

YEAR OF THE COMET



WIZKIDS



YEAR OF THE COMET



THE END IS HERE!
THE THIRD ANGE
COUNTED HIS TRUMPET
AND A GREAT STAB,
BLAZING, FELL FROM THE
SKY ON A THIRD OF
THE RIVERS AND ON
THE TALLEST OF
THE MOUNTAINS.
THE END IS HERE!
THE END IS HERE!

FANPRO

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INTRODUCTION

Year of the Comet is a pressurized can of whoop-ass for the world of *Shadowrun*. This book contains a series of world-shaking events that will cause aftershocks for years to come. It describes the chaos and upheaval as Halley's Comet, the harbinger of change, pays the Earth a visit in 2061. The comet's flyby also coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Awakening, that historic moment in 2011 when magic returned to the world, elves and dwarfs were born and the great dragons awoke from ages of slumber. Is the timing accidental, or does it point to a new stage of world history?

Year of the Comet provides gamemasters with numerous plot seeds to create adventures and campaigns anywhere in the world of *Shadowrun*. The information, plot hooks and storylines provided allow the gamemaster to craft a setting where the player characters can either plug directly into the events taking place or plunge into a spin-off scenario. Many of these plot seeds will blossom over time and in future *Shadowrun* books, constructing a story arc that players can relate to for years.

Year of the Comet is presented as a series of electronic documents posted by Captain Chaos, sysop of the vast Shadowland archive and data haven—the number one source for shadowrunners on what's going on in the world of *Shadowrun*. The documents are written by various characters, from hack journalists to shadowrunners to dragons, each with their own prejudices and points of view. Each piece is marked up with a running commentary by other runners who add to, revise and contradict the original post. These pieces of black information add innuendos, allegations, opinions, rumors, misconceptions, misinformation, lies and sometimes even the truth to the information presented. It is left up to the gamemaster to decide what information is correct and which is just filling, as appropriate to his or her game.

The first document, *Return of the Comet*, describes the hype, media furor and general mayhem that accompanies Halley's Comet. It also delves into the megacorporate probe race, a sensationalized and highly competitive contest to be the first to reach the comet with a space probe.

The next chapter, *SURGE*, describes a new wave of transformation that sweeps metahuman society. The changelings created by SURGE are unique, expressing their own particular genetic traits. This chapter explains how the world reacts to SURGE, first with fear and riots, then with cultural exploitation. It also describes several newly discovered paracritters.

Hysteria crawls around the murky underbelly of Halley's Comet—the cults and religious upheavals that occur as people's hatreds, desires and beliefs are inspired or altered by the comet's passing.

Ghost Stories tells of the "re-birth" of an old dragon, whom the media dubs Ghostwalker. The astral form of this dragon claws its way through the Dunkelzahn Rift, reclaims its body, then lays siege to Denver. The resulting political shift comes as a shock to many.

Like Mana From Heaven explores some of the magical disturbances that arise in conjunction with the comet. In addition to unusual fluctuations of mana and in astral space, the discovery of naturally-occurring orichalcum leads to a claim rush as corporations and prospectors seek to mine the highly valuable alchemical material. But the world is truly shaken by the arrival of the shedim, horrible new spirits that seize control of dead bodies, bringing them back to unlife.

Red Sunset, Red Sunrise explains how the eruption of the Ring of Fire brings disaster and chaos to Imperial Japan, leading to a power struggle that rocks the world. *California Uber Alles* describes a side effect of Japan's calamity, when a racist, rogue Japanese officer stages a coup and begins systematically seizing chunks of California.

A new offensive to clear the Yucatan rebels out of the jungles through chemical weaponry and brutal measures leads to a series of natural disasters, toxic zones and spirit warfare, described in *The Yucatan War*.

The *Aftershocks* chapter describes a few of the repercussions that the events above have on the rest of the world. From a Filipino revolt to a CAS-Aztlán border conflict to religious infighting, these events illustrate the significance of the changes enveloping the world.

The *Game Information* section instructs the gamemaster on how to put all of this information to use. It includes rules for characters affected by SURGE, details on the shedim and new paracritters and also adventure ideas.

A NEW AGE



Welcome to the new year, my friends. I hope your hangovers aren't as bad as mine. I should have stuck to the nano-energy drink and champagne mixes rather than the hard stuff.

This year certainly promises to be an interesting one—perhaps even a new beginning. The first news item in my inbox this morning tells me that the UN has officially declared 2061 to be the “Year of the Comet.” Massive celebrations are already being planned to commemorate the arrival of Halley’s Comet and the fiftieth anniversary of the Awakening. Many of you readers are already celebrating the new job offers arriving on your doorstep.

Something tells me we’re going to have a lot to talk about this year. If the guy I saw walking down the street wearing tinfoil on his head is any clue, things are going to get interesting. I’ve used this as an excuse to open up this new SIG. Maybe we’ll find some answers here.

“Why bother?” you say? I’ve heard the arguments. So what if the Awakening occurred fifty years ago. Fifty is just an arbitrary number, right? Maybe, chummer, maybe. But if there’s anything the Awakening and the return of magic taught us, it’s to expect the unexpected. As any magical theorist can tell you, perception is the key to magic. According to the files I’ve read, our willpower and our emotions have a strong impact upon the fluctuation of mana. So if all across the globe people fear, desire or simply expect something to happen simply based upon an arbitrary measurement, it just may.

Even more to the point is this comet business. You have to admit it’s quite a coincidence that this historical harbinger of upheaval and doom just happens to be cruising back by our planet at the same time as the big five-oh. Now we’re getting two doses of hype for the price of one.

I know some of you don’t believe in coincidence; some do. You either think the universe is yanking our collective chain, or we’re in for a wild ride.

Which begs the question: do we strap on our safety harnesses or crank down on the gas pedal? I think I’ll do both.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 1 January 2061 at 15:23:23 (PST)

RETURN OF THE COMET

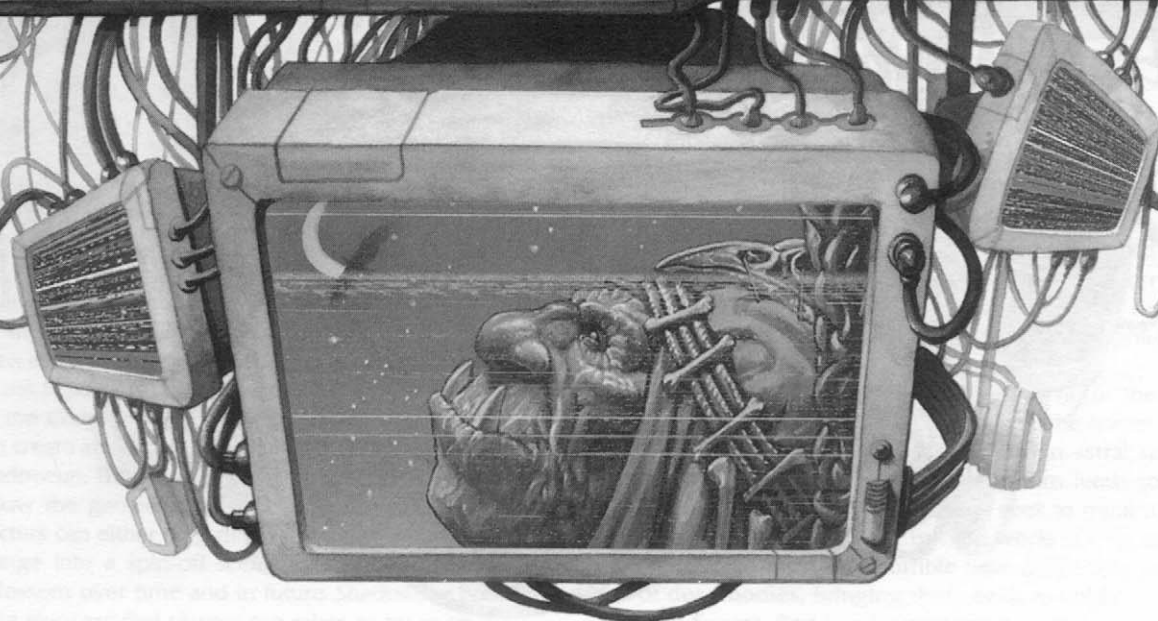


figure the best way to prepare for the turbulence ahead is to get a firm grasp on what we're dealing with. Halley's Comet brings with it a trainload of historical, psychological, social and possibly magical baggage. Any articles I dig up that relate to the comet phenomenon will go here. This will also include any mass reactions to the comet's passing, such as the "probe race" that's shifting into high gear—and what they mean to shadowrunners.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 1 January 2061 at 15:44:03 (PST)

THE AWAKENED SKEPTIC

by Sam Langston, *Skeptical Observer*, January 2061

If you scan the open magic forums, you'll find all kinds of speculation about the magical effects that Halley's Comet is expected to bring. Rains of frogs, bleeding idols, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, the liberation of all bound spirits—these are just a few of the hysterical claims you will see.

All hype to the contrary, Halley's Comet won't have much of an impact on the manasphere or anything else for that matter. Simply put, the comet will be too far away from Earth to affect it. Depending on the theory you subscribe to, the manasphere extends to the edge of the atmosphere, and even then the warping of astral space gets severe above seventy kilometers. Even if you assume that the manasphere extends further into space, the extreme warping it undergoes makes it unrecognizable. The likelihood of any magic effects crossing the distance is minute. I don't know of any serious theorist who would suggest the manasphere extends past lunar orbit, and even on its closest approach the comet will be much further out than that.

• One popular theory postulates that the "manasphere" has no boundaries—it extends across the universe. However, the lack of life energies outside of a planetary body warps the mana so severely that the use of magic in these areas is impossible at best, dangerous at worst. So the chances of the comet interfering with Earth's manafield are extremely unlikely.

• Talon





• There's another theory that claims heavenly bodies like the comet may create disturbances and fluctuations even in mana-warped areas, like the ripples and waves created by a passing boat. These "mana waves" may have an impact as they wash over our planet, especially if they are based in warped mana.

• Wide Eyed

• Chummer, I can theorize that the comet will turn my skin blue and make me sprout antenna, but until you got some facts to back it up, I ain't believing drek.

• Andy Ryan

Halley's greatest effect will be on popular psychology. Emotions can and do affect magic. Any forensic magician will tell you that a murder scene feels quite different astrally than a Sunday picnic. With all of the hysteria surrounding the comet, the general feel of astral space may fluctuate over large areas. On the nights you can see the comet clearly, there may be swaths of panic, elation, excitement, fear, confusion and whatever else people are feeling. It is likely that comet visibility may create low background counts in areas where masses of people see and react to it.

• Not anything more than you'd expect to get from a really energetic music concert.

• Magister

The comet's arrival at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the Awakening is surely just a coincidence. The number fifty has no special magical significance, and scientists who have been measuring the so-called "mana curve" do not expect or see signs of any fluctuations in the ambient mana level. The widespread claims that Halley's Comet was predicted by the Mayan calendar are patently false. In fact, the Mayan calendar round repeats just under every fifty-two years, which may indicate some change in 2063, long after the comet is gone, but not 2061.

In short, I don't think the approach of the famous comet will be anything like throwing a rock into a pond or kicking over an anthill or opening a floodgate. Once it passes and is out of sight, most people will realize it was a historic occasion, but more a non-event than anything else. We'll all forget about it and get on with our lives. The "Year of the Comet" won't seem like anything special.

• I'm taking bets on expected changes this year. Current odds on Dunkelzahn's return are 18 to 1, The sinking of LA is 5 to 1, and a CAS-UCAS reunification is currently at 32 to 1. Place your bets!

• Oddball

• I'll bet you 5,000 nuyen that the world won't end. Sucker.

• Grid Reaper

• You are fools to dismiss change so quickly. All routines falter eventually. The world is never as safe as it seems.

• Man-of-Many-Names

HALLEY'S HISTORY AND HYSTERIA

by Kepler

In only a few months Halley's Comet will be visible to the naked eye. For those of you too lazy to load your search routines, I've done you the favor of compiling the following facts and historical footnotes.

Halley's Comet was first recorded in 239 BCE in China and made its first predicted appearance on Christmas 1758, shortly after Edmund Halley's death. It swings by on its retrograde orbit every 76 years or so. The orbit has an inclination of 162.2 degrees, an orbital eccentricity of .967, a semi-major axis of 17.94 AU, and is below the elliptic most of the time. It crosses the elliptic near Earth's orbit, which makes viewing easy for us. It will reach a perihelion of .6 AU behind the Sun in January.

The comet will be visible to the naked eye from September to late November of 2061. It will be visible again on its return pass from March to April of 2062, but less so since it will be farther from Earth. Extend these times for telescope viewing. Back in 1986 it had a magnitude of 5.5, but it's brighter this time (estimates range from 5.7 up to an unconfirmed 6.0), and we're not sure why.

• Scientists speculate that a stronger dose of solar radiation (thanks to heavy solar flare activity) has vaporized higher amounts of gas from the comet's nucleus, increasing the size of the comet's coma and tail.

• Astro Boy

• Except that this has been a banner low year on the solar flare activity scale.

• Orbital Bandit

We got a fairly good look at Halley last time, and this approach will be monitored by hundreds of telescopes and dozens of satellites, most of which are already in space. There's a great deal of interest: governments, corporations, universities and even magical foundations are sponsoring research and investigations. A media-driven "probe race" is already underway, as dozens of corporations struggle to be the first to fly a probe past the comet, or even land one there. Driven by Matrix rumors, comet stories are circulating furiously. The most popular claim than an unidentified alien spacecraft has been spotted tailing the comet, that one telescope has clearly viewed a face etched into the comet's surface and that the comet has an astral aura.

• I heard spectroanalysis showed that the comet carries orichalcum.

• Chemical Spill

• Puh-leez! It's ice and mud, maybe with a small rock in the center.

• Abacus

• Unlikely, Spill. They tried to find something unusual about the comet Wirtannen when it zoomed by in 2012. No sign of magic dust then and no verifiable signs now.

• Tesseract



• Do you think the corps would publicize that it was made of orichalcum? They're keeping it under their belts—and that's the real reason behind the probe race.

• Astrolabe

Halley's best-known pre-modern apparition was in 1066. The appearance inspired mass terror in Europe and was said to foreshadow war and the death of kings. The English and the Normans were preparing for invasion, and both saw the spectacle as a dire omen, though no one knew at whom the celestial sword was pointed. It was only after the Battle of Hastings and the death of King Harold II in October that the chroniclers decided the comet must have been bad for the English. The victory of William the Conqueror and the Normans changed the face of England—and the course of history.

In an early sixteenth century illustrated manuscript of civic history called the *Lucerne Chronicles*, the 1456 appearance of Halley's Comet was blamed for earthquakes, illness, a mysterious red rain and even the births of two-headed animals. That year, according to popular legend, Pope Callixtus III excommunicated the comet as an instrument of the devil.

• That's because Halley's Comet is Wormwood, and it signals the coming Apocalypse. Wormwood will fall upon the Earth and poison our waters!

• Rev 8:10-11

• And here I thought Chernobyl (Wormwood in Russian) had already done the devil's work to us.

• Rad Trooper

Comets still inspired fear and trepidation even after advances in astronomy recognized the snowballs as members of our solar system. A better understanding did not prevent people from blaming the 1835-36 appearance of Halley's Comet for everything from the massacre at the Alamo to a fire that almost burned New York City to a crisp to a disastrous fire in British Parliament.

In 1910, new myths were born. Astronomers at the University of Chicago discovered that Halley's tail contained poisonous cyanogen gas. Panic ensued when it was "realized" that the Earth was scheduled to pass through the "deadly" tail on May 18th. Newspaper headlines warned: "Comet's Tail Poisonous: French Astronomer Thinks Gases Might Affect the Earth's Atmosphere." This led to widespread construction of gas-proof rooms around the world, sometimes with instructions from scientists. The scientific finding was a boon to wily entrepreneurs who hawked comet pills, inhalers, conjure bags and comet insurance to the gullible.

The 1910 apparition was also a bright one, since the comet passed so close to Earth. The large fire in the sky frightened people, and the proximity suggested an impact. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran a front page headline that read: "Comet to Bounce off Earth Today." Across the United States, generalized panic inspired similar headlines, such as "See Comet Then Die," "Several Driven Insane: Others Commit Suicide," and "Killed Watching For Comet." People who foresaw the end of the world sold their property. Work stoppages

were widespread. Religious revivals did their biggest business since the doomsday of the Millerites in the 1840's, and even professional astronomers attracted crowds of thousands. From the New York, Los Angeles and Chicago newspapers alone there were reports of eight suicide attempts (seven successful), five people committed to insane asylums, two murders, five accidental deaths, one murder confession and one virgin-sacrifice that were all directly attributable to the comet.

• With all the comet loonies running around the Barrens right now, I think we're going to top those figures before the comet is even visible.

• Straightjacket

Of course, not everyone in 1910 was infected by comet fever. Newspapers devoted at most one page a day to the return of Halley's Comet. None of them issued subscription cancellation notices, so they clearly didn't believe the world was going to end. Cartoonists zealously poked fun at both astronomers and the public's fears. Most people simply took it as a chance to celebrate—every major city had numerous "comet parties." In one entertaining instance, a thousand Dartmouth College students performed a snake dance in their pajamas at midnight and then went to serenade astronomers.

• A lot of cities are planning similar mega-gala events this year, both for the comet and for the Awakening anniversary. The Times Square blast will be the biggest, with a free concert featuring just about every big-name band you can think of. In Japan, they're planning a party that will feature a gigantic segmented dragon balloon-puppet to simulate the appearance of Ryumyo. But the real action will be at the private soirees held by corp powerbrokers and high-society cliques—good hunting grounds for eavesdropping, extractions and more.

• Party Crasher

The last appearance of Halley's Comet in the enlightened 1980s saw a continuation of comet craziness. One rumor claimed that the comet would crash into the North Pole, corrupt the Earth's magnetic field, and electrocute us one and all! Like previous times, the comet heralded disasters and changes such as the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, which set the U.S. and other space programs back several years, and the beginning of Perestroika, which led to the downfall of the Soviet Union.

• There are some interesting literary connections to Halley's Comet over the years. Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Chaucer's works were posthumously published in 1532. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was born in 1835 and died in 1910. And just yesterday, Nobel Laureate Yelena Zvereva died at the age of 76. She was born in 1985. All of these years were comet years.

• Bookworm

• Trust me, those dates only have meaning if you believe they have meaning.

• The Laughing Man

"HAI Fraggin' HAI"



Will we see similar comet hysteria this year? Definitely. Already we are seeing some of the most extreme comet cult activity in history. Matrix rumors are already in full swing, such as the fake internal Saeder-Krupp memo being circulated that claims the comet is carrying a batch of Lofwyr's eggs. In politics, Tir Tairngire has announced the re-scheduling of the next Rite of Progression and there are reports of a call for elections in England. The frequency of mana storms and unusual mana-related disturbances around the world is on the rise, making the magical community buzz with excitement. And at least one of the zillions of probes being prepared to fly by the comet has succumbed to sabotage as the corps engage in a heavy competition for the prestige of getting there first.

More events will likely follow in the coming months. A year from now, we'll have a wealth of amazing headlines to look back on. The interesting question to ponder will be: "Without the comet, would these events have happened anyway?"

THE NIGHT SKY

from *Astronomica*, August 2061

The return of Halley's Comet will be quite a treat for the world's stargazers, and there's even more to come. A total lunar eclipse is scheduled for September 29th, followed by an annular solar eclipse on October 13th (the best show will be over the South Shetland Islands off the coast of Antarctica). Several planetary conjunctions occur throughout the fall, most notably Mars and Venus in the southwest and Neptune and Saturn in the northeast during October. As a final treat, we'll get a glimpse of the Orionids meteor shower, peaking on October 19th.

For the best view of the comet, I'd recommend that trip to the countryside you've been thinking about. Sprawl dwellers are going to have their view muddled by light pollution unless they're very high up. As a good rule of thumb, if you can't see the Big Dipper you won't be able to see Halley. Prime viewing time is after sunset, before moonrise.

- The close approach will fall near Samhain. This could be bad. If the comet pierces the veil between the worlds, chaotic comet energies will enter the spirit world and create turmoil. I'd advise against séances or ancestor spirit summoning until after November 22nd.

- Scary Bob

- The comet will be closest to us with the Sun in Scorpio, the sign of death, so expect calamities. I predict numerous accidents and killings. I for one am staying indoors.

- Harbinger

- Good news for us. One less loony to deal with.

- Bung

- No, we should be looking at the comet in Taurus. I expect great wealth and personal growth. And Scorpio is a sign of rebirth and transformation. The comet is clearly a symbol for the Awakening.

- Charouse

If you are a sprawl dweller, I recommend supporting one of the voluntary blackout initiatives being pursued in some municipalities. Across the globe, astronomy clubs and sky-minding civic leaders are hoping to arrange temporary blackouts in metropolitan areas so that the comet's glory can be seen by all. These initiatives are being resisted due to public safety concerns, so they need all the support they can get.

- Aw yeah, I'm all over that one. Convince the city to turn off all the lights? I'm in favor! Just imagine the running opportunities ...

- The Ex

- Don't quote me on this, but I hear there's a Matrix gang/cult calling itself the Bright Night that's planning on arranging some involuntary blackouts, if you get my drift. They claim the comet will cause a catastrophe if we don't dim the lights as a sign of respect. Or at least that's the excuse they give for wanting to wreak some havoc.

- Sidewinder

For those of you looking ahead, December 24th will be a full moon—perfect for those all-night Awakening parties. And thanks to Halley, the Eta Aquirid meteor showers should be quite a sight for the next decade.

SMILE FOR THE TELESCOPE

by Carl Peterson, *MatrixWeek*, August 2061

Ares and the UCAS government issued a joint press release today detailing the deployment of a massive infrastructure upgrade in the Hubble II space telescope uplink and data distribution systems. Apparently, the demand for images of Halley's Comet from the Hubble II has grown too large for the system to handle, causing a series of system crashes. A new 20 gigapulse switch was installed at Goddard to offload data requests and has been operating at full capacity since its activation. A new mirror site was also brought online in Hong Kong today to handle the unexpected demand from Asia.

- Sure, blame the system crashes on popularity. Nice way to cover up the results of a shadowrun and still look good, Ares.

- Gremlin

In response to public pressure, Ares has also cut the 24 hour processing delay for releasing images to 12 hours, so that viewers may now see the previous night's appearance during the day. Corporate efficiency watchdogs have reported that productivity has slipped in many offices due to comet image viewing; many corporations are now limiting access to the images to lunch hours and late night only.

- That 12 hour "processing" delay still gives them enough time to doctor the images. The truth is out there!

- MUFON Boy

- Get a life, chummer. There's so many fraggin' telescopes peeking at that comet right now that nothing is going to happen there without word leaking out.
- Carl

With Halley being brighter than expected and coming in relatively close to Earth, the images are nothing short of spectacular. Advertising rates for image sites have doubled in the last week and are expected to increase again. Matrix sites that charge to access Halley images are recording in excess of a hundred hits per hour.

Amateur observations are also popular. Many comet-watchers have pooled their resources and images to create 3-D approximations of the comet, usually with animations. Most of these sites are contributing to the International Halley Watch Digital Archive, which will be available next July from the AresSpace Planetary Data Systems Small Bodies Node on the UCAS National Space Sciences Data Center host.

SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

by Amy McNeill, *Seattle Times*, 18 August 2061

Across the globe, religious groups are greeting the arrival of the controversial Halley's Comet, seen in the past as a portent of doom and chaos, with mixed reactions. Since many organized religions have suffered a decline in membership over the past few decades, they have prepared aggressive strategies to retain their flocks in the face of the Awakening anniversary and comet hype. Many of these groups report that their constituency numbers remain stable, despite a high turnover rate.

Christian denominations are each responding to the comet's return in different manners. Most are simply warning against attributing any spiritual significance to the comet. Others are going so far as to denounce the numerous comet-related cults that are arising. A few minor Christian sects are encouraging their flocks to prepare for the Rapture, and a breakaway Mormon sect is preparing for an unspecified "New Exodus." Other groupings, such as the Southern Baptists, are proclaiming the comet as a sign that the Awakening will end, and that the Satanic influence of magic upon the world will soon cease. These congregations are preparing massive celebrations and revivals, expecting many to renew their faith.

The Vatican is urging dioceses to offer extra services for the faithful in these trying times. The Archbishop of Seattle, Richard Simoneau, recently announced that area churches will hold special nightly masses through the months of September, October and November, to offer strength to people against the anxiety over these turbulent times. Cardinal von Heeremann of the German Catholic Church announced the successful prosecution of several comet-worshipping cults in Westphalia. He urged all proper Catholics to "pray for the souls of wayward humanity that they might find strength in the Lord during these chaotic times."

The Muslim world, often wracked with violence and factionalism, has been surprisingly unified in welcoming the comet. The popular leader of the Islamic Unity Movement, Ibn

Eisa, proclaimed that the comet was a sign of Allah's will, signaling a need to draw all Muslims together. Several Islamic groups are also rising to new levels of prominence as their traditional fields of astronomy and astrology are currently in high demand and high regard.

At the other end of the spectrum, the various pagan and Awakened faiths are, quite frankly, living it up. Not all attribute special significance to the comet, but those that do are attracting converts and reaching out into their communities. Comet celebrations and rituals are quite common and growing in frequency. Some of these groups also report an upsurge in spirit activity.

Many people are finding answers, or at least sympathy, in these groups. The Children of the Dragon are the most rapidly growing group, with thousands of new members. The vigil sponsored by the Children at the DeeCee Rift on the anniversary of Dunkelzahn's death drew a crowd of thousands, many of whom haven't left yet.

Mainstream religious groups have not had to deal with a situation like this since the Awakening—the turn of the Millennium was nothing by comparison. As comet rumors escalate and reports of magical phenomenon increase, the fears of their members are intensifying. Some are being driven away from their faith, while others are finding solace and answers in new beliefs. The comet is sending a shockwave through society, driving people into new modes of thinking. As the recent self-immolation of a man in downtown Seattle proved, heightened tensions and emotions will inflame extreme attitudes and actions—his note said that he sacrificed himself so the world would survive the wrath of the comet.

- I hear some corps are taking measures to squash comet hysteria among their employees. Rumor control is in full swing, so wageslaves can expect their Matrix activity to be monitored and their "extracurricular" activities to be scanned for signs of "cult behavior." I can just imagine what their "deprogramming" sessions are like.

• Almac

- At the same time, a lot of corps are squeezing the comet for all the marketing gimmicks they can. And with the probe race in full swing, these same corps are also building the hype that they're worried may provoke bad reactions. It's a dangerous game they're playing.

• MacBeth

- Yeah, I got "caught" reading some Children of the Dragon literature. Got a good talking-to, so I quit. You'd think 50 hours per would buy me some slack.

• Sam@echostation.org

- Not in this life, chummer.

• Tesseract



PARTY OR PANIC?

by Susanna Tarrig, *UCAS Today*, 20 August 2061

Halley's Comet will be in sight in just a few weeks, but already you can't step outside—or into the Matrix—without the comet hitting you over the head. Everywhere you go, it's non-stop news and hype about the Awakening anniversary and Halley's Comet. Comet icons. Dragon balloons. Comet insurance. Cults and celebrations. Do we paint the town red or hide out in the hills? Panic and euphoria are parading through the media like evil twins.

If you believe the tabloid screamsheets, Halley has set in motion the end of civilization. Hundreds of Matrix sites are pumping out advice on how to survive the coming cataclysm. Purchases of bottled water and bulk, dried and canned food are soaring. Some people are trying to cash in their credit for hard currency. Hardware stores are having trouble keeping flashlights, batteries and portable generators in stock. Telescopes are selling quite well. And Lone Star reports that black market firearm dealers are raking it in.

- I know a street doc that's making a killing selling "cometware," I drek you not. From what I gathered, he's just added some extra electrical surge protection and cutoff circuits, then marketed them as defenses against "comet rays and comet radiation." Sadly, some of the local gangers just don't know any better.
- Skaven

Everyone seems to have something to say. Humanis and the Vatican aren't happy about any of this, but Awakened groups are dancing in the streets. Joe Average on Main Street just seems confused. It's like Mardi Gras meets Halloween out there. The skeptics are trying to retain their calm, but they're being drowned out by the voices of those who claim the comet is a sign. Even a few sage experts concede that something may happen. Who should we trust? Who should we listen to?

Comet art is everywhere, now that a campaign to celebrate the Awakening and comet visit with public murals has brightened walls across the UCAS. Sneaky comet insignias have also infiltrated several corporate logos. Comet tattoos are de rigueur in some circles, and comet graffiti is costing cities thousands in clean-up bills.

If you turn on the trid, you'd think the megacorps invented Halley's Comet as an advertising ploy. Orbital vacation packages are selling like mad despite extra charges for "comet viewing." Concrete Dreams, which has been virtually silent for two years, is on constant rotation with their new single called "Halley Come Down," climbing the charts like a rocket.

Even the NAN states are getting in on the action, sponsoring comet-viewing vacations to remote areas with no electricity for miles and reasonably clear skies. Some are even marketing to the gloom-and-doom crowd, selling shelters and remote encampments as a safe haven from the end of the world.

Whether it's cults, commercials, catastrophes, conspiracies or a carnival, Halley seems to be delivering something for everyone this year.

THE PROBE RACE

by Orbital Bandit

Nothing captures the world's imagination like adventures in space. All the cred that gets raked in by cheezeball space-opera trid shows and simchips proves my point. So when a once-in-a-lifetime oddball event like Halley's Comet comes around, everyone sits up and takes notice. And when the corp survey takers, pollsters and marketing hacks smell mass interest, they converge on it like sharks to blood.

In the late 2050s, the space industry was alive, but it wasn't exactly thriving. The profits from space-based research and construction were high enough to keep the corps interested, and the habitat tourist trade was strong enough to keep the traffic flowing up and down the gravity well. But the corp war made everyone a bit more paranoid and everything a bit more expensive. Leaving the planet and going into space was interesting, but not exciting. There was no panache, no zeal, no *vision*.

The comet has turned all of that inside out faster than your lungs in vacuum. When Ares first announced back in 2060 that they were going to send a probe to say hi to Halley, it grabbed the world by the short and curlies. The media response was overwhelming, Matrix sites were overloaded with hits, imagination was soaring—and all of the other corps realized they needed to get their dirty little fingers in on the probing action. With a few weeks, every corp with space assets had announced plans to buzz the comet with their own spycraft. The race was on!

- For those of you who fed your history sims to the dog, the first space race took place between the old USA and USSR in the 1950s and 60s. The Russkies took an early lead, when they put first a satellite, then a dog and finally a human into orbit. But the Americans staged a comeback and won the race by landing the first man on the moon in 1969.

- Laika

- Some nutcases believe the US staged the moon landing—that it was all filmed on secret stage sets and used to dupe the world. Not me, though. I'm a good citizen who believes all the government propaganda. I would never suspect that any of our world's dear megacorps would try anything so shocking or distasteful.

- Sir Chasm

What we have now is a media blitz of massive proportions. It can be compared to the race to map the human genome or to cure AIDS, or to the rivalry of the Urban Brawl championship—only it's better, because it's a *space* race. All of the mystery, danger and futuristic excitement of space travel make this a race that people won't forget. And the corps will ensure that by bombarding us all with kitsch like Solar Soyburgers, Cometary Fries and Halley Value Meals.

- And while everyone's bedazzled by the spectacle and losing cred on comet crap, the corps continue to rape our planet, exploit workers and throw their weight around unnoticed. Ain't distractions grand?

- Black Bloc

What's in it for the corps? Well, ego, grandeur and a marketing coup to start—whoever wins the probe race will be seen as the leader in space development and will lord it over the other corps for the next 75 years. The probe race is also a boost to research and development, as the top corporate wetware works overtime to achieve breakthroughs that will win the prize. While the corps are pouring meganuyen into these projects, they're sure to make a profit as the trickle down effect of this new technology works its way into society as modern household items.

- Though many of you scoff at the idea of a corp holding laudable goals, there are also substantial scientific reasons pushing the probe race forward. There are still many things we need to learn about our solar system and how it formed, and comets are holding many clues frozen under layers of eon-old ice. Since comet appearances are not exactly common, we need to take advantage of the ones we can plan for.

- Seer

- Even though we've had the technology to closely examine comets for decades, our track record has been lousy, as we've screwed up the few chances we've had so far. For example, the NASA probe launched to intercept the Temple 1 comet in 2006 failed disastrously. There's heavy pressure coming down to get it right this time.

- Challenger

- Bulldrek. Almost half a dozen probes buzzed the comet on its last pass. It's been done already, so why the big deal now?

- Suisel

- That was seventy-five years go. Who remembers that? It's history. That means nothing to modern day, instant gratification, no-long-term memory media consumers like us. A lot of the records and data were lost in the Crash, anyway. Plus it's a corporate race this time, and corporate media jingoism blows good old-fashioned patriotism out of the water.

- Transcendant

Aside from the cred and the toys, there's one other major side effect of the probe race that everyone seems to be missing so far—a rekindled interest in space. The orbitals are already booked solid by those hoping to get a peek at Halley's snowball without all of that pesky air getting in the way. As a result, many spacecorps have rapid expansion plans underway to take advantage of the rush. But more to the point, space has transformed in the public mind from a faraway place that the corps exploit into a place that's exciting to go. Momma Earth has been a possessive parent, but it's time that we escaped her



clutches and started reaching for the mysteries of the stars, the same mysteries that have been driving us since we first climbed out of the trees and stared at the night sky.

Frankly, it gets kind of lonely up here in orbit, looking down on all you busy ants, and I'm sick of seeing the same old mugs whenever I dock. So it's going to be refreshing to have lots of new blood and talent climbing up the well. New people means new experiences, and more people means more opportunities for shadow work. Get my drift?

- That's right. The corp media campaign will bring all sorts of new cred to near space, and the orbital population is already booming. And where the money and corps go, shadowrunners follow.
- Ad Astra
- It's possible that the energy may keep going even after Halley is gone. Ares has plans for a base on Mars, so I can see a race to be the first to land humans on the Red Planet being the next big thing. I hear some of the other corps have plans for the asteroid belt and Europa, and there's other planets as well.
- Uri Gagarin

PROBE RACE CONTENDERS

Now that this probe race is reaching escape velocity, I told the Cap that I would supply Shadowland with a download of who's planning what and where. Some probes are already complete and on their way, while others are being trashed thanks to, ahem, "unforeseen complications." The world's launch pads are abuzz with activity, and the top secret research installations are all stocking up on extra caffeine and deodorant. Since you may find yourself as an active agent in these proceedings, you should know all you can about the probe race's ins and outs. Here's a summary of the major players.

- It's worth pointing out here that most of the projects outlined below are planned to intercept the comet on its first pass by the Earth. Several of the corps have back-up plans to hit the comet with a probe on the second pass, in case the first one fails.
- B-Team

Ares Macrotechnology

Ares, with its aptly named aerospace division, AresSpace, is the undisputed top dog in space. Ever since their purchase of NASA from the US government in 2016 and the downfall of competitor Harris-3M during the Crash, Ares has dominated almost all aspects of off-world development. Individual corps may compete within a specific niche of space development, but no one can compete on all fronts.

AresSpace launch facilities are concentrated on the North American continent. Cape Canaveral is their primary launch pad and sees more rocket launches per year than any other facility in the world (approximately one a week). Kennedy Space Center in Florida, Edwards Base in CalFree and Wallops Island in Virginia also see launches on a less frequent schedule, as do the China Lake and Inyokern Test Range sites. Most orbit-destined spaceplane flights launch from either the Edwards

AresSpace base or from the Alaskan Spaceport on Kodiak Island, in the Athabaskan Council.

AresSpace launch sites are the most sophisticated in the world, and boast appropriate security. Each site is well protected by Knight Errant ground forces outfitted with milspec gear, and hosts enough light armor and attack aircraft to repulse a significant invasion. Cutting edge anti-missile systems (the type Ares doesn't sell to the world at large yet) guard the rockets against attempts to shoot them down.

- I hear AresSpace regularly sends drone "escorts" that accompany launches up until a specified altitude as a last line of defense.
- Galaga

AresSpace maintains dozens of additional facilities around the world, mostly dedicated to deep space tracking, radio astronomy and uplink points for their satellite networks. The AresSpace headquarters and command center remains in Houston.

Ares' presence in space is almost as expansive as its ground facilities. Depending upon whom you talk to, Ares has at least five operational off-world habitats, including a moon base and a station in solar orbit, and possibly many more. Most of these stations are dedicated to research or small-scale production.

- Word is that Damien Knight takes a personal interest in the interaction of space and magic, and that a hefty chunk of AresSpace research involves initiated mages, paranormal critters like devil rats and Awakened prison inmates serving as test subjects.
- Braxton

Ares initiated the probe race with the unveiling of their 8-ton, 2-billion nuyen *Gigas* probe. Under construction for the past two years, the heavy *Gigas* has already been launched to much fanfare. In addition to a heavy instrumentation payload, the *Gigas* probe features a state-of-the-art prototype fusion drive being tested for the first time. Though favored to win the race, the slow *Gigas* may well be overtaken by lighter, faster probes launched at a later date.

- I heard the *Gigas* is armed with several magnetic induction guns, which will be fired at the comet body as the probe passes by at an estimated distance of 20 kilometers. *Gigas* will collect samples of the ejecta, reporting its findings and also returning them to Earth.
- Blazer
- Those guns may be a way of dealing with competitor probes as well.
- Flak

In response to the swarm of rival probes, Ares has also cobbled together two secondary probes, named *Velox I* and *II*. These two probes are going to be launched via chemical rocket from Cape Canaveral a week apart, and are set to ren-

devious with the comet before the *Gigas*. The *Velox* probes are scheduled to pass through the comet's tail, collecting samples of the ionized material that makes up the comet's body.

Saeder-Krupp

Saeder-Krupp's space program centers on orbital production, resource exploitation and satellite networks. Based on the remnants of the European Space Agency, Saeder-Krupp has also picked up several state-controlled sites that had fallen into disrepair. Saeder-Krupp's primary launch centers are the Tyuratam Space Center in Baikonur, Khazakastan and the Ariane Center just outside of Kourou in French Guiana, right next to the Proteus launch pad on Devil's Island. Each of these boasts over five separate launch pads, extensive landing fields, testing complexes and cryogenics centers.

- Both Baikonur and Kourou are historical sites with hundreds of launches notched into their gantries. That means they host museums, tours, launch viewing centers and other tourist draws. This could provide a shadow team with some opportunities for access.
- Austin

Saeder-Krupp has a secondary launch site in Overberg, at the southern tip of Africa, just 200 kilometers from Cape Town. Equipped with thermal vacuum chambers, insulated hangars and a powerful Matrix system, Overberg handles the bulk of Saeder-Krupp's research and testing. The corp also uses a number of facilities across Europe to launch and land suborbitals and semiballistics. Many other sites are used for satellite tracking, radio astronomy, spacecraft telemetry and other roles. Saeder-Krupp accomplishes about two rocket lift-offs a month, primarily destined for its lunar base, though its spaceplane traffic is much higher.

- No one seems to know where exactly Saeder-Krupp's main Space Control Center is located. The old European Space Operations Center (ESOC) in Darmstadt, Germany is the prime suspect, but Matrix traffic analysis and radio interception indicate otherwise. My guess is that they have some sort of ESA hideout or missile command bunker tucked away somewhere in Europe. Lofwyr likes to keep his command centers well protected.
- Felix
- There's talk in the Islamic countries that Saeder-Krupp recently finished constructing a new secret launch facility deep in the desert. No one can identify what country, but the rumor claims the nation is keeping it under wrap in exchange for satellite launches.
- Kohl
- Saeder-Krupp transports a lot of bulk material in and out of the atmosphere—these shipments offer excellent opportunities to smuggle gear, weapons or even people up and down the well. Just be careful with your measurements.
- Astrhobo

Saeder-Krupp's entry in the probe race is a little rocket by the name of *Duccio*. Named after an Italian painter of the thirteenth century, *Duccio* is unique from the other probes in that it is designed to directly intercept the comet and land on the surface itself. *Duccio's* entry into the probe race came rather late, almost as an afterthought, and was not given the media boost that other corps gave their probes. They won't even say when or where it's going to be launched from, though I have it on good authority that it will be launched from the Himmelsschmiede (Sky Forge) orbital. Since Lofwyr is being all quiet about it, the probe has become a major controversy. Every crackpot conspiracy theorist under the sun has speculated about Lofwyr's actual intentions in landing a probe aboard the comet. While most of the theories are just plain loopy, it does make you pause when you wonder what the wizworm wants exactly.

- *Duccio* has a payload of magical telesma that, once deployed, will allow Lofwyr to directly affect the comet with ritual magic. A ritual of that size will require massive sacrifices to offset the drain—what disaster will the dragon sponsor to claim his victims?
- George
- Buldrek. The serpent's going to blow the comet out of the sky. It's a dragon, for chrissakes, so it doesn't want us to find out the truth about how life was created in this solar-3.7 Mp deleted by Sysop.
- Drummer
- If you want to torture yourself by reading the other 98 theories on Lofwyr's Secret Plans, scan the Comet Conspiracy SIGs.
- Captain Chaos
"I am everywhere!"

Thanks to its design, *Duccio* has the highest chance of failure of all the probes—there's just too many things that might go wrong when they try to land it. But Saeder-Krupp claims it's "worth the risk" for the unequalled opportunities a successful landing would allow. With no chance of return, *Duccio* will take samples, photographs and other readings directly on the surface of the comet, before transmitting them to Earth. It will also drill into the comet and do some additional sampling. Unable to decouple again from the comet, *Duccio* will become a permanent inhabitant and will join Halley's on its unending journey around the sun.

- What right do they have to do that? The comet is a completely natural, untouched wonder. Where do they get off putting one of mankind's creations on it and destroying it's untouched tranquillity?
- Grub
- I'm not so much worried about the tranquillity, but what happens if things go wrong? Couldn't the probe destabilize the orbit of the comet?
- Weeble



• People, it's a ball of ice. Ice, mud and rocks. Within it lay potential hints as to the creation of our sun and our solar system, and you are worried about disturbing its tranquility? It's not going to fall out of orbit, and it's not going to care if it gets a permanent piggy backer, but I sure will care if it helps us understand our world more.

• Seer

Novatech

Novatech may be a minor megacorp dirtside, but in space it's a hotshot. Novatech inherited all of Fuchi's aerospace assets, including two major orbital habitats, several smaller ones and some noteworthy satellite networks. Though Ares and Saeder-Krupp have more assets in space, Novatech keeps pace by sliding a bit ahead on the technology curve.

Novatech has two rocket launch pads, both based on sea platforms. The first is based in Formosa Bay, off the Kenyan coast, and is used primarily for Novatech's Darkside Junction station and top secret projects. The second is based on a mobile rig in the Caribbean League and caters to their Camelot station and satellite network needs. While not optimal for orbital launches, Novatech also owns an aerospace facility in Woomea, Australia, which a little hacker tells me is their test bed for a new spaceplane prototype.

• Sea platforms, eh? That's an automatic first line of defense—any attempt at infiltration or attack will have to come by sea or air.

• Long John

• Novatech has their air defenses sown up tight. They'll scramble fighter jets to intercept any bogies that threaten

their air space, and there's a flock of security drones in the sky around these sites at any given time. I would imagine they've got some serious spirit muscle on call as well.

• Steel Lynx

• Their weakness is undersea defense. While Novatech has tight connections with several pirate crews in the Carib, they don't have the undersea tech edge that other corps do. Their Carib Fuchi Orbital launch pad is mobile, though, so finding it's current location may be tricky. Be careful when you ask around—their rum-splashing buddies have been known to leak word of shadow ops to them.

• Gremlin

Novatech's comet probe, the *Whipple*, is under rapid construction onboard the Camelot research station. I actually got a peek at this puppy, and it puts the other probes to shame in the style department. Most of the other corps just let their top geeks design the probes and tossed aesthetics out the airlock. But Novatech clearly kept the media spectacle in mind. Not only is the *Whipple* sleek and shiny, it has a paint-job with racing stripes. All class. Judging by the specs, it's also carrying the most sophisticated sensor array.

Proteus

One of the few AA corps to play in the probe race sandbox, Proteus keeps their space-related schemes close to their chest. It was only last month that some of my pals broke the news on the station they've been secretly building at the L1 LaGrange point, which is nearly operational. The only publicized launch pad used by the corp is off of their partially-submerged arkoblock near Devil's Island, French Guiana. According to some material posted on Asgard, they have another sea launch site currently under construction off the coast of Ecuador to take maximal advantage of equatorial launches.

• I was inside another one of Proteus' arkoblocks—I won't say which one—when I came across a whole section of the structure clearly designed to construct and possibly launch rockets. I thought it was some military function at first, to defend against attacks, but now I'm thinking it may have been a secret spacelaunch site.

• Owen

Proteus still hasn't announced that they were dropping their hat into the probe race ring, but I'll bet you my Spindle docking pass that they have something in the works. The buzz in orbit says that they're going to be launching a probe from their L1 station, but nobody knows for sure. I wouldn't be surprised if they announce clear out of the black that their probe has arrived at the comet and that they've won the race.

• I've heard that Proteus has a probe called the Götterbote under construction at their French Guiana facility. Some snotty telemetry know-it-all named Heinrich

SAEDER-KRUPP COMET PROBE DESTROYED!

Posted: 5-29-61

Detroit (NN)—Damien Knight, the CEO of Ares, issued a public apology today to Saeder-Krupp for the accidental destruction of Saeder-Krupp's *Duccio* space probe. The *Duccio* probe, which Saeder-Krupp hoped to land on the comet for direct investigation, was destroyed just a few hours after launch when it strayed into a "test zone" used by Ares for orbital weapons checks. According to Ares officials, they were conducting a routine test of an anti-satellite laser weapons array that fired into a deep space safety zone. Ares claims they were unaware of the *Duccio*'s presence in the zone, as Saeder-Krupp had kept the craft's launch and trajectory under wraps.

Immediately after the incident, Saeder-Krupp petitioned the Corporate Court for redress, claiming that Ares intentionally shot down their probe as an act of aggression. Ares issued a public apology and offered an undisclosed financial sum in compensation for the incident. Though Saeder-Krupp initially refused the settlement, the Corporate Court ruled in favor of Ares and backed the agreement as a resolution to the affair.

Hausmann is running the project. He's worth his weight in platinum if anyone has the guts to extract him.

• Blackbird

Shiawase

Shiawase is a relative small timer in the aerospace field, with a correspondingly small presence in space. They shove their rockets into orbit from Normanton, Australia, on the Cape York Peninsula. Many of their launches are commercial ventures, allowing universities and smaller corporations to climb into orbit without having to construct their own launch pad. They also boost a lot of rockets into equatorial orbit from the San Marco launch pad, a former Italian launch facility built on a converted oil platform off the Kenyan coast.

Though Shiawase doesn't have much in the way of orbital hardware, they do have a rather successful research and development department. Based out of Cairns, about five hundred kilometers east of Normanton, this subsidiary is responsible for many recent breakthroughs in propulsion technology, both for launch vehicles and powered satellites and probes. In fact, Shiawase's comet probe, the *Brahe*, was designed at Cairns. It contains some high-tech features that will give it an edge over its competition, including proprietary nanotechnology that gives it a significant fuel advantage and a significantly reduced mass (the *Brahe* probe is less than half the mass of Ares' *Gigas*).

• I was digging around a Shiawase system, and I found plans for a probe named the *Brahe*. Get this, though—it's a manned probe, not the small thing that Shiawase keeps advertising. What gives?

• Snarf

• Maybe they actually have two probes, both named *Brahe* to confuse the competition.

• Tricky

• If Shiawase lands a manned probe on the comet, they'll score a major public relations coup. Even if they get to the comet after another probe, or catch it on the second pass, they'll steal the thunder. Smart thinking on their part. Most other corps dis-



carded a manned visit as too expensive, but Shiawase must view the benefits as worth it.

• Ad Astra

Shibata Construction and Engineering

Shibata, like Proteus, is one of the few companies of less than AAA rating to have sizeable space assets. Originally focused on architecture and mass-scale dwelling construction, Shibata recently expanded into the aerospace field and habitat maintenance. The corp's big break came when Aztechnology contracted them to run the Spindle, an Aztechnology habitat

that has been limping around in orbit since it suffered severe failures back in 2050 and had to be partly evacuated. Shibata is now in the process of shoring the station up and handles most of its operations.

As a side benefit to the Spindle agreement, Shibata was also given an exclusive contract to run the Aztechnology launch center near La Paz. It also owns the Jiuquan launch pad that was China's first satellite launch center, though this facility is still under extensive renovation. Most of the corp's service and supply boosts are made from Aztlan, while the Jiuquan pad handles satellite and other launches.

Shibata's little probe wonder is named the *Kepler* and is actually a joint project between Shibata, Aztechnology and

Federated Boeing. The probe is being manufactured on the ground, but is scheduled to launch from the Spindle. The *Kepler* is actually a carrier for a number of smaller drones that will be released to land on the comet and transmit data back to the probe, which will then relay it to Earth.

- Aztechnology is attempting to use this joint project as a sign of good will to boost its application to join the Pacific Prosperity Group. In my opinion, the two PPG corps are taking advantage of Aztechnology's hopes, and have no intention of letting the Azzies into their corp clique.

- Snow Tiger

PROBE LAUNCH FAILS

Posted 06-11-01

Atlanta (HTB)—The *Kepler* probe, considered by many to be the underdog in the corporate "probe race" to reach Halley's Comet, suffered a severe setback this morning when a tragic fire destroyed the launch engines and damaged the probe. Less than an hour before the probe's intended launch from the Spindle orbital habitat, a fuel line ruptured, leaking accelerant that ignited, causing a small explosion. The *Kepler* probe was quickly disentangled from the launch engines, but had already suffered significant damage to its sensor and telemetry systems.

A joint project between Aztechnology, Shibata Construction and Engineering and Federated Boeing, officials stated that the *Kepler* is repairable, but would not be able to be launched in time to surveil the comet on its first pass near the Earth. The *Kepler* will be scheduled for a new launch later in the year, intercepting the comet on its second pass.

PROBE HIJACKED!

Posted 06-18-01

Cairns (NN)—A comet-worshipping terrorist cell identified as the Cataclysts seized control of a semiballistic that was intended to carry Shiawase's *Brahe* probe into orbit earlier today, shortly before launch.

The cultists infiltrated Shiawase's Normanton launch site, killing the crew and commandeering control of the vessel. Despite a security attempt to avert the takeoff, the Cataclyst cell launched the semiballistic towards orbit. A devastating explosion halted the spaceplane's climb, destroying the probe and all onboard.

The Cataclysts issued a press release, claiming that the cell intended to accompany the probe to the comet, but that Shiawase shot the craft down with a surface-to-air missile. Shiawase refuted this claim, pointing out that the probe was incapable of carrying passengers and reporting that the terrorists employed a bomb to destroy the probe and commit suicide.

Yamatetsu

Yamatetsu is making a comeback in the space arena, after spending too much time focusing on their undersea efforts. The corp is finally taking full advantage of their Svobodniy Cosmodrome, purchased from the Russkies just after the corp relocated to Vladivostok. Launches from the site have increased significantly in the past year, approaching once a week. Large numbers of these launches have been nothing but tests, apparently experimenting with various prototype launch craft (too expensive to play around with before Yamatetsu bought the site), but quite a few have been satellite boosts or regular runs to their Shibanojuji orbital resort.

- The Cosmodrome is a city unto itself, with a total population exceeding ten thousand. The facilities include a propellant farm, training center, communications center, tracking station, airport, hospital and housing, as well as recreation for the Yamatetsu and Russian citizens.
- Suzuki

Yamatetsu's gift to the comet is a probe they call *Gagarin*—guess who's nationalistic sentiments that one plays to. The *Gagarin* is already on the way, taking a roundabout route around Venus, using the planet's gravity well to slingshot the craft for a quick interception of the comet and then back to Earth. Yamatetsu won't publicize their rendezvous date, so they may even beat Ares' *Velox* probes. The *Gagarin*'s course will take it to within 10 kilometers of the comet, though Yamatetsu hasn't revealed what the craft's sensor and analysis capabilities are.

- In the wake of the probe race, Yamatetsu has also announced plans for manned missions to Mars and long term plans for a mission to Europa, an ice covered moon orbiting Jupiter. Europa is theorized as a possible genesis spot for life forms.
- Dave

Runner Ups

Only three other corps can be counted as launch pad operators and potential probe race contenders: Hisato-

Turner, Trans-Orbital and Federated Boeing. As I already mentioned, Fed Boeing threw their lots in with Shibata and Aztechnology; I guess there's no accounting for taste. If they had the desire, Boeing could have done it themselves from their aptly named Sea Launch platform, a mobile, seagoing, former-oil rig launch pad that is berthed near Christmas Island or wherever they drag it in the Indian Ocean or Pacific.

Both Trans-Orbital and Hisato-Turner have publicly conceded the probe race to the competition, following a suspicious string of "accidents" and unexplained problems that pushed their prospective launch dates back to the end of the year. Both corps are still toiling away on their probes with forced smiles, but unless everyone gets knocked out of the running on the comet's first pass, these projects will remain on the backburner and will probably be discontinued.

For the record, Hisato-Turner operates the Tanegashima launch facility, which happens to be Japan's main launch site. That role earns them major prestige, not to mention nuyen from subcontracting, but it also makes them a major target in the competitive Japanese corporate sphere. Trans-Orbital's booster pad and spaceplane strip is down on Matagorda Island—one of the first commercial launch vehicle sites in the world. They operate a clean, streamlined business with recently expanded facilities and upgraded security.

- I've taken a ride into orbit with Trans-Orbital, and their staff is as sweet and accommodating as their security scanners are unobtrusive. But watch out for their sec guards—most of 'em are Jersey gutterboys with thick accents transplanted from the sprawl and plugged full of chrome. Nasty fraggers.

- Big Tony

- I hear that the Atlantean Foundation plunked down a wad of cred to finance the Trans-Orbital probe (they're kicking themselves now, I bet). Anyone know what the AF is hoping to find? (Please refrain from telling me that the comet is carrying relics of lost Atlantis—I'd like hard data, thank you.)

- Short Round

- Ask yourself this question: Why else would archaeologists be looking into space?

- Planetary

A few of the old nation-states—y'know, those bureaucratic ghosts that pretend to run things and keep the corps in line—still own and operate their launch facilities, though the list grows smaller every day. Israel has a launch site in Palmachim, and Imperial Japan still shoots up satellites from their Kagoshima pad. The Russians kept ahold of their Plesetsk Cosmodrome, though Yamatetsu and Saeder-Krupp

have started a high-pressure bidding war to convince the National Supreme Soviet to give it up. Spain still has Gran Canaria, India still has Sriharikota and even Amazonia keeps the Alcantra site active.

Most of these nation-owned pads are used to maintain satellite networks and spycraft, but they also serve as moneymakers. A lot of corps prefer to contract with an actual country for their orbital

ARES GIGAS PROBE STRUCK BY METEOR!

Posted 07-12-61

Houston (AP)—Ares announced today that their costly comet probe, the *Gigas*, was struck by a meteorite, coming within inches of destruction. The meteorite wreaked havoc in the probe's guidance systems and knocked it off course. Ares officials have said that they are adjusting the probe's trajectory to account for the disturbance the impact has caused and will be on track for an intercept of Halley's Comet later this year. Ares attributes the probe's survival to the two inches of polyamide armor in the front dust shield.

This news follows only a week after Ares announced that the launch of both of its backup probes, *Velox I* and *Velox II* would be delayed until December 2061 due to "necessary adjustments" that needed to be made to the probes designs.

Though Ares expects all three of its probes to successfully reach Halley's Comet during its second pass by the Earth in 2062, Ares is now unlikely to win the heavily publicized "probe race."

NOVATECH PROBE LOST

Posted 08-11-61

Boston (IIN)—Sources within Novatech confirmed today that the *Whipple* space probe veered drastically off course yesterday and will miss its rendezvous with Halley's Comet. The course change is the result of a programming error that occurred via telemetry, ordering the probe to conduct an attitude burn that used most of its remaining fuel. Unconfirmed reports claim that the damaging orders were the result of computer sabotage by a rival corporation. Novatech sources denied this claim, attributing the tragedy to a "glitch."

The *Whipple*'s new course will take it around the sun towards an eventual collision with the planet Mars in 2064. The Novatech sources stated that there was no hope of switching the *Whipple*'s course to bypass Halley's Comet, even on its second pass near the Earth next year. This tragic event removes Novatech as a contender in the probe race, though the corporation does have plans to launch a new probe by the end of the year.

This news also leaves Yamatetsu's *Gagarin* probe as the only remaining contender able to reach Halley's Comet on its first pass.



YAMATETSU LOSES CONTACT WITH GAGARIN

Posted 08-30-61

Shibanokuji (NN)—Just moments before Yamatetsu's *Gagarin* probe was to intercept Halley's Comet, telemetry specialists lost contact with the probe, stunning millions of viewers around the globe.

As the last remaining contender in the much-publicized "probe race," the *Gagarin*'s full sensor suite was set to activate upon coming within 500 kilometers of the comet. Expecting to see the first close-up pictures and readings transmitted by the *Gagarin*, people around the world subscribed to Yamatetsu's "live" Matrix feeds, only to be disappointed when no images came through.

The event was a public relations disaster for Yamatetsu, and the corporation is offering discounted rates on other Matrix feeds and its MetaMatrix service as compensation to its disgruntled customers. Meanwhile, Yamatetsu scientists are working feverishly to regain contact with the probe. Despite the likelihood that the probe met an untimely end as the result of an equipment failure, micrometeorite collision or sabotage, Yamatetsu remains hopeful that the communication break is temporary and that contact will be re-established.

needs, despite the higher rates, rather than put their hot tech in the hands of a competitor corp. Nation-state launch pads are usually guarded with military assets, and so may even boast better security than some corps. The drawback is that the service is lousier, accidents are more common, and often the government is so corrupt that a rival corp can easily create complications anyway.

None of the nations jumped into the probe race—they all have more serious issues like overpopulation, pollution and rampant poverty and crime to worry about. If the first round of the probe race doesn't provide any winners, however, one of them may be coerced into a joint project with an under-the-radar aerospace corp. Stranger things have happened, and will again.

PROBE RUNNING

With a competition of this sort, where everyone's fighting for the same piece of pie in the sky, the megas are stopping at nothing short of outright corporate warfare to beat their competitors. Shadowrunners will find their skills in demand as the corps start final preparations to launch their probes. Stopping or delaying a competitor, even by a few days, can make all the difference. Each corporation doesn't want to beat their competitors by much, they just want to beat them.

So what sorts of jobs will be out there? Here's a short run-down of opportunities that I see likely. In fact, if you're really hard up for cred, you can probably devise your own plan and market it to Corp X. With a race this hot, the corps are likely to take any potential advantages that present themselves.

Information Gathering

The most common shadow op in this period will be simple intel. Two types of probe paydata are at top value: SOTA tech and compromising data. The contents, sensor schematics and other details of a probe's payload are quite useful to a competitor trying to one-up the other. Likewise, info relating to launch schedules, project personnel and launch pad security will assist a rival in taking his competition out completely, or at least slowing them down. Most of these details can be acquired through Matrix system raids or prolonged surveillance, though this may require onsite penetration given current security standards. There is always more than one way to skin a devil rat, though, and personnel are vulnerable to blackmail or intimidation.

Hindrance

For those who like greater risks and greater rewards, shadowruns aimed at delaying or destroying a rival probe are the way to go. Luckily, probe launches are complicated affairs, with a long chain of personnel and logistical affairs that can be exploited. Given the high security of most launch facilities and top science labs, subterfuge and infiltration are the most likely strategies to succeed in derailing a launch and ensuring that you can at least limp away afterwards.

The kidnapping or assassination of key personnel is a more subtle and survivable approach than attempting to damage onsite facilities. The disappearance of a corp's lead probe engineer, telemetry specialist or sensor-array designer can delay or even irrevocably halt a launch, or possibly keep the probe from ever being completed. Acquiring a rival's chief astrophysicist not only denies the targeted corporation the chance to use the skills of the employee, but also gives the new company access to the technical specifications and other secrets of their rival.

- An actual extraction isn't necessary if you can get to the target through blackmail or threats upon their friends and family. This gives the subverted staff member the chance to delay or halt the launch internally. If done successfully, the target corporation will not even know that security has been breached.
- Mongoose

An oblique way of delaying a probe launch would be to interfere with the production or shipment of equipment or parts that are necessary either for the launch or for the probe itself. Even more subtly, critical supplies can be replaced with tainted ones, leading to a breakdown or failure far down the line (perhaps even after the probe is launched), assuming the faulty parts pass inspection. This option is good, as crucial supplies are usually not as securely protected as the probe or launch site itself.

If options are limited, a straightforward raid to damage the probe or launch vehicle may be the way to go. There may be other vulnerable systems that are critical to the launch, such as computer and Matrix systems, control centers, fuel containers, telemetry dishes, satellite relays and so forth. This type of run is the most dangerous, as it pits the runners against the strongest area of security. If the probe is being launched from an orbital station, the likelihood of success becomes even smaller.

- The good news is that failing on a run of this type may be acceptable as well. A breach of security, even if it fails to damage its objective, will nearly always delay the launch while safety checks are performed again to make sure that no damage was done.
- Argent

Defensive

Given the importance of the probe race and the minds, materials and profits involved, security is bound to be strict. Though it is unlikely that outsiders would be contracted to guard a probe or launch site, a corp that finds itself under extreme duress from its competition may bite the bullet and hire shadowrunners to protect non-key personnel, Matrix systems or gear.

Shadowrunners are likely to be hired for a more proactive defensive stance—in other words, hunting down and eliminating potential threats. With all of the cult activity spawned by the comet, freaks who can infiltrate, spy on and divert potential fanatics are in demand. Shadowrunners can also be used to spy on, warn off or take out policlubbers, other shadowrunners or anyone else who doesn't happen to like the corp in question.

If there's any way a corp can use shadowrunners for its dirty work and keep the blood and grime off its hands, it will. Sadly, most of us will jump at the chance to do so.

SURGE



(Begin Log : Meta Affairs SIG : 9 September 2061 at 21:23:04 PST)

- Welcome to the Meta Affairs SIG, an open discussion of issues relating to metahumanity and race relations.
- MA SIG Bot

- Hey, check this out.
- Kobold

//Begin File Attachment//

DOUBLE GOBLINIZATION?

Posted 09-06-61

ATLANTA (HTB)—Officials at St. Mary's Hospital confirmed tonight that an unidentified male troll admitted last night seems to have undergone a second phase of Goblinization. According to reports, the troll was brought in off the street after bystanders called the police. "He was screaming like his insides were being shredded, and we could see his facial bones reshaping themselves under his skin—it was horrible!" said one eyewitness. "I thought at first he was under attack by a spell, or maybe a spirit. But I assensed him and saw that it was some sort of somatic transmogrification," said a licensed mage on the scene who declined to give his name.

Hospital officials refused to comment on the troll's transformation, stating only that he appeared to have undergone a "recessive phase of his previous Goblinization." They flatly denied rumors that the troll had been infected by some sort of disease, claiming that "his body was simply finishing the process it apparently had not finished before."

//End File Attachment//

- Sounds pretty sketchy to me. Has anyone ever heard of an incomplete Goblinization before?
- Kobold

- No, but it's theoretically possible. Whenever you deal with genetics on a mass scale, there's bound to be a few mutants who don't quite turn out the same.
- Lela





• Oh man, I think I'll go get me a checkup tomorrow. The last thing I need is to finish Goblinizing halfway through a shadowrun—or worse yet, a hot date.

• Grimsley

• I always knew you were only half the ork you could be, Grims.

• Slouxzi

• That news report doesn't sit well with me. How could you only half-transform into a troll? Wouldn't the docs have noticed something wasn't right the first time? My bet is that the poor slag was a corp guinea pig of some kind who escaped from the lab and made it into the news before it was covered up. They were probably testing some scary kind of nanotech on him.

• Encino

• Scan this. I was bored, so I decided to hack St. Mary's files and see what the scoop was. I had to scramble quick, because the CDC had put a lock on his files—that's right, the Center for Disease Control. There are half a dozen brands of CAS spooks running around that hospital right now, so something's definitely not right. I did manage to pilfer his files, chock full of juicy tidbits. First, our troll friend is only 20 years old. That's right, he never Goblinized at all—he was born a troll to proud, healthy troll parents. Second, up to now he had a clean bill of health. No diseases, no health problems, no genetic defects. He wasn't a half-troll or anything whack like that, he was as troll as they come. Third, his transformation is kinda scary. He seems to have shed his horns, grown a snout and developed a thick pelt of fur. Weird drek, neh?

• Grid Reaper

• This whole troll thing has got to be a prank. You breeder slags are all just pulling my leg.

• Bull

"The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

• I wouldn't sweat it. Whoever that troll is, he's an abnormality, a genetic throwback maybe. Whatever's affecting him isn't going to affect anyone else, because it's obviously caused by his genes.

• Lingua Chef

(End Log)

(Begin Log : Meta Affairs SIG : 10 September 2061 at 21:48:11 PST)

• Hey, remember the news about that troll I posted a few days back? Remember saying it was nothing I should worry about? Bite your tongue.

• Kobold

//Begin File Attachment//

HUNDREDS TRANSFORM—NEW WAVE OF GOBLINIZATION?

Posted 09-10-61

SEATTLE (AP)—Public health officials urged calm this evening, seeking to quell rampant rumors and speculation in the wake

of reports that dozens of individuals within Seattle—and hundreds more throughout the world—have undergone an unexplained metamorphosis.

"This is not a disease. This is not a virus. It is not contagious," said Dr. Fonda Peters, the head of City Health and Group Medical. "What we are facing here is a potential new wave of Goblinization, similar to four decades ago. The victims of these changes are not a threat to public health or safety." Dr. Peters went on to describe what medical attention should be given to those undergoing transformation. She refused to answer questions about what exactly the documented individuals are transforming into.

Less than an hour after the announcement, Jasper Squashright of the Ork Rights Commission (ORC) blasted Dr. Peters for slandering those affected by this new wave of transformations. "These people are not 'victims' and to call them that is an insult to metahumans everywhere. An ork is not a victim because he transformed into an ork, and these new changelings are not victims either—there should be no shame applied to the change they have gone through. We demand an immediate apology from Dr. Peters, whose slanders has fueled the fires of racial intolerance."

//End File Attachment//

• It looks like we are seeing the birth of a new species. Anyone have any idea what this new race is?

• Kobold

• Don't jump to conclusions. From the reports I've seen the transformations have varied wildly. Some people have simply grown horns or pointed ears, while others have suffered weirder changes like scales—or the guy in Calcutta who grew a third eye. We may be looking at a whole slew of new metatypes here!

• Swarm

• I don't know, the numbers just don't add up. Despite the hype, very few people in the world have gone through a metamorphosis. Judging by the hype, you'd think a quarter of Seattle had turned green and fuzzy, but as far as I can tell there's been less than ten cases in the city (so far). Unless this wave is off to a slow start, there's simply not going to be enough of each new variant to constitute a bunch of new metatypes.

• The Smiling Bandit

Strikes Again! Ha Ha Ha!

• So you're saying that this new wave of Goblinization isn't creating a new race, that it's simply creating a bunch of offshoots, mutants and freaks?

• Lynch

• In a word, yes.

• The Smiling Bandit

Strikes Again! Ha Ha Ha!



• Some of you old-timers may remember what it was like when Goblinization first struck. You might remember the fear, the panic, the hatred, and all the chaos that followed. I know this isn't a news flash, but it needs to be said—we're still suffering from the legacy of that period. Remember the Nights of Rage? How could you not? Even though the turmoil has boiled down, even though orks and trolls have established their own communities, earning a certain level of respect and tolerance, the world has still not fully accepted them. This news does not bode well.

• MOM

• Frag, how can you slags sit and discuss this so calmly? In my neighborhood, people are freaking out! Everyone's talking about the new plague that turns you into a goblin, and some folks are saying some corporate biowarfare retrovirus has finally gotten loose and is turning people into slobbering monsters. Gangs are barricading off the streets, people are holing up with canned food and guns or trying to flee town. And some poor ork just got the drek kicked out of him by a bunch of breeders who called him a "plague carrier." We're heading straight towards a new Night of Rage!

• Brick

• Hmm, sounds like Lone Star will be busy tonight. I might take a little impromptu run this evening while everyone's distracted.

• HoodRat

• Good luck. Every compound I know of is on high alert or lockdown. A storm cloud of tension is hanging over the city.

• Night Owl

• A Humanis drone just buzzed my block with leaflets, calling on the populace to round up any "mutants" and lock them up before they spread their "disease." They strongly imply that any meta could be a mutant waiting to erupt. Fraggin' racist scum.

• Brick

• I'm down at Seattle General Hospital. So far we've had 5 changelings admitted—not nearly the "plague" or "cataclysm" I kept hearing about in chat rooms and message boards. But there's a growing crowd outside the hospital chanting and carrying signs like "Take the Mutants Away" and "Keep Our City Clean." I have a feeling things are going to get ugly.

• Code Red

(End Log)

(Begin Log : Meta Affairs SIG : 13 September 2061 at 09:06:01 PST)

• What a night! I can still see smoke from the fires in Redmond and downtown. There's so much glass and debris in the road that I wouldn't recommend taking a vehicle out unless you've got runflat tires. Here's the latest.

• Kobold

//Begin File Attachment//

RIOTS ENGULF SPRAWL

Posted 09-13-61

SEATTLE (IIN)—Lone Star is urging everyone to stay indoors and off the streets this morning following a night of riots and violence across the Seattle Metroplex. Several fires set by rioters are still burning out of control, and Lone Star riot squads are herding crowds of looters off the street.

Governor Lindstrom declared a State of Emergency at 3 AM, calling out troops from Ft. Lewis to help contain the violence and pacify the city. Officials close to the Governor claim that martial law will be put into effect if the rioting does not abate, and a curfew is expected to be imposed over the city this evening. Dozens of other cities throughout the world experienced similar levels of violence, sparked by a reported new wave of Goblinization that scientists are calling Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression, or SURGE.

The violence began last night outside of Seattle General Hospital, where a massive crowd had gathered to lay siege, to demonstrate against the hospital's care of SURGE-affected "changelings." When a young man who had recently expressed hooves and a series of painful rashes all over his body was brought out of an ambulance, the crowd attacked, overwhelming hospital security. The mob was eventually repulsed, but not before significant damage had been done to the hospital, including several fires set by Molotov cocktails. The mob then spread throughout the downtown area, smashing windows, overturning cars and attacking metahumans.

As news reports hit the wire, similar violence erupted in other neighborhoods across the Metroplex. Several metahuman groups and gangs responded to the racial attacks by organizing their own militias, sometimes attacking humans in retaliation. Lone Star is under heavy criticism for their handling of the riots, as officers were initially overwhelmed and unable to contain the violence.

//End File Attachment//

• And so it begins again.

• Rohit

(End Log)

WAKE UP CALL

• The world is still settling down after this little thing called SURGE shook it up and spun it around—the violence is still going full tilt in some areas. Amidst all the speculation and high emotions, this little piece of calming rationality caught my attention. It's a statement written by none other than Ebran the Scribe for free distribution on the Matrix, issued to the newsnets by the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research. Though Shadowland is not normally in the business of posting information you can get just about anywhere on the Matrix, we felt this particular material might be useful in both understanding what's been going on lately and the sort of response people like Ebran are expecting.

Since the file is fairly short, I've made this one a read-only. You can talk about the implications over in the appropriate SIG.



• Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 14 September 2061 at 14: 52:06 (PST)

I am not a morning person. I do not spring out of bed, fresh and ready to face a new day. I linger, clinging to sleep as long as I am able. I prefer the night to morning, and I have seen far more sunsets than I have sunrises. I enjoy the simple pleasure of lounging comfortably on the edge of sleep, reluctant to leave behind the world of dreams. At my age, I prefer to sleep in when I can, which—I am sad to say—is all too rare these days. Waking, for me, is a slow and gradual process, one that should not be rushed or else I can be most unpleasant for the remainder of the day.

The world is also not a morning person. People say in 2011 the world “Awakened.” I say Mother Earth roused herself, yawned, stretched, and rolled over to lounge about for a while longer, just another fifty years or so. Now, she has roused herself again, yawned a bit more, stretched tired and neglected muscles, but she is still not out of bed yet. We have a while to go before she has truly awakened.

The analogy above is somewhat crude, but accurate. People thus far have tended to think of the Awakening as a simple on/off process. One day there was no magic and then, POOF!, along comes Yule, 2011, and magic exists. “The world has changed,” people say. “It has Awakened.” This is a narrow and flawed view of the far more complex process of the Awakening. This, in fact, is the key point. The Awakening is not an *event*—it is a *process*, a series of events. It is a cycle with no beginning and no end. While there are certain events in the process we can point to as pivotal—signposts along the road telling us how far we have come—we should not confuse these signs for the road itself, or the journey.

Take Goblinization, for example. Goblinization Day took place some ten years after the Awakening, when orks and trolls threw off their human guises and returned to their place in the world. Paranaturalists can point to at least a dozen known “Goblinization” dates for species other than *Homo sapiens*, where different animal species changed, or began giving birth to a paranormal sub-species of their own. Even among *Homo sapiens* there are different dates for the return of elves and dwarfs in 2011, and the appearance of orks and trolls in 2021.

These events all took place after the date assigned to the Awakening, some of them as recently as a few years ago (since new paranormal species are being discovered on a regular basis). They have all been signs that the Awakening is far from over. But most people refuse to realize this. They consider Goblinization a separate event, something apart from the events of 2011, rather than seeing the whole, unbroken pattern these events form.

The Awakening has not ended. In fact, it has hardly begun. We are only fifty years into a process that lasts for *millennia*, a cycle longer than recorded history. This year is only a taste of the future, another small step on a long and winding path. A path fraught with both wonder and danger.

What exactly is the step we’ve taken, many of you may ask. What scientists called Sudden Recessive Genetic

Expression—and the media has quickly and predictably dubbed “the SURGE”—is part of a natural process. Just as certain metahuman genes expressed in the presence of a particular concentration of mana, so have other latent traits expressed in the presence of ongoing changes in the manosphere, the ongoing process of Awakening. These changes are natural and normal.

The “changelings” that have emerged in the wake of this expression are no different than the metahumans who emerged forty or fifty years earlier. Except, I hope they will not have to suffer the same persecution and misunderstanding we encountered when we first showed our true faces to the world. They are not diseased. They are not “mutants.” They are not cursed. They are your brothers and sisters, your parents, your children, your friends. There is nothing to fear from them. Before you condemn, consider what traits might lie hidden within *you*, and remember the Awakening is far from over.

This is a time of change. What is needed now is not fear and ignorance, but compassion and knowledge. Dispel your fear and replace ignorance with understanding. It is said those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it, and I have learned that lesson better than most. I ask you to learn from these past fifty years so we will not repeat our mistakes. Do not let there be another Night of Rage. Do not let another generation suffer from ignorance and mistrust.

SCIENCE OF THE SURGE

• Lo and behold, a new wave of change has swept our world, for better or for worse. Though its impact is measurably different and less substantial than Goblinization, the hype and hatred that accompanied its appearance have inflicted their toll. Those who have undergone the transformation have suffered the same prejudices and xenophobia that orks and trolls endured and continue to combat. The spectacle and riots that followed only played further into the atmosphere of hysteria and impending doom accompanying our favorite little space rock.

In order to cover SURGE completely and from opposing angles, I’ve pulled pieces from a variety of reliable and not so reliable sources. The first item, snagged from Yamatetsu, gives the scientific lowdown on SURGE. I felt it was best to start with the dirty facts before we dove into the mudslinging and hyperbole, and for once a corporate perspective actually tells it like it is:

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 September 2061 at 11:14:51 (PST)

To: Yuri Shibanojuji, Chairman Yamatetsu

From: Dr. Alexi Urbanowski, Director Genetic Research, Pensodyne

Date: September 22, 2061

Re: Status Report on SURGE Investigation Project

OVERVIEW

The metamorphosis that the scientific community has dubbed SURGE is an expression of meta or magical traits from



formerly inactive and genetically recessive polypeptide chains. This causes a sudden and often violent transformation within the subject similar to the Goblinization characteristics of early ork and troll expression. Despite earlier claims and reports, the actual percentage of SURGE in the general populace seems to be significantly lower than the ratio of Goblinization. Data suggests that less than 1 in 100 have the necessary genetic traits—though our figures have a significant margin of error due to the uncertainties involving metagenetics.

The first documented case of SURGE occurred September 4, 2061, with a few more isolated and minor cases in the week that followed. The bulk of SURGE transformations began on September 10, 2061, when over two hundred cases were reported around the world. The SURGE phenomenon has continued at a regular pace ever since, though based on the current rate of expression the ratio should reach half our projection by January 1, 2062. I find it very likely that SURGE will follow the bell-curve pattern of previous metagenetic expressions. Assuming this is true and that our projections are correct, SURGE should slow to a trickle by August or September of 2062.

To date, our reports indicate that SURGE transformations have occurred with even regularity around the globe. Admittedly, the collation of such data is still underway, and certain Third World and isolationist countries such as Tir Tairngire have been withholding data.

Before continuing, I must state that much of this memo, like a great deal of metagenetic theory, is hypothesis. While the mundane segments of the metahuman genome have been accurately mapped, a wide range of metagenetic traits have not yet been pinned down with authority. The recessive traits responsible for SURGE fall into this uncharted territory, and our conclusions about them so far may turn out to be radically wrong in the near future.

CLASSIFYING SURGE

SURGE is linked to a number of polypeptide chains associated with a wide range of documented and speculative metatraits. Examination of these chains has resulted in three different classifications.

Class One SURGE is attributed to polypeptide chains that bear a strong resemblance to polypeptide chains that have already been associated with specific metagenes. These new chains, however, appear to be incomplete or fractional pieces of the originals. We believe this to be the direct cause of the partial genetic expression of certain metatraits already exhibited by metahumans and the Awakened. Examples of Class One SURGE include pointed ears, tusks, horns, or the ability to perceive the astral world.

Class Two SURGE is believed to be caused by the activation of ancient polypeptide chains, leftovers from an earlier stage of genetic development. The exact method by which these chains are expressed is uncertain as we have found no markers to date. The expression of these traits causes development of fur or tails, vertically slotted eyes or even fully functional gills. These traits, like those of Class One, tend to follow a single pattern such as the expression of canine or ichthyus traits.

- Ichthyus traits? Does he mean fish-people?
- Winger

• Kinda. He means people that exhibit certain fish-like characteristics. I believe that the case the doctor is referencing is that of Nathan Saunders, a SURGE "changeling" who developed mildly webbed hands and functional gills while retaining a human appearance. Unfortunately, Nathan seems to require near constant immersion or he suffers from severe dry skin, causing dermal bleeding in less than an hour. Never something for nothing, eh chummer?

- Jack Q

Class Three SURGE is categorized by the expression of mutated or otherwise unknown genetics, sometimes leading to the termination of the case. Theoretically, Class Three changes could encompass any metamorphosis, though experience leads us to believe that a single physiological change is more likely to occur than a drastic transformation of multiple features. Examples have included the loss of all body hair, unusual skin pigmentation and even one case which developed an extra knuckle on two fingers of each hand.

In each class of SURGE there is evidence that the genome has been altered through the passage of time. While metagenes are stable during periods where the ambient level of mana has risen above a certain threshold and are copied unaltered during gamete production, it might be possible for the coding to be altered by standard mutational effects or chance during a time when the metagenes were inactive.

- Huh? All the words are English—I checked—but they don't make any sense when you put them together.
- Winger

• Translation: The genes responsible for metahuman traits and magical ability were around before the Awakening, and they were just as vulnerable to breaking down and mutating (thanks to radiation, chance error, inbreeding or whatever) as normal genes are. So it's highly possible that SURGE is merely the expression of mutated metagenes.

- Tanaka

• So SURGE victims are mutant freaks? Yet more evidence that these aberrations need to be rounded up before they infect—

.8 Mp deleted by SysOp.

- Curtis

• Sorry, you'll have to organize your lynch mob on another SIG. Keep it civil.

- Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

Most of the mutational effects upon human genetics have remained in a constant state for the duration of geological time. The advancement and abuse of technology over the past

few centuries, however, and the biochemical food processing, radiation, depleted ozone and environmental pollution that resulted have created an environment of mutational advantage. The increased strength of these mutational effects may have overcome the tenacity of the meta-bonds in the human genome, and occasionally fractured them to create the tapestry that is the SURGE.

• Ah, poetic justice. After hearing for years how biotechnology will save the world, how genetically modified food is good for us, how pesticides keep our crops pest-free and hormones boost production and aerosols are more convenient, it's refreshing to have a scientist acknowledge our society's shortsightedness.

• The Smiling Bandit
Strikes Again! Ha Ha Ha!

Because the metagenes expressed by SURGE are incomplete, we do not find evidence of total Goblinization as we did forty years ago, but instead find the expression of a family of traits associated with the secondary genetics. Since the genes are incomplete, there are almost always genetic defects associated with the metamorphosis. As DNA division is responsible for the creation of bodily protein chains, discovery that digestion and allergies are also affected is not surprising. Many of the SURGE "changelings" (as the media has dubbed them) have expressed intolerance to common conditions, unusual dietary allergies and even severe skin allergies to normally benign substances.

• Every bodily protein is created via DNA. If the DNA is altered, even just a fraction, the protein it produces might function in entirely new ways. For example, one "expressed" woman I met could no longer digest animal proteins after her transformation. More unfortunate cases might not be able to bond oxygen to their blood's hemoglobin or may no longer have the instructions to generate certain interferon or leukocytes and thus be more prone to disease. Another possibility is the creation of entirely new enzymes that open the cell walls to toxic substances, such as the changeling whose skin absorbed many airborne pollutants com-

mon to the sprawl—a fact which quickly poisoned him to death.

• Tanaka

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF SURGE

That SURGE is currently an ongoing phenomenon is without doubt, but causation is still in question. There have been many alleged catalysts bandied about both in the press and the scientific community. A great number of these relate to the coincidental timing of SURGE with the initial naked-eye viewing of Halley's Comet, as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the Awakening and alleged links proposed by the Mayan Calendar. Clearly, many of these claims are based in irrational foundations and beliefs, and bear no relevance to a scientific investigation. These events have clearly captured the public's mind and imagination, but magic—though it definitely follows cycles—does not bow to the whim of metahuman calendars.

There has been evidence that the world's ambient mana level has been slowly but surely rising in minute degrees since the Awakening. Though research into this phenomenon is often contradictory or inconclusive, I find this mana level escalation to be a likely cause of SURGE. Much like the original Awakening and Goblinization, I theorize that SURGE occurs when the mana level has risen to a point high enough to activate recessive and inactive metagenetics.

Due to the relative complexity and piecemeal status of SURGE genetics, I find it likely that the metagenes responsible would require a greater concentration of mana in order to activate than the metagenes responsible for standard metahuman expression and magical ability. This would also explain

why we have yet to discover a single genetic marker for SURGE that could be used to discover if a subject is a likely carrier. These markers simply might not exist, making SURGE difficult (maybe even impossible) to detect in an unexpressed individual.

• This well-touted hypothesis is becoming widely accepted, and it fits quite snugly with previous metagenetic theories such as those proposed by Dr. Mendelson. If it's true, then gene therapy is going to have absolutely no effect on SURGE, just as it hasn't affected any metagene currently discovered. In fact most attempts to alter metagenes leave the subject dead. If



we take this hypothesis to be true, then it follows there will be no non-fatal cure for SURGE.

• Tanaka

Another theory has been circulated that deserves some commentary—the so-called meta-retrovirus. It is entirely possible that SURGE was and is caused by a retrovirus, one which targets and activates specific genes or even rewrites certain genetic codes in the host organism. This hypothesis, like my own hypothesis, would explain the lack of genetic markers for SURGE, though the retrovirus would need an unusual vector. Given the percentage of the world's population affected by SURGE to date and the even distribution of occurrence, I would rule out sexual, airborne or water vectors and would suggest that the vector would need to be more universally prevalent. Perhaps it exists in the soil in a similar fashion to polio over a century ago. Though the evidence seems stacked against it, this possibility does still warrant some investigation.

• So SURGE might be caused by a retrovirus? Any chance the virus was manufactured in a lab? Are we looking at a conspiracy here? Maybe some tragic error was made manufacturing the virus unintentionally?

• Reynard

• In a word, my paranoid friend, no. Given the low success rate associated with tinkering with any meta-gene, I say it would be impossible to accomplish intentionally. It is also extremely unlikely that a retrovirus released at one point would have spread so evenly across the globe and exhibited such a low percentage of occurrence.

• Tanaka

• Don't be so sure. I've gotten an inside look at more top-secret corp genetics labs than I'd care to admit, and some of the monstrosities I've seen still make me wake up screaming in a cold sweat. While a lot of it has the taste of mad science to it, some of those gene designers really know their stuff, and have created some interesting creatures out of whole cloth, so to speak. I wouldn't put a SURGE metavirus past any of them.

• Feral

WHO IS AFFECTED BY THE SURGE?

Our latest data suggests SURGE is most likely to occur in mundane humans. Mundane metahumans make up the second most susceptible group, and each metatype seems to be equally affected. The Awakened seem to be the least affected, though evidence indicates that a higher percentage of Awakened humans have been affected than Awakened metahumans. Other factors, such as age, gender or ethnicity seem to have no factor whatsoever.

There are several working theories regarding this variation among metatypes, though all of them lack conclusive evidence at this time.

THE FUTURE

Like other metagenetics, SURGE has had a tremendous impact on our world and so bears further study. Our committee has a dozen project proposals that we will be submitting soon to tackle new paths of investigation into the phenomenon.

With the exception of our fruitless and sometimes disastrous gene therapy trials, our other experiments to date have gone quite well and produced valuable results, despite limited budgets. While the quality of our volunteers has been below standard, we have learned what we needed to from each of them. We have found ample employment for a small percentage of these volunteers (and their new abilities) after we were finished with them. I expect to have a detailed report on these trials and our SURGE findings available for your review by the end of the month.

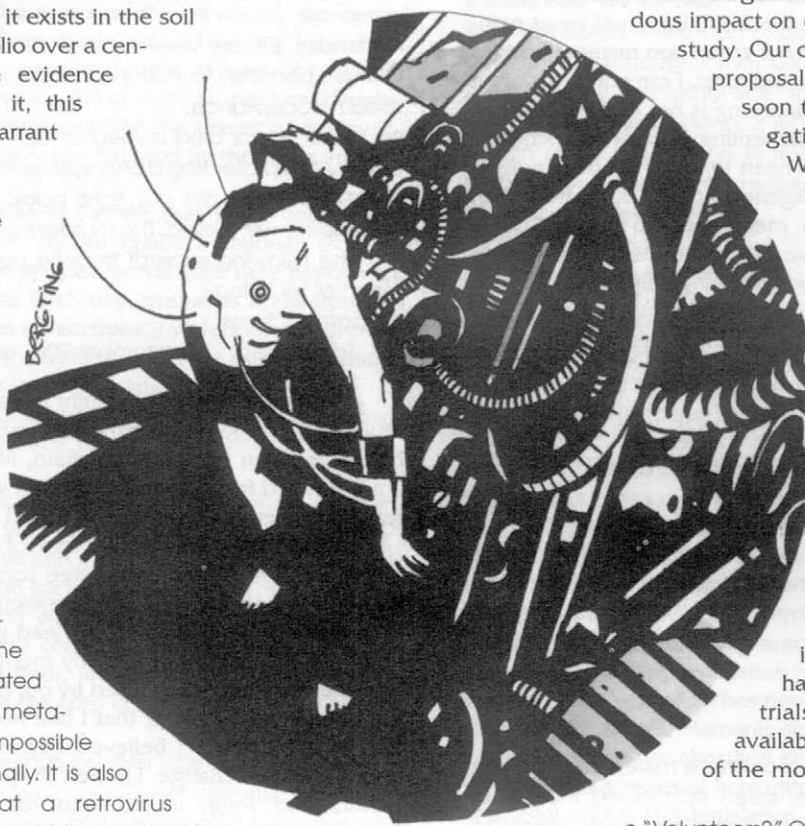
• "Volunteers?" Oh man, I don't wanna know.

• Droog

• You know, not every corp is so evil that they kidnap people for scientific exploitation. Don't forget that quite a few changelings view their condition as some sort of disease or affliction that can be cured. Many of them are willing to sign away their lives to a corp for the chance to return to "normal." Other changelings may have no choice—their expressions may place them in an adapt-or-die situation.

• Pumpkin Eater

In my professional opinion, there is no question whether we should continue down this avenue of research or whether





we should allocate more resources to it. The incredible potential that could be realized if metahumanity ever obtains a firm grasp on metagenetics is unlimited—it is simply a realm of science to which we must devote ourselves.

- Ah, yes, just think of those possibilities. Armies of troll-sized, naturally armored Awakened security guards. Legions of water-breathing, aquatic-adapted employees for all those aquacologies. Squads of pheromone-oozing, pretty-as-an-elf corporate negotiators. Makes you tremble, doesn't it?

- Strip

On A Personal Note:

My staff and I would like to express our sincere regrets for the tragedy that has befallen Yamatetsu board member Hideo Yoshida. We sincerely hope his metamorphosis will be as painless as possible, and that it will not create too many difficulties in his life. However, as our report indicates, I can only advise him that the gene therapy he is undertaking is not likely to have an effect, given our history of experimenting with metagenetics.

It may warm Mr. Yoshida's heart to know we have not yet established whether the metagenetic traits associated with SURGE will breed true. Other metagenes do not. If SURGE genes do in fact breed true, we can extrapolate from current models of metahuman breeding that changelings may be much more commonplace and may represent a much higher percentage of the population in the next few generations. He is not alone. Be sure to tell him I said so.

- Am I reading this correctly? Are SURGE traits going to be passed on to the point where, down the line a half dozen generations, everyone will be a changeling?

- Ira

- That would go a long way toward evening out the mix so to speak. Put us all on an even playing field. We may not see it in our lifetime but it could mean some hope for future generations to live outside of racial hatred.

- Brick

- Unfortunately, I think the good doctor is misrepresenting the facts here a bit. It has already been established that other metatraits do not necessarily pass completely from parent to child. When reproduction occurs, natural mutation and crossover may displace the spatial segments for the genetic code. Given how recently SURGE appeared, there simply isn't enough evidence to establish whether it will follow the same pattern, though this is likely. So even if both of your parents are changelings, there's no guarantee that you will be one as well.

- Tanaka

- So why would the doctor paint a different picture?

- Argos

- As it so happens, Mr. Yoshida is something of a bigot, or shall we say a throwback to the old Japanacorp conservatism that once dominated Yamatetsu. Our good Doctor Alexi Urbanowski happens to be a dwarf, and so the two never saw eye to eye, so to speak. Looks to me like the doc was just spilling a bit of salt into the wound.

- MacBeth

THE SURGE CRISIS

- Many of you will remember the face and voice of Rohit Talwar from the trid. One of the more outspoken leaders of the Ork Rights Committee (ORC) in Seattle, Rohit was a controversial figure. As an avowed pacifist, many viewed Rohit as a calming influence upon the ORC, a gifted leader who was turning the group away from its violence-marked past into a new era of legitimacy. Others viewed Rohit as an ungrounded idealist, whose opposition to militancy was a sell-out bid to gain mainstream acceptance.

Rohit Talwar died on September 15th, 2061. He was struck down while protecting a changeling from a rampaging human street gang. He did not fight back, and both he and the changeling were killed. The murderers are still at large.

The following excerpt from his personal journal was read aloud at his eulogy.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 25 September 2061 at 01:34:42 (PST)

I was alive during the Night of Rage. I do not remember much, but I do remember the fear my parents felt that night. I had never seen my father so afraid. My father was human, as am I. We had friends and family who were orks and trolls. We feared for them as much as we feared for ourselves.

I would say it was some sense of higher justice that drew me to the Ork Rights Committee some ten years ago, but it was not. It was fear. Fear that the tactics of young militants in ORC and similar groups would lead nowhere but to another night like the one burnt into my memory. It was through this fear, the warning system used by our body and mind when we are threatened by harm, that I had hoped to be motivated to do the most good. I believed that violent tactics could not lead to positive change. I hoped that my influence, like that of Gandhi and King, would lead to greater understanding. Sometimes the greatest illusions are within our own mind.

- Violence is not always the proper tactic, but lynch mobs are not known for listening to reason, and the only way you get the attention of the power structure is by threatening to undermine it or hurting its profit margin.

- Brick

Perhaps it was only familiarity that caused metahumanity to become more accepted over time. We have seen significant ork and troll candidates run and occasionally win political elections. They've even run for president, and the sign that a drag-



on won must certainly be positive. I had seen my bright future as more than just a hope, but it was not to be.

SURGE brought along with it the same old hatred. Rational people turned to the media and the Matrix for information and perhaps a reprieve, but none was to come. Instead of calming fears, the media fed us only rumors and paranoia. Instead of science and understanding, we received speculation and hatred. The Night of Rage had returned.

Hatred glowed in the eyes of both humans and metahumans. The source of this hatred—a small body of afflicted who deserved nothing but our aid and pity. Without knowledge, people assumed the worst—fear welled within their hearts and warped their minds. No one may ever know what spark lit the flame that burned September 12th, but it is certain that few who were there will ever forget the outcome.

I know nothing of the numbers: the wounded, the death count, the loss of nyuen from vandalism and looting. What I do know is how it felt on the street that night. Whenever I drift off to sleep, I see my father's face, full of fear. I suspect my daughter saw a similar look on my face when the streets gave way to rage once again. I pray she is not haunted by the same images that plague my sleep.

The masses that ravaged Seattle that night committed crimes not only against society but against individuals as well. Assault, murder and rape are just words until they happen to you or someone you love. Each day, the news bombards our eyes and ears with images of reactionary violence from all over the world: SURGE victims attacked by roving mobs, hospitals burned to the ground for treating changelings.

Those afflicted by SURGE have begun to fight back, escalating the violence and fueling the hatred. But what else are they to do?

We look to our political and financial leaders for inspiration and see none. Politicians who undergo SURGE almost uniformly step out of the public eye and those who do not are shunned and threatened. Those who speak out against the mistreatment of SURGE victims are dealt with harshly by the populace and the policlubs. Many of the corporations have begun to turn away changelings at the door, and God only knows what is happening to them inside the corp complexes.

- Sure, a bunch of changelings lost their jobs or suddenly found out their insurance policies don't cover genetically driven metamorphosis. I haven't seen any evidence of corps actually rounding them up or using them as lab rats, though.

- Pistol Pete

- Scan this. Yakashima corp instituted a ban on changelings right after SURGE became big news. Every single one of their corp citizens who went through the change disappeared, their records erased. It's worse than the damn Inquisition. You don't believe me, check their personnel files. If you believe a corp that size hasn't had one incident of SURGE among its citizens, then I've got some lunar real estate to sell you.

- Moon Man

- Some corps have taken a positive approach to the change. Both Wuxing and Yamatetsu are offering special employment opportunities for SURGE changelings. Granted, their real motivation may be to get an up-close look at as many changelings as possible.

- Tricky

I pray each day the violence will end and the healing will begin. I hope all sides will see the light of reason and acceptance. I act each day in accordance with my beliefs. I abide by the lessons of my youth and will not hide from my fear. I will confront it. I will stand before it and conquer it. Hopefully, others will follow my lead and we can end this together.

POLITICS OF HATE

- Like all stories, there's an opposite perspective to the SURGE phenomenon, though it may be loathsome and despicable. To show you how the "other side" thinks, here's an excerpt from a speech by Donald Leyton, a lobbyist for the Humanis Policlub. Leyton gave this speech in front of the Dunkelzahn Rift, just before the breakout of a massive riot that led to hundreds of injuries and casualties.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 5 October 2061 at 20:04:39 (PST)

I, for one, find it abhorrent that our government's laws are so far out of concurrence with scientific fact. Metahumanity has been proven to be of a separate and divergent genetic stock than the pure human genome—far enough that separate sub-species have been classified for each branch. It is more correct to refer to an elf as an elf, rather than a meta-human. The genetic codes of an elf or ork are as different from humanity as the code of a chimpanzee. We do not legally recognize chimps as humans, so why do we recognize orks as meta-humans? After all, chimpanzees are often better behaved! <laughter and cheers>

For this very reason, it is a crime against the human race that the landmark legislation proposed by Representative Slattery many years ago has never been accepted into law. As many of you faithful Humanis supporters know, Slattery's legislation would have classified elves, dwarfs, orks and trolls as separate sub-species of humanity and not races in the classical and legal sense. This legislation was defeated by liberals who claimed it would override the human rights and privileges granted to metahumans by the 2023 U.S. Supreme Court case, despite the fact that it did no such thing. Lies. All lies.

- The Slattery legislation proposed to classify metahumanity as sub-species, not races. The key here, legally at least, is that metas would no longer gain the right to protected racial status under the Constitution. Certainly they would have the right to bear arms and practice the religion of their choice, as any citizen, but they would not be legally protected from discrimination, nor would they necessarily have the right to vote in feder-



al elections. The legislation has been introduced multiple times in Congress but has failed to pass every time.

• Legal Eagle

Now, a new threat to the human race has reared its ugly head—the mutant infection dubbed Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression. This genetic disease is none other than a further dilution of both human and metahuman genetics. A whole new mongrel species has come to the fore, much more divorced from root humanity than even the trolls and orks. These monsters and half-breeds are not only granted special privileges and protections by our government, but they are allowed to walk the streets where they will infect our race with genetic decrepitude.

• Technically, this man is more full of himself than he is full of truth. All of metahumanity can interbreed with varying results, leading scientists to classify the meta-breeds as sub-species rather than species unto themselves, an important distinction.

• Tanaka

• The long and the short of it is that the man is a Humanis slug who thinks that metas are less than human. It's the same old rhetoric with a modified target. The worst of it is that inside the metahuman communities and the elven nations there are sentiments that echo Mr. Leyton's. Prejudice comes in all forms, chummer, and from all sides.

• Argent

Ask yourself why our government is diverting money to provide health care for these SURGE mutants (who make up less than 1 percent of the population) when there are still people dying from cancer and VITAS. Ask yourself what you are willing to give up in order to give the mutants a free ride. Are you willing to give up your child's education? You are, according to a recent government report that states more than 20 percent of our nation's human children are illiterate. A staggering figure, greater than many third world nations. In our nation there is a larger number of humans without SINS than there are SURGE mutants. Where is the free health care for them? Where is their education? Where are the programs to re-invest them into society and provide them with SINS? These people are not genetic freaks. They are good and decent human beings who just need a helping hand. I believe our hard-earned nuyen would be better spent on our own kind. <cheers and applause>

We can no longer stand aside and let this liberal administration give handouts to genetic mutants while human children are starving. We need to treat this SURGE phenomenon as we would any outbreak of disease and put experts in place to combat and cure the affliction. We need strong leaders and strong action to isolate those inflicted with SURGE lest they spread the disease, sexually or otherwise. This is standard procedure as outlined by the Center for Disease Control, a procedure I suggest we follow, whatever it takes. <cheers and applause>

Our nation must once again step forward and become the measure by which the world judges its actions. I call for isolated disease centers to be established outside every city, in

every state and county, to inter those with the SURGE mutation. This is the only way to protect ourselves from the prolific spread of this disease until an acceptable solution can be found. <cheers and applause>

We cannot assume that this liberal, mongrelized administration has our best interests—the interests of the pure human race—at heart. We must take decisive action ourselves, to ensure this disease is controlled. If it can't be cured, it must be curbed—starting immediately! Our genetic future and the future of all humanity lies in the balance. We can not afford to be complacent! We can not afford to be inactive! We must take a stand and we must win, this time and forever! <cheers, followed by shouting, gunfire and screams>

• I'm actually surprised. This guy is Humanis? Where is the call for extermination of the inferior races? What am I missing?

• Winger

• Remember, this was the public face of Humanis. Even they can only spew so much vitriolic dogma and get away with it. Look at this as a call to arms. Read between the lines and the message you are looking for is there, just hidden a bit more carefully. I'm sure in private Leyton has more explosive things to say.

• Puddy

• Maybe, but you will never hear them. Decades ago, Humanis took a beating, both legally and politically, for spouting that kind of nonsense. Today racism comes gift wrapped in much more pleasant and potentially agreeable packages. Make no mistake, the message of hate is the same.

• Legal Eagle

THE NEWEST RAGE—SURGE!

• You cannot expect a shockwave such as SURGE to not have an effect upon popular consciousness and culture. I pulled this report off the newswire. SURGE has already been accepted among the trendier crowds, much more quickly than Goblinization. Hopefully, the attitudes expressed by hipsters will spread into the mainstream.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 28 October 2061 at 11:41:30 (PST)

Welcome, I'm Linda Teng and this is Seattle Beat, reporting the hottest and newest in Seattle culture since 2054.

There's been a SURGE in popular culture lately, as the changelings have taken the spotlight. From fear to fascination, SURGE is on everyone's mind. Even the name sounds exciting, and let me tell you—it is!

At last count, over 5,000 changelings have expressed in the Seattle sprawl. After weeks of hospital stays and social acclimation, these changelings are now ready to reveal themselves to the world. A whole new changeling subculture has sprung into place to accommodate this need, and the first generation of SURGE clubs is providing this scene a comfortable and safe haven.



SURGE clubs are places of unusual scenery to say the least, as illustrated by the Fractured Helix—the first SURGE club to open its doors in downtown Seattle. Compared to its neighbors, Fractured Helix is an island of genetic difference, where changelings are highlighted rather than shunned. Though non-changelings are also admitted, little else is common in the establishment.

Most of the live artists who grace FH's elevated stage are changelings, such as the up-and-coming keyboardist Digit. Not only did Digit's expression grant him perfect pitch, it also gave him an additional finger on each hand for an extra level of key manipulation. Digit is often accompanied by changeling bombshell Noticia Nightcord, whose evolved vocal cords produce sonic stylings found only in nature. This duo has proven so popular, they're already receiving airtime on local Matrix feeds and are at the center of a bidding war between multiple lauded record companies. We had a chance to speak with Digit before his latest show, and here's what he had to say:

"It's not like I didn't play before I changed. I've always been a musician and my music hasn't changed all that much. For me it's just a gimmick, something for the draw, right? My music has always been acid hot, and now many more people are hearing it. SURGE gave me a gift that I've put to use, like a shot from heaven. I'm not afraid to admit it."

The Fractured Helix is quickly becoming the place to be, as local scenesters flock to the freak show. Last week, the Helix was rated the third hottest place to hang in Seattle, just under the two all time favorites, the Inferno and the 93. The man responsible is a flashing star from the San Francisco night scene who has graced our skyline with his husky voice and dwarven stature—Bonaparte. He may not top the ruler, but the Helix's manager has a flair for the unusual, which may be just what the doctor ordered for the good-old-boy-network that has been the Seattle nightlife. We had a few words with Bonaparte and here's what he had to say:

"Linda, I can't say that I'm not excited, but really I just saw a niche and took a chance. But it isn't all about money. I wasn't even born when the worst of the prejudice hit after Goblinization, and I was just a kid during the Night of Rage. But since then I've seen my share of prejudice, and I felt it was time to do something about it. To me the Fractured Helix is a place where changelings, metas and humans can all come together and have a great time while enjoying the finest in drinks, style and live entertainment. The way I see it, when you party with a person, it's hard to wake up hating them the next day. I'm just doing my little bit for racial harmony here."

And making a pretty penny at it too, Bonaparte.

While the Fractured Helix may be the greatest success, a small handful of other SURGE clubs are also doing well in their secluded way. Some of these are thrown together in the cheapest places available, often operating illegally without the proper licenses for liquor and recreational narcotics. Many of them enforce a changeling-only policy, though a few will allow anyone with the guts and the credit to come inside.



The SURGE explosion has other dark sides as well. Perhaps it is our curse, but people always seem to want what they can't or don't have—and SURGE is no exception. From the cheapest and least invasive methods such as skin dyes, prosthetics and contact lenses, to the expensive and permanent methods such as cosmetic surgery and crafted bioware, there are those who try to mimic with technology what others gain from nature. And we aren't just talking sculpted ears and fur implants. Some changelings have expressed exotic changes that shouldn't be mimicked by any sane person. Those who have tried to mimic these extreme changes have sometimes done grievous harm to themselves.

Yet, like all fads, some people always insist on taking it too far.

Until next time, this is Linda Teng for Seattle Beat.

THE CHANGELINGS

• Some of you may respect Jack Q, perhaps one of Seattle's most notorious tridsnoops. The rest of you may despise him for his holier-than-thou attitude and his willingness to dump anyone's rep in search of the truth. Whatever your thoughts are on Jack Q, there is no denying the amusement factor of his interviews. The following 60-seconds Live Chat between Jack Q and one of the first changelling celebrities, Rebecca Constantine, certainly lives up to Jack's standards.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 12 December 2061 at 07:31:59 (PST)

Jack Q: My guest today is Rebecca Constantine, one of the first changeling superstars. Rebecca, forgive me for saying this, but you are hotter than Texas asphalt during a heat wave in August.

Rebecca Constantine: So I've been told. It's the kitty-cat genes, Jack.

JQ: Well, you certainly give new meaning to the term "household pet."

RC: Are you coming on to me, Jack?

JQ: No. I'm a professional, Rebecca. I would never.

RC: Not that I would mind.

JQ: Whoa. Okay. Moving on. What did it feel like when you changed?

RC: I itched all over for about an hour—it was horrible—and then the changes really began. The most drastic expressions took a bit of time to grow out completely so the pain was spread over a few days. My eyes caused the worst problem, and I had splitting headaches for about a week. I'm glad I didn't grow a tail like some others I've seen. That probably hurts.

JQ: From Plain Jane to Fabulously Feline.

RC: Yep.

JQ: I understand that your change caused a bit of upheaval in your life. You lost your old job, the support of your family and your friends ... care to tell us what happened?

RC: I was a receptionist at a major Seattle shipping firm. I was officially fired because I hissed at my boss one too many times. He wanted me, of course, but I wasn't having any of that fat pig. Felines don't get along well with swine. Oh, and I gave the kid in the mail room a couple of scars while we made it in a broom closet—but that was an accident. The higher-ups thought I assaulted him. It was exactly the kind of excuse they needed to let me go. He was a good kid. I felt kinda bad about the scars, so I got de-clawed.

JQ: What about your friends and family?

RC: Well, I lost some friends because they were bigots and others because they just couldn't cope with my changes. And my family, well ... they don't approve of my lifestyle since the change. They have a very strict sense of morality, and, well ... I'm a porn star.

JQ: I thought the proper term was "simsensualist."

RC: My family raised me with a strong set of morals. Before I SURGE'd, I was a good girl.

JQ: And now you're a naughty kitty.

RC: Did you make that one up yourself or did the cute Ivy League writer boy on the other end of the teleprompter make it up for you?

JQ: I must admit, it was me.

RC: Sorry. I didn't mean to be rude, darling. My doctor says I have poor impulse control as a result of my feline genes. I find it next to impossible to say no to my impulses, Jack.

JQ: Any impulses right now, Rebecca?

RC: Rrowr. Don't tease, unless you want me to increase your download to the point where the routers can't handle it.

JQ: I'll do anything for ratings. Moving on. Rebecca, I get the sense you're not being up-front with me.

RC: How so? I'm always up-front.

JQ: Well, Doctor Poule of the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research has discovered no link between the physiology and psychology of SURGE changelings—in other words, SURGE does not seem to alter a victim's behavior, only their body. Is it possible you are just acting out, playing a part to further your career?



RC: Are you calling me a liar, Jack?

JQ: No. I'm calling you an actress.

RC: Who are you going to believe? A dried up old hack psychologist, or me?

JQ: Dr. Poule is far from a hack. She may not look as good in a latex bodysuit, but she's at the top of her field. I think I'll side with her on this issue. Sorry.

RC: You're not winning points here, Jack.

JQ: What can you tell me about the Draco Foundation? I understand they help displaced changelings find new jobs. Did they help you find your current employment?

RC: No, I don't think the Draco Foundation would place people into my line of work. They tried to help me find doctors specializing in SURGE, but I did just fine on my own. I didn't need a handout. And my new employers were able to find a doctor to help me adjust to my new problems.

JQ: What problems are those?

RC: Dietary mainly. I have to eat a lot of meat. Preferably rare.

JQ: Rare?

RC: Let's just say my building doesn't have rodent problems anymore.

JQ: Whoa. Well, that's about all the time we have for today, but if you would like to see any of the sims starring Ms. Constantine you can find links in our directory. My personal favorite is *In Heat*, by the way.

RC: Thanks.

JQ: Rebecca, stop licking yourself.

RC: I'm preening, Jack.

SURGE IN NATURE

• It's important to remember that SURGE isn't just a phenomenon affecting metahumanity—all sorts of critters have undergone changes. The following article comes from the November 2061 issue of *Neoscientist*. The more scientifically inclined among us may have already read this, as *Neoscientist* subscriptions are quite popular these days. But for those of you who haven't, hopefully you'll find this interesting and relevant, especially if you're planning any runs in the outdoors.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 12 December 2061 at 22:51:30 (PST)

SURGE—THE MYSTERY PRIZE DRAW OF NATURE.

by Talia Dullemond

In a paper entitled "Incidences of SURGE Expression Among the Native Flora and Fauna of the Azanian Steppes," noted Azanian scientists Carmel and Anthony Masala stunned the scientific world with their research into SURGE effects in nature.

The Masalas described several dozen new species variations they've recorded amongst the animal, plant and insect life of South Africa. Like SURGE expressions among metahumanity, the new characteristics being exhibited by the variant species tend to be more subtle than a complete transformation into a new species, and enable the creature to fulfill its ecological niche more effectively.

• So what you're saying is that we won't get any armadillos turning into juggernauts, but we may get an armadillo with hardened armor or the ability to shape earth?

• Scarab

• That's exactly what they're saying. Let me just say that I think I might get offline and feed my cat, just in case it suddenly expresses and leaps through the cupboard door or sharpens its claws on my cyberdeck ...

• Minx

The Masalas discovered that a creature may express a particular ability, but that ability is not manifested species wide. For example, at least three variant expressions are known to have occurred among the common white field mouse. One mouse has expressed adaptive coloration, a second has exhibited increased reflexes, while the third has been dubbed the Prickle Mouse after manifesting a coat of tiny quills, somewhat akin to a porcupine.

In a statement recently issued by the Combined International Committee of Zoological and Botanical Nomenclature, the identifier of "Novo"—meaning to make anew, change or alter—is to be appended to any SURGE variants, along with their variant identification. For example a SURGE variation of the common click beetle that originally attracted the moniker of "Capacitor Bug" (due to the unusual static electrical defenses it has expressed) has been categorized as *Elateridae Novo Beta*. The Alpha variant expressed the ability to emit a spray of caustic liquids from its abdomen to deter anything that may try to make it a tasty snack.

• Take it from me folks, you don't want to start scrabbling around if one of these little buggers lands in your hair, or it's a short trip into lobotomy land with frizzy hair.

• Caliban

In their paper, the pair also discuss the commercial viability of the new species, stating that at this stage, the numbers of SURGE affected flora and fauna are still too low to enable wholesale monopolization. One example they cite as particularly ripe for study is the dual-natured variant of the Swallowtail Butterfly (*Papilio Antimachus Novo Gamma*). This



particular insect has wings which constantly swirl with all manner of colors. Preliminary research by the Masalas has discovered that this particular effect is due to an astrally sensitive pigmentation contained in the butterfly's wings. This causes the pigmentation to change hue according to the changes in the butterfly's aura.

- That's interesting. Several benefits are of course immediately obvious; if this pigmentation could be extracted, it could then be made into some form of spray in order to allow mundane doctors—once trained—to monitor their patients' health by viewing aural shifting. And, of course, mood rings may now become a reality!

- The Smiling Bandit
Strikes Again! Ha Ha Ha!

- This also begs the question as to whether or not SURGE affected creatures breed true, or if their manifested powers are, in effect, random. I guess we will discover this with time, though magic has a nasty habit of following its own rules.

- Dr. Doolittle

- What this document doesn't say is that there have been many reported cases of entirely new species being discovered that have no precedents. For all we know, they've appeared out of nowhere.

- Psychojester

The Masalas' paper is careful to point out that SURGE effects are not limited to fauna. All manner of Awakened plant varieties have also been listed. One of the most apt variations is a new strain of clover that has expressed an immunity to herbicides, making it difficult to eradicate. Many of the plant species variants on record have become dual-natured to attract pollinators with astral sight. Any daisy can glow in the ultraviolet spectrum, but the astral spectrum is going to be comparatively emptier, thus making it easier for Awakened bees to find their flowers.

- Great ... super-clover. Why am I even bothering to read this?
- Frogger

- These little variations may not be large enough to swallow you whole, but the next time you're swarmed by bees that think your activated foci is an Awakened daisy, don't come whining to me when you've been stung.

- Tamino

"All too easy!"

- Pay attention, Froggy. Your world is changing around you, and you could care less? If simple curiosity about the world isn't enough, think of what toxin resistance could mean if someone was able to get wheat or soy to grow safely in otherwise toxic

land. Do you think there might just be a little bit of research going on there? Don't you think that could be of interest to your running career?

- NightRain

"Don't vote, it only encourages them."

THE NEW PARANORMALS

- Since SURGE kicked in, parazoologists have been scrambling like crazed children to identify and categorize new species. Quite a few of them have already made significant finds, boosting their careers and extraction potential quite significantly. The new species below were each discovered by Dr. David Wright. Some of you may recognize Wright as a pupil of the famous Dr. Patterson. Following his mentor's disappearance four years ago during a trip into Amazonia, Dr. Wright has dedicated himself to continuing Dr. Patterson's work, producing several supplemental guides to paranormal creatures. The following entries were excerpted from his latest work.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 15 Dec 2061 at 22:09:38 (PST)

DEMON RAT

Demon rats are the result of a widespread SURGE expression in the common paranormal animal known as the devil rat. Quite similar to their devil rat cousins, demon rats have been reported in almost every metroplex and sprawl across the globe.

Demon rats are a bit larger than devil rats, with their bodies typically reaching a full meter in length. Their tails extend an additional meter, and significantly aid the creature's balance. The most common physiological difference between demon rats and their progenitors is a pair of short but sharp horns mounted on the rat's head, slightly behind and above the eyes. Demon rats also tend to have full coats of fur, like a normal rat. They are just as resistant to poisons and diseases as their predecessors, and they have also exhibited saliva that is exceptionally caustic and corrosive, causing severe burns. As a rule, demon rats tend to be much tougher than devil rats, and there have been several reports of demon rats that rapidly recovered from apparently lethal wounds.

Like devil rats, demon rats are quite cunning, and can easily identify and avoid traps. Demon rats also seem to be more socially organized, acting in concert and leading packs of normal rats and even devil rats. Their hands are quite dexterous, and they have reportedly used them to unlatch cage doors. Demon Rats are aggressive hunters and have been known to attack humans and metahumans.

- What do you get when you put a Demon Rat in the blender?
One pissed-off Demon Rat.

- Jaws

- When Dr. Wright says these things are aggressive, he's not kidding. Devil Rats tend to be scavengers, digging through trash and eating the occasional dead animal. Demon Rats, on the



other hand, are hunters. They scavenge when necessary, but if they're hungry and something they think they can kill is around, they'll go for it.

- Mime

- Wait and minute. These things can regenerate? Drek, the sprawl is doomed!

- Piper

GLOMOSS

Glomoss was first documented in the Allied German States and several other Central European regions. It was quickly discovered that this hardy moss would grow almost anywhere, provided it had an abundant supply of water. Since its discovery, several corporations have capitalized upon it, growing it for customers who wish to take advantage of its special properties.

Glomoss is a dual natured flora that is sensitive to magical activity on the astral plane. When the plant detects astral activity or mana concentrations on the astral plane, its physical form undergoes a chemical reaction that causes the moss to glow with a luminescent green light.

Since this discovery, glomoss has been used as a cheap and easily maintained source of astral security, often deployed in conjunction with a camera or light sensitive receptors near

the plant to trigger an alarm when it glows. Some corps have begun to grow glomoss on walls or within wall-shaped containers, so that it acts as a living astral barrier as well as an astral detection system.

- There are drawbacks to using glomoss for astral security. First of all, it's dual, so it's vulnerable to mana spells. Dead moss doesn't glow. Secondly, if you use glomoss you can't use bound spirits; if the spirit wanders too close the glomoss will detect it. The same goes with wards or other astral constructs—they have to be kept away. I don't know about you, but I'd rather have a spirit around than Awakened moss.

- Shetani



- The ability of the moss to detect astral activity doesn't require line of sight. Some smart security specialists have begun hiding the moss within opaque containers along with photosensitive sensors. (Of course, the moss needs light to live, so it's only "on watch" half the time—the rest of the time it gets sun lamp treatment.) An astral mage or spirit won't see the moss unless they stick their astral head inside the box, but the glomoss may well detect them, light up and set off the alarm.

- Peek-a-boo



HORNED BEAR

Following its first appearance in the northern UCAS, the horned bear was given its name by several screamsheets for both its size and its ram-like horns. Since then, over thirty horned bear sightings have been reported, almost all within the cold climate regions of the Northern Hemisphere, especially Yakut and Norway. Horned bear sightings in the northern forests of the California Free State, however, suggest they are not restricted to cooler climates.

Horned bears are much larger than standard black bears, standing 4 meters tall when erect. They sport a pair of curled, ram-like horns on either side of the head and their fur has a dark, almost-black hue.

Like most bears, horned bears are incredibly strong and resilient, and quite dangerous when angered. Horned bear hides are exceptionally thick and feature a layer of tough dermal deposits, allowing the creature to shrug off most damage. Horned bears are also dual-natured, and have exhibited exceptional speed and strength that can only be magical in nature.

When an intruder enters a horned bear's territory (physically or astrally), these creatures seem to follow a certain pattern of behavior. The horned bear approaches and issues a howling challenge, expecting the intruders to flee.

- The Doc's assessment is not entirely true. I was with my team out in the frozen tundra of a country I'll decline to name, when

we ran across one of these things. It stood up to its full length and roared at us, like it was trying to scare us off. We didn't want to risk alerting others with gunfire, and we couldn't go around it. My chummer Tor, who's part Amerind and has been on a "personal honor" kick lately, decides he wants to take this thing on, mano a bear-o. He pulls his axe, charges forward, and goes at it with the bear. Tor got batted around a bit, but then he managed to tag it with a good slice. After that, the bear simply backed off, licking its cut, watching us walk away. Weird.

Sure enough, on our way back out three days later, we ran into it again. We got the same challenge, only this time we had pursuit that was getting close and couldn't waste time. So we simply opened up on it. Boy, did that press the bear's big red button. It charged us like a demon from hell, moving quicker than I'd have thought possible, knocking trees out of the way to get at us. Small arms fire didn't even hurt it, and it ripped Tor in half like he was made out of ricepaper. Luckily we had some heavy ordnance left to take care of it.

In retrospect, we handled it the right way the first time around. Be warned.

- Mac
- So you're saying these things are intelligent?
- Mime
- Not really, though they're smarter than the average bear. Many animals exhibit behavior similar to this, at least within their own species. The horned bear is just a little more obvious about it.
- Wright

NIGHT MANTA

The creature dubbed the night manta is an Awakened variant of the manta ray. However, unlike its aquatic cousins, the night manta is not confined to the water. A night manta spends most of its time airborne, levitating through magical means. They average 1.8 meters in length, including their tail, and have a wingspan of almost 3 meters.

Night mantas are nocturnal hunters, sleeping underground and away from the sunlight during the daylight hours. Due to their jet-black skin, they are virtually invisible in the night sky as they swoop down upon their prey. Night mantas have a large stinger at the end of their tails, through which they inject their target with a virulent venom. The mouths of night mantas contain several rows of sharp, needle-like teeth which they use to tear apart and eat their prey.

Night mantas are dual natured, though they seem to have no interest in the astral forms of magicians or spirits.

Few night mantas have been reported to date, though all reports have placed them in remote locations, usually in temperate climate zones.

- The doc's not fraggin' around when he talks about these critters havin' some deadly poison. I was laid up in a "hospital" after a job in Portland, and this enormous, cybered up troll was

brought in and set up at the bed next to me. I'm no slouch and have my share of 'ware, but this dude was definitely not someone I'd want to start a fight with, and here he was screaming like a little girl. After a couple minutes, he seemed to scream himself hoarse, and just lay there whimperin' while the doc tried to figure out what to do. Then he convulsed a few times, his face turned black, and he croaked.

Not the way I want to go out, that's for sure. If I had my choice, I'd rather go out quietly, in my sleep, filthy rich.

• Krom



• About a month back, I saw about a dozen or so of these things flying around the evening skies just outside Houston. Don't know what they were doing, they just circled around for a while. I didn't know what they were, so I watched for a little while. It was actually kind of breathtaking the way they were dancing around the night sky, silhouetted against a full moon. Then they just flew away.

It was a really eerie sight, but one I'll never forget.

• Maelwys



SANGRE DEL DIABLO

In the rainforests of South America, there is a tree called *Sangre del Drago*, which translates to Blood of the Dragon. For centuries, the dark red sap of this tree was said to have miraculous healing properties. Rumors have abounded for decades of an Awakened version of this tree hidden deep within the jungles of Amazonia that does, indeed, have a magical healing property.

The *Sangre del Diablo* (Blood of the Devil), however, is a twisted and hideous SURGE variant of this noble tree. Only a few instances of this tree have been reported, and we can only hope they do not spread. Standing up to 40 meters tall, this huge tree has expressed a number of magical capabilities.

The *Sangre del Diablo* doesn't feed off chlorophyll, as most plants do. Instead, the tree is carnivorous, using a magical compulsion to lure its victims close. Once the unfortunate creature is near enough, the tree engulfs it, spewing its dark-red corrosive sap onto its victim. The sap kills, then dissolves the tree's prey, allowing the *Sangre del Diablo* to absorb the liquid remains.

The porous wood of the *Sangre del Diablo* is surprisingly solid, making the tree resistant to conventional means of removal (axes, chainsaws, fire and so on). The *Sangre del Diablo* has also proven highly resistant to magic.

• These abominations are not merely a byproduct of SURGE, they are the result of years of torture and slow poisoning of the Earth. What was once a beneficial living being, a creature of the Earth, has been twisted and warped by the mistakes of metahumanity into a fearsome and evil predator.

• Son of Gaia

• Toxic, carnivorous trees? Remind me to support my local deforestation project.

• Bull

"The Best Ork Decker You Never Met!"

• What Doc Wright didn't mention was that his buddy and mentor, Dr. Patterson, disappeared in the Amazonian jungles four years ago looking for the rumored Dragon's Blood tree. The question is, did Patterson find his Awakened tree, or the Sangre del Diablo?

• Who

• I know a rich slag who's offering top cred for someone to retrieve the wood of one of these trees. He wants to have a nice, blood-red, real-wood dining table to fit his décor, and seems to think this wood fits the bill with its rarity and durability. Before you go harvesting though, be warned, this tree may harvest you.

• Psycho Toon

SHAMBLER

Over a dozen of these loathsome creatures have been reported in swamps and sewers around the world. It was originally speculated that shamblers were SURGE-expressing variants of ghouls or goblins, but this theory has been discarded because shamblers are not infected with the HMMVV virus.

The shambler is a slight but muscular creature standing approximately 1.4 meters tall and weighing 150 kilograms with a set of four near-sighted eyes. Specimens captured to date have been pale and lethargic, and they seem to have a preference for dark, secluded places. Shamblers are able to produce an extremely sticky substance from glands in its neck and chest cavity. Shamblers spit globs of this "glue" at targets, temporarily immobilizing them and sticking them to the ground and surrounding objects. Within minutes, the shambler's victim suffocates.

A shambler then uses this glue to stick the corpse to the shambler's own body, creating a protective, grisly "pelt." Multiple creatures are trapped in this manner, forming a grotesque shell the shambler carries around and hides under. The shambler continues to excrete more of its sticky secretions over the bodies, which eventually hardens into a resinous glaze, strengthening the shambler's shell. The shambler feeds off the bodies through a network of veins close to the surface of its skin. The veins meld to the shell, allowing the shambler to suck vital nutrients from the corpses.

A shambler shell is extremely hard, able to deflect a hail of bullets, but weakens rapidly under prolonged exposure to heat or sunlight. The shells vary greatly in size and weight, depending on the number and type of creatures forming it. To date,



the largest shambler shell reported was nearly 8 feet wide and over 500 kilograms.

• Hey Doc, here's one for you. I was slogging my way through the sewer systems after a little job a few weeks back, and I ran across what I assume now was one of these shamblers. The weird thing was, it was outside of its shell! This small, ugly, pale white thing went running for cover as soon as our flashlight hit it. We were in a bit of a hurry and it didn't seem too interested in us, so we didn't stop to play.

A minute or so later we passed this big mound of critters and stuff all stuck together. We would've passed right by and ignored it, but it started to spit these mucous goobers at us, so we had to riddle the bugger with bullets. After expending more shells than I would've guessed were necessary, the thing keeled over. We checked underneath the mound (nearly getting stuck in the process), and saw a similar critter to the one we'd seen earlier.

Any ideas?

• Jaws

• It's been theorized that shamblers reproduce asexually. The few specimens that have been studied don't have any reproductive organs. It's quite possible that after it's fed enough, a shambler sheds its shell and simultaneously produces an off-



spring. The old shell serves as food and shelter until the new shambler is strong enough to create its own shell. The parent shambler would probably then start accumulating a new shell for itself.

• Wright

• I have a new paranormal to report—or at least I think I do. I was part of a smuggler crew operating a ship in the north Atlantic, and we had just picked up a new deckhand, a Welsh slag named MacDougal. He was a spooky fragger, but he at least kept his weirdness to himself. To cut a long story short, we ran into some trouble and had to shake loose some pursuit. Things were looking grim, so our pilot took a radical course of action and steered directly towards Tir na nOg—right into the Veil.

Now, the Veil is some sort of magical protection the Tir uses to keep intruders out of their land, and all I can say is that it severely messes with your mind. Not only do you find yourself going loopy and unable to tell up from down, but all the instrumentation goes wacky. It's impossible to track another ship into the Veil.

Sure enough, we lost our pursuit, and came out of the Veil about 12 clicks southwest of our last recorded position. But while we were in the thick of it, MacDougal suddenly went crazy. He was running around on deck, screaming and tearing his clothes off. Me and some of the crew tackled him, but while we were holding him down, he started to change. His skin suddenly turned scaly, his neck extended, and his face transformed into this wicked beak with small horns on the side. In only a few seconds, he had torn through his clothes and pushed all of us off of him like we were rag dolls.

I was one of the lucky ones who didn't go over the side, and I got a good view of him—or whatever bloody monstrosity he had turned into. If I hadn't seen the size of Dunkelzahn on the trid, I'd have said he had transformed into a dragon. He had the scales, claws and wings of a dragon, but he was only about 2.5 meters tall. Now, I suppose he could have secretly been a dragon all along, riding around in human form, until something about the Veil disagreed with him. But I got the sense he was as surprised with the change as we were, and that he never expected to turn into some mini dracoform.

In any case, MacDougal didn't stick around to explain, probably because the deck-mounted Vindicator was already swinging around to bear on him. He put those new wings of his

to use, and off he went, never to be seen again. Was this just the most wicked SURGE expression seen so far, or was something even stranger going on? You tell me.

• George

• Sounds to me like the Veil messed with more than your sense of direction.

• Callisto

• I don't know. I heard a similar story about some guy who turned into a small dragon down in Jakarta. The first report I saw mentioned the guy had gone on a rampage, and it mysteriously ended when a larger dragon appeared on the scene.

Oddly enough, when I went back to retrieve the news article after reading George's post, I couldn't find any record of it. In fact, I'd be willing to say someone had deliberately arranged for that little news item to disappear.

• Pink Eye

• Sounds to me like a dragon child went astray, and Momma or Poppa Dragon had to come along and spank it. No one knows anything about baby or young adult dragons, right? How do we know they don't send 'em out into the world in human guise to learn the ropes? Maybe it's like missionary work among the mortals or something. I mean, it's dragons we're talking about. Just be glad they don't send their kids to school with the metahuman kids.

• Bob—who spells the name backwards

• It could be that dragon children Goblinize at puberty, like orks and trolls sometimes do.

• Red Menace

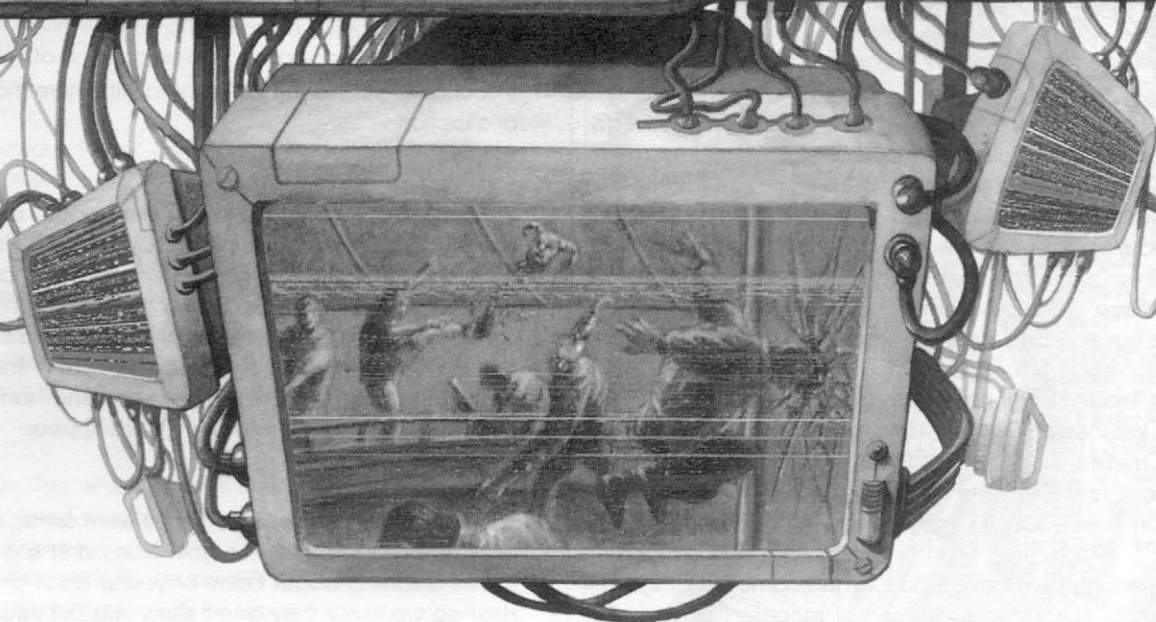
• I've met one of these creatures, and to the best of my knowledge it is not a dragon—though it did work for one. It is clear these creatures are related to dragons in some way, but in my experience the relationship is one of master and pawn.

• Shetani

• Not all of these creatures work for dragons, though the dragons wish this was not the case. Many of these creatures have their own agendas and goals, and walk their own paths.

• Quicksilver

HYSTERIA



Nothing says End Of The World like the rise in chaos, cults, religious fervor and just plain weirdness from every quarter of the globe. Karl Marx once said that religion is the opiate of the masses. If that's the case, then cults are the BTL-induced nightmare of the masses. Some are useless and silly, but others are deadly and vicious. Do the cults create hysteria, or does hysteria create the cults?

Most sprawl dwellers don't worry too much about cults—they just hope they don't get caught in a random subway nerve-gas attack or that their rebellious teen doesn't choose to be the next Universal Brotherhood poster child. Those of us creeping around the shadows tend to bump into cults and other uglies in the dark, so it pays to be informed. Here are some samplings of what's out there, culled from a list of literally hundreds of them. Some of these reports come from shadowrunners who have done their research, others come from the mouths of madness themselves. Activate your bulldrek buffers now.

• Captain Chaos

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CHILDREN OF THE DRAGON

by Rae Martin, NewsNet Reporter, 9 August 2061

Ever since metahumanity decided that using tools and wearing clothes were good ideas, people have consistently shown interest in being a part of something larger than themselves. This can be a nation, a club or even a chat room. The largest concentration of this feeling, however, can be found in religion, especially since the advent of the Sixth World.

One of the direct beneficiaries of this "call to prayer" has been the Children of the Dragon organization. The Children of the Dragon (CotD) is a religious group that was formed following the tragic assassination of President Dunkelzahn in 2057 to "spread the sacred word of the dragon to all people." The members of the group believe that Dunkelzahn was a divine being who sacrificed himself for the sake of the survival of metahumanity.

Here on the fourth anniversary of his death, with Halley's Comet in the sky, we look toward the Children to see if they're still keeping the flame burning.



PRESCOTT



• I've always felt sorry for them more than anything else. To have such a lack within yourself that you have to find something external to throw your heart and soul into, that's a feeling I've never understood. The real power is within oneself.

• Mystic

• And the lack of the ability to see beyond your own limited experience is even sadder. Don't preach on issues you know nothing about. The Dragon has shown us the way, and all we do is celebrate that fact and try to share it with others. If you can't handle that, then you're the one I pity.

• Sister Goldenhair

• I just loaded Shadowcell with a continuous loop of the most boring lesson on binary mathematics I could find. It awaits anyone who wishes to start a flamewar over spiritual and religious beliefs. Respect, people, respect.

• Captain Chaos

"I Am Everywhere!"

The number of individuals who claim membership in the group has increased dramatically since Dunkelzahn's death. The reappearance of Halley's Comet has thrown membership through the roof as people search for a way to make sense of the events that surround them. The number of men and women who follow the Children of the Dragon is difficult to measure, as they recruit heavily from among the SINless and other street people.

• Sounds suspiciously like the Universal Brotherhood to me.

• Joey

• You could say the same thing about most other ministries for the poor out there. I'd say the main difference is that the converted don't drop their former lives, don't move into Dragon Central and don't develop an allergy to insecticides. Plus, all bug scans on CotD types have turned up negative.

• Deprogrammer

This practice skews any attempt at determining the actual membership count, but the closest estimation places membership approaching 80,000 members across the UCAS.

• Sweet Jesus, I knew I was seeing a lot of dragon-kinder lately, but I didn't realize it was that many. I even saw a trid-ad for them the other day during the Timberwolves match.

• Curious George

• And if that isn't a statement on our time, I don't know what is.

• Zephyr

The Children of the Dragon has enjoyed enough prosperity to rival any other religion to surface since the Awakening. Their congregations, called crèches, center around the temples that are the focus of their religious lives. The first and largest Temple of the Dragon was built on Prince Edward Island, UCAS, and is considered by members of the group to be the center of their faith.

• Ms. Martin isn't kidding about that, either. All major events in the Children of the Dragon are held in those temples, be they marriage, funeral, whatever. I understand that every member is supposed to try to make a pilgrimage to one of those temples once every few years to commune with the spirit of Dunkelzahn or something. I asked a friend of mine who's in the church to explain it, but he said he couldn't talk about it outside of the crèche.

• Sam I Am

• Has anyone checked any of these major temples on the astral? They have a noticeable astral presence.

• Collide

• Those temples are so hot because each of the main sites has a special altar with one of the Big D's talon clippings incorporated into it and then consecrated. The mojo those things generate is off the scale.

• Abyssinia

• They also don't stint on astral security. Those pretty ivy plants they love to grow along the walls of the temples are Guardian Vines, designed to hold you just until one (or more) of the good number of people on astral watch drop by. That is, assuming they don't spot you themselves. They're always friendly until you give them a reason not to be, but they don't kid around. Don't mess with them unless you want your hoop professionally kicked.

• Wild Child

• Where the frag did they get Dunkelzahn's talon clippings?

• Madam Rouge

The organization originally attempted to obtain the land next to the Dunkelzahn Rift as the site for their main temple, but was unable to do so. Instead, they purchased land a few miles away and built the temple for their DeeCee chapter there within two years of the President's death. Since that time, the organization has spread to temples in St. Louis and Boston, with smaller crèches throughout the UCAS.

The founder and leader of the Children of the Dragon is known as David Dragonson. Dragonson was born as David Lawrence Emerson in DeeCee in 2031. His father was one of the board of directors of a mid-size corporation, guaranteeing a life of privilege for his son. He was an only child who never excelled in school or work, without magical talent or ambition. Though popular, he had few lasting friendships and seemed unable to decide on a direction for his life, drifting from cause to cause as he searched for a final goal.

• Emerson used to date my sister for a couple of years in college. He was one of those guys that could smile, say the most outrageous lies and get away with it because you couldn't help liking him. He'd have made a great politician except for the fact that he couldn't get his act together long enough to finish a pack of chewing gum.

• Desiree

• Given our current crop of political winners, I'm not sure that disqualifies him.

• Poli Sci

• Charisma like that is often the mark of a budding magical talent. I wonder that no one ever saw the potential in him.

• Mystic

Lacking direction, his father got him a job as a gofer for Dunkelzahn's campaign team. The campaign seemed to flip a switch inside Emerson's head and he threw himself into the work, making a name for himself as a dedicated and resourceful individual. Something about the dragon inspired young David, motivating him towards dreams he had never held before. Those dreams were shattered when Dunkelzahn was assassinated.

Following the President's death, Emerson committed himself to holding a silent vigil at the site of the explosion. For months, he acted as a man whose sanity had been ripped from him, staring for hours at a time into the magical rift that had opened during the explosion that killed President Dunkelzahn. He would also recite from Dunkelzahn's last will and testament to anyone who would listen. Most who passed by ignored the wild, unkempt man who rambled about the former president. But a few of the other dragon groupies listened, and they followed him when he finally left the rift.

• I heard that among the people who went with Emerson was Chara Kendring, the head of magical security for the Republican Party HQ. She just disappeared when Emerson left and showed up six months later at a CoTD press conference at the main temple on Prince Edward Island. There was quite the proper panic attack when the higher-ups learned she was gone and their precious party secrets might be out.

• DeeCee Insider

Two months later, David reappeared as David Dragonson, leader of the Children of the Dragon. He gave his initial statement on the talk show "UCAS Today," telling the nation of the divine message of Dunkelzahn. The group gained attention when Dragonson began performing magical acts such as healing and transmutation, much to the surprise of those who had known him as a mundane. He claimed that his magical ability was a gift of the dragon and even more people flocked to his church.

• The Children of the Dragon have become a clearing-house for magically active wannabes. It seems that a few people formerly considered mundane have had abilities triggered since joining the group, so hermetic hopefuls are showing up in droves.

• Mystic

• Word is that the newly Awakened are following a totem named Dragon. That's the center of the church's

doctrine, and some who weren't shamans before have become so since contacting the totem.

• Wild Child

• That's ludicrous. A totem doesn't limit itself to a small group of people. It either is or isn't, across eternity. Totems are picky about who they work with, but they aren't that picky.

• Callban

• But if it's new, who's to say? Magic hasn't been around long enough for us to know all the rules yet. This year alone ought to prove that.

• Miranda

• Dragonson is a dragon himself. That's the only possible answer that fits all the facts.

• Dragonslayer

In the years that followed, the Children of the Dragon reached a plateau. While they continued their focus on ministry and aiding the poor and neglected, their membership ceased to grow. The current members showed little sign of falling away, but the organization had difficulty drawing in fresh blood. Observers thought this was a sign that the group had been little more than a fad following Dunkelzahn's death, but recent months have shown signs of renewal.

NO SUSPECTS IN BRUTAL SLAYINGS

Posted 08-14-61

New Orleans (HTB)—Police say they have no leads yet to the bloody multiple homicide discovered in an apartment in the French Quarter. At least eleven adults and two children died in the slaying, though police have declined to release their identities. There is no confirmation whether this is the work of a single mass murderer, or whether cult activity or drugs were involved.

While details of the murders are being kept confidential, the man who discovered the bodies, pizza delivery person Chad Earl, had this to say: "Oh man, was it gross. I got the apartment number wrong, and I saw that the door was slightly open. It was dark inside, but I could smell something funny in the air, like, uh, incense. Yeah. So I knocked and stuck my head in, and kicked on the eyelights I use to read receipts in the dark. Oh man, there was blood everywhere. Splattered on the walls, dripping from the ceiling, congealing in dark pools on the floor. I thought at first it was syrup or something, but then I saw the bodies. Oh man, it was a major buzzkill. All of their throats had been slit, and they had these grotesque flaps of skin or something hanging out. I guess that was their tongues. Oh man. So I called the cops, and while I waited, I saw that there were black handprints and some other weird symbols drawn on the floor and walls, in a bunch of shapes. I was trying to read them, but the cops kicked me out because I was tracking blood all over the place."



The organization has recently broken ground on new temple sites in Denver and Seattle. Smaller groups have begun appearing not only across the UCAS, but across the border in the CAS as well, forcing more than one crèche to move to larger buildings to accommodate its worshippers. It has been suggested that the reappearance of Halley's comet is partially to blame for this resurgence of religious interest. Putting the effects of hysteria aside, the question of why the Children of the Dragon should have gained so many more members proportionally than other cults is one that has puzzled observers for some time.

- The cult (because that's what it is) has grown because it uniquely focuses on the Sixth World. I mean, who else follows a dragon? Emerson has great timing, and he knows how to use marketing and investments to package an appealing product. The last time any religion was this skillfully built was when some science fiction writers got together in the twentieth century. Money can sell anything.
- Deprogrammer
- There's more to it. Dragonson has formed a secret organization within the cult composed mostly of "ex"-shadowrunners. He uses this group both as security and to proactively counter "dark things in the world" like he believes Dunkelzahn would have done—one of their first ops was to eliminate a bug hive in DeeCee.
- Blossom
- Watch for a guy who calls himself Joshua Morningstar. He's the power behind the recent upswing in converts and he can speak with the voice of an angel. He'll probably be inheriting the whole dragon kit-and-kaboodle when Dragonson retires.
- Abyssinia

Regardless of the cause, no one can deny that the Children of the Dragon is becoming a familiar name across the UCAS, rivaling smaller, traditional Judeo-Christian sects for membership. While some are concerned at this growth, others welcome the group with open arms. A few pundits have pointed out similarities between the Children and the Universal Brotherhood, another group that claimed to be acting for the good of metahumanity. But so far there has been no indication that the Children of the Dragon are anything more than they claim to be. The only thing we are assured of is that the Children of the Dragon will not be disappearing any time soon.

CULT OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

by Fatima

Charles Manson. Jim Jones. Shoko Asahara. What do they all have in common, besides being dead? Don't know? Maybe a few more names will help. How about Skyler Parks from the Tacoma chapter of Humanis Policlub? Youn Kim Abal from the Reformed Moonies in Bellevue? Sound familiar now? They should. They're all extremely charismatic cult leaders. You should remember their names because they're also the type of cult leaders who had their followers building pipe bombs, mixing deadly chemical compounds and taking lives instead of just

recruiting people to pass out flowers and leaflets at the airport.

Folks, I got a new name to add to that list, if you haven't heard it on the news already: Jeremiah Adams. Jeremiah is the leader of the Seventh Seal, a Bible-swinging hate cult that definitely doesn't believe that the meek will inherit the Earth. Now, the Seventh Seal hasn't pulled any mass-murder sprees or bombing campaigns yet, but they get my vote for cult-that's-most-likely-to-go-pop-and-take-lots-of-us-with-it.

- Yawn. More alarmist bulldrek? Come on Cap, it's just more of the same comet hype. Nothing extreme. There's weirder stuff happening in Hong Kong.
- Droog
- Tell that to the people suffering from SURGE in the hospitals because of the severe changes going on in their bodies, or because some Humanis thug beat them so badly they'll be drinking from a straw for the rest of their lives.
- Doc

I found out about this group when I went to visit a friend of mine who'd just gotten out of the hospital. My friend had just undergone SURGE, but her expression was fairly minor and the hospital merely ran a check-up then sent her home. And before you ask, yeah, she's got a legit SIN. She actually runs a profitable talismonger shop in Renton, which is where I went to visit her.

- If that's who I think it is, Fatima's chummer is Rosy Baker and her shop was Rose's Magic Garden. Shame what happened to her shop; it was kinda small but real cozy, and she always had a cup of tea for a friend or favorite customer.
- BethSheba

I arrived to find a motley group of norms with signs in one hand and Bibles in another, throwing handfuls of ashes at passers-by. Apparently, word had spread in the community about her condition, and the freaks had crawled out of the woodwork. Some of them were wailing and holding signs proclaiming the world's end. When I got closer, I saw that the signs had a postscript that read "Revelation 5:6-14." Not being a Biblical scholar, it didn't mean much to me except that Revelations supposedly had an apocalyptic vision of the future in which spiritual war was waged for the salvation of mankind. Still, something about the group put the hairs on the back of my neck to prickle, so I took a look at them in the astral.

Of course, I immediately regretted it. The sheer fervor of emotion swirling around them, the hate, excitement, religious zeal and desperation was enough to immediately give me a headache. So far, though, I didn't see any evidence of magical tampering with the crowd. My mistake was in assuming that this meant they were somehow safe.

I passed through, getting a mouthful of ash and some menacing glares for my trouble. My friend was inside having some tea, still a little shaken up by the turn of events. I did my best to comfort her, then offered to give her a lift home. As she closed up the shop, I could see the crowd outside had grown a bit larger. We shrugged on our jackets and stepped outside.



As soon as they saw her, the mob of maniacs set upon us, their wild hair, ashes and stones flying. "Repent!" they shouted. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone!" one yelled as a rock smacked an intricate pattern in the door's safety glass. Another rock knocked my friend square on the head. Down she went like a cooked noodle, and I saw red. These fraggers had *hit* us!

"Eye for an eye!" I shouted, and let loose a stun spell on the crowd. That bought me enough time to drag her into my car, but it didn't sit too well with the fanatics I missed, who started howling for my blood. Thankfully I had a spirit on standby, and it kept them busy while we escaped. The violence didn't stop once we left, though. The bastards firebombed my friend's shop and a riot ensued, spreading through the neighborhood. Some other metas in the hood were badly beaten. It was only later that I'd heard about Humanis' involvement.

Once I got my chummer all taken care of, I put some feelers out and asked for any info I could get. The first business was the deal behind the Revelations quote. It dealt with all these fires, floods and disasters that happen around the end of the world after a bunch of seals are broken open. What really caught my eye, though, was the passage about the seventh seal, and this star the Bible called Wormwood that falls to earth. What do you think my next thought was? If you said "the comet," you got it in one. That gave me the shivers and set me to digging for more.

I had a decker run the arrest reports from the riot, and it turned out a few of the arrestees had been linked to a religious group called the Seventh Seal, led by one Jeremiah Adams. A

quick search on Mr. Adams turned up a surprise—he was a changeling! The picture we dug up clearly showed the crown of seven horns around his blonde head that were a result of SURGE. Talk about your fashion victims. I thought at first the horns might actually be cyber, but they were all natural. This raised the first Big Question: why was a changeling-led cult attacking others affected by SURGE?

I asked around on the street, and I found out that his adherents called Jeremiah the "Lamb of God." According to those Bible verses, the Lamb of God was the only one worthy enough to break open the seals and pass judgment, since he was slain and rose again (to paraphrase what they said). In this guy's case, it didn't really make sense. How could someone rise from the dead?

We dug in a little deeper and found the real dirt. First, Jeremiah was listed as a low-end flunky in the Humanis poli-club just a few months earlier, before he expressed as a changeling. Jeremiah apparently said the wrong thing to the wrong person, because he had a near-death experience at the hands of the Sons of Sauron, that ork/troll extremist group. They caught him in an alley and stomped on his innards until they became pudding. Humanis made a big deal out of paying his hospital bills and decrying the attack, crying to the media about how this was another example that metahumans weren't much better than rabid animals.

Then, in the middle of his hospital stay, Jeremiah SURGED into a changeling. Humanis suddenly had a mess on their hands—they were harboring a metahuman freak! Not a prob-



lem, say the Bible-thumpers of the group. Check this passage here. He's not a freak, but divinely gifted. He's the Lamb of God. Wink wink, nudge nudge.

- Do not pay attention to what Fatima says. We have found that she works for a number of subversive elements that seek to pervert what is left of our society. If you want to know the truth, come to one of our meetings in Renton or call LTG# 5536-72-0612.
- Hugh Mann

You have to give Humanis credit, they must have really worked all two of their available brain cells to pull an advantage out of this one. They created a whole rationale to prop Jeremiah up as a cult figurehead. SURGE, the comet and all the craziness happening around the world are the results of the breaking of the seventh seal. The sixth seal got broken around the Awakening, and other disasters in the past are blamed on the breaking of other seals. Of course, the only flaw in this is that Jeremiah wasn't around during those times, but like most fanatic groups with gaping holes in their ideas, they either ignore you, pretend to misunderstand what you say or just start calling you a heathen and a sinner. Then you're in really deep dreck; metahumans and SURGE victims, they say, are not of the tribes of Israel that will be saved. We have been marked.

And so Humanis builds up this hate and fear-mongering cult and uses Jeremiah as their puppet, their figurehead. Except he's not completely under their thumb; I've since seen him in action, and his speeches are stirring, overflowing with charisma. He looks more than capable of independent thought. Still, he gets what they want done. They sow ignorance about the true nature of SURGE, they recruit devout and honest people to throw themselves into harm's way, and all the while more money keeps flowing into the Humanis Policlub coffers through "tithes" and "donations." On paper, that money's clean, but the way that they get it is by bilking the gullible and extorting protection money from smaller businesses.

CULT MEMBERS MISSING

Posted 08-28-61

Vladivostok (NN)—The MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) announced that it is investigating the disappearance of over twenty citizens from northern Vladivostok. All of the missing persons are believed to be members of an outlawed cult called Bridging the Void. Cult members believe that Halley's Comet signals the opening of a "bridge between worlds" that will see the return of an unknown type of spirit or spirits destined to rule metahumanity. The suspected cult members have each been missing for over a week. MVD officials initiated the investigation when signs of blood and a magical ritual were discovered in one missing cult-member's home.

- It gets worse. These guys aren't just prejudiced and violence-prone, they're murderers. A group of them ritually sacrificed an ork child down at Ingersoll Aquaculture in Snohomish. Ingersoll had to shut down for a day while they contained the news and cleaned up the mess. The reason why? Because just the other week, Ingersoll Aquaculture had decided to sponsor a mostly metahuman Little League team.

- Day-Zee

- I knew the Seventh Seal wasn't really a righteous group of Christians—but that's because so many of them are Satanists. Before you blow a fuse, let me explain. When Jeremiah first hit the trid, talking about the coming Apocalypse and sporting that crown of horns, he drew the attention of a man named Simon White. You may have seen him, he's always standing behind Jeremiah, since he's now become his right-hand man. I happen to know Simon from the past, and I know he follows the voice of the Adversary. My guess is that he views Jeremiah in a little bit of a different light—the living incarnation of his Idol.

- The Redmond Baron

- Are you implying that this Simon fellow thinks Jeremiah is the anti-Christ?
- D. Thomas

- It's not that cut and dry. The Adversary and Satan aren't necessarily the same thing. But he must see the mark of the beast on Jeremiah somewhere for him to buy into the cult so strongly. The scary thing is, Simon already had a cult following of his own, and those bleeders are now Seventh Sealists. They must be having a real kick of a time—normally Christians are their sworn enemies, but now they're leading them by the nose.

- The Redmond Baron

THE ATLANTIAN REBIRTH

by Miroth Be'nahven

- Miroth? What mother names her child Miroth?
- Court Jester

- Not his, apparently. I did some digging on this guy since an acquaintance of mine was showing interest in this little clambake. Turns out he was born Nick Reith in Auburn back in 2030 and he worked in a small-time ad agency up until about six months ago. His dad was a blue-collar guy, mom stayed at home. Who'd have guessed their little boy would grow up to be an Atlantean, hmm?

- Gobstopper

There are some in life who feel misplaced, out of sync. The feelings these people experience can never truly be resolved, for no matter how successful they become, how much wealth they acquire, how happy



they are in love, they still feel something is missing. These individuals never truly achieve peace, however much they long for it. Until now.

At this time, in this place, the answers are finally at hand. The reappearance of the comet has brought forth wondrous knowledge. Rejoice, all you who feel dispossessed, for hope has returned once more. That hope is called Ale'i Menatis.

Those who are part of the magical community know that Atlantis is no longer considered a madman's fantasy. Its existence is now considered to be fact. Lost to the world aeons ago, its ruins lie beneath the waves in a watery unmarked grave, its knowledge and culture wiped from the face of the planet. Or was it?

We at Ale'i Menatis have rediscovered ourselves and our glorious destinies. No longer do we search endlessly for that which was not to be found in this life. No longer do we ache for something we could not name or imagine, but yet we knew its lack. No longer. Now we know brotherhood and fellowship. Now fulfillment and peace are our birthrights, as they were meant to be from the first. They can be yours as well.

- You wouldn't believe (or maybe you would) how well this plays to the corp crowd. Membership in this little enterprise is growing at an amazing rate, primarily in the middle management ranks.
- Howler

- Of course it plays well to them. That's who it's designed for.
- Deprogrammer

- Cynicism is the last resort of the damned. Your unwillingness to see beyond your limitations saddens me beyond words.
- Kale'iana

During the last age of the Atlantean Empire, the rulers had grown weak, allowing society to become base and unworthy of the Empire's greatness. The Empire became isolationist and introverted as xenophobia drove the people to associate only with their own kind. Waste and corruption were rampant, and the few frugal and open-minded leaders that were left knew that the end would come soon. In vain they tried to convince the others, but their efforts failed.

Finally, the dissenters realized there was no hope left for change. In secret, they began to recognize one another and met to decide what was to be done, calling themselves the Ale'i, meaning Promise. Their skills and knowledge were great. Their magical talents had no equal then or now. Through great trials and even greater personal agony, they discovered a method of casting their souls forward in time, to be reborn with their full knowledge and skills in an age when they might revive the Atlantean culture in its full glory, bringing their beloved land to life once more. That time is now.

- Stop! You're killing me! Oh, dear, why didn't I think of this?! Whoever dreamed this up, I salute you.

- The Laughing Man
Hal Fraggin' Hal

- Are you so certain that this is the prank you think it is?
- Orange Queen

The return of Halley's Comet to this magic-filled Sixth World is the first of the Three Signs. Now we are the Ale'i, the Promise, returned. Reborn into men of this age, we seek to join with our brothers and sisters and usher in a new age of enlightenment. Join us!

- Ok, I'll bite. What are the other two signs, and what do they mean?
- Fish

- Supposedly, the signs indicate different stages of the Promise's fulfillment. The first sign is just the beginning, but by the third the Atlantean Empire will be reborn. The Atlanteans are pretty tight-lipped about what the other two signs are—they're probably just keeping their options open.
- Deprogrammer

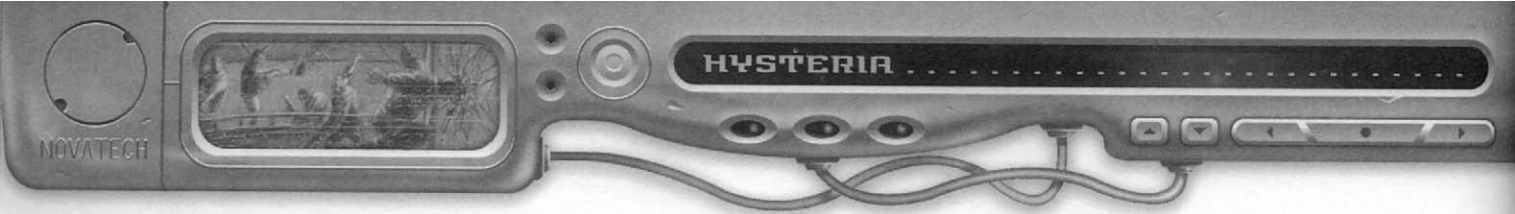
Ale'i Menatis is a group made up of men and women who hold the reincarnated spirits of Atlanteans within their minds and bodies. We meet regularly to discuss our purpose in this age and to help locate our lost brethren. Through a technique called "sublimation," we trigger the latent memories held within the mind of an aspiring member.

- Let me tell you about this "sublimation," as ol' Nick puts it. First, the "hopeful" is put in a large dark room with atonal music playing softly and mini-spotlights trained upon their face to limit their vision. There's a "priest" in attendance, wearing black robes and a hood, who helps the hopeful into a sensory deprivation tank. The "priest" conducting the ceremony uses trodes or otherwise plugs the subject into a simfeed where they're "sublimated" in the experience of being one with the sea, or some such bull-drek. Anyway, this process can take a few hours, or it can be pretty quick, depending on the subject. Either way, the subject is unplugged a while later and now remembers their former life as an Atlantean. Pretty slick.
- Deprogrammer

- Are you saying that Be'nahven is a BTL pusher?
- Buzz

- The Ale'i Menatis use a modified dreamchip/p-fix mix to achieve the desired results. After a successful session, the basic personality will be retained but additional traits are implanted. These traits can be deepened with additional sessions or customized chips.
- Inside Outted

- Nothing like an anonymous accusation to whet the appetite. Guess I'll be heading over to the religion SIGs after this to see what I can stir up.
- Slamm-O!



• Not every candidate is discovered to be Ale'i. Your suppositions are meaningless.

• Duffy

• I don't like the sounds of this at all.

• Syzygy

We wish to state clearly that not all who feel drawn to us are Ale'i. However, even those who are not among the reborn have a place with us. We will never turn away any who wish to join our cause. If you feel that you are isolated and alone; that you are a silent outcast among those who should be your companions; that you are eternally out of step with your surroundings; come to us. Our journey has only begun.

• Duffy's right on that point. Of course, if you look over the list of successful and non-successful candidates, you'll find that the Atlanteans have better security access, special skills or lots of money. Most of the would-be Ale'i lack those qualifications. Reith is using his members to funnel information and cash his way, like any other fragger with illusions of grandeur would.

• Deprogrammer

• Don't forget the Awakened—they automatically get in. Can't have any magicians escaping from their "magical society" now, can they.

• Magister

• So who's in charge of this operation? Where's the cred being funneled to? What is the secret cabal in charge doing with all of its lackeys? Do these Atlanteans do anything besides meet? It doesn't seem like they're much of a threat.

• George

• Good questions, all of them. I ran some basic checks and hit a lot of dead ends. Whoever's pulling the strings has isolated themselves from the rank and file quite nicely. But, hey, I always liked a good challenge. I'll get to work. If they're really using BTs, they must have someone supplying them with the goods.

• Marauder

• Any connection between this group and the Atlantean Foundation?

• Rooster

• The Foundation views the cult as a group of wannabe wingnuts. In fact, they just finished purging all of the "Ale'i" they could find. The buzz says that they caught some members of the cult trying to pull some kind of inside job. I guess the Mystic Crusaders don't take well to competing con schemes.

• Bard

• Anyone heard from Marauder lately?

• Maximus

• Anyone?

• Maximus

CHURCH OF THE UNDYING LIGHT

by Rose Red

I told the Cap that there was something interesting going on with this Church of the Undying Light. He asked me to provide details, so here are two news articles that give the basics. I'll leave it to the rest of you to fill in the behind the scenes data.

//Begin File Attachment//

FLOWERS IN PUYALLUP

Posted to KSAF Community Concerns, 5 September 2061

A few neighborhoods in Puyallup received a surprise this morning as hundreds of humans and metahumans wearing long white tunics and white pants paraded through the streets, handing out pamphlets and flowers along with bags of prepared food. The group, calling itself the Church of the Undying Light, has established an outreach center in the Puyallup Barrens, at 152nd and Canyon Rd.

• Well, that must have been a popular little parade. I'm surprised the Humanis groups or go-gangs didn't decide to rain all over it.

• Chopped Liver

• I was there (sorry, I ain't spilling why), and while most of these neo-hippies looked like a mugger's next victim, there was no shortage of subtle security. Some of them flower children were real nasty bruisers, your garden-variety mob thug (pun intended). They were well prepared for trouble under those pretty white tunics they wore, and they also had magical backup on hand.

• Smiley

The response of Puyallup residents was mixed. Some graciously accepted the flowers and meals, thanking the Church members for their generosity. Others reacted with amusement, and in a few cases, hostility. "What's up with that sheet, whitey? Get your pampered corporate ass back downtown behind that barbed

PORTLAND PLAGUED BY GRAPHIC MUTILATIONS

Posted 09-02-61

Seattle (IIN)—According to unofficial reports, a grotesque message was left in downtown Portland late last night, as at least six severed metahuman tongues were found drilled into signposts surrounding a small city park. All of the tongues appeared to have been freshly amputated, but there is no evidence leading police to the victims or any other signs of violence. Police cordoned off the park following the discovery, and refused to answer allegations that some sort of ritual had been conducted there.



wire—we don't need your charity" said one resident who refused to give his name and stamped angrily on the flowers. "Fraggin' fanatics always think they know what's best for us."

The Church's founder, Ellen Barai, gave a press conference upon arriving back at the center. "The suffering has gone on for too long, dividing us as surely as a blade can slice a loaf of bread. We of the Undying Light have devoted our lives to the eradication of poverty and hatred wherever we can reach; wherever the Light's rays can still touch, no matter how dim they may seem to be. We welcome all who are in need: Whatever we have is yours."

Ms. Barai was a citizen of Renraku prior to the arcology closure, working as a mid-level nurse. She was rescued from the arcology by UCAS forces at the beginning of this year.

- Renraku? That explains the sudden change in philosophy, doesn't it?
- Zephyr

- Ellen was a great help to the Resistance. I couldn't begin to count how many lives she saved.
- Peregrine

Using her retirement fund and other investments, Ms. Barai founded the Church of the Undying Light and began gathering both sponsors and members. The church has been in existence for five months now, with membership growing steadily. Members take vows of obedience, charity and poverty, giving their worldly goods to the church. The church then converts those belongings into cash, using that money to pay for its living expenses and charity programs.

- You wouldn't think she'd get many takers on a trip like that, but you'd be surprised. Seems it's the time of the year for people to begin panicking and hooking up with whatever seems "good" in a shot at redeeming their unworthy hoops before they all fry in the afterlife. Of course, I'm still waiting for bugs to pop out of the background, so we'll see.

- Wiz Kid

- Let me get this straight. This group convinces corporate suits to give up their soulless, competitive lifestyles and dedicate their lives to a selfless, ascetic existence. In the process, they surrender all their toys and cred. I'm guessing some of these slags have inside knowledge of certain corps, too. Corpsec types must be all over this group.
- Headhunter

- Ms. Barai was smart in how she went about this. She's the daughter of Thomas Barai, one of the wealthier men in Bellevue and known for his connections with the Bigio family. She played her cards well when she started the organization, getting some good (straight) legal and financial people in early and paying them from her inheritance fund to make sure that the business side of the

church was watertight. They invest the money they get, most of it legally, and spend the dividends instead of spending it outright.

- The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

- They may be legit now, but I bet the Bigios will be calling in the debt later. Those church principles will go right out the window.
- Louie

The outreach center in the Puyallup area holds a soup kitchen, lodging area, day care facility and both adult and child educational areas. In addition to these facilities, the church has planned a workshop and store facility to open in the first quarter of 2062, allowing them to implement on-the-job skill and trade training for the residents of the area. Two additional facilities are in the works for the Puyallup and Redmond Barrens areas as well.

In reaction to a question about the cult's beliefs regarding the comet, Ms. Barai said, "I make no claim to prescience. To me, the comet is a symbol of how fleeting our time here really is and how beautiful it can be if we try. That is the basis of our church and our efforts. If anyone wishes to join us, we welcome them."

//End File Attachment//

- She's nothing but a pawn of Deus. The name of her group "Church of the Undying Light," is a direct reference to it. She and all of her meta-loving followers will burn.

- Cristof

- Ewwwww-kay. Nothing like a little racist otaku paranoia to start the day off right.

- Cleo

//Begin File Attachment//

ARSON DESTROYS CHARITY HOUSE

Posted to KSAF Community Concerns, 11 August 2061

Lone Star declared that arson is responsible for the conflagration that consumed the new outreach center for the Church of the Undying Light in the Puyallup Barrens. At least a dozen

MASS SLAYINGS LINKED TO CULT

Posted 09-23-61

Austin (AP)—Lone Star announced today that it has obtained evidence linking a string of mass killings across the globe to a comet-worshipping cult known as Bridging the Void. It is unclear yet whether those killed in six separate scenes of mass slaughter in Tenochtitlán, Ankara, Seattle, Pusan, Tunis and Samarkand were members of the cult or victims. Neither mass suicide nor mass murder are being ruled out as options.

Lone Star stated, "Members of Bridging the Void are to be considered heavily armed, skilled in magic and extremely dangerous. We believe that the cult may be conducting ritual suicides or murder in order to open an alleged gateway between the metaplanes." No other information is available at this time.



Church members were killed in the blaze, though some of them may have been killed before the fire began. Several other members are also missing, according to unconfirmed reports.

"This is an outrage! This is terrible! Who would do this to such a wonderful, humanitarian organization?" said local resident Moira Jacobs, a frequent visitor to the center's food kitchen. The Church's leader, Ms. Ellen Barai, could not be reached for comment.

Lone Star declined to state if they had any suspects.

//End File Attachment//

- So who made the hit? Was it corp revenge for stealing a valued employee? Or was it an extraction of a former valued employee?
- George

- My bet is that it was a mob hit. The Bigios are probably using the group as a front to launder money, and one of the other syndicates decided to teach them a lesson.
- Moe

- Does there have to be a conspiracy behind everything?
- Cynic

NEW ISLAMIC JIHAD

(Begin Log : Middle East SIG : 4 September 2061 at 01:25:33 GMT)

- Hi all. Is there something odd going down in Makkah right now? I just got a strange call from a chummer of mine, and it

sounded like something heavy might be happening.

- Ammar

- Nothing more than the usual that I've heard. Why, what did you hear?

- Saevar

- Query: Makkah?

- SJT

- That's Mecca for the unenlightened. One of these days you're going to learn to keep up with current affairs, SJT.

- Saevar

- Well, my chummer was taking a quick astral trip to see how his sister's redecorations were doing. He passed over Makkah on the way, and he saw the signs of a big commotion and something incredible lingering in the astral. He said it was right near the Ka'bah. He couldn't really describe it properly.

- Ammar

- Ka'bah—that's the central shrine of Mecca, right? Doesn't it have an unusually strong astral presence anyway, due to all that faith floating around? I thought that was established years ago. Your friend probably just caught a rush of worshippers.

- Palo



• I assume my friend would be familiar with the effect, oh infidel. He said it was something quite different. Something powerful has happened at the Ka'bah. I'd like to know what.

• Ammar

• Well well. I just did a quick search of the news feeds, and here's the most informative report I turned up. It's from a pirate Matrix screamsheet—it's Westernized, but based out of the Allied German States I think.

• Transplanted Soul

//Begin File Attachment//

ISLAMIC UNITY LEADER ASSASSINATED

Posted 09-04-61

<Unknown Source>—Shocking news from Mecca this evening. It appears that Badr al Din Ibn Eisa, leader of the popular Islamic Unity Movement, was gunned down in front of the Ka'bah, the central shrine of Mecca, by unknown assailants. Details of the event have yet to be officially confirmed, but the death of Islam's premier charismatic leader was verified.

One eyewitness, who preferred not to be identified, described the incident: "Ibn Eisa was performing Umrah, in the midst of the Rite of Tawaf. Several men suddenly emerged from the crowd at once, drawing weapons. Ibn Eisa's guards were quick to react and a gun battle ensued. But they were too late. He was shot in the head. His blood was everywhere. He lay on his back, his eyes open, staring upwards into the sky. I heard someone cry 'Il Allah Akhbar!' We tried to help him, but we were too late. We failed him."

Other witnesses report that all of the assailants were killed. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack in which many bystanders were also injured. We'll bring you more news as soon as it comes to hand.

//End File Attachment//

• So there you have it, folks. Ibn Eisa is now fodder for the ghouls, thanks to some pissy faction or another. Makes one wonder how the Islamic Unity Movement is going to hang together now.

• Transplanted Soul

• Merciful Allah ...

• Ammar

• Islamic Unity Movement? Okay, now I really do feel out of touch. Someone want to bring me up to speed, in words of one syllable or less?

• SJT

• Someone else, please. I have to hop a semiballistic to San'a—I have a family to check on.

• Ammar

• Alright, Slacky, here's the gen. I'll assume you haven't been paying attention for about the last year or three—stop me when it starts sounding familiar. Basically, this Ibn Eisa chap is—was—one of Islam's greatest prophets. Many feel that he was

Mohammed, come again. In the past few years he's built a unified juggernaut in the Middle East, a social movement dedicated to bringing the Islamic nations and people together again—the Islamic Unity Movement.

• Kephalos

• Whoa, Keph, don't waste your electrons explaining all this again. I'll just post one of the many news summaries floating around the 'trix. Here y'go:

• Amitri

//Begin File Attachment//

POLITICAL FACT SHEET 1338A: BADR AL DIN IBN EISA

Posted 12 August 2061

The spiritual leader Ibn Eisa was born in 2016 in Al-Basrah, in southeastern Iraq. His early life is clouded in relative obscurity, but he grew to become a well-known and respected mufti, or Sunni interpreter of Islamic law, whose piety and wisdom gained him many admirers and students among the rulers of Muslim nations.

Ibn Eisa founded the Islamic Unity Movement as a response to his experiences with the failed Second Ottoman Jihad and the constant infighting between Islamic nations. The Movement gained prestige when Ibn Eisa helped to negotiate a settlement to the Second Iran-Iraq War. Ibn Eisa is directly credited for spearheading the initiative to unify the Arabian peninsula under one government. When the nation of Arabia was formed from the former states of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain, Ibn Eisa was made an official advisor to the first Caliph of Arabia, Kalim Sa'ud.

Following this success, the Islamic Unity Movement exploded as multitudes flocked to Ibn Eisa's cause. With a strong base of support in Arabia, Syria and Lebanon, Ibn Eisa's power as a religious leader rivals that of secular state leaders. His drive to reclaim unified Islamic control over Lebanon is gaining support, forcing government figureheads to support the plan. Ibn Eisa's power base has attracted many enemies as well; the humble Ibn Eisa has survived several assassination attempts already.

//End File Attachment//

• So this guy is a wise religious advisor cum evil vizier, right? His religious power base made him a political powerbroker, and he stepped on some toes. That sum it up?

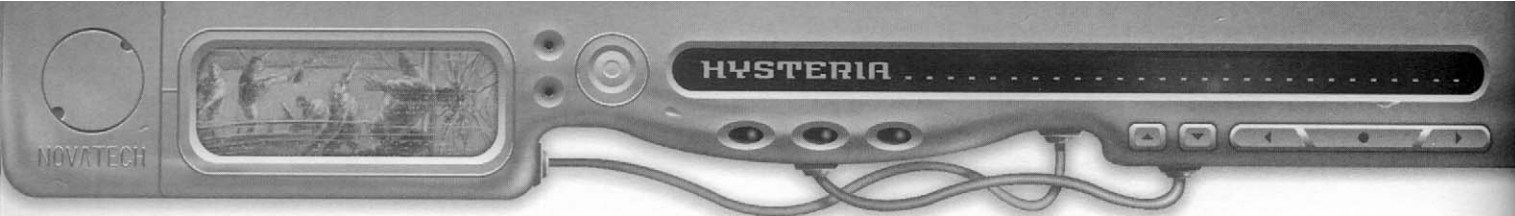
• Tacks

• Word is that Ibn Eisa was honestly a devoutly spiritual man who followed what he saw as a divine calling to reunite Islam. I heard several accounts of other Islamic leaders attempting to exert temporal influence over him, but he simply followed what he called the "higher authority."

• Saevar

• A couple of Ibn Eisa's more weaselly advisors dropped out of the public eye about a month ago. Perhaps they realized they weren't onto a winner with Ibn Eisa and ran off to manipulate someone more prophetic, er, profitable.

• Desert Fox



- Ouch. So let's get to the dirt. Who had him whacked?
- Tacks

• Well, keep in mind that Ibn Eisa orchestrated the successful occupation of Lebanon last month—a major political victory for the Islamic Unity Movement. I would guess that Lebanon's twitchy neighbors, the Israelis, didn't like such a strong mass movement knocking on their back door. Jerusalem has been the glittering prize in a millenium's worth of holy wars, after all. They probably took him out as pre-emptive self-defense.

- Hulagu

• Israel's been wary of the IUM since it coalesced, of course, and they've been taking precautions from the get-go. Just last week several key IUM personnel came down with a nasty case of mysterious disappearance, and I'm willing to bet they were being shown hospitality by some Mossad agents. That could be why Ibn Eisa was taking temporary residence at Makkah.

- Amitri

• Well, Mossad isn't known for playing nice. They're one of the most cunning and brutally pragmatic of the world's intelligence agencies. Pulling a hit like that fits their style—they like to send a strong message.

- Rubin

• Yeah, but they also just created a martyr, and that's sure to come back and bite them in the hoop.

- Tacks

(End Log)

(Begin Log : Middle East SIG : 7 September 2061 at 01:25:33 GMT)

- MERCIFUL ALLAH!
- Ammar

• I'm with you, buddy. I've been monitoring the situation since I heard it half an hour ago. I just can't believe it. This has to be a hoax.

- Saevar

- Care to let us in on the inside joke??
- Tacks

- Badr al Din Ibn Eisa has just risen from the dead!
- Ammar

- Get some sleep, Ammar.
- Tacks

• Holy drek on a stick. Scan this. The Middle East newsnets are aflame with this news. Fire is raining down from every corner. But it looks to be legit, not a hoax.

- Zook

//Begin File Attachment//

IBN EISA LIVES!

Posted 09-09-61

<Unknown Source>—A joyous Islamic Unity Movement held a press conference just minutes ago to announce the resurrection of movement leader Badr al Din Ibn Eisa. Despite being confirmed dead five days ago after masked assailants shot him in front of the Ka'bah, Ibn Eisa appeared in person this morning to a group of mourning followers outside his mausoleum in Mecca. Cheering crowds greeted Ibn Eisa as he embraced other movement leaders and made the following brief statement.

"I have much work yet to do for Allah. In my time of absence, I was granted a vision of a new path to take. The Islamic Unity Movement has served its purpose. Our people will soon be as one. Now it is time to look towards our enemies, those who would strike us down. I declare a new movement to carry forth Allah's will. I declare a New Islamic Jihad!"

//End File Attachment//

- I think I'll be moving to the Middle East soon. I see lots of job opportunities opening up there in the near future.
- Prime Runner

- Better watch out. Your infidel hoop might get hosed.
- Mirage

- I don't buy it. Nobody returns from the dead. They must have staged it. Ibn Eisa must have serious cojones to pull a stunt like that.
- Tacks

- I dunno. I just checked some records. It looks like they actually embalmed the fragger before they entombed him. And he's already submitted to a host of scans, include a gene match, to prove his identity.
- Amitri

- Yeah, computer records never lie.
- Sidewinder

- They must have used magic to put him in suspended animation. Are we sure he's not a mage or adept?
- Viz

- If he was a mage, he used his magic more subtly than any observer could detect. Regardless of how he staged his martyrdom in front of masses of people, the fact remains that he is now seen by almost all of Islam as the Prophet returned. Not an easy feat.
- Mahmoud

- I bet the Israelis are sweating blood right now. Serves them right.
- Amitri

(End Log)

GHOST STORIES



My father used to say that when one door closes, somewhere else, another one opens. At the time, he was talking about opportunity, but I'm sure he'd agree that the saying fits here, too. Chummers, what follows is a collection of documents on the newest and one of the most mysterious power players ever to hit the limelight. Who is he? What does he want? Where did he come from? Like a famous dead guy said, "A puzzle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Or, as a chummer of mine used to say, "It ain't what you know, but what you don't know that'll slot you up in the end."

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 18:22:49 (PST)

THE WATERGATE RIFT

- Someone "found" this buried in a pile of memos and reports from the Army Corps of Thaumaturgists, who've been keeping tabs on the site in order to study the rift. Occasionally they have to warn away the magically active who feel a need to come pay homage to the site of President Dunkelzahn's death, not to mention Humanis protestors and cult loonies. So when things started getting weird, you can bet they sat up and took notice.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 18:24:09 (PST)

From: Capt. Anson Betters

To: Lt. Col. Matthew Jameson

Date: 22 November 2061

Re: A summary of the recent activities at the Watergate Rift

Sir,

A review of our reports on the rift since September has turned up a trend that I feel bears close watching. There has been an upswing of activity in and near the rift during the past few months that is disturbing, to say the least. Coupled with the rising number of insurrections in the wake of the appearance of SURGE, this situation warrants adding more personnel to the site to prevent further violence and loss of life (as well as materiel). To give substance to my rec-



ommendation, I will list and summarize in this document separate accounts that, taken together, are very concerning.

5 September 2061

At 0400 hours, during a change of shift in guard duty at the site, those present witnessed and reported a "shimmering" of the rift, making it appear to waver or ripple. Since the rift had not exhibited such an activity before, it was duly noted in the logbook and a report filed. The mage on duty, Lt. Hansen, reported that when he astrally perceived the rift from his post, it had flared briefly and then pulsed in the space of a minute. He reported a slight sensation of "nausea and homesickness." He further noted that this was the first night that Halley's Comet has been visible to the naked eye.

15 September 2061

Those on duty reported another rippling at 1500 hours, with civilian witnesses as well. In addition, an unusual trio of spirit entities manifested approximately three meters away from the rift in mid-air. A full description is noted in the report (#622-A-3G); in short, they appeared to be nebulous and amoeboid, fainter than most apparitions. These entities swiftly moved off into astral space, breaking through our spirit patrol perimeter. Astral pursuit proved unsuccessful.

- Great. You leave the door open, and pretty soon you've got all sorts of bad elements wandering in. What's next? Demons? Brain-sucking spirit creatures?
- Waverley

2 October 2061

A Humanis demonstration calling for the detention and isolation of SURGE changelings became a riot after inflammatory speeches were made and the crowd attempted to penetrate the rift cordon. You will have seen the reports on this already, sir; I bring your attention to the unusual aspects of it that were kept from the media, namely the unusually heightened background count. All spells cast at that time seemed to dangerously drain the mages working to quell the riot, while their elementals and spirits refused orders and instead hovered near the rift until the insurrection had been laid to rest.

13 October 2061

Visiting members of the DIMR, investigating the rift in cooperation with our unit, witnessed an unusual incident. At 1119 hours, a dozen or more spirit entities of the type described above, along with another unidentified type resembling incandescent balls of light and numbering approximately twenty, spontaneously appeared through the rift. Many of these spirits manifested on the physical plane, where they drew the attention of the standard large crowd of onlookers gathered just outside our cordon. The spirits seemed to rush toward the crowd, sparking a panic that turned into yet another riot, equally difficult to put down. In the end, we lost one of our people, First Lt. James Two-Hats, a Bear shaman. Civilian loss of life totaled eleven, with six more seriously wounded and one of our vehicles firebombed. A few of the alien spirits

were destroyed, the rest escaped. After this incident we extended the rift cordon another 50 meters.

- They should do more than that. They should ward the whole thing in to keep these alien spirits from wandering in and out.
- Spiritchaser

31 October/1 November 2061

Coinciding with Halloween celebrations, more spirit appearances and manifestations were observed near the rift during the course of the night. Due to the suddenness of their appearance and the difficulties in managing the celebrating crowd, tracking astrally and physically ended up being an exercise in futility.

At 0022, I was notified that a local Asian magician, whom I am told follows the wujen tradition, wished to speak with me. After granting some time to the man, he informed me that his ancestor spirits were "very upset" and agitated. He went on to say that one of his ancestor spirits was especially peeved, as he had recently died and his body had been stolen. This wujen's ancestor had demanded that we be told that the "dead" were returning. Questioning the wujen on the differences between the "dead" and ancestor spirits simply ended up with him repeating the warning emphatically and gesturing towards the rift and the celebrations down the street. Considering that many cultures from which magical traditions have sprung all have days like Halloween where the dead purportedly return, I was not quite sure what to make of this. This matter, I confess, has greatly confused me, sir. So far, we have not gotten any real corroborating evidence for this claim, as no one in the Corps follows a tradition involving ancestor spirits, but all who had met the wujen magician say that he appeared neither mentally deficient nor possessed at the time.

- If only we had heeded their warnings ...
- Doc Cane

Since these events, other fluctuations in and around the rift have been witnessed and documented, seeming to steadily grow in strength. The locals are growing more agitated as more occurrences pop up, and it is becoming difficult to keep this under wraps. We have been asked at least once, already, what we intend to do about the recent activity around the Watergate rift; we need to make a show of strength in order to prevent any more panics and dissuade demonstrations that may incite riots. Hopefully we can keep the situation under control until a decision can be reached on what can be done about the rift.

ENTER THE DRAGON

- Though I must consider Mooch a biased source, he was one of the only people I could get ahold of who had witnessed the incident he is about to explain. For the record, Mooch is a conjuring expert.
- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 25 December 2061 at 00:36:55 (PST)





by Mooch

Okay, I'll say it: I'm a fanboy. See, I like dragons. Anything to do with dragons. If it's got "dragon" in the title, whether it's a book, flatvid, chip, comic, trid, sim, t-shirt, tat, you name it—I buy it. I read it. I wear it. I eat it. So I guess it's no surprise that Cap asked me to post what I saw Christmas Eve, right?

- Let me guess, Mooch here is a Child of the Dragon as well.
- Abyssinia

- Actually, pop, no. I groove on the CotD's message, and they put on some scorclin' parties, but I haven't wandered from fan to fanatic yet.
- Mooch

So anyway, there I am on Christmas Eve, hanging out in front of the Watergate Hotel since that's where President Dunkelzahn bit it, watching the localized manastorm that had sprung into place around the rift. There was a big shindig inside the Watergate that was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Awakening, but as you could probably guess, I wasn't on the guest list. Me and my buddy Lee decided to go to the party going on outside and whoop it up with a bunch of other folks. A couple chummers would get a little misty-eyed, talking about the Big D and how he'd be trying to help SURGE changelings if he were still alive right now, drek like that, and then someone else'd come along, stick a mug of soy-nog in their hand and say, "Drink up!" And then they'd be laughing and having fun again; it was one of those parties. And I tell ya, the lights from that rift lit up the place prettier than those cheapass foam and plastic wreaths and drek they had all over the place.

What'd I tell you? Yeah, I was totally tapping astral for this little soiree, and it was wizzer. Even the Army boys had relaxed their guard a little, though there was about twice as many on scene as they normally had. What a downer to be workin' Christmas Eve. At least it was at the Watergate ... where was I? Oh yeah, what happened at the rift.

Chummer, that was the most wizzer-scary thing I'd ever seen. I nearly drekked my shorts. Lee had just started talking up this joygirl wearing nothing but strings of blinking lights, when he looks up and fragging near swallows his tongue. You know the look, right? Since I was facing him, I had to turn around to see what'd made his jaw drop. And that's right when the rift apparently decided to remind us all that it's a twisted mutation of nature, because it flared so bright some were struck blind for at least a minute. I even think a few chummers were literally stunned. The view on the astral wasn't as bright, so I was spared the glare, but it was an emotional and sensory bombardment. It was like having an orgasm while simultaneously giving birth and getting murdered.

The rift bulged and rippled, and I could tell that something was trying to push through it. It was like watching something being born. Bluish-white light glowed all around it, with silvery bolts crisscrossing it now and then. As I watched, I saw a few spirits start to leak from it, pulling themselves out and streaking away into the world. The Army spirits that were on hand didn't

even try to stop them, they just watched them go by. And there were simply too many for the Army spellslingers to handle.

Now, you gotta understand that I've probably dealt with just about every spirit there is, 'cause if I haven't conjured it, I've talked to it or banished it. And I've never seen spirits like these before. I like to think I'm a fairly stone guy, that not a lot of drek bothers me. But some of these things were just creepy. There was a sense of coldness, a chill that just flowed around 'em and seemed to be a part of them. Some looked like wormy things, and others looked like slimy creatures from the depths of the sea. They didn't have the nasty taste I associate with toxics, but they had some bone-numbing "I'm going to chew away your sanity" feel that made most folks just steer clear. It was a wild scene, attracting my attention better than a car wreck.

There seemed to be a kind of wall separating whatever was inside the rift from the rest of the world, and it seemed to stretch and get thinner as more and more spirits came wisping out. And then there was a ... a *tearing*, and through that pushed what looked like the astral head of a western dragon. I've never really met one before, but like I said before, I'm a dragon fanboy. This dragon seemed to be struggling and straining, like it was in a lot of pain, and I could even see the rest of the rift straining with it. Finally, though, it seemed to completely give, splitting wide open as the dragon's astral form launched through.

The dragon was huge and a really pale white, almost ghostly lookin'. It could've been because of the lights of the manastorm it just came through, but it had a bluish-silver shimmer on its astral scales. It must've been acting like a dam, too, because right behind it came a big, boiling mass of more spirits. There were all kinds—at least half of which I'd also never encountered.

At that point I saw a few astral mages fly in close, checking it all out. They must've been Army boys, trying to figure out what the heck to do. Doesn't matter, though, because the dragon, probably not in its right mind after what it'd just been through, swooped over and ate 'em. Gulp. Just like that. I didn't even think that was possible!

I think he sorta woke up after that, and realized what he'd done. All I know is that he didn't seem too happy; he bel-lowed, and I heard more than a few chummers around me gasp in pain. I realized then that his astral form was manifest, and that the entire crowd could see him. Most of the crowd was mesmerized or paralyzed, hard to tell which, but a few bolted like the world was ending.

But the dragon, well, he just took off, too, and lit out towards the west like a bat outta hell. I know, because I had Lee grab me while I went totally astral, and followed him. Yeah, I know, kinda stupid after I'd just watched the dragon slurp up a snack, but I couldn't help it. I wasn't the only one who followed him, either. We zoomed out west behind him, passing sprawls, farms and drek ... and then we lost him. He was just too freaking fast for us to keep up with. We tried, though. I ended up somewhere in the Rockies before I decided to turn tail and go back.

And after all that, you know what? All I wanna know is, now that I've seen the news of what happened after he took off, what the frag is in Colorado?

• Okay, something that's been bugging me from the beginning about this. The Army Corps of Thaumaturgists have known for a while now that the DeeCee rift was getting unstable, judging from that report. When things got worse, why didn't they just shut the area down?

• Bandit

• Tough to do, guy. There are a lot of folks who took it hard when President Dunkelzahn bought the farm, and the rift marks the spot in a really visible way. It's like visiting a holy shrine, for them. The Army does a decent job of keeping them far away—but how far away is safe? Not to mention that the rift is right smack next to the Watergate, and a lot of other business and foot traffic. Shutting it all down would draw massive protests.

On top of that, there's a small turf war going on over who gets to study the rift. There aren't that many gaping holes leading in to gods-know-where in the world, and so the right to study them up close is a hot commodity.

• Socio Pat

• The scary thing is that the rift is still open and active. Who knows what's going to crawl through it next?

• Miss Tick

RAMPAGE IN DENVER!

• We caught a transcript of this as well as the video feed seconds after it was uploaded into KSAF's Matrix host for later transmission. Naturally, we've got the unedited version for your amusement and amazement. Merry Christmas.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 25 December 2061 at 00:21:13 (PST)

//Begin File//

Transcript 339, "live" transmission, edit for content, no promo or trailer.

(Tech note: edit images for clarity)

(Audio only)

S. Crosbie: [yawns] Can you believe this drek? This is boring. We're missing prime stories about the Awakening anniversary parties, and for what? A few cruddy shots of the Aztec teocalli?

[Muttered replies, rattle of equipment in the background.]

S. Crosbie: A scoop? Right. I didn't know you had a chip habit, Carl. We're hovering out here in the dark. The only thing keeping Ace up there from crashing us into the Rockies is the full moon ...

[Indistinct sarcastic reply.]

S. Crosbie: Hey, not my fault you're quick on the stick. [sighing] Carl, might as well get that camera up and "film to the east." Jeez-ah, what kind of vague order is that?

[Grunted response, more tech rattling.]

S. Crosbie: Yeah, yeah. Look, just make sure you get that teocalli in the frame-up, all right? With luck, maybe we can cut this short and get back to the real action.

Ace: Holy son of a lizard!

S. Crosbie: Huh? What ... oh wow. Carl, get that camera up! Hurry!

[Helicopter drone grows slightly louder, trideo comes online with a blurry image.]

S. Crosbie: It's ... what is that? Oh wow, it's some huge, white dragon, and he's headed right for the teocalli! Come on, hurry up with that camera!

[No reply, camera's view swings in and out of focus.]

S. Crosbie: Any word from tower on who it is? Can't be Hestaby ... No? Frag. So no one knows ... I'll have to wing the intro.

Carl: Jus' git yer facts straight, Summer.

S. Crosbie: [distracted] Mm-hmm, yeah ... what's that coming from the teocalli?

[Muffled reply from the cockpit.]

S. Crosbie: Drones? What kind?

[Another muffled reply]

S. Crosbie: Scouts and TADS? Oh, yeah, I know what those are. Did a report on Aztechnology once. Drek! That dragon just fireballed the teocalli! Amazing—get closer, Ace! Get us nearer to the action. Frag that drek about airspace!

[Rumble and explosion in the background.]

S. Crosbie: [shrieking] Carl, get that hoop-fragging camera online or I swear to Christ I'll sacrifice you on that teocalli myself! We just missed a spectacular shot! That ... that dragon took a missile—a fragging missile, Carl!—on the chin! And it's still going! Do you hear me?

Carl: Summer, stick it up yer hoop or yer holdin' this drek-eatin' camera. Almost got it. An' the dragon looked pretty fraggin' surprised, you ask me. So yer little award-winnin' fracas ain't goin' away anytime soon.

S. Crosbie: [muttering and sighing] Fine, fine. But you get awards outta this too, you know. Are we on yet?

[Unintelligible noise. Camera blurs then focuses on helicopter floor, then swings to view outside. Background noises: thrumming helicopter blades, distant explosions.]

S. Crosbie: About fragging time.

[Camera swings to frame Summer Crosbie. Crosbie pushes whipping blonde hair from her face.]

S. Crosbie: This is Summer Crosbie with KSAF News, Denver. We are live over Aztlan sector airspace and watching one of the most amazing events to have occurred in Denver since the late President Dunkelzahn made his first appearance at Cherry Creek Lake. Carl, get a shot of this ...

[Camera moves view to outside helicopter. Frame and zoom in on Aztec teocalli. Large white blur streaks by, blue lightning blasts the top of the teocalli.]

S. Crosbie: Holy! Did you get that shot? Okay, what we just witnessed was a dragon—huge, white—frag, he needs a name. Make a note of that. This dragon just now approached—Drek, this may in fact be the same dragon that was reported as clawing its way through the Dunkelzahn Rift in DeeCee just an hour or so ago!

[Another shot of the teocalli, clearer focus on the dragon. A SAM streaks from the teocalli at the dragon, which dodges, wings beating furiously.]



S. Crosbie: Frag, that was intense. This dragon began attacking the Aztec teocalli in the Aztlan sector several minutes ago. Shortly after, a fleet of Aztechnology assault and TADS drones were launched for a counterattack—what's happening now?

[Zoom in on three approaching aircraft; two Aztechnology Aguilar helicopters and one Halcón ground-attack aircraft.]

S. Crosbie: It appears as if Aztechnology will be attempting an air battle soon ...

[Noise from cockpit.]

S. Crosbie: Sounds like we're being hailed. Crank it up, would you?

Unidentified Voice: ... helicopter. We insist that you clear out of Aztlan airspace. You are in violation of—

S. Crosbie: Skip it. They can take a flying frag. This story's too important to worry about their twisting panties. They're too busy with the dragon to really worry about us anyway.

[Distant wavery screeching sound.]

S. Crosbie: Whoa, Jake? You're the magic man. Explain that, would you?

[Camera zooms in on the dragon, shrugging off strafing bullets, hovering over the teocalli with an indistinct form struggling in its grasp.]

Jake: That's amazing. Perceiving astrally—by the Mother! The dragon is pulling a spirit of great power from the teocalli! It's red about the edges, like a glow, or streaked in blood. Whatever it is, it's putting up a great fight!

S. Crosbie: Sure looks like it from my end, too. Jesus, it's screaming!

[A drone and Aguilar fly into the camera's view, performing a diving maneuver at the dragon. With an annoyed air, the dragon lets go of the fighting free spirit to claw both vehicles out of the sky. The spirit bolts away before it can be retrieved.]

S. Crosbie: [chuckling] Whoops, there's the "one that got away," and our dragon sure looks slotted off.

[Deafening explosion; five seconds of static.]

S. Crosbie: ... completely demolished! I repeat, the dragon just completely demolished the Aztec teocalli! This is un-fragging-believable! Carl, you'd better get a good feed on this. Awards are at stake!

[View switches from the dragon dodging hails of bullets and missiles to what's left of the pyramid. Blasted and burning sandstone, brickwork and other unnamable materials lie on the site of the smoking remains of the teocalli. Somewhere, an air-raid siren wails.]

S. Crosbie: As you can see, nothing remains. How could that have been done? I don't see—what's that, Jake? Cripes, you're telling me a *spell* wrecked it? Oh frag—hey, where'd all these spirits come from?!

Jake: This is very strange ... there's a mixture of spirits here like I've never seen before. Elementals ... I see two sylphs and a salamander. Is that? Oh yes, we've got a wind spirit and a storm spirit, even.

[Another explosion; camera finds the source, an Aguilar with a missing tail. It spins as it begins falling, engine straining and failing.]

S. Crosbie: Make sure we're not going to be hit by any falling helicopters, and then see if you can't head closer to the

teocalli. I've got to have a good close-up of what's left of it. What? Oh, whatever—fine, we'll get that later. But we follow the dragon, okay? Where's he off to now?

[Camera swings from the crashed Aguilar back to the Halcón, which zooms past, firing off a missile. A monstrous ball of fire materializes in its path, scorching the craft and starting an engine blaze. As the fighter streaks off to safety, the dragon casually slips past the missile and veers off, beating its wings rapidly.]

S. Crosbie: The dragon is now headed north, towards downtown. No wait, he's veered off towards the Aztechnology Building. Is he going to do what I think he is?

[The camera zooms in on one of the Aztechnology rooftop helipads, where a Lobo LAV is taking off. The dragon pauses for the space of a few wing beats, after which the air next to him shimmers.]

S. Crosbie: They're going to pull out all the stops. I almost feel sorry for him. I wonder if he even knows what he's in for?

[Three laser beams strike out from turrets near the Aztechnology roof, leaving black welts across the dragon's side. As the dragon roars in rage, a barrage of missiles launches towards him. They converge, and then are stopped by an invisible force where they explode, just meters away from the dragon. The dragon falters as the force of the blast ripples the air, then streaks once more towards the building.]

S. Crosbie: Okay, maybe not. Frag, he's tough! He ... eh? No drek? Apparently, according to our mage, Jake, the dragon whistled up a great form air elemental out of, ah, thin air.

[The LAV launches a missile of its own towards the dragon, who drops down under it and then pops back up to toss a lightning bolt in return. It hits the hull and rocks the LAV, making a brief technicolor display as smoke and sparks indicate fried electronics.]

S. Crosbie: Nova! That was absolute beauty. It's like fighting a ghost. And we're the first on the scene with this! Can you get a little closer?

[Garbled exclamation from the cockpit.]

S. Crosbie: Just asking! Drekk. I know they're launching missiles all over the place ...

[Loud zooming noise as an aircraft speeds by the KSAF helicopter. It bucks in the wake, making the camera jiggle.]

S. Crosbie: Auugh! Never mind, we're close enough! Just worry about keeping this thing steady before we get shaken to pieces!

[The view steadies and refocuses in time to see another Halcón do a flyby, positioning itself for another attack with a fire elemental following it close behind. The dragon wings around to another side of the building to maneuver away; one of the helipads explodes as if hit by a massive force. Chunks of the building fall dozens of stories to the street below.]

S. Crosbie: Did I say that this was wizz? Because it is—

[The LAV, apparently recovered, maneuvers into a good position and opens up with a minigun. A fusillade of bullets spang away from the dragon, a sylph acting as his shield. He takes off away from the Aztechnology building, and a flotilla of Wandjina RPs rise in pursuit. Arcing around, the dragon turns east, heading directly towards the camera.]



S. Crosbie: The dragon rampages on, unleashing its fury on the Aztechnology building and other targets—oh drek, he's coming right at us! Ace, get the frag out of—

[As the dragon flashes past, a wing drops towards the camera, filling the frame. The camera goes dark.]

//End File//

"GHOSTWALKER 1, DENVER 0"

• Our chummers at the Nexus clued us in to the *Rocky Mountain Post's* reliability and unbiased reporting—as in, they have none. So we took the liberty of digging up the original version before the Monitoring Office's tender loving editing care had been applied. I've opened this one up for comments, but keep the speculations out; there'll be a SIG set up just to handle that. I know how you chummers love to talk.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 26 January 2062 at 14:57:19 (PST)

by Mitchell Douglas, *Rocky Mountain Post*, 26 January 2062

The big question on everyone's mind in Denver is: When will the conflict end? Since appearing a month ago, the dragon dubbed "Ghostwalker" has conducted a campaign of terror, leading many to question their faith in dragonkind. This is definitely a different dragon than our late UCAS President Dunkelzahn, who had made his own first documented appearance here in the Mile-High City fifty years ago tomorrow at the Cherry Creek Lake State Park. Where did this new dragon come from? What are his motives behind the war he wages with Denver?

Several weeks ago, on Christmas Eve, the astral form of Ghostwalker was spotted emerging from the astral rift in front of the Watergate Hotel in the FDC in the UCAS, the same site at which the much-revered late president Dunkelzahn met with his end. After inciting panic, he turned and flew west, where his manifest astral form was spotted several times en route to Denver. Somewhere along the way, he picked up his material body—which leads one to wonder where exactly he's been and where the heck he's been hiding his body this whole time.

He then appeared over Denver in the Aztlan Sector, where he immediately engaged in an attack, completely destroying the Aztec teocalli and damaging the Aztechnology building. Next he headed into the CAS sector, where he engaged with the CAS border security, but then broke off and disappeared.

• What a dogfight that was. I only got to see part of that tangle with the CAS before the dragon poofed, but I tell ya, I ain't seen nothin' like it before. Heard a rumor that Ghostwalker had used an invisibility spell, somethin' so good even the on-duty mages didn't know if he was still kickin' around or had taken a stray shot and flown on to the Happy Dragon Grounds.

• CASper

It was then that the media, due to the dragon's behavior as well as his coloration and seeming affinity with spirits, named

him Ghostwalker. He did not reappear for several days, during which time Aztlan representatives accused the UCAS of terrorism, as it was from the UCAS that Ghostwalker had allegedly been sent. UCAS officials denied the accusation, citing that they were as perplexed by the event as Aztlan.

• If you thought the Council was tense before, after Ghostwalker's rampaging it got downright hostile. There was the Aztlan Council rep Hector Ramirez at one end of the table looking like he was going to rain napalm death on Jeremy Falloon, the UCAS Council rep, on the other end. And true to form, Falloon, not knowing what the drek was going on, was about ready to spit nails. Even Betty Kalheim, the CAS yes-woman, got a little icy.

• Drac

After a three-day hiatus, Ghostwalker resurfaced over the UCAS sector. The destruction began anew as he singled out a high-rise residence and firebombed it. Half a dozen residents were killed, their bodies reduced to fine ash in an intense blaze that threatened to spread had not firefighters stopped it in time. Among the presumed dead is Glennis Shand, leader of the Unity policlub in the CAS sector.

• I was just down the street when this happened. I heard shouts, and looked out the window to see this fraggin' dragon battling some kind of powerful spirit. The sight of the spirit struck fear into my heart. It was a deep black with pinpoints of light within its form, and it just oozed coldness and inhumanity. Ghostwalker rent it to pieces, scattering it on the winds of the astral. May the Lord have mercy.

• Espiritu

• Night falls, and the other realms open to embrace their child.

• Choi-Mu

• Whoah. Did I miss the line for free peyote or something? What were those posts about? And if Ms. Shand's touchy-feely poli-club (sarcasm is so fun) is set in the CAS sector, then what's she doing with a place in the UCAS sector?

• Quinn

• Got me, chummer, on both counts.

• Eagle-Eye

• I've heard other, similar reports as well. Always a friend of a friend saw something of a titanic battle between Ghostwalker and a powerful, unknown spirit. At least one of these reports I heard came from Pueblo, along with a claim that the dragon had challenged a border guard there. The rest of the stories I feel more inclined to dismiss; I related these to a shaman I know, and he feels that, at least in comparison to the Pueblo story and the account listed above, the spirits in the other tales were less powerful. If it weren't for the fact that Ghostwalker has been



seen summoning spirits, I'd say that he was hunting them for some unknown reason.

• Marley

Bolstering the idea that he may be targeting Unity, Ghostwalker struck their headquarters in the CAS sector almost immediately afterwards. By the time sector security had arrived on scene, ready to do battle, the dragon had seemingly finished what it set out to do. Security forces report that he had paused long enough to magically sow confusion, indirectly causing damage as drivers of vehicles collided or crashed, and then disappeared once more. In the wake of the attack, representatives of the Humanis policlub voiced their sympathy for Unity's loss, stating that it was "... a sad state of affairs for humanity. We are besieged on all sides by the radically different, who would like nothing more than to see us become a mere footnote in history."

• Freaky, considering Humanis and Unity had been at each other's throats since '52. I guess this time they figured they had to stand up for "one of their own."

• Jackie

These have been just the tip of the iceberg of Ghostwalker's guerilla tactics. Displaying a phenomenal magical arsenal consisting of a vast repertoire of spells, the powers innate to him as a dragon and the ability to rally or summon a wide selection of spirits, wyverns and even thunderbirds on one occasion, each sector has been targeted at least once, apparently randomly. The

only thing tying these incidences together is the fact that all have been relatively high-profile, leaving many people terrified of enduring another attack. Even the Council Hall, located in the Aztlan sector and brought to nothing but rubble yesterday, has not been exempt. Other places targeted and/or destroyed in the past few weeks include: Pueblo Corporate Council sector president Julio Caron's home, various locations within Chinatown (CAS), Denver Foodstuffs, Inc. (Sioux), the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (UCAS), Lakeside Amusement Park (Ute), Ares Macrotech subsidiary Ares Arms (CAS) and Ft. Carson (PCC).

Less than a week after these attacks began, however, in a move that surprised many, both the UCAS and the Sioux stood down from the fight, ordering their people not to attack Ghostwalker outright. Both nations even exhorted the other governments to let the dragon be, arguments that have been ignored in favor of returning fire against the ghost-like western dragon.

• Now, I can understand the desire not to piss off a great dragon, but that stand-down order smacks of string-pulling to me. Anyone got the full download?

• Edmar

• I've heard the orders came from high up. The buzz is Nadja Daviar issued the UCAS orders, while the Sioux orders came directly from Lucinda Gray Arrow, the Sioux rep to the Denver Council.

• Jacob



• I thought Mary Cat Dancing was the Sioux rep. Don't tell me that that ancient dominatrix finally died after all these centuries!

• Papillon

• You're not from Denver, are you chummer? No, Mary Cat Dancing is still alive, though she looks like she should have died several decades ago. She stepped down after a 5-year term on the Council, and has reportedly been fighting off a bout of cancer. She remains in Denver, though, and she's still a power player. Lucinda was her replacement.

• Jacob

• Wait a minute—Ghostwalker attacked the Rocky Mountain Arsenal? I thought that was abandoned.

• Bullwinkle

• Apparently not. When Ghostwalker attacked, that's when he had those thunderbirds with him. Their natural EMP-like abilities scrambled the systems of a lot of the aircraft and ground equipment that suddenly came boiling out to defend. My guess is that it was the base of a smuggling ring, with the UCAS turning a blind eye to what was happening so long as they got their cut.

• Leggy

• How much did the UCAS pay you for that cover story Leggy? Truth be told, the UCAS was using the Arsenal as a secret military base and training facility—after all, the Treaty of Denver bans military units from the FRFZ.

• Shelley

• Do you honestly think the UCAS could get away with hiding a military installation? Leggy is right on target—it was a smuggling ring, though most of their business was headed down south towards Aztlan, the Yucatan and Amazonia. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal was one of the major sources for the guns and technology that flow in a pipeline to all kinds of rebel groups in the South American countries. The UCAS had been doing more than turning a blind eye. It was all but selling them direct, wholesale.

• Southern Cross

• Pity about Jammer and his crew. They woulda told us all years ago if they hadn't been geeked.

• Louis

• Can anyone explain Ghostwalker's choice of targets? They don't make a whole lot of sense.

• Bouncing Betty

• I'll give it a shot, based on stories I've heard, speculation and good old-fashioned tactics.

Some of those targets make sense if your goal is to put the fear of God—or rather, fear of Ghostwalker—into your opposition. The reporter himself said that all the targets were high-pro-

file or nearly so. That means he carried out attacks against places with a higher concentration of people, or that were extremely public and likely not to go unnoticed whether the number of people there is twenty or twenty thousand. This is a tactic common with terrorists, especially those with causes.

Some of those other sites, like Lakeside Amusement Park, however, don't have a very big "visibility factor." I agree that they don't really make sense. But since this is a dragon we're talking about, more than likely there are factors to this story that we're not seeing. Perhaps he's settling an old score.

• Argent

Even so, while the Aztlan and CAS sectors are calling for dragon blood, the Ute and Pueblo Corporate Council sectors have rescinded their "attack upon sight" orders and adopted a self-defense, wait-and-see strategy. Reliable sources, speaking on terms of anonymity, say that tomorrow the Council will convene with Ghostwalker in attendance in order to reach a peaceful solution.

"We believe that Ghostwalker, while his tactics may be unorthodox, is acting upon honorable intentions," said the UCAS Representative Jeremy Falloon. "It is my hope that, when the time does come for talks, all parties may lay aside their differences and work together for the common good." Mr. Falloon is currently engaged in confidential talks with UCAS Vice President Nadja Daviar, who is visiting Denver.

• I happened to check into some travel records, and I noticed that Veep Daviar just happened to arrive in Denver early in the morning on the 24th. Is this a coincidence that she just happened to arrive on a visit to "take care of Draco Foundation business" the day Ghostwalker appeared?

• Pipeline

According to Sioux representative Lucinda Gray Arrow, "Fighting fire with fire is well and good in a war against your enemies, but we do not consider Ghostwalker to be our enemy. The entire Front Range Free Zone is at stake here, and not just our respective sectors. It is time to put out the fire, before we are consumed."

Aztlan Council representative Hector Ramirez disagreed. "We have been subjected to terrorism of the worst kind. No one feels safe anymore. How can we reassure our people that the dragon will suddenly change its mind? It is an unrealistic expectation. We must be ready to defend our home and, if necessary, bring this threat to an end."

To that end, Aztlan airlifted military forces earlier this week from Manchaca to their sector in the Front Range Free Zone, a move that has created an uproar. Over voices of protest, the CAS has begun doing the same, flying troops and equipment from Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene as well as other bases they've taken control of since splitting from the old United States.

"What [Aztlan] has done is in direct violation of the Treaty of Denver. As such, we are now only protecting ourselves and our own interests," declared Elizabeth Kalheim, the CAS representative to the Council of Denver. "Although we cannot



support the actions of the Aztlan sector leaders and the leaders back in Aztlan proper, we must unfortunately agree that entire trust in Ghostwalker without adequate defense is wholly misplaced."

- There goes the neighborhood ...
- Ranger

• Aww frag. Now everybody's gonna jump on the bandwagon and wanna bring in troops too. I mean, why not? Treaty's already been violated, why not just go all the way? And I had a hot date planned this weekend, too.

- CASper

• How the heck did the Azzies airlift military in? Wouldn't the CAS have shot them down as soon as they stepped into CAS airspace?

- Tenser

• You bet. The Azzies snuck a few transports in by camouflaging them as legitimate commercial vehicles, passing right through Pueblo or CAS airspace. The rest they dropped in via suborbital. Lucky for the Azzies they revamped their Denver airport to handle suborbital and semiballistic traffic a few years ago.

- Irving

When asked about the situation, the Ute rep to the Council, William Huhuseca, responded that though the Ute planned on abiding by the truce, they would also bring in military forces. "We must remain on our guard, that neither Aztlan nor the CAS will attempt any takeovers by military force. We plan on keeping our defenses tight until such a time that we can be sure the dangers have passed," he said.

The remaining Council member, Jonathan Popé, could not be reached for comment, nor could PCC sector president Caron.

• That's because Caron is hiding; after his house got demolished, you can bet he's keeping a really low profile until it looks like the situation's done. As for Popé? I can only guess that he's too busy burying his head in the sand and hoping the dragon'll go away.

- Firelight

• If that's right, then the PCC may start looking for a new sector rep on the Council (assuming there will still be one tomorrow) soon. Pueblo as a whole may not have all the attitude of the Sioux, but they also can't afford to look like cowards.

- Reid

With the Treaty of Denver violated by Aztlan, a great deal of concern has been aired about the stability of the Front Range Free Zone. Though all representatives have sworn that Denver will continue to run as it has, it is worth noting that security on all borders has been increased significantly. In many cases, this has slowed down operations as workers and regular travelers between sectors have not been able to reach their respective destinations until several hours later than normal.

• It also means that running a border crossing with contraband or uninvited guests is more dangerous. Smuggling rates just got jacked through the roof, and free traders can pick and choose their job offers.

- Zack

THE WYRMS TALK

Posted: 01-02-62

Hestaby: "Ghostwalker ... is a presence that has been sorely needed in the Sixth World. I only wish that he could have returned sooner. His actions in Denver are not entirely unexpected. In all frankness, were any of us put in a similar stressful position, we would do the same. However, times have changed. May he resolve things to his satisfaction, and quickly."

Hualpa: "Ghostwalker has been rash, but I admit to some admiration for his tactics. They are bold and unexpected, and display great cunning worthy of his respected sire. I urge him to caution, however. He may be stepping on toes best left untouched."

Lofwyr: "No comment."

Lung: "Greetings to the one who has returned. Retake what is yours, but do not forget that which belongs to others."

Masaru: "We have not met yet, but I feel a kinship with Ghostwalker nonetheless. It is my hope that we may find the time to visit with one another and exchange ideas. Perhaps they are not dissimilar. I wish him luck."

Mujaji: "What can be said of Ghostwalker that has not already been said? He is not unknown to us. But he has a great many things yet to learn. I can only convey my formal greetings to him."

Rhonabwy: "I issue my condolences for his loss."

Ryumyo: "A flighty one with the weight of years behind him. Ghostwalker may find his appearance not unplanned for, and old alliances may be forged anew or crumbled to dust. Salutations, Lost One. Plan wisely."

"What Aztlan has done is reprehensible. They may be concerned about Ghostwalker, but the rest of us are more concerned about being able to come back to a secure home without fear of another sector moving in to take over," complained one citizen on condition of anonymity. "Who's to say that the whole treaty won't get chunked out the window?"

A MEETING OF MINDS

• This next piece comes by way of Priest, whom many of you in the Denver scene may be familiar with. Priest used to be a Jesuit, and he was trained by some of the best deckers and code-breakers that order ever put out. He couldn't hack the lifestyle, though, and took himself and his talents where he felt pretty sure even the Vatican would hesitate to go—the Nexus. Though he has an admitted weakness for nuyen that led him to the shadows, his cracking abilities are considerably above par.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 16:40:19 (PST)

by Priest

First off, let me start out by saying that, over the years, I've been accused of being all kinds of drek, true or not. Word gets around, so I know that my credibility's tarnished. I'm not a jerk until cred is on the line. So think about that as you read this post, and you decide if you want to hang around and listen to an old school hacker like me.

- Bastard. You still owe me 100 nuyen.
- Shiva

Christmas day, I was at the Brown Palace Hotel in the UCAS sector. For the benefit of all you wags who've never been to Denver, the UCAS sector, or the Brown, it's one of the swankiest, most posh hotels to stay at in the FRFZ. All over the place, you can see antiques and expensive objets d'art placed strategically to enhance the look of the rooms in which they're put, like a SWAT team of interior decorators ran through the hotel with rulers, cloth swatches and auction catalogs. Because of all that, it's very expensive to stay there, so you know most of the people who stay there are the rich and powerful. The management, however, doesn't seem to know or care that their Matrix security is lousy, which made my job at the time a walk in the park.

You see, I had a particular little pigeon to look for, so I had made myself nice and comfy in the Brown's security camera slave node. He was bound to come along, even with it being Christmas, just because he was that type of slag. A real Scrooge, making me work when I could've been unwrapping goodies at home ... but since it was fat birds like him from whom I took the cred that paid for those goodies, I couldn't bring myself to feel too aggrieved.

Now, when I started seeing a few professional muscle types, you'll be understanding if I say I thought they were for my target. But after scoping a few out as they entered and mingled, I realized there were actually a lot of them, and they were being especially discreet. In fact, they kept on coming, each acting more well-trained than the last, giving the Brown a thorough once, twice and thrice-over. Naturally, this

grabbed my focus away from the job at hand. Couldn't be for my guy, unless he'd been given reason to become a paranoid son of a slitch ... and there was no chance of that happening. I'm too good. So I kept watch, wondering when the other shoe would drop and thinking some bigwig like Jeremy Falloon (you laugh, but I got stories about that slag) was here to have a little rendezvous.

But 'lo, what to my wondering eyes did appear, but one SilveryK and a black elf with white hair!

• Someone stop him now, before he adapts the rest of the "The Night Before Christmas"...

• Momma Goose

• Hold on a tic—SilveryK? I thought she'd gotten herself installed at the Nexus. What's she doing wandering around the UCAS sector, besides picking up someone who sounds like a photo-negative of herself?

• Lara

• How are we even sure it was SilveryK? Could've been anybody.

• D. Thomas

• How many sexy albino hotshot female ice-slicers are there, Thomas? Trust me, it was her. I'd know her anywhere. It's cliché, but we've got history.

• Priest

Naturally, this aroused my curiosity. For a moment, I was torn between attempting to keep tabs on what SilveryK and her friend were doing at the Brown Palace and keeping a lookout for my meal ticket. That's when I saw, I drek you not, UCAS Veep Nadja Daviar show up with some huge, sculpted-looking red-haired beefcake slag on her arm, apparently following yet another guy. This one was shorter than Ms. Daviar's companion, a spare but slightly stocky human ... compact, I guess you could call him. I couldn't shake a distinct feeling of power associated with him. His hair was an odd shade of blonde; it looked almost white, and reminded me of pictures I'd seen once of glaciers and polar icecaps. His eyes, which fortunately I could see because of the very sweet SOTA cameras I was looking through, were a very sharp and penetrating blue.

Of course, the reason I could see this so well, camera or no camera, is because he decided to look straight up into the lens—as in, right at it, directly, no mistake. That gave me the willies and made me seriously consider that it was time to cut and run, or at least judiciously turn my attention elsewhere. Namely, where it belonged: my nuyen-gaining job. I just about gave that thought another spin on the neural carousel when I saw him turn to talk to thin air. Yeah, I know, I can hear it; you sure he was talking? Let me put it to you this way—his lips were moving, sound was coming out, and there wasn't anyone that I could see, at least, that he was addressing. As for what he said, if you want to find out you'll have to send me a few nuyen. Information may want to be free, but this data will have to buy its way out of captivity first.



Anyway, I had one hand on the disconnect button and the other on the keystroke to switch cameras, debating which course of action was better for my health and peace of mind, when the last man in walks up to our blonde oddball. This last guy was a halfer who was so ugly that I imagine he stands out anywhere he goes—not only would children run away from him, but I'd expect grown men to. He had dirty blonde hair pulled back into a braid that rested on his shoulder, a prize-fighter's nose, bugged-out eyes and a harelip. I was afraid the camera would bust. He looked more than capable of picking up and tossing Ms. Daviar's date, but he was fairly deferential towards Mr. Blonde Guy.

So who exactly was this motley crew? I've got some guesses, but I'll give you one for free. On hindsight, I think Mr. Talks-to-Air must have been Ghostwalker, jandering around in human form. The rest I will leave up to speculation and your credstick.

[9.2 Mp deleted by SysOp]

- Don't make me regret opening this file. Keep the explosions to yourselves.

- Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

- Okay. If we grant that this is true and not some practical joke, then the "black elf with white hair" must be Aina Dupree, Vice-Chairperson for the Draco Foundation. She's the only one I've heard of described like that, and with Vice President Daviar, who is the Chairperson and Head, there as well, it only makes sense. Don't ask me who Ms. Daviar was with, however. For all I know, he could just be her joyboy. Same with Ghostwalker's friend.

- Lara

- Yeah, but that now begs the question—assuming this is right, why were they meeting? I could see where the Draco Foundation might have an interest in talking to Ghostwalker, but what's the stake for SilveryK? Would this have anything to do with President Dunkelzahn's (RIP) will?

- Findler-Man

- What are you saying? That Ghostwalker flew in all the way from dragon-metaplanar-never-never-land to collect whatever ol' Dunkie left him in the will?

- Pan

- Maybe ... just, maybe ... Ghostwalker is really Dunkelzahn, returned from Beyond. That would explain why SilveryK was there as well—she was part of Dunkelzahn's network of "watchers." Doesn't it make sense to ask the one who used to be in charge to take it back?

- Tom-Tom

- Hmmm. Now I know most of you probably think all great dragons look alike, but I've scanned pix of both Dunkelzahn and Ghostwalker. While there are some striking similarities, there's enough differences to make it clear that we're dealing with

another dragon. Not to mention that their coloration is different.

- Tiamat

- I can buy zombies, but a zombie dragon is taking it a bit too far. I think it's much more likely that Ghostwalker is taking up the reins of the former President's contacts network.

- Conspir-I-See

- You guys all need to take your medication, you're seeing conspiracies everywhere. Maybe SilveryK merely owes the Draco Foundation a debt, and she came along for the ride on this meeting to make sure everything was on the up-and-up. Why look for a complex scenario when the truth may be simple?

- Firelight

- C'mon, you chummers act like you'd never read the will before. The way Dunkelzahn had it all set up, I'd be willing to bet that this little "welcome-back" meeting was jotted down somewhere in whatever super-safe notes he gave to Ms. Daviar before he kicked off. Dragons always think way ahead of time. It would certainly explain why Daviar showed up in Denver just a few hours before Ghostwalker did. I bet Dunkelzahn knew all about this. Heck, I wouldn't be surprised to find out that he reserved the hotel's conference room before he died.

Who will take odds that the next meeting Ghostwalker goes to is going to have a bunch of other dragons in it?

- Dragonslayer

- Hey, I found out something interesting after combing through the DeeCee society column. That big hunky slag Ms. Daviar had with her is named "Ryan," and he's supposed to be some wizzer adept. (And looking at that body, I'm not real surprised.) They started going out and being seen with each other sometime after the Scott Commission got into full swing. Doesn't really answer why he was there, except maybe as her bodyguard.

- DeeCeeBelle

- Does anyone know where Ghostwalker has set up his lair? I assume it's in the vicinity of Denver. Are there any big unclaimed cave networks nearby in the Rockies?

- Zaratosa

- Chummer, this is the twenty-first century, and dragons can take human form. For all we know, he may have just rented a spacious three-bedroom flat in the Ute Sector.

- Zephyr

- Well, his body had to have been in the Denver area, because when Ghostwalker first appeared he was in astral form, and it wasn't until he appeared in this neck of the woods that he dragged his meat out of the closet. Where the heck would a dragon store its body for umpteen years while it was away in the metaplanes?

- Silicon Mage

• Personally, I am amazed that he can live in such a hole. Of course, I am also amazed that he is even here.

• The Laughing Man

Ha! Fraggin' Ha!

"MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES"

• I can remember a time when life seemed boring, that nothing would ever really change. I remember also wishing that things would change, that something interesting and exciting would happen. As it has been said before, and doubtless will be said again for a long time to come, "Be careful of what you ask for you, you just might get it." Things are shaking loose all over the place now, kids. Kinda makes you wish things were boring again, neh?

Just remember that the next time you're wanting a change, and read this transcript we snatched of the meeting between Ghostwalker and the Council of Denver. Another good, anonymous chummer sent this little jewel in. Since Council Hall had been knocked around like a kid's block tower, the Council convened in the Compri Room at the Compri Hotel in the PCC sector, and let's just say their Matrix security wasn't up to snuff. Like other meeting-type transcripts, I've cut out all the motions, seconds, roll-calling and what-have-you. Save your comments for afterwards.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 17:43:02 (PST)

//Transcript begins//

COUNCIL OF DENVER, FRONT RANGE FREE ZONE

Minutes For January 27, 2062

Emergency Council meeting called by Lucinda Gray Arrow, interim Council representative for the Sioux sector.

Members Present:

Hector Ramirez, representing the Aztlan sector
Elizabeth Kalheim, representing the CAS sector
Jonathan Popé, representing the Pueblo sector
Lucinda Gray Arrow, representing the Sioux sector
Jeremy Falloon, representing the UCAS sector
William Huhuseca, representing the Ute sector

Also present:

Nicholas Whitebird, representing the great dragon Ghostwalker

[Chairman HUHUSECA calls the COUNCIL to order.]

Chairman HUHUSECA: Thank you all for coming, as unorthodox a situation and location as this is. Without waxing too philosophical on the vagaries of life and its chaotic nature, I give Ms. Gray Arrow the floor.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: Thank you, Chairman Huhuseca. Gentlemen and lady, I have called for this meeting with you in order that we may come to resolve the situation in which we currently find ourselves. Never before since the Treaty of





Denver was signed have we seen and been a party to such chaos. It is my firm belief that some resolution must come to this conflict with Ghostwalker, and that this resolution needs be an entirely peaceful one for the good of the people we each represent. To that end, I open the floor for discussion.

Mr. POPÉ: If peace is indeed what is being sought, then it would behoove us to start with the basics. Mr. Whitebird, if I may be so blunt, how may we end this? What is it that Ghostwalker wants?

Mr. RAMIREZ: Judging by his actions, I would say he wishes to destroy us all.

Mr. FALLOON: Please, Hector, enough of the drama. We know how you feel about this already.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Let me remind you, Mr. Falloon, to please use the proper form of address, even if you're thinking something else.

Mr. RAMIREZ: I am sure you find this amusing, but the people of Aztlan do not find humor in the destruction of their heritage! We wish the dragon to immediately turn himself over so that he may be prosecuted for his war crimes.

Ms. KALHEIM: War crimes? Such as violating the Treaty of Denver and airlifting Aztlan military personnel and materiel over CAS airspace?

Mr. POPÉ: Please, fellow Council members, I have asked the great dragon's representative a question. Allow him to answer.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: Ladies and gentlemen, Ghostwalker's wants at this time are very simple. He has asked me to convey his wish that the governance of the Front Range Free Zone be turned over to him immediately.

Chairman HUHUSECA: What?!

Mr. RAMIREZ: Ridiculous, we—

Ms. KALHEIM: I don't see—

Mr. FALLOON: But we—

Ms. GRAY ARROW: [Speaking a little over the din] Let's bring some order back to this, and ask questions in a calm and reasonable fashion.

Mr. POPÉ: Just what exactly do you mean by that, Mr. Whitebird?

Mr. WHITEBIRD: I will make myself clearer, as it seems there remains some confusion. As I have been given to understand, long ago the entirety of this area was under Ghostwalker's protection and guardianship. It was his home, but he had to

leave through circumstances as yet unrevealed to me. Now that he has returned, he wishes to regain what he has lost.

Surely at the least the Native American representatives here can understand this—it is simply a matter of reclaiming a heritage that has been stolen away by uninvited colonists.

Ms. KALHEIM: In a nutshell, if I'm understanding you correctly, you want us to give Ghostwalker control of Denver?

Mr. WHITEBIRD: Yes, Ms. Kalheim, you are entirely correct.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Preposterous!

Chairman HUHUSECA: This is ... a somewhat awkward request. Awkward for us, you understand.

Ms. KALHEIM: The Chairman is right. We can't—and won't—simply pack up and move.

Mr. FALLOON: Awkward? This is abdicating national sovereignty all over again. We can't just do that without a good reason or the people will give my government hell.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: As would mine, but I do not think that is being asked of us. Am I correct, Mr. Whitebird?

Mr. WHITEBIRD: That is so. Ghostwalker is a very fair-minded individual. He is content to allow everyone to remain as they are, with the Council retaining governance of their respective sectors.

Mr. RAMIREZ: This meeting is useless. Aztlan cannot and will not accept anything other than the dragon's surrender.

Mr. POPÉ: Your belligerence ill behooves you, Mr. Ramirez. We are here to discuss a solution that is amenable to us all, not simply to the people of the Aztlan sector. In other words, we're not here for the benefit of the Aztechnology Corporation.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Your insinuation is offensive. I represent the interests of the Aztlaner people.

Mr. POPÉ: Then maybe you won't mind if Aztechnology stops sending you paychecks.

Mr. RAMIREZ: The people of Los Angeles may allow your country to walk all over their rights, but the people of Aztlan will not stand for such abuse.

Mr. FALLOON: Gentlemen, I believe we are discussing sowing peace, not dissent. The events in California should have no bearing on this discussion.

Ms. KALHEIM: I also have to say that the CAS still can't accept those terms. There are plenty who will believe that we've become nothing more than puppets, that the appearance of letting us keep things as they are is a farce and a sham. I

respectfully submit that the dragon simply rescind his claim and let us be. He has already cost us the Treaty of Denver.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: I'm afraid that he will not, Ms. Kalheim. I feel that some apology must be made for the state of this Treaty, however, no direct blame may be placed upon Ghostwalker. The Aztlan sector and its government decided to bring in the Treaty-breaking troops, not Ghostwalker.

Mr. RAMIREZ: This would not have occurred if we had not been attacked and forced to defend ourselves, Mr. Whitebird. The Aztlan sector merely wished to protect itself from the dragon's tyrannical and terrorist activities. Again, we call for Ghostwalker's surrender.

Mr. FALLOON: What are you going to do, clap Mr. Whitebird here in chains and haul him off? Think about it, man. The dragon isn't going to meekly submit just because you're demanding that he do it, and I doubt you'll subdue him either.

Mr. RAMIREZ: I see he's already subdued the UCAS and the Sioux, however. As soon as he began attacking, your sectors immediately showed your bellies. Or is there some other motive for supporting Ghostwalker? Do you regularly deal with your enemies thusly?

Ms. GRAY ARROW: If that were true, Mr. Ramirez, then we would have embraced Aztlan already. Ghostwalker is not an enemy, though you choose to see him as such.

Mr. POPÉ: Ghostwalker started the aggressions, Ms. Gray Arrow, surely you must admit that. If the dragon is not, as you say, an enemy, then how is it that he is now a friend? We are all curious how this seeming alliance has come to be.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Our coast-loving friend has the right idea. Let's hear why the UCAS and Sioux have been calling for us to become friendly with Ghostwalker.

Ms. KALHEIM: Dragon got your tongue?

Mr. FALLOON: I'm not at liberty to say, and that's not the issue right now.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: Agreed. If a resolution is being sought, then let's remain on track.

Mr. RAMIREZ: A peaceful resolution will occur when Ghostwalker turns himself over! All else is irrelevant. He threatens our way of life, and we shall not stand idly by and watch this dragon make a mockery of our security forces.

Ms. KALHEIM: And the CAS will not stand idly by, Mr. Ramirez, while the Treaty of Denver is made a mockery of with the installation of Aztlan military. It smacks of the prelude to a ground war. You can't expect us not to do the same, simply in order to maintain good defenses in the face of what is arguably

a viable threat. I'm afraid that Ghostwalker also falls under that heading, Mr. Whitebird.

Mr. FALLOON: Ms. Kalheim brings up a valid point. The Treaty of Denver, as it stands, is on the brink of becoming null and void after Aztlan's actions. The minute your people brought military in, Mr. Ramirez, that started an escalating game of one-upmanship. Everyone has brought in military, now, and don't tell me you didn't notice how carefully we were scanned on the way here. It's only going to get worse.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: The Front Range Free Zone, never mind the people we are charged with governing, can't afford for a war to break out because of the nullification of the Treaty.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: Then please, accept Ghostwalker's claim. As soon as he is in office, so to speak, all of this can be settled satisfactorily. Perhaps a vote is in order?

Chairman HUHUSECA: While what you say makes a certain amount of sense, you have heard the opposition to your master's claim. If you could clarify Ghostwalker's terms, then a vote might be considered.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: All right, let me be clear. The Council of Denver will no longer be the supreme governing body of Denver—instead, Ghostwalker shall be the ultimate authority of the autonomous entity known as the Front Range Free Zone, or Denver if you will. However, each sector within it will be run as it has been run before, and will remain under your respective governments' laws. The Council of Denver will be granted the authority by Ghostwalker to continue to exercise its powers as it has in the past. In other words, the Council will be authorized to maintain the Front Range Free Zone and make all decisions relating to policy, economy, security and judicial affairs. Ghostwalker will be kept apprised of all current happenings, and when he deems it necessary he will sit in on the Council or send a delegate to express his wishes—as far as I know, I will remain his liaison in this. As the ultimate ruler of this domain, Ghostwalker will have veto power over all Council decisions, and will pass down judgments for matters on which the Council becomes deadlocked.

I have an electronic file that lays out everything in explicit details, assembled by the best lawyers Ghostwalker could find. I shall download it to each of you now.

Ms. KALHEIM: My, is that all? We aren't required to hand over our firstborn children?

Mr. POPÉ: The dragon asks for much, Mr. Whitebird. I hope you understand this.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: What I do and don't understand in that regard doesn't matter. These are Ghostwalker's wishes, and I am his messenger.

Mr. RAMIREZ: A lackey sent to negotiate. The dragon's arrogance is astounding. The terms are unacceptable.



Ms. GRAY ARROW: We can't afford to war like this. No one will win, but if we can make some compromise ...

Mr. WHITEBIRD: My apologies, Ms. Gray Arrow. Ghostwalker explicitly set out his terms and did not leave room for compromise.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: [Sighs] Very well. If we can agree on these terms, then, we may end up with more to gain than to lose. I beg you all to carefully consider the choices before you.

Mr. POPÉ: Ms. Gray Arrow, we in essence only have two choices. We either agree to submit to the great dragon's rule with us acting as stewards, or we reject it entirely and plunge ourselves into war.

Mr. RAMIREZ: The events in Los Angeles prove that Pueblo has no aversion to war.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Agreed. And neither, it seems, does Aztlan.

Ms. KALHEIM: Isn't Aztlan busy with a war elsewhere, already?

Mr. FALLOON: That was unworthy, my dear. And for the record, I believe you're talking about the Yucatán.

Ms. KALHEIM: Thank you. This illustrates my point. Aztlan has been very keen on warring; we have all seen evidence of this. We can't allow them to drag the rest of us into a war of their making, although if it becomes necessary, the CAS will willingly enter the front lines.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Armed by Ares, no doubt.

Ms. KALHEIM: As Aztechnology will arm Aztlan. Shall we compare bank statements next?

Ms. GRAY ARROW: Enough of the squabbling. I move we take a recess and reconvene in an hour's time.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Seconded. Everyone please return no later than a quarter after the hour. I strongly recommend that everyone remain here at the Compri.

[The COUNCIL and Mr. WHITEBIRD take a recess.]

//Transcript break//

• Hoo-wee, what a ride. Anyone get sick on that little roller-coaster?

Don't let all the official language fool you: the Council is a veritable hotbed of intrigue, petty bickering and excitement. Since most of you are not exactly intimately familiar with who's who and how they're screwing each other, I've taken the liberty of whipping together this cheat sheet.

William Huhuseca: Like the transcript says, he's the Ute rep to the Council of Denver. What it doesn't say is that Huhuseca

is an ork and a Coyote shaman, so at times he's a serious drek-disturber. Looks like right now, he's just serious, habitual cracks notwithstanding. The Ute position, so far as I know, has lately meant siding with the Sioux on most affairs. They occasionally side with the Pueblo Corporate Council, though the recent California situation has strained their relationship to the point of hostility. What does this mean for the Council meeting? Huhuseca will likely vote how the Sioux (meaning Ms. Gray Arrow) votes.

Elizabeth "Betty" Kalheim: Consistently underestimated as being merely a talking head for Ares and her CAS superiors, Betty always manages to come out on top. She's as canny as they come, and even her occasional mistakes somehow seem to factor in to some grand scheme in the works later down the line. A few years ago, Betty went into rehabilitation for a previously undiscovered chip habit, which you know had the boys looking to impeach. Predictably, it never happened. For a short while, it looked like the CAS and Aztlan may have forged an alliance over this Ghostwalker situation, but by bringing in troops I believe the Azzies just slit their own throat.

Jonathan Popé: I remember when he used to be a combat decker in the Pueblo subnet; we even mixed it up at least once. He's a sharp, quiet, scholarly-type chummer, so you know when he speaks up in Council for the PPC, the others tend to listen. Until now, he'd been fighting the good fight alongside Aztlan, but that's not likely to survive the next few hours. The PCC doesn't want a war anymore than half the other sectors, and they're already dealing with a bad rep for their recent annexation of Los Angeles. With all the saber-rattling going on between Aztlan and the CAS, Popé's position is on the precarious side.

Hector Ramirez: As you smart cookies have guessed, Ramirez is the Aztlan rep. And just like other Aztlan reps the Council's had in the past, he's more about irritating the bugs out of you than really doing anything terribly constructive. He sure is pushing it for all he's worth this time. Maybe Aztechnology's decided to slip his leash a little—it's no secret that the destruction of their teocalli severely slotted them off. Now they'll have to make do with another place to continue their heart-ripping ceremonies.

Lucinda Gray Arrow: Lucinda is the representative for the Sioux sector, having replaced Mary Cat Dancing a little while back. Ms. Gray Arrow is as bright as old Mary, and she has the benefit of not having as many enemies. She's also a Cat shaman, and there are lots of strange rumors passing around about her cat familiar. No one's quite sure when or why she decided that Ghostwalker was the second coming of Jetblack, but the Sioux sector has been behind making nice with the dragon ever since, along with the UCAS.

Jeremy Falloon: The media likes to dice him up as "Falloon the Buffoon," but if you buy that you'll also buy that the Universal Brotherhood was about sweetness and light. He's a true Machiavellian, as slick as a dragon's tongue. Most of his enemies never even see him coming. He's got a shadowy past, and he can certainly handle himself in the street, as the six cybered



gangers a few years back learned after he left them bleeding and moaning for Mommy in the gutter. Falloon is currently operating under the direct supervision of Nadja Daviar.

As for Ghostwalker and his representative Nicholas Whitebird ... you've read the other documents, so you should be able to figure them out as well as anyone else. Keep your ears open.

• FastJack

• C'mon Jack, I had to reset the protections on this transcript twice after you posted. You're setting a bad example for the kiddies.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

//Transcript resumes//

[The COUNCIL reconvenes. The great dragon GHOSTWALKER joins the meeting. All sit.]

Chairman HUHUSECA: Thanks, everyone, for returning promptly. Ghostwalker, thank you for joining us.

GHOSTWALKER: Naturally, I would hardly do otherwise. I trust Nicholas, but I wanted to see these proceedings for myself. The outcome interests me.

Mr. POPÉ: An equally interesting answer, honored Ghostwalker. We are all interested in the outcome.

Mr. FALLOON: Then I say we get on with it and cut the jibber-jabber.

GHOSTWALKER: [aside to Mr. WHITEBIRD] Jibber-jabber?

Mr. WHITEBIRD: [aside to GHOSTWALKER] He means inconsequential talk, great one.

GHOSTWALKER: Yes, by all means, cut the jibber-jabber. Begin your voting.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Ladies and gentlemen, now that we are fully aware of the issues, we must come to a vote on whether we follow the path of peace, or the path of war. As this is an emergency meeting, this will be a majority vote, and not an "all or none" proposition. All other debates and considerations will be handled after the vote, since they center upon the outcome. As I call your name, please give a "yea" or "nay" answer. Should we honor Ghostwalker's claim and thereby end this war?

GHOSTWALKER: I assure you all, it is in your best interests to capitulate.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Thank you, honored Ghostwalker. Mr. Ramirez?

Mr. RAMIREZ: Nay. We will not do the bidding of a dishonorable dragon. The spirit of the Aztlan people will not be crushed by the oppression of a petty tyrant.

GHOSTWALKER: I am surprised to find any spirit left in your people after so many years under Aztechnology's yoke. I would think they would have nowhere to go but up.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Gentlemen, please! Mr. Falloon?

Mr. FALLOON: Yea. The UCAS finds the dragon's claim to be valid, and his terms acceptable. We have also been assured that we will each retain control over our sectors, and so we find no conflict of interest.

GHOSTWALKER: "Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus; and we petty men walk under his huge legs, and peep about to find ourselves dishonorable graves."

Chairman HUHUSECA: That's from Cassius' speech in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. I didn't know you enjoyed The Bard's work.

GHOSTWALKER: I am finding much among your classics to enjoy. Particularly the discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli.

Chairman HUHUSECA: I see. Ms. Gray Arrow?

Ms. GRAY ARROW: Yea. Let peace reign, so old wounds may heal and we gather no new ones.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Mr. Popé?

Mr. POPÉ: Yea. Frankly, I see no other choice in order to stop what will otherwise be massive bloodshed, and enough of that has occurred already. Our nation desires stability in this area while we manage instability elsewhere in the world.

Chairman HUHUSECA: Well, well. If that isn't a surprising vote.

Mr. RAMIREZ: You are all making a fatal mistake. Are you blind?

Mr. WHITEBIRD: I advise that you remain seated, Mr. Ramirez, and remain quiet.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Advice? On whose behalf—the dragon's?

GHOSTWALKER: He means on your behalf. Sit. Your jibber-jabber is tiresome.

Chairman HUHUSECA: If we may continue the voting? Ms. Kalheim?

Ms. KALHEIM: As you know, this isn't an easy matter. The CAS does not feel comfortable with having a dragon overlord for Denver. But neither are we eager to enter into a free-for-all war, which is the alternative with a violated treaty on our hands. Our vote is "yea."

[Several seconds of stunned silence follow.]



Mr. RAMIREZ: What?!

Chairman HUHUSECA: As we have a majority vote with or without my vote, which incidentally is also "yea," the motion passes. We will honor Ghostwalker's claim, and therefore Denver, the Front Range Free Zone, is now under his protection and overall governance.

Mr. RAMIREZ: You ignorant fools! This is a ridiculous farce. The Treaty has now been nullified. You are asking to have Denver plunged into warfare and chaos. I assure you that you seal your own dooms.

GHOSTWALKER: Sit, little man. Your threats have been abated. I am well aware of your contingency preparations to shut down Denver's Matrix grids. No such thing will be occurring. Your grids have been given over to Pueblo.

Mr. RAMIREZ: You're bluffing.

Mr. WHITEBIRD: No sir, he is not. Arrangements have already been made for the Pueblo Corporate Council to assume grid control, as Mr. Popé can attest to. We expect the Corporate Court to approve the transfer in a matter of minutes, given the evidence Ghostwalker has provided them and in light of the decision this Council just reached.

Mr. FALLOON: Face it, Hector, Aztlan's been eunuched.

Mr. RAMIREZ: You self-satisfied ... we won't allow this to happen.

GHOSTWALKER: You've no choice in the matter. Aztlan is no longer welcome in Denver. Pack up and get out.

Mr. RAMIREZ: What? We are not leaving! We won't be ousted by this treacherous wyrm!

Ms. KALHEIM: Then perhaps your people will be ousted by CAS troops.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Is that a threat? As I'm sure you are aware, we also have military nearby.

GHOSTWALKER: No, it is the current reality. Confederated American States troops are, as we speak, invading the Aztlan sector and starting the relocation process.

[Several unidentified security personnel enter the meeting room.]

Mr. WHITEBIRD: If I might add, sir, Mr. Ramirez's helicopter has now landed. Our personnel are ready to escort him to the helipad and back to Aztlan.

Ms. KALHEIM: Hurry, Hector, you don't want to miss your flight. Ghostwalker, thank you. We will now implement the sec-

and part of our deal, meaning that the CAS will assume control over the former Aztlan sector lands.

GHOSTWALKER: This is acceptable. Our deal is done.

Mr. RAMIREZ: Idiots, all of you. No matter. This is out of my hands now, so it seems. May you get what you deserve, toadying to the dragon. Good riddance.

[Mr. RAMIREZ and the security personnel leave the meeting.]

Chairman HUHUSECA: Wow. Ah ... [clears throat] This brings us brutally to the next point of business. Before we move on to any other tasks, we must consider these ramifications upon the Treaty of Denver. Ghostwalker?

GHOSTWALKER: I leave this largely to the Council, with suggestions. One—rewrite it, without Aztlan as one of the signatories. Two—add in a point, or clause, concerning my status. Be absolutely sure to state that what I rule is law. I rule Denver. You govern its sectors.

Ms. KALHEIM: [Murmurs] Very succinct.

Mr. FALLOON: And what about the military situation? If everyone's going to keep their military forces here, then some of us need to play catch-up, if you get my meaning. Otherwise, scrub 'em. Get them out of here, and we start back at square one. Which is it?

GHOSTWALKER: Neither. As the Treaty stipulates, no nation shall station military forces under their command in the Front Range Free Zone. However, defense is an important issue that we cannot afford to overlook, and so I offer the following solution. A joint "peacekeeping" force shall be established for the defense of Denver, composed of equal elements of units from each of your nations. This Zone Defense Force shall be independently operated by a command staff composed of personnel "loaned" by your respective countries. Your nations may nominate staff, but I will make the final selection. The Zone Defense Force will, of course, answer to me.

Mr. FALLOON: Sounds reasonable, though such projects always work better in theory than in practice. It will certainly discourage Aztlan from seeking to reclaim its sector.

Mr. POPÉ: It would also bring military matters into the open, so we no longer have to deal with behind-the-scenes militarization as we have for years.

Mr. FALLOON: True. Establishing this force and re-establishing the Treaty is definitely a multi-session job, and I'm sure each of us is going to need to spend some time de-escalating the situation now that fighting has broken out in the Az—I mean, CAS sector. I move to make these the first topics of new business at our next meeting.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: I second that motion.

Chairman HUHUSECA: The motion is passed and noted.

Ms. KALHEIM: A little strange from you, Ms. Gray Arrow, since you've been suing for peace.

Ms. GRAY ARROW: Peace can only be maintained through vigilance, unfortunately. Surely you can agree with that.

GHOSTWALKER: A great many good men counted as good leaders have said as much.

//Transcript ends//

- Aztlan kicked out of Denver! Holy fragging hotcakes, can that be true?
- The Kid
- What, didn't you hear Hector Ramirez swallowing his tongue? Yeah, it's true all right.
- Lara
- And the CAS snatches it up. Ain't we lucky?
- CASper
- This is my home you're talking about. Fragging vampire.
- Eagle Warrior

(1.3 Mp deleted by SysOp)

- I know it's a touchy subject, but try to keep it civil.
- Captain Chaos
"I am everywhere!"
- I can't imagine Aztlan just rolled over and let the CAS walk in. How bad is the fighting?
- People Watcher
- Not as bad as you might expect. The CAS invasion seems to be backed by spirit support, which has managed to keep most of Aztlan's air assets grounded. There was some pretty bloody fighting at the border posts as CAS troops stormed in, but they seized tactical control rapidly. The Aztechnology building held out the longest, and that area was a warzone for several hours.
I understand that CAS troops are automatically deporting anyone who's employed by or a citizen of Aztechnology. The other residents are being interned, until their cases can be reviewed individually. Many of them are actually being given a choice whether they want to stay or go—quite a few are opting to stay under CAS supervision.
- Pyramid Watcher
- If I had a choice, I'd certainly choose to stay the frag away from Aztlan. Of course, I've seen sides to Aztechnology that no



metahuman should ever see ...

- Midnight Angel
- Even with the screening process, the CAS is going to have to be careful. Some Aztechnology loyalists are going to slip through their nets. They'll be sure to have a fifth column active in no time, aiming to put the sector back in Aztlan's hands.
- Warmonger
- I've heard that Henequen Enterprises is lobbying to import some of those Aztlan residents into the Sioux. In case you didn't know, HE is run by Henequen, a small feathered serpent who's rumored to be an ex-Aztechnology employee. If I'm scanning it right, Henequen's pulling his old agents out, before they get too far out of his reach. I wonder what Henequen thinks of Ghostwalker?
- Monitor
- Hmm, I predict that some of the syndicates will be taking advantage of the power vacuum following Aztechnology's "departure." The Triads have a strong presence in the CAS sector, and they now have a prime opportunity for growth on their hands. Unless someone else moves in first ...
- China Doll
- I imagine the Azzies are already laying the groundwork to take back their turf—they've never been ones to back down from a fight. Of course, they'll probably have to shift some troops away from their Yucatán conflict, which could be a problem for them.
- Sidewinder
- Well, this whole drama certainly proves that Ghostwalker has been a busy dragon in the past few weeks. When he wasn't burning select parts of Denver down, he must have been working deals like mad. He bought CAS support with Azzie land and sucked in Pueblo by handing them the Denver RTG (I have to say that one makes me happy—the thought of Aztlan running the grids gave me crawlies).
- Zephyr
- Taking that secret meeting at the Brown Palace as a cue, Ghostwalker also seems to have Nadja Daviar—and thus the UCAS—on his side. But what's he got on the Sioux? Why is Lucinda Gray Arrow supporting him?
- Puma
- Curiosity killed the cat, you know.
- The Laughing Man
Ha! Fraggin' Ha!
- Hey, I think I see where SilveryK might fit in now. I seriously doubt that Ghostwalker is Matrix savvy enough to have dug up that dirt on Aztechnology's grid shutdown plan—but I

could easily see SilveryK or the Nexus holding on to data like that. The only question is, what did they get from the dragon in return?

- Slamm-O!
- Seems to me that all of these slags have forgotten the most important rule of negotiations: never deal with a dragon. Ghostwalker's going to wring each and every one of them dry as a bone. Caveat emptor.
- Dragonslayer
- Caveat emptor?
- GnuB
- It means "Buyer beware."
- Etty Molly Gee
- It will be interesting to see how Ghostwalker's takeover influences the Denver Council. The Council has always been a paper tiger, completely ineffectual when it came to running the place—which is why Denver was so great for us shadowy types. But now that the tiger has teeth, things may change considerably.
- Little Red
- Hey, what's the scoop on this Whitebird guy? Where did he come from? Did the dragon drag him back from the meta-planes or something?
- Joey
- There is no Nicholas Whitebird in the SIN Registry, real or fake. The rumormill places him as an ork Eagle shaman who grew up in the Ute sector.
- FastJack
- Scan this. The way I hear it, Ghostwalker was on one of his guerrilla attack missions in the Ute sector, trashing a whole city block for some obscure reason. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, this weirdo blind guy they call the Guide walks up, with his hand on the shoulder of some gutter shaman ork. The pair waltzes right up and stands there in the middle of the street, like they see dragons walking on condos every day.
- Ghostwalker spots them, and immediately drops what he's doing (literally). He steps down into the street, and swings his head in low, just five paces away from the Guide. They stare at each other eye to eye for a few seconds, then the Guide starts speaking, telling Ghostwalker that he's brought "the one he had sought." He then pushes the ork forward—an ork who is later identified as Nicholas Whitebird. The white wyrm gives the ork a real thorough once-over, like he's got x-ray vision and wanted to be sure that Nicholas was wearing the right color of underwear, and then nods. The weirdest part? For at least a full minute, Ghostwalker and the Guide just stood there real quiet, staring at each other, without saying a word. Then finally the mysterious Ute turns around and leaves without a "goodbye" or

"slot off" or anything. Nicholas has barely left the dragon's side ever since.

• Hectic

• Yeah, but Nicholas ain't the ugly halfer who was escorting Ghostwalker to that Brown Palace meeting. Has anyone ID'd that chump yet?

• George

STATE OF THE FRONT RANGE FREE ZONE

• We received this the same day as the meeting between Ghostwalker and the Council of Denver, with pretty specific instructions to post it up. It came direct through the Nexus, and since the sender at least said "pretty please," we figured it was in our best interests to do it. Besides, it's been a while since we've had a direct address from a dragon that wasn't Dunkelzahn, much less one that's shaken up the status quo as much as Ghostwalker has. That's right: we've got our first "State of the Union" type address from our new neighbor in the Rockies.

On an interesting sidenote, this missive comes to us on the same date that the late great dragon Dunkelzahn held his first press conference, 50 years ago.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 21:03:42 (PST)

Greetings to all who read this. I am that whom you call Ghostwalker. Many news agencies have told you something of me and the recent events in Denver, the benefits of which are somewhat dubious. I have not participated in any "interviews" for a few simple reasons, chief among them the reliance upon others to relate my words accurately, ensuring that Truth prevails. After speaking with those whom I trust, and hearing that irresponsible reporting and "creative editing" are commonplace, the thought of giving interviews has not sat well. And yet I must address you all, so I have decided to rely upon this medium where information can be exchanged freely and retain its basic integrity during transference.

I have been asked about myself and my plans for Denver, or the Front Range Free Zone. As this necessitates telling what's happened so far for clarification, then this is what I will address first. You ephemerals have always been overly worried about such things, but since this is largely your age, in this matter at least I will gladly bow and soothe your worries.

Through thankfully unrepeatable events long ago, I needed to leave my home, that which is now Denver. Now that I am returned, I have reclaimed my rightful place as guardian and protector of this region. There are those who question my methods; these I challenge to conclusively prove my wrongdoing. Whatever the beliefs concerning my actions, I can only say that necessity forced my hand. This has wrought some measure of healing and stability, however, where previously there could only be distrust with the threat of violence. I have even allowed the Council of Denver to retain the powers given to it by the former version of the Treaty of Denver and the governments from which

their people and representatives came. Few there are who may say that this has not been beneficial to those now willingly under my governance.

The largest hue and cry has been raised concerning the removal of Aztlan interests from Denver. Reasons for this are many and varied, and will not be explained. My answer is merely thus: "To those who understand, no explanation is needed; to those who do not, no explanation will suffice." The only consolation I offer is the fact that I have made yet more enemies to add to the list I once carried. This is as it should be, and no more.

Aztlan's banishment left a hole to be filled, and for that I chose the Confederated American States. I have heard tell shortly afterward of castigation leveled at the CAS for "making deals with dragons" as if this were a shameful idea. This impugns dragon honor, and I will not have it said in my presence. To do so will be to risk my wrath; consider yourselves adequately warned. Dragonkind has done much to earn simple respect, and I insist that it be paid. But even as potent as we are, I concede that frequently there is need for representatives from among you.

I formally declare that Nicholas Whitebird shall be my liaison not only to the Council of Denver, but to the world at large until such time as I choose another or additional employee, or he leaves my employ. Deal with him as you would with me; he carries my voice and my authority. He will assist the sectors with their day-to-day operations, making sure that all runs smoothly for Denver's inhabitants. He will also oversee the building of a new Council Hall in the UCAS sector. With such a large burden of responsibility upon his shoulders, I also appoint an office, housed in the Sioux sector, which will help relieve the burden and carry out his assigned tasks.

Inevitably, there will be those of you who will wish for a personal audience with me. It is only fitting and natural to engender such a wish, and to that end I have set up the means with which you may approach me with your petitions. I am, however, an understandably busy dragon, and I can't be bothered with matters of little to no importance. Therefore, petitioners will be challenged and must present a suitable gift before I grant a portion of my attention.

To take advantage of the wonders created in this age, the method by which this will occur shall be the use of the Matrix. I have learned much about this ingenious and useful tool, allowing me to set the petitioning procedure into place. A node has been set up within the Denver Regional Telecommunications Grid. All of you with matters to present before me must first leave your petition with the node's message service, along with the means to contact you. It is customary among my kind to submit a gift when petitioning—such gifts may be tendered in information, nuyen or other appropriate barter. Petitions that fail these requirements will be ignored. If I choose to grant you an audience, my liaison will arrange a time and place to my satisfaction.

I am lenient and generous, but I do not brook foolishness; I foresee, however, a congenial relationship between myself and Denver. A bright future awaits this region that I call home, and I intend upon being the instrument that ushers it in.

LIKE MANA FROM HEAVEN



There's no doubt about it. This past year we have seen more "naturally occurring" magical changes, upheavals and outright weirdness since the time of the Awakening and the Ghost Dance War. The number of mana storms around the world has doubled, and they have even appeared in areas that have never experienced such phenomenon before. According to magical experts, the world's mana lines have increased in activity and potency, new ones have been discovered and old ones have shifted their flow—in both the geographical and metaphysical aspects. The magical community has also been abuzz with talk of new developments from "mana rifts" to "mana shallows" and everything in between.

It would be easy to devote hundreds of megapulses to these developments, but such files are best saved for other compilations. The crucial issue here is whether these mana fluctuations are caused by the appearance of the comet itself, or whether they simply coincide in terms of timing. Most thaumaturgical experts agree—the comet is merely a portent of changing times, a herald of a new age. It is not in itself the catalyst for these changes. Of course, your local street shaman may beg to differ.

Whatever your opinion, the times have changed and these new developments are here to stay. Many of these may have a direct impact on your shadowrunning career—after all, it's important to keep abreast of current events.

First on our plate of comet-related magical curiosities is a report not from a shaman or a mage, but from a mundane shadowrunner named Drake. Our friend Drake happened to attend a Wuxing shareholder meeting and private social event where he recorded some fascinating information detailing how Wuxing is capitalizing upon these world-altering events.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 12 December 2061 at 03:00:41 (PST)

WUXING: HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

by Drake

As a shadowrunner, I've made it a habit to obtain megacorporate stock whenever I've had the opportunity. By holding stock in a public corp, I'm entitled to receive shareholder reports and attend shareholder meetings where I can learn all about the corp's financial





doings and latest projects. Granted, a lot of this drek is pretty boring, but if you read between the lines and watch who's rubbing elbows with whom, you can scan a lot about the corp's internal power structure and even get a feeling for what the corp may be doing behind the scenes. Now, some of the megas are privately owned—Aztechnology, Novatech and Saeder-Krupp for example. But the rest of the megas have stock available at any bank or brokerage house, or through your friendly neighborhood Mr. Johnson.

- You'd be amazed at who shows up at these types of things—corporate powerbrokers, spies from the competition and the smattering of runners and databrokers looking to score. It's almost like a shadowrunner convention, except surrounded by corporate security.
- DefCon

Just recently, I took advantage of the chunk of Wuxing shares I have in my portfolio and hopped a suborbital down to Hong Kong. I had an inkling that Wuxing was expanding down some new avenues, so I also hired a decker to make arrangements for me to attend the invite-only party for high-level stockholders that followed. I expected to score some useful data, but frag if I wasn't in for some surprises.

The material I found most intriguing came directly from the mouth of Wuxing CEO Wu Lung Wei. What follows is the transcript of the introductory speech he gave at the shareholder's meeting. Though his tone was that of a reserved Chinese businessman giving a report about routine events, the impact of his words was substantial.

//Begin Audio Transcript//

Esteemed fellow shareholders of Wuxing,

Last year, the world's financial analysts said we could not possibly continue our explosive rate of growth, our ascension into the upper ranks of the world's most powerful corporations. I am pleased to tell you we have proved them wrong beyond their wildest imaginations.

Before we delve into those matters, I would first like to welcome back esteemed Board Member Sharon Chaing-Wu from maternity leave. She has blessed me with five heirs to the Wu family dynasty, all strong, healthy girls. Fo, Shui, Moak, Tou and Gum are developing quite distinctive personalities, so much so that I have no difficulty differentiating one from another.

- For those of you whose translation algorithms didn't translate Wu's kids' proper names, in English they are fire, water, earth, wood and metal/gold (depending on the context of the word). Those would be the five elements of the wujen tradition.
- Chang
- Identical quintuplets? I don't know much about birthin' babies, but isn't that pretty rare?
- iShmoo

- No doubt the effects of Sharon Chaing-Wu's Coin of Luck, which was bequeathed to her in Dunkelzahn's will. According to the myth, the coin grants fertility. Looks like it works as advertised.
- Natasha
- You can't say that for sure. No one has ever proved the Coins of Luck do anything at all. It wouldn't surprise me if they were just mundane trinkets.
- Night Owl

It is important to examine where our journey as a corporation began to appreciate where we are today. Please indulge me while I relate a somewhat personal story, you will see how it applies.

Our corporate pilgrimage began under very ominous circumstances in the year 1986, during the Qingming holiday. My esteemed father Wu Kuan-Lei was contacted by one of our ancestors while worshipping at our ancestral shrine. Though thaumaturgical scientists would argue that such contact would have been impossible before the Awakening, the spirits of my ancestors assure me that it did indeed occur.

The ancestor who contacted my father was none other than Wu Xu, one of the first of our family name, and he had a terrible revelation to deliver. Wu Xu said that the Wu ancestral shrine, where my family had worshiped for thousands of years, was experiencing severe geopathic disruption. The feng shui of our shrine had been disturbed, and the flow of chi had become stagnant and stressed. Though it had been built thousands of years earlier by Wu Xu's grandsons at a large dragon line nexus, environmental changes had diverted its energies elsewhere.

- For you Westerners, Qingming is a holiday observed in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan where families gather at ancestral gravesides. Qingming normally falls on April 4th or 5th. It is the occasion when people "sweep the grave," which comprises worshipping the ancestors, making offerings and literally sweeping away the year's accumulated weeds and rubbish. The Chinese have celebrated Qingming since before the Zhou Dynasty (eleventh century BC to 221 BC). It makes sense that the ancestors might choose to use the occasion to drop a hint or two to the descendents.
- Phillipau
- So what if there's bad feng shui at the gravesite? What's feng shui?
- Hades
- Feng shui is a geomantic arcane art which teaches that the landscape of an area and the layout of a building affects the flow of chi, or life force, through it. Though chi and mana aren't considered to be the same thing, a place where chi flows well will generally be conducive for the flow of mana as well. The use of proper feng shui is important to wujen, who claim that feng shui can affect the flow of mana in an area.
- Phillipau



• Actually, that separation is a contemporary concept. Old-school wujen consider chi synonymous with mana. It gives them bragging rights since easterners have been harnessing their chi for thousands of years.

• Scoop

• Some Chinese believe that if feng shui is bad over an ancestral shrine it will be reflected in the fortunes of the family. Bad feng shui is considered to be synonymous with hard times for the family. Feng shui is so important to some Chinese families that they sometimes re-bury the ancestors to correct the problem. There are traditional rituals for doing this properly.

• Bo

My father was not entirely surprised by the news Wu Xu had delivered. He had long suspected our ancestral shrine was not properly attuned, but lacked the talent to rectify the situation himself. He was surprised however that the feng shui was so misaligned that our ancestor felt compelled to notify him in person. The situation was dire and required immediate attention.

Wu Xu told my father of a place in Aberdeen, a section of Hong Kong with which I'm sure we are all familiar. It was here where our ancestors were to be relocated. It was a location of exceptional feng shui, rivaling the original energies that had once flowed through our ancestral shrine. Taking the spirit's advice, my father purchased the land. He then reburied our ancestors on the land. It is the very same land our present day corporate headquarters, the Wuxing Skytower, was built upon many years later, in 2017. The move has been a good one for the Wuxing Corporation, as well as for my family. Prosperity has followed our every move.

• There's a section of Hong Kong named Aberdeen?

• Espirito

• It's left over from the old British Protectorate days. There are quite a few other parts of town that also bear English names.

• Phillipau

• Hong Kong businesses take the feng shui of their buildings very seriously. Shortly after the Wuxing Skytower was built, a rival corp built a new structure nearby that started a "feng shui war." The new building's corners were directing "poison arrows" of negative energy towards the Skytower. To ward it off, they replaced all of the windows in the Skytower with mirrored glass, symbolically reflecting the negative energy back at their rival. Wuxing took it a step further and bought the land next to their rival's tower, then built a major public fountain there that symbolically "flooded" their enemy.

• Foster

• Wu's not kidding about the Wuxing site having good feng shui—it's smack on the crossroads of two major dragon lines. According to the mages I've talked to, it's a very potent site of power.

• Snow tiger

• It's true, the whole building is built like one huge mana focus. It's been pointed out to me that the pattern is similar to those you sometimes see in other ancient Chinese ancestor shrines. The entire skyscraper is Wu's rebuilt ancestor shrine!

• Bork3

• That particular junction is so large, it seems probable that it was in use before Wu arrived. This would mean that in order to rebury the Wu family at the Aberdeen mana junction, Papa Wu had to move a pre-existing shrine of a different family.

• Talon

• It's a bad idea to disturb ancestors, even if they're not your own. They might have some beef with the Wu family as a result.

• Posthumous Lee

In order to envision the future, it is necessary to understand the past. That is enough history for today. Thank you for indulging an old man. Now, on to current events.

I have been asked to comment on how the changes in the Hong Kong-area manasphere have affected daily operations here at the Wuxing Skytower. Those of us who work here are well aware of the current local situation in Hong Kong, however I will elaborate for the benefit of our shareholders in attendance via the Matrix. As of a few months ago, the realm of astral space has become visible to mundanes in the area surrounding our Skytower, extending approximately one kilometer in all directions.

This is not the first time this has occurred in Hong Kong. Our city is in fact known for its wild magic and unpredictable surges of chi. There have been dozens of incidents in the last few years where the barrier between the physical and astral planes has become like glass, allowing the mundane residents of our city to view the glorious reflections of life and energy that exists on just the other side. These windows into the other world have rarely lasted for long—a few days at most—until now. The exact cause of this arcane phenomenon is being investigated, but it should assure each of you to know that we have consulted a number of expert geomancers, and each of them agrees that the effect is harmless. In fact, most suspect that this effect is caused by the superior feng shui of our Skytower. The pooling of so much chi within our halls clearly proves that we are on a path of good fortune.

• Our team mage discovered the hard way about visible astral space while trying to survey a Hong Kong extraction target. My team is based out of Beijing, and we had no idea that the astral space in the area where our target lived had become visible. So our shaman took an astral trip over and started casing out his apartment, leisurely wandering around like she always did. Apparently at some point she passed between him and his trid, and he spotted her and freaked out. Needless to say, the extraction became a lot more difficult when he suddenly moved back into corporate HQ for protection.

• Manchu



• The visible astral effect can be a boon as well, if you're worried about astral surveillance on yourself. Night runs are real interesting too—sustained spells glow in the dark, and so do active foci. Being able to see a person's aura also has its advantages. If you look real close you can notice a change in the color of a person's skin when they get mad, sad or emotional in general. I pissed off this bleeder in a bar so bad that he started to give off a faint red glow. I was even able to make out some of his cyberware from the dark spots in the aura.

• HK Kid

• When this effect kicks in, it generally means a lot of the magical creepies clear out of the area. Ghouls, insect spirit flesh-forms and other dual monsters suddenly find that their true nature is visible to mundanes. Big threats like toxic spirits and the like light up the area like bonfires. It makes them hard to hide.

• Blacklight

• Masking still works, so those who possess the ability can still conceal their true aura.

• Huck

I understand that some of you have voiced concerns that due to the visibility of astral space to mundanes, our magical security has been laid bare. I wish to put these rumors to rest. Though our security spirits are indeed visible to any who would pass by, even the most hardened corporate spies would balk at the sight of them. My Security Director informs me that the sheer number of spirits we have on patrol—spirits of unusual potency no less—serves as a firm deterrent to would-be intruders. Our other magical security assets continue to function better than ever, and in fact have recently been upgraded. Truth be told, the visibility of astral space has proven quite beneficial to our security, as now even mundane staff can guard against astral incursion—we no longer require Awakened staff to detect astral intruders. So please rest assured that Wuxing's headquarters remains as secure as ever, if not more so.

• He's not kidding about the amount of spirits they have on guard there. I happened to cruise by last week and the place looked like a damn spirit playground. There were at least a dozen swirling around the Wuxing Skytower on patrol. There must have been half a dozen others lounging in the vicinity, almost like they were socializing. I spotted all different kinds—elementals, spirits of the elements, nature spirits and a few I couldn't identify right away. The sight has actually drawn crowds, and occasionally the spirits will even chat with mundanes. Spooky.

• Thaumus

• Not all of those spirits are bound to Wuxing. The nature of the area seems to attract free spirits, and they're not shy about chatting it up with other ghostly types. The gods only know what they have to discuss.

• Red Phoenix

//End Audio Transcript//

The rest of Wu's speech is pretty dull, so I cut it. The gist of it was several more minutes of self-congratulation and propaganda designed to drive up the price of Wuxing shares, spiced up with a few jabs at Wuxing's Japanese competitors and the unfortunate catastrophes that have befallen them in recent years. The rest of the meeting was just as boring, as various officials gave pep talks or droned on about Wuxing's amazing financial success.

After the meeting, I slipped back to the hotel for some nicer clothes, then I made my way to the special VIP after-party. After passing the impressive dragon sculptures that guard the Skytower's wide entrance (to channel in chi, I was told), I was escorted up to the building's spacious penthouse suite. It's definitely in the running for eighth wonder of the world. Every inch of the place was covered in ornate gold and jade inlay. The floor was tiled in jade as well as most of the ceiling. Whoever built it took advantage of the natural difference in hues of the mineral to design intricate historical scenes made only of the color changes in the jade.

In the center of the room was a large, exquisite statue of three carp jumping in the water. I was told that this magnificent piece was none other than the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire, a sculpture bequeathed to Wu by the great dragon Dunkelzahn. Wide, clear pathways led to the statue from the room's eight large entranceways, each surrounded by reliefs that made them appear as the mouth of a jade dragon. The pathways between these dragon-mouth archways and the Jade Dragon were illuminated by some sort of ghostly incandescent fire—some sort of astral mana flow made visible to us mundanes. It was impressive, to say the least.

• If I'm reading this correctly, Wuxing is channeling the mana line junctions directly into the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. That's a lot of mana being pumped into that thing. Does anyone know what that statue does?

• Neutron

• It could be creating the effect that makes astral space around the tower visible.

• King

• Well, let's see: feng shui means "water earth." It's the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. Seems complimentary—all four elements are covered.

• Drapes

• Except that the Awakened researchers that Wuxing employs are mostly wujen, not mages. The wujen tradition uses five elements, not four (drop air and include metal and wood).

• Denang

• Could the Jade Dragon be acting as some sort of mana prism? Perhaps it aspects the mana of the dragon lines towards one or more of the elements, or towards a particular type of



magic. Maybe the Jade Dragon is an artifact whose magic hasn't activated yet because the ambient mana level in the world isn't high enough—and Wu's trying to "wake it up" early.

• Yeoh

• Why aren't any geomancers speaking up? Wouldn't they have an inkling of what's going on here?

• Magister

I'm a mundane, but even I could feel the power that was coursing through this room. The room was alight, not just by electricity but by the glow of vibrant auras and the shine of spirit forms. I felt unnaturally calm and whole. The magical types were getting a real kick out of it. A few were levitating around rather than walking, as if they did it every day. Others seemed to be tapping into the power somehow. A few were actually crackling with energy (they said they couldn't stop, I don't know whether to believe that or not). Every day now I wake up knowing that as long as I live I'll never see anything more incredible than what I saw that night. I can't wait for next year's party ...

As the celebration got underway, things got real interesting. Turns out that Wu likes drinking a bit too much—or else he was just drunk on his own sense of power. In any case, a few hours into the party, he was addressing a small crowd of big-wigs and his mouth started flapping a bit too loosely. Here's what he had to say:

//Begin Audio Transcript//

For those of you who haven't yet met him, meet Mr. Jan Drucus. Mr. Drucus has been a valuable member of the Wuxing community for many years now, and has outperformed himself in handling relationships with other members of the Pacific Prosperity Group.

I am pleased to announce that Mr. Drucus was just recently appointed to the Board of Debeers-Omnitech. This heralds the dawn of a new partnership between Wuxing and Debeers, one that we are in a position to take immediate advantage of.

• Debeers-Omnitech? They're a subsidiary of Universal Omnitech. UO's a member of the Pacific Prosperity Group that Wuxing started, so no controversy there that I can see.

• Numb

• Check again, buddy. Aztechnology has a big investment in UO, and the Azzies have been biting at Wuxing's heels for awhile now. For one thing, the Azzies want in on the PPG, but that ain't going to happen any time soon. And since Wuxing's moved into the Big Ten sphere, they've been muscling in on markets that are home turf to the Azzies. If Wuxing has sunk their teeth into UO as well, that corp may quickly be on its way to becoming a bloody battleground.

• Frontline

As many of you have been informed by recent news reports, several deposits of naturally-occurring orichalcum have been discovered in the past week. In fact, Wuxing has been aware of many such deposits since this fall, and we have moved quickly to capitalize upon the situation. Through the use of geomancy and the skilled reading of the world's dragon lines, our researchers have been able to locate these sites before the world knew they existed.

• Bunk! I've seen it in the news, but I still firmly believe that it's impossible. Orichalcum simply can't exist in nature—it's a byproduct of specialized alchemical processes. This has to be a public relations move of some sort.

• Silicon Mage

• So a corp the size of Wuxing is just dumping money into rumor and myth? I think not. Natural orichalcum has been rumored for years now, but it looks like that truth has finally become reality. Thank the comet, we now have a lot more work headed our way!

• Prime Runner

• This certainly explains some odd rumors I'd heard a few months back. First there were several accounts of Wuxing research teams conducting "dowsing experiments" and other magical hoopla at some out-of-the-way spots—Appalachia and the Caucasus for example. Later, I'd heard that Wuxing had moved in and strong-armed the sale of some land in northwestern Wales, evicted all of the ranchers from the area, then set up some sort of top secret facility. Looks like Wuxing will use any tactics to get at these deposits.

• Ned

• What's this about "reading" the dragon lines to find the orichalcum? Is this something geomancers can actually do? If so, a lot of corps are going to be "acquiring" their own pet geomancers soon.

• Crane

ORICHALCUM VEIN DISCOVERED!

Posted: 11-27-61

Boston (NN)—A team of researchers led by Tamara Nimbus of the Dunklezahn Institute of Magical Research announced today that they confirmed that a vein of unidentified metal discovered in the Transvaal mountains of Azania was in fact orichalcum, a precious metal used in alchemical processes. Previously, it was believed that it was impossible for orichalcum to occur naturally and that it could only be created synthetically. News of this discovery is expected to lead to an "Orichalcum Rush," as prospectors seek out previously undiscovered deposits of the rare alloy. Over a dozen claims have already been made against orichalcum deposits around the world.



• The whole concept of tracking orichalcum deposits through geomancy is ludicrous. Druids and wiccans have been playing with mana lines for years, and they're only steps ahead of textbook mages when it comes to understanding them. Wu's just impressing his shareholders with mystical gobbledygook.

• Ley Lo

• Not so, Lo. I've seen geomancers do things with dragon lines that are quantum leaps ahead of current magical theory.

• Snow Tiger

• Makes sense to me. There are many magical traditions that have developed their style off the beaten path, refining certain techniques, rituals or metamagic well ahead of the mainstream. Take a look at voodooists—it wasn't until decades after the Awakening that many mages even acknowledged voodoo as a separate and distinct magical tradition. It would not surprise me at all to find that wujen geomancers have the skill to do as Wu says.

• Talon

• I'll believe it when I see it.

• Ley Lo

• Hey, if that Jade Dragon thing is sitting on a manaline junction, could it have something to do with tracking down orichalcum sites?

• Zeng

• Chinese tradition suggests that meddling with Dragon Veins can cause nations to crumble.

• Yang

• There's been a bit of that going on lately. That recent "border dispute" between Tsimshian and the Salish-Shidhe wasn't just about bad tempers—it was a fight over a new manaline near their border. Tsimshian has it for now, but the Salish may be taking it back—especially if it leads to orichalcum in the area. And I've heard lots of nasty rumors about bloodshed in the Chinese mainland. I know a few mercenaries who have more job offers than they can accept right now.

• Key

Given that our own corporate mining resources are few, we contracted with DeBeers-Omnitech to help with the mining of the lion's share of the deposits. In the past few months we have acquired the mining rights to thousands of square kilometers of land and established mining operations that should prove bountiful. Early estimates indicate that we will be able to mine over a dozen metric tons of the scarce alchemical metal. Our analysts speculate that we have cornered almost 20 percent of the available deposits, and we have dozens of teams hard at work securing sites that have not yet been claimed. We have undoubtedly claimed a position that allows us to exploit this limited resource to our full potential. Let us toast our success!

//End Audio Transcript//

And that's it kiddies. Wu fielded a few questions and congratulations, and the schmoozing went on. I left Hong Kong with a much better understanding of Wuxing's agenda and goals ... and now I've shared them with you.

• Wow, you have to hand it to Wu—this is a real coup. He definitely stuck it to the Azzies this time.

• Maus

• Don't expect the Azzies to take this laying down. As we speak, I'm sure they're swarming all over UO and DeBeers-Omnitech, trying to get any angle they can to horn in on Wuxing's mining scores.

• Pyramid Watcher

• The corps have an important angle here—they don't necessarily have to buy the land, they just need to acquire the mining rights to it. Theoretically, purchasing the rights is a lot cheaper—especially when the occupants are ignorant of what the land actually holds.

• Pragmaticus

• Or when they're convinced to sign over rights because there's a gun to their head. This whole process is a complete screw-job. Rich companies move in, swindle the locals out of millions of nuyen of resources that they owned but didn't even know it, screw up the environment with polluting mining practices, and then bail out, leaving them with nothing. Rat corporate bastards!

• Cletus

• And how is this different from everyday life under capitalism?

• Retro Bob

• This news is sure to make Wuxing's stock soar even higher. Of course, since people have been speculating on the corp since the Big D granted them that huge cash investment, their stock is fairly overvalued. I predict that when the market catches up to Wuxing's real worth, their stock will go down the toilet.

• Nuyen Nick

• Not necessarily. Wuxing's on the prowl. They're aggressively leveraging their stock to buy up dozens of smaller PacRim corps. And they're making similar moves in the rest of the world to establish operations in new untapped markets. Wuxing purchases these companies for nearly 100 percent stock, which means that they're paying out no cash and thus putting no pressure on their bank accounts. The other companies take the stock because Wuxing is skyrocketing right now, just going up and up with no end in sight.

When will Wuxing's stock suffer a correction? It doesn't appear to be anytime soon—Wuxing's easily holding its own.



Additionally, the more asset-rich companies they purchase with their stock, the more they add to Wuxing's total hard assets, which in turn justifies the higher stock price. If Wuxing can grow fast enough, their stock won't correct as sharply when the market sours on them. It's a self-fulfilling cycle.

• The Chromed Accountant
"It's all about dollars and sense."

• Translation: Wuxing's overvalued stock is becoming less overvalued as it takes over other smaller companies. As long as Wuxing stays smart and aggressive, they've got an open road. I wouldn't be surprised to see the Azzies throwing together some roadblocks in the near future.

• Stewart

THE ORICALCUM RUSH

• Once the orichalcum story broke, every corp, country, magical group and independent speculator with a metal detector was scouring the map, looking for signs of "magical gold." Clearly, Wuxing got the jump on everyone, but there still seems to be plenty of the stuff to go around.

To give us the lowdown on what orichalcum actually is and where it can be found, I enlisted the services of a parageologist who we'll call Rockhound. Rocky's well versed in the alchemical properties of orichalcum, and has actually mined

some of it first hand. His perspective is interesting, and he knows his dirt, so to speak, so scan on.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 January 2062 at 12:51:44 (PST)

by Rockhound

To most people, it's just shiny rock that happens to be worth buckets of nuyen. To the Awakened, it's raw material for building the path to power. For me, the discovery of naturally occurring orichalcum deposits has been the single most exciting development in my career.

• Parageologist? Where do you get a degree for that? The University of Made-Up Science?

• Francis

• MIT&T offers an accredited Ph.D. program in parageology. The attrition rate for it runs around 90 percent. Those that drop out go on to easier careers like industrial molecular engineering.

• Talon

Let's start with the bare essentials. Orichalcum is a magical alloy composed of copper, gold, silver and mercury. Without magic, such a composition is completely impossible—in fact, it's laughable. And up until a few months ago, every single qualified expert in my field would have told you that



orichalcum could not occur in nature. The only known way to create orichalcum was through the magical synthesis of alchemy—a process that is simply impossible to recreate in nature.

All of this went out the window when over a dozen deposits of orichalcum appeared, seemingly overnight. Some of these deposits appeared in places that had been previously evaluated by parageologists such as myself and were found to be lacking such elements. The existence of these deposits clearly shows that they are unnatural—they did not develop as the result of geological processes over time—yet there the veins lie, ready to be mined.

How do we explain this? Simple. If the biosphere is a living organism, its Awakening will cause ripple effects in minerals, soil and landscapes. To some degree, we witnessed some changes during the first Awakening, and in subsequent years since in Awakened nations such as Tir Tairngire, Tir na nOg and Amazonia. We are rapidly coming to the conclusion that we are currently in the process of a “Second Awakening,” as the advent of SURGE and other events have shown. With this understanding, it is certainly plausible that as the world’s background mana level continues to rise, that we will see more changes in the global geology.

- You may find it interesting that orichalcum isn’t the only “Awakened mineral” that’s been discovered in the ground this year. Parageologists from different corps and schools have identified at least five others which are even rarer than orichalcum itself. Don’t expect to see these finds advertised in the Matrix yet—they’re the sorts of claims that will make or break both careers and companies.

- Manganese Shake

- Got any proof of that?
- D Bunker

- I’ve read that some parageologists are questioning how long the orichalcum deposits will be available. Some claim that the deposits are a temporary phenomenon and sport evidence that they will dry up about the time the comet finishes its second pass. Others are claiming the deposits are here to stay.

- Hyper Billy

Nearly all the orichalcum deposits located so far have been discovered in the vicinity of powerful manaline junctions, power sites and other areas with unusual mana disturbances. It is unclear exactly how these facts correlate with each other, though the megacorp Wuxing has claimed success at locating orichalcum veins by “following” mana lines—a claim disputed by other experts.

- Take note of this. Wuxing reports indicate that they’ve encountered a high ratio of spontaneous appearances by spirits in the region of orichalcum sites. And more than once, these spirits have been rather protective of their domains.

- Grasshopper

I already know what most of you are thinking—time to grab a pickaxe, find a deposit, chop a chunk or two off, and carry it home to make a focus or sell it and buy a Saab Dynamit 778. If only it were that easy. Orichalcum ore is exploited through underground mining, and it is usually recovered from copper or nickel sulfide minerals. But what you get is a rock of ore—orichalcum mixed in with other metals. With similar precious metals, the process to separate them involves smelting the ore and leaching out a concentrate in an autoclave. The precious metal is then melted out of the concentrate with hydrochloric acid, filtered out, and solidified back into a metallic form. If you were to use this refining process with orichalcum, however, you would destroy the orichalcum and break it down into its component materials. To successfully separate it, the orichalcum ore must be placed through an alchemical circulation, purifying it enough to use as a radical for artificing purposes. Joe Runner ain’t going to be able to do this with a chemistry set, he’ll need an enchanting shop at the very least. And you better believe the corps have the facilities necessary.

There’s one important fact about natural orichalcum that many prospectors and artificers don’t yet realize. Lab results have shown that orichalcum pulled from the earth, even after circulation, retains a level of impurity that makes it less potent than synthetic orichalcum. This means that it is less potent for artificing purposes—though it is still much more valuable than other materials.

THE HOT SPOTS

So what does all this mean? Well the last time I checked, a single kilogram of raw orichalcum was still worth over 1,000,000¥. That’s a pretty penny for some funny-colored rocks that just need to be pulled from the ground. Naturally, anyone who can find a deposit is doing everything in their power to lay claim to it. Here’s a rundown of some of the sites I’ve heard about, as well as who’s trying to exploit them.

Antarctica

Just a few weeks ago, some Japanese scientists from their Antarctic Showa base who had been tunneling under the ice near the Transantarctic Mountains for mineral and rock samples claimed to have discovered an orichalcum vein. Before Imperial Marines could be sent to fortify the site, a massive snowstorm swept the area, and it’s still going strong several weeks later. An expedition is ready to investigate the site as soon as the weather clears—which could take weeks more.

- You can bet some other groups aren’t waiting for the weather to clear.

- Arctic Fox

Asamando

Thema Laula, Queen of the African ghoulish nation of Asamando, subcontracted with DeBeers-Omnitech a few years back to mine diamonds, gold and other precious metals within her borders. These mining projects produced a lot of byproduct material that was simply sluiced into the Black Volta river, littering the river bed all the way down to the Bay of Ghana.



Along with the discovery of orichalcum in Asamsando, it turns out that much of that mining byproduct is now turning up as orichalcum as well. This has kicked off a rush of prospectors looking to strike it rich panning for orichalcum in the river.

- Lots of prospectors turn up missing a few weeks after arriving. I think we all know why.
- Posthumous Lee

- The Asamando Nation's deposits are a real boon for the country—the Queen is using them as strong leverage when negotiating for official status and trade with other nations. So far, it's working.
- Omniphagist

Avebury, England

The stone circle at Avebury is so huge a small town sits inside its boundaries. It's the largest stone circle known, extending for several kilometers, and the May Ley Line runs right through it. It also happens to have the largest concentration of orichalcum veins located in England thus far.

Wuxing has a small branch office in Avebury, stationed in an old manor once owned by the family of Wuxing shareholder James Harper-Smythe. The business of the branch office is unclear, and for such a small site it has an alarming amount of security. Prior to the news about orichalcum getting out, Harper-Smythe tried to buy up large segments of land around the town. He was met with a wall of opposition by the local gentry and their Druid allies, pointing out that a registered national historical site should not be taken into the private sector.

Avebury itself, a fairly well known tourist destination, is now completely overrun by tourists, druids and other new age folks eager to see with their own eyes what is happening there. Wuxing is still fighting for mining rights, but it's a lost battle. The Lord Protector of England has assigned his Oversight Board to the situation, to ensure that the country's "national treasures" are not exploited.

- The Lord Protector is backing the Druids on this one—they're climbing over each other to claim this site. Of course, they can't mine it either without looking hypocritical ... unless they hire some deniable prospectors.
- Natasha

Azania

Home to DeBeers-Omnitech, one of the world's leading precious mineral mining corps, Azania also holds roughly half of the world's unmined diamond supply. Now it looks like the country is also home to a good percentage of the world's natural orichalcum. In fact, many old diamond mines are now being reactivated as traces of orichalcum are found. Debeers-Omnitech is reaping amazing profits off of the situation, and Wuxing has become a major presence in the country practically overnight.

- Bas Groenenburg, the CEO of Debeers-Omnitech, has been very aggressive about expanding his corporation's markets

with the aid of Wuxing. He's just become embroiled in the power struggle of his life thanks to the newly appointed Chairman of the Board, Victor Heinrich. Heinrich was dropped into place by the clout of Universal Omnitech's board, who seem to want to use him to regain control of Debeers-Omnitech. It's not clear whether Heinrich is also backed by the Azzies or whether he's just a UO-loyalist. Only time will tell.

- Boer Hunter

Aztlan

Though the Aztlan government has kept a firm lid on the matter, reports indicate that a number of new excavation projects have been sponsored by Aztechnology at various archaeological sites. Many of these areas are in or around teocallis, and presumed to lie on mana lines.

Nepal

After it was revealed that a new Wuxing meteorological station was in fact an orichalcum mining operation, the Himalayas have been overrun with miners and other entrepreneurs. Initial reports indicate that claim-jumping bandits and scavenging sasquatch tribes have benefited greatly from the influx of outsiders.

- I was up in the Himalayas last week, and I heard lots of yeti stories. From all accounts, it sounds like the yeti have a firm grasp on why all of these prospectors are running around, and have actually occupied some of the claim sites until they've gotten what they've wanted—usually food and sometimes tools. Many people like to think that sasquatch are just animals—but they're smarter than you'd expect.
- Llama Mama

A recent expedition to install a wireless tower at the top of Mount Everest came back with a report that they'd discovered orichalcum ore near the summit. Considering the weather conditions, thin air and steep mountainsides, actually mining that ore is going to be impossible—but I'm sure some daredevil mountaineer will try anyway.

Peru

According to recent reports, orichalcum traces have been sampled near the remnants of ancient Incan emerald mines in the Peruvian Andes. Reports since then have been spotty and vague at best.

- That's because Shiawase, Japanese Imperial Marines, communist guerrillas and the drug-running Ghost Cartels are engaging in a free-for-all over them.
- 16 Volt

Snowdonia, Wales

For years, rumors have circulated that the Countess of Snowdon has overseen the mining of orichalcum from caverns in Blenau Ffestiniog and the mountains of central Snowdonia. The Countess denies this rumor, but maintains strong security



over these areas, successfully keeping out those who seek to uncover the truth. According to the tales, globes of orichalcum are found inside quartz stalactites—a claim that defies the recent orichalcum discoveries. This may merely be a false rumor, but reports of an increase in mining activities in Snowdonia certainly lend credence to the rumors.

- Rockhound's right, Snowdonia's orichalcum is different. I don't know how, but there's some sort of magic in those caves that causes the orichalcum to grow inside the crystal. It's not so much a mining operation as it is harvesting an orichalcum farm.
- Falcon

- Oh, absolutely! And judging by that post you're growing orichalcum earwax in your head, too.
- Blastoma

UCAS

Several deposits have turned up in the southern UCAS near Cumberland, Kentucky, right near the CAS border. The deposit is just under the soil of a mountain that was previously strip-mined. There's been some sort of controversy over the quality of the orichalcum that's been mined from there so far, with some experts questioning its purity.

- I've been to that strip mine site. It's a tragic, ugly place. After they ripped off the mountain's skin, the vegetation never entirely grew back. Nothing can grow there now without being corrupted.
- Dogpatch
- There's a lot of old weirdos in those hills, hiding out in the woods, living in abandoned mine shafts and so on. They're up to no good. There's lots of talk of "night riders" and other badness. Best be careful around those parts.
- Cletus
- I hear the CAS is really interested in these finds. It's just a short step over their border ...
- Dan-O

Ukraine

The Atlantean Foundation has secured mining rights to several deposits they have located in the Caucus Mountains, near the area of half a dozen Atlantean Foundation archaeological digs. The Foundation has worked out a deal with the Ukrainian government, sliding them a percentage of the digs' profits in exchange for military protection.

- My guess is that it would be fairly easy to cut a deal with the Ukrainians to boot the Atlantean Foundation out. The Ukraine government has no love for the Atlantean Foundation, they just need their money.
- Reality Czech

- I've seen some of these AF digs, and they're worse than prison labor camps. They have dozens of dirt-poor Ukrainians—many of whom are dwarfs—who they work like they're slaves. The conditions are abhorrent. The workers slave all day for a pittance, receive bad food and unfiltered water, and don't even get medical attention when they fall or catch one of the rampant diseases floating around. Somebody needs to do something about those gulags.

- Maus

Unnamed Island

Of all the spots where orichalcum has appeared, this is one of the most interesting from a parageologist's point of view. When the great dragon Dunkelzahn died, he willed the lands and mineral rights for a volcanic island that would erupt in the Pacific on Oct 3rd, 2060 to Federated Boeing. Sure enough, the island appeared, right on schedule, 301 kilometers off the coast of Petrolia CFS, to the delight of wyrm-lovers everywhere. As soon as the crust had dried, Federated Boeing moved in and staked their claim. After giving it a once over, however, they realized it really wasn't that special. They evaluated its usefulness as a research or shipping way station and decided it wasn't worth the trouble. So they established a small station with a handful of guards to keep watch, and basically forgot about it. The guards disappeared a few months later (due to an altercation with Big Sur pirates who were scouting out a new base), and no one bothered to replace them.

Recently, FB decided to check back on their island—and discovered that Wuxing and Debeers-Omnitech were squatting it. The duo had established a midnight mining operation to clear out the veins of orichalcum that allegedly lace the island. After a short exchange of rocket fire, the situation has settled into a stalemate. Wuxing still occupies the land (backed up by some missile ships), arguing to the Corporate Court that Dunkelzahn had no legal authority to give away land that didn't exist yet. If the Corporate Court doesn't settle the situation soon, it may well turn ugly quite quickly.

- If the Court rules against Wuxing, you can be sure they'll try to carry out as much of that orichalcum as they can first. Anyone got a sub for hire?
- 9-Finger Steve

Other Sites

The ones I've listed above are just the ones I've heard about through the parageologist grapevine. I'd be willing to bet my pet rock collection that there are twice as many orichalcum deposits that have been discovered but not announced, and are quietly being mined to the very last pebble as we speak. And as more prospectors scour the planet, expect new sites to be found—and fought over.

- I'm sure the corps are using every resource at their disposal to find new deposits—satellite geological readings, seismographs, not to mention good old fashioned drilling and blowing things up.
- Retro Bob



• Given the nature of this business, keeping discoveries secret is pretty important if you want to keep someone from jumping your claim. I foresee lots of work for shadowrunners to keep certain news items from reaching the bitstream and to encourage folks to "keep their mouths shut." I love being a thug.

• Max

• A lot of these claim-wars are turning into an un-televised version of the Desert Wars. Every corp with a mining operation is keeping it heavily guarded. If I were a mega-corporation I'd just follow others around, wait until they found a deposit, watch where they took the ore, and then sweep in and grab it for myself. Let the others do all the work.

• Agent 68

DEAD MEN WALKING

• We received this email message just a few days after Ghostwalker made his grand entrance in DeeCee, through the account of a Shadowland regular known as Nocturne. At first, we took it for an exercise in creative writing and placed it in the circular file. But after scan-

ning a few similar accounts and odd news articles in the week since then, we felt it was worth digging back up.

I checked with my friend Yeager, and he confirmed that the people mentioned here were all active in the smuggling biz and were in fact a team. He also confirmed that they hadn't been heard from since they took on a run headed North. We

SHIP SINKS IN MID-PACIFIC

Posted 02-05-62

Hong Kong (HTB)— A Wuxing cargo-freighter, *Jade Petal*, sunk last night approximately 150 kilometers due east of Western Samoa. All hands appear to be lost, though rescue craft are still searching for survivors. There is no evidence as to what caused a suspected hull breach in the ship, which was transporting a load of light mining equipment on behalf of Debeers-Omnitech. Wuxing has asked the Corporate Court to investigate the incident, claiming that a flight of Aztechnology *Aguilar* attack helicopters was spotted in the vicinity. The Corporate Court and Aztechnology have declined to comment.

also traced the message back to an uplink from a remote UCAS location near the Sioux border. So it looks legit, which means that it may in fact be true. If that's the case, if you ever meet any of the runners mentioned here—run.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 4 January 2062 at 13:07:23 (PST)

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//Transponder Link Achieved. Lock on FreeSat. Welcome//
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Okay I don't know if anyone will get this. I'm not much of a decker and hopefully it'll end up in the Denver Nexus and it can do you some good.

As I type this my left leg is broken, at least twice. The pain is making me a bit numb and I keep passing out. My name is Sasperilla. Some of you in Denver might know me as Sassy or even SP. I smuggle into and out of the CAS, mostly down to Austin.

Me and my partner Nocturne took on a job to bring some Cavalier Arms goodies up to Vancouver. The nuyen was good and we knew that our third partner One Ton had a vehicle that could make the run.

Our second night out we sstoooooooooooooooooooo

(Block Delete)

• This goes on for two more pages. I edited it.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

Sorry. I think I passed out. We stopped in South Dakota, in an old Indian Reservation called Lower Bruhle. One Ton heard that it was abandoned and other smugglers used it for a quick stop.

● This is true. Once the Native American nations seceded, many of the old reservations in the UCAS and CAS were abandoned. Some had been re-education camps for awhile and many had been scenes of some brutal events during the war that followed. Those close to the border were used as POW camps and even MASH units or burial grounds during the conflicts that followed. This one is just southeast of Pierre, South Dakota, right near the Sioux boarder. It's a ghost town, and only a few buildings are still standing. Smugglers love places like this—they're great for temporary stops and hideouts.

• Yeager

We got in just after nightfall. The place was empty. We pulled the Land Rover into one of the old barns and went for a look around. The town was spread out and many of the buildings had fallen. The ones that were still intact were tagged with all sorts of anti-Amerind graffiti, all old. It was pretty clear that no one really lived here anymore.

We were walking though an open field when One Ton tripped. Nocturne pulled out his flashlight and after a quick search of the grounds we found it. It was a hand. A freakin' human hand. It was mostly bones, and purposely covered in the dirt.

Yeah, it creeped us out. Me mostly. I wanted to head back to the garage. But no, Nocturne thought it would be cool to go

look around. He was sure it was an old Indian burial ground. He actually thought they usually buried people with gold and stuff. Nocturne is an idiot.

Nocturne and One Ton started kicking around the field with their flashlights, joking about the grave-robbing loot they would score. Then they ran across an arm that was sticking straight up out of the ground. When I saw it in the glare of the flashlight, I felt a bone-numbing chill come over me. I was freaked, but those two jokers found it funny. They started making spooky sounds and prancing about like ghosts and monsters were stalking them. Then they tried to pretend that the arm had gone, that it had disappeared when they had taken the flashlights off of it. They claimed someone must have walked off with it. I had my thermo on, so I knew there wasn't any other living soul around.

Nocturne kept looking at the ground. He kept mumbling about how the arm was there and how he saw it. He got down on his hands and knees and began to dig at the dirt.

I'm not sure exactly how to describe what happened next. One Ton was running around like a vampire he saw once in a simflick and I was looking back over towards the garage.

Nocturne screamed.

One Ton laughed.

Nocturne was on his knees, holding the arm that was sticking out of the ground. I simply thought he was playing with it, so it looked as if the hand was on his throat.

One Ton was commenting on what a class joke that was, and how we should keep the arm in the truck with us. Nocturne kept gagging and screaming.

I shouted for him to shut up.

And then he looked at me.

His left eye had popped out of the socket and dangled by the optic nerves. One bony hand gripped his neck and then I saw a second arm break out of the ground and grip his face. His mouth was contorted and foam was spewing from it. One Ton stopped laughing and began puking.

I ran. I ranoo

(Block Delete)

• This time for twelve pages—approximately 3 minutes.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

● If I didn't just read today that a group of corpses had come to life in a hospital meat locker downtown, I would think this was a load of bunk. I mean, zombies? What is this, retro B-flatvid night?

- Pragmaticus

● I just did a global news search, and came back with over 30 hits about alleged zombie attacks in the past few days. It looks like this is for real. It's only a matter of time before the media catches on and cranks up the hype and paranoia dial.

● Scoop



• So what's causing it? A plague? Magic? And if anyone tries to tell me it's the fraggin' comet, I'm going to introduce you to the afterlife.

• Pragmaticus

• Sounds like voodoo to me.

• Swamp Monster

• Not unless a creepy cabal of hounngans has been secretly storing up corpses and preparing their zombie army for world conquest. Hey! Now there's an idea ...

• Holden C.

The hands were everywhere. They seemed to be growing out of the ground. I saw an arm and even a skull. I kept screaming and kept running. The only place I knew was safe was the Land Rover.

In between his dry heaves, I could hear One Ton calling after me for help. Screw the bastard, I thought. Too dumb to run.

I only stopped running when I heard Nocturne stop screaming. I looked back and I saw them. Living corpses. They pulled themselves up from the ground. Some were skeletons, some looked more like ghouls. I screamed myself hoarse as I saw five of them pull One Ton down to the ground. The stupid ork was screaming like a little girl.

It didn't stop me. I was heading towards the garage. I was going to start the Land Rover and then I was going to drive to Vancouver myself. Frag this place.

I heard the gunshot, then fell over suddenly. I felt the pain in my leg. I think I blacked out because I woke up with a face full of dirt and my left leg was throbbing.

I turned to see some sort of zombie standing above me.

I never saw anything like it. The sims of ghouls that I've seen don't match up.

It was a human and male. It was still wearing what looked like an army uniform, though it was falling from its emaciated body. There were no actual eyes, only sockets. The head was mostly just skull and the left part of the jaw was disconnected and hung open and away from the rest of the skull. It was awkwardly holding a rusted pistol.

It reached towards me, but I dodged away. I kicked it with my good leg and I heard bones crunch. It began to fall toward me. I rolled along the ground until I was well out of its way. I would have laughed watching it try to stand if I wasn't in so much pain and it wasn't a living freakin' skeleton.

It started coming towards me. But it was shuffling, like its legs didn't work right. Even with my bad leg I could still out run it.

There were some others shambling in my direction. A dog walked next to one of them, eating the flesh off its leg. I was screaming again. I couldn't stop. I emptied my gun. The bullets ripped into them, knocking them around. I even hit the dog. But they kept coming.

My leg hurt so bad it was burning. I hobbled to the garage barn door and opened it. The Land Rover was sitting there just like we left it. I hobbled to the driver side and got inside. I start-

ed it up when I saw him in the side mirror. It was One Ton! I couldn't believe it. I was screaming uncontrollably—laughing and crying and terrified out of my wits.

He moved a bit slower than he normally did, but he was probably hurt too. When he got to the driver door. I started to feel funny, kind of sick. I figured it was the leg and the relief at seeing him. And then he touched me. The coldness of his hand on my arm, the strange feeling of my life being sucked from me. I started to scream again, and that's when I saw it, the hole in One Ton's neck. It was as big as a fist and I could see his spine.

I was dying. I knew it. But I couldn't seem to move.

In a last ditch effort I swung my legs out and kicked One Ton. He had no real balance and fell back against the door and then to the ground under the chassis. He grabbed my leg, the broken one. The only way to get him to let go was to continue to slam the door on both my legs and his hands. I was screaming and slamming long after he let go. All I remember is gunning the Land Rover. I crashed through the closed end of the barn and the Rover got stuck. I passed out.

I'm not sure how long I was passed out. The Land Rover's battery was still working and I was able to grab an AK-97 from one of the crates. The good news was that One Ton lay there twitching.

I also found Nocturne's cyberdeck. I tried to remember how to make the satellite uplink work. He taught me once.

I continued to pass out and write this.

They are out there, watching.

I woke up again and One Ton was gone. That has me worried. I can't move very well, but maybe I can get this message out. Maybe get help.

I can hear them coming now. It's unnaturally dark, and my thermo's not picking up a thing. I just remembered to check my ammo, and the damn magazine is empty. I don't even have a bullet to finish myself off. Here they come. Damn, Nocturne's leading the way.

I hope I don't ' jas'mi0ga8ew9j-0KWQKD-HJMV'AS'M'ON8V QJ9JF2 J90CKSD90ANVM

//End Link//

• Well, a truck full of guns sitting in a barn in an abandoned Indian reservation! See you in Pierre!

• Prime Runner

• Hmpf. Unnatural darkness. Overpowering panic. Paralyzing fear. A feeling of life being drained away. Sounds like a spirit to me. Maybe an offshoot of wraiths, or some kind of free spirit.

• Magister

• Has anyone assensed one of these things yet?

• Philosomancer

• I have. I was helping someone dispose of a recently deceased enemy, without leaving a trail. So we made a delivery to a local shop that's supposed to be a front for Tamanous. The place was devoid of life ... but it was crawling with undead.



We scooted, but I got an astral glimpse before we bailed. Each one was dual natured. If I had to wager a guess, I'd say it looked like a spirit was possessing a body—with some noticeable differences. I can't explain it, but it was creepy. I tossed a man-abolt at one, and it shrugged it off like I'd thrown a tomato at it. If you run across these things, whatever they are, take my advice and run.

• Manacle

WITCH HUNT

• As soon as the first reports of zombie attacks and walking dead hit the trid, rumours and speculation began flying fast and freely. It could only be expected in this time of mass hysteria that reports of flesh-eating zombies would be attributed towards the practitioners of voodoo. In no time at all, a full scale witch hunt was underway. Across the globe, hounsans and loa-worshippers have been ostracized, exiled and even attacked or jailed. Even in the Caribbean League, where voodoo has its roots, a lot of scared and hostile people are running the hounsans out in fear for their own lives.

In the interest of keeping all of our collective hoops intact, I'm posting whatever info we get. Remember, people, that we do not know what these spirits are or what they want with us, so let's try to keep the wild paranoia with in tolerable limits.

I've asked Doc Cane to try and give us the real data on the situation down there. He's been on the front lines since this zombie-uproar started. Some of you may remember that the good Doctor provided the info on voodoo for our little write up on running in the Big Easy, so he knows what he's talking about. Read and learn kiddies, this could save your life.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 22 January 2062 at 11:47:31 (PST)

by Doc Cane

These are dark times, bonhommes, very dark indeed. Rumors from all over are saying that the dead now walk, that they eat the flesh of the living and curse the earth where they pass. Spurred on by fear, everyone's looking to find a scapegoat to blame. Those with the Talent are blamed, especially those who speak to the loa. The fearmongers claim that hounsans and mambos have conjured evil spirits to plague the living. I've heard experts blame the phenomenon on the "Voodoo Wars" that shook the Caribbean a short while ago. The media makes reference to the "Voodoo Plague." We all know how dangerous bad press can be. But I know of spirits that are far more dangerous ...

Let me set the record straight, my children. That the dead walk the earth is nothing new. To those familiar with the ways of the loa and the trickery of Ghede, the sight of a shambling corpse is unremarkable. Yes, it is quite true that Voodoo does involve the animation of dead bodies, or zombies. But these zombies are servants of the loa, and their existence is due to their will. These are not the creatures that now stalk the earth in droves, feeding on the living.

In truth, new spirits have entered our world. These spirits take shelter in the empty husks of the dead, seizing corpses as

their new homes. These new spirits have no purpose other than to feed and cause harm. To them we are no better than cattle to be slaughtered.

• Well that really helps. Oh yes, we can make a corpse get up and dance and eat your brains, but we're not responsible for these attacks, it must be something else. Please. Cap, couldn't you get someone who could at least come up with a better excuse than "He did it!"

• Hotwire

• Go frag yourself limey. I lost a chummer to a swarm of these things. I want to know where they came from so I can get me some payback.

• Sneaks

There is a great responsibility involved with creating a zombie, and this is not something that any hounsan or mambo takes lightly. Most zombies are purely animated bones and flesh, nothing more than a puppet controlled by its creator. In rare instances, a zombie can slip free of its strings and become what is known as a grande zombie. Though terrifying and powerful, a grande zombie is more akin to a spirit or elemental which has become separate from the mage or shaman that controls it. A grande zombie does feed on the flesh of the living to sustain itself, and while they sound the same as the spirits that are currently plaguing us, let me tell you, they are not the same.

"Ah," you say, "but what about hounsans that follow a darker path?" Yes, friends, it is true. Like all religions, voodoo has a dark side. Those who practice the petro ways walk a shadowy path of wrath and revenge. They indulge in human sacrifice and use the power of blood to summon spirits to punish those who have crossed them. This desire soon leads to their downfall, but the call of power is too great for some to ignore. Knowing this, it is easy to see how the media and the public could think that hounsans are in a way responsible for these recent attacks.

Yet even the petro followers of Baron Samedi agree that these undead are not servants of the loa. In the voodoo tradition, the spirits of the dead are a power to be respected and feared, and these are not the spirits of dead ancestors. These are something entirely alien. Much like the insect spirits that have traveled to our world, these spirits may be part of the natural mana cycle that simply has not manifested itself until now.

• I know of some who claim that these new undead are a sign—indicating the beginning of a great cleansing. Once they have consumed all the evil in the world, they will leave.

• Necropolis

• Consume all the evil? Drek, it'd take 'em a month just to consume the "evil" on my block. And from what I've heard, these creepies aren't picky about whom they eat—they'll munch on innocent children and evil criminals alike.

• Holden C.



Knowing this to be true, it saddens me to see the ignorant and rash response against the loa's children. In the past few weeks, those who walk the path of the loa have been blamed for crimes they did not commit, ostracized for their beliefs, and hunted by those who wrongfully seek revenge. Some governments have gone so far as to place curfews and other restrictions on my people. The CAS has deemed it appropriate to place a bounty on houngans who would dare to follow the loa's leadership.

• What? The CAS is offering a bounty on houngans? New Orleans must be a war zone!

• 9-Finger Steve

• Check your facts people, this is how bad Matrix rumors get started. Here's the official CAS statement:

"Until the nature of these apparent beings has been determined, the police will be enforcing restrictions on practitioners of magic and those who follow the religious system of voodoo for their own safety and the well being of the general populace. Furthermore, the CAS government is offering a bounty of 100,000\$ for the capture of anyone found to be associated with the summoning and control of extra-planar entities for the animation of dead bodies, be they animal or human."

See? It's only a bounty on houngans—or others—who create zombies. And creating zombies was already illegal anyway. Not as bad as it was made to seem.

• Pragmaticus

• Great, not only does this give CAS cops more freedom to hand out beatings, it justifies vigilante squads out to enforce redneck justice. Thank the spirits I got out of there.

• Tex-Mex

• This isn't a joke either. It's affecting all magicians, not just houngans. In the past week, dozens of talismongering shops have been shut down, while others have been destroyed by angry mobs.

• Scorch

• You should see the so-called secure areas where the government is placing anyone suspected of associating with zombie spirits or voodoo. Makes the re-education camps of the early century look like a country club.

• Spyder

• The drastic CAS response has caused a massive flood of refugees back to the Caribbean League. The Carib League itself is in a bit of an uproar over the matter. A few islands are reacting as badly as the CAS, but most of them are taking it in stride, or even offering protection to voodoo followers.

The tension has increased friction among the various pirate kingdoms as well. A few skirmishes have broken out, sparked by zombie fears. To make matters worse, both the government of the Confederated American States and the British

government have erected blockades around shipping lanes, boarding and astrally scanning vessels to ensue that none of these entities are on board. This has caused a drastic rise in the price of shipping, not to mention that the prices on the black market are skyrocketing. Many pirates are getting rich by charging huge prices to smuggle people out of the CAS and back to the CL where they're safe.

• Scoop

• Prices for certain fetish materials only found in the Carib are going through the roof. Anyone who is able to sneak through the blockades, grab the stuff and return can name their price.

• Monkeyboy

• The British Navy found a cargo ship on Bermuda's south shore two days ago that was crawling with undead sailors. Damn things killed the boarding crew before the Brits napalmed the ship to Hades.

• Hotwire

Our people are not taking this provocation lying down. Many of the voodoo sects have decided to resist through peaceful and non-violent means. A few others have decided to strike back with force. The sects that still operate openly within the CAS have put out a call to stand up to the government, and are pursuing other diplomatic options.

• I don't think anyone's even tried to pursue the CAS bounty in New Orleans. Everyone knows better than to piss off the krewes, zobops and other voodoo players.

• Tex-Mex

The Voice of Ogoun is the loudest and best-known sect calling for a united stand against this unwarranted aggression. Their interim leader, Marcus Cross, had been trying to meet with various members of the CAS government until his arrest on the steps of the capital.

• According to the latest CAS posting, Marcus is being held "comfortably in protective custody of the state" in a secure area outside of Houston. Basically they've got his hoop in an internment camp, where he'll rot.

• Spyder

• Who's this Marcus guy? I thought Justin Rochefort was named Head Houngoun of the Voice?

• Agent 68

• He was. On December 31, 2060, Justin Rochefort was named the Head Houngoun after a series of trials to win the talon clippings that Dunklezahn left behind in his will. Rochefort was gacked two days later while en route to Washington to collect the prize from the Draco Foundation. Marcus was brought in as the interim leader, but he's not the leader that Justin was. His arrest has severely crippled the Voice's political power, which



was already hurting after Rochefort's demise. Expect the fight for leadership to begin again.

- Eye Tower
- The Shango cult from Trinidad iced Rochefort. They never approved of him because he wasn't born in the CL.
- Jack.W.Frost
- Actually, my money is on the CAS or Azzies. Both governments benefit from keeping the various sects unbalanced and from uniting and becoming a force to be reckoned with.
- Fishy

With Marcus' arrest, our anger has risen. It is rumored that the red sects seek revenge against the CAS. Several government buildings have been bombed or attacked by spirits already. Many are calling for the CAS to rescind the restrictions and bounty and for the release of Marcus.

- We will not stand by and allow our brethren to be condemned in such a manner. There will be retribution rained down upon those who have crossed us.
- Maman Sangre
- So you're gonna whip up some more of your little flesh eaters then? Good let me know where you are, so I can collect the bounty for your hoop.
- Black Eagle
- Latest news, people. Two bodies were found in a Baton Rouge cemetery yesterday. One was the Mayor's aide, and the other was the missing intern from the governor's office. Both their hearts were ripped out, and the bodies have what appear to be bite marks. Anyone care to take a guess at who did it?
- Impact

Heed this warning, my children. The followers of the loa are not responsible for bringing these new undead to Earth. But if we are persecuted for it, we will spill as much blood as we need to pass through these dark times.

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

- You want the lowdown on these new zombies? Well, for once, the feds are doing their job. This National Alert comes hot off the wire. For your viewing pleasure, we've also appended the confidential attachment that was only sent out to law enforcement and certain government agencies.
- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 January 2062 at 04:21:40 (PST)

NATIONAL ALERT: A WARNING ABOUT "SHEDIM" SPIRITS Issued 10 January 2062

The recent discovery of a new type of magical spirit which may cause psychological problems is reason for the UCAS Department of Health and Metahuman Services (DHMS) to issue this alert to the general public.

These spirits, dubbed "shedim" by the media, were completely unknown until very recently. Sightings have been reported in the entire country and throughout the world.

- Does that name have any special significance?
- Tomtom
- It means "undead."
- Joey

Though appearances are rare and unlikely to take place, the potential trauma this spirit can cause is severe enough that every member of the general public should be made aware of these spirits' existence and abilities.

What Are Shedim Spirits?

Shedim spirits are magical creatures that live on the astral plane. They have the ability to take control of the deceased bodies of metahumans and animals alike, animating them.

- Holy drek, these things can take over animal corpses too? I don't relish the thought of running into a shedim shark or shedim gargoyle!
- The Alarmist

No other information is currently available concerning the origin of these spirits, but an emergency program to find ways to stop these spirits is under way. Its findings will be implemented as soon as possible.

How Can Shedim Spirits Affect My Health?

All the evidence collected thus far indicates that shedim spirits cannot affect your health. Living people cannot be controlled by them, and because these spirits cannot affect the physical world, you are in no danger from suffering bodily harm from them.

- Bulldrek! One of my chummers was out for a bit of astral snooping, and when he came back his body had disappeared! When he tracked it down he found that some spirit whose aura he'd never seen before had taken it for a walk.
- Wallow
- You're saying that these shedim don't just take over the dead, but can hijack any "empty" body? Glad I'm only an adept.
- Cannonball
- It's easy to arrange for them to take over your body anyway.
- Wavy

However, there have been a number of cases across the country of persons suffering severe psychological trauma due to a shedim spirit taking control of the body of a deceased person. For this reason, the DHMS advises everyone to read the *General Tips*, below, and follow those recommendations.



- "Psychological trauma." Sorry, I don't exactly think you can rationalize having your face ripped off and your entrails chewed on by a goddamn zombie as "psychological." Where the bloody drek do they find the scags that write these things?
- Young

- They all used to write corp ad copy.
- 9-Finger Steve

General Tips

It is recommended that all bodies be cremated immediately after death, unless otherwise directed by the appropriate authorities, such as by court order, your local police force or the FBI.

- Within two days of the press release I've seen strong protests against that recommendation from Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. Nothing big, but all very heated because it goes against some of their basic religious beliefs. One spokesman on the trid said they'll fight this in court if it's not withdrawn soon.
- ASDF

- Why not just bury them? Even if a shedim spirit gets inside the body, it'll be confined to the coffin six feet underground. Not a problem to anyone but itself.
- Expo-Man

- Haven't you seen B-horror flicks? When you're dead, you've got all the time in the world to dig yourself out, even if it takes a few months to claw through the casket. It's not like they have to eat or breathe or anything.
- Cannonball

- There's nothing more unsettling than walking through a cemetery and hearing someone thump the inside of a coffin below your feet.
- Steel

Bodies that cannot be cremated should be stored in areas protected by magical barriers. Efforts are underway to provide such facilities at all morgues, but full implementation throughout the UCAS will take some time.

Do not trust people or companies who claim to incinerate bodies unless they can show the proper licenses issued by the federal, state or local government. If in doubt, contact the DHMS for verification of such licenses before coming to any arrangement with any organization making such claims.

- That I don't get.
- Joey
- It's a warning against organleggers. Obviously they don't want to just say, "Don't give your grandfather's corpse to someone you don't trust 'cause they'll sell it for parts."
- Streak

- Which happens quite a lot these days. With this shedim scare, people want to get rid of their dead ASAP, so they often give them to the first person who claims to dispose of them in a way that will prevent possession by shedim. Usually the bereaved even pay the organleggers for the privilege of having the body chopped up after they've gone.
- Plaidinum

- This begs the question: can you trust even licensed undertakers? After all, you never actually get to see the coffin go into the incinerator—they make it disappear through some elevator contraption and only actually incinerate it when everyone's gone home. I don't want to think about this.
- Fullerton

Important LTG Numbers

UCAS Department of Health and Metahuman Services (DHMS): NA/UCAS-NC 202 (625-7365)
DHMS General Information: 800 (239-8226)
National Response Center: 800 (424-8802)

//Begin File Attachment//

DHMS REPORT ON "SHEDIM" SPIRITS—SECRET

- This is the part the government doesn't want you to know about yet. Things are a lot worse than they're made out to be in that press release.
- Captain Chaos
"I am everywhere!"

This report details what is currently known about shedim spirits (hereafter "shedim"). Our knowledge about this phenomenon is incomplete, but further studies are underway to assess what danger is posed to the UCAS population. A basic understanding by the reader of common magical techniques is assumed.

Though occurrences of shedim-like spirits have been reported since late September 2061, definitive proof of their existence was not established until December 25, 2061.

The word "shedim" means "undead" in Hebrew. It has been applied to these spirits by the media since it was first used by an independent trideo station.

Habits & Behavior

It is speculated that shedim enter the astral plane via unknown methods from a home metaplane. They cannot materialize onto the physical plane unaided (unlike most other types of spirit presently known). Virtually the only behavior shown by an astral shedim is a relentless search for a body to inhabit.

To interact with the physical world, shedim must inhabit a body. The most common choice is a metahuman or animal corpse, but incidents have been reported where shedim possessed the bodies of magicians who had projected their consciousness onto the astral plane.

- Woah. No way am I ever going to leave my body without astral protection again. Wards or spirits, at the least!
- Wiz Kid



The condition of the corpse does not seem to limit shedim, though they clearly favor "fresher" corpses. Once taken over, the corpse no longer seems to decay, though this has not been confirmed yet through sustained observation. Shedim spirits seem incapable or unwilling of leaving a corpse once they have inhabited it.

- Well, the Museum of Natural History just improved their astral security. They didn't take kindly to one of these shedim trying to walk off in one of their mummy exhibits.
- Word Broker

No specific subtypes of shedim have been identified with certainty, though documented encounters suggest that some shedim have abilities not possessed by other shedim. It is unknown at this time whether this is merely variation among a species or whether there are in fact separate shedim breeds. Careful observation on the astral plane has distinguished individual characteristics between different shedim, suggesting that some shedim may simply be more potent than others.

The majority of shedim spirits seem to travel in packs, preferring to occupy a number of bodies en masse. Whether this is a characteristic of social behavior or a simple survival/protection mechanism is unclear. They do not show signs of intelligence, functioning more by instinct than through decision-making. They seem to feed off of the life force of living beings, and for some undetermined reason they may also consume meat or metahuman flesh.

There have been a few exceptions observed to these behavioral standards. Some shedim remain separate from a pack, seeming to prefer to act on their own. These solitary shedim have exhibited more intelligence, but it is unclear if they are sentient.

- Just what the world needed: one more kind of brain-eating, life-draining undead. I do hope these are vulnerable to high-velocity lead poisoning, unlike most of their kind.
- Arclight

The appearance of shedim-inhabited corpses often leads to the shedim being confused for a ghoul (*Manesphagus horridus*) or zombie (no taxonomy).

- If you're only going by smell, sure. Otherwise, it's not too hard with a bit of experience.
- Harry
- Like anyone would want that kind of experience.
- Expo-Man

Handling Shedim

DHMS magicians have attempted standard methods of spirit handling on shedim, with varying degrees of success. Shedim appear not to respond to standard hermetic or shamanic summoning or controlling techniques. Since the astral metaplane from which shedim originate has not yet been

identified, techniques for the summoning and binding of free spirits have not yet been tested.

- Someone I met said he summoned a shedim, so it is possible. He didn't say how he did it, though.
- Cannonball
- I was there too, CB, and his breath alone was enough to get me drunk. I'd take the claim with a grain of salt.
- Sister Sledgehammer

Many shedim have exhibited a strong inherent resistance to magic. They also possess the ability to regenerate any damage inflicted upon their host bodies. This ability does not seem to allow the shedim to repair the body to full functionality—they are only capable of restoring it to the same level of decomposition as when they inhabited the body. In any case, these factors make shedim especially difficult to kill. Evidence has shown, however, that mana spells affect the shedim spirit and not the host body, and a strong mana attack may penetrate its defenses and injure or kill the creature. Additionally, if a shedim's host body is totally destroyed, it cannot regenerate and the shedim is purged from it back into the astral plane.

When inhabiting a body, shedim are dual natured. In this state, they are limited by wards and other magical security precautions.

Experiments on captured specimens show that normal banishing methods work equally well on shedim as on other types of spirit, provided the shedim is not inhabiting a corpse at the time. Shedim that are inhabiting a corpse can be banished (exorcised), but this takes more effort, since banishing only exorcises them from the corpse. They must then be banished a second time in order to be destroyed.

It appears a shedim cannot repossess a body from which it has been exorcised.

Long-term Solutions

The most obvious solution to the shedim problem is to deny the spirits access to corpses, thereby confining them to the astral plane where they are fairly weak and more easily dealt with.

Emergency measures are being put into place recommending the incineration of all corpses (metahuman and animal) within 24 hours of death, and the storage of any corpses not (yet) incinerated behind powerful astral barriers. Though not a true solution, assessments show the number of shedim-related incidents will be reduced by a minimum of approximately 40 percent.

Shedim pose a serious threat to the health and welfare of UCAS citizens, especially those who regularly deal with dead bodies of metahumans or animals. Whenever they are encountered, the proper authorities should be notified immediately.

//End File Attachment//

PUTTING THE DEAD TO REST

- I would never have expected the Catholic Church to be on the cutting edge of magical theory, but in the context of these



new spirits known as shedim, the Church seems to know what it's talking about. The following interview gives a fairly comprehensive overview of our new astral visitors, in a language and format that even mundanes like me can understand.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 12 February 2062 at 20:09:02 (PST)

//Begin Audio Transcript//

Jenkins: Good evening, and thanks for joining us. With us tonight is Father Paul Rass, an expert on spirits and the Public Relations Director for the Roman Catholic Church's Order of St. Sylvester. Father Rass, glad to have you back.

Rass: Happy to be here, Kevin. Always glad to fill in some holes for your audience.

Jenkins: Well, let's just hope this interview is as informative as our last one, when SURGE first started—the ratings were phenomenal!

Rass: (smiling) I'll do my best.

Jenkins: Yes, well, I have no doubt that our viewers will be more than satisfied. Now to get started, quite a variety of unknown spirit types have come through Dunkelzahn's Rift, correct?

Rass: Yes, that's right, Kevin—not that we were anywhere near cataloguing the spirits that were around before that, mind you. It's like finding and studying all the animals in the world—each time you think you're done, someone finds a new species of bug or whatnot. It's the same with spirits—these new types just add to the number we haven't studied yet. To be honest, I don't know if we'll ever discover all of the different spirit types. Or animals, for that matter.

Jenkins: A bit of pessimism on your part, Father?

Rass: Not really, Kevin. I'm just not sure if we could do it before the Second Coming of Our Lord, and even if we did, how would we know when we were done? It isn't as if we have a list of these things, now is it?

Jenkins: True enough, Father. I concede the point. Now, about these new spirit types—the one that has grabbed the public's attention the most is the "shedim." What can you tell us about these guys?

Rass: Well, the magical community doesn't have a lot of solid information so far, but we have discovered a few things about the shedim. Unlike other spirits, which are often loathe to take a material form in the physical world, preferring to stay in their astral form, the shedim fancy the opposite. They seem to dislike a purely astral state, and so they seek to find a body for themselves as soon as possible. However, they can't make their own bodies out of whole cloth, as other spirits can. They need to find one that already exists, but that is uninhabited.

Jenkins: What exactly do you mean by "uninhabited," Father? That sounds rather unsettling.

Rass: Well, to be blunt, they can only inhabit a body that no longer has a soul. In other words, their possession power seems to be limited to dead bodies.

Jenkins: So they can't possess living people? Only dead ones?

Rass: Correct. As far as we know.

Jenkins: Is there anything we can do to protect our dead from having their bodies desecrated by these things?

Rass: The holy nature of the Last Rites seems to keep the shedim from entering the body for a time.

Jenkins: But not forever? Is there anything else that can be done?

Rass: Well, the cremation of the body soon after death will deprive the shedim of a host, though on the whole we disapprove of cremation unless there is no other choice. Members of my Order are working around the clock to ward and protect the coffins of the dead faithful from astral intrusion, which will keep the shedim from being able to reach the body, and thus stop possession. Bodies should also be stored until burial in consecrated, warded areas—the governments of various nations have begun providing similar areas, but of course I recommend using the Church's facilities instead.

Jenkins: Of course. Tell me Father, what happens if these shedim do possess a body?

Rass: Well, to begin with, the shedim have been able to take over the dead bodies of both people and animals. An obvious parallel exists between the shedim and the devils known as Legion, cast out by our Lord from a man and forced into the bodies of pigs. This is the first type of spirit known to readily inhabit animal bodies, lending credence to theories that they are of demonic origin.

Jenkins: Are you saying that these spirits may in fact be the servants of Satan?

Rass: With stress on the word "may," that is exactly what I am saying. The effectiveness of the Last Rites seems to back this up, as does the fact that the Church's exorcism ritual has proven quite effective in driving the shedim from their current body.

We live in a world of magic and mystery, Kevin. Both Goblinization and SURGE have brought many old legends to life—is it really so hard to believe that the devil is real as well, and sends his minions to assault the children of God? I know it seems outlandish, and keep in mind I don't know for certain that the shedim are demonic, but discounting the idea simply because it appears outlandish seems fairly unrealistic in this day and age.



Jenkins: OK, OK, Father, I surrender—you've made your point. So, what should we do if we encounter one of these shedim in a possessed body?

Rass: First of all, stay away from it! I cannot stress this enough. Leave dealing with these spirits to the experts. Contact your priest or, if none are available, a magician you know to be of good conscience. Your priest will contact my Order, which has members all over the world, and he will come, day or night, as soon as he can to perform an exorcism and then a banishment. Until he arrives, do whatever you can to keep the spirit where it is physically without putting yourself in danger.

Jenkins: What about these rumors of the bodies of magicians being possessed by these shedim while they are astrally projecting?

Rass: These rumors are unfortunately true. When a magician projects into the astral plane, his soul leaves his body. It is possible for a shedim to then take control of the body while the magician is away.

Jenkins: I see! Well, we're out of time, so I must say thank you and good night to Father Rass. Join us tomorrow, when I interview a sailor who claims to have encountered a ghostly Blackbeard and his crew!

UNINVITED GUESTS

- The following excerpt comes from an Open Forum discussion on the shedim. My reasons for including it should be quite clear.
- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 15 February 2062 at 09:37:41 (PST)

(Begin Log: Shedim SIG : 13 February 2062 at 15:48:30 PST)

- Does anyone know how other spirits view these shedim critters? Do they get along? Are they astral buddies? Or do other spirits treat them like some revolting thing that just crawled out from the sewer grate?

• Inquisitor

- I sicced a fire elemental on a group of shedim zombies. It seemed to enjoy blasting the corpses with flame, but it usually does. It didn't seem to have any particular reluctance to attack, nor did it seem to get an extra thrill out of it.

• Shetani

- I once ran across some shedim in a graveyard, and I asked the spirit of that place to aid me in casting them out. The spirit granted me the favor, but it seemed reluctant to do so. I was given the impression that it didn't like dealing with such ... unnatural ... things.

• Eli

- I had the same experience, but I usually get that reaction from spirits in areas with background count.

• Necropolis

- What do the loa think of shedim?

• Inquisitor

- I am blessed to carry the mantle of Ghede, the Lord of Death and the consumer of all things. Ghede is also a lover of pranks and trickery, and revels in the making of fools. But Ghede finds no humor in the shedim, my children. In Ghede's eyes, the shedim are a mockery of his power, and he would consume them wherever he can.

• Horse Fly

- I have a message to pass on.

Recently, my grandfather died. Grandpa Joe was a leader of our people, and carried our tribe through many uncomfortable years. When his health failed, he was honored as an elder, and he enlightened our people with many words of wisdom over the years. When he died, we held a traditional ceremony to honor him, and to honor all of our dead. Our ancestors were called upon to escort Grandpa Joe on his journey onwards.

The next night, I was graced with a visit in my home by our honored ancestors. Rarely have they chosen to come directly to me, and never more than one at a time. But this time there were many of them, including Grandpa Joe.

My ancestors were irate. "What have you done?" they asked me. "Why have you dishonored us so?" I abased myself at their wrath. I was afraid. They had cold fire in their eyes. I explained that I did not understand why they were angry. They called me irresponsible. They called me a poor guardian. I pled ignorance, and begged to be told what was wrong.

Grandpa Joe stepped forward. These were his words: "Let all know. Let everyone, everywhere know. We will not tolerate this intrusion. We will not tolerate this abuse of our sacred forms. Those who would debase our memories must be destroyed. They are uninvited guests, and must be shown the same hospitality one shows a thieving weasel."

Then Grandpa Joe left me, as did the others.

I raced down the path to where we had buried Grandpa Joe, but I did not reach his grave. Halfway down the path, I saw a figure in the moonlight, perhaps more. I called upon Owl to gain her vision of the night, and then I clearly saw what can only be called an abomination. The body of Grandpa Joe was coming towards me, with the bodies of several others close behind. But it was not Grandpa Joe. It was a thief.

I followed my ancestors' instructions. I warn you to heed them as well.

- Night Watcher

(End Log)

RED SUNSET, RED SUNRISE



Japan's undergone quite a few changes in a relatively short time. Despite an article in the Constitution prohibiting the maintenance of military forces, the government established the Self-Defense Force in 1954, rationalizing that it was for self-defense purposes only and wasn't truly military. Then came the Second Korean War, when North Korea launched several nuclear missiles at Japan (all of which were shot down). This led to some reforms in 2006, where the Emperor became even more of a figurehead than he already was and Japan became Imperial Japan. The SDF's name also changed to fit the reality, becoming the Imperial military. Though the Emperor lacked actual political power, everything the government did was proclaimed to be in his name, recalling the glories of previous centuries. They also began an aggressive campaign of expansion, both militarily and economically, as evidenced by the occupation of the Philippines in 2021 and San Francisco in 2036. And let's not forget the expansion of the Japanacorps all over the world.

Guess what—that's just the beginning. Scan this and you'll see what I mean.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 16 March 2062 at 04:27:55 (PST)

DISASTER STRIKES

(Begin Log : Japan SIG : 27 October 2061 at 00:02:50:23 PST)

• I've just heard reports on some of the news channels that Japan has been hit by a series of small tremors in the past couple of hours. Anyone else monitoring the news feeds?

• Snow Dragon

• Yeah. Apparently there was a 5.5 near Yokohama a bit over two hours ago, and they just registered a 5.9 offshore from Nagoya. The one near Yokohama has started a few small fires and caused some structural damage, but nothing spectacular. Not much info on the one near Nagoya yet. It's offshore, so they might get some minor tidal surges.

• Manticore



• No surprises there. Japan has been unstable for the past year or so. Lots of little earthquakes, and some of the volcanoes up in Hokkaido have been puffing sporadically for the past few months. Does anyone care to place any money on the big "Gojira quake" hitting Tokyo this year? It's definitely well overdue.

• Spavin

• Oh, my God! Folks, look at this! The south island of Japan has just gone up in smoke!

• Armistice

//Begin File Attachment//

NEWSNET SPECIAL NEWS BROADCAST

27 October 2061 at 06:07:54 GMT [16:07:54 local]

Live Near Sasebo, Japan

Ladies and gentlemen, what you see behind me from the window of our NewsNet chopper is the immense smoke plume which blasted from Unzen Volcano, as it erupted without warning no more than thirty minutes ago. The volcano, which covers much of Shimabara Peninsula, has erupted in several areas, but the focus of the activity seems to be Fugendake, a mountain on the eastern part of the volcano.

It is totally impossible to see through the cloud of dust and smoke to the nearby city of Shimabara, built at the base of the volcano, but it is assumed even at this early stage that the loss of life has been heavy. There are unconfirmed reports just coming to hand that there may have also been a tidal surge in the bay. We have no idea of potential death tolls, but we do know that the damage may range as far as the outlying areas of Nagasaki, almost 50 kilometers away.

The Japanese Imperial government has declared a state of national emergency, suspending all air traffic into and out of Kyushu Island. Suborbital lifts are being canceled nation-wide due to upper-atmospheric dust, and severe restrictions are being placed on all non-military air traffic throughout Japan. Seoul and Pusan International airports have similarly suspended all trans-atmospheric flights and are beginning to divert all non-essential traffic.

The eruption is continuing as we speak, and numerous small aftershocks are being registered up the eastern seaboard of—

Oh drek, what was that?

Folks, we have just been buzzed by a Mitsuhamma fighter jet, demanding that we vacate the area immediately. The pilot has stated that he is acting with the full authority of the Imperial government, and is prepared to use force as necessary. At this stage we have no choice but to comply. Stay tuned folks, we'll be back with the hottest news as it comes to hand.

This is Rolf Davidson, your man on the scene for NewsNet Special Broadcasts.

[Cut to real time orbital video from Shiawase Envirotech]

[Cut to ground camera montage]

//End File Attachment//

• Holy drek—the action's not over yet, folks. They've just registered another 7.2 quake in Yokohama, and a seaquake some-

where in the Sea of Japan. A tsunami alert has just been released for the entire northern coastal area. There are aftershocks being registered all over the place. It looks like Unzen Volcano may have triggered some major bad karma for Japan. Just pray that Fuji-sama doesn't feel like going copycat.

• AEnima

• Well, I don't know about you, but I've just sold all my shares in anything even remotely Japanese. I'd expect the Japanacorp to take something of a hammering with this.

• Armistice

• Damn straight. Unzen is too far away from major industries to do much, but Yokohama is a major industrial area, and there's a lot of high value real estate at risk. Just sit back and watch Renraku's share price go into free-fall.

• Denada

• It's not just Japan that's feeling the heat, it looks like the whole Ring of Fire is buckling. CalFree, New Zealand, Indonesia; Momma Earth ain't happy.

• Yael

• Oh, no—I have family working in one of the Saotome aquacologies in the Sea of Japan. I just tried placing a call and got a "no signal" error. Can anybody tell me anything?

• Inari

• Wow. Those are damn cool orbital visuals. Never would have thought that a volcano would put out that much dust into the atmosphere. You can barely see anything of the entire island. It looks like Yokohama has taken a pounding too; you can see the smoke from a couple of big fires.

• Spavin

• I've seen pictures of Mt. St. Helens when it went off last century. If Unzen has done anything similar there really isn't much chance anyone near the volcano is alive, is there? How big was Shimabara city? Just how many people has this killed?

• Ereskanti

• "Was," he says—a firm grasp of the situation. The last census showed that Shimabara was home to about 180,000 people. Add the rest of the small towns around Ariake-kai—the bay—and you might tally as high as 300,000 people. The final death toll will depend upon how big any tidal waves are, and how much damage Nagasaki and Yokohama suffered.

• Hastur-3

• Hell, yes. Things are going to be a little chaotic in the near future. All these quakes will cost the Japanacorp and the government a pretty penny to fix or patch over, and it won't take long for the corporate sharks to sniff the blood and find weak companies to snap up. From our perspective, this will



PRESCOTT



mean lots of employment, as long as you don't mind your work hasty and brutal.

• Findler-Man

(End Log)

(Begin Log : Japan SIG : 29 October 2061 at 15:40:23 PST)

• Here's the latest.

• Armistice

//Begin File Attachment//

JAPANESE DIET CONVENES OVER CRISIS

Posted 10-29-61

Washington (NN)—Imperial Japan remains in turmoil after Unzen Volcano's catastrophic explosion, and the related earthquakes that happened late on Thursday afternoon, local time. The erupting magma and ash fall has virtually razed the city of Shimabara and the surrounding countryside, home to over a quarter of a million inhabitants. Nearby towns have reported tsunami, rains of hot ash, huge rocks, clouds of noxious gas and worse. Casualties have already reached the tens of thousands, and the final death toll may be much higher. Even at this early stage, the PacRim Bank has estimated the cost of the disaster to be in the range of tens of billions of nuyen.

Ash and pumice falls as far as Tokyo and Osaka are causing the continued cancellation of all suborbital flights and

have closed ports on the island of Kyushu for safety reasons, prompting protests from the corporate community due to economic loss. Satellite pictures clearly show the extent and intensity of the ash clouds as they are tugged east over the Pacific. The death toll in the Yokohama earthquake is rising past 5,000, as fire crews have only just extinguished the last of the industrial blazes. Over 900 people on the north coast of Japan are still registered as "missing" due to a five-meter tsunami originating from the quake in the Sea of Japan.

The Diet is currently meeting in a crisis assembly to resolve the situation and develop relief plans. Shobo Kazama, the Japanese Prime Minister, has also called for an official investigation into the geological monitoring and risk management of Unzen. Shiawase Envirotech, responsible for landsat imaging and environmental monitoring intended to give early warning of such upheavals, has refused to make any official public statement regarding the situation. Tensions are high, and the Japanese government has demanded an explanation of why their sophisticated billion-nuyen monitoring system detected absolutely no sign of the incipient earthquakes or eruption.

As the sun goes down over a subdued, smoke-stained Tokyo, the nation is beginning the process of mourning all those lost in the recent disasters.

//End File Attachment//

• Well, the Diet obviously made some fairly hefty decisions. The latest buzz on the Japanese newsnets is that the Imperial Marines have received orders to pull out of San Fran and head home to help with the relief effort. The announcement was apparently personally made by the Emperor via a pre-recorded electronic broadcast.

• Faedra

• That's strange. Nobody's seen anything of His Imperial Majesty for close to a week, even before the eruption. Since then, he's declined all interviews, public appointments and scheduled events, citing a need to "personally monitor the tragedy of Unzen and to pray for the souls of the departed."

• Mushin

• Well, if that order's genuine, the Marines probably won't be back in a hurry. That'll help make running in CFS a little less stressful, and I'm guessing all the metas in San Fran will be shedding lots of crocodile tears about Unzen right about now.

• Dexter

• Yup. Less stressful, and probably much more fruitful in the long term. An open market is better for business, especially one in flux.

• Roughcut

IMPERIAL JAPAN'S GOVERNMENT

Shadowland Japan SIG Help Topics >> Government Basics

Emperor: The symbol of Japan and the unity of its people. A figurehead for the state, everything is done "in the Emperor's name," but he holds no actual political power. The Imperial Throne is dynastic and descendant from father to son.

Diet: Composed of two Houses, the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors, the Diet is the highest organ of state power and the sole law-making organ of the state. Its members are all elected by the people. This is where the real power of the government lies, and many of the Diet's members are in the pockets of corporations.

Cabinet: Executive power resides within the Cabinet, which is led by the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the Emperor as directed by the Diet. The Prime Minister, in turn, appoints Ministers of State to run various Ministries of the Cabinet. The Diet can remove the entire membership of the Cabinet from power with a vote of no confidence.

Judiciary: The Supreme Court and lesser courts of the land. The Chief Judge is appointed by the Emperor as directed by the Cabinet, and the rest of the Supreme Court is appointed by the Cabinet directly.

• I can confirm what Faedra reported. Their base near the harbor in San Fran is a hive of activity right now, and all troops have been recalled from leave. It looks like at least two divisions are rotating out.

• Tuskadero

• Hmmm ... are they taking all of their heavy ordnance with them? I wonder if they'd miss any of it?

• Kilroy

• I've just checked up on what's hot gossip in Asgard. Apparently a similar thing is happening in the Japanese garrisons in the Philippines, Peru and in Northern Australia. Spirits alone know how much further they're planning on pushing this, but right now the Japanese government is recalling every man they can spare. It must be making the Japanacops in these areas just a bit twitchy to be losing their security blanket and their big whacking stick all at once.

• Nils

• Not to mention that it's probably going to give the local rebels, pirates and other entrepreneurs all kinds of ideas. I reckon it might be a good time to try a little "freelance arms trading" along the Pacific Rim.

• Glaive

(End Log)

(Begin Log : Japan SIG : 4 November 2061 at 18:55:14 PST)

• Check this—one of the Imperial officers in San Francisco is refusing to pull out. Looks like the Japanacops in San Fran got to this General Saito—whatever they offered him was enough to make him betray his government. His soldiers are all on his side, it looks like; more loyal to the General than to the Emperor. In any case, the corps will still have the military backing to operate safely in San Fran, though Saito's soldiers can't protect anywhere near as much of an area as before.

• Argent

• Yeah, and Saito makes a great figurehead for the anti-Imperial movement starting in the corps.

• Discus

• Well, Armistice was right. The share markets around the world have taken a pummeling since the eruption. Not surprisingly, the Japanacops are putting a hold on their "venture projects" until they figure out exactly how much it's going to cost to rebuild. You're going to see a whole lot of research companies being leveraged off or having their funding axed. That'll make them vulnerable. The translation: Black-ops galore.

• The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense."

• Has anyone noticed that there's been a veritable epidemic of unexpected deaths amongst the extended Imperial Family in the week since the eruption? Everything from food poisoning to accidental falls, helicopter accidents and random street violence. Something like seventeen people all in all.

• Neon Flower

• Utter nonsense. Japan doesn't have random street violence.

• Mushin

• Precisely. I think something has happened to cause a huge power vacuum, and what you're seeing are the side effects of people desperately scrambling to fill it. There's lots of wheeling and dealing going on in the shadows of Japan right now. The police also are getting twitchy about the Yakuza for some reason and the AAA's seem to be eyeing each other again. About the only thing keeping them at all civil is the swathe of destruction caused by the disasters.

• Neon Flower

• Ditto that. My team works out of the west coast of America, but even so we've recently received three offers from different Johnsons who run ops for triple-A Japanacops, all aimed at other Japanese corps. Things are getting hot in the shadows all over the world right now. As to what's started it all, nobody seems to know for sure.

• Pasquale

(End Log)

DEATH OF AN EMPEROR

• Some of you may remember Naginata, the philanthropist responsible for the exposé on Shiawase a year or so ago. We had assumed he'd vanished into the Chiba shadows for good. Apparently not—he's alive and well, and he's got some good inside info. Apologies for the formal tone in places, we had to run it through a translator. I've appended an interactive glossary to help us gaijin wade through the text.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 08 January 2062 at 10:43:46 (PST)

by Naginata

Good evening, everybody. I hope that this finds you in good health. As you may know, the shadows of Japan have been a very interesting and dangerous place to live for the past two months. The eruption of Unzen Volcano has had an effect far beyond that of simple physical destruction, and the ripples are still being felt around the world, much like a large rock dropped into a small pond. Business in the shadows of Chiba has been frantic as alliances form, mutate and dissolve seemingly overnight. For the present at least, it seems that the niceties of etiquette and politeness have been suspended.

There has indeed been a reason for this turmoil, and it recently became public knowledge exactly why. I have appended an article in explanation.



//Begin Newsfeed//

03 January 2062

... And in international news today, the Japanese government has released a statement, belatedly confirming the death of Emperor Kenichi and most of his immediate family in the eruption of Unzen Volcano, just over two months ago. The Emperor and his family were attending the re-dedication of a Shinto shrine on one of their estates on the shore of *Ariake-kai* near Shimabara city. They were presumably swept away by either a volcanic mudslide or the resulting tsunami.

Prime Minister Kazama stated that Japan was deeply shaken and saddened by their dual loss of friends and family and of their much-loved Emperor. He appealed for continued calm and re-focused effort in the reconstruction of the area around Unzen.

Kazama-san went on to state that Yasuhito, the 14-year-old grandson of the Emperor and his sole surviving direct descendant, would assume the Imperial throne in name in a coronation ceremony scheduled for the fifth of January. He said that the long delay had been necessary to recover and bury the bodies of the Emperor's family with appropriate dignity and to ensure a smooth transition. Kazama-san also stated that a Sessho had been chosen by the Imperial House Council, to act as Regent until Yasuhito could truly take the throne upon turning eighteen. The chosen Sessho is Taro Yonekura, one of the few members of the Imperial Family still living and Yasuhito's distant cousin.

The Japanese financial markets have greeted this news with notable apprehension, dropping another 200 points to their lowest mark in two years. Mitsuhamas Computer Technologies has registered a formal protest with the government, stating that "without an effective leader capable of gathering popular support, the nation will be hampered in its return to stability and prosperity." Other corporations have declined to comment on the matter at this stage.

//End Newsfeed//

• No kidding. Yonekura's one of the few Imperial Family members left. They've been dropping like flies recently, and the only ones left besides Yasuhito are all at least one generation removed from truly being family members. They only belong to the Family because one of their recent ancestors did and the Imperial Household never got around to taking the status away from them.

• Neon Flower

• There are also persistent rumors linking Yonekura to Yamatetsu. I've got a feeling that those rumors are the real reason the megas are up in arms.

• Packer

• Naginata's not drekking about the blood-letting either. Things have certainly changed since two months ago. I saw someone get cut in half with a monowhip at the front door to a downtown Kyoto nightclub on New Years Eve. The local doshin didn't even blink—just hosed off the blood and took the body away. Anyone would think this is the OK Corral, not Japan. It doesn't help that the Japanacops seem to be all too busy with their own agendas to help pacify the situation by wading in with their Fuzzy Pink Samurai or their pocket ninja clans. It's really open season at the moment.

• Just Johnny

As of two days ago, Japan has a new Tenno Heika, and he is little more than a child. To make matters worse, Yasuhito's lineage is tainted with impurity. He is officially an only child, but there have been persistent rumors that he has a half-brother and a sister that were born oni and were quietly consigned to Yomi. It is for this reason that, despite the fact that Yasuhito is human, he was never considered to be in line for the throne.

• It's true, all right. I did some checking up on them, and both of 'em died in Yomi a few years ago in a fire.

• Bearclaw

• You moron, don't tell me you believed that? I was hired to extract the kids from Yomi (and girl—that was way tough!). The fire was just a cover-up so the Japanese would think they were dead. They're safe and sound.

• Ice Queen

• If that's true, expect even more chaos as

every anti-Japanese group tries to use them against their brother, assuming they can be found.

• Argent

The power of the Emperor is mainly a symbolic one, meaning that Yasuhito's young age is not much of a problem. He is being represented by his cousin Yonekura, who performs the Emperor's duties as his Sessho, but rumor says that Yonekura just does what his young cousin tells him to.

The Japanese place immense store in tradition and conformity, and this choice of new Emperor represents a total reversal of the natural order of things. It is causing no end of consternation amongst the older Kuge. Many of them are refusing to bow, even symbolically, to someone they consider tainted. Yasuhito may not have time to grow into his title of Tenno Heika, as his reign may be short and bloody—there have already been some faint whisperings of regicide.

GLOSSARY

Doshin	Police officer
Gaijin	Foreigner
Kawaruhito	Metahuman (literally "changed person")
Kuge	Aristocrat of the Imperial court
Miko	A Shinto magician (generally female)
Oni	Ork metatype variant found in Japan
Sessho	Regent for an under-aged Emperor
Tenno Heika	The Emperor (literally "Lord Son of Heaven")

Whatever the case, there are many rumors and whispered half-stories circulating about Yasuhito. The major thing that nobody is willing to discuss is the fact that he was apparently with the Imperial family on the day that Unzen erupted. The Shinto Miko in Kyushu are whispering that Yasuhito was discovered walking beside the shore line of Ariake-kai after the eruption, naked and dusty, but otherwise totally unharmed. Some of the Miko are even swearing that they could see a faint aura of some kind of indeterminable magic around him in astral space. Since then however, he has tested as totally mundane to all kinds of magical probes intended to discover any latent magical talent. Whatever protective magic it was that allowed him to survive the full force of a volcanic eruption has the best mages in Japan baffled.

Perhaps the biggest mystery of all is from exactly where his power base and popular support have materialized. In a scant few days, he has consolidated the support of the majority of the Shinto and Buddhist priesthood and reputedly at least one influential family. Large numbers of the younger and more ambitious palace Kuge are also quietly forming new alliances and power blocs, perhaps inspired by the possibility of quick advancement. The Imperial Palace is certainly divided.

- That's awfully quick, on all counts. They go without an Emperor for two whole months, and then they want to crown a mere child as replacement with two days notice ... and other factions are already whispering about regicide loud enough for the world to hear? What gives? Talk about unstable. Hey—didn't the Emperor make a trid statement a couple of days after the eruption, when it turns now out he was actually "dead?" I smell a big, skanky devil rat.

- Defcon

- That's the official story, yes. I've had another run over the footage with some specialized tools. It turned out to be electronically generated. It's not easy to see; mainly trivial inconsistencies in reflections in the eyes. You have

to wonder just how much of the footage we see these days is real and not jiggered, don't you?

- KrackR



- The eruption killed nearly everybody in Shimabara, and yet this boy was found walking unharmed in the ashes? How? You can't tell me that he just got lucky. Either he's a powerful mage, which is impossible at his age, or the story that he was at Unzen is nothing but PR white-wash. There is no other explanation.

- Idoru

- That's rather narrow-minded of you. There are more things in heaven and earth, Idoru, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

- Izanagi

- That story is pretty much backed up by some of the "research" I've found on the Imperial host. To cut a long story short, it appears that a Renraku black clinic near Beppu did a full physical and magical exam on Yasuhito about twelve hours after the mountain blew. They performed every kind of test known to man, but they found absolutely nothing wrong with him. They did mention some unspecified "difficulty" with some of their procedures though, whatever that means.

- Manticore

- One interesting point is that his support amongst the Shinto priesthood is by no means unanimous, though they present an outwardly unified front. There are some heated "philosophical debates" happening in private right now.

- Kamiko

Yasuhito has certainly wasted no time in gathering popular support in the Diet, and a surprising number of politicians seem to be backing him. Yonekura spends much of his time with various influential Diet members, presumably making deals and building support for his cousin. With enough Diet backing,

Yasuhito could have the influence to push decrees through the legislature as law, becoming the first Emperor to have actual power in over a century.



Of course, the Japanacorns are fighting back, using their Diet influence to try to block this rise to power before it ever truly starts. Unsurprisingly, Yamatetsu is using all of its influence with the politicians to back the Sessho and his cousin. It's looking more and more likely that those rumors about links to Yamatetsu were true.

The young Emperor's Diet supporters have already begun an initiative within the two Houses to open Japan as a free market, lowering tariffs and trade restrictions on extranational companies. The Japanese business community has reacted to this with horror, and has marshaled its forces to block this move and stop it cold.

Perhaps not unreasonably, Yasuhito also appears to hold a personal vendetta against Shiawase Corporation for the death of his family. He has demanded a personal explanation and apology both to him and to the people of Japan from Tadashi Shiawase regarding the absolute failure of their geological monitoring system, which has thus far been ignored. Popular opinion supports the Emperor in this matter, however, and may force Shiawase's hand.

Yonekura has been working with Diet members to prepare an initiative to relax the official laws for both immigration and codifying discrimination against kawaruhito. It will likely be a while before that initiative is introduced, as he lacks the support necessary for such a massive change. At the same time, Yasuhito has requested in a national address that the people of Japan work to put an end to discrimination.

His most recent, and perhaps his most symbolically important action, has been to quietly reclaim his mantle of divinity, which the Imperial family was forced to abdicate after World War II, more than a century ago. Rather surprisingly, the Shinto priesthood immediately affirmed his divine status. In practical terms it means little, but it is however a potent signal to the rest of the world of his desire to lead, and to overturn whatever conventions he sees as pointless or restrictive.

- My God, all this in two days?!? This is all slightly too surreal for me.
- Spazz

• I think I see something of his strategy—by pushing change after change at the people who oppose him, he keeps them too far off-balance to effect a serious counterattack. Tactically brilliant. I must wonder where he learned such capacity for intrigue, and who is tutoring him.

- Sun Tzu II

• He's not going to change Japan overnight, though. He can push whatever laws he wants through the Diet, but excising the racism and xenophobia will take centuries.

- Satchmo

• I'd give my right arm to know who it is with their arm up Yasuhito's back, using him as a puppet.

- Darien

• Well, the people he's seen most with are: Yonekura (duh); Kiyoshi Hirai, an influential member of the House of Representatives who is rumored to be in the pocket of the PacRim Bank; Shobo Kazama, the Prime Minister; an as-yet-unidentified woman introduced to him by Yonekura; and Shidzue Ishimoto, a Miiko and longtime friend of the Imperial family. If anyone is advising Yasuhito, it's probably these folks—they all seem to support him, at least.

- Kamiko

• It's got to be Yamatetsu. Hell, with them pulling the strings on the Emperor, Japan is going to get awfully interesting.

- Happyjan

• I wouldn't be so sure. It could just as easily be the Yakuza, Ryumyo, or any number of other contenders. One thing is for sure; I wouldn't want to be Yasuhito. His life expectancy has got to be measured in days.

- Spellbinder

• You'd be surprised. Whispered talk says that there has already been one attempt on his life. I understand that somebody tried to kill him with magic just before his coronation. Apparently the magician in question died rather horribly—autopsy was something of a moot point.

- Debear

RIDING THE TIGER

(Begin Log : Japan SIG : 11 March 2062 at 05:20:47 PST)

- So what's the story in Japan right now, folks?
- Muchacho

• Where to start? As far as I know Shiawase is back in the Emperor's good graces, though how they managed that, I don't know.

- Maxus

• Deceptively easily, actually. Tadashi Shiawase has betrothed his daughter Hitomi to the Emperor, to be consummated on the day after his sixteenth birthday. I'm not sure who had the leverage in that bargain, but apparently Hitomi is not happy about the arrangement, not leastwise due to the fact that she is almost six years older than Yasuhito. I doubt that Tadashi really cares all that much—for the political advantage of having an Empress in the family, I think he would have given his daughter to the Universal Brotherhood.

- Neon Flower

• So, Shiawase's buddying up to the Imperial family. That must make the rest of the corps in Japan something less than joyously happy.

- Dark Father

• Possibly, but the rest of the corps probably don't want to be too close to the Emperor in case he burns out and detonates spectacularly—he is unpredictable to say the least. Shiawase has well and truly got the tiger by the tail now; they're going to have to hang on while he takes them for a ride. Spirits alone know why they made such an uncharacteristically bold decision.

• Disconnected

• To add insult to injury, Yonekura has just recruited several oni to fill out the traditional Imperial guard. This has come as a huge shock for the pampered nobility; most of them would never have even seen a kawarukito until Yonekura shoved them so blatantly in their face. It has been very interesting watching some of the Kuge do everything possible to avoid even acknowledging their existence. This can be a difficult proposition when there's two meters of oni blocking your way into the throne room, wearing traditional Samurai armor and holding a drawn katana.

• Neko

• Economically, if not socially, Japan is at least settling down and getting back on track. The share market is edging back over the mark it was at when Unzen blew, and the corps are starting to look further afield than domestic politics. Obviously the playing field has shifted dramatically in the past year. There's now an open rebellion in the Philippines and San Francisco is no longer wholly under their control. It will be interesting to see what they make of this brave new world.

• Ainu

• The Imperial Marines are tooling up again as well. They're no longer really needed on disaster relief. The corporations have been petitioning the government to redeploy them to their old bases to secure their territorial interests, but the Emperor has so far used his new influence to block those requests.

• Mushin

• Yeah, now they've been ordered to help rebuild Japan. Most of the Army troops provide security around still-dangerous or unstable areas to keep citizens from wandering in, while the engineering corps builds bridges, reconstructs dams, and generally helps put the nation back together. The Navy and Marines are performing salvage missions all around the islands, as well as search-and-rescue stuff. The Air Force is helping to determine the exact extent of the damage from above, and performing fire-fighting duties where needed from the air. All in all, I'd say they're being more useful than they ever have before.

• Snowblind

• Remember that the military owes personal loyalty to the Emperor, and that bushido is something they take very seriously indeed. He is also keeping them at home to use as a big

sledgehammer to keep the corps in line. I doubt Yasuhito will be in much of a hurry to send them too far from home until he's got his own political situation a bit more in line.

• Dark Father

• To a casual observer it may appear that Yasuhito is making a lot of waves for no good reason. There has, however, been one common agenda in all of his actions—to keep his enemies off-balance and distracted, while he transforms the role of Emperor from a purely symbolic role to one with real teeth in the Diet. Japan will be interesting to watch over the next few years.

• Sun Tzu II

• How many fourteen-year-old boys would be capable of this? There has to be somebody advising him and pulling his strings. I can't believe that he hasn't been deposed or simply killed by now. Who is it that wants him in power?

• Defcon

• Well, you can't just depose him. The Japanese people are paying too much attention to the ongoing drama for that. They need at least a sham of constitutional monarchy. As for killing him, they've tried that—repeatedly. I think that the tally so far is two shootings, three poisonings, one bomb, two attempted magical assassinations and an "accidental fall" from a four-story building, almost all by professional assassins. So far, he has inexplicably escaped them all utterly unharmed, despite any collateral damage. It's no wonder that his apparent divinity is slowly becoming more accepted. What do you do with a divine Emperor you can't get rid of, except accommodate him?

• Izanagi

• According to my sources, the bomb and one shooting can actually be linked to Yasuhito himself, through several layers of deception, of course. I think he was setting things up to make himself look divine, and all the real attempts were just icing on the cake. That still doesn't explain how he keeps surviving, though.

• Silverback

• Well folks, the end result of all of this is that the "old" Japan is disappearing like mist. Things are changing at a bewildering rate. For us shadowrunners this will mean lots of opportunity, whether or not you're Japanese—or even human. The other megacorps will be looking to open up niche markets in the land of the Rising Sun, and it's going to be hard-fought all the way. They're going to need lots of people to do their dirty work. Not to mention all of the fur that will fly as the corps and the Emperor fight for voting control in the Diet. The word on the streets is that Japan is beautiful this time of year.

• Neon Flower

CALIFORNIA UBER ALLES



This one comes to us hot off the presses, chummers. With all the fallout from the appearance of SURGE, shedim zombie attacks, dragon rampages and Japan-shaking natural disasters, many of us completely missed the withdrawal of Japanese Imperial troops from the city of San Francisco, as well as the Philippines, Australia and Peru. Naturally, the Bay Area Japanacorp were not pleased to see their private army waltz off to the homeland, leaving their city wide open to the kawaruhito wolves. Lucky for them, they seem to have found a renegade Imperial officer to take care of matters.

With all of the miles of cutting-edge research sitting right in Silicon Valley campuses, you can bet Damien Knight was paying attention to the situation. Never being one to let others gnaw away at his corporate empire, Knight has planted a sizable obstacle between the renegade Imperial troops and the Valley—though Ares seems to care less what happens to the rest of the CalFree State. Naturally, Knight's soldiers have the best intel on the San Francisco scene—and such data just happens to have found its way into my inbox. Commenting is on, so please add any relevant data you have to this posting. We need more angles than just Ares' on this.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 27 November 2061 at 12:02:38 (PST)

CHAOS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Situational Evaluation for Tactical Operations

Ares Macrotechnology

Lt. Col. L. Ritter

22 November 2061

As I'm sure all the parties receiving this evaluation are aware, all hell has broken loose in San Francisco. This evaluation exists to give you a greater idea of the depth of this hell. Three major factors have contributed to this situation. The first was the earthquake that struck the Bay Area on October 27. San Francisco itself has long been designed to withstand earthquakes and came out of it mostly unharmed. The majority of the damage was suffered in the less protected Berkeley/Oakland sprawl east of the bay. The second factor was the much more devastating earthquake and volcanic eruption that struck Japan on the same date. This crisis led to a recall of all Imperial Japanese troops by Japan's Diet, in the Emperor's name. Rather than aid-



ing in the repair and restoration of the Bay area, the Japanese Imperial State ordered a full withdrawal of military assets from the San Francisco Bay area. Ares Macrotechnology was immediately aware of this order and made plans to reposition corporate assets to maximize our response to this situation. However, the third factor—the bloodless coup led by Colonel Keiji Saito—took even Ares HQ by surprise. Saito has refused to withdraw the forces now under his command, in open defiance to the Emperor's orders.

• I don't think Saito's coup was as bloodless as Ares thinks. The way I heard it went down, about half of the Imperial Marines had already moved out, including all the top brass. Saito was left behind to bring up the rear. When he issued the order to halt, chaos reigned for a few hours. Someone in Japan gave the order to have Saito arrested, but the I-Marines that tried were gunned down. Most of the troops that remained were loyal to Saito, but he allegedly gave those that weren't the opportunity to leave—sadly, the first ship out sunk like a bowling ball, all hands lost. No one else left after that. I also heard that Mitsuhamas troops and drones helped to secure certain facilities until Saito's dictatorship was solidified. And, of course, no one's seen the old Imperial Governor, Shiro Kawanaga, since Saito seized power (though rumors persist that he's in hiding, craftily eluding a massive manhunt).

• Wallfly

EARTHQUAKES, VOLCANOES SHAKE PACIFIC RIM

Posted 10-27-61

Seattle (IN)—A series of unprecedented seismic activity shook the world today, setting off earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tidal waves around the Pacific Rim. The island of Kyushu, Japan was hit the hardest as the Enzu Volcano erupted, burying the city of Shimabara and coating the nation in ash. Tidal waves also devastated the area, causing millions of nuyen in damages and claiming untold lives.

Other areas have also been struck, though reports are still filtering in. The Ngauruhoe volcano in New Zealand erupted, spewing hot ash and cinders and starting a series of uncontrolled blazes. Mount Suribachi has also erupted, covering large segments of Iwo Jima and forcing an evacuation of the island. Debris was spewed by several volcanic vents in the Aleutian Islands, smashing cars, crushing houses and injuring 14. Tidal waves and volcanic explosions have stripped away whole segments of Indonesian coastline, thousands are missing and believed dead. At least six volcanoes have enveloped the Philippines in a haze of hot ash and debris. An earthquake rattled the Bay Area, causing structural damage in San Francisco and devastating some areas of Berkeley and Oakland. The Santa Maria Quezaltenango volcano in Aztlan has scoured the countryside with waves of lava, and toxic fumes emitted near Concepción have claimed over 50 victims.

• What's this about Ares' plan to "reposition corporate assets?" Can someone cut through the corp-speak on this one for me?
• Crash Test Dummy

• Since I'm not an Ares executive, I can't be sure on this one, but I'm willing to bet my last nuyen that Ares was planning on moving Knight Errant forces into San Francisco when the Japanese left. Why? Because San Francisco is the single most important foothold for Japanese corporations in North America. By putting Ares security on the street under the guise of "riot control" (an excuse that worked great for them after Dunkelzahn's assassination), they could effectively put the squeeze on the Japanacops. Keep in mind that San Francisco was hit by the tail end of a series of earthquakes that shook the entire spine of California. Though San Francisco was hardly damaged compared to Los Angeles, if all of the Japanese troops had pulled out, that city would have been a powder keg just waiting to explode. If Knight Errant were the only thing sitting between the Japanacops and rioting mobs, they'd be in a great position to call in favors.

• The Wyrms Ouroboros

• That theory makes a lot more sense when you consider that Lieutenant Colonel Ritter arrived in Silicon Valley at the end of October, well before Saito took control of San Francisco. Ares definitely had something up their sleeve before they were forced to bring in the troops in November.

• Demonseed Elite

• Who is this Ritter guy anyway? He must be pretty important if he's writing up this evaluation, I'd think.

• Selkie

• I'll tell you this: Ritter's good at burying his skeletons—luckily I'm better at digging them up. Lloyd Ritter is a long-time Ares operative who comes from a long-time Ares family. Prime company-man material. He holds the well-deserved rank of Lieutenant Colonel after serving in many successful and grueling campaigns for Ares, including a string of operations as a worldwide Ares bug-hunter after the Chicago incident. This guy led the charge that shut down a sizeable hive in Istanbul. Currently he's the man in charge of one of the Knight Errant battalions stationed in the Silicon Valley, specifically the Signals Intelligence and Recon battalion—which is why he's responsible for gathering this intelligence for Ares HQ.

• Marley

• Ritter has also run the shadows by the name of Grey Knight. And he also has the Talent.

• Grim Faerie

• And here I thought you didn't kiss and tell.

• Grey Knight



Colonel Saito is now Protectorate General Saito—a promotion he gave himself—and single-handedly controls the two divisions of AWOL Japanese Imperial Marine forces stationed in San Francisco. General Saito's military history in Peru, the Philippines and finally San Francisco shows him as a capable soldier and tough leader. He comes from a long line of Japanese soldiers, and in fact the Saito family name originates with one of the ancient Japanese samurai families. As a military commander, he is definitely not to be underestimated. He understands his troops and they are loyal to him for it, a quality that Imperial Governor Kawanaga lacked. In addition, he is also a focused tactician and strategist, as has been proven by his skilled deployment of troops since the coup.

• Okay, let's play the Who's Who game again. Colonel, oops, I mean General Saito is everything Ritter said he is. He was certainly not the most diplomatic soldier in the Japanese Imperial Marines, a trait that kept him from ever earning a spot as an Imperial General until he decided to take it into his own hands. He is strict and gruff, a member of the old hard-liner school of Japanese soldier that has been sustained since World War II and makes up the strong backbone of the Imperial military. He is a man of decisive action, extreme measures and strong results, which goes a long way to explain why Ares is stationing a military presence on the border of Silicon Valley.

• Marley

• Saito also served a stint as military commander of Yomi Island—where Japan exiles all of their metahumans. Like most Yomi commanders, he treated the metahumans there like insects and had no qualms executing troublemakers or letting hundreds die of malnutrition or malaria.

• Krathis

General Saito's actions since his rise to power can be classified as aggressive and therefore encourage a strong Ares military presence in the Silicon Valley area. They are also politically motivated, as Saito himself has verbalized an anti-metahuman and intensely patriotic agenda, very much in line with the Japanese Empire's "Yamato Spirit"—the belief in the superiority of a pure Japanese people. While usually an AWOL force would run dry on supplies quickly and therefore lose steam, our intelligence indicates that Saito is being funded and supported by the corporations that comprise the San Francisco Corporate Council: Mitsuham Computer Technologies, Renraku Computer Systems, Shiawase Corporation, PacRim Bank and the Financial Services Corporation.

Our intelligence also indicates that Saito is receiving backing from elements within international human supremacist organizations as well as partisan factions within the Japanese government. The corporations clearly back him to maintain power within the region, while the human supremacist organizations view Saito as a way to gain power and numbers. The partisan factions are believed to be motivated in opposition to the Emperor's policies.

• Obviously Ares didn't know about the child Emperor at the time of this. Those partisan factions back Saito in the hopes that they can use him to usurp Yasuhito in the future.

• Ginsu

• "Elements within international human supremacist organizations." Let me dispense with the suit-and-soldier speak here. General Saito is in bed with the Human Nation. He is finally giving them the opportunity they've been waiting for, a chance at an actual eugenic nation built for pure humanity. They've organized support from their rich and powerful cronies all over the globe to make sure no one makes any hasty moves towards toppling Saito's protectorate.

• Anonymous

• We have officially entered the realm of paranoid conspiracy.

• Critic

• The Human Nation backing goes a long way towards explaining why the California government in Sacramento is capitulating with Saito's regime. The heavily armed Japanese marines sitting right inside the capital city finishes off the explanation.

• Eponine

• Capitulating? The puppets in the government didn't even bat an eye at this whole affair until Saito's troops were marching right into Sacramento. And by then, it was too late.

• Local Yokel

• Actually, the government is doing what it can to buck Saito's orders, but it doesn't have much breathing room. I'm not painting them out to be saints—because they aren't—but they aren't big fans of Saito's troops walking around in their city. They can't do much, but they have years of practice with the talent of smiling and nodding while sneaking someone in around your back.

• Arnold

• Human Nation? Useless government puppets? The metahumans of the California can't be taking this whole thing lying down! Now is their time to fight back—1.5 MP Deleted by SysOp.

• Mad Hatter

• You know the rules—keep the recruiting drives to the appropriate SIGs.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

With an inexhaustible supply line and high troop morale, General Saito has aggressively expanded his control over this region of California, securing the Bay Area and sending forces as far as Sacramento. Saito's obvious intention here, in addition to having easy access to the anti-metahuman groups of the region, was to capture the three large air force bases in the area. McClellan in Sacramento was the most valuable capture



for Saito's forces, but he also struck Beale Air Force Base in Marysville and Travis in Fairfield. Only the forces under the combined command of General Torres and myself have prevented Saito from expanding southward.

If General Saito were to concentrate his attacks on our Silicon Valley line, we would be at a distinct tactical disadvantage and more than likely would lose any prolonged engagement. When it comes down to numbers, Saito's forces outnumber ours ten to one, even though he only retained half of the Imperial troops that had been stationed in San Francisco. With his capture of three of the region's air force bases, Saito will soon enjoy vast air superiority over our forces. With our request for further reinforcements rejected, we are blessed in that General Saito has concentrated his expansion eastward and has had to quell partisan revolutionaries in areas he already controls. His forces have tested ours in small border skirmishes, but he has not committed any sizeable force against us and is not likely to as long as he continues into the Central Valley. It is quite possible that the Japanese megacorporations, having lost the element of surprise against us, fear Ares accusations against them in the Corporate Court if they were to attack Silicon Valley now.

- If those ten-to-one calculations are correct, judging by the troop sizes of Saito's two divisions, that means that Ares is sporting a force of about twenty-five hundred troops. Isn't that pretty large for a corporate military presence?

- Static

- Yes, it is very large, but keep in mind that this is Ares we are talking about. A good portion of the Ares troops are actually Knight-Errant "security" detachments armed with milspec gear supplied to them by Ares Arms. Ritter himself is leading an intelligence and recon battalion consisting of about five hundred troops. The other troops fall under the umbrella command of General Frank Torres, and are made up of two armor and two mechanized infantry battalions. These guard the border between Saito's forces and Silicon Valley, specifically concentrating on the highway routes that enter the Valley from the north.

- Stillman

- The Ares forces are well trained and well equipped, but they are definitely only playing a defensive game here, at least outside the shadows. They don't have the firepower to challenge Saito offensively, especially since their request for reinforcements was denied. Damien Knight tried to convince the UCAS government that sending peacekeeping forces into California was in their best interests, but with all the chaos coming down this year, the UCAS flatly refused. Knight appealed to the idea of Californian Reunification, but in reality all he wanted was access to all the Japanese corporate assets locked up behind Saito's troops.

- Raygun

Tactically, an offensive military campaign of any sort against General Saito's forces is absolutely out of the question. Our well-fortified position in Silicon Valley, however, gives us

a sound launching point for covert operations against General Saito. Unstable elements within Saito's own territory supply us with allies and covers. On the eastern side of the San Francisco Bay, specifically within Berkeley and Oakland, a skilled rebellion operates against Saito's forces. The rebellion is made primarily of metahumans and metahuman sympathizers whose ranks have swollen since the appearance of SURGE. Though limited in resources and reach, they have been quite effective within the Berkeley/Oakland sprawl and they provide cover for the insertion of our shadow operatives into General Saito's Protectorate.

- Hrmf. Now that the Metahuman People's Army has proof that Ares is using infiltrators to maneuver their own operatives, they'll clamp down on that angle.

- Slingshot

Part of General Saito's military campaign has included destroying criminal elements within his Protectorate, which has threatened our ability to use the San Francisco underworld as a cover for covert operations. After further investigation, Saito's claims to be cleaning up crime are only a surface facade; in reality he has simply been assisting the Yakuza in destroying their competition. Thanks to this military aid, the San Francisco Yakuza have nearly wiped out the Worczek Mafia family. However, our intelligence has discovered that the Chinese Triads are still operating strong within the Berkeley/Oakland sprawl, working hand-in-hand with the revolutionary forces. The Triads have secured their survival by supplying weapons and intelligence to the revolutionary forces and have proven willing to work with our operatives in exchange for military hardware. This has ensured our reach into at least one entry point within the shadows of Saito's territory.

However, with the growing pressure upon the revolutionary forces and the security on the Bay Bridge, we have secured an alternate entry point by using our links with the pirates of the Big Sur. By supplying these pirates, we have encouraged them to move northwards to take advantage of the situation in San Francisco. We support them whenever possible and in exchange they have given us the ability to sneak past Saito's small naval presence and land covert operatives right onto the docks of San Francisco. This entry route is more valuable to us, but we are using it more sparingly to prevent the pirates from attracting too much attention from General Saito. Combined, these two links have allowed us to run successful covert campaigns into Saito's Protectorate. Further reports will be generated to evaluate our impact upon his regime.

- What links to the pirates is Ritter talking about? Since when has Ares had allies within the Big Sur pirates? And since when have any of the Big Sur pirates operated so far north as San Francisco?

- Wipeout

- Grania O'Malley's pirates have been operating in San Francisco of late, but only since Saito's forces have taken over. Before the Japanese pulled the majority of their naval assets out of the area, it was just too dangerous for the pirates to make a

living there. But now there are plenty of opportunities for a skilled pirate like O'Malley. There are shipments that need smuggling and rogue Imperial naval vessels that need plundering. Life is good for the pirate queen.

- Reality Czech
- Lucrative biz isn't the only reason why O'Malley is up there. Y'know those links that were mentioned? You can thank Arthur Vogel for that. You may have forgotten about the dwarf in Ares' boardroom, but that dwarf has been just as busy as Knight securing power in California. After all, the majority of Vogel's ecoterrorist buddies are centered near the Big Sur, which extends Ares' reach in this area considerably—a reach that extends all the way to O'Malley's pirate empire, since O'Malley has been linked to pro-green policlubs since her youth.
- Hazeldean
- Total bulldrek. O'Malley's no more a part of any environmental movement than the agricorps. She's just out to make a buck.
- Skeptic
- Think about it. What other links could Ritter be talking about? Vogel's links to O'Malley through his eco-action friends make perfect sense. It's all one happy family.
- Green Machine

• There's another wildcard in this whole situation that Ritter forgot to mention: the California Rangers. At the moment these guys are hardly a blip on anyone's radar, but I'd keep an eye on them. The mess in California has them splitting six ways to Sunday, and they could tilt the game in favor of any side. Saito has closed down the Rangers' Sacramento and Berkeley headquarters and has secured the major highways running through the protectorate. This has led more than a few of the local rangers to join up with some unlikely allies—namely the smugglers and pirates. However, the rest are still listening to the word from Sacramento, and are staying out of the mess with General Saito.

- Panzer Man
- The Rangers are an independent lot—don't write off the ones sticking to policy as useless. In fact, Ares has been in dealings with some of the Rangers, exchanging mil-spec gear for a local and skilled mobile fighting force. I'd go so far as to say that maybe the Sacramento puppets are encouraging this; the more fighting going on, the less anyone can clamp down on them and the more opportunity they have to switch to whatever side is on top.
- Ranger Rick

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM!

• If you were to walk the streets of the Berkeley/Oakland sprawl right now, there are four things you would not be able to miss. The first is the damage from the earthquake; wide cracks running through the middle of the streets and buildings leaning on broken foundations. The second is the angry looks in the eyes of

the metahuman population there; the faces of a people fighting for their own right to existence in their home. The third is a barrage of pro-metahuman, anti-Saito, anti-Japanese graffiti—from scrawled slogans to full-wall mural pieces. The fourth is a virtual snowfall of white pamphlets distributed haphazardly through the city by the Metahuman People's Army, pamphlets that carry a message of revolution. In the interests of all of you throughout the world who might be sympathetic to their plight, I've decided to transcribe one of these pamphlets onto Shadowland. Make of it what you will.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 29 November 2061 at 04:35:12 (PST)

Open your eyes! Look around you! It can't be denied that we are at war. A war for our very lives. Ever since the Japanese Marines arrived in 2036, metahumanity has been persecuted; enslaved by their Cultural Protection Laws and rejected by their people. For decades we have lived a second-class life, spit on and beaten by those who think they are better than we are because they don't have pointed ears, tusks, or horns. Peaceful solutions were attempted to give voice to our cause, our cause of equality between the races of humanity and metahumanity. No progress was ever made, and in the meantime thousands of metahumans paid with their freedom and their lives.

Now our plight has only gone from bad to worse. The rogue Japanese soldier Keiji Saito, one of the overseers who has denied us our rightful existence for decades, has claimed San Francisco as his own empire. An empire built upon hate and murder, an empire built upon the corpses of metahumans. The General's own words resonate with his bloodlust, his desire to destroy our lives. The following is translated from the speech General Saito delivered after he overthrew the Imperial Governor:

"We will not retreat with our tail between our legs. We will not crawl home to a shattered island and a honorless emperor. We will not allow the greatness of the Japanese Empire to crumble and be destroyed. I, General Keiji Saito, will not allow it. Until the time comes when the Emperor wakes from his confused daze and realizes his errors in judgment, we shall hold down San Francisco as a Protectorate of Japan. It is our station in life to keep San Francisco out of the hands of criminal metahuman mobs. Their wickedness is a perversion of all that the Japanese Empire stands for, an insult to the Yamato Spirit that binds us together. They may send the rest of the world to hell, but the diseased and wretched metahumans will not take San Francisco with them."

• C'mon, Keiji, tell us how you really feel.

• Bung

• If Saito is so rabidly anti-metahuman, Tir Tairngire must drive him nuts. A whole nation ruled by metahumans, not too far to his north.

• Pablo

• Maybe this expansion of his includes a plan to invade the Tir?

• Outtatown

• Ha Ha! If the market for shadowrunners ever stalls, maybe you should try for stand-up comedy. Do you honestly think that Saito's ragtag army of traitors could possibly take on the full military of the Tir? You must be cracked.

• Tears-of-a-Clown

• This is no laughing matter. While the General's forces could not possibly survive a full invasion into Tir Tairngire, his popularity is growing and his ranks are only likely to swell as he takes more of the Central Valley. He is building a military industry of hate in California, hate directed at a people. Another man once did the same thing. His name was Hitler.

• Blake

Saito's jackbooted thugs control the land from San Francisco to Sacramento and his hateful taint reaches even farther. Throughout the Bay Area and the Central Valley, metahumans are arrested for the crime of their identity and are shipped to metahuman ghettos that lie outside the cities of San Francisco and Sacramento. There, Saito's guards kill with impunity, burying metahumans in mass graves bearing no names of the victimized.

We can not stand and take this any longer. We must fight back to preserve what lives we have left. We must take the fight to Saito in any way we can and show him that metahumanity will not just roll over and die. The Metahuman People's Army will lead the fight. We will strike with precision and skill, our hearts burning with pride for who we are. All those who are willing to fight for a better tomorrow, all those who are willing to suffer so that our children will know a better world, spread the word of the Metahuman People's Army. Raise the cry, join our ranks, and fight for your freedom!

• I'm usually pretty skeptical of propaganda pamphlets, so can someone give me the straight story? Are there really metahuman internment camps being built in the Central Valley?

• Architect

• I'm in Sacramento now, and I've never been more relieved to be human. Saito's troops walked right over the Californian troops guarding Sacramento. Of course, the CalFree grunts have been under-trained, under-equipped and pretty much out of fuel for years now due to budget cuts (read: politicians skimming the funds). Even worse, the troops suffered occasional home-brewed terrorist attacks from racist locals—locals who now want to see Saito's regime clean up the metahumans once and for all. Saito's troops have most of the Sacramento government under house arrest and they have been going door to door to arrest metahumans. But I haven't seen any internment camps here in the city.

• Lefty

• Look west of the Brannan Island State Recreational Area. There are at least two freshly built metahuman ghettos there.

I've seen them dropping off truckloads of metahumans behind the razorwire fences.

• Widow

• Life isn't easy even for the metahumans not shipped to the ghettos yet. Saito hasn't had the resources to clean out the Berkeley/Oakland sprawl, but even there metahumans are spit on and insulted from day to day. Most humans will not even acknowledge a meta there for fear of being labeled a sympathizer and suffering the same fate. The MPA is trying hard to recruit, but it is as if the souls of most of the metahumans there have been sucked dry by fear.

• Local Yokel

• Help is coming though. The Metahuman People's Army has been using the online People's University to spread the word of the metahuman plight in California. It's starting to attract attention in the shadows.

• Eye Spy

• But will it be too late by the time anyone acts?

• Question Mark

FALLEN IS THE CITY OF ANGELS

• Don't fool yourselves, chummers. Southern California was hit as hard as Northern Cal-not-so-Free during the recent months of chaos. Los Angeles, home of the Hollywood "Dream Industry" has become the focal point of a political firestorm worthy of a big-budget sim-epic. I sought out a friend of mine down in L.A. to give us the scoop on what is going on. Take it with a grain or two of salt, he's a bit dramatic. But then again, who isn't down in Tinseltown?

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 20 December 2061 at 23:10:58 (PST)

"After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.'

—Revelations 18:1-3

by Star-Struck

Babylon is indeed fallen, and it's hard to imagine these days that Revelations wasn't speaking about Los Angeles. The past month brought the City of Angels to its knees, age-old fault-lines (both political and geological) finally exploding with devastating force. We should have heard the warnings, but instead we dealt with the rumblings the same way Los Angeles always deals with problems—by sticking our heads in the sand and throwing endless parties.



• That's for sure. Look at El Infierno. Instead of solving a festering social problem, the rich folks just walled it up and turned up their party music, hoping it would go away if they ignored it.

• Sick Haxx

• That came back and bit them in the hoop, huh?

• Lemon

As the comet came closer to Earth, the end-of-the-world parties got crazier. Determined to outdo the past feverish manias that always came with Halley's Comet, Los Angeles turned on the hype machines and rolled out the red carpet. Comet parties were the latest big thing, with each sim-star trying to top the next with outlandish and totally indulgent entertainment. Nuyen flowed like water at these Bacchanalian events, while families perished from hunger just over the wall in the slums.

We deserved a reckoning just for our callousness and pride. But the world wasn't done sending us warnings, and Los Angeles wasn't done ignoring them. SURGE hit us right at the apex of the comet parties, when the entire wealthy half of the city was living one long celebration for the arrival of the heavenly messenger. SURGE slammed the "beautiful people" of Los Angeles, a slap in the face to the sim-star system that had been the status quo here. In a matter of days, careers were ruined and new stars were born. Winona Flying Horse sprouted horns and claws (making some old jokes at her expense ironically come true) and locked herself away in her Studio City palace, her career over as a simsense starlet. A few nobodies ran the wave of SURGE, capitalizing on the shock value of their sudden mutations. Clarisa Rogers, a former hairdresser and UCLA student, suddenly scored a three-picture contract with Amalgamated Studios when her skin, hair and eyes turned a deep black and made her into a true vixen of the night.

• SURGE shook things up in Los Angeles, but it never saw the riots that plagued the rest of the world. Riots just don't happen in the over-constructed neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Some folks just cashed in while other became rejected and went into hiding. Nothing violent happens here unless it is a staged publicity stunt.

• Working Girl

• You must live with the better half, because that sure isn't what happened in East L.A. SURGE sparked off gang wars like we haven't seen in decades. Every half-wit, machismo-infected punk used SURGE as an excuse to off his neighboring gang or even the former leader of his own. Nuyen may have flowed like water in Studio City, but blood was flowing down in the skids.

• Angeleno

Disaster after disaster struck the world, and Los Angeles became Nero, fiddling while Rome burnt to the ground. Armageddon came to Earth then, erupting with fury throughout the world. The seas raged and the mountains exploded and Los Angeles just looked on with glee, intent on celebrating the final days of the world. California fell apart around us, but we never lifted a finger to help. The studio execs and simsense stars couldn't be bothered with those troubles. Besides, what had the rest

of California ever done for us? Why should we care? Party on.

Soon after, our sins were repaid. Los Angelenos had ignored the tremors that rumbled under Los Angeles since October, passing them off as minor temblors and no need for concern. Then, on December 2nd, an earthquake that rated 8.5 on the Richter scale tore through Los Angeles. It was the most violent in Californian history, smiting us for our sins of pride and our lifestyles of indulgence. Buildings came crashing down and thousands were killed. The earthquake didn't care if you were rich or poor, human or metahuman. It killed indiscriminately, bringing our own mansions and studios down around us.

Worse yet, it brought down the walls that we had built to ignore our own problems. We were forced to look upon those we had ignored for so long—and then the true harrowing began. The poor and ignored flooded over the crumbled walls and into the sculptured gardens of Studio City and Fun City. Like starving wolves they ran wild through the metroplex, looting, stealing and killing. Taking what had been taken from them.

• As over-dramatic as he sounds, Star-Struck is not too far from the truth. It was hell on earth. The wealthy locked themselves up in their mansions, praying that the roving gangs of looters would skip over their home. Corporate security forces stood firm and defended their studios, firing without hesitation upon rioters and even peaceful locals. Injured victims of the earthquake slowly died under suffocating rubble, because emergency vehicles were being held up or lit on fire. Final death toll: over 10,000.

• Demonseed Elite

The wealthy neighborhoods of studio and aerospace executives, the true rulers of Los Angeles, became armed camps. Hoping to somehow come out of this hell alive, these powers begged for help, begged for the survival of Los Angeles. First they pleaded to the California administration, but their cries were ignored. What government remained in California were now lackeys of Imperial General Saito and couldn't care less about the troubles so far south in L.A. Then they pleaded to the City Authority, but they maintained an attitude that Los Angeles could take care of itself (apparently their rooms have no windows). So instead, the spin-doctors and industrial barons of Los Angeles went directly to the UCAS, Ute, and Pueblo and made a desperate request for assistance.

All three nations would have loved to waltz into Los Angeles as heroes, but all of them had been heavily taxed by the events of the year. As it turned out, Pueblo won by default, simply because it was much quicker on the draw. On December 8th, Pueblo Corporate Council forces moved into Los Angeles. The cavalry had arrived.

• Star-Struck, like most Los Angelenos, doesn't know the full story behind the PCC's arrival. Pueblo moved fast, that much is true. But they had some help that allowed them to move so fast. Locally, a lot of the media magnates were in favor of a close tie to Pueblo's thriving technology development and many of the industrial powers saw money to be made in supplying Pueblo's



top-class military. They even went so far as to use their security forces to help Pueblo hold down the city, hoping the favor would be remembered later.

- Raygun

- The UCAS has been pretty quiet about the whole incident, probably because the voters wouldn't have backed the idea of aiding California right now anyway, since the UCAS is knee-deep in drek as it is. The Ute nation is absolutely livid, citing the Pueblo move as an insult to the accords of the Sovereign Tribal Council. In reality, however, those accords haven't meant anything in decades and Ute is just upset that Pueblo got there first.

- Windsinger

- Pueblo's invasion was boosted by the use of a Mojave military base that was once property of Fuchi Industrial Electronics. The Pueblo forces used the base as a forward supply and stationing point, allowing them to move their forces in so much quicker than anyone else and win the prize.

- Slim

- Fuchi's been long dead, though. Who's been operating the base?

- Crazy Eddie

- Ownership of the Mojave base transferred to Novatech after the corporate war died down. Novatech's official plans are to use the base for a testing ground for milspec weaponry, but with all the restructuring they've been doing, they haven't gotten around to it yet.

- Jammer

- Looks like they found a more profitable use for it. How much you wanna bet that the PCC cut some kind of deal with Novatech in order to use the base as a staging ground?

- Killroy

- It's obvious what the nature of the deal is. Novatech wants an in with the high-tech computer companies in the PCC. Novatech helps Pueblo take Los Angeles and in exchange the Pueblo Corporate Council licenses all of its new cutting-edge Matrix tech to Novatech subsidiaries.

- New England Patriot

- I don't know about that. I think the prize that Novatech has its eyes on is Los Angeles itself. Though the quake and riot destroyed a good chunk of L.A.'s economy, there are still billions of nuyen worth of industry in entertainment and aerospace. Walker Aerodesign, a Novatech company, would love to get its hands on Los Angeles. And exclusive deals with L.A.'s studios would give a serious boost to Novatech's consumer entertainment electronics field. I'm waiting for Los Angeles to become Novatech Boston West.

- Orange Stripe

Now Los Angeles is Pueblo territory. We paid for our arrogance with our independence. Now Native American soldiers patrol our streets and repair our shattered city. The Pueblo have expanded their nation through the Mojave Desert all the way to L.A. But will they stay? Aztlan and Ute have threatened with retaliation for Pueblo's bold move and Pueblo soldiers speak of ghost stories and men going missing in the haunted Mojave Desert. For now, Los Angeles' reckoning seems to be over. Now the question is whether we have learned any lessons.

- Pueblo's got a good military, but it's hard for me to believe that the Azzies haven't rolled in their own forces. Why hasn't Aztlan made a move against them?

- Sandsnake

- Right as Pueblo swooped in, the Azzies did actually make some half-hearted moves towards Los Angeles, but they didn't get far. They simply didn't have enough forces mobilized to match the Pueblo invasion and their hoops were soundly thrashed. Aztlan slunk back to its own turf, but they are still taking a few potshots at Pueblo now and then. And since then, Aztlan's been pre-occupied with problems elsewhere ...

- Diego

- They planned to, believe me. But keep reading this file, chum. They got distracted later on and haven't been able to tackle anything since. Ute, in the meantime, is just talking tough. They don't really want to tangle with Pueblo's military unless absolutely necessary. But at the same time they do not want the world to think they support Pueblo's move. So harsh language has been tossed back and forth between Ute and Pueblo, threats that we can only hope never materialize. But it has certainly destroyed any image of the Native American nations being unified.

- South of the Border

- The only obstacle to Pueblo's efforts to control all of Southern California has been the Mojave Desert. It's expansive, deadly, and full of a lot of independent folks who prefer not to be ruled by any government. The only friends the PCC has there are the Mojave base and Palm Springs. The posh corporate enclave cut a deal with Pueblo quickly, since many of LA's beleaguered wealthy ran there to hide.

- The Thirtieth Palm

- Those Mojave ghost stories that Star-Struck mentioned are a big deal among the PCC soldiers right now. Thirty-five soldiers have disappeared into the desert since the Pueblo occupation began, lost despite all the tracking technology they've been using. The soldiers stationed in the Mojave talk about the "Siren of the Sands" luring soldiers away with magic and eventually stealing their life from them. Sounds like a bunch of paranoia to me, but something's definitely making soldiers vanish out there.

- Spooks

YUCATÁN WAR



With so many events shaking the world up in the past six months, it's easy to miss small struggles taking place in hidden areas of the world. When you live in the sprawl, it takes an effort to be concerned about a dirty war being fought in the jungles of a country half the world away. Well, it's my job to bring these matters to your attention, to tell the tales that no else will, and to point out exactly why you should care. So listen up. There's a nasty fight taking place in the Yucatán, and it may affect not just you, but the entire world.

I've assembled several messages that, combined, provide a good background to the war. The first of these was a call for aid that was blitzed to just about every email address in the Matrix. That means your spam filters probably nuked it, or you probably axed it yourself without even looking at it. I recommend you take a closer look, so you can see exactly what our friends in the Yucatán are experiencing. I took the liberty of translating it from the original Spanish. If you know something more about the situation that we don't, feel free to share.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 14 February 2062 at 16:28:05 (PST)

SUPPORT THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE OF THE YUCATÁN!

Posted 02-12-62

"Here we are, the dead. They die again, but this time for a better life."

On the day the Aztlan army massacred hundreds of unarmed civilians, my people, the traditional people of Mexico, began our struggle. After many years suffering the grave conditions of our poverty and the lack of freedom and true democracy, we knew we had to fight for our elementary rights. The bloody slaughter in Campeche in 2050 proved to us that we had to fight in the only way the Aztlan government has left us: armed struggle.

In the dozen years since, we have fought a people's war against the military and cultural oppression of Aztlan. A war for basic respect, metahuman dignity and authentic freedom. From the beginning, our war for liberation has been subject to attacks by repressive government and corporate bodies and military troops. The Aztlan and foreign media, who care little about the truth of our struggle, have also slandered us. But now we are being attacked with an intensity that is genocidal in scope, and so we plead for your support.



• While the Yucatán freedom fighters are largely composed of peasants and traditionals, they've become far more of a serious guerrilla force than this post gives them credit for. They have enough backing from Amazonia, Tir Tairngire and other powers to field top-notch milspec gear and hefty Awakened abilities. They've also been known to employ mercenaries like me.

• Jungle Creeper

• If you buy the Aztlan media spin, the rebel strings are being pulled by foreign interests who are deceiving the Mexican people and are simply out to get poor, poor little Aztlan. The truth is never so simple, but the rebels aren't necessarily shining knights either.

• Beowulf

• They're fighting a just cause in my book, and they've done a good job of it so far, despite the lack of outside attention and support. Many areas of the Yucatán are no-go zones for Azzie troops—the rebels are in control. Elsewhere the Azzies have to keep on their toes, because the rebels excel at guerrilla hit and run warfare. They use all the tricks in the book, and are inventing more every day.

• VC

One week ago today, the Aztlaner army began a major offensive throughout the Yucatán. This invasion has the clear intention of savagely destroying our land and our people. The Aztlaners wish to kill all freedom fighters regardless of the cost in metahuman lives or our beloved country.

As I write this, Aztlan troops are sparing no one in their savage drive to completely eliminate all liberation movements in the Yucatán peninsula. Throughout the Yucatán, they cut down forests, burn crops and demolish entire villages in an effort to crush our already-suffering people, whose spirit could not be broken by the terror tactics the Aztlan government has long employed.

This offensive is more than simple warfare. It is thorough devastation. They raze the jungles that protect our people from their spying devices and they poison the earth so that we may not use it again to grow food and sustain ourselves. They spread defoliants and toxins from aircraft and drones, gas our villages and taint our water supplies with invisible death. They have slain tens of thousands, including our innocent children. They have burned millions of hectares of farmland and jungle. They even slaughter the forest animals. Their cruelty spares no one.

• Since when do peasants hire ad copy hacks to pull people's heartstrings like this? Now I'm not saying I support Aztlan's Yucatán war, but I find this whole "plea for help" a bit suspect. It comes across to me as a poorly staged ploy to give Aztechnology some bad press. Remember that the source isn't exactly unbiased.

• Cynic

• Actually, from what I've heard on the merc grapevine, the account is pretty much telling the truth. I know half a dozen merc units that are getting paid extra to help the Azzies "clean house." Some of those bastards are bloodthirsty monsters, but at least one group is balking at the carnage and excessive brutality being employed.

• Arctic White

• I'm not surprised to hear that the ACS troops have resorted to chemical weapons. Such weapons aren't very useful in conventional warfare since you have to issue gas masks and protective systems to all your troops, and these tend to make troops uncomfortable, less able to coordinate their actions and more likely to panic. But most guerrilla fighters, and above all civilians, are virtually unprotected. Even relatively primitive chemical weapons, such as phosgene or sarin, can be devastating under those conditions, never mind the drek we can produce nowadays. Wiping out an entire town wouldn't be hard, provided you've got decent delivery systems (which is the real trick to using chemical weapons, and incidentally also why terrorist attacks with such weapons usually fail). I don't doubt Aztechnology has the resources.

• Argent

• Let's not forget that even if the civilians somehow survive a chem attack, their livestock probably will not, instantly plunging whole villages into poverty. Add to that the apparent use of strong defoliants, and no crops will grow in the near future, either. After that, the gradual build-up of toxins at the top of the food chain—i.e., in metahumans—will cause all sorts of cancers for a long time to come. Warfare of this sort is very nasty, and will create repercussions years down the line.

• Mad Chemist

• How much land does millions of hectares represent anyway?
• Asphalt

• The entire Seattle Metroplex is about 4,000 square kilometers, or 400,000 hectares. At a quick guess, millions of hectares would be the equivalent of the whole 'plex plus much of the surrounding lands up to the Cascades.

• ASDF

In the face of this outrageous assault, the Mexican people are calling upon people throughout the world to support our struggle. We call upon you to initiate actions in solidarity with our freedom fighters. We call upon all foreign leaders to suspend economic trade to the dictatorial government that seeks to destroy us. We call upon any material support that can be offered, to help throw off the yoke of Aztlan oppression by any means necessary!

The Revolutionary Council of the Flame of Freedom





• Or you could buy some more BTLs. (Lots of “freedom fighters” support their operations with them.)

• Oozin Aah

• I know corps and governments that deal more BTLs than any rebel groups do. Whose interests does keeping people zombified on sims really serve?

• Vitamin X

• Ok, so why now? This may sound harsh, but the civil war has been going on for over ten years. So why didn't Aztlan do this ages ago?

• SuperTech

• First of all, to win a guerrilla war, you need to win the locals over to your side—can't do that by massacring them. Plus outright slaughter is usually pretty bad for foreign PR, which even a country like Aztlan needs to worry about. That's why they haven't done this before.

So why now? I see two reasons: Denver and Los Angeles. When the Big One wrecked LA and the city was lying on its back, begging for mercy, Pueblo pounced on it first. That slotted the Azzies off nicely, and they were gearing up to contest it when blam!—Ghostwalker boots them out of Denver. For over a decade they've managed to handle both the Yucatán insurrection and ongoing border skirmishes with Amazonia and the CAS. But the Azzies are smart enough to know that they can't handle a three-front conflict, so in order to make their moves up north they need to disengage somewhere. Amazonia is unlikely to give up, so the Yucatán rebels got the short straw.

• SWO

• The Azzies have probably had contingency plans for this sort of political situation for some time, so after the Denver debacle, they must have set one in motion that guaranteed a quick victory (of sorts) over their backyard rebels. If nothing else, success will allow them to move lots of experienced troops up north soon. Judging by how quickly the Yucatán offensive started, the chemicals and delivery systems were already stockpiled and quickly moved into position to deploy.

• Arctic White

• I'd like to answer the Revolutionary Council's call for help, but the Yucatán is very far away. Ideas on how I can help?

• Rage

• The easiest way is to simply donate some cred. There are several public donation accounts that you can transfer cred to online (be careful, I'm sure the Azzies monitor them). You can also do some volunteer work for one of the half dozen, above-ground organizations that support the cause. The Free Yucatán Movement has an office in downtown Seattle at 12th Avenue & Olive Street (yes, two blocks from the Aztechnology pyramid—

ironic, eh?). You can also enlist as a volunteer fighter, but you'll need to find a way to get yourself smuggled in. Or you can simply firebomb your local Aztechnology office or Aztlan embassy. Every little bit counts.

• Wreckoon

• I'd think twice before heading down to the Yucatán to lend a hand. It's not fun to operate in an area you're not used to and without your normal resources at hand. At the least, you better speak Spanish and probably some indigenous languages as well.

• Marcos

• The rebels have a lot of support in Latin communities around the sprawl. If you know the right people, you can make the contacts necessary. They're always looking for good arms dealers, and they occasionally hire shadowrunners for runs against Aztechnology. They're paranoid about Azzie spies, though, so expect strict precautions.

• Sin Fronteras

• The Johnsons for these runs are usually not working for the rebels themselves, but for wealthy, independent supporters—the rebels are too strapped for cash to pay a typical runner's fee. Recently, I've been getting the impression Aztechnology is doing some hiring of its own—for missions against itself. The point seems to be making the rebels look bad (even if it costs some Azzie lives or property damage), so as to turn public opinion against them. Why else would an Aztechnology Johnson have tried to hire me to perform a gruesome attack against a Stuffer Shack and leave signs behind pointing to the rebels? (I turned the job down, BTW.)

• Dorwinlon

• That's just the shadowrunner side, where one-off missions are the norm. The rebels are much more in the market for mercenaries. They don't care much about your rep as long as you're available right now and are willing to fight for what they can pay (which isn't all that much, truth be told, but there are exceptions). Merc missions run the full spectrum: simply fighting the Azzies, training guerrillas, special operations, you name it. The job is unusual in that you work for the rebels, whereas usually in a guerrilla war mercs are employed by the larger (government) side.

• Matador

THE OTHER SIDE

• Here's an Aztlan Armed Forces message, intercepted and decoded by one of our contributors; it's dated earlier than the plea for help, but it makes more sense if you read it after that.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 14 February 2062 at 16:32:39 (PST)

To: Major-General J. Sanguino, Ground Forces General Staff
From: Colonel A. Oviedo, Headquarters, 62nd Infantry Division (Mechanized)
Subject: Operation Rancho Obrero
Date: 02-06-62

Sir,

As instructed, Operation Rancho Obrero in the Yucatán Special Military Zone is well underway. This is the initial situation report and should be considered preliminary.

Initial artillery, rocket and aerial bombardments of known and suspected rebel positions started at H-hour, 0500, on 02-05-62, using a combination of high explosive, Violet Cross and Black Cross munitions. Phase One of operations was initiated at 1000 hours that same day; rebel resistance has been light and easily crushed where encountered. The disruption caused by the area bombardments and Cross munitions prevented rebel forces from putting up a coherent defense, allowing all our units to move virtually unhindered to secure their first-day objectives.

Casualties have been light. Ten soldiers have been killed and thirty-nine wounded by rebel counterattacks or ambushes. Reports indicate that in three incidents our soldiers were exposed to Violet Cross due to negligence with their protective equipment, leading to five further fatalities and two hospitalizations. Estimates of rebel casualties are several thousand dead, five hundred wounded.

- This Violet Cross is pretty vile stuff. Does anyone have a concrete idea what it might be?

- Night 1-Too

- It could be anything. "Violet Cross" is most likely a code name for some standard war gas like green ring-3 or seven-7. Or it could be something entirely new that Aztechnology developed specifically to kill rebels dead. I'm willing to bet that even the Azzie soldiers using it probably don't know what's actually in the containers—all they'll have been told is how to store and handle it without getting themselves killed.

- Earl

- I wonder how much they'll adjust those body counts later on. Thousands dead but only five hundred wounded seems unlikely, as it tends to be the other way around.

- Capricorn

- Don't forget they're spraying chemical weapons against unprotected people. Like we said earlier, that's going to cause lots of casualties, and not just among the rebel fighters.

- Mad Chemist

- So let's donate some gas masks to them. I bet the Azzies have a warehouse of them sitting around somewhere.

- Streak

- Remind me to tell you about some shadowrunners I used to know, who flooded an office building with neurostun, then went inside with only gas masks for protection.

- ASDF

Phase Two of operations will begin according to schedule, tomorrow morning. The Air Forces indicate sufficient transports outfitted with spray tanks are ready for full-scale operations against rebel bases and supporting villages deep inside the theater of operations.

If resistance continues to remain light, operations will be complete ahead of schedule, allowing early redeployment of the 62nd Division. A detailed report will follow when more precise information has become available.

- Why doesn't this slot say what's really going on? That "according to schedule" and "sufficient aircraft" drivel could mean anything!

- Wiley

- Probably because this General Sanguino already knows the way the operation should run, and this message may be intercepted. Thus, the colonel is not saying things he doesn't need to.

- Night 1-Too

VIEW FROM THE FRONT

- Like everyone else, Azzie soldiers write letters and email to loved ones at home. Some friends of mine happened to stumble upon a batch of these in an Aztechnology mail relay host, where they were on hold until the military censors could take a pass at them. We stole them and posted the interesting ones to Azziewatch. This one comes from an ACS lieutenant on the front lines.

- Corona

Transmitted: 01 March 2062 at 06:22:19 (PST)

The middle of nowhere, February 27, 2062

Dear Mother and Father,

It has been over three weeks since we started our "big push" against the rebels. We are destroying their capacity to fight at a steady pace. Their resistance has not been this weak at any time I can remember from my fifteen months here in the Yucatán, so it will not be much longer before we will be victorious here—and then, as the saying here goes, "Denver is next."

- Ha! Come on over and try, Azzie scum!

- Texan Tumbleweed

I must admit, the rebels do put up a good fight. There is much respect for their tenacity among the men, despite the atrocities the terrorists commit against our soldiers. Many of them are simple people, trying to live their lives, just like our own families back home. It's impossible to tell who is a rebel and who is a farmer—they are all one and the same. Some of them live for months deep in the jungle, appearing out of nowhere to strike at us when we least expect them. They use underground caves and man-made tunnels to move around



where we can't see them, and ambush our units before fleeing back into the jungle. Their noncombatants hide the fighters, give them shelter and store their weapons and supplies. So we are forced to torture them for information and burn entire villages to the ground to find the hiding spots. The work is gruesome, and I find that I must continually remind myself that eliminating the terrorist menace is necessary to save Aztlan from corruption by foreign powers.

- That's it, toe the party line. Nothing is stronger than the cop in your own head.
- Zapatista

We come across many booby traps, and have to be constantly watchful not to fall victim to them. Our bases are also regularly attacked by rockets, mortars and even suicide bombers. But on every mission, it is obvious that the enemy is weakening with each passing day—the numbers of rebel patrols we encounter become lower, their attacks more sporadic, their ambushes less effective and the prisoners we take are more diverse—more women, children and even aged elders. Total victory is only a matter of time.

Our biggest victory yet was last week, on the 23rd. My platoon was part of an operation that struck a hard blow to the enemy during a four-day search and destroy mission. We had already engaged the enemy several times and caused them heavy casualties at each turn. On the fourth day, my scouts came across an enemy base. We called in reinforcements and joined them for a six-hour battle. We set soldiers, helicopters and artillery against their troops, magic and a feathered serpent! It was a hard-fought victory, but my anti-aircraft gunner fired the missile that finally shot down the beast! When they saw their champion go down, the remaining rebels saw that they couldn't win. As they fled into the jungle they ran straight into our flanking force, which made short work of them. Many soldiers are interpreting the death of the feathered serpent as the beginning of the end for the rebels.

- So are many of the rebels—with a symbol as strong as that of a dracoform shot down, plenty of the rebels are ready to roll over and bow to the Azzie military.
- Isabel
- Anyone know who that wizworm was? Henequen? Pobre? Maybe even Hualpa?
- George
- It wasn't a great dragon, so it wasn't Hualpa. From what I've heard, Henequen is still running his La Venta organization from Denver. It must have been one of the other beasts.
- Dragonslayer

I must end this letter now, as I am about to go out on another mission. I hope it finds you and the rest of the family well, and I promise to write again as soon as possible.

Your son, Manny

- It sounds to me like the rebels are getting their hoops kicked. It may only be a matter of time before they lose the war.

• Vulture

- Some Carib pirates are making loads of cred by getting people who can pay out of the Yucatán to "safer" places. A lot of the smugglers who used to bring the rebels weapons and supplies are now charging COD or even in advance for their services, since running the Azzie blockade has become a lot more dangerous. It's also a sign that they don't expect the rebels to be around for much longer.

• Lynch

POISONING THE EARTH

• This article was written for the Awakened World e-zine by Ms. Heather Edwards, an MIT&T graduate with a Th.D. and a specialty in parobotany. She happened to be in the Yucatán for research when this mess started and only managed to get out via less-than-legitimate channels. As a result of her direct experiences, the article was rather brazen and revealing about the particulars of the conflict. Unfortunately, Aztechnology got word of the content and threatened AW with eight different types of lawsuit if they didn't spike the article or tone it down to something their censors felt was "acceptable." Luckily for us, an Azziewatch muckraker caught wind of the deal and arranged to liberate the original article. Enjoy.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 05 March 2062 at 11:32:09 (PST)

Aztlan military forces have started a campaign with far-reaching effects on the integrity of the manafield of the Yucatán peninsula. Heather Edwards, AW special correspondent, sent in the following report.

Approximately one month ago, Aztlan army and air force units began a major slash and burn offensive in the Yucatán, targeting guerrilla forces and civilians alike. The Aztlan military campaign to root out the rebel threat relies heavily on the use of chemical weapons and biowarfare agents sprayed from aircraft, trucks and even backpack spraying tanks. According to rebel forces, the chemicals being used range from defoliants to blistering gases and nerve agents and other assorted toxic or carcinogenic chemicals.

Aside from large casualties among the metahuman population and wildlife, the immediate effect of this chemical warfare has been the devastation of large areas of farmland and forest. Rebels and civilians alike report that Aztlan forces are leaving nothing untouched as they burn forests, destroy food stockpiles and poison wells. Apparently, the Aztlan military command feels that such extreme sanctions are necessary in order to weed out the rebel "infestation." A large percentage of the population has fled its homes in search of safety, but rebel commanders report that Aztlan forces indiscriminately target refugee columns with chemical weapons as well.

• There isn't a peep about any of this on the mainstream news-nets, trid and Matrix channels. The Aztlan public relations machine is working overtime to cover up the whole affair and offering a whole range of distractions—Aztechnology product giveaways, fire sales and competitions, new high-profile advert campaigns and flashy products, press conferences, celebrity appearances and so on. The second leg of the probe race plays right into this, of course.

• Subvertiser

As a result of the massive contamination, devastation and bloodletting, a high background count has developed in many areas, polluting the manafield and clouding the astral plane. This has made the use of magic difficult at best, hazardous at worst. Dozens of shamans, on both sides of the conflict, report that they are sometimes unable to conjure nature spirits in affected areas, or that their spirits refuse to enter these areas and sometimes become belligerent and hostile. Some shamans report summoning spirits that appear as toxic forms of their normal manifestations. I personally assented one such conjuring, where the summoned spirit appeared twisted and toxic and was impossible to keep under control. Banishing proved difficult, but was the only viable solution under the circumstances. It succeeded, but other shamans have not been so lucky.

Furthermore, rebel forces report that the Aztlan military is deploying a number of magicians trained in the use of blood magic. They claim that many prisoners of war have been sacrificed so that these "blood mages" can fuel their spells of mass destruction and summon spirits of the blood to track down and destroy rebels. Though similar rumors have been leveled against Aztlan in the past, the sheer amount of reports and the first hand eyewitness accounts of villagers and rebels who simply don't know enough about magical theory to craft such correct and detailed accounts is unnerving.

Even worse, an ever-increasing number of tales from all over the Yucatán speak of shamans who have changed their behavior. Several shamans supporting the rebel fighters have allegedly gone insane and been subdued, or been driven from the region because the devastation was wrecking them on an emotional level. On the other side, it is rumored that many Aztlan military shamans have actually refused orders or gone AWOL. Others clearly seem to be taking their destructive mission further than necessary, expressing obscenely glib behavior to the mass-scale ruin and life-taking they are systematically conducting. Though no one dares to say it, these erratic, sudden and callous changes in behavior can only be viewed as "going toxic."

• After a quick look at the place, I'm convinced. Whole swaths of ravaged landscape in the Yucatán simply feel wrong. On the astral, a heavy haze lingers, tasting of ash, misery and other things that I don't care to think about. In some areas, the environmental carnage was surreal, and the astral distortion weighed so heavily on my psyche that I couldn't bear to stay there. They are killing the place, turning it into an ugly, lifeless void.

• Eli

• How do you take a quick look in the Yucatán?
• Mad Chemist

• It's only about 4,500 kilometers from Seattle, my hometown, and even less from many other North American cities. As a healthy magician can do over 6,000 km an hour on the astral plane, I was there in about 45 minutes, including a few stops along the way to check I was still on the right course. Allowing for a decent safety margin, that left several hours to snoop around and get back home.

• Eli

Whatever Aztlan's goals are, their current military campaign is wreaking a terrible toll on the ecology of the Yucatán, the purity of the mana flow and the mental stability of magicians on both sides of the war. If this initiative is allowed to continue, large areas of the Yucatán may be rendered inhospitable, horribly polluted on both the astral and physical planes. This threat to basic life and survival cannot be allowed to continue—the international community must appeal to Aztlan to call off the offensive. If something does not happen soon, the relentless onslaught will mean dire consequences for the people, ecology and mana of the Yucatán for many years to come.

THE TIDE TURNS

• This email to the parental units comes from the same Azzie lieutenant whose private mail we hung out to see just a few weeks ago. Apparently the poor slag's parents never got to see this one because it was dumped entirely by the censor. I don't waste much love on Azzie soldiers, but I pity the ones who are just duped cogs in the machine and who may end up dying for a cause they shouldn't support.

• Corona

Transmitted: 14 March 2062 at 18:51:59 (PST)

Base Camp, March 12, 2062

Dear Mother and Father,

As I write this letter, I don't know if I will ever see you again. The whole war is rapidly taking a turn for the worse, and I doubt we will ever get out of here.

Mom and Dad, things aren't going as well as the screamsheets in Tenochtitlán say. Desertion has started to climb alarmingly—my platoon has lost six soldiers over the past two weeks alone (two of them were caught and shot). The morale of the regular troops has plummeted due to the needless destruction we are causing to the people of this region—people that are not all that different from our own families at home. Our conditions are also quite bad. We are sometimes forced to wear our protective systems for days on end. The air tastes sharp, and many days a chemical haze lies over the land. Many men have become sick. It is hard to sleep, because we are bombarding the rebels with bombs, shells, missiles and rockets around the clock.

Insubordination has become a serious problem. Some of our men have been jailed for refusing orders, or for acts of sabotage. I suspect that the "combat accident" that claimed the



life of Sgt. Morales was not really an accident—his own troops had come to hate him.

I am seeing many men who once were extremely loyal to their units and their country turn against them. Our own mission is tearing us apart from within.

- I hear that the Azzies are trying to prop up morale by switching out regular grunts with warriors from these weird military orders they have. Almost every damn Eagle warrior in the country has been rotated into action, and a lot of these Otontin warriors as well. Apparently the Azzie higher-ups feel that they can count on these order types for a higher level of loyalty and commitment.

- Beowulf

- The Azzies aren't the only ones bringing in fresh troops. I'm a merc who used to fight for one of the rebel factions, and I'll tell you that Amazonia has started to take a heavier hand in the war. For years they've simply sponsored the guerrillas, aiding them with gear, weapons, magic and advice. Last week, they started sneaking in actual troops. They're being smart about it—they all represent as mercs or local volunteers, and they don't carry a scrap of paper that could link them to Amazonia. But they operate like regular soldiers of some elite unit. Not necessarily SpecOps, but certainly above-average in quality.

- Lynch

The worst element of the whole situation is the shamans. Every one of the shamans I have seen in the past few weeks, whether attached to my unit or another, has shown a shocking degree of insubordination and a near-total disregard for their fellow soldiers' well-being. Just recently, the shaman attached to my platoon caused two incidents in the same day. First, her "reconnaissance" led a squad straight into a rebel ambush which—looking back—I'm certain she must have known was there. Later on, I was called forward by a scout to look at something, and when I returned, the prisoners we took after the ambush had been killed on her orders. I suspect she used some form of magical compulsion to force the men into obeying her orders. This was an outrage, a *murder* that I could not allow. I had her arrested and reported the incident to my captain. He released her and told me to forget it had ever happened.

I was stunned, but that was not the end of it. A few days later, she went mad. One of the men caught her in the act as she attempted to sabotage the chemical tanker trucks at base camp. She resisted arrest, and fought with magic and spirits. She was shot dead for the safety of the camp, but not before injuring many men and setting off an explosion and chemical spill that forced us to relocate the camp.

I have heard rumors that speak of many similar incidents. Many of our soldiers have been found, both inside camp and out in the field, murdered and mutilated by magical means.

Not all of these deaths are due to the rebels. Our shamans can no longer be trusted. I would suspect them all of turning traitor, except that they each seem to enjoy killing rebels—in fact, they revel in it. This makes me afraid. If we cannot control our own shamans, we are lost.

I pray to Huitzilopochtli that this war will end soon. I want this madness to stop. I want with all of my heart to see you again.

Manny

- After a letter like that, he can sure kiss his commission goodbye.

- GPF

- I find it amazing that he went from "victory is right around the corner" to "we're all doomed" within the space of two weeks. If this letter is truly indicative of the morale of the Azzie troops, then their dirty little "quick-fix" war is going to be a lot more difficult than they think.

- Findler-Man

GAIA'S WRATH

- This transcript comes straight from NewsNet. It looks like it will change the whole Yucatán situation, so pay attention.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 15 March 2062 at 20:17:52 (PST)

//Begin Transcript//

Ian McGrath, NewsNet Anchor: This is NewsNet's News at Nine, and my name is Ian McGrath. Good evening, and thank you for joining us tonight.

A major earthquake struck the Yucatán peninsula in eastern Aztlan at eight minutes past three this afternoon. Scientists at the CAS Seismological Institute say it had a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale and was followed by at least three aftershocks of lesser magnitude. The epicenter was located some one hundred kilometers south of the city of Mérida, in a sparsely-populated area of jungle. Furthermore, there have been reports of tidal waves along the Yucatán's coastline. This disaster follows a week of gale-force storms that have been raging in Yucatán coastal areas for several days already and are continuing unabated.

We have no pictures of the disaster to show you as the Aztlan government quarantined the area as part of a special military zone several years ago, with highly restricted access for civilians and journalists alike, due to the activities of several rebel insurgent groups in the area. For this reason, little factual information is available about the precise effects of this earthquake and storms on the people living there, or on the Aztlan military, which is apparently in the midst of a major offensive against those rebel forces.

According to experts of the Seismological Institute here in Atlanta, damage to urban areas is most likely extensive, with a high possibility of fires caused by ruptured gas mains and broken electrical cables. Most buildings in the area are suspected

not to be earthquake-resistant, so some casualties from falling debris are likely. It is also probable that large numbers of trees in the jungle areas have been uprooted by the shocks.

NewsNet will keep you up-to-date as more news arrives about this catastrophe.

//End Transcript//

- That isn't saying much, is it? Does anyone here know more? I'm looking for facts, please, not gossip or unsubstantiated rumors.

- Aghast View

- That's going to be very difficult. The Azzies already have a tight cordon over the area, though the shakeup knocked open a few holes. But they're working fast to tighten the noose—they're trying hard to keep journalists and even relief workers out. I guess they're hoping the earthquake will do some of their dirty work for them.

- PG18

- An earthquake plus heavy storms and tidal waves, eh? For this to come all at once doesn't smack of coincidence to me. It sounds a lot like magic on the scale of the Great Ghost Dance, especially when it all happens during Aztlan's biggest offensive ever in the region.

- Uninvited

- Howling Coyote and his followers did it forty-five years ago, and I imagine some of those old shamans must support the Yucatán struggle. Maybe they taught the rebels the rituals they used for the Ghost Dance.

- Parallel

- Maybe those Amazonians are responsible for it.

- Xena

- Could be, but it's very hard to tell the difference between a natural earthquake and a magically-induced one. The rebels could claim they've summoned it, but I think nobody will be able to prove anything either way.

- ASDF

- But why strike the Yucatán? Aren't they putting themselves at risk? Granted, it could be a desperate, last chance, scorch-and-retreat maneuver. But why wouldn't they strike other areas where they could hurt the Azzies more and force them to divert their attention?

- Matador

- Actually, I think the rebels are more prepared to survive a natural disaster like this. They're used to living off the land, while the Aztlan troops are based in cities and camps that are vulnerable to quakes.

- Mole

• A tree falling on your head is just as likely to kill you as a collapsing building. Would you want to be living in a rebel tunnel complex when an earthquake hits? Can you say "Instant grave?" Not a fun way to go.

• Cu Chi Crawler

• Think about this. If everything we've heard is true, then the Yucatán is crawling with toxics at the moment. What if all of these toxic shamans banded together and caused the earthquake as revenge against the poisoning of nature? They'd be dropping dead in droves from ritual magic on that scale, but knowing toxics, that's not their concern.

• Silicon Mage

• The toxics may have simply wanted to cause more destruction. With unhinged braincases like that, their actual motives are generally unfathomable—all you know for sure is that they're frayed in the head.

• Nova

• No. This was not a metahuman effort. The Earth herself rose up and fought back.

• Anonymous

• Y'know, I wonder about that. I happen to know a free spirit from the deep jungles of the Yucatán (it's a long story how we met, worth some cred at the least). I'm not going to give you its name, but let's call it Ivy. Ivy was the curious type, and tended to stick around me for months on end, checking out what I was doing. When those bad storms started up about a week ago, my crew docked in Cuba to wait it out. I was on deck watching the storm clouds the first night when Ivy suddenly appears in front of me and says he's sorry, but he's gotta go. "The land is calling me," he said. "I must go and protect it. I must wage war." Then, shazam, he was gone.

I didn't understand it at the time. But now I think I do. The Yucatán issued a call to arms, and Ivy listened.

• Maroon

• Whoa, hold up there. The Earth doesn't tell people, or spirits, what to do. It's a planet. It's just a big hunk of rock. It's not alive!

• Marx

• I know a lot of magical theorists who would beg to differ. Gaia is most definitely alive. It may not be sentient, but it certainly has protective mechanisms to defend itself against attack.

• Serenity

• I'm diverting this thread now to the Environmental Metaphysics SIG. Drop the theory; let's get back to the hard, provable facts.

• Captain Chaos

"I am everywhere!"

• This earthquake and discussion prompted me to take another astral look down south (it's been about three weeks since my first one), and you wouldn't believe how many things have changed.

Large tracts of the jungle were already poisonous wastelands on my last trip, and the Azzies have certainly not sat still since then—the devastation is a lot worse, and now it's also spread to the urban areas. The earthquake and floods leveled large parts of the major cities (Mérida, Campeche, Valladolid, Tepich, Progreso and assorted others) and virtually all the small villages and hamlets that were still standing after the Aztlan bombardments. The military camps are possibly in the worst state of all. Many of them seemed to have suffered chemical contamination from burst tanks and ruptured storage containers. I saw more than one that was completely lifeless, littered with corpses.

The field of astral space was ... unclean. I've never felt so revolted in my life. I scrubbed and scrubbed in the shower afterward, but the stink, the taste of death, still lingers. I'm never going back there again.

• Eli

SPIRITS IN FLUX

• Here's the latest disturbing news from inside the Aztlan military machine.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 17 March 2062 at 09:21:59 (PST)

To: Major-General J. Sanguino, Ground Forces General Staff
From: Colonel A. Oviedo, Headquarters, 62nd Infantry Division (Mechanized)

Subject: Operation Rancho Obrero

Date: 03-16-62

Sir,

The situation in the Yucatán Special Military Zone has taken a drastic turn for the worse.

The earthquake has seriously disrupted our operations by destroying or damaging several camps, disrupting our communications and hindering our supply lines. Many roads have been rendered impassable, and the constant severe storms impair our ability to use drones and aerial transport. Dozens of camps suffered chemical leakages or toxic contamination, causing hundreds of casualties and forcing us to relocate our facilities or simply abandon them as unsalvageable. The weather has even blocked satellite visibility, leaving us unable to assess our situation from the sky above.

• I asked a meteorologist friend of mine if there was anything unusual about this storm that's been hanging over the Yucatán for several weeks, and he says it's been the talk of the weather community. According to the wind patterns and other weather conditions, it should have moved on some time ago, but it's lingering. A bunch of theories are being tossed around, talk about cold fronts and pressure drops, but nobody can explain it. It's unnatural ...

• Nimbus

Tenaciously, some isolated pockets of rebel forces have actually managed to launch a counter-offensive, using the severe conditions as cover. We have lost contact with whole companies, and our base camp areas are in disarray. The steady attrition from sabotage is becoming a serious hindrance.

- Smart move. Strike when your enemy is unbalanced. I doubt the rebels are in any position to win at this point, but they may be able to buy themselves enough time and space to regroup and rebuild.
- Arctic White

Our divisional staff has received numerous reports of attacks initiated on our forces by hostile spirits. Originally we assumed the rebels were exerting an impressive level of magical support. However, analysis of these attacks by our remaining combat magicians indicates that we are being plagued by both nature spirits and by corrupt, poisonous toxic spirits. In at least one case, a combat mage identified a nature spirit that spontaneously manifested—it was not summoned by a conjurer, but appeared of its own accord. We also have evidence that indicates these spirits sometimes engage each other in combat, and the toxic spirits appear to target rebel forces as well. My evaluation of these reports is that we are witnessing some sort of “spirit war,” and that we are in fact caught in the middle, where both sides target us. In fact, the extreme nature of our campaign to eliminate the rebels may have initiated this conflict.

- Hey, this guy’s thinking too hard. They better bust him back down to private before he starts questioning other orders.
- Bung
- At least he’s bold enough to admit the truth—that the Azzies brought this on themselves. The question is, can anyone save the situation, or is the Yucatán doomed to be a toxic hellhole for the rest of eternity?
- Snog
- Never underestimate the Earth’s ability to recuperate. And don’t forget the rebels have Amazonian backing. If they were able to save the Brazilian rainforests, they can save the Yucatán.
- Green Piece

• That’s assuming the toxics let them. At this point, the toxics may have the upper hand. And the Azzies aren’t necessarily giving up yet either. They may have lost this round, but they’re determined to win the war.

- Silicon Mage

It is my assessment that we are currently unable to cope with the environmental conditions, remaining rebel forces and paranormal attacks. In addition to direct confrontations, the spirit forces are using their magical powers to great effect. The movement of our supply convoys and troop transports has been slowed to a crawl through magical manipulation of the terrain. Unlikely freak accidents are damaging our relief efforts and claiming lives. Units of soldiers have become lost and confused on patrol, often wandering into direct ambushes or engaging our own forces with friendly fire. Terrified soldiers have fled our camps, sometimes sparking mass desertions.

As a result of this situation, morale is deteriorating rapidly. Our soldiers cannot be expected to face an enemy that they cannot see or combat effectively.

In my opinion, our situation is rapidly becoming impossible to hold. Major-General Salinas shares that opinion and requests permission to withdraw all units from the field to base camps, in anticipation of a rapid and complete disengagement from both rebel and spirit forces.

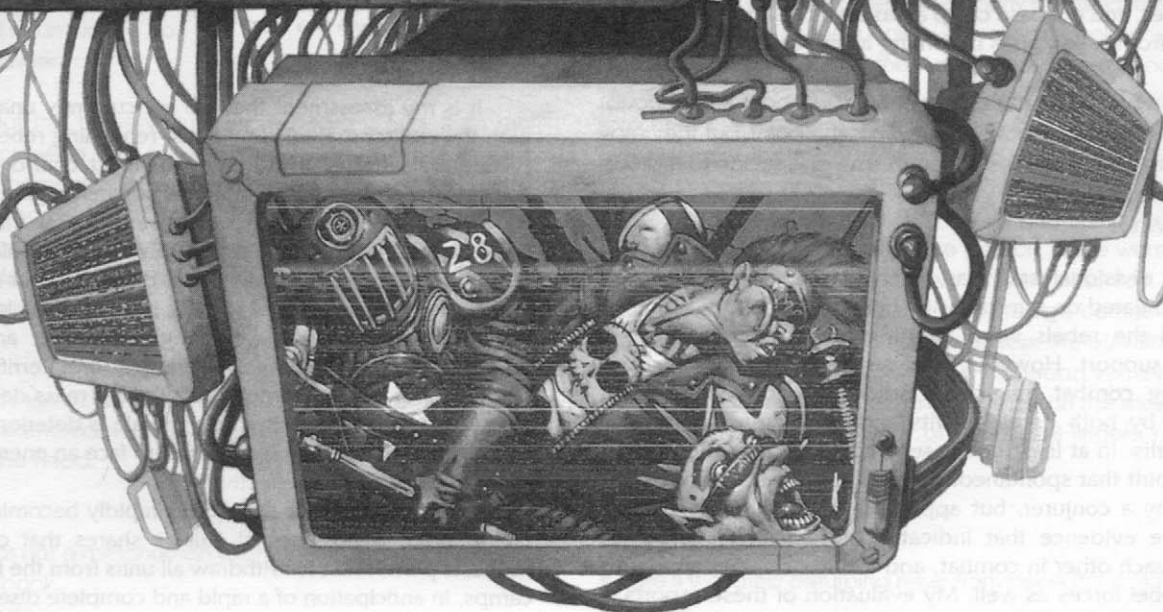
- Translation: we’re in deep drek down here, give us a hand in pulling ourselves out!
- GPF

• The Azzies may pull out, but the people of the Yucatán are not going to leave their homes.

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing a song of angry men?
It is the music of a people
Who will not be slaves again!
—Les Misérables, Act I

- Zapatista

AFTERSHOCKS



What, you say? There's more? Cults, SURGE, spirits, dragons, disasters and war weren't enough? That's right chummer. The bulk of the information presented in this compilation was just the tip of the iceberg. Around the world, there have been more changes occurring during this year of the comet than we could ever cram into a single file collection. And the ones we did manage to bring to your attention will have repercussions and spin-off events for years to come. Halley's Comet was pressure-packed with worms.

To pique your interest, I've attached a few more accounts to this compilation about other goings-on in the world. These are just a representative sample, and I'm sure you'll find plenty more should you go digging.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 21 February 2062 at 05:57:03 (PST)

SEEDS OF REBELLION

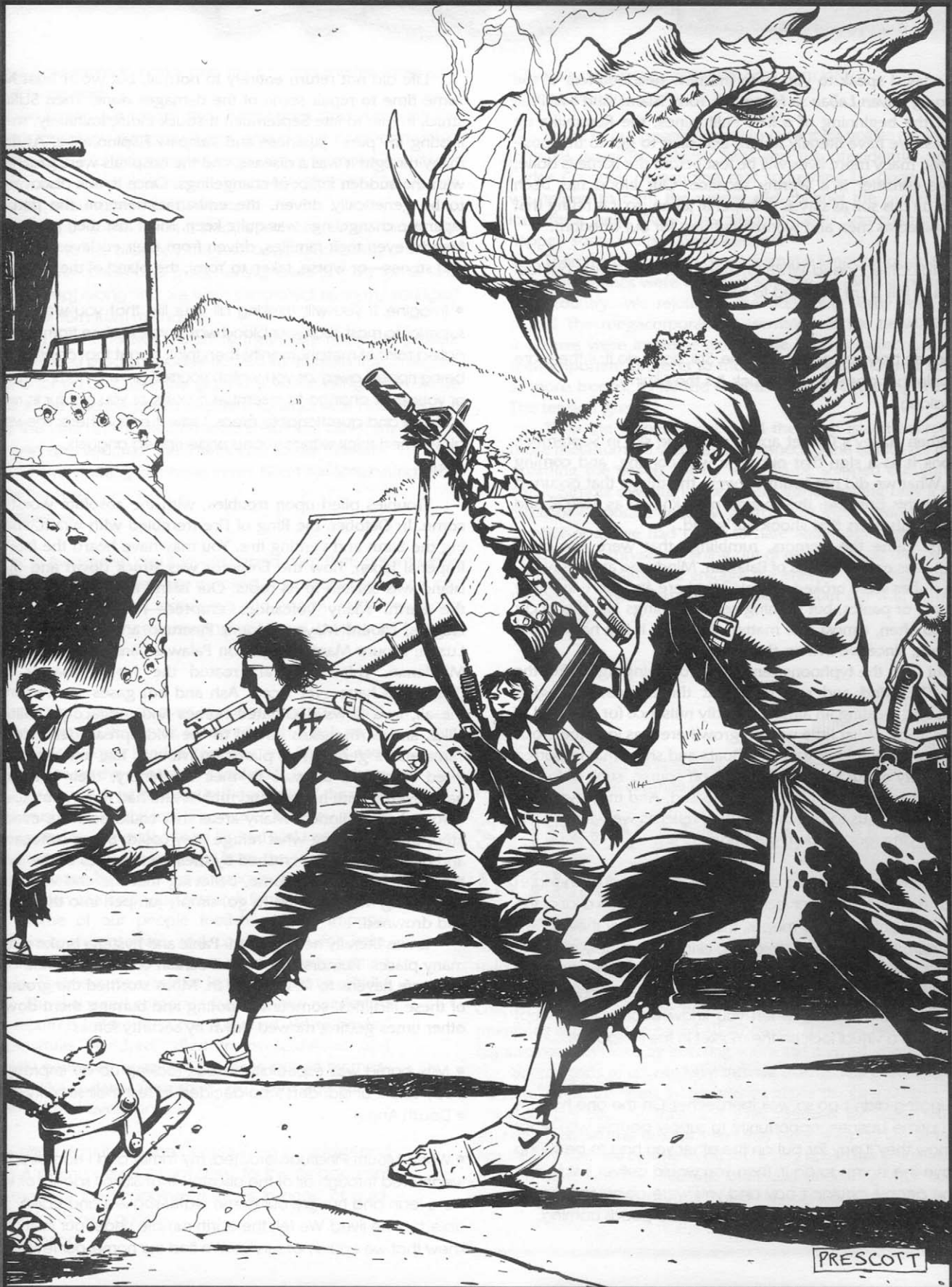
By Siukoy

The last time I spoke to you, I told you what it was like to live in the Imperial Prefecture of the Philippine Islands. We were one month away from holding our presidential election, the first to be held in thirty years, and we had hoped to see the beginning of a new era for our home. But that hope was crushed, and many of us had bitterly told ourselves that we should have expected it; it was, after all, the Japanese corporation Fuchi that had supplied and monitored the voting apparatus. Our candidate, Filipa Salonga, did not win the election. The victor was Carlos Consuni of the Catholic Voters Party. This we could have accepted ... If Consuni had been the popular one amongst my people.

The cry of fraud was raised, but no revote was allowed. They feared we would riot, and so many times it nearly did happen, but we remained quiet. In our hearts we silently vowed that the day would come when we could revolt and oust the Hapon.

• Masaru was keeping a tight rein on the Huk. He didn't want their anger wasted on riots and wasteful actions that would simply be put down. He put those angry people to work, building a monstrous powderkeg that was just waiting for the right event to detonate.

• Trot





Today, I speak to you from the new headquarters of the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* on Yomi Island, and I will tell you of the beginning of a free Philippines, the *Republika ng Pilipinas*. We have literally fought and died to get to this position, and many more lives will be lost before the battle is done, but we consider it a worthy sacrifice. Our blood has been spilled on this soil as slaves to Imperial Japan, so it is fitting that it be spilled as men and women fighting for our freedom.

- A hard battle, indeed. While I sympathize, I can't help but feel that all of this is just doomed to failure.

- Jinx

- I can see how you got your name. Still, don't do it; if there are a people that deserve a little luck, it's the Filipino.

- Tikbalang

When Halley's Comet appeared in the sky in September, we took it as a sign that our time was coming, and coming soon. What we did not count on were the things that occurred to make this possible: the change now known as SURGE and the many disasters that shook our world.

First came the tremors, rumblings that were not quite earthquakes on the islands of Palawan, Mindanao and Visayans. Some dishes were broken, people hurt here and there in minor accidents or panics, but nothing serious. Things like this occur every so often, almost as a matter of course; it is a hazard that all accept, since we live on the Ring of Fire.

But then the typhoons came, one following right after the other. The wind and rain lashed at the islands, damaging homes and creating an almost-deadly nuisance for any kind of regular living. What little we can grow here was lost, the crops drowning in their little gardens. Boats and ships that imported the majority of our food were blown off course, sunk or forced to dock elsewhere until the storms abated. And they eventually did, allowing us to breathe a sigh of relief as we watched the ships carrying food dock in our harbors.

- Lots of the poorer people, especially in the metahuman-segregated neighborhoods, starved during that time. Since a lot of the food is brought in by the megas, they have to pay their prices, which naturally went up both during and immediately after the storms. "Availability" was one reason, another one was having to pay the ships' crews more for having worked in a dangerous situation. Plausible reasons when you know economics, except they've got a virtual lock on the market in the Philippines.

- Judy

- Smuggling didn't go so well then, either. On the one hand, it was a prime business opportunity to supply people with what you know they'll pay for, but on the other you had to be willing to brave the storms to do it. Then you would deliver just to find out the people couldn't pay and you were going to have to take a loss. Only those with a heart kept the goods coming.

- Tanker

Life did not return entirely to normal, but we at least had some time to repair some of the damages done. Then SURGE struck in mid to late September. It struck indiscriminately, manifesting in "pure" Japanese and *kalapaw* Filipino alike. At first, many thought it was a disease, and the hospitals were groaning with the sudden influx of changelings. Once it was discovered to be genetically driven, the embarrassment on the part of Japanese changelings was quite keen. Most lost their jobs, their friends, even their families, driven from their enclaves with fire and stones—or worse, taken to Yomi, the island of the damned.

- Imagine, if you will, thinking all your life that you were born superior to most, that your blood was pure and free from the so-called taint of metahumanity. Then think about that dear illusion being ripped away as you watch yourself grow a horn, or tusks, or your eyes change to resemble a cat's, or you get fur in really visible and questionable areas. I saw it everywhere; the very air seemed thick with fear and pride-ripped anguish.

- Fury

Troubles piled upon troubles, with the absolute worst to come. In October, the Ring of Fire trembled with wrath, shaking the Earth and venting fire. You may have heard the fate of Imperial Japan, how the Emperor was struck down and their island was shaken to its roots. Our island also felt the rage of the Earth. Many volcanoes erupted—Mount Canlaon on Negros; Mount Mayon, Mount Pinatubo and Mount Taal on Luzon; Mount Mantalingajan on Palawan; and Mount Apo on Mindanao. This upheaval created the worst disaster the Philippines have ever faced. Ash and hot gases spewed into the air, lava flows decimated homes and megacorp facilities alike, and earthquakes added to the widespread destruction. Yamatetsu's geothermal plants on Mounts Taal and Apo suffered significant stresses to their machinery, their buildings half-covered with hot ash and rubble, and had to be shut down before they exploded. Many areas that could be were evacuated, the rest taking what refuge they could. Some suffocated and died; some were crushed by their own homes or the facilities they had fled to; some, believing that the end was near and having no where left to go, simply jumped into the ocean and drowned.

It was literally hell on earth. Panic and hysteria broke out in many places. Rumors spread that certain corporations had created safe havens to take shelter in. Mobs stormed the grounds of these facilities, sometimes looting and burning them down, other times getting mowed down by security forces.

- Mitsuhama was especially vicious, racking up an impressive body count of islanders who decided to test their security.

- Death Angel

- When Mount Pinatubo erupted, my family and I had already weathered through all of the disasters that Siukoy speaks of. We were lean and hungry, our home water-soaked and barely livable, but we lived. We felt the earth rumble under our feet and knew that we could not survive. We fled our home, our few trea-



sured possessions in hand, and tried to find shelter. There was none to be had.

And then we heard that Mitsuhama had room at the Baguio arcology. We knew it was a sound structure and could shelter many, for it employed many of us to make computer parts and video games for Japanese children. Surely, we thought, Mitsuhama would help us?

I do not know when it happened, but as we made our approach to the arcology, the fear began spreading and soon we became a hysterical mob, rushing towards it. My family and I were swept along until we were separated, even my youngest daughter torn from my hands.

All I could do was watch as they were ripped to pieces, their thin and precious bodies riddled with bullets from the guns that popped up out of the ground. It was a killing zone. By the time some had begun to understand what was happening, it was too late. For myself, with tears streaming down my cheeks, I turned and fled from the smell of my family's death.

I have nothing but hate in my heart for Mitsuhama. God bless the Huk.

• Dalakitnon

• Some Awakened creatures escaped from their prisons when Mitsuhama's Parashield site cracked open. Some escaped into the wild, while others wandered into nearby settlements and became a nuisance, scavenging dead bodies or hunting metahumans for food.

• Cujo

As soon as it was over, we attempted to rebuild. The devastation, however, rendered such a task nearly impossible. People banded together and helped each other shore up the remains of ramshackle houses, hoping that it would not fall apart in the middle of the night and crush the inhabitants. The water in many places was unusable, or needed to be filtered and treated as it was poisoned by the seepage from the volcanoes or contaminated by unnamed chemicals released at the annihilation of a corporate research facility.

Some of our people foolishly asked Imperial Japan's representatives and corporations for help. These petitions for relief efforts were casually pushed aside. Their excuse was that Japan needed to rebuild first. The damaged corporate facilities also needed to be repaired before they could extend aid to others. Meanwhile, hundreds died in overcrowded and poorly equipped hospitals. Diseases spread by mosquito, like malaria, flourished. Exposure and starvation claimed even more.

• A pitiful sight it is to see people living in squalor and filth. A shame we could not assist, for it is still apparent to me that the Philippines remains in need of guidance for its own good.

• Higaonna

- There's a term for people like you: slum lord.
- Mansayagan

Some of our people began to raise their voices against the Imperial governor Fukatsu Saru and the presidential puppet Carlos Consuni, demanding that something be done. Before, we helped to calm the voices and channel the protests into long-term help. Now, we stepped back. Something would happen soon; we had been assured.

Then the order came down from the Emperor of Japan. The Imperial Marines were to return to Japan, to assist in rebuilding their country. We rejoiced—the occupying army was going home! The megacorporations trembled at the news. Drastic measures were implemented. Some fled the country, or took their important projects to more secure areas. Others airlifted in more troops, to fill the void left by the departing marines. The tension grew.

Then the Emperor rescinded the Yomi Island decree. No more metahumans were to be shipped to the island. All troops guarding the prison colony were to be shipped out immediately. Almost overnight, they were gone, leaving only a token force of corporate security guards. For years, Yomi was the symbol of all we had come to hate about our Imperial overlords. Like a chrysalis coming out of its cocoon, so did we burst forth out of hiding and engage the enemy. Yomi was the first, the best symbolic target with which to start our war. Yomi was the match.

...less and pot... imbued with a negative aura. Customer... as 6,000¥ for the pieces. The UCAS Thaumaturgical Society applauded the action, urging people to only buy from certified talismongers.

SYDNEY MANASTORM INTENSIFIES

Posted 03-03-62

Melbourne (NN)—The permanent mana storm fluctuating around the independent city of Sydney has once again intensified, effectively cutting off the city from the outside world. Two outbound aircraft crashed as a result of mana storm interference shortly after takeoff, prompting authorities to cancel all air travel. Travel by sea and land has also been restricted by battering winds and magical effects.

Several parts of the city have suffered damage and disruption as "tendrils" from the mana storm crossed inside the city. Dozens of casualties have been reported, and other residents are hastily constructing shelters. Fear that the storm may close in on the city or isolate the city from the outside world for a long period has prompted a rush on basic supplies. Sporadic outbreaks of looting have been crushed by police, only to erupt in another neighborhood.



- Ah, poetic justice.
- Orange Queen
- Visit sometime. We have many songs to sing and poems to recite about this day.
- Masaru

- A glorious day, even with all the blood spilled. Neither side escaped unscathed, but what was left of the corporate security forces ran from the island, eventually. We overran them, our arnis making deadly use of their sticks, our kris swords and carefully rationed guns flashing and blazing. Many Huk used their divinely-given gifts as well, raining fire upon the faithless and healing their comrades.
- Arimaonga

The battle was long, bloody and very hard-fought, but in the end, we won. We have shown the Imperial Governor and the rest of the Japanese that we will not be meek and mildly accepting of what they have us do. We have shown that we are willing to fight and die in order to free ourselves, our friends and our families. No more will we cower under the shadow of the Empire or the long shadows cast by the Japanese megacorporations. Our war has just begun.

- He's not kidding. The Huk are rising up all over the islands. They've already seized some areas and turned them into corporate no-go zones, like Yomi. The Imperial Governor has gone into fits and the corps are scrambling to protect what's theirs. Revolution is in the air!
- Fury
- Yeah, but things aren't gonna stay like that forever. Governments and megacorporations bounce back quicker than a troll on Kamikaze. They have contingency plans for this sort of thing, not to mention the military might to take on a bunch of rabble with sticks in their hands. Watch your hoop, because they'll be back in force.
- Vet
- The Huk have some aces up their sleeve as well, not the least of which is that big fraggin' dragon Masaru. I agree that planning a rebellion and carrying it out are two separate things, but if anyone's got a shot at succeeding, my cred is on the Huk.
- Dark Horse
- Hey, with all the casualties from the natural disasters and the revolution, does anyone know if they're getting a big problem with their, uh, dead rising up again?
- Bardiche

RUN TO THE BORDER

by Corona

Now that Aztlan has been booted out of Denver, you might be wondering about recent relations between the CAS and

Aztlan. Not to put too fine a point on it, but they suck rat juice through a straw. In fact, things have gotten plain unfriendly.

Now, the CAS and Aztlan have been on bad terms since 2035, when the Azzies decided to take a bite out of Texas. The border's been a line of tension since then, occasionally exploding with a border guard exchange of fire, an "accidental" border crossing by a military aircraft on maneuvers or chasing a smuggler, and other reindeer games.

The airspace issue became a big deal when the CAS invaded the Aztlan sector of Denver. The Azzies had no way to safely fly in reinforcements, and both sides dug in even further behind their respective dotted lines.

The airspace issue is old news, now, but the current fire under the kettle is burning strong. In the past few months, there's been an increase in the number of "civilian" border incursions along the Texas/Aztlan border, primarily from the Texas side. Civilian militias in Texas are a fact of life, but something that's new is how organized they're becoming. A lot of them have been getting help from a group called the Sons of the Alamo, an outfit that's been contributing gigapulses to Azziewatch lately. Our research hasn't turned up much, but here's what we know about these hombres.

The Sons of the Alamo started out as a small, local-interest polyclub back in 2047, with a couple of dozen members who met outside of Fort Worth. According to their charter/manifesto, they're dedicated to reclaiming the land stolen by Aztlan back in the mid 2030s. Though they were originally located only in Texas, a quick check through a few databases shows that there are chapters in every state in the CAS, though naturally the highest concentration of their membership is in the Lone Star State.

Until recently, their operations were limited to fairly standard methods of political pressure: lobbying, email campaigns to CAS and Aztlan government officials of all stripes, rallies, that sort of thing. Apparently, they got tired of complaining to figureheads who never listened, and opted for a more direct course of action. Right when the Denver fiasco was in full swing, the core cadre of the Sons of the Alamo went underground. Poof. Overnight, at least twenty hard-core Texans took to the shadows.

For a month or so, nothing happened. Then the propaganda blitz began. Several Matrix nodes were vandalized with messages advocating a military campaign against Aztlan to retake Texas land. Then a Sons of the Alamo pirate trid station hit the airwaves, followed by flyer drops and other unconventional agitprop. Rumors spread through Azziewatch that the Sons of the Alamo were sponsoring several training camps for militias that wanted to take the fight to Aztlan. These camps must have been in action for a while already, because soon afterward, the first strike came.

The Sons of the Alamo made headlines after claiming responsibility for an attack on an Aztlan military supply depot in San Antonio. Just a few days later, an Aztlan listening post just a few kilometers from the border took a barrage of rockets that left it in ruins. The third attack was made on an Aztlan military commander, assassinated by an armed drone while out walking his dog.



Aztlan has been up in arms about the attacks, condemning the CAS for being unable to restrain its own terrorist groups. Several thinly veiled threats imply that a retaliatory strike against the CAS will be in order if the Sons of the Alamo strike again.

- And that's exactly the response the SOA wanted. If they get the Azzies to retaliate, the CAS will be forced to retaliate as well, and pretty soon the whole mess will escalate into a full-on war.
- Wholly Rollins

• I hear that some CAS military officers are quite happy at the turn of events. They're publicly sympathetic to the SOA's goals and they've been itching for a good reason to lob some heavy ordnance over the border. This might be the excuse they're looking for.

- Texas 2-Step

El Paso: Never surrender. Never forgive. Never forget.

- With the troop pullbacks Aztlan has been forced to make because of the Yucatan situation, the SOA might be able to cause them some hurt along the border. We might actually get some of our land back.
- Fuzzdog

• We'll finish the rebellion in the south, and then we'll reclaim our losses in the north. Don't be so smug as to think you'll reclaim what is rightfully ours.

- El Guerrero del Águila

- Blow it out your hoop, featherbreath.

You want to know the best thing the SOA has done in the last few weeks? It's not training the militia units. It's the pride they're stirring up here in Texas. Even people who aren't a part of the policlub are walking around with their heads up, talking about the Republic again. And meaning it, too, from the sounds of things.

- Lone Star Rising

• Republic of Texas—didn't we try that once? That, for some reason, scares me more than the troop movements on the border.

- Riggs

CHILDREN OF THE DRAGON, UPDATE

by Deprogrammer

"The time has come," the Walrus said, "to talk of many things. Of sailing ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings." And dragons. And those who would be both dragons and kings, all at once. And those who would give their lives at the command of a lunatic.

I hope you'll pardon the Lewis Carroll quote, but that's about what I feel like lately when I'm trying to comprehend the reality behind the mess that's popped up in major sprawls across the UCAS. That up-and-coming church/reli-

gion/cult known as the Children of the Dragon, who claimed all sweetness and light to be their province, has turned bloody and nasty on us. To say that this is a serious turn of events is understating the truth of the matter slightly, but my dear readers out there probably won't grasp why without a little backstory.

When we last left our beloved dragon groupies, they were busily opening new crèches across the continent, building temples and secretly waging a war against "dark forces" on the sly. The church, a term I use only because the CotD had technically gotten too big to classify as a cult, was branching out in all directions under the leadership of Dragonson, the originator and "prophet" who brought the group to pass. The CotD had inevitably gotten organized enough to have an internal structure, which consisted of crèches (or congregations), temples, regional administration and national administration.

- Most of the people at the regional level have been with the church since the beginning, with many of the ones on the east coast being founding members of the church along with Dragonson.

- Sister Goldenhair

At the national level stands a board of elders, led by Dragonson, who determine the direction of the church and arrange budgets for branch locations and charitable works nationwide. The board itself consists of eleven people, three of whom are elected by the membership of the church.

In any group larger than five people, politics is a forgone conclusion. In a group that spans a continent, simple politicking can turn into a career. This is particularly apt in the case of Joshua Morningstar, formerly Joshua Keller. Brother Morningstar was a liberal arts major out of the University of Virginia when he joined the church. He campaigned for Dunkelzahn early on in the race, but was dismissed after getting into physical altercations with supporters of Brackhaven. Keller continued his practice of "in your face" politics by working with aggressive anti-Humanis organizations, Terra First! and other fringe groups. Repeated run-ins with the law seemed to only increase his fervor, but his interest was scattered across a wide group of causes. At least, until the CotD came along.

- Keller's Lone Star record is impressive, btw. More than once he's taken a firearm to a fistfight and pulled it out when it seemed like things weren't going his way. Before he ran into the CotD, he was just a nasty character with supposedly higher ideals, none of which involved feeling bad about putting someone in the hospital. He stayed out of trouble after joining the church, but he kept up with all his old buddies in the shadow communities.

- Buzz

- The only reason he didn't try to solve everything with his guns was that there was someone behind the scenes keeping him in check. When he joined up, he was seen all the time with a



blonde in the background, pretty girl, the kind that knows when to keep quiet. Now all of a sudden the girl is gone. Wonder where she went? Any comments, Sister Goldenhair?

• Friar Tuck

• None that I'd bother putting in print.

• Sister Goldenhair

Morningstar's rise within the CotD was quick, even within such a rapidly growing enterprise. He quickly gained a reputation as someone who was willing to sacrifice anything for the beliefs and goals of the church, and his significant charisma and impressive public speaking skills endeared him to his crèche. Donations went up significantly after he began to stump for the crèche's soup kitchens, a talent which caught the eye of the regional president. He arranged for Morningstar's rise to prominence (all astronomical jokes aside) and sent him on numerous fundraising and diplomatic appeals. Morningstar threw himself into his calling, and by the end of 2060 he'd achieved such a high level of visibility that he was a shoe-in for an elected board position.

It didn't take long for Dragonson to notice such a potentially bright protégé, and soon they were nearly inseparable. While the board has always been kinda chummy, this type of singling-out hadn't occurred before. Nobody complained, though, and soon Morningstar became thought of as the second-in-command, a sort of "heir to the Dragon Throne." The combination of the two most magnetic personalities in modern religion apparently struck a chord with people, and thus you get the last six months of unforeseen growth and prosperity, due in no small part to attracting some very influential, very wealthy Hollywood and DeeCee converts.

- Word is there was even a movie deal in the works, to star Dragonson and Morningstar as themselves in a film based on the dragon's teachings. It fell through when the church split, though.
- Angel

So here we are: new temples are being planned, money is pouring in, and everyone is happy. Until Ghostwalker shows up, that is.

That Christmas Eve emergence threw a dragon-sized monkey wrench in the plans of the faithful, and here's why. Following the chaos in Denver, Morningstar collapsed while in a board meeting. Doctors were summoned, magical healing was tried, but nothing seemed to rouse him and no one could figure out what was wrong. He remained in that unconscious state for three days before waking up in his hospital bed and calling for his clothes.

- The doctors reported a possible stroke, but they had no idea what was really going on. Keller has no history of heart trouble, and the tests he's submitted to since then, including MRI's and other imaging, show no signs of residual damage.
- Doc Faustus

• That's not entirely correct. During his episode he exhibited a high fever, which broke only hours before his awakening. Prior to the episode, he had shown signs of disorientation, headache and vomiting. The one brainscan he submitted to following the episode showed unusual brain activity in line with a diagnosis of viral encephalitis.

• Nursie

• Then why isn't that what's on his medical records? And why isn't he deteriorating if he does have encephalitis that hasn't been treated?

• Doc Faustus

• Because the nuyen is mightier than the Hippocratic Oath, for one. As to the second, I'll admit that I don't know. Perhaps he is being treated. Perhaps it was simply a mild case. Perhaps the magical healing did do something for him. Unfortunately, he's shown no signs of wanting to come in and be treated, and his followers are rather resistant to the idea that his divine vision was nothing more than fever-induced delirium.

• Nursie

• Or just maybe Morningstar is divinely inspired and you're out to discredit him. The signs are there if you'll only see them. Ghostwalker is Dunkelzahn reborn, returned from death to lead mankind into a new age of glory.

• Brother Starfire

Once he was released, Morningstar called Dragonson on the phone and a meeting of the board was called. In that meeting, Morningstar claimed that it was revealed to him that Ghostwalker was the savior of mankind. This declaration met with stiff opposition, not the least of which came from Dragonson himself. Apparently Dragonson, along with the majority of the board, was highly opposed to worshipping any one dragon, having based his religion on the codes which the dragon had left. He and Morningstar argued vehemently, before Morningstar burst out of the room and stormed off.

Within forty-eight hours, the word had spread, due in no small part to Morningstar's efforts to draw power and followers to himself in a bid to take over the church. He slapped together a trid statement of his revelation of faith and had it broadcast on national TV, pulling in a few favors from friends in the entertainment industry. Dragonson took it in stride at first, issuing his own trid statement stating that Ghostwalker was indeed another dragon, but no more a messiah than any other of dragonkind.

- Dragonson tried to contact Morningstar the day of the trid release, but Joshua refused to talk to him. There's been no communication between them since.
- Sister Goldenhair



Morningstar then issued a press release calling all true members of the church to stage a march against the DeeCee temple, to wrest control of it from the leaders. On the day of the march, Morningstar turned up with something like four hundred members of the local *crèches*, most of them originally street converts. Dragonson stopped him at the property line, backed by the temple's security forces plus some volunteers.

Dragonson tried speaking to the crowds to make them disperse, but someone (the identity of the individual has not been determined) cast a confusion spell of some sort in order to disrupt Dragonson's speech. It was quickly dispelled, but it sparked a riot in response that caused one death and sent fifteen to the hospital. *Crèches* across the nation met in response to the crisis, and chaos reigned across the nation as the main temples fell under siege and *crèches* fought against each other according to their own alliances.

- Morningstar cast that spell to prevent his people from falling back under the leadership of Dragonson.

- Anon

- Morningstar has no magical talent. It couldn't have been him.

- Mystic

- Scanned him since the episode? I think you'd be surprised at what you see.

- Brother Starfire

- Bulldrek. Just because it happened with Dragonson doesn't mean it happens to every two-bit Jamestown wanna-be.

- Abyssinia

In the end, it fell out something like this. Most of the established members of the church held to Dragonson and the original tenets of the church, particularly those who had achieved some position. All but one board member and all of the regional heads declared their loyalty to Dragonson almost immediately, leaving him in charge of the center of the faith, the temples. Dragonson capitalized on this by declaring that all those who left the faith to follow Morningstar were banned from the temples until they returned to the church. This decision turned the temple areas into a sort of warzone, because many of the *crèches*—particularly those with active street ministries—joined Morningstar.

- Declaring the center of a faith off-limits for a militant faction of said faith hardly ever makes for peaceful times. I wonder what Dragonson thought he was doing.

- Sandstorm

Morningstar's people have since been involved in gunfire battles against temple guards at each of the sites, staging a kind of guerrilla siege. Clashes against Dragonson *crèches* have occurred regularly in almost every sprawl in the UCAS, with the latest atrocity being a bombing in Seattle where a family of four was killed. Many of Morningstar's followers are active or former shadowrunners or other criminals, people accustomed to using force to solve problems. Within weeks, Morningstar has accumulated what amounts to a fanatical army of individuals determined to capture the physical and spiritual centers of their faith. Clashes have occurred all across the nation, even going so far as to physically damage the Prince Edward Island temple itself.

This is, according to all definitions, a holy war. And as such, the people involved don't really care who gets hurt, especially Morningstar's faction. These clashes get as bloody as any gang battle you've ever had the misfortune to get caught in, and word is that even bombing rival *crèche* sites isn't out of the question for Joshua's kids. So you can now consider yourself informed and forewarned. If you've got a loved one on either side of the dispute, I'd highly encourage you to encourage them to put a little distance between themselves and their religion right now. It might keep everyone alive just that much longer.

- Any word from Ghostwalker on what he thinks of Morningstar's claim?

- Fetish

- Word is that Morningstar was one of the first to petition the dragon after Ghostie's state of the union address. No one seems to know for sure what came of it, but Morningstar's followers managed to seize the Denver temple and transform it into their main headquarters. Ghostwalker hasn't made any public statements about the violence.

- Denver Lowdown

- If you were a dragon, would you dismiss a devoted cult of followers who hang on your every word?

- Sith

GAME INFORMATION



The events of *Year of the Comet* will permanently alter the world of *Shadowrun*. Just when everyone thought the Awakening was buried in the past, along comes the comet to rattle the world and remind everyone that the universe still has a lot of surprises up its sleeve. While the comet itself is simply a symbol, the events that accompany it are quite real, and are likely to have an effect on all characters in the world of *Shadowrun*.

This chapter provides the gamemaster with all of the background info and rules he or she will need to use this book.

HOW TO USE YEAR OF THE COMET

The best way to use *Year of the Comet* in a *Shadowrun* campaign is to build up to it, working in the events slowly over time. The Year of the Comet Timeline on p. 136 provides a chronological breakdown of the major events. As the year 2061 opens, the hype surrounding the comet will begin to seep into the media on all levels. Scientists will debate on the comet's nature and impact, religious groups will seek to recruit, protect or whip up their flocks, all sorts of cults and creepies will crawl out the woodwork and corps and politicians will use the hype to cover up their nefarious activities. The corporate probe race will begin in earnest, sparking off advertising campaigns, comet and probe-related products and corporate nationalism. Even on the street, the comet will be a topic of chitchat in bars and clubs, and some survivalist types may be making preparations for world disorder. No character will be able to access the Matrix, watch the trid or read a screamsheet without seeing something relating to the comet or probe race. This publicity overload should begin to grate on even the most gullible trend-followers, working up their cynicism just in time to smash it apart with SURGE.

When SURGE strikes, the initial response will be widespread panic. Paranoia will reign supreme as nobody knows who will "express" next, or what the actual results might be. Fear will lead to xenophobia, hatred will lead to riots, culminating in worldwide riots similar to the Night of Rage. And SURGE will just be the first event. Natural disasters, magical fluctuations, Ghostwalker, the shedim, war and revolution will batter the planet, one after another.

Characters in a campaign can easily become caught up in these events, either through personal involvement or through a job offer. For example, one of the characters may undergo SURGE, or may learn that their dead parents' bodies have been stolen by shedim. The run-





YEAR OF THE COMET TIMELINE

2061

January	Comet hype begins.
January–September	The first leg of the "Probe Race," as the space megacorps compete to be the first to send a probe to the comet. One by one, each probe falls victims to accident or sabotage.
August	Typhoons batter the Philippines.
September	Halley's Comet becomes visible to the naked eye. Mana storms and other magical disturbances increase in frequency and potency around the world; fluctuations and disturbances are noted in the Dunkelzahn Rift; astral space becomes visible within the vicinity of the Wuxing HQ in Hong Kong.
	Sharon Wu gives birth to quintuplets.
	Wuxing discovers and secretly begins mining natural orichalcum deposits.
September 4	The first reported cases of SURGE express.
	Ibn Elsa, leader of the Islamic Unity Movement, is assassinated.
September 9	Ibn Elsa rises from the dead, proclaims a New Islamic Jihad.
September 10	SURGE sweeps the globe, continues at a regular pace.
September 12	Paranoia about SURGE sparks riots, attacks and urban unrest.
October	SURGE backlash continues in full swing, with riots and attacks on metahumans.
October 27	The Ring of Fire erupts; Japan is smitten with volcanic eruptions and tidal waves; the Bay Area is trampled by an earthquake; six volcanic eruptions and an earthquake wreck the Philippines; many other PacRim areas are also devastated.
October 29	The Japanese Diet orders the withdrawal of Imperial troops from foreign soil to assist with disaster relief and to rebuild Japan.
November	Halley's Comet temporarily disappears from view. General Saito refuses the Diet's withdrawal order, staging a military coup in San Francisco backed by loyal troops and Japanese megacorps. Saito's troops quickly move into the Central Valley, seizing Sacramento and key sites.
	Ares moves troops in to defend Silicon Valley.
November 1	Ancestor spirits warn of the "return of the dead."
November 27	The news of the discovery of natural orichalcum deposits sparks an Orichalcum Rush.
December 2	An earthquake demolishes LA; walls go down, riots and looting sweep the city.
December 8	The Pueblo Corporate Council moves in troops, seizing LA and the outlying areas.
December 24	The astral form of Ghostwalker breaks through the Dunkelzahn Rift, followed by a wave of spirits; Ghostwalker appears in Denver, destroying the Aztlan teocalli and rampaging through the city; the dragon wages a guerrilla warfare campaign against the city in the weeks that follow. The first reported "zombie" (shedim) attack occurs; many more are reported in the weeks that follow.
December 25	Ghostwalker secretly meets with Aina Dúpre and Nadja Daviar of the Draco Foundation, as well as SilveryK (the Nexus) and Ryan Mercury (Assets, Inc.).

2062

January	The CAS offers a bounty for magicians who reanimate corpses. Aztlan moves military troops into their sector in Denver in direct violation of the Treaty of Denver; the other sectors also reinforce their borders with troops.
January 3	The new child Emperor of Japan is announced to the world.
January 27	The Council of Denver meets with Ghostwalker; Ghostwalker is given control of the city; Aztlan is kicked out of Denver; CAS troops invade the Aztlan sector.
February	The Emperor rescinds the Yomi Island decree; the Huk openly declare revolution in the Philippines.
February 5	Aztlan/Aztechnology military forces start slash and burn of Yucatán.
March	Halley's Comet becomes visible to the naked eye again.
March 15	An earthquake, tidal waves and storms batter the Yucatán, halting the Aztlan offensive; in the weeks that follow, nature and toxic spirits wage warfare against both sides and each other.
April	Halley's Comet disappears from view. All known natural orichalcum deposits run dry; no new deposits are located. New SURGE cases decrease to a trickle.

ners may be hired to extract the lead engineer of a space probe team, or rescue an important official from the natural disaster that strikes Japan. The constant changes in the world will pull on people's emotions and loyalties, impacting the characters in small ways as one of their contacts joins a comet cult or decides to join the revolution in the Philippines. The gamemaster can pick and choose what storylines to draw the characters into, or let them plot their own course by presenting a variety of options as the world changes around them. Alternately, the events described here can merely serve as a muted background noise, a chaotic backdrop as the runners carry on with their lives.

The events described in this book raise a number of questions. Who sabotaged Novatech's *Whipple* probe? What are the true goals of the Church of Undying Light? Who is the power behind the Japanese throne? Can Wuxing really use feng shui to find orichalcum deposits? What are the shedim, and why have they come here? Who will win the second round of the probe race? Who is Ghostwalker, what does he want, and where the hell has he been? The answers to these questions and many more are up to the gamemaster to decide, as appropriate for his or her game. Some of them may be answered in future *Shadowrun* products, others may forever remain a mystery, open to interpretation and speculation.

RUNNING THE PROBE RACE

The probe race is the perfect scenario to introduce characters into the *Year of the Comet* plotline. As described on pp. 13–21, a slew of corps are involved in the competition. From advertising agencies to research labs to launch pads to control centers, the probe race offers a slew of job opportunities for shadowrunners.

The gamemaster may choose to have the characters become involved in the first leg of the probe race, perhaps having a hand in one of the events described in the news articles about the demise of each probe. Alternately, the gamemaster can craft an adventure around the second leg of the race, which is bound to be a much more desperate race. All of the corps involved lost face on the first round, and they are each concerned about salvaging their public image by winning the second round. The second round is also the last chance any of the corps will have—if they lose, they're out of the race for good. The stakes will be high as some corps are eliminated, bringing pressure to bear on the few that remain.

Several probes still survive from the first leg of the probe race and have a chance to win during the second: Ares' *Gigas* and *Velox* probes, Proteus' *Götterbote*, Shibata's *Kepler*, Yamatetsu's *Gagarin* and the probes constructed by Trans-Orbital and Hisato-Turner. Other corporations, such as Saeder-Krupp, Novatech and Shiawase must construct new probes to compete in the second half of the race. There is also the possibility that other corps may try their hand that didn't have a chance during the first round.

SURGE

Like the wave of Unexplained Genetic Expression (UGE) that produced dwarfs and elves, and the wave of Goblinization



that produced orks and trolls, SURGE is a byproduct of the slowly rising level of ambient mana in the Sixth World. Just as with the effects of the first Awakening, SURGE is a wakeup call that says the world is still transforming, and the wild ride to the future is just beginning.

Unlike UGE and Goblinization, SURGE has not created entirely new species of metahumanity (though the situation with other critters seems to be different). Instead, SURGE merely seems to have brought out more variants and differentiations—or as some would view them, mutations. A person who is stricken by SURGE does not transform into a new creature, he simply manifests a new set of features or abilities that did not express previously. SURGE effects are permanent; a person who has undergone SURGE—known as a “changeling”—will never return to his unaltered self.

In reality, the actual percentage of those affected by SURGE in the world of *Shadowrun* is quite small—less than 1 percent. However, because SURGE coincides with the appearance of Halley's Comet, and the previous waves of UGE and Goblinization had such a large impact on the world, the SURGE phenomenon plays directly into the fears and prejudices of an already agitated populace. The first cases of SURGE are hyped so strongly by the media, and harped upon so furiously by Humanis and other fear-mongers, that SURGE becomes the spark that lights the powderkeg.

SURGE IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

The advent of SURGE in your campaign should come slowly. During the first few days of September 2061, the media will note the few early, isolated incidents, but they will be treated as anomalies in an already bizarre world. When SURGE kicks in strongly on September 10, 2061, it will be headline news. Fear and panic will break out as everyone begins to worry about a new wave of “comet-influenced Goblinization.” Humanis will seize the situation, whipping up a furor about plagues and mutations. Demonstrations turn into riots, changelings are shunned and attacked, thousands flee the metroplex, and for a few days the world threatens to plunge into chaos. Then the balance restores itself, though incidents of violence and mayhem still break out over the next few months.

SURGE AND CHARACTERS

For *Shadowrun* players, SURGE is a way to give a character a distinctive trait, look or ability—something that makes the characters different, so they stand out and have that extra bit of flash. As a game mechanic, SURGE is not intended to have a drastic effect on gameplay—it creates no new races, no new superpowers and is unlikely to even have a direct impact on most player characters. Though it certainly has an effect on the world setting and may play a role in certain plotlines, SURGE is intended to have only a minor effect on the characters themselves. The changes brought about by SURGE are primarily window dressing—they add a new layer of conceptual differences and allow new tweaks for role-playing.

Note that mundane human characters who lack implants are the most likely to become changelings—they roughly have a 15 percent chance of doing so. Awakened characters, metahumans and other character types are much less likely to express. The percentage of player characters who will change is significantly higher than the actual percentages of SURGE expression in the fictional *Shadowrun* population world-wide—this is intentional. After all, the percentage of Awakened characters is significantly higher than the percentage of Awakened in the *Shadowrun* world, and the real fun with SURGE is being able to roleplay it from an affected character's point of view.

Existing Characters

If a gamemaster uses *Year of the Comet* in his campaign, he will need to decide whether or not to “inflict” SURGE upon existing player characters. A gamemaster can certainly choose to decree that SURGE will not affect any player characters in his game, or he can even go the opposite route and decide that it *must* affect each of the characters. We recommend that, like life itself, the chance of a player character undergoing SURGE be random.

Using the random method, the gamemaster should have each character make a SURGE Test. If a character is struck by SURGE, the gamemaster should choose the most dramatic possible moment for the change to occur. Not every character needs to be stricken by SURGE in September of 2061—many changelings do not manifest changes until months later. The transformation itself may be drastic and sudden, or may take place slowly over the course of days or even weeks. Depending upon the severity of the changes, the character may even be hospitalized or forced to go through a period of physical and/or emotional trauma and adjustment.

Characters who express obvious SURGE characteristics may well become the target of racist attacks or prejudice (see *SURGE and Social Interaction*, p. 143). The gamemaster can use this to introduce new enemies and antagonists, or even to draw the character into new adventures. Likewise, SURGE has a certain “sexy” appeal to certain subcultures, and changelings are glamorized, idolized and even imitated in some social scenes. The gamemaster can use this phenomenon to introduce new allies, friends or fans, or even to engulf the character into a new “glamorous” lifestyle.

New Characters and SURGE

If new characters are being introduced into a *Shadowrun* game that is set after September of 2061, the gamemaster may choose to allow them to be SURGE-affected. There are two ways this can be done. Either the gamemaster has each new character make a SURGE Test just as existing characters did, or

else he allows characters to take on SURGE Positive and Negative Effects the same as if they were choosing Edges and Flaws (see p. 15, *SRComp*). If the latter method is used, the gamemaster should apply a fee of 5 Building Points to new characters that wish to become changelings; a character should not be allowed to take

SURGE TEST TABLE

Character	Modifier
Awakened	+(Magic rating ÷ 2, round up)
Metahuman	
Dwarf, Elf, Ork, Troll	+2
Metahuman Variant (ie., a gnome)	+3
Albino	+4
Otaku	+4
Infected (with HMHV)	+5
Shapeshifter	+6

Positive or Negative SURGE Effects without paying this cost.

THE SURGE TEST

To determine if a character is affected by SURGE, the character makes an Essence (12) Test. Apply any appropriate target number modifiers from the SURGE Test Table. For characters with partial Essence scores, round Essence up. Characters with a variable Essence (such as vampires), cyberzombies or any character with an Essence of 0 or less cannot be affected by SURGE.

Karma may not be used on the SURGE Test.

Determine SURGE Severity

If a character scored any successes on the SURGE Test, he undergoes SURGE and becomes a changeling. The character rolls 1D6 and adds 2 for each additional success scored on the SURGE Test past the first. The result is the number of points of Negative SURGE Effects the character acquires. The character then makes an identical 1D6 roll (with the same modifier of +2 per additional success) to determine how many Positive SURGE Effect points he acquires.

If the gamemaster allows it, a character may spend 5 Good Karma points to re-roll either of these 1D6 rolls. The results of the second roll are final, and must be used.

SURGE EFFECTS

All SURGE Effects are divided into two categories: Negative and Positive. Each also has a Point value. Like the system of Edges and Flaws (see p. 15, *SRComp*), Positive SURGE Effects have positive values and Negative Effects have negative values. Unlike Edges and Flaws, however, a character's Positive and Negative SURGE points are unlikely to balance out and equal zero.

When a character undergoes SURGE, the gamemaster may allow him to choose what Positive and Negative Effects he picks up. Alternately, the gamemaster can make the entire process as random as nature, and instruct the player to roll on the Random SURGE Effects Tables (p. 142).

Some SURGE effects cannot be applied to certain characters, as noted in the description—have the player roll again or choose another effect.

NEGATIVE SURGE EFFECTS

Each of the SURGE Effects below has a negative value listed in parentheses. Any effects the SURGE expression may have in gameplay are noted in the description.

Altered Eye Color (-1)

The character's irises, whites or possibly even the entire eyes change to an unusual and distinctive color. For example, a character may acquire bright green irises, both eyes may turn to a light silver color, or one eye may turn white and one black. Many onlookers will simply assume the character has cybereyes. Altered eye color has no effect on the character's vision.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with cybereyes or bioware cat's eyes. It is not compatible with the feline eyes effect (p. 141).

Altered Skin Coloration (-1 or -2)

The character's skin changes to an unusual color, either entirely or just in certain areas of the body. For example, a black character's hands, feet and face may turn Caucasian, a Caucasian character may acquire brown leopard spots across his neck, shoulder and arms, or a character's skin may turn entirely orange or red like an oni. The value of this effect depends on how visible it is, and how strongly it may affect a character's chances of being noticed, recognized or encountering prejudice.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with dermal sheathing, chloroplast skin or bioware skin pigmentation.

Astral Hazing (-5)

A character inflicted with this unusual effect gradually corrupts the mana around him, creating a background count (see p. 83, *MTS*) wherever he goes. If the character remains in a single location for over an hour, the locale will develop a background count of 1. Over time, this count may increase up to a value equal to the character's Essence ÷ 2 (round down to a minimum of 1). This background count affects magic on both the physical and astral planes. The increased Background Count will fade about an hour after the character leaves.

This effect cannot be applied to Awakened characters.

Bio-Rejection (-5/-2 for Awakened characters)

Similar to the Bio-Rejection Flaw (see p. 19, *SRComp*), the character's body completely rejects all cyberware (including nano-implants but not nanoware) and non-cultured bioware implants. If the character already has implants when the SURGE takes place, he will slowly become ill and then incapacitated over a period of (Body) days as his body begins to reject the implants. If the character is not hospitalized and does not have the implants removed within Body x 2 days, he will die.

Chronic Osteocusp (-10)

One of the most hideous SURGE effects, a character struck with this effect goes through a period of agonizing pain as razor-sharp bony deposits erupt from the skeletal structure and puncture through the skin. In other words, the character sprouts bony spikes all over his body. Victimized characters are incapacitated by the pain of this event, and must suffer through a customization period of (10 - Willpower) weeks until they get used to the constant level of pain caused by the thorny protrusions. During this period the character suffers a +4 modifier to all actions due to the pain. (At the gamemaster's discretion, pain-alleviating drugs, powers or implants may decrease this modifier, but they may also increase the acclimation period.)

Besides being somewhat hideous to look at, characters with chronic osteocusp cannot wear armor or restrictive clothing because the protruding bone spurs make it too uncomfortable. Specially designed armor and clothing must be purchased, at a 50 percent increase in base cost.

Over time, characters with this affliction become accustomed to living with pain, and so they gain the equivalent of the Pain Resistance adept power (see p. 170, *SR3*) at level 3. However, these characters also heal more slowly, and automatically gain the slow healer effect (p. 140) at no additional value. The bony thorns also make the character slightly more dangerous in unarmed combat. Add +1 to the Power of any unarmed attacks.

The bony spikes may be surgically removed (or even painfully trimmed), but they grow back over an agonizing two-week period during which the character will suffer a +2 modifier to all actions.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with dermal sheathing.

Critter Spook (-1)

Something about the character's presence or smell now seems threatening to animals and paranormal critters. Any animals within the vicinity of the character will react with fear and hostility (apply a +2 modifier to attempts to control, soothe or pacify them). If drawn into combat, the critters will go out of their way to attack this character first, before any other targets.

Cyclops (-4)

The eyes of a character who expresses this SURGE effect will wither and "heal up" as if they never existed (cybereyes will be purged from the user's system). A single new eye will express directly above the nose, with the same natural vision abilities as the character's previous eyes. The character will suf-



fer from a lack of depth perception with only one eye, and so will suffer a +2 target number modifier to all ranged attacks.

Dual Natured (-10/-5 for Awakened characters)

This unfortunate person becomes permanently attuned to the astral plane, effectively becoming dual natured. This condition can never be turned off. Like other dual natured entities, the character can affect and be affected by astral objects (such as wards) and astral forms (spirits, projecting magicians and so forth). This means the character is vulnerable to the power of possession as well as astral attack, though he may defend himself using standard astral combat rules. On the plus side, the dual natured person can now learn the Aura Reading skill.

If the character afflicted with this SURGE effect is Awakened, they can still astrally project and leave their mundane body behind. However, as soon as they return they become dual natured again.

Feathers (-1 or -2)

The character sprouts feathers which either replace her regular body hair and/or cover other parts of her body. These feathers may be fine and downy (and water-resistant to a degree, like a duck's) or fluffy and vibrant. The value of this effect depends on how visible it is, and how strongly it may affect a character's chances of being noticed, recognized or encountering prejudice.

Feathers offer no protective value.

Pointed Ears (-1)

A human who gains this effect manifests elongated and pointed ears, just like an elf or other metahuman. This allows the character to pass as an elf if he chooses. However, elf NPCs who discover this deception may treat the poser with hostility and contempt.

This effect cannot be applied to non-human characters.

Scales (-1 or -2)

The character expresses scaly skin, similar to a lizard or snake, over his body. The scales may cover his entire body or only certain sections. The scales might grow in certain patterns, or may even appear in unusual colors (such as bright red, turquoise blue and green). The character will also periodically shed his scaly skin, as a new layer grows in underneath. The value of this effect depends on how visible it is and how strongly it may affect a character's chances of being noticed, recognized or encountering prejudice.

Scaly skin offers no protective value. This effect cannot be applied to a character with dermal sheathing.

Slow Healer (-2)

The character's system responds to damage more sluggishly, and typically takes longer to heal wounds and fatigue. Apply a +2 modifier to all Healing Tests made by the character.

Third Eye (-2)

A third eye expresses in the middle of the character's forehead. This third eye incurs no vision modifiers, except that the

character may still perceive depth with one eye closed. Even when the third eye is closed, an onlooker can detect its presence with a Perception (4) Test.

Tusks (-1)

A character struck by this effect grows small tusks from his lower jaw, similar to those of an ork or troll. These tusks slightly impede the character's speech.

This effect cannot be applied to orks and trolls.

Unusual Hair (-1 or -2)

The character's hair either changes to an unusual color or texture, or grows from his body in unusual patterns or areas. For example, a character's hair may suddenly turn naturally violet, or he may sprout a lion-like mane from his head down his shoulders and back, or he may be entirely covered in fur, like a bear or a Night One elven metavariant. The value of this effect depends on how visible it is and how strongly it may affect a character's chances of being noticed, recognized or encountering prejudice.

This effect is not compatible with the feathers effect.

Vestigial Tail (-1)

A short, stumpy tail grows from the user's lower back, at the base of the spine. This tail may be scaly (like a lizard), hairy (like a dog) or hairless (like a rat). Unlike the long tail effect (see p. 141), the vestigial tail provides no bonuses for balance. The tail may be wagged slightly with effort. The character will need to have his clothing tailored to accommodate the tail, and he will find it uncomfortable to sit in certain positions for long periods.

Flaws as Negative Effects

In addition to the SURGE Effects listed above, the following Flaws are also available as Negative Effects, using the same negative value (see *Edges and Flaws*, p. 15, *SRComp*): Allergy (-2 to -5), Color Blind (-1), Low Pain Tolerance (-4), Night Blindness (-2/-1), Weak Immune System (-1), Sensitive Neural Structure (-2/-4), Sensesense Vertigo (-2/-4), Astral Impressions (-2) or Spirit Bane (-2).

POSITIVE SURGE EFFECTS

Each of the SURGE Effects below has a value listed in parentheses. Any effects the SURGE expression may have in gameplay are noted in the description.

Astral Sight (6)

The character undergoes a limited Awakening, acquiring a Magic rating of 1. This Awakening allows her to open her perceptions to the astral plane and assense, just like a magician (see *Astral Perception*, p. 171, *SR3*). She can also now learn the Magical skills of Aura Reading and Enchanting. She cannot astrally project, however, nor does she gain access to any other magical abilities or skills.

This effect cannot be applied to Awakened characters (including adepts).

Claws or Talons (2)

The character's fingernails and toenails harden and lengthen into claws or talons, like those of a natural predator. The character may use these claws to attack an opponent using Unarmed Combat skill, inflicting damage of (STR + 1)L.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with handrazor cyberware.

Dermal Deposits (2)

The character acquires tough and sinewy dermal deposits under his skin, much like a troll. These deposits add +1 the character's Body for Damage Resistance Tests.

If a troll or a character with dermal plating cyberware acquires this effect, his dermal deposits become even more widespread and pronounced. The bonus to Body from both his natural dermal armor or dermal plating cyberware and this effect are cumulative.

Fangs (2)

The character's canines become enlarged and dangerous like those of a carnivore. The character can attack with the fangs using Unarmed Combat skill, though fang attacks suffer a -1 Reach penalty. Fang attacks inflict (STR + 1)L damage.

Feline Eyes (2)

The character's eyes transform into those of a feline's. Like bioware cat's eyes (see p. 64, *M&M*), feline eyes are slit and provide natural low light vision. Under minimal lighting they appear to be reflective and glow in the dark.

If the character had natural thermographic vision, that ability is lost as a result of the transformation—for such characters this effect has a value of 0. Feline eyes cannot be applied to a character with cybereyes or bioware cat's eyes.

Gills (4)

Amphibian-like gills express on the sides of the character's neck, allowing him to breathe underwater. The respiratory and circulation systems also evolve so that he can reflexively alternate between using lungs (above water) and gills (below water). These gills give the same advantages as the OXSYS cybergill (see p. 31, *M&M*), however they do not require any cyber-related upkeep.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with OXSYS cybergill cyberware.

Goblinization (10)

A character who undergoes this drastic and painful effect transforms into a different variant of metahuman. Human characters may only Goblinize into an ork or troll, while other metahumans may only transform into a metavariant of their species (such as an ork transforming into an oni). All of the character's racial modifiers are replaced with the ones appropriate to his new species, and the character may also suffer severe height, weight and appearance changes. At the gamemaster's discretion, certain implants may suffer Stress or failure as a result of the transformation.

Gamemasters are encouraged to strictly control the use of this effect.

High Frequency Hearing (2)

The character gains the ability to hear and detect sounds at a higher pitch than normal human hearing allows.

This effect cannot be applied to characters with cyberears or high frequency hearing cyberware modifications.

Horns (2)

A horn or horns express on the character's head. This effect can range from troll-like ram horns or deer-like antlers to devilish horns or even jagged crests of bone around the skull. The character can attack with the horns using Unarmed Combat skill, though horn attacks suffer a -1 Reach penalty. Horn attacks inflict (STR)M damage.

Improved Scent (2)

This effect grants the character a keener sense of smell, and functions just like the adept power of the same name (see p. 170, *SR3*).

This affect cannot be applied to adepts with the improved scent power.

Improved Taste (2)

The character acquires a much more refined sense of taste that functions just like the adept power of the same name (see p. 170, *SR3*).

This affect cannot be applied to adepts with the improved taste power.

Long Tail (2)

A tail sprouts from the base of the user's spine, at least a meter (but less than two meters) in length. This tail may be scaly (like a lizard), hairy (like a dog) or hairless (like a rat). The tail is not under the character's conscious control, and will tend to twitch, sway and possibly even wrap around things randomly. The tail does greatly assist the character's balance, reducing by -2 the target number for any tests involving balance, climbing, jumping, falling, Knockdown and so on. If combined with balance augmentation earware, the cumulative modifier is -3. The character will need to have his clothing adjusted to accommodate the tail, and he will find it uncomfortable to sit in certain positions for long periods.

Low Frequency Hearing (2)

The character gains the ability to hear and detect sounds at a lower pitch than normal human hearing allows.

This effect cannot be applied to characters with cyberears or low frequency hearing cyberware modifications.

Marsupial Pouch (2)

The character develops a pocket-like pouch on his chest or abdomen, just like the pouch a kangaroo uses to carry its young. This pouch can be used to carry items of Concealability 6 or higher, and adds +4 to the item's Concealability when carried.

RANDOM SURGE EFFECTS TABLES

Positive SURGE Effects

3D6 Roll	Result
3	Goblinization
4	Satyr Legs
5	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Retractable Claws; 4-6 Marsupial Pouch
6	Dermal Deposits
7	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Resistance to Disease; 4-6 Resistance to Poisons
8	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Claws; 4-6 Talons
9	Choose an Edge as a Positive Effect (or make one up)
10	Thermographic Vision
11	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Fangs; 4-6 Horns
12	Roll 1D6: 1-3 High Frequency Hearing; 4-6 Low Frequency Hearing
13	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Improved Scent; 4-6 Improved Taste
14	Feline Eyes
15	Natural Venom
16	Prehensile Tail
17	Gills
18	Astral Sight

Negative SURGE Effects

3D6 Roll	Result
3	Chronic Osteocarpus
4	Bio-Rejection
5	Cyclops
6	Third Eye
7	Critter Spook
8	Tusks
9	Altered Skin Coloration
10	Unusual Hair
11	Altered Eye Color
12	Choose a Flaw as a Negative Effect (or make one up)
13	Pointed Ears
14	Roll 1D6: 1-3 Feathers; 4-6 Scales
15	Vestigial Tail
16	Slow Healer
17	Astral Hazing
18	Dual Natured

Natural Venom (2, 4, 6, or 8)

The character's body begins to produce a natural toxin (which the character herself acquires a complete immunity to). The value of this effect is determined by the toxin's vector:

Ingestion Vector (2): The character's spit or mucus is toxic if ingested (with food or drink).

Injection Vector (4): The character's spit or mucus is poi-

sonous if injected into the bloodstream. A needle or dartgun may be used to apply the poisonous fluid.

Inhalation Vector (6): The character can emit a gaseous toxin that is poisonous if inhaled. The toxin can be delivered with an aerosol-like squirt (use the rules for the exhalation spray on p. 65, *M&M*).

Contact Vector (8): The character produces a substance that is poisonous if absorbed through direct skin contact. The venom may be used to coat weapons, and may also be delivered with a spit attack (see p. 65, *M&M*).

The venom has a Power equal to the character's unaugmented Body, a Damage Level of M and a Speed of Immediate. A character can produce a maximum of (Essence) number of doses per day. At the gamemaster's discretion, the venom may be more dangerous or may have an effect similar to that of a compound—in this case the value of the natural venom should increase appropriately.

Prehensile Tail (5)

The prehensile tail functions exactly like the long tail effect (p. 141), except that the character can consciously use and manipulate the tail as if it were an extra limb. The tail can be used to pick up items, though it lacks digits and so cannot finely manipulate objects, pull triggers and so on. Apply a +2 modifier to any attempt to use objects with the tail. The tail has an effective strength equal to half the character's unaugmented Strength (round down), but it can hold the character's entire body weight if he chooses to hang from it (it is after all, attached to his spine).

Note that prehensile tails do not provide an extra attack.

Resistance to Disease (1, 3 or 5)

Similar to the Resistance to Pathogens Edge (see p. 21, *SRComp*), each level of this ability provides one additional die for use in Body Tests to resist the effects of disease. This bonus is compatible with the bonus from any disease-resisting implant, magic or the natural resistance of dwarfs.

Resistance to Poisons (1, 3 or 5)

Similar to the Resistance to Toxins Edge (see p. 21, *SRComp*), each level of this ability provides one additional die for use in Body Tests to resist the effects of toxins. This bonus is compatible with the bonus from any toxin-resisting implant, magic or the natural resistance of dwarfs.

Retractable Claws (3)

This effect is similar to the claws or talons effect (p. 141), except that the claws may be retracted, like those of a cat.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with handrazor cyberware.

Satyr Legs (6)

The character's legs transform into the shape of a quadruped's hind legs (just like *Kid Stealth Cyberlegs*, p. 37, *M&M*) and his feet change into cloven hooves. The legs also grow more hair, like those of a satyr. These legs allow the character to run much faster—add 1 to his running multiplier. The character also gains +2 Power to kicking attacks, and receives an additional die for Athletics Tests involving jumping.

This effect cannot be applied to a character with cyberlegs.

Thermographic Vision (2/1 for Decker and Rigger Characters)

The character acquires natural thermographic vision, just like dwarfs and trolls.

Edges as Positive Effects

In addition to the SURGE Effects listed below, the following Edges are also available as Positive Effects, using the same value (see *Edges and Flaws*, p. 15, *SRComp*): Exceptional Attribute (2), Adrenaline Surge (2), Double Jointed (1), High Pain Tolerance (2 per box), Lightning Reflexes (2, 4 or 6), Natural Immunity (1 or 3), Night Vision (2/1), Quick Healer (2), Toughness (3), Will to Live (1, 2 or 3), Perfect Time (1), Photographic Memory (3), Sense of Direction (1), Animal Empathy (2), Astral Chameleon (2), Magic Resistance (1 to 4), Poor Link (2) or Spirit Affinity (2).

SURGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Changelings tend to stick out in a crowd. Many people will regard them as freaks at best, mutants at worst. This unusual look can be a liability in some social interactions, as the changeling's look may make another person uncomfortable, distrustful or even hostile.

As a general rule, a +1 modifier should be applied to all Charisma or Charisma-linked skill tests made by a changeling to reflect their freakishness. At the gamemaster's discretion, this modifier can be increased if the changeling's expressions are exceptionally noticeable, weird or scary (such as satyr legs or chronic osteocuspis).

In some cases, however, a changeling's expressions may be accepted or even idolized, such as in the SURGE clubs described on p. 32. In these cases, the modifier above may not apply, or the changeling may even receive a -1 modifier when dealing with changeling fans.

CREATING YOUR OWN SURGE EFFECTS

There are many more SURGE expressions manifesting in the world of *Shadowrun* than the ones listed here. If a gamemaster or player has a specific look or effect in mind, they

are encouraged to work together to create a custom SURGE effect. All such effects require the final approval of the gamemaster, and should be carefully balanced in terms of value and game effect. The SURGE effects provided here, as well as the Edges and Flaws included in the *Shadowrun Companion*, can serve as a guideline.

NPCS AND SURGE

It is important that gamemasters remember that SURGE is completely random, and that it may well strike NPCs as readily as it affects player characters. Gamemasters are encouraged to have at least a few NPCs in their campaign become changelings. The rules used for determining whether SURGE affects player characters can also be used for each NPC.

Changeling NPCs can also fill some useful or intriguing roles within a campaign. For example, a changeling who has suffered attacks by Humanis can be the source of an adventure, whether he hires the characters for defense or revenge or whether he is killed and the characters are hired to investigate his death. Likewise, a SURGE expression can add that special little effect to make an NPC antagonist seem especially twisted or evil, such as the enemy mage with chronic osteocuspis or the triple-crossing Mr. Johnson triclops.

NEW CRITTERS

The following statistics apply to the new paranormal creatures described beginning on p. 36.



DEMON RAT

Demon rats have a very high animalistic intelligence and are quite cunning. They will often travel in swarms, leading devil rats as well as mundane rats with them in search of food. Smaller swarms (under a dozen rats) will hunt using stealth, relying on the devil and demon rats' concealment powers.

Larger swarms will often attack en masse, relying on numbers to take down their prey.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
5/4	6 x 3	5	5	4/6	4	6Z	6

INIT: 6 + 2D6

Attacks: 6M

Powers: Animal Control (Mundane Rats, Devil Rats), Concealment (Personal), Corrosive Saliva, Immunity (Pathogens, Poisons)

Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate)

Notes: There is a 1 in 6 chance that any given demon rat has the pestilence power (VITAS-3). Infected rats are immune to the virus, they are just the carrier.

There is also a 1 in 6 chance that the demon rat has the regeneration power.

**GLOMOSS**

Gloomoss has rapidly become popular as a relatively cheap astral alarm system. While it cannot actively affect anything astrally, the moss will glow brightly for several minutes after it senses magical activity. Any magical activity in the astral plane will trigger the glo-moss, including foci, spells, spirits and astrally perceiving or projecting magicians.

Gloomoss is rated in Force and is considered dual natured. A moss's Force is limited by its size; the Force rating may not exceed the moss's area in square meters x 5.

Powers: Magic Sense (astral plane only)

Weaknesses: Dietary Requirement (Water)

HORNED BEAR

Horned Bears are semi-intelligent creatures and very territorial. At full maturity, they can reach up to 4 meters in height and weigh as much as 600 kilograms. When any creature it views as a threat enters its designated territory, it will offer up a challenge for ritualized combat. If a single opponent steps forward and accepts this challenge, the

horned bear with fight it in hand to hand combat with sheathed claws, doing stun damage only. If the horned bear takes any wound, it will withdraw from combat and leave the trespassers in peace. If the horned bear wins combat, it will expect the opponent(s) to leave its territory immediately (or when they regain consciousness).

Should the rituals of this combat be violated in any way, such as multiple opponents attacking at once, using ranged weapons or offensive spells, etc., the horned bear will activate its enhanced abilities and fight to the death.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
13/6	6 x 4	13	—	4/6	5	6Z	5

INIT: 5 + 2D6

Attacks: 10M (Stun, w/o claws), 13S (Physical, with claws), +2 Reach

Powers: Enhanced Physical Attribute (Strength), Enhanced Reactions

**NIGHT MANTA**

Night mantas are deadly and efficient hunters, silently swooping down to sting their prey, then landing leisurely and devouring it. Because they are virtually invisible and silent, they often take their prey by surprise.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
6	6 x 4	6	—	4/4	4	6	5

INIT: 4 + 1D6

Attacks: 8M

Powers: Innate Spell (Levitate), Shadow Cloak, Silence, Venom (6S, **Speed:** 1 Combat Turn)

SANGRE DEL DIABLOS

These trees use their compulsion power to draw in victims. Once the victim gets close enough, the tree engulfs him, drawing him into its trunk where sap dissolves the body. Their iron-like bark and resistance to fire make the Sangre Del Diablos incredibly difficult to kill or cut down, as does their resistance to magic.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
16/8	5 x 0	14	—	2/5	6	8	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Powers: Compulsion, Corrosive Secretions, Engulf, Immunity (Fire), Magical Guard

Notes: Treat the engulf power as a sludge engulf (see p. 9, *Critters*)

SHAMBLER

Shamblers typically make their lairs deep underground, in sewers and abandoned buildings, though they are occasionally found in dank, sunless areas such as heavy swamps. Most shamblers simply lie in wait for prey to wander nearby, typically scavengers attracted by the smell of corpses. The shambler then uses its globular spit to immobilize its victims. The glue coats the target with a

heavy, sticky secretion that makes it nearly impossible to move or break free.

Once a victim has been immobilized, the shambler will shamble in and paralyze its prey, then attach the helpless victim to its shell. It then secretes more glue to cover the new



addition, which hardens over a period of hours into another layer or armored shell. Veins grow outward from the inner layers of the shell into the newly acquired body, allowing the shambler to begin feeding off the unfortunate creature.

As the shambler adds to its shell, the shell becomes heavier and more unwieldy. When the shell gets too large, it will shed the shell and produce an offspring. The young shambler grows rapidly, reaching maturity in 2 months.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
4/*	5 x 3	6	1	4/5	5	6	5

INIT: 5 + 1D6

Attacks: 4M

Powers: Engulf, Hardened Armor, Innate Spell (Glue), Paralyzing Touch

Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)

***Notes:** Shamblers gain 1 point of armor for every 6 points of Body that is added to their shell. Shamblers will spawn a new shambler when they have 13 points of armor. As their shell gets heavier, the shambler's Body attribute will increase, while its Quickness and Reaction will decrease. For every 4 points of armor the shambler has, apply the following attribute modifiers: +2 Body, -1 Quickness, -1 Reaction.

USING HYSTERIA

The various cults and religious factions described in this book are just a sampling of the spectrum of weird beliefs and religious infighting that spring up as a result of the comet's passing. The comet draws all sorts of fringe elements out of the closet, including wannabe prophets, huckster criminals, madmen, monsters and saints. Each of them puts their own particular spin on the comet and current events, luring in the desperate and naïve.

These cults and religious groups do not rely on the hysteria of the times alone to draw in recruits—they employ a range of subtle tactics to lure people in and then chain them to the group. The primary recruitment method is to play upon people's needs, fears and insecurities—they find the hole in that person's life and then offer them something to fill it. Many recruits are recovering addicts or believers in other faiths. Recruits are also tempted with the urge to belong to something, to be a part of a whole, connected to an extended family.

Once they are in, these groups will often enforce strict rules or behavioral conduct designed to keep the person attached to the group. The cult will attempt to dominate the person's life in all aspects. Recruits will be encouraged to quit their jobs and surrender everything they own, so that they become entirely dependent upon the group for basic needs. Heavy peer pressure, strict responsibilities, rewards and punishment and love-bombing are just the beginning—drugs, BTLs, threats, blackmail and magical coercion may also play a role. Such groups are ripe grounds for paranormal creatures such as shadow free spirits, vampires, insect spirits and nomads.

What will happen when Halley's Comet passes? Will these groups melt away, implode or transform into something else entirely? Those that are truly based on extreme beliefs may commit mass suicide when the comet fails to perform as

expected. Since many of these groups are just a cover that someone or something uses for exploitation, they will most likely continue on until they are exposed, acting as a potential threat for years to come.

USING THE CHILDREN OF THE DRAGON

In its initial heyday, the Children of the Dragon was a growing religious organization that seemed to be genuinely attempting to undertake projects to aid the UCAS' poor, SINless and downtrodden. Behind the scenes, its leader also had an agenda to oppose dark forces in the world as Dunkelzahn once did, though their efforts towards this are still developing. The schism (and the violence that accompanies it) allows the gamemaster to introduce a religious dispute between two parties that are otherwise upstanding.

The leaders of the two factions, Dragonson and Morningstar, are both charismatic, powerful individuals with connections throughout the political and entertainment worlds. The strife between them can act as a powerful plot hook, either by having an NPC contact or dependant drawn into the violence or having it directly affect the characters themselves. While the temples are the focus of much of the violence, clashes can occur anytime members of the two factions meet.

Dragonson, the founder of the Children, wants nothing more than a unified group and to continue to follow the path put down by Dunkelzahn. Dragonson understands how political and economic powers work in the Sixth World, so he employs a number of trained individuals—essentially mercenary forces—to protect the Children's temples and crèches. Some of these guards are shadowrunners whom Dragonson also sometimes employs for secret missions against "dark forces." The majority of Dragonson's followers, however, are standard civilians. Dragonson himself is an enigma, as the source of his magical talent has not been explained. Did he really Awaken or does his Talent stem from something else entirely?

Morningstar is the bane of Dragonson. Professing that Ghostwalker is Dunkelzahn returned, Morningstar is willing to spill blood to reclaim the Children from what he sees as an errant path. Many of Morningstar's followers, roughly a third of the Children's membership, are from the underclass—including many former gangers, shadowrunners and petty criminals. These people have been shut out of the temples because of their beliefs, and they are willing to follow Morningstar and fight to reclaim what they believe is rightfully theirs. Ghostwalker's attitude towards this group so far has been neutral—or has it? Is Morningstar also Awakened? Is there some other power pulling his strings, and to what end?

Some Awakened members of the Children of the Dragon claim to follow a new totem or idol known as Dragon, though the validity of this claim is disputed. Should the gamemaster decide this claim is true, the following rules should be used.

Dragon

Dragon is a wily wyrm who sees the future laid out before him as a myriad of pathways. Rather than simply walking the path that leads towards his goal, Dragon arranges the path-



ways so that they *all* lead to his goal, one way or another. Dragon is a crafty manipulator, subtle and far-reaching, whose every move has repercussions that may not be seen for years to come. Dragon is a creature of terrible might, but he is also a creature of balance who sees that each action has a consequence and so strives to achieve a harmonious equilibrium.

Environment: Mountains

Advantages: +2 dice for detection and manipulation spells, +1 dice for mountain spirits

Disadvantages: Dragon shamans must have a minimum Intelligence of 6. Dragon shamans are overconfident, and must make a Willpower (6) Test to change a course of action based on the advice of another. They are also hoarders, and must make a Willpower (6) Test to relinquish possession of an item with value.

USING THE CULT OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

The Seventh Seal is a Humanis Policlub-spawned, Bible-swinging hate cult. Though mostly based in Seattle, the cult's followers may spread to other sprawls as well. Jeremiah Adams, the Humanis member and SURGE changeling who becomes the cult's leader, is using his followers to demand repentance, spread hatred and sow further chaos during an already chaotic time. But there is more to Jeremiah than meets the eye, and his true goals remain a mystery. Is he simply a mouthpiece and fundraiser for the Humanis Policlub's agenda, filling the coffers of Alamos 20K and Brackhaven? Is he a puppet of a secret cabal of Adversary Idol worshippers? Or is he a canny manipulator, chock-full of mesmerizing charisma, with plans to take all the glory gained for himself?

Characters may be exposed to the Seventh Seal in several ways. Changeling, metahuman or Awakened characters may be targeted for attack by Seventh Seal extremists. The runners may be hired by the family of a cult member, who wants his relative kidnapped and "deprogrammed." A group like the Mothers of Metahumans may hire runners to investigate the truth behind Jeremiah, and to expose the cult's inner workings. Or a group like the Sons of Sauron may ask for help in destroying this hate cult once and for all. Whatever the gamemaster decides, this cult allows him or her to introduce doomsaying prophecies, religious subtexts, racist terrorism and fanatical adversaries into an adventure.

USING THE ATLANTIAN REBIRTH

On the surface, Ale'i Menatis is a self-help organization that recruits depressed, needy people and provides them with a sense of identity, belonging and purpose. Behind the exterior, Ale'i Menatis is a shady outfit, exploiting the gullible and ripping them off for money, data and more. Though the leadership of Ale'i Menatis is hidden from view, Miroth Be'nahven (or Nick Reithoth) is the most public figurehead. Miroth comes off as an opportunist and egotist with little concern for the well-being of others. While he rarely resorts to violence, he has no compunction about subverting the lives and identities of his targets. He is not Awakened, but he heavily recruits those who are magically active and quickly puts them to work "converting" new recruits.

Though Ale'i Menatis prefers to recruit people through good old-fashioned subterfuge, they are not above using BTL addiction and conditioning to ensure the conversions of plump targets.

Of course, there may be more to Ale'i Menatis than meets the eye. Who is in charge? What are their real goals? Where does the cult acquire its BTLs? What is being done with the credit, data and other prizes being stripped from new recruits?

USING THE CHURCH OF THE UNDYING LIGHT

The Church of the Undying Light is one of the few bright spots in an otherwise crazy time. Not apocalyptic, homicidal or suicidal, they actively try to help the less fortunate in ways that will make an immediate difference. Ellen Barai is a woman of vision, yet imminently practical. She has devoted herself and her fortune to the betterment of the people around her. The Church of the Undying Light recruits actively from those they help, though they also make themselves known in brighter social circles and have received a goodly amount of help from those sources.

Unfortunately, Barai is also a bit naïve. To establish the Church, she took support, advice and many favors from well-connected friends and family members, including the Bigio Mafia family. Now some of these groups are beginning to call in their markers, and Barai is faced with the choice of selling out and exploiting the people she's trying to help or refusing and facing the consequences. As the pressure intensifies, Barai and her supporters may well call upon humanitarian shadowrunners ("hooders") for protection, while the Bigio and other interests may be hiring runners to break Barai to their will.

Barai herself was an employee of Renraku who was eventually freed when the AI Deus was "destroyed." There is no conclusive evidence that Barai was part of Deus' plans, but ties to that storyline may be made at the gamemaster's discretion.

USING THE NEW ISLAMIC JIHAD

Badr al Din Ibn Eisa is the charismatic leader of a popular religious movement known as the Islamic Unity Movement. Raised among Islamic nations that were fractured by war, sectarianism and infighting, Ibn Eisa founded a movement to unite all of Islam under one banner. Starting slowly with negotiations between Iran and Iraq, Ibn Eisa's support has swelled to the point where he is credited with uniting several smaller states to form the new nation of Arabia, as well as sponsoring the drive to occupy and reclaim Lebanon.

As a popular figurehead, Ibn Eisa is dangerous to many Islamic state leaders because he can sway the opinion of masses of people and force them to take actions they otherwise wouldn't. For years, Ibn Eisa has been the target of those threatened by his power as well as other sects who have differing goals. The occupation of Lebanon also made Ibn Eisa an enemy of Israel, a nation that fears Ibn Eisa may lead a war against them. Which of these agencies assassinates Ibn Eisa? That is for the gamemaster to decide. The players themselves may become involved by being asked to monitor Ibn Eisa before his death, or even to root out those who wish to or who succeed in killing him.

Ibn Eisa's rise from the dead raises many questions and shocks the Middle East. Was his death staged as a ploy to gain more support? Is the new Ibn Eisa actually an imposter? Or is something more sinister at work? One thing is certain—the resurrected Ibn Eisa is no longer the same. His calls for unity have transformed into a call for jihad—war against the enemies of Islam. Overnight, his support swells dramatically, making him the premier power in the Middle East. What are his goals? If jihad is declared, who will his target be? Will he succeed in uniting the Islamic world behind his holy war?

A number of adventures may arise from this situation. Those countries threatened by the jihad—Israel, Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey to name a few, may hire shadowrunners to investigate the truth about Ibn Eisa's resurrection or to assess his power base for weaknesses. Some of Ibn Eisa's enemies may attempt another assassination, this time to put him down for good. Other opportunities exist as Ibn Eisa consolidates his forces—the New Islamic Jihad wants to know who its enemies are and how best to undermine them.

USING GHOST STORIES

Like all the other events surrounding Halley's Comet, the events surrounding the introduction of Ghostwalker are likely to take the *Shadowrun* universe into a somewhat unexpected turn. For some games, it may take players into new territory, figuratively and literally speaking.

THE DUNKELZAHN RIFT

The rift is a tear in the fabric of reality, a hole ripping through the physical world and leading to metaplanar parts unknown. As described in *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets*, the rift was a byproduct of the assassination of the great dragon Dunkelzahn the night he was inaugurated as President of the UCAS. The rift hovers 6 meters over the pavement near the Watergate Hotel, and has defied all attempts to investigate or explore it—several trained magicians have died trying. The rift is a homage site to Dunkelzahn's fans, who hold vigils and memorials there. It is also a popular rallying spot for certain polyclubs in DeeCee, particularly Humanis. The site draws thousands of tourists, researchers and comet doomsayers.

In the later months of 2061, the rift grows turbulent, and on more than one occasion strange spirits make their way through it. When Ghostwalker breaks through, a flood of strange spirits engulfs the area. Many of these spirits are shed-im (see p. 149), while others are unknown.

The rift can be used by gamemasters as the eerie backdrop to a meeting or shadowrun, whether characters meet with a Johnson in the crowd or are hired to spy on or disrupt political rallies. The cordon placed by the UCAS Army and the presence of trained troops, mages and spirits makes action in the vicinity difficult. Just being near the rift is dangerous, as the rift has occasionally been known to exhibit unusual magical effects.

The rift disturbances can be used as plot seeds, where the runners are hired either to track down some of the alien spirits that have broken through or to steal research files from the





UCAS Army or any of the other groups competing to investigate it. Some of the spirits venturing through the rift are free spirits (see p. 113, *MIT*S), while others belong to new “species” of spirit never before classified. The spirits venturing through the rift may be benign and helpful, dangerous or simply pursuing their own agendas.

GHOSTWALKER'S RAMPAGE

Ghostwalker's first vicious rampage and the weeks of guerrilla warfare that follow present quite a few opportunities for shadowrun campaigns. The characters may simply be in the wrong place at the wrong time and find themselves pinned between Ghostwalker and a fierce opponent (Aztechnology, sector guards, or one of these strange spirits that Ghostwalker seems to be hunting). Alternately, the runners may be hired as protection against the dragon by someone who fears they may be targeted, or they may be hired to find out what they can about the dragon and his allies.

The chaos of this period lends itself well to freelance shadow work. Some shadowrunners may take advantage of the tension to set enemies against each other or simply use the chaos as a distraction. The heightened state of security will make crime difficult, but smuggling will also become more profitable. Finally, as Aztlan and the other nations bring in military units, runners may be hired to sabotage these operations or collect information on them for rivals.

The runners may even be hired by Ghostwalker himself, as he goes about his meticulous plan to seize the city. Many deals need to be made; where negotiations fail, blackmail, assassination and theft will suffice.

THE MILE-HIGH DRAGON CITY

The situation does not settle when Ghostwalker gains control of the Front Range Free Zone—in fact, it intensifies.

First, the invasion of the Aztlan sector by CAS troops has numerous repercussions. Though the military operation itself is finished in less than a day, it takes the CAS weeks to completely subdue the sector. Pockets of Aztechnology-backed resistance fighters wage a campaign of guerrilla warfare against CAS troops, eventually simmering down to a low-intensity warfare campaign. Thousands are rounded into internment camps where they are processed and then either deported or released as probationary CAS citizens. Naturally, criminal syndicates, underhanded corporate Johnsons and other criminals take advantage of the fracas, seizing new markets and raiding enemy files.

Elsewhere in the city, the announcement of Denver's new dragon overlord does not go over well with everyone. Humanis and other hate-mongering policlubs take to the streets, calling for the dragon to be ousted. Thousands of corps and citizens flee the city for “safer” sprawls. Meanwhile, the political infrastructure of the city undergoes a purging and re-organization as the dragon's rule upsets the old balance. Shadowrunners will be able to pick and choose their jobs.

Naturally, the events in Denver have an impact on the larger world picture. Aztechnology gears up to take their sec-

tor back, and a series of conflicts occur as the CAS-Aztlan border heats up. Aztlan does not want to be fighting wars on several fronts, however, so the decision is made to end the Yucatan conflict by any means necessary—leading to the events described on p. 115. The revisions of the Treaty and power balance within Denver also spread out into the Native American nations and other states, causing arguments in the sovereign Tribal Council and escalating tensions elsewhere. Very little is known about Ghostwalker and his goals, and each of the neighboring states is going to want to know more about this unpredictable power player. And then there are the other great dragons, who are unusually tight-lipped when it comes to welcoming one of their brethren back from beyond ...

MAGIC AND THE COMET

In the latter half of 2061, the appearance of Halley's Comet triggers a flood of unusual magical events and disturbances around the world. Odd and unusual spirits, ghosts, mana storms and wild magic—the year of the comet is an exciting time. The manasphere is awash with turbulence, and no one can predict the outcome. Besides SURGE and new paracritters, the mana level rise triggers the appearance of new sources of naturally occurring orichalcum and other magical oddities.

Many of these magical disturbances are localized and temporary phenomena. For example, during one lunch hour, a mana backlash temporarily turns all spell effects against their spellcasters in the middle of downtown Seattle. Other phenomenon have more lasting, even permanent effects. An overnight spur of deep-forest growth appears where only scraggly weeds survived before, for example, or a strange, perpetual fog suddenly blankets an area. Some of the mana disturbances are strong enough to create natural disasters, such as floods, mudslides, volcanic eruptions and devastating storms.

Some of these magical disturbances—such as the strange rain of frogs that disrupts downtown traffic—are merely nuisances. Others—such as the specters and ghosts that haunt households or the poor soul who develops a magical “curse” that threatens to doom him—are more sinister. Some of these disturbances destroy people's homes and vehicles and even metahuman lives. Certain individuals and groups seek to exploit these effects for their own ends. These include magical groups who seek to seize control of new mana lines or aspected power sites to enhance their power or advance their causes. The magical disturbances and those who exploit them can provide any number of plot hooks and adventure seeds, limited only by a gamemaster's imagination.

For gamemasters who want to use pre-existing rules for such magical effects, the sections on *Background Count*, *Mana Surges* and *Wild Magic* on pp. 83–88, *MIT*S, offer a good starting point. Gamemasters are also encouraged to devise their own effects.

WUXING AND THE ORICHALCUM RUSH

Starting in September of 2061, natural orichalcum deposits that were previously unknown to exist are found throughout the world. This creates an “orichalcum rush” as

thousands of individuals and corporations scramble to stake their claims and cash in.

At first, the few who are aware of the new discoveries keep quiet, hoping to exploit the situation to their maximum advantage. Wuxing, a megacorp with strong traditional ties to the art of feng shui and its geomantic practitioners, is one such player. As soon as news of the discoveries reaches Wuxing headquarters, the corp sends out wujen skilled in geomantic metamagic to scour the world's dragon lines and locate new orichalcum deposits. Other magical theorists scoff at the mention of geomantic metamagic and claim that Wuxing is hiding the real scientific methods it's using to locate deposits.

Once Wuxing locates a deposit, it moves quickly to obtain the land or mining rights to the areas—through any means necessary. In most cases, Wuxing begins with a “soft approach.” The megacorp makes generous purchase offers, business deals or mining claims, all the time being careful not to mention the magic “O” word. If suspicions are raised or other obstructions are met, Wuxing drops the soft approach and resorts to “Plan B.” Under Plan B, a host of corporate men, hired mercenaries and shadowrunners employ bribery, blackmail, Matrix fraud, forgery and outright strong-arm tactics such as murder and land seizure—whatever it takes to acquire the land and its orichalcum deposit.

Because it lacks significant mining assets, Wuxing is forced to acquire an ally to fully exploit these orichalcum deposits. The most obvious choice is DeBeers-Omnitech, a subsidiary of the Pacific Prosperity Group's Universal Omnitech. As the world leader in the mining of diamonds and other precious minerals, DeBeers-Omnitech is in an excellent position to mobilize equipment and personnel to mine orichalcum rapidly and secretly. A partnership is quickly formed, and the two corps gain a significant head start on the opposition.

Wuxing cannot expect to keep such a secret under its belt forever, and within a few short months news of orichalcum discoveries make their way into the daily news. Within days, the news sparks an “orichalcum rush,” as prospecting corps and independents begin scouring the Earth for the precious material.

Though Wuxing and DeBeers-Omnitech clearly have the lead, the specter of Aztechnology haunts their operations. Aztechnology has maintained a close relationship with Universal Omnitech for years and does not take kindly to Wuxing stepping into its “territory”—especially with such a windfall at stake. Aztechnology also holds a grudge against Wuxing for keeping it out of the Pacific Prosperity Group. In no time at all, a shadow war between the two corps begins, with Omnitech as the primary battleground.

The orichalcum rush provides thousands of new jobs for shadowrunners. Many potential orichalcum deposits are located in backwater regions, so scouting parties hire guides and outdoorsmen as well as guards to protect them from paracritters, bandits and warlords. Once deposits are located, the land itself or the mining rights must be acquired; quite often, land owners are reluctant to surrender land or mining rights. Once obtained, additional guards are needed to protect claims

against shadowrunners and others who may attempt to seize them by force.

THE WELL DRIES UP

In mid-2062, shortly after Halley's Comet passes from sight, the predictions of some parageologists come true. All known orichalcum deposits run dry, and those that have been located but not yet exploited mysteriously cease to exist. No new orichalcum veins are found, and the rush comes to an abrupt end.

The corps, however, remain vigilant. Operating under the assumption that the mana level may one day rise again, returning natural orichalcum to the world, they continue to scout for locations where orichalcum is likely to appear. Taking the long view, they hope to have such areas firmly under their control when the next rush begins. Such investments will keep shadowrunners occupied in the years to come.

USING NATURAL ORICHALCUM

Unlike synthetic orichalcum, natural orichalcum is laced with imperfections and impurities. However, traditional methods for refining raw metal materials for alchemy (see *Refining Materials*, p. 41, *MIT*) dissolves orichalcum. Instead, treat orichalcum ore as if it were already a refined material. Before it can be used, it must be put through an alchemical circulation, as described in *Making Radicals*, p. 42, *MIT*. To successfully weed out the impurities, the alchemist must make a successful Enchanting (Alchemy) Test against a target number equal to the number of raw orichalcum units, multiplied by 3. A unit of raw natural orichalcum weighs 20 grams and produces a single unit of radical orichalcum weighing 10 grams.

Natural orichalcum is not as effective as synthetic orichalcum for artificing purposes. It provides only a -1 Enchanting Test modifier for every two units (only one unit of synthetic orichalcum provides the same modifier). Likewise, two units of natural orichalcum are needed to reduce the Karma cost for bonding by 1. For more information, see p. 44, *MIT*.

NATURAL ORICHALCUM ON THE BLACK MARKET

As a result of impurities, natural orichalcum commands a much lower price on the black market than synthetic orichalcum. In its raw, unrefined state, a single unit of natural orichalcum (20 grams) sells for approximately 25,000¥. A unit of natural orichalcum that has been refined through alchemy (10 grams) sells for approximately 50,000¥.

After the orichalcum rush begins, the black market is flooded with natural orichalcum being sold as synthetic orichalcum to naive buyers. Without a careful investigation, the difference between synthetic and refined natural orichalcum is hard to determine. To tell the two apart, a character must make a successful Parageology (6) Test (a similar appropriate Knowledge skill may be substituted for Parageology) or achieve five or more successes on an Assensing Test.

THE SHEDIM

The *shedim* are spirits from an unknown metaplane that have recently found their way into our world. The shedim



encountered so far have been extremely hostile toward metahumans and other spirits, so their motivation for entering this plane has not been determined. All that is known is that they are alien entities, with an alien consciousness and an alien mindset.

The first documented sighting of a shedim occurred shortly after Ghostwalker tore his way through the Dunkelzahn Rift. A flood of spirits followed in Ghostwalker's wake, taking advantage of the metaplanar paths the dragon opened to pour through from their worlds into the Earth's astral plane. Once they had arrived, these spirits scattered to the four winds; most are still at large. A good portion of these new arrivals were shedim, and they have shown no desire to return to their native metaplane.

Shedim are a unique type of free spirit, differing from other free spirits in their use and accumulation of Spirit Energy and several other important ways. Whether or not shedim have true names like other free spirits remains a matter of conjecture.

Once a shedim has found its way to our world and entered the astral plane, it cannot voluntarily return to its native plane or the metaplanes. However, the astral forms of shedim seem to be inherently unstable, and they quickly lose power over time. The only way a shedim can remain in this world is by anchoring itself within a body. A shedim that does not quickly find such a "vessel" to inhabit (see p. 151) will not be long for this world.

The number of shedim sightings around the world has greatly outnumbered the number of shedim that were observed entering this world in Ghostwalker's wake. Clearly, the shedim have some way of entering the Earth's astral plane from the metaplanes of their own accord. The first shedim that arrived may have devised methods to summon more of their brethren across the planes into this world, or it may be that Ghostwalker merely forged a trail that other shedim are now following, trickling through and increasing their numbers.

The level of intelligence, motivation and malice observed among individual shedim varies greatly. Some magical theorists speculate that different types of shedim spirits may in fact exist.

SHEDIM RULES

As spirits, shedim have Force ratings that reflect their power. A shedim's Force rating is used for all of its attributes.

Shedim Astral Forms

Unlike many spirits, which appear on the astral plane as coherent aggregations of energy in distinct individual forms, the shedim appear as insubstantial, translucent apparitions. These ghostly forms resemble large, free-floating, jellyfish-like amoeboid entities.

As their dissipated appearance suggests, shedim are actually quite weak on the astral plane. Once a shedim assumes astral form, it has a limited period of time before its astral form dissipates and the shedim is drawn back to its home metaplane. For each full day (24 hours) that a shedim remains in full astral form, reduce its Force rating by 1. A shedim whose Force rating reaches 0 is destroyed.

The only way a shedim in astral form can prevent this Force loss is by inhabiting a vessel (see p. *Inhabitation*). As long as a shedim inhabits a vessel, it does not lose Force points. However, once a shedim has been forced out of a vessel, the countdown begins again. For this reason, finding a body to occupy is the primary task of a shedim newly arrived on Earth.

The etherealness of shedim astral forms also increases the difficulty of detecting them on the astral plane. Apply a +2 modifier to all Assensing Tests against shedim as well as magical detection attempts made through other means, such as the Magic Sense power or Detect Magic spell.

Finally, the insubstantial astral forms of shedim spirits enable them to bypass astral barriers easily by using the Aura Masking power (see *Fooling Astral Barriers*, p. 88, *MITS*). Apply a -2 modifier to the shedim's target number for the Success Contest.

Shedim Spirit Energy

When a shedim enters astral space from the metaplanes, it receives 1 point of Spirit Energy. This spirit energy may be used in all the ways described under *Spirit Energy*, p. 114, *MITS*. A shedim's Spirit Energy rating can never be higher than its Force rating.

Shedim spirits can increase their Spirit Energy and/or Force ratings by acquiring and spending Good Karma (see *Uses of Good Karma*, p. 116, *MITS*). To acquire Karma, the shedim must use its Karma Drain power (see p. 153). Karma Points can also be freely given to shedim spirits (as described under *Free Spirits and Good Karma*, p. 116, *MITS*).

Shedim and Conjuring

How shedim are finding and entering our world remains unclear. No magician has the ability to conjure or control shedim spirits.

However, magicians can banish shedim spirits (see p. 189, *SR3*). A shedim that is inhabiting a vessel (see *Inhabitation*) when it is banished is merely forced back into the astral plane at its full Force. A shedim may not re-inhabit a vessel it has been banished from until 24 hours have passed (though another shedim may). It is unknown whether banishing a shedim's astral form actually destroys the shedim spirit or merely disrupts it, sending it back to its native plane.

Shedim Karma Pool

Shedim spirits enter this world with a Karma Pool of 1D6. This pool may be increased by 1 at a cost of 10 Good Karma Points. Gamemasters should feel free to adjust this amount as appropriate to their games.

SHEDIM POWERS

The shedim encountered so far have exhibited one or more of the following powers: Aura Masking, Compulsion, Deathly Aura, Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Inhabitation, Karma Drain, Magical Guard, Noxious Breath, Regeneration, Shadowcloak and Silence. Most of these powers are described on pp. 7-15 of *Critters*. Descriptions of remaining powers are provided in *YOTC* or elsewhere: Deathly Aura,

Inhabitation, Karma Drain (p. 153) and Aura Masking (p. 117, *MITS*). Individual gamemasters determine the specific powers available to specific shedim spirits, based on the spirits' threat levels and roles within campaigns.

Note that a shedim in astral form can only use mana-based powers. The shedim must inhabit a vessel to use its physical powers.

Shedim also possess the Weakness of Allergy (Sunlight, Mild).

Deathly Aura

Type: P • Action: Free • Range: Special • Duration: Sustained

A shedim with the Deathly Aura power exudes an aura of primordial fear and decay from its vessel. The aura extends in a radius equal to the spirit's Force (plus Spirit Energy) in meters. The aura has several effects.

First, a noticeable chill affects everyone within range. A metahuman's breath will create fog in the chill, which raises goosebumps on skin as well. The chill is not severe enough to freeze water, however.

Second, the aura triggers the decay of all organic matter in the area of effect. Food spoils, plants wither and die, wood rots and natural textiles weaken and fray. This effect is not strong enough to affect living metahumans and critters, though it does kill insects and small animals such as mice.

Third, the Deathly Aura fills living creatures with a paralyzing sense of panic. The first time a character enters the area of effect of a shedim's aura, he must make a Willpower (Force) Test. If the test succeeds, he is scared, but remains in control. If the test fails, an unreasoning terror pierces his heart and he is immediately paralyzed and unable to take any action other than whimpering and soiling his pants. At the end of each subsequent Combat Turn, the character may attempt an Opposed Test between his Willpower and the shedim's Force ratings. If the test succeeds, the character breaks out of the aura's grip and may act normally.

Shedim that possess the Aura Masking power can use that power to "turn off" a deathly aura.

Inhabitation

Type: M • Action: Exclusive Complex • Range: Special • Duration: Special

Shedim spirits cannot materialize in physical form as other spirits do (though they may manifest their astral forms on the physical plane). To act in the physical plane, a shedim spirit must occupy a body that once possessed a living spirit (i.e., a corpse). Shedim cannot possess the body of a living creature (as other spirits with the power of possession can) if the creature's living spirit is residing within its body. However, shedim can inhabit the body of an astrally projecting magician, as the magician's living spirit vacates his body when it takes astral form.

To inhabit a body—referred to here as a *vessel*—the shedim must move into contact with the vessel's aura. It then makes a Force Test against a target number based on the "age" of the vessel, as shown on the *Shedim Inhabitation Table*. Taking over the body of a still living (but astrally pro-

CORPSE ATTRIBUTES TABLE

Corpse Has Been Dead For:	Body	Quickness	Strength	Running Multiplier
Less than 1 hour	—	-1	—	—
1 hour–24 hours	+1	-3	—	-2
24 hours–1 week	—	-1	-1	—
1 week–1 month	-1	-2	-2	—
1 month–1 year	-2	-4	-3	—
1 year–10 years	-3	-5	-4	-1
10 years–100 years	-4	-6	-5	-1
100 years–1,000 years	-6	-8	-7	-2
More than 1,000 years	-8	-10	-10	-2

SHEDIM INHABITATION TABLE

Host Vessel	Target Number
Still alive (astrally projecting magician)	4
Dead:	
Less than 1 hour	5
1 hour–24 hours	6
24 hours–1 week	8
1 week–1 month	9
1 month–1 year	10
1 year–10 years	11
10 years–100 years	12
100 years–1,000 years	15
More than 1,000 years	18

jecting) magician is much easier than taking over the decayed body of a millennia-old corpse. Inhabiting a vessel requires an Exclusive Complex Action. If the test succeeds, the shedim inhabits the vessel. If the shedim's test fails, it loses a point of Force. The shedim may try again, though it receives a +2 cumulative modifier for each additional attempt.

When a shedim inhabits a vessel, it becomes dual natured and can take advantage of its physical-based powers. The body's Physical attributes are increased by the shedim's Force (plus Spirit Energy), and the shedim continues to use its own Mental attributes rather than the vessel's. Mana spells affect the shedim, while physical spells and attacks affect the vessel only.

While in the vessel, the shedim obtains the natural abilities possessed by the vessel. For example, a dwarf vessel provides a shedim with thermographic vision, while a troll vessel provides dermal armor and Reach as well.

Once a shedim has inhabited a vessel, it cannot leave the vessel voluntarily. If the vessel is killed (it reaches Deadly damage and does not regenerate), the shedim is immediately ejected into astral space. A shedim can also be driven out of a vessel by killing it in astral combat, banishing it or possessing

its vessel by using possession metamagic (or the critter power).

Dead Vessels: Depending on the cause of death, a corpse may display significant physical damage. It may also display some decomposition, depending on how long it's been dead. To

reflect this, modify the Physical attributes and running multipliers of corpses according to the *Corpse Attributes Table*. No corpse attribute can be reduced below 1. Any damage a corpse has sustained prior to inhabitation does not directly affect the shedim inhabiting the vessel. An inhabiting shedim cannot heal previous damage, however, even if the shedim has the power of regeneration.

Decomposition and previous damage does affect a vessel's natural abilities. For example, if a vessel's eyes are severely decayed or damaged, an inhabiting shedim cannot see through them (though it can still perceive astrally).

Only structural cyberware in a vessel—bone lacing, dermal plating and so on—can be used by an inhabiting shedim. Cyberware that requires any sort of mental or nervous system interaction or requires electrical energy does not work and provides no bonuses.

Likewise, bioware dependant on bodily functions provide no bonus, though some structural implants (cat's eyes, enhanced articulation, muscle augmentation, muscle toner, nictitating membranes, orthoskin) do—unless the body "parts" they enhance have decomposed or been damaged. Nanoware does not function in corpses.

Once inhabited, a corpse does not decompose further until the shedim leaves the vessel. Any damage sustained by an inhabited vessel impedes the inhabiting shedim per standard rules. Shedim with the Regeneration power can heal such damage.

When a shedim leaves a corpse vessel, the corpse goes through a rapid process of degradation. Within a single Combat Turn, the corpse decomposes to the point of decay it would have reached had the shedim never inhabited it. Thus, a corpse that has been inhabited by a shedim for years or decades may suddenly mummify, turn skeletal or even fall to dust when the shedim leaves. Similarly, a flesh sample intended for use as a material link for ritual sorcery may well decay into an unusable form if the shedim has inhabited the vessel for long enough.

A shedim can re-inhabit a corpse vessel from which it has been "ejected." However, re-inhabiting a corpse is more diffi-

cult then initially inhabiting it. Apply a +4 modifier to the required Force Test for each previous inhabitation of the corpse.

Living Vessels: When a shedim inhabits the living body of an astrally projecting magician, the magician instantly senses that something has affected his link with his body. The magician may attempt to locate his body per standard rules. If the body is no longer in the same location, the mage must search for it (see p. 173, *SR3*). Apply a special +2 modifier to the test required to search for the body—the shedim's inhabitation distorts the mage's link to it.

If the magician locates the shedim, he can attempt to recover control of his body by engaging and killing the shedim in astral combat, by banishing it or by using the possession metamagic power to "repossess" his own body.

Because the vessel is still alive, the shedim must feed, water and otherwise take care of the body to keep it alive and useful. Many shedim do not immediately understand this concept and may not take particularly good care of their bodies until they comprehend what is required. If the vessel dies, the shedim is ejected back into astral space. However, nothing prevents the shedim from immediately re-inhabiting the corpse.

A shedim inhabiting a living vessel can take advantage of all of the vessel's implants, though it may not understand what those implants are or how they work. The shedim does not receive access to any of the vessel's memories, skills, personality or magical abilities.

Karma Drain

Type: P • Action: Exclusive Complex • Range: Touch • Duration: Sustained

A shedim who manages to touch a character can use this power to suck Good Karma away from the character's life force. The shedim may need to succeed in an Unarmed Combat Test to touch its victim.

To drain away Good Karma, the shedim must succeed in an Opposed Test between its Force (plus Spirit Energy) rating and the victim's Willpower rating. Each net success for the shedim allows it to drain one point of Good Karma from the victim, provided the victim has unspent Good Karma. If the victim has none, the shedim drains away Karma Pool at a ratio of 1 Karma Pool point per 2 successes. Drained Karma Pool points are converted to an equal number of Good Karma points for the shedim. If the victim has no Karma Pool, the attempted drain has no effect. Any Good Karma or Karma Pool points drained by a shedim are permanently lost to the character.

The draining process is incredibly painful to the victim, who is struck with wrenching side effects such as cramps, dizziness and nausea. The victim must make an immediate Willpower (Force) Test or be knocked down. The victim also takes a single box of Physical damage for each Karma point drained.

The damage caused by this power manifests in several ways. Many victims actually suffer from a withering effect that dries their skin and gives them a hollow, haunted look. Other victims have been known to develop signs of premature aging, such as white hair, hair loss or wrinkles. Some shedim have been known to literally consume the bodies of the victims whom they have drained to death.

USING SHEDIM

Gamemasters can use shedim in their campaigns in several ways. They can be presented as the typical mindless, shambling, brain- or flesh-eating undead common in B-grade horror flicks. They can also be presented as manipulative, fully sentient creatures that are slowly learning to take advantage of modern technology. While some shedim are not going to be picky about their vessels, others may search specifically for living vessels so that they may infiltrate metahuman society.

Shedim make an excellent threat to player characters, as even shedim with low Force ratings have enough powers to make life difficult for them. The shedim ability to inhabit the vacant bodies of astrally projecting magicians also makes them an excellent astral threat and an effective tool for curbing excessive projection by player characters.

The exact motivations of the shedim remain a mystery, so gamemasters have plenty of freedom when portraying shedim in campaigns. Some shedim may be collecting "fresh" bodies for new shedim arrivals. Other shedim may simply be interested in feeding on the Earth's abundant life forces. Still other shedim may have other goals, which may even involve working with other entities and agencies.

Shedim make excellent recurring villains for campaigns because they can flee vessels that are destroyed and are difficult to track on the astral plane.

More details on the shedim will appear in future *Shadowrun* products.

DISASTER IN JAPAN

The shakeup of Japan described in *Red Sunset, Red Sunrise* (p. 97) also sends tremors throughout the world. Imperial Japan is one of the world's strongest nations, and is home to some of the world's most powerful megacorps. When this power bloc is upset, the world shakes with their grief.

THE RING OF FIRE SPEAKS UP

The chaos begins when a series of volcanic eruptions, tidal waves and other natural disasters do significant, but not irrecoverable, damage to Japan's infrastructure. For characters in Japan at this time, especially those on the island of Kyushu, their lives may be threatened by hot lava, noxious gases, devastating tidal waves, overpowering smoke or earthquake-struck buildings. Getting out of the disaster zone alive may be an adventure unto itself. Runners may also be hired to locate missing persons or to extract valuable personnel from hospitals or crisis relief camps.

In the wake of these disasters, many unscrupulous types will move to take advantage of the situation. Corporations that are hit hard may find themselves in danger of buyouts or corporate piracy, while damaged facilities may be the target of shadowruns while their security is weakened. As the Japanese megacorps move to stabilize their business in a time of economic turbulence, shadow activity heats up.

This natural upheaval does not just affect Japan alone—the entire so-called "Ring of Fire" (volcanoes that dot the Pacific Rim) acts up, wreaking havoc and destruction. Some areas only suffer minor turbulence such as tremors or ash fallout. Others



are devastated as volcanoes explode, clouding the sky with choking ash and hot particles. Lava flows, earthquakes and tidal waves take their toll, sweeping away entire towns and decimating populations.

THE CHILD EMPEROR

With the death of the Emperor and the ascension of a fourteen-year-old boy to the divine mantle, the political structure of Japan becomes fractured and divided. Protected by a regent, mysterious invulnerability, Yamatetsu support and other shadowy backers, the child Emperor issues a number of decrees that put Japan's leadership on edge. Almost overnight, their traditions and customs are manhandled and revised, and there seems to be very little they can do about it.

As factions coalesce and fragment, the opportunities for shadowrunners explode in number. Many hardliners seek to kill or depose the child before he can do more harm, and rumors abound of the Emperor even setting up fake assassination attempts to assert his divinity. Everyone wants to know who is pulling the Emperor's strings and many more would like to seize those strings if they could. Others throw their weight behind the Emperor, hoping to take advantage of the situation and further their own ends.

When Imperial troops are recalled en masse throughout the world, to return and help rebuild Japan, Japanese dominance in several countries falters. The troop pullout has massive consequences in both California (see p. 106) and the Philippines (see p. 126), but other countries such as Peru and Australia are affected as well. Many Japanacops who relied on the Imperial Marines to sustain their power suddenly find themselves out in the cold. These corps are forced to establish other means of intimidation or back out of dangerous situations.

CHAOS IN CALIFORNIA

The devastation caused by the Ring of Fire shakeup strikes the Bay Area as well, damaging Berkeley and Oakland much more heavily than San Francisco. The real shock hits when the Imperial Marines are ordered to pull out, leaving the Japanacorp beachhead in CalFree vulnerable. A shifty Imperial officer comes to their rescue, staging a coup and refusing the Emperor's orders to withdraw. A large force of Imperial Marines stays behind, bolstered by corporate security forces. Almost immediately, General Saito begins a campaign to bring more of California under his control. In the process, his underlying racist agenda seeps out.

SAITO'S EMPIRE

General Saito's refusal, coup and subsequent offensive opens up limitless possibilities for shadowrun activity. The runners may initially be hired to help Saito seize power by kidnapping important officials, intimidating officers and troops into supporting him or seizing useful assets. In the aftermath, runners may find work rescuing captives, sneaking fugitives out of the city or collecting information on the new regime for outsiders.

As Saito begins to expand his influence into California, seizing Sacramento and other critical areas, shadowrunners who don't care about where their money comes from will have

many opportunities. General Saito may send "expendable assets" into an area ahead of his soldiers to "soften it up." Saito may also use runners to sow dissent and spark violence between local Humanis and racist groups in the Central Valley and the metahuman populations. When violence erupts, Saito can then move his soldiers in and secure the area under the pretense of restoring order. Saito also helps out the Yakuza behind the scenes, assisting them in wiping out opposition and expanding their influence.

In areas under Saito's control, institutionalized racism will be extremely evident. Metahumans will be openly discriminated against, forced to follow special regulations and may even be rounded up into internment camps. Squads of pro-Saito racist militias will run the streets, beating and terrorizing metahumans and other "undesirables." Some metahumans will fight back, either by simply standing up for their rights or by going underground and supporting the Metahuman People's Army. The MPA and allied groups intensify their campaign of guerrilla warfare, and the People's University (see p. 72, *Target: Matrix*) becomes a focus point of their struggle. Shadowrunners may become involved either as targets of racist sanctions or in support of the MPA.

ARES AND SILICON VALLEY

When news spreads of the Imperial Marines recall, Ares turns their eye toward San Francisco. If not for Saito, the corp may have attempted to seize power there. Instead, Ares finds itself moving to protect its own assets in the area from potential invasion.

Lt. Col. Lloyd Ritter, a.k.a. Grey Knight, is handling Ares' information gathering and black ops in the area, and will make ready use of shadowrunners. In addition to datasteals and sabotage missions, Ritter may send shadowrunners to establish contact with MPA cells or to support them with direct action. Shadowrunners may also be hired to smuggle weapons or personnel into or out of Saito-controlled areas. As mentioned in *Corporate Download*, Ares will sometimes offer to pay runners in hardware instead of cash.

Ares has also established a connection with Grania O'Malley's pirates, based out of the Big Sur coast. Ares supplies O'Malley with goods, cred and intelligence on prize piracy targets and in exchange the pirates sneak shadow operatives onto the San Francisco docks and hinder Saito with pirate raids. Generally, the pirates use small, fast and quiet vessels to sneak past the small naval presence that Saito runs out of his small empire. These small vessels, relying on speed and stealth, have even been used to board and commandeer Saito's military vessels, which has not endeared the pirates to the General. Fortunately for the pirates, Saito has had bigger fish to fry so far.

THE CITY OF ANGELS

The lines are not as clearly drawn in Los Angeles, but there are still plenty of opportunities for shadowrunners. SURGE had a significant impact on the entertainment industry, as some changeling stars went into hiding and others rose to the fore. Shadowrunners may find work bodyguarding a changed star

from paparazzi and stalking fans or protecting a rising new star from an embittered has-been who wants to see the new blood's blood. Trid-snoops may hire shadowrunners to track down stars in hiding to expose their changeling natures to the world. Meanwhile, in the Los Angeles ghettos, SURGE stirs up old hatreds and forges new ones, leading to a new round of gang warfare.

The earthquake that strikes Los Angeles hits well over a month after the Ring of Fire eruption, but it is still significant in scope. As the walls between the impoverished underclass and the pampered elite come tumbling down, all Hell breaks loose. The upper crust scampers to hire bodyguards to protect their bodies and homes from riotous mobs, while competitive studios and jealous stars take advantage of the chaos to strike out at old enemies.

The arrival of the Pueblo military and new regime is both welcomed and reviled. A token resistance is put up by some gangs and die-hards, but the occupation itself is a fait accompli. Aztlan throws as many wrenches into the gears as they can, hiring runners to sabotage Pueblo supply lines, organize local militias and otherwise hinder the occupation. Many corps and bigwigs opt to escape from the unstable situation, hiring smugglers to take them to greener pastures. The Pueblo military also takes advantage of unofficial help, using runners to seize certain objectives, pacify violent street gangs, make deals with certain local figureheads ("support us or else") and otherwise pave the way.

The one kink to Pueblo's occupation plans is the Mojave Desert. Normally a place of strong spirits, wild magic and odd critters, the Mojave is an even more dangerous place to dwell since the comet's passing. Pueblo forces quickly find that occupying the Mojave isn't an easy task, and rumors fly of a "Siren of the Sands" that lures soldiers off into the desert by mirages and whispers, never to return. Runners may find work looking into these disappearances, or they can opt for the more lucrative but dangerous mission of talislegging under the watchful eyes of Pueblo troops.

WAR IN THE YUCATÁN

The Aztlan offensive in the Yucatán is quick, mean and dirty. The Aztlan/Aztechnology leadership has had enough of this brushfire rebellion in their backyard, because in their minds they have more serious political/military situations brewing. The order comes down to crush the Yucatán rebel threat once and for all, by whatever means necessary. Given that the rebels are entrenched in the jungles and native villages, the Azzies opt for a campaign to flush them out with fire and chemicals, destroying the very jungles and villages they hide behind.

The campaign is initially extremely effective; the rebels are routed and thrown into disarray. But the massive despoliation, bloodshed and chemical poisoning have severe repercussions. Shamans and spirits on both sides of the conflict are wracked with psychological pain as the mana of the region becomes tainted with ruin and devastation. Some shamans are forced to flee to save their sanity, others that remain struggle under the psychic onslaught of the mass destruction and the corruption of nature. Many shamans—including most of those working with

the Aztlan offensive—falter, their outlooks twisting and perverting until they walk the toxic path. These toxic shamans aggravate the situation even further, pushing the boundaries of brutality and slaughter, and even turning on their own allies.

The Yucatán jungle, once a place of vibrant mystery, full of life and magic, suffers a severe shock. The nature spirits of the region, faced with extinction or corruption, begin to fight back of their own accord. At the same time, toxic spirits grow more numerous and powerful and also take more of a direct hand.

What causes the storms, earthquakes and tidal waves that shatter the region? Did the Earth itself rebel against the onslaught, or was it the work of nature spirits? Did toxic forces summon the disaster to further ruin the place, or was it a last, desperate attempt by the Yucatán rebels and their Amazonian allies? And if so, who taught them such great rituals of power, and what cost did they pay in lives and sanity? No one knows for sure, but the calamity serves one purpose: it levels the playing field. In the aftermath, rebel and Aztlan troops alike are broken. As they begin to withdraw and regroup, opposing spirits continue to battle, fighting over the very future of the Yucatán. Will it be returned to its natural bountiful state, or will toxic forces prevail, rendering the area a lifeless wasteland?

JUNGLE WAR

There are many ways in which characters can become involved in the Yucatán war. Mercenaries are in demand by both sides; while Aztlan offers better pay and benefits, the rebel cause may appeal to some sympathies. Getting in to support the rebels will be an adventure unto itself, as the Aztlan blockade around the Yucatán intensifies in order to deny the rebel's aid. As a result, profits for smuggling weapons, personnel and other goods skyrocket—as does the danger.

Aztechnology also goes so far as to hire mercenaries to infiltrate the rebel side in order to gather intelligence, spread confusion and strike from within. The war within the jungle should shock the characters with its intensity and brutality. Miles of jungle are being razed, whole villages are massacred and chemical poisons pollute the air and water.

Runners may also get involved elsewhere in the world, as rebel supporters escalate attacks against Aztlan and Aztechnology targets. The runners may be hired to assassinate Azzie leaders, damage Azzie Matrix systems or to perform structure hits against Azzie installations. By elevating the costs of the war, the sympathizers hope to force Aztlan to withdraw. Other anti-Aztlan forces—such as Pueblo, CAS and Amazonia—will take the opportunity to jump on the bandwagon, sponsoring runs on their own under the guise of supporting the rebel cause.

TOXIC ZONES

The Aztlan military uses unbelievable amounts of chemicals in the Yucatán, from defoliants and insecticides to neurotoxins and biowarfare agents. Fire and napalm are also used extensively to burn down large areas of jungle. As a result, most of the Yucatán becomes contaminated to a degree and several areas become uninhabitable toxic zones.

The chemical contamination should have a serious effect upon characters in the Yucatán. When they are being deployed by the Azzies, the effects will depend on the exact compound being used. For rules on chemicals and their effects, see pp. 101–123, *M&M*. Even when they are not being directly employed against characters, however, the runners may suffer ill effects. Clouds of particle-bearing smoke, noxious fumes and other gases drift across the Yucatán. The air has a chemical tang, and most sources of drinking water will be tainted. Simply passing through some areas may make the characters ill, as will the buildup of accumulated toxins in the characters' systems over time.

Toxic Rating

As a simple method of portraying this effect, the gamemaster can simply assign each area a Toxic Rating between 1 (light) and 10 (deadly wasteland). The rating for a particular area can be determined quickly by rolling 1D6 (areas with ratings of 7 or higher are rare, and should be used sparingly). For every day spent in an area with a Toxic Rating, characters must roll a Damage Resistance Test (using Body) against a Damage Code based on the Toxic Rating Table. Chemsuits and other protective systems will protect the character from these effects as described. Open wounds will aggravate the problem; increase the target number by the Wound Modifier for the character's Physical wounds (but not Stun). Likewise, the pollutants will affect medical procedures performed on characters inside a toxic zone, so apply the area's Toxic Rating to the target number for first aid and other procedures.

Critters

Though the effects will, in most cases, not be immediately apparent, many critters in the Yucatán jungle will suffer from toxic poisoning. Most of these creatures will simply sicken and die. However, some may develop mutations as a result of the chemical exposure. Use the rules provided for *Mutant Critters* and *Toxic Critters* on p. 15 and p. 17 (respectively) of the *Critters* book in the *SR3 Gamemaster Screen*.

Spirits and Shamans

When an area becomes toxic, it becomes the domain of toxic spirits. Since only toxic shamans can summon toxic spirits, other magicians who summon nature spirits cannot do so while in a toxic domain. Nature spirits and spirits of the elements capable of crossing domain lines can enter a toxic domain, although they are reluctant to do so. For details on using toxic shamans and toxic spirits, see p. 124, *MITS*.

If a shaman player character is in the Yucatán during this period, he or she will undergo a period of discomfort as the destruction takes its toll on the environment. The character may be plagued by nightmares or horrible visions of a tainted

and ruined Earth, and the shaman's totem is likely to urge the character to either flee or do all he or she can to fight for and protect the Yucatán ecology. Spirits summoned by the shaman may be reluctant to enter certain areas, and will become more reticent and less helpful in general. The gamemaster may feel free to inflict the character with an appropriate Mental Flaw or other penalty (such as 1 box of unrecoverable Stun damage) during this period, to reflect the psychic trauma. No shaman characters should ever be driven to the point where they become toxic (though they may hear the call ...). If a shaman character does turn toxic, he or she should immediately be handed over to the gamemaster as an NPC.

As the war progresses, the cases of spontaneously appearing spirits (see p. 98, *MITS*) in the Yucatán jungles will increase dramatically. Toxic spirits will also play more of a role, potentially hindering or attacking characters.

AFTERSHOCKS

We cannot possibly hope to cover all of the changes that occur throughout the world of Shadowrun as a result of the events described in *Year of the Comet*. The *Aftershocks* chapter offers a few samples of the repercussions and changes being wrought elsewhere. The gamemaster is encouraged to invent more, as appropriate for his or her setting.

THE PHILIPPINE REBELLION

Like other scenarios described in this book, the Philippine rebellion provides ample room for shadowrunners to become involved in disaster relief, opportunistic black ops, smuggling, piracy, guerrilla warfare or corporate espionage—and that's just the beginning.

The rebellion is just starting, and where it ultimately leads is up to the gamemaster. The Japanese corporations may rally, using their influence to squash the revolt. The conflict may draw out for years, with both sides giving and taking but no clear winner surfacing. Or the Huk revolution may succeed in driving the Japanese power structure out of their country—but what then?

THE SONS OF THE ALAMO

If their success continues, the Sons of the Alamo may see their goals realized—an open border war between the CAS and Aztlan, with the possibility of Texas land being reclaimed by the CAS. While hostilities are certainly escalating, there are conflicting forces within the CAS: those that support the Sons of the Alamo and those that fear a war with Aztlan may result in a loss for the CAS. Will Aztlan stoically put up with the terrorist attacks, or will they sponsor sanctions of their own?

Shadowrunners may play into this conflict in a number of ways. They may be hired to support the Sons of the Alamo on actions, or they may be hired to root the Sons out and expose or eliminate them. Aztlan may hire runners to infiltrate the Sons of the Alamo, or to pose as them and commit heinous acts of

TOXIC RATING TABLE	
Toxic Rating	Damage
1	2L
2	3L
3	4M
4	5M
5	6M
6	6S
7+	(Rating)D

terrorism to destroy the Sons' public support. Aztlan may decide to take the war to the CAS, paying runners to blow things up in response to Sons of the Alamo attacks.

ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

The groups and events described in this book are just the beginning. Around the world, much more is going on. How does Tir Tairngire respond to the General Saito's expansion? How does the Ute react to Pueblo's annexation of Los Angeles? Do the Shining Path guerrillas renew their offensive in the wake of the Japanese military pullout in Peru? How does SURGE affect the sprawls and corporations in Europe? How do authorities respond to comet cult murders in Vladivostok?

If the gamemaster is running a campaign set in an area of the world not directly described in *Year of the Comet*, he or she will need to determine how exactly that area is affected by the year's events. Are any corporate facilities in the area involved in the probe race? What comet cults pop up? Is the area damaged by SURGE riots or the natural disasters that occur when the Ring of Fire acts up? Do any of the revolutions or wars impact the area, or does a local conflict break out? Do any of the area's leaders turn into changelings? Is there an outbreak of shedim from the local morgue or cemetery? The gamemaster should carefully weigh the events and determine how best to involve the characters locally, with an eye towards global affairs.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

The following adventure ideas represent just a few of the possibilities for *Year of the Comet* based adventures.

LIGHTS OUT

The runners are hired by Shiawase to keep an eye on Mark Coleman, the scientist responsible for designing the sensor package on Shiawase's *Brahe* comet probe. Coleman has an invitation to attend a comet party being hosted by a simsense star on the roof of a penthouse downtown. Shiawase is worried that someone may attempt to extract Coleman, and provides the runners with passes to the party to guard Coleman without his knowledge.

Unfortunately for the runners, an Ares spy within Shiawase receives word of their mission and decides to have some fun. During the height of the comet party, the Ares agent arranges for Coleman to be informed that the shadowrunners are working for Aztechnology and that they are present at the party to extract him. Coleman will become nervous and jittery, and will attempt to keep his distance from the runners. He does not want to alarm the party's host, but he tries to stick near the party's security.

A short while later, a temporary blackout strikes the penthouse—the work of a Matrix comet cult trying to dim the

lights. Chaos ensues. Coleman will attempt to escape from the runners, believing the blackout to be a ploy to kidnap him. The runners will have to contend with the party's security, drunken and panicked partygoers, no lights and a reluctant Coleman as they try to get him to safety.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

In Denver in late January of 2062, the runners are hired by a man they will later recognize as Nicholas Whitebird, Ghostwalker's emissary. Whitebird will ask the runners to track down and locate a hermetic mage named Gervaise Brooks. Whitebird will be able to describe Brooks, but knows only that he will be found in the Aztlan Sector and that "there may be more to him than meets the eye." Whitebird wants Brooks to be captured and delivered back to him.

Unknown to the runners, Gervaise Brooks is in fact one of the identities of a fragment of the Great Spirit of Denver that calls itself Rojo. The runners will have to sneak into the Aztlan Sector (under heavy alert to guard against Ghostwalker), track Brooks down and attempt to capture him. Rojo will use spells and trickery to escape, and will only reveal his true nature if there is no other choice. The runners should find it difficult to capture a free spirit. If the runners discover that they are actually being employed by Ghostwalker and Rojo learns of this, they may be able to convince him to go willingly if they can convince him that he will not be "punished."

To complicate matters, the CAS invades the Aztlan sector in the middle of the run. If the runners succeed and bring Brooks/Rojo back to Whitebird, Ghostwalker himself will be there to take the spirit into custody. Rojo is a great form city spirit with Force of 9, Spirit Energy 5, and the powers of astral gateway, aura masking, dispelling, human form, personal domain, sorcery and wealth.

BAGGING A BODY

This adventure requires the death of a player character. It is not advised to kill a character just for the purposes of this adventure; it should simply be kept in store in the event that a character dies.

When one of the shadowrunners dies, his or her body will become host to a powerful shedim spirit before it can be disposed of properly. If the dead character is interred at a morgue, left behind at a massacre, buried in a cemetery or otherwise left in the vicinity of other corpses, these other bodies will also become vessels of shedim spirits.

The other characters should learn of the stolen bodies through news reports, or perhaps through a contact who's wondering why their old buddy is still walking. The runners will then have to track down their old friend and put him (and the other corpses) to rest, stopping a shedim zombie rampage.

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