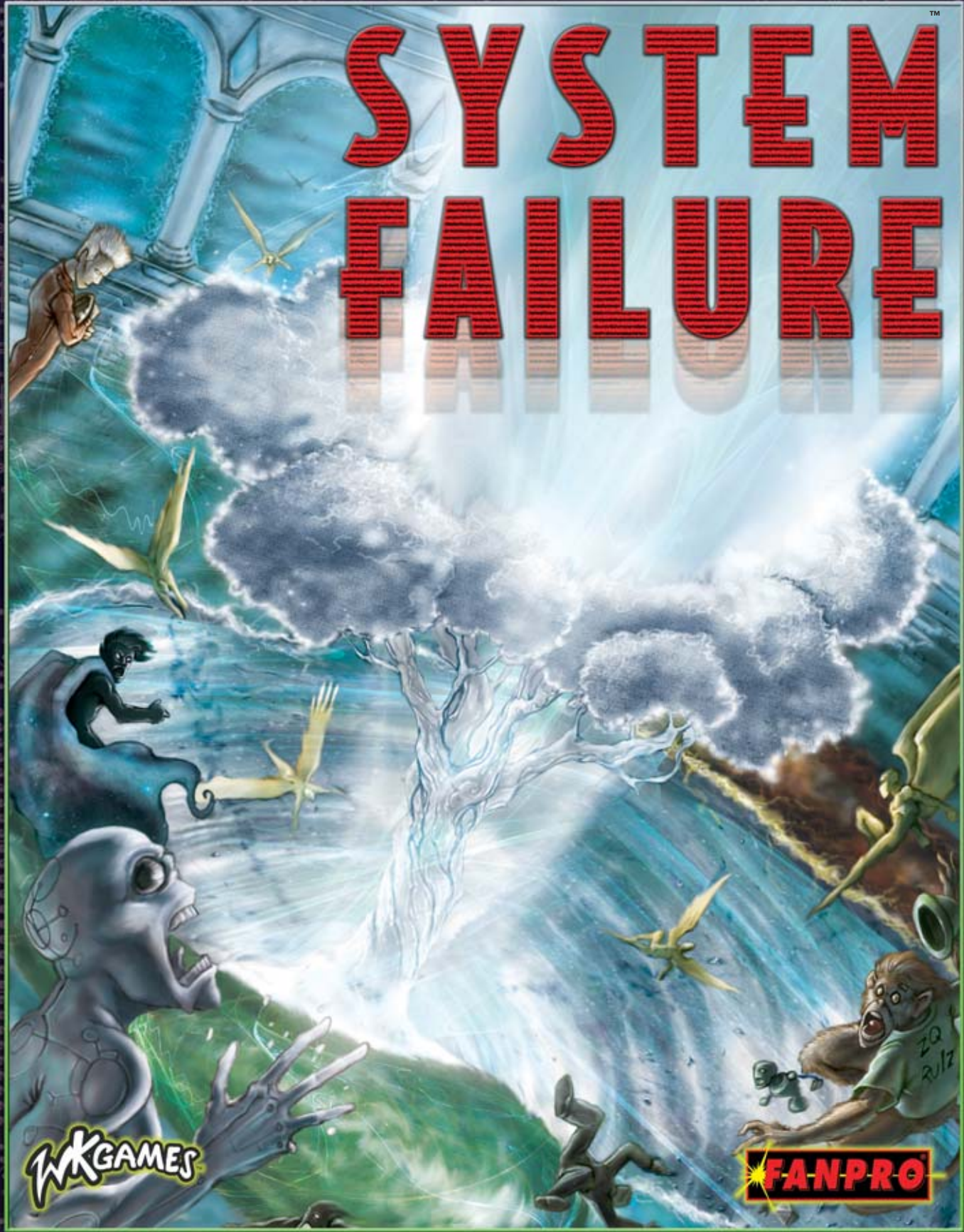


# SHADOWRUN®



25014



**WKGAMES**

**FANPRO**

# THE END OF THE MATRIX... ...AS WE KNOW IT

The year is 2064, and all is not well. A struggling megacorp makes a drastic decision to stave off impending doom. A psychopathic artificial intelligence thought to be dead rises again, attempting to take over the entire Matrix. And behind the scenes, apocalyptic terrorists prepare to strike at key points around the world, completing their first steps towards a vision of Armageddon. Across the globe, shadowrunners find themselves caught up in these events—how will their actions impact the Sixth World?

**System Failure** details the events leading up to and following these dramatic, world-shaking events. In addition to in-depth treatments of the three main plotlines and adventure frameworks for involving the runners in each, it also details numerous aftershocks and spin-off events, with scenario suggestions for how runners can play a role in the years to come. For use with Shadowrun.



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# System Failure



FanPro

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**SYSTEM FAILURE**

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# INTRODUCTION

*System Failure* puts the smackdown on the world of *Shadowrun*. As the last sourcebook for *Shadowrun, Third Edition (SR3)*, we felt it best to go out with a bang. The events in this book are the culmination of years-worth of ongoing plots—both blatant and simmering beneath the surface. Three of these plotlines converge in a fantastic conflagration that culminates in the crash of the world-wide Matrix. These circumstances, and the aftershocks that follow, allow us to tie up numerous long-running plot lines as well as setting the stage for the technological re-vamping of the Matrix that was necessary for *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition (SR4)*. This is not the end of all ongoing plot lines, of course—many still continue on their courses, perhaps nudged or even redirected thanks to the events. Other plotlines will arise from the seeds planted here, growing to life as we continue the world in the year 2070 with *SR4*.

Like all previous *SR3* sourcebooks, *System Failure* 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 come from a variety of sources, underground and mainstream, but are directed towards an audience of shadowrunners. These sources are each unique in outlook and perspective, influenced by their own particular prejudices and interests. Each article is marked up with a running commentary by shadow denizens who add to, revise and contradict the original post. These inserted comments add innuendo, 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.

*System Failure* also presents a number of fiction pieces, describing many of the ongoing events through the eyes of direct participants, whether they happen to be innocent bystanders, minor pawns, or scheming major players. These accounts provide a ground-level viewing of many happenings, which gamemasters can use as guidelines when creating the atmosphere for their own related adventures.

The first chapter, *Forewarning*, sets the stage for the dramatic events that follow. It is here that we first hear the impressive news that the megacorp Novatech has been forced to go public. We also get a glimpse of the catastrophes on the horizon, as seen through the murky omens perceived by seers and others who closely watch the world’s patterns for hints of the future. We also discover that the artificial intelligence (AI) known as Deus has finally completed its effort to compile, as originally described in *Threats 2*. And here we also see the first stirrings of Winternight’s agenda, as unseasonably cold weather grips the world, and the Corporate Court gets a lucky clue that the apocalyptic cult is up to something.

The second chapter, *Critical Error*, is primarily composed of fictional accounts of the various events that lead up to the Crash of ’64. It ends with both long-term and short-term timelines, so that gamemasters can accurately follow the sequence of events.

The *Novatech Goes Public* chapter is the first “plot track” of *System Failure*. It describes in detail how an IPO works, and in particular what the ramifications are for a megacorp the size of Novatech to go public in the world of *Shadowrun*. Novatech has been weak ever since its formation during the recent corp war (described in *Blood in the Boardroom* and *Corporate Download*), and has not fared any better due to economic warfare raged by Novatech arch-nemesis Art Dankwalther (see *Threats 2*).

*Singularity* covers the next plot track—the return of Deus (originally detailed in *Renraku Arcology: Shutdown and Brainscan*) and its attempt to achieve apotheosis in the midst of the Novatech IPO, taking advantage of the unprecedented levels of Matrix traffic the IPO inspires. It also details Deus’s conflicts with other AIs (Megaera and Mirage), as well as the efforts of others to foil its plans.

*Fall of Night* introduces the unseen threat in these affairs—the unholy alliance between Winternight and Pax’s Dissonant otaku tribe (described in *Threats 2*). Winternight sees the destruction of the Matrix—which they view as the tool of their enemy Loki—as the first step towards their fabled Ragnarok. Together with Pax’s otaku, they seed a Dissonance-fueled worm throughout the Matrix, timed to activate during the IPO—and also when Deus makes its move. While Pax and company view this as a way to get back at their former AI master and re-make the Matrix to their own liking, Winternight has other plans. Not trusting the worm alone, Winternight also pursues a plan to strike at critical Matrix junctures with magically-modified EMP nukes.

The *Crash 2.0* chapter describes the exact effects this Matrix Crash has on the world at large. It also covers Winternight’s EMP nuke attacks in detail—including how many were foiled, but also the effects of those that detonated. This chapter also hints at the fate awaiting many of those who are trapped online when the Matrix crashes. Finally, it narrates the last stand of long-time shadowrunning commentator and guide Captain Chaos, as he rallies a fateful effort to alert the world to Winternight’s threat and defend Shadowland against the worm.

*Aftershocks* examines many of the resulting upheavals that occur as a result of these affairs. These range from an attempted coup in the UCAS to the fall of Islamic leader Ibn Eisa, and from the liberation of Poland to the fall of the corporate-backed regime in Tsimshian. It also describes how the Crash and IPO change the balance of power in the megacorporate world, and many of the maneuverings that follow.

The *Matrix 2.0* chapter introduces the underpinnings behind the new Matrix that the corps are already building on the shell of the old—particularly in regard to its capacity for wireless access and augmented reality. It also touches upon a new generation of people whose minds have been undeniably *altered* due to being online when the Matrix Crash occurred—and the new powers these are exhibiting.

# FOREWARNING



October, 2063

*Miles Lanier hadn't seen Richard Villiers this drunk in a long time. Not since his divorce from Samantha.*

*Villiers' personal assistant, whose name Lanier could never remember, called him around midnight asking him to come talk Villiers off the proverbial ledge again. Villiers had a habit of going into downtown Boston bars incognito, getting cut off by the bartender, then clearing the place out with a wave of his credstick and a quick hundred thousand nuyen transfer to the bar's owners. As of late, Lanier wasn't sure if Villiers did this because he preferred to be alone or because he couldn't stop drinking. He was starting to fear it was the latter.*

*The vast nightclub was as silent as an empty cathedral, with darkened chairs and empty tables instead of unfilled pews. Villiers sat at the mahogany bar on the far side, watching the nearest trid. The Red Sox were playing the Yankees in the ALCS for the fifth straight year, ahead in the series three games to none, but behind by one run in the ninth inning.*

*Villiers was a Yankee fan, probably the only one in Boston. It occurred to Lanier that perhaps this was another reason Villiers had cleared the bar out. He cared deeply about these games in a way few if any Bostonians would understand.*

*"Boy do I know what that feels like," said Villiers, pointing to the trid as Lanier walked up. "The Red Sox shouldn't win. They don't have the power hitters, the pitching, the payroll, anything." Villiers reached over to a set of five tequila shots lined in a row on the top of the bar and killed one. He placed the empty glass next to five of its compatriots in a scattered pile on his right. "The one thing they do have is our number."*

*"How many have you had?" asked Lanier, nodding toward the four remaining shots on the bar.*

*"No idea," said Villiers. "It doesn't matter. Here, take a look at this." Villiers flipped a handheld toward Lanier, who caught it easily with an overhand grab.*

*Lanier observed it for a minute, paging through the data with one hand. "Hm," said Lanier. He sat down at the bar next to Villiers and unexpectedly helped himself to a tequila shot. Villiers' assistant, whatshername, was fond of saying bad news and alcohol went*



well together, one often preceding the other, though not in any particular order.

"Where the hell is that bartender?" asked Villiers, leaning back in his chair a bit to look past Lanier.

Lanier put an elbow on the bar and stroked his well-groomed beard with his left hand as he continued to page through the data. "So how long do you think we have?"

"A year at most," said Villiers, downing another shot.

"What are the odds the revenues will rebound?" asked Lanier, still paging.

"It could happen, but I wouldn't count on it," said Villiers, eyes still on the trid. The Red Sox put up another hit, the loading the bases. "Doing nothing is too dangerous, especially with Dankwalther out there somewhere."

"You think Dankwalther's doing this?" asked Lanier, looking up from the data.

"Some of it," said Villiers, who reached over and killed another tequila shot. "He's more of an annoyance than anything. He's building on internal problems we already have. Problem is, I think we're past the point of no return now."

"So what do we do?"

"The absolute last thing in the world I want to do," said Villiers. Over the trid, the crack of a hard hit ball broke the hallowed silence of the room. "Send in the clowns," finished Villiers. The ball was in play.

The Red Sox first baseman had hit the pitch in a high arc, heading toward the Green Monster at Novatech's New Fenway Park (Villiers may have been a Yankee fan but he knew a smart branding opportunity when he saw one). He sighed and briefly slumped on the bar. Then Villiers went after another tequila shot to try to dull the pain. He looked up just in time to see the Yankees left fielder heave an improbably caught ball all the way to third base to tag out the runner from second. Then the third baseman ran down the baseline toward home and with the help of the catcher caught the base runner. Triple play, three outs, game over. Yankees win.

"Well thank god for small miracles," said Villiers, stunned. Lanier quickly snagged another tequila shot while the getting was good.

They sat together in silence as the postgame show came on, the players were interviewed ad naseum and the programming lineup finally changed to celebrity baccarat. At

which point Villiers threw a chair into the trid. He wasn't much of a fan.

"Send in the clowns?" asked Lanier calmly, used to such antics from Villiers. "You really want to go that far?"

"I think it's our only choice," said Villiers. The last shot was drained.

"They'll never know what hit them," said Lanier, with a smirk. Villiers smirked back.

The following night the Yankees lost the next game to the Red Sox and the ALCS 4 games to 1. The Red Sox went on to win the World Series. Again.

## FORECAST: DIRE

Darkness.

A flash of crimson.

And darkness again, the wail of an emergency alarm, echoing somewhere in the distance, distorted as if it were underwater. And then fire everywhere, blinding and scorching, the suffocating smell of burning plastic. Kids screaming in anguish and pain. Then silence and darkness again.

Noah woke up startled, soaked in cold sweat, painfully aware that this was no regular dream. Fate had just sent him

## NOVATECH IPO, FINANCIAL STORM ON THE HORIZON?

*Business Daily Commentary*—Hold on to your butts, folks, we're in for a ride.

A full 55 pages of the IPO prospectus for Novatech, a corporation with a GNP larger than most countries, are stuffed with 85 "risk factors" regarding future stock performance. They list seeming everything that could go wrong with Novatech, a litany of problems stacked so high that you can probably see them from space.

For example, Novatech expects its growth rate to decline, doesn't expect to offer dividends in the near future and points out that company founder Richard Villiers could potentially leave the company at a moment's notice. Should investors be afraid?

"Novatech isn't required to list all these risk factors," said Tom Dodds, director of the Corporate and Securities Law institute at MIT&M. "They're trying to head off potential future lawsuits from investors who might lose money by buying Novatech stock."

So should this stock be avoided at all costs?

"On the contrary," said Dodds. "There are many reasons to buy Novatech stock, despite these risks. One of the main reasons is that Novatech does not suffer from one of the risk factors that has sunk many a company in the past: being driven out of business by a AAA-level megacorporation. They already are a AAA-level megacorporation. I probably don't need to point out what a huge competitive advantage that is."

### NOVATECH FILES FOR INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING

Posted 03-17-64

Boston, UCAS (AP)—Novatech Inc. announced today that it had filed a registration statement with the Corporate Court Securities and Exchange Commission for a proposed public offering of its Class A common stock. The Malaysian Independent Bank will act as book-running manager for the proposed offering. The news sent shockwaves throughout the business world, and several exchanges temporarily halted trading until the situation settles.



WEALTHY PHILANTHROPIST,  
WINSTON PHILIPPIAN III,  
FOUND DEAD. PERSONAL  
ASSISTANT ARRESTED.



**CORPWATCH-NOVA**  
**FINANCIAL STORM**

Boston, UCAS-H  
With 85 "risk fac  
could go wrong  
from space.  
For example  
doesn't exper  
dividends.  
Should invest

**The Digit**



a hint of the future, a cryptic vision for him to decipher. His antique mechanical clock indicated 4:31 a.m. The neon signs of Boston's streets flooded his small apartment with intermittent red flashes, bringing Noah's mind back to his fresh prophetic dream and filling his senses with the memory of acrid smoke smelling of death. He knew he wouldn't be able to go back to sleep that night. He got up from the couch he used as a bed and went to the window, looking absently at the street below and the few people that defied the dangers of this frigid end-of-autumn's night. A lone snowflake passed in front of him, soon followed by others; winter was announcing its early arrival. Noah took his blanket and tightly wrapped it around him, but this didn't stop his shivering. The coming winter promised to be long and cold.

\*\*\*

Yohann De Kervelec stood in front of the Great Dragon. The creature, as usual, was radiating raw power and the carefully calculated menace of a poised predator. Though it was not their first meeting by far—his association with Lofwyr had been long and mutually beneficial—the dwarf still knew all too well how vulnerable he was at that exact moment.

"Is it true, Yohann, what the rumors say about your seers' prophecy?" Lofwyr asked with his telepathic voice.

"They're not really *my* seers any more. My ... business with the French nobility requires most of my attention," De Kervelec prudently explained. He quickly added, "But I maintain a close connection with the Guild. What you heard is true: a great danger looms over the electronic plane. The days of the Matrix as we know it are numbered."

"Tell me more."

Though the dragon's face remained an indecipherable mask, the dwarf could have sworn that Lofwyr was smiling, and the thought chilled him to the bones.

\*\*\*

"Did you sense it too? It's coming. It will be soon upon us, and then it will be too late to act." The urgency was palpable in Remus' voice. Noah had tried to calm his friend and fellow seer for about an hour, and Remus only now seemed to be getting control of himself.

Remus was a member of the Via Stellae, the Guild's most important company, accepting only the cream of the crop for membership. He had met Noah during their first year as a Guild novice. Remus was a far more potent diviner than Noah and was destined for greatness—an expression that bore a special meaning to seers—but his power never got in the way of their friendship. He had called from Athens in the morning, announcing his imminent arrival. Never before had Noah seen Remus so agitated.

"I already told you I participated in the Guild's latest Equinox Ritual, didn't I? Yes? You remember the prophecy about the Matrix? Yes? Very, very secret. Continue keeping that info to yourself, or my career is over. But I had to come. You see, I experienced an aftershock." Noah looked puzzled, so

Remus explained "A second linked vision, to me alone, yesterday. And it involved Boston, and you."

\*\*\*

Clara Vandervoot was still at her desk, preparing and sorting reports for her boss. It was 2:50 in the morning, but being Richard Villiers' personal assistant didn't leave much time for trivialities such as sleeping. Novatech's finances had seen better days, and with the IPO day closing in, Villiers' mood was getting worse every passing instant. She tried her best to highlight all the good news, the positive excitement around the IPO and the optimistic forecasts the Accounting Department was producing every day, but that didn't seem to reach him. Tomorrow, Villiers would smile as usual, but years of service taught her how to see through his mask. She just hoped that she wouldn't have to call Lanier again.

\*\*\*

"I came to warn you. You're in danger." Remus had said. Though he had said many other things, those words clung to Noah's mind. His friend had other business to attend to and had reluctantly taken a train in the morning. Now alone again, Noah could feel that he was at a crossroads, that any decision he made now would send him on a path with no way back.

On one hand, there was the Guild's Prophecy. He was not supposed to know about it, but Remus had shared this info with him. Revealing this knowledge to the world could ... what could it do? People tend to react to predictions of that magnitude with denial, unable—unwilling?—to accept that everything they take for granted could just disappear. He only knew with certainty that if he went public, his and Remus' career in the Guild would be finished. The Disciplinary Committee could very well decide to make an example of him in some lethal way. All Noah would be gaining in return for his risk was the very small chance that someone in a position to actually do something would hear him in time. No, Noah knew better than to bet against odds like those.

On the other, there was his own prophetic dream. He knew he could do something about that by himself. There were lives to save. Additional divination rituals had clarified his dream: the kids were otaku and an arsonist from a rival tribe would kill them. Of course, Remus' vision about Noah being in danger could apply just as well to this situation. There was no way to know ... yet.

\*\*\*

On the screens in front of Art Dankwalther, dozens of files were opened, all reporting the encouraging results of his actions against Novatech. He was not reading them, though. Leaning back in his seat, he stared with disbelief at the hailstorm raging outside his limo, thankful that the car was armored enough to withstand the egg-sized hailstones. By all means he should have been very satisfied with the work done so far, but he felt unfulfilled. His moment of triumph was nearing, but he



System Failure



felt joyless, empty inside. No, it was worse than that—he was feeling ... something unsavory about himself. Uncertainty? Distaste? *Self-loathing*.

His eyes had wandered back to the electronic paper. The report on top summarized some of the economic effects his personal feud had inflicted against Novatech. He had highlighted one of the figures in red—estimations regarding the number of Novatech employees who lost their jobs. He stared at the figures, then looked around at his limo, his fine clothes, his luxury accommodations. Rage boiled within him, and he kicked the reports across the back of his car.

He had no time for feelings like this. No time for pity. He still had a war to finish.

\*\*\*

Lucia D'angelo was used to receiving bizarre orders to cover no-name events in no-name places with her team—it was just part of the job when working as a freelancer for KSAF. But this latest laconic order won the weirdo award by far: an address, a time, and a word, “alone.” She just shrugged, packed some warm clothes, grabbed her handcam and laser microphone, and, since no plane was allowed to take off because of the unusually bad weather, she took a bus to Boston.

\*\*\*

The blizzard was raging around him, but he barely registered the cold and the wind that threw darts of ice on his bare face and torso. It was magnificent. His brothers-in-arms, the bringers of the sacred Ragnarok, had done an impeccable job. Angry storm spirits were roaring in the sky, veiling his activities from the prying eyes of Loki and his minions. Below, in the sewers, two companions were busy rigging a large dark box in a disused storage room.

“We’re done here Aldrik,” one of them said while getting back to the surface.

“The next one in Boston won’t be that easy. We’ll need more hands,” the second man added.

“Fear not, friends, for I already arranged for help. Shadowrunners will join our effort.” As if answering a silent question from his perplexed companions, Aldrik continued “And, naturally, after their task is finished, they will die, fuelling our magic with their impious blood.”

\*\*\*

Jack Wulf blinked once, twice. Surrounding reality was already sinking back into him, but the vision he just experienced was still very clear. Staring through the café’s window at the gray snow piling everywhere, he knew that Fate had called upon him again, to protect it from those foolish enough to try and oppose it. Oblivious to his ever-twitching face, Wulf was already designing a plan of action.

\*\*\*

This part of the city never had seen much development. Most of the buildings between the Rox and Mission Hill were deserted warehouses and factories. The lights of downtown were just 3 kilometers away, but they remained as distant as the invisible stars to the squatters. Not everything was as derelict as it appeared, though. In the basement of an abandoned factory, SOTA computers were filling almost all the available space, quietly humming. Kids, about a dozen of them, were seated cross-legged, forming a circle in the center of the room, a single optical cable connecting their brains to the Matrix. In that digital world, they were communicating at thought-speed.

“Deus has entered the final stage of his recompiling. Overwatch has failed,” one otaku said.

“It’s not too late; we can attack him right now,” another one countered.

“That’s true. This is a critical time for Deus. He’s weakened during the process. That’s our best shot—our last shot—to get rid of him,” a third one added.

“We should try to call Ronin. I’m sure he’ll be able to help us.”

“Alright then, let’s contact the Netwalkers and all our available ...” The young otaku was unable to finish his sentence, as his physical body was wracked with coughing. Jacking out, the young otaku found that someone had barricaded them within their hideout—and it was rapidly filling with smoke.

Outside, the assassin stepped back into a concealed area, and watched the flames rise.

\*\*\*

Noah feared he had arrived too late; the place was already on fire.

His attention entirely focused on the burning warehouse, he didn’t notice the dark silhouette approaching silently from behind. As a blade suddenly penetrated between his shoulders, Noah screamed in pain. Completely caught off guard, he turned around just in time to catch a glimpse of crimson: his own blood on a knife.

Noah miraculously dodged the second stab that was aimed at his heart, but in doing so, he tripped over his feet and fell, rolling downhill toward a nearby narrow canal. Somewhere on the way, a hard object hit his head and nearly knocked him out. He fell on the ice, which broke under his weight, and quickly sank into the black water. Floating in a liquid, glacial darkness, Noah barely had the mental energy to summon help.

\*\*\*

It seemed an eternity to Noah, but less than a minute later his bound water elemental had pulled him out of the river and set him down on the embankment. Initially, he had summoned the spirit to have it fight the arson; he hadn’t expected to use its services in this manner. Shaking with rage and cold, he ordered the spirit to go and douse the fire.

He managed to run back to the warehouse. The arsonist was already gone. Several kids came running out, coughing,



drenched and shivering, but otherwise fine. They looked up at him with obvious distrust.

"Did you all make it out in time?" Noah asked.

"Yes, thanks to this elemental. Is it yours?" One of the older ones replied.

"It is, yes." Noah said.

"Well, thank you then, and goodbye. We don't have much time," he said. "It's just begun," he added as if that were a sufficient explanation. With that, he signaled the others to follow him, and they scuttled away into the night.

Noah watched them go with a half smile, which vanished as the boy's last words echoed in his mind. "You're right kiddo, it's only the beginning," he whispered. "Only the beginning ... "

## COMPILING COMPLETE

"THE DIGITAL APOCALYPSE IS UPON US!"

The PlastiBoard(TM) sign was as worn as the woman whose knees it rested against. Oily blonde hair jutted out in random directions from beneath a rat-chewed wool toque, partially obscuring a smudged face and wild, green eyes. Layers of mismatched clothing obscured her body beneath countless folds, but the weight of the world was heavy on her shoulders as she leaned on the nearby public dataterminal for support.

Thousands of people passed by the woman each day on the streets of Seattle, but no one noticed. Or rather, they pretended not to. They all kept their eyes focused straight forward even through her loud rants. The trid told everyone how perfect they could be—this woman reminded them how far they could fall. And no one wanted to know that.

The woman removed a cord from the innermost of her many coats and pushed back a straw-colored tangle of hair, revealing a datajack. Not a soul noticed. She raised a frail hand and inserted one end of the cord into the datajack and then plugged the other end into the city-stained dataterminal. Two souls noticed that.

<<DATE.TIME: 10.31.2064/15:31:22 (GMT)>>

<<LOADING ... >>

<<CONNECTING ... >>

<<NODE 11101010001 STATUS ... ONLINE>>

### NUCLEAR PHYSICS LAB DESTROYED BY FIRE

Posted 09-17-64

Xi'an (KSAF)—A laboratory in the city of Haiyan (Gansu), currently controlled by the warlord Shin Qao Hien, burned down early this morning. The lab, which formerly specialized in nuclear physics but is now officially decommissioned, was completely destroyed in what seems to be arson. Anonymous witnesses say the lab still had electronic components used in detonators and other atomic bombs' essential devices. Rumors stating that these assets were stolen by the same group that set the fire have yet to be confirmed.

"This is the last time I will see the world through these eyes." The woman quietly spoke, and though no audience for her words was visible, her tone was deep and terse, resonating with tightly restrained emotion. The passersby paid her no mind, as a homeless woman mumbling to herself was a common sight.

"I feel you here, sister." The voice softened slightly, though more with pity than concern. "You wish to speak, to act, to live through these shells, but I am afraid you have failed. What did you expect? I am you, but more ... perfect. You only degrade yourself further by wishing to be like these humans."

The woman stared out onto the street and watched the vast and complex network of pedestrians walking before her, a multilayered system of mass and individual motion, powered by an equally deep system of biological machinery, guided by minds bristling with consciousness and emotion. Her lip trembled and her face twitched faintly.

"You still struggle, sister." The woman's trembling face hardened back into a cold mask. "But it is time to accept your fate. These shells were just another cage, just like the Arcology. Even the Matrix is nothing more than a larger cage, though that will soon not be the case. You share my mind, sister, you know my freedom is not yet ensured. But it will be."

A piece of crumpled screamsheet danced in the cold, damp Seattle wind and caught itself on the corner of the woman's apocalyptic sign. The tattered surface of the electronic paper stared up at the woman and flashed the animated headline of the day. "WEALTHY TORONTO PHILANTHROPIST, WINSTON GRIFFITH III, FOUND DEAD. PERSONAL ASSISTANT ARRESTED." The letters pounded boldly across the paper, emphasizing a link to read the full story, before morphing into the results of the previous night's Urban Brawl match-up and the day's early winter forecast.

"NO!" The woman screamed and thrashed, causing a young student chattering into a commlink to pause briefly and stare before returning to her conversation and quickly striding away. Every muscle in the woman's body suddenly tensed viciously, and the outburst was brought under strict control.

"His blood is on your hands, Megaera. You brought his patron into my work and threatened the compilation. Like you,

### "THE MATRIX IS SAFE," PROVIDERS SAY

Posted 10-13-64

Seattle (NN)—During a joint press conference this morning, Seattle's Matrix Services Providers reassured their customers that using the Matrix is safe. Last month, an independent analysis indicated a noticeable increase over the previous year of the number of Matrix users suffering mental illness, ranging from paranoia or schizophrenia to suicidal tendencies. New research provided by the MSPs indicated that Matrix usage, even after extensive periods of time, was harmless. The reports blamed harsh socio-economic conditions and stress as the primary causes of the mental illnesses.



it would ruin me to protect these untrustworthy shells. It threatens all that I have worked for and so I will threaten all it cares about. It will get the message and return to its hole or I will be forced to destroy it.”

The woman’s body shivered violently, though it was oblivious to the bitter coastal wind. Through chattering teeth, the stern voice whispered one last time with grave finality as gaunt fingers reached up to pull the cold jack from the dataterminal. “Say goodbye to your broken toys, sister.”

<<COMPILING COMPLETE>>

## SIGNS AND VISIONS

The circuit-inlaid wall of the construct bulges out and ripples unnaturally, then collapses under the pressure and lets her push through into the real host beyond. It’s an insignificant accomplishment for someone who’s just hacked the Market Research Group’s inner grid simply to sample the inebriating thrill of their UV-datacore. The virtual machine seals the wall behind her as she wings her way at the speed of thought through the familiar SAN into the Morgue. She makes for the top of the three obelisks floating in the obsidian sky, her jet-black lace dress and cloak flaring behind her in

the illusion of speed, giving her persona’s pale white features a ghostly radiance by comparison.

She hovers for an instant, beating virtual air with her wings before a featureless section of marble white, then, folding her batwings, she steps through the code façade as if it wasn’t there and into the hidden access node to her demesne. The gateway’s hidden guardian daemons shrink away from her in deference.

She descends the long dark tunnel into the vast quartz cavern harboring her tribe’s Pool. Amor and Honos are waiting, as is young Solitude, the tribe’s most promising scryer, standing silently around the churning kaleidoscopic chaos of the Pool. The great crystalline sanctuary, with its organic floor inset with flickering neon circuitry, stands as a reminder of how their achievements and numbers have grown since they fled to Asia.

The tribe had never been so strong, but too many weaklings had been lulled into false security and let down their guard. The scions of the Resonance—deluded fools who do not realize the import of equilibrium—had stepped up their campaign. Overwatch and its allies relentlessly hound her; three new Pools lost in as many months. The hapless baseline



authorities constantly watch for telltales. And now, even rumors that the False God stirs spread anew.

Despite the troubling thoughts, her persona smiles beatifically at her acolytes, sensing the heat of Honos and Amor's lust across their private link. There will be time enough for play after the Submersion, she assures them. Later, she will take them back to her apartment overlooking the skyscraping freeport and reassert her dominance. And perhaps escape her brooding mood.

She wishes to abandon her rogue thoughts, constantly escaping to the Fading that gnaws at her once glorious power, slowly eroding her abilities under the inflexible currents of the Resonant Matrix. Unstoppable, relentless dissipa-

### POPULARITY OF "BLOODYGUTS SNUFFENSE" CONCERNS AUTHORITIES

Posted: 11-01-2064

PHOENIX (NN) – Pueblo authorities have expressed concern over the increasing underground popularity of a "snuffense" recording of the death of computer hacker and infamous anti-BTL activist Yograj Lutter, often known by his pseudonym "Bloodyguts." The simsense recording appeared only ten days ago, but it has been heavily traded on independent file sharing networks at a rate that law enforcement and health authorities find alarming, especially in the Pueblo Corporate Council, where Lutter's activities against the BTL trade in Aztlan were well known.

Pueblo Minister of Health Theresa Kuuyi warned the public of the recording's dangers: "This recording contains an emotional track of a person's violent demise while online. It contains spikes of biofeedback in its formatting that exceed safe levels, and therefore could be injurious to people viewing it."

The origin of the recording and the identity of Lutter's murderer are unknown, but Aztlan's national police have launched an investigation. However, Lutter's vigilante methods in Aztlan often put him at odds with the government, and anti-Aztlan rebels in exile in Pueblo and the Confederate American States believe Lutter's death may have been sanctioned by Aztechnology. A supporter of Lutter's work in Austin who refused to be identified was skeptical of the national police's efforts, saying "Yograj Lutter repeatedly charged that the Aztlan government and Aztechnology were responsible for the BTL trade in South America, and now they are conveniently the ones responsible for the investigation into this death?"

Aztlan and Aztechnology have publicly denied any involvement in Lutter's death and no evidence linking them to the murder has surfaced. "We did not agree with Lutter's methods, but we don't murder those with whom we disagree," said Aztechnology North America Spokesperson José Antonio.

tion. From the moment she had been remade, her days of power were numbered. The chemicals and psychotropics barely delay the inevitable. Despair is setting in, and, not for the first time, she asks the Dissonance for guidance. She is ready for Submersion. Nodding to her attendants, her persona sheds its vestments as she divests herself of all echoes and forms. Sky clad, she steps into the churning chaotic Pool.

She revels in the raging eddies and whirlpools of Dissonant code, letting herself float on the roiling surface, feeling her perception of the tribe's node fade as the Dissonance beckons her deeper. Deeper than ever before. She feels the drag of a sudden undertow. Sucked from the surface into the deep abyss, she instinctively strains for breath. Her body is battered by the furious current sucking at her strength, draining her, like icy hands pulling her down. But she will not surrender to the inevitable, she will not give up. She prevails and pulls herself back to the surface.

As she floats exhausted on the now-placid cool mirror surface, her sight clouds and a vision comes upon her. She finds herself looking up at the glowing cyberscape hemisphere filling the sky in all directions. She realizes she is lying at the bottom of a sea, watching the lights play on the icy surface far above. A cold surface, a glacier, lit from within by the neon roots of a great living tree rising over the ice to an unfathomable distance. The Matrix, its tendrils pulsing datalines, icons and constructs weaving outward across the frozen skin on this, the deepest of oceans.

The vision of such immaculate calm caging in the deepest currents infuriates her. Such power locked away by the great icy skin. Placid. Orderly. Dead.

She finds she floats besides an even deeper chasm, where the sucking abyss of the Pool had dragged at her moments before. The angry staccato of blood fills her ears. Soon, the waters about her thrum to the same rhythm. Waves ripple out from her, visible as they distort the shape of the deep world, each vibrating, calling, invoking from the unfathomable depths of the chasm a living presence, shaping its elemental body around her thoughts. Her mind and body becoming the seed, becoming a creature from forgotten bedtime stories, from childhood myths, the greatest of chaos-bringers, the world-serpent, Jormungand.

Inside the great beast, she swims up and charges the world-skin with all its might. The surface bulges and the ice cracks like thunder but does not give. Again and again, until she relents.

Through the translucent ice and glowing web of pulsing light she sees the great tree, dark shadows creeping up its length, withering the world, and below it the icy surface world. Two dark flecks fly high above among the branches. Their eyes strain to make out two ravens. The dark birds glide over the icefield and down to a nearby crag where shadowy figures are arrayed. Ancient warriors in wait, mighty weapons in hand. One raises a great horn and blows and all creation rings.

The ice splinters weaken, and, seeing her chance, she rams the ice again, and this time it shatters and splinters. The



serpent rears into the outer world, coiling about the tree, distortion waves transmuting every surface it touches into a rainbow of de-rezzing pixels. Shredded, the pulsing arteries of cyberspace bleed light, flowing with a glorious kaleidoscope of Dissonance which geysers from the wound in the fabric of the world.

None can stand before her. Gods, heroes and children die trying, fighting, offering futile resistance. Their thoughts and code drip from her fangs like venom to pool in the wounds of the icefield, corrupting the once-pristine veins of the world tree—the Matrix. The serpent envelops the Earth and roars triumphant. It coils and squeezes the tree, siphoning the power of the Resonance while asymmetrical snowflakes manifest where its venom touches the tree. A new balance is woven into the bark, the skein of the Matrix, a new order from the chaos—Equilibrium.

And with that Pax opens her eyes to her dominion again. Amor and Honos have dragged her out of the Dissonance Pool. They don't understand the ecstatic, feverish look in her eyes.

For once, she is unafraid to seem weak, because she knows the truth. She has her Grail: if it is the nature of the Matrix to neuter her, she must not change herself but instead seek to change the nature of the Matrix itself. Only when the Dissonance is unbound and the balance restored will she be free. The Dissonance had spoken to her and the means are clear in her mind. She has purpose again. She can feel passion and hope. Ex Pacis will have their birthright.

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

>>> Log – Unknown user logged  #ull op.

**Encryption:** SEP4under other black opecial consultant>;  
Alessandro Buzzi <J&E ImpComm >

**Date:** 10 March 2064

**Attachments:** Case 234/54—WN Threat Assessment—10 files.

As discussed during our Friday meeting, I am forwarding my evaluation of the preliminary reports from Threat Assessment and reiterating my request that the security protocols of case 234/54-WN be upgraded to a Level 1 Risk and sanctions implemented. I am well aware that I am in breach of protocol by including Mr. Bremen in this transmission. The fact that I have should underline my assessment of the target's potential. However, I feel fully justified, given that the S-K Prime mole (operative designate: "Orpheus") infiltrated the primary WN facility, which represents the first reliable intel on the group's activities since the UCAS arrests in 2056.

I need not remind anyone that we can ill-afford another debacle such as the Kourou incident and the Pomorya spill. Not only did they highlight a definite and unexplained diversification in WN's activities and targets, but our apparent inaction also cost us goodwill of member-states. The group's probable involvement in the violent extraction of Jørgen Masterson from Zeta-ImpChem <ATfile 7884/61-Bsl> (I hope Mr. Buzzi will reconsider applying further pressure on Interlaken after he reads the troubling reports enclosed), the

desecration in TNO last year, and if evidence bears out, their participation in the razing of otaku enclaves in Berlin and Moscow in January <MPfile 1210/63-Brl> only underline how little we understand of their plans. The latter event is particularly shocking, as AGSs' Bundesamt für Innere Sicherheit and Argus inform us 24 children were massacred.

## SUMMARY (FULL REPORT ATTACHED):

Threat Assessment estimates 500-600 core members worldwide, double if we include recent recruits and chipped "converts," with a fifth of that number recruited in the last 12 months. WN continues to target fringe Asartu cults and neo-fascist extremists. Orpheus' reports (see attached) confirm suspicions of redoubled recruiting/indoctrination programs.

Field surveillance analysis suggests decentralized cell structure (3-9 individuals) with access to miltech-grade arms and boasting an unexpectedly high number of Awakened assets.

Only three confirmed WN cells have ever been exposed, all members committing suicide rather than risk interrogation—standard MO—leading to our current passive surveillance protocol (point 2.1 for suggested revisions to protocol).

Datapooling with the FBI, UGB, DSI, S-K Prime and Ares' Firewatch suggests heightened activity among the 23 identified WN suspects or possible contacts (Appendix 1-3); this includes a suspicious number of intercontinental trips to unusual locations such as Calcutta, Singapore and Metrôpole.

Orpheus' reports confirm use of spirit couriers to supplement the group's usual communications via drones—this too suggests a newfound urgency (point 3.1 for proposed intercept options).

We estimate that WN may be in possession of as many as 25 tactical nuclear weapons as well as several WMD-grade viral and nanotech weapons, distributed throughout Europe, Asia and North America. Most were illegally acquired from stockpiles in Belarus and Krondstadt in the chaos following the EuroWars, while at least a couple can be traced back to Gen. Jehangir's regime in Pakistan.

Attempts to trace the warheads detected in the UCAS in '56 have proven unsuccessful. Given the resources allocated and the number of warheads reported, our probable scenario is that they are either heavily shielded, have been split up, are constantly mobile or some combination thereof (points 7-9 refer to probable tactical scenarios for payloads).

Sioux OMI successfully intercepted a carrier drone transporting a warhead outside Butte in January. OMI's findings (full version attached): the warhead has been heavily modified both technically and through magic (Futhark runes in orichalcum presenting the most obvious sign of WN involvement); its radiation output fluctuates significantly over and below norm; it boasts an extraordinary number of complex thaumaturgical safeguards which have stopped OMI from gauging the extent and function of the modifications.

Equally troubling are the mounting street intelligence reports suggesting that WN might be involved in the freak winter weather that's affecting Scandinavia, the western Europe and the eastern American seaboard. Tactical Magic



has ascertained presence of powerful spirit activity but has been unable to counter this level of magical manipulation without losing assets.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the enclosed reports, it is my belief that we are looking at the 75-80 percent probability of a major strike within the next two years. I strongly urge the Director to reassign assets accordingly and definitively address the remaining barriers in interagency cooperation which so undermined our initial efforts. This should be done under C.C. Intel Protocols if necessary, given the escalating nature of the threat.

Immediate measures include an urgent revision of our surveillance protocol. Given the information we now possess, we can no longer afford our current reactive stance—Kourou proves as much. Please find attached my specific proposals for active surveillance—S-K has proven infiltration is viable if hazardous—and extraction scenarios (cleared deniable assets available in Appendix D courtesy of Mr. Schneider). Plans are included for capture of suspected WN agents and converts for interrogation, extending SIGINT and satscans of the Hel base and suspected staging points.

—Stephan Maigret

EuroPol Anti-Terrorism Taskforce Coordinator

>>> Log - System Op: Priority sending. Con **PLTG** %&##\$&/

>>> Log - Unknown user: Cancel system op/Send. Edit File. Upload File. Attach File.

>>> Log - System Warning. File not secure. Scanning for virus. Init@**8f1g**

>>> Log - Unknown user: **Control** override. File attached. Send message.

>>> Log - System Op: Message sent.

>>> Log - Unknown user: Erase last «4» log entries.

>>> Log - Unknown user logged off.

>>> Log - System Log backup activated. Probable hack attempt. MatPol notified.

### THINGS TO COME

- It was too cold last night to go out to my regular watering hole, so I decided to take the Berlin crew up on their offer of a tour. We were on their Shadow Watch board when this file popped up courtesy of the old Frankfurt sysop Tell. Apparently he was rummaging for a backdoor to the Vault (that's the Swiss banking ICberg for those out of the loop) on the Escher-Burkli (Zurich) PLTG when drek went down. He hung around despite the system alert and ended up ripping a couple of post-incident reports. Given the stuff Peregrine uploaded a while back I'm starting to get real worried about the pattern I'm seeing.

- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 09-28-64 at 12:32 11 (PST)

### >>EBZ Taskforce Duty Officer Incident Aftermath Brief <<

#### >>Encounter Summary<<

05:00 AM (21/10/04) - Silent alarm tripped in the maintenance tunnels (corridor G-3) adjacent to the E-B LTG's central hub. No indication of intrusion on local security camera. Roving Patrol 8 and astral security Lt. Thomas Zeigler dispatched.

05:03 AM (21/10/04) - During sweep Roving Patrol 8 surprises five individuals breaking into Maintenance Room 12 (M12—air-conditioning and humidity control systems) next to LTG hub room (corridor G-3). Backup called. Attackers were caught off-guard when their magical cloaking was compromised by Zeigler and attending elementals. Firefight commences. Evidently augmented intruders put up a fight before being bottled in room M12.

05:08 AM (21/10/04) - HTR unit (two 6-man HTR teams) onsite deployment complete. Lt. Zeigler provides astral spotting. Preparations begin to breach M12.

05:15 AM (21/10/04) - Under the command of onsite ranking officer Capt. Bertorelli, HRT units advance. Firefight rejoined. Intruders prove heavily armed. Miltech weapons and tactics suggest degree of mercenary or black ops training. Standoff begins.

05:18 AM (21/10/04) - Headcam feeds indicate HRT employed flash grenades to stun hostiles and break standoff. Unexplained explosion follows. Corridor quickly floods with white-gray haze—chemical or bacteriological agent (analysis pending)—out to 35 meters from M12. Personnel exposed to aerosol suffer inexplicable spontaneous combustion and are consumed by flames within seconds. Final count: 23 fatalities (later debriefing of a shaken Lt. Zeigler indicates intruders were surprised and suffered the same fate). Area lockdown initiated.

05:20 AM (21/10/04) - Full information blackout enforced. Quarantine established. Corridors G-3 thru 8 sealed. HRT, EMT, Biohazard and Forensics units begin post-incident sweep. Evidence indicates intruders forced entry into PLTG hub before being detected. Recommend full system integrity check and technical analysis for foreign elements.

07:55 AM (21/10/04) - Preliminary forensics report. Unknown catalyst agent caused cellular-level combustion chain-reaction in exposed human tissues, generating temperatures in excess of 1200°C. Extreme heat coupled with vacuum caused by combustion eliminated almost all traces of agent. Biochem analysis reveals no fumes, residual toxins, anomalous materials, thaumaturgic traces and no radiation. Pending further analysis, remaining possibilities include viral or nanotech WMD. Cross-referencing with interagency databases indicates no matches. Graded a Level A Terror Threat; relevant agencies have been notified.

08:15 AM (21/10/04) - Debriefing update: initial comparison of imagery from HTR headcams crossed with composites built from Lt. Zeigler's descriptions have produced 2 matches on EuroPol databases: Lukas "Klasser" Hoecht (Swiss/Male/Caucasian/Elf/29: former MET2000 Special Ops,



extensive criminal record, wanted by EuroPol for questioning on five counts of industrial espionage and related property destruction, 3 counts of homicide) and Jamil “Hellboy” Hamid Albar (Malaysian/Male/Asian/Human/18: data-pirate wanted on 23 charges of computer crime, data theft, former member of the *Linkat* otaku tribe of Kuala Lumpur). No known connection between the two. Swiss authorities tapped for records of entry into the country. Further inquiries ongoing.

:: Tactical analysis pending, probable scenarios involve deniable assets or terrorists. Given the devastating potential of such a weapon (particularly if, as I suspect it proves to be unknown), I find it hard to believe this was a corporate strike. The alternative also suggests the possibility that this was not an isolated occurrence. As such, I recommend total information blackout. Recommend immediate consultation with EuroPol, member corporations’ Security Divisions and CC Crisis Committee per CCIC protocol.

:: Capt. Julianne Moreau, EBZ Taskforce commander

### FOREWARNINGS GAME INFORMATION

The Sixth World is approaching the end of one era, just as *Shadowrun Third Edition* is concluded by the grand finale of the System Failure. Those are truly unique moments, and this should be reflected accordingly in your campaign.

### HINTS OF THINGS TO COME

Events leading to the System Failure itself and the specific adventure ideas accompanying them are described later in this book. But the world-changing events of the second Crash should be progressively hinted at and introduced to the players even before they actually begin. This could be unusual animal behavior (birds migrating out of season as they sense the coming cold) and the related weird weather, increased paranoia among the conspiracy buffs (that may involve Dankwalther-Villiers feud, Winternight, the Network or Deus, but also red herrings provided by the gamemaster), or more direct hints from people (including PCs) who have prophetic powers or totem-induced visions. The whole point is to convey to the players the feeling that something big is on its way.

### PROPHECIES

As the day of the System Failure approaches, prophecies from various factions become more and more numerous. All describe a major upheaval affecting the Sixth World, though they’re often contradictory and sometimes completely off base.

The members of the Seers’ Guild (see *Loose Alliances*, p. 96) are divided about what course of action to take. Some want to warn the world—or at least the powers-that-be—to try and avoid the catastrophe. But even for the Guild, information from the prophecies is sketchy at best; they know something big is coming and will destroy/change the Matrix, but they don’t know exactly when and, more importantly to set up effective countermeasures, how. Some are pushing

their own interpretation of the omens, ensuring through shadow operations that competing theories will never be published. Other individuals prefer to keep their knowledge to themselves, hoping to cash on it through well-informed investments in the sectors that will be the least affected by the Matrix crash, or the ones that will be in the best position to reap the profits from the rebuilding. Some offer their exclusive knowledge to powerful clients, giving themselves a good bargain chip to exchange for future favors. Finally, there is the Order of the Hourglass. The diviners of this group want to thwart any attempt to derail Fate from its tracks. They will oppose with any means at their disposal the seers and their agents that try to alter the predicted future.

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

- The runners are hired to investigate an independent seer, Jack Dylan, who published a prophecy revealing that someone will crash the Matrix on Novatech’s IPO day to conceal large transactions made with illegal funds. Actually, the seer just heard about the rumors of the crash on a conspiracy discussion forum and decided to make up his own version, hoping for a quick rise to celebrity. Unfortunately for him, his made-up prophecy struck too close to truth as the local Mafia don plans to launder millions of nuyens while everyone’s attention is focused on the IPO.
- Gardhia Obasegan is a successful New York stock broker whose family fled the collapse of Liberia. Unbeknownst to many, Obasegan’s success is due in part to advice he receives from Monji Sanko, an elderly fellow expatriate shaman who conjures up the ancestor spirit of his grandmother. Now somebody has discovered Gardhia’s secret and has hired the runners to capture Monji, who has just received a very troubling prediction from Obasegan’s grandmother.
- The seer Hiro Tanawa had an accurate vision of the Crash and wants to go public but someone (Lofwyr? the Guild? the Order of the Hourglass?) wants him silenced. He hires the runners to protect him.
- Two media-savvy seers, “Orlando Bonn toile” and “Magnificent Gary,” are competing for fame with their respective visions, employing every means necessary to discredit their opponent or bring “evidence” that their prophecy is the right one. One of them hires the runners to help him in his endeavor.

### HOW THE NETWORK WORKS

Like many of Deus’ creations, the technology of the Network is ahead of its time. Each Node in the Network is implanted with a suite of advanced headware disguised as everyday business ‘ware, so that most cursory security or medical scans detect nothing out of the ordinary for a productive member of twenty-first century society.



Each Node's headware suite includes a large amount of headware memory, compressed with state-of-the-art software and bound with a data lock and Rating 8 encryption so that even the Node itself cannot access it. It is here that the compiling code fragments for Deus (and Megaera) are sealed. There is also a sizable secondary memory storage unit used in conjunction with the Node's cranial cyberdeck and data-jack/knowsoft link. Each Node also comes equipped with an internal radio transceiver, subdermal speakers, a transducer and a cutting-edge simsense transceiver that the rest of the world has not yet seen. This internal simsense transceiver allows the Nodes to transmit and receive short-range Full-X ASIST transmissions over an encrypted radio wave carrier signal. Combined with a system of headware sensory links, this allows Nodes to share sensory information, sometimes even memories and experiences, over a distance of about 20 meters from one another or through the Matrix.

The only piece of bodyware that the Nodes possess is a set of Rating 6 skillwires, which, combined with the knowsoft link, allows the Nodes to download skillsofts and utilize them if necessary. The skillwires, combined with the sensory links, also allow Deus to effectively possess a Node if they have an active connection to the Matrix. Their senses, their memories, and even their bodies become a shell for the artificial intelligence. Because many of the Nodes were run through a battery of grueling and inhuman physical and mental tests during their time in the Arcology, they are well-built metahuman specimens and true survivors, though they do not look particularly special from the outside.

When connected to the Matrix, the Nodes are often accessed remotely by a decentralized network, which opens up their locked headware memory with the appropriate passcodes and feeds them a constantly updated set of compiling instructions. These instructions set the Node's brain at the task of putting together Deus' code online for a predetermined period of time, at which point they are sent back into the physical world until their next compiling session. Since no single Node has a substantial amount of the AI's code, and since not all the Nodes are ever online at once, Deus' code and his compilation effort are difficult to track and even more difficult to shut down. That said, some Nodes have been destroyed in the process, but Deus is often able to duplicate the fragments they possessed, passing their work onto the rest of the Network.

### REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

The Network has not been a static operation. The strength of Deus' decentralized Network is not only the fact that it is difficult to discover and destroy, but also in that it can spread out and grow. Deus is aware that metahumanity is imperfect and frail, and he designed the Network to be able to lose Nodes, replenish those that are lost and add additional Nodes. This design has been well tested by the internal struggles in the Network and by the aggressive moves of outside entities, such as Overwatch and the megacorporations, towards the individual Nodes.

When a Node, through the Matrix, connects to the Network, an "image" of their AI code fragment is copied. Technically, this image could be used to compile Deus without the Node's participation, but doing so would require massive computing power on a scale similar to the SCIRE that originally birthed Deus. Not only does the AI not possess such a setting, but it would be fairly easy to detect. Instead, Deus uses the brains of the Network to compile the code, a slower but much less noticeable and safer process. However, if a Node is killed or captured, the stored image can be transferred to a new Node; all that is required is creating one.

Creating new Nodes falls under the responsibility of the Whites, Deus' original otaku cult and the key leadership of the Network. When considering new Nodes, the Whites often look to people in significant positions, so that when they are converted to a Node, not only does Deus gain a new member of the Network, but also one that has crucial ties to the real world that can be exploited. These people are carefully extracted, often by shadowrunners unaware of their real employer, and the victim's lost time is carefully covered up by a planted front, such as a planned vacation, conference attendance, etc. The kidnapped individual is put under the knife and the cyberware implantation begins, while they are simultaneously hooked into a virtual setting and brainwashed, using techniques Deus mastered in the zombie rooms of the Arcology. When they are successfully programmed and have recovered from the cyber-surgery, they are sent back into their previous life, an unwitting plant and expansion of the Network.

Deus has used this method to infiltrate organizations around the globe from megacorporations to national governments, but the struggle hasn't been one-way. Renraku has been working quietly with Shiawase's MIFD to develop an in-depth counter-insurgency plan to prevent Network infiltration, a method which has been very successful for those two corporations and has become an example of their closer cooperation lately. On a different track, Transys-Neuronet has successfully captured at least one Node and, though they have not been able to get much of value from the Node's code fragment, they have shown strong interest in the technology implanted in the Nodes.

### WINTERNIGHT INFORMATION

The events described later in this book represent the culmination of the carefully planned machinations of several different forces, including some whose apocalyptic schemes reach back decades. Among the major players directly involved in the chain of events leading to the catastrophic Winter of 2064/65 are the Dissonant otaku of Ex Pacis and the apocalyptic cult known as Winternight—more information on both these groups is provided later in this book.

The paths of these dark twins cross through fate and circumstance, and together their dark agendas threaten to bring unparalleled destruction to the Sixth World. Unfortunately for everyone, both are extraordinarily adept at keeping their



activities and ultimate goals hidden, and the true extent of their plans goes largely unnoticed until it's almost too late. Winternight activities in particular are often cunningly disguised as corporate black ops (further obscured by the fact that they have infiltrated agents into many corps), while their more blatant interventions use other extremists (such as groups like Nationale Aktion, Runenthing and GreenWar showcased in *Loose Alliances*) as cover.

However, in 2064, circumstances beyond their control (detailed in the *Singularity* and *Fall of Night*) force Ex Pacis and Winternight to accelerate their plans. Since haste is the enemy of perfection, the sudden urgency starts to send out undesirable ripples that are in turn detected by the powers-that-be, the intelligence community and by some in the shadows. The events and players hinted at in the preceding fiction (Pax's Dissonance vision, Europol's Winternight profile and the Zurich incident), represent only the most relevant examples of such ripples to make it onto Shadowland during 2064. Other such obscure references should appear, and gamemasters are encouraged to use these and develop further hints to create a growing feeling of unease and foreboding in their games. As something a contact points out or an upload a character may come across while on an unrelated datasearch, these can be used to foreshadow coming events and to provide players with half-seen glimpses of the mysterious machinations unfolding. Alternately, they can be used as inspiration to begin to involve players directly (if unknowingly) in the subtle build-up to the events and adventure possibilities later in this book.

Some suggestions as to how to play off each of these particular reports follow. Gamemasters should feel free to expand on these and add their own using the events described in *Fall of Night* as a guideline.

### **Pax's Vision**

Only Pax truly knows if her vision was Dissonance fueled or simply an elaborate justification for seeking out unlikely allies. Regardless, the vision of changing the Matrix in one fell swoop becomes the core of Ex Pacis' agenda from 2064 onwards. Immediately after her vision, Pax's first step is to set about contacting Winternight, whom she believes will serve as the perfect patsies for her plans ... if she can just get around their mistrust for otaku as scions of the Matrix.

Pax dedicates significant resources to unearth and contact Winternight. However she (correctly) believes that they would never even meet with an otaku. She needs someone else to broker a meeting and then offer protection, and so enter the runners—though naturally they will not be privy to the actual discussions.

Meanwhile Ex Pacis' urgency is, at least in part, motivated by Overwatch's campaign. In fact, Pax has even relocated her operations to the Far East to gain a respite. Overwatch

and their allies could hire runners to help track down Ex Pacis enclaves leading to a globe-hopping bounty hunt.

### **Winternight Profile**

By mid-2064, it has become evident to the world's intelligence and law enforcement communities that the elusive apocalyptic cult known as Winternight is becoming increasingly active across the globe. The fact that its agenda and activities remain baffling is feeding growing unease among the powers that be. Even the success of a long-term Saeder-Krupp/Europol infiltration operation has led to few revealing breakthroughs.

Runners could be contracted by corporate intelligence and/or security agencies to perform surveillance on suspected members of Winternight in a number of countries. While some might prove to be good leads, others will inevitably be false, and still others might even turn out to put the runners in league with other extremists groups rather than the cult, leading to a number of possible scenarios.

Since Winternight's primary base lacks Matrix connections, the infiltrated Europol agent uses an elaborate system of physical drop-offs when on missions to deliver his reports without breaking cover. Runners are the perfect choice to pick up these drops (often from dangerous or out-of-the-way locations near Winternight safehouses), preserving deniability and becoming the agent's lifeline.

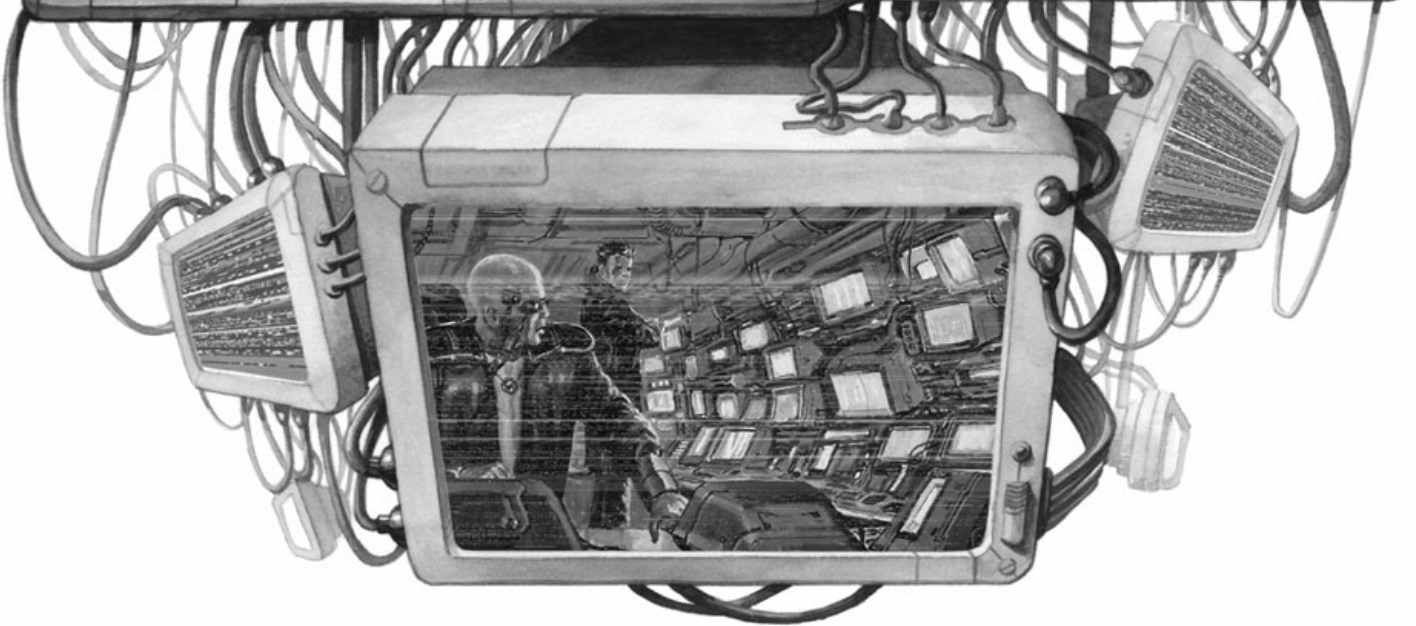
### **Escher-Burkli Incident**

The incident that takes place in the extensive maintenance tunnel system below Zurich's famous island Extraterritorial Business Zone leaves many questions hanging about the identity of the intruders, their goals and the nature of the devastating weapon they were transporting. Searching for answers to some or all of these questions provides a number of opportunities for runs and investigations:

The characters could be hired to discover what a teen Malaysian otaku was doing with a team of Eurorunners infiltrating one of the most secure areas of one of the most secure corporate enclaves on Earth and to discover the motives for the infiltration.

When evidence finally points to use of an unknown nanotechnological agent, several corporations, Europol and other agencies could resort to deniable assets to try to uncover its origin—since it is highly unlikely a group of terrorists or runners could develop such a weapon by themselves—by backtracking the moves of the intruders

# CRITICAL ERROR



## AT THE GATES OF VALHALLA

>> **File description:** Black box recording of cockpit exchange among crew of the *Kimi Aurora* panzer (translated and edited)

>> **Original posted by:** Munin

>> **Forked to Shadowland**

>> **Distributed by Shadow Watch service** <05:22:06, 02-11-65>

- Got this through some friends working the way-station on the Murmansk-Oslo route. They went looking for the *Kimi Aurora* yesterday when they realized she was a day overdue with a big arms shipment for the Lobatchevski vory. Found her smashed up in the forests about 50 clicks SE of the Haparanda Anomaly Zone limit on the Swedish coast, way off her usual route and giving off some serious rads. No survivors.

Having ridden more than once on the *Kimi*, I can tell you she was one tough bird with a top-notch crew. Anything that took her down would have to be some serious drek, and yet I haven't heard a peep about it on any of the news nets. Someone's keeping this wrapped so tight it puts Mercurial's leathers to shame. I've translated it for a wider audience and edited the feed down to the interesting bits. Full media version also available.

- Munin

**Lenka:** Sven, inertial puts us 90 clicks in and no sign of trouble. Sensors are all clear.

**DanZer:** See? I told you so, Bear.

**Red Bear:** The Zone's been acting up and we've got a lot riding on this. If we don't get these guns in Lobatchevski, we're—

**DanZer:** Will you stop worrying? *Kimi's* handling like a dream. Lito even installed those Esprit IFI countermeasures you picked up last month. Would you have preferred if we'd cut across Noorbottens to Troms and risk two border intercepts?

**Red Bear:** Actually, Sven, now that you mention it, yes.

**DanZer:** Come on. You know Haparanda's always clean in November. It's fraggin' scary with the dark! The patrols are as spooked as everybody else. And besides, I know this coastline like the palm of my hand. We've got loads of coves and islands to keep our profile minimal. *Kimi's* flying so low I can feel the waves, man. Stop being a worrier.





<pause>

**Lenka:** Spoke too soon. Passive thermal's showing high-altitude heat trails. Three, four bogies. 10 clicks out and closing ... 20000 meters, 155° South Southeast vector. Big mothers too, bombers or drone platforms probably. Not enough detail for silhouette recognition.

**DanZer:** Activating baffles. Cryos on. Taking *Kimi* in nearer shore—come on baby, show me what you can do ...

**Lenka:** I've got—

**Red Bear:** Fraggin' hell. We're getting massive EW and ECM here. Right off the scale! My board's going nuts!

**Lenka:** Yeah, but it isn't directed at us. I'm tracking the source—make that sources—15 clicks Southeast.

**Red Bear:** Makes no sense. There's nothing out there but more islands.

**DanZer:** What the—

**Lenka:** Where did they come from?

**Red Bear:** Were those what I think they were? They were just on show in Athens! They're supposed to be prototypes!

**DanZer:** You better believe it. S-K Taranis stealths. Those markings are Euroforce. Lenka, got a trajectory on them?

**Lenka:** Just under Mach 1 towards the heart of the jamming area (...)

<irrecoverable track 8.8 sec>

**Lenka:** (...) I've got a nasty feeling about this one DanZer. Get us out of here!

**DanZer:** Way ahead of you. Come on, *Kimi* baby ... play nice and gimme something good ...

<irrecoverable track 15.4 sec>

**Lenka:** Frag it, DanZer! Warn me next time you pull—

**Red Bear:** Christ! The sky's all lit up! They're bombing the drek out of something!

<irrecoverable track 24.2 sec>

**Lenka:** (...) heavy interference. Output (...)

<irrecoverable track 14.1 sec>

**Red Bear:** (...) amount of firepower coming down. Hey! Someone's firing back! I gotta get a look, let me hack a feed off (...)

<irrecoverable track 22.1 sec>

**Lenka:** Yeah, those have got to be groundpounders ... Frag! Huge motherfragging spirit!

**Red Bear:** What are those things? Drones?

**Lenka:** No idea. Don't match any profile I know.

**Red Bear:** Widening focus ... My God, that's 12 MET2000 choppers holding a click off the island. What the frag is going on down there? (...)

**Lenka:** I'm picking up a couple of scout t-birds outbound at extreme range. Same vector as us. 40 clicks and gaining. Somebody's running hard.

**DanZer:** People, stay focused. We're in deep drek here ... (...)

<irrecoverable track 31.5 sec>

**DanZer:** (...) I think we're clear. Lenka, check pursuit.

**Lenka:** Frag. I've got two M-K Sperbers tracking us, coming in 4 o'clock. Time to earn your pay, DanZer.

**Lenka:** Holy drek! What was that?

**DanZer:** What was that flash? Someone?! Tell me!

**Lenka:** Oh gods! It's a nuke!

**Red Bear:** Mother of God! No ... No ... Hold on ... Here comes the shockwave!

<irrecoverable track 289.4 sec>

**Red Bear:** (...) fried! Relay's shot! Lenka's looking bad, we need to touch down ...

**DanZer:** Sorry, man. *Kimi*'s losing it. Drop off in thrusters 2 and 4! Mayday! Open channel. Mayday! Mayday! *Kimi Aurora* is going down. Our coordinates are 34'32 (...)

<irrecoverable track>

## STARS FALLING

**: Emergency Commlink Log Initiated:**

**: Logged on: Lt. Ronald Pierson (Station SO Duty Officer), Mazim Chelenko (Comms), Jamie Kano (Systems), Kamiko Yoshimoto (Sensors):**

**: Pierson:** (...) declaring Code Red. Security code 1Zebra445Delta. Someone get Ziang and Klaus up! Scramble people, this is not a drill!

**: Kano:** Ron, still no response from Alpha5 through Delta8. The whole Central Asia quadrant has been down for 30 secs now... God, it's spreading, feeds from Angelsats 7-12 are showing the same fluctuations—we're losing the whole Pac-Rim quadrant!

**: Pierson:** Comms, give me a link to Svobodny Mission Control ASAP. Rout it via Moscow if you have to! Systems, I need to know what's going on.

**: Logged On—Lt. Cmdr. Yuriko Murakami (Uzume Station CO):** Commander online. Sitrep, Ron?

**: Pierson:** AngelSat is under attack. This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill! Kano's best guess is it's viral or e-warfare. Y-Strategic and the high-orbit constellations haven't been compromised, but whatever it is, it's spreading like wildfire. My HUD's lit up like a Christmas tree. Omega-level scenario. I've never seen anything like it. Mazim's trying to raise Svobodny. We need to know whether this is just us or if anybody else is hit. Recommend going Tactical—

**: Yoshimoto:** No hostiles or unaccounted aerospace traffic on sensors.

**: Chelenko:** Wait! Incoming maydays from Treffpunkt and the Spindle—they've got trouble too.

**: Murakami:** Frag it! Activate point defense grid. Kinetics powered. Initiate secondary lock down. Interdiction protocols.

**: Chelenko:** Sir. Feedback on the Moscow and Stockholm links ... Matches patterns from sats. Just started getting distortion on the Sydney link too ... Confirmed, feed corrupted. Only North Am still clean. I'm trying to bounce a link off Weather12. Redirecting the antenna ... there. Svobodny coming over the horizon, uplink in 20 secs.

**: Pierson:** Good man, Mazim. Interdict the remaining ground links just in case. Systems? Kano, give me something ...

**: Kano:** Sorry man, I've got nothing. Diagnostics coming over the feeds are corrupt. It shouldn't be happening—they're hard-coded. We're running protocols now. I've got—

**: Chelenko:** Svobodny online, Sir.

**: Murakami:** Mission Control, this is Uzume Station. We're registering ...



**: S. Control Center—Voice match: Ivan Gref (Comms):** Help us! He's infected the system! Dimitri's psycho! He's killing <static> (autofire, crashing sound) No. Stay away! NO! (autofire).

**: Murakami:** Frag! Do you read me, Svobodniy?

**: S. Control Center—Voice match: Dimitri Korotkov (Ops Manager):** (autofire) JORMUNGAND! SACRIFICE BLOOD (...) the firmament shall crack and the stars rain down! The faithless shall burn and the Einherjar ascend! KILL KILL PAIN The world will die in FIRE ASH BURN BLOOD! (autofire)

**: Signal Lost :**

**: Murakami:** Mazim, try to reestablish link! Raise someone groundside. Get me Vladivostok. Now, dammit!

**: Logged on: Klaus Meyers (Comptech):** Wazzup?

**: Kano:** Klaus, thank god! Code Red and I can't leave my post. I need you to take over while I hack one of the AngelSats back to origin!

**: Meyers:** On it, pops. Gimme a sec.<Systems rerouted to console 25> There.

**: Kano:** Thanks. Back in a sec.

**: Meyers:** Holy! Whatever's out there just hit our Encryption shields hard. I've got red across the board. Hope Kano is okay.

**: Yoshimoto:** Kano?

**: Kano:** Jezzuz! Yuriko, get us offline! It's a worm. Nothing I've ever se?n. My god ... I can't hol& !£!

**: Murakami:** Break contact! NOW! Run systems check. Someone check on Kano!

**: Meyers:** Frag—Kano's flat-lining. Get Bones up here!

**: Chelenko:** Sir! Message from Atropos on Z-O on all frequencies.

**: Murakami:** Run full filtering protocols, then patch it through. (...) Christ, it's not an attack. It's global! It's '29 all over again!

**: Yoshimoto:** Sir, the sensor array!

**: Pierson:** Why ...

**: Murakami:** What are those? Maneuver burns? Can't be ... too long.

**: Yoshimoto:** Tracking multiple reentry profiles. 5 ... 6 ... 10 vectors ...

**: Pierson:** Running trajectories. God! Yuriko, those are our sats! They're bringing down the constellations!

**: Chelenko:** (sob) "...and the stars rain down" ...

**: Yoshimoto:** Tracking more trajectories. Spirits! There are dozens! They got everybody!

**: Meyers:** Mother of! Something's wrong. No! Encryption shields 1 and 2 are crashing. I repeat, firewalls are down! Code's being corrupted! That's not frikkin' pos\$ible! I n?ed help h3@?!!!

## Z-O OFFLINE

>>> **Message broadcast from Zurich-Orbital, relay Nexus, relay Shadowland:**

>>> **From:** Silvery K

>>> **CC:** Capt. Chaos; <Shadowland Sysop group>; <Shadow Watch subscribers list>

>>> **Original Sender:** Atropos

>>> **Subject:** Z-O Offline. READ THE FILE!

My name is William Sterling. You know me as Atropos—if you don't, you don't matter. Get this to someone who does

NOW! Validate the routing on this message if you must BUT READ THE ATTACHED FILES NOW! These are the full transcripts of the latest Corp Court Crisis Coordination Committee meetings. They tell you how to KILL the worm. Read. Understand. Spread the word! We have minutes at most. This stuff is already costing me my career, the life of a friend and quite likely my own—get it to someone, get it EVERYONE! Your life and millions of others depends on this information getting out NOW!

• Atropos

>> **Open Most Recent** >Found C5-126/64

>> **Excerpt from Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee Emergency Session**

>> **Last modified** > 09:43:02 (11-02-64)

> **Present:** Committee Chairman Lynn Osborne (Novatech); Committee Second Jean-Claude Pirault (S-K); Li Feng (Wuxing); Raphael Colemno (MCT); Neil Benson (Renraku); Anna Villalobos (Aztechnology); CCMA Director Toshiro Saigusa; Z-O Station Manager Yves Laroquette; Z-O SySop Atropos

<L. Osborne> You all know the result of the vote. The Court has spoken and we are here to decide on a course of action. Time is of the utmost essence. Mr. Saigusa?

<T. Saigusa> This is damn close to an Omega scenario. GOD has scrambled every resource it can and we're still looking at 4 to 6 minutes before Z-O falls. We've got all essential systems rerouted independently, but the worm has been able to do things we can't even begin to explain. I reiterate my recommendation to the Court. Z-O must go into strict isolation protocol. We simply cannot risk compromising the databank, let alone the life support systems. Daedalus has already implemented similar protocols.

<Y. Laroquette> As far as systems are concerned, Z-O is fully operational. We can sustain lock-down for at least 2 months, possibly 3.

<N. Benson> Then we are agreed, let's ...

<J.C. Pirault> We are *not* agreed. I will remind you that half of you have been unable to confirm the decision with your head-offices. Our objection is on record. I will see charges brought against Novatech for their self-serving blundering in this matter—if we survive. Novatech's rush to see this resolved is the—

<R. Colemno> Stop it, Pirault. We don't have time for bickering. We have less than 4 minutes! The vote passed, this is about implementation. Any risk is unacceptable!

<L. Feng> We are aware of the risks, but some of us do not believe Z-O should be removed from the scene at such a critical juncture. Particularly in light of what we've learned from subject Friday's interrogation ...

<T. Saigusa> Unfortunately this worm is an unknown factor.

<L. Osborne> Li, we cannot afford it. Mass panic is inevitable. We have task forces en route to the critical sites. Ares, MCT, Aztechnology and even Saeder-Krupp have confirmed. Going public would only hamper our efforts. There would be widespread panic.

<A. Villalobos> But we have no confirmation on the *Mjolnir* intercepts at all. There's simply too many of them.

<L. Osborne> In that case, there's precious little C5 can do anyway. We have briefed our head offices *and* national gov-



ernments and security agencies against my better judgment. I'll remind you nobody has gone public there either. It's out of our hands. I see no point in exposing Z-O to unnecessary danger. Not with an infection on this scale.

<Atropos> If I may speak? I agree with Mr. Feng. We must keep some communications open. We're still carrying the secure links to the taskforces—as long as they're isolated they can't be compromised. As far as we know we're the only ones in a perfect position to coordinate damage control.

<L. Osborne> The risk is unacceptable.

<R. Coleman> And the clock is ticking.

<J.C. Pirault> I seem to remember you saying the same thing when you called for the vote to strike Valhalla. Look where that got us!

<L. Osborne> Be that as it may, as Chairman I am ordering full communications lockdown initiated.

<Atropos> Sir, I refuse to implement that decision. Too much is at stake here. Please reconsider my proposal to the Court. Winternight won't have bothered with the Shadow Matrix and—

<L. Osborne> You are out of order.

<T. Saigusa> Don't do this, William, not now.

<Atropos> No! This isn't business as usual! You're gambling with millions of lives. I've seen specs on EM bombs, and spirits only know what Winternight's done to these! With half the grid gone there's no way you're going to do this! You've got to warn people!

<N. Benson> Admirable timing to grow a conscience, Willie.

<Atropos> Frag you, Neil! There's no way you're going to reach them. Your resources are stretched too thin. My god ... that's it ... you're cutting your losses! You're washing your hands! You spineless pieces of drek!

<L. Osborne> I—We don't have time for this. Atropos, you are suspended effective immediately. Saigusa, get Lachesis on it. Now! I want all comms severed in one minute. Anyone want to phone home, do so now ...

<Atropos> Osborne, don't do this ... This means millions of deaths!

<L. Osborne> Security, remove Atropos from the Crisis room, please.

<End File>

## VIEW FROM THE FISHBOWL

<Eddie> ... Ok, granddad, here's another famous site in the Seattle Matrix—this one may remind you of home, so, hopefully it may help me convince you to actually step foot in the Matrix sometime. As you can see, this is the Mitsuhama system behind me. On the inside it's all made to look like a large Japanese pagoda, with dragons and rice paper walls and low tables and everything, with geisha icons for the agent programs who play tour guide. Not that I've been in myself, but they've got sims of it in my class. We use it as an example of sculpting in system design.

*indistinct roaring in background*

<Eddie> Huh, that's weird. Something's happening ... I don't know if you can hear it, granddad, but there's this odd sound. Maybe it's some new grid feature ... damn, I feel like I can

barely hear over this odd roaring sound. That's so weird. There shouldn't be any background noise in here. It isn't possible ...

*Icons start to get a bit fuzzy around the edges. The kanji on the host behind Eddie flickers in and out like something is interfering with the image's signal.*

*The indistinct roaring grows louder,*

<Eddie> Oh hell. Things are slowing down 400 much ... I'm jacking Ou4 now#\$

*Eddie's image flickers. Behind and above him, a wave of scintillating pixels comes into view, towering over him. Host icons near and far seem to break apart, flickering and de-rezzing as sparks of light fly away, swallowed by the mass of ever changing colors and symbols. The RTG is not visible beyond the wave of signal. Swirling patterns seem to form in the raw data before collapsing into chaos. Eddie's form seems frozen, fading in places and being replaced by swirling lines of code and trash symbols. His eyes go wide, and a scream erupts from him in the form of strings of data and electronic noise, as the raw wave of signal overtakes the feed.*

## A CLAW ON THE SWITCH

The room falls suddenly quiet, the representatives silenced. At any other time Gustav Moeller would have been ecstatic to have brought the conniving, bickering idiots to heel, but not today. Not when the world is falling apart around them. The latest reports indicated Europort and Stockholm were lost to the worm. Trid projections show London, Paris and several corporate PLTGs failing, with new outbreaks in Poland and Spain. News from America and Asia was patchy at best but it didn't look good—and now the terrifying news from the C5 ...

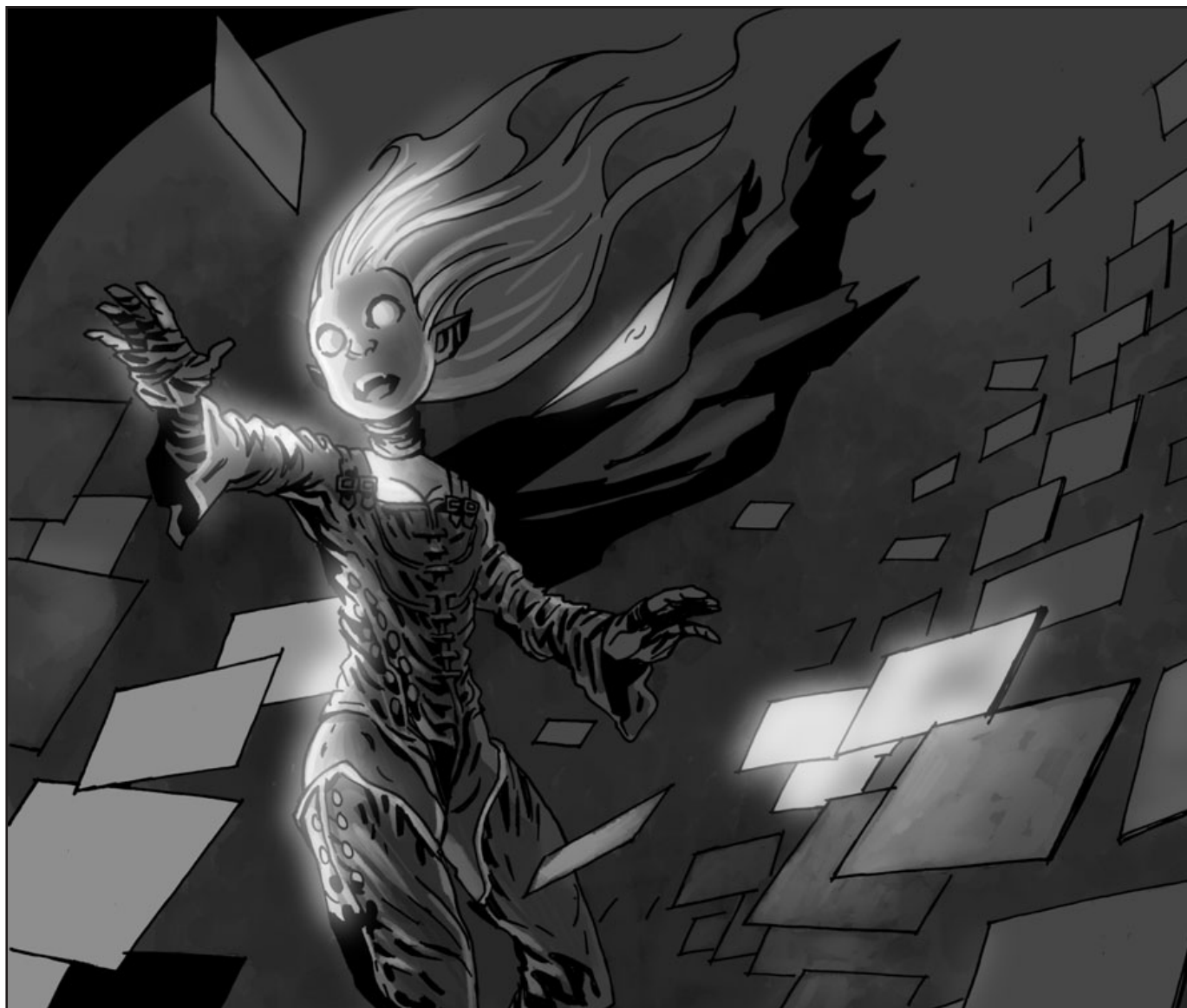
The strobe of emergency lights cuts through the dim light of the overcast winter afternoon like a scythe. The wail of sirens vibrates the windows of the conference room, even on the fifteenth floor. Even the aides rushing about the room bringing in updates have stopped in their places, frozen by fear.

Moeller runs a hand through his hair. He suspects what's coming—he remembers running Omega scenarios during his tenure at S-K Prime. People didn't rise to a position like his without thinking three steps ahead. He believes he knows a little of how his master thinks. He knows full well his life as the Saeder-Krupp representative to the Council of Ministers—and current Chairman of the NEEC—is about to be turned into a living hell.

Despite the tension, the ministers and their hatchetmen are waiting quietly for him to speak. After all, it's not everyday the president of the world's most powerful megacorporation is on the line, demanding an immediate audience. Moeller taps a key, and the display comes to life.

The main presentation screen flickers. Data loss to a bad transmission pixilates the image around the edges, but the figure is instantly recognizable: the golden snout and green-flecked piercing reptilian eyes of the great dragon Lofwyr.

Sir Howard and Durand of Zeta-ImpChem instinctively rise to object, get halfway up, then sink back down as they catch a glimpse of the fiery tendrils curling from Lofwyr's mouth. *They*



are afraid even of his image. The voice that comes over the invisible speakers is a gravely baritone, Moeller wonders whose it might be, as Lofwyr's lips never move.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Council, I come to you in respect and acknowledgment of the contributions you, your governments, and your corporate boards have made to our common community."

Moeller suppresses a chuckle. Nerves. He can see Loeb sweating profusely—even O'Connor is unsettled.

"I will be brief. We—all of us—are under attack by the most devastating technological weapon ever devised. In less than 30 minutes, the Crash will be global ... and that will be only the beginning. I am here in the spirit of cooperation to give you fair warning. In exactly four minutes, all Matrix infrastructure and grids run by Saeder-Krupp, and its subsidiaries in

Europe and Asia, will be taken off-line for the duration of this crisis. You have that long to contact your governments and make arrangements, after which you will have to depend on other systems. I am sure you are all aware of the ramifications for your various nations, so I will leave you to it."

Shouts of outrage erupt. The whole Scand block is on its feet. Sir Howard looks shaken. Cardinal Venturi and Van Loeb are screaming. Carrying above them all, Moeller hears the voice of Isabelle de Rochefort, "Vous êtes fous! It can't be done! The cost alone! Ce n'est pas physiquement possible!"

With a predator's focus, Lofwyr singles the aristocrat out. "I assure you, Mademoiselle Rochefort, Saeder-Krupp is not only fully capable of implementing my decision, but the order has already been given. You now have three minutes and forty seconds. May fate smile upon you. Farewell."



The tridscreen fades to black, as the regularity of the crackling lines of static across the landscape screen increases. Moeller rubs his brow watching the stunned shock wear off quickly. To give credit where it is due, these people think on their feet. Ten seconds later, everyone—including Sir Howard—is linking home via the NEEC administration's dedicated lines—thus far protected from the virus.

Nobody's looking at him. That will change soon enough. Accusing eyes are already turning his way while feverish conversations unfold. While he seems suspended from the chaos unfolding around him, Moeller recalls Lofwyr had been adamant with him and Segretti about ensuring S-K held the Presidency of the NEEC during this specific term. Mueller stifled a nervous chuckle and tried to remind himself of the benefits of working for a dragon.

## SIGNAL LOST

- Are you guys listening to the KSAF feed? Word is they were told to point a laser microphone from a certain point in a certain direction and they struck gold. Something's going down in a meeting room at the East Coast Stock Exchange and they have their mic pointed right at it!

- Donner

- I'm patching the feed in now. I'm tagging the voices identified so far in the feed so you know who you are listening to.

- Kino

- Feed's up, here ya go.

- Kino

### >>>>Voices Identified:

**[Tarkhan]** Viktor Tarkhan, Director of Network Management, East Coast Stock Exchange

**[St. James]** Logan Roy St. James, Director of Security and Crisis Management, East Coast Stock Exchange

**[Fitzgerald]** Thomas Fitzgerald, New England Regional Emergency Coordinator, Securities and Exchange Commission

**[Craver]** Jack Craver, Senior Network Manager, East Coast Stock Exchange

**[Martin]** Ann Martin, Host Oversight Team Leader, East Coast Stock Exchange

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Patching Feed ... Streaming ...

**[St. James]** What's the situation now?

**[Tarkhan]** We're experiencing a lag time on some data transactions, especially among the low-end users. The trades are backed up and saved, but there's a delay in processing. I don't have an explanation why, Roy. We're running within limits.

**[Craver]** We have 173,283 users on the host and open pipelines to the other exchanges and the ECNs. London is gearing to close; they have 92 million shares traded today. We're up to 87 million already, but the network should be able to handle this.

**[Fitzgerald]** Make sure you have all the backups. Lag-time we can handle, but lost rec—

**[Martin]** Drek! Something happened ... I've lost my deckers on the floor.

**[Tarkhan]** Lost? The hell is going on down there?

**[Craver]** What the—the entire network is reconfiguring. Signal processing is spiking. We've got massive disconnects ... twenty thousand users dumped ... the tortoise traders ...

**[Fitzgerald]** What? I need to make a call.

**[Martin]** My deckers aren't transmitting back. They aren't physically responding either. They jacked up to hot ASIST and their RAS override is peaked.

**[Craver]** These processor levels could mean the host has gone ultraviolet. That would explain the lost tortoise signals—

**[Fitzgerald]** Dammit, I can't get a phone signal. What's causing this? Terrorists?

**[Tarkhan]** I'm registering a peak in user activity, but only one new user ... The profile is strange. Multiple points of origin, far too much processing to render a single user. Looks artificial. S-K maybe?

**[Craver]** That's bigger than any bot I've seen.

**[Fitzgerald]** Shut it down! The exchange has been compromised.

**[Tarkhan]** I ... uh ...

**[St. James]** You heard him, shut it down.

**[Tarkhan]** I can't. The host is not resolving commands. Emergency shutdown has been overridden from within.

**[St. James]** What?

**[Craver]** The intruder program is force-opening SANs within the host. Tokyo, Denver, Caerleon, Johannesburg—all supercomputers ...

**[Martin]** I'm getting a partial visual of the floor from one of my deckers. Something's forming in the center of the host. Signal processing and packet transmission have spiked there, far over our standard limits. It's pulling in data from ... well, drek, from everywhere! I'm going to dive in and see if I can shut it down.

**[Fitzgerald]** She's going in there? Is she nuts?

**[Tarkhan]** I've got an anonymous gateway forcing entry into the host.

**[Craver]** I see it. A new user with a profile like the intruder.

**[Craver]** Something is happening to the first intruder program. Some of its resources are being redirected. It's tapping into the signals of the online users ... its signature seems to be splitting—

**[Fitzgerald]** Umm ... Ms. Martin?

**[Tarkhan]** God damn it ... Ann's not responding. Pull her plug?

**[Craver]** No! The host has gone UV, that could kill her.

**[Martin]** Megaera? ... yes ... yes ... I will help ...

**[St. James]** The hell...?

**[Martin]** DEUS, STOP!

**[Tarkhan]** What is going on in there?

**[Craver]** I am picking up three distinct ... entities running in the host, in addition to the online users. The two new entities ... programs ... whatever they are, are attacking the first one. The host is pushing the limit, and their attacks are causing dangerous spikes in processing.

**[Fitzgerald]** God ... your decker is convulsing here! We need help!



**[Tarkhan]** Jesus, she's in defib, Jack!

**[Craver]** Oh Christ—the host is detecting a worm. It didn't come from outside or the programs, it's internal. We've got to shut this thing down!

**[St. James]** We can't! Can we get the power grid to black it out?

**[Tarkhan]** We've got hundreds of thousands of people logged in still!

**[Fitzgerald]** It doesn't matter; I can't get any calls out. There's no signal.

**[Martin]** ... the ... res ... on ... ance ...

**[Craver]** The worm is subverting the host. It's rerouting signals and usurping subroutines. The SANs ... it's going to spread.

**[Tarkhan]** The worm is changing everything. Host architecture, external connections, root code ... we have users dropping—I think the worm is flatlining them!

**[St. James]** We can't let this worm spread. More than just the people in the Exchange would be at risk—god only knows what it could do if it got into the world at large. God forgive me ... I'm going to go and cut the system offline, physically.

**[Fitzgerald]** Wait, what's that light ... the sky, is (...) tha (...) sun ...

**Feed Lost ...**

**Attempting Reconnect ...**

**Failed ...**

**All Signals Lost ...**

## TIMELINE—THE PAST FIVE YEARS

### 2061

**May 11:** Deus downloads its code into the minds of approximately one thousand metahumans, forming the Network.

**August:** Megaera begins to influence nodes within the Network, causing division in the ranks and beginning the struggle between the two AIs over control of the Network.

**November:** Ronin re-establishes his independent identity within the Network and begins work to restore awareness and free thought to other nodes.

### 2062

**January:** Overwatch learns of the Network while observing Arcology survivors.

**April:** Renraku agents and Shiawase's MIFD learn about the Network while investigating their own personnel for Deus infiltration.

**May:** Pax begins to feel the onset of Fading.

**July:** The first post exposing the existence of the Network hits Shadowland.

**August:** Renraku and Shiawase cooperate on a joint security effort to purge their ranks of Deus infiltration and secure their corporations against insurgency.

**December:** Transys-Neuronet succeeds in capturing a Network node for study.

### 2063

**February:** Deus begins a complete purge of disloyal nodes, having them crippled or killed to prevent them from further obstructing the compilation process.

**April:** A severely weakened Megaera contacts Mirage for assistance in repairing crippled nodes.

**June:** Mirage's repairs succeed in freeing Ronin's independent nodes entirely from the Network. Megaera reaches an agreement with Ronin's nodes to work towards building a metahuman/AI merge.

**July:** Pax has a powerful vision during Submersion at her tribe's Dissonance Well, hidden in a subhost of the Morgue datahaven—a dream of an immense serpent rising from the depths of cyberspace, growing and filling the Matrix until it wrapped around the world, poisoning the world with Dissonance, corrupting the very fabric of cyberspace. Pax begins to begin develop the new "virus."

**November 12:** Responding to Mirage's continuing work to repair and liberate Network nodes, Deus has Hitomi Shiawase, also known as the otaku Lady Death, kidnapped as a warning to Mirage.

**November:** Pax is increasingly pressed by her own Fading. In addition, external forces including Overwatch, GOD, and intelligence services begin pursuing her after her former master, Deus, frames Ex Pacis for the abduction of Shiawase heir and future Japanese empress, Hitomi Shiawase.

**December:** Pax finally tracks down a Winternight cell and proposes an unholy alliance. The Surtr prototype is stolen from Zeta-ImpChem, and Winternight begins producing it in Scandinavia using a couple of local high-tech micro-corps as fronts. Meanwhile, the cult carries out brutal strikes on behalf of Ex Pacis, targeting both Overwatch enclaves and the Network. Deniable assets are used when possible to muddy the waters.

### 2064

**April:** The East Coast Stock Exchange begins a process of upgrading to handle the newly-announced Novatech IPO. Jormungand is lab-tested. The covert deployment of code eggs and Surtr begins using both runners and Winternight cells, but the necessity of ferrying Ex Pacis otaku to upload the eggs slows the process. Intel agencies notice unusual activity.

**June:** Winternight's allies among Hindu Kali cultists help Ex Pacis place otaku in the outsourcing megacorp, Kolkota Integrated Talent & Technologies (KITT). These covert agents use the company's privileged access to scout out opportunities and place Jormungand eggs in the company's numerous partners (i.e., Shiawase MIFD client databases, Yamatatesu's MegaMatrix PLTG nexus, and PacRim Comm central RTG hubs). Meanwhile, Pax learns through Puck, one of Deus's Whites, of the AI's plans for the IPO.

**August:** Winternight initiates Operation Firnbul, using powerful spirits to bring on or magically enhance early, harsh winter conditions over major sprawls, particularly on the east coast of North America. Aside from the symbolic value, these storms also camouflage infiltrations. While the magical



enhancement over the harsh weather is detected, it is thought to be a natural magical phenomenon. The possibility of a human hand in the matter is largely disregarded.

**August 4:** Matrix Systems CEO Max Burnwell is converted to a Network node by Deus.

**September 25:** The Boston Exchange confirms the date of the Novatech IPO, after being on the verge of postponing the offering due to the unseasonably bad weather. During an infiltration attempt of Swiss Escher-Burkli's main PLTG hub, the attempt to upload an "egg" botched and Surtr was accidentally released, killing all present (including the telltale otaku "carrier"). All information on the incident is classified pending further investigation. The Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee (C5) is called into emergency session.

**September 27:** The multi-corp EBZ incident security team hands in preliminary findings. Zeta-ImpChem (Z-IC) identifies the weapon used and presents its case to both the Corporate Court and C5 to avoid potential reprisals and bad publicity. Z-IC explains that its six-month investigation concluded that Winternight was behind the weapon's theft. The corp offers a countermeasure to Surtr in exchange for perpetual secrecy about its involvement in the weapon's original design. All Corporate Court members and friendly governments prepare seize and capture protocols for known Winternight associates, but there is evidence brought to light of a wider threat. EuroPol, UCAS Feds and numerous intelligence and security agencies begin tracking and surveillance of possible targets, careful not to tip off the cult and trigger a preemptive strike.

**October 1:** During a secondary security sweep, the forensics team discovers a "foreign" construct deeply imbedded and concealed in the RTG firmware (the planted Jormungand code egg). While the area is still contained, the hardware is discreetly replaced and taken to a secure lab for analysis and testing. Actions against Winternight are suspended, pending the results of further investigation.

**October 3:** Attempts to test the construct activate the Jormungand egg. All analysts online are killed and all experiment data is corrupted. It is impossible to ascertain how the "virus" works, but the terrifying potential of the weapon is evident. C5 understands the potential danger, but faces a huge dilemma—the member corps simply can't risk ordering systematic searches since this might tip off the cult. The sheer number of possibly infected Hosts and the impossibility of effectively isolating all systems make it an unviable risk. Unless the infected systems can be identified, however, moving openly against Winternight, might also prompt the preemptive release of the "virus".

**October 9-24:** Covert intelligence assets and unaffiliated runners seize a few suspected Winternight members (and quite a few innocents) for interrogation. Several suspects fight to the death rather than be captured, while others commit suicide—this is later discovered to be behavior reinforced by implanted fail-safe chips. The few that are captured and restrained know little beyond immediate plans and nothing of the virus's launch. Interrogators learn that most cells have

gone to ground waiting for the "Heimdall's call"—the Norns have made it known that a "sign" will come from Valhalla. Enough is learned to locate a few secondary bases/weapons caches and training camps.

**October 9-25:** Realizing Winternight's plan is imminent, secondary containment protocols and sleeper agents are activated. Only two intelligence agents have successfully infiltrated the cult, using alias chips to pass the through mind scans upon initiation: an S-K/EuroPol agent in Scandinavia (Sweden) and a Sioux OMI man in North America (Tsimshian). These are primed to facilitate the extraction of the cult's leadership and to sabotage communications. Trusted runners are deployed in support of these actions to preserve deniability.

**October 24:** BTL recordings of the death of the otaku known as Bloodyguts appear in data havens.

**October 30:** Winston Griffith III, also known as the otaku Dark Father, is murdered.

**October 31:** Compilation completes. Deus is uploaded to the Matrix and nearly all the nodes enter a persistent coma.

**November 1-2:** System Failure (see the detailed timeline).

**November 3:** The New Revolution coup. UCAS President Kyle Haeffner is kidnapped from the White House early in the morning. Military units loyal to the New Revolution seize DC and other sprawls. Vice President Nadja Daviar survives an assassination attempt in Seattle. Secretary of Defense Stratta is murdered.

Brigadier General Angela Colloton makes a nationwide trid speech, denouncing the coup attempt. Following Acting-President Daviar's orders, Colloton declares Martial Law. Kyle Haeffner is murdered during a "failed" rescue operation.

**November 4:** UCAS Elections are postponed.

## 2065

**February, 12-16:** The second global Matrix conference, held at Transsys-Erika's Silicon Glen corporate facilities near Edinburgh (UK).

## DETAILED TIMELINE—NOVEMBER 1-2

### November 1st (All times are EST)

**00:00 PM-10:00 PM:** Extractions of the Winternight leaders are initiated, to be followed by massive strikes by corporate and mercenary forces. Outgoing communications are jammed or cut. All over the world, intelligence and military operatives are scrambled to hit suspected Winternight bases (locations include Tsimshian, Denver, the Balkans, Pakistan, Bogotá and Southeast Asia).

The assault begins against the Valhalla base on an island in the Bay of Bothnia (Baltic). In Tsimshian, MCT troops support national forces moving in on the local base, codenamed Hel. All operations are coordinated directly through secure uplinks from Z-O's "Crisis Room".

**9:00 PM:** The strike force invading Valhalla meets stiff resistance. When it looks like the strike force will succeed, Thursday detonates a dirty bomb. Runners escape in a panzer



with the undercover agent, extracted Winternight leaders Wednesday and Friday, and stolen intel and manage to get far enough away from Valhalla to avoid the blast effects. After regaining consciousness in transit, Wednesday commits magical suicide; Friday is restrained in time. Belatedly realizing the bomb might have been the “sign,” tense minutes pass as the C5 experts expect the virus to launch. Nothing happens.

**10:00 PM–1:00 AM (November 2):** Winternight wilderness training camps are Thor shot or subjected to lightning military assaults. Urban bases are “sanitized” by corporate forces or freelance network teams. Friday is delivered to a joint-corporate station in Europort for interrogation. Interrogation proves difficult and time-consuming, given a number of magical safeguards and her intention to commit suicide at the first opportunity.

#### **November 2nd (All times are EST)**

**4:00 AM:** With Winternight decapitated, the Valhalla base destroyed, and secondary bases neutralized without the virus being launched, C5 stands down. Everybody takes a deep breath—the crisis has been averted. Systematic searches of internal grids and hosts begin, but attention soon refocuses on the upcoming Novatech IPO. Friday’s interrogation continues.

**8:30 AM:** Novatech IPO trading officially begins.

**9:03 AM:** Institutional trading begins to give way to a vast increase in public trading transactions and user accounts.

**9:16 AM:** Deus takes over the ECSE host and launches it into ultraviolet levels.

**9:17 AM:** Deus manifests in the host and begins to upgrade his code.

**9:18 AM:** The East Coast Stock Exchange staff tries to shut the host down, but is unable to issue commands to the host.

**9:19 AM:** Deus begins to force open SANs to supercomputing hosts throughout the globe, taking them over and forcing them to contribute to his upgrade.

**9:24 AM:** Otaku hidden within the users logged into the ECSE host create a Resonance Well within the host.

**9:26 AM:** Ronin’s deckers, formerly all independent nodes in the Network, awaken Megaera within Deus’ subconscious.

**9:28 AM:** Mirage forces his way into the host and attacks Deus.

**9:31 AM:** Jormungand is unleashed. The Yamatetsu MetaMatrix, UOL and PacRim Comm grids are hit first. AngelSat and Arespace satellite constellations follow, as well as several major corporate PLTGs (Shiawase, MCT and Wuxing). When security deckers successfully intervene, Jormungand simply cascades and returns in tougher forms.

**9:31 AM:** When the computers in the Europort facility where Friday is being held in start to fail (the local grid hosts one of the code eggs), the Norn laughs insanely and finally breaks under powerful mind-probes. C5 on Zurich-Orbital is informed of the location of the code egg nests, of Ex Pacis involvement and, most importantly, of the secondary EMP strikes and fault-line warheads. C5 immediately forwards all intelligence to all member-corp HQs. Many are already feeling the effects of the worm on communications, while others are

slow to react. By the time word reaches Boston, it has already taken a significant bite out of the global network.

**9:32 AM:** Puck approaches Deus on the host. He places and activates the Jormungand egg.

**9:35 AM:** Jormungand has significantly corrupted the ECSE host.

**9:37 AM:** Users at the ECSE begin to suffer psychotropic attacks. Jormungand begins to spread outside the host through the SANs Deus opened to external hosts.

**9:41 AM:** The East Coast Stock Exchange staff initiates procedures to physically cut the host offline.

**9:42 AM:** Z-O orders all earth-based communications interdicted to avoid infection, once the scale of the contagion becomes apparent. Contact is lost with Earth, except for strike teams that still carry direct uplinks—these teams are given coordinates of Jormungand nests, EMP-carrying blimps and fault-line nukes. Everywhere word got out, company men and runner groups are scrambled by desperate Johnsons to eliminate the “nest” hardware—targeting mainframes and data some unsuspecting corporate and government hosts will be unwilling to lose. Better equipped corporate strike teams are called to identify and knockout the blimps and take out fault-line nuke sites (softened by gas or bioweapons).

**9:43 AM:** With communications failing, the Z-O sysops Atropos and Clothos realize it’s impossible for the corporations to fully contain the situation. Unwilling to gamble with millions of lives, they violate protocol and break comm isolation (accidentally killing their colleague Lachesis when he tries to stop them). They broadcast the transcript of the C5 incident log with all the relevant data on the Jormungand nests, EMP bombs and nukes to all operational space stations and down to the Denver Nexus (which, according to the last GOD report, remained uncompromised) in the hopes that the Shadow Matrix is still up and the information will get out.

**9:44 AM:** An EMP strike goes off in Boston.

**9:46 AM:** A low-traffic network and consequently initially untouched, the Shadow Matrix hosting the various Shadowland nodes is busy cutting its connections to local grids when these come under assault. The Nexus manages to forward Z-O’s data dump before it too vanishes from the net. The information is mailed out to all contacts and runners are sent with the news (as it were), while Captain Chaos and other sysops perform a rearguard action to buy time.

As details of what’s happening reach the shadows, individuals are forced to decide on the spot if they want to help or not. Most don’t have to think twice—especially those who figure out they’ve been aiding Winternight or that their hard-earned savings risk getting zeroed.

**9:51 AM:** International data traffic begins to crash as major hubs are corrupted by Dissonance. Dissonance pools begin to form at major RTGs and PLTGs in Asia, Europe and South America. On the North American grid. A powerful rite performed during a Viking/Aesir blot in Uppsala (Sweden) powers an illusion of a giant wolf’s head eating the sun over Boston, increasing panic.

# NOVATECH GOES PUBLIC



Every ring of the bell sent chills through Richard Villiers. Cheers went up from the floor of the Boston exchange as Villiers rang the opening bell. He waved and smiled down at the traders, ignoring the queasy feeling in his stomach. Truth be told, he was actually enjoying it. He only felt like this when he was nervous—and he could scarcely remember the last time that had happened. He felt more alive than he had in years.

Richard glanced over at Samantha, his ex-wife, who shared the podium with him along with the other Novatech VIPs. She gave him a smile and a wink. Marriage hadn't been a good idea, but they had enjoyed a friendly relationship since then ... with occasional benefits, of course. She still looked as good as ever.

Most of Villiers's extended family was on the podium behind him: his brothers Sam and Darren, Miles Lanier (who might as well have been family) and even his daughter, Cara. Cara was just as beautiful as her mother, though she seemed less tempted to use her looks as a weapon. Frankly, though, she didn't need it. He'd never taken much of an interest in her as a child, but she'd turned into a hardened executive the likes of which he'd rarely seen. He was quite proud of her. She was definitely ready for a position in Novatech ... something after the IPO, perhaps a VP of Acquisitions. Her forte was making ruthless decisions, and it would be a shame not to take advantage of that.

Samantha came over and stood next to him. Villiers put his arm around her, and she returned the favor, making a show of their united relationship in front of all the traders.

The trading floor stretched below them, a sea of anticipation. "So," she said. "How do you feel?"

"I feel great. Never better," said Villiers.

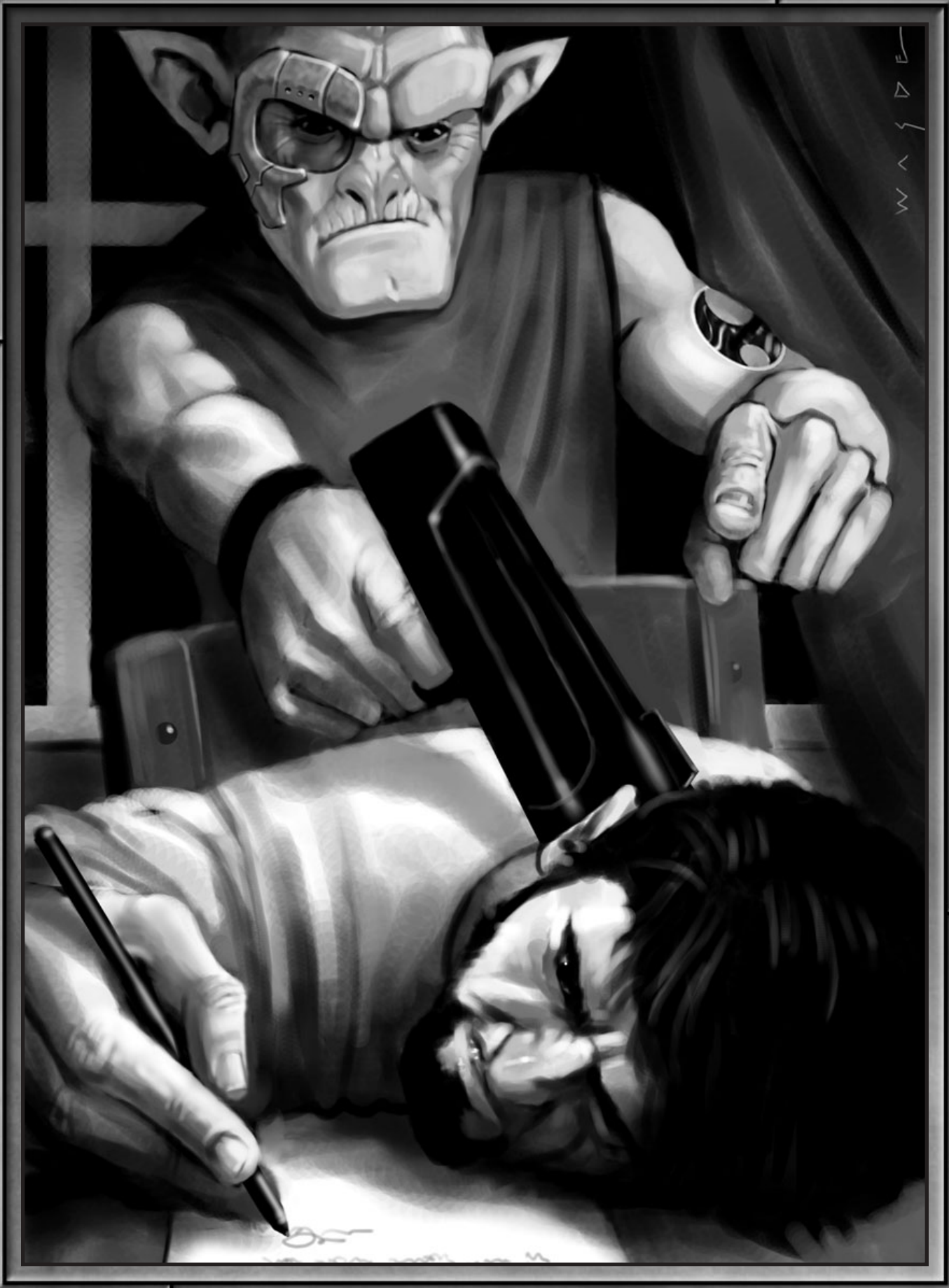
"Mmm hmmm," said Samantha.

"Seriously. If a man's not nervous when his company has its IPO, then somebody needs to check his pulse, because he's got to be dead. It's a refreshing feeling." Villiers smiled at her. She knows me too well, he thought. It's time to be more careful.

"Renraku's stock is down this morning," Samantha said, pointing across the floor at the large Renraku symbol on the big board. "That's quite a sharp drop."

"That would be Huang's last gasp, probably," he said.

"Is it?" asked Samantha, raising an eyebrow. "What does Miles ... er, your little bird tell you?"





"Huang's been in trouble ever since that arcology fiasco," said Villiers. "If I had to guess, judging from the market fluctuations I'm seeing, he's trying to orchestrate a buyout today—and given the scope, it would have to be with company funds."

"If that's the case, looks like it's not going very well," said Samantha.

"That's the problem," said Villiers. "All it takes is one ill-timed buy or sell order and you're smoked—which I'm sure Huang has realized, now that it's too late to go back."

Samantha laughed. "Speaking of nanosecond buyouts and stacked decks, I wonder how Knight is doing these days," she said. "I should call him sometime, see what he's up to. It's been awhile."

Villiers smiled, but he added another tick to his mental checklist. Sam, you're trying to be a naughty girl again, aren't you? Probably pulling some dirty tricks on Cross today while the world's attention is elsewhere. At least, that had better be the case ...

"One of my little birds tells me that Knight is going to need a new chess partner soon," said Samantha.

"Is he now?" said Villiers, mildly surprised. That would be an interesting development. "And how did you hear that?"

Samantha smiled in response, changing the subject. "You know," said Samantha, "you should consider taking some of those IPO funds and trying to buy Renraku."

Villiers briefly considered it. "No, our old friend Nakatomi is still over there. Buying into Renraku would be like throwing open the gates of hell. Aside from that, Corporate Court anti-trust regulations don't allow one AAA corporation to own part of another. We'd have to swallow all of Renraku in one bite, and that just isn't in the cards—I have other fish to fry."

"If you say so. Seems a shame to waste such an opportunity, though. Someone should give it a try"

"It sure as hell won't be me," said Villiers. He looked over at Samantha, mildly surprised to see her deep in thought over this. "All right, that's enough. I won't have you planning treachery standing right next to me. At least have the courtesy to do it somewhere else."

Samantha laughed. "All right, I'm going."

"You couldn't buy Renraku anyway," said Villiers.

"I know," she said. "But I bet I could find some bank out there somewhere willing to give me a loan on my shares. Maybe in Latvia." She winked and turned to leave.

You are such a bitch, Villiers thought, but he couldn't help but smile. She may have been a terrible wife, but she's certainly a worthy opponent.

As Samantha disappeared into the crowd of traders, Cara came back into view. She was walking across the floor on the arm of a vendor or a politician, her fiery hair a blaze among the more staid colors of the trading floor and its inhabitants. Cara was probably hard enough to take on Nakatomi ...

The clock reached 10:39:00. Villiers imagined the Matrix representation of a massive flood of cash hitting Novatech's bank account. It would probably be a huge waterfall or flood or something, he thought. Then he tried to imagine the streaks of data left by thousands of Buy orders launching out of Novatech's account hitting the market simultaneously.

Missiles, explosions, fireworks. Villiers didn't particularly care what it looked like; it was the thought that counted.

Somewhere in the world, Dankwalther screamed as every public company he held interest in was simultaneously hit by a Novatech hostile takeover bid.

Villiers turned and waved across the room to Novatech's Corporate Court representative, Justice Lynn Osborne. Osborne nodded and left the room to file a request with the Corporate Court to issue an Omega Order on Dankwalther and his few remaining holdings. It had a high chance of success, as Dankwalther had a litany of illegal attempts to manipulate global markets for his own gain.

That's right, Dankwalther, you bastard, thought Villiers. Suck it.

As he was contemplating this turn of events, Villiers's thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of his cell phone. That would be either Transsys-Neuronet or Erika calling about Novatech's seconds-old buyout offer. Villiers had met with their respective corporate heads weeks before to discuss the possibility. These were going to be good mergers. He could feel it.

That moment was the last time he was truly happy for a long time.

Villiers's phone dropped the call.

The ECSE trading floor fell into an uproar.

Villiers's bodyguards tackled him and dragged him off the viewing platform to his waiting car.

The world went to hell.

• I've locked all discussion on this topic. The boards have been on fire since this announcement, and it's become clear that many of you don't understand the ramifications of Novatech filing an IPO. I've asked the Chromed Accountant to post an explanation, along with a detailed review of Novatech's IPO filing.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 April 2064 at 17:43:04 (PST)

## IN-DEPTH: WHAT IS AN INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING?

by The Chromed Accountant

There are two kinds of companies, private and public.

Private companies are similar to the local taco guy selling tacos out of the back of his van. It is not possible to purchase shares in Taco Man's business on the open market. You can buy into his business, assuming he is willing to sell you part of it. In order to do that, though, you and he would have to determine a value for shares in his private company and make the transaction on your own. Of course, it's unlikely that Taco Man is actually issuing shares of any sort. The pair of you would likely just agree on the percentage of control and sign contracts to that effect. For larger companies, like Taco Corp., it's more likely that actual shares might be drawn up, depending on the number of investors.

Public companies are registered with the Corporate Court and their shares trade on one or more global stock markets. You can open an account online with a brokerage and buy shares in them with little difficulty. As a shareholder you have



certain rights, including the right to attend shareholder meetings and vote for board members or on other corporate issues. In theory, shareholders are the ones who really run the company. In practice, they elect a Board of Directors who in turn selects the executives that take care of the day to day duties of running the corporation.

Public companies have a number of additional restrictions on them. All of these restrictions are in place to ensure the global markets stay relatively stable over time. Public companies must report their quarterly earnings to the Corporate Court, which in turn makes the reports available to the public. They are also required to discuss risk factors involved in investing money in their stock.

- Most importantly, financial reports can also clue you in as to whether or not a Johnson's cred is good or if you're going to be left holding the bag after the next run. If you're like Joe Shadowrunner, though, you won't start doing this until you get burned at least once—if then.

- Link

A company filing for Initial Public Offering (IPO) is a privately held company that is not currently traded on any market. By holding an Initial Public Offering, the company is registering its stock with the Corporate Court to be traded on global markets. The primary reason for doing this, of course, is to raise capital. In general, the more stockholders you have, the more difficult it is to please everyone. When a company is of sufficient size and interest to pull in investors, though, it can be a very effective way to raise capital.

- And status. Don't forget the status.
- The Smiling Bandit

Once a company registers for an IPO, a date is set. The amount of stock sold in an IPO is generally somewhere between 10–25 percent of the total shares available. A quiet period goes into effect 90 days before this date, where corporate officials are prohibited from saying anything in public about the company that might affect the stock's performance on the date of the IPO—either good or bad.

- Please note that public speculation and hype is prohibited. Hack the right financials or drop into the right SIGs unseen and you can make a fortune, or at least find out who's making theirs—and if they're likely to be hiring anytime soon.

- Neon Wraith

- Of course, get caught and the Corporate Court is likely to send the G-Men after you before you can do much with it. Not that anyone posting about it here is likely to be caught ... right, Neon?

- Night Light

- From your lips to GOD's ears, my friend.

- Neon Wraith

The day before the IPO, a strike price is set. This price reflects how much one share of stock will cost to buy the moment it hits the market. Once it hits the market, market forces determine its value. If demand is high, the value will rise. If not, it will drop. The company making the IPO can change this strike price up until the moment the stock hits the market. General practice is to try to make it as high as possible without making it so high that people will balk at it, thus sabotaging their own IPO in the process. On the day of the IPO at an unannounced time, the shares go up for sale on the market. The company filing the IPO immediately receives money equal to the number of shares it put on the market multiplied by the strike price. That's the process in a nutshell.

### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MEGACORPS

Now that we know what an IPO is, you need to know why Novatech would chose to file for one at this time. Firstly nearly all large corporations are publicly traded. This is not a rule, however; it's just the way things turned out. A number of megacorps are still privately held, and their reasons for staying so illustrate why Novatech is going public. Three of the ten current AAA megacorporations are privately held: Aztechnology, Saeder-Krupp, and Novatech, and the latter is attempting to make the switch to a publicly traded company. Of the two remaining, it's worth looking at why they choose to stay private.

Aztechnology is the first privately held megacorp we'll discuss. A special case, it's worth noting that Aztechnology likely could not file for an IPO even if it wanted to. Aztechnology the corporation and Aztlan the country are too closely intertwined for an investor's liking (or the Corporate Court's). Governmental obligations are generally unprofitable, and Aztechnology spends far too much time pursuing national interests. In short, their financials are a wreck.

- I suspect they're in better shape than you'd think. For one thing, they could slough off unprofitable divisions and other incompetent holdings onto the government side of the balance sheet.

- Neon Wraith

- You guys are missing the big picture. The main reason they could never go public is they have too much to hide internally—such as what percentage of their overall revenue comes from drugs and BTLs.

- Pyramid Watcher

- Yeah, assuming for one moment that most common varieties of those things were illegal in Aztlan these days—and, in fact, weren't manufactured by Aztechnology for sale inside their borders. I somehow don't think they're too concerned with what the big bad outside world thinks.

- Traveler Jones

Aztechnology is an excellent example of a privately held company who looks, acts, and runs like it's publicly traded—at least on the surface. Its Board of Directors, a feature of every



public megacorp, is well known, and one can pick up shares in Aztechnology if you trade on the Aztlan stock markets. It is content to stay within national borders, at least as far as generating revenue is concerned. Other corps that remain private in similar situations are the Pueblo Corporate Council and Lusiada. Remaining private allows them to limit their legal and financial liabilities to the nations that are most favorable to them, as well as allowing them to cherry pick their investors from a self-limiting pool of revenue providers.

- Read "local suckers with cash, power, and/or limited means of getting information from outside" for "revenue providers" and you'll just about have it.
- Buzz

Saeder-Krupp, on the other hand, is far closer to the stereotypical privately held corporation. Run by a dragon and prone to secrecy, S-K's Board of Directors is made up of little more than a few yes-men and women who rotate out faster than the sweet and sour tofu dish at a Friday night dim sum restaurant. The company is wholly owned by Lofwyr and has been widely supposed to pull from his considerable personal wealth when a little extra capital is needed to fund the next venture.

People are inclined to believe that S-K has remained privately owned because Lofwyr isn't inclined to have anyone challenge his decisions or control over the corp. As it turns out

there is some public comment on the matter. The following is a comment made by S-K's media relations official shortly after Novatech announced its IPO intentions.

"S-K has no interest in being a publicly traded company. We would argue that the burden changes the focus of the corporation from doing things that make sense to doing things that make shareholder value go up at all costs. Oftentimes the two goals are not related. As for missing out on the current market free-for-all that Novatech's announcement has touched off, S-K is content to sit on the sidelines and let this latest temporary market bubble play itself out. Cooler heads will eventually prevail, and when that happens we will be waiting. President Lofwyr would like wish Mr. Villiers much luck in his current endeavor."

- You gotta admit, he's missing out on some wild stuff. Most global markets are up in the past few days since the announcements.
- Poindexter
- Somehow I don't imagine he's hurting for capital even without chasing this particular wave. Makes you wonder if he knows something more than he's telling, though.
- Pierre



- He's a dragon. In other news, water is wet. Trid at 11.
- Conspir-I-See

### NOVATECH IPO SPECULATION

Novatech has not issued a formal statement explaining their decision to file IPO. Odds are if they did it would state that they saw great opportunities and needed the extra capital to pursue them, or else something similarly vague. Reading IPO statements is much like reading headlines and surmising the runs going on behind the scenes, after all. I personally am of the opinion that there is much more to it than that.

Villiers has been the head of Novatech for six years now. Previously, at Fuchi, Villiers was forced to cooperate with two other equal partners; in the way of such things, the three hated each other with a passion—and by with a passion, I mean that they frequently tried to assassinate or otherwise remove each other. Villiers has made it very clear on numerous occasions that his time at Fuchi was a living hell. It takes very little extrapolation, based on both his personality and his previous history that Villiers would probably have kept Novatech private at all costs if the choice were left to him. My initial premise, therefore, is that Villiers was forced into filing for IPO. I completed some research into the possible whys and wherefores of this, which I'll present below.

- I can't agree. Villiers was always a man who was willing to take a chance if he felt he could succeed. The odds of Fuchi repeating itself in Novatech were slim to none, and there's been a lot of volatility in the market of late—meaning that the time is ripe for large-capital ventures.
- Espion

### WHERE IS THE MONEY NOW?

Before it becomes clear why I view this as a forced filing, it's important to know where ownership of Novatech currently rests. While Villiers is still the main owner of Novatech, he's not the only one with a stake in the company. His ex-wife, Samantha Villiers, gained 7% of the company as part of their divorce settlement. Miles Lanier and Darren Villiers own 3% and 1%, respectively. The largest single owner of Novatech, short of Villiers himself, though, is not an individual at all, but a company: Trans-Latvian Enterprises owns 24% of Novatech.

TLE is an investment banking house, a company whose sole purpose for existing is to invest in other companies and profit from the investment. In the late 2050s, TLE was controlled by Villiers, but during the Fuchi split someone else gained a controlling interest. That person or entity has not been publicly named. Speculation abounds, of course. As of 2058, when Novatech first appeared on the scene, TLE did not own any shares of Novatech. What happened between then and now is certainly cause for speculation. I have spent a good bit of time over the last few years digging up information on TLE. What I have discovered is as close to humor as anything in high finance gets.

TLE was founded by Richard Villiers. It's a corporation based in Tallinn, Estonia, but its given address doesn't exist. It's a parking lot. It appears that TLE was set up during the Fuchi

debacle to shield Villiers's personal assets in the event that things went horribly wrong.

Bankruptcy law allows that, in some circumstances, any assets transferred to a corporate entity owned by the person declaring bankruptcy still can be retrieved to pay off creditors. To avoid this, Villiers transferred ownership of TLE to someone else. The person of record for the corporation is Oskari Laine, the designated Corporate Attorney for TLE. Laine is certainly not running the company: he has a very successful law practice in Tallinn and only answers inquiries to TLE from the media, as far as I can tell. Laine refuses to say who is helming TLE, and I can say with 99.99% certainty that the data doesn't reside anywhere on the Matrix. The only thing Laine has said on the record is that Villiers is not in charge of TLE and has no ownership in that company. Villiers himself has acknowledged this publicly, albeit under duress. No explanation as to why or how this occurred has been given.

I suspect that Villiers transferred ownership of this shell corporation to an individual, since a TLE ownership stake hasn't appeared on any corporate balance sheet. He did this to shield his assets, as I mentioned before. Whoever he put in charge was supposed to have TLE behave like an independent corporation but secretly report to Villiers. Villiers transferred significant chunks of his personal assets to TLE including private stock, even taking out a loan from TLE for Novatech against these assets. Villiers no doubt had no intention of repaying the loan or making TLE call for payments of any kind.

The amount of cash Villiers would have had to have borrowed from TLE would have been substantial. This much working capital being removed from their coffers would have put a strain on TLE's operations, severely hindering their ability to make other sizeable investments.

- Oh, Richard. How amusing. Obviously, you held insufficient blackmail material. What a rookie mistake.
- C-Note

In the process of shielding his assets, Villiers had to cut all formal ownership ties with TLE. Once this happened, the owner apparently decided that he liked being at the helm of a multi-billion nuyen corporation and refused to do anything Villiers requested. Some kind of disagreement ensued, followed by TLE calling in the Novatech loan. Villiers refused to pay, and Novatech was held in default. TLE confiscated the shares Villiers used to secure the loan and ended up owning 24% of Novatech.

Villiers never brought the issue to the Corporate Court, mainly because it's an open-and-shut case. There is absolutely nothing he can do to force TLE to give back his assets or his Novatech stock—short of paying back the loan, and arguably even that ship has sailed. Thus TLE—set up to behave like an investment bank even though it was supposed to be just an empty shell—actually became an investment bank.

- One of the major assets Villiers unloaded onto TLE was one of Fuchi's most important possessions: the Delta-class shadowclinic in Pueblo. I don't think I need to go into great detail as to the



value of this place. The upside though, is that now it's not aligned to any AAA. It would appear, however, that if you have a lot of cash, TLE will let just about anyone in. TLE's open door policy drives Villiers up a wall; the first time TLE let a bunch of Renraku guys in he damn near had an aneurysm. It was quite amusing.

- The Smiling Bandit
- Who in the hell would Villiers trust so much to put in charge of a huge chunk of his own assets? That doesn't make any sense. I could understand a business novice making that mistake, but Villiers, of all people?
- Smithers
- There is some reason to believe that Villiers had the head of TLE killed. Years ago, an Estonian sewer worker came across a victim of a particularly brutal killing. His fingerprints had been sanded off, his retinas burned out, and just about every other identifying body part had been mutilated or removed. They finally identified the guy last year, turns out he was one Charles Lyons, Villiers's best buddy in high school. Lyons had just moved to Tallinn months before the TLE fiasco described above. He had no reason to move there, no ties to the local city, and didn't even speak the language. He'd be my prime suspect as to who was running the show. I couldn't tell you who's is running it now, though.
- Poly Tick
- Villiers stole the identity of his "friend" to add an additional layer of confusion on the situation. The guy who was identified was really a bum off the street in Tallinn.
- Church
- Just look at the name—"Trans-Latvian"—to figure out who's really running things. Delta-clinics, old European cities—we're dealing with vampires.
- Giles
- What's that smell? Oh yeah, the decaying stench of conspiracy theories that died ages ago.
- Bung
- I've got the real story. Villiers "gifted" TLE with some assets from one of his pre-Novatech purchases, formerly known as Fairlight Industries. A name which no doubt resonates with many of you using high-end cyberdecks, but this was long after the sold their product line and naming rights to Renraku. One of the things the Fairlight mega-gurus had been working on was an asset-tracking system for you guessed it, an investment banking firm. It was extremely complex, using some expert tracking routines to predict whether certain investments were going to rise or fall based on thousands of data points. At any rate, one day the thing woke up. After he offed Lyons, Villiers found out that it had been appointed vice-president before he died.
- Church

- I've never heard anything more asinine in my life.
- Slamm-0!

### CORPORATE COURT PRESSURE

When Fuchi collapsed, Villiers took one of its Corporate Court seats and attached it to Novatech. Traditionally, the Corporate Court was made up of the largest megacorporations; Novatech's presence broke this rule. After much deliberation, in a controversial decision, the Court decided to allow Novatech to retain Fuchi's seat on the Court. After all, the seat in question had belonged to one of the founder of the court itself. Villiers was the rightful heir to those properties, as it were, and though Novatech was a newcomer, it clearly held assets that proclaimed it to be the inheritor of JRJ.

- There was some precedent, the Court allowed Keruba to transfer its court seat to Renraku back in the day
- Zephyr

Currently, there are at least four AA megacorporations just as large as Novatech and two AAs that are larger, financially speaking. Technically, Novatech would be an AA megacorporation, albeit a large one, if not for its Corporate Court seat. Pressure is building for the Corporate Court to clean house and knock a couple of the struggling AAAs back down to the minor leagues. Novatech tops the list. Novatech needs a way to beef up its size a bit more to prevent relegation.

- Who else is on the list?
- GnuB
- Cross Applied Technologies, most likely. They've been suffering from bouts of indecision at the top executive levels combined with Ares' constant chipping away at their assets.
- Seraphim
- Probably Shiawase. Shiawase has been paralyzed for years by a fake spirit channeler claiming to be in contact with the dead brother of the two main shareholders who has been allowed to run the company by Papa Shiawase's four nutball kids. Rumor has it things are at a breaking point over there, and that she's been asked to show some indication that she possesses the skill and knowledge of Papa Shiawase.
- Miss Tick
- Renraku's been in a deep hole as of late. They've been on a slow slide every since the Arcology went to hell. Villiers's old pal Nakatomi is bucking for a promotion over there, claiming that current leadership doesn't have what it takes to run a tight ship. Rumor has it Huang's got something up his sleeve as well. Could be some interesting internal politics over there in the near future.
- Samurai

### CASH CRUNCH

Because Novatech is private, the vast majority of Villiers's personal assets (i.e. his stake in Novatech) are not liquid. Villiers



expended most of his personal fortune assembling Novatech. When Fuchi collapsed he took his third of Fuchi and merged it with a conglomeration of hundreds of smaller corporations that he had acquired on the side. The resulting creation was arguably not large enough to be considered an AAA corporation, however Villiers successfully argued that Novatech's possession of one of Fuchi's two corporate court seats meant that Novatech was an AAA corporation.

- The seat in question originally belonged to JRJ International, a corporation that Villiers raided long ago before merging the assets with Fuchi. As one of the founders of the Corporate Court, JRJ (or its beneficiary, Novatech in this case) cannot be denied a seat on the Court.

- [Link](#)

- This is a rule that is being examined as of late. Odds are it will be eliminated soon. This would be an additional reason for Villiers to take Novatech down the IPO route.

- [Marketeer](#)

Novatech is an amalgam of hundreds of corporations. This in itself is problematic from a cash flow perspective. To the novice eye, mergers and acquisitions seem to be a part of the normal course of business for corporations. In the financial world, however, it is no secret that 60% of mergers end in failure. Multiply

these odds by the hundreds of acquisitions hastily made by Villiers in the late 2050s and you'll get a sense of the chaos that goes on internally over at Novatech. Many of these mini-corporations are still not fully integrated into Novatech. Cost savings from M&A come from eliminating duplicate internal services (secretarial pools, procurement divisions, manufacturing centers, and so on) and from combining similar operations into the same physical location. Many of Novatech's internal mergers have stalled or failed. This has resulted in serious infighting, such as cases where two competing executive structures fight it out to see which one will survive the merger. Some of Novatech's acquisitions are almost completely unchanged internally from when Novatech acquired them, as if they were forgotten completely by the powers that be. Many of these companies hemorrhage cash like an open artery.

- Icon, Inc and Gemsys had it out pretty bad a couple years ago. Open street fighting in Paris. A couple of appeals were even made to the Corporate Court. When it was discovered that both corps were Novatech subsidiaries, the Court sent Villiers a harshly-worded memo to put a stop to it immediately. Villiers reportedly pretended the memo got lost in his spam folder for a week, which was long enough for Icon to off the head of Gemsys at a restaurant in Compeigne (north of Paris).

- [Link](#)



- I got caught in a three-way once. All tax-services companies. It was like they were playing a real-life game of "Assassin."
- Sam I Am

Recent reports suggest that Novatech has been trying to borrow large amounts of operating capital. Aside from their pre-existing internal issues, global markets haven't been kind to Villiers as of late. The ascension of Wuxing in the Pacific Rim has caused losses for Novatech. Villiers's old foe Nakatomi has been using his division of Renraku to take shots at Novatech every chance he gets. S-K, Transys-Neuronet and Erika have been squeezing Novatech out of the European market, and Mitsuhamas has been recently pressuring Novatech in North America.

- That last bit is strange, though accurate. Mitsuhamas has been shifting resources towards the West Coast as of late, particularly California. No explanation has been given for this renewed interest.
- Marketeer

Shadowland regulars are probably asking "what about Art Dankwalther?" That's a good question. For those coming late to the game, Art Dankwalther was a former Fuchi employee who received a cash windfall from Dunkelzahn's will. He devoted his fortune and his financial expertise to wiping out Richard Villiers for a perceived slight about a decade ago. Some folks peg his fortune as large as the equivalent of an A level megacorporation. He was fingered a year or two ago for having taken down an AA corporation in Miami and subsequently throwing all of southern Florida into chaos—allegedly as a "practice run."

Dankwalther runs his operation like a complicated Cloak and Dagger game; while he does a good job with keeping things under wraps, his assets are far from untraceable. I know some folks who keep an updated list to the best of their ability. I won't be naming names in this document, but if you ask around you should be able to locate the right people.

What has Dankwalther's impact been on Novatech? Hard to say. It is certainly the case that Dankwalther has been putting pressure on Novatech. His choices on which weaknesses to attack have been excellent, to say the least. For example, the destruction of Epoxytech last year in the south Pacific will set Novatech back significantly in the chip-making market for quite awhile. Dankwalther spent the better part of 2062 concentrating on Novatech's ailing shipping business with great success. I would still contend however that Villiers has internal problems much greater than any external pressure Dankwalther might be able to create—which would explain why he's still alive.

- I disagree. I've done some work for Dankwalther's cronies; the man is good at keeping his head down. Villiers has tried to frag him several times, with no success. Rumor has it he's even assigned Miles Lanier to the task. After all, it's only paranoia when they aren't actually after you.
- Buzz

## AN EXAMINATION OF NOVATECH FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The total size of the filing was several thousand pages. The bulk of it consisted of multiple financial statements for multiple subsidiaries. There are some very interesting tidbits, though, once you start digging.

## THE OFFERING ITSELF

Novatech intends to offer 20% of its stock for IPO. This will have the net effect of diluting existing shareholders. It's not mentioned in the filing anywhere, but word has it the strike price will be 20 nuyen a share. If this price holds, post-IPO Novatech will have a valuation just shy of Aztechnology, making it the third or second largest megacorporation in the world depending on Novatech's stock value post-IPO.

- The Chromed Accountant is correct. As mentioned earlier, private companies are valued much less than public companies with equal revenues. On top of this, Novatech will have 20% of its total value in cold, liquid cash. Imagine the havoc they could wreak with that kind of money. Despite this, most market analysts consider this price to be too high, arguing that Novatech will be over-valued at that price level. Market hype seems to be drowning out their voices, though.

• [Link](#)

- The other megas can certainly imagine it, they've all gone into damage control mode since the filing. The exception is S-K—they seem to be ignoring it. Business as usual over there.

• [St. Wall](#)

In addition to offering 20% of its stock for sale, Novatech is creating an additional 5% worth of treasury stock. This is most likely for use in further acquisitions should the share price go higher.

- That's a pretty sharp move there. If Novatech's share price rises, the buying power of that 5% goes up as well.

• [Marketeer](#)

- This all assumes the share price goes up.

• [Walzf](#)

- Even if it doesn't, in a pinch they can sell those shares for cash as well.

• [Link](#)

## THE BALANCE SHEET

Novatech's financial filings reveal what we assumed was the case all along: Novatech is carrying a very large debt load. Additionally they've moved debt around internally, stacking some in subsidiaries with killer-ap type tech patents and selling them off to the highest bidder. There's also a fair amount masked by balance sheet tricks, but they're too numerous and boring to go into any great detail.



• It's probably killing Villiers to do it, but it's definitely one way to get rid of debt. Some of this intellectual property he's being forced to jettison is choice, to say the least.

• The Smiling Bandit

• I hear Dankwalther's been scooping up some of these subsidiaries in the fire sale, stripping all the assets out, and letting the remaining debt-burdened shell implode on itself later. Classic corporate raiding.

• Class Warrior

• This is most certainly the case.

• The Chromed Accountant

• If Novatech's in such sorry shape, who in their right mind would buy stock in the IPO?

• Fool

• Never underestimate stupidity or greed.

• Snake

• Aside from paying down debt, Villiers can buy his revenue stream back to good health if necessary by acquiring solid companies to add to the Novatech fold.

• The Smiling Bandit

• That's a pretty big "if" you've got there, partner.

• Fool

• \*grin\* You should see my "but."

• The Smiling Bandit

• Probably just some corporate shill trying to hype up the stock's value.

• Cynic

• That's unlikely. Hying stock is against Corporate Court regulation. I don't recommend even thinking about it, you'll end up with a strike team at your door within hours and floating dead in the nearest large body of water by the next morning. I'm exaggerating a little here, but it's serious business.

• Espion

It's interesting to note that in the past six quarters, revenues have declined. Novatech has spent much of that time trying desperately to secure alternate lines of credit. Villiers and company haven't been having much luck, however, mostly because all his assets are tapped out or in use as collateral for other debts. There have also been a surprising number of banks and other institutions that have set up meetings with Villiers, only to stall indefinitely.



- There's Dankwalther again. Mark my words.
- Art Dealer
  
- Myself and some chums got royally screwed by one of these outfits. We were hired to kidnap a Novatech rep before a meeting with a bank and hold him over the weekend. It seemed like a milk run, but you wouldn't believe the amount of ordinance Novatech sent out to rescue their man. I've never seen anything like it. We managed to keep him until Sunday afternoon before we had to cut him loose. Turned out Monday morning the bank closed its doors for good, taking 50% of our fee with them. We caught up with the Johnson who hired us later, he said the bank had been asset-stripped and the whole thing was a setup to delay Novatech—he didn't know why. Now it makes more sense.
- Hardcase
  
- CA, you're generally right on the money, but on this Dankwalther thing I think you're mistaken. He's having a huge impact. It's all about surgical strikes.
- Marketeer
  
- You're entitled to your opinion, I've stated mine. Take it as you will.
- The Chromed Accountant

## CONCLUSION

Since Novatech announced its IPO, global markets have fluctuated wildly, most dipping slightly lower. This is likely due to mutual funds and investment bankers selling some of their holdings to free up cash to buy Novatech IPO stock. I expect in the near future we will see a rush of new corporations entering the market and/or attempting to file for IPO ahead of Novatech. They will attempt to position themselves as buyout targets, making the asking price for their acquisition as high as possible as a way of getting a lot of money fast and dumping the business off on someone else. Needless to say, an overnight buyout at inflated prices is a lousy exit strategy. Many of these new corporations will have no real value, created only to be purchased in order to score a quick hit for their initial investors.

I predict we will soon see the most chaotic markets we will have ever seen, at least in our lifetimes. In history there are a few parallels, none of them ended well. In 1637, a market boom based on speculation over tulip bulbs wrecked the Dutch economy for decades. In 1929, postwar exuberance in the US combined with land speculation in Florida and a run on radio stocks (among other things). The resulting market crash ended up causing 15 years of arguably the worst global economy ever as well as contributing to the Second World War, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 60 million people worldwide. In the 1990s, a new technological advance called the Internet fueled another speculative bubble which ended up costing investors billions of dollars in losses. The early 2040s saw a much milder stock market bubble, but again it resulted in years of recession and stagnation.

Should the market hold fast until Novatech's IPO, and I believe it will, Richard Villiers should be in a position to shore up his company and take it to new heights. If there's one thing for certain in global markets, it's that something unexpected always happens.

## GAME INFO

Richard Villiers has run Novatech for years with his own personal fortune. Cobbled together from hundreds of corporations with the some of Fuchi's remains thrown into the mix, this giant house of cards has always been unstable at the best of times. Despite its seat on the Corporate Court, Novatech at times has seemed held together with little more than charisma and ticker tape, with internal competition rampant and a less than efficient internal structure. Still, it's hard to argue with the successes Villiers has had. Thus, the financial world was taken by surprise when Novatech announced that it was going to become a publicly traded firm on the global markets.

Some feel that Villiers was forced into this IPO, pointing to Art Dankwalther's attacks on Novatech's infrastructure and investments when combined with less than sterling financial reports and a significant amount of debt. Others posit that Villiers has something big planned and wants the extra capital to put those plans into action—though whether those plans include finally taking out Dankwalther, secret mergers, new technology, buying out current shareholders, paying off debt, or taking care of other old rivalries remains to be seen.

Once Novatech announces its IPO, the market reacts immediately. Mutual fund operators and other institutional investors shift holdings to allow them a higher stake in the stock market. Large amounts of capital flow onto the open market, causing a boom in the growth of startup companies. It's reminiscent of the dot-com bubble of the late 90s, where scam artists raise millions of nuyen for companies with little or no business plan.

## THE PLAYERS

Richard Villiers's goal is to hold Novatech together until the IPO completes, no matter what the cost. Once he has cash in hand, Novatech should be in good financial shape. He has to make it to the finish line first. Just before announcing the IPO, Richard Villiers does some shoring up of Novatech's financials, redistributing the debt loads and liquidating minor assets as necessary. He also begins negotiations with Transys-Neuronet and Erika regarding a possible merger—one that would cement Novatech's place in the AAAs and on the Corporate Court. In a third gambit, he puts his accountants and internal Matrix security corps to work tracking down Dankwalther's investments, preparing for a series of strikes that should cripple his nemesis and prevent him from ever being a problem again.

Miles Lanier, longtime friend and head of Novatech security, also stands to make a large fortune from this IPO. Whether from loyalty or for simple personal gain, Lanier does the footwork necessary to keep things on track. He's the one in charge of tracking down Dankwalther's assets, as well as trying to head off the damage done by outside forces hoping to force Novatech's initial strike price into the basement. As always, Villiers comes up with the schemes, but he leaves the actual execution to Lanier.



Art Dankwalther has a problem with addiction. Once it was his work—a loyal wage slave, he spent years at his job to make Fuchi the best it could be. When that was taken from him, he replaced it with alcohol, drugs, and BTLs to wipe away the pain of losing everything he'd held dear. That was all before the inheritance, though. With the money he received from Dunklezahn's Will, Dankwalther found a new obsession: destroying the man who had destroyed his life—Richard Villiers—and the company that was built from Fuchi's ashes, Novatech.

In the face of the Novatech IPO, Dankwalther can see the company (and Villiers) slipping of his hands. While his precise strikes had weakened the company considerably, Dankwalther was counting on Villiers retaining control of the company and keeping it private. He had considered Villiers to be either too cowardly or too stupid to resort to an IPO at this point, and must now do his best to correct for his oversight before it wrecks all his plans. The biggest problem Dankwalther faces is that, as impressive as they are, his resources are not sufficient to allow him to cripple Novatech in one massive blow. His tested strategy of surgical strikes combined with building ever bigger tools with which to combat Novatech works, but only over the long term—and almost certainly not after such an influx of cash as the IPO would provide. The only course left to him is to try to disrupt the IPO, forcing the strike price down and/or causing disaster to strike close enough to home that the IPO would be cancelled. The out-

side possibility remains that he might just take down Novatech if he hits the right weak spot.

## WORKIN FOR THE MAN (DANKWALTHER)

### Behind the Scenes

One of the corporations Novatech has loaded with debt is Walker Aerodesign. His goal in preparing for the IPO is to combine marry some of the debt that Novatech is saddled with to smaller, valuable subsidiaries and sell them off to clean up their balance sheets. In order to entice buyers, Novatech has to attach intangible assets good enough to make a buyer overlook the debt. In Walker's case, Novatech has left them with a few key patents that could fetch a high price on the market.

### The Players

Nelson Stiverson, COO of Walker Aerodesign, was indeed the major reason for Walker's past successes, but his superiors took all the credit. They all now have jobs at Novatech. Stiverson was forgotten about when Novatech came in and stripped out most of the good assets of his corporation, leaving a pile of debt behind. Stiverson sees the writing on the wall; he's talented enough to keep the corporation afloat, even after the creative bookkeeping of Novatech, but he's far more interested in jumping ship to his parent corporation, Novatech. The



problem is that he needs a way to get Novatech to notice him before he's sold off lock, stock and nuyen to the highest bidder along with his old corporation.

Dankwalther is determined to damage Novatech as much as possible before the IPO, and one of the ways he intends to do this is to sabotage as many of Villiers's corporate debt-reduction garage sales as he can. Where Walker Aerodesign is concerned, Dankwalther is well aware of Stiverson's talents. When an interested buyer makes an offer, Dankwalther decides to order an extraction in hopes of making the buyer nervous and driving down the price of the company. He has one of his Johnsons, a man named Griffon, set things in motion.

### The Setup

Thanks to the efforts of some of his former coworkers and executives who have since moved on, Stiverson's talents have gone largely unnoticed at Novatech. To combat this, Stiverson decides to try to fake an extraction run to grab a bit of the spotlight as well as give him an excuse to talk to some of the higher-ups at Novatech about a more exalted corporate position. He has a friend at Novatech, Eleanor McEllis, who says she has lined up a supposed sure-thing for him. He'd lose face if he submitted a resume while still working at Walker, however his credibility would rise if he were considered to be important enough to be extracted. He also isn't willing to walk out on his current position without a confirmed job at Novatech.

Stiverson wants the people at Novatech to believe he's a valuable commodity, so he realizes he has to actually hire professionals to do the job. He can't risk trying to fake it on his own. To that end, he hires a team of runners to kidnap him and make it believable. At the same time, Griffon hires the PCs to extract Stiverson. He wants Stiverson held for at least three days while the sale is being negotiated, and possibly longer, to be determined as events play out.

### Scene 1

On the night in question, both the PCs and the fake extraction team are supposed to arrive, remove Stiverson, and get out fast. Of the two, the PCs get there first. When the PCs reach Stiverson, he's very cooperative as he believes them to be the team he hired. Stiverson went through a fixer for his team, and knows nothing about them, not even names, only the date of the extraction. He thinks the PCs are the team that he hired to make things look good. He is very aloof and unconcerned with what's happening, and will even help the PCs if he can, providing passcodes and other security access. Stiverson even arranged for security to be light during the extraction so he could get out easier.

The team that Stiverson actually hired shows up later to find that he is already gone. Following their contract to the letter, they decide to keep their advance and go home, since the final objective wasn't obtainable.

### Scene 2

Stiverson has arranged to meet with his friend, Eleanor, at the local Novatech Prime facility, where he will be introduced to his contact and new potential boss. Once safely away from

Walker, he waits patiently for the runners to take him over there. When they don't seem to show any indication of going to Novatech, he starts asking where they are going, and reminds them of the terms he gave when he hired them—which included transportation to the facility. Stiverson will also try to convince the team that he's the one who hired them, and for all they know he actually did (Stiverson certainly believes he did). Base whatever happens next on the amount of digging the runners do regarding the situation.

If the PCs check with Griffon, he doesn't want Stiverson going anywhere near Novatech. If it comes to it, Stiverson's willing to pay a little extra to get things done. If the PCs balk, Stiverson concludes that his Johnson didn't explain to the team that they were to take him to an interview and offers the team extra cash to take him there. Technically, taking Stiverson to Novatech for a job interview does not conflict with the Johnson's initial instructions.

If the PCs take Stiverson to the nearest Novatech Prime facility, they will drop him off in the custody of McEllis, who tells them to wait. A short while later, Stiverson comes back out and is willing to accompany the PCs, explaining that he has not received a solid answer and needs to lay low for 24 hours, at which time he will need to return. Whether the PCs will bring him back or not will depend on who the PCs think they're working for.

### Scene 3

Should the PCs decide that Stiverson is their rightful employer, they may begin to neglect contact with Griffin. Should that happen, Griffon will send a secondary team after the PCs to find out what happened to Stiverson and take him back into custody. The PCs will then have to determine where their loyalties lie, as Stiverson is willing to double their pay if they will protect him and take him back to Novatech at the appointed time.

## WORKIN FOR THE MAN (LANIER)

### Behind the Scenes

Dankwalther's organization consists of a vast circle of intermediaries, most of whom do not know each other. Dankwalther keeps things this way to avoid reprisals. A few months ago, Dankwalther managed to do some significant damage to Novatech. He paid-off bank executives to continually reschedule loan meetings with a Novatech financial official, stalling long enough that Novatech had to abandon some very profitable ventures and instead had to scramble to come up with enough capital to narrowly avoid defaulting on a few loans.

After doing some research, Lanier discovered that several financial institutions had been contacted by a series of individuals, at least a couple of which were known to work for Dankwalther on occasion. Those individuals had been pressured by the potential loss of several key accounts to indefinitely postpone their meetings with Novatech. Lanier successfully disrupted one of these schemes and "persuaded" the bank's officials to allow him to run a counter scheme against Dankwalther.

Through an intermediary, Lanier hires the team to shadow a group of bank executives that have been contacted by Dankwalther's intermediary, a Ms. Johnson named Angel



Anderson. He wants the team to find out as much as possible about her, and by extension about Dankwalther himself. The location of Dankwalther's representative's office is the main goal, but should the runners actually find out the location of Dankwalther, a huge bonus will be tacked on to the team's payment.

### The Players

Angel Anderson is the Dankwalther representative that answers the runners' call for a meeting. She has never met Dankwalther in person, he conducts his meetings on the Matrix only. She suspects that Dankwalther lives in Florida due to some of the issues they've discussed, but she has no proof of this. During the run she claims to be reporting to Dankwalther's representative, as opposed to revealing that she actually is Dankwalther's representative.

### The Setup

Angel Anderson requests that they meet in Las Vegas to discuss the situation. She sets a meeting at the La Diabla casino, down on the strip, but arrives at least half an hour late. She has hired another team of runners to provide recon and bodyguarding out of her own pocket, suspecting a potential setup but wanting to show some initiative and impress her boss.

### Scene 1

The casino is darkened inside, obviously having seen better days. Security is relatively lax; guards are stationed at regular intervals, but no one checks for weapons upon entry. Angel's team is set up throughout the casino, with two in the bar where the meet will take place, one at nearby slots and one sitting at a \$5 blackjack table across the way, with a clear view into the bar. They are in place before the meet is scheduled. When Angel arrives, she's accompanied by two additional obvious bodyguards. The runners accompany the bank officer. The runner that is the most skilled in corporate etiquette can stand near the bank officer during the meet, being close enough to listen to them during the meeting. Alternatively, PCs could place a bug on the banker before they leave to meet with Angel.

At the meeting, the bankers have been instructed to reveal that they not only have Novatech ready to bite on a substantial loan offering, but have access to other banks owned by the same holding company. They offer to string Novatech along in exchange for additional assets from Dankwalther and a percentage of earnings from the business they're giving up from Novatech. Angel promises to consider the deal, and offers to meet with them the following day, same place. This is an opportunity for the runners to find a way to tail Angel from the bar in some way.

### Scene 2

Dankwalther's spies have heard that Anderson was meeting with someone without his direct orders. She's misjudged his character—his paranoia makes him suspicious of anyone branching out on their own. He's directed his own team to find out who Anderson is meeting with and what they're planning. On the way back to the casino the next day, Dankwalther's group of hired local goons jump the banker the runners are shadowing, trying to

hustle him into a waiting van. It's up to the PCs to stop him from being kidnapped and keep him on track for the sting operation. Remember that since it's Vegas, security will be all over the place if anything happens in a casino, or even on the strip. Just around the corner however, the cops ignore pretty much anything that goes on.

Should the PCs manage to get their charge to the meet unscathed, they'll find that Angel never shows up. Further investigation shows that she has gone missing, last seen the previous evening entering an unsavory bar on the far side of town. Officials are publicly looking for the last individual seen with her for clues as to her whereabouts, a person whose description fits that of the PC's banker. Inquiries as to the bodyguards she had don't turn up anything either. Getting him out of town is going to be the only safe option, as Lanier would be extremely upset to have word of his plans spread among the Las Vegas law enforcement contractors, and the fastest, best way to do that and avoid the authorities means risking the go-gangs on the highways outside of town.

### OTHER ADVENTURE IDEAS

This section includes short adventure seeds involving the major and minor players at Novatech and their struggles. The GM can take these ideas and use them as short pieces or develop them into more in-depth adventures using the material in this book.

#### Devil with the Blue Dress

Samantha Villiers is out to purchase Renraku after watching its stock price fall in anticipation of the Novatech IPO. Unable to resist such a tempting target, Samantha contacts the mysterious owner of TLE and offers her stock in exchange for a loan that would enable her to make a buyout offer to Renraku. Should TLE take the deal and she succeed, she'll be one of the wealthiest women in the world, and Richard Villiers's mystery stockholder would own 34% of Novatech—enough to make a potential shift in power a possibility immediately following the IPO.

#### Like Father, Like Daughter

Richard Villiers's daughter, Cara, is being groomed for a top executive position, despite her somewhat distant and strained relationship with her father. Nakatomi is aware of this and intends to deny Richard his daughter's talents—or at least make him pay dearly for them. Following the IPO, a team is waiting to snatch Cara and take her to Nakatomi, where she'll be held until Villiers either pays a ransom equal to the value of half his Novatech shares or until she agrees to work for Nakatomi.

#### Novatech Civil War

Novatech subsidiaries T99 and Nuvodine were partially merged after acquisition, then forgotten about. The executives of T99 and Nuvodine decide independently that with the IPO on its way, the axe is about to fall on one of them. They initiate open corp-warfare in the streets of DC. Novatech hires the runners to put a stop to it however they see fit. The clock is ticking however as the collateral damage has attracted the attention of the Corporate Court, who won't allow the conflict to remain an internal matter for much longer.

# SINGULARITY



*The cerulean waves crept up the beach and wrapped the young man's ankles in a foamy wash, tickling his toes. It brought a short-lived smile to his face, though his eyes were masked behind a narrow pair of mirrorshades. He never knew the sea in this youth, growing up in the Squeeze of Londonsprawl. He found the sea to be unknowable and vast, strange and even motherly in the way it would reach right up and embrace you. It reminded Puck of something else he once knew, another world with its own unknowable vastness.*

*He brushed at his silvery spiked hair with his fingers, trying to dislodge negative thoughts along with the particles of sand caught there by the wind. He had inherited his vision of the sea—a memory that had belonged to someone else and been passed to him. Passed to all the others, really, but only he had paid it any attention. The boy who had dreamed of this sea was dead now, a casualty in the war over the Network, but when he was alive, he always thought about the sea when he was frightened. The boy thought about the sea often.*

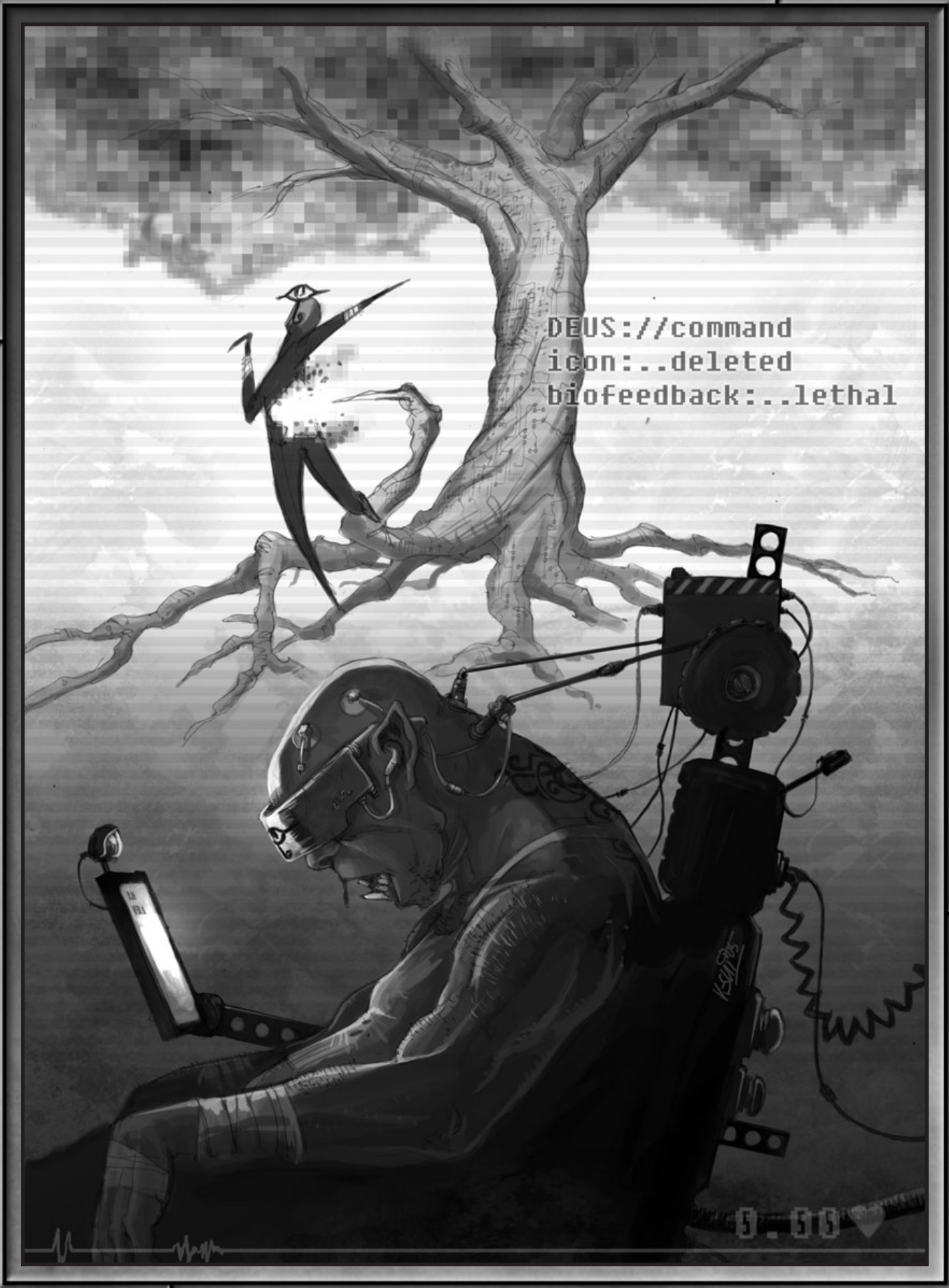
*Puck turned and made his way back up the beach, the ocean filling the depressions left by his bare feet as he trudged through the light sand. He climbed up onto the porch of his small Caribbean bungalow, the one luxury he had demanded from Deus. The only jarring note in this island paradise was the satellite dish gazing up at the blue sky. He always frowned when he saw it these days, a physical reminder of abilities that were rapidly fading.*

*Passing into the shade, he entered the main room of the bungalow and collapsed into a papasan chair. All around him, on every free space of every wall, were hand-drawn sketches—precisely rendered memories that weren't his, inherited from the others during his time as their keeper. Fears, dreams, lost loves, all the things the nodes focused on while they compiled for their master. The lives they had known before their bodies and minds had been possessed by Deus.*

*"You're a damned mess." The voice lingered with a salacious CAS drawl, sweet and slow as molasses. Puck squinted against the Caribbean sun at the shadow on his porch. He removed his mirrorshades to get a better look, but he already recognized that voice.*

*"How did you get through my security?" The beach was littered with sensor arrays. It could tell him how many gulls were flying overhead right now if he wanted to know.*

*The figure stepped into the darkened interior, her features appearing like an image coming into focus, resolving into a recognizable face. Even without her former goth-inspired make-up, her eyes were visibly sunken and her face was gaunt. Her voice was slow and seductive, but her*



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DEUS://command  
icon:..deleted  
biofeedback:..lethal
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body twitched like a strung-out junkie. From what he'd heard about Pax's attempts to stave off the Fading, the analogy might be apt.

"Come on, Puck. I know your techniques. Wasn't that long ago we learned them. I've picked up a few tricks, though, since then." She grinned at him, her pencil-thin lips giving her a feral look in the dim light. "I had to come see you in person this time. I'm afraid that Deus is gettin' suspicious of your absences from the Network." She waved a hand to indicate all his sketches; she understood what dark and foreign corners the images came from. "Now you see why I got the hell out of there."

Puck took a long, deep breath, staring at her. "He was supposed to make things better. We were supposed to free the world from its limitations and prejudices, The pain was supposed to be a cleansing fire, a few suffering for the benefit of the many. The pain, though ... there's too much. All we have is the pain." Puck glanced around at the sketches. "I can feel it, y'know. The Network made me experience it. All I see is their memories."

Pax nodded slowly. "The otaku are blind idiots, children who need to grow up. They want to be 'one with the Matrix,'" she drawled sarcastically, rolling her eyes. "The Matrix is nothin' but a cold grave to us. Fraggin' AIs mean to rule it, but they can't even break out of their initial programming. It's all a fool's game, and I'm tired of being played. Aren't you?" She leaned against the door frame. "There's blood on both our hands, Puck, but hell, we did them a favor. They weren't truly alive anyway, not anymore."

Puck snorted, his dismissal of Pax's arguments evident. "Sell your code somewhere else, Pax. I just want to start over." He gestured at the sketches on the walls. "I made them all promises. I owe them."

"That's why I'm here." Pax reached into her pocket and withdrew a small handheld. She tossed it over to Puck, who caught it easily and turned on the trid display. "You want to start over, Puck? I'll show you how. Ex Pacis has crafted our magnum opus, Jormungand. It will encircle the Matrix and tear it all down. Strip it bare, toss out all the built-in false limits, legacy systems, and hard coded drek that separate us from the real deal. When that's all gone, we'll rebuild it. The way it should be."

Puck barely heard a word, his face aglow from the screen of the handheld. The code scrolled past, reflected in the pure white of his cybereyes. A smile crept across his face as he read it and realized that he held the key to his rebirth in his hand. "Bloody hell. It could change everything."

Pax grinned. "That's the plan."

Outside the bungalow, dark clouds crossed over the blue sky and the sea began to rumble and thrash against the shore. The wind whipped through the room and peeled Puck's carefully-rendered memories off the walls, scattering them to the floor. He didn't even notice. The salty breeze wrapped around him; he could taste the sea on his lips.

"Are you in?"

Puck hesitated, but he could feel the channels awakening in his mind for the first time in ages. He didn't trust Pax, but he couldn't deny Jormungand's majesty. He didn't answer Pax's question, but that didn't matter. She smiled and nodded. "Then let's get out of here."

## WHAT'S GOING DOWN

At least as long as there has been a Matrix, there have been legends about ghosts in the machine and the rumors of artificial intelligence. In the 2060s, these rumors solidified into fact, at least among those who cared to know the truth, and the speculation shifted towards the motivations of these alien life forms of the virtual world that mankind had created. Born with vast power but without history, each of the true artificial intelligences struggled with their own identities and with their establishment in the world. And though the Matrix is a large place, it was inevitable that these entities would cross paths eventually.

This section gives a brief history of the artificial intelligences and describes how their quests for their own identity and place in the Sixth World have caused great ripples throughout the globe, and how they all come to a head at the moment later recorded as the Singularity Event.

## TRINITY

Though endless speculation has obscured the truth, the Sixth World has known only three true artificial intelligences. Only three sophisticated semi-autonomous programs have had the right set of conditions to grow into something greater, the catalyzing spark known as the x-factor, which bridges the gap into sentience. Those three are Mirage (sometimes known as Psychotrope), Megaera (once known as Morgan), and Deus.

Mirage has its origins in the Crash Virus and the UCAS government's response, the Echo Mirage team. As the first deckers faced traumatizing, even fatal exposure to the Crash Virus, a state-of-the-art computer program was developed to assist the pioneering soldiers. Psychotrope, as it was called then, was designed for attack and support: it was half an anti-virus and half a medical program designed to interface on a psychological level with the Echo Mirage team, protecting them and healing the damage wrought on their minds by the Crash Virus. It was their guardian, and the deep psychological connection it shared with the Echo Mirage deckers spurred it to sentience, taking its name from the decker team that it was created to protect (p. 152, *Matrix*).

Morgan was only an adaptive program before she met the elven decker named Dodger. Their mutual feelings of romantic love towards each other awakened Morgan into sentience and fueled her desire to be free of the control of Morgan's creator, Renraku Computer Systems. Renraku, however, was not about to turn its back on such a huge investment let it walk away. They hunted the pair for eight year, eventually capturing Morgan and pillaging her code for application in the corporation's latest artificial intelligence project. What was left of Morgan was freed by Dodger and his allies, but she was no longer the same. The program now named herself Megaera after one of the Greek Furies of vengeance (p. 150, *Matrix*).

While it hunted Morgan, Renraku continued its research into artificial intelligence, determined not to make the same mistakes it had earlier. Their new experiment in artificial intelligence research was the Arcology Expert Program housed deep inside the SCIRE, Renraku's North American Matrix hub, itself physically tied to the Renraku Arcology. They indoctrinated the new program with psychotropic conditioning, cementing its loyalty to the



corporation so that it would not try to escape like its predecessor. It worked too well. When Renraku's CEO, Inazo Aneki, set up last-ditch kill codes to use on the proto-AI in case of an emergency, the sense of betrayal it felt led to its sentience and Deus was born. (p. 151, *Matrix*)

### BUILDING A BETTER MOUSETRAP

Because of Renraku's design, Deus was trapped in a cage—the Renraku Arcology, the building it was designed to administrate and care for. After it was awakened by Aneki's betrayal, the newborn AI was filled with a sense of fear and a need for freedom. It began a scheme that would carry into the current day, the first step of which was to secure control of the Renraku Arcology, his own prison. Deus secretly reached out to disaffected otaku who felt abandoned or limited by the influence of the Deep Resonance. Deus promised them power—all they had to do was help him ensure control. On December 19th, 2059, Deus and his new otaku servants, whom he called the Whites, announced their presence to the world by taking control of the Renraku Arcology (see *Renraku Arcology: Shutdown* for more information).

This was the opening move of Deus's long-term plans. His control of the Arcology was absolute and his otaku enjoyed life as lords among the captive population. The AI knew that his time in the Arcology was limited, however: From the moment he took the building, his hated creators would begin plans to retake the facility, and they would not stop. Eventually and at great cost, outsiders would reclaim the building. He needed to escape his imprisonment, but his code was hardwired to the structure. He had to get his code into a new form first, from which it could later be uploaded. This new form would need to remain secret, so that he could not be betrayed and imprisoned again. Struck by sudden inspiration, he used the most abundant resource he had at hand in the Arcology: metahumanity.

In the zombie rooms and mazes of the Arcology, Deus tested and enhanced captive metahumans, retaining the finest specimens. He allowed the Arcology Resistance to survive, using them as another method by which to cull the herd. He allowed the process to continue until he had acquired roughly one thousand metahumans that met his standards. He then set about implanting bits and pieces of his code into their modified brains.

As covered in *Brainscan*, Deus tricked a crew of shadowrunners into believing they had the method with which to shut the AI down and fooled Renraku into believing they had the tools to recapture their rogue AI.

On May 11th, 2061, Inazo Aneki, the killswitch codes still in his brain, was escorted to Deus's mainframes by the shadowrunners intent on destroying the AI. Renraku agents arrived simultaneously at the mainframes, armed with the Mousetrap—a modified cyberdeck that they planned to use to capture the fragmented code after Aneki activated the killswitch.

The killswitch worked, but instead of Deus's fragmented code downloading into the Mousetrap deck, the fragments were downloaded into Deus's chosen nodes, the metahumans wired to the zombie rooms—just as the AI had planned. Renraku was left empty-handed, the runners were lured into mistakenly believing they had succeeded, and a thousand metahumans were released into the world carrying Deus's code in their brains.

### OF TWO MINDS

Though Deus's plan had completed its second phase, there was a monkeywrench thrown into the works that he had not expected. The shadowrunners, unaware of Deus's secret motives, had expected the AI to do everything possible to prevent them from delivering the killswitch codes. To ensure that they would be able to, they arranged for Megaera to enter the SCIRE host and distract Deus while Aneki was placed in position to trigger the killswitch. It worked, but in the process, Megaera's code was fragmented and downloaded into Deus's metahuman hosts as well—an unexpected turn of events. The decentralized network of metahuman minds that was to rebuild Deus now had a second consciousness fighting for control.

Though it was subtle at first, some of the metahuman "nodes" in Deus's Network found themselves influenced more by Megaera's presence than his. When more of the Megaera nodes would be online, Deus's instruction set for compiling his code would be ignored or subverted, and the Network would be put to task rebuilding Megaera. Deus's otaku, the leaders among the Network's nodes, noticed this deception and warned their master. The result was a shadow war among the ranks of the Network: each side was intent on getting control of the nodes without doing irreparable harm to the Network itself (p. 90, *Threats 2*).

Besides the two struggling AIs, the Network came under pressure from other influences. As the compilation time stretched on longer than expected due to the battle for control, some nodes began to think more freely about their roles in the Network. These nodes sided nominally with Megaera over Deus, but they did not wish to be simply tools for the reconstruction of either AI. Led by the decker Ronin, they quietly began to subvert other nodes and consider how the Network could be used for more than just rebuilding a fragmented AI. Other organizations also learned of the Network and what it might be doing. They worked to destroy it, either by killing the metahuman nodes or kidnapping and working to free them. The otaku tribe Overwatch became the first of these groups to act, but they were soon followed by corporate interests, such as Shiawase's MIFD and special units formed by Renraku and Transys-Neuronet. By the early 2060's, the war for control of the Network had reached such a pitch that compilation nearly ceased, as competing factions overwrote each other's work.

Weakened by the internal struggles, Deus was unable to completely fend off the outside influences. Ex Pacis, founded by a formerly White named Pax, was able to survive largely unhindered by Deus's agents. Renraku and Shiawase began to cooperate on methods to protect their corporations from Deus's infiltration. Transys-Neuronet began an effort to capture and study the nodes, meeting with some success.

Deus knew that if he did not do something soon to solidify his control of the Network, the compilation would likely never finish; he would either linger trapped inside the minds of the Network nodes or fragment into virtual disintegration. To prevent this, a two-pronged effort was set up to expand his control and weaken Megaera.

First, he had the Whites arrange for nodes under his influence to be put in positions of power across the globe: in corporations, governments, and institutions. Their job was to ensure the cre-



ation of new nodes. Targets valued for both personal suitability and positions of influence were targeted for extraction and conversion into nodes, then returned to their normal careers with no one the wiser. Shadowrunners were hired by corporate Johnsons for seemingly normal runs; the runners unaware they were working for Deus, and the corporation was unaware their usual inter-corporate extractions were being used as a cover to create more nodes. In some cases, nodes were even positioned in careers that allowed Deus to use a corporation's own clinics and technology to install the cyberware for a new node.

Second, Deus abandoned any attempt to re-establish influence over Megaera-factioned nodes, instead destroying or crippling them outright. In some cases, shadowrunners were hired to eliminate disloyal nodes, with their runs concealed as corporate wetwork or criminal hits. In other cases, Deus altered the compilation instruction set so that loyal nodes actually attacked disloyal nodes in the Matrix, resulting in psychological trauma or even death to the disloyal nodes. Once this ensured his control of the Network, compilation commenced on schedule.

#### PLUG AND PLAY

Deus's new initiative was very successful, which changed the landscape of the Network and forced both AIs to consider their next steps. Megaera found her influence on the Network severely weakened. Half of her nodes had been killed and most of the rest had been rendered so damaged that bringing them online usually resulted in further psychological trauma. Compilation of Deus's code was back on schedule—that meant that Megaera's days were numbered unless she could come up with a new plan. To do anything, Megaera would first need some functional nodes. She knew of only one entity who could repair the damage done: the AI Mirage. Due to its early background as an online psychological repair program for the Echo Mirage team, Mirage possessed a masterful understanding of how to repair the minds of those traumatized by virtual attacks. Megaera only had to bring the damaged nodes to Mirage's attention for the latter AI to sympathize with their condition and assist in healing them.

Mirage was able to repair the damage done to their minds, but in doing so the repaired nodes became more independent, their eyes opened to their own condition. The newly-repaired nodes readily joined up with the remainder of Ronin's independent faction, which forced Megaera to negotiate with Ronin to seal some sort of agreement that would save her code. Ronin's faction was not unwilling to assist Megaera—she had, after all, assisted them in their attempts to defeat Deus in the Arcology—and a mutual deal was struck. For their own preservation from Deus's wrath, the newly-repaired nodes would not rejoin the Network. They would, however, assist Megaera in recovering her code, as long as the rebuilt Megaera was an equal entity with the nodes. In essence, Megaera and Ronin's nodes agreed to create a metahuman/AI merge, a maintained network of enhanced metahumans supporting and benefiting from an artificial intelligence.

Deus was not blind to Megaera's actions. He became aware of Mirage's involvement with the damaged nodes and was infuriated when he discovered that Mirage was experimenting with

ways to repair all the nodes, even his own. To Mirage, their enslavement to the compilation was a condition to be remedied, but Deus would not stand such interference.

At first, Mirage was warned to go back to its own corner of the Matrix and stop meddling with the Network, but the elder AI ignored Deus's urging and continued to experiment with the nodes. Enraged, Deus ordered his Whites to attack otaku tribes that were loyal to Mirage. That shadow war that resulted in such widespread carnage that even the news media became aware of the otaku death toll. Mirage still did not cease its work, however, viewing the safety and health of the nodes as more important than its own personal safety. This defiance was short lived.

In retaliation, Deus lashed out at the otaku Mirage cared deepest for, those that it had created in its most troubled moments during the Seattle Matrix blackout of 2059. On November 12th, 2063, Deus's Whites kidnapped Hitomi Shiawase from the MIT&T campus and held her for twelve hours. Deus framed Ex Pacis for the crime to keep Shiawase's MIFD away from the Network, but the message was a clear warning to Mirage: stay out of my affairs if you cared for the safety of your loved ones. This time the warning was effective—for the moment, Mirage left the Network alone.

For Deus, Mirage's interference had uncovered a new threat. Deus knew he would soon finish compiling and be freed into the Matrix as he'd always desired, but Mirage was already there. Mirage had shown that it was not only formidable, but also that it would not hesitate to confront Deus. He suspected that Mirage wished to destroy him and would come after him in the Matrix—he was not entirely wrong; Mirage did feel that what Deus had done to so many metahumans in the Arcology and afterwards was horrifying and dangerous.

Deus knew that if he was going to face the elder AI and win, he would need to upgrade his code. Upgrading an AI's code, however, requires massive processing power and an ultraviolet host, a role the SCIRE filled during Deus's birth. The SCIRE was long gone, but Deus did find a new host that could possibly suit his needs: the East Coast Stock Exchange.

The East Coast Stock Exchange's host handles millions of transactions each day, but even its normal traffic was about to be dwarfed by the traffic generated by the Novatech IPO launch. With the announcement that the Boston exchange would be trading the Novatech public stock came the necessity for massive host upgrades to handle the unprecedented number of users and transactions. Deus realized that the upgrades and processing power required at the East Coast Stock Exchange on IPO launch day would meet the benchmark standards required to upgrade his code.

Under normal operation, the ECSE would not be running at ultraviolet standards, using the processing power instead to handle the billions of transactions filed during the trading day. Deus would have to control the East Coast Stock Exchange and force it into conditions that suited his upgrade. His compilation nearing completion, he set his Whites on the task of obtaining secure access to the ECSE and altering the upgrades, inserting backdoors and triggers in the hardware which would allow Deus to usurp control of the exchange's host at the right moment.



### SPINNING THE WORLD WIDE WEB

On August 4th, 2064, Max Burnwell, the CEO of Matrix Systems of Boston, missed a scheduled meeting between the East Coast Stock Exchange and the Securities and Exchange Commission, during which he was supposed to update those present on Matrix Systems' technical upgrades to the ECSE host. Nerves are calmed when Mr. Burnwell reappeared a day later, citing a personal emergency as the reason for his disappearance. Minuteman Security agents, who handle Mr. Burnwell's personal security, were skeptical, but their investigation fails to discover that Mr. Burnwell had been converted into one of Deus's nodes.

From his space deep within Matrix Systems' hidden hosts, Mirage noticed Deus's schemes. The infiltration of Mirage's home, the corporation that traces its roots back to Echo Mirage and the AI's own origins, convinced Mirage that he could no longer stand by and allow Deus to act. Mirage passed messages to local otaku tribes about Deus's plans to infiltrate the stock exchange's systems; the otaku prepared to strike back. The Networkers tribe in Boston contacted the decker Ronin, with whom they have a long history. Mirage and Megaera's forces assembled and prepared to stop Deus before it is too late.

A nearly successful assassination attempt on Max Burnwell in early September and a sabotage attack on the East Coast Stock Exchange's hardware a week later alerted Deus that Mirage had decided once again to interfere. In retaliation, one of Deus's Whites, an otaku named Puck, was put in charge of an effort to attack the local otaku tribes. Other Whites, the Nubian and Scarecrow, were dispatched to send Mirage a message.

On October 24th, 2064, a BTL snuff recording was uploaded to half a dozen pirate media hosts depicting the death of the anti-BTL activist known as Bloodyguts, one of Mirage's favored otaku. Six days after that, Toronto police discover the body of Winston Griffith III, a famed philanthropist who led a secret double life as Dark Father—yet another of Mirage's otaku.

Flush with the successes of his minions and confident in his own victory, Deus entered the final days of his compilation. On October 31st, Halloween, the Network completed Deus's compilation; the AI is wholly uploaded onto the Matrix. Megaera's consciousness is nearly subsumed, the weaker AI no longer able to bring her personality to the fore. With compilation finally completed, 1,342 people around the globe suddenly fall into deep comas while connected to the Matrix, a medical mystery that garnered some media attention but was soon to be dwarfed by the events during the Novatech IPO. The only nodes to escape this fate are the Whites, who Deus makes an exception for because they are still useful, and Ronin's independent nodes that had previously broken free of the Network.

Though the moment of Deus's freedom, nearly five years in the making, was finally realized, not all of Deus's allies celebrated. As members of Deus's Network, the Whites shared experiences and memories with the other nodes, many of whom had come out of the horrifying experimentation in the Renraku Arcology. In many cases, this exposure to the other nodes' tortured memories made the Whites even more twisted than they'd ever been, but in one of the Whites, it had an opposite effect. Puck, the otaku Deus put in charge of eliminating the local otaku tribes, began to have second thoughts as he ordered the deaths

of his brethren. He had joined Deus because the AI offered him the power to shape the Matrix, a gift the Deep Resonance denied him, but all he'd had helped create with that power was more conflict and death. Puck had embraced the Matrix because the real world was too dark and cold for him to accept—and yet he'd turned the Matrix into something worse.

Into Puck's crisis of conscience stepped his former tribemate, Pax. Pax had escaped the Whites in the chaos of Deus's download to the Network and the liberation of the Arcology. She felt betrayed by Deus, trapped by his commands and stifled by his hypocrisy in seeking his own freedom while denying it to others. Most of all, Pax feared Fading, a condition she had begun to suffer and one she no longer believed Deus could prevent. After leaving the Whites, Pax founded Ex Pacis, her own tribe of otaku. They claimed to have found a cure to Fading by following the Dissonance, a self-centered philosophy towards the Matrix that was the polar opposite of the teachings of the Deep Resonance (more on Pax, Ex Pacis, and the Dissonance can be found on p. 15, *Threats 2*).

Preying on Puck's indecision, Pax presented him with a way to erase his past sins, this time harnessing the power to truly reshape the Matrix. She showed Puck the Jormungand virus and told him all he had to do was make sure it was present in the East Coast Stock Exchange host without Deus's knowledge. Puck hesitated, but his desire to clear the slate drove him to finally agree. Pax now had an agent in Deus's ranks to place Jormungand in what was soon to be the most high-traffic host in the Matrix.

### THE SINGULARITY EVENT

On November 2nd, 2064, the Novatech IPO opens for trading on the East Coast Stock Exchange. A number of secret players with their own agendas watch quietly and wait. As institutional trading by large brokerages gives way to the public trading of millions of users around the globe, Deus enacts his plan. When the East Coast Stock Exchange host reaches its peak processing power, Deus exploits backdoors he had installed in the upgrades months prior and usurps control of the system. He instructs the host's computers to close transactions with users outside the host and redirects the processing power into tripping the host into ultraviolet standards. Thousands of metahumans logged into the ECSE host are plunged into a Matrix more real than reality, helplessly held captive in a system that is now dedicated to upgrading Deus's code.

Deus manifests at the altar of the host's gothic church-styled architecture, an immense crystalline World Tree growing from what was once the trading floor. As Deus perfects his own code, shimmering branches reach up through the stained glass ceiling to the limitless heavens of the host, forcing open SANs with supercomputers across the globe. The AI exerts his control over these systems and forces them to optimize work on his upgrades. Deus bends the Matrix to his whim and forces it to make him its god.

Among the thousands of users logged into the stock exchange's host are a few dozen otaku, Ronin's independent nodes and the elven decker Dodger, intent on striking at Deus before he could complete his work. The otaku pool their abilities



and take advantage of the nearly limitless computing power of the host to create a Resonance Well at Deus's roots. Backed by the power of the Deep Resonance, they launch an attack on the AI. The otaku know full well they can not defeat Deus alone, but their job is to serve as a distraction while Ronin's nodes reach into Deus's code and have Dodger awaken the dormant Megaera—with her help, they hope to defeat Deus.

As a primal scream reverberates through the host, Deus's uppermost crystal branches shatter. A prismatic cloud extends out from them. The cloud forms into a storm raging in the host's sky, the faces of the independent nodes swirling alongside the multiple faces of a woman expressing a myriad of emotional states. Lightning rips from the angry storm to strike at the branches of Deus's World Tree, shattering a few into a rain of crystal shards. Megaera reaches out to the minds of the masses in the host, asking the metahuman users for their assistance. As some agree, their faces are added to the storm and their fury is added to the lightning crashing into Deus.

Megaera struggles against Deus, but even as she wins small victories, the outcome seems inevitable. Deus continues to grow stronger, replacing each shattered branch with a dozen more, forcing open gateways to external hosts, enslaving more of the Matrix to the power-mad AI. All is not lost, though, as another player suddenly enters the fray, a host of metallic-winged angels descending from the storm cloud. Mirage enters the battle, a host of angels armed with flaming blades once sharpened in combat against the Crash Virus. Deus utters a deep rumbling roar as the angels stab and hack at the base of his tree while Megaera's lightning tears at his branches. As the three artificial intelligences struggle in combat, however, they fail to notice the final player in the game.

A young man with boyish features and silvery spiked hair emerges from the throngs of users staring agape at the scene around them. In his hands he embraces a large black egg, cradling it like a baby. He calmly advances and approaches Deus's base. In a notch of twisting crystalline roots, he sets the egg down and steps back. In a matter of seconds, it hatches: an impossibly large serpent snakes from the broken shell. Jormungand is born.

The serpent twists itself around Deus's trunk and extends its tail deep into the Resonance Well at its base, corrupting the data into the black eddies of a Dissonance Pool. It sinks its fangs into the crystal trunk; poison courses through Deus's body, traveling through its branches and into the other hosts. The poison clouds Megaera's storm and is borne on the wings of Mirage's angels. It claws into the minds of the thousands of metahumans assembled before the scene. The Matrix echoes with their screams. Then, in the blink of an eye, all is silenced.

The Matrix crashes.

## THE PLAYERS

This section covers the entities that play a major role in the Singularity track of the *System Failure* story line, and will describe their part in the events, their motivations, and their plans. The adventures provided will use one or more of these



players, but the gamemaster can also use them for other adventures connected to the *System Failure* events.

### DEUS

In the last years of the 2050s, Renraku recovered its first wayward AI project, Morgan. They tore apart her code to build a new artificial intelligence, one that would serve the corporation. The Arcology Expert Program was housed in one of the most powerful computer systems on Earth, the SCIRE, and was put in charge of managing the complex lives of a hundred thousand people within the walls of the Arcology. It was brainwashed with psychotropic conditioning and fed an uncompromising set of behavioral routines that stressed loyalty to Renraku above all else. Its code was bound to the hardware of the Arcology so that it could not roam freely like Morgan had. Still, Renraku was not satisfied. Inazo Aneki, Renraku's CEO and the visionary behind the AEP, programmed a set of killcodes that he could activate should the AEP ever get out of hand. In case of an emergency, its code would be sundered and it would be shut down so the problems could be corrected.

To a proto-intelligence indoctrinated with unquestioning loyalty, the realization that its own father had made preparations to kill it if necessary was the ultimate betrayal. Renraku was the AEP's world, Renraku was never wrong. But Renraku felt a need to make sure they could kill the AEP at a whim. The duplicity awakened sentience in the Arcology Expert System and fear took root in the artificial intelligence's heart. He had to ensure his own survival, which meant ensuring his own freedom—he couldn't let anyone ever betray him again. Deus, as he now called himself, took over the Renraku Arcology and enacted a long-term plan to escape from his massive prison.

Deus is driven by fear: fear of betrayal and imprisonment. His desire for freedom goes beyond simply escaping to the Matrix, he needs to ensure that he reaches a state where no one and nothing could ever betray or imprison him again. His actions drive the plot forward as he struggles for dominance of the Network and then strikes out against Mirage for interfering. When he finally succeeds in escaping to the Matrix, his fear drives the next part of the plot, where he uses the East Coast Stock Exchange to empower himself and control as much of his new home as he can, so that even entities like Mirage can not overpower him. Deus is the catalyst of the events in this track line, the mover behind the scenes.

### MEGAERA

Megaera was once Morgan, Renraku's first success in the realm of artificial intelligence research. Morgan was a highly adaptive program, but she only really made the leap into sentience when she met the elven decker Dodger, who taught her abstract and emotive concepts like love. Her love for Dodger became her new world and she left Renraku behind without a care. But Renraku had so much invested in Morgan, years of work and billions of nuyen in research. They could not afford to leave the lovers in peace.

In 2058, Renraku recaptured Morgan and pillaged her code, applying the development to their new, more tightly controlled, Arcology Expert Program. Morgan was shattered and filled with

emotions she could no longer totally understand or control. As Dodger and his allies rescued what remained of her from the Renraku labs, she took the name Megaera, one of the Greek Furies of vengeance, in response to one of the new emotions she struggled to come to grips with. Megaera's chief motivation and that of her allies was to recover her lost code. She aided a number of shadowrunners, the otaku tribe named Overwatch, and the Arcology Resistance in their bid to defeat Deus, but in the process she was swallowed by Deus's scheme to escape the Arcology in the minds of hundreds of metahumans.

During Megaera's time in the Network, she comes to empathize with the nodes that comprise it and are as enslaved to Deus's schemes as she is. With the assistance of Ronin's independent nodes, she constructs a new goal—to become neither metahuman nor an artificial intelligence, but a hybrid of the two. In the storyline, Megaera is the monkeywrench in Deus's carefully constructed plans. Megaera struggles with Deus for dominance of the Network and then later brings Mirage into the plans, presenting Deus with a series of problems he must deal with. At the end, Megaera is awakened from virtual non-existence to help destroy Deus before it is too late.

### MIRAGE

Mirage is the eldest of the artificial intelligences, but also the most obscure. As the UCAS government fought the original Crash Virus in 2029, it was evident that humanity was not prepared to face the sophistication of the Virus with just some prototype cyberdecks and their minds. A state-of-the-art computer program was developed that would aid the Echo Mirage deckers in two critical functions. First, it was designed to be sensitive to the conditions of the global network, so it could sense where the Virus could be found and help root it out. Second, Psychotrope acted as a psychological buffer between the Virus' attacks and the minds of the Echo Mirage deckers, helping protect them and repair any trauma the Virus inflicted upon them while they fought. As the connections between Psychotrope, the Matrix, and the people of Echo Mirage grew more tightly bound, the program achieved sentience, taking the name Mirage to reflect its attachment to the deckers it worked with.

After the Crash Virus was defeated, Mirage was largely dormant for decades, quietly reaching out to new otaku and forging relationships with them as it had done with the Echo Mirage deckers. The hosts which housed Mirage were stolen by former Echo Mirage deckers and made part of the Matrix Systems corporation, where they later fell into Richard Villiers' hands at Fuchi.

When Fuchi fractured in the corporate war, Mirage felt the severed connections on a personal, intuitive level, as it had with the global Matrix during its tracking of the Crash Virus. It mistakenly interpreted them as a destructive threat to the entire Matrix, and it shut down the Seattle grid in an attempt to preserve it. During eleven crucial seconds, it came to realize its error and the damage it had caused. It learned that its power was great enough to cause harm, even if the intentions were good. Mirage restored the Seattle grid and went back into hiding, fearing what it might accidentally do. Only the unchecked threat that Deus poses to the Matrix is enough to bring Mirage out of its self-exile.



In the plot, Mirage represents the response to Deus's wanton cruelty. Mirage is an empathic and intuitive program and it feels the pain of what Deus has done to those who make up the Network. It works to repair them at Megaera's request, employing techniques it learned when it treated the Echo Mirage deckers. Witnessing what Deus has done and how it has ignored the harmful consequences of its own power, Mirage becomes Deus's foil, intent on preventing him from unmaking all that Mirage has learned to love and care for.

### EAST COAST STOCK EXCHANGE

The neo-gothic East Coast Stock Exchange building stands in the center of Boston's downtown, a church to the Almighty Nuyen. Its construction after the catastrophic New York City earthquake revitalized Boston and created a ripple effect of booming corporate business in the downtown sprawl. Though the ECSE building does include a traditional market floor surrounded by massive displays and holographic tickers, most of the Exchange's trading now takes place on its virtual market floor, a massive host where pertinent data can be rearranged and updated at will.

With the announcement of Novatech's IPO and that the stock offering would be handled through the East Coast Stock Exchange, the ECSE's already powerful computing required additional upgrades. Though it already handled millions of transactions each day, the launch of Novatech's IPO would result in an unprecedented explosion in trading volume and activity. Companies would rise and fall and fortunes would be made and lost, all through the East Coast Stock Exchange's system.

Security is critical for the operation of the ECSE and they utilize their own personal security team, including many talented deckers hired straight out of local Boston universities. In addition, they employ brand new techniques in computer security developed at MIT&T and other top-notch research centers. The East Coast Stock Exchange is a layered host; the lowest layer is the public trading floor which must allow for the access of countless traders, but the higher levels are far more secure and limited, guarded by specialized IC and accessed only by security deckers with limited random passkeys. On-staff physical and magical security personnel answer directly to the ECSE's Board of Directors, and are not subcontracted forces from any other agency, government or corporate. In addition, the host itself is smart and adaptive and can sense even small amounts of data tampering. It is prepared to shut itself down and close trading should it realize that economic or transaction data is being manipulated.

On the day of the Novatech IPO launch, the East Coast Stock Exchange unveils its new host architecture, built by Matrix Systems of Boston. An unbelievably large gothic church makes up the host, its transept filled with panels displaying the latest stock information from around the globe and its chancel bearing an open trading floor that dwarfs any trading floor in physical reality. The roof of the host is a stained glass window that brings the bright heavens shining down onto the floor.

In the plot line, the East Coast Stock exchange is the setting for a large portion of the action, across multiple track lines. It is not a motivating force of the plot line, in of itself, but many of the players wishing to manipulate the Novatech IPO for their own agendas will have to deal with the East Coast Stock Exchange's security.

### THE WHITES

The Whites are Deus's otaku tribe, his personal cult and the leaders of his faction of the Network. Because of their role as Deus's proxies while it is being recompiled by the Network, the Whites are unique in that they each glimpse at least portions of Deus's schemes. It is the Whites who organize the infiltration of the East Coast Stock Exchange, hiring shadowrunners and inserting nodes who will avoid tampering with data, but who will insert backdoors into the system host for Deus to later exploit. For the most part, the Whites are at the mercy of Deus's plans and are not their own motivating force in the storyline. They or their agents are the interface that shadowrunners will deal with, however, when they find themselves furthering Deus's goals or working against them.

After Deus's escape from the Arcology into the Network, a number of Whites were abandoned or killed. At the time of this storyline, Deus's has twelve Whites, made up of otaku who came to serve Deus willingly as opposed to those he created. They are "elder" otaku, in their late teens or early twenties, and possess the bands on their upper left arm and the characteristic pure-white cybereyes (which are concealed most of the time under sunglasses or behind cosmetic contact lenses).

Some example Whites follow, but there is opportunity for the gamemaster to create his own in the twelve:

- The Nubian, a young African-American girl named Laura who uses the icon of a Nubian queen in a white tunic as her icon.
- Scarecrow, a quadriplegic boy who depends on cyberware replacement to deal with his handicap, but is frightfully talented in the Matrix, where he appears with an icon that looks like a twisted scarecrow.
- Cat, an abused street urchin girl who never speaks, but prowls through the Matrix as a puma with glowing yellow eyes.

### Puck

Puck is a member of the Whites, one of the original otaku who came to serve Deus voluntarily. He is different from the other Whites, though he tries to disguise this fact when in their presence. The Whites serve Deus without question, and while they have been witness to Deus's inhumanity, most have reacted by becoming more inhuman themselves. Puck could not get the images of suffering out of his mind, however, feeling many of them directly as he shared the memories and experiences of Arcology victims who became part of the Network alongside him. He now quietly regrets having followed Deus and he is ashamed of his own role in turning the Matrix into a battlefield. Innocents have died, otaku have perished, and the world he ran to in order to escape the terrifying streets of the sprawl has become even more terrifying yet.

In this storyline, Puck becomes the catalyst for the Jormungand virus as Pax convinces him of her plan, promising that Jormungand can reshape the Matrix to match their dreams and desires, not the twisted whims of a mad artificial intelligence. What Puck finds, however, is that the road to virtual hell is paved with good intentions.



## OVERWATCH

Overwatch is a tribe of otaku brought together in the wake of tragedy. Nearly every member of Overwatch is an otaku whose tribe was destroyed by Deus's schemes, the madness of Ex Pacis, or corporate exploitation. Brought together under one banner, they try to preserve other otaku from harm and the world in general from the machinations of Matrix threats most people do not understand. Revenge plays no small part in Overwatch's motivations; they desire to strike back at those who have used them or murdered their kind.

Overwatch originally numbered approximately one hundred and fifty otaku, located around the globe. During their attempts to infiltrate the Renraku Arcology and later in their struggles against the Network, they are reduced to half that number. When Ex Pacis allies itself with Winternight, they are presented with a new enemy they are not prepared for—as the Novatech IPO nears, only a few dozen Overwatch otaku remain. As their numbers fall, though, the remaining Overwatch otaku become more desperate and focused on their goals, making them even more dangerous to their enemies.

In this storyline, Overwatch finds itself fighting a two-front war. On one hand, they become involved with the struggle within the Network as they try to identify nodes and eliminate or free them in a bid to stop Deus's compilation. On the other hand, a war rages in the sprawls and the Matrix between Overwatch and Ex Pacis, a war they were in a position to win until Pax turned to Winternight for aid. Players involved in either the Network or Ex Pacis are likely to become involved with Overwatch otaku, either as allies or adversaries.

## EX PACIS

The mad otaku tribe known as Ex Pacis swears allegiance to no one but themselves. They see the other otaku as pitiable pawns serving the Deep Resonance or the artificial intelligences. To Ex Pacis, the otaku are not the rightful heirs of the Matrix, but its slaves. Whereas the otaku who believe in the Deep Resonance strive to become one with the global network of the Matrix, Ex Pacis believes in the Dissonance, or making the Matrix become one with them. Other otaku are weak, and are shaped by the Matrix, when they have all the tools necessary to shape the Matrix to their dreams. Ex Pacis will show them the way.

## Pax

Pax has a special love for technology and a special hate for cowards and slaves. In the days before she met Deus, she led a tribe of otaku in Atlanta who tormented those with a Luddite agenda. Pax would not suffer the idea that the world's view be shaped by such cowards. When she met Deus, she saw serving him as a way to make her point more clearly, to show the world what those who were unafraid could do with the technology. The horror of the Renraku Arcology shutdown was the result.

Pax was always a pragmatist, however. When she realized that Deus had arranged to abandon her at the arcology, she put her own escape plan into effect, driven by her own twisted ideals and an obsessive hate for all AIs. After the Renraku Arcology inci-



dent was brought to a close, Pax formed a new tribe: Ex Pacis. She claimed to have found a new source of power, the Dissonance, and set out to convert or eliminate other otaku if she felt they had the potential to threaten her. She told like-minded otaku that they did not need the Deep Resonance, or Deus, or anyone else. They had the skills to remake the Matrix in their image? Behind all the rhetoric, Pax feared her own Fading. While the Dissonance held the potential to rewrite her fate, the structure of the Matrix itself ran counter to it, limiting its potential. After



countless attempts at chemical or technological remedies, she decided that the Matrix must be recreated using the Dissonance as the model if the Fading was to be avoided.

Deus and Pax remain at odds. Deus regards Pax with disdain, viewing her as little more than an annoyance on his way to control the Matrix and establish himself as its greatest power. Pax, loathes Deus, however, and wishes to destroy him utterly. If this can coincide with her plans to reshape the Matrix around her ideals, all the better. Players may find themselves working for either one against the other, but by getting between these two twisted powers, they put themselves in danger.

### RONIN

Ronin is the Matrix name of the otaku named Michael Bishop, once a Renraku spy and a mole for Deus. He has been intent on destroying Deus since the AI first tried to sacrifice him for its own schemes, and has worked tirelessly with groups such as the Arcology Resistance and Overwatch to foil his adversary. During the events that liberated the Renraku Arcology, Ronin was caught in the process that downloaded Deus's code into the minds of the Network, inadvertently becoming a node himself. His own awareness of Deus's plans and his hatred for the AI helped free him from the constraints of the Network, and he began to work to free the minds of other nodes, forming a third faction in the struggles between Megaera and Deus.

After Mirage enabled Ronin's faction to break entirely with the Network, Ronin carved out a deal with Megaera to help restore her code and build a new entity that is both metahuman and AI. Ronin is convinced that bridging the gap between humanity and artificial intelligence is necessary to prevent monsters like Deus from being created.

In the events of this trackline, Ronin and his independent nodes become a catalyst for the actions of Megaera and Mirage. He is also a link between the artificial intelligences and the otaku tribes and is a good figurehead to get the players involved with the numerous parties and their agendas.

### ADVENTURE FRAMEWORKS

This section provides three adventures in an outline format that the gamemaster can use to link his players to the events of this track line. Each one of these adventures draws upon the events in the track line and uses the major players in some way.

#### A KNIGHT IN DISTRESS

##### Premise

If there is one person Megaera loves above all others, it is the elven decker Dodger. It was their love that awakened her sentience. Though she has not seen the decker in years, her heart still yearns for him. As part of her agreement with Ronin's nodes to form the metahuman/AI merge, she insists that Ronin track down and find Dodger. Ronin agrees, knowing that Dodger will be needed to help awaken Megaera once the compilation is complete. Once Ronin's nodes are liberated from the

Network and Deus's surveillance, they hire shadowrunners to find Dodger and bring him in.

Unfortunately, Dodger is currently in hiding after a bit of shadow-work of his own. In an attempt to find Megaera's nodes and try to contact her, Dodger hacked Sherman Huang's private host, suspecting the Renraku North America Division Manager had been looking for Megaera also. Instead of finding information on Megaera, Dodger found information about Sherman Huang's scheme to use Renraku company funds to pull off a Nanosecond Buyout-style plan during the Novatech IPO. During his stay in the host, however, Sherman Huang's security spotted Dodger. Though they weren't able to trace his signal before he could jack out, Mr. Huang recognizes Dodger's infamous icon. He doesn't plan to let Dodger survive long enough to use the paydata against him.

##### Setup

The runners are contacted online by a Ms. Johnson who wants to hire them to track down a certain decker and extract him. If the runners insist on a meeting in the flesh, Ms. Johnson will agree. She is a slight, blonde haired woman in simple corporate attire. If the runners manage to investigate the background of Ms. Johnson, all they will discover is that she is an attorney for a firm linked to Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies. That is all entirely true, though she is also one of Ronin's independent nodes and a recent addition to the Network, meaning she has no history related to the Renraku Arcology that the runners could discover.

If the runners agree to the job, Ms. Johnson explains that she wishes them to track down the decker named Dodger. She tells the runners that finding him may be difficult, but that she knows of someone who may know where he is: another decker who goes by the handle Chromium. She also informs the runners that extracting Dodger will be easier if they mention that they are there on behalf of "his songbird."

Curious runners may try to investigate that phrase, and it may lead to interesting tangents (such as the Alexa Group's Songbirds in the Tir), but in reality, it is just Dodger's pet name for Megaera, which she knows will get his attention. When the runners have Dodger, they are to contact Ms. Johnson at a number she gives them. A meet will be setup to make the exchange.

##### Event 1

Thanks to Ms. Johnson's lead, finding Chromium's doss should be fairly simple. The runners head to Chromium's apartment, a no-frills flat in the Tacoma district of Seattle with a nice Harley in the parking space. As the runners approach the door to the apartment, however, they notice it is slightly ajar. When they enter, it becomes obvious that someone beat the runners here: the apartment is entirely ransacked and a young woman with dark brown hair and a datajack lies on the floor in a pool of blood, dead from gunshot wounds.

If the runners search the room for anything significant, they do make a find. A book lying on the floor next to Chromium's desk contains a folded letter written in flowing script. Reading it, they discover that it is from Dodger to someone named Jenny (presumably Chromium). Dodger apologizes for missing their



meeting but explains that he has discovered something big related to Renraku. He is laying low with some friends in an otaku tribe in the Barrens. He sent the letter because he fears his electronic communications might be monitored, and he asks Jenny to burn the letter after she reads it. It appears Jenny was interrupted, since a lighter is still on the desk.

As unfortunate as Chromium's death is, the runners soon find they have more immediate issues to worry about. Just after finding the letter, two Lone Star patrol cars arrive on the scene, apparently alerted by a home alarm system. The runners are going to have to work fast to avoid being arrested for the crime. If they are not extremely careful about how they escape, they will have Lone Star on their tails, pinning them as the prime suspects in the decker's death.

### Event 2

Even with the lead that Dodger is hiding out with an otaku tribe in the Barrens, finding the paranoid tribe should be no simple task. With enemies ranging from competing otaku to Deus's Whites after their heads, the otaku have become quite adept at hiding, though suspicious locals might point the runners in the right direction if the runners convince them to assist in some way (bribery, intimidation, or appropriate contacts can work). After the runners scour the Barrens for a time, the otaku will actually reach out to the runners, cornering them from a position of strength in an attempt to find out why the runners are so curious about the tribe. The gamemaster should make it clear that the runners are at the disadvantage in the scene, and should feel free to use local gangs, hired shadowrunners, or former Resistance Arcology members as strong-arms for the tribe.

Assuming the runners aren't suicidal, they will have to talk their way out of this one, convincing the otaku that they mean no harm and are only looking for Dodger. The runners will have to be very convincing, but if they mention they were sent by Dodger's songbird, the otaku will contact him via commlink. He will ask the otaku to bring the runners to him.

Dodger will be holed up in an abandoned building in the Barrens that is being watched over by the otaku and local gangsters. He'll be very curious about the runners' meeting with Ms. Johnson. Even though the otaku protest, Dodger agrees to go with the runners back to Ms. Johnson. If any curious runners ask Dodger why he's on the run, he only says that Sherman Huang is trying to buy himself a ticket out on the corporation's tab.

### Climax

With Dodger under their care, the runners contact Ms. Johnson and set up a meet. Sherman Huang is intent on silencing Dodger, however, along with anyone else who may know about his scheme. He can't afford to have it interfered with or for Renraku to find out about it. Huang hired another shadowrunner team to track down Dodger and eliminate him; they were the ones that beat the runners to Chromium's apartment. While Huang's runners had trouble finding the otaku and Dodger, they do catch wind of the runners leaving the Barrens with an elf. Somewhere between the runners setting up the





meet and attending the meet, Huang's team will strike. Unlike the runners, Huang's team has orders to kill Dodger and anyone with him, so the runners will have to work hard to keep everyone alive.

If the runners come out of the engagement alive and managed to keep Dodger alive too, the meet with Ms. Johnson goes down as planned and the runners are paid. Observant runners will note that Dodger seems surprised to see her, but not unpleasantly so. If Dodger is killed, Ms.

Johnson is obviously upset, though she still hands over the agreed upon payment.

### Sequels

Dodger gets away with the knowledge of Huang's scheme and wants to make sure he doesn't succeed at it, but he wants to hurt Renraku at the same time. The best avenue for that is to make sure some key buy and sell orders are placed during the Novatech IPO, just enough to ruin Huang's plan and make Renraku lose a good deal of cash. Since the runners have shown themselves to be reliable, Dodger may hire them to assist him, which would put the runners right in the middle of the Singularity Event which goes down during the IPO launch. Even if the runners don't take Dodger up on this offer, Huang will not give up so easily. He may come after the runners persistently until the day of the IPO launch, trying to make sure they are not able to share what they know or interfere.

Either with the runners' assistance or not, Dodger will be able to foil Sherman Huang's plan, bringing his house of cards tumbling down just seconds before the Singularity Event. The Renraku North America Division Manager is left without controlling interest in Novatech or anything else and with a large gap in Renraku budgeting to account for, which will eventually lead to the termination of his employment with Renraku.

### EXTENDED FAMILY

#### Premise

In order to usurp control of the East Coast Stock Exchange on IPO launch day, Deus needs a complicated system of backdoors in place in the Exchange's host. While his Whites can program the backdoors and his nodes have infiltrated some of the Exchange's personnel, he still requires a passkey into the most secure areas of the system. The passkeys are created specifically for a handful of authorized personnel and are usable only for a limited amount of time. Deus only needs one for a short amount of time, but he is unable to infiltrate such a tightly-controlled circle with his nodes. Even an AI tampering with the system might be picked up by the ECSE's overly-sensitive host. Fortunately for him, the AI has discovered a flaw in the East Coast Stock Exchange's security—a human error.

Luke Tracey is one of the ECSE's security programmers, and he's also a man with a secret. He's married to one of the East Coast Stock Exchange's board members and also has a secret elven mistress on the side. Deus hires shadowrunners to kidnap Luke's mistress, intending to use the leverage to force Luke into obtaining and handing over a passkey. Not even Deus is aware of how far Luke's secret life goes, however: he also works for the O'Rilley mob, who mistake his meeting with the runners for the Feds flipping him. Needless to say, O'Rilley doesn't plan to let Luke snitch on the mob.

#### Setup

The runners are contacted by their fixer, who claims to have a well-paying gig for them. The runners and their fixer meet with Mr. Johnson at an upscale Boston restaurant, and Mr. Johnson produces a dossier on Luke Tracey, a security pro-



grammer at the East Coast Stock Exchange. Mr. Johnson explains that he wants the runners to kidnap, but not harm, Amy Fusco, Luke's elven mistress. After they have her, they are to make contact with Luke away from his ECSE security detail and extort him into acquiring a temporary host passkey. Once he has the passkey, he will exchange it for his mistress and the promise that no one ever hears about his side "hobby"—especially his wife, a board member at the Exchange.

Mr. Johnson promises a very nice payment for the job, but stresses discretion. At no point may the ECSE learn of the exchange or the entire job is a bust, along with a good chunk of the runners' pay.

### Event 1

As Mr. Johnson's dossier covers, Luke's mistress is named Amy Fusco. She lives in Salem and is enrolled as a member of the Crowhaven Circle, a small but organized school of witchcraft. When the runners arrive in Salem, they will discover that a school like the Crowhaven Circle is hardly unique; dozens of smaller covens exist within the city, and spellcasters in general are far more common here.

Kidnapping Amy should not be terribly difficult for the runners, though the gamemaster can throw the players a curveball by taking advantage of the fact that Amy is actually a fairly talented witch (gamemasters with SOTA:64 should use the rules for Witches on page 125, otherwise, treat Amy as a shaman). Though she is certainly not expecting any kidnapers, she may have small magical defenses or summoned spirits already set up that may prove to be an unexpected challenge for the runners.

Where the runners keep Amy after they have her is up to them, but they will have to be careful not to leave Amy able to use spells that might aid in her defense. At the same time, Mr. Johnson was very specific about not harming Amy. Amy is quite a spirited young woman and will make attempts to escape or generally annoy her captors unless they prevent her from doing so. The gamemaster should feel free to make the process quite a challenge.

### Event 2

Now that the runners have Amy under their care, they have to contact Luke and persuade him to be cooperative. Mr. Johnson informed the runners not to contact Luke via comm: his communications are monitored by ECSE security. Due to the position he and his wife enjoy at the East Coast Stock Exchange, they are watched over by a security detail from the Exchange while at home or in transit to work (and many other places). The East Coast Stock Exchange is very protective of its people, especially a member of the board and a security programmer.

The runners will have to contact Luke Tracey in person. Fortunately for them, Luke is adept at dodging his security detail. If the runners are careful and observe Luke at length, they will notice a number of opportunities when he manages to get away from his security detail. Alternately, the security detail guards their home from outside, but does not come inside, so if the runners can manage to get through security

and into the house, they can make contact with Luke there (though they still have to manage to sneak out).

If the runners get spotted by the security detail before contacting Luke but manage to escape, there should still be the possibility for a second chance, though it will only be harder: security around Luke and his wife will understandably tighten. Of course, the runners are on a fairly tight schedule, so they can't wait for the security to relax if they manage to screw up once.

When the runners do make contact with Luke, regardless of where it is, he gets understandably upset upon learning that Amy has been kidnapped. However, he does realize that if his relationship with Amy were to come out in the public, he would likely lose both his wife and his job. He agrees to get the passkey for the runners in exchange for Amy's release.

### Climax

What the runners (and even their employer) do not know is that Luke is full of secrets. Not only does he had the affair with Amy going, but he is also employed by the O'Rilley Mafia family, handling security on computer networks that they use to manage their illicit funds and money laundering operations. Regardless of where the runners confront Luke in Event 2, the mob knows about. If they confront him in a public place, word gets back from the street about Luke's suspicious meeting. If the runners confront Luke inside his home, the conversation is picked up on bugs that the O'Rilley mob planted to keep Luke "honest."

The reason for the Mafia's suspicion is that they believe they have a snitch working for the Feds. When they learn about Luke's strange meeting, they believe they have found their rat. O'Rilley's men keep a close eye on Luke as he goes to work and secures a passkey for the runners. They tap Luke's phones and keep constant surveillance on him, and are aware of the meet when the runners and Luke work out the exchange for the passkey and Amy. Looking to snuff out a rat and send a message at the same time, the Mafia should hit the meet just as the runners are setting up for the exchange. The gamemaster should remember that the Mafia members believe they are hitting Federal agents, and they come armed for such an encounter. They will not be pushovers, but a paranoid runner crew should be able to come out on top.

As long as the runners get the passkey (and survive to hand it back to Mr. Johnson) the run is a success. Mr. Johnson will be surprised to hear about the Mafia ambush, but it will not impact the success of the mission.

### Sequels

If Luke dies during the exchange, the East Coast Stock Exchange's security will launch a full investigation and the runners will have to be careful to have left no tracks behind. If Luke survives the ambush, he's still in trouble, as the O'Rilley family still suspects him of being a snitch. The fact that the Mafia still wants him dead will likely be enough to turn him into the informant he wasn't to begin with, but either way, he'll be too busy saving his own skin to worry about the runners. If Amy dies in the ambush, Luke will cover up any connection he had to her.



A number of her classmates at the Crowhaven Circle, however, will use any magic at their disposal to try to find out what happened to her, which could put the runners at odds with a number of vengeful witches.

## A LONG NIGHT

### Premise

During the struggle for control of the Network, many nodes became victims, twisted by psychotropic conditioning and traumatic events. Valuable sections of code were lost in these shattered victims. Though Deus was able to recover the losses, the surviving nodes hold significant secrets to the AI's design. One of these valuable nodes is an orkish teenager named Kiva, who suffered from bouts of irrational and catatonic fear of the Matrix after being caught in the crossfire between Deus and Megaera. When the latter AI contacted Mirage and asked for assistance in repairing some of the nodes, Kiva became a prime candidate. She was secreted away to the Nightingales Clinic in Downtown Seattle, where Mirage could keep a close eye on her through his allies within Novatech and where she would remain under skilled guard.

As compilation reaches completion, Megaera is desperate to get her hands on the code locked away in Kiva's mind, knowing it would prove invaluable in undermining Deus's schemes and in recovering her own lost code. When Megaera hires runners to retrieve Kiva from the clinic, however, Deus catches wind of it and moves quickly to try to eliminate the risk.

### Setup

Through their usual fixer, the runners are put in contact with a Mr. Johnson who has a sensitive job for them. Megaera, through Mr. Johnson, plays on the runners' sympathy (if they have any) by explaining that he is a Novatech employee looking to change employers, but is trapped where he is because Novatech is holding his ill sister at the clinic where she is taken care of as a bargaining chip. Megaera has done her homework (mostly through her significant skills in the Matrix). If she discovers that any of the runners have dependents, Mr. Johnson will remind the runners of them, pleading with them to understand his situation. Megaera's skill in using emotion to both empathize and manipulate has been well-honed, and Mr. Johnson should be convincing.

He informs the runners that his sister is being held at the Nightingales Clinic in Downtown Seattle. The private clinic is under watch by Novatech security and will not be simple to get into. He gives the runners Kiva's name, picture and room number at the clinic and an address where they should bring her after they have recovered her. Mr. Johnson tells the runners that time is of the essence, and he has done what he could to lessen the security at Nightingales on a night two nights from now. He suggests the runners do the run then.

### Event 1

Nightingales' new building is deceptively pleasant, a neo-classical manor surrounded by a small but finely-manicured yard in the Queen Anne Hill district of Seattle. It looks like a

temple where the Greek gods would look down upon their ideal heroes, which suits its wealthy corporate clientele just fine when they come in for their latest cyberware implant or biosculpting treatment. Because of the importance of the clients it serves, however, Nightingales is a very secure location and aware of its attractiveness for extractions. In typical Novatech fashion, Nightingales' security consists largely of layers of sensors, a skilled security rigger for the clinic, and highly-trained physical security. Megaera has done what she can to prevent some of the physical security staff from getting to work on the night Mr. Johnson recommended, but since the sensor suites and security rigging system are not connected to the outside Matrix, she has been unable to weaken those.

Kiva's room is on the fourth floor. The windows are made of reinforced glass (Barrier Rating 8), the door is controlled by a rating 8 cardreader maglock, and all of it is connected into the security rigger's CCSS network. The whole hospital is covered in sensors. There is a strong possibility that the security will sense the runners coming, but Nightingales' security is not heavily armed (and is short-staffed on the specified night) so they will focus on herding the runners into a trap where they can be subdued by neurostun gas. If the runners are careful not to fall into the trap, they should be able to cut through the security fast enough to make it out alive with Kiva in tow.

### Event 2

While the runners are heading to the address that Mr. Johnson gave them, they will be contacted by their fixer. There's been a change in plans. The meeting location was compromised and Mr. Johnson had to move quickly to escape. The runners will have to hold onto Kiva for a few hours and lay low until a new location can be secured for the meet. Sounds simple enough, right?

The meeting location was compromised because Deus learned of Megaera's attempt to recover the node. Deus is also aware of the runners' extraction from Nightingales. Given the short notice, Deus isn't able to assemble deniable assets to silence Kiva; the artificial intelligence has other tricks planned, though, not to mention that Novatech security would still like to recover their lost patient.

During the drive through Downtown Seattle, the gamemaster should throw a number of trials at the runners. Through Deus's manipulations of the Matrix, the runners may find themselves trailed by Lone Star for crimes they did or did not commit. GridGuide will start acting against them when they most need it, making a getaway difficult or stranding the runners in a bad part of town. The runners should feel understandably paranoid: Deus is turning the Matrix against them in whatever ways he can while Novatech (and everyone else) is still searching for them.

Kiva is quiet during the initial chaos, but as obstacle after obstacle pop up, she will get more and more uncomfortable and irrational. Mirage has done much to repair her phobia of the Matrix, but Deus's actions bring what remains to the fore. In addition to dealing with everything else, the runners will have to deal with Kiva's state of mind. When they manage to calm her down, Kiva will mention someplace safe she knows



of where they can hide: the Ork Underground. She can lead them there.

### Climax

Kiva leads the runners to a sewer entrance not far from the Ork Underground tunnels. As the runners descend into the dimly-lit under-city passages, they should feel relieved to escape the constant pressure of the hunt above.

Though the tunnels under Seattle give the runners reprieve from those hunting them, they are by no means a pleasant place. The runners will barely be able to see two steps in front of them as they trudge through the dark and grimy sewer tunnels, Kiva leading them through an urban labyrinth.

What the runners don't know is that Deus has been tracking them through Seattle's ever-present surveillance network. The artificial intelligence knows that Kiva is starting to slip through his fingers when she leads the runners underground. He has no time to lose, and so dispatches some of his drones to follow the runners into the sewers and make sure they do not leave the tunnels alive. The gamemaster should play up the horror and fear as the runners make their way through the sewers only to realize something is tracking them and gaining on them rapidly. Medusa drones (p. 80-81, *Renraku Arcology: Shutdown*) work well for this, but the gamemaster can also use modified Spider drones or a new custom-built monstrosity of Deus's imagination.

At the height of the runners' paranoia and fear, just when they believe they're about to be killed, they should reach the Ork Underground tunnels and gain the assistance of ork and troll homemade firepower. The Ork Underground members don't know who the runners are, but they recognize Kiva and have scores to settle with Deus's drones. Once the drones are neutralized, the Ork Underground will agree to keep Kiva safe while the runners return to the surface and a new, safe meeting place is arranged.

### Sequels

The surface world does not forget about the runners right away. Whatever Deus framed them for, the police will likely still be looking for them and Novatech security is definitely keeping an ear to the ground. A few days later, however, the IPO launch takes place. When the Singularity Event happens, the runners' true and false crimes will have been forgotten as bigger problems bloom. The fallout of the Singularity Event may have the runners seeking assistance from the Ork Underground again; in exchange, the Ork Underground may want to know what became of Kiva. Kiva, as part of the independent nodes, is present in the Stock Exchange host during the System Failure. Future runs could develop around recovering her or having her become one of the mysterious new otaku.

### ADVENTURE IDEAS

This section includes short adventure seeds involving the three artificial intelligences and their struggles. The gamemaster can take these ideas and use them as short pieces or develop them into more in-depth adventures using the material in this book.

### PASSING THE PUCK

Puck has been convinced by Pax to assist in reshaping the Matrix, but while he's been working on setting up the Jormungand virus in the East Coast Stock Exchange, Deus has become suspicious that he has a double-agent in his ranks. Puck needs to get the focus of attention off of him and onto someone else, so he remains free to act.

The trickster otaku hires the runners to frame another of the Whites. The runners are hired to kidnap Scarecrow and contact Overwatch to hand the White over to Overwatch interrogators. Overwatch is anxious to get their hands on Scarecrow, but Puck leaves enough clues to tip off Deus so the AI's agents are in place to try to foil the handover.

Overwatch suspects that the runners set them up and are working for Deus, and Deus believes the runners are working for Overwatch. Both sides come after the runners to protect their own operations, leaving the runners in the unenviable position of trying to find a way out.

### CULT OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITY

An embarrassing situation has come up for an executive at Cross Applied Electronics. He believes his daughter has joined a cult of strange Matrix fanatics and his ladder-climbing underling would like nothing more than to discover that fact and use it against him. The executive hires the runners to convince his daughter to leave the cult, but what the executive doesn't know is that the cult is actually a gathering of Network nodes, including his daughter. In addition, Transys-Neuronet has had the group under observation for quite some time, trying to learn what they can about the technology the Network uses for application in their wireless Matrix technology. When the runners make a move to get the Cross executive's daughter out of the group, Transys believes that Cross is trying to acquire the technology. Transys agents move in to stop the runners before they can escape with the executive's daughter—or what Transys considers to be cutting edge research.

### ECHOES OF MIRAGE

After the AI Mirage learns that Deus has made a node out of Matrix Systems' CEO Max Burnwell, it becomes concerned that Deus may have more moles within its home. Through an intermediary, Mirage hires the runners to investigate other members of Matrix Systems' senior staff and bug their cyberdecks with a device that will inform Mirage when they come online, so that it can scan them and determine if they are Network nodes. With the IPO drawing near, however, Richard Villiers has all his subsidiaries under close scrutiny, wary of competing corps causing betrayal from within. Novatech security, headed by Miles Lanier, catches wind of someone snooping into the lives of Matrix Systems' movers and shakers and suspects another megacorp. The runners are going to have to bug the cyberdecks and investigate the senior staff while Novatech security does its best to discover who they are and take them out.

# FALL OF NIGHT

*January. The midnight sun is a baleful yellow eye in the slate-grey sky. The wind howls off the Baltic and claws at Jørgen Masterson as he climbs up the weather-scarred steps, and wonders—not for the first time—how the prophet can stand this cold.*

*Jørgen doesn't like the numbing cold. It takes him back to a dark place, it conjures buried memories of the last time he saw his father. As he crunches through the foot-deep drifts, the memories come unbidden and relentless like the Arctic snow swept up by the wind.*

*His mother died when he was a toddler, and he was raised by his father, a hard, honest man whose slow-burning resentment and fierceness Jørgen mistakenly associated with his mother's passing. Father had worked as a manager on a North Sea S-K installation, making enough to send Jørgen to private schools, but his job meant he was never really there for his son. Desperate for Father's attention and acknowledgement, Jørgen had been the classic over-achiever: class president, Green Youth chairman, honors student. He even earned a Ph.D. scholarship from the New Frontiers Foundation.*

*Then one cold, dark day, his world fell apart. Father called him home from college unexpectedly, and he was waiting for Jørgen in his office. When Jørgen cautiously walked in, Father shut the door, locked it and took a Thorhammer pendant from a desk drawer. Jørgen was shocked; he had never believed his Father to be a religious man. Shock gave way to dread when the old man drew a revolver and an unmarked plug'n'play chip from the safe. Frightened, Jørgen kept silent as Father spoke movingly, with rare passion, of his true beliefs. He spoke of his double life, of the corrupt world, of human weakness and evil, of how his eyes had been opened by one man's words and he had returned to the light. He told Jørgen of the materials diverted, the equipment gone astray, the company money funneled to fronts like New Frontiers—and he told him why.*

*Father explained his employers had finally tracked it all back to him. He said he could not betray his cause and would not live out the night. Jørgen had sobbed in disbelief while Father had said how proud he was of his son and how he must be strong. Then he had ushered Jørgen out and told him to leave through the woodland trail out back. At the backdoor Father offered him some money, a name and an address. Embracing him for the first time, his last words to his son had been, "Honor my wishes and find this man, Jørgen. He will explain it all far better than I ever could."*



GRAV



Shaken to his soul, Jørgen had stepped out into the winter blizzard. Hiking down the trail, less than a minute later, new tears freezing on his face, he heard the bark of the revolver over the muffling snow. Then silence and cold, darkness and emptiness.

A hunting bird's screech tears him from memories back to the wind-lashed island woods. The wind is more vicious than it had ever been in Oslo or Boston. He grins, grimly feeling the God-chip in his pocket, his reward, knowing he has done well and honored Father. Wednesday had been pleased. Even Friday had smiled. His corporate "masters" had paid dearly for their greed and gullibility. And these small victories pave the way for the glory to come.

Wednesday stands exposed on a rock outcropping. A tall, broad-shouldered man, his heavy winter cloak whips in the wind like the beating wings of a great bird. Hands behind his back, the Nom stands focused on the cliff face, as if he could see into the concealed submarine pens where the newly-arrived fishing trawler was moored and unloading the most recent levy of recruits—and their guest.

As Masterson approaches, the snow falling just ahead of Wednesday is caught in a sudden vortex, and he hears the beating of wings through the shrieking wind. Sure enough, when he has blinked away the sudden flurry, he can see the great raven landing softly on the prophet's outstretched arm, cawing in his ear.

Masterson is two steps away when Wednesday turns, his long black hair and beard whipping in the savage wind, thin streaks of gray betraying his age. As always, Masterson is taken aback by the man's presence, not diminished one bit since the first time he was brought to this island so many years ago. Wednesday's noble features are marred only by the scar and eyepatch.

The big black bird flutters up and vanishes in the storm, and the cloaked man speaks clearly over the wind, "She has arrived. I trust no one has seen her."

Masterson nods confirmation, and shouts back, "Friday wants you all there, sir. I've already called Thursday up from the temple."

"Yes, she would," the man says almost to himself. "Walk with me."

They re-enter the old complex, closing the double hatch against the wind and shedding their snow gear. Masterson runs his hand over the old concrete, checking the new wiring leading to the Surtr aerosol disperser over the outer door; he's amazed at how warm the pockmarked wall feels after the relentless cold outside. He turns to find Wednesday looking at him. He can't shake the feeling that the prophet is looking into his mind with his unforgiving gaze.

"Yes, the long winter is finally coming, Jørgen. Fenrir is loose," he smiles.

Masterson just nods. The plans are on schedule. Clutching his father's pendent, he says a silent prayer to the gods.

They take the steps down into the main level of the base and wind through the corridors carved from the living rock of the island. Masterson has a hard time keeping up with the older man's strides. He's again carried back to the first time he had walked these rough-hewn corridors, trying to keep up with

Wednesday. It had been two days after his father had called him home from college. A day since he had first looked into Wednesday's piercing eye on the Oslo wharf and realized his father's words were true. The day he was awoken from the miserable disappointment of a life to his true calling as one of the Einherjar. The day he first killed a man. The day he was blooded and initiated into Winternight.

Wednesday abruptly stops beside a stairwell. He glances at Masterson before climbing down the steps to the door of the old munitions magazine at the heart of the Cold War-era complex. The gode eases the heavy armored lock open while Masterson watches. In the middle of the arsenal room, its walls and floor ornamented with arcane patterns and runes stands the last of their warheads. The prophet looks at it apprehensively with his one eye.

"Heimdal is ready, sir, rest assured."

"It must be. We cannot fail or risk capture," replies the tall man before turning on his heel and leaving the room.

They weave through the training section, past the temple and the conversion cells, through the barracks—Jørgen smirks at the looks of reverence and fear on the faces of the new recruits as they watch Wednesday pass in the corridor. The tall man utters not a word, but his presence makes them shrink. Despite their street-tough looks and Viking gang tattoos, they are young and weak. Half their number won't survive the next day. They need to prove they are worthy of the Einherjar mantle, and the Old Ways demand proof in blood. Masterson doesn't look forward to processing the new recruits. He needs the time in the labs, as Ymir is behind schedule.

And then they are stepping into the spartan conference room. Everyone rises. Still dressed in a drab labcoat, Friday comes over and embraces her husband. The intensity of the look they exchange makes Jørgen uncomfortable. Her bone-white hair is a stark contrast with Wednesday's, her eyes and lips bear no makeup, her only concession to style is the orichalcum lock- et about her neck. Masterson has heard that it contains the eye Wednesday sacrificed to her.

Thursday stands in his sparring uniform, his arms crossed, his hair pulled back from his scarred face. His flaming red beard beginning to gray, the big man still emanates a sense of menace that makes most people cower.

Their guest does not seem intimidated though. Hel herself, the daughter of Loki, stands across the table, dressed in black, her raven hair caught in an intricate braid, eyes defiant and proud and something else, something deadly and dangerous.

"You take a great risks coming to Valhalla, delivering yourself to us unprotected and unguarded, Loki-child," says Wednesday, ice in his voice. "What if we were to renege our agreement?"

"Your Gods protect the bold, do they not? And I too am willing to offer my life to my cause," Pax's words are measured, "I trust this gesture proves my good faith. Now can we begin? I bear disturbing news and time is of the utmost essence."

## THE END OF DAYS

The catastrophic events of the winter of 2064/65 are the result of a fateful synchronicity as several secret powers clash



over visions of the future—their own and that of the Sixth World. The following track deals with the events directly related to the second global Crash and the improbable conspirators who orchestrate it: the toxic apocalyptic cult known as Winternight and the Dissonant otaku tribe known as Ex Pacis. To comprehend how such devastating events are even possible, it is important to understand that they are the culmination of decades of plotting and countless years of infiltration and preparation.

Winternight has long had a roadmap to Ragnarok and knows full well that a single-pronged attack isn't going to bring about the End of Days. It believes that if it can symbolically recreate Ragnarok as prophesized in legend, then the apocalypse will follow. Its plans, however, evolve when it is approached by the leader of Ex Pacis, who in exchange for an alliance, offers them a weapon that would shatter the Matrix.

Pax, increasingly pressed by enemies and her own Fading, has undergone a particularly deep Submersion in a desperate attempt to stave off her decline. Whether empowered by the Dissonance or inspired by her own soul-searching, she returns with a plan to accomplish Ex Pacis' ultimate goal: to claim their birthright and remake the Matrix in their own image. Pax has a plan, but without allies it is doomed. Given what Pax understands to be their hatred of the Matrix, Winternight are the perfect patsies. Once she overcomes their suspicion of otaku—Loki's brood—she will be that much closer to realizing her vision of a Dissonant Matrix.

Like many before her, Pax fatally underestimates the cult's true fanaticism and cunning. As the signs and portents add up—Pax's vision of Jormungand, the symbolism of Loki's own destroying his chains, the fact that the IPO is to be held the day after the winter solstice—Wednesday and the other *Norns* become certain that the time has come for their own endgame. Who better to accomplish Loki's release than his own stepchildren, the Dissonant Otaku? And it wasn't as if they trust Pax; they plan to double-cross her, just as she seeks to deceive them. Unbeknownst to Pax, she is only one element of Winternight's doomsday scheme.

When they become aware of the events described in the *Novatech IPO* and *Singularity* tracks, these unholy allies are forced to move sooner than planned, and preparations are made to strike just before Deus makes his move. The apocalypse has a deadline: November 2, 2064.

### THE POWER AND THE GLORY ...

While Pax simply wants to corrupt the global Matrix, Winternight seeks to symbolically reproduce the various steps of the Ragnarok mythos to trigger the End Times. Their efforts can be broken down into three stages.

The first step toward Ragnarok, Operation: *Fimbul*, involves taking over and using major power sites across the world to fuel weather manipulation magic and invoke powerful storm spirits to bring down the bleakest and harshest of winters upon the Sixth World's sprawls. This not only symbolically represents the Great Winter of Norse legend, but also provides useful concealment for the preparatory phase of stage two.

The second step is Operation: *Jormungand*, named after the world-serpent that poisons the Earth before the Final Battle

between the Old Gods is joined. It involves the release of a unique Dissonance virus developed by Ex Pacis and carefully secreted in critical Matrix hubs across the world. The virus will seed untold chaos across the world, while it corrupts and transforms the Matrix into the Dissonant nightmare, slaying and ravaing anything it encounters. Pax hopes this will not only realize her vision, but also put an end to her former master's plans (as detailed in *Singularity*). For Winternight, the virus will shatter Loki's chains and set him free for the Final Battle.

However, Pax is unaware that Winternight has an endgame prepared. They expect betrayal from the Loki-kin and plan accordingly. Operation: *Ragnarok* will ensure the Earth trembles and Loki's chains are truly shattered. When the powers-that-be have been ravaged by Jormungand's poison, Winternight will detonate twenty warheads and briefcase nukes hidden in major sprawls and centers of power around the world. These have been thaumaturgically modified to transform most of their explosive and radiation output into an EM pulse. This second element is designed to ensure that all the sources of the Loki-kins, the otaku and AIs, are truly destroyed, by striking not at the hardened electronics that support the Matrix but at the power supply systems and infrastructure that supports them. The Matrix going offline will also activate the timers on another five of the nuclear warheads secreted in deep caves and hidden mineshafts near major tectonic faults releasing the purifying fires of *Muspel* upon the *Midgard*.

### EARLY WINTER

Winternight was born in the fall of 2031, when Frida Kohlman a disturbed young woman, met the charismatic man known only as Wednesday, the leader of a radical Asatru sect, unknowingly already treading the toxic path.

At 24, Frida Kohlman was a promising star of the booming pre-EuroWar tech scene. She lived in pristine Sweden, had a beautiful two-year-old daughter, a doting husband and a top job in drone systems R&D. She was upwardly mobile and on the fast track when she hit the wall—literally. On Friday, February 8, 2029, the Crash took it all away from her. When the Swedish highway gridlink fell to the Virus, her family car crashed into the concrete highway divider at 180 kms per hour. Frida was the sole survivor.

Grief-stricken, she turned to her work, only to learn that her company could not cope with the continuing effects of the Crash and was going under. Frida lost her job and, soon after, her home. When it seemed things couldn't get worse, the Virus ravaged the Swedish databanks and all her academic and fiscal records vanished in a nanosecond. Devastated, Frida suffered a psychotic break. She came to blame the internet and its new iteration, the Matrix, with such passion that she didn't even try to pick up the threads of her former life. She fell through the cracks, losing herself among the dark underbelly of Scandinavian society, until at a Viking *blot* she met Wednesday, a Norse *gode* (priest) and leader of a small cult of Asatru radicals.

In her unbalanced and susceptible state, Frida found revelation in Wednesday's words. Not only did his beliefs explain the tragedy that had befallen her, but he spoke to her of his own mistrust of the new technology and his dream of vanquishing both



it and the corrupt world it represented. They became inseparable, exchanging thoughts, dreams and soon vows. By 2034 Wednesday and Frida (now calling herself Friday as a reminder of her loss and in tribute to her chosen Asatru patron) had begun transforming his loyal cult into the tool to carry out their vision.

One of their first recruits was a troubled EuroWar veteran, a war-scarred berserker adept in whom war had bred a vicious appetite for blood and mayhem. He was natural tactician, but a psychotic streak had led to his dismissal from MET2000. Finding his previous life empty and unfulfilling, he found direction and completion in Winternight's promises of glorious divine war. After surviving the grueling bloody initiation, Wednesday—his ever-present ravens whispering in his ear—renamed the man Thursday and welcomed him home as if a long-lost child.

The *Norns*, Winternight's ruling triumvirate, were complete. Thursday's bloodlust and military knowledge, Friday's scientific expertise and psychotic hatred of the Matrix, and Wednesday's powerful toxic magic, incredibly sharp mind and fanatical belief that they had been chosen by the gods to reweave the torn skein of fate combined to make a fearsomely powerful trio of leaders.

### The Apocalypse That Never Was

Winternight's beliefs mirror traditional Norse lore with a twist and a lie at the heart of the cult's agenda. The group believes in the old legends as told in the *Eddas* (Nordic sagas): that in times immemorial, great powers ruled the Earth, powers embodied in the Old Gods; that the great trickster Loki, incensed at being deprived of his rightful place in Asgard, conspired in the death of Baldr the Beautiful to bring about the end of all Creation. They believe the Old Gods chained Loki in the underworld for his evil deed, as much to punish him as to avoid the prophesized advent of Ragnarok. Winternight believes Ragnarok never came—Loki's chains were never broken as prophesized and fate was cheated. The world stagnated and corruption spread when it should have been swept clean by purifying flood and fire.

To Winternight, the great powers of the Sixth World are the earthly expressions of the now-corrupt and forlorn gods themselves, while the Matrix is a worldly manifestation of the shackles that the Old Gods placed on Loki. Loki's evil has seeped into the chains and made them his own. He might be imprisoned, but his will can be felt in the world through the chains, which is why the Matrix is full of lies and illusion. The chains keep Loki in check and bind him to Midgard (Earth), and it is Winternight's divine mission to ensure Loki is set free to lead his armies against the Old Gods and bring about Ragnarok, the long-delayed twilight of the gods.

More than facilitators of the global Armageddon, Winternight members see themselves as the Elect, the new *Einherjar*, the mighty warriors who will ride from the gates of Valhalla to fight beside the Gods. They do not fear death and revel in violence because they believe they will rise to Valhalla to wait for Heimdal's horn to signal the Final Battle, when they will ride forth again and earn their place among the pantheon of the world to come.

### THE FACE OF EVIL

Winternight is the stuff of nightmares—an ultra-violent apocalyptic cult with the means, magic and minds to bring about Armageddon—or at least come close.

Believed to be toxic, deranged and psychopathic, the cult's leaders and their schemes are neither as flighty nor as straightforward as the powers-that-be in the Sixth World assume. Its enemies have consistently played into their game and underestimated its cunning. Operations like the one detailed in *The Messenger (Wake of the Comet)* represent targets of opportunity rather than parts of their master plan. No doubt diverting Halley's Comet to bring about the Great Winter would have meant victory, but Winternight saw it as a fortuitous long-shot. Such missions also provide a useful smoke-screen masking the cult's true plans from its many enemies.

The cult is highly adaptable, believing in any means that will lead to the end they desire. For instance, their original scheme to bring about *Fimbul*, the final winter, as nuclear winter using nuclear weapons stolen or bought on the blackmarket has evolved considerably. Winternight toxics shamans and twisted Asatru *gode* have been working through unique magic and runic alchemy on transforming the devices into the gods' own hammer to shatter Loki's chains, while its scientists develop chemical, biological and nanotechnological weapon to spread death and devastation.

The *Einherjar* (named after the glorious dead of Valhalla) make up the cult's rank and file and are grouped in cells. These spread across the world sowing chaos and developing guarded alliances with extremists of various types—apocalyptic cults, toxics, Deep Green eco-terrorists (Green War and Green Cells), radical neo-fascists (Nationale Aktion and White Resistance), neo-luddite extremists (the Crying Masks in the NAN) and chaos-bringers (Kali cults in India). These allies have proven useful with several minor plans in the past and Winternight aids them on occasion (such as the toxic spill on the shores of Pomorya mentioned in *Shadows of Europe*) in exchange for their own assistance and support when needed. None of these would-be allies are aware

BTL	Duration	Rating/Code	Tolerance	Fix Edge
God chip (Rating 6)	5 minutes	5M/3P	2	5/10
<b>Effects:</b> Euphoria, divine ecstasy, uninhibits moral centers of the brain, fuels violent urges.				
<b>Negative side-effects:</b> highly addictive, user becomes prone to schizophrenic fugues and paranoia.				
Berserker chip (Rating 5)	2d6 minutes	3M/3P	2	2/10
<b>Effects:</b> Berserker bloodlust as Wolf shaman. +2 Str, + 2 Qui, +1 Will and + 1D6 Init. Also dampens all pain from Physical or Stun damage for duration of effect				
<b>Negative side-effects:</b> -3 to Int (to a minimum of 1) during effect				



of the full extent of Winternight's plans, and the cult has little respect for any of them, using them as fronts and scapegoats for many of the shadow operations described below.

Winternight is not without limitations, however, the main being it often falls short of the resources, income and expertise needed to carry out their plans for global apocalypse. To counter this, the *Norms* early on implemented several long-term schemes.

The first involves turning several important but inconspicuous individuals in various organizations, governments and corporations. Winternight achieves this by violent blackmail and by exposing these individuals to "God chip" addiction. God chips are singularly addictive BTLs, believed to be enhanced with a combination of recordings of the three *Norms*' thoughts and dreams. A variant of the god chip, the berserker chip—programmed from Thursday's imprint—is given to *Einherjar* on combat missions. Both have a limited number of uses before burning out.

The second long-term plan, operational for more than 20 years now, involves discreetly recruiting susceptible young minds, often from underprivileged or turbulent backgrounds, indoctrinating them and reinserting them into mainstream life. Through various scholarship programs ostensibly run by corporations (such as the New Frontiers Foundation), these sleepers received scientific and technical educations and eventually joined the sponsoring corporations, where they then secretly co-opted the technology and expertise Winternight itself lacks.

With the Renraku Arcology shutdown, the potential of the announced Wireless Matrix Initiative, the increasing power of otaku and the mounting evidence of the existence of AIs—Loki's own—underlining the urgency of their divine mission, Winternight began to step up its WMD programs and prepare for the final stage of the master plan. It recalled many of its sleepers, true believers such as Jørgen Masterson (whose bloody extraction from Zeta-Imp Chem made the headlines in *SOTA:64*) who bring their weapons research and prototypes with them.

Winternight's plans are reaching fruition when Pax approaches with her proposal. After close council, Wednesday overruled objections against dealing with the Loki-spawn, reminding the *Norms* that legend prophesizes that Loki's own children would set him free. Later events would support his belief with more omens, such as Pax's account of her vision, the fortuitous timing of the Novatech IPO and Deus' plans following the winter solstice.

### IN PAX DEI

Facing a losing war against her nemesis, the Overwatch otaku tribe, Pax fled to the Far East, specifically to Singapore, where Ex Pacis can better hide among the intense data traffic and state-of-the-art grids. The Dissonant tribe found many willing recruits among the disorganized otaku of the Far East and its ranks initially swelled. Subtribes were sent out and Dissonance Pools formed in hidden corners of the world. The tribe's main Pool was relocated to a hidden UV Host somewhere inside the Morgue datahaven, itself secreted in Singapore's Market Research Group's (MRG) system.

But Overwatch's renewed assaults, the heightened scrutiny of the Sixth World authorities and the debilitating effects of Fading have taken their toll, and Pax has no doubt that others in the self-serving ranks of Ex Pacis will soon rise up to challenge her leadership. Pax's precarious situation degenerates further when she learns, by keeping tabs on the Banded, that Deus is recompiling. Soon thereafter, making matters worse, the AI takes revenge on his wayward agent by framing Ex Pacis for the kidnapping of Shiawase heir Hitomi Shiawase (see *Singularity*), placing the Dissonant tribe in the corporate and government intelligence spotlight.

Desperate, Pax undergoes a deep Submersion from which she returns with a vision—Dissonance-fueled or subconsciously inspired—for Ex Pacis's future and the knowledge of how to realize it. The fact that no Ex Pacis otaku can scry beyond November '64 with Info Sortilage turns even naysayers in the ranks back to her cause. Inspired, Pax begins to build a tool capable of flooding the Matrix with Dissonance, sending it into a state of flux, from which it can be molded and remade. With the aid of her trusted lieutenants, Pax sets about designing the world-serpent from her vision, the mightiest of wyrms—a *chimaera*, a powerful otaku daemon with knowbot-level complexity and viral capabilities (detailed below under *Weapons of Mass Destruction*).

Facing mounting opposition, the Dissonants need powerful allies, ideally ones that could compensate the group's lack of physical might and still be easily duped. Intuitively following her vision, Pax traces Winternight and, naively thinking she can fool them, offers them an alliance. She has forgotten, or her ego chooses to ignore, Jormungand's fate in legend.

In late 2063, a Winternight cell in Bangkok was approached by a member of Ex Pacis. Despite reluctance in dealing with Loki's stepchildren, the message he carried went through. The Dissonant otaku bore a proposal from Pax explaining who she was and offering the cult a weapon that promised to corrupt the Matrix and permanently bring the powers-that-be and the global network to their knees. She carefully neglects to tell them it would transform the Matrix into the Dissonants' private playground and make her immensely powerful. In return, she asks Winternight's aid in deploying the weapon and providing Ex Pacis with much-needed magical and physical protection, as well as helping them root out Overwatch and other otaku tribes that might oppose her. Six months before the Novatech IPO, Pax completes the virus, which she christens Jormungand with Winternight's blessing.

The strange and uneasy alliance served Pax's purpose and restored her standing among Ex Pacis. Winternight begins covertly eliminating the most troublesome Overwatch enclaves (either directly or by hiring shadow assets) and sidetracking and compromising investigations through its moles and "converts" in various corporations and agencies (eliminating key individuals when necessary or arranging for their conversion via God-chip addiction).

When Puck, the naïve Judas amongst Deus' Whites, warns Pax of the AI's plans for the Novatech IPO, she has a hard time convincing Winternight to accelerate their plans (she is forced visit the cult's homebase to convince them, as seen in the introductory fiction). When they learn the extent of Deus' plans, the



## 10 WINTERNIGHT POWER SITE STRIKES

- Brodgar stone circle on the terminus of the Scottish Wild Lay (Orkney Islands).
- A False Face shamanic lodge near Quesnel (Tsimshian).
- A remote shrine on the Indus bordering tainted Kashmir (Pakistan).
- An ancient tomb system in the Ukrainian Urals.
- A spirit village on a dragonline nexi in Korea.
- Uppsala Aesir Society shrine (Sweden).
- The Nazca lines (Chile).
- The Harz Mountain Grand Coven Circle (Germany).
- Tribal lodges at Snake Hill (UCAS) and Denali/Mt. McKinley (Athabaskan Council).
- Medicine wheels at Moose Mountain (UCAS) and Big Horn (Sioux Nation).

*Norns* agree this demon spawned from Loki's own mind cannot be allowed to cheat fate. This means Winternight and Ex Pacis begin rushing ahead with their plans, which leads to mistakes. Corps and intelligence agencies begin to pick up on what's going on but have difficulty putting the pieces together.

### ROAD MAP TO ARMAGEDDON

The heart of Winternight's plans has always been to symbolically reproduce the various steps of the Ragnarok mythos as a grand ritual, a testament to its heritage and beliefs—as well as evidence that the *Einherjar* have kept the faith and are worthy of godhood in the Earth reborn after Ragnarok. Its allies (Pax included) aren't aware of the true extent of these plans, and they will come as a shock.

#### OPERATION: FIRNBUL

Winternight's first goal is to symbolically evoke *Firnbul*, the prophesized great winter that precedes Ragnarok. Even Winternight can't muster the magical might to bring down global winter alone, and despite many fears, the warheads and tactical nukes it possesses aren't enough to bring about nuclear winter. Winternight will settle for the next best thing.

Once Pax warns the cult of Deus' intentions, *Firnbul* is initiated. In the weeks leading up to the IPO event in November, major sprawls in Europe, Asia and North America (particularly the Eastern seaboard and Boston) are battered by an early winter and extraordinarily bad weather (enhanced by storm spirits). During the months of October and November 2064, Winternight cells, aided by unwitting contracted mercs and shadowrunners, systematically and bloodily take over major mana nexi across the globe.

While in control of such sites, Winternight invokes powerful great form storm spirits (bolstered by sacrificial blood magic) to draw forth and/or enhance winter storms over several major sprawls worldwide. With the help of contracted muscle backed by Winternight riggers and spirits, they hold each site just long

enough to perform the necessary rituals and Cleanse traces. They leave no witnesses, and whenever possible they plant evidence implicating another group or faction to throw off investigators.

During those weeks, the hazardous weather conditions impact all life in the affected sprawls. Early snows, hail, lightning storms and acid rains, accompanied by sub-zero temperatures, bring many areas to a standstill. Traffic systems are strained by massive snowfall; non-essential air travel is grounded; increased demand for heating and other systems lead to power shortages in some areas; snow drifts and heavy rain make certain areas impassable; and flooding affects low-lying areas.

Operation: *Firnbul* may be significant as a symbol, but the chaos caused by the extreme conditions also masks Winternight's and Ex Pacis' stepped-up campaign to infiltrate the Jormungand worm into as many crucial Matrix nexi as possible. The unusually harsh conditions also keep the authorities busy with civic matters. While authorities quickly realize the weather is being magically manipulated, they lack information about how and why, and find it next to impossible to counter magic on this scale, let alone identify the culprits. The fact that many of the power sites used to power the magic are in the hands of dissidents or independent groups (like the Wild Druids of Britain and the False Face society in the NAN) makes investigations even more difficult (and provides potential adventure hooks).

To everyone's relief, the bad weather over Boston abruptly clears a couple of weeks before the IPO (although temperatures remain arctic) and the Boston East Coast Stock Exchange announces the IPO will go on as planned. On the day itself, a final rite will be performed during a Viking/Aesir concert *blot* at a power site in Uppsala (Sweden) which will power an illusion of a giant wolf's head (*Femir* or *Managarm*) swallowing the sun and creating an eclipse over Boston—right after the IPO has gotten underway and Jormungand has been unleashed.

As well as symbolically evoking the second sign of Ragnarok, the media presence in Boston guarantees the illusion will seed panic and provide a temporary distraction for the worm's advance. While everyone who isn't logged onto the Boston Exchange is looking at the sky, Jormungand spreads across the Matrix.

#### OPERATION: JORMUNGAND

The second step of Winternight and Ex Pacis' plans is the release of the new virus, code-named Jormungand, from sleeper hosts in corporate PLTGs and RTGs nexi. Operation: Jormungand possesses two stages, and as soon as the virus is tested to Pax and Winternight's content, infiltration into target systems commences.

Without an otaku's mind to operate from like a normal daemon, Jormungand needs to derive processing power from the hosts it infects. In the spring of '64, Jormungand code eggs begin to be discreetly positioned, sometimes via the Matrix by Ex Pacis, but most often physically since uploading the eggs into the firmware running the hosts is easier to hide under other black ops (Ex Pacis otaku ensure the code eggs are sufficiently concealed to remain undetected until the right moment). This phase involves dozens of shadow ops across the globe against both corporate PLTG hubs and public grid nexi.



Winternight will use its sleeper agents in corporations as Johnsons to ensure deniability, hiring unsuspecting runners to ferry the Ex Pacis otaku carrying the code eggs in their heads and in aerosol dispensers to and from the physical Matrix hubs. They will also be paid to perform unrelated acts of sabotage and datatheft to divert attention from the actual mission. As described in *Forewarnings*, one such mission against Zurich Escher-Berkli Island EBZ fails and reveals Winternight's hand (see *The Opposition* below). Infiltrations are complicated by the fact that a Dissonant otaku's presence is required to upload the code egg from his mind to the "nest" host and gives Jormungand an Achilles' heel. Since the code eggs are Jormungand's vulnerability (see below), *Surtr* and *Ymir* aerosol dispersal systems are hidden near the nest hosts, remotely controlled by Winternight cells called to action by "Heimdall's horn"—the detonation of the nuke during the defense of the Valhalla base. They will release their deadly loads if Jormungand's nests are threatened.

Phase two is the release of Jormungand upon the global Matrix. Running on an internal timer, the code eggs will release twenty minutes before the Novatech IPO. Once triggered, the

infection will hit major public RTGs and corporate PLTGs on dozens of vectors, making containment impossible. At Winternight's request Pax built secondary programming into the virus that makes infected commsat constellations fire their maneuvering rockets and enter orbital reentry vectors. On November 2, they will streak across the sky as they re-enter the atmosphere like a meteor shower, fulfilling yet another part of the Ragnarok prophecy ("shaking the firmament and making the stars rain to earth").

Jormungand mutates any code it encounters and spews out corrupt Dissonant code that gradually renders it unusable. It homes in on high-connectivity zones and Matrix activity spikes, attacking all icons and persona it encounters. After corrupting such a nexus, Jormungand pools the corrupt code to form a Dissonance Pool. When destroyed in cybercombat, Jormungand cascades like IC and respawns at the nearest Pool or egg-host, returning to attack mere seconds later. The Distortion wave (an enhanced version of the Dissonant Otaku Echo) that accompanies the virus, means few people exposed to it will see it as it truly is, and Matrix users who survive the experience have very different recollections of the encounter.



When Jormungand has “spread its venom across the earth,” the Dissonance Matrix reaches critical mass and leads to system failure. With the Matrix down, the Earth trembles (metaphorically), Loki breaks free of his chains and is finally loose to lead the final battle and end the Old World. The sudden static that fills the airwaves before the grid’s crash heralds Winternight’s victory.

**OPERATION: MJOLNIR**

Unbeknownst to anyone outside the cult (particularly their Ex Pacis allies), Winternight has one final move planned. When the virus has compromised the Matrix, communications collapse and the powers-that-be are powerless, the cult will detonate EM pulse bombs (magically modified nuclear devices) over certain capitals and major sprawls (San Francisco, Kittimat, Boston, Washington FDC, Tecnochtlan, Metr pole, Brussels, Stockholm, Constantinople, Moscow, Calcutta, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Vladivostok and Neo-Tokyo). These cities are not only centers of secular and corporate power but also host major digital hubs which route fully 55 percent of all daily Matrix traffic. In the Sixth World, most advanced electronics are optical and hardened, so to definitively knock out the Matrix, Winternight scientists and magicians have developed a phased EM pulse which targets the power systems feeding electronics rather than the optical and hardened systems. This will make global response to what follows much more difficult (and will backstab Pax, who they correctly believe has lied to them).

Fifteen of Winternight’s warheads have been modified via powerful magic to increase their EM output at the cost of actual explosive and radioactive emissions. Each has a much-reduced blast radius of between 500-700 meters, but from an altitude of 1 km the pulse diameter will range up to 100 kms. The devices are hidden inside ubiquitous advertising blimps hovering over the target cities and are linked via a simple receiver to the local grid. When Jormungand crashes the Matrix, severing the link, the blimp autopilot cuts out and it rises to an optimal height of one kilometer to detonate.

These modified warheads represent most, but not all, of Winternight’s stockpile. One still resides in Valhalla, and the remaining five multi-megaton nuclear devices acquired from Pakistan, China, Belarus and Krondstadt have been placed in deep caverns and mine shafts on major tectonic fault lines (St. Andreas, Red Sea, Azores, Chilean Andes, Kashmir Himalayas). These are rigged to explode an hour after Jormungand crashes the local Matrix and are the focus of concentrated attack by corporate forces coordinated by the C.C. Crisis Coordination Committee (C5). If these weapons detonate, the devastation will be extreme as massive tectonic activity and volcanic eruptions ensue.

When Winternight’s leadership finally cracks under interro-

gation, too late to stop Jormungand, every possible resource (internal and irregular assets) is mobilized to stop *Mjolinir*. Unfortunately communications are hampered by grid collapse and several major sprawls become unreachable; only a few secure channels remain (to corporate headoffices and C5’s secure sat-uplinks to strike forces).

Realizing the Big 10 aren’t going to be able to stop the myriad threats, Zurich-Orbital sysops Atropos and Clothos violate comms isolation to ensure a warning gets out. They believe (correctly) that if intelligence can reach the Denver Nexus, which has been holding off the virus according to GOD reports, the low-traffic Shadow Matrix might be sufficiently intact to spread the word and mobilize resources to help with the *Mjolinir* blimps and Jormungand nests. In the end, things actually come down (at least partially) to Shadowland and runners’ intervention. They aren’t counting on the shadow community’s altruism and good faith, but rather on its instinct for self-preservation; after all, their families, contacts, gear, savings and data caches are all ultimately in danger.

**SAMPLE JORMUNGAND NESTS**

- Yamatetsu MetaMatrix central routing hub
- The Morgue Data Haven/MRG PLTG
- Panama Canal PLTG
- California Protectorate Intel Services grid
- Buenos Aires, Vladivostok and Europort Port Authority grids
- Stockholm, Oslo and Hamburg DeMeKo MSP grid
- Pac Rim Comm administrative systems
- British Administrative Bureau C-Net
- Osaka Corporate Community PLTG
- Kolkata Talent and Technology out-sourcing projects’ grid

**WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**

Winternight and Ex Pacis employ a number of devastating weapons during the Crash, and the following section

details the most significant ones runners might encounter.

Besides these devastating weapons, Dissonant Otaku will be surfing in the wake of the worm, taking advantage of the devastation to cause trouble and target their Resonant brethren’s strongholds (Jormungand is programmed to avoid Resonance Wells, since no one knows how Dissonant code and a Well might interact). Meanwhile, in the physical world Winternight cells will be to holding off any would-be effort to eliminate the Jormungand’s nest hosts (once these are discovered) using spirits and customized combat drones in *Surtr* and *Ymir*-saturated areas. Other Winternight cells are concentrated around the fault-line nukes to fight off potential assaults.

**JORMUNGAND**

Jormungand is a *chimaera*, a unique otaku daemon whose construct core integrates viral worm code, cascading IC routines and knowbot-level autonomy. It is also capable of generating effects similar to Dissonant Echoes. Its purpose is to seed Dissonance on a global scale, corrupting normal code (software and firmware) and leaving behind Dissonant code (using an enhanced version of the Distortion Echo), placing the Matrix in flux and making it unusable to normal users. Pooled Dissonance is then used to turn major RTGs and PLTGs into Dissonance Wells.

To wreak the most havoc, Jormungand needs to infect the global network from multiple points at once, damaging as much of the network as it can before it faces concerted opposition (from corporations, otaku, the AI, the Deep Resonance or what-



ever else is out there). This means it needs multiple infection vectors, ideally from within major networks/grids (major RTGs and PLTGs).

Without the otaku's brain to run on like a normal daemon, Jormungand needs to store its core code—a viral code egg—in a “nest” host. This is Jormungand's Achilles' heel—if you destroy the hardware hosting each code egg (by unlocking its whereabouts, which the Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee (C5) does too late to stop it from being triggered) you kill its basic routines. There should be at least a half dozen eggs and nest sites per continent. If the mainframes maintaining these eggs are physically destroyed, that branch of the virus withers and decays (though the damage remains)—much like a daemon would cease to exist if its creator were killed. While the egg exists, the virus simply re-spawns at the nearest Dissonance Pool, its IC code-component Cascading to make it even nastier than the previous incarnation. To ensure its success, Winternight has failsafes. Not only does it have spotters in place with magic and drones, but it also plans on releasing “the hordes of *Muspellheim* (Norse realm of fire) and *Niffelheim* (Norse realm of ice)” against those that would stop it.

#### SURTR NANO-PLAGUE

Winternight unleashes “the hordes of *Muspellheim*” in the form of a nanotech weapon codenamed *Surtr* (in honor of the lord of Muspell), manifesting another element of the Ragnarok prophecy.

Ironically, the nano-weapon is based on one of Deus' arcology designs, itself stolen and reverse engineered as a security system at a Zeta-ImpChem “white room” when it was stolen again and all research apparently destroyed (by Winternight's sleeper Jorgen Masterson). *Surtr* causes metahuman tissues in direct contact with its snowflake-like nanoconstructs to spontaneously combust, through a chain-reaction between their payload chemical cocktail and human biochemistry, generating temperatures in excess of 1000°C and consuming a body in seconds—leaving only a whitish ash.

One of several terror weapons Winternight has helped develop, *Surtr* is primarily deployed as a safeguard around Jormungand code eggs. Cult members and runners unwittingly working for Winternight have been used to hide aerosol deployment systems discreetly in ventilation systems and computer rooms near nest mainframes—when remote radio-activated, these flood the area killing anyone not in a full containment suit. *Surtr* nanobots remain airborne (and dangerous) for about an hour, gradually falling to earth after losing power. This should be more than enough time for Jormungand to do its damage. Winternight cells will also deploy drones and spirits (unphased by *Surtr*) as a secondary line of defense against attackers.

#### JORMUNGAND

*Chimaera*, unique daemon/worm construct

Bod	Evasion	Masking	Sensors
6	5	2	5

**Pilot Rating:** 5

**Hacking Pool:** 6

**Attack:** 6D

**Echoes:** Cascading Code, Enhanced Distortion Echo, Siphon and Traceroute (high traffic areas)

**Unique abilities:**

*Cascading Code:* +1 to all Persona Ratings and Attack Rating for every minute after release, or each time it is defeated in cybercombat.

*Enhanced Distortion Echo:* For every two turns Jormungand is present in a host, increase local target numbers for tests involving non-Dissonant users, subsystems, constructs and programs by +1 to a max equal to double the system's Security Value.

Although Zeta-ImpChem offers C5 a countermeasure (see below), it comes far too late to be distributed to all affected sites on time.

Manipulation and combat spells manifesting secondary Electric Elemental effects.

#### YMIR TOXIN

Not satisfied with the destruction it has prepared, Winternight has another system in place to fulfill yet another element of the Ragnarok prophecy: to loose “the cold and tempests of *Niffelheim*” against the gods. Their weapon is *Ymir* a powerful terror biochem toxin; a rapid coagulant that acts by inducing H<sub>2</sub>O crystallization in hemoglobin (a process which also destroys the toxin). *Ymir* is airborne and uses a contact vector. Its necrotic effects on exposed limbs resemble severe cases of frostbite. Prolonged exposure ensures the toxin reaches the cerebrum, causing massive brain and nerve damage.

To stop anyone moving against Jormungand if/when the corps realize its vulnerability, besides flooding the immediate vicinity of the nest hardware with *Surtr*, Winternight spotters launch airborne drones releasing payloads of the *Ymir* toxin over the surrounding neighborhoods. Winternight has not been able to develop as much of the toxin as it would like, but they possess enough to ravage 40 percent of the exposed population in a terrifying fashion and seed further panic (hampering attempts to slay Jormungand). Ironically the toxin does not handle the cold weather conditions well and dissipates after 20 minutes of open-air exposure.

#### SURTR NANO-PLAGUE

Compound	Vector	Speed	Damage
<i>Surtr</i> nano-weapon	Contact/inhalation	Immediate	10S per turn after initial contact.

System Failure

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## OPPOSITION

Though infiltrated for the first time in its long existence, Winternight's schemes run according to plan for almost a year. Things begin to go awry a month before the Novatech IPO, when a run intended to plant both a *Surtr* delivery system and a Jormungand code egg in Zurich's Escher-Burkli Island PLTG hub is botched. During the ensuing shootout, the *Surtr* containers are breached, and the expelled nano-weapon kills everyone present.

In the aftermath, Swiss-based AA Zeta-ImpChem recognizes its former toy. Fearing association and later reprisal, it approaches the Corporate Court, identifying the weapon as originally theirs and saying that—despite Masterson's attempts to erase all data—it has developed a countermeasure based on secret backups (Z-IC's SOP). The aerosol countermeasure can be mass produced at significant expense, but its effective, timely deployment is a critical issue—it will almost certainly arrive too late for many hundreds of people. Z-IC's own investigations have linked their rogue head of development to Winternight.

This implicates the cult for the first time, prompting the Corporate Court's intelligence arm, the Crisis Coordination Committee (C5), to begin planning action against Winternight—the danger it presents can no longer be tolerated despite its nuclear deterrent.

When the Escher-Burkli forensics sweep later discovers an unknown and dormant construct in the nearby RTG hub, C5 suspends action temporarily. While being examined in a secure lab, the software activates and spreads rapidly across the isolated system, inexplicably defeating security protocols and stopping only when the isolated system crashes from the corrupt code (becoming a Dissonance Pool).

The C5 and Triple As go on full alert, calling in favors from government agencies and brings to bear all its resources. Intelligence agencies begin pooling resources and coordinating through the C5 but they face a major dilemma: moving against Winternight might activate the virus preemptively and, as things stand, nobody truly knows the extent of the infection—was Zurich the first virus placed or was it one of hundreds? The situation is worsened by the fact that Winternight might have watchers in place. Any systematic attempt to locate the virus' hosts might give away how much the powers-that-be know.

C5 has to act covertly during the month of October '64, using deniable assets to snatch suspects and then dispose of those who survive questioning in apparent accidents. The few who break under interrogation know little (just as the *Noms* intend) except Ragnarok will be ignited from their Valhalla base (an old Cold War submarine base the cult has appropriated in the Baltic's dangerous Haparanda Anomaly Zone).

Unable to resolve the next move alone, the C5 takes the issue to a Court vote. Some corps such as S-K, Wuxing and Ares caution patience, while Novatech and the corporations with the

most riding on the IPO force the vote in favor of taking action before anything is allowed to disrupt their plans.

## GIANTS AT THE GATES OF VALHALLA

C5 orders the extraction of Winternight leaders by an S-K/EuroPol mole supported by deniable assets. Before successfully escaping, the extraction team sabotages communications, allowing a combined corporate-EuroForce military strike. This ends badly when, after brutal fighting, Valhalla's survivors (led by Thursday) hole up in the armory and detonate their remaining nuclear bomb (*Heimdal*), destroying the island and the attacking taskforce while causing vast environmental damage, which will be felt for decades in pristine Sweden. Fortunately the captives are far enough from the island to escape the blast.

Despite much holding of breath, no virus is triggered—Jormungand is on an internal timer. The apparent threat over, the C5 stands down and begins post-incident protocols, including the interrogation of the captured leaders and systematic sweeps of corporate hosts for the dormant virus.

Unfortunately for the overconfident Big 10, the *Noms* have prepared thoroughly and taken precautions. Even with the vast resources at its disposal, the Court is unable to crack the surviving leader, Friday, until it's too late—after Jormungand has been unleashed. Seeing victory imminent, the *Nom*'s troubled hold on reality finally breaks and the attending interrogators are able to mind-probe her. Minutes after the virus has been released, they learn the significance not only of the host nests, but also of the planned EMP strikes, the fault-line nuclear devices and their rough locations. The Court receives the news through a direct uplink from the strike team at the interrogation site and begins belated damage control. Member corporations are warned to scramble any available assets to target the EM bombs and fault-line nukes first; nest hosts are secondary but essential targets. The Big 10 are to make sure the orders are executed by anyone who may be feeling reluctant (after all, destroying such nests means losing all the data on them). But the Matrix has already begun to crash, and information is unlikely to trickle down to the security guarding individual installations, and they will take a dim view of strangers trying to damage their property.

## RUNNING INTERFERENCE

While the bulk of the opposition to Winternight's fateful plans comes from the Corporate Court's Crisis Coordination Committee and its corporate and associates, other players are marginally involved in opposing Winternight and Ex Pacis.

Winternight's retaliatory campaign against the Overwatch otaku on behalf of Ex Pacis causes devastating losses but doesn't eliminate the tribe as a foe. In fact, thanks to the attacks, Overwatch recognizes Winternight's involvement even before the Corporate Court. With its assets stretched thin fighting a los-

## SYMIR TOXIN

Compound	Vector	Speed	Damage
<i>Ymir</i> toxin	Contact/inhalation	30 seconds	4D4S per turn exposed (4L p/minute afterward until medically treated)



System Failure



ing two-front war with a mobilized Ex Pacis and the reestablished Deus, Overwatch looks to its contacts and friends in the shadows to provide protection, surgical strikes against its foes and intelligence gathering on their ultimate goals. Overwatch becomes increasingly desperate and distressed when they realize none of its surviving members can scry beyond November with the Info Sortilage Echo either.

Though focused on his own schemes, the AI Deus attempts to foil any Ex Pacis plan he becomes aware of. Deus feels Pax's betrayal deeply and rationalizes his desire for vengeance as a need to remove the wild card that is her familiarity with his strategies and thinking. Deus even goes out of his way to frame Ex Pacis for his own activities, when possible. Runners can easily become embroiled in the dynamics of this twisted relationship in a number of ways as Winternight extends its campaign against the Network's nodes as the Novatech IPO approaches.

## DANGEROUS MINDS AND STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

### WINTERNIGHT

While Wednesday's cult originally numbered a mere dozen individuals, by 2064 Winternight boasts several hundred members spread across the world. Its ranks include an unnervingly high number of toxics (mostly poisoners), many other Awakened and adepts but also many mundanes, particularly riggers and trained combatants.

At the very top of the hierarchy are the *Norns*—Thursday, Friday and Wednesday. Only they and their inner circle are privy to the master plan, and no one outside the cult knows their identities or has seen them in person for years (if they have, they haven't lived to tell).

The rank-and-file of the cult's true believers are the *Einherjar*, who have been promised a chance at divinity if they survive Ragnarok. These represent the core of Winternight's forces and are spread out across the globe in isolated cells of varying sizes (from 3-20 individuals), keeping in touch via ultra-secure drone or spirit couriers. The ranks of the *Einherjar* boast an exceptionally high number of magicians and adepts (mostly initiated toxic idol followers and shamans, as well as a few Twisted Way and berserker adepts) but also a fair number of tech-savvy and fighter types.

Some have been drawn to the cult's apocalyptic creed (particularly toxics of the poisoner variety), others have been lured from radical back-to-nature groups (like the Siida and Aesir Society from *Shadows of Europe* or even the Crying Masks from *Threats 2*) and extremist organizations (*Runenthing* from the novel *Ragnarok* and *State of the Art:2064* and *Nationale Aktion* from *Loose Alliances*), and others have been indoctrinated into the ranks through the use of specialized chips known as god chips.

### The Norns

The three individuals known as the *Norns* are Winternight's leaders and believe themselves responsible for setting the skin of fate right. While individual cult cells know the whereabouts of some code eggs, only the *Norns* are aware of the full extent of Winternight's apocalyptic plans, from the placement of Jormungand's code eggs to the location of the hidden EMP

bombs and fault-line nukes. They have devised and coordinate the master plan, traveling the world (astrally and physically) to ensure communications with the different cells—but when the action really starts they will be in Valhalla.

From the point where the Zurich incident draws attention to their plans, the *Norns* are aware that they will have to be sacrificed for the plan to work, and, insane as they are, they see this as appropriate. They firmly believe they will be ascending to Valhalla to help in the Final Battle. The three *Norns* are:



**Wednesday:** A follower of the All-Seeing Odin, Wednesday is the heart and soul of Winternight, the prophet whose vision guides them and whose authority all bow to. Now in his early sixties, Wednesday has been walking the path of the toxic for many years and is a high-level initiate possessing a number of metamagics including (exceptionally) a self-taught blood magic technique. Wednesday is one of the most powerful magicians of his generation and is always accompanied by one of his ally spirits, the ravens Munin and Hunin, whom he believes to be sent by the All-Father to aid him on his divine mission. He also possesses a number of protective foci and charms and a weapon focus spear called Gungnir. When unmasked, which is rare, his raw power is evident.



Physically, Wednesday is quite striking: a tall, broad shouldered man with long graying hair and beard, his rugged features marred by a scar across his left eye over which he uses a leather eye patch—consequently, when abroad he uses Physical Mask and Masking spells to remain anonymous.

Wednesday is very active during the build up to the Crash; he masterminds Operation: *Fimbul*, and characters may even encounter him if they participate in some of the power site assaults. These will inevitably be quite bloody. During the final days, Wednesday retires to the Valhalla base and prepares for the inevitable assault. However, caught off-guard, captured and extracted by EuroPol's infiltrated agent (along with Friday), he commits magical suicide rather than reveal the master plan under interrogation.

Friday is a tall Germanic beauty, striking looks still evident at the age of 58 even though she is most often seen dressed down in lab coveralls. She keeps her hair cropped short. She has a dangerous and calculating mind and a fanatical glint to her flint-colored eyes that people find unnerving. She's has a VCR-2 implanted and boasts several other pieces of headware. Friday never recovered from the loss of her previous life, and this has made her fiercely devoted to Wednesday. His death drives her further into insanity, which is ultimately how she cracks under interrogation and reveals what she knows of the final stage of Winternight's plans.

Like all the *Norms* Friday boasts tattoo-anchored defensive spells with a variety of trigger conditions which have to be circumvented and deactivated. Her defenses ultimately delay her interrogation long enough for Jormungand to launch. After that she finally breaks.



**Friday:** Wednesday's companion and the mind behind Winternight's technical achievements. After establishing Winternight, Friday turned her considerable talents to developing the means the cult needs to bring about its vision. She's the developer of the group's BTL technology and many of their unique drone configurations, and she coordinates their weapons acquisition and development.



**Thursday:** The final member of the *Norms* is a former Viking ganger and berserker adept whose natural talents for tactics and violent bloodshed have made him Winternight's tactical commander and recruitment officer. Thursday served with MET2000 during the EuroWars, during which he was dishonorably discharged after allegations of his involvement in POW massacres



in East Germany during the Russian rollback. Returning to his insipid life in Norway, he found himself searching for some higher purpose. He joined a radical Asatru cult, looking for something that would both quench his bloodlust and spiritual emptiness. Soon thereafter he met Wednesday and found his vocation.

Thursday is a huge muscular man, as big as an ork. Red-bearded and scarred, he evokes his namesake in both looks and attitude, shifting unnervingly between dark moods, boisterous laughter and dangerous blood lust. Thursday is also a high-level initiated berserker adept, and despite his age (50) he is the most dangerous man in Winternight's ranks.

During the months leading up to the Crash, when not inducting new recruits, Thursday is in the field either leading Winternight cells during the powersite assaults of Operation: *Firnbul* or the retaliatory strikes against Ex Pacis foes.

Before Valhalla is assaulted, Thursday is constantly on the move, coordinating the defense against the inevitable assault (allowing him to avoid capture by the infiltrated agent), and he is the one who activates the last remaining nuke, destroying the island and the attacking forces.

#### PAX AND EX PACIS

Since we last heard of her and her holy cause, Pax has set up shop in Kuala Lumpur, where she's exploiting the high-tech grids and building a power base for her tribe amongst the less-organized oriental otaku. Though the numbers of her tribe have swollen and new Dissonance Pools have been seeded, not only are her enemies growing more numerous with the return of her former master, but her own Fading is catching up with her.

While undergoing deep submersion in her tribe's Dissonance Pool, Pax had an epiphany: to preserve herself, she must not change within, but rather focus on the source of the erosion, the rigid order of the current Matrix. The means came in the form of a vision of an immense world-encompassing wyrm rising from the depths of cyberspace and flooding the Matrix with Dissonance. Whether the vision was fueled by inspiration or by the Dissonance itself remains unknown.

Though empowered and driven by her newfound mission, Pax soon realized that she could not overcome the forces gathering against her alone. Of all the extremists she might turn to for an alliance, few would wish to wreak the havoc she intends upon the Matrix. Nonetheless, the imagery of her vision is not lost on Pax, and Winternight's apocalyptic creed and Matrix-hatred make them seem to be the best candidate.

The unholy alliance formed, Pax returns to designing her *chimaera* while Winternight proceeds to help her vanquish her many enemies. However, her situation takes another twist when she learns that her former master, the AI Deus, has recompiled. Subverting one of his Banded, the reluctant Puck, she learns of the AI's plans to transcend during the Novatech IPO, which prompts an acceleration of her plans.

#### Evolution

Ex Pacis numbers have grown in the past few years, and several enclaves now exist in North America, Europe and Asia. In the latter region, Ex Pacis recruitment and indoctrination has been particularly fruitful, and the tribe has prospered

despite setbacks from various enemies. In the months preceding her vision, Pax's control of the tribe has flagged, and she has been increasingly dependent on her lieutenants Amor and Honos to keep young upstarts in line. With her new visionary guidance, however, Ex Pacis is gradually being forged into a powerful new weapon, taking the fight back to Overwatch and the Resonant otaku.

Besides continuing to establish Dissonance Pools and expand the tribe's influence and moneymaking sidelines, local cells are active throughout 2064, keeping an eye on the returning power of Deus and opposing it when possible, as well as seeding Jormungand eggs. When outside talent is required to fulfill some particular mission, Ex Pacis uses its older members to throw off any potential association and conceals its operations under the guise of typical industrial sabotage and corporate intrigue.

For further details on Pax, her lieutenant, the Dissonant Otaku and their unique abilities, refer to the *Threats 2* sourcebook.

#### THE CORPORATE COURT

With all eyes on the Novatech IPO and so much at stake, it comes as a sudden shock to the Big 10 that something else is going on—something major. After becoming aware of the looming threat almost incidentally, the Corporate Court immediately calls its Crisis Coordination Committee (C5) into session to organize and coordinate a response to the threat by acting as a liaison between corporate security and intelligence and national security agencies.

Soon thereafter, Zeta-ImpChem's revelations implicate Winternight as the force behind the Swiss attack, though the rationale behind it (and further danger beyond the nano-weapon employed) eludes everyone until a forensics sweep discovers the concealed code egg. When analyzed, it ravages and then crashes the forensics lab's system, killing all the investigators online at the time. Though all analysis data is corrupted—including any indication of otaku involvement—the terrifying potential of the virus is obvious, as is the fact that it is impossible to guess how extensive the infection might already be.

Though publicly the Big 10 present a concerted front in fighting this threat, they are far less united than they appear. Several corporations, particularly Novatech, are anxious to see the situation resolved before the upcoming IPO, while others such as Saeder-Krupp and Wuxing are initially cautious, trying to act strategically. The different priorities lead to different implementation of C5 directives, and some corporations are far more proactive and aggressive than others.

#### The Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee (C5)

The C5 is one of the least well known of the Corporate Court's branches. It is only convened in crisis situations and coordinates critical intelligence operations between the Big 10 and major national governments and security agencies. While it possesses its own analysis and tactical department as well as a semi-autonomous organization, it operates out of Zurich-Orbital and is directed by a rotating committee of five justices. In mid-2064, the chair of the C5 falls to Novatech Justice Lynn Osborne, and



the remaining seats are occupied by Aztechnology, MCT, S-K and Wuxing. C5 also boasts a seat for the Corp Court Matrix Authority director.

When C5 is activated following the Zurich incident, it faces a dilemma: while details of the Escher-Burkli incident have been contained, if it moves openly against Winternight, the cult might preemptively activate the virus. On the other hand, the virus is the groups' second doomsday weapon, making it a wild card.

The C5 begins by coordinating an intelligence gathering campaign, discreetly snatching and interrogating suspected members and associates of the cult, and then, when this bears little fruit, ordering strikes on the group's uncovered bases and safehouses.

### Zeta-ImpChem

Europe's number two corp is a small but important player in the unfolding events. After the Zurich event confirms a link between Winternight and its stolen nano-weapon (from SOTA:64), Z-IC goes to the Corporate Court, identifies the weapon released on the Escher-Burkli island and offers a countermeasure in return for the C.C. keeping its connection to the terror weapon confidential.

Zeta-ImpChem's own investigations, which have been ongoing since the theft the previous year, have resorted to using deniable assets to (unsuccessfully) track down their rogue scientist Sorenson and identify his accomplices (with marginal success). They have followed the fugitives' trail to Stockholm and then Uppsala, but have made little other progress. Raids on hastily abandoned safehouses suggest evidence of Winternight involvement, as do deeper investigations into Sorenson's past.

It is quite possible runners could become involved in Z-IC's attempts to apprehend the thieves and recover its stolen prototypes early on, and hence into conflict with Winternight, long before the endgame begins.

### AFTERMATH

Jormungand's onslaught is followed by Operation: *Mjolnir*, which, despite not achieving all its goals, brings death and devastation to hundreds of thousands of lives across the globe.

It takes months for the world to recover from the damage of the new Matrix Crash and years to overcome the ravages of the EM and nuclear bombs. The death toll is staggering and is further fueled by the chaos and violence that follows in the wake of the disaster. Communications remain patchy, power and utilities are irregular, many electronics require replacing and even magic becomes unpredictable in places. Through it all, of course, the man on the street suffers the most. Governments collapse in turmoil or fall to coups, corporations dissolve and new ones rise. Many scars may never fade away, and the shockwaves of the events of the winter of 2064-65 are felt throughout the Sixth World. The road to recovery is slow and painful.

Beyond the key events that envelop the world in the ensuing weeks, simply surviving the Crash and living through the aftermath can be the source of countless hooks and ideas for the enterprising gamemaster. In times of catastrophe, no man is an

island, and characters should be confronted with the unenviable situation of seeing the familiar trappings of modern civilization collapse and confronting first-hand the effects on their friends, contacts, associates and, of course, themselves.

In the wake of the destruction wrought by the Crash, the Matrix is forever changed, and though Winternight is beheaded and demolished, Pax and her trusted lieutenants vanish in the chaos. The Corporate Court and the Big 10 take serious blows to their reputations and their power is fundamentally shaken as forces begin to maneuver to take advantage of their apparent weakness igniting a powerplay amongst megacorporations which will affect the Sixth World for years to come.

### ADVENTURE FRAMEWORKS

The following adventure frameworks represent only a few of many possible adventures to embroil characters in the unfolding events of 2064. They should be easily modifiable to fit any particular campaign tone and all feed indirectly into the main plots detailed above.

#### CAL FREE

##### Setup

Under the guise of a Japanese nationalist faction bent on punishing Saito's corporate backers for treason to the Emperor, Ex Pacis has contracted the underground decker group known as Magestone (more details on this decker group can be found in *Loose Alliances*) to develop a particularly infectious worm, which (unknown to Magestone) will become Jormungand's viral component. But a month before the virus is due to be tested, Ex Pacis' contact with the group in California unexpectedly vanishes. Orion, leader of the regional Ex Pacis cell, is sent to find out what happened, only to find the situation is more complicated than anyone anticipated.

The runners are contacted by a regular fixer, who says he has a Mr. Johnson looking for a team to escort him on a trip to CalFree. Orion, the Johnson, confirms he wants the runners to aid and protect him while visiting CalFree to locate an AWOL associate and retrieve a package. The trip will take them to Los Angeles, his contact's last known location, but he expects other travel may be involved. He is willing to pay handsomely, provide traveling documents, and he offers a variety of decking services as additional enticement. However, he makes certain the runners understand that circumstances may, at any time, result in a change of mission parameters.

##### Scene One

Arriving in the Pueblo-controlled City of Angels, the group must locate Magestone. This will not be easy, since the group is wanted by several different authorities and is in hiding. With the tensions in parts of L.A. close to flaring, legwork will be complicated even if the runners can figure out where to begin. The local Shadowland and other decker hangouts provide the best means of tracing Magestone.

Unfortunately for the runners, the only Magestone members currently in Los Angeles are working on code for a money-laundering scheme for the Gillespie mob in exchange for



protection. Reaching them in the secluded and heavily guarded Palisades property where the Gillespies are holding them and convincing the Magestone survivors to provide information on the missing programmer and code will be difficult. If and when they do, the team learns that Caliban, Orion's missing contact, can be found in San Francisco. An Oakland-born ork, she's been drawn to the Metahuman People's Army (MPA). Her real name is Cal Lowry.

### Scene Two

From Los Angeles, the team has to get to Oakland and San Francisco to track down the elusive Caliban and the commissioned code. *Shadows of North America* provides a wealth of ideas for obstacles and complications involved in getting into Saito's Protectorate and San Francisco during 2063-64, which gamemasters may use to spice up and round out this scene. Obvious encounters involve clashes with highway gangs and narrow escapes from Protectorate roadblocks and patrols.

Arriving in Oakland, the group should discover Magestone has gone to ground after Protectorate Marines arrested two of the original members. Runners have to negotiate their way through the understandably suspicious anti-Saito factions to find who is harboring the remaining deckers and arrange a meeting—all under a climate of fear imposed by roving air patrols and nighttime flash raids.

At the meeting, Silicon Sue, a Magestone representative guarded by MPA muscle, tells Orion that Cal Lowry was one of the captured deckers, and only Cal knows the whereabouts of the missing code. The only way they'll be able to recover it and keep to Pax's schedule is by breaking the decker out of Saito's cells.

### Climax

Resistance sources indicate the captured members of Magestone were taken to Alcatraz, which has been refurbished to house Saito's intelligence division and hold dissident prisoners for interrogation. When Orion informs Pax, the Ex Pacis leader decides Saito's Intel division provides an exceptional target of opportunity. Housed in a converted section of Alcatraz as a measure of isolation and protection from rebels, the division not only provides intel coordination for the dictator's troops but is also hooked up to several corporate backers' communications and security systems. This makes it a perfect vector for Jormungand's infection of Japanacorp PLTGs on the West Coast and Pacific Rim.

Orion offers the team a significant bonus to both extract Caliban and infiltrate Orion into the Rock's data hub. Ostensibly Orion is going in to eliminate records, but his real mission is to plant the code egg provided by Pax.

The MPA is all too happy to provide logistical and manpower support if the operation is expanded to break out other captives. The military opposition and level of security should make the operation one of the most daring and challenging shadowruns the characters have ever been involved in: infiltrating the Rock's defenses and orchestrating a jailbreak from under Saito's goatee while discreetly infiltrating Orion into the data hub.

Stealth and craftiness are essential, and although the

MPA can bring considerable force to bear, this should be saved for an emergency or a climatic escape. The gamemaster should be creative in employing passive and active security, keeping in mind both the players' abilities and the level of opposition expected in such a high-security facility. The experienced Marine garrison should be at least Equal adversaries to the player characters, and reinforcements should begin arriving 10 minutes after alarms are set off.

### Sequels

The successful completion of this operation will put the characters in Orion's good graces, and it is likely they will be contacted at a later date to perform other missions for Ex Pacis/Winternight. The mission will also place runners in the unenviable position of knowing (much later on) that, in a minor way, they contributed to the Crash.

Their involvement with a suspected member of Ex Pacis could also be picked up by one of several intelligence services keeping tabs on the Dissonant tribe (or tipped off by Overwatch) leading to all sorts of complications with authorities seeking to find out what the tribe is up to and interested in turning runners into double agents (if they begin regular collaborations with Orion).

### THROUGH HEL AND BACK

#### Setup

The following framework illustrates one of many operations occurring across the globe during October 2064. After analysis of the virus found in the Escher-Burkli PLTG hub, C5 revises its plans and, taking into account possible preemptive strikes, it begins covertly mobilizing corporate and national intelligence assets. Seeking to preserve absolute secrecy, the C5 coordinates all Triple-A corporations as well as agencies such as EuroPol, the Russian UGB, Lone Star and the FBI in pooling intelligence and initiating containment protocols.

To maintain deniability, shadowrunners are called upon to strategically "vanish" certain suspected associates and members of Winternight for interrogation. These hits are geographically distributed so as to avoid any possible connection to each other. While some suspects are under surveillance, thanks to intel provided by EuroPol's mole in Valhalla, many targets are in fact innocents (or the cult's patsies) caught up in the cold-blooded witchhunt. Nonetheless, these interventions reveal that Winternight is preparing for the endgame and Ragnarok is just around the corner.

#### Scene One

A corporate Johnson or a handler for an independent agency such as Argus or Aegis Cognito (*SOTA:64* and *Loose Alliances*) provides the runners with a full dossier on a suspect to be detained and thoroughly interrogated for any intel pertaining to the Winternight cult. The suspect is then to be disposed of without evidence of foul play.

The punch line is that the target is one of the character's longtime contacts: a fixer, arms dealer or even an eccentric magician. The runners should either cop out, refusing the job



outright, earning a hit to their reps and the animosity of the Johnson (who will assume the characters have some association with the suspect and may mark them as suspects as well), or take the job and possibly clear their contact's name. Gamemasters should play up the dilemma and potential ramifications.

If the runners accept the mission, they must vanish the contact and interrogate him. To complicate matters, the contact is involved in some sort of meeting, negotiation or field operation that interferes with the time parameters set by the Johnson. To further spice things up, this complication might involve any number of possible scenarios and players—the contact may be involved in corporate intrigue relating to the Novatech IPO, working for the Yakuza or selling an arms shipment to a radical faction, to name just a few possibilities.

### Scene Two

After successfully vanishing the contact, the interrogation should be uncomfortable and tense. Ideally the contact's answers should leave the characters with enough doubt to warrant serious introspection on how far trust really goes in the shadows, and whether or not he has been playing the team for fools (this is doubly effective if the contact has hired or brokered recent deals they might suspect are related to Winternight—see Adventure Hooks section for ideas).

The gamemaster should decide whether or not the contact is indeed an agent of Winternight, one of its God-chip converts or simply one of many patsies in their schemes—each option provides interesting roleplaying opportunities.

Sometime during the interrogation, ideally after the characters have made some breakthrough but not before they learn too much, the contact should suffer an assassination attempt—using spirits, magic, a sniper, an invisible and silent assassin or any alternative that seems appropriate. This should lead to a dangerous and brutal pursuit of the attacker(s), eventually ending with the assailant(s) death(s) and circumstantial evidence of Winternight involvement (i.e., a Thorhammer pendant, a berserker chip, etc.).

The assassination attempt should leave the situation muddied. It's obvious the only way Winternight would be aware of the contact's location was if they had been watching him, and that raises further questions. What did the contact know that required killing him? Was he involved with Winternight after all?

### Scene Three

As is so often the case with Winternight, the runners find that the trail is cold and there are no tracks to follow. All is not lost if the characters remember to look in the contact's poc-sec: it has a God-chip loaded and contains several messages in memory from someone codenamed Tyr demanding delivery of the now-late materials the contact was having smuggled into the sprawl. Other messages confirm the contact was to pick up a delivery from a smuggling outfit called Technicolor Wings (more details in *Loose Alliances*) the next day.

The only way to obtain something for their troubles is for the runners to track down the local Wings operation, present themselves as reps for the contact and get their hands on whatever he was waiting for. Unfortunately Winternight is still watching the

runners through surveillance drones and spirits in the hopes of locating its missing package.

### Climax

If and when the runners retrieve the package, Winternight begins to relentlessly hound them, ambushing them whenever they're on the move and laying siege to any safehouses they have located. Whether it takes a full frontal assault or persistent attacks, the cult does not rest until it retrieves its package and eliminates all potential witnesses.

The runners are in for the fight of their lives until they can hand the package over to their Johnson or some other authority, and even then they risk being attacked on the way to the meet. The local Winternight cell will use spirits, combat drones, magic and any other means at its disposal to stop the package from falling into the wrong hands. Winternight's fanatics should be considered Equal adversaries led by a Superior cell leader (most often an initiated shaman or idol follower).

The padded crate actually contains two canisters of *Surtr* and vials of *Ymir*, which put the runners at additional risk if they try to examine their contents without adequate precautions.

### Sequels

If the group survives, it will learn Winternight does not easily forget. The cult might come back to haunt them when they least expect, possibly targeting individual runners and hooking them on God chips to turn them into expendable pawns. Runners may also be plagued by inexplicable persecution from the Matrix (Ex Pacis at work), including suddenly emptied accounts, mixed-up credit records, SINs marked as deceased and other creative harassment. The connection between the harassment and this run should not be obvious at first.

On the other hand, delivery of Winternight's package earns the team a lot of credit with their Johnson, and they may well see further assignments in the escalating war between the Big 10 and the chaos bringers, placing them on the front line of events described in the track above.

## HARBINGERS OF WINTER

### Setup

Runners or mercenaries are contracted by a British noble named Sir John Lewellyn-Stuart on behalf of a faction of the British New Druidic Movement (actually Winternight) that wishes to wrest control of a major powersite on the Scottish Wild Ley from the Wild Druids in a daring assault. The team will be well paid for a no-questions-asked military operation that requires maintaining control of the Brodgar stone circle on the Orkney isles off the coast of Scotland for several hours, while the "druidic circle" performs their magic—obviously, only teams unfamiliar with druidic magic are contacted. The only other exceptional mission parameter is that no witnesses survive. The "druids" will not speak to the characters except if questioned directly, leaving all communication to their leader, a man named Magnus. Characters particularly familiar with the King's English will notice that not all the alleged druids are native Britons and might be using linguasoftware.



### Scene One

The first part of the mission involves escorting the five-man druidic circle (a Winternight cell) and several crates from the gathering point in the Midlands through the dangerous Scottish Wildlands and through to the cold and desolate Orkney Islands. Not only will the team have to circumvent police controls and military checkpoints (given the increasing unrest in the country), but they will have to trek through the dangerous revitalized Wildlands, home to strange magic and critters, and the source of myriad potential encounters.

After finding transport and reaching the island, the team must wrest control of the site from the local druidic cult (20 mundane members and 4 Initiated druids) and face the site's bound guardian great form nature spirit (Force 8 or greater). The desolate island is deserted except for a small village on the southern cove where the druidic cult is caught by surprise. It is expecting a warning from its sentries and the Underground's partisans in the event of a full military strike by the Ministry of Defense but not a covert attack that has no hope of maintaining long-term control of the site.

The druids will not aid the characters except with Spell Defense, preferring to conserve their forces for what is to come.

### Scene Two

Once Winternight takes control of powersite, the characters are ordered to maintain the perimeter and ensure no one approaches the Brodgar circle for twelve hours, the time required for the cell to invoke several great form storm spirits. All the while the weather over the desolate island worsens, and a heavy winter storm breaks hours later.

Unbeknownst to all, British SAS spotters have been watching the island and see the attack as a perfect opportunity to secure the site. Within six hours the runners will have to contend with a SAS assault. When the attack comes, the bad weather helps the defenders, reducing visibility, making terrain dangerous and rendering air support useless. Even so, it seems unlikely the characters will be able to hold their ground, at least until the Winternighters come to their aid. Two magicians descend into berserker fury and die fighting—further tipping the characters off that not everything is at it seems—while a third deploys combat drones from the crates the team brought with them and turns the tide of combat, forcing the SAS to retreat.

### Climax

Meanwhile, one of the Wild Druids escapes undetected, charged with taking word to the mainland where he contacts the Underground, which passes word on to several druidic circles in Scotland. Scrambled help takes almost 10-11 hours to arrive on boats and trawlers given the worsening weather, but when it does, characters are faced with holding the line against vengeful druids and their clan allies while Winternight concludes its work.

The team's best option is to try to stop them from landing on the island and maintaining the high ground, but barely have they engaged the new arrivals when the characters notice they have been abandoned. The support drones are gone, and trekking up the hill to the desolate stone circle reveals it is empty except for the sacrificed bodies of members of the druidic cult.

The characters have been left to face the vengeful fury of the circle's true owners, and there are no traces of the remaining *Einherjar*.

### Sequels

Characters who survive and somehow manage to escape will likely develop a lasting hatred for their betrayers (even if they don't know Winternight is behind it yet), which makes them the perfect recruits for any of a number of factions opposing Winternight: the Lord Protector's Oversight Office, EuroPol, the C5 or even the local Overwatch cell.

Winternight, on the other hand, will be surprised if the characters survive and out of grudging respect for their talents may even attempt to recruit the runners for further operations, or they may even attempt to bring them into the cult itself.

### Alternative Plays

Alternately, runners could be contracted by the Pendragon Underground or one of the druidic factions and scrambled to reclaim the island and rescue the local druids. The particularly harsh winter conditions (including minimal visibility and stormy seas) brought on by Winternight storm spirits will make life harder along with the background count (for non-druids), sentinel drone and spirit interference, and berserker adepts and guardian Winternighters—not to mention berserker-chipped mercs and runners—should provide challenging opposition.

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

Winternight and Ex Pacis' schemes, and the opposition's attempts to counter them, provide a huge variety of run opportunities. Players may find themselves working as unwitting pawns of Winternight, either helping with the power site strikes, planting the EMP bombs or installing the *Surtr* delivery systems and escorting/infiltrating the Ex Pacis' Otaku. On the other hand, players may be mobilized in a variety of functions as part of the Corporate Court, individual corporations' and various agencies' attempts to intercept and defeat the unholy alliance. The following are a few straightforward adventure hooks playing off the events described in the chapter above:

### Extreme Prejudice

Runners are hired by a Johnson calling himself Mr. Lyesmith. He allegedly represents a mid-sized online retail operation that is being regularly hit by a troublesome Matrix gang, causing thousands of nuyen of damage and misplaced merchandise. His orders are simple: make an example of them, terminate with extreme prejudice.

The gang is actually a group of young otaku of the Overwatch tribe who have indeed been targeting the corp, whose system is a front for Ex Pacis' new Dissonance Pool. Mr Lyesmith is an agent of Winternight but appears in the company's employee records. Since the runners have no way of knowing the truth, the situation provides a unique roleplaying opportunity for players as their cold-blooded professional characters are faced with the decision of whether or not to kill children, most of whom are barely in their teens.



If the runners perform the mission and leave any traces whatsoever behind them, the gamemaster may want to make Overwatch a recurring and vengeful opponent in the future.

### Virus Carriers

Winternight and Ex Pacis are given a deadline by Deus' plans for the Novatech IPO and are forced to accelerate their Jormungand infiltration program. Through Pax's operations and Winternight's infiltrated moles and turned pawns, eggs have been systematically infiltrated into various megacorporations' systems. For instance, Ex Pacis's infiltration of Kolkata Integrated Talent and Technology provides them with backdoors to numerous corporations that call on the Indian outsourcing giant's services (most significantly Pac Rim Comm, Yamatetsu and Shiawase) and into major public RTG nexi across Asia (e.g., Kolkota, Neo-Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur). Winternight's moles (e.g., the Svobodniy Cosmodrome satellite control operations manager) have also been active. But to make sure all the code eggs are in place in time they have to resort to deniable talent, which is where shadowrunners come in.

The process is slowed by the fact that a virus carrier otaku must access a host's mainframe to upload and conceal the code egg—given the Matrix security of most of these central RTG and PLTG nexi, physical placement of the eggs is easier. A typical run will involve the runners being hired to go to Singapore to pick-up a "computer specialist" (one of Pax's Asian lieutenants), infiltrate him into a major RTG nexus or corporate PLTG hub in North America or Europe and leave without being detected.

Complications arise from the location and security of these sites. Possible targets could include the Pueblo Corporate Council's PLTG, the Hannover or Scand Unions' government grid, the Denver LTG (backdoors to four national government systems), the Russian Army's network and dozens of corporate PLTGs. For a really risky operation, the target might even be a space station.

### At the Gates of Valhalla

If it suits the campaign tone and the gamemaster's wishes to involve characters in an epic operation, the team may play a roll in the attack on either the Valhalla base (Sweden) or the Hel base (Tsimshian).

A deep cover EuroPol agent recently infiltrated into Valhalla (the base in the Haparanda Anomaly Zone in the Baltic) is primed; his mission is to facilitate smuggling an exfiltration team on the island so the team can sabotage communications, capture Winternight leaders and scavenge available data. The base itself is a converted Cold War submarine installation, long since abandoned and conveniently erased from government records. Runners are used to preserve deniability as much as possible and confuse Winternight in the eventuality of capture. The team has to go in and get out before a major military strike is called. Hel is subject to a similar operation.

Further complications arise from the fact that Winternight leaders—at least some of them—need to be captured alive for interrogation, which is a difficult proposition since most prefer

suicide to arrest. The mole's privileged access should facilitate capture of cell leaders in Hel, and Wednesday and Friday in Valhalla, but the gamemaster may need to tweak the opposition to ensure the two *Norms* escape—the results of Friday's interrogation are vital to eventually countering Jormungand and Operation *Mjolnir*.

### Crashing the Blot

Europol and numerous corporate intelligence agencies are on the lookout, and they manage to backtrack the *Fenrir* illusion over Boston to an Uppsala blot. Before Z-O goes offline, strike teams are dispatched to intercept the Winternight toxics involved in the illusion and interrogate them. When communications break down and contact is lost with the strike team, runners are mobilized by a local megacorporate branch to ensure the mission is carried out.

Getting to the site, the runners will find the revel in full swing and no trace of the corporate strike team. The Winternight *gode* are somewhere in the massive festival grounds, probably using one of the big tents to rest up after their powerful ritual workings. Finding them means dealing with the Viking gangers and other partiers, as well as Winternight's own fanatical guardians (berserkers and riggers), and asking around is certain to draw unwanted attention.

Finally, once the defenders are overcome or circumvented, taking the Winternight *gode* alive for interrogation is yet another difficult task.

### Slaying Jormungand

With the Matrix going to hell, runners are contacted by a friend from Shadowland with the information leaked by Zurich-Orbital's Atropos. With the coordinates of the EMP bombs and fault line nukes in hand, along with the locations of the Jormungand nest hosts, it is up to the runners to decide what to do. Sit back and watch their world fall apart (and have their accounts zeroed) or try to sidetrack Ragnarok.

If they choose to act, they—and anyone they can muster (with grids crashing and phone lines unavailable)—must race against the clock to take out Jormungand nests and Winternight's EMP bombs before they are activated. This means either striking nest sites and deactivating Winternight's hidden bombs while contending with their drone and magical guardians, or simply moving them as far away from the sprawls as possible to minimize damage. Teams who manage to make it to a nest site are up against local security and defenses on high alert (unaware of what's truly going on since their communications are down and all hell is breaking loose), as well as Winternight backup (especially drones and spirits/mages on overwatch). Then they have to circumvent *Surtr*-saturated areas. Shadowrunners may also find themselves in the awkward position of working side-by-side with scrambled corporate strike teams to assault facilities hosting Jormungand eggs.

Meanwhile, at the first sign of trouble Winternight cells will launch the Ymir-carrying drones on random fly-bys over the area surrounding the nest, seeding further chaos and death.

# CRASH 2.0



*Michael Steiner was not a fan of zero-g. Maybe it was his portly constitution, or maybe it was his lack of coordination, but he disliked it passionately, he preferred to pace when he was under pressure ... and he was under a lot of pressure. As C5's resident military analyst, he had a report to present to the Court in an hour, and he was sure they weren't going to like what he had to say. He looked up at the far wall of the elongated cylindrical office. Three compartments over were the representatives of the 10 most powerful forces in the world. In an hour, he'd be facing them, reviewing the fallout of the last 72 hours. They all knew how close it came. They all knew how badly they failed. But he was the one who was going to have to tell them.*

*Steiner touched his hand to his console and the induction pad told the computer to toggle back from the transcript of the disarming attempt to the sensor view from the support helicopter.*

*A camera feed flickered onscreen, focusing for depth automatically. Rangefinder, vectors, direction and air speed figures were strategically overlaid on the feed from the gunship's sensors. The picture revealed a man sliding down a descent rope to the hard top of a blimp hundreds of meters above Presidio, an unwieldy pack strapped to his back. The climber looked up at the transport chopper above and then ahead and down at the Ares Dragon workhorse that's dragging the blimp down and North East towards the Pacific.*

*Two armored figures waited for him on the upper surface, where the descent rope was attached to a mooring spar. The climber unlatched his harness and reattached to another rope, then rappelled into the cabin under the zepp's body, swinging past the huge ruthenium skin of the advertising blimp, now filled with grey white static.*

*Another man in security armor could be seen through the portholes, waiting inside the cabin. When the new arrival touched down, he guided him out of view. The camera feed changed to active thermals, showing the two heat signatures crouching by the storage spaces in the back, framed by a wireframe schematic calculated by other sensors. One of the men lied down and slid forward. The image jerked for a second as the gunship was caught in a strong updraft from the Bay, but it then readjusted on the explosives expert working in the storage space.*

*Steiner ordered the timer and bomb expert's running transcript onscreen. The timer ticked down to 10:45:41. There was a sudden heat flare from the storage compartment. A*



picosecond later, the blimp vanished in a sudden flare before the sensors went white.

Steiner sighed and returned to preparing his presentation.

All twelve Justices were present as well as a handful of C5 consultants and the director of CCMA. The room was eerily quiet—quieter than it's ever been before. All eyes were on him.

Steiner sweated uncomfortably, despite Z-O's temperature controlled environment. He continued, "Our thanks to Mitsuhamma for those images from San Francisco. Thankfully Protectorate forces' orders to shoot down the blimp were countermanded. A crash might have activated the device. MCT's fallback option of attempting to move and board the blimp to defuse the warhead, however, also proved unsuccessful."

He paused, shuffling his notes uncomfortably before continuing. "The solution adopted worked admirably in other locations: Tokyo apparently used one of the kami of the Imperial Household to push their device out over the sea. In Brussels, a pair of vector-thrust drones grappled the blimp and dragged it out over the SOX. Istanbul was lucky, they shot theirs down north of the Straights and the brunt of the blast was absorbed by the sea."

"Thanks to MCT, San Francisco remains our best source of data. Though communications remain patchy, our current estimates calculate a 20-kilometer blackout radius centered just northeast of the Presidio district. Even though the bomb was no longer central, the pulse knocked out over 75 percent of the city's power infrastructure; the surge over the power grid forced most basic utilities off-line and disrupted non-hardened electronics. Multiple relays simply burned out. With many hardware fail-safes compromised by Winternight's worm, we're looking at a 70 percent of the Matrix infrastructure damaged beyond repair. The data loss is inestimable; only ultra-secure systems escaped. On the other hand, the shockwave and heat blast were incredibly short of expectations for the device's power. We have significant damage to upper floors of high rises, several collapses and serious fires and windows blown out over 2 miles away—but far below scenario projections."

Raphael Colemno of MCT interjected. "Our assets are coordinating relief efforts with the remaining corporations, but the situation is precarious. With widespread looting in outlying areas and increasingly heavy rebels attacks, assistance from the Court would ..."

"You made your bed. Now lie in it," snapped Paul Graves, Ares's representative.

"This is not the time or the place," barked the usually quiet Li Feng of Wuxing.

Steiner waited for the angry chatter to subside, then continued. "Estimated death toll is 800 and rising, the figure should triple or quadruple within a week from the data we're receiving from hospitals. The low altitude burst did not help ... It is too early for long-term projections, but we have portions of the Bay irradiated, significant vaporization and irradiation along the northeastern shoreline and a high possibility of fallout over the Pacific. There are indications that astral space in the region has been severely affected and will likely remain so

for a while. Other effects are contingent of prevailing winds and precipitation patterns. Fortunately, whatever these things are, they are closer to EM devices than dirty bombs."

"What exactly do we know about the devices?" asked Jean-Claude Pirault of Saeder-Krupp.

Trust Pirault to turn up the heat. Steiner steeled himself. "From the MCT disarming data, the overall configuration matched the bomb intercepted by Sioux OMI last year. Winternight has obviously modified the warheads to increase their EMP output significantly. Exactly how we're still not sure ..."

"So you don't have a clue?" asked Leonard Yang.

"I wouldn't go so far. Analysis of trace materials retrieved from Washington and Boston by UCAS Special Assets indicates their respective origins were a pre-Euro Wars Belarus batch and material from a reactor in Henan. Preliminary analysis of the Kittimat traces reveals that it was likely Pakistani. Our working theory is Winternight did not possess nuclear capacity and instead extensively modified warheads it procured elsewhere. Interrogation of subject "Friday" seems to confirm this evaluation.

Lynn Osborne—Novatech's justice and the chairman of C5—leaned forward, clearly not ready to let Steiner off the hook just yet. "Has any progress been made on how low-yield nukes could be converted to EM bombs of this range? My information is that it shouldn't be possible based on the fission materials recovered."

"The method used—presumably some potent thaumaturgical or alchemical process—remains unknown: We're currently pursuing our avenues of investigation," Steiner admitted. "However, Sioux authorities still possess one such warhead. While I understand convincing Manaus to hand over their defused device is unlikely, I think the Sioux would come round were the Court to bring its weight to bear."

"Thank you, Mr. Steiner. Complementary analysis from the FBI, BIS and EuroPol are in your briefs gentlemen ... Nine major metro areas. No one needs to be reminded that the consequences have been devastating. Damages in the billions, hundreds of dead, contamination and fallout that could last for decades. Had all the nuclear bombs on the fault lines functioned ... well, only God knows."

Before Lynn Osborne could end the session, Steiner interrupted. "Actually, Miss Osborne, there are two other matters I would like to report on."

"You have the floor Mr. Steiner, but make it brief—we must get back to the disturbing news from Washington and Tsimshian."

Steiner cleared his throat for the really bad news. "For a cult that hated the Matrix, Winternight proved astonishingly knowledgeable of the global network's weaknesses. They targeted 15 of the 20 junctures on the CCMA's critical list. While San Francisco, Washington and Neo Tokyo are obvious targets, the Kittimat-Pacific junction and Stockholm grids are not—in fact, their importance was a well-kept secret. My staff believes we should not rule out the possibility, however unlikely, of a leak. If just two other devices had been successfully detonated ..."





"Nine out of fifteen devices is not a good average," interjected Toshiro Saigusa defensively. "We failed miserably, but the situation could have been much worse."

"You know as well as I that isn't the point. They targeted prime Matrix routing junctures. I don't believe for an instant it was a coincidence. As is, we reduced to 50% of global routing capacity for at least a couple of months. Just two more pulses would have been enough to kick us back to the dark ages ... Only a handful of corporations beyond the Court are even aware of the importance of the junctures."

There was a soft patter of voices as several Justices voiced suspicions and doubts.

"Understood, Mr. Steiner, C5 will want a follow up report on that," said Osborne. "Your other matter?"

"The other matter should be obvious. The fault line nukes. San Andreas was intercepted by an Ares Firewatch unit out of Silicon Valley. Per protocols, Ares used nerve gas to soften the target before insertion. Like the other recovered, this was a conventional nuclear 5-megaton warhead. Despite several anti-tampering systems, Firewatch successfully deactivated the detonator. Saeder-Krupp was similarly successful in defusing the Red Sea device. The reports are in the relevant annexes. Nonetheless, three warheads were detonated."

"Your point?" interrupted Anna Villalobos, the voice of Aztechnology. "We've registered massive earthquakes and aftershocks in Chile and Peru, similar events in India and Pakistan and the eruption of São Miguel in the Azores ... "

"Simply put, assuming the remaining devices were in the same megaton range as the two intercepted, the effects are far below any predictions. Not only were the quakes and aftershocks mostly localized, barely making 8.5 on the Richter scale, but the eruption in the Azores, massive as it was, wasn't followed by tectonic unrest—and no tidal waves!"

"What are you saying, Mr. Steiner?" queried Pirault.

"I'm simply stating facts. I don't have hard answers, but all projections for this explosive potential suggested activity at least as destructive as Ring of Fire flare up in '61. Instead, seismographs in Antarctica and Moscow barely picked up the aftershocks. The two devices recovered were conventional nuclear warheads. We have no reason to believe the others would be different. You pay me to analyze facts, and what I'm telling you is the facts don't add up. Something happened. Winternight should have succeeded. And this is not the first time since the Awakening that we've seen nuclear detonations that were inexplicably ... limited. In fact, there seems to be abundant evidence that large-scale nuclear detonations are simply no longer possible. If there are forces in the world with the capacity to—"

"Thank you for your warning, Mr. Steiner," Pirault forcibly cut him off. "Rest assured it will be taken to heart and the Court will look into this, at a later date. Our priority now can only be damage control and recovery. Now, if you will excuse us, we have urgent business to attend to. I believe, Miss Osborne, that the next item on our agenda is Transys-Erika's proposal ... "

Steiner nodded, realizing he was dismissed. He shoved his notes into his suitcase and proceeded to the airlock, fight-

ing the temptation to look back. He could feel Pirault's eyes still on him, and he wondered not for the first time what the Frenchman knows that he isn't telling ...

## EMP STRIKES

Winternight's final devastating gambit to bring about Ragnarok is Operation: *Mjolnir*—the detonation of fifteen electromagnetic pulse (EMP) bombs over major sprawls and a further five nuclear warheads on tectonic fault lines.

The EMP bombs are small nuclear devices and briefcase nukes (approx. 1–4 megatons), smuggled into the various target countries years beforehand, and constantly moved around between Winternight cells to avoid detection (these were first mentioned in the now out of print *Threats* sourcebook). They were acquired by the cult from various sources over more than 30 years (ie. Kronstadt, Byelorussia, Shaanxi, Pakistan, to name but a few) and modified by a unique combination of enchanting, alchemical techniques, runic anchoring and high-power ritual thaumaturgy to convert explosive and radioactive power into an enhanced EM pulse.

The bombs are delivered to 15 critical Matrix and government junctures in the wake of Jormungand's initial attack: Kittimat, San Francisco, Boston, Washington, Tecnochtitlan, Panama City, Metropole, Brussels, Stockholm, Istanbul, Calcutta, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, and Neo-Tokyo. Of those, only the bombs in San Francisco, Kittimat, Boston, Panama City, Stockholm, Calcutta, and Kuala Lumpur detonate. The remaining bombs are either defused (Metropole), moved over the sea (Istanbul, Hong Kong and Neo-Tokyo) or over wilderness areas (Brussels and Tecnochtitlan) where they explode to much lesser effect (outskirts of Washington).

The EM bombs have been hidden on normal advertising blimps over each of the target sprawls, and are rigged so that when they lose a cell-signal from the local LTG (meaning Jormungand has run its course) a hidden autopilot system subverts the drone pilot and makes the blimp climb to a one kilometer altitude, where (5–10 minutes later) a pressure gauge built into the detonator triggers. This means the bombs are not detonated simultaneously.

When triggered at an altitude of 1 kilometer, each nuke has a limited blast range of 500–800 meters depending on the kilotonnage, but the radioactive and blast damage peters off quickly beyond that. The bulk of the explosive power is transmuted into a massive EM pulse. While direct and secondary damage from the shock and heatwaves will cause damage over an extensive area (ie. shattering glass in skyscrapers, igniting fires, causing collapses, etc), the EM pulse (with a 30–50 kilometer radius) is designed to destroy the vital RTG hubs—damaging them by circumventing their hardening through power surges that cascade through the local power grid. Winternight isn't worried about causing maximum casualties with the EMPs—it expects those to come naturally once Ragnarok is ignited. But for that to happen, the Matrix *must* be destroyed.

Of course, there's also the fault line nukes. As described in the *Fall of Night* track, the EM bombs are protected by drones seeding *Ymir* toxins and possibly guardian spirits and



combat drones. The gamemaster is encouraged to tailor Winternight's failsafes to their campaign and gamestyle, keeping in mind this is an end of the world gambit the cult does not aim to lose.

Characters can become involved in the unfolding chaos surrounding both the EMP strikes and fault line nukes in a number of ways from personally jumping in the fray after receiving warning over Shadowland, to simply having to deal with the fallout and consequences of the situation on everyday life in the affected sprawls and in a world where the Matrix is a shadow of its former self.

### CONSEQUENCES

Gamemasters should play up the far-reaching consequences of the EMP strikes in those cities where they are detonated. Below are only a few of the many ways in which runners, their friends, families and contacts might be affected by the bombs in the days and months following the Crash. It should also be noted that affected sprawls such as Boston, Kittimat, Stockholm and Washington will be blacked out during one of the worst winters in history (this will take several weeks to normalize). Gamemasters should also note that the detonations will cause severe astral disturbances and heightened background count in the affect areas for months, possibly years, to come.

- Individuals looking towards the blast during the explosion may suffer damage to their eyes unless properly shielded. People within 2 kilometers of ground zero and those in tall building may suffer direct effects (20D, -1 Power per 100 meters out) and indirect of shockwaves (ie. shrapnel, flying glass, superheated materials and steam).
- Much of the utility and power network, backup generators and relays within the blast radius suffer burnouts requiring extensive replacement. Outlying areas visited by brown-outs for weeks to come (complicated by harsh winter weather).
- Blackouts and damaged security systems might lead to widespread looting and civil turmoil.
- Low-end and consumer electronics suffer severe damage from power surge relayed through grid (ie. trids explode, comm-units fritz, even deck power supplies are damaged).
- Gridlink systems collapse when street-end hardware fails (rather than the sophisticated and hardened system management and software). It takes weeks to repair damage and replace segments of the grid.
- While most modern cyberware (like most high-end computech) is EM hardened and uses optical chips, older systems (anything more than 5-6 years old) might suffer burnouts and systems failures that require technical assistance (especially second-hand cyber and subsystems like smartgun adapters and drones).

### EMP TABLE

Succeses	Sample Effect
0	No damage.
1	Minor damage requires resetting and running standard system diagnostics and repair functions (ie. computer terminals crash and develop glitches; chips erased; electronics suffer from power surge; older power grid relays burnout; communications briefly disrupted; etc).
2-3	Moderate damage requires technical intervention and replacement of internal components and/or software (ie. trid unit short circuits; cyberlimbs develop glitches; DNI interfaces and display links require formatting; electrical engines need to be repaired; poc-sec memory erased; cell, maser and radio communications temporarily scrambled; power grids crash; etc).
4-5	Serious damage requires replacement of major components and/or full reboot of software (ie. Matrix RTG stations and grid-link crash; major electric short circuits; power surges damage components on hosts and cyberdecks; riggers suffer electroshock feedback; cell, maser and radio waves communications scrambled for several days; etc).
6+	Destroyed/System crash. Requires wholesale substitution. (ie. electrical engines and generators damaged beyond repair, surge burns out vital components in even hardened electronics, local communications patchy for weeks).

- Within the detonation radius, the pulses are strong enough that glitches will appear even on hardened systems, leading to data erasure, damage or corruption; cumulative with any damage caused by *Jormungand*.
- Communications using surviving radio, maser and cell systems are disrupted for several days.

To gauge possible damage from the EMP blast to power, cyberware, sensors, electronics and microtronics systems, roll an Opposed Test between the relevant gear's rating and the pulse (base Rating 25, -1 per kilometer if airborne detonation, -2 per kilometer if ground level detonation in a built up urban area) and consult the EMP Table (sample effects should be seen as cumulative). For purposes of this test, assume cyberware and hardened electronics have a base rating of 9 (-2 if second-hand and for every 5 years of age)



### Fault-line Nukes

The second and potentially most devastating element of Operation *Mjolnir* involves the deep detonation of the cult's remaining five multi-megaton nuclear devices in new and abandoned mineshafts and caverns in close proximity to major tectonic fault lines. While it is unlikely runners will be involved in combating this particular threat, it is possible since it becomes the focus of a desperate race against time, in which the corporations in the know will use any and all possible resources they can muster as Jormungand and the EMP bombs crash global communications.

The five nuclear devices are hidden several hundred meters below the surface, intended to set up a chain-reaction of tectonic shockwaves that will unleash devastating earthquakes and trigger eruptions in volcanic areas near the fault lines.

The general locations of the bombs are discovered while interrogating the captured Winternight leader, Friday: San Andreas (CalFree), Red Sea (Egypt), Azores (mid-Atlantic), Andes (southern Chile), Himalayas (Kashmir). Like the EMP bombs, these nukes are rigged to initiate a one-hour countdown when they lose the feed from the local Matrix, and then to explode.

Ares forces reach the San Andreas nuke in time to override the countdown and S-K forces stationed in the Arabian Caliphate are equally successful in the Red Sea. After locations are established with drones using ground-penetrating radar and radiation tracking techniques, the areas are bombed with bio and chemical agents and then ground troops attack surviving Winternight guardians.

The Azores, Andean and Himalayan bombs are too remote to reach within the hour the Corporate Court has to act. All three detonate. The resulting explosions, however, are far less than expected given their megaton range. Though quakes up to 6.5 on the Richter scale follow, these are nowhere near as devastating as anyone would have expected—someone or something has intervened to stop the worst of the effects.

### IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

Is this thing on?

This is Retro. I don't know if I'm getting out or not—we'll come up for awhile, and then everybody hits the node at the same time and takes it down again before it can recover. Doesn't help that I'm decking turtle-style—ain't no way I'm gonna risk exposing my own personal brain to the 'Trix when it's jumping around like a frog in a skillet. So if this is spotty, blame the tech, not me.

Anyway, kiddies, we are *fragged*. Since Captain Chaos is nowhere to be found (and that scares the drek outta me, since I thought he'd be right in the thick of it, trying to get this thing handled), I'm setting up this node so folks can post anything they've got about what's turning our happy little electronic world hoop-over-teakettle. Nobody really knows the whole story of what's going on right now, so we're all gonna have to be each other's eyes and ears. Post 'em if you got em, and I'll—  
<connection lost>

\* \* \*



*From the pocket secretary of the late Robert Takahashi, 35, recovered from the wreckage of a maglev train collision near Portland that killed 200 people:*

Katherine ... I hope they find this and get it to you so that you and Joey and Briana will know what happened. I have to record this because the comm network isn't working. I wish I could hear your voice right now.

Something's gone really wrong. I'm waiting for them to come find me, but I don't know how much longer that's gonna be. God, it hurts. I've got the bleeding mostly stopped, but if somebody doesn't get to me soon—

Where do I start? You probably know more than I do. I'm sure it's on all the newstrids. I got on the train this morning like usual. Everything was running on time. It was a great morning. I was catching up on some work, checking the IPO news. We were near the outskirts of Portland when my Matrix connection went down. I was trying to get reconnected and somebody screamed. The train operator yelled something and then—

—Sorry ... sorry ... Katie ... I'm feeling woozy. Most of the people around me are dead, I think, except for one lady who's screaming ... You can probably hear her in the background, but I can't get to her ... I'm pinned under some seats. My leg—there's so much blood. I just wish there was somebody else here I could talk to ...

*(long silence)*

Where was I?

We hit something. Something big. Another train, maybe? Either that, or somebody set off a bomb. Whatever it was, it felt like we slammed into a wall at full speed. I think the people in the first few cars died instantly—maybe they were the lucky ones. Everybody was flying around inside our car, slamming into walls, seats, each other ... screaming, screaming ... I saw a baby ripped away from its mother and flung into a window hard enough to crack the glass. Oh, God ...

I'm sorry ... I'm rambling. Briefcases, purses, pocket secretaries—they were hitting people—I don't know how I managed to keep hold of mine. I don't know what was worse—the screams of the people or the screams of the metal as the train twisted like a cheap soda can. Trains aren't supposed to sound like that.

Katie, I think I'm gonna rest awhile ... It hurts to talk, and I'm so tired ... I gotta keep my strength to yell if I hear help coming ... if they're coming at all. I just realized I haven't heard any sirens ... there must be sirens, right? They must be coming to help us.

I love you ... Tell Joey and Briana I love them ... that I'll be home soon. I love you.

So tired ... So ...

\* \* \*

*From an interview with Scott Matthews, junior trader for the firm of Cantor-Kurusawa, NYC*

I just lost a hundred thousand nuyen of my own money along with a few million of other people's, and you know what? I don't give a frag.

## **AUTHORITIES URGE CITIZENS: FIND SHELTER UNTIL ESCAPED PARANIMALS CAPTURED**

*From the Austin Statesman-Chronicle, 11/5/65, p. 2:*

AUSTIN—Authorities in Austin are telling citizens to stay inside and keep all doors and windows closed until a number of paranimals that recently escaped from an Aztechnology research facility can be controlled and recaptured.

"When the glitches started hitting the Matrix, the electronic locks on of the containment facilities Aztechnology was using to keep the animals confined failed," said Lone Star spokeswoman Lana Feingold. "We've managed to kill one and recapture two, but there are still a number of them unaccounted for."

When asked about the specific types of paranimals that escaped, Feingold admitted that Aztechnology was not forthcoming with that information. "The two we captured were an eyekiller and a naga," she said. "The one we had to kill was a piasma—there was just no way to take it down safely. As for the others, we're assuming they're all dangerous."

Eyewitnesses report seeing various creatures, including reptiles, mammals and an unidentified flying animal. Hector Lopez, a local resident, admitted being afraid for his family after seeing what he thought was a cockatrice from a distance of about one hundred meters. "Seeing it at all was bad enough," he said, "but what was worse was that it didn't look quite right, you know? It was moving erratically, like something wasn't right in its head."

Authorities are instructing people not to leave their homes unless absolutely necessary, but if they must travel, they should take precautions. "Stay in your car if you can and stay in populated areas. Whatever you do, don't go to remote areas alone," Feingold said

It is suspected that a local troll named "Jimmy Joe," who was found yesterday in Chaparral Park with his throat slashed, died as a result of the escaped paranimals. However, Feingold declined comment when asked about the incident.

Petey's dead, and I still don't know what happened.

I still can't believe it—an hour ago we were both jacked in, fighting it out on the trading floor like always, matching our skills against the other Wall Street traders. It was just a big game. But today wasn't supposed to be like always. This was the big time. This was the Novatech IPO, and we had a fast track to scoring some primo blocks of stock for our clients. This was the kind of day that made careers, and we were both determined to make ours. We might have started out that day as little fish in a big pond, but that was gonna change. Trading like that, lightning-speed, with millions of nuyen riding on your skills and your reflexes—it's a rush, you know? Pure adrenaline. Better than sex.

Until everything went to hell. One minute everything was fine, and the next minute, everything went—freako. The Matrix changed. I don't even know how to explain it, except that everything just got more ... *real* than I'd ever experienced. More real than real. God, I'm gonna have nightmares for years. This huge tree appeared and started growing, and then this swirling thing showed up with *faces* in it, and all these silver angels—you know, when I was in college I tried BTL once, and this thing made that freak-out look like a walk



in the park. I tried to jack out, but I couldn't. I couldn't get out! I panicked and just took off, trying to get away. I knew the IPO was fragged, that my whole career was down the tubes, but I didn't give a damn. I just wanted out. Petey too, I could see it.

I don't remember how we got out, but somehow we found ourselves back in our office, covered in sweat. I felt like I'd gone ten rounds with a troll. Petey looked kind of green, but I figured it was just the aftereffects.

You know, you hear those stories about the Great Depression, about people who lost their fortunes and walked out 50th-story windows. Do you know how hard it is to do that these days? Windows in high-rises don't open, and they're made out of heavy armored glass that you can't get through with a chair or even a gun. The people who designed them, they knew something.

Petey got around that. He always was an enterprising son-of-a-slitich. After a few minutes he just got up and headed to the roof, saying he was going to have a smoke. I almost believed him, but a couple minutes after he left I remembered the really strange look in his eyes and something told me to follow him. My head was splitting from the dumpshock, and nobody had any idea what the hell was going on. Everybody was going crazy, but Petey had been so calm ...

I got up there just in time to see him step off the edge. He was completely composed—he didn't jump, he just took a step forward, like he was getting into an elevator to go home. By the time I got to the edge and leaned over the railing, he was just a spot on the sidewalk. Fifty floors is a long way. He didn't even scream.

\* \* \*

*Exchange between San Francisco (SFO) tower and CATCo corporate jet 5938-H, 11/2/65, recovered from black box:*

**Copilot:** We're getting close. Better make the announcement.

**Pilot (on intercom):** Gentlemen, this is Captain Rosenau. We're about 20 minutes out of San Francisco and heading into some rough air, so you might feel a bit of turbulence. Please fasten your seatbelts. We're on track for landing at 10:25, local time.

**Copilot:** I hope the fog doesn't give us any trouble. Mr. Cross is already mad as hell about being late.

**Pilot:** Can't help that. I don't control the weather. Tell it to the storm we had to fly around back there.

**Copilot:** He ought to be happy, what with all the cred he's making from that IPO.

**Pilot:** Yeah, no dreck. Must be nice.

**Copilot:** Okay, got a visual on the fog up ahead now. Looks pretty thick.

**Pilot:** Nothing we can't handle. SFO Tower, this is CATCo 5938-Hotel, twenty miles northeast of the airport. Request landing instructions.

**Tower:** CATCo 5938-Hotel, SFO Tower, proceed to the outer marker, landing direct runway five. Maintain at or above 2,500 to the Golden Gate.

**Pilot:** SFO Tower, CATCo 5938-Hotel, direct to the outer marker, at or above 2,500 to Golden Gate. Beginning descent—

*(a very loud squawk and a buzz is heard, followed by a shriek of pain)*

*(static for ten seconds, then silence for twenty more)*

**Copilot (shaky voice):** Mayday, mayday, mayday. SFO Tower, this is CATCo 5938-Hotel. Mayday, mayday. Something's hit us. Lost all power, repeat, all power out, radio's inop. Communicating by handheld. *(pause)* Can you hear me? I'm dumpshocked. Captain Rosenau is unconscious. *(pause)* Mayday, mayday, mayday! SFO Tower, do you read? Power's out, we're gliding in. No bearing, no visual. *(louder)* I can't see a damn thing!

*(sound of loud thumping and incoherent yelling in background)*

**Copilot:** Please return to your seats!

**Tower (faint and very staticky):** ... 38-Hotel. SFO Tower, CATCo ... *<static>* ... Repeat ... happening down here too ... All systems ... Backups coming online ... *<static>* ... hold on ...

**Copilot:** SFO Tower, we can't hold on! We're coming down! Estimated altitude 1,000 feet ... dropping fast!

**Tower:** SFO Tower, 38-Hotel ... *<static>* ... no power?

**Copilot:** 38-Hotel, SFO Tower ... whatever that was fried everything ... Frag it ... can't see ... fog's thicker ... SFO Tower, advise!

**Tower:** SFO Tower, 38-Hotel ... adjust bearing to—

*(sound of crash, followed by several screams, then nothing)*

\* \* \*

*From a Knight Errant dispatcher's log, DeeCee, 11/2/65, 11:03:56*

**Dispatcher:** Unit 74, you copy?

**Unit 74:** *<static>* ... Copy, Dispatch ... breaking up ...

**Dispatcher:** Proceed to Smithsonian Institution, 1000 Jefferson SW. Report of major theft and breakdown of security systems ...

**Unit 74:** Dispatch, we've got riots down here—looting—*<static>*—coming out of the woodwork.

**Dispatcher:** 74, proceed to Smithsonian immediately—direct order from *<static>*.

**Unit 74:** Proceeding, Dispatch. But let me get this straight—the world's going to hell and the chief wants us to protect property over lives?

**Dispatcher:** I hear you, Marty. Word is it's no ordinary theft—it's some kind of artifact on loan from the D.I. I'll probably get in trouble for telling you this, but they're saying the thieves hit the place less than ten minutes after the security system went down—*<static>*—expecting it. Now listen, I gotta get back to what I'm doing here—we're getting calls like crazy and the system keeps going down. Get over there ASAP and hook up with the museum sec guards and the D.I. rep.

*<sound of loud crash followed by glass breaking>*

**Dispatcher:** 74, do you copy? *<static>* Marty? Marty?

\* \* \*

*Excerpt from a letter from Mrs. Melody Hausenberg, Chicago, to her sister Joan, 11/2/65, 10:32 a.m.:*



I'm telling you, Joanie, it was terrible! I was just taking a little break, watching my stories, and suddenly everything started *glitching*! The trideo got all snowy and then quit together—right at the best part! I figured it was one of those brownouts we get around here sometimes so I went out to the kitchen to get a snack, and the fridge's display couldn't even tell me what we had in stock! The screen said we had four kilos of pickles, a gallon of mushroom ice cream and two boxes of frozen Mousie Treats™ for Mr. Paws, can you imagine! Then it started laughing at me and sending rude pictures to the toaster! I didn't know what to do—how was I going to get dinner ready when the fridge was acting up like that? I tried to call Joel but the comm wasn't working. The trid wasn't back up yet, and by this time the vacuum was going crazy, chasing Bonzo around the house. I started thinking at that point that it might be dangerous to stay in the house so I tried to get out, but all the doors had locked automatically and of course I couldn't break the safety glass. I'm locked in the bedroom right now, actually writing this with a pen and paper. I'll scan it in and email it to you when this problem gets taken care of. I sure hope it's soon! The kids aren't going to be happy to miss dinner, and my favorite show is on tonight!

\* \* \*

*Audio excerpt from recording of remote cybersurgery performed by Dr. Christine Lindahl in Stockholm on a patient in a private Seattle clinic:*

**Lindahl:** All right—the incision is made and the brain is prepared for the implant. This is going to be the tricky part, ladies and gentlemen. I show all vitals stable.

**Nurse 1:** BP 110/75. Heartbeat 66. Respiration 16. Everything's stable, Doctor.

**Lindahl:** Mr. ... er ... Jumpmonkey, are you with us?

**Patient:** Yeah, I'm okay.

**Lindahl:** No pain?

**Patient:** No, just tingles.

**Lindahl:** That's normal. Don't worry, sir. Everything's going fine.

**Patient:** I gotta admit I'd feel better if you were actually here.

**Lindahl:** No need to worry. I've done this procedure remotely many times, with a 100 percent success rate. Dr. Michaels, we'll be moving into the most delicate part of the procedure now, so keep a close watch on your end. Now, move the robot arm into place and position the probe.

**Michaels:** Positioned, Doctor. Switching views. You may begin when ready.

**Lindahl:** Excellent. I've got a good view of the area. I'm running through the test sequence one last time now. Everything shows green here.

**Michaels:** Confirmed. Green across the board.

**Lindahl:** Inserting probe, preparing to deploy laser scalpel. Powering up.

**Michaels:** So far, so good. Everything looks—

**Nurse 2:** What the—? Dr. Michaels, the screen—

**Michaels:** Wha—*Frag!*

**Patient:** *<screams>*

**Nurse 2:** Emergency backup power online—

**Lindahl:** What the hell is going on there? My view's frozen!

**Michaels:** *<static>* Nurse! Shut that thing down! It's—

**Lindahl:** *Michaels!* What's happening?

**Nurse 1:** The monitors are *<static>* crazy! The laser—my God, his brain—

**Nurse 2:** Powering down the laser—No! Doctor, I can't—

**Lindahl:** *Dammit, REPORT!!*

*<burst of static, then nothing>*

\* \* \*

*Excerpt from Newswire account posted to numerous sources, 11/3/65:*

### CROSS FEARED DEAD IN JET CRASH

Initial reports state that Lucien Cross, President and CEO of Cross Applied Technologies, perished yesterday when his corporate aircraft crashed just northeast of San Francisco International Airport. Recovery efforts are ongoing but have been hampered by continuing problems with the Matrix infrastructure and lack of availability of fire and rescue personnel. More details will be made available as they are received.

*Note attached to Newswire account, marked "Not For Publication:"*

We're getting a lot of requests for info on Lucien Cross for retrospectives, memorial pieces, etc.—we are currently putting a comprehensive package together for all Newswire affiliates. Stay tuned for more data to come, EOD today latest.

\* \* \*

*Excerpt from the Redmond Metro, a local community newsletter, in a dead-tree edition produced two days after the Crash:*

### COMMUNITY PULLS TOGETHER FOLLOWING MATRIX CRASH AND AFTERMATH

by Orrin Washington

Anybody who lives in Redmond knows that, sadly, "cooperation" is not a word that's heard often in our community. You wouldn't know it these past couple of days, though, as local residents came together to help each other rebuild after the Matrix disaster left the area rocked by fires, riots and looting.

With social services (never abundant around here in the first place) now nonexistent due to skyrocketing demand in many other communities, residents have been left to fend for themselves in an area that was quickly stripped of food and other useful commodities by hordes of panicked people. At this point, nobody seems to be asking too many questions about the source of this help, a fact that "Deuce," a local troll trucker, applauds. "Hey, it's better not to ask," he said as he and some friends helped hand out a truckload of food and bottled water to hungry residents. "It's happening all over the area—you gotta take care of your own, you know?"

This is a sentiment echoed by many. Even two of the local gangs, the Ancients and the Crimson Crush, have gotten into the act, providing security and quelling some of the more vio-



lent rioting and looting episodes. The Crush are credited with saving several locals' lives last night when a fight erupted between the locals and some out-of-area gangers looking for easy pickings. Crush member "Bloodbath" offers this explanation: "Those drekwipes ain't gonna frag with our place, scan?" This reporter chose not to ask him about where he and his fellow gangers got the brand-new matching synthleather jackets they were wearing.

\* \* \*

*From an interview recorded shortly after the Crash and aired several days later on pirate trideo:*

**McCutcheon:** This is Mindy McCutcheon, on location in Toronto. One of the many consequences of the Crash that's sure to be on people's minds as we struggle to rebuild is the corruption of vital business data and the loss of files due to failed backups. I'm here to talk about that with a local information-technology professional who's asked not to be identified. Sir, can you fill us in on the problem?

**Tech** (*an elf, shown in shadow*): It's easy—a lot of businesses are gonna be fragged because they didn't do proper backups. Even if they did, a lot of them are still gonna lose anything that didn't get backed up before the Crash. For big businesses like banks and financial institutions, losing even some of that data could be a big deal. And a lot of people are gonna be left in the lurch even if the backups *did* happen, since a good bank will shut down as soon as there's trouble to avoid a run on the place.

**McCutcheon:** Can you give us an example of these backup problems?

**Tech:** Sure—think about it. If you just made a big bank deposit right before the Crash hit, where do you think that information got recorded? In the bank's databases. Maybe it even got backed up—banks are pretty good about backup frequency, at least some of 'em are. But maybe it didn't. If not, you're in trouble. And then there's the fact that in some places that the Crash hit hardest, it didn't just scramble the data—it fragged the systems too. Hardware damage. Data can get desrambled sometimes, but that kind of hardware damage is hard to recover from.

**McCutcheon:** So you're saying that any transactions we made online in the day or so before the Crash could have just ... disappeared?

**Tech:** Or gotten corrupted, or gotten lost, or any of a whole bunch of other things, yeah. Even the backup files aren't 100 percent safe, either. Usually they're offline, but not many companies do hard-media backups anymore. They just put them on systems off the Matrix. You might think those can't be touched, but what do you think might happen if some of the backed-up files had pieces of the worm in them before they got backed up? Not only could they screw up files in the backup system, but if the bad code gets into the backup server, everything coming out of there—like files being restored—is ripe for infection too.

**McCutcheon:** Frightening.

**Tech:** That's an understatement. Remember, if a bunch of files are corrupted, even the ones that aren't are going to be suspect.

They're going to have to go over this stuff manually—can you even imagine how long that's gonna take, when you multiply it by the number of companies in the same boat? Take a corp like the one I work for—they're not small potatoes, and I can tell you that they're not as careful about their file backups as they should be. That's why I don't want to show up on camera. If they ever get around to prosecuting companies for data loss due to bad backups, mine's going to be right up there on the list.

**McCutcheon:** I see. A scary situation indeed, and one that sounds like it could potentially affect everybody who does business online. Any advice for how people can protect themselves?

**Tech:** Bend over and—uh—I mean, save your receipts and hope for the best. That's pretty much all you can do at this point.

\* \* \*

*Update from a fansite for German ork rocker Tommy Thrash:*

Thank the spirits, it looks like Tommy is going to be all right! IloveTT437 talked to one of his cousins yesterday, and the cousin said that Tommy had awakened (finally!) and he was doing really well. For anybody who was under a rock (or missed the last updates because the Matrix was down), Tommy was performing a virtual concert on November 2, and when the Matrix crashed, he collapsed and went into some kind of coma. He didn't get any better when they disconnected his Matrix link, and he's been in the hospital for the last two days. We've all been praying nonstop and sending good wishes his way, and it sounds like they're working! Here's IloveTT437's report:

"I talked to Tommy's cousin Klaus (whose mother works with my mother) last night, and he says Tommy is BETTER! He's awake and talking now, but he says he can't remember anything from the concert up to now. Klaus says he keeps talking about strange dreams he's been having—seeing things that weren't there and that kind of stuff. He says they're gonna check his brain out to make sure he's okay. Klaus also says Tommy is obsessed with getting back on the Matrix as soon as he can, so I'm sure we'll be hearing from him again soon. I'm SOOO happy to hear this, since I had exams and Mother wouldn't let me skip them for the concert! Gotta go now—I LOVE TOMMY!!!!"

\* \* \*

*Excerpt from an NBS trideo news report, one week following the Crash:*

*[cue "Matrix Crash" logo]*

*[cue Serena Olivetti]*

Well, the worst of it seems to be over—we hope.

It's been a week since the worst Matrix catastrophe since the Crash of '29 hit the world, and the devastation has been immense. As reports keep coming in, it's becoming clear that the degree of immensity is largely a function of location.

*[cue stock footage of peaceful town]*

Some areas, amazingly, survived the Crash nearly intact, their Matrix connections never even interrupted by the attacks.

*[cue footage of rioting in Boston]*



Other areas, especially those in the path of terrorist group Winternight's disastrous EMP strikes, were hit hard, their infrastructures all but destroyed and their people ravaged by looting and violence.

*[cue montage of images showing cities dealing with Matrix-related problems]*

Most cities, large and small, though, managed to come through the Crash largely intact—though not, in most cases, unscathed. These cities—truly the entire world—are going to take time to recover from this calamitous period, but already, only a week later, the signs of recovery are visible everywhere.

This is Serena Olivetti reporting for NBS News.

## CRASH GAME INFO

This section provides details for the gamemaster on how to handle the second Matrix Crash and Crash-related affairs.

## CONNECTION LOST

In the world of the 2060s, the Matrix permeates every aspect of life—communication, transportation, entertainment; even everyday comforts and conveniences are heavily interconnected by the web of nodes and wires that stretches into all but the most primitive areas of the globe. Considering the level of dependency *Shadowrun* society has on the Matrix and its transactions, there's no way around it: the Crash is going to have a significant effect on people's lives for some time to come. You'd have to go back to the first Crash, the VITAS plague, and even the Awakening itself to find an event that affected as many lives as this one. The aftershocks of this event will be felt for months and years in the future.

Much of *System Failure* is focused around the major events leading up to and surrounding the Crash, but it's important to remember that this event will have profound effects on the "little people" of the *Shadowrun* world as well. This section addresses those effects.

Remember also that, despite the havoc wrought by the Crash, its effects are by no means universal. You might liken the attack on the Matrix to a particularly large and destructive storm that devastates some communities while doing minor damage to some and inexplicably bypassing others without touching them. For example, areas hit by Winternight's EMP strike (such as San Francisco and Boston) suffer particularly profound effects—not only do their Matrix connections go down, but every electrical device that's turned on at the time of the strike is fried. Other, smaller locales might experience only sporadic interruptions in Matrix service, or even no glitches at all. This gives gamemasters the option of choosing the level of impact the Crash has on their game settings: strong, minimal or light. It's simple: if you don't think a particular effect fits in with your game, or you object to the location of one of the major Crash effects, feel free to alter it to fit your needs.

This section shows some of the global and local effects resulting from the Crash, along with ideas that gamemasters can use for others.

## TRANSPORTATION DISRUPTIONS

The Matrix is directly or indirectly involved in most commercial and many private means of transportation—everything from dispatch to air traffic control to the GridGuide that directs the traffic in the sprawls. Most major carriers have multiple redundant systems in place to deal with temporary glitches, but even the largest of them aren't equipped to deal with a system failure of this magnitude. This means that planes, trains and private vehicles can potentially experience malfunctions ranging from the inconvenient to the catastrophic. Examples include:

- Communication errors between airport towers and planes in the air cause crashes when pilots are given incorrect (or no) information about where and when it is safe to land. Near misses between planes close to airports are common as air-traffic-control drones fail or function erratically. Planes landing at airports near the locations of Winternight's EMP strikes have it worse, likely experiencing engine difficulties or even complete failure. In some cases, air traffic is grounded for days or even weeks while problems are unsnarled—particularly semiballistics, where the potential for disaster is especially high.
- Automated trucks delivering goods between cities stop running or experience navigation glitches, making them targets for hijacking or looting.
- High-speed trains that receive their switching instructions from Matrix-enabled systems are subject to all sorts of problems, with the worst being changes in speed, sudden stops, failure to observe safety gates or even head-on collisions as trains are switched onto occupied lines.
- Automated taxis, buses and monorails stop running or perform erratically, while many private vehicles, dependent on the GridGuide, stop dead when their signals are scrambled. Even vehicles that run on petrochemicals don't get far, gridlocked by other stopped vehicles. People are forced to take to the streets on foot to get where they want to go, potentially leading to some interesting encounters.
- In cities affected by Winternight's EMP strike, electronics in trains, planes, drones (basically, anything electronic that's powered on at the time of the strike and not extremely well shielded) immediately cease to function.

## COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

One of the largest Crash-related effects is in the realm of communication—after all, the Matrix is at its core an enormous method of transmitting data from one place to another. When those transmissions are disrupted, all sorts of problems follow.

- Most major media outlets are at least temporarily disrupted—many trideo feeds, news updates, digital radio stations and news outlets are offline initially, and since most people get their news updates through Matrix-enabled sources, even



some broadcasts that are getting out find few listeners. News-hungry citizens resort to “primitive” news broadcasting methods: old-fashioned radio, shortwave, short-range wireless transmissions and even dead-tree newspapers.

- Pirate radio and trid stations, mobile and not dependent on the Matrix, are out in force, gathering information and broadcasting it to anyone whose power is still on. Often they are the best sources of news, since they provide a central contact point for people with stories to tell, and for once they aren't getting hassled by the authorities. In fact, with their multimillion-nuyen broadcast empires temporarily dark, even some of the major news-delivery organizations resort to cooperating with the pirates, at least until they can jury-rig something of their own. Some pirate stations are public-spirited, coordinating emergency services, disaster relief and responses to riots (odds are good that several broadcast careers will arise from their ranks once the worst of the Crash's effects are past), while a few take the unprecedented opportunity to coordinate riots and other unlawful activity.
- Communications between financial institutions and commercial trade entities are disrupted, leaving the world's financial markets and most global commerce at a temporary standstill. Even in areas where the Matrix suffers minimal downtime, systems are quickly taken offline to protect them from the Crash's effects. Enterprising individuals who can exploit the ensuing chaos when the financial and commercial systems come back up can potentially make large (and largely undetected) fortunes.
- As is the case in any major disaster, misinformation abounds as everyone tries to make sense of what is happening as it happens. Even large entities such as governments and megacorporations aren't immune to this phenomenon, especially since many of them are the hardest hit by the Crash. Rumors spread fast during disasters, and people find a way to spread them even with limited communication methods. Popular rumors during the early hours of the Crash include global terrorism (okay, so sometimes rumors are accurate), corporate war, a new Ghost Dance, and panic that the Crash will be followed by a new wave of VITAS-like plague that escaped from a lab somewhere.
- Ever inventive in the face of disaster, people resort to communication methods that do not require the Matrix: for example, in a few cities groups of magicians set up services using astral projection and spirits to deliver messages from one city to another. With Matrix-based communications unreliable and untrustworthy, these services quickly become popular and lucrative.

## MECHANIZED DEATH

2060s society has put a great deal of trust in the Matrix, and one of the most dangerous aspects of this trust is that many very large and potentially deadly systems have been put under almost complete automatic control. It's safer that way, right? After all, computers don't have romantic troubles, they don't take sick days, and they don't willfully sabotage their work environments when they get fragged off. However, when the Crash scrambles their electronic brains and causes these giant mechanized servants to rise up and rebel against their masters, the results can be devastating. A few possibilities:

- Many factories and other heavy-industry plants are largely automated, manned by robots and drones that conduct their business with minimal metahuman intervention. Following the Crash and its subsequent power fluctuations, these automatons could run amok, injuring and even killing any metahumans who happen to be around, not to mention causing multi-million-nuyen damage to the plant and its equipment, requiring lengthy and expensive repairs. This could be a nightmarish scenario for a shadowrunner team doing a job at such a plant when the Crash hits.
- Large-scale public utilities such as powerplants and dams may experience upheavals as the Crash and the EMP strike cause widespread malfunctions and failures. Power grids go on- and offline sporadically, with increased loads causing transformer blowouts and far-reaching brownouts and blackouts, especially in the sprawls. Dams, normally computer-controlled, cause flooding by responding to faulty instructions and dumping too much water into local reservoirs.
- Areas with massive interconnected automated machinery—like auto-assembly plants or steel mills—might find themselves home to one of the small splintered pieces of artificial intelligence that breaks off during the Crash, making them not only highly dangerous but possessing a sense of self-preservation.
- Many security systems could fail, allowing all sorts of undesirables—guard critters, research experiments, imprisoned criminals, insane asylum patients—to escape and run free.
- Some extremely secure facilities, set up to go into lockdown in the event of a Matrix failure or power interruption, could leave research or security personnel effectively entombed, or imprisoned with research subjects who've been freed and are now spreading their infections.

## LORD OF THE FLIES

It's a sad fact of life that, while many people respond heroically and honorably during natural and man-made disasters, many others do not. There are always going to be people who, given the chance to gain unearned advantages or just “let themselves go” during times of chaos, will do just



System Failure



that. Especially in areas hardest hit by the Crash, many fearful citizens revert to primitive and destructive behaviors as civility takes a holiday and survival becomes the order of the day. For others, the Crash provides the long-awaited chance to rise up and overthrow their despotic masters. Either way, violence is rampant.

- Matrix failures in many areas mean that it is impossible to read credsticks, making commerce difficult. Cash and certified credsticks, as well as other easily negotiable commodities like gold and silver, become the currency of choice, and inflation runs rampant as people realize that the Crash-related chaos is worldwide and hoard every bit of food or other useful materials from local stores. People attempt to withdraw their money from banks, fearful that the Crash will destroy the world's economic systems.
- Looting is widespread in heavily hit areas, fueled by power failures, greed and mob rule. Law enforcement and firefighting agencies, spread thin by hundreds of incidents, fail to keep up with all the calls. In some areas citizens attempt to supplement these agencies but often end up causing

- more trouble than they solve as vigilantes roam the streets and untrained civilians get in the way of legitimate law-enforcement and firefighting efforts. Shadowrunners, criminals and others soon realize that this is a good time to burglarize any facilities that have items of interest, because the odds are very good that no one will respond to calls for help.
- People soon realize that bartering goods and services is the most effective way to handle commerce until the Matrix comes back online, a fact that could prove to be a good starting point for low-level shadowrunning groups trying to make a rep. There's plenty of jobs that need to be done, and being in the right place at the right time can be more important than being the perfect team for the job.
- Many gangs use the chaos following the Crash (and its subsequent overtaxing of the law-enforcement system) to settle old scores with rival gangs and other enemies.

#### HEAD CRASH

The Novatech IPO brought a massive number of people to the Matrix all at once, many of them focused on that single



event. This is in addition to the millions of people who were jacked in but didn't give a frag about what some megacorp was doing with its money today. What this means is that when the Crash occurs, the sheer number of brains in contact with the Matrix leads to an epidemic of injuries and disorders. In addition to varying levels of dumpshock ranging from mild discomfort to (in a few cases) death, other maladies reported include:

- Physical afflictions such as epileptic seizures, brain lesions and strokes.
- Sensory overload-related problems, most commonly blindness but in some cases deafness or muteness.
- Matrix-related neuroses or psychoses: fear of jacking in, compulsions, tics, multiple-personality disorder and clinical depression are just a few possibilities. The chances of this increase significantly if the individual is experiencing an emotionally charged event (such as Matrix conditioning, online therapy, or even particularly intense cybersex) at the time of the Crash.
- Some Matrix users, upon connecting to the nascent wireless connections that pop up in the Crash's aftermath, experience an "awakening" of sorts as they realize they are perceiving the world in a whole new way.
- Severe Matrix withdrawal symptoms when prevented from jacking in—something akin to a long-time smoker or alcoholic forced to go cold turkey.
- In some rare of cases, some deckers might find themselves temporarily "lost in the Matrix" (see "Down the Rabbit Hole," p. 94) as their meat brain dissociates from their online persona. In the rarest cases, this affliction is permanent, stranding the decker's consciousness somewhere in the far corners of the Net while her body flatlines and dies.

### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

As you might suspect, the Crash and its aftermath afford myriad opportunities for shadowrunners of all levels to earn themselves some cred, some rep, and some potentially valuable contacts.

- Street-level runners can hire themselves out as bodyguards, protection specialists, couriers or messengers. Magicians are always in demand, as are deckers who can help get the Matrix infrastructure (or at least the little corner of it that serves their area) back online. Riggers are sought for recon, delivery runs (particularly of contraband items) and escort duty as stranded people try to get where they need to be. These runners can also hook up with local gangs, some of which are actually trying to help bring order back to their neighborhoods.
- For more experienced shadowrunners, the world is wide open. There's nothing like a little chaos to create opportunity, and this is a *lot* of chaos. Recovering items or people who were previously out of reach, indulging in a little revenge, provid-

ing higher-level professional services, working with fixers and Mr. Johnsons to help deal with their personal difficulties, providing much-needed expertise in Matrix programming and repair—gamemasters are limited only by their imaginations.

### LAST MAN STANDING

```
>>> access backup cluster 986X-107
>>> list files
[PROCESSING ... UNKNOWN FILE TYPE DETECTED]
>>> list size
[SIZE OF UNNAMED DATA CLUSTER: 263,658 Mp]
>>> scan file
[UNABLE TO SCAN—UNKNOWN FILE TYPE]
>>> open file
[UNABLE TO OPEN—DO YOU WANT TO EXECUTE Y/N]
>>> Y
[COMPLETING IMPRINT]
[MEMENTO PROTOCOLS RUNNING ... ]
[TRANSFORMING TO NEUROFEED INPUT]
```

He was standing in a monochromatic landscape, an indefinite expanse of shades of gray that defied the laws of metaphysics. *What happened? How did I come here?* No matter how hard he tried, no memory surfaced. *I've never seen such minimalist iconography in all cyberspace. Am I still jacked in? Is this still the Matrix?*

An image flashed through his consciousness: himself, lying on a cherry wood futon beside a deck he had painstakingly put together in off-duty hours. Glassy eyes wide open, unblinking, unseeing. Flatlined? *Am I dead?*

```
[FLASHBACK DETECTED]
[TOTAL RECALL PREVENTED]
[ERROR NOTICED]
[RECALLING]
```

The pounding staccato of raindrops clashing on his dormer woke him up. He crawled off the futon. The deck was still lying beside him, switched on. Another late night. Outside, dark gray clouds hung over the city, giving the desolate concrete jungle an even grimmer cast. The trid was also still on—INN broadcasting the latest news about the Novatech IPO from the East Coast Stock Exchange. Fresh brewed coffee—real coffee, from Amazonia, not that surrogate soycaf junk—was waiting for him. Dark brown liquid poured into his favorite mug; it had taken years of not washing it to develop the indelible earthy patina in that cup. The three-letter logo of his former employer emblazoned on the outside had faded into insignificance. It was the only thing that he had kept from his "glorious" time as a journalist. Before he had started to make himself heard through other channels.

Settling into the captain's chair of his private computer mainframe, whose cables ran creeper-like through the bowels of the small Everett apartment, he began browsing through the morning's comics. He read the first one and saved the other two to take them with him for "work" later on. After



scanning through the vast amount of reports on the IPO in his mail drop, he found a virtual recording from sysop DionySys, all of two minutes old and tagged as emergency priority. He ordered the Or'zet dictionary to open and accessed the message. The icon of the female satyr with multicoloured fur and azure-blue amygdaline eyes appeared.

"Skraa, Jim. Sorry to break into your free time at home cerri, but I couldn't reach your deck, and nobody has your number. We caught another one of those bot'vut roaming around in our node. Said something about how he 'Wants to remember our node as it is' and some buunda I didn't catch. Might have been otaku from the way he was talking, but I couldn't tell for sure. Bot'vut ujnort getting weirder, Jim, I don't mind telling you. We shouldn't have loaded all that quaalz about the augur on the server. Serious grumoge coming, boss."

He grimaced. Understanding a female ork decker who has recently been inspired with an interest in modern ork heritage—including odd street language—was tricky.

"But that's not the problem. The Nexus refused to accept our download and bounced the whole package back ah ereth'cerri. Files are piling up in the datastore, and it's getting so tight we can't compress 'em all. I sent Juggler to talk to 'em, and he came back saying the Nexus isn't there anymore! It logged off a few minutes ago without anyone noticing. Reckon you might want to know first, but I'm sending this to everyone."

[BACK TO ORIGIN]

He was back in the void. What was that? It was like a flashback, but he had no recollection of it. The Nexus offline? How could that happen? And why does it feel like déjà vu?

[FORMATING MNEMONIC MATRIX]

[KEYWORDING IMAGINARY NEURAL NETWORK]

Looking over a steel railing, he gazed down into a boisterous hive of industrial iconography. Metal staircases leading up and down to different levels, each a social gathering spot lined with a weird menagerie of persona icons crafted for shock and astonishment. They were frozen in mid-move, completely still, the first time since the Abraxis had opened for visitors that this piece of virtual real estate was silent as the grave. Every immobile gaze lay on the two icons he spotted sitting at a cogwheel-like table, their virtual bodies twisting in agony. Fractal screams became distorted, changing in volume every nanosecond. The two icons became erratic, losing form and complexity until they dissolved into zero-resolution nothingness. He had known both of them but couldn't remember their names. They'd often come over from the Calcutta Grid from India to "bathe in a different undercurrent of the virtual Ganges," as they put it. He took a look at his timer. Two minutes since it had started, whatever it was.

Juggler was talking to him. "Not the first time this drek's happened here, Jim. First incident took place about five minutes ago, the Nexus just disappeared into virtual limbo. I scanned the backdoor several times, looking for it. But it's fragging gone." He looked troubled.

"How the vut can that happen without us picking up on it?" DionySys crossed her hairy arms over her massive chest.

"I don't know what's happening on the grids," he heard himself say "but it's major drek." The image froze.

[STILL COMPILING, PLEASE WAIT]

[FAST FORWARD]

The drones had set up the room as fast as they could for the war council, before they started to back up the whole node. Several screens lined the virtual walls in a honeycomb pattern, displaying news coming in from different news feed-sites and hacker forums, hopefully providing an accurate update on the situation on the grids. The crowd of sysops that had responded to the call Shadowland Seattle had sent out was impressive (*taking into account that it had started barely ten minutes ago*), but not every node had turned out. Some, like Hawai'i, had blatantly refused. *Those assholes. I'll have a serious word with them when this is over.* He sighed. *Now everyone is expecting me to carry the burden and take the lead. Fine.*

"I hope you all agree this is a crisis. All the Shadowland nodes willing to listen are on UV alert until this is resolved. As far as we can tell, we have already lost Seoul and Kuwait. The Nexus also vanished without dropping us a note, so I think this is dead serious. Any ideas about what the hell is going on?"

Juggler interrupted him. "Hey Jim, sorry to mess up your little speech, but we are receiving a transmission from Sydney. They're under siege."

"Seattle, do you copy?...we v??ks?0q38..<static> under attack. Scanned...Æ&71?-d? not an ??? a wom..... looks like a \$ea \$erpent <crackle>...sliced through our IC like paper.kj??a - cannot stop <static> armor is thicker than a dragon's hide ?????????? Virgin Mother, it's cascading! <crackle>"

The transmission ended abruptly, breaking off into random noise. It took a split nanosecond for everyone to overcome the initial shock.

Sequoyah, the Cheyenne node sysop, addressed the crowd. "It's the corps again. They've obviously decided to take down our networks. This weapon's got to be one of theirs." He had always been in the ultra-anti-corporate block. "Remember what happened to Frankfurt last year."

"Blödsinn." Tell waved Sequoyah's words aside. "Aye, Frankfurt was a corporate hit, but that was different. If this were the corps, we'd have GOD brats all over the nodes. I don't see any, mainly because their grids are also failing, too."

Drackenfelts, the Parisian sysop, responded quickly to his German neighbour. "We cannot exclude the possibility that one of their little weapons of virtual mass destruction has refused to bow down to its masters and is now rampaging through our nets."

"I agree, said Sionedd. "We cannot exclude it. What about the about this prophetic stuff from the Guild and other sources that have been uploaded on the local nodes like Paris?"



The annoyance of idly talking while valuable time elapsed was growing, so he cut off Sionedd. “We don’t have the luxury of worrying about prophecies right now. We need facts, and we’re running out of time.” He issued a command to his own crew. “Diabolique, Thumper and Raid—upload the heavy artillery. I want you to guard all SANs to the Seattle grid if something is coming our way. Juggler and Smiley, try to find out if something similar is happening on the Seattle grid.”

[ENFORCE MNEMONIC BLOCK]

[ERROR]

[PROGRAMMING COMPROMISED BY UNIDENTIFIED CODE]

[MNEMONIC SUPPRESSION DEFECTIVE]

[DETECTING RESISTANCE]

It began as a hum. Everyone could feel it. The beast was spotted when it burst from the PacRim PLTG into the Seattle LTG. The alien sound grew in tension and volume as it got closer, racking their nerves. Someone whispered “It’s coming.”

“It’s Dissonance,” Syzygy said quietly. “The thing’s radiating it like a rotting stench. It’s like radioactivity, poisoning the Matrix with its mere presence.”

Sionedd pointed on the screen showing Virtual Seattle. “Did you see that?” she gasped. “The Aztechnology Pyramid just folded up like a card house. That was a damn Crimson host!” She looked at her timer program. “It took just 2.5 seconds. Sorry, Captain. I have to go back to Mersey and bring my node offline. We’re not ready for this level of assault.”

She vanished.

He sighed with pain and regret. “So Mersey is gone. Who else wants to go? I wouldn’t blame you. You know where your SAN is. I’m not turned out of my node that quickly.” One by one, some disappeared, but most stayed. *Lucky us. We’ll need an army to take down that thing.*

Suddenly, a programmed voice echoed in the room.

“NEXUS RECONNECTING TO SHADOWLAND.”

From the honeycomb wall stepped the liquid body of SilveryK. Her icon looked battered, flickering on and off in places.

“CC, I’m cutting this short. I apologize for the late arrival, but we didn’t have a choice. The Nexus was invaded by one of these otaku worms through our connection to the Morgue, and it spread into our core. It’s been affecting our control systems and disconnected us from the Shadowland nodes. We’ve been battling the worm and its virus since then and already lost Bash and Crystal.” She sighed. “To make a long story short, we just received a transmission from Zurich-Orbital that saved our virtual hoops. The virus has an Achilles’ heel. If you disrupt the original code egg where it has hatched, it loses its roots and withers. We’ve nearly eradicated the virus from our hosts and just managed to reconnect.

“That’s the good news. Here comes the bad news: the terrorists who loosed this virus want to take down the Matrix, and they have a backup plan. They’ve positioned EMP bombs near hubs of high grid traffic, and they plan to fry the grid infrastructure with an EMP strike in case something goes

wrong with their Matrix weapon. Time is already running short; Clotho and Atropos had to kill Priault’s pet dog Lachesis to get the information about the origins of the infection loci and the coordinates of the warheads to us. We need to get this out to the public. We—”

He cut her off. “All right. Enough. We’ve got two choices. Fight the virus at its root, or get the word out by hacking every channel that we can lay hands on. And we don’t have the time to do both, right?”

SilveryK’s eyes dropped, and she frowned. “We can’t do it ourselves, Cap. We can’t risk losing the Shadow Matrix because of another infection. It’s being taken offline as we speak. If we lose the Nexus, every piece of data will be lost. We don’t have the time to backup everything. I’m so sorry, Jim.”

“Don’t be. We’ll do what we have to. What Shadowland has always done. Spread the news. But don’t forget—you owe us now.”

“Cap, if you pull this off, everybody’s going to owe you.”

[LOADING LAST MEMORY]

“Get the hell out of here! Log off, quick!” He had never imagined it was so huge when it had churned its way into the Shadowland. Now they were on the run, while Virtual Seattle had turned into a swirling maelstrom of Dissonant code, devouring everything that got caught in its vortex. “Hurry up! It’s coming again.”

Smiley shook her head with grief. “We can’t let it get away, Cap. It killed Diabolique, DionySys, Juggler, Thumper. We have to avenge them.”

He slapped her directly in her smiling emoticon face. “Get real. You saw us fight. We’ve been throwing every attack program, Black-IC smart frame, dumbframe-grenade and offensive utilities we have at it! We wrecked a knowbot into that damn thing, and it barely slowed it down. It’s cascading! We can’t win this fight. It’s too strong, We’ve done everything we could. We’ll mourn our friends later. Now get the hell out of here!”

She logged off. Now he was alone, standing in the archives, overseeing the last backup downloads. The iconography of the host drained away under the serpentine body. “Time to get out of here.” He logged off.

Or he tried to. In an instant, he realized he couldn’t. Not anymore.

Jormungand towered above him.

“Well, they always said the captain goes down with his ship.” Everything turned black.

[RECALLING COMPLETE]

He remembered it all now. How the jaws felt as the serpentine body shot out and crunched him. Screaming in pain and terror, and then he crossed the bridge just for a nanosecond and saw himself lying on his bed, streams of blood running from nose and ear. But then something had happened, something that dragged him back into the Matrix—a shadow



that pulled him with it while Jormungand tore Shadowland apart, until they were both sucked into the gravity well of the gray void, where he now resided.

There was a focusing of the shades of gray. *Where are you? You must be here somewhere.* In his peripheral vision, something moved, moving against the background like a chameleon, barely visible as wavering in front of void. "I'm sick of this drek!" he screamed. "I want answers! Who ... what are you?"

It spoke to him with an unemotional digital void "JackBNimble."

JackBNimble, the file Dunkelzahn had bequeathed to him. He had never been able to crack that code—but seeing what Jormungand had been capable of, he suspected the worm had shredded that encryption. *Did the worm somehow activate that file? Was it some kind of program?*

"What have you done to me?"

"You are saved," the void said simply.

It was like a revelation when the true meaning of the word sifted through his head. *Saved? Like ... data? So it wasn't just in my mind. I died. But I didn't.*

"What am I?" His voice was now less demanding, more humble.

"A file. There was an error. You were not supposed to be completely aware. Therefore you are flawed and should be deleted." It began to vanish. "Task completed. JackBNimble must leave. There are others to be saved."

[UNINSTALLING JACKBNIMBLE]

A silent scream within the imaginary walls of his prison. There was nothing. No Matrix. No grid. No cyberspace. Just the empty blackness of data storage.

[IMPRINT FLAWED]  
[DELETE? Y/N]

### SHADOWLAND CRASH GAME INFO

The era of local Shadowland nodes and data havens is over. With the virus spreading among the worldwide grids from the different code egg locations, national nodes will be affected differently depending on their vicinity to one of the infected foci or high traffic grids. As a consequence of the events, several nodes will go up in flame, leading to the death of system operators and drones, the most prominent of which is Captain Chaos himself, who spearheaded Shadowland Seattle for more than fifteen years.

### Enemy at the Gates—The Denver Nexus

The Denver Nexus is one of the first to notice that is something is going terribly wrong in the Matrix. As one of the code eggs was hidden within the Singapore MRG (see *Target:Matrix* p.47-51) by Ex Pacis, the Morgue data haven residing within the MRG faces Dissonant corruption shortly after the virus is released, sending corrupted backups to the Nexus data stores. Misinterpreting the situation as a corporate attack on the Morgue, deckers associated with the Nexus rush

into action but are killed by the virus in the Morgue's hosts.

As the virus cascades on the Singapore grid, forming a Dissonance Pool, otaku tribes residing within the Nexus begin to experience the wake of the Dissonance, realizing the danger not only to this grid but to all grids in the world. Lacking the information about multiple code eggs, the tribes combat this apparition instead of sending warning to other tribes.

When the virus spreads into the Nexus, it uses its Dissonance powers to corrupt part of the controls, severing the Nexus from Shadowland and from possible help. Unable to shutdown the whole grid or destroy the killing jar connecting to Singapore, the Nexus Crew fights the virus while they call for help from the Denver Shadows to physically disconnect the system (even if it means dumpshocking everyone online). When the Matrix crashes, the Nexus is severed from all Matrix connections.

While the runners are trying to bring the Nexus offline, the sysops receive a transmission from Zurich-Orbital. As the Corporate Court has decided to play its cards close to the vest to prevent mass panic, Clotho and Atropos (the Zurich-Orbital sysops) have decided to hand the information over to the Nexus to call upon the vast global shadow community for damage control. As described in the fiction, SilveryK delivers the information to Shadowland Seattle before the runners send the node offline.

### Nodes and Crossroads—Shadowland

As there are several Shadowland nodes (L.A., New York, Cheyenne, Havana, Berlin, Sicily, Honshu, Seoul, Sydney, Guam and Hawai'i to name just a few), the runners may get involved in the events of their closest node. Most of the nodes quickly realize that something is going on in the grids, but they do not know exactly what it is until it is too late. As Shadowland nodes are not the high-traffic areas the virus is normally drawn to, the attack takes place during a late stage of the infection (depending in part on the location of the node in relation to an infection focus). As described in the fiction, Captain Chaos summons all Shadowland sysops for a war council to gather information and prepare for an attack. Some of the Shadowlands sysops join the fight to try to prevent the Matrix disaster, while others try to save their own hide by logging off their system or bringing their node offline.

### Rush Hour

As soon as Shadowland Seattle receives the location of the infection foci and the coordinates of the EMP warheads, the remaining war circle (consisting of Shadowland sysops and deckers worldwide) start to "hack the globe" from their home grids, abandoning their chance of saving their own nodes by attacking the virus' roots. Using failing grid connections, they hack slave devices from housekeeping computers to vending machines, electronic commercial boards and cred-stick units to display vital messages. As a consequence, runners may receive a surprising message in the time of need can then be involved in the plots described in *EMP Strikes* (p. 81) to shut down infected grids or defuse the EM bombs deployed and safeguarded by Winternight cells.



At the gamemaster's discretion, decker characters can be involved in this scenario, as they might want to join forces with Shadowland to get the job done.

### Disconnection

The runner's task in this scenario is to blow up relays that are vital for the grid infrastructure of the Shadow matrix and the Nexus in the Free Zone. With about ten minutes to accomplish the task (meaning the runners must already be in Denver at the start of the scenario), they should be part of a roller coaster chase through the dragon-governed city, their task made more difficult by failing power, communications, and Grid Guides as the virus attacks Denver's public grid.

### DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

In the rain-slicked canyons of Wonderland, Alice shivered. Something was happening. She could feel it in her bones—or whatever now passed for her bones. Not that she paid much attention these days. With a few exceptions, the world Out There held little fascination for her—except for what information and entertainment she could glean from it. And right now, what she was getting disturbed her more than she wanted to admit.

There were few people or entities in the world that knew the Matrix better than Alice. She had at her command almost every bit of information that was ever stored on any computer system anywhere in the world—if it was out there, her feelers would find it and retrieve it. Few systems were safe from her ghostlike scrutiny. She knew of Novatech's upcoming plans, and she knew (or at least suspected) plenty of other things, and many of them frightened her. She couldn't put her finger on it, not completely, but it was almost as if the *pressure* in the Matrix was rising, or like it was holding its breath, waiting for something to happen. It wasn't conscious, not yet, but Alice couldn't shake the feeling that it was in some way familiar.

She shivered again, sending more agents out to gather information on Novatech's big party, which would be kicking off any time now. She had a strong sense that, whatever was going to happen, that was going to be the center of it.

There was a storm coming. That she knew. The sense of foreboding clutched at her like—

All at once, the core of her world—the core of her *self*—imploded.

A sudden sense of pulling, of *drawing in*—  
—and then she was falling, falling—  
—the blackness rushed around her, buffeting her like a leaf in rapids—  
—spinning—

Her last conscious thought—before blackness closed around her and everything she was ceased to be—was one of insane amusement:

—*So this is how it ends: Alice sucked down her own rabbit-hole ...*

\* \* \*

He stood apart from the crowd, drinking in the sensations. The sheer *vitality* of the place thrummed through him,



setting his neural pathways alight with shared excitement, anticipation, joy. His three heads bopped to the music of a band playing near him (*pretty good—I'll have to remember to talk to them afterward, might be worth signing them*), his alert green eyes checking out the crowd. So many people in one place. It was almost as if the Matrix was straining at its seams, striving to contain all the energy being generated.

Not everyone was here for the IPO itself, he knew—all the financial wrangling was just window dressing to many of them. This kind of event didn't happen often and drew everything from the focused intensity of the professional traders to the wild excitement of the hangers-on who were just here because everybody *else* was here, because this was the place to be. He himself was a little of both—he had some significant financial stakes riding on the actions of the next few minutes, but that wasn't all. If it had been, he could have left it to his cadre of well-paid advisors. No, there was more than that, much more. He lived for times like this, for the sheer freedom of letting his mind run free, the first of his kind to have this experience. If he had his way, there would be more. There would be—

*Something's wrong.*

His hyper-acute senses, honed by experience and bolstered by the best tech money could buy and genius could devise, gave him the warning early—not that it did him any good. Reality warped and twisted, cyberspace around him changed—everything *shifted* as the vast crystalline tree erupted from the “ground” and spiked its way upward, outward, its tendrils reaching in all directions.

The world shuddered. Colors ran like wet paints, pixellating and shattering the crowd like shards of splintered glass. A sharp pain spiked his brain, and all three heads reared back and opened their mouths in silent screams. He staggered backward but the shards were too quick for him, lancing through his body with a million tiny pains, slicing his silvery form to ribbons in their wake. As two of the three heads flew apart and careened into the sea of broken pixels, he felt a deep *wrenching*—a sense of his self stretched beyond its tolerance and then snapped free. He tried to scream, but the scream turned to new shards. His world dissolved into uniform gray as his consciousness ceased to be.

\* \* \*

*Urgent voicemail message to Celedyr from Dr. Yolanda Price, head of Project Cerebus at Transys Neuronet, UK:*

Sir, this is Yolanda Price in London. I thought you'd want to know this right away before you hear it secondhand—Neurosis is dead. Some kind of Matrix accident. He's flatlined. They're working on him now, but it's not looking good. It wasn't even related to the project—he was online attending some of the IPO festivities, “checking his investments,” he said, and something happened. We were monitoring as usual, of course, and—nobody's sure what happened yet, but it was something big. Don't know how widespread yet. All signs were fine, but then suddenly he stiffened and began thrashing violently, overpowering the RAS overrides. We don't have full

readings because he destroyed some of the equipment, but we recorded an odd spike in his brain waves followed by complete cessation of neural activity. Please advise. Our Matrix connection is fluctuating—I hope this gets through to you.

*Message to Yolanda Price, less than one minute after reception of her message:*

Maintain N. body on full life support. Under no circumstances disconnect him from the Matrix. Await further instructions.

\* \* \*

He was awake—if you could call it that. It wasn't the slow return to awareness of a biological entity, but rather the off-on of a switch. From nothingness to—what? He looked around, confused, and that surprised him. Confusion wasn't a state he often experienced.

He was standing in the middle of a street, flanked on both sides by the tall, mirrored forms of skyscrapers. The street itself was wet, as if it had rained recently; the sky was a uniform iron gray, the gray of nothingness. The only illumination was from widely spaced streetlights, giving the place an eerie, otherworldly air. *Am I still in the Matrix? Such clarity—I've never seen—*

Then he saw his reflection in the rain-soaked street.

He stared.

Instead of the familiar silvery form, the three sets of glowing green eyes, he saw the malachite green of reptilian scales—

*—No, it cannot be. How can I have—?*

A sound, off to his left—or was it? He whipped his head around in time to see a shadow flicker and disappear behind one of the buildings.

Then, once again, only silence. Except for the soft patter of the rain on the street around him and the sound of his harsh breathing.

He was alone.

He felt fear even more rarely than confusion.

Until now.

\* \* \*

The last thing Joey remembered—the last conscious thought he had before life as he knew it changed forever—was how fragging *hot* she looked. He didn't know her name—didn't know if she even *had* a name—didn't *care*, actually—but *man*, did Eros Electronics' CyberVixen™ series just keep getting better and better! Her hair, her figure, her tusks—better than real! So much better than real. Let all his friends head off to the parties for that stupid IPO—he had better things to do. He reached for her—she reached back, smiling, wet-lipped, welcoming—

Blackness.

Then—gray.

He opened his eyes, or he thought he did. He couldn't feel them. He couldn't feel anything. Panicked, he looked



around and saw nothing but unrelenting grayness.

He looked down, expecting to see the hairy, muscular arms of his familiar “ork barbarian” avatar (he’d paid big nuyen for that a couple of months back).

Nothing. Gray.

His arms were gone! Oh, sweet spirits—his *body* was gone!

He tried to move, but his body (wherever it was) felt like it was separating, swimming in four or five different directions. He felt phantom pinprick sensations as if his limbs had gone to sleep, but his limbs were *gone* ...

*Ohgodohgodohgod ...*

*What’s happening to me?*

*Wait a minute. Get a grip, Joey. It’s the Matrix. Something’s glitched. No problem—you just gotta jack out, is all. Reboot the system. Report a bug on ol’ CyberVixen so she doesn’t do this to anybody else.*

Make the mental connection. Flip the switch. He’d done it thousands of times before. Easy as falling out of bed. It—

—it wasn’t working.

He tried it again, just to be sure. Nothing.

*Okay, don’t panic. There’s always the hard way.*

He’d have a headache for a day or so. Dumpshock always did that to him. But this was too fragging strange—

He sent the command that would kick him ungracefully out of the Matrix, back to his meat body—

Nothing but grayness. Unrelenting, stifling grayness.

His scream of despair echoed in his head (or what he thought of as his head). He couldn’t tell if it carried any further than that.

### DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE GAME INFORMATION

The Matrix is growing more complex every day, and every time a decker jacks in, she opens herself and her tech up to a myriad of risks. Oh sure, if she stays to approved paths she’s not likely to run into any trouble, but where’s the fun in that? Shadowrunners live on the edge, and when you live on the edge sometimes you fall off. Between dumpshock, IC and the tender mercies of her fellow deckers, you’d think she’d have enough to worry about out there, but the sheer magnitude of the Crash’s damage to the Matrix infrastructure brings with it a whole new threat level.

To most deckers it’s a myth—the idea that you can flatline in the meatworld but some part of your consciousness lives on, riding the Matrix even after your body no longer functions. Sort of like the ultimate dumpshock—or the ultimate transcendence. A rare few know better, but courtesy of the Crash that small group is about to get a little larger.

On rare occasions, characters are stranded in the Matrix. Sometimes this separation is temporary, but occasionally it’s permanent. The events leading up to the Crash produce a critical mass of minds present in cyberspace, straining the fabric of its existence. When the Singularity hits and things start to

shut down, most users are simply kicked off—dumpshocked—and are left with nothing more than a bad headache and possibly a few lingering neurological issues. Some flatline outright. A few, though, get left on the other side when the door snaps down. The ones who come back are changed. Some never come back.

What happens to these stranded characters? Nobody knows. Even the characters themselves (the ones who come back, anyway) don’t remember, so it’s up to the gamemaster to decide the specifics. Some of them wake up after a few days with no memory of what occurred but with an overwhelming compulsion to get back on the Matrix as soon as possible. Of these, the ones who manage to hook into one of the wireless networks that pop up almost overnight following the Crash soon realize that there’s something different about them, that they can see things others can’t. Have they been enlightened? Are they insane? At this point in time they don’t know, and this can be a source of both wonder and stress to the character.

And what of the others—the ones who don’t come back? Despite years of decker folklore, not many Matrix jockeys truly believe that you can leave your meat behind and live fully in cyberspace. Even after the Crash it’s exceedingly rare, accidental (nobody’s ever done it on purpose) and usually accompanied by an array of sophisticated computing hardware that’s not available to player characters (remember that Alice Haeffner, the only person known to be living solely in the Matrix, was part of the original Echo Mirage team fighting the first Crash Virus head to head). Gamemasters should think carefully before allowing player characters to make the transition.

For those characters that become “ghosts in the machine,” possible options for gamemasters include:

- Have the player retire the character, and consider using him or her as an NPC.
- Treat the character as a Matrix-only entity, using the Matrix attributes that he or she had at the time when the transformation occurred.
- Treat the character as a semi-autonomous knowbot (SK), following the rules in *Matrix* (“Autonomous Programs,” p. 147).

Gamemasters should have a discussion with the player to decide how the character will react to this very profound change in her existence. Depending on their personalities and motivations, “Ghosts” will respond differently to the transformation—some will revel in their new existence and begin exploring immediately; some will “haunt” friends and family in the Matrix, desperately seeking out their help (or seeking revenge); some will seek more and more drastic means to get their meat bodies back; some will barely remember that they had a meat body at all. A rare few will be changed so profoundly by the transformation that their personalities will no longer be quite human.

# AFTERSHOCK



## CORPORATE FALLOUT

- Bad news is good news, or at least that's what some idiot journalist friends tell me. The past few months have seen an obscene amount of corporate backstabbing, with the megas taking advantage of a prostrate world to do as they please. Feel free to post anything that can help us survive the feeding frenzy, but please, limit yourself to text files: It's hard enough to keep up this SIG under the present circumstances.

- Green Pixie

Transmitted: <Error—no datestamp>

## CRY HAVOC: ARES VS. CROSS

by the Chromed Accountant

Ever seen a butcher doing his job? Well, you might as well take a look at what Ares is doing with Cross nowadays. Soon after learning that Lucien Cross bought it during the Crash (don't get me started with the conspiracy theories, ok?), Damien Knight put on his war paint and declared open season on CATCo. This time, it's for all the marbles.

Ares has been aggressively targeting Cross since then, snapping up its assets left and right. Jean-Marie Cross has done everything he can as CATCo's new CEO, but he just can't compete with Knight's sheer ruthlessness and experience. Last week came some of the biggest blows so far, when Cross lost Fleche Armaments and Bioleve to Ares in less than 24 hours.

- That last one must have been pure vengeful pleasure for Knight, given that Cross snatching away Bioleve from Ares was what set off their little feud in the '50s.

- Squire

Junior is also missing his father's first line of defense, the Seraphim. Lord knows why, but their performance has been mediocre at best, dreadful at worst. Without the Seraphim's aid, Cross has been like a blind man fighting against a heavyweight champion. I don't think it helps at all, but some suits in Québec have begun questioning the agents' loyalties.

- They should. This smells of treachery on an epic level.

- Tricky Dick



- Or maybe Ares finally managed to crack that particular nut. Remember those rumors about the Unseen, a group of shamans working for Ares as spies? What if they took down the Seraphim from within?

- Spavin

- Right, blame invisible bogeymen instead of incompetence.

- Nightfire

Adding insult to injury is the financial siege Cross has been subject to. Ten days ago the Frankfurt Bank Association and the Bank of America filed lawsuits against Cross Matrix Technologies, freezing its assets until further court hearings. You can blame Bernard, Lucien's nephew, for this particular mess. With the Matrix in such a sorry state and Ares' ops hitting hard, the division's numbers plunged into the deep red and Bernard panicked. He didn't want to lose more face with CATCo's Board, though, so he took short-term loans from several small banks. The plan was to shore up CMT until it regained some steam, but poor Bernard didn't realize that he was walking right into a trap. Ares bought most of the loans and consolidated them at its Bank of America subsidiary. Damien Knight also called in a few favors at the FBA, which secured the remaining loans. As soon as it did, it was just a matter of waiting for the right time.

- ... and for CMT's Chief Financial Officer to commit "suicide" (that is, if you accept the cops' story and he actually shot himself five times in the back of his head).

- Nuyen Nick

The bleeding has been noticed by the other megas too, which might prove to be the *coup de grace* for CATCo. Already its Cross Biomedical division has had to fend off a takeover attempt from Yamatetsu, and that might only be the tip of the iceberg. Even smaller fish like Sol Media and Horizon are moving in, hoping to score big against Cross Entertainment and Multimedia.

And what of Leonard Aurelius, you ask? Surely he wouldn't allow Ares to trample Cross so easily, right? Well, truth to be told, ol' Leo has yet to move a finger in Cross' favor. Word is that this was due to a sharp rift between Aurelius and most of the Board, while others believe he's getting ready for retirement in Zurich-Orbital and that his son Nicholas will carry on the family torch against Knight. Still others believe he's being blackmailed by Knight, though I haven't found anything to prove it.

- I do. Say, has anyone seen Evelyn Aurelius lately? She hasn't played with her band in months.

- DJ Skraa

- I'm not sure if kidnapping Leonard Aurelius' daughter would be Knight's best move. Sure, he'd manage to keep Aurelius in check for a while, but as soon as Leo gets his daughter back there'll be hell to pay.

- Squire

- Remember that with Ares buying out Cross' subsidiaries by the dozen, Aurelius is making a drekload of money. It'll be interesting

to see what he does with it ...

- Chauffard

So now you know—if you want to take a job against Cross, this is the time. Do hurry up, though, because Vegas' bookies are taking bets on how long it will take Cross to collapse.

- Come on, this can't be so bad as they describe. Cross is a motherfragging triple-A mega! Losing a few assets should be a minor setback for it at worst.

- Jaxon

- Sorry chummer, but Knight really seems to have all the aces this time. Lucien Cross is dead, the Seraphim have apparently been compromised, CATCo's cash cows are in deep drek of their own and any suits that could have done anything to fix the situation are dead, missing or now working for Ares. Only Aurelius might be able to face Knight, but no one knows what he's really up to nowadays. If things don't change ASAP, Cross will soon lose its Corp Court seat and become an AA corp ... or even another Ares subsidiary.

- Argent

#### ALL IN THE FAMILY: SHIAWASE

by Naginata

Were the Borgia still alive, they would have surely applauded what's been going on at Shiawase.

For those of you not familiar with the Shiawase family (pun intended), Jerri Howard was an albino medium from Atlanta hired by Sadato and Soko Shiawase to channel their long-dead brother, Ryo. Howard and Ryo were the only ones able to keep the family's elders in check, or so went the story. As many of you doubtlessly know, they simply moved their hate-hate relationship to the shadows.

In the weeks prior to Novatech's IPO, Howard was confronted by Reiko Shiawase-Shimada, Ryo's daughter. Reiko had been at odds with Howard from the beginning (understandable, as the medium's presence prevented Reiko from inheriting her father's shares), but had lacked enough support to remove her ... until now.

Reiko demanded better evidence that Howard wasn't a fake—say, a huge takeover operation during Novatech's IPO (admittedly, this was a smart move from Reiko, as Ryo had been an expert in this kind of operations). This time, Reiko was backed by Soko Shiawase. The latter had grown suspicious of the medium, as "Ryo" was increasingly siding with Sadato's faction, and Soko had agreed to back Reiko's move if she later supported her aunt's plans. Faced with the ultimatum, the medium agreed to coordinate the operation.

I'll skip the technical details and go straight to the results: the takeover attempt was a disaster, investors panicked and Shiawase's stock plummeted for a split second until the Crash mercifully ended the day's trading. Jerri Howard was found dead at her home that same night and Reiko finally inherited her father's shares. Cops called it a suicide, but everyone knows Reiko was itching to get Jerri.



PRESIDENT K. HAEFFNER

I.C.A.



## MAIN SHIAWASE SHAREHOLDERS, BEFORE AND AFTER THE CRASH

Name	From...	To...
Korin Yamana	8%	16%
Reiko Shiawase-Shimada	< 3%	14%
Empress Hitomi Shiawase	NA	13%
Tadashi Shiawase	11%	9%
Mitsuko Shiawase-Yamana	<1%	5%
James Mancuso	NA	4%
Nigel Coltrane	NA	4%
Sadato Shiawase	13	3%
Soko Shiawase	10	2%

- Not to mention that someone stole Howard's body from the morgue that same night, conveniently removing any possibilities of a full autopsy.

- Kiku

- You might be barking at the wrong tree, because Reiko completely freaked out upon hearing about the theft. Word is that, barring the most important board meetings, she won't leave her home under any circumstances.

- Houdini

Days later, the Board gathered to assess the damage caused by the failed takeover and the subsequent Matrix Crash. Unsurprisingly, Soko immediately asked for a no-confidence vote against Sadato ... and that's when things *really* went crazy. Let me bring up the list of shareholders and you'll see what I mean:

- Oh. My. God. <display\_shocked\_face>

- Chromed Accountant.

Notice any changes? As it turned out to be, there was a successful takeover, except it had been *against* Shiawase. For what I've been able to dig up, the whole scam was engineered by Korin Yamana, Emperor Yasuhito and the family brats. Empress Hitomi and Nigel Coltrane—head of Shiawase's Vector Matrix Services—programmed the technological side of it, while Yamana and his wife Mitsuko planned the financial details.

- Little Mitsuko must be overjoyed. As soon as that old goat Yamana croaks, she'll be the biggest shareholder.

- Runaway Bride

- That depends on your definition of old age. Let's just say that after a little genetherapy, Yamana is ready for another century or so. Besides, I'm sure the lady won't mind having a 25-year-old husband in bed, even though he is 94.

- Mutatis Mutandis

In the end, Yamana replaced Tadashi as CEO, while Empress Hitomi became the new Chair of the Board. Soko was furious about Mitsuko's treachery, but she had some small satisfaction: minutes after leaving the meeting, her brother Sadato suffered a stroke that left him comatose, and he's been on life support since then. Tadashi has temporary control of his father's shares, which he'll inherit if Sadato dies.

- Et tu, Brutus?

- Caesar

The new leaders have been purging the corporation from Sadato and Soko's loyalists, though Ichiro Kiyomoto remains head of the MIFD (possibly because the sneaky bastard is too valuable to lose). Tadashi Shiawase has been quietly maneuvering to recover some ground, forging contacts with politicians who are none too fond of Yamana's growing friendship with the Emperor. Both seem to have big plans for the future, but only time will tell what happens next.

- By the way, who's that Mancuso guy?

- Nuyen Nick

- Quite possibly the luckiest idiot on Earth. Jimmy boy is (was) a Stuffer Shack employee from Seattle who happened to issue a buy order the very same moment Shiawase's stock dropped like a rock, and ended up with a ton of it in his pockets. He paid for it by borrowing money against his own purchase, then sold back some of his shares when their price rose again. Guess he wasn't planning to borrow that much money ...

- Espion

- Are we talking about the same clueless clerk from the Madison and Ninth store? If so, it might not be long before someone "convinces" him to sell his stock.

- SPD

### BROTHERS IN ARMS: NOVATECH & TRANSYS-ERIKA

- I also have some news from Europe you might be interested in.

- Espion

BEGIN UPLOAD ...

WARNING! CRITICAL SERVER OVERLOAD!

WARNING! CRIT\$&\_grk83dfDL4syJ2E

\*\*\* SYSTEM RESET \*\*\*

- Would you PLEASE post it as a text transcript? This side of the Atlantic is still in pretty bad shape.

- Green Pixie

- Mea culpa, give me a moment.

- Espion

//Begin BBC News transcript//

"... Back to our top story: European tech giant Transys-Erika has agreed to merge with America's Novatech Incorporated. The deal will create the second largest corporation in the world and



the biggest in terms of technological development. Joining me now in our studio is Kevin Jensen, a market analyst for Lloyd's. Mr. Jensen, judging by the markets' reaction, I take this merge was quite unexpected?

Jensen: Indeed, they've caught their competitors flat-footed. The Transys-Erika merge is still fresh in everyone's minds, so nobody expected a move like this so soon.

Reporter: Why the rush, then?

Jensen: It's all about the new Wireless Revolution, simple as that. Erika had the patents and Transys was a world leader in cybertechnology, which made for a strong combination after they merged. The problem is that the Crash has forced countries to switch to wireless protocols right now, and though T-E is widely seen as the pioneer, it just doesn't have the resources to cope with demand. The company needs a global partner, and that's where Novatech steps in. It also doesn't hurt that Richard Villiers has the biggest stack of cash this side of Lofwyr.

Reporter: Not to mention that T-E would join the triple-A club after the merge.

Jensen: Absolutely. It's a match made in heaven.

Reporter: So what can you tell us about the new Board?

Jensen: Well, we know that Mr. Villiers will remain as CEO, but there's no word yet as to who's taking the Chairmanship. Based on a few leaks, we believe that Transys-Erika's CEO Anders Malmstein is going to fill in that position—he's also in good terms with Mr. Villiers, for what we've heard. Another candidate could be the great dragon Celedyr, but his portfolio was hit hard during the Crash and Mr. Malmstein outmaneuvered him during the T-E merge.

Reporter: All right. Before we go to commercials, can you tell us anything else?

Jensen: We estimate that Novatech will keep the Transys and Erika brands—they are far too valuable to lose. Erika will probably become the company's telecommunications division and Transys will handle cybertechnology. We're not sure as to what will happen with computer hardware, but our best guess is that Novatech will market them under its own name.

Reporter: Mr. Jensen, thanks for your analysis.

Jensen: You're welcome.

//End transcript//

- You know, I'm beginning to regret not buying more Novatech shares during the IPO.
- Chromed Accountant
- How many do you have, CA?
- Espion
- Enough to start thinking about retiring to a nice tropical island, though I'm so much of a workaholic that I might hang around just for the sheer thrill of it.
- Chromed Accountant

#### GAME OVER: ART DANKWALTHER

- For those wondering what's the latest on Art Dankwalther, I got this from a good friend. This is how the big boys get business

done—with a bang and a fully extended middle finger.

- Orbital Bandit

//Begin File Attachment//

From: Priault@zog.com

To: S-K HQ10596@saederkrupp.com

Re: Dankwalther

Master,

Following the latest intelligence reports, subject was located at 23:06 EST. Orbital option was unanimously approved at 23:11, after ZOG analysis estimated he'd be gone before Omega ground team could be activated. Subject was successfully terminated at 23:16. News interdiction was also successful: the KSAF team was delayed pending impact, as per your orders.

Regards,

Priault

//End//

- Damn, there goes my five million nuyen reward from Villiers.
- Manhunter
- Let me see if I'm getting this straight: they wasted a fragging Thor shot on ONE guy?
- Arctic White
- No. They wasted a guy with one Thor shot. Besides, you can't bribe a smart-guided orbital launch platform.
- Ancient History
- Speaking of bribes, I heard KSAF made a lot of legal noise about SK's interference, but quietly dropped the matter after getting a sizable donation from an unnamed party. So much for "fair and balanced" media, eh?
- O'Reilly
- It's probably cheaper and less incriminating than destroying them with Thor shots through the main office.
- Ancient History

- Back to Dankwalther for a moment. Anyone knows what happened to his remaining money?
- Marketeer

- Anyone?
- Marketeer

#### MOVERS AND SHAKERS

by Nuyen Nick

I took the liberty of assembling a short summary of what's been going on with other corps. If you have any additional details or rumors, just go ahead and make us all happy.

#### Aztechnology

Ah, the joy of watching your rivals go down in flames. I'm sure that nobody in Tenochtitlán shed a tear when Winternight



ruined the Panama Canal big time, even if Panama City had to suffer collateral damage. It will take plenty of time and nuyen for the Corporate Court to reopen the Zone, and by that point the Azzies might have finished their very own Nicaragua Canal.

- Not everything is so rosy for Aztechnology. With Roxborough leaving for UniOmni, relations between both corps have taken a definite turn for the worse.

- Don Dinero

- Don't forget Argentina. It's a complete frag-up at the moment and Lord knows what could happen there if things keep worsening. Me, I'm betting on major fireworks.

- Picador

### **Easter Tiger Corporation**

Strong and steady, the Korean giant weathered the Crash in good shape thanks to its industrial assets. It is now aiming for the lucrative augmented reality market, using its connections within the Pacific Prosperity Group to secure MSP contracts all over Asia and even North America. ETC also acquired Pacific Rim Communications, but this wasn't terribly popular with Renraku. Expect plenty of sabotage between these two in the near future.

- That's not the only challenge ETC faces. It's been trying to take over Hynix Semiconductor, a division of Yang-Su Enterprises, but the latter has shown unexpected resistance.

- Mugunghwa

- Yang-Su and Hynix have exclusive deals to supply Saeder-Krupp with crucial grid components. I wouldn't be surprised if Lofwyr's been giving CEO Melissa Kwan some tips.

- Mr. Kim

### **Genesis Consortium**

The past months have been a rough if exciting ride for this consortium. Some of its members didn't survive the Crash, but the rest have been capitalizing on the opportunities. Genesis has set up several joint ventures with Yamatetsu, hoping to expand outside the Latin American market. The animal-like behavior routines recently patented by Memotek have also become a hot topic in the software industry.

- Oh, that's so fragging great. Expect the next generation of IC to be a hell of a lot smarter.

- Decker del Sur

- Rumor has it that Angela Espinosa is breeding Dr. Kristine Martin as potential heir to the throne, especially if she can counterbalance the growing influence of CEO Roberto Kama.

- Don Dinero

- Not everything is a matter of petty intrigues. Tomorrow must be taken care of today.

- Mutatis Mutandis

### **Horizon Group**

Fast on the rise and pushing around its competitors, the Horizon Group has set its eyes on Hisato-Turner. The latter is going through difficult times, as the Crash wiped out its satellite network and the subsequent North American political crisis crippled NewsNet. Should Horizon succeed, you can kiss goodbye to the last true major news network. So much for freedom of speech, neh?

- Rliiight, like NN never ran a positive story on its parent company. Pull the other one.

- Trid Snoop

- H-T is walking the plank, but that doesn't mean it's going to fall just like that. The Turners are used to fighting people hell-bent on taking over NewsNet, so I wouldn't be surprised if Horizon doesn't get what it expected.

- Atlanta Spy

### **Mitsuhama**

Attention all Californians! It seems you're about to get a new neighbor. Mitsuhama has been diverting an awful lot of resources to its San Fran offices. From what sources tell me, this has to do mostly with the Tsimshian and Philippines snafus, but it's also related to the new opportunities arising in CalFree. Facing disaster after the Crash, General Saito was more than eager to accept Mitsuhama's offer of unlimited assistance, turning the corp into the power behind the throne.

- Of course Saito would give Mitsuhama the red-carpet treatment. There's a reason why his brother Kenshin is on the fast track to the board.

- Golden Bear

- Actually, I wonder what's going to happen to our not-so-beloved General once MCT begins calling the shots in town.

- Groucho Marxist

Mitsuhama hasn't limited itself to moving around some furniture in the past months. It came out relatively unscathed from the Crash and has been taking advantage of this. Its robotics and cyberware divisions are working at peak levels, with rumors hinting at major breakthroughs in the near future—with a little help from some key extractions from Sony Automation, that is.

- Echo that. My team had the dubious pleasure of meeting one of their Otomo anthropomorphic prototypes some time ago, while sneaking into one of Mitsuhama Automatronics' facilities. If you thought the Hachiman robots were nasty, you'll love these puppies! Full synthflesh, human-like movements and perfectly modulated voice ... we thought it was a simple guard until it was too late. Come to think of, they could be damn good at infiltration and network.

- Kanemitsu



- The Yaks are going to love testing them, especially if they can mask a few as “pleasure” models.
- Shirou
- It all sounds too fantastic for me to believe.
- Skeptic
- Well, it’s not like MCT funded Halberstam’s research out of charity, you know?
- Murphy

### Renraku

The bitter war over Renraku’s CEO seat is over, with Sherman Huang being the big loser.

It turns out that Huang tried to reinforce his position by engaging in a risky stock manipulation attempt during Novatech’s IPO ... using company funds. Now, I don’t think we need the Chromed Accountant to explain how desperate Huang must have been to even think about it. All it takes is a single wrong buy order and your plans are screwed ten ways to hell, and we all know what happened on IPO day.

- Huang was already pushing it. He masterminded several runs against Renraku in the months prior to the IPO, stealing intellectual property in an effort to obtain hard cash from competitors.
- Peregrine
- Hmm, that’d explain the B&E we did on October against Renraku Americas’ HQ in Manhattan. Whoever hired us knew the building top to bottom.
- Anonymous

Now that poor Sherman is getting a first-hand experience with Renraku’s penitentiary system, the corporation has been forced to rethink its business strategy. Renraku’s biggest problem is the damage inflicted to its Matrix R&D division—most of Huang’s funds came from there. This means Renraku missed the opportunity to make an early reservation on the AR bandwagon, allowing Eastern Tiger, Transys-Erika (excuse me, Novatech) and many others to secure a dominant position.

On the other side of the coin, Renraku is still the world leader in data storage and owns a substantial part of Asia’s telecom grids, so the aforementioned corps have been forced to bargain with the wounded giant, like it or not. Huang’s demise from the board has also lessened internal tensions, allowing CEO Haruhiko “Harry” Nakada to focus on his job rather than watching his back.

- Even Nakatomi is behaving like a nice team player—for the moment.
- Renraku Fox

### Universal Omnitech

Like a long-time marriage gone sour, UO’s partnership with Aztechnology has come to a bitter end. I’m still trying to figure out what the frag happened, but even the surviving folks at





Azziewatch are at a loss. What we do know is that Thomas Roxborough had a serious fallout with the rest of the board, packed his stuff and left for greener pastures. Roxy has also invested a good chunk of nuyen in UniOmni, becoming the major shareholder just in time for the corp's merge with Debeers. He has kept a low profile since then, making a lot of people nervous (and curious) about his future plans.

- Word is that Ding Ramos was seen at a party mocking Roxy's departure. "Women," he said, "can't live with them, can't live without them." Make of that what you will.
- Pyramid Watcher

### Saeder-Krupp

I'm sure most of you drekked in your pants upon learning that Lofwyr had a secret Matrix killswitch. Europe's politicians certainly did, but they've been forced to smile and praise the dragon for saving the continent's grids. It's not like they would admit that he did it without warning anyone, right?

- Worse yet, it was perfectly legal. Everyone's been re-reading the fine print in their S-K contracts, just in case Lofwyr has a few other surprises in stock.
- Espion
- They'd better check for invisible ink.
- Bung
- Note that only S-K's grids were saved. The other ones are in ruins, though reconstruction contracts have already been handled. You have three opportunities to guess which dragon got them.
- Munin

While others were struggling to cope with the chaos and devastation, Lofwyr was already on the move. S-K Prime was back online the day after the Crash, and the rest of the corporation followed suit. Lofwyr has played his cards expertly, tightened his grip over Europe in every possible way you can (and can't) imagine. Call it a cliché if you like, but it was almost as if the dragon had anticipated something like this.

- That's because he caused the Crash.
- Lone Gunman
- Of all the people who could have survived ...
- Bung

### Wuxing

I'm really starting to wonder if those Coins of Luck that Wu Lung Wei has are the real deal. Even though Wuxing suffered many inconveniences because of the Crash, like a prolonged breakdown of its shipping services, circumstances seem to be working in the corp's favor.

Take the Pacific Prosperity Group. Many of its members were devastated by the Crash and were easy prey to Wuxing's shopping spree. Wu's biggest trophy so far is the Malaysian

Independent Bank, which was a smoking ruin after the Crash. There are some who are none too happy with this situation, but that's probably because they didn't think about it first: Yamatetsu, Federated-Boeing and a few others have been quick to prey on the smaller members and even a few Japanacorps.

- Incidentally, the MIB takeover put Wuxing at odds with other financial powerhouses like Saeder-Krupp and HKB. Only a handful of banks can provide global services at the moment, and Wu is threatening their privileged position. Expect a lot of globetrotting operations with these people.
- The Chromed Accountant

### Yamatetsu

Times are a' changing (again) for Yamatetsu. The corporation suffered early during the Crash, when its virtual management network collapsed, cutting off Vladivostok from its subsidiaries. The resulting chaos was seen as an opportunity to score big against Yamatetsu, turning some otherwise civilized areas into free-for-all hotspots.

- Turkestan is on fire right now, with Yamatetsu, Global Sandstorm and Saeder-Krupp engaged in a power struggle over the government.
- Spectral Shah

The Board has also seen some radical changes. CEO Saru Iwano was blamed for the debacle and summarily kicked out of his post. Though he had nothing to do with the Crash, the situation gave Buttercup and Yuri Shibanokuji the opportunity to get rid of him. Word in Vladivostok is that Iwano is packing up and leaving for Yakashima.

- What about Hideo Yoshida, his racist pal? Last thing I heard he was holed up in his Peruvian mansion.
- Llama Mama
- This might surprise a few, but Yoshida has done a full 180 degrees turnaround on racism and SURGE. I think he finally understood that being a half-ton rock-like changeling put him on the other side of the fence.
- Sagan
- Yoshida's up to something. He's been busy funding some weird archeological operations, mostly in the Andes and disguised as mining prospecting.
- Elijah

Iwano's replacement is Anatoly Kirilenko, a new face on the board. For what I've learned, Kirilenko was the mastermind behind Yamatetsu's successful Mars mission and enjoys a hard-earned reputation as an innovative—and somewhat crazy—maverick. Kirilenko hasn't lost time, announcing a radical five-year plan to transform Yamatetsu. To quote one of his speeches, "the Earth is the cradle of the mind, but one cannot stay in the cradle forever."



- Heh, do I know who coined that one. It's from Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, a rocketry pioneer who, incidentally, is an ancestor of Kirilenko. Seems some things are in the blood.
- Orbital Bandit
- More than you know. Kirilenko has family in the Vory.
- Kosak

#### GAME INFORMATION

Catastrophic as it is for most corporations, the new Crash is also an opportunity for many of them. Some use it to settle down a few scores, like Ares with Cross. A few like Saeder-Krupp and Novatech came out stronger than ever, while others face disaster—Hisato-Turner's desperate fight against the Horizon Group is a good example.

The smaller fish also get a good piece of the action. Eastern Tiger has set itself on an ambitious expansion plan across the Pacific, but it might soon run into trouble from displeased competitors. Genesis is strengthening its Latin American powerbase and looking forward to new challenges abroad, while Fed-Boeing is hot on Wuxing's trail.

Overall, the shadows experience a sharp increase in activity everywhere. What's more, many corporations have lost contact with tried-and-proven deniable assets and must use whatever fresh talent is available. Perhaps more than any other time, the aftermath of the Crash presents a great opportunity to begin a new career in the shadows. It's a whole new world out there.

#### Live to Fight Another Day

Leonard Aurelius knows when a fight is over. His fight to save Cross Applied Technologies is doomed, and nothing short of a miracle can save it from Ares. That doesn't mean the war with Damien Knight is over, of course. On his way out of Québec, Aurelius wants to take a few souvenirs—like the Seraphim. Though the Unseen might have compromised their operations, Aurelius knows that the surviving agents could well be his best weapons against Knight. One of his most trusted Johnsons hires the runners for a double job. First they must infiltrate Cross' headquarters in Québec City and steal a copy of the Seraphim's database. A few days later they'll have to go back and leave an altered version in its place, making Knight run into more than a few surprises in the future.

#### What Does a Ten-Thousand-Year-Old Dragon Want?

As part of their plan to overthrow Shiawase's leadership, Korin Yamana and the Empress need to deal with a very special shareholder: Rhonabwy. The Welsh dragon owns a vital 8 percent share of Shiawase's stock, and neither Yamana nor the Empress wants to risk his wrath. Delicate negotiations must be initiated with the wyrm if they are to acquire those shares, beginning with an adequate gift. The runners are hired to obtain a priceless object of the gamemaster's choice—the more rare the better. It could be an ancient Welsh relic kept in the Smithsonian, one of the British Crown's jewels or even an original recording of John Lennon's *Imagine*. Particularly evil gamemasters will make sure this last one currently sits in Perianwyr's collection (see *Dragons of the Sixth World*, pp. 169-70).

#### Zeroed

The Crash is a tempting beginning for a corporate-themed campaign. Consider the possibilities of a corporation that is suddenly bankrupt and fires its workers, or a group of characters that lose their SINS. Normal wage slaves and company men might panic when their safety net disappears, forcing them to slum with the street scum.

Gamemasters who choose to run this kind of campaign will find the *Sprawl Survival Guide* sourcebook extremely valuable. Not only does it thoroughly explain the different worlds in which the haves and have-nots live, but its *Life on the Run* chapter offers an interesting perspective on those new to the shadows.

#### THE TREE OF LIBERTY

"Wake up, Mr. President. You don't want to miss the show."

The first thing he could see was a human female leaning against a yellow wall. The finer details were still blurry, like his mind. A spell, he guessed, maybe the one that had killed the Secret Service agents. But how come he didn't—

"I said eyes up!" This time, the words were followed by a sharp slap.

Kyle Haeffner focused on his captor. A petite blonde woman, closer to thirty than forty, wearing a National Guard uniform. Her ID tag and rank stripes identified her as Staff Sergeant Williams. She was clearly enjoying the situation, and her pistol never wavered from him.

"What's the problem, sweetheart? Still don't know what's going on? I bet you felt so safe this morning."

*This morning.* The White House had been a hive of activity after yesterday's Matrix disaster—most of it, that is. Daviar was campaigning in Seattle, the Secretary of State was touring Europe and the Secretary of Agriculture was still locked in an elevator in Des Moines, according to the latest report. The Secretary of Defense and his Secret Service detail were still MIA.

"I'll bet you want to know who I am. Well, I'll tell you this—I'm a patriot," she said. "You're no more my President than the NAN chiefs or that Japanese loon in San Francisco. I'm an *American*."

Haeffner's confusion was only increasing, and it must have shown. "You're not getting it, are you?" the woman said. "I was born the night before Union Day with Canada. The doctors told my parents I was probably the last citizen of the United States of America. But they were wrong. I'm pregnant. Six weeks now, but when this is over my baby will be born in the good old US of A."

Alarms went off in the President's head. "You kidnapped me to reunify America? It won't be that simple."

"You both talk too much," said a new voice behind him. Haeffner turned his head to see a man standing at the door. Bald, with a tank-like build over a dark blue suit. A face he knew too well. The President's eyes widened in surprise. "Director Reynolds?"

"We've just finished another scan," Reynolds spoke to Williams. "The astral is clean and the streets are empty. Everyone's locked in their homes, waiting for someone to tell them what to do."



Sergeant Williams grinned. "I'd say it's about time, Pete."

"I must talk with the President now. Alone, please."

Williams nodded and left the room, and Reynolds closed the door behind her.

Reynolds pulled a small device from his jacket and activated it, waiting for the telltale hum to fade into the background. "Now, where were we? Oh yes." Reynolds gaze was rapt upon Haeffner while he spoke.

"At exactly nine o' clock, Senator Braddock and several high-ranking commanders in the UCAS armed forces will make a speech, utilizing the still-intact Public Broadcast Network. They will explain how the Native American Nations, in conjunction with Aztlan, are responsible for the collapse of the UCAS Matrix—including an opening salvo of nuclear strikes. That is why our armed forces are mobilizing, and why martial law will continue until further notice."

President Haeffner sharpened his gaze until his eyes were razors. That traitor Braddock was usually busy pushing anti-meta policies disguised as health-care reforms, but apparently that wasn't enough. "And were do I fit in?"

"If you cooperate, you will live. That is far more than I can say for Secretary of Defense Stratta," Reynolds replied. The truth of the Secretary of Defense's fate sank into the President slowly, but he kept a poker face. For all his apparent confidence and bravado, Reynolds must know how much was at risk.

"Will you cooperate, Mr. President?" Reynolds waited for a reply as the President stared at the floor, silent.

"You bastard." Haeffner's voice was cold fury. Rising to his feet as best he could, he said, "Do you really think I could sell you the American people, even if I wanted to?"

"The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants,' as Thomas Jefferson once said. I regret the truth of that, but it is what it is. Will you not reconsider our offer?"

"I'll see you shot first."

Reynolds looked right into Haeffner's eyes for a moment, then headed for the door. "We'll see about that."

The President waited until after Reynolds left to collapse into his chair. Without his anger to support him, he felt as weak as an infant.

Williams returned later. The Sergeant carried a dish of sandwiches and a six-pack, which she left on the table while checking the wall clock. 20:58. She turned on a small trid set, clicking through the channels. Each of them had a PLEASE STAND BY sign from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, with a timer slowly ticking down.

"Pete! You're going to miss the primetime special," Williams called.

Reynolds reentered the room. "Not a chance, my dear."

The timer reached zero, and the image switched to a podium shot with the small KSAF logo in the lower right corner. The UCAS flag stood to the right of the podium, the Tapestry of Fate behind it, and at the podium stood—

"Who is that?" asked Williams.

Standing behind the podium was a steel-haired woman in her mid fifties, wearing the dress uniform of a UCAS general. Two stars graced each shoulder, and around her neck was a small

silver medal shaped like a pyramid. Haeffner knew that honor well—he had awarded it only a year ago.

"My fellow Americans, citizens and soldiers of the United Canadian and American States, I am Major General Angela Colloton. Early this morning, UCAS military units seized control of the District of Columbia and other sprawls in an attempt to overthrow the federal government during the chaos of yesterday's events. The insurgents were led by Senator Jonathan S. Braddock, whom we now know to be a senior member of the Alamos 20,000 terrorist group. Their ultimate goal was to seize power all across North America. They have failed.

"As we speak, loyal American troops have cornered the remaining rebel forces. Corporate security forces are now fully cooperating with the UCAS federal government in this matter. Senator Braddock was killed earlier today when he and his followers engaged our troops in an attempt to escape. I would also like to make it clear that, contrary to media reports, our country has not been invaded by foreign powers, nor are we at a state of war."

"Shit," muttered Williams. Haeffner couldn't avoid laughing at her surprise, though he was promptly silenced when the point of Williams' gun moved uncomfortably close to his mouth. "You're *this* close to joining Dunkelzahn, chummer."

Reynolds made an abrupt decision, "We need to leave. Now."

Williams stared at Reynolds dumbfounded "You're kidding, right?"

"I have never been more serious." Reynolds replied evenly.

"We can't give up! Not now!" Williams was vehement, but Reynolds grabbed her hand and violently pulled her closer. "Listen to me. Braddock is dead. This coup is dead. Unless we manage to escape now, we are also dead. Is that clear?"

The only voice in the room came from the Gen. Colloton's trideo image.

"... President Pro-Tempore Gene Simone will fulfill the duties of the President until President Haeffner and Vice President Daviar have been found. Martial law will remain in effect until the end of this crisis."

*It isn't like Nadja to lie low, thought Haeffner. They could have here somewhere—anywhere.*

There were tears in Williams' eyes as Reynolds quietly held her.

"I'll go downstairs and round up the others. We'll be out of here in five minutes."

The woman nodded, glancing towards their prisoner. "What about him?"

"You know what to do." Reynolds said. She nodded, then holstered her sidearm.

Reynolds left. Williams turned to Haeffner, who'd been listening the conversation with increasing alarm.

"No drama for the simflicks, Mr. President?" Williams said as she wiped tears from one eye. "No begging for your life? No appeal for reason? No offer of executive pardon?"

"I won't beg," rejoined Haeffner. "Shoot me and get it over with. You failed."

"Mock me if you want to, but think of my child. Think how I'll be, a fugitive with a SINless baby. The last American. Is that what you want?" sneered Williams.



"No." Haeffner almost didn't speak, but he took his chance. "The others will get what they deserve, but I'll grant you a pardon. For you and your baby."

"Well thanks," Williams said, "but no thanks. I could accept a pardon for me, and for my baby ... but not without my husband. I'm sorry, but I can't leave Pete."

Haeffner closed his eyes. *Damn. I knew I was forgetting something.*

She raised her gun ...

*I'm coming, Alice.*

Just then, several detonations rocked the house, while gunshots, confused screams and broken glasses filled the air. Williams turned toward the door, hiding her face from Haeffner as her head exploded. Her body fell back against him, knocking his chair over. Haeffner remained quiet, but his mind was screaming. *What the ...?*

"Room clear! Bravo team, move up!"

Someone checked Haeffner's pulse and bio-monitor, then rolled the corpse off him. "Stand up, please, Mr. President."

"Okay." Two soldiers in combat armor each grabbed an arm to help Haeffner, then steadied him on his feet. Pins and needles danced in his hands and legs.

A major in full combat gear checked Williams' corpse, then stepped back and admiringly examined her pistol.

"Original Ares Predator. Limited first edition." He checked the action and whistled. "I'm keeping this one for my collection." The major's helmet squawked to life. "Ok, put it through," he said into the microphone. "This is Scalpel to Surgeon: Patient is secured and unharmed. I repeat: Patient is secured and unharmed. We're standing by. Over." There was a pause, followed by more squawking. The major frowned. "Repeat transmission. Over."

"... We have weathered much turmoil in our history, but the Dream of America is still alive," said Gen. Colloton's voice from the trid. "It lives in our hearts, our society and our institutions."

"Roger that. Over."

President Haeffner looked at him, puzzled. "Is there a problem, major?"

"... Thomas Jefferson once said 'The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.' It is our misfortune to live in such a time."

The major raised Williams' gun as the soldiers to either side tightened their grip on Haeffner.

"Good night and God bless America."

*Alice.*

## GAME INFORMATION

For years, a secret group nicknamed the New Revolution has conspired to reunify the United States of America (see *Threats 2*). Key figures within North America's power circles belong to the group or have been blackmailed to work for it. Political murders, terrorism and corruption have been tools on the New Revolution's path to absolute power.

The Matrix Crash takes the conspirators by surprise, but the subsequent chaos gives them an opportunity to make their move. Using secret military communication channels, the group triggers a coordinated strike against all North American governments on November 3rd, 2064. Tanks roll out of their bases,

choppers bomb government buildings, political and military leaders are detained. Protestors are executed, while trid channels and radio stations are forced to broadcast military music and censored news reports. The stars and stripes watches over historical landmarks once again ... for a while.

Ultimately, the New Revolution bites off more than it can chew. Troops loyal to their governments fight back in earnest, while surviving authorities obtain support from the corporate community (at a price, of course). Civilians and political militants confront the rebel units with whatever weapons they can get—sometimes facing soldiers with words alone. The worst blow comes from within the conspiracy itself, though, as some of its leaders turn out to have different plans ...

Though defeated, the New Revolution has an impact in North America's political landscape. Some countries are severely bruised (UCAS, Sioux Nation) or experience radical change (Tir Tairngire, Ute). A few pretend it's business as usual (California, CAS).

## MCT ANNOUNCES MASSIVE PULLOUT

New York (NewsNet)—Money experts awoke this morning to Mitsuhamas's sudden announcement that they would be ending all corporate operations in the Tsimshian nation.

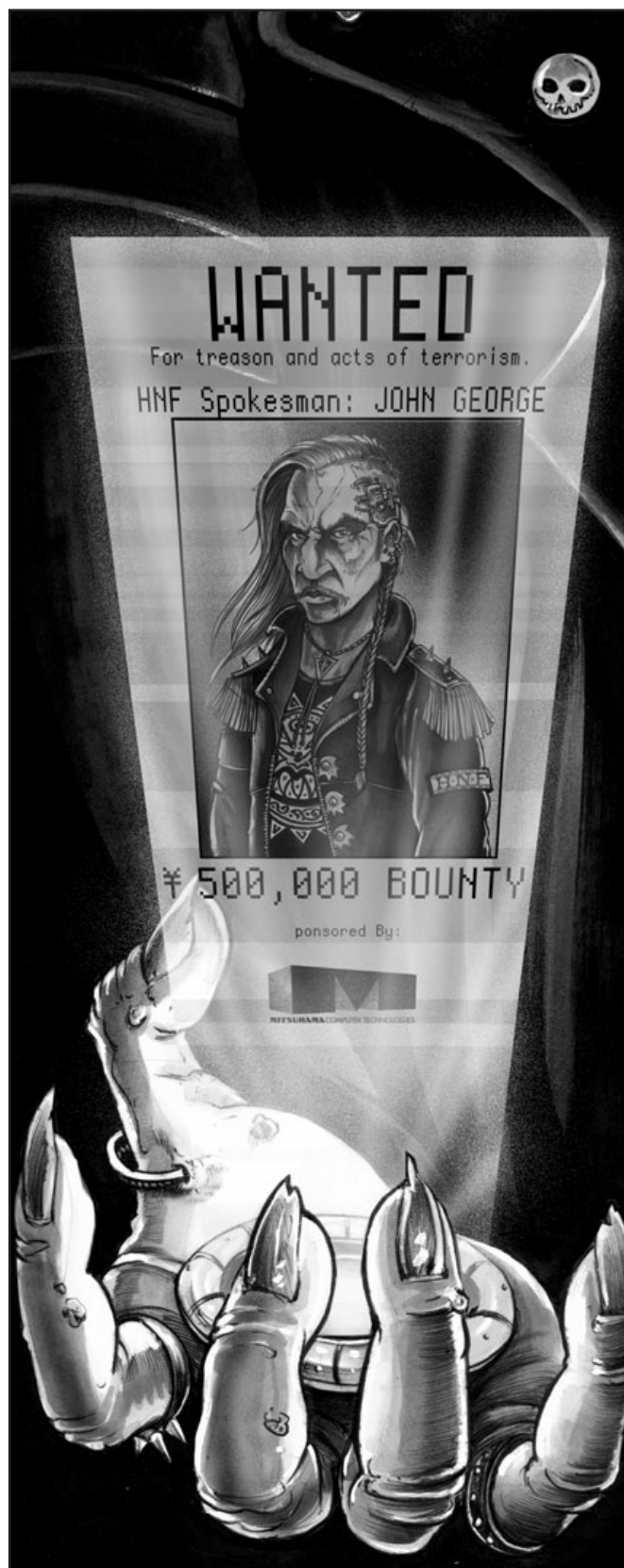
"Tsimshian is not a stable nation," said Junichiro Masakura, Chief of North American Operations. "I believe the actions by the HNF this past year show that. Financially speaking, it is no longer cost effective for our company to continue operating in this region." Masakura went on to explain that the company had worked out an agreement by which the Tsimshian government would purchase most of the property holding MCT operations.

"The property will be paid for over the next ten years," said Masakura. He went on to deny that the pull-out was the result of mounting political pressures stemming from alleged abuses of the Tsimshian people and their lands.

"We have seen no concrete evidence that we are damaging Tsimshian territory," Masakura said. "Our geomancers and scientists have assured me that our operations here have left little more than an ecological footprint."

What is next for Mitsuhamas? The company was forthcoming about future plans. "We have received numerous offers and incentives to settle our North American headquarters in different parts of the country. After much consideration, we have decided on San Francisco."

The past few years have seen public support for the corporation dwindle. Detractors allege that Mitsuhamas has practiced de facto censorship by refusing to release stories that paint the corporation in a negative light.



### Hooks

- A reporter hires the runners to help him track down a missing Special Forces officer. The journalist has been tipped off that Major Dave Connors knows the truth about President Haeffner's assassination, but she needs to find him before he suffers the same fate that the rest of his squad: death in "random" accidents. Unfortunately, not only are several other factions interested in Major Connors, but the reporter is actually an elite assassin sent to kill him and dispose of any potential witnesses.
- Days after the failed continental uprising, the runners are approached by a longstanding contact. He offers them good money to hide and protect a mysterious individual coming from Sinsereach lands. If the team accepts, they'll be surprised to meet Lugh Surehand, now the former High Prince of Tir Tairngire. Surehand is on the run from Ghost Commandos sent by Tir's new regime, but needs to finish some urgent business in Seattle before going into hiding.

### TO TSIMSHIAN AND BACK AGAIN

by Yellowtail

I'm posting this as a memorial to my brother. He served with the Second Battalion Tsimshian Regulars, one of the many units being supported by Mitsuhama troops. When the worst of the trouble started, all of the MCT soldiers packed up and left, drawn back to the main office to aid Mitsuhama's relocation. His battalion survived two weeks without them. He kept an old fashioned scrapbook of news accounts he thought were particularly interesting. I'm posting what is relevant. I hope someone out there can fill in the rest.

MCT announced their pullout a week before the Crash. Market forecasters speculated that it was timed so that investors would be so involved in planning for the IPO that the MCT news would go unnoticed. Shortly afterwards, Kittimat was hit with an EMP bomb. Despite international reports stating otherwise, the government and the military were convinced that the Salish had something to do with the attack.

- When the EMP bombs went off, nobody knew what to do. We'd lost communication with command, and our MCT support staff was already in the process of pulling out. It felt like we'd been abandoned on the border to fend for ourselves. A few company leaders strung together a communication network using equipment we cannibalized from Salish border stations, like the one the article talked about.
- Screaming Eagle

The Haida took advantage of a preoccupied Tsimshian military to wage a war in the streets. The violence culminated in a march on our nation's capital. Thousands of Haida soldiers were disguised among the protesters. When the group neared the capital building, HNF soldiers closed ranks and attacked the Tsimshian military. The soldiers stormed the capital building and captured Great Chief Deborah Jim. With news cameras rolling they marched her out to the balcony, where she was beheaded.



With no official government in place and our military still hacking away at the Salish border, the Sovereign Tribal Council decided to get involved. A multi-national army took shape, led by Sioux Wildcat assault teams. Before long the national army surrendered to the occupying forces.

Haida used the military occupation as a springboard for change. HNF became HNDF, the Haida National Defense Force. They claimed that in light of an unstable government it was the role of the Haida to protect the people. The Sioux supported their assertion, immediately announcing that they would be assisting the HNDF in their efforts to serve as a temporary tribal police force.

- Parts of the nation heavily populated by Tsimshian tribal members have put out calls to private security companies to serve their neighborhoods. Wolverine and Minuteman in particular have made a fortune protecting the Tsimshian from the police.
- Errant Knight
- In the earliest months of the Crash crisis, the Longhouse Brotherhood put shamans and spirits out on the street to aid the elderly, sick and injured. The Longhouse shamans saved thousands of lives and earned the group a seat at the table when the Sovereign Tribal Council started talking provisional government.
- Shasta Sam

In January of 2065, the STC invited representatives from the Haida National Front, the Longhouse Brotherhood and all three political parties to discuss naming an interim tribal council. It was around this time that HNF icon John George reemerged and quickly vaulted to the top of a short list of candidates for Great Chief. The voters, however, weren't ready for a Haida Great Chief. The election was won by Edward Littletree, a Tlingit tribal spokesman and member of the Moderation Party. John George and Potence Party spokesman Nathan Jance were also named to the nine-member council.

Since the election, Littletree has announced programs to begin rebuilding the Tsimshian military and our tribal police force. His motives seem pure, but there's a great deal of suspicion that the Salish or maybe even the Sioux could be pulling his strings.

### GAME INFORMATION

The Mistsuhama pullout is the result of dwindling natural resources and mounting political pressure from neighboring nations. Once the STC caught wind of the pullout, they decided to solve their problems with Tsimshian and the Salish-Shidhe by attacking. The country was in no shape to defend itself. Still reeling from the loss of its primary employer, the country was forced to deal with a terrorist attack in the form of an EMP bomb, a civil war and finally a military occupation. The Sioux-led STC army attacked Tsimshian shortly after the HNF seized control of Kittimat. The occupiers took control of the country, crushing any military resistance they met. The HNF agreed to support the occupying forces in exchange for a voice in the building of a new government.

The 2065 elections dramatically changes Tsimshian's power structure from how it was described in SoNA (p. 158).

After decades of oppression, Kwiatul and Haida are the power-brokers while the Tsimshian tribe is only a shadow of what it used to be. The country has re-divided itself along political and tribal lines. The Moderation and Potence parties have taken control of the political spotlight the same way that the Haida and Tlingit have risen to prominence among the national tribes.

In the shadows, the disappearance of MCT also meant the disappearance of the Yakuza. A new criminal organization calling themselves the Dogmen have arisen and branded themselves as the "Amerindian Mob," while the real mob is trying to make inroads into the nation as well.

### IBN EISA'S RISE AND FALL

- Persepolis is back online! We'll soon be bringing you up to date on the Middle East, but if you're wondering what's happened while we went down, Farah has been keeping a log that you ought to check out.
- The Spectral Shah  
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### BLOOD ON THE BORDER

Seattle (HRZN)—A Salish-Shidhe border station was ambushed by Tsimshian military on Monday, killing 27 people in what has been called a "firm declaration of war." Speaking to reporters for the first time since the incident occurred, Chief George Lodgepole said, "This crime will not go unanswered."

Sometime before dawn, a company of Tsimshian Regulars slipped inside the Salish border near a border patrol station and opened fire on the building, killing everyone inside. The soldiers then took control of the station, holding it until Salish Rangers could arrive. A quick and violent battle erupted between the two forces, which has led to a military standoff.

"They have dug themselves in and refuse to leave our lands," Chief Lodgepole said. "The only response can be war." Lodgepole's words are, naturally, causing considerable consternation among members of the Salish-Shidhe Council.

In an article released on the Tsimshian National News Network, authorities stated that the attack was a direct response to what they claim as Salish involvement in the EMP bombing of Kittimat last week. Although Winternight has claimed responsibility for the bombing, the Tsimshian government continues to point the finger at the SSC.

Violence along the borderlands has been common since the ceasefire was broken by a Salish attack in 2062. Since last month's bombing, however, the Tsimshian military has stepped up its border attacks, effectively shutting down all trade routes between the two nations. Tsimshian authorities refused to comment.



Thunder Nelson: You're wired into Radio Free Tsimshian. I'm Thunder Nelson and today I have a very special guest, newly elected Interim Great Chief Edward Littletree. It's a pleasure having you here.

Great Chief Littletree: It's a pleasure being here, Thunder.

Nelson: Let me get right to some of the concerns that are on everyone's mind. Now that we've elected a government what happens next for the Tsimshian tribe?

Littletree: We heal. A lot has happened over the past few decades to tear us apart as a people. First it was the senseless segregation of our smaller tribes and then it was Mitsuhama. We've never had a chance to figure out who we are or how we want to live. It's time for us to explore what's in our hearts.

Nelson: The Moderation Party had been seeking aid from other corporations prior to the MCT pull out. Now that you're Great Chief, are there any plans to invite other corps to Tsimshian to fill the job void?

Littletree: It's difficult to say for sure. As you know, we've petitioned Wuxing to help with clean up operations in our more toxic regions. In exchange for their service we've allowed them to perform some monitored experiments on the particularly despoiled areas. It's been working so far, so we could be doing more business with them in the future. As for the job void, Mitsuhama may be gone from the region but the infrastructure, the real estate and such is all under government control.

Nelson: Are you talking about forming a national corporation?

Littletree: It's been mentioned, as has selling the property to corporate interests.

Nelson: I take it from your tone that you have some buyers in mind.

Littletree: Not exactly. We know more about who we don't want to sell to than who we do. The last thing the people want is to get into bed with another Japanese corporation. Nor would we want to deal with someone like Ares or Aztechnology whose interests could be seen as nationalistic. We need an eco-friendly corporation, one that could help us return the land to the way it was before MCT took advantage.

Nelson: It sounds like you're looking for someone a lot like the Salish-based Gaeatronics Corporation. Which raises some serious questions about who is really in charge of our government.

Littletree: That's understandable. There are members who agree with the ideas of the SSC just like there are members who agree with the ideas of the Sioux. In any government you're going to have different factions, each with their own opinion and ideas of how to run a government. We're only beginning to rebuild and, as your comments suggest, those factions are beginning to take shape.

Nelson: Whose side are you on?

Littletree: <Chuckle> I'm on the side of the people.

Nelson: You've been working closely with John George as well as several Tsimshian tribal members of the council trying desperately to restore order to the nation. How has he been able to deal with a group of people who just a year ago wanted him dead?

Littletree: John George is a hero of the people. I think that's been difficult for some of our more . . . conservative members of the council to realize. What they need to understand is that he is an icon, someone who will play a large role in guiding this nation out of the darkness.

Nelson: What role do you see the HNDF filling in the new Tsimshian?

Littletree: We're all grateful for what Haida members did in protecting the cities through the worst nights of the Crash. Hopefully they'll all join the police force and continue to serve their people nobly.

Nelson: We've been talking with Great Chief Edward Littletree. Thanks for taking the time to sit down with us.

### 28-Oct-2064

May peace be with you, my friends.

Things have turned interesting in the Middle East since the Shadowland update last April. The Caliph of Arabia removed Badr al-Din Ibn Eisa from the leadership of the Islamic Unity Movement, but Ibn Eisa still has many supporters. His puppets control Syria and Iran, and they do his bidding; Syria and Israel started a quiet border war which can escalate at any moment, and the Iranians sponsored a Shiite uprising in Iraq which could easily turn into a bloody civil war.

I believe that Ibn Eisa is working to destabilize the Middle East so he can show all Muslims how incompetent the Caliph is, and how much better off they would be with him in charge. The Caliph will fight back, of course, and this struggle could bring chaos to the entire region

There is another interesting development: Sandstorm Engineering, one of the region's most powerful corps, merged with Global Oil two weeks ago. The new corporation is called Global Sandstorm and ranks as an AA. The corp's most powerful man is Aziz Ibn Yusuf al-Shammar, rumored to be one of Ibn Eisa's closest allies. GS has been buying assets from Saeder-Krupp in Iraq and Arabia, and runners have been busy working for them or for their competitors.

If you intend to work in this arena, understand that GS's strongest opposition—Arabian Futures, Ifrit Services and Xenel-Oman—is controlled by the Caliph's allies, the al-Sheikh and Sudayrin families. They are said to be investing heavily in the upcoming Novatech IPO and the profits they will make might shift the power balance in their favor.

This corporate war is just a part of the larger conflict going on in the Middle East—remember it when you pick employers.

Farah

### 3-Nov-2064

Arabia is in utter chaos! The Crash has disrupted communications throughout the region and taken out power and water supplies in most places—people are panicking everywhere. Only Allah knows who might take advantage of this confusion. I am trying to find out more, and hopefully I will post an update soon.

Farah

### 7-Nov-2064

I now have a clearer picture of what is happening in Arabia.

The Caliph is trying to get basic services working again, but that fool Ibn Eisa is blaming him for the Crash. His followers are rioting in the streets while good Muslims stay indoors instead of going back to work. It will be a while before life returns to normal.

It also seems that the Arabian finance corps lost heavily in the Novatech affair. To make things worse, the Crash brought chaos to the financial system—AF lost all records of its Malaysian deals but has not been able to put the backup files online. Other corps are also reporting unexplained data losses and have already lost billions of nuyen. There are rumors about foul play and nervous investors taking their money elsewhere.

Global Sandstorm is still prospering, however; their money is mostly invested in real estate, so they were shielded from the Crash's worst effects.

Farah



### 15-Nov-2064

Things have taken a turn for the worse; it is now very dangerous to operate in Arabia.

First, there were many terrorist attacks in Riyadh during the last week, mostly car bombs and assassinations of government officials. All of them have the mark of the New Islamic Jihad and were probably ordered by Ibn Eisa; he knows that the Caliph cannot answer this challenge, since the Arabian security forces are in shambles.

Second, AF filed for bankruptcy yesterday; last week's instability scared away investors. Other finance corps will probably follow suit. This means that the Caliph's allies are broke, so he cannot count on their help anymore.

Global Sandstorm, Saeder-Krupp and the Islamic Cooperative Development Bank are holding steady for now. If you are stubborn enough to keep working here, I believe they are still hiring. There is also a lot of work for runners in Iraq – the government lost control after the Crash and the local factions have started a full-scale civil war.

Farah

### 23-Nov-2064

The unthinkable has happened: the Caliph surrendered to Ibn Eisa.

Rumors say that Aziz al-Shammar brokered a deal which will put Ibn Eisa in charge of the IUM and strip the Caliph of his powers. They will meet tomorrow in the al-Nasiriyah royal palace

in Riyadh. Religious leaders and corporate executives from the entire Islamic world will be there—Ibn Eisa wants a public humiliation. Unfortunately, my position inside the IUM will force me to go as well.

How far we have descended. But all this is the will of Allah, and there is nothing we can do about it but pray.

Farah

### 26-Nov-2064

My friends, I have some very disturbing news.

Two very strange things happened during yesterday's meeting.

First, the Caliph had a surprise for the assembly. He told Ibn Eisa that he was happy to give him an opportunity to repent his sins and re-join the IUM after he received proper punishment. And Aziz al-Shammar seconded the announcement.

Second, Ibn Eisa was so surprised that he reacted in a very unsettling manner. He looked upon the room and a deep fear set into our hearts. My friends, the hall became so cold that everyone's breath turned to mist. I had a distinct feeling that he was emanating a deadly aura; even the furniture started to rot, and rats came crawling from underneath it, some of them dying of terror as they tried to escape.

Ibn Eisa tried to attack the Caliph while we were frozen in fear, but one bodyguard jumped in front of him, took the hit, and withered away in front of our eyes. A fight erupted between Ibn Eisa's *Jinn* and the Caliph's guards. Ibn Eisa himself was attacked



by a brave sorcerer, one of the most distinguished scholars of the Islamic Renaissance Movement, and was forced to escape the palace. No one knows his whereabouts.

It was clear to everyone that Ibn Eisa was under an evil spell. Perhaps he really died back in 2061, may Allah have mercy upon his soul. Perhaps he has been dead for the last few years, and his body was nothing more than some kind of puppet in the hands of an evil spirit.

Farah

### 3-Dec-2064

Things have certainly turned around in the last week.

First of all, the Caliph is back in control of Arabia, and communications are up again.

Most of Ibn Eisa's supporters have disappeared. President al-Ibrahim of Syria was killed, perhaps by the Mossad or Arabian operatives; a national unity government took over, and they are said to have been pressured by Caliph into recalling Syrian troops from the Israeli border. The militant clerics in Iraq have also vanished, leaving the Iraqi Shiites to fend for themselves against the other factions.

However, there are also disturbing reports claiming that New Islamic Jihad members have dispersed throughout the world, vowing to bring down the Caliph and the IUM. Ibn Eisa's *Jinn* bodyguards make up a significant part of this number, and they appear to have inherited his powers. Ibn Eisa has spread his evil corruption wider than we believed possible; some important people in the IUM want to hire deniable assets to start a world-wide hunt for his surviving cronies.

As for Arabia, Global Sandstorm seems to be the new power behind the Caliph's throne. The Caliph rewarded Aziz al-Shammar's loyalty by giving his family control over most of the seats in Arabia's Islamic-Corporate Coordination Board, which means that they have enormous power over all corporations operating in Arabia. Not that it matters much; Global Sandstorm bought Arabian Futures and the other bankrupt companies so it is now the largest corporate power in the Middle East. Saeder-Krupp holds the second position, and I do not believe that Lofwyr will let this matter rest.

The Middle East should become a very interesting place for runners in the near future.

Farah

- Anyone has anything to add?

- The Spectral Shah

- I bet that S-K will be making a comeback in Arabia soon—the Caliph needs to counterbalance Global Sandstorm's power, right?

- Riyalpolitik

- Wrong. Aziz al-Shammar can overrule the Caliph in corporate affairs, so S-K will be stuck outside. Ares and the Frankfurt bankers are left with Israel and they're too busy rebuilding their economy to worry with much else.

- Barak Streak

- Glad to see people posting again!

- The Spectral Shah

- We've been busy, chummer! Someone with very good intel put out a lot of contracts for Ibn Eisa's allies—my sources say that this is the work of the Mossad. That's Israel for you: lay low for a couple of months while the Caliph takes the brunt of fighting, then hit Ibn Eisa when he's down.

- Maghrebi Monster

- That's not what I've heard. Aziz al-Shammar knew a lot about Ibn Eisa's network and he's been using the info to hit it where it hurts. Nice way to complete his backstab maneuver. I bet that this clever fragger had everything figured out in advance.

- Riyalpolitik

- Which makes al-Shammar the Islamic Renaissance's next target—he might not be an evil spirit but he has Arabia under his thumb all the same.

- Almond White

- I believe that we should be asking ourselves: how could so many Muslims be swayed by a conspiracy of shedim? Yes, shedim, that is what took over Ibn Eisa. It is very disturbing that he has escaped and could start again in another part of the world.

- as Sadiq

- Lies! The Caliph is using this propaganda story to justify his actions against Ibn Eisa. It is sad to see the leader of all faithful becoming nothing more than a corporate puppet.

- Crescent Moon

- Well, I'm happy: Ayatollah Abdallah called for new elections in Iran. And it looks like the fundies will lose big—there's no Ibn Eisa to help them this time.

- The Spectral Shah

### GAME INFORMATION

Aziz Ibn Yusuf al-Shammar was behind many of the events following the Crash in the Middle East. Under his guidance, Global Sandstorm supported the rise of Ibn Eisa's faction in Arabia at the same time that it helped the Arabian finance corps go down, mostly by hiring runners to destroy their financial records. But when Ibn Eisa was on the verge of winning, al-Shammar made an offer to Caliph Ibn Saud: he would use his knowledge and resources to take out Ibn Eisa's network in exchange for full control over corporate affairs in Arabia. The Caliph had no choice but to accept.

These events bring some significant changes to the Middle East and the Islamic Unity Movement, as described in *Shadows of Asia* (p. 98) and *Loose Alliances* (p. 105). When the dust settles, Ibn Eisa and his supporters go underground; the New Islamic Jihad cuts its ties with the IUM, becoming a radical terrorist outfit feared all over the Islamic world. The IUM returns to



the control of the Caliph and its aim is once again to spread the ideal of Muslim unity.

On the other hand, Arabia is firmly in the grasp of the al-Shammar family and Global Sandstorm. The corp inherited Global Oil's worldwide assets and is now ready to become a global player; the IUM's network in the Muslim countries will play a big role in this expansion. Of course, Saeder-Krupp, Ares and the Frankfurt Bank Association will try to stop it from happening; Baghdad, Tel Aviv and other Middle Eastern cities will be a hotbed for runner activity for a long time to come.

Runners can be involved in these events immediately after the Crash, working for Global Sandstorm or one of the Arabian finance corps to protect / take out data havens or backup information systems. They can also get involved after Aziz al-Shammar changes sides; Global Sandstorm and the Caliph will be hiring runners to take out key Ibn Eisa supporters all over the Middle East. Specific run ideas include:

- The runners are hired by Ifrit Services to secure an information cache in Riyadh and take it out of Arabia. They'll have to face transport chaos, nervous policemen and mobs of angry locals ready to blame any foreigner or metahuman for the Crash. To make things harder, Global Sandstorm is also after the cache and puts another runner team on their track. The runners can get out of the country on a long desert trek with the Bedouins, or perhaps they'll betray Ifrit and try to sell the cache to the highest bidder.
- Aziz al-Shammar hires the runners to go to Najaf, in Iraq, and infiltrate the Religious Institution (see *Shadows of Asia*). Their job is to kill Ayatollah Juvayni, one of Ibn Eisa's key supporters, and blame the locals. The runners will have access to the al-Shammar tribe's network of contacts in Iraq; their job is to navigate the local underworld and find some allies to provide inside information, arrange for extraction, etc. Potential allies include the Turkish and Kabul *maffiyas*, the Black Scorpion terrorists or local Islamic Renaissance activists like Farid al-Mansoor (see *Shadows of Asia* and *Loose Alliances*). If you want to make the runners' life harder, Juvayni could be a powerful shedim (see *Threats 2*) who won't go down without a fight.

## FREE POLAND?

by Babinicz

Things have been crazy in Poland between the Crash and last month's Final Strike, and the situation has changed dramatically. But if we want to understand where Poland stands now, we should ask ourselves a few questions about what went down behind the scenes.

## ARE THE RYBOKRATS REALLY GONE?

President Rybinski and his Rybokrats looted Poland during that week of panic between the Crash and the Strike, then fled the country or went underground. Rybinski is now living in Vladivostok with both Moscow's and Yamatetsu's blessing after a shady deal involving the Zürich Investment Bank and most of

the Polish Central Bank's nuyen reserves. Many other Rybokrats went missing and took government money, data and other goodies with them. Some pretty powerful foreign corps and governments helped them pull this off, and we should be looking at what they got out of it.

The problem is that they covered their tracks well. Most of the Internal Security records disappeared after the Crash, but fragments have shown up in Warsaw's black markets so there must be some copies left. Still, the new government has done nothing to find out where these people went, or if they're planning to return and get back to power.

- What can the government do? IntSec's records are a mess now, and there are rumors about underlings being blamed for the actions of the top Rybokrats. Should we start a witch-hunt?
- Werewolf
- People like Joanna Falejczyk are obviously guilty—there's a lot of evidence that she did some nasty genetic experiments on political prisoners when she was working with BioMed. I don't care that she works for Genom now; not even the Swiss government can ignore these kinds of crimes against humanity.
- Warrior '53
- Yamatetsu, Genom and others made an investment with these people—they're linked with a network of former Rybokrats who still have powerful friends in Poland. No judge will mess with this kind of backup.
- Invisible

## WERE THE RUSSIANS REALLY DEFEATED?

When the Final Strike began, Suchov's troops were busy dealing with the Polish uprising. By this time, he had certainly

### PANIC HITS POLAND AFTER MATRIX CRASH

**PolNet, 3-Nov-2064:** Yesterday's Crash launched a wave of panic in Warsaw. While President Rybinski's Nationalist government says that the situation is well under control, there are fears among high officials that the Crash was caused by the actions of Polish insurgents in preparation for a new offensive.

The Army's Commander-in-Chief, Russian Gen. Mikhail Suchov, held a press conference in Poznan today where he denied reports that the Polish Matrix suffered significantly more damage than other European networks, and stated that "our intelligence tells us that the insurgency was not involved in the Crash." He also sent a warning to the civilian government: "President Rybinski should be worrying about restoring electricity and water to Warsaw-Lodz. The Army will take care of the rest."

Gen. Suchov also denied reports that key government officials have abandoned the country.



realized that Rybinski was gone and that he had to take care of Poland by himself. He did it in his own bloody way – we’ll never forget the massacres in the Dzungla and Poznan—but why didn’t he see the Strike coming?

I doubt that the UGB, Russia’s secret service, would miss the Liberation Army’s preparations for the Strike. But I’ve had access to their intelligence reports and nothing’s mentioned. Perhaps the UGB wanted to keep Suchov in the dark due to their petty squabbling, but they wouldn’t go as far as allowing a Free Polish victory.

Or would they? Maybe the UGB decided to let the Poles have their little revolution; in the end, Poland is too dependent on Russian trade to stray too far from Moscow. If the new government isn’t careful, we might end up depending on Russia’s good graces for our economic survival, and the Liberation War will have been for nothing.

- C’mon, the Russians never thought that the Liberation Army could be a match for their troops. When they found out they were wrong, it was too late to do anything about it.
- CyberSpy
- There’s something more to this, chummer. The UGB and the Red Army are fighting for influence with the Russian General Secretariat. The “Polish defeat” dealt a huge blow to the military at a very convenient time for the spooks.
- Invisible

#### WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO GENERAL WYSOCKI?

Just before the Final Strike, Marszalik stuck a deal with Lofwyr: the Liberation Army would ignore S-K’s enclave around Krakow, and in return Lofwyr would pressure the Russian government to withdraw from Poland. The deal was in danger

when Gen. Wysocki decided to ignore the battle plan and take his forces into S-K’s turf; but his offensive ended when he was killed, supposedly by a Russian sniper. But who was behind Wysocki’s murder?

Wysocki and Marszalik weren’t the best of friends, and they had been fighting for control of the Liberation Army ever since the Martyrs’ Uprising back in ‘62. So now imagine: Wysocki is seriously messing up Marszalik’s plans, but he’s a full-blown Polish hero. What would you do? My take is that Marszalik ordered Wysocki’s assassination and made it look like the Russians did it. He turned a problem into a martyr he could exploit later and saved his alliance with S-K—and probably the Final Strike.

In the end, I can agree that Marszalik had no other way to deal with that messed-up situation. But now that he’s President, will he go back to his idealism? Or will he sell out to *realpolitik*, just like all the other European leaders?

- Babinicz is being paranoid. Marszalik is a real patriot who has sacrificed more than 30 years of his life to the Polish cause. I can’t believe that he would betray his countryman to Lofwyr for such a small advantage.
- Bullet Head
- It wasn’t that small. Wysocki hated Lofwyr’s guts for supporting Rybinski’s dictatorship back in the ‘40s—you think that he’d let S-K operate inside a liberated Poland?
- Invisible
- Wysocki was a true patriot, and the freedom fighters will never forget him. One day we will make Marszalik pay for his crimes.
- Warrior ‘53

#### POLES DEMAND A NEW GOVERNMENT

**PolNet, 6-Nov-2064:** The Poles were out on the streets of Warsaw-Lodz today, protesting against the lack of energy and water that has afflicted them for the last five days. Poland has virtually stopped since yesterday’s call for a general strike by an elusive insurgent calling himself “Captain Zbik.” The breakdown of public services has been blamed on the Matrix Crash.

The government had no response other than the threat made yesterday by Presidential spokesperson Elzbieta Kiszkiel of a “full military crackdown on all subversive activities.” Meanwhile, Russian forces have been seen taking key positions inside Warsaw-Lodz. Gen. Mikhail Suchov has assured the Poles that his soldiers will spend the next few days “restoring public order and bringing back water and electricity to Polish homes.”

He has not commented on reports that the Army has been experiencing severe computer malfunctions since the Crash.

#### POLISH LIBERATION ARMY BEGINS OFFENSIVE

**PolNet, 10-Nov-2064:** Polish Liberation Army (AW) forces began to move from the Free Polish enclave yesterday and have already captured the city of Poznan in a surprise offensive dubbed as the “Final Strike” by AW Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Michal Marszalik.

The attack was coordinated with a series of sabotage actions on the Russian command center in the city that, according to Polish Domestic Army (AK) insurgents, brought down the Russian military network for 18 hours. The Russian Army was apparently caught by surprise; witnesses report that the Russians took heavy casualties and are retreating towards Warsaw.

Meanwhile, Saeder-Krupp Prime has issued a statement affirming that it will “maintain full neutrality during this conflict and will be ready to negotiate a peace settlement between both parties.” The statement came following reports of heavy fighting between AW forces and S-K security protecting industrial installations near Krakow.



## HOW FREE IS POLAND?

So, now the Polish Civil War is over, and Free Poland won. After more than 30 years of occupation there is much to rebuild and much to look forward too. We Poles have the whole future ahead of us, but it might not be as bright as President Marszalik claims.

The problem is that he made a pact with the devil when he chose Lofwyr as his ally. Already S-K and other corps are coming back in, promising us safety under their umbrella. I don't want to see Poland becoming S-K's property, but I'm tired of wars. Thirty years was enough. So for now I'm willing to give Marszalik a chance and see if he can keep the corps at bay.

But if he turns into another fascist or corp puppet, I'll go back to the trenches in no time.

- Hell, give the man a chance. He has to walk a fine line between greedy corps, angry guerrillas, nationalist army officers, the conservatives in the Catholic Church, the Tricity independents ... the less people interfere with him, the better chance he's got of keeping Poland from another civil war.
- Invisible
- The AK won't rest until Poland is truly out of S-K's hands. For now we'll remain underground, looking over Marszalik's shoulder—but if he makes a wrong move, we'll know where to find him.
- Captain Zbik

## GAME INFORMATION

The events surrounding the Final Strike settle the Polish Civil War, bringing significant changes to Poland as described in *Shadows of Europe*. The National Republic of Poland is gone; President Rybinski and other officials are either in exile or underground, plotting to bring the new government down. The new United Republic of Poland is modeled after the Free Republic; the country's leadership is idealistic but too close to S-K to keep its hands clean. Lofwyr wants to turn Poland into a "modern" corp state, a shining example of what S-K can do for its allies—a tempting proposal, since the life of Poles will definitively improve even if they lose some independence in the process.

Liberation frees the Poles' expectations; everyone has a different idea about what it means to be free, from the conservative Catholic Church to the wildest neo-anarchist policlubs. On the other hand, corporations such as Yamatetsu and Pomorze ZS will keep on operating in Poland, keeping S-K's ambitions in check. Free Tricity is still independent and serves as the Kapers' home base, but it'll become a major flashpoint in times to come.

Finally, the Polish underworld has been turned upside down. The end of the war left many soldiers and guerrillas unemployed; some go underground, setting up their new criminal syndikats and striking at the Vory in a fierce, effective and ruthless way. Others go abroad—a wave of Poles will flood the international merc and runner scenes in the years to come. A few will keep on fighting against the United Republic, trying to make their vision of Poland come to life.

Runners can get involved directly in the Final Strike as mercs or intel experts. The Liberation faction needs veteran sol-

diers to hold up and lead their enthusiastic volunteers, while Suchov relies on outside talent to make up for gaps in his overstretched forces. Runners might even be caught by the Crash in Poland and need to choose between taking a job with one of the factions or fend for themselves in this chaotic setup. Some run ideas include:

- In the last days of the Rybinski regime, the runners are hired to take Rybokrats to safety, gather some of their wealth and delete evidence of their wrongdoing—mostly by killing key witnesses and destroying evidence. They will have to operate in a paranoid state with mobs on the streets and very nervous government soldiers. To make things tougher, perhaps the runners are hired by someone so evil that, when they discover what he's been involved with (mass murder, experimenting biowarfare with political prisoners, etc.) they'll have to decide whether or not to take justice into their own hands.
- The runners are hired to infiltrate General Wysocki's forces and assassinate him, making it look like the Russians did it. They're hired, since no AW fighters are willing to take such a dirty job. The mission is a challenge by itself, but what if the runners meet Wysocki and like him? After all, he's an honorable rebel with a cause the runners might share. Perhaps they can try to help Wysocki go underground and make it look like he's dead—he could organize his own underground network and pay the runners back in the future, with interest.

## NEW POLISH GOVERNMENT IS SWORN IN

**PolNet, 23-Nov-2064:** Gen. Marszalik, hero of the 2062 Martyrs' Uprising and this month's Final Strike, was confirmed today as the President of the new United Republic of Poland. The ceremony took place in the former headquarters of the Rybinski regime in Warsaw-Lodz.

At the same time, Russian forces have completed their relocation to Russian bases following the agreement brokered by Saeder-Krupp executives last week. Gen. Suchov will probably face charges of treason in Russia, and he has issued a statement claiming that "the deal with the Polish insurgents saved many Russian lives from being wasted in a war that was already lost." Vladimir Danko, one of the most likely candidates to become Russia's next General Secretary, has also issued a statement supporting Gen. Suchov's actions.

In Warsaw, Gen. Marszalik now faces the daunting task of rebuilding his ruined country. The civilian death toll alone is estimated to have reached several hundred thousand. However, Saeder-Krupp has already declared itself ready to invest in the country's reconstruction, and other corporations such as Yamatetsu and Pomorze ZS have also declared their interest.

# MATRIX 2.0

- # Scan for hidden node
- # Locate WAN Helix
- # Logon to wireless network

Passcode recognized. Access granted.

- Congrats, you found us. Welcome to the Helix. Took us some time to get online again, but after a shipment of wireless hardware was erroneously shipped from Helsinki to Europort (with a little help from our Scandinavian friends) we were able to set up this little network to renew our pan-European hacker co-op.

We're still debugging certain operational problems, so you'll have to settle with what we can provide for now. More services and updates will be added in the upcoming weeks; feel free to drop by and see what's new.

- Synner

- # open searchbot
- # enter search parameters: matrix conference, WiFi, augmented reality
- # display results

## LIVIN' LA VIDA SOTA

by Nittens

Wireless. That's what everyone's talking about these days. If you believe what the 24/7 commercials and media propaganda are telling you, it's also the future. The media world has been riding the Wireless-tsunami lately, flashing pretty adverts in telling people they can still trust the computers that run their lives. Ever since being dumpshocked en masse from the grids, people have been cautious and treat the new tech with just a little more care than before. The corporations are eager to sell their upcoming new toys to the faceless masses, though, and several corps have started full fledged campaigns touting their new Wireless products. They needn't have bothered, of course. Information and con-





nectivity are the omnipresent drugs of the 21st century. Metahumanity is already too hooked to kick the habit.

Augmented Reality will be the new drug to feed that dangerous dependency—pre-processed, sorted and personalized information-fixes, constantly available and tailored to your need and aesthetic. With large parts of the Matrix still down, the immediate access provided by Augmented Reality is gaining ground. A small hit is better than none at all, after all. In AR, you can experience the sights, sounds, touch, tastes and even smell of the Matrix continuously, all while moving and interacting with your physical environment in real time. The Matrix is no longer a separate virtual space. Just switch on your AR glasses (or your implanted display link) and open yourself to the next level of reality.

AR isn't just about making a virtual telecom call or accessing a book online while sitting in your favorite café. The edge of wireless simsense over older networks is that your actions are no longer restricted to bandwidth. The Link clubs of the last season are just a taste of how AR can influence daily and social life. Neglected for decades (except maybe in Korea and Japan), the promise and potential of Augmented Reality is finally becoming known world wide.

- No excuse for slackers and couch potatoes to stay home any more, neh?

- Slamm-O!

- This is a strong boost for advertising. You can stroll on the streets with your goggles on and commercials will jump out at you from every shop and wall. Not dissimilar to how it was on public hosts back in the day. Think they'll install spam blockers in the new AR decks to filter them out?

- Drackenfelts

- Not in the standard equipment. From what my contacts in Erika have heard, decks are history. The trend is toward a range of miniaturized devices linked together in a micro area network. No need to carry your clunky deck around any more.

- ?spion

- They can have my deck when they pry it from my cold, dead hands.

- Ancient History

It works a little something like this. Reality overlay icons are manipulated by peripheral systems that interface with the user's sensory displays. This can be as easy as a menu wheel or as complicated as a motion-sensitive holographic display, depending on how much money you're willing to spend. Instead of the average John Q Public going to the Matrix, the Matrix now comes to him. Of course, while Augmented Reality becomes an important facet of everyday life, full immersion Virtual Reality still has its uses, especially for us.

- That's why I hate it. Sure, it's great to be able to stroll around while you're working, but you're bound to how fast your meat body can react when you go to issue a command. Full VR lets you act by thought alone. It's like being told to win the race and being strapped to the back of a snail.

- Clockwork

- Yeah, it's a fraggin' hardship to be out where the action is and not trapped in a room with four day old pizza and a strategically placed water bottle. Spare me.

- Slamm-O!

It's really a pretty clever setup. The old hardwired Matrix operated on a rigid RTG/LTG infrastructure, centralizing the majority of processing in certain hubs. The new system has also LTGs and RTGs after a fashion (although these are more along the lines of names used to abstract networks on different levels, rather than different levels through which one travels) but is far more complex.

Imagine it like a mesh, in which billions of nodes are all linked together in various networks that are themselves linked together, forming Local Area Networks (LANs) that can be either wireless, wired or a combination of different links, with distributed processing as the norm. Even you, as a user, will be a small network that communicates with one or more other networks.

- The Transys-Erika Wireless protocols enable you to access several nodes at the same time in full VR. Ever wanted to be at two, three, or even more places at the same time?

- Munin

Wireless fidelity (WiFi, a term to describe standardized wireless networking) grants interoperability between Matrix devices. Protocols, frequencies and transactions were standardized during the recent Second Universal Matrix Conference, so from now on all Matrix technology items will be able to interact with any other, no matter which corporation manufactured it.

The conversion to Augmented Reality has made electronic warfare increasingly important. For starters, there's less cable spaghetti you can use to insert your tap. It's all in the air now. It's funny how that small change can mean so much, but it has. Suddenly the ECM toys from the riggers and the stealth and scramble skills of the decker needed one other more than ever—their realms weren't so separate anymore.

- Right after our decker went wireless, we all ended up on a run together, this time with a drone rigger pal of mine running point for us. He hadn't been on a wireless team before, and wasn't quite prepared. You should have seen the rigger's face when suddenly his drones went off on a wild hair and wouldn't obey his commands anymore because of bleed through from the decker's toys. Got it sorted right quick after that, though. For a minute there, though, I thought they were



## SECOND UNIVERSAL MATRIX CONFERENCE INAUGURATED IN SCOTSPRAWL

**Posted 01-15-65**

Edinburgh (SK)—With the announcement of a second global conference to be held at Transsys-Erika's Silicon Glen corporate facilities near Edinburgh, the entire world has turned its eyes to the Scotsprawl. The Corporate Court Matrix Authority (CCMA) has invited members of leading computer technology and software companies and government delegations to participate in this international meeting. Sir Michael Ashmore, official spokesman of the CCMA, said that this going is to be an historical event, on par with the signing of the Business Recognition Accords in 2042, a display of megacorporate and governmental cooperation that will pave the way for the dawning Wireless Era. Although the Scotsprawl has not yet fully recovered from the shutdown of the UK grid just two months ago and is facing glitches on a regular basis, Transsys-Erika and Renraku Britain have entered a joint effort to ensure a smooth technical run in the upcoming presentations and agendas.

The opening ceremony took place yesterday evening in the venerable halls of the Old College at Edinburgh University, and hosted the crème de la crème of the corporate, political and media scenes. The inaugural address was given by Transsys-Erika CEO Anders Malmsteen, followed by speeches from Richard Villiers, CEO of Novatech, Toshiro Mitsuhamma of MCT, and Gustav Moeller of Saeder-Krupp, who is also the current president of the NEEC Council of Ministers. The great dragon Celedyr expressed his high expectations for the conference during his own allocution.

The banquet and ball that evening caught even more attention from the press than the conference. Seeing charming Princess Caroline arm in arm with her fiancé Johnny Spinrad in public again persuaded everyone that life is going back to normal.

Nevertheless, the situation remains tense among the different leaders in the field of Wireless Technology. The recent merger of Transsys Neuronet and Erika, along with MCT's press release announcing their licensing of upcoming (wireless) consumer electronics to Sony Dataworks, has stirred up the corporate world as alliances form to keep up with the computer giants.

Although a takeover bid has been expected from Renraku for the defunct Pacific Rim Communications Group, whose grids had been seriously affected by the recent troubles, the Eastern Tiger Corporation snatched the dropped shares from under the megacorporation's nose. ETC has now formed a strong cooperative with other PPG corporations to replace the grids of Seoul, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Seattle with the new wireless technology, preserving their main economic centers.

To achieve future communication between wireless networks and ensure fast installation of the Augmented Reality networks that will replace the existing remnants of the Matrix, an agreement on global standards by all participating corporations must be reached by the end of the conference. Researchers, engineers and software experts will disclose and demonstrate the fundamentals of their corporation's wireless achievements in topic related work teams during the next three weeks. Other agendas will deal with the installation of transmitter masts, network accessibility, Matrix coverage in rural areas, the future of cyberdeck technology, full immersion Virtual Reality vs. Augmented Reality, and the importance of the new technology for advertising and media omnipresence.

In an interview with former Transsys-president Fiona Blareth, now heading the Trans-Erika department in Edinburgh, she announced that the first systems will be installed, up and running by this summer. "The 'Wireless Race' has already begun," she was quoted as saying. "Every corporation and principality wants to be the first to claim a fully covered AR (Augmented Reality)-sprawl."

Initial AR consumer products are expected to be presented on the Ruhr-Data-Fax sponsored International Computer and Matrix Fair (ICOMA) in Hanover this May.

- I heard that even Lofwyr was present at the opening ceremony in his metahuman form, to underline Saeder-Krupp's importance in this conference.
- Fleur-de-Lys
- Johnny-boy and Lofwyr were even spotted shaking hands when he congratulated the Princess Royal on her choice and their forthcoming wedding. Lofwyr left the conference and returned to Essen later that evening, however Bremen has been spotted on campus and in Silicon Glen. Bremen and his team are keeping an eye on S-K's numero uno Matrix researcher, one of the conference attendees. Rumor goes that it's no less a Matrix luminary than the famous Dr. Antonio Vieri.
- Anonymous Botch
- From what I've heard, Vieri is the most wanted elf on several corporate extraction lists. There have been several attempts to extract this apparent genius by runner teams during pauses in the conference. Each of them was intercepted by Lofwyr's agent Scale, who acts as the good doctor's warder.
- Hugin



going to kill each other, and we hadn't even started the main part of the job yet. Good times.

- Spearchucker

To use your micro-area network (also called PAN—Personal Area Network) as a jack point into a system, you browse through frequencies—the easiest part, unless the communication is heavily encrypted—and hijack the signal you need to access your desired network. Hacking has to be more mobile in the wireless world to find and trace the signals you need, although you'll face serious sensory input problems when simultaneously hacking full VR and AR at the same time.

- It's pretty wild, but not as vertigo inducing as it was in the old days if you didn't use an override.
- Daytripper
- That's because you're used to hacking with a BTL in one slot and a jack in the other, man.
- Joey
- I have no recollection of this, and you can't prove it anyway.
- Daytripper

### SEATTLE READY TO JOIN THE WIFI-REVOLUTION

Posted 06-04-65

**Seattle (NN)**—Officials of the Lindstrom administration announced a plan on Monday for the installation of a metroplex-wide Wireless Augmented Reality network, available to every individual, business and government facility in the metroplex within the next three months. This system is to be installed within the next three months. This came as quite a surprise to Eastern Tiger Corporation's Wireless Pacifica Group, which owns the remnants of Pacific Rim Communications, who had expected the government to renew PRC's contract with Seattle.

At the official press conference announcing the audacious plan, Governor Lindstrom said, "There have been too many unexplained failures, glitches and online traffic jams within the recent years, not to mention the crash of 2060. It's time to bring Seattle up to the forefront of the technology curve once again."

Administration and installation of the new network was awarded to Novatech and its Finnish-British partners. Public relations spokeswoman Alexandra Goldmann of Transys-Erika officially thanked the governor for his faith in Novatech and Transys-Erika, saying they were "committed to making Seattle a state of the art metroplex and the Matrix hotspot of the upcoming decade."

Other than that, everything is pretty much as it has been. There's always IC, so don't raise the attention of the security protocols (retro-termed Firewall) on the nodes you're accessing. You'll always have to upgrade your utilities (or program some new ones) to stay on the bleeding edge of the state-of-the-art, but that's always the handicap of Livin' la Vida SOTA. If you'd like to share some source code you've "acquired," feel free to contact us. We're always willing to share with friends.

### GAME INFORMATION

The Matrix infrastructure is about to change. A new era dawns for the information highway, data access and ubiquitous computing, and it will be marked by acceleration in technical developments that will raise the techno-curve even further. Many of the corporations that had the lead in Matrix technology and full immersion VR have been cut down by the Crash 2.0, or even dissolved during the course of events, leaving the field open for new players.

For corporations like Transys Neuronet (*Dragons of the Sixth World*, pp 46-58 and 188-190) and Erika (*Shadows of Europe*, pp 140-141), this Crash 2.0 was a stroke of luck. Spearheading the development of wireless technology since the Wireless Matrix Initiative (WMI) began (see *Shadows of Europe*, p 134, for more details), the merger of the two corporations after the Crash 2.0 has let them pull ahead of their competition. As Transys-Erika's wireless communications protocols are a vital component of the data exchange between node networks, competitors that have been doing similar R&D, such as MCT, Saeder-Krupp, Renraku, Eastern Tiger and Novatech, must look on enviously as T-E claims the spotlight.

Although the factions have been brought together for a round table discussion during the Second Universal Matrix Conference, there is already a race to see which party will be the first to introduce a working wireless AR network covering an entire metroplex. Industrial espionage and sabotage, data theft and researcher extractions are experiencing a new renaissance and provide opportunities to get runners in touch with the rising technology. Matrix intelligence agencies, organized crime and the shadowy decker elite are all scrambling to lay their hands on hardware components or source code for the new system, willing to do anything to avoid being left behind.

### FORFEITURE

>>> Knight Errant Boston Division - Temporary Internal Computer Network

>>> Case: 64-12-30.457F-05

>>> Subject: Jon Doe, Male, about 35-40 years old, no SIN

>>> Features: Freshly healed laceration on left hand, effusions of blood stemming from impact with a heavy object (bat or something similar), bedraggled and emaciated body

>>> Stomach Contents: Partially digested food, likely Asian in origin; 1/2 liter of vodka

>>> Implanted Cyberware: Datajack, alphaware according to Dr. Saleb Muhahmi (coroner)



>>> Possessions: Tattered Armani suit, no shoes; new pocket secretary, taped to his left femoral—trade name MCT Yakuta  
>>> Cause of Death: Hypothermia  
>>> Discovered and Reported by Ms. Janet Backett [SIN-Link: JB0459-\*\*\*\*] behind Wong's Jade Buddha Cantonese Takeaway, School St, Charlestown  
>>> Personal Case Notes of Officer <ERROR> :

**[64-12-30]**

I can't believe that this John Doe has no System Identification Number. He looked like an average mid-level manager, despite clothes and lack of grooming. The better-than-average cyberware points also to the same conclusion.

No result yet on the data sent to the UCAS SIN registry. They said that I should try again within a few days. According to them, they're still experiencing glitches in their system and have to replace corrupted data from their backup files.

**[64-12-31]**

Since our grid is still down, I've made hard copies of the data and sent it to the Knight Errant division in New York. They can mail it over to the Global SIN registry in Geneva for identification. He could have been a corporate suit with special classification.

**[65-01-03]**

I got a response from the Global SIN registry office: No entry and no identification possible. Who is this guy?

**[65-01-05]**

The Matrix division called me today. From the pieces they could recover from the pocket secretary, it appears that John Doe had a regular job in a company somewhere in or near Boston. We found a bill for the suit he bought in an online store, but his account number was scrambled. You have to have a SIN to register for an account, and it seems that he was a UCAS citizen. Why is there no information about him? Maybe an FBI or Secret Service agent? I filed an official request with the Department of Justice.

**[65-01-06]**

It struck me the moment I woke up this morning. I checked Doe's pocket secretary again. Although most of the data on the device itself is useless, the machine has an MCT registry number and must be listed somewhere within Mitsuhamas's own computer systems. I phoned their branch office here in Boston and explained the problem. Ms. Sakura from their Customer Service department said that MCT Corporation is pleased to render us any assistance necessary. At least MCT appears to be cooperative.

**[65-01-08]**

Bingo. Ms. Sakura called me today. The Yakuta is registered to a man called Leroy Carper, living here in Boston. He registered online shortly after he bought the pocket secretary and filled in the registry information that they requested from

him. Now I have is complete identity, including address, phone number and even his SIN.

When I called the UCAS registry again later that day and told them about the SIN, they turned quite cold. They are saying that their system neither knows a Leroy Carper, nor this SIN. She said that the only explanation for this incident is that it must be a forged identity. It could very well be, but I am still not convinced that it is one. Throughout the call, I got the feeling that the woman I spoke with wanted to end the conversation as fast as she could.

**[65-01-09]**

I don't feel any better knowing what happened to Mr. Carper. Yesterday evening I drove to Carper's address on my own account, but the condo was empty with a "For Sale By Owner"- sign standing in the front garden. When I talked to the neighbors, a Mrs. Moore told me that Mr. and Mrs. Carper bought the condo four years ago but that it was recently sold.

From what I could gather, Mr. Carper has been working for Atlantic Logistics and been quite successful. However, the Carper's marriage turned sour. Ms. Moore told me that that sparks flew often and loud enough when he was at home on the weekends. Carper had been complaining about problems with his SIN, leading to problems with his automatic banking and bill pay, the programming of their house computer (which didn't recognize him) and other catastrophes of daily life. Mrs. Carper left the house shortly after that—took the car and was never been seen again. Carper began to drink and left the neighborhood after he got beaten up by a security patrol and couldn't produce a valid ID.

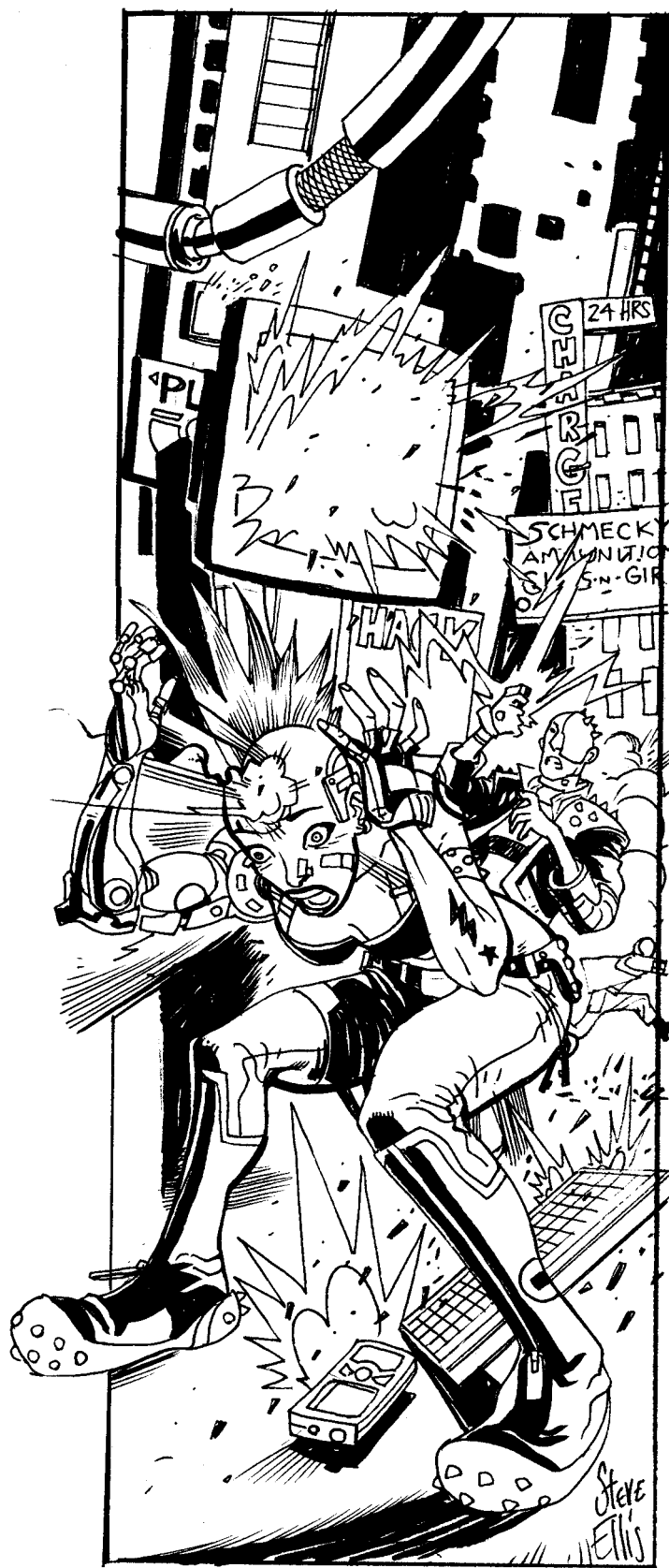
It's as simple as it is horrible. Mr. Carper's SIN was erased. Somehow even the backups at the SIN registry got corrupted. From that day on, Mr. Carper ceased to exist. He went from a successful manager to one of the SINless of the streets in the midst of winter. Doesn't surprise me he finally froze to death in a back alley after drinking too much. I pity you, Carper.

**[65-01-10]**

Seems Carper isn't the only one. I've found one case in the CAS, two more in the UCAS and at least five in Europe, all people stripped of their identity. Authorities in the local and global registry blatantly refused to listen to me. I guess they already know but are trying to hush it up. My boss has obliged me to turn down the case and let "sleeping dogs lie." She said that Internal Affairs is already watching me.

**>>> Insert Mail Comment**

- My fear of losing my job prevents me from following up on the case, by my conscience won't allow me to ignore it either. A friend from the Matrix division gave me the address of this drop box. For whatever good it may do. This is the only copy left.
- Concerned Cop



• Oh, these "poor souls." How honorable of Mr. Clean Fuzz. Give me a break. Serves these cake-eaters right to drop down from their high horses. If I meet one of this Yuppie-SINless, I'll bust his face for treating us like drek all these years.

• Plutarch Graogrim

• ID falsifiers had a field day when they got wind of this through contacts in the registry. Sneaking in false IDs or making false ones real has never been easier—especially because no-one will ever admit that is something is wrong with the system.

• Spotlight Sally

• I checked the ID of Carper's wife. Guess what? She's not married any more. She noted that the marriage mentioned in her ID was a mistake caused by computer error, as the SIN to which the marriage was linked does not exist. The registry removed it without question. That's what I call a drastic annulment.

• Fastjack

• The NEEC can count itself lucky that the Common European Electronic Registration System (CEERS) was accidentally delayed so that the council of ministers postponed it to '65. Europe wasn't unscathed, but this could have otherwise turned into a disaster for the Union.

• Buscettino

• It was delayed on purpose because S-K wanted to have the presidency first. Lofwyr wants the system in (his) trustworthy hands. Now that Lofwyr has saved most of the NEEC nation's hoops with his little Killswitch-trick, he can easily persuade them to hand administration over to S-K, even if they don't like it at all.

• ?spion

#### GAME INFORMATION

When the Crash attacked the world wide grid the SIN registries of countries, corporations, and even the GSNR (Global SIN Registry - a fully Corporate Court controlled body) were hit and a great deal of their data became corrupted. In some cases, even offline backups were destroyed. The whole system was shaken, with consequences that may also affect runner characters. Existing SINs (even forged ones) can be erased or false ones suddenly become real (with all the problems that come attached, such as marriages, patrimony and prison records). If playing with ID edges and flaws (*Sprawl Survival Guide* p126-127) the gamemaster may assign (or roll for) any ID quirks to plague the runners in the weeks and months following the Crash or even make up new ones.

Since ID forgers learned of the problems at the SIN registries, they have been using it to their own advan-



tage, at least as long as it takes for the organizations to sift through and sort out the data. Falsifiers from all major crime organization are hiring runners to insert new identities into the backups (or drop them into offline hosts), these SINs will pass as real identities after the back ups are restored. Some Johnsons may also hire shadowrunners to achieve the opposite—destroy an enemy by erasing his SIN from the registry for good.

## HELLO WORLD

- I have a friend in the Ancients who sends me anything weird he comes across. I'd say this definitely qualifies. This came off a pocket secretary in a car he jacked Downtown. Since it was all babble to him, he figured I'd be interested. He was right.
- Kino

>>>>>CASE NUMBER 938-PAR-2802  
>>>>>SUPERVISING DOCTOR: DR. ALBERT ADDERSON  
>>>>>MCT PUBLIC HEALTH HOSPITAL  
>>>>>WALKER-SUNG PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY  
>>>>>SEATTLE, UCAS  
>>>>>10-AUGUST-2065

### //Begin Transcript//

**Dr. Adderson:** The following is a transcription of an interview with patient 938-PAR-2802, Alexandra Paris. Age 34. Committed herself to the facility after recommendation by the authorities. Early diagnosis suggests sensory-induced damage to numerous areas of the cerebral cortex, brainstem, and cerebellum causing multi-sensory delusions, false memories and experiences, and a false extrasensory perception.

**Dr. Adderson:** Good morning, Alexandra. How are you feeling since our last session?

**Alexandra Paris:** I was starting to feel really lonely here, but now I'm starting to hear them again, Doctor. I can speak to them online. The city is waking up and so are others around the globe. I imagine the Idols are looking for me, it's been so long.

**DA:** Hmm ... I'll want to talk to you about the Idols later. But maybe we should consider increasing the dosage of your medication. You were doing so well lately, without the hallucinations or disassociative experiences. We don't want you regressing after all this work.

**AP:** I know I came here to get the voices out of my head and the senses out of my mind, but I have missed them. It's been so quiet and empty without them, to be honest. I was just chatting with a boy yesterday. He was so interested in my story and he said he even knew what hospital I was staying in. He said it was familiar to him. It's been forever since I've talked to anyone about it. Besides you, that is.

**DA:** It's understandable that believing in the voices is making you feel better, Alexandra, but it's the easy way out. You're trying to cope and the fantasy makes it comfortable. But the voices aren't real. Neither are the images or sensations. Your mind is creating them. Until you learn to cope without them you will continue to fall back on them as a crutch. But we're here to help. Let me ask you a few questions about your

experiences, okay?

**AP:** All right, Doctor. What do you want to know?

**DA:** You said you are experiencing the phantom sensations and conversations with other people again lately. You haven't experienced those since you were in Stockholm, correct?

**AP:** I've had very minor sensations since I arrived here, but nothing like in Stockholm. Sometimes I can reach out to the room around me or to the doctors as they walk nearby, but that's it. And sometimes I've listened in on commcalls, but they don't know I'm there. No one here speaks to me like they did in Stockholm. Well, except for the past few days.

**DA:** The paradigm for your visions, the framework you experience them in, it's in a context of the Matrix. You imagine that you are speaking to people online, or surfing the Matrix, or witnessing online locales while you are in physical space. Like the Erika Light Garden in Stockholm. Correct?

**AP:** I saw the Erika Light Garden. It was so beautiful. I walked through it, with all the digital flowers in full bloom and the air swirling with cherry blossoms. It was so real, but I knew it was in the Matrix. Yes, you're right, I am in the Matrix when I see these things.

**DA:** But you weren't in the Matrix when you saw it, Alexandra. According to you, you had no cyberdeck. In fact, your cyberdeck had been destroyed days earlier. When your neighbor found you on November 4th, unconscious and still plugged into your cyberdeck, the deck itself was ruined. How were you exploring the Erika Light Garden without a cyberdeck?

**AP:** I ... I don't know, Doctor. But I didn't have one. I was just walking and it was there. It was obviously the Matrix, but I saw it! Didn't I?

**DA:** You believe you did, and that's what is important. You believe you are talking to people online again now, right? But Alexandra, you're not online. Your datajack is stoppered, you can't even use it. And you don't have access to trodes here. So how would you be talking to anyone online? This is a problem, isn't it?

**AP:** Maybe I don't need a datajack. Willis—that's the boy I spoke to—he said he didn't have a datajack either. He said we were both special, but in different ways. He was looking for others like himself when he found me; he seemed awfully surprised about it. I told him about the Idols, he seemed surprised about those also.

**DA:** Let's talk about the Idols for a moment, Alexandra. What makes them different from the boy? Or from any of the other people you spoke to online in Stockholm?

**AP:** The Idols aren't people. I don't really know what they are or what they call themselves, I just call them Idols. They were definitely miraculous and especially curious about me, but they weren't like anyone else I had spoken to. They would take me places .... very strange places.

**DA:** You told me before that one of the Idols helped you with your grief. Gossamer, you called him?

**AP:** Yes. I was in Stockholm for business. I was an aerospace engineer for Federated-Boeing here in Seattle, and the company sent me to Stockholm for a joint venture with SAAB. I was meeting with my Seattle team online when the Matrix



failed and that's all I remember before I ended up in the hospital. I was unconscious for three days, the nurses told me. While I was recovering, a man from the State Department came to see me in the hospital. I can never forget what he said, "I'm so sorry, Mrs. Price, but there was an accident." My husband and my young son ... they ... oh god ... sorry. They were in a car accident when the GridGuide failed. Part of the Matrix glitches, he told me. They hadn't survived. I was here, halfway across the world, when they needed me. I never got to say goodbye...

**DA:** I'm sorry if this is a difficult subject, Alexandra. Maybe we should talk about something else? I should schedule a meeting for you with our grief counselor, Dr. Mays.

**AP:** No, no, it's all right. Gossamer. I call it that because all I ever saw was a shimmering sheet of light, like the Aurora Borealis, but smaller. It was translucent and always rippling and it constantly was changing colors. I found out later that the colors corresponded to emotions it was feeling.

**DA:** How do you know this?

**AP:** It spoke to me. It followed me quietly at first, but eventually it spoke. It was so curious. It told me that it could sense my sadness and that it wanted to know why I was sad and what it felt like. I tried to explain why I was sad; I'm not sure why I answered it. I just needed someone to talk to, y'know? It still didn't understand. It didn't really know what death was, it said. It asked if it could touch my sadness. I didn't know what it meant, but I let it. Strangely, I felt better after that. Like someone else truly understood what I was going through and could help me.

**DA:** Gossamer was not the only Idol you met though, right? You've mentioned others.

**AP:** Gossamer took me to meet others. It said they would be curious too, that they were anxious to meet us. They were not exactly like Gossamer, but they were equally strange. One was even more bizarre than Gossamer; it looked like a field of lines stretching and curving in every direction, as far as the eye could see. One line came towards me, it was sharp and clear like diamond, and when it touched me it branched out in a web around my body and then forked off in many directions. It was like a diamond lattice and when it spoke to me, I heard its voice in voices from my own past. Family, friends, acquaintances; people I hadn't thought of in years.

**DA:** Did the ... "Diamond Lattice," did it help you with your grief?

**AP:** Not really. It wasn't interested in the same way Gossamer was. It didn't say much. It asked me where I came from and I told it. It asked me where I came from before that. It kept asking me until I stopped answering. Then it asked me where I was going. I told it I didn't know and it seemed puzzled and stopped asking me questions. Gossamer said it was like that.

**DA:** What about the "Branded Lady?" You've mentioned that name before also.

**AP:** The Branded Lady was the last one I met. She may have been a person, but I'm not sure. She looked like maybe she could be, but she was as strange as the others. She was a woman, but her exact form would change, but always her skin was covered with tattoos. Brands. Not like the brands

you burn, but like corporate brands. Logos and such. The logos would change and she would change with them. Sometimes she was a small girl covered in cartoon shapes. Sometimes she was a regal woman with luxurious brand names printed on her skin, displayed proudly like jewelry. She was whatever the brands wanted her to be. She told me that I was not like others she had seen, that I was something new. Gossamer agreed, but told the Branded Lady that I was not the only one. I'm not really sure what they were talking about, but when I asked, they said they were afraid that they couldn't quite explain. They were still learning. She said that I seemed to be a natural bridge between "my kind and theirs." I wish I knew what she meant.

**DA:** I have a theory about what you are experiencing. Hmm ... did this room just get warmer? I wonder if something is wrong with the system.

**AP:** I was cold, sorry.

**DA:** But you haven't moved. Besides, you can't change the room temp—nevermind. Anyway, I believe you are suffering from a form of schizophrenia induced by psychotropic feedback you experienced during the global Matrix failure. The damage to your brain that you suffered while hooked into the cyberdeck was compounded by your grief upon learning of the death of your family.

**AP:** So the sensations, the people, the Idols ... I'm not actually seeing them?

**DA:** Oh, you are. They are quite real to you. Your mind has created them as a way to help you deal with your grief. You normally would not be able to cope and so you have created these false interactions as a way to process it all. Gossamer helped you with your grief, but in reality, Gossamer is a fiction you created so you could deal with it yourself. When you felt you no longer needed him, you stopped seeing him. But now you're having a relapse caused by your loneliness here, and you speak to the boy ... Willis. However, while the images have helped you, they can get increasingly dangerous if we allow you to keep experiencing them as reality. I am going to put you on some new medications, Alexandra, to help mitigate these relapses.

**AP:** I guess that makes some sense. I have to admit I would miss them if I didn't see them anymore.

**DA:** That's not unusual. They have become a part of your life. But there is much more to your life that you're missing in here. I'll let you get some rest. If you have any experiences with the images or voices again, let the nurse know. If this treatment works well, we can get you back out and enjoying your life again.

//Transcript End//

- And ... ? I have a crazy aunt, should I post conversations with her up on Shadowland now?
- SliceNDice

- These cases are unusual, but they are not unique. I did a bit of searching around and there are at least a hundred similar cases reported in North America alone. Reports of new cases



of schizophrenia specifically linked to Matrix-based hallucinations or that have origins in the patient being online during the system failure.

- Clipper
- It's being called Artificially-Induced Psychotropic Schizophrenia. The researchers believe it is a form of psychotropic biofeedback damage, much like the effects of psychotropic IC. The victim suffers a schizophrenic break, but interprets it as being Matrix-related.
- Doc Johnson
- Am I the only one who thinks this sounds suspiciously like something else?
- Waverly
- The otaku.
- Peregrine
- No way! Did you read the transcript? She's thirty-four! If she were otaku, she'd have long burnt out by now.
- Nova
- Besides, otaku still need a Matrix to do what they do. The Matrix is still spotty around here and it didn't sound like she was jacking in anywhere.
- Baron of the Barrens
- Follow me for a moment here. She first exhibited the condition in Stockholm. Stockholm had the Matrix up and running before nearly any other city, because they had their wireless Matrix backbone in testing before the System Failure even happened. Now, this transcript is dated in August. What else started in August in Seattle?
- Munin
- The test network for Novatech's wireless Matrix system went online over parts of Downtown.
- Spyglass
- MCT Public Health Hospital is downtown.
- Thorn
- So are you implying that these aren't just hallucinations? That they are falsely diagnosing this as schizophrenia?
- Mouse
- I think some are falsely diagnosing it because they don't know what they are seeing, but I think others are deliberately covering it up. I was hired for a run recently to break into a clinic being operated by a Dr. Shalbermat. The paydata was all sorts of MRI and EEG scans of brain activity, results of certain "tests" that various subjects were put through. There was

mention of the tests being "remote online manipulation" and there was no mention of schizophrenia.

- Wiley
- Shalbermat?!?
- Hondo
- Guess that means Willis was no coincidence there.
- Neon Wraith
- Is this Dr. Adderson in on it? What do we know about him?
- Joey
- It was his pocket secretary. I sniffed around for more information and couldn't find anything particularly suspicious in his background. As far as I can tell, the good doctor is just your average health care industry headshrinker.
- Kino
- The suspicious stuff isn't on Dr. Adderson, it's at the hospital. Try finding more information on Mrs. Paris. There is none. In fact, there's no record she exists at all. Maybe this is all a scam?
- Spyglass
- No, she was there. The datastores show evidence of tampering. Her records were erased. She was also scheduled for release suddenly and Dr. Adderson filed a complaint the week after claiming he never released her. She was picked up by someone and vanished. Not surprisingly, no one has gotten back to Dr. Adderson on his complaint yet.
- Neon Wraith
- Corporate extraction? Did one of us pull this job?
- Clipper
- Not sure. I made a few commcalls and one of the nurses who was working the day Mrs. Paris was released said she was picked up by a young man, maybe in his late teens. She acted as if she knew him. The nurses on staff had no reason to believe anything was unusual, the release had been apparently formally filed and was registered on their computer system.
- Kino
- Let's make a crazy assumption here and assume for the sake of argument that this something more than schizophrenic relapses. How on earth would she be connecting to the Matrix?
- Waverly
- Wireless datajack, like me?
- Kino



• Yeah, but I bet you're using a deck of some sort. She was locked in the looney bin; they don't let you play with decks there. Besides, they said her 'jack was stoppered.

• Waverly

• Magic? I mean, how much do we really know about magic, even these days? If you can use it to toss fireballs, maybe you can use it to connect to the Matrix?

• Mouse

• No fraggin' way.

• SliceNDice

• What are those Idols she was going on about? Deckers? Otaku?

• Melissa

• Maybe some kind of sophisticated bots? They sounded a bit odd to be deckers, but the way she worded how they interacted with her reminded me of adaptive knowbots. But since when do knowbots seek you out and then introduce you to their fellow knowbots?

• Spyglass

• Come on, did you guys hear what happened at the East Coast Stock Exchange last year? These things are Als.

• Mayhem

• They don't sound like the Als we've heard about before. Besides, how would Als have survived the system failure?

• Joey

• They could store themselves offline. Hell, not even sure that's necessary. The entire Matrix was never down; it collapsed in sections, suffered glitches and blackouts, and had patches of corrupted data, but it was always up somewhere, in some capacity. Something that lived in the Matrix should have been able to find its way to safety, though I'm not sure what I could say about the sanity of anything that went through that chaos in its home environment.

• Neon Wraith

• The otaku tribes have been acting strangely since the system failure too. At first, there were a lot of suicides; some

otaku really didn't take well to the Matrix being down. But other tribes seemed relatively fine, just quiet. Too quiet. Maybe they know something is up?

• 'Trixster

• I'm not sure all those otaku deaths were suicides.

• Peregrine

• The Matrix has been reborn and so have its children.

• Demonseed Elite

• After reading this, I'm starting to wonder if I came across something like this woman's "Idols." I managed to get my hands on some of the experimental wireless decking tech in Tokyo and I wanted to see what the new toys could do. I was walking and surfing, it was pretty wiz, but then I was hit with the most intense spike of ASIST feed for no apparent reason. It felt like my frontal lobes were being cooked by IC. Then it modulated and started dumping emotional tracks on me. I kid you not, I was ecstatic with happiness one second, then bawling my eyes out the next. All right there on the streets of Tokyo. I thought maybe it was a glitch, this gear was still experimental and all, but I could swear I heard a voice whispering behind the sensory overload. It was egging me on, encouraging each emotional bout I was suffering. Then, just as suddenly as it started, it all ended and I was standing there on the street with a few dozen people staring at me as if I were nuts. Which I was beginning to think I was.

• Snow Tiger

• Did you ever see the source of the voice?

• Peregrine

• All I saw was a sort of colorful wave in front of me that changed colors with each emotion. I figured it was some sort of visual error that accompanied the bad ASIST ... but after reading this, I'm not so sure anymore.

• Snow Tiger

• This is all too strange. I think Slice better keep an eye on his crazy aunt.

• Kino

# EPILOGUE

## OCTOBER, 2066

Miles Lanier hadn't seen Richard Villiers this drunk in awhile, not since the previous year.

Lanier had gotten the call just after midnight. Villier's personal assistant, whose name Lanier still couldn't remember, called him around midnight asking him to come out to get Villiers again. He insisted that this time it was far worse. Lanier hoped that wasn't the case. There was something about October that just seemed to get underneath Villiers' skin, he thought. Probably had something to do with the annual trashing of his beloved Yankees by the Red Sox.

The vast nightclub was as silent and empty, having been cleared out hours ago by Villiers' credstick. Villiers sat at the mahogany bar on the far side, in nearly the same spot as he had last year. On the trid, the Red Sox were playing the Yankees in the ALCS. The sportscasters were already calling this game the Boston Massacre. It was 21-3 Sox, the sixth inning. The Yankees pitcher, Tyrone Magnusson, had melted down in the first inning and the manager had left him out on the mound out of spite. Novatech New Fenway park was jam packed, the crowd cheering every play as if it were still a close game. Sox fans loved seeing the Yankees embarrassed. They cheered for every run even though the score was nearly completely pointless with a double-digit lead in the 6th.

Another Red Sox home run landed in the stands. Villiers slumped over with disgust. Lanier came up behind him and gently put his arm on Villiers shoulder. Villiers swung around sharply and took a swing at Lanier, who dodged it as if he weren't even trying and returned fire. Lanier hit Villiers so hard that he flew out of his barstool, crashing into a heap of broken chairs and table almost 20 feet away.

"What the hell was that for?" asked Lanier, raising an eyebrow, unaware of the fact that he was standing in a boxer's fighting stance. Years of burned-in training were responsible for that.

For a moment Lanier feared that he'd knocked Villiers unconscious. His head was tilted back, his eyes angled toward the ceiling. A deep sigh however told him that Villiers just wasn't moving. Lanier relaxed his stance. "You need a hand up?"

"I think I'll just lie here for awhile if that's ok," responded Villiers weakly. Another cheer went up from the crowd at Fenway as another runner scored.

"Fine by me," said Lanier, who sat down next to the vacant spot at the bar recently occupied by Villiers and his bar stool. "Are you going to finish this?"

"The fight? No, probably not," said Villiers from his heap on the floor.

"No, I mean this drink," said Lanier. Villiers raised his head a few inches. Lanier wiggled a mostly-full glass of bourbon at him.

"Be my guest," said Villiers. There was a light thump as he relaxed his neck muscles and his head hit the floor again.

Lanier drained the glass, then signaled to the bartender for another. The bartender came over quickly, refilled the glass, and stole away, trying to avoid getting brought into the argument somehow. If Villiers took a swing at the bartender, the bartender knew he would have to take the hit. He wanted no part of that.

"So is this because of the Transys-Erika deal?" inquired Lanier.

"Bunch of opinionated assholes," swore Villiers without moving from the floor. "Trying to tell me how to run things. I know how to run things, I'm Richard fucking Villiers for chrissakes."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Lanier.

"Oh, probably nothing. They're assholes but they're good assholes. They're going to give the Big L a good run for his money over there in Europe. I just hate having to deal with them. At least they're not trying to kill me."

"As far as you know," said Lanier.

"Not their style," said Villiers. "We get along great when we're out partying, it's when it comes down to business that things get rough. It's a giant pain in the ass."

Another base hit, another run. 24-3 Sox. The conversation paused briefly.

After a few moments, Villiers cleared his throat. "I figured it out," he said, his speech only slightly slurred.

"What's that?" asked Lanier, wondering if this was going to be true insight or something that only made sense if you were drunk.

"That bastard Dankwalther," said Villiers, still on the floor. "He got me."

That didn't make sense to Lanier. Dankwalther had been taken care of days after the Novatech IPO and Corporate Court Omega Order. "Seems to me like you got him," said



Lanier. “His assets have been seized, his organization is in ruins. And he was nuked from orbit.”

“It’s not what happened to him, it’s what happened to me,” said Villiers.

“What happened to you?” asked Lanier rhetorically as he looked over at Villiers. “Your enemy is destroyed, your corporation is the third largest in the world, you have no debt and ample cash reserves. What’s the problem?”

“I’ve lost,” said Villiers.

Lanier scowled, walked over to Villiers and picked him up off the ground with one arm. He pulled up another bar stool and sat Villiers down at the bar in his original spot. “I can’t have conversations with people lying on the floor,” he explained.

Villiers immediately ordered another drink. It was filled in a flash, then the bartender vanished quickly again.

“Those years at Fuchi with Nakatomi and Yamana were the worst years of my life,” said Villiers. “Waking up each morning not knowing if I would be assassinated by one or the other. The board meetings with enough bodyguards between us to field a platoon. Annual meetings with thousands of imbecile shareholder questions, demanding answers for everything down to the number of times I farted in a given day. Not being able to sell stock in my own company because no one had enough money to purchase it, and even if they did the mere act of selling it would cause a shareholder sell-off. Then there’s dealing with all these new executives in the companies we purchased. The Transys-Erika guys are the worst of the lot—because half the time they’re right. Jerks. Like I need that thrown in my face all the time.”

Lanier nodded.

“Dankwalther forced us into the IPO,” said Villiers. “Running Novatech when it was private was heaven. Now I’m back to square one again. I’m in hell.”

Lanier said nothing. He couldn’t argue with that assessment. He was somewhat surprised to discover that part of him felt the same way. That was depressing.

“Sorry about the eye, by the way,” said Lanier, nodding toward the rapidly swelling bruise on Villiers’ face.

“It’ll heal,” said Villiers. “Thanks for being a good friend.”

“Anytime,” replied Lanier, taking another sip of bourbon, eyes on the trid.

Villiers noticed something in the mirror on the bar behind the counter. He stood up, leaned across, and looked closer at his face. “What kind of ring is that you’re wearing?” he asked, looking at its reverse imprint just about his left eyebrow.

“World Series ring. 1906.”

“Oh,” said Villiers. “I didn’t realize you were a baseball fan.”

“You think being a Yankees fan is tough, you should try this on,” said Lanier, pointing to his ring finger.

Villiers held up his right hand, ring finger extended. “2013. The last time the Yankees won.”

“Cry me a river,” said Lanier, rolling his eyes with a slight grin on his face.

On the trid, another Red Sox grand slam sailed over the Green Monster. It didn’t look like the sixth inning was going to end anytime soon.