

underworldTM sourcebook



FASA
CORPORATION

STEPHEN KENSON

underworld

sourcebook

FASA CORPORATION

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UNDERWORLD SOURCEBOOK CREDITS

Author
 Stephen Kenson
 based on concepts by Nigel D. Findley

Additional Writing
 The only Ultimate-Rating gang in existence, the FASA Posse: Randall Bills, John Bridegroom, Jim Nelson, Mike Nielsen, Diane Piron-Gelman

Product Development
 Michael Mulvihill

Editing
 Diane Piron-Gelman
 Rob Cruz
 Sharon Turner Mulvihill

Shadowrun Line Developer
 Michael Mulvihill

Editorial

Editorial Director
 Danna Ippolito

Managing Editor
 Sharon Turner Mulvihill

Associate Editors
 Diane Piron-Gelman
 Rob Cruz

Production Staff

Art Director
 Jim "stunty" Nelson

Assistant Art Director
 Joel Biske

Cover Art
 Fred Fields

Cover Design
 Joel Biske & Jim Nelson

Black & White Illustration
 Tom Baxa
 John Bridegroom
 Mike Jackson
 Jeff Laubenstein
 Mike "green skin" Nielsen
 Karl Waller

Layout
 John Bridegroom

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Published by FASA Corporation • 1100 W. Cermak Road • Suite B305
 Chicago, IL 60608

FASA Corporation can be reached on America OnLine (E-Mail--FASALou (Earthdawn), FASAInfo (BattleTech, Shadowrun, General Information) or FASA Art (Art Comments)) in the Online Gaming area (Keyword "Gaming"). Via InterNet use <AOL Account Name>@AOL.COM, but please, no list or server subscriptions. Thanks!

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SHADOWLAND V2.1

"I have taken all knowledge to be my province."—Francis Bacon

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."—T. S. Eliot

A word from our sponsor:

On a beautiful Seattle day (and there're way too few of those), a single shot rings out and takes down a Mafia boss. No big deal, you say. Scum hitting scum. World's better for it. Well, just you keep that attitude while everything you know goes BOOOOM! over the next few months. Has anyone noticed that assassinations seem to be back in vogue? Time was when a quiet "died in his sleep" type of hit was the norm. Nowadays they're bigger, splashier and bloodier. Welcome to 2050!

THE BACK STOCK

California Free State (From the Tir to Aztlan and everything in between)
Threats (Paranola, conspiracies and secret stuff)
Election 2057 (Is it ever really over? Time to prepare for 2060!)
The Big D's Will (Did you win the lottery? Check here!)

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THE DAILY SPECIAL

The Criminal Underbelly

Always on the cutting edge, Shadowland uses up all its favors and markers to get inside information from the made men and initiates of the secret world of the Brotherhood and the Family and the Tongs. We got 'em to spill their guts (figuratively, of course) about all the criminal syndicates—especially how they make their money in the cracks between the megacorps and the law. They've been around forever, but now they're gearing up for war. So strap on the big guns and powerful mojo and let's go play with the big dogs.

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COMING SOON

Target: UCAS (A year in Hell ... let's see what survived)
Rigger Book II (Hey—you wanna keep up with the SOTA?)
Cyberpirates (The swashbuckling smuggler's handbook)

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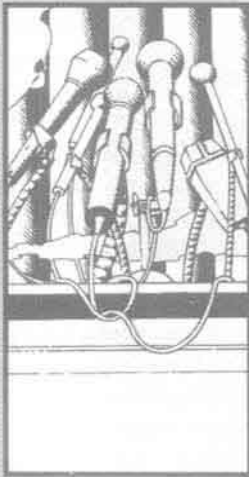


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FINAL ELECTION TALLY

Here are the official election results, finalized by the UCAS gummint its own self. Dunkelzahn: 47,827,746 votes, or 37%. Brackhaven: 38,754,731 votes, or 30%. Vogel: 23,200,993 votes, or 18%. Yeats/Penchyk: 12,831,834 votes, or 10%. Hernandez: 5,054,964, or 4%. Booth: 1,166,530, or 1%. Other freaks and weirdoes got 777,687 votes. [Click here for more useless breakdowns.](#)



ABSENTEEISM

Here are the numbers from those of you who voted from the (relative) safety of your own home. Dunkelzahn, 72%; Brackhaven, 2%; Vogel, 11%; Yeats/Penchyk, 10%; Hernandez, 5%; Booth, 0%. Congrats, chummer! You made a difference! (Did that sound convincing?) [Click here for even more useless breakdowns.](#)



MORE FROM THE GUMMINT

According to the UCAS bigwigs, the election was clean. Hip Hip Hooray! We won't have another Prez Election for 4 years! An incredible 75.35% of UCAS citizens voted—that's nearly everybody who had a SIN. The rest of the population (us SIN-less types) couldn't vote. No word on how many dragons voted. [Click here for yet more useless breakdowns.](#)



PEACE IN FDC

Haeffner has moved to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Daviar into the VP mansion. This is the quietest January in years in the Capitol, what with Congress, the Scott Commission and the Draco Foundation all on vacation. If it wasn't for the big glowing astral rift, life would be great. [Click here to see what's on the winter agenda for DeeCee's VIPs.](#)

It's 08:49:17. Do You Know Where Your Meat Body Is?

INTRODUCTION



The **Underworld Sourcebook** is a supplement for the **Shadowrun** game system. It describes in detail the "Big Four" organized crime syndicates—the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads and the Seoupa Rings—from their origins to their status in 2058. It also includes in-depth information about smaller criminal players, from street gangs to terrorists to assassins to an organlegger cartel. The recent death of a major Mob player in Seattle has shattered the uneasy peace between the large crime syndicates, turning the entire underworld into a war zone where everyone, from the powerful Yakuza to the smallest neighborhood street gang, is a target. Player characters find themselves caught in the middle—will they survive and even profit from the chaos in the streets, or become part of the grim statistics?

The **Underworld Sourcebook** provides gamemasters with enough information to create any number of adventures and campaigns using the various adventure hooks and "story starters" incorporated throughout the text. Players will find a wealth of facts, rumors, advice and warnings that they can use to arm their characters with the knowledge needed to survive runs involving criminal syndicates—those in the background pulling the strings and those who take direct action in events.

Like previous **Shadowrun** sourcebooks, the **Underworld Sourcebook** is formatted as an electronic document from that fictional world. Scattered throughout the document are comments and additions from readers who seek to correct, expand, corroborate or contradict the information it presents. Because this "black" information comes from characters within the game universe, players or characters cannot safely assume that these comments are truthful, accurate, considered or clearly thought out (though they may be all those things). The material in the **Underworld Sourcebook** comes from a variety of sources, most unofficial and all with their own biases built in. These different points of view give gamemasters greater scope to decide how much of the information presented is accurate, misleading or false in their own games.

This sourcebook describes the major syndicates and various smaller factions, cartels and gangs that work outside corporate interests and outside the law. It offers detailed information on why these groups exist, and how they make money, use their influence and control their various territories. Important personalities and secret rituals are revealed, along with each group's business practices and the markets each controls. Gamemasters can use the rules to customize the local branches of various syndicates in the area where a campaign takes place, and to run campaigns in which player characters are members of the various organized crime syndicates.

The **Underworld Sourcebook** is intended for use with **Shadowrun, Second Edition**, and the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**.

THE SHADOWS GET DARKER ...

Welcome to my world, chummers! Shadowland has been all abuzz since the First Wyrn kicked it last summer and things show no sign of slowing down any time soon. The new UCAS government has managed to restore order to the streets and honor to the halls of government (as if!), but the shadows continue to reel from the aftershocks of Dunkelzahn's death and all of the accompanying fallout.

The underworld took a big hit from the dragon's demise, and not because they were expecting great things from his administration. No, the underbelly of the business world now finds itself in a tizzy because of all the "treasures, influence and cred Dunkelzahn's will dumped into the open market. In the "shadowy cracks between the megacorporate giants," as NewsNet is fond of saying, unexpected distribution of wealth and power always upsets the status quo—and the results are usually fraggin' messy. When everything you know changes, then it's time to hit the ol' Shadowland postings to learn the latest news, secrets, rumors, deaths and promotions. You know that it's the only way to stay one step ahead of the game.

As usual, we deliver the goods. Right now, Shadowland is offering the latest and greatest dirt and data on organized crime in order to keep you alive one more day on the mean streets. Hell, you may even learn enough to score some of that nuyen that's floating around and manage to avoid catching any flying lead. And there's plenty of lead and other "data" substances flying around. Just ask James O'Malley.

For those of you who aren't from Seattle or who haven't been keeping a search bot trained on our newsfeed—which is why you're now standing there scratching your me on—Mr. James "The Hammer" O'Malley is the now *late* Mafia capo of Seattle and former don of the Finnigan Family of La Cosa Nostra (better known as the Mob to you slackers out there). He controlled the Seattle Mafia for an unprecedented number of years and ruled his domain with an iron fist. His main goal—and it was largely successful—was to reclaim a lot of ground lost to the Yakuza and newcomer upstarts like the Seoulba Rings. Old Jimmy was a mobster's mobster and, rumor has it, was looking to occupy the top slot of the Mafia's Commission. What he got instead was a bullet in the cranpon a few days ago, a New Year's Day present delivered via some assassin's rifle.

The "New Year's Hit," as it is already known, rocked the Seattle mob pretty seriously, and the unity and cooperation that O'Malley worked so hard to foster among the Families started to

break down almost immediately. He was grooming his 28-year-old daughter Rowena as his heir, but few Family members are betting in favor of her chances of making the rarely successful leap to the position of *capo* (female Mafia boss)—there's even odds that she could be the next one taken out by the assassin's bullet. In the meantime, O'Malley's close friends and rivals alike have their eyes on the top spot in Seattle, and are taking advantage of the temporary power vacuum to air some of their own personal differences on the streets and back alleys of the metroplex. Plan on seeing a lot of "packages" being delivered by the Seattle mob over the next few weeks.

Naturally, whatever affects the Mob eventually flows to the other criminal organizations in the plex. At the moment all sides are either shaking hands or stabbing each other in the back, and most are doing both at the same time. Won't be long before ripples from the struggle hit elsewhere in North America and maybe even touch off other small power struggles in other cities; add those tensions to the effects of Dunkelzahn's election and assassination, and you've got the recipe for a killer shakeup.

We love the domino effect! Or maybe in this case we should be talking about the butterfly effect—you know, the theory that scientists talk about in which the movements of a butterfly's wings propagaté in the atmosphere for years until the build-up leads to the development of a hurricane. What I'm trying to say here is that there might be a storm building in the underworld, chummers. We need to start looking into some weather forecasts and ways to patch down the hatches, as well as how to ride out the storm and come away with something to show for it. Toward that end, we've pulled in some people in the know to tell us what they can about the darker side of the shadows.

The first two bits are mostly by a chummer going by the handle X-Star. As the name implies, this man was with Lone Star—spent a number of years in the organized crime division. And if you know anything about the Star's orgcrime division, you know the code: working that beat sleep, eat and drink their work. They don't waste a spare thought on internal politics or requisitioning equipment or getting a raise; they focus on organized crime 24-7-365. So, take it as read that X-Star knows his stuff. His parting of the ways with the Star is definitely their loss and our gain, because he was quite willing to share some pertinent facts and figures with us. Looks like a lot of the people working with Lone Star aren't quite as dim as some of us would like to believe. Unless all of the other smart ones have taken X-Star's cue and ditched.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 5 January 2058 at 16:20:44 (EST)

WHERE IT'S AT

As long as there have been laws to break, people have been breaking them. Hell, some shadowrunners break them so enthusiastically that they actually use the old saying, "rules are made to be broken" as their personal motto. Crime is everywhere in this day and age and, despite what the hype of Lone Star's press releases tells you, shows no sign of slowing down or going away. Anyone who says different, be it Knight-Errant or any of the North American governments or anyone else, is just trying to take you for a ride.

Now, I know I don't have to tell a bunch of shadowrunners about crime. If you're a shadowrunner, then you're a criminal by definition. But there's crime and then there's Crime. Shadowrunners may break the law all of the time, sometimes in pretty spectacular ways, but the activities of a few specialized mercenaries and black-ops agents are only a drop in the bucket compared to the kind of crimes that take place in the metroplex on a daily basis.

A friend of mine in the Star used to joke that the only difference between shadowrunners and organized crime was the "organized" part. Well, all the runners except the real newbies who go shooting off without a clue have some sort of organization, but the fact of the matter is that the combined operations of all of the shadowrunners in an entire metroplex equal only the smallest percentage of the illegal drek handled by organized crime. In most civic jurisdictions—as opposed to limited "neighborhood" levels of operation—Lone Star dedicates the majority of its resources to fighting organized crime, because organized crime is responsible for the majority of criminal activity. For example, in the Seattle metroplex, 60 percent of all crimes are committed by criminal organizations or directly related to their operations. That percentage is based on a simple count: when you look at the percentage of organized crime-related activities based on nuyen volume, organized crime is responsible for more than 80 percent of criminal activity.

◆ Hun? Explain your statistics.

◆ Digits.

◆ Ah, the wonder of numbers. All it means, Digits, is that 6 out of 10 felonies are perpetrated by organized crime, but those crimes represent 80 percent of all monetary losses due to crime—in other words, organized crime has an 80 percent "market share" of criminal activity. When organized crime pulls some operation, it has a higher-than-average return. For example, an independent go-gang knocks over a Stuffer Shack and fences its haul for 2,500 nuyen. A Seoulpa Ring deacker subverts the Stuffer Shack chain's computer system, and diverts 2.5 million nuyen. Each event represents one "crime." Get it?

◆ The Chromed Accountant.

"It's All About Dollars and Sense."

Obviously, organized crime is big business. The larger criminal syndicates rake in enough cred to equal the annual income of some of the smaller megacorporations—nothing like the AAA megas, of course, but easily in the billions of nuyen. Lucky for the rest of the world that even the biggest criminal syndicates lack the almost limitless resources of a typical corporation, and that there are

a lot of them competing for slices of the same pie. The bottom line is that organized crime resembles the megacorps in a lot of ways, which is one of the reasons I left Lone Star and went to the shadows.

See, I realized that security outfits like Lone Star and all of the other cop shops in the world were only treating the symptoms of the syndicates rather than the underlying disease. Most organized crime is simple economics, pure supply and demand. As long as illegal products and services exist, including everything from recreational drugs and BTLs to murder for hire, from sex for sale to food and medical supplies in a war zone, people will find some way to meet those needs—for a price. The more dangerous and illegal the desire, the more valuable the commodity that will satisfy it becomes. The only way to eliminate crime is to eliminate the market it serves. And if you can do that, you may as well eliminate capitalism and economics and establish world peace while you're at it.

The twenty-first century is nothing short of an economic free-for-all. All the conditions that allow the corporations to prosper are also jacking up the profits for organized crime. Weak governments and law enforcement contracted out to the lowest bidder create just the kind of free-trade environment that lets the corps and the syndicates sell their products any way they want. I even know people who think that organizations like the Yakuza and the Mafia are pretty romantic because they work to help out the underdog and sell necessary supplies through the black market to people in places like Oakland-Berkeley, Redmond, Newark and Fulton County. Whatever their motives, the bottom line is that as long as you have desperate people willing to pay, you will have smart people willing to supply. And the vast majority of those smart people are in organized crime.

I don't have the solution. Maybe it's world peace and prosperity—but if I had those kinds of answers I would have run for fraggin' president of the UCAS. What I do know is that outfits like Lone Star aren't all that much better than the criminals they're working against. The syndicates shake down citizens for their nuyen, and the Star takes those same citizens' tax money for protection. Both sides are squeezing the little guy between them for all of the cred they can, selling their services to the highest bidder and following the bottom line. Lone Star just dresses their extortion up in the holy cloak of "serve and protect" to make it go down a little easier.

When I was working for Lone Star, I spent all my time chasing after a single group of criminals. If I did my job well, it meant my company would win bigger contracts, allowing it to up its fees even more and thus rip off the people I was supposed to be protecting. There wasn't anything there to feel good about. In the shadows, we may all be pawns of the big players like the corps and the organized crime bosses, but we get a chance to take their cred and frag them over. The shadows are the only place a lot of honest people can turn for help. Shadowrunners serve as the only remaining truly neutral party, needed and used by all sides but loyal to none. Runners represent the ultimate wild card in today's mixed-up world, and I gotta tell ya, I'd rather be something gumming up the works than a small gear helping to keep it all going.

◆ Just keep an eye out for the cleaning brush, X-Star old son.

◆ Bitter Lemon.



THE BUSINESS OF CRIME



Lesson One for students of the criminal underworld: organized crime is a business. Big business. It always has been, and it always will be. And like any business in this conglomeration that we like to call civilization, crime has its lightweight and heavyweight players. In Seattle and most other metroplexes in North America, organized crime belongs to the "Big Three"—the Mafia, the Yakuza and the Seoupa Rings. Between them they've pretty much cornered the market, though a few of the smaller players like the Triads would love to think otherwise.

- X-Star's information is a bit out of date. The Triads are becoming a powerful influence on both coasts and moving into some of the other groups' operations. Frag in places like Hong Kong and the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia, the Triads are more powerful than the other three put together. What gives?
- Billy-Bob

- Star's talking from the point of view he knows best (nummer), that's why this is an open document—so that all you armchair experts can point out just how he's getting it wrong. Anyone out there has more accurate info than what you see here, post it.
- Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 10 January 2038 at 14:27:08 (EST)

In terms of the business of crime, the similarities between the big outfits are much greater than their differences. Each syndicate exists to grab as much money and influence as possible, within and outside the law, and each runs its operations accordingly. Think of them as megacorporations whose primary business is illegal activity—from bootlegging to extortion to prostitution and just about any other profitable crime you can think of—and you'll have it about right. If you know how one works, you pretty much know how they all work.

- Just don't say that out loud to a mafioso. Or a yaku. Or a Seoupa man. Or a Triad member or a ganger, for that matter. In fact, just don't say it out loud.
- Yokoshi

Like any other business, organized crime syndicates have their own markets: specific customer bases to which they offer products and services, all dictated by supply and demand. I know plenty of criminal big-boys who spent time learning how to run a business and then applied that know-how to their illicit operations. You'll find more MBAs in the Mafia and Yakuza than you will just about anywhere outside Harvard Business School—and why not? The smart ones go where the money is, after all. And it's no coincidence that a lot of big-time crime bosses turn out to be "humble businessmen" on the side.

Like the megacorporations we all know and love to hate, each criminal organization has a different focus, with varying levels of resources dedicated to different "business segments." Of course, there are only so many illicit markets out there, and so each outfit has at least one finger in each illegal pie.

THE MARKETS

Lesson Two: organized crime has at least a toehold in just about any criminal enterprise that can possibly make money. You'll find most of those enterprises—"market segments," to keep our business analogy going—in the following post. I spent years in the Star busting these people, or trying to, so I know what they're involved in and can make pretty fair guesses as to just how far their criminal webs extend. I've kept this file to an overview, however—Shadowland doesn't have the space for a long, hard look into every nook and cranny of the organized crime business. Lone Star's experts—of whom I used to be one—break down each of these areas into dozens of different specializations, and the legal codes for any one of them take up gigapulses. You want more information, look up a good online law library or break into the Star's system and get the skinny (and tell them I sent you).

COMPUTER CRIME

Used to be if you wanted to hold up a bank, you needed a stocking mask, a gun and maybe a few chummers to back you up and drive the getaway car. Nowadays if you want to hold up a bank (or a liquor store or just about any other money making establishment), all you need is a computer, some know-how and the right programs. Old-fashioned robbery is a whole different ball game—I'll get to that later on. But if you're looking to steal pure cred in the twenty-first century, you need a decker.

Most people think all deckers are shadowrunners, mavericks who'd rather have their brains slagged down than take orders from anyone (except maybe their best buddy Joe Street Sammy, who leads the ragtag team they usually run with). A lot of deckers are like that, but plenty of bitheads out there sell their services permanently to the highest bidder—including organized crime outfits. The syndicate decker usually gets to call the shots on tactics, while his bosses in the organization decide strategy—specifically, who gets hit and where the booty ends up.

The syndicate decker gets expensive support from his organization (just like corporate deckers do). The organization supplies the decker with the best hardware and software ill-gotten gains can buy, and sometimes even top-line cyberware to go with it. In exchange, the decker follows orders and does what he or she does best. Not a bad arrangement for deckers who don't see

much difference between sleazing numbers for the syndicate and sleazing numbers for Renraku (and frankly, I'm not so sure they're wrong). There's no lack of e-slippers perfectly happy to take a syndicate up on that kind of offer.

♦ Why would any decker worthy of the name sell her soul to an organization? Anybody who'd do that has to be a hack.

♦ Pentacost

♦ Some are hacks, Pente, but not that many. Why would the yoks pay good nuyen for a hack?

A chummer of mine did some contract work for the Yakuza awhile back. They gave her a fragging Excalbur, let her juice it ten ways to Sunday, and outfitted her with the hottest icepicks I've ever seen. Sure, she had to pay back the cost—with interest—but it came out of her out of the ops she ran for them. After a couple of weeks' work, she walked away with the Excalbur, close to 50k nuyen in cold cred, and some useful experience in slicing government databases. The way she saw it, the yoks let her buy that Excalbur on credit when nobody on the legitimate side of the street would have floated her a loan.

♦ Serge

♦ I can see the attraction, but you're wrong on one thing, Serge. Your chummer didn't walk away. *Nobody* "walks away" from the yoks. They've got the hooks into her now, and one day they're going to decide to reel her in. Groups like the Yakuza don't give drek like that out of the kindness of their hearts. It's a business investment, pure and simple.

♦ Boffo

♦ Sometimes it can be a good business investment on both sides if you understand what you're getting into. For some, decking for the syndicate is no different than decking freelance or working for a different Johnson every week. Cred is cred and a job's a job. It's running the Matrix that counts.

♦ Uncle Enzo

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

Remember what I said about supply and demand? Well, controlled substances are the purest example of that principle at work. When something people want is declared illegal, demand for it almost always *increases*—and even in those few cases where the demand remains the same, the potential profit from supplying that demand shoots right through the roof. We all find forbidden fruit sweeter than any other kind, so slapping the "illegal" label on something automatically gives it cachet. That means those who supply it can charge what they want and people will pay. For organized crime outfits, "forbidden fruit" means big cred. The huge returns on the investment make dealing in controlled substances a mainstay for plenty of syndicates.

♦ If the government was really as dead set on crippling organized crime as they claim, they'd legalize most illicit drugs and BTs. The lost revenue would cripple the Mafia, and probably the yoks, too.

♦ Ika

• Maybe. More likely we'd end up with a society filled with even more burned-out addicts than we have now, and the corps and the syndicates would really frag us blind.

• Prometheus

Most organized crime outfits have their hooks into legitimate corps that produce pharmaceutical and entertainment products. (Any enterprise with high cash flow offers terrific potential for laundering illegal revenue—another subject I'll discuss later on in this post.) These connections let the syndicates use legit developers and manufacturers of pharmaceuticals and entertainment chips to produce illegal goods. Plenty of runt-sized but perfectly legal simshow corps in California turn out BTLs and CalHors for organized crime on the side. Why not? They need the money, and cred is cred, right?

In places where it doesn't control the production of chips and drugs, organized crime goes out of its way to co-opt and take over the distribution chain somewhere along the line. Your neighborhood chip-pusher might be a smalltime ganger, but a step or two up the ladder you can bet that the Mafia or some other major player has a big slice of the pie. Drugs and chips rake in more money than just about any other criminal enterprise, so you've got to be a big player to get involved at the top of the food chain. You need lots of up-front money and lots of connections. A corp could handle it—and some of them play in the market when they need quick and untraceable capital—but the only other players with enough resources to stay on top of the production chain are the syndicates. Gangs get involved closer to the street, where they can buy into a smaller piece of the action.

• Let's talk figures. A typical five-minute single-play beetle costs about 500 nuyen on the street, typical production cost—taking into account talent fees, gear, pre- and post-processing, etc., etc., plus chip-banks and burning—runs about a million nuyen, or close to it. Call your average production run 10 million units, putting the per-unit cost at 0.10 nuyen apiece. The producer will sell the beetles to the nearest distributor for maybe 100 nuyen a pop—that's a 100,000 percent markup. By the time they get to the front-line distributor—the thirteen-year-old entrepreneur who lives across the hall from you—they cost 350 to 400 nuyen. So where do you think guttertrash and lowlifes are going to buy into the distribution channel? Pretty damn near the street and the end user. The profit margins are better near the source, but to play in that league you've got to be able to invest a million a shot and then wait a couple of months for any return.

• The Keynesian Kid
"Greece IS Good"

Though BTLs tend to be the controlled substance of choice on the streets nowadays, some syndicates are still active in the illegal drugs market. For years the Mafia and the Yakuza claimed they didn't deal in drugs because drugs were "dirty," but that's jetwash. PR jetwash at that—another lesson they took from the megacorps. Looking bad to your customer base cuts into the bottom line, after all. But drugs mean money, and money always

interests the Mafia and the yaks. It's true both syndicates run more BTLs than smack, novacoke, ice, bliss or any of the other designer street drugs that've turned up in the past few decades, but the shift comes from market demand. Meanwhile, they've kept their fingers in the drug trade because it still pulls in a tidy little profit.

• The Triads are heavily invested in drug smuggling—not much in North America, except to specialty markets in the Chinatowns they control, but plenty in Asia and the Golden Triangle. The Triads have a multi-billion-nuyen opium market going in those parts. That part of the world isn't like Seattle or Los Angeles, where every kid on the street has a portable sim-player. But you don't need a player or a chip-pack to get an opium high. Also, a lot of the people in those countries don't trust BTL—but opium's been around since forever. Better the devil you know, I guess.

• Ennegram

• That, and the Triads want to make sure that if BTL catches on, people are sitting *their* beetles, not drek from one of their competitors.

• Rob

COUNTERFEITING AND FORGERY

Back in the Dark Ages—before the advent of the Matrix—organized crime cleared a tidy profit from printing bogus currency, share certificates, bearer bonds and such. It took elaborate, expensive technology to print passable bank notes, and so the big boys didn't have much competition. The tech curve changed all that—temporarily. For a while, anyone with a computer scanner and a good printer could turn out forgeries good enough to fool casual inspection. Then the arms race kicked in between counterfeiters and those with an interest in stopping them (pretty much everyone but the counterfeiters). For every innovation, the street-corner counterfeiter needed a new tech toy to stay in business—and after a while, the tech toys got to be beyond the little guy's means. With the changeover to computerized credit and the demise of "hard" currency and other financial instruments, major fraud once again became the province of those few who could afford the highly sophisticated technology required to pull it off. Full circle—organized crime came back into its own, and today it dominates the counterfeiting industry.

You can still find smalltime cred spoofer, of course. Anyone with a good computer, a chip-blower and some other peripherals—probably under 100K nuyen worth of gear if you shop smart—can turn out a standard-grade certified credstick authentic enough to fool a Level 1 checker. A really good spoofer can fool a Rating 2 or even a Rating 3 checker—I've seen it happen. The spoofer can also hook you up with a credstick ident that looks clean on first inspection—all the bits in the right place, all the data fields filled out in the right syntax, all the appropriate checksums nicely balanced. However, the art of forgery today doesn't have much to do with the credstick (yes, here comes Lesson Three). The "back story"—the corroborating data—is the hard part, and that drek's *not* on the stick.

Think about it. What happens when you slot a stick to ID yourself? The credchecker hooks up to the government databanks

or some corporate datacore, using the SIN on your stick as the search parameter, and pulls up your records. Then it compares the data on your stick with the data in whatever record it needs. If you're buying something, the credchecker links with your bank to make sure you've got enough money in your account to cover the transaction you're making. If you're slotting your stick at a Lone Star precinct because you've been picked up for jaywalking, the checker makes sure there are no outstanding warrants for your arrest.

So if you've bought your stick from a second-rate spoofer, the data on the stick looks kosher ... but it doesn't match up with anything in the target computer. The system says "No Records Matched," and suddenly you've got a lot of explaining to do.

To forge a stick that's worth something, you've got to blow the bits into the stick itself and then insert the matching data—the citizenship record, bank account, employment file, whatever—into the target hosts throughout the Matrix. And *that* is tough. It takes talent and serious gear—lots more than your friendly neighborhood data-phreak can possibly lay hands on (or afford, even if he finds it). Only a big-time organization can get this stuff—like a corporation, a government or (watch the flashing neon sign!) an organized crime syndicate. And since the kind of people who a) want to pull off major fraud, and b) can afford to do it right usually spare no expense when buying the tools they need, the syndicates (once again) make a fair pile of cred off the counterfeiting business—even when they're not pulling off the caper themselves.

Art Forgery

Because making counterfeit money in this day and age is so much more difficult than it used to be, smart forgers with fewer resources have branched out into copying easier things, like art and collectibles. Art forgery is still difficult, but a talented forger can reproduce masterpieces and even create "undiscovered" works good enough to fool art experts. If you can do that, you're in the money.

The big problem with producing forgeries is the need to steal the original, which is usually hanging in a well-secured museum or private collection somewhere. If you can't swipe the original, you've got to do something almost as difficult—convince your buyer that you have the genuine article. It's tough to slide a forgery past experts who are on the lookout for attempts to rip them off. A single misplaced brush stroke can clue in a real expert to a forgery. So smart con artists invent a plausible excuse for that misplaced brush stroke or whatever. One art-theft ring in Europe, back around the turn of the century, came up with a truly ingenious scheme. They'd forge a piece that was in a museum somewhere, for which they had a potential buyer. The forgery was good, but not good enough to slip past anyone who really knew their stuff. So the crooks would break into the museum, swipe the piece they wanted, hang their forgery in its place, and then deface it. Slash it, spray-bomb it, burn it, whatever ... and leave behind evidence that some terrorist group had "struck a blow against the repressive plutocrats" (or whatever) by destroying a work of art allegedly symbolic of that repression, or some other such drek.

The experts would panic, of course: a major masterpiece had just been trashed. They'd frantically start cleaning it off and repairing it. If they found any flaws in the forgery, they attributed them

to the desecration and repaired them. Meanwhile, the thieves happily sold the real thing to their mysterious collector for a small fortune.

That kind of overhead can make forgery as expensive as straightforward robbery, and some art-theft rings use forgery on the side to make extra cred. They steal a work and then produce copies so they can sell it two or three or ten times over, then split with the cred *and* the original before their buyer finds out he's been ripped off. Art thieves make serious money this way, but they also tend to spend a lot on good bodyguards (if they're smart, that is). Hell hath no fury like a wealthy art collector who's been stiffed.

Once upon a time, the art-forgery market was too small and specialized, with too much risk and expense for too little payoff to attract the syndicates' attention. That all changed when a certain dragon bought some agricultural real estate and opened up his toy box for everyone else to play in. With the publication of Dunkelzahn's will, the art-forgery market is taking off like a rocket. The payoff is bigger, so (all together now, class) the syndicates are poking their claws into this pie, too.

Dunkelzahn's will put some incredibly valuable art pieces, some of them unknown works, out on the market. It also set off a firestorm of speculation about other artworks and rare collectibles from the dragon's estate that are now in the hands of the Draco Foundation. Collectors and connoisseurs around the world started salivating, and the market for art forgeries and illicit art sales went through the roof. A big market in stealing, duplicating, smuggling and selling black-market art and artifacts from the dragon's collection has mushroomed almost overnight. So if you're one of the legions of shadowrunners recently hired to steal a painting or a statue, or to help to deliver some work of art to its alleged destination according to Dunkelzahn's bequests, keep in mind that you may well be working for organized crime.

❖ Since the will came out, the underground art market has been flooded with forgeries that sellers claim are "undiscovered originals" from the dragon's collection. An even better con is people trying to pass off forgeries by using the old trick X-Star talks about above, claiming the forgery is actually the original—stolen years ago, don't you know—and that the one hanging on a wall some place is the forgery. Supposedly, some Gainsborough in the British Museum isn't a Gainsborough, and the original's for sale under the table as part of Dunkelzahn's estate.

❖ Object of Art



❖ What about the "undiscovered da Vinci" Lucien Cross got from the will?

❖ Crisis-Cross

❖ Not real. Couldn't be. It has to be a fake.

❖ Object of Art

❖ Another new market for forgeries is bogus talismans and magical items. You can really jack up the price of an item if you can tell customers that it has "unknown magical properties." People are interested in any treasure from the dragon's hoard, but a magical

treasure ... just name your price. I've heard of an enchanting technique that lets a magician put a kind of temporary magical aura on an object so that it "looks" magical from astral space, but nobody can really tell what it does. The extra cost of paying the magician to do this is more than offset by the fatter profit you get from selling a "rare and powerful magic item." So buyers beware—the next "ancient talisman" you buy could well be a magical fake.

• Mage-XX

• I went on a run recently for a certain DeeCee based magical order to net them a talisman from Dunkie's estate. Turns out the thing was a fake like Mage-XX describes: the original was a ready on its way to some mysterious buyer in Europe. What a waste of time that was.

• Falco

FENCING

Fencing is the fine art of swordsmanship. Okay, just checking to see if you're paying attention. It's actually the fine art of taking what other people have stolen and turning it into hard, spendable cred. You might know that the information on Mr. Suit's freshly heisted pocket secretary is valuable, but without some way to contact an interested buyer and arrange an exchange, the data isn't worth the chips it's stored on. As the saying goes, you can't eat paydata, and you usually can't pay your rent with it, either. So if you want to make some money off your swag—paydata or anything else—you need a fence.

Most people who aren't fences don't think much about what it takes to succeed at it. A good fence needs an eye for the value of all kinds of merchandise and a massive collection of contacts—not just potential buyers, but other people who know how to evaluate and move hot goods to still more potential buyers. Building a web of contacts that wide takes resources, financial as well as personal. So once again, the boys with the big money—organized crime—have an edge over the independent entrepreneur. By my personal estimate, at least half the successful, big-league fences have ties to one crime syndicate or another.

• "At least half"?—where the frag does that figure come from?

• Bomber Harris

• I'd like to know, too. If you ask me, it's a major overestimation.

• Argent

In most cases, those ties are fairly loose: the fence uses the organization's resources to find buyers, and pays a cut of the profits for the privilege. But organized crime ties can tighten up fast if the syndicate needs something done. Like a fixer, a fence depends on his contacts to stay in business. If most of those contacts happen to work for a particular organization—say, the Mafia—that organization can apply a lot of pressure just by threatening to cut the fence loose. None of the big outfits pull the reins too hard, unless some heavy drek is going down and they're calling in all their markers. Unhappy employees don't do their best work, so the syndicates prefer to keep their underlings happy. In most

cases, they don't have to yank the fence's chain hard enough to choke him. All they need to do is deliver a simple "suggestion" that the fence keep his ears open about a certain subject and pass on any information that comes along. The fence gets the message, the syndicate gets what it wants, and everyone stays friends.

• Before you deal with a fence, always find out what "professional affiliations" he happens to have. It should go without saying, I know, but two years ago a chummer of mine ran a datasteal against a research outfit that was in tight with the local Yakuza. He went to his regular fence and cut a deal for the data. He didn't know the fence was deep in the yaks' pocket and had been told to keep an eye out for anyone trying to unload data from the run. The fixer passed word back, some yak physical adepts crashed the meet, and that was the end of a budding career. Do your research, boys and girls. It could save your miserable life.

• France

• What do you do with the fence?

• Lou

• I let her walk. Frag, it wasn't like she had any choice in the matter. I turned over a glass for my chummer next time I went out drinking, but his own stupidity got him geeked. That's how I read it.

• France

The syndicates get into the fencing business for two reasons: information and (you guessed it) profits. Fencing can be quite lucrative ... for everyone except the seller, that is. You might have your hot little mitts on data worth a million nuyen, but that million is how much the fence sells it for—or maybe what the fence's customer sells it for. Either way, the big profits are on the other side of the equation from you, *omae*. A fence always tries to get as good a price as possible, but the cred gets cut up along the line. Before the seller sees a plugged nuyen, the fence takes a cut and the organization backing him takes a cut. Every nuyen the fence gives the seller means one less nuyen for him, so most fences try to negotiate as low as they can—especially when they know they're dealing with merchandise that only they can move. If no fence in the world will touch what you've got, your paydata or whatever isn't worth a burned-out credstick. Even in best-case scenarios, sellers usually get something like 20 to 30 percent of an item's real value from a fence. So that hypothetical million-nuyen chunk of paydata might net you 300K, if you're lucky. Not too shabby, but not as big a score as you thought. Of the remaining 700K, some goes to the fence. Most slides into the syndicate's pockets.

While fences usually sell items acquired by others, many also actively acquire items for interested customers. If a fence knows he has a buyer for a particular item, he might take it upon himself to hire someone to acquire it, and base the runners' fee on the profit he expects to make. Again, we're talking about 20 to 30 percent of the item's value to the fence. If the fence is syndicate backed, it'll take its cut as usual. (Remember, crime is a business—and the first rule of business is to profit as much as possible from your employees' initiative.)



FIXING

Like fences, good fixers live or die on their network of contacts and connections. The more people they know, the more they can make happen and the more people will want their services. Good independent fixers are out there, but most successful ones need backing from somebody who matters. They usually get it from one of two sources: a corporate black ops division or an organized crime syndicate.

❶ Not entirely true, my dear fellow. Certain fixers have their own organizations or "patrons" operating behind the scenes, as we have recently learned. The exposure of Dunkelzahn's network of fixers after his death suggests that many allegedly "independent" fixers may in fact owe their loyalty to a patron of whose backing they are not fully aware. If Dunkelzahn could create and maintain such a large network of operatives, it is virtually certain that other factions in the Sixth World have done likewise.

❷ Watson@B*G.52893-221B

Fixers with connections to organized crime can still work independently, but they owe something to the organization that sponsors them. That means the organization can call in its markers whenever it wants. So it pays to know where your fixer's loyalties lie when you decide whether or not to take a particular job from him, or go through him for intel or equipment for a particular run. That marker might get called in any time, and you'll get sucked into the syndicate spider web right along with your fixer if you're not careful.

❶ That's for 'fraggin' sure. I went on a run once where we were working against the Family's side of the street. I was expecting to get some gear we needed from a fixer who I've worked with for years. I trust him about as far as you can trust anyone in this business. Well, he told me up front that he couldn't help me out. The local syndicate had helped him get started in the biz, and he still owed them. He was honorable enough not to sell me out, but he wouldn't do business with me for that run, either. Things ended up costing a lot more than we planned because we had to go through different connections that we didn't know so well. And we got off lucky, at that. If my chummer had decided to rat me out to the syndicate, me and my whole team'd be decorating the floor of Puget Sound right now.

❷ Alright

Fixing is the one area where information and control matter more to the syndicates than money. The number of fixers and fences that organized crime has in its collective pocket gives the syndicates a lot of pull in the shadows, even more than the megacorps in lots of the ways that matter. Shadowrunners operate outside the law, outside so-called normal society. But to do that, SINless slags like us need things: gear, connections, information and the day-to-day necessities that upright citizens so carefully reserve for themselves. We need a pipeline to get those things—and guess who controls the major pipelines? (One hint: this is not a multiple-choice question.)

To avoid becoming connected in an umbilical fashion to one corp or other powerful patron, a shadowrunner has to deal with one or a l of the syndicates sooner or later. Organized crime holds the lifeblood of the shadow community in its dirty hands. The syndicates know it, the corps know it, and you'd better learn it if you want to survive on the streets.

That's why the corps often go through one of the local syndicates when they're looking for shadow talent. It's a lot simpler than beefing up their own black ops division—padding the payroll just makes it more of a target for their rivals. Think of the syndicates as keepers of the "game preserve" created by the corps. Runners like us live here, in our "native habitat," until the corp needs a few of us for something. The corp sends some people to some syndicate-connected fixers, who turn around and rustle up some fresh runner meat. Expect this trend to increase as more of the little microcorps start getting into the game. They're going to need shadow talent on the cheap, which means lots of temp labor. They'll turn to the syndicate specialists to provide it.

❶ No way, chummer. I'm nobody's fraggin' puppet. I run the shadows, to stay out of all that drek. I take the corps' money, but I'm dug in all the way to the bank. Life in the shadows is the only real freedom there is anymore.

❷ Chrome King

❶ Really, Chrome? Who helps supply the street doc who patches you up and maybe slips in a new piece of metal now and again? Who backs the fence who sells the swag you steal? Who arranges for the shiny new guns you want to buy and who finds you the 'fraggin' jobs you work? Most of those support systems are run by the syndicate, directly or indirectly. The only way you become a puppet is by denying that the strings are there. A smart runner recognizes them and doesn't let his ties to any one faction get too tight—it's a tightrope walk between all the fine folks that control operations down on the street. If you don't want to fall, you'd better know which way the wind is blowing.

❷ Fiddle-Man

❶ X-Star nailed one thing bang on. The little Mom-and-Pop shops that got cred from the Draco Foundation need some talent to keep them safe from all the corporate wolves howling outside the door. A company that can count its employees in the tens instead of thousands can't afford a "black ops division," but they can take some of that new cred and make arrangements with the Mafia or the yaks or even the local gang for "protection" and shadow talent as needed. The syndicate usually cuts themselves in for a piece of the action along the way.

❷ CySky

GAMBLING

In the past few decades, most countries in North America have loosened up laws against gambling, to the point where there might as well not be any. Certain types of gambling are verboten—depending on the jurisdiction—for example, it's illegal to bet on Aztlanian blood sports throughout the CAS and UCAS—but in most places a citizen can place a bet on just about anything that strikes his or her fancy.

Of course, the absence of prohibition doesn't mean that gambling is totally unregulated. Most jurisdictions have gigapulses of laws on maximum wagers, allowable odds, house percentages and all kinds of gambling-related jetwash. And in a perfect example of the Law of Unintended Consequences, the regs have created a market for people who want to play games that go against those laws. They want to bet on the Aztlan pit fights, or maybe the legally mandated maximum bet on the spin of a roulette wheel just doesn't get their hearts pumping hard enough. Lesson Four: for every demand, an entire industry will spring up to satisfy it. Syndicate controlled, of course.

Most major organized crime outfits control any illegal gambling operations in their territory that make enough cred to be worth the trouble. These places are the illegal casinos—clean, luxurious, safe watering-holes-slash-gambling-dens where high rollers with a taste for the forbidden can feel comfortable hanging out. People with too much money and no imagination can play for the thrill of betting everything they own on a single roll of the dice or hand of cards, while beautiful people serve them drinks and fawn over them.

Then there are the establishments that cater to more exotic tastes—placing bets on live-feed gladiator fights from Aztlan, or even on a pit fight on the premises. Pit fights can be *mano a mano* (meaning any metatype; before anyone jumps down my throat, “man-to-man” is a figure of speech), man against beast (the more exotic, the better), critter against critter, even man against machine or a couple of rigger-controlled drones slugging it out (though that last one is usually too expensive and nowhere near bloody enough to satisfy most crowds). A lot of the fights are rigged (no surprise), and the houses often “recruit” fresh meat off the streets for the latest pit-brawl—except in places like Aztlan, where they get to use criminals. Hell, I guess that's still recruiting off the streets.

Some places cater to even more bizarre gambling habits. I know an illegal club in Hong Kong run by the Triads where customers actually bet their fraggin' lives in the craziest games around—everything from Russian roulette to virtual combats with black IC-level neural feedback to eating mushrooms or puffer fish and hoping they picked the nonpoisonous serving. Everyone else wagers on the outcome of these contests. The people who survive consider it the biggest thrill there is. The clientele is about what you'd expect of people loaded enough to risk death for a cheap thrill.

ChinaDoll

Naturally, organized crime also grabs hold of a lot of legit gambling operations. Dig deep enough into the background of supposedly legal gambling concerns and you'll find links to organized crime, like rotting wood under a nice new coat of paint. (Expect to slice your way through a literal maze of shells and holding companies to manage it, though.) Cities and resort towns that live or die on gambling, like Las Vegas, Atlantic City, New Orleans and Palm Springs, pretty much belong to a syndicate—sometimes more than one. Apart from the syndicate's cut of each legit house's winnings—which can be considerable—legal gambling

operations make a great way to launder dirty money because so much cash continually changes hands. (Got to clean the tainted cred somehow, after all.)

Palm Springs is one of the best examples of “neutral ground” between the Mafia and the yaks. The two syndicates run the place as a resort where the fat cats—themselves included—can get away from it all. Nobody starts any trouble there because kicking off a gang war in Palm Springs would spoil everybody's profits. So far it's worked like a charm.

Cabana Boy

Atlantic City's the opposite. We've seen some pretty bloody conflicts between the syndicates picking over what little meat is left on the bones of our worn-out casinos and resort hotels. Anyone visiting the Jersey shore is well advised to know who's up and who's down on any given day.

Jersey Devil

HIJACKING

Hijacking is the art of diverting shipments of god-knows-what to wherever the hijacker wants them. These days, god-knows-what is likely to be something that'll fetch the hijacker—and his syndicate backers—a pretty nuyen or three. The number of hijackings has decreased over the past several decades, but the total value of the diverted goods has grown because criminal organizations have gotten much more choosy about what they steal. Not being fools, they go for the really valuable cargo that gives the biggest return for the risk they put into swiping it. Obviously, valuable cargoes are surrounded by tight security—but the simple fact that such cargo must be mobile puts an upper limit on the amount of security possible. And then there's the matter of diminishing returns—decent security costs money. As soon as the cost of securing the cargo becomes greater than the cargo's actual value, the company shipping the stuff is playing a losing game. That means they'll only spend so much to keep their shipments safe.

The Mafia has traditionally been the biggest player in this area, but rivals have recently begun to challenge its dominance. The Seoulpa Rings particularly are moving into the hijacking business, seizing shipments and then quickly selling their booty on the black market. A lot of gangs, especially go-gangs like the Ancients, also turn a pretty good profit from hijacking. Of course, a gang that makes too much cred this way will come to the attention of the local Seoulpa Ring or Mafia don or *oyabun*, so it's a good bet that most gang-related hijackings are syndicate connected as well. We'll let you keep ripping off Corps X, Y and Z if you give us a cut of the profits—that's the way the game is played, and all the big syndicates excel at it.

The favorite target for hijackers right now is weapons. Over the past five years, hijackers have hit three shipments of ordnance intended for the CAS military. That means they've acquired—for their own use or for sale on the open market—mil-spec toys like man-pack SAMs, pulse-laser units, and more AP cluster-bombs than any reasonable person would know what to do with. (Anyone feeling nervous yet? You should be.)

• Big-time market for that stuff in the shadows. Expect to see more hijacking of mil-spec equipment in the future, unless the corps start coming down hard on these operations.

• Ingram

• Nah, they won't come down too hard. Plenty of corps arrange for some real nice toys to get "lost" from time to time, to supply their pet projects that have to stay off the books. Hijackings are good cover for funneling supplies into shadow ops. Best of all, the corp can claim the whole scam as a loss on the balance sheet.

• Sheaffer

• Hijacking pays real well. Did a couple runs to get corporate mil-spec gear for a fixer who put us in on some of the stuff we heisted in addition to the cred. Sweet deal, got us some nice toys.

• Winger

• Better make sure the corp doesn't catch you with any of 'em.

• Nightfire

After ordnance, the next most popular items for hijacking are computer and other electronic parts and equipment, medical supplies (especially drugs) and "luxury items" like booze.

• What's worth hijacking also depends on where you're planning to sell it. There's a whole black market in water in parts of Cal-rod, which means water shipments are damn well protected. Likewise, there's a black market for fragging sugar in parts of the Trans-Polar Aleut. They've got sugar addicts up in those parts, swear to fragging god, just goes to show that people will steal anything if someone else thinks it's valuable enough.

• Sundance

Of course, shipping companies—and the military, natch—take precautions against hijacking. Guards, escort convoys, armor, alarms and surveillance equipment are the usual methods. As with everything else in the criminal business, an informal arms race is going on between the security providers and the hijackers. The sec-boys come up with a foolproof safeguard, the hijackers figure a way around it, the sec-boys go back to the drawing board and come back with something nastier, and merrily on it goes.

• Ever since the late twentieth century, just about every commercial vehicle on the road has come equipped with a transponder that tells the company's dispatcher exactly where the vehicle is within a margin of error measured in centimeters. If the vehicle goes missing, it's easy to patch that locator system into the local police network and dispatch a response team directly to it. Same thing with cargo. Most shipping containers nowadays include tracers and locator beacons. Most of the time, the little chips built into the containers are used to keep track of inventory in the warehouse, but companies can also use them to track down goods that go missing. Unless a hijacker knows about these precautions and counters them, the vehicle and cargo she's just

nailed will be screaming out their location to everyone with the gear to pick up the message.

• River Belle

KIDNAPPING

Another old standby of the Mafia, kidnapping, is something that organized crime outfits still indulge in from time to time. But nobody does it quite as well as *La Familia*. They don't do it much these days—but when they do, it's a fine art. No one will see the victim again unless the Mafia wants them to.

Some kidnapping for ransom still takes place, but the big trend nowadays is to apply the skills and techniques of snatching warm bodies to corporate extractions and such. The bigger syndicates tread carefully where kidnapping's concerned, because they don't want to frag off the megacorps too much. Smaller mobs like the Seoulpa Rings don't care about that quite so much, and so are more likely to take this kind of risk.

Other organizations that skirt the legal gray areas—police clubs, eco-terrorists, metahuman rights organizations and such—kidnap people more often than organized crime groups do, mainly because kidnapping brings media attention. A kidnapping is an "event," so it draws the newshounds like flies to muck. Most well-established organized crime outfits prefer to stay out of the spotlight, but fringe groups crave it like a desert craves water. Nothing gets them headlines like kidnapping somebody important.

Invariably, shadowrunners carry out these kinds of operations. Runners are capable, anonymous and best of all, deniable assets that the syndicate or the corp behind the snatch can leave flapping in the breeze if things go wrong.

• Syndicate kidnappings have actually picked up in popularity recently. With all the competition between the low-level corps and the megas looking to swat the annoying little guys before they get hung in a tender spot, organized crime is getting into extractions with a vengeance. The Mafia in Denver just recently snatched a hot programmer from Warpdrive Systems, but the runners the Wolf hired didn't do their homework, and the programmer had quite a few shadowrunner friends who were willing to help pull his fat out of the fire.

• Loyce

• Organized crime outfits also use kidnapping and extortion at the adjunct to other operations—for example, pressuring a union boss they need to subvert. Nothing like a whispered "Do what he says or he'll kill me, Mommy" to realign your priorities overnight.

• Buster

• Another wrinkle on the old kidnapping routine are sags who arrange to have themselves kidnapped. We got hired for a run a few months back where a certain corporate exec wanted us to find her kidnapped daughter. Turned out that Mommy's Little Girl was just fine; she'd staged her own kidnapping so that she and her new gargoyle boyfriend could scam wads of money from Corporate Mom and then pull a face.

• Grape Ape

LOANSHARKING

Next on the hit parade of the Mafia Top Ten is the fine art of loansharking. This is the kind of thing the Mafia is best known for—the classic soft-spoken loanshark in a pinstriped suit, backed by a couple of legbreakers to make sure you pay up.

In truth, the Mafia isn't as deep into loansharking as most people believe. They loanshark as a sideline to more profitable activities, like selling chips or running numbers. Plenty of cred can be made in loan-sharking—especially when the syndicate can charge whatever interest rates they want—but the biggest payoff of loansharking isn't money. It's *influence*. Lending cred to the right people gives the syndicate a hold over them, even if they manage to pay the loan back (and plenty of people do). Imagine the struggling businessman who takes a loan from the local syndicate to get his company back on its feet. He pays the loan off and thinks he's home free. Years down the road, he becomes wealthy and successful, and then one day the fine friends who loaned him money all those years ago want him to do them a favor. If he refuses, or even takes too long to think about it, the secret of his success might just leak out ... and take his hard-earned reputation down the drekker.

• This same principle applies to things other than money that organized crime has to offer. The Yakuza loves to give "civil aid" to people in their territory, like making some trouble-some problem go away. Naturally, they expect this gift, or debt of honor, to be paid back at a later date. Or here's an example even closer to home—the yaks (or whoever) give a street punk some sniffy new cyber in exchange for later "favors"—and they most likely throw a cortex bomb or slow-release toxin sacs into the deal to ensure compliance. No syndicate ever gives anything away. —Chummers

• *Play!*

Loansharking also offers a convenient way to launder money by "investing" it in various legitimate business interests that can simultaneously turn a profit and hide some of the syndicate's assets.

Shadowrunners tend to get involved in loansharking on both sides of the equation. Most often they get hired as legbreakers to make sure Joe Chummer pays what he owes, or to make an example of him so that everyone else knows the price of failing to pay back the syndicate. All too often, runners find themselves in need of a syndicate's financial services. Living in the shadows can get expensive, especially if you have to have every new cybertoy that comes down the pike. I've known plenty of runners who got over their heads in debt to the syndicate and then ended up working for them to pay it off. Organized crime gets control of a lot of runners this way, the same way they do by buying fixers and fences. If you owe them, they own you.

• As with a lot of things lately, the Great Departed Wyrmswirl has thrown a spanner in the works. Like the man says, the syndicates love to get their hooks into legit small-time businesses through loansharking; they've done pretty well of it until recently, because the little guys all needed ready cred that the syndicates were only too happy to provide. But now lots of little corps are awash in cash

from the wii. They don't need syndicate loans anymore, so our syndicate friends have fewer money laundries.

• *Foam!*

• That's assuming the little corps haven't already taken syndicate money. If they ever have, even all that dragon-hoarded cred won't help them when the local syndicate calls in its chips.

• *Really Czech*

PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography has got to be one of the ten most profitable enterprises in the world, and thus a major attraction for organized crime. The syndicates are involved with legal porn (a great laundry for syndicate funds) and the illegal drek like kiddie porn, snuff films and even less pleasant kinks and sexual turn-ons. Hard-copy (as opposed to "hard-core") pornography has been declining over the past few decades in favor of electronic and digitized media, which are more portable and easier to encrypt, transport and distribute.

The traditional "dirty pictures" market still operates, mostly over the Matrix through legit and pirate BBS systems and nodes. These are electronic versions of the old-time peep show: you log on, pay the fee and watch. They're pretty harmless, and legal in most places for anyone with a valid ID that proves they're of age.

The big porn market these days is cybersex: simsense and BTL. I'm old enough to remember the big squawk back in the early 2040s over the boom in "digital cat houses"; Matrix nodes with names like "I Can't Believe It's Not Sex!™" where you could log on and have sexual experiences downloaded into your head. No BTLs, at least not then; the technology worked just like regular simsense. It was the subject matter that caused the problem. Conservative groups wanted cybersex banned, but ultimately greed won out over common decency and cybersex parlors were allowed to operate within certain guidelines in most North American countries. Of course, they rapidly spread all over the world; "borders" in the Matrix have always been a pretty vague concept.

• Cybersex is the best! All the fun and none of the risk, no talk about how "deep" your relationship is, no gifts. You don't even have to buy her dinner.

• *JohnnyStudd*

• Yeah, and no chance you'll pass on your obviously defective genes. Grow up and get a life, you loser.

• *Rat Grr*

Cybersex is a legit business, albeit a slimy one. The biggest money, though, comes from BTL sex chips, many of which step right outside of what most people consider erotic. BTL suppliers can give interested customers something as simple as a looped playback of a really fantastic orgasm that just keeps going and going and doesn't end until you remove the chip or the timer cuts out, or something more sophisticated. The more elaborate chips have sims of various sexual acts, ranging from plain vanilla with the gain boosted for an "enhanced experience" to the deepest

and darkest sexual depravities you can imagine. And some you can't, most likely ... but I'm not going to repeat them here. I had enough nightmares when I worked Vice back at the Star, thank you very much.

Right on the borderline between cybersex and BTL are "California Hot" chips, which are simsense chips with a real high gain juuuust edging into BTL territory. They're legal in the CFS and often feature some very pornographic material, but they're illegal most everywhere else in North America. So naturally there's a thriving black market for them across the continent, if not throughout the world. Several syndicates, including the Mafia, the yaks and the Rings, make a pile smuggling and selling these puppies.

California Demon

PROSTITUTION

At first glance, you might think prostitution is one of the last havens for the "independent"—that just about anyone can go into this biz without linking up to organized crime. Unfortunately that's not the case any more, if it ever was. Theoretically, an independent could get into the business, but couldn't stay in it for long before some predator noticed and decided to "recruit" him or her.

Just as pimps cruise the streets looking for independents to add to their stables, so higher-level predators look for independent pimps and do much the same thing. In some UCAS cities, all the pimps are part of a larger organization.

No* in Seattle.

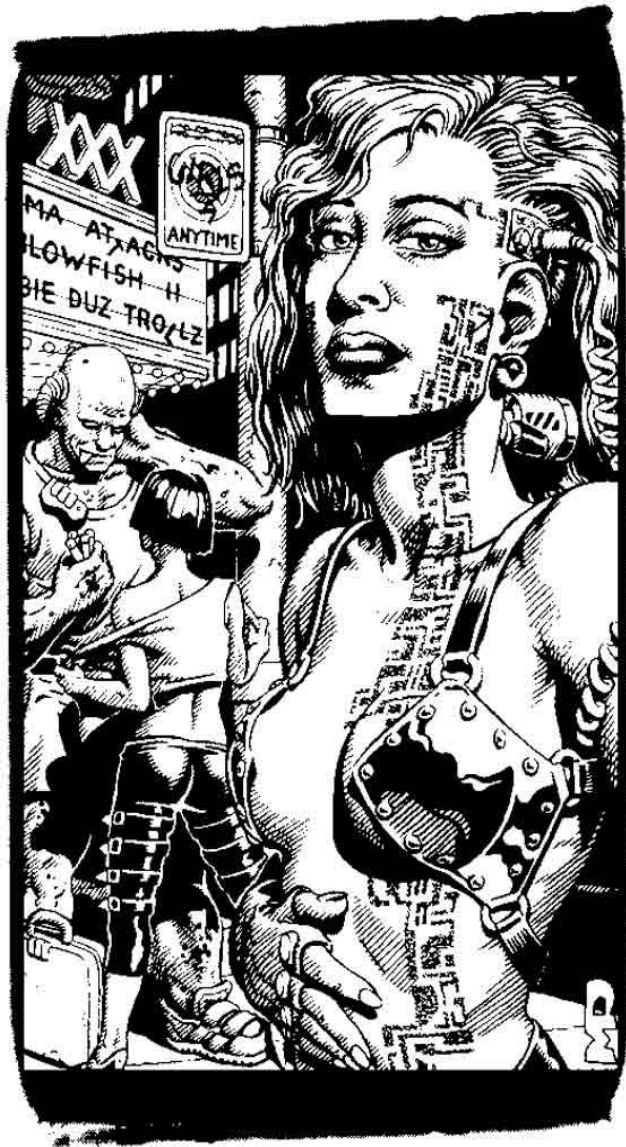
Piget Deb

But only because the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Scound Rings and a couple of the Triads are all trying simultaneously to tie up the biz for themselves. So many turf wars and skirmishes are going down that the organizers—"drummers," they're called on the street—get distracted. (A bullet behind the ear will do that ...) The sheer chaos lets some indies slip through the cracks, if they're careful and lucky.

Spook

Certain syndicates take the prostitution biz a step further than others and go into "business development." Many actively recruit among runaways and street kids, preferring new arrivals to the Big City because fresh meat is particularly vulnerable. Others—and here the Triads and the yaks definitely outdo the Mafia—go abroad to recruit. They bring their new "talent" into the country under false datwork, often as "dancers," "entertainers" or even "nannies."

The yakuza have come up with a new and disturbing development in the prostitution industry, known as "bunraku"—the word for the puppeteer in Japanese puppet theater. In bunraku brothels, the sex workers have specialized cyberware installed in their brains. These implants combine a neural cutoff—known in the biz as a shunt—with a direct-feed for personafix BTL chips. While the shunt is operating, the subject is unconscious—totally unaware of what's happening around him or her, or to him or her. Meanwhile, the personafix BTL controls the subject's body, letting him or her act in as normal or abnormal a way as the client desires.



Expect the Mafia and the Triads to begin moving in on the bunraku brothel market with a vengeance. They'll both be trying to get the jump on the competition and open up their own meat puppet shops in territories they control before the yaks can do it.

That's already happening. The Mafia in California is already competing with the yaks out of Frisco to be the first to set up puppet parlors in different areas of the state.

Ganz

Okay, so in the tech: What's about scaring the client? What's so wild about snagging a meat puppet?

Stirling

It's the fantasy element. Lots of clients go to sex workers for some kind of fantasy. A good prostitute is a great role player.

can make the client's fantasy come true. But the john always knows it's an act. And that can detract from the experience.

With a meat puppet, it's *not* an act. When the bunraku slots a b-fix chip, he or she becomes the personality on that chip. Blushing virgin, terrified schoolgirl, domatrix, lust-crazed nympho, whatever. It's real—as real as BTU technology can make it (which is realer than reality, according to Tuchi's ads). That's the attraction.

We heard of an exclusive bunraku brothel down in San'ran that takes things even further; they use shunt-BTL tech combined with cosmetic surgery. There have always been clients who like to do the wild thing with sex workers who look like celebrities, and they're willing to pay big cred for the experience. How much more would they pay to bump and grind with a biff who not only looks like Mercurial but acts like Mercurial... and really believes she's Mercurial?

• Spook

• The popular "flavors" lately seem to be Nadja Davar, Anne Penchyk, Lorelei Angele, and—I drek you not, Kenneth Brackhaven and Dunkelzahn as he appeared in his human form. And there's always the perennial favorites like Jarback, Mercurial, Ricky Sato and Honey Brighton. Frag, some people are just weird.

• Cosmo

• I know a place that specializes in oves—as the meet. They do all the big names from the Tirs—Ugh Surehand, Jenna Ni'Farra, Lady Brane De'gh, even Airhne Oakforast. I finally got to live out my fantasies and make them pay for all the oves they've given me. Anyone needs the address, let me know.

• Frog

• There is no way—the fragging way in the world—to set one of those b-fix chips, chummies. Think about it: How do you know what personality is on the chip? Do you trust the ome? Do you trust your pimp not to slip you a different chip—something like "masochistic torture aficionado with a death wish"—because a special client is paying extra? With the shunt, there's not even the slightest remnant of you present to take control. Things get unpeasant. Ugh! And frog if I find you, I will kill you.

• Merd

• From what I hear, most of the sex workers who get the shunt BTL treatment don't have much choice. Their "handlers" tell them that's the way it's going to be—end of story. But some voluntarily go the shunt route. I guess it's the best possible way to disassociate yourself from what must be a pretty fragging sordid life—as Frog so eloquently allowed us all to see.

• Frst

PROTECTION

Protection rackets are a standby of all criminal organizations, from the major syndicates right down to scroffy neighborhood gangs. The difference is that some outfits—the Triads and Seoul men particularly, and to a lesser extent the Yakuza—actually offer something in return for the money paid (though not near enough, of course). A store or business that pays its dues to the local Triad

gets a symbol scratched into its door frame or drawn on its front wall indicating that it's "protected." Anyone who messes with that business thereafter has to deal with the Triad.

Of course, the first benefit of paying protection money is that the syndicate or the gang won't burn out your store. You're mostly buying protection from the syndicate itself—everything else is a bonus.

• Some of the smaller Triads and gangs collect "insurance," but don't bother to leave a symbol indicating that a business is under their protection. That's straight-out extortion.

• Kwon the Oppressor

• One of the more interesting protection rackets is run by a free health saint in Atlanta that calls itself Etna. It seems Etna has no trouble whistling up a passel of health saints to protect places that have paid their dues and to trash places that haven't.

• PBN

A favorite among some Seoulpa Rings is Matrix protection rackets. Ring deckers penetrate a corporate system and infect it with a dormant virus. Then they call up the corp and say, "Send us so much nuyen, or we turn loose the virus we infected you with and trash your system. Frag us around afterward, and we won't tell you the passwords you need to use every three months to keep your system up and running." Quite the innovation, typical of the Seoul men: Matrix protection rackets allow them to skim profits from scared-to-death people who mistakenly thought they were safe from this kind of thing.

• Some real clever Matrix racketeers don't even bother to insert a virus into the system. They just claim they did. What are the corp sysops going to think if they get a virus threat, search their system and find nothing? Just to be on the safe side, they'll assume that the virus is there, but steelhead so they can't see it.

• Mojo Rojo

Protection rackets are a huge bone of contention between syndicates in a lot of places. In any given area that's paying protection money to one gang or syndicate, another will sooner or later try to muscle in on the territory. Invariably, that sets off a hot little street war, which lasts until one side or the other runs out of gangers—or cred-greedy runners—to use as cannon fodder. But no matter who wins this battle, the locals end up losing the war.

• Hey—a job's a job, ain't it? Just like with the megacorps, infighting at the top means opportunity down here at the bottom. When the syndicates are hiring, the cred is just as good as anyone else's. Play the game smart enough, and you can walk away from a syndicate dustup with well-lined pockets.

• Smokin' Joe@plumfield.com

ROBBERY

Few organized crime outfits indulge much in robbery these days—too much risk for too little return, compared to some of

their other money-making options. However, some individuals within an organization, plus some of the small-fry gangs, pull a little of this kind of action on the side.

No matter what your expertise, robbery—particularly on a big enough scale to interest a crime syndicate—is high-risk. Once upon a time a handful of thugs with shotguns could knock over a bank, but now all the cred is in the Matrix. That means slicing ice to get at it, and a big shotgun is about as useful for that as a one-wheeled squad car. These days, jewelry stores and depositories and other sources of hard cash or valuables are the targets of choice ... so you can imagine the level of security surrounding them. That's the main reason why big crime organizations don't play the robbery game. Why take the major risk of punching through some of the toughest security known to metahumanity, when you can turn a bigger profit with virtually no risk running a fly-by-night casino?

Most syndicates get involved in robberies these days through syndicate-owned fixers, middlemen and fences for the stolen merchandise. The Kozlowski family in New Orleans runs a little robbery biz on the side, but they do what you might call "consulting and support" rather than actually sending muscle out to knock over the bank. If a runner gets a tip that a particular jewelry store is holding some choice pieces, but he needs a wheelman, close cover, maybe a decker or anyone else useful on such a job, the runner approaches Miriam Kozlowski. If she likes his pitch, she might assign him the support he needs—probably by calling in favors, rather than using her own people—and also arrange to fence the goods afterward. In return, she gets a percentage off the top, just like a fixer.

For the syndicate, it's a win-win situation. The runner gets help he wouldn't have gotten otherwise, and the Kozlowski family makes money they wouldn't have made otherwise. Best of all (for the syndicate), the support comes from outsiders. No matter what happens, the Kozlowskis don't have to worry about direct exposure: the runner and his newfound friends are taking all the risks.

❖ Great idea, in theory. Unfortunately, trusting Miriam Kozlowski to keep her side of a deal—any deal—is an invitation to disaster. That woman's so twisted, I bet she meets herself coming around corners. Over the past two years, she's set up three "independent contractors" ... and those're just the ones I know about.

❖ Rex

SHADOW SERVICES

All organized crime outfits have special talent on tap for their own use: deckers, bodyguards, surveillance personnel, assassins and so on. From time to time, they hire this talent out for special projects, if the payoff is high enough. Overall, though, the syndicates have a lot fewer pet shadowrunners than most people think. Once again, the syndicates are like the megacorporations: if they need shadow talent, they go out and hire some. No muss, no fuss and no inconvenient loose ends to take care of if the hired hand doesn't perform as advertised. Organized crime likes shadowrunners just as they are: deniable assets to be used as needed and then discarded.

Over time, some shadowrunners get a reputation as "belonging" to one camp or another. Do enough work for the Mafia, and

before you know it people on the streets are referring to you as a "made man" or a "Mafia runner" even if you haven't officially joined the Family. Same thing with working for the yaks, the Triads, or anyone else. That's another reason for runners to pick jobs carefully. Becoming too closely associated with any particular syndicate can be hazardous to your health.

❖ On the other hand, that kind of behavior makes you appear untrustworthy to potential employers because you change allegiances so quickly and so often. Sometimes you have to make the choice between becoming associated with a particular syndicate or being considered a pose cannon that nobody wants to hire.

❖ Archmage

❖ There's also the proverbial "offer you can't refuse." Sometimes a Johnson with enough pull—corporate, criminal or otherwise—will play the "you'll never work in this town again" card if you refuse a job offer. And they usually mean it. Johnsons can't pull this one too often; they have to watch their reputations the same as we do, and a rep for frogging over runners makes it damned difficult to hire any again. But it does happen. That's when you've got to decide just how much you don't want to do that job. A good runner needs to know when to walk away.

❖ Argenti

❖ Like said chummers, it's a tightrope.

❖ Finley-Man

❖ The syndicates are starting to take more of an interest in the shadow market, mostly as brokers—like temp service providers in shady operations. Since the Big D's will give so many little guys more money than God—and also made them takeover targets—there's a bigger demand for shadow talent. The little guys aren't competent, normally trustworthy people RIGHT NOW, they don't have time to waste on idiots or people who'll frag 'em over on a play getting-to-know-you with Shadowrunning Teams X, Y, and Z. They need capable operators fast, so someone's got to do the screening for them. And who better than the biggest players in the underworld, organized crime? Go through the local syndicate; you'll get an employee with some idea of what he's doing. Hire on your own, you'll likely get a good with spent shell casings and brains.

❖ Wizard

SMUGGLING

Smuggling—transporting and selling illegal merchandise—requires a certain amount of investment up front, but it also earns an attractive and steady income for those willing to take the risks (supply and demand, remember?). This makes it a natural fit for organized crime. The highest-profile type of smuggling—with the highest potential profit—is drugs and chips. Most organized crime outfits make a fair amount trafficking in that kind of sleaze; just good businessmen providing desired services, that's how they see it. People want to mess themselves up, who are the syndicates to say no?

Lots of them also make good cred smuggling other kinds of illicit cargo. Weapons, magical talismans and materials, or just about anything else that's cheap in one place and valuable in another can earn the syndicates an income if they bootleg it from here to there.

Unlike most markets where the syndicates have a foothold, smuggling actually has a lot of independents playing the field. The r-bird jammers who work the major smuggling routes in North America, especially "the North American Autobahn"—the Rocky Mountains—are mostly independents. Running their heavily modified panzer LAVs through border crossings and around radar and sensor installations, the jammers make a tidy profit getting cargo where it needs to go. The Yakuza and the Maïa have both made moves to grab ahold of the r-bird smuggling trade through Denver, but neither has been successful (yet). The indies treasure their freedom, and they tend to be suspicious of any offer that smells of being bought.

Plenty of smuggling also takes place on the high seas. Yes, Virginia, there are still pirates in the twenty-first century. The so-called Pirate Kingdoms base their major smuggling and hijacking operations in places like the Barbary Coast of California, the Caribbean League, the coast of Africa and parts of the Far East. The Gulf of Aztlan sees a lot of smuggling between New Orleans, the Yucatan, the Carib League and Miami.

• There's been a big upswing in smuggling since the dragon bought the farm. All kinds of different contraband is making its way from places in the UCAS and points west: everything from books and papers (real paper) to paintings, statues and other drek that somebody thinks may have belonged to Dunkelohn at one point or another. I half expect to see the cargo hold of somebody's bird loaded down with sacks of gold coins or drek like that. Not even half of this stuff can be genuine, because there's just too "fraggin'" much of it.

• Cowboy

Gunrunning

Why would anyone run guns, you ask? After all, you can drop by any of the weapons dealers down on Second Avenue and pick up just about anything your little heart desires. All for "personal and home defense," of course. You can buy an AK-97 with AP rounds (in case a home intruder hides behind your fridge) and an assault shotgun, and still get change back from your 2,000 nuyen stick. All nice and legal. So where's the market for gunrunning?

Simple. Where did you buy your guns? If you work the shadows, I'd bet you didn't pick up your toys at the local Weapons World™ or Kong-Wal-Mart. You can buy bang-bangs legally, but there are restrictions, limitations and out-and-out dangers to doing it that way.

For example, the law mandates a record check anytime you buy a weapon with a muzzle velocity greater than that of a pea-shooter. You have to present a credstick with a valid ID code on it—note the word "valid." The credchecker at the gun store doesn't just look at the checksums and anti-tamper codes on the stick. It starts there, then uses the SIN on the stick to do a quick look-up via the Matrix to make sure the SIN's valid. No match in the central SIN records? PANICBUTTON time. Now I've got myself a

SIN, left over from my days at the Star, but I'm guessing most of you folks reading this left your SIN in your other suit.

The saving grace is, it's only a first-level look-up—nothing deep. The search algorithm doesn't crosscheck anything or do any internal error-checking within related records. So it's not too tricky—as these things go—to slip a false ID into the record banks that'll pass muster. But that kind of drek costs nuyen, even for a simple false ID that won't get caught on a first-order look-up: a couple thousand nuyen at least. So you've got to add that cost to the price of the weapon you're buying. Jacks the nice toys up out of most people's price range. That's why most people prefer to go the shadow route. You pay a markup for buying an unregistered weapon from a syndicate-connected fixer or supplier, but it's probably not more than arranging a false ID would have cost, and you avoid a lot of potential legal entanglements in the bargain. Talk about more bang for your buck.

• Have you heard that most of the larger gun dealers—the legal ones—in the CAS are forming some kind of association? They're planning on bringing in additional security. A security vidcam captures the image of anyone buying a gun while they're slotting their stick for the record check and then shoots it over the Matrix to a central record bank. Pattern-recognition algorithms juggle the image and compare it to all previously captured images. If there's any regularity—like if the same slob buys weapons under multiple IDs, or if one slob buys two dozen assault weapons all over the sprawl—then the association reserves the right to notify the cops. If this actually happens, chummers, take it into account!

• Tankerbel

Talislegging

In my granddad's day, the very idea of smuggling crates full of crystals, twigs and little fairy statues would have gotten a real good laugh. Today there's a big black market in magical drek of all kinds, and plenty of magicians willing to pay top dollar for the best stuff.

Again, why buy from the black market when you can go to plenty of legal, licensed lore shops? All together now, class ... because those legal stores require you to present valid identification, plus proof that you're licensed to practice the kind of magic you're looking to buy supplies for. Also, access to some materials (like the drek you need to send a ritual toxic wave down on someone) is restricted unless you work for the government or an outfit like Lone Star, and most of them have their own pipelines of magical supplies for their pet spellworms.

Shadow magicians and various street wizards who can't afford to apply for a magical license (usually because they don't have a SIN in the first place) have no choice but to go through black-market fetishmen and "novelty stores" willing to supply them with quality magical material. If you're a shaman out in tribal territory I hear you can gather your own stuff out in the woods, but if you happen to live in Hell's Kitchen or El Infierno, there aren't a lot of trips through the woods in your future. Once again, you pay for access and the convenience of avoiding legal hassles.

Not only that, but some of the best places to get talisman-quality materials are protected or reserved by one group or another for their own personal use. Tir Tairngire keeps a careful eye on the red-

wood groves of Northern California, the Anasazi protect the secrets of their desert plants, and the NAN doesn't like anyone but their shamans poaching their sacred sites for crystals and drek. The only way to get materials from places like this is on the black market, so there's a lucrative biz in stealing and selling drek from these places. Which inevitably means syndicate tentacles wrapped around various people ... so be careful who you deal with.

Expect talislegging to see a real boom in the next year or two. You want to know why, check out Lone Star's Department of Paranormal Investigations and the restrictions they're working to push through, like requiring you to register with the Star if you're making fetishes over a certain power level or have a license to import certain materials. The disaster in Chicago and the still-unexplained death of President Dunkelzahn are being used as excuses for tighter control over magicians and magic. And the tighter that groups like the DIPs try to restrict magical supplies, the more business there'll be for black-market talisleggers with stuff to sell.

• Magical orders like the Illuminatos of the New Dawn and the United Talismongers Association are lobbying against proposed talismongering restrictions by Lone Star, but only because they'd rather be the ones stamping permits and licenses and raking in the nuyen that goes with it.

• MissTick

• The other big boom in black-market talismans is all the magical stuff that's come on the market since Dunkelzahn bought it. Check out other sections in this post, along with the dragon's wif in the **Dunkelzahn's Secrets** up oad, for more intel.

• Talon

• There's also the telema associated with the dragon in one way or another: ashes and rocks from the blast site outside the Watergate Hotel, (alleged) blood, scales and talon droppings, drek like that.

• Suarez

WHITE-COLLAR CRIME

I've included this subject because I was a cop for a long time, and a decent cop learns to make a thorough report as instinctively as breathing. As to what it means for Joe Shadowrunner—not all that much, unless you're one of the few highly skilled electron manipulators that some syndicate somewhere might tap for a sophisticated fraud job. So-called white-collar crime covers lots of bases, all of which are of interest to the syndicates—fraud, embezzlement, price-fixing, antitrust violations, income-tax evasion, misuse of public funds and abuse of political and legal powers. That kind of drek happens behind closed doors high above the level of the streets, but sometimes trickles down to affect things for runners and other shadow types. For the most part, though, white-collar crime's better left to the suits and accountants to figure out. Most runners who try messing with this stuff end up in way more trouble than they bargained for.

• That's not to say shadowrunners don't get involved in this part of the business, because we do—indirectly. Say the local syndi-

cate needs runners to recover some important accounting data that contains details of their embezzlement operations; they'll likely hire runners to retrieve it. But they won't hire runners to embezzle the money in the first place, or to help syndicate-run businesses cheat on their taxes. That's the suits' job. As usual, we get hired for the dirty work, not the cushy desk jobs.

• Prime Runner

• Wouldn't have it any other way, omigod

• Pentecost

MONEY LAUNDRIES

BY THE CHROMED ACCOUNTANT

Ah, back in my element again. All right, everyone. Class is now in session. Hope you brought the teacher a gift.

It's easy to think that organized crime is involved only in illegal enterprises ("It's organized *crime*, right?"), but nothing could be further from the truth. While most organized crime outfits started off operating on the wrong side of the law, over time the vast majority have become more and more legitimate. Here's an extreme case: one of the most notorious Mafia families on the East Coast—the Carnettis—is now 100 percent legit and has opened, incorporated as Carnetti Enterprises, Inc. No evidence trail exists to connect the Carnettis to any illegal activities; they're "honest businessfolk," and nobody looks too carefully at where their money originally came from. Now granted, that's a fairly dramatic example, but lots of times it's difficult to tell where a syndicate's legal business interests end and its illegal activities begin. The big-crime boys run legal operations for one reason, and that's not a sudden burning desire to straighten up and fly right. They do it for money—clean money.

One of the biggest problems any crime organization faces is laundering the revenue from its illicit activities. Laundering money is the process of breaking the audit trail that tracks the source of credit. Once that audit trail is broken, it's impossible to prove the credit came from illegal sources. If the audit trail still exists, the credit is tainted, and few legitimate financial institutions will touch it. In fact, most will report tainted money to the appropriate authorities. Then you've got trouble right here in River City for sure.

Money laundering involves passing credit through a series of "sieve": a series of complicated transactions intended to disguise its true origin and purpose. A "sieve" can be a bank—traditionally a Swiss bank, but now most often a megacorp bank or one based in the Carib League—that keeps records of transactions and withdrawals inviolably secret. If somebody tries to backtrack a particular whack of credit, the trace will get as far as the sieve before it smacks into a stone wall. No one, but no one, will be able to determine where the credit came from before it was deposited with that bank.

Nowadays a lot of banks will release a depositor's records to authorities only if those authorities can *prove*—beyond a shadow of a doubt—that the depositor is guilty of a crime *within the jurisdiction in which the bank operates*. (The italics are there for a reason, kids—pay attention.) Take the example of an interface-bank on the island of St. Lucia, in the Caribbean League. The FBI pays

the managers a visit, looking for information on one of the bank's clients. The bank will release that information if and only if the FBI can prove that client has done something against Carib League law—or, depending on the bank, specifically against *St. Lucia* law. If the FBI can't prove that, the bank managers can and will tell the Feds to frag off and die. The client could've broken every law in the UCAS into a thousand itty-bitty pieces, and it won't make a drek-eating bit of difference.

Same with a corp bank. An Aztechnology *cambio*, for example, keeps its clients' dirty secrets until and unless an outside authority can prove a client committed a crime against Aztechnology corporate law, on Aztechnology corporate territory. Good fraggin' luck. Of course, if you *have* broken an Azzie law, an outside authority wanting a piece of your hide is going to have to get in line.

Now, that assumes that you trust the management of the bank you're working with. After all, *they* have access to the records, so they know where your money originated. So if you're in a business—particularly an illegal business—that runs counter to the Big A's interests, it's probably not a good idea to trust Azzie *cambios* and credit unions to launder your cred.

If you're really paranoid—and most of the players in the dirty money biz are—you run the money through several sieves. With so many corporate jurisdictions, with the Balkanization of Europe and the Carib League, with interface-banks letting you make thousands if not millions of transactions a second, with short-term loans and stock transfers that last for microseconds, authorities around the world privately admit that they can't do a fragging thing about money laundering. These days, money-laundering operations only get broken when another part of the whole dirty structure gets compromised and informants rat out the laundries. It's a sorry state of affairs when people turn on their own—ain't life a bitch?

• Or a hot market for freedancers. Legally, the authorities can't get the information they want out of an off-shore bank, but a sneaker can do the job. Just sleaze in, get the dirt and sleaze back out again. So it isn't admissible in court—so what? It can still give the authorities enough background to spot weaknesses in an organization and plan their future operations. There's more ways to break up an organized crime ring than taking the principals to court right, CA?

• Neon Spatter

Once money has been "washed" through a sieve like a bank, it's usually "dried" through a secondary sieve—this time, a legitimate business in which the syndicate has an interest. The business might be a legal gambling or prostitution establishment that the syndicate secretly owns, or some more conventional avenue of investment like stocks, bonds or finance capital. Real estate is another popular investment. I've read estimates I trust that close to half the real estate in Miami—one of the smuggling meccas of North America—was bought and paid for with laundered money.

• No big surprise that the new favorite place to invest freshly laundered crime money is in some of the up-and-coming baby corps. Taking their hint from Dunkelzahn's will, the mobs have been pouring cash into life startup companies in hopes of having them

generate a legitimate profit on their own. If some of these companies take off, we might see a new megacorporation some fine day that owes its existence to organized crime.

• Debiel Debit

• You mean the ones we've already got don't?

• KnightWare

• So Mom and Pop Circuit Boards Inc. finds out that Dunkelzahn has been pouring money into their business. That means Daviar and Draco still have their talons in it. Then along comes the Mafia, the yak or whoever, dumping even more money in the lap of this little family biz. Now Mom and Pop have to decide who they'd rather piss off—the Big D's team or the Family. It's like trying to decide if you'd rather get shot with a LAW rocker or a Panther Assault cannon. Both will hurt you real bad, and even if you survive you may never walk the same way again.

• Slide&hujak.com/ml

ORGANLEGGING

• This file from Cimmaron down in DFW (Dallas-Fort Worth, for the acronym-challenged) highlights a disturbing new wrinkle on hijacking and bootlegging, organlegging, the sale of (meta)human organs on the black market, along with a new player who may not owe its allegiance to any of the big organized-crime syndicates.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 January 2058 at 20:14:51 (EST)

Ever had to get an organ replaced? I have, and lots of other shadowrunners I know have. Our line of work is pretty hard on the original equipment; it tends to fail, especially after getting perforated by a few high-velocity rounds. So let's say (just for fun) that you don't have a lifelong contract with DocWagon™ and you aren't interested in getting another piece of metal or plastic stuck in your body to replace whatever you lost (assuming that you can cram any more cyberjunk in there). Guess what? You need a replacement organ.

No way in hell you can afford synthetics or bioware. Clonal, vat-grown replacements'll cost you 30K nuyen for something like a kidney or liver, plus they take five weeks or more to grow—during which time you're hospitalized on life-support and paying through the nose (between 500 and 1K nuyen a *day!*). Even Type G replacements—if they're available—will set you back 12K nuyen or more per organ.

How about your local shadow clinic? Odds are they've got something on ice—or available within a day or two—that'll fit the bill, close enough in blood and tissue type that you won't reject it ... as long as you pop immunosuppressants for the rest of your life, of course. Parts like that'll cost you maybe half the price of Type G replacements. Now we're talking affordable (though still not cheap).

The thing is, you don't want to ask where those parts came from. Registered hospitals and HMOs like DocWagon get organs via organ donation programs, removed from people who no longer have any use for them, under carefully controlled conditions—medical and legal. The shadow clinics? Lots of them get their "spare parts" from organleggers.

Organleggers are black marketeers with a unique product: metal/human body parts. With the kind of transplant technology we've got now, it's pretty easy to replace just about anything short of the brain or central nervous system (and I hear they're working on that). Trouble is, there just isn't enough supply to meet the demand for replacement parts, and cloning—even forced cloning—takes too long for our vidblip, gotta-have-it-now culture. It's too expensive and time consuming to get organs through legal channels like legitimate donors, so organleggers come up with all kinds of new and creative ways to get their merchandise.

Some organleggers acquire parts from registered hospitals. Crossing the right palms with some nuyen, they arrange for a few pieces to "fall off the back of an ambulance" from time to time. Or they just break in and steal them. Others pay a bounty on any dead—or nearly dead—bodies brought into their facility: sort of the biological version of an automobile chop shop. Then there are the organleggers—real proactive types, these guys. They don't want to wait for someone to kick off before slicing them up when there's so many spare parts wandering around "on the hoof," so to speak, especially so many SINless types who'll never be missed. Plenty of them just disappear: they're raw material for the people-fixing machine.

TAMANOUS

Originally, small gangs did most of the organlegging. It was a good way to make some extra cred, and the big boys didn't want to get their hands dirty with it: they were too busy running crooked casinos and raking in millions from chips and drugs. But now it seems there's a bigger player getting into the spare-parts business, and I'll lay down some serious cred that the newcomer's presence will draw the big shadow players as soon as they realize somebody's getting rich off something they passed up.

Mi amigos and I were involved in a run in DFW where some high-tower suit's kid pulled the old disappearing act into the sprawl. We figured on running into the usual trouble, with the *chica* getting picked up by a local pimp or maybe one of the "entertainment complexes" around there—as a fresh young thing right out of company-land, she made the perfect target. So we started looking into it, working the local scene to get some word. Nada. We were expecting people to lie, but the people we talked to were serious about not seeing our mark.

So we happened to talk to this lowlife—I'll call him Sleazy, cuz he was like the missing eighth dwarf. Sleazy ran some joyboys and joygirls out of a "private club" that wasn't. He told us he hadn't seen the *chica* either, but he at least was actually lying about it according to Angelica, and she's wizzer with truth spells. We started watching Sleazy's place to find out if he might have some real info, and Weaver poked around in the dwarf's accounts for some intel. He pulled up financial records that showed Sleazy was pulling in plenty of illegal cred from his "fun house" operation, but also some flags that showed deposits from other sources that we couldn't attribute to the dwarf's regular business. Weaver tried backtracking them, but they'd come through too many blinds for him to get anywhere.

Only weird thing we found was that ol' Sleazy paid out cred to a local street doc to give all his boys and girls regular physicals and checkups. That was kinda strange, since the place he ran didn't

seem classy enough to care about hygiene. Weaver got to work on the street doc, but he was an old-fashioned type who kept all his records on an isolated system. So we watched and waited.

After a day or two of surveillance and tracking down dead ends all over the plex, we hit paydirt. Sleazy got a visit from a strange man who wasn't there to sample the merchandise, at least not the way that most people were. He showed up in a van with a couple of friends, hauled a few packages out to the alley behind Sleazy's place, handed a credstick to the dwarf and drove off. Weaver had a drone watching the whole exchange, and those packages looked a lot like body bags. Weaver's RPV tracked the van across town to an old warehouse in Irving, and we decided to follow up on it.

We asked around about the dark van and the guys in it, who we figured for organleggers. We got an interesting response: People freaked. I've heard about organjackers and had to deal with them one or twice before, but I never saw anybody as afraid of them as people were of these *tamanous*. After some more digging, we got ourselves a name: Tamananous. We also got a couple of horror stories about how these Tamananous guys were big in the black-market body parts, bigger than anyone had ever seen before, and that they'd pull a guy out of bed to cut him up for sale. They had a lot of pull and they were totally ruthless.

We finally found one guy who told us that Tamananous snatched him, drugged him and cut out one of his kidneys. They stitched him back up easy as you please and left him in a gutter somewhere with a pounding head, a sutured incision in his back, and one less kidney than he'd had the day before.

❖ For Ghost's sake, why?

❖ Nix.

❖ You mean why go to the trouble of keeping the donor alive? Strategy. Even in the plex, the authorities follow up on murders a lot more stringently than a crime the victim lives through. I mean, think about it: The organ ring gets picked up and charged... with what? Not murder; the donor lived. Not theft; body parts aren't covered under theft laws. All that's left is "malicious wounding." Much less serious than murder one. And the Star doesn't have enough people to follow up on all the murders that get reported, much less all the malicious wounding.

❖ Faddah.

❖ Not to mention that live people who are scared dress up as you help to boost your big, bad rep on the street.

❖ D-Life.

❖ Anyone have a lead on this Tamananous?

❖ Jumbo.

❖ The name comes from the lore of my people, the *tamanous*, a creature that promotes cannibalism among mortals so that it can eat of the flesh of animals to sustain itself. It is said to look like a tall, skeletal man with fat smeared over its body. In modern times, most people believe the wendigo are the source of this legend.

❖ Old Brave.

- Are they from NAN territory, then? Could a wendigo be mixed up with this outfit? Anyone?
- Jumpy
- Unknown. Jumpy. Not enough data.
- Wirewalker

It looked like this Tamanous outfit was the best lead we had on our missing *chica*, and even without that I wanted to take out this bunch of *ghouls*. We did some checking and planned to hit their warehouse in Irving.

I've seen a lot of nasty drek in my time, but this place was one of the worst. The whole warehouse was made over into a chop-shop for processing body parts. There were operating rooms and freezers for all the parts, and lots o' bio-regen tanks for holding and growing clonal parts and frag knows what else. The worst part wasn't even all the stiffs they had stacked up there—it was the holding cells where they'd put plenty of live ones. These were people off the streets and bought from drek like Sleazy, who'd sell someone's fragging *organs* for an extra buck.

Our hit on the warehouse went off smooth as ice. Security was fraggin' tough, but we took the time to scope things out as well as we could. They didn't have a lot of guards, just some hired guns, but the surprise we should have expected was the *ghouls*. The warehouse had a band of *ghouls* guarding it and they fought like fraggin' mad cats, kept coming until you pumped them so full of lead they couldn't move any more. I must have killed at least eight of the fraggers trying to get through that place.

- Makes sense. A large organ-harvesting biz probably ends up with a lot of "scrap material" — perfect *ghoul* fodder. The *ghouls* get free munchies at the a-you-can-eat buffet and the *loggers* get some added security that can see in the dark and detect astral forms. Nice arrangement.
- De-obe
- Lends some strength to Jumpy's idea that a wendigo could be involved, too.
- Wirewalker

We got luckier than we deserved when we found our Snow White alive, along with a bunch of other girls from Sleazy's establishment, all being kept in a big kind of hospital ward in the warehouse. We cleared them out of there and bolted—and that's when we heard the *real* horror story.

Pregnancy is an occasional occupational hazard for anyone in the joygirl business. Even modern contraceptives aren't totally foolproof, especially with the kinds of fools who're the *johns*. Usually whenever such an "accident" happened, Sleazy knew a street doc who'd take care of the problem (Tamanous probably got a cut of that, too). Seems that a while back, Sleazy opened up a new line of work: selling healthy young fillies to Tamanous, along with the occasional inconvenient deader who had just a little too

much fun (a convenient way to get rid of the evidence). The stiffs got made into parts while the *chicas* were put into "special care." Tamanous doctors artificially impregnated them; when things were far enough along—say, three or four months—they aborted the pregnancy so they could harvest the fetus. Then they started the whole process over again. One of the girls, Maria, said she'd been there for over a year and had been pregnant five times.

- Good God, that's monstrous. What's the point of it all?
- I wish Rose
- It's the aliens! They're conducting secret breeding experiments with Earth females. The government knows! They've known all along. Spread the word!
- Roswell
- Not it's not, you drekwit, it's the fraggin' merghumans. Their women can't breed and they want to perpetuate their foul races, so they have to kidnap our women to do it.
- Humanitas

- You are both MORONS! It's a sad truth, Rosie, but fetal tissue is the best thing in the world for transplants and grafts: it's very adaptable, less likely than any other tissue to be rejected, and it grows faster than "adult" tissue does, which allows for faster healing. For decades we've used fetal tissue from legal abortions in medical experimentation and treatment, but with the implant age upon us the demand for fetal tissue transplants has gone way beyond the legal supply. Medical science has developed artificial substitutes that are almost as good but a lot more expensive. So some bright sadist figured out how to get a cheap source of a valuable product. I'd heard about back-alley street docs selling off aborted fetuses, but never "fetus farming" on this scale before.
- Doc

In the end we got Snow White back to daddy and she decided to keep her baby, despite her father's wishes to the contrary. We hit Tamanous pretty bad, but I've heard rumors they're getting back into operation. I've talked with some *amigos* of mine in other plexes and they've heard stories of Tamanous operating in their areas, too. So far these monsters have turned up in the UCAS, CAS and CalFree, but watch out. They could be coming to pay you a visit next.

- Hey, Cimmaron, where'd you bury that ha'er?
- Biz
- Didn't. He disappeared. I guess Tamanous found out how we tracked them down. Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.
- Cimmaron
- Frog. I gotta say it makes me wonder about my next visit to the local street doc.
- Half Pint

THE MAFIA



This file was put together by a chummer who goes by the name "Wiseguy" on the 'rix. As you might guess, he has the dubious privilege of being ex-Mafia and knows some of how La Cosa Nostra works. He agreed to post this intel because I made him an offer he couldn't refuse <grin> Thanks again, chummer!

• Captain Chass

Transmitted: 23 January 2058 at 18:58:22 (EST)

Most folks who think they know about “the Mafia” don’t got a fraggin’ clue what they’re talking about. They watch the latest true-crime shows and think they know what’s what. And that’s just fine with the real *mafiosi*, ‘cause they figure the less people know about them the better. This kinda ignorance ain’t gonna hurt most people. But if you’re a runner, the odds are you’re gonna come into contact with mafiosi. And if you think they’re like the characters you see on the tvid, you’re gonna be in for some nasty surprises.

Most folks have at least heard of the *Cosa Nostra*—the Mafia with a capital M, the granddaddy of all mobs. But even more folks don’t realize that just about every ethnic group in the world’s spawned its own homegrown crime syndicates at one time or another. Italians, Poles, Cubans, Russians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Czechs and Slovaks, Muslims, Chinese, Koreans, Africans, Jews and even Irishmen have formed their own little mafias.

Most of these ethnic mobs got gobbled up or squashed by the bigger kids on the block. In North America, the *Cosa Nostra* gobbled up the Irish, Jewish and Polish mafias, along with most of the Mexican and Afro-Caribbean syndicates. The yaks took over most of the Korean, Vietnamese and Cambodian syndicates, which remained under the Yakuza umbrella until the split that created the Seoulpa Rings. Now some of those groups work with the Rings.

A few of the other ethnic mafias are still around as independent organizations. You can still find Russian mobsters operating out of places like Little Odessa, and Thai or Vietnamese gangsters in their own ‘hoods. But these outfits keep to their own neighborhoods, among their own people. The Mafia, on the other hand, is fraggin’ everywhere.

So how did it all start? What keeps it going? Well, to start answering those questions, we’ve gotta go back a ways. That’s right, I’m gonna give a fraggin’ history lesson. So shut up and listen.

HISTORY

The Mafia started more than two hundred years ago, when a couple of Sicilian landlords began paying local thugs to protect their estates. When Napoleon’s troops invaded Sicily and southern Italy, landowners began hiring even more muscle to protect their holdings, and rallied their *soldatos* (soldiers) with the motto “Death to the French is Italy’s Cry”—that’s *Morte alla Francia Italia anela* in Italian. Get it—M-A-F-I-A? Business was good, and these early mob chieftains soon began to command a lot of power.

When the French retreated, the gangs quickly went into business for themselves. Groups of mafiosi realized they were powerful enough to go up against their former employers, and soon the landowners were paying protection money to their former hired guns. By terrorizing the peasant electorate, these early mafiosi were able to win political offices in several communities throughout Sicily and southern Italy. From there, the mobsters easily took over the local police forces and expanded their power. Naturally, the different outfits came into competition at times and occasionally fought bitter and bloody contests. Starting to see any patterns?

After a while, the Sicilian authorities began to crack down on the mafiosi gangs, and many mob leaders emigrated to the good old U.S. of A., where they promptly set up shop. But things didn’t

really take off until the U.S. government enacted Prohibition in 1920. With the legal supply of booze cut off, American mafiosi were only too happy to supply bootleg hooch. The government tried to crack down on bootleggers, of course, but that just reduced the supply and drove up the price. As prices and profit went up, more and more outfits wanted a piece of the action, leading to gang wars—which led to more government crack-downs and higher profits. By the time the government repealed Prohibition in 1933, the disorganized immigrant Sicilian gangs had become the most powerful crime syndicate the world had ever seen.

But legalizing booze didn’t slow down the mafiosi. They simply moved into new markets like gambling, prostitution and the growing drug trade. They even hooked up with trade unions like the Teamsters and various longshoremen’s unions. Through these unions, the Mafia soon controlled the docks of New York and other major ports.

• History kinda repeats itself, doesn’t it? Take a look at the Seattle docks sometime.

• In VUE

The Mafia dominated the business of crime in North America for the rest of the century. No other group could hope to match its muscle and money, and anyone foolish enough to try didn’t live very long. The Mafia lost a bit of its overwhelming power when other syndicates, like the Yakuza, rode into town on the coattails of foreign megacorps and began to move in on Mafia territory during the early twenty-first century. Events triggered by the Awakening, like the Ghost Dance War and the breakup of the old United States, shook up the Mafia organization a bit. But these events also weakened government authority and provided mafiosi with new business opportunities. In time, even old-time mobsters began to adapt to the changing times, and the Mafia survived into the Sixth World.

• Those concessions didn’t always come willingly or easily, however. Plenty of mafiosi—especially the older leaders—are still pretty traditional-bound and still don’t like the idea of magic, metaphysics or (gasp) women in their operations. It might sound crazy, but plenty of blood feuds and gang wars have been fought—and are still going on—over dreck like this.

• Twox

Over the years the Mafia organizations became much more diverse, as the old-guard Sicilian mobsters died off and the Family absorbed other crime organizations. Now you can find Irish mobsters in Boston, Polish and Creole mafiosi in New Orleans, and even some African outfits in the Carib League. Plenty of smaller independent ethnic mafias remain independent of the *Cosa Nostra*, but only because their rackets aren’t lucrative enough to attract the interest of the Mafia’s ruling Commission. Occasionally, some wacko, suicidal outfit tries to defy the Mafia, but these instances are pretty rare. Some Caribbean League gangs were the last to try it: they all ended up either working for Havana’s Batista Family or dead.

More recently, the Mafia's taken two big hits. First, the Chicago Containment Zone slammed down and trapped most of two major Mafia families inside—including one Commissione member. The poor slags that didn't die are now watching over what operations they got left in the city and running most of Bug City's black market.

And just a few weeks ago, someone offset Don James O'Malley of Seattle. Things had been getting hotter in the Rain City ever since O'Malley's brother, Brian, took over operations there a few years ago. And with the second O'Malley gone, all hell could break loose.

But don't count the Mafia out. Lotsa young Turks—in the families and even on the Commissione—are pushing to modernize operations and set a course for the rest of the century and beyond.

♦ Wiseguy won't say it, but the Mafia is dying. These guys are a bunch of dinosaurs that are losing out on a bunch of aggressive newcomers like the Yakuza, the Triads, and the Secoupa Kings. Mafiosi clinging to their old ways even if those traditions cripple them. The stuff in Chicago and O'Malley's death are the beginning of the end.

♦ Zybko

♦ Don't count on it, chummer. The Mafia is changing, not dying. Events like Chicago and the O'Malley hit are prompting the Mafia to adopt more modern stances on issues like metamorphs and magic. You can see it happening already with the presence of metamorph Mafia leaders like O'Malley and the Mafia's increasing use of the Matrix and other new technology. Hell, the Mafia already knows as much or more about BTU technology as any megacorp. wouldn't be surprised to see the Mafia expand both its legit and black-market BTU operations. If you don't believe me, go to Boston or New Orleans sometime. You can't swing a dead dwarf without hitting some Mafia enterprise there. Trust me, anything that doesn't kill the Mafia—and nothing has so far—only makes it stronger.

♦ Rubber Suit

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

Mafia operations are organized by *regimes*, which are jurisdictions or sectors. Each regime is controlled by one or more major "families." The head of each family is granted the title of "Don" (as in Don O'Malley). The head of a regime is called a *capo* ("head" or "chief"). The dons sit on the *Commissione*, a sort of board of directors led by the most powerful capi. The head of the Commissione is called the *capo di tutti capi* ("boss of all bosses"), but there hasn't been a capo di tutti capi in more than a hundred years, simply because no single capo has enough muscle to claim the title. Of course, that don't stop all of the capi from dreaming about it.

THE CODE

The Code is simply the traditions that govern all mafiosi operations. Some folks think it's just a bunch a buildrek, a romantic notion dreamed up by twentieth-century moviemakers. But the Code separates mafiosi from common criminals. It keeps the fami-

lies from destroying each other, and it's probably the main reason why the Mafia has been around for two hundred years.

The Code contains two traditions—the tradition of *omerta* (silence) and the tradition of *rispetto* (respect). And mafiosi are honor-bound to punish any fellow mobster—including capi or other people in power—who break the Code.

The tradition of omerta demands that a mafioso never reveal the Family's existence to any outsider and never admits to being a member, even under interrogation or torture. That's why mobsters always use metaphors and allusions when they talk about their work. They call the Mafia *La Cosa Nostra*—This Thing of Ours—they talk about "taking care of business." They don't give anything away. Even their wives know enough not to ask about their "Family business." Anyone who breaks the code of silence and talks to the authorities dies—usually in an unpleasant way.

Lately, some families have begun using implants or magic to enforce the code of silence. If a captured mafioso tries to talk to the authorities or otherwise betray his Family's trust—BOOM!—his head explodes or he melts into a puddle of slime. The old guard considers such practices distasteful and disrespectful to the oaths sworn by all mafiosi, but many younger capi got no problem with such techniques—'cause they work.

The code of rispetto demands that all mafiosi show proper respect and deference to those above them. That means you got to act respectful toward your higher-ups and make sure they get their "cut" of any operations. Rispetto also demands that a mafioso uphold the honor of his Family by punishing any acts of disrespect toward it.

♦ Guess that the Code means every mobster has an obligation not to fight or retaliate and take personal vengeance if you insult his Family. If he doesn't, he's snuffing down the honor of his whole family. Keep this in mind if you're dealing with wiseguys, and don't throw them, and they'll honor you and thank you for regret if it kills you.

♦ vittoria

THE COMMISSIONE

The Commissione is a council of the heads of all of the families. The Commissione makes sure that the Code is followed, violators are punished, and that the Mafia's business affairs are handled well. It's like the court of last appeal for the Cosa Nostra. If a family that thinks it's been unfairly harmed by another capi files an appeal before the Commissione and ask for reparation, the Commissione can order any Mafia Family to pay damages to another, and no one can appeal any Commissione decision.

♦ Sounds like the Corporate Court, doesn't it? Effectively, it's the law, and all-powerful within its own regime.

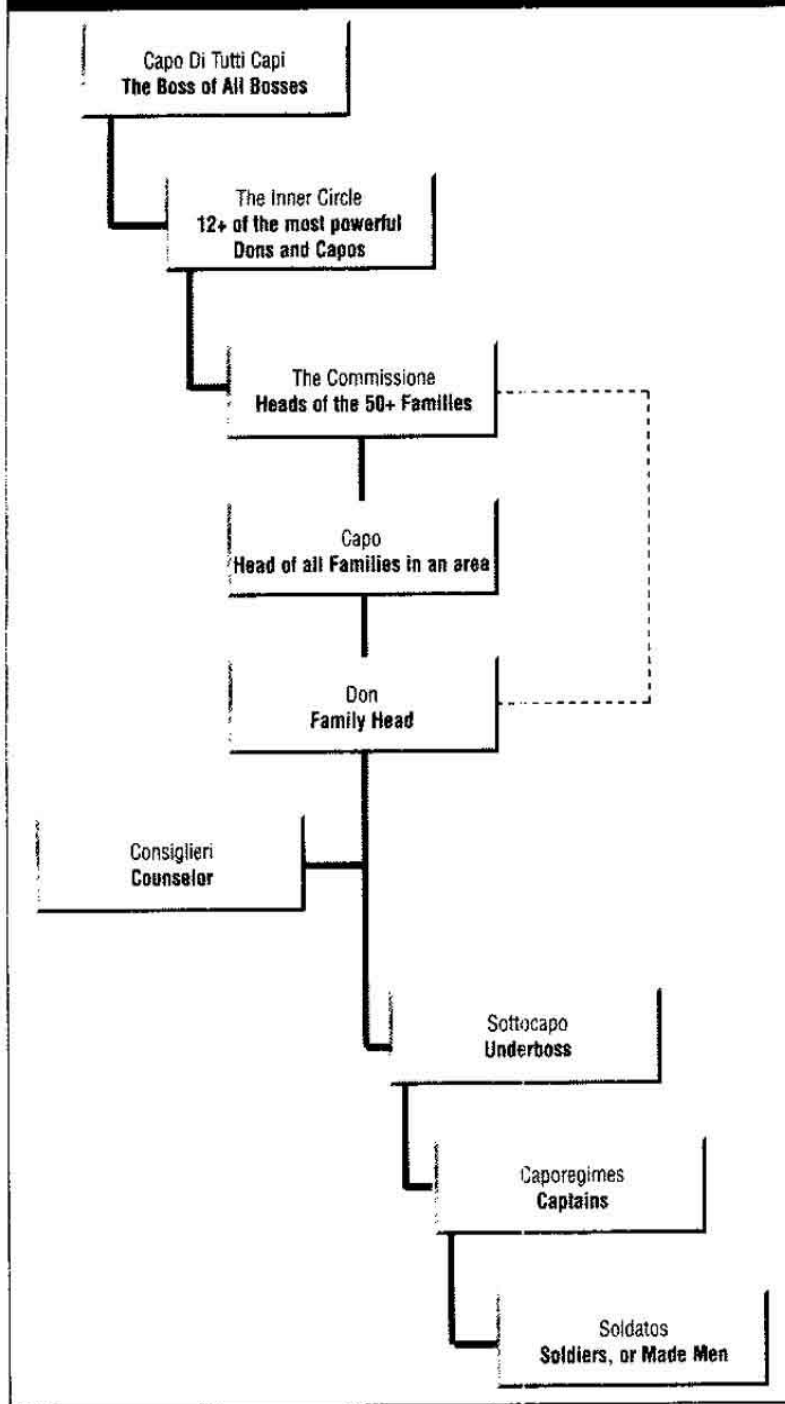
♦ Omega

♦ A good ideology

♦ Teropoda

Officially, every head of one of the forty or fifty Mafia families in North America is entitled to a seat on the Commissione, each

MAFIA ORGANIZATION



has one vote, and each has an equal voice. In reality, the Commissione is run by a central cadre of a dozen or so capi of major families from Boston, New York, DeeCee, Miami and Los Angeles. (Chicago's capo had a seat in the Inner Circle, but it remains empty for now.) These are the guys who make all the major decisions. When the Inner Circle feels like it—that is, when those capi know everybody else is going to go along with a decision—they put it out before the entire Commissione and let

everyone "vote" on it. That lets the bit players feel important and promotes general goodwill. But when it's something that really matters, the central cadre simply tells everyone else just how it's gonna be.

Originally, the Commissione met in one of the major UCAS cities controlled by one of the Inner Circle Families—usually Boston, Chicago, New York or DeeCee. But the problems in Chicago and the increasing difficulty of traveling and maintaining adequate security have led the Commissione to start holding virtual meetings over Matrix systems.

- Imagine crashing that party ...
- HeadCrash

• With the kind of ice the Family uses to protect its powwows, you'd never get near the door, 'Crash. They've got all the best stuff: black as a mafioso's heart, just the way they like it. And remember these skags aren't suits, even if they wear them. They don't waste time with any of the little niceties that corps usually worry about. They just go for the throat.

- FastJack

THE FAMILIES

About forty or fifty Mafia families operate in North America, but only a dozen or so are really big-time. Everyone else answers to them.

Nowadays, the members of a Mafia don't have to be related by blood, but it's usually true of the highest-ranking members. Traditionally, each Family is named after its founder or current leader, who usually hands power over to one of his sons or another close male relative when the time comes. The main exception to this tradition is New Orleans's Kozlowski Family, which has been led by a *capa*—a female capo—for two generations now.

• Miriam "La Dame du Morte" Kozlowski's a twisted, snaky sitch who lies as easy as breathing. But she's building up a solid, profitable regime and making some serious points with the big boys on the Commissione. I wouldn't be surprised to see Miriam "elevated" to the Inner Circle real soon.

- Rex

• It also looks like James O'Malley's daughter—Rowena—has her sights set on becoming the capo of

Seattle. Bets are flying about whether or not she'll live out the rest of the month.

- Booo

Below the don comes the *sottocapo*, or underboss. A *sottocapo*'s something like a corporate vice-president. Often, the underboss is someone that the don is grooming to be his succes-

sor. Large Families may have more than one underboss, and competition between underbosses to win the don's favor can get real fierce. (Frequently, competing underbosses hire outside shadowrunners to do dirty work, because they don't want to alienate potential allies within the Family or be double-crossed by someone loyal to their rival.)

• Getting involved in rivalry between *sottocapi* is a dangerous—but often profitable—game. Technically, going outside the Family to hire muscle for such feuds is against the Code, but today's families tolerate it as long as no one finds out. So if you frag up a run, expect a hit team to come after you.

• WhipperSnapper@some.ware.com

The don's *consiglieri*, or "counselor," offers advice to the don about business and Family matters. Traditionally, *consiglieri* are kept outside of the normal chain of command, to keep them from becoming involved in power plays within their families. A *consiglieri* might be a kind of paid consultant like a lawyer—or these days, a therapist or even a magician or "wise one" for a superstitious don—or an older Family member or trusted friend and comrade from the don's younger days. Generally, a *consiglieri* ranks at the same level as a Family's *sottocapo*, but some *consiglieri* are the real powers behind the throne in their families.

Under the *sottocapi* are the *caporegimes* ("captains"), who oversee the daily operations of the Family. The captains give the lower ranks their marching orders and handle the actual money-making activities. They're the middle managers of the Mafia and usually the guys who hire shadowrunners and any other outside help the Family might need. *Caporegimes* are also the most popular choice when the law gets too close and the Family needs someone to throw to the wolves. Understandably, most *caporegimes* work hard to catch the attention of the don and get promoted.

At the bottom of the Mafia pyramid are the *soldatos*, or "soldiers." These are the wiseguys, the legbreakers, the "made men" of the Mafia that carry out everyone else's orders. *Soldatos* usually take charge of any outside street operators hired by the Family.

By my estimate, there's probably four thousand "made men"—initiated members of the Cosa Nostra—in the whole North American continent. A made man is someone who has been formally initiated into a Mafia Family. A candidate has to be sponsored by another member. When he's brought in to be initiated, the candidate first swears an oath to obey the code of silence. The sponsoring member then cuts the candidate's right index finger—the trigger finger, natch—and his own trigger finger. A couple of drops of the candidate's and sponsor's blood are mixed and used to moisten a small picture of the Family's patron saint. (Some families have substituted other figures. I hear that the Batistas use the voodoo loa in place of saints.) The candidate then holds the picture by a corner while his sponsor sets it afire. As the picture burns, the candidate repeats another oath: "As burns this saint, so will burn my soul. I enter alive into this organization and leave it dead."

Low-rent Mafia thugs are usually right off the rack, but a lot of made men go in for cyber-implants and keep them as they

work their way up the ladder. That means some of the younger *sottocapi* and *consiglieri*—and even some *capi*—may pack the kind of cyber you'd expect from a street op. And mafiosi can usually afford top-grade modifications, so their boys will often have cyber as good as you'd expect from company men in the same position. In fact, plenty of beginning street runners cut deals with the Mafia for shiny new mods that they can't afford by any other means.

• Yeah, and the Mafia expects you to pay with your soul. Once you sign up for a deal like that, the Family owns you—and they often stick a kink bomb or a finely tuned cranial boom-boom in your head while you're under the laser, just to make sure you stay properly grateful.

• Finder-Man

Employees

Besides its don, underbosses, *consiglieri*, captains and *soldatos*, a Mafia Family usually payrolls the same kind of personnel that a successful corp supports. These nonmembers are considered "employees" of the Family and may include several levels of management, accounting personnel, data-processing personnel, deckers and low-level datapushers.

• It's interesting to note that the chances for advancement are better within most Mafia families than within the majority of corporations. It's perfectly possible—in fact, accepted as normal—for street muscle to work their way up to positions of real power and responsibility.

• Com

• Maybe, if you're a Caucasian human male. The Mafia's traditionally a "closed shop" to non-Caucasians, women and new metatypes, too.

• Sister Slaughter

• Depends on the Family, Sista. Some, like the big New Yorkers, are old-time traditionalists and won't hire metahumans as anything other than disposable muscle. But some of the new families like the Batistas, the Kozowskis and the O'Rileys have metahumans, magicians and women working at all levels of their operations. Apparently, they're planning on out-eviling some of the more "traditionalist" dinosaurs.

• Pablo@ny.ny.us

Associates

In addition to their long term employees, the Mafia families also hire a lot of outside talent for specific jobs and occasions. These "associates" do not have any of the rights accorded to members of the Family, but mafiosi usually treat them well.

Most families are less picky when hiring associates: even a conservative don will hire metahumans or magicians as associates. But they also keep associates ignorant of most aspects of the operations they are working on. They expect associates to follow the orders given by the *soldatos* or *caporegime* and not ask questions.

- Sounds like most of the Mafia jobs I've worked, all right—shadowrunning by the numbers.
- Quicks ver kid.

• A word or two about shadowrunning for the Mafia. Most of the time it's like working for any other Johnson—except for a few social considerations. First, do not, repeat, DO NOT frag with them. A corporate or government Johnson might put up with a certain amount of creek from a group of runners and might even overlook some "inadvertents" as long as the runners' antics don't affect the bottom line. But the Mafia (and most other syndicates) can't stand to do that. Their power comes from being respected on the streets, and they're not about to let a bunch of runners get the best of them. Any Family will deal with any disrespect swiftly and severely to protect its rep on the street. So make sure you're careful about what you say when you're talking about a Mafia job, and make sure that if you say you'll do something, you do it—to the letter. Remember, the Mafia not only likes making an example of the guppi who try and cross them, they're obligated by tradition to do it. Frag with them and they'll make you regret it.

• Exchange

• Yeah, working for the Mafia is dangerous as right, but I can yield unexpected rewards, too. If a Family really likes your work and you're valuable, it might hire you on as a long-term employee. And in some cases it may even offer you membership as a made man. It don't happen too often, but it does happen. Look at Bobby the Brain's career, for example.

• Bug?

• Bobby the Brain?

• Pops

• Recent Bobby the Brain? Greenspoon. He started out as your average patent lawyer by day, notable poker player by night. Apparently, he wasn't so lucky at cards and managed to rack up quite a little debt to Chicago's O'Toole family. Lucky for Rob the O'Toole, just happened to need the services of a patent guy right about the time they decided to collect from him. Old man O'Toole had just decided to set up his nephew in a legit business and needed to get around a little dispute over the rights to some new sim technology. So the Family gave Greenspoon a choice—hold out or die a slow and painful death. The don was impressed with Pops's work. Thanks to him, O'Toole's nephew managed to retain the patent on the technology and successfully sue the original inventor. O'Toole forgave Greenspoon's debt, gave him a bonus and asked him if he wanted a permanent job. Greenspoon accepted. Within a few years, his work had made millions for the O'Tooles, and the don himself invited Bobby to join the Family. No one's seen the Brain since the feds sealed off Chicago, but rumor has it that Greenspoon's holed up with some other go-gang, just west of the old Wicked Park neighborhood.

• Bug?

THE FAMILY TREE

Here's a rundown of the major North American Mafia families. Anyone who's planning on working in one of their territories should read carefully, 'cause you don't wanna step on any of their toes.

UCAS

The old U S of A was the place were the Mafia first really took off, and the UCAS is still home to the biggest Mafia operations in North America. Major UCAS strongholds include New York, Boston and DeeCee. Seattle is a big Mafia town, too, and Chicago was home to some big-time mafiosi until the bugs took over.

Boston

Three major families—the O'Rilleys, the Morellis and the Muldoons—operate in Boston. The O'Rilleys, headed by Don Conor "The Mick" O'Riley, run the metropex and the other two families answer to them. Don Conor is an elf, the only metahuman capo to sit on the Commission, and is one of the more "progressive" mob bosses. Like most of Boston's mafiosi, Don Conor got his start in the metropex's Irish Mafia, which really took off when the Shidhe took over Tir na nÓg and thousands of Irishmen came to Boston.

• On the streets, people call Don Conor "the Fairy Godfather"—but never to his face, of course.

• Trouble

• There's some tension between O'Riley and the Morelli family. The old-school hard-liners of the Morellis object to some of Conor's more liberal policies, like including more metahumans in the business. Course, some of their dislike may go back to when the first Irish families moved in on the Sicilians that used to run Boston. O'Riley has the complete backing of the Muldoons, so there's nothing that Don Morelli can do about it right now, but he's always on the lookout for a chance to stick it to O'Riley.

• Worms & backbay malucas

New York

New York's probably the biggest Mafia town in the world. Italian, Jewish, Eastern European—all kinds of mafiosi operate in the Big Rotten Apple. In fact, New York's home to the "Big Five"—the Carnetti, Colombo, Genovese, Lucchese and Bonanno families. These guys are the heavy hitters of the entire North American Mob scene—they pretty much call the shots in the Commission.

Between them, the Big Five control all Mafia activity in Manhattan, upstate New York, the Newark sprawl and Philadelphia. These guys basically run the streets, but they also operate legit businesses that may well outweigh their criminal enterprises, and they've got major influence with many of the corporations that dominate New York City's politics and economy. The Carnettis, in fact, are completely legit and control Carnetti Enterprises, Inc., a company that has a near monopoly on city services.

• It's no secret that the United Corporate Council in Manhattan would like to be rid of the Mafia, but so far they've had no luck accomplishing their goal. The families are just too interconnected.

with too many services that the city depends on—like trucking, shipping, waste removal and entertainment—so that the corps have to move cautiously to deal with them. And in the meantime the Mob continues to dig its claws in deeper and deeper to keep the corps from removing them.

• **Hilo**

• Yeah, they ain't gonna get rid of the Mafia in NYC and I tell ya why—nuyen. The Big Five ain't stupid—they take their money and invest it right back into the local corps. They probably own stock in every company that ever set foot in the Big Red Fruit.

• **Johnny the Bug**

"Not that kind of bug, you moron."

DeeCee

Mob operations in the UCAS capital have always been important to the Cosa Nostra. In fact, the Mafia considers them so important that two families operate in DeeCee. The Mueller family, run by capo Don Franco "The Enforcer" Mueller, oversees all operations in the DeeCee sprawl and handles trouble in his regime the old-fashioned way—usually with a bullet to the back of the head or a one-way trip to the bottom of the Potomac.

The Marconis serve as the Mafia's semiofficial liaison to all the politicos on Capitol Hill. Don Victor "Velvet" Marconi—who styles himself as "Cosa Nostra ambassador" to the UCAS—makes sure that the fat cats and power brokers know which way the wind is blowing and keeps them up-to-date on Mafia interest in certain bills that come their way.

• C'mon, get realistic here. No way does the Mafia have enough pull to threaten the fraggin' UCAS government.

• **Winger**

• Not the government. Winger old boy, just certain parts of the government. You know, Don Victor or one of his boys might drop in for a little visit with a particular lawmaker to say, "Well, Senator, we'd be happy to forget about that via of you, the three girls and the donkey at our exclusive club if only you'd do us this little favor." In some ways, the Mafia has the best lobbyists in the business.

• **DC Insider**

• After years of smooth sailing, old Don Victor's got some competition in DeeCee now—it's called the Draco Foundation. In many ways the Foundation's like the Mafia. It's a third party, neither a government nor a corp exactly, with its own interests and agenda and some major hooks into the UCAS government (not the least of which is Foundation head Nadja Daviar's position as vice-president of the fraggin' country). Don Victor's offering big nuyen to anyone who can give him a wedge he can use for leverage against the Foundation.

• **Greene**

• Yeah, and he ain't getting any help from his DeeCee counterpart, Don Franco. Seems that The Enforcer's a bit smitten with Daviar and her whirlwind romance with power and influence. Consequently, the Mueller family's not using any of its muscle to

help pressure the Foundation, even though Don Victor's doing his best to check its political power. In my humble opinion, it looks like Don Franco's forgetting a very important rule—never deal with a dragon (or his incredibly powerful organization).

• **DC Insider**

Chicago

Thanks to old-time skags like Al Capone and Lucky Luciano, most folks think of the Mafia when they think of Chicago. In fact, when Don Jim "Tools" O'Toole took over as Chicago's capo in 2047, he controlled families that still bore the names of those big players. Chi-town was a Mob stronghold where the city government actually consulted the Mafia about most major decisions.

That all ended when the bugs took over and the UCAS government sealed off the city. Don Jimmy bought it in the first few days of chaos. The families stuck in the Containment Zone left apart without his leadership and soon became mired in an all-out gang war with the local yaks and Seoulpa Rings over control of the Containment Zone black markets.

After a little while, the Commissione gave Don Leo "The Lion" McCaskill of Milwaukee authority to handle matters in the Windy City, but there's been no serious talk of cutting their losses and giving O'Toole's Commissione seat to some other capo. Even though no one's been able to communicate with the Mafia families trapped in the CZ, the Commissione is reluctant to completely write off O'Toole's operations. The Mafia intends to restore its influence once it gets back in, but there's just no way to judge when that might be.

• The bugs didn't get O'Toole; it was his own men who did that, trying to go up power when the whole bug thing went down. Let 'em go; it did them.

• **Zopy**

• I hear that Tools O'Toole's still alive, hiding somewhere in Chicago and looking for a way to get word out to the Commissione that he's still kicking.

• **DEFCON 1**

• Doubt it, chummer. If O'Toole were still kicking, there's no way the CZ mobs would be in such sorry shape. Things would be running much more efficiently. Frig, if Jimmy O'T were alive, he'd have crowned himself King of Chicago.

• **IceSlider**

• It's gotta go one of two ways. If O'Toole's dead, then the Mob's gotta be interested in whoever comes out on top when all the shouting's done. It's always better to subvert whoever's in charge than to force them out in a bloody war that does little more than waste resources. On the other hand, if O'Toole's alive, then he's the toughest motherfucker the Family has ever seen. Just the kind of capo you want on your team.

Or he could be a bug.

• **Johnny the Bug**

"Not that kind of bug, you moron."

It's no secret that McCaskill wants O Toole's seat on the Commission. Just the idea makes his mouth water. But it's far from a sure thing. Seems that old Leo and every other up-and-coming don in North America is working overtime to impress the big bosses and win that vacant seat. Plan on seeing the Young Turks carry out some daring operations as they fight like dogs for that position.

- Crusner Kowalski

Seattle

The Mafia's been part of the Seattle scene since the 1950s, when it ran operations on the docks. But competition from the Yaks and the Triads kept the local mob from grabbing the same kind of influence as its East Coast "relatives." Even at the end of the twentieth century, Seattle Mafia operations were run by two Chicago families that primarily concentrated on their operations elsewhere.

That all changed just after the turn of the century, when the Yaks began to expand their operations in the Rain City. Suddenly faced with real competition—and a major blow to Family pride—the Chicago mob sent one of its major bosses—one Brian "Three Fingers" O'Malley—to Seattle to straighten things out.

Old Brian didn't waste any time. As soon as he arrived, he sent hitters out after the local oyabuns, and pretty soon a full-fledged gang war was on. Things really heated up when the local mafiosi and Yaks began targeting each other's politicians. The war stalled in 2030, when Brian and the leading oyabun were assassinated within twenty-four hours of each other. Both organizations had been decimated by the war and were willing to accept a truce.

The Yakuza rebuilt its operations much quicker than the Mafia. The Chicago bosses, again, had more important fish to fry, and were unwilling to divert the muscle needed to replace what they'd lost in the gang war. That changed in 2044, when Hanzo Shotozumi became oyabun of Seattle's Yakuza. Shotozumi moved quickly and ruthlessly to consolidate the Yakuza's position, and the Chicago mafiosi—almost too late—realized they'd have to act, and act fast, if they didn't want to lose Seattle entirely. They threw support behind James O'Malley, Brian's older brother, who'd taken over as capo of Seattle. O'Malley fought back against the Yaks with a vengeance, challenging them for every street corner and every nuyen. With Jimmy at the helm, the Seattle Mafia held its own against the Yaks for twelve years. Then he was taken out by an unknown assassin.

Now control of the Mafia metroplex operations is up for grabs between the Bigios, Ciarniellos and the Finnigans (run by the late James O'Malley)—a situation the Yaks will undoubtedly try to exploit. The Commission plans to appoint a new capo, but no decision has yet been made. O'Malley's daughter Rowena actually seems to be running the Finnigan family and may make a bid for the top spot, but it's not likely that the Commission will approve of a woman—especially someone as young as Rowena—for the important job of handling the situation in Seattle.

- Know one thing, the "unknown assassin" who took out O'Malley wasn't Yakuza like most everyone thinks; he was working for the Bigios and/or the Ciarniellos. Doubt it? Then consider the

fact that the two dons—Maurice "Butcher" Bigio and Vince "Numbers" Ciarnielo—have had virtual meetings with Sergei Malenkin, the same Sergei Malenkin who's one of the higher-ups in Chinero. Check out the file on them.

- Evil Eye

- The situation in Seattle and Chicago also shows how fragged up and antiquated the Mafia's organization is. Seattle answered to the families in Chicago, which basically fell apart when the bug thing hit. So the Commission gave control of Chicago's operations to Leo McCaskill in Milwaukee, a second-rate don at best. That means that the guy ultimately in charge of the whole mess now going down in Seattle is a two-bit don of a two-bit regime who still has to answer to the Commission when this is all over. It's no wonder that things in Seattle are verging on open warfare.

- Orgchart

- Don't count ol' Leo the Lion out yet, omae. Fate has dropped some real opportunities into his lap with the drek going on in Chinatown and Seattle and, if he plays the game right, Leo might just come out on top and end up in O Toole's seat on the Commission. You can bet he'll remember his friends—and his enemies—that happens

- Tyler

- McCaskill's also backed by the infamous Edward Milhouse, a.k.a. "Eggs Milwaukee." Eggs got his name from his fondness for the expression "you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs" and his reputation for freely breaking eggs when necessary. Eggs is a little guy who seems to bring other people down to just make himself feel bigger. He also claims that a chance encounter with a trio of magicians known as "the Brothers Grimm" awakened some latent magical abilities, and he's now stronger and faster than anyone his size has a right to be.

- Mark Plaza

- Eggs is a total nutcase, chummers. Avoid him at all costs. As far as anyone knows these "Brothers Grimm" mages he talks about never existed in Milwaukee or anywhere else. Considering Eggs's personality and his unstable magical talents, I'd say he's quite likely an adept who follows the Twisted Path.

- Hi-A!

- Eggs Milwaukee ain't no adept—ne's a fraggin' bug! Think about it: inhuman strength and speed combined with a lame-o story about how he got them. He's been possessed by a warrior bug that's able to conceal itself. They're infiltrating the Mafia and the other syndicates just like they're infiltrating the government. It's so obvious!

- Tiger Faux

- Yeah, whatever. Tiger. Forget to take your medication today?

- Skeptic

CAS

The Mafia's operations south of the Mason-Dixon have never been as prosperous as those in the North—except, of course, for operations in New Orleans, which has been a big Mob town for a long time.

New Orleans

The Big Easy's also unique 'cause it's the only regime headed by a woman—Miriam Kozlowski. La Dame du Morte inherited the position from her mother Paula, who became capa when her husband, Stan, died.

Stan "Gumbo" Kozlowski was a strange one. He and Paula were partners in every sense of the word, and he caught some flack for involving her in "the Family business" as much as he did. When Family leaders read Stan's will and discovered that he wanted Paula to succeed him, they weren't crazy about the idea. But there wasn't much they could do to stop her. It seems that Paula and Stan had talked about the idea beforehand, and Stan had helped Paula arrange the support she would need to consolidate her position within the Family. So after putting down some challengers, Paula was recognized by the Commissione as capa of New Orleans.

As Paula and Stan's only child, Miriam was Paula's logical choice to succeed her, and in 2047 Miriam took over the Kozlowski family business. She's continued to run the Family with the same ruthless efficiency that earned her parents the respect and fear of the other New Orleans mafiosi. Unmarried and childless, Miriam's currently grooming her cousin, Pamela Rodenbush, to succeed her.

☉ Only Pam isn't Miriam's cousin—she's her daughter. Seems that Miriam had a little "indiscretion" when she was a teen-ager and ended up pregnant. She got sent away to an exclusive "private school" where the kid was born and then passed on to Paula's older brother and his wife to raise. Miriam wants to keep the whole affair quiet and has buried at least three people over it—including my brother. Good luck tracing this pos' down, sitch. I'll be waiting.

☉ Bayou Blood

☉ Wouldn't surprise me a bit. Good luck, bonhomme. Miriam Kozlowski is a very ruthless and dangerous woman. May the gods who preside over vengeance protect you, because otherwise don't think you have a prayer.

☉ Bourbon@cas roma

Atlanta

The Gianelli family has controlled Atlanta's slow but steady Mafia activity for years. Atlanta's mobsters make their nuyen mostly by running the smuggling activity coming north from the Caribbean League and lending muscle for the corporate skirmishes that go on in the Caribbean shadows. The Gianellis also serve as Mob "ambassadors" to the CAS government, but they're not nearly as effective as Don Victor in DeeCee.

☉ The Gianellis are getting complacent. Look for some trouble to start in Atlanta when old Don Gerald ("wofer") finally uses his gro





life, the man's already ninety-one years old and only the miracles of modern medicine are keeping him alive. His son and heir, Harold ("Sweetheart"), is a brutal loser with none of his father's smarts. Dad's are he'll be ousted in favor of his younger cousin, Harold, or he'll start a gang war and die in the first week.

● **Reedny-k**

Dallas/Fort Worth

The last major CAS regime is the Dallas/Fort Worth sprawl, run by the Chavez family. Originally, the Chavez family was part of the Mexican Mafia. They fled Mexico after the Awakening and the formation of Aztlan and settled in Texas, where they quickly and ruthlessly overwhelmed the local Mafia. Rather than continue fighting over such a minor regime, the Commission instead invited the Chavez family to join the fold. Now operations in Dallas/Fort Worth are flourishing under the control of Don Miguel "Caesar" Chavez. Expect Mafia operations in Houston and points north to expand in the near future.

● Don Miguel has a real thing against Aztlan and will take any opportunity to frag the Azzies over. He pays better than normal rates for cargoes smuggled out of Aztlan, and supposedly funnels some money to Aztlan resistance groups like La Venta and sells them weapons and black-market supplies on the cheap.

● **the Clone Ranger**

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE

The California Free State is both a big asset and a big headache for the Mafia. Operations in the southern part of the state, particularly Los Angeles and the surrounding area, produce some of the Mob's biggest moneymakers, like "California Hot" sensense chips, and provide exclusive legit and illegal resorts, casinos and vacation spots.

Northern California, on the other hand, has been nothing but trouble for the Mafia. San Francisco, which has the strongest Yakuza presence in North America and provides a fairly stable base for yak expansion along the Pacific Coast and further inland, is a particular thorn in the Mafia's side.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles is *the* big Mafia town in California.

Controlled jointly by the Larraga and Gillespie families, the city provides a lot of prime product—mostly simchips, either BTLs or CallHors—for smuggling north to Seattle and east to Denver, Vegas and Texas. All sorts of other contraband gets shipped out of L.A., too, including black-market merchandise from Aztlan and the Japanacorps in San Francisco.

The Mob also has a thriving interest in L.A.'s entertainment and vice industry. The Larragas and Gillespies have their fingers in legit trideo and simporn studios, resorts, clubs and beaches as well as illegal casinos, prostitution and even more exotic forms of "entertainment." Lots of vacationing mafiosi visit the families' exclusive resorts in Palm Springs, because they can get a bit of sun and relaxation without worrying about the law or anyone else they don't want to be bothered with.

● I'll say. Some of those places in Palm Springs serve as neutral ground, frequented by high rollers on all sides: corporate, mafiosi, ayabuns and more. They all honor a kind of gentleman's agreement not to frag with each other while they're on vacation.

● **BeachBum**

San Francisco

The embattled Worczek family runs Mafia operations in San Francisco. The Family's influence is concentrated mostly in the Oakland/Berkeley area, because the Yakuza holds a monopoly on criminal activity in "their" city. The Family works with the anti-Japanese underground and has forged alliances with the local Tongs, street gangs and Seoulpa Rings to frag the yaks at every opportunity. In fact, in some areas of Oakland, mafiosi are considered heroes for their sticking up for "the little people" against the big, bad Japanacorps.

● Make no mistake, though. The Worczeks would frag the people of San Fran blind just as quickly as the yaks if they had the chance. They aren't interested in anyone's welfare but their own.

● **Tusker**

● We all look out for our own, no?

● **Raphae**

DENVER

The Denver Front Range Free Zone forms the hub of several major smuggling routes through NAN territory to the CAS, UCAS and California. The Mafia presence is strongest in the UCAS sector—no surprise—where the ruling Casquilho family operates mostly under the front of a legitimate shipping and import company, Casquilho Imports. The Family has a tight grip on most of the criminal activity in the UCAS sector of the city, though they face fierce competition from the yaks and the Triads in the rest of the Zone.

● The Casquilhos ain't as stupid as they act. While they've been fighting to protect the UCAS sector operations from the yaks, Triads, NAN syndicates and Azzies, they've been quietly setting up a bunch of shell companies in the CAS sector. By the time the fight in the UCAS sector reaches a boiling point the whole issue might be moot.

● **Bronco Fan**

"Wait till next year..."

● Well, if that's true (and I ain't givin' Bronco any pats on the back just yet) then you might see a gang war with the Chavez family, if ain't a secret that Don Miguel's been eyeing Denver as a pipeline to the BTL riches of Southern Ca.

● **Cowboy Fan**

"...so we can kick your hoop."

No one's been able to gain control of the Denver smuggling routes so far, though several Mafia, yak and Triad syndicates have tried and failed. Apparently, the overwhelming tangle of border patrols and the other patchwork regulations and restrictions of the Treaty City of Denver make it nearly impossible for anyone to corner this market.

NATIVE AMERICAN NATIONS

Along with New Orleans and L.A., Las Vegas is the third major sin city under Mafia control, and the only major NAN city run by the Mob. Mafia families are scattered among other cities in the Native American Nations—notably Phoenix, Pueblo and Cheyenne—but these markets are small potatoes compared to operations in Vegas.

The Verontesse family, along with three smaller Mafia families, run the Mafia's very profitable gambling, prostitution, sim-porn and smuggling enterprises in Vegas. These families also take a large cut of the profits from the city's thriving black market, from which customers can buy luxury items, expensive foods and drinks, and "forbidden fruit" like exotic simsense chips.

• Vegas also supports a slave market where clients can purchase people, either *au naturel* or modified to the customer's taste (and some of the clients' tastes can get pretty weird, let me tell you.) The market operates largely under the guise of exclusive "escort services" or legal brothels and provides clients blessed with deep pockets just about anything they want in a "companion." Most of the poor slots who get sold are street punks, their "handlers" addict them to custom BTUs, then use their addictions to control them. Prices range from 10K nuyen for a "basic model" to millions of nuyen for more exotic mods. Some of the Mafia families run their own operations in the market, while others take a healthy slice of the action in exchange for protection.

• Spartacus

• Might also be that the slavers have some kind of deal going with that Tamarous. Pick-ups who don't "make the cut" for sale seem to disappear without a trace. Rumors say that the organ-legging ghouls take 'em off the dealers' hands for a song.

• DeFace

The Mafia has little presence in the rest of Native American territory, simply because the NAN offers little that the Mafia can't handle from long distance through its border gateway cities such as Vegas, Denver and Seattle. The arrangement seems to suit the Sovereign Tribal Council, which is content to let the Mafia alone as long as they restrict their activities to the gateway cities.

CARIBBEAN LEAGUE

Back in the first half of the twentieth century, the Mafia was very powerful down in the Caribbean. The Mob virtually owned Havana and ran it like its own little playground until Fidel Castro and his boys tossed the mafiosi out. But they didn't go much farther than Miami, where they waited patiently, running their businesses as usual and working behind the scenes to undermine the Castro regime. (In fact, according to long-standing rumors, the American President John F. Kennedy enlisted Mafia help in an attempt to assassinate Fidel.)

Castro fended off all attempts to oust him, however, and he remained in power until old age and ill health forced him from public office in 2014. Within weeks, the government collapsed and the Mafia, under the leadership of the Batista family, moved back into Havana and began to spread its tentacles throughout the Caribbean League.

Pretty soon the Mob was running extensive smuggling operations between the League, Miami, Atlanta and the UCAS. Most of the operations are controlled by the Batista family and Miami's Gambione family, which also has its claws deep into the ineffectual League government.

• Unfortunately for the Mafia, the Caribb government doesn't have any real power and will dance to just about anyone's tune, so things are still pretty much a free-for-all down the Caribbean way.

• Islander

Things went pretty smoothly until the Awakening, when the various voodoo cults on the islands gained some serious power. Tensions between the local mafiosi and the houngans escalated until a bloody war seemed inevitable. But just as the conflagration seemed ready to erupt, Don Raul "Sugarcane" Batista negotiated an alliance with the strongest voodoo gangs and brought them into the Family. This move proved a stroke of genius. Not only did it head off the big battle, but increased the fear of the Batistas among the islanders and among other capi, some of whom tend to distrust the magical arts.

• A lot of dons have more than a "distrust" of magic—they fear it like death itself. Most of the oldsters surround themselves with charms and amulets to protect themselves from "the evil eye" and would rather French kiss a rapid pit-bul, ferrier than let a magician within three clicks of their precious souls.

• Uncle Al

• Charms and amulets, Fetishes, you mean?

• Tonè

• Not even. Sops to small-minded superstition, without the faintest touch of the Power.

• Maxine

• Yeah, but that's just the old-timers. The younger generation of capi, born since the Awakening, recognize the advantage of having some mojo to sling around. Following the successful example of the Batistas, many regimes are hiring wagemages at a preferential rate. (Any magicians looking to become made men?)

• Hunter Rose

• The Gambione and Batista families are about as wacky as the Mafia gets. They got pirates, voodoo shaman, black-market drugs (the old-fashioned kind), smuggling rings, and grandmothers as look-outs. I'm amazed that they're even listed here. They're more like a circus than a Mafia Family.

• Bear Towner

• Hey, they make money for the Commissione—and money talk, True. They may use unorthodox methods, but folks have always done things differently down in the Caribbean League. It's just when in Rome, is it?

• Islander

THE YAKUZA



I'm a firm believer in going right to the source (or right to the source's heavily protected red-data-store, as the case may be <grin>) when you want to know something. Initially, I had a little trouble actually digging up anyone who was really in with the Sons of the Neon Chrysanthemum and willing to talk about the Yakuza. But eventually I got hold of a chummer down SanFran way who goes by the handle "Kanji." Kanji's one of a new breed of young Japanese-Californians born in the Free State and working to make it truly free. They want to see the occupation of SF end and free elections held, but they also want to stay in the CFS—simply because SanFran is their home. Gotta give them a lot of credit. I'm not sure that I'd want to work with rebel groups that distrust my entire race/culture and want to deport the whole lot of us.

Anyway, enough of my rambling. Take it away, Kanji.

◆Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 24 January 2058 at 13:04:19 (EST)

Before I joined the underground, I had the dubious pleasure of working as an icebreaker for the Karatsa-gumi—so I have firsthand experience of the Yakuza. As a favor to Captain Chaos—and in the hope that doing so will demystify the Yakuza and help those within its ranks who desire reform—I'd like to share the benefit of that experience.

The Yakuza is an organization built on ancient traditions. Though the interpretation of these traditions has changed over the years, these "old ways" continue to sustain the Yakuza and distinguish it from all other organized criminal groups. Some of these customs—such as honor, loyalty and protecting the populace—are admirable traditions that strengthen the organization. However, other traditions—such as distrust and prejudice against foreigners, metahumans, women and magic—have severely hindered the Yakuza in the Sixth World.

These factors have led to a conflict that racks the modern Yakuza. On one side are the traditionalists, who fiercely cling to the old ways and view as heresy any talk of changing or abandoning those traditions. On the other side are the reformers, who want to strengthen or resurrect the Yakuza's traditions of honor and service to the community while cultivating a more modern, open attitude toward women, metahumans and magic. The final outcome of this struggle seems far from certain. But undoubtedly the process of change in the Yakuza will not be easy—or bloodless.

To truly understand the sources of this conflict and the modern Yakuza itself, outsiders must first discard their preconceptions about the organization. Even today, most people think of the Yakuza as a "Japanese Mafia": they view the oyabun and their men as gangsters with katanas instead of Tommy guns. These views, to say the least, are based on movies and manga-vid fantasies—not real life. The Mafia and the real Yakuza do exhibit some similarities, but the differences between the two groups vastly outweigh those similarities.

• Hold it! The intro to this document said the similarities between the Mob and the Yakuza vastly outweigh the differences. Now this skag says the differences vastly outweigh the similarities. Which is it?

• Low Ranger

• It's a matter of style vs. substance, Ranger. The syndicates are into the same kinds of biz, and they run that biz in pretty much the same way. Only makes sense, right? You don't see Aztechnology and Yamatetsu using different accounting practices. A corp is a corp and a mob is a mob. That's substance.

In style, the syndicates are all very different. To stick with the corp analogy, the corporate cultures of Aztechnology and Yamatetsu are vastly different. Both are in roughly the same business, but their employees go about their business in very different ways.

So in terms of substance—business practices—the similarities outweigh the differences. But in terms of style—the "corporate" culture—the differences outweigh the similarities. Got it?

• CC Raider

"Never met a coro I didn't hate"

HISTORY

The Yakuza's about twice as old as the Mafia. It dates back to seventeenth-century Japan, where groups of *bakuto*, or gamblers (who were considered among the lowest criminals in Japanese society), first began to band together. In fact, the name *Yakuza* reputedly comes from the worst hand in the card game *hanafuda*—8-9-3 or *ya-ku-za* in Japanese. The expression came to mean something worthless, and people attached it to a whole class of criminals, who adopted it like a badge of honor.

By the late eighteenth century, the Yakuza had become one of the most powerful organizations in Japan, its members respected and feared by the entire populace. Japanese commoners especially held the Yakuza in high regard because the early Yakuza viewed themselves as "protectors of the populace"—almost like a supplemental police force. That self-appointed role was an integral part of the Yakuza code, and it earned the Yakuza a reputation for honor that survives today.

Now, some traditionalists claim that the yaks were simply honorable, stand-up guys. Personally, I don't buy it. Profitable crime was their main business—as it is today—and I think they simply figured that the best way to protect their business was to stamp out all "freelance" crime—crime that they didn't directly run or approve. So they came down hard on random street crime and common theft. Coming down hard on common "dishonorable" criminals probably also helped the early yaks create an image of themselves as men of honor. And most important, it created good will among the population, so that when the authorities came looking for the Yakuza the local folks wouldn't turn them in.

Whatever the reasons behind it, the Yakuza code—in the old days, at least—preached respect for the common citizen. And that respect manifested in the doctrine of "choice," as opposed to coercion. A victim of Yakuza criminal activities had to *choose* to be victimized; he had to embrace it of his own free will, with his eyes wide open. For example, a patron visiting a yak-run brothel *chooses* to go there—no one is coercing him. A user who buys drugs from a yak distribution ring is *choosing* to feed his addiction, no one is forcing him to do so (by Yakuza standards, anyway). But a sarariman getting mugged in an alley doesn't have much say in the matter. That's why mugging, pickpocketing and other violent crimes were anathema to the yaks of old. Some Yakuza still try to practice this part of the code by policing their areas of influence, but most have abandoned this lofty principle and simply take a cut of the street crime in their districts.

• You could argue that the historically low "street" crime rates in Japan—all the way up to the end of the twentieth century—were a matter of fact—were a result of Yakuza policy. Even in the '50s and '90s, any common thug who decided to take to the streets of Tokyo as a mugger would eventually find himself trying to explain to a yak assassin why he was more valuable alive than with a slit throat.

• Kerur

The early Yakuza also provided a "justice for hire" service to the populace. If someone believed he'd been wronged by another

er, he could take his case to the local *oyabun* (head of the local Yakuza family) and ask for help. If the *oyabun* decided that the case had merit, he'd send his soldiers out to "exact justice" from the wrongdoer. (The nature of that justice depended on the wrong committed, of course.) In exchange, the Yakuza would charge the wronged party a fee based on his ability to pay—often a percentage of any penalty "recovered" from the wrongdoer.

Even the local samurai class, the *daimyo*, weren't beyond the reach of the Yakuza, and so the organization became the only recourse for peasants who felt their liege lords were treating them unfairly. But sometimes the landed classes would use the yaks to exact "justice" from those who'd used *them* unfairly, too.

This practice is one of the reasons why even today, sympathy for the Yakuza in Japanese society extends even to the authorities, who often decline to investigate Yakuza-related criminal activities or prosecute its members.

• True, but only as long as the yaks don't break the unwritten rules: no murder—unless the circumstances make it the only "appropriate" action—and absolutely no killing of civilians.

• Takashi

Even in North America, some Yakuza still perform this kind of justice-for-hire service. Of course, tracking down your local *oyabun* is a lot more difficult than it used to be. The fees for such "services" are generally much higher, too, and the concept of "ability to pay" no longer carries as much weight as in the past.

However, a few Yakuza are attempting to restore the justice-for-hire practice in its true spirit. In Newark, for example, the Honjowara-gumi—under the guidance of the great reformer Okido Honjowara and his "New Way"—has adopted Sector 6 as its prefecture and protects the people of that area against random violence and against "outsiders" seeking to commit criminal acts.

• Sector 6? Oh yeah, I know that hood—Little Asia, around Bergen Street. Kan's right. That's the safest hood in the whole 'olex.

• Morley's Ghost

• Yeah, well, in Newark that ain't saying much.

• Shadowrunner

• I've been to Newark, and I've been to Little Asia. I'll tell you, I did feel safe—not one fragging bit. Spotted the yak "peace-keeper" the minute I stepped off the underground. They watched me throwawks, just waiting for an excuse to cut me down like a rat.

Why? Because I'm gal'in, and because I'm tok, that's why.

The Honjowara-gumi keep the Sector 6 hood safe, alright—for their people. But if you're not a Japanese human, all this justice-for-hire Robin Hood drek don't apply to you. In fact, your local cops are likely to consider you a threat to the peace.

• Rug

• I think olummer Rug might be taking that a bit far. But I don't think for a moment that any yak group—in Newark or anywhere else—keeps the peace out of the goodness of its collective heart. It's got some hidden agenda it's pursuing. Count on it.

• Pentecost

• If some gumi wants to come and keep the peace in my hood, I can live with whatever hidden agenda it's got.

• Vev

As Japan began to industrialize during the Meiji Restoration of the nineteenth century, the Yakuza also began to modernize to keep pace with the changes in Japanese society. The organization began to infiltrate the construction business, the docks—it even took control of the rickshaw business. But most important, the Yakuza began to dabble in politics, lending support to certain politicians and officials. By cooperating with the government, Yakuza members gained some freedom from harassment and even official sanction in some instances. In fact, this trend continues today, as illustrated by Yakuza strength in cities such as San Francisco, which are under the control of the Japanese government or the influence of Japanese corporations.

After World War II, another wave of reform swept through the Yakuza, giving the organization its modern form. Guns replaced swords as the weapons of choice, and Yakuza members abandoned much of the ancient Yakuza code. The Yakuza began targeting ordinary citizens for shakedowns and protection rackets, not just other criminals or specific groups. And the organization recruited aggressively and expanded its operations.

The Yakuza made a concerted effort to expand and establish operations outside the Japanese homelands, especially along the Pacific Rim and in North America. Soon, the Yakuza had gained control of the very profitable drug trade in Japan and the PacRim, established new smuggling operations, and expanded its existing vice operations and rackets. The presence of gumi outside of Japan became more and more common, and eventually the Yakuza began recruiting non-Japanese members in Asian countries such as Korea.

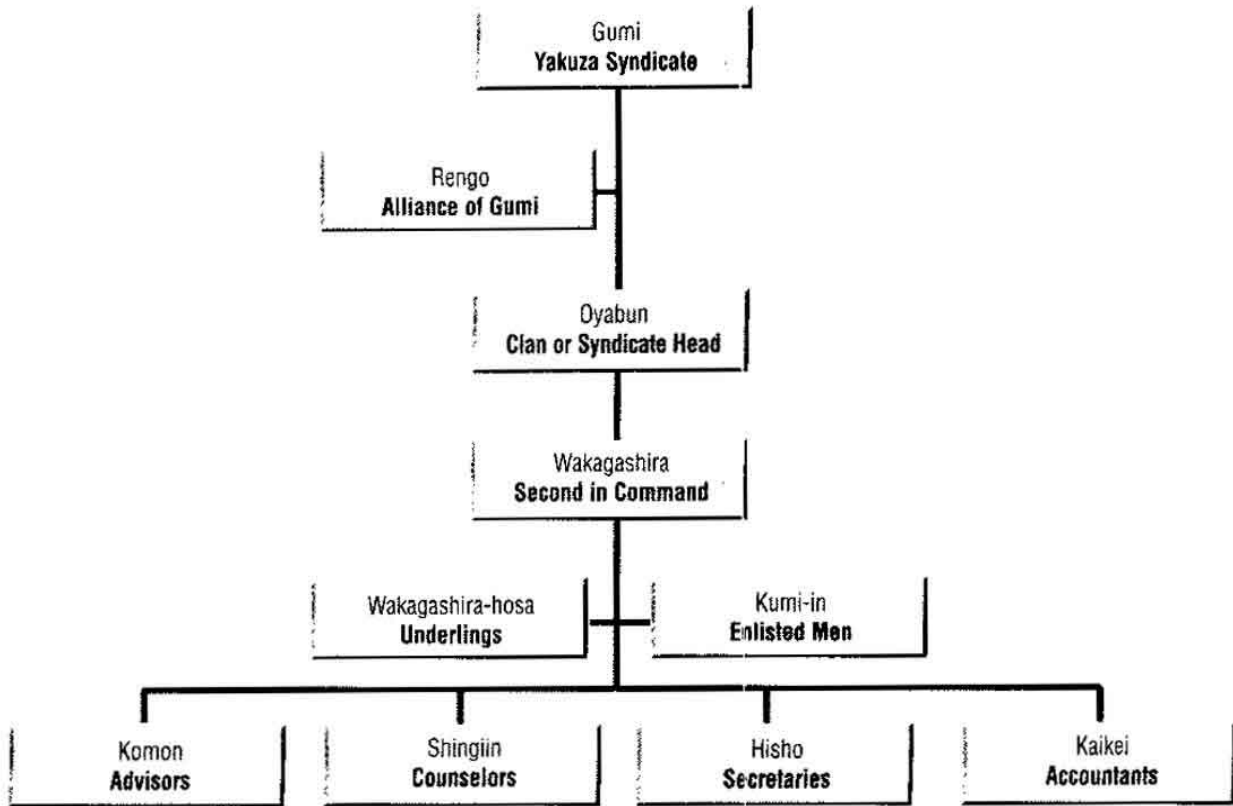
By tying its fortunes to Japanese corporations that were expanding their own global operations, the Yakuza spread throughout the world. Where the *sararimen* went, the Yakuza went—and inevitably clashed with established local criminal organizations such as the Mafia.

• In some areas, the Yakuza are still confined to the "little Tokyo" sections of town—Japanese enclaves where corporate employees and dependents live. But in places like Seattle, where Japanese citizens form a significant portion of the population, the Yakuza operates openly and on a par with—or even ahead of—homegrown mobsters like the Mafia.

• Drez@sean@sea.uccs

Yakuza operations in North America continued to grow at a steady pace throughout the early part of the twenty-first century. The greatest coup for the Yakuza in America came in 2036, when Japanese troops occupied San Francisco in a "friendly invasion" strongly backed by Yakuza gumi in Japan as well as those gumi already operating along the Pacific Rim.

The occupation gave the Yakuza a secure base of operations in North America, a place where they were generally unchallenged and could operate much as they did in Japan. Since the occupation, San Francisco has become known as the unofficial Yakuza "capital" of North America.



• A title that the Shotozumi-gumi in Seattle would like to claim for their city, but until the Imperial Marines land in Puget Sound the SanFran gumi have an edge that can't be beat.

• Q-bert

• Seattle could be next, chummer—don't get complacent. That's what happened to us.

• East Boyer

ORGANIZATION

Yakuza organization is based on two ancient concepts: the *oyabun-kobun* relationship and the *gumi* or *rengo*.

The *oyabun* is the head of the clan—a sort of father figure who uses his wisdom, insight and power to rule and guide the *kobun* under his command. A *kobun* is someone who has sworn loyalty to the *oyabun*. The *kobun* becomes the *oyabun's* vassal, like an adopted child. In return for his total loyalty and dedication, the *kobun* receives a home and the support of the *oyabun's gumi*.

A *gumi* is a Yakuza clan or syndicate. *Gumi* may range in size from a few dozen members to as many as one thousand members. Every Yakuza *gumi* is organized like a corporation, with the *gumi's oyabun* as head honcho. Directly below the *oyabun* is the *wakagashira* (second in command) of the *gumi*. The next level contains various *komon* (advisors), *shingijin* (counselors), *hisho* (secretaries), *kaikei* (accountants) and *wakagashira-hosa* (underlings of the second in command). The *kobun* and *kumi-in* (enlisted men) are the *gumi's* street-level operatives.

A *gumi's* territory is called a *nawabari*—literally, a "roped-off area." The power and influence of a *gumi* and its *oyabun* determine how large the *gumi's* territory is. A powerful *gumi* can control an entire city or even a state or small country.

• I read somewhere that Tokyo used to be split among three *gumi*, while Osaka was run by only one syndicate, as was the entire island of Shikoku.

• Piscator

A *rengo* is a loose alliance of different *gumi* that have chosen to work together for their own purposes. Usually, *rengo* members are less-powerful *gumi*—most *gumi* prefer to go it alone if their influence is strong enough. But even within a *rengo*, the *oyabun* of the member *gumi* retain control of their own *gumi*.

The Yakuza has no ruling council like the Mafia's Commission—no *oyabun-no-oyabun* like the Mafia's *capo di tutti capi*. Individual *gumi* may form *rengo* or power blocs led by a single, powerful *gumi* and its *oyabun*—but a Yakuza member's loyalty extends within his own *gumi* and *oyabun* only. A *kobun* is loyal to his *oyabun*, and that *oyabun* is a law unto himself. If that *kobun* wants to ally himself with another, larger *gumi*, he can—that's the way of the world. But he can break that alliance at any time and ever go into competition with his one-time ally.

This structure has led to a great variety among *gumi*. Some *oyabun* and their *gumi* are very traditional and follow the old ways to the letter. Others are more willing to bend or break the rules to turn a profit. And still others are proponents of the "New Way," a

movement to reform the Yakuza and ensure its survival and prosperity in the Sixth World. Only the ancient Yakuza code of honor prevents these diverse gumi from destroying one another and makes any cooperation between them possible. Even the most dishonorable gumi tend to operate within the bounds set by their peers to avoid other Yakuza banding together to eliminate them.

That being said, several major power blocs exist that runners should know about. The most important is the Watada-rengo, led by the Watada family of Chiba, Japan. All the Yakuza gumi in the Pacific Northwest have allied themselves with the Watada-rengo and subordinate themselves to Akira Watada, the oyabun of Chiba and the so-called 87th Prefecture. Of course, this alliance doesn't mean the different local gumi don't squabble among themselves, but it does reduce the number of counterproductive turf wars.

❖ Jeez, I'd hate to see the way things would shake out without the allegiance to the Watada-rengo. The Shotozum-gumi and the Nishio-gumi are at each other's throats nearly all the time.

❖ Jungle Jim

❖ Expect Hanzo Shotozumi to declare his independence from the Watadas within the next year and form his own Seattle-based rengo. Hanzo's been feeling his oats, and I figure it's just a matter of time.

❖ Paper Clip

❖ Grab some reality, Clip. The Shotozumi-gumi declares its independence, and the real leader of the Watada-rengo—and it's not Akira Watada—comes over to kick hoop and take names. Hanzo Shotozumi knows it—and, more importantly, his kobun know it. Shotozumi might talk tough about independence, but he's not stupid or suicidal.

❖ Tokanoba

❖ Who's the "real" leader of the Watada-rengo?

❖ Joy,ay

❖ The Great Dragon Ryumyo. Doesn't everybody know that?

❖ Tokanoba

Turf wars between rival gumi are incredibly bloody and brutal. But by tradition, the Yakuza take great care to limit collateral damage. They'll splatter the guts of a rival kobun across the street, they'll destroy resources, they'll use every dirty trick in the book—but they'll go out of their way to minimize damage to "civilians" (generally defined as anyone who's not involved in Yakuza business).

For example, a Mafia hit man might blow up a school to kill a don who's attending his kid's parent-teacher night. A traditional Yakuza gumi, on the other hand, would consider such an action barbaric and unconscionable for any "civilized" person. (A Yakuza hitter probably wouldn't pass up such an opportunity, but he'd use a single sniper round to the brain rather than a kilo of C9 in the coffee cart to eliminate the target.)

Unfortunately, the tradition of limiting collateral damage has begun to slip in recent years. The hard-core traditionalist gumi still make real efforts to avoid injuring civilians. But increasing num-

bers of less traditional Yakuza—and those who are being pushed harder by rival organizations—no longer put much effort into minimizing such damage. Typically, these so-called progressive gumi try to control such damage only when it might actually hurt the gumi more than a successful operation would benefit the organization. The Karatsa-gumi here in SanFran—sometimes called the "Neon Chrysanthemum" because they're into bio-luminescent body decoration—will do whatever it takes to get what they want. As long as they don't upset the Japanacops, anything goes.

YAKUZA TRADITIONS

Oyabun are like heads of state. They rule their own little independent "nations," carry out diplomatic missions and negotiations with the heads of other gumi to form and dissolve allegiances, and occasionally declare wars against competitors and rivals. The oyabun have—within their own syndicates, at least—influence similar to the unchallenged power of feudal Japan's daimyo.

Much of this power stems from the Yakuza code of honor, which requires that every Yakuza member act according to three major principles: *jingi*, *giri* and *ninjo*.

Jingi is respect for and deference to one's superiors. It's a major part of all Japanese culture, and over the years it's spawned all manner of conventions for determining social rank and the protocols that govern interaction between individuals of different social castes. Anyone who works with the Japanacops is probably familiar with these things, and may even have skillchips encoded with all the appropriate protocols to make sure they don't bow at the wrong time or say the wrong thing.

The code calls on all Yakuza members to observe the requirements of *jingi* and act in a civilized and proper manner. Of course, the words "civilized and proper" are open to interpretation, as is exactly who deserves civilized and proper treatment. More than a few oyabun still contend that "civilized behavior is only due civilized people"—Japanese humans, in other words. But other oyabun believe that all people are due civil and proper treatment, and these oyabun harshly punish any gumi members who fail to offer such treatment to their fellow (meta)humans.

Giri means "duty" or "obligation." It requires that Yakuza follow the dictates of honor and obedience and repay debts—sometimes in nuyen but more often in loyalty and service. Any gumi member who fails to do so brings shame on himself, his gumi and his oyabun. As a result, a Yakuza member takes the idea of duty very seriously. He will never forget a favor done for him and will always remain ready to repay that debt through his loyalty and service to the individual who did him the favor. Of course, this works both ways—if he does someone else a favor, he will consider that person obligated to repay the favor with loyalty and service.

Ninjo is a difficult concept to translate. It encompasses things like emotions, feelings, sympathy and compassion. *Ninjo* is the quality that makes the Yakuza sympathetic to the plight of the "common man" and motivates them to serve as protectors of those who seek justice. Because this quality must be instilled in a person early in life, the concept of *ninjo* has fallen by the wayside in modern times, though some of the more traditional and honorable Yakuza continue to uphold it. Some Yakuza reformers are attempting to revive the idea of duty to this concept.

At the heart of the Yakuza code is the concept of total obedience to the oyabun, the head of the family. Each member of the gumi is obligated to obey the oyabun's every order without question or hesitation, on pain of death. Failure is rarely tolerated: any Yakuza member who fails to discharge his duty to the oyabun is obligated to offer some form of reparation.

YABITSUME

Traditionally, the most common form of reparation is *yabitsume*, or "finger cutting." This tradition requires a gumi member who fails his oyabun to willingly cut off part of a finger—or, in serious cases, an entire finger. Generally, *yabitsume* is performed in a very formal ritual attended by the oyabun. The individual making amends ties a white cloth around the finger and is presented with a sharp knife. He then cuts off his own finger. Showing any pain or emotion during the procedure brings even greater shame than the initial failure or disobedience.

Some Yakuza members preserve their severed finger joints in small bottles of formaldehyde and keep them as reminders of the obedience they owe their oyabun.

❖ Wanna to spot a yak soldier? Look for a missing finger joint on a core Yak member who makes it to middle age without fragging up at least *once*.

❖ Liza

❖ That's why prosthetic fingers are big sellers in Yak-dominated areas. Removable ones, of course. When you're on the street, you wear the fake finger. On ritual occasions or when you're meeting your oyabun, you slip it in your pocket and proudly display your "badge of obedience."

❖ Hosoka

❖ The oyabun of any traditional gumi—and there are still quite a few of them—would instantly gut any member so dishonorable to even consider that kind of subterfuge.

❖ Raiko

❖ It's important to point out that the Yakuza have never accepted the concept of "extenuating circumstances." Failure is failure and that's all there is to it. No matter that the opposition might have been ten times stronger than you'd been informed, no matter that you coincidentally happened to make your move just as a great dragon allied with the opposition dropped in for a surprise visit, no matter that a fragging meteor killed three-quarters of your team. If your oyabun told you to snatch the head scientist from a rival's lab and you don't bring the egghead back home with you, you've failed—and you're expected to pay the price.

❖ Sato

IREZUMI

The custom of *irezumi*, or "family markings," is another Yakuza tradition that has survived virtually unchanged from the earliest manifestation of the organization. These tattoos signify family allegiance and also serve as emblems of rank and achievement.

❖ In the old days, *irezumi* also provided a convenient way for Japanese peasants to identify Yakuza members. So if a peasant needed to turn to someone for some "justice," he could find a yak without much problem.

❖ Kerum

When a new member of a Yakuza gumi has performed his first important mission, duty or service to the family, the oyabun will send him to the family tattoo artist, who gives the new kobun his first tattoo. Traditionally, this tattoo is inscribed on the small of the back and incorporates the gumi's distinguishing symbols or emblems—usually elements from classical Japanese art, such as the chrysanthemum and the cherry blossom—as well as some type of dragon motif (the dragon is the general symbol of the Yakuza).

As a member provides more—and more valuable—services for the family, the oyabun sends him back to the tattoo artist following each achievement to have his tattoos expanded and embellished. After the tattoos cover the man's entire back, they are extended onto his shoulders, chest, upper arms and thighs. By the time a Yakuza member achieves a senior rank in his gumi, he will appear to be a walking work of art.

The tattoos are never applied up the neck above the height of a conservative collar or farther down the wrists or legs than where the hems of a traditional kimono would fall. These precautions ensure that a Yakuza member can easily hide his tattoos. Only in the bathhouses of Japan—or that modern corp equivalent, the steam room and hot tub—will you see the extent of a Yakuza soldier's marks of service.

The finest tattoo artists employed by the Yakuza still work in the traditional way—with bamboo needles and hours on hours of careful work that requires the subject to endure serious discomfort (which the Yakuza consider an additional sign of courage and honor).

Some of the less conservative gumi have added a little technoflash to the old traditions. Light-emitting tattoos, thermo-sensitive pigments that shift colors, implanted holograms, "active tats" that appear only when the wearer activates them mentally, refractive crystals under the skin, even "living tattoos" (membrane-thin visual displays covered by transparent dermaplast) ... you'll see them all.

❖ In Califree, maybe in Seattle, the yaks tend toward the conservative end of the spectrum.

❖ Post-Haste

❖ I've heard that some of the more sophisticated Yakuza tattoos are charged with special magic rituals to give the tattoo's owner a little extra luck or protection. Anyone got any intel on this?

❖ Holonde

❖ Not as such, but suppose that such a thing is possible. However creating such tattoos would take a tattoo artist who was also a pretty capable magician or enchanter, not to mention some specialized inks and other components. With these things, someone might be able to create patterns that could permanently main-

can spells to protect the tattoo's wearer as you describe. But creating such tattoos would be a very time-consuming and expensive process. So these "magic tattoos" would not be something you'd find just any koban scoring. More likely they'd be an inducement for a very well-off oyabun or one of his favorites who'd like to get to having magic so close to his skin.

◆ *Silver Mage*

MAJOR RACKETS

The Yakuza are big players in the drug and chip trade, and many gumi could teach the Commissione a thing or two about innovative ways of laundering dirty credit (I've seen some Yakuza credit-transfer operations that rivaled the legendary Nanosecond Buyout in their sophistication). However, the modern Yakuza's major rackets are prostitution, gambling and *sokaiya* (a form of corporate extortion).

PROSTITUTION

The Yakuza's prostitution syndicates are a major innovation in the world of organized crime. Though Mafia families have cornered the market on prostitution in certain cities by "organizing" pimps and their stables, the Yakuza prostitution syndicate represents a different approach.

Under the Yakuza system, a gumi designs and builds a prostitution "industry" from the ground up, rather than muscling in on the existing prostitution market. After choosing where to operate its prostitution syndicate, the gumi imports its own "talent" and "managers" (the Yakuza very rarely use the word "pimp") from an existing operation. The gumi usually transfers only about a hundred prostitutes to its new market, bringing in as many as needed to form a nucleus for its syndicate.

The syndicate "managers" then start recruiting among the prostitutes already operating in the area. Initially, the managers concentrate on co-opting independent prostitutes, but they also develop "pipelines" for recruiting prostitutes at bus and train stations. Only then do the syndicate managers start to recruit talent from rival pimps. The Yakuza operators usually approach this in a very businesslike manner, offering to hire choice talent away from pimps' stables. Typically, a pimp views such an offer as an attempt to muscle in on his racket and responds with violence. As soon as the rival "businessman" threatens violence against the gumi, the gumi is free to simply wipe out the opposition without violating the precept of the Yakuza code, which prohibits approaching any "businessman" with unjustified violence.

Though recruiting takes time, a gumi will begin marketing its new syndicate almost immediately. The Yakuza learned long ago about the wonders of advertising—something that few North American pimps use to their best advantage. An advertising blitz can make the new syndicate seem to burst on to the scene full grown, which attracts new clients and woos others away from competing prostitutes.

Within months of entering a market, a Yakuza-run prostitution syndicate usually controls between 60 and 80 percent of the sex trade in an area—sometimes without a single shot being fired. Prostitution syndicates rarely make the effort to increase their market share above 80 percent, simply because new independ-

ents and "start-ups" are always entering the business. And allowing a few unaligned pimps and stables to operate is generally good for the syndicate's business. The syndicate simply recruits the best prostitutes, which look all the better when compared to the second-rate competition that shares the local market.

◆ Marketing? Advertising? Drek, what are we talking about, here? Billboards? Radio spots?

◆ *Laser's Edge*

◆ In some parts of the world, Yakuza-run syndicates do advertise on radio. (I'm thinking of Aristocratic Escorts in Amarillo and the Dream Syndicate in San Fran.) But in most places, it's a little less organized than that.

Go to downtown Seattle tonight and scope out the public phone booths. See those little postage-stamp-size stickers everywhere—the ones with flat photos and hoos of good-looking boys and girls? They look kind of like the stickers for Chiba's pop sensation of the week. But look closer. First, there's no name. What pop sensation would have his/her face plastered everywhere without a name and the title of his/her latest album? Second, the only form of ident is an LTO number.

So what are these stickers? They're ads, chummer—ads for the talent run by the local prostitution syndicate.

Try calling one of those numbers sometime. It'll take a couple of seconds to connect, because the number actually links you into a multinode relay that defeats any attempts to trace the call. But then you'll usually hear a voice-mail message from the talent in the shot. Usually it's something really tame, like a "companionship" voice-ad in the Times-Intelligencer. But if you're in the know and you punch in a special code, you get an X-rated message that describes services offered in clinical detail. Sometimes the message even includes video clips if you're at a vid phone and interested in "window shopping."

And that, my friends, is effective advertising.

◆ *Booo*

◆ Why doesn't the Star do something to stop it?

◆ *Duck & Cover*

◆ Stop what, once? Stop kids from posting stickers they get from gum packages or with the latest CD? Stop poor, lonely people from advertising for someone with whom to share their empty lives?

◆ *SPD*

◆ It's also a matter of resources. Most municipalities try to keep their spending down—including their spending on law enforcement. And many municipalities consider prostitution a victimless crime. So, if you're the local Lone Star commander and you're working with limited resources, what are you going to spend those resources on—controlling the gang violence that's claiming lives every day or rounding up the local prostitutes? Until Lone Star suddenly triples its revenue and doubles its payroll, busting prostitution syndicates is gonna remain way down the list of priorities.

◆ *X-Star*

GAMBLING

On the West Coast—particularly in the California Free State and Seattle—the local Yakuza gumi dominate traditionally Asian gambling games, such as mahjong, fan-tan, pachinko and the like. These games are very popular in any area with a sizable Japanese population, and they produce immense profits for the local gumi. Recently, gumi have begun an effort to get non-Japanese gamblers interested in their games. Usually, this requires that Japanese middle managers or execs bring their gaijin employees into Yakuza gambling dens for “business meetings” and other social gatherings.

By North American standards, the games run by the Yakuza gambling parlors are amazingly corrupt. But the gamblers are accustomed to it and regularly put up with levels of cheating that would get a Las Vegas casino burned to the ground.

Q I've seen it, too. The house rigs off the customers nine ways on Sunday, but the customers just keep on coming back. Kanji's right, the players have to know (don't they?), but they put up with it. Your typical Vegas gambler would shoot the fragging dealer if he realized he was being scammed so hard.

Q Robo

Q Maybe that's the difference between the patrons of a yak-run pachinko parlor and an uptown casino. The former are looking for a social occasion and are willing to pay a “cover charge” (in the form of cheating) for the privilege. The latter are out to make a killing.

Q Featherstone

Q Or maybe you don't make a sink because you end up as dog food in the Redmond Barrers. * you do

Q IF

“The Truth is Stronger than Fiction”

The Yakuza gumi are into high-class gambling as well. Besides smoky little gambling dens, gumi operate “exclusive clubs” that feature everything that a high-roller or a high-roller-wannabe could possibly want: high-stakes games, exotic virtual entertainments and real-time full-simsense feeds from Happy Valley racetrack in Hong Kong—all delivered direct to club patrons for a small cover fee of a few hundred nuyen.

Q Yeah, there's one of those places in the Yamateru Building in downtown San Francisco. Unmarked door and you're not going to get within five meters of it if you're not a regular or escorted by a regular. It's called Club World. Cover is 250 nuyen, and there's a two-drink minimum. A draft costs 25 nuyen—but nobody drinks beer, champers is the tipple of choice. You're expected to bet on every race, and if you're wagering less than a few thousand at a shot you're a deadbeast and you probably won't be coming back. Charming place.

Q Watson@BTG 52893-221B

Q You expect us to believe you've been inside this place? Get actual.

Q Dud

Q Hidden depths, big chad. Hidden depths

Q Watson@BTG 52893-221B

SOKAIYA

Sokaiya literally means “shareholders-meeting man.” It's the Japanese term for professionals who shake down companies—typically small corporations, owned and run by Japanese—for credit and influence. Typically, a sokaiya operator buys large blocks of shares in target companies, then extorts money from those companies by threatening to harass staff members and violently disrupting shareholders meetings. Traditionally, sokaiya have operated only in Japan. During the past decade, however, gangs of sokaiya have set up operations in North America—largely in Seattle and California, which host the largest concentrations of Japanese-controlled corporations in North America. But sokaiya have spread wherever suitable target corporations are headquartered and now can be found in far-flung places such as New York City, Boston and Atlanta as well.

Typically, the local gumi will denounce sokaiya in their city and claim no connection with them. But it's an open secret that most of the sokaiya bands operate with the approval or even the direction of the gumi. What's more, rumor has it that the leaders of certain sokaiya bands are high-standing gumi members.

Q No wait! The yaks are shaking down the megacorps? How's that? sokaiya still exist? You'd think corp payback teams would off all one and everyone with even the slightest links to that sort of scum.

Q Rake

Q Scan the text again, Rake. The sokaiya ain't stupid. They don't go after megas. They go after small corporations, independent. Sokaiya targets are the mom-&-pop shops of the corporate world: outfits that have gone public and whose stocks are traded on the exchanges, but which are still relatively small potatoes. You can bet your hoop any sokaiya that goes after a mega—or even a small corp that's a subsidiary or she-run by a mega—isn't going to enjoy more than a few days to the job about their lack of judgment.

Q Rakin

Q Come that. Typical sokaiya targets are outfits that generate 20-50 million annual revenues—big enough to have money worth extorting but small enough that they don't have the jam to fight off the extortion.

Q Margate Bob

Q Any of you slogs hear of Dynamic Systems Corporation? It's a miseducated independent software developer based out of Ft. Lewis. DSC's a vertical market provider—it concentrates on logistics-analysis software (i.e., how to rationalize shipping channels and schedules so you never run out of raw materials, parts, and so on). DSC's big client at the moment is the Metroplex Guard, but it also sells customized code to international export/import businesses. It's not a big outfit. Last year, when it went public, it posted gross sales of just over 35 million nuyen.

Seems DSC management wanted to expand, so they put out a new stock offering. The usual suspects picked up most of the

stock—investment fund managers, promoters, brokerage firms, those kind of vultures—but something like 15 percent of the stock was picked up by what seemed to be mom-&-pop investors. Now, 15 percent would be considered a significant block of stock if it was bought as a block. But it wasn't—it was picked up piecemeal by hundreds of investors.

Or that's the way it looked. In actuality, those "minor" investors were actually all shills for a sokaiya group that calls itself *Isogashii* (that means "busy" or "business," I think). So after scooping up the stock, Isogashi contacted DSC management and managed to extract a couple of million nuyen from DSC before selling off their stock holdings—for a profit, might add.

Now, some people still claim sokaiya outfits like Isogashi operate independently, with no ties to the Yakuza or other organized-crime outfits. But if that's true, answer me this: where did an independent group of scam artists get the cred to buy 15 percent of a major stock issue? That purchase cost more than 25 million nuyen. Even if the sokaiya bought on margin, they'd have to have ponied up 2.5 million to cover the order. Even with inflation and all that drek, 2.5 mil. isn't peanuts. Doesn't it seem likely that some sugar daddy ponied up the cred to back up the purchase—a sugar daddy called the *loca gumi* maybe?

• The Chromea Accountant

"It's All About Dollars and Sense"

• Natch, the Isogashii are a "profit center" for the Shotozum-gumi. In fact, the head honcho of the Isogashii is Toju Shotozum, Harzo's cousin. Doesn't everybody know that?

• Eye in the Shadows

• The sokaiya business is booming these days, too. After the establishment of the Draco Foundation, a lot of small-to-midsized corps got themselves a big influx of operating capital that sent their stock prices right through the roof. And that means big profit potential for sokaiya. But sokaiya that go after these firms are also dealing with corps that have become more powerful and influential almost overnight—corps that might decide to spend some of that newfound cash to rid themselves of a certain monkey on their backs.

• Wheezer

• Yep, down in San Francisco, a sokaiya outfit made a move on an independent outfit called Sunrise Software and started shacking them down. But before they knew it, Sunrise got snapped up whole by Denver-based Warpdrive Technologies, an up-and-coming baby corp with cred to burn. The sokaiya tried to put the squeeze on Warpdrive and get some extra cred out of the deal, but it seems that Warpdrive CEO Steve Ridgemont didn't like the deal and responded by hiring shadowrunners to track down every last one of that group and teach them a very pointed object lesson. Ridgemont definitely didn't make himself any friends among the San Francisco gumi, but Sunrise got left alone. Place your bets now on whether or not there will be a Yakuza reprisal against Warpdrive in Denver.

• Presidio

• Doubt it. The Denver gumi are too wrapped up in their own rockets and busy trying to grab hold of the slippery smuggling

rockets in the Free Zone to bother nacking off one of the area's major new corps. The Yakuza know that revenge doesn't improve the bottom line, and I hear buzz that most of those sokaiya got what they deserved for being stupid.

• Anzo

• I've been scanning this doc like the rest of you, and since my last post I've seen that both the Mafia and the yak go after businesses that Dunkelzahn invested in. Any clear winner yet? Are the Mob and the Yakuza winning? Did Dunkelzahn lose? Is the Draco Foundation able to take on these criminal organizations? What the drek is going on?

• CySky

• Whoa, settle down, CySky. There's no winner yet. But the war is still way too subtle to really figure out the score. Draco lost a lot when D died, but it has all of the Big D's government connections, corp connections, dragon connections, elf connections, probably "free spirit" connections, and—if the make-up of the Draco Foundation board is anything like what I scanned it to be—every metahuman connection in the book. And then there's that interesting little snadowrun played out in the Dunkelzahn portfolio area about the Big D leaving some stuff to a possible bigwig in the Triads. For all I know, the Draco Foundation controls both the Mafia and the Yakuza and this whole post is moot.

• DC Insider

• Or vice versa.

• Dragon Hater

"The only good wyrm is a dead wyrm."

RECRUITING PRACTICES

As you might expect of any traditional Japanese organization, the Yakuza maintain strictly defined membership qualifications. First off, *gaijin*—foreign barbarians—need not apply. If you aren't Japanese, you aren't worthy to shine a yak's shoes, as far as the oyabun are concerned. The Yakuza relented a bit when some of the major gumi spread to Korea and recruited Koreans. But that changed with the purges that created the Seoulpa Rings, and the Yakuza returned to its racial-purity policy. Some oyabun still point to the debacle with the Koreans as good reason not to change the status quo.

So need you even ask about metahumans? If a half-breed Japanese—half Japanese, half *gaijin*—isn't quite human, how do you think the Yakuza react to what they so coyly call a *kawaruhiro* ("changed person")? That's right. Metas—even pure-heritage Japanese metas—also need not apply.

• The prohibition against metahumans is especially strong in the Free State, where the Yakuza gumi have to worry about resistance groups like the October 25 Alliance and the Metahuman People's Army. The possibility of rebel infiltrators trying to get at the Japanacorps through the Yakuza is a very real danger, so it's not surprising that when it comes to recruitment and the loyalty of their kobun, the Bay Area yak outfits are even tighter than some gumi in the home islands.

• Bay Jewel

◉ The yaks don't seem to have a problem with hiring metahu-
mans, only with letting them join their little club. Yaks don't insist
that all of their runners meet the same standard they expect for a
kobun—if they did, they wouldn't have too many runners to hire.
(How many teams made up entirely of Japanese human shadow-
runners do you know?) Metahuman shadowrunners work for
the Yakuza as much as for any other organized crime outfit.

◉ Jazz

These arrogant and elitist attitudes are particularly ironic con-
sidering that the Yakuza historically recruited from the lowest ele-
ments of Japanese society, from the peasant classes and the
burakumin, the "untouchable" caste of Japan. In fact, Japanese
nobles considered the Yakuza lowly criminals and gangsters.

◉ Yeah, but the yaks figure that even the lowest Japanese noble
is still way up the ladder compared to a gaijin or kawarunite. They
may be scum, but they think they're better scum than everyone
else.

◉ DVBR

Traditionally, the gumi have been closed to women as well.
This is changing, but quite slowly—mainly because the Yakuza
need not heed public opinion. Some North American gumi have
allowed female kobun to join their organizations and a few even
have women in minor positions of power (one gumi contains a
female wakagashira-hosa). But the few women who do join the
ranks of the Yakuza must be at least twice as capable as their male
counterparts simply to attain half the respect given to their co-
workers.

◉ Echo that. Miko Isnikawa, the aforementioned wakagashira-
hosa of the Shotozumi-gumi in Seattle, is one colasitch who will do
whatever it takes to advance her position in the organization. I
think she has her eye on becoming the first female oyabun ever—
and she might even have the *cojones* to pull it off.

◉ ZootScot

THE NEW WAY

Not all the Yakuza are bound by the organization's tradition-
al prejudices. In fact, today's Yakuza includes a strong reform
movement—the so-called New Way—whose adherents are striv-
ing to maintain or revive the old Yakuza traditions of honor and
service to the community while cultivating a more modern atti-
tude toward women, metahumans and magic.

The strongest proponent of the New Way is Okido
Honjowara, head of the Nagato Combine and Honjowara-gumi in
New Jersey. Honjowara-sama speaks eloquently of the need for
the Yakuza to adapt to the modern demands of the Sixth World by
abandoning the foolish prejudices of the past and accepting
metahumans, women and anyone else who can contribute to the
betterment of the gumi. And more important, Honjowara-gumi
practices what its oyabun preaches by recruiting metahumans. As a
matter of fact, the oyabun's Praetorian bodyguard, the Green
Serpent Guard, are all elves—and powerful physical adepts as well.

The gumi within the Nagato Combine's sphere of influence
along the East Coast are beginning to come around to the idea of
the New Way, but the Pacific Rim gumi are still too conservative
to ever consider the idea. In my opinion, such resistance is short-
sighted and may cause the Yakuza to miss a historic opportunity.
The Yakuza can exert considerable influence over government
authorities, and so acceptance and practice of the New Way could
help end the tensions between Japanese and foreigners and
metahumans in San Francisco—and Japan, for that matter.

◉ Truth-in-advertising time. It's worth mentioning, onummers, that
Kanji is a Japanese elf. His "service" with SanFran's Karatsa-gumi
was little more than slavery. He's a big believer in Honjowara's
New Way because it would allow metas to rise to positions of
power in the Yakuza and receive fair and equal treatment. But
think his own experience tends to blind him to some of the realities
of the situation.

◉ Godot

◉ I have hidden nothing here—nothing. My race is irrelevant. My
support for Honjowara-sama's reforms simply stems from what
I believe is best for my people—*all* of my people. The Yakuza isn't
going to go away, my friend. Better a Yakuza that supports us
rather than enslaves us, neh?

◉ Kanji

NINJA

The ninja—silent stalker in black who uses magical powers to
carry out his secret work—is a legendary figure, and rumors about
the Yakuza using ninja as its agents to do its shadow work are as
old as the hills. But like most legends in the Sixth World, the
image of the ninja is only partially based on fact.

"Ninja" is a loaded word in the shadow-biz, much like "samu-
rai." A lot of people use it to describe anyone who wears black
and sneaks around a lot. I have heard people use the word to
describe elven commandos, UCAS SEALs, Sioux Wildcats and a
huge collection of various shadowrunners at various times. But
most people have never seen a real ninja and probably wouldn't
even know one if they did.

The original ninja were clans of mercenary assassins in feudal
Japan. These clans operated outside of the traditional, rigid power
structures of the time and represented a useful tool that Japanese
nobles could use to spy on their enemies and carry out the dirty
work.

Sound familiar? It should. The role that the ninja filled in ancient
Japan is pretty much the same niche that shadowrunners fill these
days. Shadowrunners operate outside the system and they are both
feared and romanticized by the ordinary folk. Runners do the dirty
work of today's corporate "lords"—and like the ninja, runners have
a strange kind of love/hate relationship with their corporate masters.

In many ways, shadowrunners are the modern inheritors of
the ninja tradition. But direct descendants of the ancient ninja sur-
vive as well—and they have their own place in the shadows.

The Evolving Ninja

The first ninja clans began to operate during the thirteenth
century in Japan's Iga and Koga mountains. For centuries the ninja

operated from strongholds in these mountains. Originally, the stealth of the ninja warriors earned them the name *shinobi*—“sneaker-in,” and their art became known as *shinobi-jutsu*.

The ninja clans reached the height of their influence during the Tokugawa era. Some historians claim that the ninja began to decline in the late nineteenth century, and that the last true ninja practiced their arts as commandos during World War II.

In the latter part of twentieth century, ninja characters began to appear in Japanese and American movies, comic books and television shows. Soon, a variety of modern “ninja societies” sprang up, led by self-proclaimed masters claiming to teach the ancient Art of Invisibility for self-defense rather than assassination. Many of these same “masters” offered up “ninja secrets” in books, tapes and lectures. Eventually the ninja fad passed, but the black-clad assassins remained a staple of action movies for years after.

The Awakening in 2011 sparked renewed interest in magical and esoteric traditions of all kinds—including ninjutsu—and led to a second ninja “revival.” Most of the new generation of ninja “masters” who came along during this time were at best honest martial arts teachers trying to re-create a tradition that had been dead for nearly sixty years; at worst, these so-called masters were outright con men and frauds. Within a short time, people began to catch on to the frauds and realize that learning any mystic art requires dedication and patience. Consequently, this ninja fad passed as well.

Interest in ninjutsu rose yet again in 2023, when the identification of physical adepts raised the possibility that many of the legendary ninja abilities might have been based on real magic. Soon, many physical adepts began to model their powers after the ninja pop-culture archetype.

• **ninja life imitates art loop:** some physical adepts who style themselves as ninja imitate the pajama-wearing guys from the vids and kiddie-flicks, which means that they go in for the head-wraps, swords and all of that jumping around drek. Most of the time it's more funny than frightening, but I have seen one or two self-styled “ninja” who were powerful enough adepts to make me worried about what matter how silly they decided to dress and act.

• **Archange!**

• **Authentic ninja do still exist:** Some of the clans from ancient Japan did die out in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; they simply went underground and continued to practice and pass on their traditions in secret as they had done for centuries. Occasionally they pulled a job to secure political favor or to keep their existence a secret, but mostly they waited for the time when their talents would be needed again. Now they're back and working for the Japanacorns. If a cora really wants you out of the way, they call on the ninja and you might as well start digging your own grave.

• **Kenjira**

• **What a total load of drek!** I can't believe anyone buys this stuff. It's like Archange said, ninja are just physical adepts who like to style themselves after the ninja they've seen on the vid.

• **Dinero**

• **Whether or not a magical tradition is really “ancient” doesn't really mean drek anyway, chummers.** If a bunch of physods decide to call themselves ninja and use that to train and focus their powers, it doesn't make them any less deadly than if they really do come from some ancient clan that's been hiding in the mountains for two hundred years.

• **Silicon Mage**

Clan Organization

The ancient ninja clans of Japan were organized into three ranks. The *genin* were the “agent-level” ninja who went out on missions and did the bulk of the work. *Chunin* were functionaries, sort of the middle managers of the ninja clans. The chunin arranged jobs and made sure that whatever needed to get done to keep everything running got done. The top-dog was the *jonin*, who led his clan much like an oyabun leads his gumi. The jonin had final say on who joined the clan and what jobs were taken or refused.

The ninja were unusually egalitarian for medieval Japan. In fact, they even allowed women into their ranks. Female ninja, known as *kunoichi*, were often especially effective when disguised as geisha, because few Japanese suspected a woman could be dangerous. Kunoichi would often carry poison-coated weapons disguised as decorative fans, hairpins or other hair ornaments.

• **That's a ninja tradition that's still around.** And many Japanese continue to underestimate the potential of female assassins, which gives such killers a definite edge. For example, the hit that took out Ryuchi Mifune, the CEO of Blue Lotus software in Osaka, was carried out by a kunoichi. Buzz on the street says the assassin researched Mifune's particular taste in prostitutes, then delivered the poison in a very effective (and probably painful) manner.

• **Red Ryder**

• **How do you know so much about this one, Ryder?** The Osaka Prefecture Police don't exactly hand out info like that, and their systems are tough to crack. The only other people who might know are the ones behind the hit.

• **Jaxon**

• **Yeah, or the ones who were supposed to be protecting Mifune at the time he was geeked.** Not your fault, Ryder. You can't protect a man from his own stupidity.

• **Flangfire**

The Oni-Do

The *Oni-Do*, the followers of the “Goblin Way,” are a ninja clan that successfully changed to fit the Sixth World. The clan is made up of *genin* who are all *kawaruhito*, specifically *oni* and *koborokuru*—the Japanese ork and dwarf metavariants—as well as trolls and even some elves.

The recruitment of metahumans may seem atypical for a Japanese organization, but it follows ninja tradition of recruiting from the lowest classes of Japanese society. And in modern Japan, no class is lower than the *oni*, who are considered demon abominations at worst or figures of pity at best. Like other *kawaruhito*, *oni* are deported to relocation camps and isolated from “normal” society.



It is said that the genin of the Oni-Do take some of the young kawaruhito from the relocation camps and into their own clan, where they are trained in the art of ninjutsu and taught the magical powers that are attributed to oni in Japanese mythology. Their martial prowess and natural strength makes the Oni-Do fearsome fighters, and their resemblance to traditional Japanese demons enhances the fear they create in their targets.

Like other ninja, the Oni-Do work as agents for their corporate daimyo.

❖ Wait a second, if the Japanese have got their kimonos all in a twist about metahumans, why would any Japanacorp hire these Oni-Do guys?

❖ Tongo

❖ First of all, Tongo, don't over-generalize. Saying that all of us Japanese are racists who hate metas is almost as bad as the Nippon uber alles types that say all metas are lower life forms. Secondly, the Japanacorps and the Yakuza have a history of letting metahumans do their dirty work for them, especially in places like San Francisco. Not to mention the fact that—though the corps would never admit it—the Oni-Do are scary. There's something

about being stalked by a "demon" that automatically terrifies people. (Imagine what it would be like to be hunted by a guy who's ten feet tall with goat horns and cloven hooves and you'll get an idea of what I'm talking about.) And more often than not, oni get the job done—and expediency often comes before personal prejudice.

❖ Ivul

❖ I'm sorry, but the image of a troll dressed in black pajamas doing acrobatic hand springs and cartwheels, seems more humorous than frightening to me.

❖ Chuck-Chuck Razool

❖ Don't laugh, omae. I tangled with these fraggers a couple years ago on a yak job. If they're not ninja, then they're the next best thing. I've never had anything as large as a troll sneak up behind me like that and nobody that big had any business being as fast as these pruzers were. If you've got to get into a fight with these Oni-Do slags, then shoot 'em from a good distance away. Get into hand-to-hand with them and you're toast.

❖ Da kaku

YAKUZA-CORPORATE RELATIONS

The Yakuza work closely with Japanese corporations, especially in San Francisco, where the local gumi and Japanacops jointly rule the city. For the most part, corps do not interfere in Yakuza activity as long as gumi operate within guidelines set by the corps. And in some cases, the corps may even provide the gumi with covert assistance when dealing with local law enforcement authorities. (The principle of corporate extraterritoriality often proves quite useful for this purpose: by declaring a Yakuza activity corporate business, a corp can legally bar even the authorities from interfering in a Yakuza operation.) In return, the local gumi provide valuable shadow resources for the Japanacops.

Relations between individual corps and gumi vary from one corp to another. For example, Mitsuhama maintains close ties with several major gumi in North America and Japan. Fuchi, on the other hand, tends to ignore the Yakuza, and Fuchi North America might as well be a gaijin for all its dealings with the Yakuza. Renraku and Yamatetsu fall somewhere in the middle: they keep a fairly tight lid on the local gumi but make use of them as need arises.

• The megacorps might be able to push the yaks about a bit, but the situation is reversed with the small corps and even some of the baby megas that don't belong to the Big Eight. With operations like the soka ya, the Yakuza can effectively run some of these corporations. In fact, plenty of smaller corps are virtually front organizations that the gumi use to launder money or supplement their income. The Yakuza don't get as involved in legit businesses as direct owners like the Mafia, but they are out there.

• *Civile*

• *Au contraire, bonhomme.* There are most definitely Yakuza involved directly in the control of corporations. Honjowara's Nagato Combine is made up of his gumi, several subordinate gumi, and the resources of Nagato Corporation—of which Honjowara is the chairman. Nagato is a legit corporation in every way—its chairman simply happens to be oyabun of the Honjowara. There are similar small, Yakuza-run corps all over the world.

• Monsieur Matrix
"Live Ya Network!"

• Not just small ones. Most of the Mitsuhama bigwigs are Yakuza. The corp's four major shareholders are an oyabun of powerful gumi in Japan. The yaks provided the seed money to get Mitsuhama started and are living proof of just how far a little legitimate investment can take you. What started out as a money-laundering operation for them now makes more cred than all of the gumi in the world put together.

• Ripper

• I still haven't seen any hard evidence to convince me that the people running Mitsuhama are yaks. If they are, then they hide their affiliations pretty friggin' well.

• Turner

• The Villers family that dominates Fuchi North America might not want to have too much to do with the yaks, but the same doesn't hold true for the other two-thirds of the company. The Nakatomi have worked with the Yakuza before in both North America and in Japan, and the Yamano aren't far behind them. With the balance of power in the corp shifting toward Richard Villers, you can plan on the other two factions calling in more shadow resources to do runs on their own corp. And you can bet they'll be getting plenty of those shadow resources from their Yakuza pals.

• Star-Watcher

The gumi's corporate relations have also enabled the Yakuza to become the most high-tech criminal syndicate in the world. Commonly, corps pay for Yakuza services with cutting-edge weapons and equipment, which a gumi can keep for itself or sell on the black market. Undoubtedly, many "stolen" or "lost" high-tech items are actually given to gumi every year.

• What Kanji says is true: the Yakuza have the sweetest techie toys in the biz. They get some of the latest stuff from the Japanacops and sometime pass those goodies on down the line to fixers and runners that they work with. The yaks already cornered the market on illegal computer tech and cyberdecks along the Pacific Rim. And even in places like New York a lot of the best sources for cyberdeck parts are yak connected.

• Bright Boy

• Maybe so, chummies, but don't trust a Yakuza deck to be worth more than the silicon it's made outta. The Japanacops aren't stupid, they give goodies to the yak knowing that a lot of them are going to "trickle down" to the streets sooner or later. That's why most of the electronics and deck they pass out are encoded with SASSys—Signature Aware Signal Suppression chips—that make the stuff useless against the "parent" corp's systems and operations.

So if you want your shiny new Yakuza-bought deck to work when you want it to, you're going to have to go through and pull and recode a lot of chips. More trouble than it's worth, if you ask me. Know who you're getting your gear from and check it out before you use it, or you could suddenly find your masking programs folding up on you just as you skate into a new system.

• Digital Dawg

• The yaks also go in big for cybermods, mostly because friendly corps often offer the gumi access to nice, clean corporate clinics and cyberdocs. As a result, Yakuza members often have top-line cyberimplants. Some of the younger kooun consider their cybermods symbols of their loyalty to their oyabun, and they take a lot of pride in them.

• Sato

THE TRIADS



I'm pleased to inform you all that my chummer Lei Kung, who sent us material on what was going down with Wuxing, Inc. and some of the late Dunke zahn's booty, is still alive and kicking. Lei managed to settle matters with the Triads in Hong Kong over one of the items acquired by his team, the Sons of Thunder. Given his recent dealings with them, I figured he'd be the perfect candidate to tell us about the Triads.

Despite the fact that they're (possibly) the biggest criminal organization in the world, no one's talked much about the Triads until lately. Their operations are less well known to the Citizen on the Street than those of the Mafia and the Yakuza, but their influence in North America is increasing now that they've pretty much secured their hold on the "Golden Triangle" region of Southeast Asia. Triad operations in Seattle and California are starting to get attention, and the Chinese syndicates are becoming important players in San Francisco's underground resistance movement. They also have a lot of pull here in the Denver area through Chinatown, and I predict that Triad interest in NA will increase once they get all their ducks in a row. So pay attention to what Lei Kung says in this file, chummers, 'cause you might be needing this intel real soon now.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 January 2058 at 14:56:09 (EST)

I knew I'd regret that Hong Kong assignment. As soon as I heard the words "great dragon," I should've walked away. But what can I say? I got curious. And it wasn't a total loss—I got paid, and I learned some things I never expected to learn. Best of all, I survived in spite of what I learned ... or maybe because of it, though that thought makes me less than comfy. It suggests that the Triads let me live for some reason I can't guess at, even though I can tell the outside world more about them than most "foreign devils" ever get to know. Or maybe they want me to tell. Which might suggest that the following post is selective information—not total bulldrek, because I'd spot it, but carefully chosen bits of the truth. Or maybe what I know just isn't vital enough in their book to make silencing me worth their trouble.

I never was any good at guessing games. So here goes nothing—or something—or everything.

The Triads are Chinese crime syndicates that control major criminal activities—smuggling and vice especially—in the so-called Golden Triangle of Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. Over the past several decades, the Triads have started to make inroads in North America. The influence of the Tongs (the name by which the Triads are commonly called in NA) is strongest on the West Coast, but they've spread well beyond that region.

I've made a living as a runner in Hong Kong for longer than I care to admit, and I've learned a lot about the Triads—obviously, because I'm still here to tell you about it. If you don't learn Triad ways and how to work within them in Hong Kong, you won't last a week in this burg. The Corporate Council may rule the sunny parts of Hong Kong, but the Triads rule the shadows. So long as you acknowledge that and do things their way, you can get by.

HISTORY

The history of the Triads is brief and easy to find. I took this summary of it off the public datanets, cleaned it up a bit and added my own two nuyen here and there. (Don't skim over the next few paragraphs, people; history matters when you're dealing with tradition-steeped folks like Triad members.) Like many other criminal organizations, the Triads started out as an underground movement dedicated to overthrowing the colonial rulers of their homeland. For the Mafia, the original enemy was the French in Sicily; for the Triads, the Europeans in China. The Triads devoted themselves to deposing what they considered the corrupt Manchu dynasty (which had allowed Westerners to tromp all over the Chinese) in order to restore the Ming dynasty in its place. Even today, some Triad societies keep a few holdovers of that goal in their oaths and rituals.

❖ Where does the name "Triad" come from?

❖ Wilby

❖ From the society's emblem; a triangle, the sides of which represent heaven, earth and man. That ties in with the names Iko "Three United Association" and "Heaven and Earth Association" that some of the Triads use.

❖ One

The Manchu came from Manchuria, a country north of China. You can look it up on the old flat maps you sometimes find in libraries. The Manchu took Beijing by force and established their dynasty in 1674, and the Chinese people understandably saw them as foreign interlopers. Resentment hardened into the seeds of rebellion when Kiang Hsi, the second Manchu emperor, indulged in a piece of remarkable political stupidity. In the thirteenth year of his reign, Hsi recruited a monastery of fighting monks to put down a rebellion in Fukien. As a reward, the monastery received some imperial power. But soon the emperor began to see the monks as a threat, and sent an army to suppress them. Only five monks survived the purge; they founded five monasteries and five secret societies dedicated to overthrowing the Manchu, or Ch'ing, dynasty. Once finished with that bit of unpleasantness, they intended to restore the previous Ming dynasty, whose rule they had come to recall as a golden age for China. (Spirits know whether it really was or not, but misty memories of better times have no logic.) The fighting monks' motto was "Crush the Ch'ing, establish the Ming." Catchy, isn't it?

The family name of the Ming emperors was Hung, and their color was red. So the secret societies adopted the name "Hung Mun" and incorporated the color red into various symbols and titles. The Hung Mun trained their people in martial arts and developed secret codes to frustrate the emperor's spies. Many Chinese saw the Hung Mun as protectors of the people against a repressive and sometimes vicious imperial regime, much as the Yakuza in Japan provided commoners with justice-for-hire under the rule of the daimyo. And, in another Yakuza parallel, the secrecy and fighting skills eventually lent themselves just as well to criminal purposes as political ones.

The five secret societies played roles in several rebellions against the Manchus: the White Lotus Society rebellion in the 1790s; the "Cudgels" uprising in Kwangsi province, 1847 to 1850; and Hung Hsiu Chuan's Kwangsi-based rebellion of 1851–1865. The Boxer Rebellion, which erupted in Beijing in 1896 (yes, that's the famous one you've actually heard of once or twice), involved the White Lotus Society as well as two other Triads: the Big Swords and the Red Fists. Sun Yat Sen, the founder of Republican China, allied himself with the Hsing Chung Triad society in his 1906 rebellion.

❖ Well, thank the Ghost in the Machine for the timely information. I can rest easier now, knowing who was buddy-buddy with whom in the 1790s. I'll feel safer on the streets knowing that when a Triad gang gets in my way, I can escape a nasty beating or a swift death just by shouting out, "You were right to rebel in Kwang province—nice going, boys!" Can we get something useful here?

❖ Last Chance

❖ Know your enemy, chumley. Ever heard that one? You should have—we've said it here often enough. Tradition-based organizations like gangs and organized crime families will find your knowledge of their history—especially their victories—an opening for discussion, maybe even friendship. Learning their history teaches you something useful about their ways and their motives.

❖ The Librarian

Yeah, but knowing too much can get you geeked. Walk the fine line carefully, chummers.

Starley

"I didn't mean it..."

The Manchus were overthrown in 1911, but by then there were no Mings left to restore. The Nationalist government that came to power in 1927 in Nanking was headed by Chiang Kai Shek, a known killer and criminal member of the Shanghai Green Gang. The Triads took over the government of southern China and fought the Communists for total control. The Western powers often aided the Triads, apparently preferring China to be run by criminals than "commies."

The enemy of my enemy is my friend... the classic modus operandi of governments, gangs and criminal organizations

The Librarian

When the Japanese invaded major Chinese cities in World War II, the Triads offered to work for them. In Hong Kong, the Triads ran criminal enterprises for the Japanese. The Japanese united the gangs under an association called the *Hing Ah Kee Kwan* (the Asia Flourishing Organization—another example of the Japanese talent for using pretty words to hide ugly realities). The Japanese lords of Hong Kong used Chinese gangsters—which is what the Triads had pretty much become, by this time—to help police local residents and to suppress anti-Japanese activity.

When Mao Tse Tung's Communists triumphed over the Nationalist government in 1949, Triad nationalists scattered to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Thailand, San Francisco, Vancouver and Australia. The Communists suppressed Triads on the mainland, executing and imprisoning anyone associated with them. As you might expect, the Triads proceeded to centralize their power in Hong Kong and Taiwan—hotbeds of Asian free enterprise and therefore awash in cash—as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia and along the Pacific Rim.

The Triads first came to North America in the nineteenth century with Chinese immigrant workers who settled in California. These insular Chinese enclaves included some Triad members, who established the first Tongs in America to serve the needs of the Chinese population. (And as a power base, but I'll get to that later on. A real forward-thinking bunch, the Triads.) In the early twentieth century, Tong operations in Chinatowns across the United States attracted the interest of white patrons who liked to burn in Tong-run establishments, particularly as opium, gambling and vice dens became popular recreations for the bored and well-to-do (sounds familiar, doesn't it?).

But the Triads didn't really make a big splash in the Sixth World until the shift of power in Hong Kong and the violent dissolution of the Chinese government. The Triads strongly backed the Hong Kong freedom movement that led to the island's declaration of independence in 2015, less than twenty years after the United Kingdom had returned its former colony to Chinese control. The creation of the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Enclave gave the Triads their tightest grip ever over the island, and to this day Hong Kong remains the stronghold of the Triad powers.

The other big boost for the Triads came with the Awakening. Even before 2011, the Triads had favored mystical traditions and rituals, some of them dating back to ancient China. When the world's magic woke up, the Triads were the first major crime syndicate to have a real grasp of this unknown new force and to use it in their operations. That magical advantage gave the Triads a death grip on the action in the Golden Triangle and China, and that same magic lets them keep it. Apart from sheer numbers, magical power is probably the Triad's biggest edge over rival organizations. (Okay, boys, how'm I doing so far? Just in case anyone from HK is watching. ...)

The magical power of the Triads is seriously overestimated. It's gotta be. Le Kung and others talk like they're the Chinese equivalent of the Ghost Dancers. But if they have that kind of mojo, why didn't they just take over China instead of letting the warlords fight over the carcass?

D. Bunker

Who says they want to rule the country? As it is, the political situation in China is a gold mine for the Triads, it's made them the numero uno syndicate in the region. Sounds like things worked out just like the Triads wanted it to.

Cho

Not to mention that the Ghost Dancers were unified by Howling Coyote. The Triads are nowhere near unified. Maybe they'd have Ghost-Dance-type mojo if they all got together, but that's about as likely as me winning the next presidential election.

Winger

The Triads were implicated in the fall of China's Communist government in 2019, though (as usual) no one can prove anything. The collapse of the government in Beijing split China into warring provinces, each under the control of a local warlord, junta or splinter government that claimed to be the true and rightful ruler of China. Years of violent civil war have ground down by now to border skirmishes and bush wars between the major provinces, with an occasional new warlord breaking away from one of the larger dominions and setting himself up in the petty-dictator biz.

I heard that the Chinese government's fall was engineered by the great dragon Lung. He definitely dislikes Communism and has been linked to the Triads in the past. Whether or not things worked out like the dragon planned, I have no idea, but I'd bet the answer's yes if Lung was involved.

Chan

The constant conflict between the provinces and central authority too weak to nail so much as a horsefly created an environment tailor-made for the Triads to move back to the mainland and set up a hugely successful black market. They made mountains of credit selling weapons, food, medical supplies and other scarce goods to all the different provinces and factions. In the process, many of the Triads became "patrons" of one faction or another; sometimes, these proxies play out violent conflicts



between Triads that are having a ... difference of opinion. Inter-Triad wars are mostly confined to the mainland, because messing up a place that's already gone to hell in the proverbial hand basket is the least disruptive to business.

❖ Not always. Everything is interconnected these days, so a Triad operation to disrupt a rival gang's supply lines to some province in China can set off street fights as far away as San Francisco or Seattle, where some of those supplies originate. If you want to take out a weed, you pull it up at the roots.

❖ Fando

With a prosperous environment in China and their power in the surrounding nations mostly secured, the Triads started aggressively expanding operations in North America and elsewhere. Established criminal syndicates like the Mafia and the yakuza are fighting the Triads for every inch of ground (so to speak), but so far haven't been able to stop them from making inroads. And I very much doubt they ever will.

❖ Back home in New York, the Large Circle League is causing trouble with the Toki-gumi. The Toki are connected with the Hanjowara gumi, which may have to back them up. A couple of the larger Seattle Triads—the Eighty-Eights and the Yellow Lotus—are also joining forces to take over gambling operations in the Seattle Coliseum from the Shotozumi-gumi. Everybody duck and cover—things could get messy.

❖ Reid

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

Whenever the trideo runs one of its so-called exposés of the Triads, it shows them as a monolithic organization of stereotypically inscrutable Chinese. Time to play “what’s wrong with this picture”—and the answer is, a lot. In fact, the Triad societies are even less centralized than the Yakuza, and they certainly have no central authority to match the Mafia’s Commission. Individual Triad societies have their own turf and they war with neighbors and rivals, rarely or incessantly, depending on the specific societies involved.

Each Triad may have a headquarters in Hong Kong, but that leadership includes no Mafia-style “boss of bosses” or anyone else who holds much overall power. The Hong Kong lodges don’t control their branches, or even local members, anywhere near so tightly. The Hong Kong lodge is in charge of rituals and the Triad’s image as a whole. The rest they pretty much leave up to local Triad bosses to handle.

❖ That’s true as long as the local Shan Chu is handling things well. If there’s trouble, he’ll have to answer to someone higher up back in Hong Kong or Singapore. Then the heads start rolling (sometimes literally).

❖ Tango

No one within the organization—if I can use that word to describe something so loose and anarchic—calls it a “Triad.” Different societies, just like Mafia regimes and Yakuza gumi, call

themselves by different names, such as the Octagon, the Yellow Lotus, the Eighty-Eights, to name a few of the more notorious. They also have different names for the Triad “movement” as a whole: *Hung Mun* (Hung League), *Sam Hop Wui* (Three United Association), *Tin Tei Wui* (Heaven and Earth Association) and others. Chinese-speaking nonmembers sometimes call the Triads *Hak Sh'e Wui* (Black Society Association). If you hear any of these names, you know that the person speaking is talking about a Triad.

Of the hundred or more different Triads that exist, twenty or so have territories that cover more than one country. In North America, Triads have traditionally had the strongest footholds in New York City, San Francisco (no surprise there, with the city’s large and famous Chinatown), Denver, Los Angeles and Houston. Since the late 2030s, however, the Triads have been slowly but surely gaining influence in Seattle.

An official police estimate from 2056 states that in Hong Kong, the stronghold of the Triads, *one in six* residents are Triad members. Just a little fact to keep in mind if you plan on Hong Kong as your next vacation spot.

❖ What? That can’t be right.

❖ Serwach

❖ Lei’s right about those figures coming from the cops in Hong Kong. Maybe they have a reason for exaggerating the Triad threat, but it doesn’t seem likely. I’ve been to Hong Kong—I believe that number.

Anyway, it makes sense. Even in North America the Triads go in for widespread recruiting—often by coercion, and almost exclusively in Chinese speaking areas (i.e., Chinatowns). If you go into the depths of San Fran’s Chinatown, for example—in those parts where families live who’ve been in NA for half a dozen generations and still speak nothing but Cantonese—don’t be too surprised to find a one-in-six membership rate there, too.

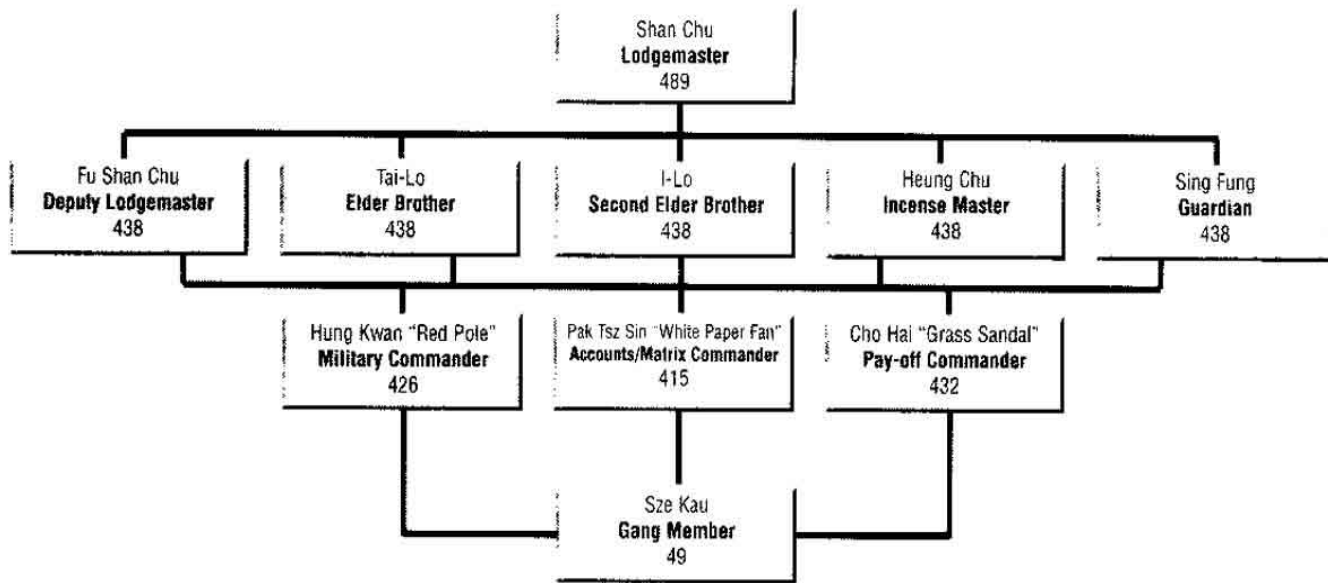
❖ Chinc Do!

BY THE NUMBERS

The ranks within a Triad have names and numbers, whose mystical significance is derived from Chinese numerology of the Buddhist and Taoist traditions. The numbers are part of the elaborate codes the Triads use to communicate. (Why they’ve left me alive to spill this—as they must have known I would—is one of the things that keeps me up at night. But here’s the paydata anyway. And if anyone out there wants to pay me back with a few creative remedies for insomnia, I’ll take ‘em.)

Within a Triad—and within each branch of a really large Triad like the Yellow Lotus—the head figure is called the *Shan Chu*, or Lodgemaster. His number is 489. The Shan Chu is the boss of the gang, and his word is law. Like most major organized crime bosses, the Shan Chu tends to be isolated from day-to-day operations and is often a “humble businessman” in the local community. Every Shan Chu appears to be wrapped in a mystical aura, and most people assume he has great magical power. (Most of them are too much in awe of him to test that belief, so the “mystic aura” is a neat trick whether or not the Shan Chu has real magic.)

THE TRIAD ORGANIZATION



• Quite a few Shan Chu these days actually are magicians, with more showing up all the time. Plenty of the legends of Lodgemasters with mystical power are based in fact.

• Slider

• Not as many as you'd think. Slider. Most magicians high up in the ranks of a Triad are actually Incense Masters, who act as magical advisors and aides to the Lodgemaster. A lot of the mojo backing up the Lodgemasters comes from spirits and spells given to them by the Incense Master.

• HK-Kid

The second level of ranks, numbered 438, includes the *Fu Shan Chu*, or Deputy Lodgemaster; the *Tai-Lo* (Elder Brother); and the sub-boss, the *I-Lo* (Second Elder Brother). These men can impose death sentences on members and others who cross the Triad. Other 438 ranks are the Incense Master, or *Heung Chu*, and the Guardian (*Sing Fung*). The *Heung Chu* is the spiritual master; he oversees rituals, oaths and new membership. These days the Incense Master is usually a mage who follows the unique Triad magical path. The *Sing Fung* assists the Incense Master and also establishes new subgroups of the Triad, almost like a franchise officer in a corp.

The military commander for the Triad's "soldiers" is called the *Hung Kwan*, or Red Pole, and his number is 426. The Red Pole protects gang territory and takes over new turf from other gangs. Plenty of these are physical adepts and chi masters, even though the Red Pole himself may simply supply the tactical brain behind the scenes. In sweet and simple terms, that kind of combat talent means that if a Triad wants you dead, start ordering garlands for your funeral. Your friends and family will need them pretty soon.

The financial and business advisor is the *Pak Tsz Sin*, or White Paper Fan number 415. He keeps the books and, nowadays, oversees the Triad's various Matrix needs. The *Cho Hai* (Grass Sandal or Messenger, number 432) works with payoff victims, other branches of the Triad and other gangs.

Below these dignitaries, each Triad takes care of its own accounting, finance, money laundering, recruiting, social events, profitable activities (like drugs, prostitution, extortion and gambling), punishment and revenge, communications, liaisons between other branches of the Triad, liaisons with other criminal syndicates, envoys to Hong Kong lodges, martial arts and weapons training, benefits to widows and wives of jailed or dead members and even medical coverage for members of the Triad. Sort of a full-service Mob, if you catch my drift.

The lowest level, the common gang member, is called a *Sze Kau*, number 49. Common gangers are pretty much like any other Mob foot soldier, except for their fanatical devotion to their Triad. Mafia and Yakuza foot soldiers are loyal because loyalty is the smart move, but most of them have a breaking point. *Sze Kau* will kill or die without question at the command of the Lodgemaster or his officers, and they fear the Triad's retribution more than death itself.

• With the oaths these guys have to swear and all that mystical drux, I'm not surprised.

• Zelda

The Triads have held on to a lot of elements from the days when the members of the Hung Mun had to keep their existence hidden from imperial spies. The numbered ranks are just one



example, Triad members also communicate with each other through secret hand signs and code words, or at times by using secret orientations of tea cups and a tea pot. Two Triad members can carry on an entire conversation in a room full of outsiders without anyone else knowing that anything is going on. (And no, I can't give you a little list of hands signs with accompanying translations. If I could, I'd likely be a dead man. *That secret I'm sure they'd keep.*)

Because of their past, the Triads are especially paranoid about spies and infiltrators. They deal brutally and efficiently with any undercover agents or spies they discover, usually sending the parts back to the spy's employer as a warning.

THE MARKETS

In Triad strongholds like Hong Kong and China, there likely isn't a criminal operation worth mentioning that the Triads don't run. Individual Triads might war over a particular market or play power games with some of the Chinese warlords, but outside syndicates are not welcome. Foreign devils, you know. Just as they tried to oust the Manchu "interlopers" all those years ago, today's Triads band together against any attempts by the Yakuza or the Mafia to move in on their territory.

In Seattle, the Triads largely concentrate on a few pieces of the organized crime marketplace. Protection and extortion are their biggest moneymakers, with smuggling and drug- and chip-stealing coming in a close second. Elsewhere in North America, they control traditionally Asian forms of gambling. In Seattle and elsewhere on the West Coast, the Yakuza run the mahjong parlors—but expect that to change in the near future. The larger Seattle Triads are joining forces to take back what they see as theirs by right. They're not real fond of the Japanese in general, which only gives them added reason to take on this major competitor.

- Expect to see the gutters running red with Triad blood. The yaks aren't going to stand by and watch while the Triads pick away at their market share. Bet on that (but not through a Triad bookie, *grin*).
- nskp

Protection rackets are the biggest Triad cash cow in North America. Most shop owners and businesses in any Chinatown pay Triad squeezers to keep their establishments open and running. Of course, it's not just the local Chinese businessmen who need to worry about Triad enforcers these days. Plenty of Triads are extending their protection rackets beyond Chinatown in cities where their influence is strong enough. They hit up outside businesses for protection money with just as much enthusiasm as they hit Chinese-owned targets; occasionally, their zeal touches off gang wars when they march into someone else's territory and plant the Triad flag.

Unlike a lot of the other syndicates, the Triads actually offer some security for the money they extort. (I suppose this gives them a certain "honor among thieves" cachet.) Anyone, especially an outsider, foolish enough to mess with a Triad-protected business usually finds himself serving as a brutally messy example to others. The Triads take the business of punishment seriously; no one ever crosses them twice.

• The Triads are very big on "examples," and they do it well. Triad hitlers and legbreakers are admired, if you can call it that, for their ability to torture, maim and kill in some of the most imaginative ways known to man. They're not as efficient as some of the silent stalkers that leave no traces—after all, the Triad wants everyone to know who did it— but, in a way, that almost makes them more frightening.

- Blace

Smuggling is another major Triad operation, in North America and abroad. As long as there's a profit in it, various Triads will smuggle just about everything under the sun from Point A to Point B. A lot of goods get sent through the pipeline to China, where the black market swallows up whatever the Triads feed it and then cries out for more. Weapons are popular, especially mil-spec gear that "fell off the back of a panzer" somewhere along the line. The Triads also smuggle food, medical supplies, art, pornography, electronics and other contraband all over the world. Rumor has it they were even smuggling food and blankets into the Chicago Containment Zone, though I can't vouch for the truth of that one. Can't say it would surprise me, though. They're stretching their tentacles everywhere these days.

By far the most profitable contraband items are illegal drugs and chips. The Triads run a thriving opium and heroin trade in the Golden Triangle, where BTL chips and the tech to use them are hard to come by. Opium plantations have sprung up in isolated areas all across war-torn China, where the Triads raise their crops and chemically tinker with the finished product in laboratories more secure than the head office at the Renraku Arcology. Not surprisingly, Triad opium is more potent than the ancient Chinese ever dreamed possible. Quit a few local warlords "subsidize" this opium farming in exchange for a cut of the take, which means that plenty of opium fields are protected by military forces armed with the best gear the Triad can buy, smuggle or steal. (There's nothing quite like a shared public/private-sector enterprise, now is there?)

Trade in BTLs is becoming a growth industry for the Triads; they've got their Hong Kong and Singapore beetle shops knocking out chips like they're going out of style. Some get sold in Hong Kong, but most end up on the streets of North America and Europe, where they turn the Triads a nice profit.

• HK beetles are pretty cheap. Not as good as the stuff you can get from yak sources, but they cost less, and plenty of chipheads don't frogging care anymore so long as they have something to pug into their heads. They don't care that a lot of HK chips have less-than-perfect encoding that may blow their brains out in one shot instead of the usual nice, slow neural degradation. Frag, for all I know, some of them prefer it that way.

Anyway, the cheap "kong chips" are starting to edge out yak and Mafia BTLs on the streets, and neither syndicate is very pleased about that. Odds are they'll do what they can to limit the flow of Triad chips into North American metropolises, probably by encouraging stronger import restrictions and squeezing off any smuggling connections they don't personally control.

- Rat Tail

Gambling and other "vices" are a new market for the North American Triads. This stuff's old hat for the boys back home, where the Triads own illegal gambling and prostitution, but in North America the Triads are fighting for turf from entrenched Yakuza and Mafia syndicates and even the Seoulpa Rings. Being the can-do folks that they are, the Triads have been using a wide variety of scare tactics: the short list includes roughing up customers, kidnapping and beating "entertainers," and generally creating a hostile working and playing environment to force their rivals out of the business. Once they manage that, they can move in and take over.

❶ That's stupid. Tactics like that'll just lead to Mob wars as the other syndicates strike back to protect their people. Nobody's going to do business under those conditions.

❶ Talbot

❶ Exactly, chummer. Think about it. The Triads aren't doing business in those areas—their rivals are. Who do you think gets hurt worse by the interruption of "business as usual"? The Triads figure they have the numbers over the other guy, plus they've got fragging near nothing to lose. So maybe the other guy will give up a piece of his action just to avoid an all-out war that might snuff everything down.

❶ Chiba Barb

❶ What's this drek I hear about some of the Triads being offshoots—"security arms" or private armies—for some Chinese corporations?

❶ Flash

❶ Just that, Drek.

❶ Truman

❶ Maybe not. I've heard the same thing. The question is, what to make of it? Are the Triads we're talking about here—the Ocragori, for example—Chinese corp security forces pretending to be Triads, or have some Chinese corps hired the Triads to keep them "on retainer"? Or have corp assets infiltrated and suborned some of the Triads? Could be any of these, could be something else.

Most folks have heard by now that Wuxing, the new "big brother" of the Chinese/HK corps, is supposed to have ties with the Triads. I've heard the same about Tan-Tien, Inc., but so far I've seen no evidence either way.

❶ Argent

❶ It's also possible that some Triads have gone legit—at least partly—by investing some of their money in a corp or start-up company. All the other crime outfits do it, so why not them? Maybe it's not the Triads working for the Chinese corps—maybe the Triads own some of those corps.

❶ Spam@spam.spam.spamnet.com

❶ Frag—if Wuxing and the local Triads are working together, that puts a whole nother spin on Lei-Kung's investigation that he post-

ed in the *Dunkelzahn's Secrets* file. That would mean the two are working toward the same goal instead of being rivals.

❶ Lee

❶ Maybe, maybe not. Even if Wuxing is working with a Triad, it's not *the* Triad. There are lots of Triads, so there might be others out there fighting against them on all levels.

❶ China Doll

PERSONNEL

Estimates of the number of people working for the Triads would be total guesswork on my part, so I'm not going to bother giving them. All you need to know is, the Triads are *big*. From what little I do know, there may be more Triad members in Hong Kong alone than initiated mafiosi and kobun in all of North America.

❶ Of course. Hong Kong also has just about the highest population density of any place on Earth. That throws the curve off a bit, especially if you assume that the HK heat is right about one-sixth of the population being Triad members.

❶ Digits

Compared to their brothers in crime among the Mafia and the yaks, the Triads are positively enlightened when it comes to women and metas. They've got metahumans of every race among them: they care that a Triad candidate be Chinese, but don't give much of a drek about him being human. In North America, even the Chinese-only mentality has loosened up somewhat (like I said they're a forward-thinking bunch); some Triads include Thai, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Filipino and even Anglo members.

❶ In some cases, the Triads use their "enlightened" attitude toward metahumans to their advantage. They approach distracted metahumans who can't join organizations like the Mafia and the Yakuza and recruit them in their own neighborhoods. It gives the Triads a lot of pull in mostly metahuman neighborhoods and they're starting to push out the all-human gangs who've been running rackets in those places. Can't say I like it much. Give me good old-fashioned racism, rotten as it is, any old day. But the Triads using their own brand of it to get people to exploit their own kind seems even worse.

❶ Tuskadero

❶ The Triads are still strongest in the Chinese enclaves of Chinatowns of the major metropolises. Local folks there are tight, they never betray Triad operations to outsiders, even if the Triads are shaking them down. In fact, they've got a name for people who talk to the outside authorities—they call them *non chiew*.

❶ Lee

❶ Is my Chinese translator prog fragged? They call the bananas? Why?

❶ Bung

- You know, chummer: yellow on the outside, white on the inside.
- See.

The Triads admit women to their ranks, though women aren't real likely to rise to positions of power. Sometimes they manage it, though: over the past few decades, some women have worked their way pretty far up the ladder in some Triads. One of them's actually a Lodgemistress: Hsu Tai, of the White Crane Triad. By all accounts she's a formidable woman and a powerful sorceress. Not anyone you'd want to meet in a dark alley—or anywhere else, for that matter. Actually, a fair number of Triad magicians are female. The Talent doesn't discriminate, and people who've got it tend to go far regardless of their gender. The many different oaths and initiations of the Triads take on additional significance for magicians, who treat them with almost religious reverence.

- No surprise—some societies are initiatory magical groups.
- For.

• To the best of my knowledge, such groups are relatively rare in North America (the key word being "relatively"). Things are very different—and very strange—in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland. We're talking serious magic use—from "schools" and "traditions" you just don't see in North America. Fraggging scary stuff. My big worry is that some of the local Triads will import talent from Hong Kong someday soon, or that the HK Triads will decide they want a little more direct control over their North American cousins. That'd put the magical rat among the mundane pigeons. Fraggging sure.

- The.

• Bularek on this static about "unknown" schools and traditions. He'd such things, chummer. Magic's magic. Any distinctions—like between hermetic and shamanic—reflects the way (meta)humanity looks at the world; they've got nothing to do with the nature of magic itself.

- Tomtom.

• Let's go visit HK Tomtom, and see if you still feel that way when you get back. If you get back.

- Cool.

Unlike most criminal syndicates, the Triads embraced the Awakening. Some folks say they were waiting for it, and they may be right (in some sense, anyway). Magic is part and parcel of Triad traditions and operations: they've got more magicians working for them than any other syndicate in the world. This wholesale acceptance of magic leads to its own strange prejudices, like the taboo in lots of Triads against cyberware. (But not all of them, so don't anybody go thinking you can successfully take on a Triad if you just have enough wizzer chrome. Lots of them have chrome too, and by the time you find that out, it'll be way too fraggging late. But I digress.)

In a fair number of Triads, conservative Heung Chu often express the opinion that adding metal to the meat creates a terrible imbalance in the person's ch'i or between their yin and their yang that is unhealthy at best, and morally wrong at worst. I've personally seen at least one Incense Master look at a razorboy like he was lower than a slu, or some cripple not worth the effort of pitying. However, the anticyber attitude lightens up further down the food chain. Triad soldiers often use truckloads of cyber and all kinds of implants: most low-level grunts have about as much cyberware as you'd expect from a Mafia wiseguy or a kobun. The difference is, folks who expect to advance very far in a traditionalist Triad had better be right off God's factory floor, with as few mods as possible. So far, the most influential Lodgemasters are still either plain-vanilla or else have very few, very well-concealed implants.

• That explains something I've been wondering about. Given that kind of bias against cyberware, what's the best way for a soldier to survive and advance in a group as violent as a Triad without getting any implants or being a spell-singer? Be a physical adept, that's what. The upper ranks of the Triads are crawling with physads (so to speak) and people rumored to be physads. Like Cho said about Triad mages, some of these adepts have really weird wizzer powers. They're scary enough to frighten me, and I don't scare easy.

- Johnny Zen.

• Echo that. Hai Feng, the Lodgemaster of the White Lotus Association in Denver, is a master of crane-style kung fu and has got to be a physical adept, probably an initiate. He's fifty years old. He's a doer, but fitter than men half his age. I once saw him kick a heavy security door right off its hinges. Just imagine what a kick like that would have done to a body.

- Connor.

INITIATION

Before I tell you what I know about Triad initiations, a warning: my intel is about six or seven years out of date. (This stuff I did *not* get from my recent trip to Hong Kong, in case anyone was wondering—which may explain why I'm still breathing. Man, I hate it when big-time crime bosses play nice. Makes me wonder what they're getting from me that I don't know I've given them.) It's true that a tradition-bound outfit like the Triads doesn't change much, but according to my info, to pass yourself off as a Triad member is an invitation to a very unpleasant death. So much for the disclaimer—here's the data.

A traditional Triad initiation for the lowest rank—Sze Kau—lasts three days and nights and takes place in a lodge operated by the society. It includes a whole lot of symbolic drek, more than I care to talk about in-depth (besides which, I'd run over my space allotment and my good friend Cap C would tear a nice strip out of my hide): flags, signs, special foods, incense, utensils, even a kind of origami (paper folding). Every single thing in the ritual has some kind of mystical significance according to a complex system of correspondences and symbols. Even societies that don't do the

whole three-day-three-night trip demand that the candidate come back to the lodge three days after the initial ceremony for "follow-up" rituals.

The show goes roughly like this. The candidate enters the lodge through the eastern door and walks past a bunch of flags and banners covered with symbols. Then he faces the Heaven and Earth Circle, a hoop with paper "teeth" attached to it. As two members hold the hoop, the candidate kneels on his right knee and climbs through the hoop, left leg first. This act symbolizes rebirth—the candidate's old life ends, and a new one begins.

Then the candidate reaches the Fiery Pit, where he has to walk across some burning joss paper (some kind of Hell imagery is my guess).

Finally the candidate kneels in front of an altar, surrounded by Triad members, and swears oaths. Lots of oaths—thirty-six, to be precise. The syntax of these oaths is very much the same, "I won't [some transgression], or else I'll suffer [some horrific punishment]." Many of the punishments involve being flayed alive or dying the death of a thousand sword cuts.

Some oaths are standard oaths of secrecy: "I will never reveal the secrets of my initiation to anyone, even for money." Some get kind of flaky. My personal favorite is "If any of my sworn brothers has committed a terrible offense, I will not inform on them to the government to obtain a reward." That one's a throwback to the old resistance-fighter days for sure. The candidate also has to swear to keep his mitts off other members' spouses, concubines and small children; I don't even want to go where that one might take me (if I thought about it too hard).

After the requisite swearing-in babble, the initiator burns a piece of paper with all thirty-six oaths written on it, along with the name and address of the candidate. The ashes are dissolved in a mixture of cinnabar (a mercury-based pigment, quite toxic), sugar and wine. Then a member cuts the head off a chicken. While the blood drips into the cinnabar-sugar-wine mixture, another member warns the candidate. "After joining the Hung Mun, remain loyal and faithful. The treacherous will die like this rooster."

The candidate kneels and holds up one hand—left for males, right for females. The Incense Master pricks the candidate's middle finger with a silver needle, then dips the bleeding finger in the cinnabar mixture. The Incense Master then has the candidate repeat another oath: "The silver brings blood from the finger. Do not reveal our secrets to others. If any secrets are disclosed, blood will be shed from the five holes of your body." The candidate sucks the blood from his finger and announces, "It is sweet." Now he's a Sze Kau, a grunt for the Triad.

Most Triad societies also have ranks of initiation somewhat like a magical group, each with its own symbolic number and rituals. The number for the lowest rank is 49—symbolic because 4 times 9 is 36, which matches the number of oaths sworn. Clever, no? As to initiation rites for the higher ranks, I don't know a thing and I don't want to know a thing. Anyone wants to find that out, do your own research (and may you survive to tell the tale). Me, I've spilled enough of my guts on a potentially dangerous subject. So take what I've told you and use it wisely if you can. I'm going to go try my fifteenth insomnia-bearing strategy and hope to hell

this one works. Because if I watch many more of those 3 a.m. infomercials, I just *know* I'll end up buying something.

❖ It's not like a magical group. The Triads are magical initiation groups—for those members who sling mojo, at least. Why do you think Triad mages and adepts are so fraggin' scary? Most of the higher-level initiation ceremonies include various ordeals to strengthen the candidate's spirit and weed out the losers from the organization. So the skags who make it up to Lodgemosher are even one of the ranks below that are usually pretty competent.

❖ K-lai

❖ Most initiation rituals are conducted by the Incense Master, who's usually a mage. It's possible that Triad initiations and oaths are magically binding in some way and carry a lot more weight because of it. That would certainly explain the abject gibberish and fear of Triad soldiers at the very thought of breaking their oaths. Under most circumstances, these guys are such tough customers that taking on a Desert Wars army single-handedly wouldn't faze them. Makes you wonder what they're afraid of, doesn't it?

❖ Choi

❖ I don't know how it works either, but I did see it in action not long ago. Here's how it went down: My team and I were hired for extra protection against pirates for an arms shipment to one of the Chinese warlords on the Yangtze River. Run was going smooth as silk, but we were looking for trouble anyway—that's what we were there for. Good thing, too.

We were about halfway to our rendezvous when a group of pirates in small speedboats hit us from out of nowhere. They were faster and more maneuverable than the cargo haulers we were riding, and they started spraying us with autofire. We got the decks and sent enough rounds their way to make 'em think twice about whether what we were carrying was worth dying for. Meanwhile Su-Ling, our magician, called up a spirit of the river to give us a hand. This huge wave promptly swamped the pirates' boats, and while they tried to keep from sinking we picked 'em off one by one.

I glanced over at Su-Ling as I was samming a new clip in my HK 97 and saw she was still concentrating on her magic. I saw one of the Triads on our side coming up behind her with a knife. I shouted a warning, but she didn't hear me over the roar of gunfire. As I swung my rifle toward the traitor, the deck underneath suddenly gave way and he fell into the cargo hold. As soon as we got the pirate situation under control I headed below deck to get some answers from our supposed ally. He wasn't talking.

A crate of bayonets had broken his fall. All out about twenty feet, we were still wrapped in the packing material, but somehow twenty naked blades had impaled the man from as many different angles. The Triad crew just threw the slog overboard, muttered something about the "death of one hundred swords." They acted like it was perfectly normal for someone who would sell out his blood brothers to die such a dramatically strange death. Should like magic to me.

❖ Righteous Robber

THE SEOUPLA RINGS



Everybody's got an image—right or wrong—of the Mafia and the Yakuza. But very few North Americans—runners included—have any clue about the Seoupla Rings. But don't feel bad if you're one of the clueless. Even I had a tough time getting information on the Rings for this document. I don't think it's because the Rings are any better at keeping secrets than the yaks or the Mob—I think the dearth of data stems from the fact that the Seoupla Rings are a relatively young organization. They're truly a twenty-first century syndicate, and it shows in their personnel and operations. In fact, if their current organization is anything to judge by, I think the Rings' future prospects are very good.

Anyway, I hope this file will help fill in that big gap of missing information. It's basically a summary of various bits and pieces uploaded to Shadow and over the years (I'd like to thank all the Shadowland personnel who helped shape it all into something useful). If anyone out there's got better intel, share it with the rest of us.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 24 January 2056 at 15:39:07 (EST)

HISTORY

• Our organization has a long and distinguished heritage. Throughout our history there have been those who have attempted to destroy or enslave us, but we have always fought back and prevailed because we are stronger than our enemies. We have learned the lessons of pain and war, and we know how to survive in the New Age that lies before us. The old men of the Yakuza still cling to their pale traditions, while we of the Seoulpa forge ahead and build the Rings that will encompass them all.

• Kyu (member of the Choson Ring)

Transmitted: 23 August 2045 at 01:11:14 (EST)

That was one of the first Shadowland postings on the Seoulpa Rings. Despite the fact that contemporary Seoulpa Ring members often talk about the "long and distinguished heritage" of their organizations, no one's ever found any early evidence of the Rings or any conclusive link between today's Rings and any similar organizations in Korea.

Some criminal rings and anti-government gangs—which some modern historians refer to as Seoulpa Rings—did exist in Korea at the end of the past century. Some of these organizations were behind the pro-democracy protesters who staged the bloody and violent demonstrations against President Chun Doo Hwan in 1987; others were just your standard burglary and street-crime gangs. There's no doubt that these organizations existed. However, there is substantial doubt as to whether or not any of them called themselves Seoulpa Rings or if later historians simply applied the term to these groups in response to the modern Rings' claims of uninterrupted descent from ancient predecessors.

• The uninterrupted heritage is truth. Any denial of this heritage is a racist attempt to minimize the cultural importance of Korea in today's world. We know the truth, and we will not be denied.

• Xian

• Oh, give me a fragging break.

• Encarta

Whether or not the Seoulpa Rings are truly the inheritors of an "ancient heritage" is almost completely irrelevant to anyone but the Rings themselves. They exist now, and over the past dozen years the Seoulpa Rings have successfully challenged the traditional dominance of major organized crime syndicates in their own markets to become a force that must be reckoned with in the underworld. In particular, the Seoulpa Rings have become a thorn in the side of the Yakuza in North America and Southeast Asia. But the yaks have nobody to blame but themselves for the problem, because they were largely responsible for the creation of the Rings in the first place.

• The Japanese dogs will suffer for their attempts at genocide. We will <BREAK>

• OK. Ground rules again, children. Post USEFUL information or commentary. Rants and personal vendettas will be deleted without mercy—and if I have to warn anybody more than once, I'll

pull your access privileges, too. We want everyone's input, but this file is not your personal forum. If you want to rant, go to one of the chat or discussion areas. We now return you to your regularly scheduled block information.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 25 January 2058 at 00:02:19 (EST)

THE JAPANESE CONNECTION

Traditionally, many Japanese have viewed Koreans as an inferior race, and Korea itself as an inferior nation. Because of this, the Japanese Yakuza considered the Korean underworld unworthy of its attention and ignored Korea's potential markets for most of its history. Certain Yakuza gumi inducted Koreans, but only as street muscle—and even this type of hiring diminished these families in the eyes of their more traditional brethren.

This outlook underwent a dramatic change at the end of the twentieth century. Japan's tremendous economic growth of the previous forty to fifty years had begun to slow, while the economies of the "mini-dragons"—Korea and Taiwan—were gaining strength. South Korea was quickly becoming an economic powerhouse, and some of the Yakuza gumi began to reassess their traditional prejudice against doing business in Korea. Quietly, several Yakuza gumi began operations in South Korea, where they quickly and efficiently took control of Korea's organized crime "industry" and turned the Korean syndicates into vassals of the Yakuza. In an attempt to hold on to its new markets, the Yakuza gumi began to allow Koreans into their "management" ranks for the first time. In fact, some gumi began actively recruiting Koreans to administer business in the "new territory." As time passed, increasing numbers of Koreans joined the gumi, and soon the Koreans had become a tolerated, even accepted, part of the Yakuza.

A second influx of Koreans into the Yakuza—primarily senior managers and leaders this time—followed the gang war in Seattle between the Yakuza and the Mafia in 2032. These leaders found a small but fiercely loyal Korean population in Seattle from which to recruit new members and recruit they did. Soon Koreans accounted for nearly half of all Seattle Yakuza members.

This trend disturbed Akira Watada, the oyabun of the massively influential Watada-rengo. A traditionalist, Watada still remembered the days when Koreans were considered "inferior," and his own anti-Korean prejudices colored his perceptions of what was going on in Seattle and elsewhere. The Yakuza had already begun to withdraw from operations in Korea in the 2030s. Events elsewhere made Korea less of a valuable property, and expansion in other areas of the Pacific Rim had become the priority that Watada set for his rengo.

Fearing that Seattle's Korean gangsters were planning to seize control of the city's Yakuza gumi, Watada-sama began to exert more direct control over the operations of gumi with large numbers of Korean leaders. Understandably, these Korean leaders began to chafe under this control when they realized that Watada was not subjecting predominantly Japanese gumi to such interference. Quite understandably—considering the times and the history of Japanese-Korean relations—the Koreans began to fear a resurgence of anti-Korean prejudice and the re-establishment of direct Japanese "rule" over their operations. In response, the

Korean oyabun began to take precautions and establish an "organization within an organization"—a Korean syndicate serving Korean interests within the Yakuza.

- Talk about self-fulfilling prophecies—sounds like Watada created his own problem.
- Excer

Naturally, Watada saw in these precautions exactly what he feared: an attempt by the Koreans to take over Seattle's Yakuza. Consequently, Watada tried to tighten his hold, and the Koreans in Seattle responded by increasing their recruitment of "independent assets." The situation continued to escalate for nearly a decade, feeding the ever-growing tensions within the Seattle Yakuza.

The oyabun of the Watada-rengo tried to bring Seattle "back into the fold" through diplomacy, but by 2042 it became clear that such efforts were wasted. Toward the end of that year, the oyabun issued an ultimatum: pledge complete and undying loyalty to the Watada-rengo or suffer the consequences. The Korean leaders ignored the threat, but Watada wasn't bluffing.

THE SCHISM

In January of 2043, Akira Watada responded to the refusal of his demands by sending a "shadow army" of assassins into the Seattle metroplex. Within days, most of the Korean leaders—and many of their close personal followers—were dead. Only a handful escaped.

- Anyone who questions whether or not there are any *nirja* working the shadows need only look at the results of Watada's purge of the Seattle Yakuza. Hundreds dead in a matter of days, all dispatched very quietly and efficiently.
- Digger Dan

- Ninja my hoop. Watada used runners and his own hitters to carry out his final solution to the "Korean problem." Real sick pros, sure, but not mystical assassins.
- Argent

- Estimates range from three to maybe fifteen survivors of the purge. Having personally seen the efficiency of Yakuza hit teams, my guess is closer to three.
- To Har

- Watada talk—we got conflicting stories here. I read in another file that a hundred or so Koreans survived the purge.
- The Ivy

- The number depends on who you're counting, Smiley. The "three to fifteen" estimate refers to senior leaders—oyabuns and/or their eutenants. The "hundred or so" figure refers to "officers" of all ranks—basically anybody above the level of street muscle. And if you include street muscle, the number of Koreans who escaped the purge and broke away from the Yakuza gets up toward four hundred. Okay?
- Monitor

- Let's see if I got this correct. To maintain its honor, the Yakuza used a sneak attack against its own guys—guys who were doing a thriving biz—simply because they were Korean. And when the purges over the yaks feel all warm and fuzzy about how they did such a good and honorable thing, Did I miss something here, or is this "final solution" as hypocritical as all the others?
- Jimmy Jazz

"The winner and still champ"

- History always repeats itself—only the players change.
- The Librarian

The high level of "disloyalty" that led to the ultimatum and the wave of assassinations had been limited to Seattle, but Watada believed it was only a matter of time before the same events occurred in other North American cities whose Yakuza contained a high percentage of Koreans. It was time to purge and "purify" the Yakuza, he decided. Orders were sent out—sometimes but not always backed by assassins—and the "Korean taint" was purged from the upper ranks of the North American Yakuza within a year.

- Note that the purge of Koreans from the Yakuza was not universal among the gumi. Watada and his rengo were very powerful, but Watada couldn't really "give orders" to more than a handful of gumi that owed him their direct loyalty (which, admittedly, did include most of the Yakuza along the Pacific Rim). The yaks elsewhere in North America simply followed suit because they wanted to curry favor with Watada or the oyabun back home, or because they had their own suspicions about the Koreans (old belief's *aié haré*). There are still some gumi, especially on the East Coast and in Europe, that have Korean members. And this remains a source of contention for many Yakuza.
- Tanaka

- Was Akira Watada brain-fragged or what? Didn't he know the Koreans he was purging would hold grudges? Couldn't he guess he was creating his own nemesis?
- Jean Genie

- I think it was that unshakable, typically Japanese sense of cultural and racial superiority that blinded Watada to consequences that should have been obvious. He was a traditionalist, after all, and the people he was purging were "only Koreans"—barbarians, barely human and definitely not truly civilized. What kind of damage could such subhumans cause to an organization—a Japanese organization—that had existed for hundreds of years? I'd guess he was thinking along those lines.
- People Watcher

- There have also been suggestions that clamping down on the Koreans was not entirely Watada-sama's idea and that someone, or something, may have been whispering warnings of Korean treachery in his ear.
- Conspir--See

- Ryumyo?
- Dragonslayer

- Possibly
- Conspir-I-See

THE RINGS

Among the survivors of what came to be known as the Schism was one of the most influential of the Korean oyabun. Stories and rumors about Park Jai Kyu suggest that he may have been half-Japanese himself, the son of an influential oyabun and his Korean mistress. These tales also suggest that Park had some magical talent for "spirit vision"—clairvoyance and precognition—that may have saved his life during the Schism, though shrewd planning seems a more plausible explanation for his escape. Regardless of the veracity of the various stories that have grown around Park, no one disputes that it was Park who organized the first modern Seoulpa Rings.

Realizing that the surviving Koreans lacked the resources to stand up to the Yakuza directly and recognizing that tracking individuals would be more difficult than tracking groups, Park and his followers split up and went underground. Individually, they started recruiting followers of their own, forming many independent gangs throughout the Northwest, and these were the first Seoulpa Rings.

The recruiting patterns established by Park and his men are still in use today. Each Ring leader recruited individuals he knew from the streets—telling these recruits that they were simply joining a small local gang or crime ring. Initially, each of Park's followers recruited twelve new members. In turn, each member was then ordered to seek out eleven recruits of his own. Within a matter of months, each of these "gangs" numbered 145 members and began establishing small spheres of influence in the underworld of the Seattle sprawl.

- The same kind of thing was going on in other cities, too. When Park hatched this plan, he passed it on to people he trusted— all Koreans ousted from the Yakuza—elsewhere on the continent, and they followed suit when things started hopping in Seattle.
- Boxer

Only after new recruits had proved themselves to the satisfaction of their "ringleaders" were they told the true nature of the organization they'd joined—a loose confederation of Rings dedicated to stealing market share from the Yakuza and eventually challenging the Japanese gumi for dominance of Seattle's underworld.

At first, these new recruits were almost exclusively Korean. This quickly changed under the guidance of Park. Park believed that the homogeneous nature of the Yakuza was that organization's greatest weakness, and he concluded that diversity would strengthen his Rings. At the same time, Park recognized that the Yakuza's sense of tradition and unity provided strength as well, and he realized that his confederation needed a tradition of its own to provide its members with a collective identity, a sense of belonging and shared destiny. Turning to Korean cultural traditions, he quickly found something that would serve this purpose.

Within days, Park called a meeting of the individual ringleaders and described to them his vision. Drawing on accounts of various crime rings and anti-government groups from Korean history, Park described an ongoing anti-Japanese movement—the Seoulpa Rings (the first confirmed use of this term). The new groups the ringleaders had assembled, Park said, were part of this tradition, part of a centuries-old association with a proud and glorious history. And as part of that historical association, the new Rings had an obligation and a destiny to oppose the Japanese whenever and wherever the opportunity arose.

- Even ten years later, there's still some question as to whether Park's ring leaders accepted Park's story as fact or whether they—like Park himself—embraced it as a convenient and useful fiction. But there's no question that the rank-and-file Ring members bought it hook, line and sinker.

- Yang

- Doesn't really matter if it's true or not, chummer. It keeps the Rings focused on a common theme and a common enemy, and it keeps them together—despite that fact that the Rings comprise the most diverse criminal organization in the world. And the story's been working for more than twenty years now.

- D Bunker

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

Today, each individual Ring operates independently and is totally self-contained. Compared to Yakuza families and Mafia regimes, typical Seoulpa Rings are small, usually with fewer than thirty sworn members—individuals who have gone through blood initiation into the Ring itself. Like the made men of the Mafia, the sworn members of the Seoulpa Rings are the elite of the Rings—they control a larger network of street operatives. To protect the Rings, the sworn members never tell their street operatives that they are really working for a Seoulpa Ring. Consequently, these street operatives simply assume they're working for ordinary, small-time gangs.

- Under thirty members? That's not enough to get squat done in a city.

- Caro

- Small size isn't necessarily a weakness, in fact. It's often a strength, because a small outfit like a Ring can respond to an opportunity—or a threat—much more quickly than a larger syndicate like a Mafia family or a yak gumi. Think about it: Who responds faster to a technological breakthrough—a small cutting-edge company or a megacorp like Fuch?

- Poster Girl

- What most Rings lack in numbers they make up for in pure mean. You want an old analogy? The Yakuza's like a bull, big, powerful, flogging near impossible to stop when it gets going. A Seoulpa Ring's like a pit bull terrier, smaller, but faster and much more aggressive. Personally, I'd much rather try to stay out of a bull's way than try to pry a pit bull off my throat.



When the big war between the Rings and the yaks comes—and it will—it's going to be like that old English pastime: bull baiting, but a bull in a cage with half a dozen bull terriers, and bet on how long it takes the doggies to tear the bull to shreds.

• Judy

Because of their size, Seoulpa Rings limit themselves to certain types of operations. Typically, the Rings concentrate on street gambling, burglary and occasionally prostitution, drugs and chips and leave the high-investment operations to the Yakuza and Mafia. From time to time, however, a handful of Rings will combine their resources and run a pretty sophisticated operation—usually targeted at some yak-run enterprise. These bigger operations are usually temporary arrangements, and the various Rings go their separate ways once they've split the booty.

Rings usually form around influential individuals and often disintegrate if that individual is removed or killed. Frequently, senior lieutenants split from their parent Rings and form their own Rings—most commonly with the blessing of the original Ring's leader. No central "managing body" oversees the Seoulpa Rings—no equivalent of the Mafia's Commission—so in that sense the Rings follow the Yakuza "family" model. Unlike the Yakuza, however, very little direct conflict ever occurs between individual Seoulpa Rings—no waves of assassination, no turf wars, almost no rivalry whatsoever.

• That's mainly because they're small, though, right? They just don't rub shoulders with rivals. When they get bigger or when there get to be more of them (frag, what a nasty thought!), they're going to be hashing it out just as violently as the yaks—or worse.

• Macroc

• Don't count on it. The Rings seem to have an innate tendency toward cooperation instead of conflict.

And don't think the Rings don't rub shoulders. Frag, the Seattle docks damn near got more Rings than rats. But those Rings don't waste time and resources trying to geek each other. Usually when Rings start stepping on each other's toes, they talk it out and either divvy up the biz or cooperate.

The Rings' unarguable nastiness and their quick reactions to changing circumstances certainly make them dangerous. But their preference for cooperation over conflict is probably their greatest strength.

• Argent

• Let's make one thing perfectly clear. When a Ring butts head with another Ring, they'll work out an agreement that benefits both parties. All true.

But when a Ring butts heads with anybody else, the Seoul Men don't waste time talking—they come out cutting. No negotiation, no warnings—not even a gang-style declaration of war. All-out attack, until the head they've been butting against is rolling in the gutter.

I love Judy's bull terrier analogy—it fits here, too. How does a guard dog that masses 45 kilos bring down an armed troll massing five times that much? All-out attack, that's how. And that's how the Seoulpa Rings handle things.

• Yolanda

Seoulpa Rings are also very "progressive" by the standards of organized crime. They've always been willing to use all of the tools of the Sixth World to their advantage. Spend any time around the Rings, and you'll see their soldiers tricked out with flashy combat cyberware, as well as plenty of magic. In fact, a few Seattle Rings are organized around magicians and frequently recruit wizzergang members or street-meat with the Talent. These gangs use spells, ritual sorcery and spirits as part of their criminal enterprises, sometimes with frightening effectiveness.

• Ritual sorcery certainly can be a great way to shake people down. Drek, sometimes the mere threat of letting loose some decker or mage on a target is enough to get the hapless fragger to fork over the nuyen.

• Kraft

Other Rings specialize in decker crimes. These groups may include a single nova-hot decker, or they may keep a small stable of decking talent. Apparently, these Rings have realized that their small size can actually be an asset when it comes to data-crime.

• The Rings are pretty much willing to try anything once—and that kind of thinking puts them ahead of the other crime syndicates, which limit themselves with a lot of traditions and unwritten rules about how to do business. The Rings go straight for the most effective, profitable way to do things, no questions asked, and plow right over anyone who gets in their way. There's already signs that this attitude is enabling the Rings to cut into Mafia and Yakuza business in Seattle and elsewhere, and this trend's probably going to continue.

• SPD

PERSONNEL

In the early days of the Seoulpa Rings, candidates for recruitment were all members of Seattle's Korean community. This practice minimized risks of penetration and subversion because the members' common ethnic heritage strengthened their loyalty to one another and greatly increased the difficulty of infiltrating the Rings. Additionally, all the original members of Park's Seoulpa Rings were fluent in the Korean language, so they could use ordinary Korean phrases for their recognition codes and communications.

• Korean—fascinating language. Quite different from Chinese and Japanese—of uncertain linguistic affiliation, maybe distantly related to the Altaic languages. Like Japanese, Korean uses a system of "honorifics"—word endings and internal markers that change according to the social relationship of the speaker, the person spoken to, and the person/thing spoken about (e.g., a stranger, an older person, a child or a friend). From the beginning, recognition phrases for the Rings used these characteristics as a code. It didn't matter, for example, exactly what you said in one of these sign-countersign identification exchanges—what mattered was the protocol mode you used. Very elegant, and totally impenetrable to anyone but a native Korean speaker. Worked so well that Korean-speaking Ring members still use the system today.

• Webster

• And those members who don't speak Korean?

• Travis

• The Rings also use a staggering number of signs, symbols, phrases, handshakes and other assorted drek, much of it based on ancient Korean art and history—or, more precisely, on Park's revisionist versions of those things. But a great many Ring members still speak Korean, at least enough to get by, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Even those Rings with large numbers of Amerind, Russian, Vietnamese and Anglo members still use the Korean recognition codes.

• Webster

The Rings still use Park's "two-phase" recruitment system, too. First, new members are inducted into what they think is a local gang. Only after they've proved themselves worthy in the eyes of the local Ring leader are they initiated into the central cadre. That means that Seoulpa Rings usually operate one or two "front" gangs for recruitment. It's also led to increasing connections between Seattle's Seoulpa Rings and gangs.

The Rings are probably the most "equal opportunity" criminal organization in the sprawl. They recruit both humans and metahumans of all different races and backgrounds, and they generally consider a candidate's abilities and loyalty far more important than his or her bloodlines or heritage—though the prejudices of individual Ring leaders come into play sometimes. This open recruitment tradition enables the Rings to recruit from a larger pool than most crime organizations and to snatch up many of the talented "castoffs" rejected by other syndicates—particularly the Yakuza gum.

Originally the members of the Seoulpa Rings, particularly the leaders, were all Korean, but that didn't last more than a couple of years after the Rings got going. By recruiting non-Korean and metahuman members, the Rings became an eclectic mix of "new blood" that kept them changing and growing—and confused the frag-all out of organizations like the Yakuza and even Lone Star which were looking for patterns of recruitment among certain populations and not finding them.

• Yeah, about the only people the Rings don't recruit are ethnic Japanese. And their wide-open recruiting can produce some very diverse Rings. Personally, I think making any general assumptions about Seoulpa Rings is dangerous.

• Vance

• Vance is right. For example, I know the Choson Ring down near the Seattle docks is about as rabidly anti-Amerind as any chapter of the Order (in fact, the Ring's got a running battle going with a local Amerind gang—the First Nations, if you know them). But then there's the Komun'go Ring, which seems to actively recruit Amerinds—predominately Haida, interestingly enough. I understand that one of the Komun'go lieutenants is a full-blood Haida shaman.

• Sledge

• These sound like nothing but gangs with an ideology. What gives?

• Sister Sledge

• Sledge hit the nail on the head—in fact, the Seoulpa Rings are just street gangs with illusions of heritage and a good marketing/PR spin, but that's a discussion for another day. Here's the scoop, chummies. Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of Seoulpa Rings are personality cults—they form around a charismatic leader, pretty much like a street gang. The leader of the Ring chooses its "culture." So if the leader is a magician or has a thing for magic, then the Ring recruits magicians. If one of the leader's right hand men is a Haida shaman (like the Komun'go Ring), then you'll get lots of Amerind members. If the leader is a Humanis wannabe—or worse yet, a Humanis member—then the Ring isn't going to be too friendly to metahumans. So if you want to know about what kind of Ring you're going to be dealing with, find out who's in charge.

• Socie Pat

INITIATION

Seoulpa Ring initiation rituals seem designed to weed out any potential spies or moles—probably a legacy of the early days of the Rings, when they had to be constantly on the watch for Yakuza assassins. But beyond the obvious fact that the rituals are usually pretty brutal—probably because they're also designed to be "tests of strength" or some macho drek like that—no one outside the Rings knows much about them.

◆ Know a little about the initiation of one Ring, the Changgo Ring—but the Changgo don't exist anymore. (Fuori Security infiltrated it and broke it up because the Changgo had the poor judgment to run a darastek against a Fuchi subsidiary.) What I know I learned from witnessing the ... debriefing ... of a captured Changgo member.

Apparently, the Changgo initiation was an eight-hour ordeal conducted by the bossman of the Ring and his lieutenant. The candidate had to be recommended by a Ring member and at least two other members personally familiar with the candidate had to second the recommendation before the bossman would consider the candidate. This biz of recommending and seconding wasn't just some kind of rubber-stamp procedure either. During the first three months of the candidate's membership in the Ring—a kind of probationary membership—the sponsor was responsible, on pain of death, for the actions of the candidate. If the candidate screwed up in any way or was exposed as an infiltrator, the candidate would be killed out of hand. The member who had recommended that candidate would also be executed, and the two other members who seconded the candidate would be tortured within a millimeter of their lives. This guaranteed that no one recommended a candidate without being pretty frigging certain the candidate was on the up and up.

The initiation itself took place in the basement of a condemned warehouse down near Aaskan Way. The candidate was led to the place by her sponsor and the two seconders. Buck naked and blindfolded, she had to walk into the middle of a ring of members—all masked, wearing ritual headdresses and robes—and explain in perfect, idiomatic Korean why she wanted to join the Ring. The bossman of the Ring asked a few symbolic questions, which were answered by the candidate's sponsor. Then the boss asked the candidate a final question, "What is it you most want?" She answered, "Light." Her blindfold was removed, and the initiation moved on to the next stage.

The candidate then recited an oath, swearing on her undying soul that she'd remain true—until and beyond death—to the Ring and all its members, on the pain of horrendous punishment. Then she was "put to ordeal"—basically tortured, physically and magically. Every half hour or so, the Ring members had her repeat the same oath, and she'd have to get it word perfect no matter what unpleasantness she was undergoing at the moment.

The ordeal lasted a full eight hours. The Ring members then gathered up the candidate and dressed her in a ritual robe and headdress. Then she knelt before the Ring leadership and recited the oath one last time. Only then did she become a member of the Changgo Ring—a probationary member, of course.



From what I understand, the torment was supposed to test the candidate's devotion to the Ring. If she couldn't handle the torture—if she begged for relief, for example, rather than reciting the oath—then she would have been considered too weak to qualify for membership, and the Ring members would have executed her. (Note that this kind of failure—a breakdown during the ordeal—wouldn't reflect badly on the sponsor and seconders. They wouldn't be punished if the candidate couldn't make it through the initiation.)

Personally, I'm convinced the Changgo leaders were simply sadistic fraggers who liked to hurt people.

- ◆ Archangel
- ◆ "Trial by ordeal" isn't limited to the Changgo Ring. Other Rings are into the same kind of thing. And like Archangel implies, these trials aren't just symbolic. The rites of passage are often so brutal that a significant percentage of applicants either don't survive the experience or emerge permanently crippled.
- ◆ Holy
- ◆ Keep in mind that initiation practices, like other Seoulpa traditions, vary from one Ring to another depending on who's in charge. I know that the Komun'go Ring doesn't use any type of physical torture on potential members, but the Ring's shamans do an extensive mind probe of the candidate and dig up all of his or her dirty secrets and unpleasant memories. It's supposed to ensure that the candidate's "heart and mind are true" to the purposes of the Ring, but it also lets the Ring leaders know where all of the member's skeletons are buried and gives them a serious hold over the Ring member.
- ◆ SocioPat

OTHER OPERATIONS



The Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads and the Seoupa Rings are the big participants in the organized crime market, but they're not the only players in the game. Far from it. Below the top level are plenty of smaller operations that make up the backbone of some of the bigger syndicates, along with independent operators fighting to stay that way. The big boys use a lot of small-time players as pawns, while other minor groups try to scratch out some turf in their corner of the sprawl. I've put together as much solid info as I could get on some of the significant small fry from people in the know. If anyone reading this has any better info, go ahead and post it.

◆ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 24 January 2058 at 01:07:59 (EST)

GANGS

BY SOCIAL ADEPT

For many people, especially the good-citizen viewers at home, the word “gang” conjures up images of leather-clad bikers hanging out in the worst areas of the sprawl and rolling innocent passers by for their pocket cred. Well, maybe that’s true for some of the piddly-squat gangs in a metroplex like Seattle, but gangs are actually an influential subculture in the Sixth World. They make up a significant part of the underworld community (if you can call it that) and the lower tiers of most organized crime outfits.

WorldWide WordWatch defines a gang as “an organized association of individuals who express their identification through private language, symbolic behavior and the wearing of ‘colors,’ a group who commonly claim territory in a given neighborhood.” That definition covers everything from the Boy Scouts to a group of roller-skater fans waiting in line for concert tix. The big difference between “organized associations of individuals” like those and a gang is that gang members tend to engage in criminal behavior as a function of their membership.

In the Sixth World, gangs fall into three tiers: small-time local flyboys, mid-sized gangs with something on the ball, and just-barely-of-the-big-time gangs with real prospects.

THIRD TIER: LOCAL BULLIES

The smallest gangs occupy the lowest tier of the gangland pyramid. These itty-bitty fry account for most of the gangsters in the gangplexes like Seattle, DeeCee and Los Angeles. Most of these gangs consist of a handful of people, a few dozen at most. They operate within a specific turf or area of influence in the metroplex and generally don’t stray too far out of it.

Third-tier gangs are the littlest of little guys in the organized crime business. They’re still a threat to Joe and Jane Citizen when they want to be, of course; harmless they’re not. But compared to the bigger gangs and the world-class syndicates, they’re dust on the floor. The big-timers use them as pawns, errand boys and sometimes as cannon fodder, when they pay attention to them at all. Lots of small-time gangs get pushed aside when a bigger gang with a syndicate sponsor tries to move into their turf. That often sets off a gang war, but the gang with outside backing is much more likely to win.

• Usually, but not always. Some small gangs fight like fraggin’ chickens when cornered or challenged on their own turf. They do have the “home field advantage” they know the hood, the people and the score, which can sometimes give them the edge they need to win.

• King Solomon

• Some small gangs can also be fraggin’ tough because they’re backed by somebody with something on the ball: a fixer with solid connections, a hot shadowrunner, even a spirt. They might have wit, big mops or major mojo. That’s not true of all gangs, but a lot of the smaller ones have stuff like that up their sleeves, so watch out.

• Baker

• I hear the Spiders in Seattle have Spider herself (himself? Itself?) as their leader. Gives me chills just thinking about it.

• The Fly

• Gang PR at its best ... spread the wildest story possible about your exploits. That gives your gang the upper hand when dealing with everyone else. To use the Fly’s asinine assumption as an example, spread the word that Spider is your leader and watch the other gangs trip over their Velcro flaps running away from you. Most gangs are a bunch of runner wannabes with the smarts of a small pebble.

• Prime Runner

• “Use your brain ... it’s the difference between you and the freakin’ maggots!”

• Never underestimate gangs, Primo. Small-bore or not, they can kill, and they usually do when you go in expecting them to roll over and play dead. Most don’t run the shadows because they’re too psycho, too untrustworthy and too willing to screw everyone over but themselves. You don’t want them running the shadows, because they’re out of control.

• Status Quo

The vast majority of gangs in the metroplex are too small and have too few resources to qualify as anything like *organized* crime. Most thrillers and go-gangs don’t have what it takes to get into anything more serious than a little drug- and chip-dealing, simple B&E work, and casual protection/extortion rackets.

The smaller outfits sometimes get drawn into biz that’s much too heavy for them, but usually only on the edge. Say two Mafia families or yak gumi are taking a run at each other. They need street muscle, expendables. They get it by co-opting or recruiting a gang. Don’t tell the poor guttertrash what they’re really getting themselves into, of course. Just dangle a fat carrot in front of their faces—“Want a piece of the action, boys?”—and watch them jump. Then push them out to the front lines as cannon fodder in a war the poor gang-bangers don’t even know is taking place.

• Happens all too often. I hear buzz on the streets that the First Nations gang recently got “recruited” that way by the yaks. The Firsts think they’re “serving an apprenticeship” to prove they’re good enough to handle a slice of the yaks’ chip trade. What they’re really doing is walking into a shooting gallery to draw fire away from the real yak operators.

• Eagle

SECOND TIER: NEARLY A PLAYER

The second-tier gangs are the larger gangs in a metroplex. They might have memberships in the hundreds, approaching the size of small syndicates unto themselves. These gangs are large enough to be players in the metroplex criminal markets, and often work as distributors, intermediaries and other brands of hired help for various organized crime outfits. They rarely operate in more than one plex, however, and they pose no real threat to the big boys (or at least, none that the big boys can’t handle).

• The Triads are particularly into using Asian gangs to distribute their contraband, especially in North America. Most of the Chinese gangs in Seattle and the rest of the West Coast are tied in with the Triads and report to some higher-up within the local association. Some of the Triads even set up second-tier gangs as “youth associations,” a kind of kiddie version of the Triad that does the grunt work and provides a kind of farm system for new recruits.

• China Doll

• The Seoupa Rings are kind of like second-tier gangs, only more organized and formal than most. The Rings don't use gangers to do their dirty work because they're close enough to the street that they don't have a problem getting plenty dirty themselves. That tends to place the Rings in much closer competition with major gangs than most of the other syndicates.

• SocioPat

• It's no fun being a mid-sized gang. Too big to hold up nice and safe in your turf until the heat is off, but not big enough or powerful enough to pull any strings above you on the streets. The Star, the corps and almost everyone else can finger you, and they usually do because you just can't get out of it. Second-tier gangs mostly control smaller cities off the beaten path—lots of CFS cities are owned by a single mid-sized gang. So are places like Minneapolis, Phoenix, Charlotte... any city where there's not a lot of organized crime action.

• X-Star

• There are cities without much organized crime? Where Atlantis? Brigadoon? Shangri-La?

• Skeptic

“Prove it!”

• There's more movement back and forth between second- and third-tier gangs than between first and second. Third-tier gangs are forever getting powerful enough to jump to the second tier, until their leader gets offed. Then they tumble back down to the third tier and regroup as multiple new little gangs. Only rarely does a gang grow into a first-tier player. When it does happen, the gang is usually the only player in an area for years, or they've got a charismatic leader willing to deal with other gangs in other cities (a rare find), or they get by on their sheer ability to survive and adapt (very, very, very few). First-tier gangs usually make it as high as they do because they have a rep as a force to be reckoned with as well as a solid organization. For example, some ethnic gangs who were first tier before the Awakening managed to become Families in the modern Mafia; a few Asian gangs went yok or Triad. Even some of the race gangs ended up joining one of the big boys. Nearly all first-tier gangs “make the big time” eventually.

• SocioPat

FIRST TIER: ALMOST ON TOP

The first-tier gangs are organizations like the Ancients or the Cutters that have “chapters” in various metroplexes all across

North America. Though they generally avoid syndicate waters (because the syndicate slaps them down when they try to swim there), they have a real presence in various organized crime business enterprises. For example, the Ancients have developed a widespread and effective secondary distribution channel for drugs and chips through many cities in the West and Midwest, while the Cutters are actually starting to challenge the Mafia as a source of restricted weapons and ammunition.

• You've been listening to the Cutters' PR too much. Asson. They'd love you to believe they're up there with the fragging Mafia—it gives them big top on the streets. But in real life they're not even playing in the same ballpark, much less the same league.

For example, say you want to kit out a dozen gangers for a major clash in the streets. You want assault rifles, grenade launchers, and enough ammunition to keep the party raging long into the night. For that, you go talk to the Cutters. That's all the speed they'll buff you out with EastEuro gear that fell off the back of a truck somewhere in the fragging Balkans and somehow made its way across the Atlantic. They'll talk the talk like they're out fragging action, and your padding little order isn't really worth their time—they're just helping you out because they feel like it. Don't buy a word of it. A couple of dozen ARs is stretching their resources.

Now say you're a coro secteam and you want to outfit a private army with “cold iron”—untraceable weapons. You want a hundred ARs with all the toys, a couple of assault cannons and maybe a crew-served piece to bolt into the back of a half-truck. Go see the Cutters? Not a fragging chance, *privatel*. They couldn't touch that action unless you gave them a year's headtime and didn't care how much they shook the bushes looking for you to get. For that kind of dreck, you go to the Mafia or the yoks. Situate megacorp, for that matter.

What's the difference between the Cutters and the big boys?

• Wolf

• And where do the Ancients fit in then?

• Carol

• Kinda in the middle, bigger than the Cutters, smaller than the Mafas. Wolf's right—you can't judge by the way the gangers talk. If you listen to the bandel-on-eaters, you'd think they could take out the entire Ares security arm in a street fight.

• Angelfire

• The Cutters—Iko the Ancients—are big league when it comes to gangs. They're not just one spawl-dreck. They've got chapters in Seattle, Atlanta, the Great Lakes spawl (Detroit, I think), Newark (d'fro) and even in Califree (or so I hear). They're bad and they're not on nice.

Now that I think about it, the Seattle chapter's had some bad times of late. The Cutters used to have safe houses in various parts of the Seattleplex, but street buzz says the chapter's basically dead and gone. And I don't think a gang war wiped them out—in hearing on the street that a bunch of them died of boson. Maybe a rival—the Ancients, could be—slipped something nasty into their soyburgers one night and they kicked off that way.

But I don't think we've seen the end of the Cutters in Seattle and boys. The way I figure, the Cutters'll make a few "strategic transfers of assets" from other chapters to re-establish some presence up here on the coast. Why, of a perfectly good market go to waste?

• DoubleTalk

• So who are the heavy bangers in the sprawl?

• Decker Dan

• In Seattle? The Ancients, for one. The Halloweeners, definitely. The Crimson Crush and the Eye-Fivers probably qualify. The Rusted Streets and the Hell Hounds might or might not fit, depending on their fortunes this week. As to the rest? Chummers, we've got more than 300 go-gangs and thrillers in the sprawl, constantly banging it out for turf and influence. You can't tell the players without a program, and you could fill a 24-hour flat channel keeping track of who's hot and who's not from day to day.

• Kibor

GANG CULTURE

Most gangs operate along the lines of primitive tribal bands or wolf packs. Many gangs have elaborate initiation rituals—rites of passage that often include ritual markings, piercing and scarification. Some of the markings, which can get pretty elaborate, carry specific meanings for the members of the gang and to their rivals who speak the same symbolic "language."

Most members join a gang by being "beaten down" or "jumping in." This means that up to a dozen gangers beat up the prospective member for a certain amount of time, usually a couple of minutes. The prospective member is allowed to fight back, but the members doing the beating can and will use almost anything at hand: bats, bottles and so on. If you can take enough punishment while still dishing out some yourself, you're in. In another style of initiation, the prospective gang member does what they call a "drive-by," involving some sort of crime on the run. Some of the larger city gangs go even farther, making new recruits do something even more dangerous, like take a gun from a police officer or pull an armed robbery. Some of the smaller gangs allow a member to "jump out" (like jumping in, only worse) and leave the gang—but this is the exception. Mostly, gangers only leave in a body bag.

Many gangs adopt elaborate codes of dress. Lots of gangers wear clothes with the logos or famous faces of sports teams popular with gangs, usually "tough" sports like football, urban brawl or combat oiker. Clothing built with plenty of places to conceal a weapon or two is popular, as is anything considered the "street look" for that week.

"Colors" are of immense significance to gangs, often more so than territory (which is saying something; gangs are so territorial, they make your average lioness look like she doesn't give a frag). Most gang colors show up in an item of clothing: an Ancient's green jacket, or a Brain Eater's fez. When a ganger wears his colors, he's considered "on duty," and his actions reflect on the gang's honor. Any action taken against a ganger wearing his colors is considered action against the entire gang. And no ganger ever removes his colors lightly.

• Some consequences of this? If you're a ganger wearing your colors and you happen to enter another gang's territory, you're asking to be drek-kicked or flatlined. Because you're wearing colors, you're an "official" member of your gang, so even poking a toe onto some other gang's turf is tantamount to an invasion. If you need to pass through another gang's territory, the safest thing to do is remove your colors. That means you're ceding authority to the local gang, you're officially admitting that this is their stretch of town. Of course, many gangers would rather bleed to death than show another gang honor like that. So you get all kinds of strange dynamics—kind of a dominance-submission game—around colors and turf boundaries.

• Carstairs

• What about gangs like the Razor Heads, then? Aren't their shaved heads and tattoos their colors? What are they supposed to do: take off their heads?

• Monty P

• Rival gangs would gladly do it for them, but all joking aside, you're right. Adopting colors that can't be removed when it becomes expedient can have some serious consequences. Look at the Night Hunters: those twisted frags adopt all kinds of cyber-moos for their "colors," and there're certainly not going to be able to remove those. Of course, the Hunters are almost always looking for a fight anyway.

• Carstairs

"Tagging" a wall with graffiti is the usual way a gang marks its territory. In some places, a tagged wall is referred to as a "wall of honor." Any defacing of it is roughly akin to spitting in the gang's face. Crossing out the tag of another gang amounts to a declaration of war against them—so if your local go-gang tags the wall of your plascrete apartment block and you want to clean it up, paint over the whole thing. Don't make that big X mark over the gang sign, or you'll buy more trouble than you ever bargained for.

Who leads a gang is often decided through trial by combat. A subordinate ganger can challenge the leader to a fight—usually nonlethal, though not always—and the winner is the leader of the pack. Depending on the particular gang, the loser may remain in the gang or else is banished. Gangs with this wolf-pack mentality are always led by the fiercest fighter and tend to change leadership fairly often.

• Keeping the loser in the fold fosters major grudges, of course.

• Log One

• The wolf-pack style of organization isn't the only arrangement you'll see on the streets, though it's by far the most common. Some gangs operate more like paramilitary groups, with defined ranks, chains of command and conditions for promotion. Lots of Ancients chapters work like that. Still other gangs organize themselves along the lines of a corp. That's how the local chapter of the Cutters put it together.

• Holly

• The key thing to remember about gang leadership is that it's a personality cult. The whole nature of the gang largely depends on who's in charge at any given time. Gangs don't have the kind of continuity that a Commission or a successive line of cybans can create. Some of the older gangs have traditions that all the members are supposed to respect, but new leaders can make some serious changes in a gang without too much opposition, especially if they're popular or feared by the other gang members. Leadership of a gang is a big deal because the difference between a good and a bad leader can be the difference between the gang's survival or death. And survival is the number one goal for any gang in the sprawl.

• SocioPat

• "Turf" has always been a big thing for gangers. But since the Awakening, it's taken on a new twist. Some of the gangs around the Plex have hooked up with free city spirits. I don't know what the arrangements are: partnerships, quid-pro-quo business deals, or one party dominating the other. But those gangs conform their turf to match the personal domains of the spirits that're backing them.

• Blackstone

• Which gangs, Blackie?

• London

• The First Nations, for one. Buzz says the leader of the First Nations is a free city spirit. So maybe the Firsts aren't quite the helpless cannon fodder like the yaks want to believe.

• Blackstone

GO-GANGS

Descendants of the motorcycle gangs of the late twentieth century, go-gangs are the kings of the open roads and urban highways. A fast, hot bike is the ultimate goal of every go-ganger, and they're usually willing to do anything to get one. Dominance in the gang depends on riding ability and the quality of the hardware, as well as roughness and combat skill.

Go-gangs are much like any other gang, except a helluva lot more mobile, and thus more likely to be involved in criminal activities that rely on mobility, like smuggling, hijacking and drive-by shootings. Sometimes a really large gang like the Ancients incorporates a go-gang element, with the riders having a certain prestige over the rank-and-file gang members.

Go-gangers like to harass motorists and often charge "tolls" for using roads that cross their turf. Some go-gang members become champion combat bikers, and a biker's former gang affiliation is often used to determine how well he'll do professionally—some gangs have a reputation for producing particularly bold, innovative and skilled riders. Believing that speed is everything, go-gangers love races, obstacle courses and games of chicken to test their skills and courage. They also respect outsiders' ability to handle a hog.

• Don't most of the sprawl's go-gangs have ties to either the yaks or the Maf's? I'm sure I read that somewhere.

• Nyx

• Depends what you mean by ties. Long-term associations? Not usually. Short-term links that shift like the wind? Damn straight.

Go-gangs represent too attractive a resource for the yaks and the Maf to not use them from time to time. As soldiers sometimes—often as diversions. Occasionally a go-gang gets hired to act as armed couriers or outsiders for a particular shipment, which is also a good way to make sure those particular gangers don't get hired to nick your cargo.

The thing is, these "associations" are always pay-as-you-go affairs. The yaks need some dirty work done, so they side some crew (or drugs or chips or other valuta) to the leader of the Mob or the Rovers. When the job's done, the Rovers go their own way, maybe taking cred from the Mob or the Fraggling Chosen Ring, or whoever the next week.

• Absol..!

• The corps aren't above hiring gangs as street muscle either when it suits their purposes. Even Lord Star does it from time to time.

• Hongfire

WIZZER GANGS

Wizzer gangs just might be the most dangerous type of gang. Luckily, they're also the rarest. Members of wizzer gangs all have magical talent plus just enough skill to make them dangerous. Mostly composed of budding hermetic magicians and adepts, wizzer gangs occasionally include urban shamans. Physical adepts are rare; they usually end up in other kinds of gangs, where their magic-based combat skills are highly valued and they don't get cross-eyed looks from fellow gangers because they can't sling spells. The average wizzer gang prides itself on the power of "the Art," not the less flashy magical abilities that physical adepts display. They tend to look down on anyone who has to dirty their own hands to get a job done rather than using a spell or spirit to do it.

A wizzer gang typically uses magical firepower to terrorize the unfortunates in their turf with fireballs, acid bombs and runaway spirits. They run protection rackets with a twist, threatening magical assaults and ritual sorcery, while other gangs have to settle for basing windows and raking shop fronts with bullets. They challenge the poor, pitiful mundanes to stop them and laugh at any "greybeard magician" (read: any spell-slinger over twenty) who tries.

Given the colossal egos of most of their members, wizzer gangs tend to form and dissolve fast. Most break up within weeks or months of forming, usually in a spectacular and messy magical battle that often catches innocents in the crossfire. The mere rumor of a wizzer gang breakup usually keeps most people indoors until the smoke clears.

• I say I was with the Hermetic Order of the Auric Aurora when they helped contain and clean up the wizzer gang dust up on the outskirts of the Barrens. Those kids were fraggin' scary. Not one of them was older than twenty-four, but they had magical power to burn. The Order mages stopped 'em cold, though. One of my twins, mages smirked and told me that logic and skill beats your magic and power every time.

• Years

◆ Not all wizzer gangs fall apart. I know of one in Seattle, the Merlyns, that has stayed together for seven or eight years now. Most of its members are mages—probably only a dozen out of about forty or fifty. The rest are all magical wannabes or geeky whiz types who follow the magicians in charge of the gang like they're the gods of a fraggin' cult. I keep hearing buzz that the Matrix wants to use the Merlyns to pump up their magical muscle, but if that's true, they'd better be fraggin' careful. They're playing with fire, no mistake. Those Merlyn fraggers are crazy.

◆ **Void Rags**

◆ Shamanic wizzer gangs exist, too. A friend that's spreading out from down South is "yooooo passes," gangs run by one or more tooodoo shamans, with the rest of the gang being part of the tooodoo skag's "congregation" or whatever. That means the tooodoo shaman can call his sorts to immobilize any of the gangers and give them all kinds of weird spirit powers. Anybody shakin' yet?

◆ **Tin Man**

◆ Wizzer gangs are also a real good way to recruit young magicians from the SINless. What for depends on who—or what—is doing the recruiting. I know of one wizzer gang in El Infierno that's run by a freebie. The spirit teaches its "brood" of fledgling magicians different spells in exchange for some kind of magical tribute. I stole from them, so the gangers and the spirit all get more power. I also ran into a wizzer gang run by a toxic shaman who was training the gangers as her apprentices, making them into good little magical terrorists and tools for spreading her poison across the metropolis. I hope I die before I meet any bunch of skags that don't rent again.

◆ **Arkane**

MATRIX GANGS

Computer geeks—the next big gang threat? Looks like it, chummers. The way the technology curve has gone since the creation of the Matrix, more and more cyberdeck technology has been filtering down to the streets. These days you don't need a lot of cred just to log on to the Matrix. If you want to do serious ice-breaking, it's still a SOTA game, but bare bones is all some Matrix users need.

Matrix gangs are bunches of pirate users running on modified low-grade decks they've built themselves. They've got the masking and software to be real deckers, but not the juice to skate past corporate or government databases, so they turn to other sources of amusement and revenue in the Matrix.

Matrix gangs pull all the same dreck in the 'trix that other gangs do in the real world. They slap up "graffiti" on different nodes or public sectors to mark what they consider their "turf" and to show their skill at getting past security systems. They crash systems and trash files just for the fun of it, or run protection rackets on small-time stores, companies and private users by threatening to trash their Matrix access. Sometimes gangers even use combat utilities to mug personas in the Matrix, crashing the persona or even damaging the target's deck or meatbod. Sometimes they pull this trick as the first stage in a robbery scam: stage two

is backtracking the mugging victim in the real world, then breaking into their physical jackpoint and looting it for goodies they can use or fence.

Because the public dataspace in the Matrix is something of a free-for-all, Matrix gangs have plenty of places to run and hide. It doesn't help that Lone Star Gridsec and other Matrix divisions of corporate and public security forces consider the gangers a low-priority problem. They're busy worrying about serious hackers breaking into important government and corporate systems, not some punks scrawling lewd graphics all over the local UCAS Online™ "Family Forum" BBS.

◆ I met one of these gangs ... called themselves the Doppelgangers. They all had the same exact persona. At first I thought I'd gotten hit by psychotropic IC and my mind was fraggled, cuz it looked like one of those weird special FX—you know, where the person keeps duplicating him or herself. I think there were eight of them, and they all looked like gangers from one of those old fiat frids—greased-back hair, shiny leather jackets. The freaky thing was, they all had the same face with the same blank expression. Nothing behind the eyes, you know? Soulless.

They hit me cuz I came off a satlink. I was covering my tracks in case a little German company named Saeder-Krupp might happen to be on my tail. They hit me so fast I barely had time to change my programming from stealth mode to attack. I didn't need a fight just then, so I bought them off with a combat program I was going to trash and some blackmail info on an executive secretary working for Ares CFS. Funny how dirty pictures will pretty much make anyone your friend ...

◆ **King of Pain**

◆ Most of these Matrix punks don't have the warez to be much of a threat to a real decker, but sometimes they get lucky. I've also run into one or two of these kids who are novahot at writing their own software and patching together decent decks from salvaged parts. My advice? Don't worry about them too much, but don't underestimate them either.

◆ **Red Wraith**

◆ Sometimes the punks out paying in the Matrix aren't just gangers. Sometimes they're otaku, the weird, scary tribes of kids who can deck the system with nothing but their own wetware.

◆ **Brother Data**

◆ The otaku are myths, chummer. Nobody can deck without a deck. It's imposs@#5)!@#^^ **SYSTEM INTERRUPT** User logged off.

◆ You know the rules, kids. Play nice.

◆ **Captain Chaos**

Transmitted: 29 January 2058 at 14:19:02 (EST)

ETHNIC/RACIAL "MAFIAS" BY SOUL DOUGHNUT

In the old days, Mafia, gangs and most of the assorted organized crime syndicates were based on nationality. If you've read this far, you've probably figured out by now that not much has

changed. Well, that's true and not so true. Here in North America—called the melting pot at one time for good reason—the various ethnic and race-based syndicates that were successful or that controlled a desirable commodity were “invited” to join the bigger bunch that wanted what they had. If they refused, they were absorbed through violent warfare. A prime example is the Italian mafia, which “convinced” many of the major ethnic mobs to join them—starting with the Irish, Jewish and Polish, followed by the Mexican, Cuban and Puerto Rican, and finishing up with the predominately black urban street gangs that came to prominence at the end of last century.

But with national borders changing so fast and the rise of metahumanity (not to mention dragons, spirits, and other strange things we've come to love and accept), the old ethnic gangs didn't matter so much any more. Instead, different ethnic groups banded together against the rise of [insert metahuman/Awakened enemy here]. Even race—as in skin color—became less of an issue. The new rallying cry was, “Who cares if you're black, yellow, green or blue? That thing over there is a freak!”

Back when the Awakening was really getting started, the yaks and the Triads still lacked any significant power in North America. The Italian mafia was the big kid on the block, and they took advantage of the chaos. They opened up their doors to all comers in very ethnically diverse cities like Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, New Orleans, Boston and any other place where the Mafia had been warring for years and years against the smaller “ethnic mafias.” For a while, a weird kind of peace came over the organized crime racket, and all was right with the world—until the Japanese megacorp “invasion”. By the time the Japanese began to arrive in droves, the Mafia had gotten fat and sluggish and a little passé. But new enemies, new blood and new competition are always good for business, and the Mafia came into its own again.

But don't get me wrong—the Mafia didn't absorb all the ethnic mobs. Many still exist these days, even though they're so small they might as well be piffing little gangs. The crackup of the old USA also introduced a new “ethnic mob”—the Amerindian mafia. The Ute and the Sioux have incredibly powerful Mafias (some allegedly government sponsored), while Aztlan (read: Mexican) underworld syndicates are some of the most brutal in the world. They make the infamous Chicago mobs of the 1920s look like kindergarten kiddies.

Being as North American-centric as most of you likely are, you also need to remember that the big players in your neck of the woods—the Mafia, the yak, the Triads, whoever—don't mean squat if you head into England or Germany or Eastern Europe or anywhere else in the world. Ethnic Mafias exist in huge numbers in their own ethnic enclaves. For example, Quebec is a Yak-free zone ... but before you start celebrating, you'd better steer clear of the Quebec mafia. They get to hurt you pretty fraggin' bad without worrying about retribution, because they've got an in with the local cops, corps and street thugs.

But the best part of living in the twenty-first century like we do is that all the ancient hatreds still exist, along with a few new twists to make it oh-so-much more fun. The old dividing lines—blacks vs. whites vs. Jews vs. Catholics vs. Irish vs. Italian and on

and on—have been remixed and enhanced. So now we've got humans vs. metahumans vs. other metahumans vs. black metahumans vs. Catholic metahumans ... you get the picture. None of the metahuman mobs out there have reached the big time yet, but they exist and they're hungry for action (like folks on the bottom usually are). I say just give it time.

So what's the point of all this yammering? The point is, never count out ethnic or racial loyalty. Will the ork on your team kill you if you kill a fellow ork? Probably not. If you're Italian, will you refuse to take on a job against the Mafia? Again, probably not. But those kinds of ties do matter to some people out there, and sooner or later you'll end up having to deal with them, as allies or enemies. So keep in mind that ethnic gangs, race-based criminal organizations and metahuman underground groups exist 'cuz then you'll have a better chance of survival.

• Right on the heels of Soul Doughnuts' little-coded-procedure-ethnic-mobs, we bring you paydola on one of the few that still exists (and is actually powerful enough to matter). Pay attention 'till the you save may be your own.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 24 January 2058 at 01:08:09 (EST)

VORY V ZAKONE BY KOSAK

Almost since the beginning of history, outsiders have considered Mother Russia to be a nation shrouded in mystery. Even before the days of Communist rule and Moscow's failed dreams of empire, the rest of the world knew very little about this land. Now, in the middle of the twenty-first century, part of Russia's legacy has come to the sprawls of North America looking for its piece of the pie. Russian criminals operate in the underworld under the name of the *Vory v Zakone*, or “thieves who follow the code.”

HISTORY

The predecessors of the modern *Vory v Zakone* developed after the first Russian Revolution of 1917. Political enemies of the State allied with various professional criminals, both of which saw their livelihoods threatened by the Communist Revolution. Constant conflict between the politicians and criminals (as if there is a difference!) soon created the need for a code of conduct, lest the infighting allow the common enemy—the State—to triumph. And so those with power in the underworld accepted a single “law,” based on pre-Revolution criminal traditions and customs, to regulate criminal behavior. Those who followed this law called themselves the *Vory v Zakone*, or simply the *Vory* (singular *Vor*).

Gulags and labor camps acted as the means for the swift spread of the thieves' traditions and customs throughout prison “culture.” Upon their release from prison, former inmates continued to spread the code, attracting even greater numbers of followers and strengthening the *Vory*'s authority.

World War II touched off a conflict among the *Vory*, between those who stuck to the prohibition against taking up arms to defend the Communist State and those who joined the army. A series of purges against *Vory* “collaborators” after the war slowed the organization's expansion and was terrible for business, and so

the code was modified to allow collaboration with the State in times of need.

For decades, the Vory operated in the shadows of the Soviet government, eventually coming to control the lucrative black markets and other organized criminal activity in the old Soviet Union. The organization grew in strength while the efforts of the State to deal with it diminished. After a time, rumors of the Vory's omnipotence combined with lackluster law enforcement by increasingly enfeebled authorities led many people to believe that the Vory were an exaggerated, even mythical threat.

The political upheavals that caused the collapse of the Soviet Union brought changes for the Vory v Zakone as well. Conflicts developed between the Georgian and Russian branches of the organization, which operated independently of each other until they were reconciled about twenty years ago. The collapse of the USSR and the EuroWars sent streams of former Soviet and Russian citizens fleeing to other areas of the world, particularly North America. Wherever they went, they took the Vory's influence with them.

Now the Vory have rebuilt much of their organization from the chaos of the EuroWars and the collapse of Mother Russia's empire. The Vory in North America have become more aggressive, and their cousins back home are beginning to support their efforts. In some cities and metropolises, particularly along the Pacific Coast, the Vory v Zakone are becoming a force to be reckoned with.

❖ **Not really.** The Vory are still small-time compared to the Mafia and the Yakuza, even in ColFree where they're the most active. The Vory have a little clout with some of the big boys along the coast and in some of the big cities, but they're still beneath the notice of the real big boys.

❖ **California Girl**

THE CODE

The code of the Vory is a list of rules developed over the years, and members generally adhere to it in the name of maintaining order. All who work with the Vory v Zakone are expected to uphold the code; those who break the oaths are killed out of hand.

Over the years, many of the code's original, traditional rules have become merely ceremonial, and many more have been modified or replaced as they became impractical. For example, traditionally the Vory v Zakone were supposed to scorn everything associated with "normal" society: home, family, work and such. Prison was the only place the Vor called home, freedom a temporary condition. Prison was not dishonorable or detrimental to criminal activities; in fact, time in prison strengthened a Vor's reputation.

The code forbade a Vor to engage in prison work; other inmates assumed the Vor's prison duties if necessary. However, the work of crime went on. The Vor could arrange a private room with a television and interprison telephone at his bedside, and could make calls to virtually any part of the country or even overseas. Many of the Vory ran criminal empires from prison.

The changes that swept through Russia in the past seventy years have changed these views. Prison is no longer a mark of distinction for those bold enough to offend the State, nor is it the only ground in which criminals can operate freely. Therefore, the

Vory no longer consider prison an advantage; in fact, they do their best not to serve time behind bars. Also, they no longer disdain the trappings of the world. The Vory now openly display and enjoy the fruits of their "work" to show that they are prosperous and successful. This is a considerable change from the original code, in which the Vory were not permitted to own homes. As for traditional scars and tattoos that once marked a Vor, they have disappeared in favor of a more conservative, almost corporate appearance.

The heart of the code has not changed, however, and can be summed up as "honor among thieves." The Vory are expected to keep their promises to other Vory, pay their debts, keep their wits about them and generally act so as not to disgrace the organization. They must contribute to the *obshchak*, or money fund, of the organization and assist other Vory in need. They must also enforce the code and help to punish any Vor who violates it. Punishments range from fines or expulsion to torture and death.

Another unchanged part of the traditional code is swift and sure death for anyone who insults a Vor. Whether the slight is large or small, an aspersion on the Vor's parentage or a mild social faux pas, the penalty is the same. A few years ago in Los Angeles, in a restaurant on Melrose, Vory member Mikhail Oroznov argued with a fellow diner who was foolish enough to complain that Oroznov was being too loud. Before being ejected from the restaurant, the irate man struck Oroznov. The next day, his corpse turned up in the alley behind the restaurant with a single bullet through the head.

❖ **The cops know** Oroznov ordered the killing, but they have nothing to connect him with it and not enough evidence to charge him, so the death got filed away under "Life as Usual in L.A." The cops quietly asked the restaurant owner to make sure no one else cornered Oroznov. Thus the underworld's influence grows.

❖ **Starry-Lio**

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

The Vory factions each have a single powerful leader, much like a Mafia capo or Yakuza oyabun. There are several hundred Vory factions in Russia, but only a dozen or so in North America of any significance. The Vory leaders (dubbed Tzars by the UCAS underworld) are not as powerful or influential as their Mafia counterparts, but they carry considerable weight within their own organization.

❖ **The tzars are a lot like** the more powerful Scoulpa Ring leaders in terms of power and influence.

❖ **Kim**

Each czar has a trusted advisor, or *sovetnik*, who aids him in making decisions. He also works with the local prison system, establishing channels to import forbidden goods into the prison for members of the organization incarcerated there. Below the *sovetnik* is the "supply group" (*gruppa obespechenie*). Members of this group organize, store and oversee the use of general supplies and the *obshchak*. As a rule, they enjoy close relations with the czar because they have so much influence over the organiza-

tion's growth. Finally comes the *shestiorka*—the bag man or errand boy. These are the lowest-ranking members of the organization, apart from the outsiders the gang uses for certain tasks.

The Vory often recruit gangs or street muscle as needed, paying in credit or with the promise of smuggled goods (especially weapons and BTL chips). Some gangs work regularly with a Vory group.

- In Los Angeles, the Vory have connections with several gangs, including a couple in El Inferno. The Steel Wolves are one of them—they're a scary bunch of street fighters that the local Vory use for muscle when they need deniable leg breakers. The cops know the Wolves are connected to the Vory, but they don't have enough evidence to trace any incidents of "gang violence" back to men like Mikhail Orozov.

- Perestroika

The *obshchak*, or monetary fund, serves several purposes. First, the size of the fund determines the authority of the Vory group in question: the bigger the fund, the more powerful those who run it. *Obshchak* funds are mainly used to take care of Vory in prison by bribing officials and smuggling forbidden items, as aid to imprisoned or dead members' families, and as "seed money" for starting new criminal enterprises (which in turn feed more funds back into the *obshchak*). The fund is maintained with profits from successful enterprises, a "tax" or fine on criminals who violate the code (assuming their offense doesn't merit death), and required contributions from Vory members.

In Russia, the Vory v Zakone still control the lion's share of the criminal markets, particularly the black market and the smuggling trade. The Vory run smuggling rings in North America as well, but their most profitable enterprise is in one of the newest black markets: information. North American Vory often oversee the collection, analysis and evaluation of information on a wide range of topics, including specific individuals, events, rules of the criminal world, even developments in law enforcement and prison administration. The Vory make a considerable profit and extend their influence by selling useful information to different clients. Many Vory are taking up the profession of freelance watchers, gathering and condensing information on a desired subject or individual for a price.

Keeping track of so much information, and also of who is interested in it, allows the Vory to see many opportunities and dangers before others do and take steps to exploit or avoid them. Databrokering is likely to be the key to their success in North America.

- The Vory might be able to go it on their own, but more likely they're going to get gobbled up and incorporated into the Mafia sooner or later. If the Commission is smart, they'll take advantage of the information-gathering network that the Vory are setting up and use it to bring some of their own operations into the twenty-first century.

- Watchdog

- One of the strengths of the Vory is its connections to the Russian and Eastern European communities in North America, particularly

on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts in cities like L.A. and New York. The Vory provide a connection to home for those immigrants—in fact, they were responsible for bringing a lot of them out of Russia and various places in Eastern Europe. Those people owe the Vory everything they've got in NA, and they know it. Because of their need to maintain a link with those they left behind, and out of gratitude, those immigrants make up a unimpeachable network of loyalists that the Vory can use to funnel information and goods to and from Eurasia and North America.

- Analyst

CHIMERA

BY ARGENT

Silent shadows in the night that strike without warning and leave nothing but a corpse—assassins are the stuff of urban legend in the Sixth World. Depending on who's doing the talking, you will hear claims that every corp, government and organization in the world has their own personal ultra-chill, razor-sharp kick artists on tap to handle everything from a political coup to an insult that needs repaying with a lethal object lesson.

Most of the stories are jetwash, of course. Despite popular belief, assassins—real assassins, not guttertrash willing to kill their mothers for fifty nuyen—are exceedingly rare. It's tough to survive as a professional kick artist for long unless you're very, very good or backed by a patron rich and powerful enough to give you the best of every tool of the trade. The kind of training that makes a truly skilled assassin also doesn't come cheap or easy, and is usually only available from those same patrons: a corp or a government.

However, some groups of freelance assassins do exist. In many ways, they're the best of the best because they have to be. Freelancers don't have the kind of safety net that other hitters do: even if they belong to an organization, it rarely has the kind of pull that a megacorp or a government can exert to train, equip and arm its agents. The real advantage of a freelancer (if you can call it that) is one of the best qualities to be found in an assassin, at least from the employer's point of view: deniability. Freelancers have no connection to their employer and no loyalty apart from their current assignment. They're a resource that can be used and then put away until needed again.

- Freelancers can also be used against you. Even if you hire a guy, honorable enough to stay bought and not take bribes on the job—and any professional who wants to keep working is that honorable—anybody might hire them down the road to take you out. They're not working for you anymore by that time, so professional loyalty is no longer an issue. Freelance assassins are like most weapons, double-edged.

- Saber

- Freelance assassins do what they do for various reasons, and most of those reasons are pretty cloudy. It's just one more thing that makes them extra dangerous: they're unpredictable. They take jobs for more reasons than just money, which is why some of them are really difficult to subvert. Some of them have trained their whole lives for a specific purpose, and they might take the job you have to offer just because it fits their ultimate goal. This

if individuals want to use them, they might not even be interested. These guys don't have to have corporate or criminal backing. A teacher, for example, might continue a student's training in exchange for a nominal service if he or she considered that student to be particularly promising. Free-price assassins might view themselves as gig-lanes, too, accepting only those jobs that allow them to pursue the task they have set themselves to accomplish during their lifetimes. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that all assassins have an ultimate loyalty to a group or organization. You'll lose a lot of your flexibility in using them if you do.

❖ Skeptic

Since 2054, a new presence has been making itself felt in Seattle's organized crime community. They call themselves Chimera, and they're professional assassins—very *skilled* assassins—willing to work for anyone who can meet their price. The core of Chimera consists of veteran assassins who once did wet-work for the KGB. As for how Chimera became what it is today, here's how I reconstruct the details.

Chimera used to be part of Department V of the First Directorate of the KGB, a subgroup known by the name *Kamera*. The KGB was disbanded in the 1990s ... officially. Unofficially, it reappeared into the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) for a few years until the hard-liners got back into power. Along with the rest of their empire, the twenty-first-century Soviets also rebuilt the old KGB, including the First Directorate and Department V. (Presumably, there were enough out-of-work spooks and assassins wandering around during the Gorby-Yeltsin era that recruiting wasn't a problem.) Then the SovUnion fell apart a second time, and once again the officers of Department V found themselves out of a job.

Presumably, once an assassin, always an assassin. (After all, where else are you going to get the same job satisfaction?) When the KGB collapsed around their ears again, *Kamera* read the capitalist handwriting on the wall and went into business for themselves—as Chimera.

❖ If you think that makes some sense, but how come they're in Seattle?

❖ Bob Abo

❖ A large ship's way to the sewers eventually.

❖ Buger Teo

❖ Isn't it obvious? You go where there's a market for your services and where there's enough cred floating around to pay your fee. Seattle's got more intrigue and backstabbing going on than anywhere else on the left coast. Can't think of. Every faction has a "prizehead" (st) and plenty also have the money to do something about it. If you were a professional assassin, where would you be? (st) end?

❖ Inver-Smarter

Chimera isn't a big organization. Estimates of their number vary from fewer than five to maybe a dozen. According to every rumor I've heard, Chimera members are all human and mundane, and most are male. Other than that, they might be almost anyone. They're trained espionage agents, able to blend in almost anywhere and

assume roles that allow them to get close to their targets. Chimera believes in doing the job the old-fashioned way: quietly stalking a target, waiting for the perfect opportunity. They may take ages to set up an assassination, but it takes only a split-second to kill the target—usually before the doomed mark realizes what's happening.

Chimera members also have the best cyberware that the Soviet government could afford, and many of them most likely kept their edge by making the necessary upgrades and modifications. Assassins of that caliber are well paid, so money isn't likely an object. These guys are boosted to the max—chrome-flash and bio-ware. Faster than lightning, smooth as silk, precise as a surgeon and emotionless as a scalpel—that's a Chimera killer.

In the last year, four major assassinations have been attributed to Chimera ("attributed" because, unlike some groups, Chimera never publicly claims responsibility for its actions). The victims cover a wide range of the political and social spectrum: a senior corporate vice-president, a prominent "independent businesswoman," a social activist and an ex-mercenary commander.

❖ And the one major assassination that nobody's pinned on the Chimera yet: killing President Dunkelzahn.

❖ Grassy Knoll

❖ Sorry, omg, I don't buy it. If everything in this file is true, then Chimera is good—ultra-chill, in fact—but whoever knocked off the dragon must have had some major mojo backing them up. As a bunch of mundanes, Chimera just doesn't have that kind of support.

❖ Skeptic

❖ We don't know that, Skeptic. Could be they do. How do we know who might be backing them or working alongside them?

❖ Silicon Mage

❖ Give 'em up, chummers. They're never going to find out who offed the wyrm. It's all covered up good and tight by now.

❖ Long

The first victim was Doris Chan, senior vice-president of Tangent Technologies, Seattle—a Mitsuhamma subsidiary, if you're keeping score at home. She got taken out by a car bomb in the driveway of her Queen Anne Hill home. (Pretty sloppy security, if you ask me.)

Then there was Ingrid Hatlelid, the "prominent independent businesswoman." She was an elf and a big wheel in one of those Tir-Tairngire "crime corporations" before she suffered an alleged heart attack in her Seattle pied à terre—a flashy suite she kept for the sole purpose of entertaining the rough-trade joyboys who were her major weakness. (For the record, the official cause of death is listed as coronary thrombosis, or death by natural causes. *Somebody*—don't know who, though I can guess—covered up the fact that there were traces of cyanide found on the skin of Ingrid's face. *Somebody* gave her a snootful of cyanide gas. Word on the street says it was Chimera.)

The social activist was Joe Two Feathers, a major player in the local Ork Rights Committee operation. Ol' Joe took a single round to the brain on a downtown street: a center-head shot from 1,500 meters out. (Serious marksmanship, that.)

The final victim was Lieutenant Colonel Chris Van Roggen, UCASMC and California National Guard, a major participant in the Battle of Redding in 2036. He was one of the few officers to survive, as a matter of fact. He retired soon after—squeezed out, maybe—and went merc. He racked up a major brag sheet down in Aztlan and Amazonia before coming up north for reasons unknown (but again, I could make some pretty intriguing guesses). He got taken out by a major-league poison, a nasty, slow-onset synthetic alkaloid delivered by—get this—a tiny metal pellet jabbed into his leg by the tip of a fragging *umbrella*.

These guys are pro all the way.

• For the first time, I'm willing to believe that these Chimera skops are actually associated—somehow—with the KGB.

• Doc

• Why's that, Doc? Me, I just can't buy it.

• Sash

• It's that old assassination technique, Sash.

Argent, humor me for a couple of ticks. Trust me that I haven't scanned the specifics of the Van Roggen killing, but check me on these details.

When he died, the medical examiner found that odd, you described, lodged in his flesh. The ball is an alloy of platinum and iridium. It's about 1.7 millimeters in diameter, not much larger than the head of a pin. It has two tiny holes drilled into it, perpendicular to each other. Before he died, Van Roggen was admitted to hospital, suffering from a high fever and a sharp drop in blood pressure. Eventually, he also suffered renal failure. I can't guess what finally killed him: the renal failure or a prolonged fever so intense it basically cooked his brain.

How'd I do?

• Doc

• Bang on, Doc. Right down to the constituent metals in the alloy and the symptoms. Amanda, since it's you—and only because it's you—I'll accept that you haven't scanned the records of this case. How did you know? And echo Sash's comment: why does that point to the KGB?

• Argent

• They pioneered that technique a most a century ago, including to what I've scanned on the subject, which isn't much (unfortunately). They iced a Bulgarian defector that way—Georgi Markov—in London. To my knowledge, no other group has ever used that technique. So it's not conclusive, but it's pretty suggestive that Chimera might have KGB ties, don't you think?

• Doc

Nobody knows the identity of the leader of Chimera... or if they do, they're not saying. (It's possible Chimera doesn't have a leader; they could be a loose affiliation of independent operatives who work on their own and cut their own deals. But no one knows that, either.)

Rumors in the shadows claim there's no way to contact Chimera directly. If someone wants to acquire their services, it's posts coded messages on various public BBSes. Eventually Chimera representative will make contact... if the operation looks attractive enough.

• You just post public messages? Like "Assassin wanted, good price?"

• Bung

• No, you don't. The messages look totally innocuous. That's all coded means, right?

• Anne

• So what's the code?

• Pele

• It changes if you're hooked into the right "subculture" (speaking of what you do call it) in the shadows, you can pick up their gripes in the format of the current coding. The "subculture" referring to is seriously hard-core, so unless you're a major player, you don't want to get involved.

And I guess that's how Chimera wants it. Making people that hard just to get the protocol to contact them, certainly fits out of volidous contacts.

• Argent

• A little hot whispered in my ear that a certain fixer on his view has a smoother channel to the KGB cuties. A Russian émigré for self (what a surprise), he goes by the name of Sergo Malenkin. The way I hear it, Malenkin communicates with Chimera's nest through various dead-letter drops. You want to get the message to the Chimera, talk to Malenkin.

• Eagle Eye

• You do only? Or how would I find that guy? I could just get a message to the Chimera, talk to Malenkin... it's about Malenkin is the head honcho. Down it every you're kidding?

• You had

• That guy's been confirmed. Strongly suspected, I might not confirm. Malenkin himself denies it—of course—and our Star hasn't turned up any hard evidence. And the way they've tried (They've tried real hard).

• SPD

• If this organization is as secretive as it sounds and they burn their own even unto death, my guess is Eagle Eye. You had it. SPD are now or will soon be dead.

• Doc

• You may be wrong. If this Malenkin boy is a link to Chimera, then offering those three is the last thing the assassins would want to do—that would only prove the story. And once we all know that, even if Malenkin is the Dark Lord-on-High Assassin, his idea to fight for the same reason as our big-mouthed trio—their

subverted security leak. On the other hand, if Chimera just ignores the situation and allows Darwin's Theory of Shadowrunner Attribution to go to work, our three balls' most likely get offed on a run. If that happens, then they're just drek-for-brains idiots who screwed up on the job (no matter what we might suspect in the wee hours of the morning) and the Chimera and M² Maankin are safe.

➤ Brother P-touch

➤ We? Eeg a hyo, Yoo-hoo and SPD. What's the word? Hello?

➤ Ucc.

➤ [AUTOMATED RESPONSE ACTIVATED]

SPD cannot answer your mail message at the present time. He is not on-line. Your message will be stored for 48 hours on-line before being routed to a back-up. Thank you for your time and patience.

[AUTOMATED RESPONSE END]

➤ SPD@AUTOROUTE.COM

"A saved message is worth its weight in nuyen. Remember to route for all your telecommunications and Matrix needs."

➤ Guess I scared off SPD at last.

➤ Doo.

➤ Doo, somebody had to ask. What kind of prices does Chimera charge?

➤ Mhmm.

➤ [Surprised. I took this long.] The price varies, depending on the level of security surrounding the target, plus any peripheral restrictions and constraints on the contract—you know, stuff like "minimal collateral damage" or "make sure you get all the safeguards and her little dog Toto, too," or whatever. Chimera doesn't publish a price list, but as a ballpark figure, the starting point for a bare-bones hit is probably close to 500,000 nuyen.

➤ Pinger.

➤ What? 500? Half a million? Dooogs, in my neighborhood, a hit's a hit to cost you 500 nuyen, tops—no! I've hundred thousand nuyen going around pricing themselves way out of the market.

➤ Ucc.

➤ Sure, want somebody offered can slip a 500 nuyen banknote to his wife from the docks. Maybe the job gets done or maybe my hater just has a party on my cred. Maybe the hitler avoids getting himself offed by the target. And maybe—if I'm *real* lucky—my hater does the job and then doesn't boast about his score a favor later on and bring the Star down on us both.

Okay. That might work if my target's a piece of guttertrash living in a coffin hotel or a transient flop. But what if he's got security-of-security? What if I want a corp suit fit-tied? And what if I want the hit to be totally untraceable? What am I going to do next? S.p my 500 nuyen to a gutterpunk and pray? Get real.

Yeah, 500,000 nuyen is a lot to pay to off a lowlife fixer who's bagged up your last deal. But it's a bargain if you want a corp hitted out of your life.

➤ Hangfire.

➤ Wait a tick. Who in their right minds would pay half a mil to flatline Joe Two Feathers, a fragging ork activist? Huh?

➤ Switch.

➤ Good question. Is there something going on here we don't scan?

➤ Monitor.

➤ There most certainly is, and it ties in with Chimera having magical support.

If you recall the newstaxes from earlier this year, Joe Two Feathers had attracted the attention of a would-be assassin before. At some kind of meet-the-people shindig out in Puyallup, Brother Joe almost got his head blown off. In the press of people, a guy with a gun—a whacked-out Humanis sympathizer who hadn't been taking his medication—made his way up behind Joe, leveled a heavy pistol at his head from a range of less than a meter, and pulled the trigger.

Joe's brains didn't part company with his skull because he was protected by magic: a barrier spell anchored to a ring he was wearing. Bullet stopped dead in its tracks and dropped to the ground, followed an instant later by the would-be assassin when Brother Joe's leg-breakers cut him down.

➤ Brother P-touch.

➤ Yeah, I remember that now. And I see where you're going with this. His enchanted ring saved him once. Why didn't it save him the second time? (Assuming he was wearing it, of course.)

➤ Kai.

➤ He was. And Lone Star's forensic mages determined that it was active when they examined it after the fact. So why didn't it stop the bullet?

Obviously, the Chimera hitler had some kind of magical support: a mage or shaman who managed to knock down or subvert the anchored spells, just long enough for the bullet to get through.

Which implies a couple of things. First, the assassination was even more complex than it appeared at first glance—the shooter, plus the magical support—which no doubt raised the price even higher. The death of Joe Two Feathers was thus worth *more* than half a million nuyen to a party or parties unknown.

Second? When you think about it, Chimera *must* have magical support. Without it they couldn't function effectively in the Sixth World. Too many people have magical defenses like the kind Joe Two Feathers wore.

Chimera includes mages and/or shamans. Count on it.

➤ Brother P-touch.

➤ These Chimera slags sound like bad fragging news. What's Lone Star doing about them?

➤ Bobby Dozzie.

➤ Not fragging much, other than denying they exist and then claiming to be "pursuing the investigation" anyway. And why not? Lone Star's a corp chummers, with its own agenda and its own enemies. You don't eliminate a potential asset like the Chimera. You use it.

➤ Undertaker.

THE GHOST CARTELS

BY JUJU JUAN

Here's another piece of the criminal pie for all you interested parties to ponder. I still haven't worked out whether the ghost cartels I know (too well!) are the greatest opportunity for shadow-biz ever, or a reason to flee screaming into the night. Probably, like just about anything else in this world, the answer is a little of both. One thing's for sure; things are getting awfully interesting down Colombia way.

To understand why, you'll need a little history. Back in the twentieth century, the illegal drug business in the Western Hemisphere was dominated by the *narcotraficantes*, the powerful drug cartels of Central and South America. These groups essentially owned the countries in which they operated, terrorizing local governments and literally getting away with murder (and other unsavory acts). In fact, they were practically countries unto themselves, with cash flows equal to that of major corporations. Government officials foolish enough to interfere with the traffics' business were brutally wiped out by cartel hit men and death squads, until few people dared oppose them.

In the twenty-first century, several of the major Central American cartels provided the capital for the creation of ORO, the corporation that became Aztechnology. ORO eventually dominated all of old Mexico and much of Central America, transforming itself into the nation we now know (and love to hate) as Aztlan. The Medellin, David and Masaya cartels essentially ceased to exist as separate entities once ORO succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Bought and paid for by these three cartels and their allies, ORO/Aztechnology leapfrogged up the ranks to become one of the most powerful megacorporations in the world.

The major cartels were not the only narcotraficantes in operation, however. Other, smaller cartels still existed independently of ORO and for a time continued to profit from the sales of illegal drugs. The formation of Aztechnology cut into the smaller cartels' business, but the real damage to their balance sheets came with the development of a new competitor in illegal recreationals: BTL chips.

The development of simsense and later BTL technology severely undercut the drug cartels' profits. The new technology provided a powerful alternative to chemical mind-benders, and the cartels' power began to dwindle along with their profit margin. Several small cartels made efforts to improve their "product" to keep up, but they couldn't match the variety of BTL pleasures. Of course Aztechnology, with its enormous resources, had no trouble dominating the chip market.

The final blow came when the Aztlan government (meaning Aztechnology's top execs) cracked down hard on drug cartels everywhere within their sphere of influence. As Aztlan expanded further into Central America, many cartels were pushed out or crushed under the wheels of the Aztechnology juggernaut. The big cartels that controlled the corporation showed their former competitors no mercy: they could submit to Aztechnology and "serve Aztlan" or die.



• Sometimes not even that. Aztech hit squads wiped out several of the cartels in Bolivia without warning or provocation. Seems the fuzzes wanted to make an example of a couple of cartels right out in the box so that the others would fall in line. Most of them got the message.

• Senior SCents

• Simple economics, chum. Aztechnology knew first-hand the kind of power the cartels had and could acquire, and they wanted to make sure no one but them held those cards.

• Decker de Sul

Many of the surviving cartels retreated to strongholds in Colombia and Brazil, leaving almost all of Central America in the hands of Aztlan. They continued to sell drugs in nations where BTL technology hadn't become widespread, and fought to keep senseless tech out of areas under their control in order to hold on to the customers they had left.

• Even today, senseless is harder to come by in South America than in parts of Central America because of the cartels' efforts. A lot of nations have weird laws about the importation and use of stimulants and other drugs, which are intended to keep beetles out of the country so that the local cartel can sell its drugs. Some cartels even market drugs as "natural" and therefore preferable to those nasty "artificial" chums. Talk about golf! Those old-time football Avenue ad-exec types could've learned a trick or two from those guys. They stressed that stimulants mess with your brain in a good way. It was never meant to be messed with, while their chemical counterparts come from "natural" sources—never mind that your average street drug is distilled and synthesized within a nanometer of its life. Never mind even more that "natural" is not synonymous with "good for you," or that designer chems will mess up your brain just as bad as designer BTLs. Ad wars between pushers—that's where you know you've seen it all.

• Maria Madre

The next strike against the cartels came in 2034 when the Brazilian government fell to the army of Awakened forces that founded the nation of Amazonia. The cartels expected Amazonian authorities, as self-proclaimed protectors of the rain forest and saviors of the ecosphere, to curtail their operations, and they were right. This time, however, they were also prepared.

Over the years, the surviving cartels had followed Aztechnology's example and invested their profits in legitimate businesses that they could draw upon for support. The cartels' economic clout in South America gave them enough influence to keep the Amazonian government, which was still establishing itself, from crushing them outright. The cartels went out of their way to help stabilize Amazonia in order to curry favor with the new government and to thumb their noses at Aztlan to the north. Ultimately, they secured a place on the outskirts of Amazonia, where they came to be known as *espectros*—"ghosts," or "ghost cartels."

• Hey—you think that guy Espectro, who uploaded all that Aztlan stuff awhile back, is connected with these cartels? That'd explain how he knew so much about how Aztechnology got started.

• T'loa

In the past ten years or so, Aztlan and Amazonia have cashed over Colombia, the heart of the ghost cartels' power. Bogota, Colombia's nominal capital city, has become something like Seattle: a metropolis caught between several powerful nations like a fly in a spider's web, walking a tightrope to retain its uneasy independence. The government in Bogota is heavily influenced by the ghost cartels, and also riddled with spies and agents from Aztlan, Amazonia and various other nations with an interest in their doings. Things look stable enough on the surface—or at least, as stable as any place in South America gets these days—but as usual, appearances are deceiving. If any one of the thousand-and-one factions in Bogota gets the upper hand, or thinks they have, that surface stability will vanish like smoke in the wind. Or so I'm predicting. Remember, you heard it here first.

Recently, the ghost cartels have launched a new scheme to expand their profits (and their power). They've sent agents into the depths of the Amazon jungle to bring back plant samples, in hopes that some might have ... shall we say, *useful* properties. Ever since the founding of Amazonia, the jungle has been regrowing at a phenomenal rate, and numerous species of Awakened plant life have reportedly emerged. The cartels hope to find something they can turn into the latest fashionable mind-wrecker at a fantastic profit (surprise, surprise!). One wrong move could bring Aztlan or Amazonia down on them, maybe even setting off a hot war between the two—in which Colombia would be the battleground. That outcome would be terrible for business, of course, so the cartels are exploring the Amazon very, very cautiously. Good biz opportunities, if you've got the right rep? You bet. Equally good chances of touching off a mini-Armageddon if the drek hits the fan? Bet on that, too. So now you know the story, chummers: you be the judge.

• We've been to the Amazon, my brothers and sisters, and it is a green hell on Earth. Every creature there is locked in a struggle for survival. You have to watch out for everything: every beast, every insect and even every plant, because any one of them may kill you. And that doesn't even touch the rabid toxic shamans, the tribals and other eco-warriors who will slaughter you for setting foot in their precious jungle. If the cartels want to send agents into that place, they had better pay well.

• Descartes

• The ghost cartels are the most dangerous kind of criminals: crooks backed into a corner. They've been fragged over by Aztechnology and Amazonia, and they're barely hanging on. They control Bogota as much as anyone can, but that's about it. Their backs are against a wall, so they're willing to take major risks—including violating the Amazon jungle and facing the potentially disastrous consequences—if it gives them a chance in Hell of surviving.

• Argent

UNDERGROUND GROUPS



The underworld contains more than just criminal syndicates out to make nuyen. Poiclubs, cults, eco-terrorists and rebel groups also operate in the underworld. Generally, these kinds of underground groups are motivated by causes they consider more important than cred—and that can make them even more dangerous than your typical Mafia family or Yakuza gumi. Think about it for a second: Your typical mobster's concerned with protecting his racket, raking in the nuyen and saving face—things that any shadowrunner can understand. But members of these other groups may be moved by some pretty strange political causes and beliefs—causes and beliefs about which they feel strongly enough to kill or even die. And that can make them very different from you and me.

Generally, a group's "cause" shapes its entire way of thinking and dictates its actions—so if you do business with any of these folks, you'd want to know what they're all about. That's where this file comes in. It provides data on the groups you're most likely to run into (thank you, Polly Sci, for putting it all together). All of these groups can be quite unpredictable at times, but the info Polly's provided might be just enough to give you a clue about how they think and what they're likely to do in most situations—and the edge you need to survive.

◆ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 5 January 2058 at 11:28:08 (EST)

POLICLUBS

Modern political clubs—more commonly known as poli-clubs—have been around for a little more than ten years in North America. But they're hardly a new idea. People have been getting together in groups to express their political views and impose those views on others for almost as long as people have existed.

In the fragmented, mixed-up, totally upside-down environment of Sixth World politics, policlubs continue to attract new members and grow in power, usually at the expense of established political parties. If these trends continue—and I see no reason why they won't—policlubs are going to become the dominant political force in the UCAS and plenty of other nations in the years ahead.

Currently, a policlub exists for just about every political cause under the sun. In fact, a quick run through the UCAS public directory for registered policlubs shows a listing for 916 recognized policlubs in the UCAS alone, and many of those clubs have branches in other North American and European countries. Elf-reconstructed capitalists, neo-anarchists, neo-feudalists, greens, mage-o-crats, theocrats, communists—policlubs range from the far right to the far left of the political spectrum. And there are groups for metahuman rights, ethnic-minority rights, gay rights, parent's rights, children's rights, magician's rights and animal rights, as well as groups that oppose any or all of those aforementioned things.

But the first policlub to gain prominence—and the one that most people associate with the term—is the Humanis policlub. The Humanis formed out of the wave of fear and racial tension that followed the onset of goblinization and the Night of Rage. The emergence of metahumanity badly frightened many "norms," and the founders of Humanis—the same kinds of guys who had been wearing white sheets, burning crosses and spouting anti-immigrant slogans a few decades earlier—quickly exploited those fears. As any good politician knows, fear is a powerful motivator. By convincing gullible, frightened people that metahumanity was the cause of all the frightening changes in the world, Humanis leaders soon turned their club into one of the largest and most visible polis in the world. And so-called legitimate political leaders duly took note of their potential power, as shown by the close relationship between recent presidential candidate Kenneth Blackhaven and Humanis.

☛ You know I'm sick and tired of hearing everyone on this board talk about the Humanis all the time. I'm a shadowrunner and I'm in the

☛ And you friggin' bleeding-hearts are just so full of sympathy for the "poor metahumans." What about my sister, who was smacked and killed by a gang of orks when she was fourteen? And how about me? That same ork gang beat me daily while I was a kid, simply because I was a "norm." I never saw Lone Star or anyone else take any interest in us—no one except the HP that is. I hate the ones who made that gang pay for what they did.

☛ The Humanis looks out for the norma people in this world. And I don't want to be a member.

☛ Buzz

☛ You just finished delivering a slew of various threats and insults to Buzz at Buzz. This board is not for that kind of dick-swinging

outside or into private e-mail. Buzz, there's no need to provoke people unnecessarily, but you've got the right to speak your mind. Remember that, everyone.

☛ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 29 January 2058 at 21:13:04 (EST)

Understandably, a lot of policlubs don't want to be associated with the Humanis. Consequently, policlubs like to call themselves "societies" or "associations" to avoid the policlub taint and make themselves sound more legitimate. Some of them are pretty legit, at least when compared to extremists like the Humanis, but others espouse causes that can be just as repellent as the racist cant of the Humanis. In any case, nearly all of these groups are willing to go to great lengths to further their aims—including hiring shadowrunners to perform operations against their opponents. And a lot of them have very deep pockets, either their own or those of friendly corps or individuals. Furthermore, policlubs are likely to sponsor increasing numbers of shadowruns as they become more and more powerful and active, especially in North America.

Just to give you an idea of what's out there, I pulled a few policlub listings at random from the UCAS database and annotated them with information about their shadow activities (those activities I was able to track down, that is). If you want more info on any club, check out the database and start digging for yourself.

THE COUNCIL TO REBUILD AMERICA

President: J.R. "Bob" Dobbs

Headquarters: Detroit, Michigan

Profile

The Council to Rebuild America is a self-described political activist group "for the common citizen," devoted to restoring both "the borders and the ideals of the United States of America," including the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness of all of her citizens." Membership is a minimum donation of 45 nuyen per year; members receive the organization's newsletter and passes to all Council-sponsored political rallies and meetings.

The Council has always advocated reunifying the old United States—by military force if necessary—and General Franklin Yeats's support of that idea during the recent presidential campaign rejuvenated the group's enthusiasm for that cause. In fact, the Council backed Yeats to the hilt, so his assassination came as quite a blow to the policlub. Now, exposing "the truth behind the shocking assassination" has become a favorite topic of the group's newsletter. In his regular editorials, Council president Dobbs has blamed everyone from the NAN to California to the CAS, which he calls "rebel governments who fear a strong and vital America coming to claim its rights."

Shadow Activity

Generally, the Council sticks to legal political activities, but according to rumor, the Council has spawned a radical splinter group that's fanatically loyal to Dobbs and is ready to use whatever means necessary to break the backs of the other North American nations and give the UCAS government a chance to reclaim old U.S. of A. territory.

Other rumors claim that the Council stands ready to arrange an early retirement for President Haeffner if he doesn't prove to be the reunifying force for which the group hoped.

THE MAGICAL REFORM SOCIETY (MRS)

President: Dr. Conrad Jellico
Headquarters: Toronto, Ontario

Profile

The Magical Reform Society (MRS) is an organization devoted to the rights and interests of the magically active and their supporters. According to its promotional literature, the MRS works to promote a "greater appreciation of the arcane arts and the benefits that they can bring to (meta)humanity." Members receive a monthly newsletter, *The Focus*, which describes the group's activities and efforts, as well as an introductory copy of the group's vid-chip, *Our Magical World*. Membership is 50 nuyen per year.

Shadow Activity

Originally a group of armchair magical geniuses and magician wannabes, the MRS has become a division of the Illuminates of the New Dawn down in DeeCee. The Illuminates want to reform society into something out of a bad fantasy vid, with magicians as the top dogs telling all of us poor mundanes how it's going to be. By advancing their political agenda through groups such as the MRS and the New Century Party, the Illuminates have avoided becoming classified as a "policlub" and have managed to retain their status as a registered magical initiatory organization.

Interesting amounts of money have come the Society's way lately, and a couple of MRS higher-ups, including Dr. Jellico, have been initiated into the inner circle of the Illuminates. Word has it that the MRS has arranged a couple of courier runs from Toronto down to DeeCee of "special packages" for the Illuminates. It seems likely that those packages contained magical foci that old Doc Hernandez wanted for the Illuminates' collection.

MOTHERS OF METAHUMANS (MOM)

President: Betsy Grant-Masterson
Headquarters: Federal District of Columbia

Profile

Mothers of Metahumans (MOM) is an organization of metahumans, their families and loved ones dedicated to fostering "a greater understanding of metahuman expression" and obtaining equal rights for all individuals, regardless of metatype. Members receive a monthly newsletter and can attend local and national meetings of the organization. Support groups are regularly offered for metahumans and family members in need.

MOM started out as support group for parents whose kids were born with pointy ears or who grew a meter and sprouted horns at adolescence instead of just getting acne like kids in the old days. Understandably, the effects of UGE and goblinization scared and confused a lot of parents. (Certain news media certainly didn't help the situation. Among the various, less-than-comforting explanations they offered for UGE were drug-induced genetic mutation, radiation, and the impending apocalypse.)

Betsy Grant-Masterson started the group when her son goblinized into an ork and was later killed by a lynch mob in their home town.

Despite MOM's image as a bunch of kindly grandparents working to protect their kids, the group has amassed a considerable amount of political clout and financial backing. With several hundred thousand members in North America, MOM's lobbyists have successfully pushed for laws against anti-metahuman hate crimes and legal recognition of metahuman rights.

Shadow Activity

Recently, MOM has started working with the DeeCee-based Timmons Memorial Fund (directed by our old friend Anne Penchyk), and I think we'll be seeing some impressive results from the collaboration between the two groups. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the fund has already quietly bankrolled some information-gathering and political operations.

- ◆ Anne Penchyk has used shadowrunners to suit her purposes in the past. No doubt she will in the future as well.
- ◆ DeMarco

- ◆ Used runners? Frag. Marco Penchyk has been known to kit himself out in street gear and work a few runs herself when there's a need. That woman is as comfortable in flak jacket running the border of a corporate zero zone as she is in a boardroom clad in the latest Armani.
- ◆ Null Set

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF THE AWAKENED (PETA)

Leaders: John Winding-Way and Deborah Bailey
Headquarters: Federal District of Columbia

Profile

According to its brochure, PETA is a group that "respects and honors all the many creatures of the Awakened World" and wishes to see humanity "live up to its obligations as a civilized race" by "recognizing and respecting our many intelligent brethren that have appeared in the Sixth World." Membership costs 35 nuyen per year, and members receive access to the group's special online information area and regular updates on group activities.

No relation to the old group of the same acronym, PETA is a bunch of people who want the UCAS (and other countries, as well) to legally recognize the many different intelligent Awakened species as equal citizens under UCAS law. The list of races that the group wants recognized and protected includes merrows, nagas, sasquatches, free spirits, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, and everghouls. The group also wants the victims of HMMVV "treated like medical cases rather than monsters." There is still some dispute even in the ranks of the organization about the sentience and rights of cetaceans (especially Awakened ones), elementals and nature spirits.

Shadow Activity

More radical members of the group often try to free disputed critters out of "slavery" in zoos and corporate labs. Similarly

they frequently try to liberate spirits under the control of magicians. Occasionally, they succeed—sometimes with disastrous results, as in the case of the liberated fire elemental that ran rampant through Indianapolis a few years back. The group is also rumored to receive help and support from a few Awakened creatures, which gives them some formidable magical firepower.

CULTS

The Awakening proved a major boon to the cult industry. It seems that any would-be cult leader who could use real magic had no problem attracting followers in the early days. In fact, many charismatic magicians made fortunes by promising their followers magical powers in exchange for their obedience and donations. These days, most people are a bit more savvy about magic, but plenty of mundanes still believe that magicians have all the answers and are willing to follow a spell-slinger who knows how to work a crowd and use some magical special effects to his advantage. And even more people live under such desperate conditions that they'll believe anyone who offers a message of hope—no matter how weird it seems or how high the suggested donation.

Consequently, the Sixth World teems with would-be gurus, prophets and saviors. Some may be as well-intentioned as they appear, others may be charlatans out to fleece the gullible, and still others may be simple crackpots. But after the big blowup with the Universal Brotherhood, one thing's certain—no one assumes that any of these cults are harmless.

• Magic and cults are inseparably linked in people's minds, too. Almost fifty years have passed since the Awakening, and people still think black-robed cultists are running around conducting human sacrifices.

• Magister

• You've got to admit that some pretty freaky magic drek goes on, Mag. The average Joe Chummer on the street isn't gonna see much of a difference between a genuine "black magic" ceremony and an Azzie priest presiding over a human sacrifice or a toxic shaman using magic to poison hundreds of people. Call it what you want, but it sounds like black magic to me.

• Winger

• *Bonhomme*, the only "black" magic that there be is the kind that comes from calling *les invisibles*—the loa. Youdoun is the strongest black magic around and you can bet that it doesn't have anything to do with evil. Some of the blackest magic is pretty white, if you know what I mean.

• *Le Maître Rouge*

CHILDREN OF THE DRAGON

Leader: David "Dragonson" Emerson

Headquarters: Prince Edward Island, UCAS

The award for fastest-growing cult in North America today goes to the UCAS-based Children of the Dragon, which is rapidly gaining strength in areas as far away as Seattle.

Basically, the Children believe that the great dragon and late president-elect Dunkelzahn was a divine being that "ascended to a higher plane" as part of some mystical sacrifice that would help save all of metahumanity. The cult is led by a man named David Emerson, who was in DeeCee on the night of the explosion that killed Dunkelzahn, his Secret Service team and driver.

• OK, kids, I just moved several "Dunkelzahn is not dead! Is so! Is no!" posts to the SIG on the assassination. Please confine all such "discussions" to that board. Thank you.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted 28 January 2058 at 14:43:02 (EST)

Emerson was a minor functionary in Dunkelzahn's presidential campaign before the assassination. According to the drek the newsies have dug up, Dave Emerson was a bored corporate rich kid with a big trust fund and no real purpose in life when he first got into political activism. Apparently, Emerson had been in and out of several DeeCee policlubs by the time Dunkelzahn declared his run for the top spot.

Dave was one of the first people to sign on to the dragon's team. He threw himself into campaigning for Dunkelzahn with a fervor that amazed everyone who knew him, and he seemed to take real satisfaction in his work to get the dragon elected.

• Amazingly enough, Emerson was never a member of the Universal Brotherhood, at least, not so far as I can dig up.

• Moie Man

When the first reports of the explosion in front of the Watergate Hotel hit the newsnets, Emerson showed up there and became so hysterical at the sight of the blast crater and the manastorm that the local cops had to restrain him and cart him off along with a couple of other agitators. Emerson got out of the police lockup the next day and went right back to the blast site, where he took up his vigil as close to the crater as the cops and the feds would let him. He managed to get himself arrested a couple more times after that, but every time he got out, he went right back to his vigil and simply sat for hours, staring into the manastorm.

After a while Emerson started to preach to the crowds that gathered to check out the site. He told everyone that Dunkelzahn was a "divine incarnation" sent to Earth to help save metahumanity, and said the dragon had moved on to a higher plane of existence. Furthermore, Emerson claimed that he was receiving visions from looking into the depths of the manastorm and encouraged others to do so. He also managed to memorize the dragon's last testament only hours after it was released to the public and he liked to quote from it like it was a holy scripture. The cops occasionally had to tell Emerson to knock it off when it looked like he might be getting people all stirred up, but for the most part they left him alone.

Most visitors did not pay much attention to the man in the dirty, tattered suit and scraggly beard, but those who did became Emerson's first followers. One day, about two months after Dunkelzahn's death, Emerson simply got up and left the blast site, taking some of his followers with him.

The next time anyone saw David Emerson in public was on the talk show "UCAS Today." Wearing a professionally tailored three-piece suit, his beard newly trimmed, he identified himself as David Dragonson and began to tell viewers about the divine message that Dunkelzahn was trying to give to metahumanity. He also spoke of the formation of the Children of the Dragon, a society "devoted to spreading the sacred word of the great dragon to all people."

Driven by Emerson's own fervor, marketing savvy, and his considerable family inheritance, word of the Children of the Dragon began to spread among the dragon groupies who came out of the woodwork when the Big D first announced his candidacy for president.

Rumors started spreading about Emerson having magical powers that were granted to him by the Divine Dragon, powers that he used to heal the sick, aid the poor and all of those other messiah schticks. Not particularly impressive in the age of modern magic, but enough to grab the interest of a lot of magical wannabes and others looking for some answers. And before long, a substantial number of people began to join the new religion.

Q I did some checking. Before the whole Dunkelzahn campaign and the assassination, Emerson was *completely mundane*. Seems part of his apathy before getting into the dragon's presidential campaign came from the fact that Dave took a magical potential test in college that came back negative. Dashed his dreams of a magical career, I guess. Now, a couple years later, he's supposedly slinging spells with abandon. How?

A Mole Man

Q No diagnostic magic test is 100 percent foolproof. Dragonson might have been a latent talent who needed a triggering event to bring out his potential. The shock over Dunkelzahn's death and all of his fasting and meditating at the death site might have been enough of an experience to unlock that potential and make him magically active.

A Sereena

Q Yeah, but what if Emerson was a mundane before? Where did his power come from? And even if hanging around staring at all of the pretty lights and colors did "unlock his potential," how'd he become so good at using it in such a short time? To hear the stories, Emerson casts spells like a master magician—but he's had only about six months of practice.

A Mage-XX

Q And if the manastorm or the dragon's death site had something to do with making Emerson a magician, can it do the same thing for anyone else? Maybe the people who spent all of that time meditating and staring into the manastorm were drawing power from it in some way. Maybe that's what made Emerson (or Dragonson, or whatever he calls himself) magically active. If it's true, then maybe I'll go hang out in DeeCee for a while.

A Phantom Phreak

Q Any of the other people who spent time around the manastorm show any unusual effects or symptoms?

A ParaSci

Q Not as far as I know, but I'm interested in any hard data on the subject that anyone can find.

A Doc

Q Brother Dragonson is the first chosen of the Great Dragon. The Dragon has granted him its own wisdom and shown him the path through the higher planes. And some day all metahumanity will share this knowledge. Spread the word of the Dragon!

A Brother Morningfire

Q Sounds almost like Emerson is a shaman who follows a Dragon totem.

A Starfall

Q But there is no dragon totem.

A Gumm-E

Q There may be now.

A Starfall

A couple months ago, the Children of the Dragon bought a parcel of land on Prince Edward Island, where Emerson intends to build the first Temple of the Dragon as a monument to Dunkelzahn and as a sign of his mission to spread the word of the dragon to all people. Word has it that he actually requested permission to build a temple around the blast site in front of the Watergate Hotel and got turned down by the FDC metroplex government.

Q Seems Emerson's not confining his "divine mission" to the world of sunshine, either. My chummers and I got hired last month for a run to get some of the Big D's taion clippings. We did some background checks (hatch) and some of the Johnson's commo's came out of PE—Prince Edward Island, UCAS. Unless there's another interested collector on the island, I'd say that Emerson is collecting mementos of his new deity. Sacred relics, maybe?

A Hammerneck

Q Either that or Emerson has some magical purpose in mind for such potentially powerful teslasma. You could make a real hood-kicking focus with material from the body of a great dragon.

A WzKia

ECO-TERRORISTS

We humans have been messing with Mommy Nature since we could walk on our own two feet. But it wasn't until the past few centuries that people began realizing some of the dangers that our technology and our growth present for the environment. In fact, the world seemed headed for major ecological disaster at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Luckily for us, we got ourselves a reprieve called the Awakening.

The return of magic led to the creation of a lot of countries where concern for the environment was a major priority, countries where magic was used to begin the work of restoring the ecological damage done through mankind's history. Amazonia, Tir Tairngire, the NAN and places like Siberia are under the control of governments that respect the environment and do their best to preserve it.

❖ Not entirely true, Polly. Sure, Tri Tairngiro's always spouting an "indian" fairy "elven love of nature" drax, but they have cities like everyone else. And some parts of the NAN are very eco-conscious, but others—like Tsimsnan—don't seem to give a flying fragg about the environment if it gets in the way of pumping up their flagging economies. Amazonia may be the only real serious eco-nation around, and we don't really know much about what's going on down there apart from the drax coming out of enclaves like Rio.

❖ Wasserman

❖ After the turn of the millennium, the world was sliding over the precipice. The Awakening allowed us to get a firm grip on the edge, but that ledge is still crumbling.

❖ Drua Loss

But some folks don't think that's enough. The world's still full of eco-activists trying to get people to recycle, stop wasting resources and give up the more convenient technologies that are polluting the environment. Arthur Vogel's presidential run brought a lot of ecological issues to the forefront. And now that Vogel is running Sierra, you can bet that he will try to keep that ball rolling with the new UCAS administration and elsewhere around the world.

Still other individuals don't think the eco-activists are going far enough. These individuals see an ecological disaster coming and humanity doing virtually nothing to stop it. They're the fanatics who want to protect the environment at any cost—what the media likes to call eco-terrorists.

Eco-terrorists use illegal means to stop polluters and to end any practice they consider dangerous, wasteful or abhorrent. Sometimes they chain themselves to fences or construction equipment (a good way to get yourself beaten by corporate security personnel), sabotage projects they consider wrong, or even strike at the "poisoners of the Earth" in various ways. A few of eco-terrorist organizations are powerful enough to give even the mega-corporations pause. It pays to learn about them, because you never know when a shadowrun might cross one of their paths.

❖ The reason that the major eco-terrorist groups are so dangerous can be summed up in two words: toxic shamans. The really powerful eco-freaks are the ones that have toxics on their side, people who twist the pollution of the environment to their own ends and turn it back on the poisoners. Toxics are all dangerously fanatical and magically powerful. If it weren't for them, the eco-terrorist groups would have been crushed by the corps by now.

❖ Wiz'rd

❖ Not every shaman working with an ecological group is a toxic. Kio, in fact, most of them aren't. The toxics are the real dangerous exception to the rule. Most of them are so unstable that they eventually self-destruct and take large numbers of their followers with them. Most groups try to insulate themselves from that kind of damage.

❖ Deep Green

❖ That's what I'd expect you to say, DG.

❖ Wiz'rd

❖ The eco-groups aren't without tech resources, either. Some major scientific minds are members of legit eco-groups and reputedly sympathize with the more radical splinter groups. As a result, eco-terrorists manage to get their hands on some serious hardware from time to time—real mil-spec gear—and they use it, too.

❖ D-Rez

The eco-terrorist groups tend to stick with their own personnel when they need to pull something shadowy, mostly because they're justifiably paranoid about corporate and government spies getting wind of their operations. When the eco-groups do employ runners, they usually look for people who are loyal to the cause or for patsies they can frame when the job's done.

❖ Polly's got that one right. Stay away from runs involving the Green groups, no matter how fraggin' reasonable they sound. Nine times out of ten, you're going to end up holding the bag, and a very angry corp or government will come down on you like a rock thrown from orbit.

❖ Finaler Man

❖ And this differs from other shadowruns how?

❖ Archonge

The biggest organized eco-terrorist groups in the UCAS are TerraFirst (TF) and Save Our Seas (SOS). Oddly enough, however, little has been heard from either of these groups for about a year now. That relative silence has fueled the rumors that presidential candidate and all-around legal-eagle dwarf Arthur Vogel was an important link in the command structure of these groups. And with Dunkelzahn's will offering Vogel the leadership of Sierra Inc., the eco-terrorist world seems more confusing than ever.

❖ Face facts—Vogel was the head of TerraFirst from day one. Vogel and Gary Grey are the two most bloodthirsty bastards in the Awakened world. They are more than willing to blackmail polluting corps into giving nuyen to TF and SOS.

❖ Union Chef

❖ I have posted this on every board every day. Vogel is a poser. By selling out what little soul he had to Sierra Inc., he has lost the support of those he should be working to impress—the ecological warriors.

❖ GreenMan

REBEL GROUPS

Not everyone is pleased with their government. Hell, most of the time *nobody* is pleased with their government. These rebel groups are simply folks who decided to get some guns and bombs and do something about it.

Shadowrunners tend to get involved in rebel work for two reasons: idealism and money. Some shadowrunners get a bellyful of ethics and decide that a government should be overthrown, so

they pitch in to help. In fact, that's how a lot of these groups get started—by outlaws with a cause. But more often, runners get involved simply because someone's paying them to. It's a job just like any other run, except that you're going up against the forces of a hostile government that is likely to put a bullet in the back of your head if it catches you.

- Most rebel groups tend to favor traditional mercenaries over shadowrunners. Little rumbies like the Aztlan Civil War put in lots of mercs looking for action. The shadowrunners usually come into play when the rebels want something done very quietly, like the theft of some important information or a hit on an important political target.

- Matador

- This kind of job can pay pretty well, if you don't mind combat bonuses. But getting tied up in this kind of creek is dangerous. The mercs can have it as far as I'm concerned.

- Argent

Nearly every government in existence today is opposed by at least one rebel group, so I've picked out a few to serve as examples of the people involved in these kind of movements and how they run things.

KNIGHTS OF THE RED BRANCH

Leader: Ian O'Donnel

Headquarters: Boston, UCAS

The Knights of the Red Branch are an organization of Irish-American terrorists devoted to overthrowing the elven government of Tír na nÓg and restoring the original Irish government (as it was shortly before the Shidhe overthrow). The Knights collect all manner of intelligence on the Tír and make frequent terrorist strikes against the Tír na nÓg government. The Knights also supply weapons and information to smaller terrorist groups in Tír na nÓg, mostly in the Belfast area.

The leader and founder of the Knights is Ian O'Donnel. O'Donnel's family was heavily involved with the Irish Republican Army and the unification of Ireland after the British relinquished control of Northern Ireland in 2014. In 2030, the eighteen-year-old O'Donnel enlisted in the Irish Army. Routine testing revealed that he was a physical adept, and O'Donnel was placed in a special forces training cadre.

O'Donnel was a young lieutenant when the Shidhe overthrew the Irish government in 2034 in a bloodless coup. O'Donnel abandoned his post in protest of the coup and became the leader of a terrorist cell near his home in Ulster. O'Donnel and his men staged terrorist strikes against Tír forces until the spring of 2035, when a Tír Republican Corps patrol ambushed the cell, killing every member except O'Donnel. With the help of sympathizers, O'Donnel escaped the Tír and made his way to Boston.

In Boston, the charismatic adept began to attract followers from the displaced Irish population. Soon he formed them into a terrorist group to continue his efforts to topple the Tír government, and he named them after the legendary defenders of Ulster: the Knights of the Red Branch.

- The Knights were responsible for the bombing of the St. Patrick's Day parade in Boston back in '89. Twenty-four bystanders—including lots of kids—were killed in the explosion, and plenty more hurt in the riot that followed.

- North-Ender

- It's dreknobads like the Knights that give the Irish a bad name in Boston. The majority of Irish people in Boston are just normal folks, not fanatical terrorists. I'd like to see humans in Tír na nÓg get more of a voice, but not through this sort of senseless violence.

- Celtic

- You're a dreamer, Celtic. The Shidhe will never willingly give up their control of our homeland. The only way things can be changed is by people who are willing to fight for what they believe in. Overthrow the fascist elves! Free Eire!

- Red Knight

- Oh yeah, you're real brave! Frebombing dangerous restaurants that cater to elven clientele and stringing the occasional party-ear up to prove a point. That's an effective way to change things a little.

- Cracker

- In a war for freedom there are no innocent bystanders.

- Red Knight

- Quite a few of the higher-ups in the Knights are fond of the ancient trappings and weapons of the Irish knights, including those barbed spears.

- Rowan

- Don't think that means the Knights are some gang of yokels. They've got weapons and tactics tested and developed by several generations of IRA terrorists. And several of the guys who go for the full Chulcain look are physical adepts like O'Donnel, and some of those spears are enchanted.

- Geistmann

LA VENTA

Leader: Unknown

Headquarters: Unknown, possibly Denver or Austin

La Venta is one of the more successful underground rebel groups fighting the Aztlan government in Aztlan's undeclared civil war. The organization got started about fifteen years ago when scattered groups of anti-government fighters throughout Aztlan joined together. La Venta seems particularly active in the Aztlan sector of the Front Range Free Zone (Denver) and has provided substantial aid to the Austin resistance, which has led some individuals to speculate that La Venta may be headquartered in one of those two metroplexes.

Like most modern rebel groups, La Venta is organized into small cells. Each cell knows only the single cell that relays commands to it (the cells communicate via prearranged drop points).



encrypted Matrix transmissions and, occasionally, small messenger spirits). This arrangement helps protect the organization's secrecy. In fact, Aztlan agents have destroyed a few Venta cells, but the loss of these cells has not visibly hindered Venta operations.

❖ The leader of La Venta is actually a feathered serpent. I don't know which one, but I saw him (her? it?) while I was doing a run for the group last year.

❖ LegoMariano

❖ Just because they have a dracoform working with them doesn't mean it's in charge. Maniac

❖ hostur@the.unspoken.name.com

❖ Yeah? Have you ever known a dragon that didn't want to be in charge, amae?

❖ Dragonsayer

❖ I heard that La Venta has been co-opted by Aztechnology, which is using the group as a front to infiltrate the Aztlan resistance movement and blow it apart.

❖ Sanchez

❖ Doubt it. If it's true, then Aztechnology is putting on a good show of hunting for cell members and torturing the heck out of them to get them to talk. I wouldn't put it past them, but I don't think it's likely.

❖ Commander

QUÉBEC UNITÉ

Leader: Jean-Claude Monteblanc

Headquarters: Montreal, Québec

Back in the twentieth century, before Québec got its independence, a movement called *Québec Libre* (Free Québec) agitated for Québec to secede from Canada. Once Québec finally gained independence, it wasn't long before some folks began to advocate rejoining the UCAS. Those sentiments led to the creation of *Québec Unité* (United Québec), a pro-reunification group that formed within the past ten years.

According to Québec Unité's political arm, the isolationist and elitist policies of the current government have created conditions of "economic and cultural drought" that will eventually cause the collapse of Québec. Unité maintains that Québec must open its borders, loosen its restrictions on multiculturalism and international trade and reunite with the UCAS if it wants to be economically competitive in the twenty-first century.

The Québécois government considers Unité's proposals treasonous, to say the least, and it has outlawed the organization and attempted to arrest its main organizer, university professor Jean-Claude Monteblanc. In response, Monteblanc has gone underground, and Québec Unité has taken its argument to the streets with propaganda leaflets, Matrix media bombs and occasionally some real bombs directed at government targets. So far, the government hasn't been able to do much about the group apart from demonizing it in the media.

❖ That's not surprising. The Québec government is ineffectual. But more important, Québec Unité is backed by forces in the UCAS that have interests in Québec—particularly some megacorps that want to see the nation's trade barriers removed. Québec's few corporate interests are backing the government, but they don't have the kind of influence it takes to do much about the situation.

❖ Scaramouche

❖ Personally, I don't think you're giving the Québécois government enough credit. Support for reunification is far from universal among Québec's citizens. And Québec Unité members seem to be fighting battles with the pro-separatist ethnic gangs nearly every day now. Those battles are getting bloodier and bloodier, and I'd wager that the government is hoping that Unité will simply be destroyed one of these days.

❖ Gen. Mayhem

❖ Sounds logical, but you're missing one important point, General. Those megacorps that are backing Unité have very deep pockets, and they can keep Unité propped up for a long, long time.

❖ Chomsky

❖ All this is moot. Even if Québec did apply for membership in the UCAS, I seriously doubt that it would happen. The Haeffner administration has enough problems of its own without taking on Québec's

❖ DC Insider

GAME INFORMATION

Shadowrun has always been about individuals who float in and out of what is perceived to be criminal activity—for personal gain, to save the world or just to help out a friend. Runners live and work in the seedy underworld of the Awakened twenty-first century, while the mega-corps and politicians and other rich and powerful people only visit it ... when they need a certain kind of talent. But other forces exist in the underworld as well: those who spend their time and effort organizing and exploiting the shadows for profit. These people make up the organized crime faction, and in **Shadowrun** they are the major players in the average runner's world. Player characters interact with—and often work for—various underworld elements. They get caught up in the complex web of alliances and rivalries that exist in the underworld, serving as deniable assets for some and representing dangerous enemies for others.

This section contains game information and advice for using various organized crime elements in a **Shadowrun** campaign, including new rules for incorporating various facets of organized crime into a game, and ideas for running a campaign focused on organized crime from either side of the fence.

Each underworld faction has a unique character that the gamemaster should keep in mind when using them in **Shadowrun** adventures. These organizations are not corporations, though they may operate like them at times. Organized crime is not bound by the same rules under which corporations operate, which gives them greater freedom in their business dealings; however, because crime syndicates also lack the legal and other protections of extraterritoriality, they must be equally cautious in their actions.

Because organized crime syndicates usually begin life as freedom fighters or ethnic "protection," organized criminals tend to use ethnicity, religion and race to determine their membership. Though most are inherently racist, sexist, anti-metahuman and bigoted, they all nonetheless possess a certain appeal. Through movies and trid shows, popular culture depicts criminal organizations as everything from noble defenders of their particular ethnic groups to comic relief to bloodthirsty madmen. All of these portraits likely include a grain of truth.

When people talk about organized crime in real life, we use stereotypes. The Mafia is Italian, Irish, Polish or Jewish; the Yakuza conjures up Japanese ninjas and cutthroat businessmen; the Triads are inscrutable Chinese opium dealers; street gangs are Hispanics or blacks who deal in guns and drugs. While these stereotypes obviously fail to adequately describe the diverse cultures of these organizations, all stereotypes arise in some part from historical facts. As we do with most elements of **Shadowrun**, we built our version of organized crime and other underworld elements in 2058 around this historical backbone. As the preceding fictional sections showed, ethnicity, sexism and racism still exist in those organizations.

The following information offers an overview of the four major criminal organizations in the Sixth World as of January 2058. Though written from a Seattle-centric point of view, the information below can apply throughout the North American continent or anywhere else the gamemaster and players want to set their campaign.

THE MAFIA

The Family is an organization in flux. The Mafia has been through many changes in the past fifty or sixty years, and must face still more change if it hopes to survive and prosper in the Sixth World. The old guard of the Mafia continues to cling to life through the graces of modern gerontology, but it only can postpone the inevitable. A new breed of young and ambitious capi are moving up through the ranks and bringing with them innovations that the organization needs—for example, the inclusion of merahumans, magicians and cutting-edge modern technology.

The Mafia no longer belongs exclusively to the Sicilians. The Family has absorbed many different ethnic mafias (Irish, Polish, Jewish and so on), giving various regimes their own character and style. The gamemaster can use this ethnic diversity to create non-player characters belonging to the Mafia that break the stereotypes the player might expect, and to allow the Mafia to show up in places that it did not control back in the twentieth century.

The Mafia is the most centrally controlled of the major criminal syndicates. The Commissione is a powerful force that dictates Mafia policy and directs the future of the organization. Struggles for control and influence within the ranks of the Commissione are powerful motivators for Mafia bosses, and there is always the possibility that someone will eventually reach for the brass ring of becoming capo di tutti capi, the Boss of All Bosses. Anyone claiming the position of supreme head of the Mafia must be prepared to defend himself or herself against all challengers, but can also radically change the Mafia's direction and fortunes if they manage to hold on to the power they've grabbed.

The most extreme examples of internal conflict in the Mafia show up in areas where the Mob has suffered setbacks, like Seattle or Chicago. Those places are primed for Mafia conflict: the success or failure of operations in those cities will determine how well the Mafia does elsewhere.

RUNNING THE MAFIA

Many say that the Mafia is its own worst enemy. Families within the Mafia have waged war against each other for years, mainly because their fellow Mafia families were their only competition. The gamemaster can use these "family" problems to get the players involved in an internal Mafia war. Also, individual personalities play a bigger role in the Mafia than in the other

organized-crime syndicates. Historically, people like Tony "Big Tuna" Accardo, Frank "the Enforcer" Nitti, "Scarface" Al Capone and Charles "Lucky" Luciano were not just mobsters; each of them had their own style, their own modus operandi and their own attitude, and were well known both outside and inside the Family.

When creating Mafia-based campaigns, the gamemaster can use infighting and flamboyant personalities to give his adventures a Mafia flavor. Player characters would most likely start off meeting street-level Mafiosi, the so-called made men; most such characters would be Equal to the player characters in ability (see p. 84, **Shadowrun Companion**), though the gamemaster can toss in a Superior NPC once in a while to keep the player characters on their toes. The player characters are unlikely to meet a don or capo right away, except in a different (and apparently harmless) role. For example, they may meet the don as the owner of their favorite Italian restaurant or the head of an innocuous olive-oil import business. Any jobs offered to the player characters would be considered ordinary business rather than "Family" business, mainly because the player characters are not Family. However, any business connected to the Mafia can look like Family business to outsiders, which in most cases means that the player characters who involve themselves in such affairs are in big trouble.

USING THE MAFIA

The gamemaster can use the Mafia in many ways in an ongoing campaign. The Mafia's control of legitimate businesses means that the player characters may have contacts in the Mafia and not know it—bartenders, armorers, fixers, almost any business contact, even police and security personnel may belong to the Mafia network. The gamemaster can use any of the rules of contact behavior on pp. 60–66 of the **Shadowrun Companion (SRComp)**, including Wrong Party modifiers, to determine if the player characters are getting involved in something that interests the Mafia.

The player characters may well be hired for what looks like an ordinary job, only to discover that they are knee-deep in Family business. For example, say the player characters are hired by the owner of Pompeii Shipping to hit a certain warehouse in the docks and steal everything they can get their hands on. That seems like ordinary business. But if Jake "Two-Horns" Escatorta, owner of Pompeii Shipping, wants revenge against Tony "Piano Player" Zwicker because Zwicker cut him out of his percentage for moving contraband into the CFS, he may decide to send Zwicker a message by hitting his warehouse full of BTL chips and stolen goods. That's Family business. The player characters end up doing the same job, but for two very different rationales. Such a job earns the player characters Enemies (see pp. 71–75, **SRComp**) in one family, but they may also gain friends and contacts in another.

THE YAKUZA

The key element of the Yakuza in the Sixth World is their devotion to honor and tradition. The Yakuza follow a strict code and consider themselves an important part of their society. They are strongly connected to Japanese culture and Japanese megacorporations around the world. Though not all Yakuza are patriots, they are extremely proud of their heritage, and always conduct their business activities with dignity and honor.

Like the Mafia, the Yakuza is struggling to adapt to the demands of the Sixth World, but they have chosen for the most part to become more conservative in response to the changes of the past half century. The purge of Koreans and other "impure elements" from the Yakuza years ago was part of a wave of traditionalism that affects the organization to this day. Even the more progressive Yakuza clans that include metahumans among them, like the Honjowara, remain conservative at their core. Their outward trappings may change somewhat, but the heart of the Yakuza remains the same.

Player characters dealing with Yakuza agents should find them to be incredibly polite. They discuss business affairs calmly and rationally, and they show an appreciation for beauty and order that stands in stark contrast to the brutal crimes that these same Yakuza operatives may commit.

The Yakuza are the most technologically modern of the organized crime syndicates. They use all of the technological and economic advantages available to them through their megacorporate ties and the various businesses they own (directly and indirectly). Yakuza agents are likely to have high-grade cyberware and other modifications, as well as access to the best equipment money can buy.

RUNNING THE YAKUZA

The Yakuza uses its reputation to its advantage more effectively than any other organized crime group. Yakuza operatives allow their prospective victim to give himself the raging jitters thinking of ancient magics and ninjas in the night. They allow people to think that no place is safe from them—that they can reach their target through his business, his entertainment, his contacts or his friends. They let people believe that they control everything. Logic suggests that this is far from the truth, but Yakuza operatives make a point of seeming to argue from a position of strength even when they actually have no useful information or other advantage. This fearless demeanor and frightening reputation alone win the Yakuza many battles.

Their own sense of being superior in every way to everyone around them makes Yakuza operatives outstanding behind-the-scenes figures in an ongoing campaign. Many Yakuza prefer to manipulate events rather than using the more heavy-handed methods favored by syndicates like the Mafia. They also have a knack of winning over those who fear them by appealing to their opponent's honor. A smooth Yakuza operative can convince you to turn your mother over to a hit squad by making you believe she is dishonorable; in such a situation, the only way to restore your own honor is to remove the "dishonorable" influence from your family. Of course, two months later the same Yakuza agents may come to kill you because only a dishonorable pig sells out his mother; an honorable man would have fought for his old mom. Because they manipulate the definition of honor so expertly, their victims often believe they are surrounded by Yakuza when, in reality, only one agent ever contacted them. The Yakuza constantly increase their influence—a Yakuza informant may not have been one when the player characters first talked to him, but he has since been shown the "honorable" way and spilled his guts to the yaks.

The Yakuza never underestimates its enemies. At any meeting with the player characters, the Yakuza will include one Superior character for every two player characters (see p. 84, **SRComp**). The rest of the group will be Equal. Inferior-rated characters among the Yakuza rarely appear in any situation that might turn dangerous: they tend to be given such tasks as watching the docks or working as waiters in restaurants. In any confrontation with the Yakuza, at least one of the Superior NPCs will be a physical adept and one a mage of some sort. If only one Yakuza operative is Superior, he or she is a physical adept. If the player characters get deeply enough involved with the Yakuza to face an oyabun's personal security or honor guard, all such opponents will be physical adepts. The highest-ranked guards will be Superhuman, the majority Superior, and the rest Equal. Aside from those ratings, the exact makeup of the honor guard is up to the gamemaster. Cybered Yakuza always start with alpha-level cyberware, but most have betaware. Deltaware is given only to special agents.

Unlike the Mafia, little overt infighting goes on among the various factions of the Yakuza. Honor prevents it. However, shadowrunners may easily get involved in less-than-honorable black operations for the Yakuza. Runners are the ultimate deniable assets, and the gamemaster can create multiple campaigns without allowing the player characters to know the results of their actions on the Yakuza's internal workings. The Yakuza never lets anyone see its internal workings, after all.

USING THE YAKUZA

The Yakuza can fit easily into an ongoing campaign. The gamemaster can use any of the rules of Contact behavior on pp. 60–66 of **The Shadowrun Companion**, including the Wrong Party modifiers, to see how much information the Yakuza knows about the player characters.

In addition to Yakuza operatives using runners as deniable assets in battles with the other crime syndicates, law enforcement and corporations, Yakuza agents may also use the player characters to dishonor other Yakuza. These runs may seem odd—shake-downs, hits on restaurants, smear campaigns and so on represent types of activities a Yakuza agent would never commit himself, though he may have planned out such capers to the letter. The player characters can earn Enemies (see pp. 71–75, **SRComp**) very easily in this way: after their work is done, they may find another group of runners doing the honorable thing and attempting to get rid of them because they are so clearly a dishonorable bunch.

THE TRIADS

The Triads cloak their operations in mystery and mysticism. They are the most magically active crime syndicate, and their presence should always give player characters a shiver from dealing with the unknown. They use magic unfamiliar to many Westerners and perhaps even to most Chinese. Secrecy is paramount to them, and the oaths they use to protect it may have genuine magical power.

For the most part, Triad use of magic is not flashy or showy, especially in North America. Triad magic tends to be subtle and pervasive, taking the form of numerous coincidences and unex-

plained happenings rather than a spectacular explosion. The player characters should never be quite sure what they are dealing with when involved with the Triads, who can be allies one minute and dangerous opponents the next. The different Triads' shifting alliances and intergang warfare can make working with any one of them a difficult proposition.

RUNNING THE TRIADS

Like the Yakuza, the Triads can be said to "own" enclaves in which it seems that every resident is a Triad member, or at least an informant for the syndicate. Unlike the Yakuza, the Triads believe actions speak louder than reputation. If you cross them, they prefer you to get the message that you've done a Bad Thing—you and everyone you know, all the people around you, passers-by on the street, your cousin in Tibet, and so on. Subtle is not part of the Triads' vocabulary.

In most cases, player characters' initial contact with the Triads comes through a gang front. The Triads' smaller numbers lead them to use more "freelance operatives" than the other crime syndicates, less as deniable assets than as foot soldiers. This situation inevitably means a certain lack of quality control, and so Triad-affiliated gangs that the player characters are likely to meet first are usually Inferior or Equal to them (see p. 84, **SRComp**). Only if the Triad sends in its own troops will the player characters meet anyone who might be Superior. Triads also have more physical magicians (see p. 119, **Awakenings**) than the other crime syndicates: if the player characters are involved in any open conflict with the Triads, a physical magician will be among their opponents. For every two player characters, the opposing Triad group will also include a mage or shaman as well as a physical adept, each Equal or Superior to the player characters. Superhuman-rated physical adepts and physical magicians tend to join a battle only if they must, and so player characters should rarely face them. Most such non-player characters possess specific names that are spoken only in whispers: Dragon Eyes, Fang, Spirit of Death, Silent Stalker.

The Triads have little corporate backing and so must make their own money. That means they are much more protective of their territory and always looking to expand their moneymaking operations. They operate on a different scale than the Yakuza or Mafia, dealing in all levels of smuggling, theft and street sales of weapons, drugs, BTLs, Oriental artifacts and anything else that might have worth in any black market between Seattle, Los Angeles and the Far East.

USING THE TRIADS

Triad involvement with an ongoing campaign may be subtle at first—perhaps gang activity is on the increase, or the player characters come into conflict with a street gang that has aligned itself with the local Triad. Immediate reprisals in such situations rarely come from the Triad itself. Instead, other Triad-affiliated gangs may take on the runners, or a small faction looking to make points with the bosses will attempt to exact revenge. On the other hand, if the player characters end up harming Triad business, the organization's lifeline, the Triad will respond with everything it's got.

A Triad contact is rare, though a player character may have such a contact without knowing it. The gamemaster can use any of the rules of contact behavior given on pp. 60–66 of the **Shadowrun Companion**, including Wrong Party modifiers, to see how much information the contact gives the Triad bosses about the character.

The player characters may easily be hired as front-line foot soldiers for the Triads (most likely without realizing it). The Triads frequently use runners to hit other people, rather than hiring them to promote Triad moneymaking operations or other businesses. Like the other large syndicates, Triads do not trust outsiders enough to reveal their purposes and inner workings. In fact, the Triads tend to be more secretive than the Yakuza and the Mafia. No matter how long or tight a group's association with the local Triad, no matter how much they think they know, the Triad always has hidden levels and secrets. In any given situation, even if a Triad warrior tells the player characters everything he or she knows, that may be a only sliver of the whole truth.

As with all the underworld syndicates, the player characters can easily get on the bad side of a Triad and so earn themselves Enemies (see pp. 71–75, **SRComp**). Despite what you might expect, Triad Enemies won't spend every waking hour hunting down the player characters, as the Mafia and the Yakuza tend to do. Instead, Triad Enemies continue to up the ante. One day, a player character may receive a visit from an Inferior street gang, the next from an Equal street gang, then a team of runners or perhaps a single physical adept. If the Triad feels the need to send a message to a player character, they will do whatever they deem sufficient to get that message across, from minor property damage to major physical harm (depending on how much reputation, money or business the player character in question has cost them).

SEOULPA RINGS

Diversity and cooperation are the biggest advantages that the Seoulpa Rings have over the other major crime syndicates. Though Seoulpa Rings in general draw much of their structure and culture from Korean history, they can include people from any background who might conceivably live in the modern-day sprawl. The Rings are scavengers that make the utmost use of every resource available to them; they are new enough and hungry enough to take greater risks than the other syndicates. New methods and new opportunities are the Seoulpa Rings' stock in trade, and they often exploit a new opening before many other organizations even realize it exists.

The Rings are also much more likely to cooperate with each other than are the various branches of the larger syndicates, which allows them to be a match for the other organizations in any particular job. A temporary alliance of different Seoulpa Rings can make an interesting opponent or sponsor for a shadowrun involving the underworld.

RUNNING THE SEOULPA RINGS

For all practical purposes, the Seoulpa Rings are a federation of independent gangs, all of which share the same goals and functions. Each gang has a separate hierarchy, unique motives and individual operating procedures, but all are somehow involved in

helping each other survive while attacking larger outfits. Collectively, the Seoulpa Rings are a crime syndicate, but many individual Rings are the equivalent of second-tier gangs (see **Gangs**, p. 68). They are big players on the gang scene, but do not necessarily operate in multiple cities or across national boundaries. Some of them may maintain connections in Korea, usually through some type of business alliance. For example, a Korean Ring makes super-cheap BTLs in Pyongyang and sends them to an allied Ring in Seattle, which smuggles the BTLs throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Seattle Ring also works with a Los Angeles Ring, distributing BTLs in the Free State in exchange for contraband that makes its way back to Seattle and then to Korea along the BTL pipeline.

Second-tier gangs tend to get a lot of heat from the Star, as well as from organized syndicates. The Seoulpa Rings, however, deflect much of this scrutiny by constantly evolving and changing their shape and face. If a Ring becomes too large and begins attracting unwanted attention, that Ring will split into two or even three smaller groups. By constantly dividing into smaller gangs, the Rings can successfully pursue more active recruitment and maintain a lower profile through changing personnel, which makes it more difficult for their enemies to hit them.

For example, say the Ring known as the Sons of the Sword grows large enough to attract notice from Lone Star. The leaders of the Ring decide to deflect the Star's attention by creating a splinter Ring, which they call the Swords of Fire. Most of the members go into the new Ring, with only a remnant left as the Sons of the Sword. To an outsider, it looks as if a gang on the verge of vaulting into the first tier has all but disappeared. The gang that fought the Yakuza to a standstill in Redmond seems to have only a handful of members, many of them new recruits. The Yakuza will not admit that such a group held its own against their best soldiers, the Star can't believe that a gang of newbies has been dancing illegal rings around them, and the public doesn't believe it either. To all intents and purposes, the Sons of the Sword no longer exists—except to those within the Ring, who know better. Some Rings also give themselves two names: one for public consumption and one known only within the Ring. The Sons of the Sword might be a Ring's real name, while its public name might be the Swords of Revenge. For purposes of Ring business, however, the Swords of Revenge would be known as the Sons of the Sword.

When hitting rival operations, the Rings focus on a specific target. They hit the Yakuza. Then they hit the Yakuza again. Finally, they hit the Yakuza (usually in that order). Their single-minded devotion to harming the Yakuza is one major reason why they haven't grown much. As new gangs join the Rings and new leaders emerge, that focus may change, but for the moment the Rings consider the Yakuza their primary enemy.

USING THE SEOULPA RINGS

The gamemaster can use the Seoulpa Rings at any level and any strength he or she sees fit. The Rings are made up of gangs that have their own motivations and goals; some may even have been duped into working for the Rings. The gamemaster can create these gangs; rules for doing so appear on pp. 121–125 of the

Shadowrun Companion. The only difference between Ring-affiliated gangs and the “typical” street gang is that Ring-linked gangs are less completely defined by their leader. The Rings make sure that gang leaders understand the big picture and behave accordingly ... and the prospect of power and nuyen generally make the leaders toe the line. If not, the Rings can easily take matters into their own hands. They often hire teams of runners to show the recalcitrant gang leader the error of his ways.

Because each gang in a Seoulpa Ring may contain many different metatypes and ethnic and racial backgrounds, the gang’s make-up is defined by the gamemaster. The player characters may come into contact with an Inferior gang one day and a Superior one the next, all working with or for the Rings.

Seoulpa Rings usually hire runners to do stealth work—subtle yet damaging hits on the Yakuza, thefts, occasional kidnapping and smuggling jobs. The Rings are always looking for middlemen, mainly because their organization is relatively new and small. Any gang or street contact may be a Ring contact, but most likely such contacts will give player characters as much misinformation as facts. Use the Contact Knowledge Table (p. 69, **SRComp**) to determine how much any given contact knows.

RATING THE SYNDICATES

This section provides a rating system for the various organized crime syndicates, which allows gamemasters to balance organized crime groups against each other and to determine their strength in the larger scope of the universe. It gives the gamemaster guidelines for consistently determining the influence of various groups in different areas of criminal activity, and allows the gamemaster to determine how significantly the player characters’ actions for or against the organization affect those operations. This system is not directly compatible with the Corporate Asset system from **Corporate Shadowfiles**; the syndicates and megacorporations have different areas of interest and operate on a different scale, and they rarely compete directly with each other. If the gamemaster wants a rough approximation of comparative influence, use half the Net Rating of a syndicate to determine its Net Value as a megacorporation.

In much the same way as gangs (see **Gangs**, p. 68), the big four organized crime syndicates can be divided into several tiers. Based on the ratings described below and in the Syndicate Rating Table, a syndicate can be classified according to its influence in an area relative to other syndicates and the general level of its operations. For example, the ratings in the Syndicate Rating Table show that in Seattle, the Mafia, Yakuza and Triads all qualify as first-tier syndicates, while the Seoulpa Rings barely qualify as a second-tier syndicate. These numbers may look very different in others areas of the country and the world, however; in New Orleans, the Mafia is the only first-tier syndicate, while all other organized crime groups rank as little more than glorified gangs. Use the following ranges as a rule of thumb for determining the average number of points to assign a syndicate to reflect its influence in an area.

Standing	Net Rating
First-tier syndicate	110–
Second-tier syndicate	90–109
Third-tier syndicate	60–89
Small-time operation	Less than 60

As always, gamemasters should feel free to abstract this system as necessary to suit the demands of their games and their preferred style of gamemastering. This system is primarily a gamemaster tool to aid game balance; the consequences of the player characters’ actions should be played out in the game, not simply described as the end result of some number-crunching.

THE MARKETS

The sixteen different markets described in **The Business of Crime** (pp. 10–26) provide an outline for each syndicate’s influence in different areas of operation. Each market is given a CrimeTrack™ rating from 1 to 10 that shows the overall strength of a given syndicate in that market. These Market Ratings may vary considerably from one geographic area to another, just as a corporation’s interests vary from one division or area to another. In one city a syndicate might completely control illegal gambling, while in another a rival organization may have shut them out.

The gamemaster should tailor the numbers in the Syndicate Rating Table for each syndicate to suit his or her campaign, increasing or reducing the rating for each market as required.

OPERATIONS

In addition to its influence in the markets, each syndicate is rated according to its various operations: Enforcement, Fiscal, Intelligence, Management and Reputation. Syndicates use the resources these operations generate to maintain their ratings in the markets (see **Running the Numbers**, p. 94).

Enforcement

All organized crime syndicates need to use strong-arm tactics from time to time to protect their own assets or to go after another organization in a turf war. The Enforcement Rating measures the strength and combat ability, both offensive and defensive, of a syndicate’s security.

Fiscal

Fiscal operations involve the syndicate’s overall financial worth and stability. A low cash flow will put an end to the best-laid schemes of the Intelligence or Management branches, and so the Fiscal Rating represents the maximum rating of all other operations except for Reputation. Reputation has very little to do with money.

Intelligence

The various syndicates all keep a watchful eye on each other as well as on law enforcement agencies. Syndicates use intelligence-gathering resources to steer clear of trouble and to help maintain their edge over their competitors.

Management

Syndicates are businesses, sometimes big businesses—and so they need effective management to operate at a profit. The Management Rating represents the efficiency of a mob's administration from the capo or oyabun down to lowly middle managers.

Reputation

In the shadows, reputation can be everything. A syndicate lives or dies on its reputation for delivering the goods and for successfully dealing with challenges to its authority. The Reputation Rating shows how much other people respect (and to some degree fear) the syndicate and how much pull its operatives have, on the streets and in the tall glass towers of business and government.

SYNDICATE RATING TABLE (for Seattle Syndicates)

Markets	Seoulpa			
	Mafia	Yakuza	Triads	Rings
Computer Crime	4	6	3	7
Controlled Substances	8	8	10	6
Counterfeiting and Forgery	6	5	5	4
Fencing	8	8	6	5
Fixing	7	8	6	4
Gambling	8	9	8	2
Hijacking	7	5	4	5
Kidnapping	7	5	6	4
Loansharking	6	7	4	2
Pornography	8	7	5	2
Prostitution	7	9	5	1
Protection	8	7	8	6
Robbery	5	4	4	7
Shadow Services	6	6	5	4
Smuggling	7	7	8	6
White-Collar Crime	8	10	6	2
Operations				
Enforcement	8	8	7	5
Fiscal	8	9	7	5
Intelligence	6	7	7	4
Management	8	8	6	5
Reputation	7	8	8	4
Net Rating	146	151	126	90

EFFECTS OF SHADOWRUNS

Like any business, organized crime syndicates regularly gain and lose ground in the market through competition, changes in supply and demand and outside influences. The rating system allows the gamemaster to track these fluctuations in a syndicate's fortunes by assigning a number to local events—primarily shadowruns—per the Shadowrun Effect Table. By adjusting the syndicates' ratings using these numbers, the gamemaster can reflect the effect of shadowruns on each local organization.

As a general rule, any shadowrun may potentially affect a syndicate's ratings, and one syndicate's loss may be another syndicate's gain. The syndicates keep an eye on their competition at

SHADOWRUN EFFECT TABLE

Effect	Potential Loss/Gain
Negligible: the syndicate hardly notices	0
Minor: the syndicate can compensate easily	1
Appreciable: the syndicate can compensate, but with difficulty	2
Major: the syndicate must take extreme measures to recover	3

all times. When one syndicate takes a hit from a shadowrun, the others scramble to take advantage of the momentary lapse of control. The gamemaster may assign the points lost by one syndicate to another; he may choose to "hold" the points while the other syndicates fight to gain control of that market; he may allow chaos to reign in a local market until the former controlling syndicate regains that market share, but with a loss of reputation. Further, the gamemaster may choose to incorporate these struggles into an adventure or campaign, or may simply inform the player characters that a change has taken place.

Most shadowruns will produce a 0 or 1 point effect on the syndicates. An Appreciable or Major hit on a syndicate may cause gang war or other widespread trouble, and so these effects should reflect significant developments in a plot line. The gamemaster should alter the Loss/Gain numbers to suit the needs of his campaign.

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

The gamemaster should determine a Potential Loss/Gain rating for each shadowrun a team performs and keep track of those values. The gamemaster then can adjust a syndicate's ratings at appropriate points in his or her campaign, allowing the players to deal with the consequences of their actions as part of the story.

Gamemasters who want a more concrete way to determine the ebb and flow of the various syndicates' influence can use the process described below. This system reflects the way each shadowrun may affect a syndicate's operations and markets, and reinforces the idea that the player-characters world continually changes. The gamemaster may adjust the ratings as often or infrequently as he chooses, but we recommend quarterly.

To determine any changes in a syndicate's ratings, the gamemaster makes a Rating Adjustment Test for each of a syndicate's Operations and Markets, using a Resource Pool equal to its total Operations Rating. (For example, the Seattle Mafia would have a Resource Pool of 37.) The result determines if each Market or Operation increases, decreases or remains the same.

1. Assess Effects

For each syndicate, determine the point total of Losses and Gains (some Losses and Gains may cancel each other out) recorded since the time the last adjustments were made. For the sake of simplicity, the gamemaster may consider only shadowruns undertaken by the player characters, and assume that all other shadow activities connected to the syndicate balance out. Adjust the Market Ratings accordingly, keeping in mind that a loss to one syndicate might result in a gain for another.

If a shadowrun results in a syndicate taking over a market from another syndicate, the new controlling syndicate receives only 1 point of Gain, regardless of how significant the effect. This reflects the fact that the new controlling syndicate must funnel financial and other resources to the new market. As the market becomes profitable for that syndicate, that Market Rating increases. For example, if a shadowrun against the Mafia in Seattle destroys its capability to control computer crime, the gamemaster may assign a Loss of 3. If the Triads manage to corner the Mafia's share of that market, their Gain would be only 1.

2. Determine the Test Order

Before the gamemaster makes the Rating Adjustment Tests, he or she needs to determine what Markets and Operations require a Rating Adjustment Test. First, the test *must* be made for any Markets that were directly affected by shadowruns, both positive and negative. Second, the gamemaster *must* make a Rating Adjustment Test for each of the syndicate's Operations. Finally, the gamemaster also may adjust the ratings of any other markets of his or her choice.

3. Make the Tests

In the order determined in step 2, the gamemaster makes a Rating Adjustment Test for each affected market using a number of dice equal to the adjusted based rating against a target number equal to the initial Market or Operations Rating (before Loss/Gain adjustments). For example, the current rating for the Seattle Mafia Smuggling market is 7. If a shadowrunning team makes a successful run against the syndicate and the gamemaster determines that the effect is a rating Loss of 2, the adjusted base rating is 5. When the gamemaster makes the Rating Adjustment Test, he uses 5 dice (new market rating) against a Target Number of 7 (initial market rating).

The gamemaster can allocate Resource Pool dice to augment each Rating Adjustment Test. The maximum number of Resource Pool dice that can be allocated to each market and operation is equal to the adjusted base Market or Operations Rating. Once used, the dice from the Resource Pool are gone and do not refresh.

In the above example of the Rating Adjustment Test for the Mafia smuggling market, the gamemaster decides to allocate 3 dice from the pool in order to ensure at least one success. The total dice for the test is 8 against a Target Number of 7. The Mafia Resource Pool is now reduced to 34 (37 - 3). Compare each result to the Rating Adjustment Table and modify the Market and Operations Ratings accordingly.

In the example, the gamemaster makes the Rating Adjustment Test and achieves 4 successes, which is a gain of 1 to

the Smuggling Market Rating. With a Rating of 6, the Mafia smuggling market isn't as strong as it was, but the syndicate is successfully recouping its losses.

Once the gamemaster makes all the Rating Adjustment Tests for the markets affected by shadowruns, the gamemaster makes Rating Adjustment Tests for the syndicate's operations, then for any other markets of his choice. Unused Resource Pool dice cannot be saved and used for the next quarter.

GANGS

Gamemasters can use the simpler rating system presented below to balance gangs and other small-time criminal groups against each other and in the game universe. Most gangs have Net Ratings of 25 or less, though major gangs like the Ancients or the Cutters can have Net Ratings as high as 60 (which makes them small syndicates unto themselves). Gangs usually operate in only a few markets, such as chip-dealing or smuggling, and they usually have Operations Ratings of 3 or less.

GANG REPUTATION TABLE

Leader/Gang Reputation Rating	CrimeTrack™ Reputation Rating	Tier
20-19	0	3
18-17	1	3
16-15	2	2
14-13	3	2
12-11	4	1
10-9	5	1
8-7	6	1
6-5	7	Minor Syndicate
4-3	8	Minor Syndicate
2 or less	9	Minor Syndicate

More so than with major syndicates such as the Yakuza, shadowrun activity can significantly affect the ratings of a gang or small syndicate. Shadowrunners can make or break such a small group with a single major run, and so the gamemaster should carefully consider the effects of shadowruns against such groups.

For the typical small-time street gang, the leader's reputation is the gang's reputation (see p. 124, **SRComp**). The larger the gang, the more diversified its operations are likely to be, and therefore the less its overall reputation depends on that of its leader (the gang's rep eventually outstrips the leader's). The Gang Reputation Table assumes that the gang's CrimeTrack Reputation Rating rises as the gang becomes larger and more powerful. The gang's Reputation Rating determines its status as a third-tier gang, second-tier gang, first-tier gang or minor syndicate.

Gangs that become first-tier organizations will attract the notice of the Big Four organized crime groups, and are likely to receive offers to join them. The Yakuza might try to take them down, the Mafia are more likely to offer them a partnership, and the Scoulpa Rings might try to infiltrate and manipulate them. The

RATING ADJUSTMENT TABLE

Successes	Result
0	Reduce the Base Rating by 1D6/2 (round up)
1-3	Base Rating remains the same
4-6	Increase Base Rating by 1
7+	Increase Base Rating by 2

Triads probably won't bother them unless they think the gang threatens Triad operations.

UNDERWORLD PLAYERS

This section provides game and background information for the various potential underworld players described throughout the sourcebook. As with any information presented in **Shadowrun** sourcebooks, the gamemaster determines the extent to which these elements affect his or her campaign. Like the entities presented in the **Threats** sourcebook, these organizations are meant to be mysterious and dangerous—they exist on the fringes, in the nightmares of the Awakened world. Player characters should never unmask or eliminate them.

TAMANOUS

The Tamanous organization is so ruthless that the activities of many other criminal groups pale by comparison. Some of the moral and ethical issues of organlegging, fetus farming and other Tamanous activities represent extremely sensitive subjects for both players and characters, and so the gamemaster should give careful consideration to exactly how—and if—to introduce these topics into his game. At the very least, the player characters should be disgusted by the inhumanity of Tamanous; the way they treat living people as nothing more than a renewable source of "spare parts" should be very disturbing.

Tamanous may be an independent syndicate run by ordinary humans and metahumans and aided by packs of ghouls, or they may be far more sinister. The actual leader of the organization may be some paranormal creature like a wendigo, wraith or maleficent free spirit that draws sustenance and power from the carriage and suffering that Tamanous causes. If that is so, the higher-ups in the organization may have magical powers or additional "benefits" granted to them by their patron.

Tamanous might also be controlled by ghouls, with human and metahuman agents acting as front men. Running an organlegging business would be a natural activity for a group of ghouls. They might be using the money it provides to build a secret ghoul community somewhere, perhaps deep underground. Other ghouls might get wind of this situation and want the organization stopped before Tamanous triggers a race war between ghouls and normal metahumanity—a race that the ghouls most likely wouldn't survive. Other ghouls might want to jump on the Tamanous bandwagon in hopes of joining the winning side.

CHIMERA

Chimera primarily exists to scare player characters and keep them in line. The possibility of such a group of super-assassins in the shadows should be enough to give any character pause.

At a minimum, Chimera assassins should be Superior to all player characters. Chimera hit men are among the best in the business, and they should always be frighteningly competent. In addition to their formidable skills, they can have as much exotic cyberware as the gamemaster chooses to give them, much of it delta-grade or experimental. These assassins should have Threat Ratings of at least 6 and as high as 10.

Chimera members will carefully study a target and develop a plan of attack before moving in for the kill. They may even hire shadowrunners like the player characters to provide them with additional information that they need to successfully carry out their assignment. Though Chimera kick-artists are mundane, they very likely have some kind of magical back-up they can call upon for assistance against targets with magical abilities.

NINJAS

Like Chimera, ninja legends are mostly useful for scaring player characters by hinting that something more dangerous than them exists in the shadows. Ninjas also make excellent opponents when used sparingly enough that they do not become just another run-of-the-mill group of goons to kill.

Most of the ninjas described on pages 48–49 are physical adepts or physical magicians (p. 119, **Awakenings**). They possess a variety of adept powers, most commonly Combat Sense, Flexibility, Improved Ability (Armed Combat, Athletics, Stealth, Throwing and Unarmed Combat), Increased Reflexes, Killing Hands, Nerve Strike, Spell Shroud and Traceless Walk. Many ninjas have geasa that restrict some of their abilities; for example, the abilities may function only at night or while the ninja is engaged in an honorable mission for his or her jonin. Ninjas most often use silent Centering techniques like katas and kuji-kiri gestures.

Ninja spellcasters favor illusion spells like mask and invisibility along with some detection spells, shapeshifting and telekinetic manipulations, and silent combat spells like death touch and slay. Some ninja magicians are rumored to know spells that allow them to walk on water and pass through solid walls.

Not all ninjas need be magically active (though most true ninjas are). Some ninja clans might be sponsored by a corporate or government patron that provides implants and modifications in exchange for service. Such ninja groups are more likely to be specialized commandos or corporate agents rather than "real" ninjas, as true ninja clans prefer to owe loyalty only to their clan.

Though they can and do use modern weapons and armor of all kinds, ninjas prefer to use melee weapons and poisons in their work because those methods are silent and reliable. A skilled ninja with the Increased Ability power can be deadly with a sword, particularly if it has a monofilament or Dikote™ edge. Some of the most skilled and effective ninjas carry weapon foci that enable them to kill even powerful magical opponents.

UNDERWORLD MAGIC

Some organizations in the underworld give a unique spin to using magic. The gamemaster can use the following information to add unexpected dimensions to NPCs and adventures involving magic and organized crime.

TATTOO MAGIC

Some groups, such as the Yakuza and certain tribes, use tattoos and/or ritual scarification to bind certain spells to the wearer of the mark. The creation of a magical tattoo requires the attentions of an artist with the Special Skill of Tattooing and a magician using the Enchanting Skill. Usually, a tattoo artist and a magician work together on the design; the few tattoo artists who are magicians themselves command high fees for their unique services.

The tattoo serves as a means of Quickening a single spell or set of spells on the wearer. It also allows the spellcaster to "weave" the spells deeper into the subject's aura in order to protect the spells from being dispelled or overcome in astral combat. For resisting all attempts to dispel it, ground through it or for purposes of astral combat, a spell Quickened through tattoo magic has twice its effective Force (the amount of Karma spent to Quicken it).

The inks used to draw the tattoo must be specially prepared with the Enchanting Skill. One unit of herbal or mineral radicals (pp. 22–23, **Grmolre II**) is required for every 2 Force points of the spell to be Quickened (round up). These radicals are mixed with the ink through an alchemical process with a base time of 10 days and an Enchanting Test target number equal to the number of units being mixed (minimum Target Number 2). Divide the base time by the number of successes achieved to determine how long the process takes. If the enchanter rolls no successes, the base time has been wasted and he or she must try again. A result of all ones wastes the base time and also destroys the materials.

Once the inks are prepared, the artist can begin work. The size of the tattoo must be at least 10 square centimeters times the desired Force Rating to be Quickened *squared*. For example, to Quicken a spell with a Force Rating of 1 would require a tattoo measuring 10 square centimeters ($1^2 = 1$, $10 \times 1 = 1$). Quickening a spell with a Force Rating of 4 requires a tattoo measuring 160 square centimeters ($4^2 = 16$, $10 \times 16 = 160$). As the examples show, tattoos to Quicken higher-rating spells could be large enough to cover much of the subject's body. The spell's Force Rating squared is also the base number of days required for the artist to complete the tattoo. Make a Tattooing Test against a Target Number 4 and divide the base time by the number of successes rolled to determine the actual time required. No successes means the artist must spend twice the base time to complete the tattoo; a result of all ones ruins the tattoo and may well scar the wearer. A tattoo artist cannot give himself a magical tattoo.

Once the tattoo is prepared, the magician may cast the desired spells on the subject using the normal Quickening rules (p. 45, **Grmolre II**). The magician spends Karma to bind the Quickening in place. Once bound, the Quickened spell can only be undone through Dispelling or in astral combat. The gamemaster should take any un-Masked, Quickened spells into account when considering whether or not a character is detected by astral or magical security measures (p. 46, **Grmolre II**).

TRIAD MAGIC

Triad magicians follow a Chinese magical tradition based on the concepts of ch'i (life force) and the *wuxing*, or five Chinese elements: wood, fire, soil, metal and water. The interrelation of the elements produces the dynamics of *yin* and *yang*, the positive and negative polarities from which everything in the cosmos derives. Triad magicians use their intimate understanding of these primal factors to effect change in the material world through sorcery.

The Chinese tradition has hermetic and shamanic elements to it. Chinese magicians do not have totems and do not receive totem bonuses, but they do call upon the forces of nature as embodied by ch'i, *wuxing*, *yin* and *yang*. The five elements correspond with the five categories of spells as follows: wood/detection, fire/combat, soil/health, metal/manipulation and water/illusion.

Chinese magicians summon nature spirits as shamans do (p. 139, **SRII**). These spirits often manifest as creatures of the land, sea and air (very often dragonlike spirits) as well as ancestral ghosts and demons (*kuai*, or spirits of man).

Chinese and Triad magicians also make considerable use of the *feng-lung*, or "dragon lines," which are natural manalines and power sites (pp. 103–104, **Awakenings**). They often possess intricate maps of local dragon lines and know the best sites and times for tapping the lines' magical power.

ALTERNATE CAMPAIGNS

We all get the occasional urge to be someone different—and what could be more different than playing a member of a major organized crime syndicate? Players and gamemasters can use the following information to create and run characters who are members of the four major criminal syndicates. (Guidelines for creating gang-member player characters appear on pp. 121–25 of **SRComp**.)

FOR THE FAMILY

Playing a Mafia made man (or woman) is a big change from playing a shadowrunner. Instead of going on shadowruns, a made man carries out hits. Most hits are messages—threats or warnings—to other Mafia families, gangs, businesses or organized crime groups. Unlike the typical shadowrun, stealth is not required; in fact, it's a liability. When you deliver a message for the Mafia, you want the target to know who hit them.

CHARACTER CREATION

Mafia made men have no special character-creation requirements, though the gamemaster can insist that such characters possess dermal sheathing (p. 28, **Cybertechnology**) to cover any cyberware. Because of a certain lingering prejudice, the Mafia has few magicians and metahumans in its ranks, and so made men are less likely than other types of characters to be metahuman or magically active. Do not use the More Metahuman option when creating a group of made men. The gamemaster can also insist that a group of made men come from the same ethnic background or even the same Mafia family for the purposes of a Mafia campaign. Finally, the gamemaster may assign Mafia characters the Day Job Flaw because all made men have jobs—as executive security, bodyguards, bouncers and so on. Players can balance this Flaw with an Edge if they so desire.

CAMPAIGNING WITH THE MAFIA

This information complements the guidelines provided in **Archetypal Adventure Plots**, p. 101 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**.

The Premise

The player characters are made men initiated into the Mafia's inner workings and serving the Family on the front lines. They recruit talent. They make hits on the Family's enemies: the Yakuza, a rival family, an independent operator or anyone else they're told to hit. They fight the Mafia's small-scale wars, all the time making sure that the Family business continues to prosper. Made-men



player characters can be enforcers, bodyguards, messengers or even street warriors. **The Mafia** (p. 27) and **The Business of Crime** (p. 10) offer excellent adventure hooks for the player characters; players and gamemasters can also take ideas from films and television shows.

The Goal

Made men have one goal above all: to keep the syndicate successful. Whatever aspect of the Mafia's business the player characters are responsible for, they must make sure that it remains profitable and that nothing connected with it harms the syndicate. If a group of Mafia player characters are in charge of casinos, those casinos had better keep making money; if they are in charge of smuggling, the goods had better make it to their destination intact. The player characters must do whatever is necessary to ensure positive results for the syndicate, no matter what the risk to themselves. Made men owe their position and their honor to their Family and its don, to the local capo, and ultimately to the Commission. If keeping the syndicate successful means torching a Yakuza-operated casino or taking out a member of a rival Mafia family, the player characters do it without hesitation or complaint. What's good for the Family is also good for them.

Opposition

Frequently, a group of made-men player characters will find their opposition coming from the inside—other Mafia families vying for power, each trying to outdo the other or embarrass or ruin another Family. Meanwhile, the player characters must keep their own operations profitable—which means making sure that outside forces (the Yakuza, the Star, scum-sucking shadowrunners, the skinny Matrix geek who figured out the odds on the slot machines) don't stop the flow of income. The opposition for a group of made men can be anything the gamemaster can devise that might make the characters look bad in the eyes of their bosses or superiors.

Complications

Whenever players are playing criminal characters (aside from scum-of-the-earth runners, that is), the gamemaster will have to deal with the problem of Karma awards. Of all the major organized crime groups, the Mafia works best with the concepts of the amoral campaign and favors and markers (pp. 78–79, **SRComp**). The gamemaster may decide that Karma works best if the player characters follow orders and do the honorable thing according to the Mafia's definition (not necessarily the rest of the world's). Killing a local politician may not seem honorable to everyone in Seattle, but it's a great thing for the Family if the Family needs it done. The gamemaster can determine the tone of his or her game as to how he or she awards Karma.

Complications also may arise if a made man wants out of the Mafia, because no one just leaves the Mafia. If a player character or group of characters leave the Family, they automatically receive the Hunted Flaw, with no corresponding Edge (see p. 33, **SRComp**). The gamemaster should make the characters' lives a living hell. If the player characters decide to go to the Star, the Feds or any other government agency for protection, they'd bet-

ter have names, dates, times and places; the law will protect them only if their information is worth it. The gamemaster should feel free to be hard-nosed about this; under nearly all circumstances, the only way to leave the Family is feet first in a pine box.

Player characters also should be aware that Mafia families sometimes make deals, mainly with each other. This means that a player character might end up as an ally of the same rival Family that his dying grandfather told him must be wiped out, if the capo deems it necessary. A player character's lifelong friends could end up on the wrong side of a Family split. Or a player character's mentor may turn state's evidence for the feds and finger everyone the player character knows. The lives of a Mafia player-character group should never be dull.

SHOW YOUR HONOR

Respect. Honor. Butt-kicking guns and martial arts. That's what it means to play a Yakuza operative instead of a shadowrunner. For a Yakuza operative, failure doesn't just mean a missed credstick and a ticked-off Johnson. It means something worse than death—personal dishonor, dishonor to his family, his gumi and his oyabun. In many ways, playing Yakuza is much more difficult than playing a shadowrunner. Yakuza operatives take very specific orders from those above them and carry them out to the letter, using subtle means to send unmistakable messages. In the Yakuza's eyes, rash actions and bold words—the typical runner's stock in trade—is the mark of a child or of dishonorable scum.

CHARACTER CREATION

As starting characters, most Yakuza player characters are unlikely to have tattoos. A Yakuza tattoo, like Karma, honor and respect, must be earned. Nearly all of the Yakuza on the West Coast (California Free State, Seattle, Hawaii and so on) are human and of Japanese descent. A few might be of other nationalities—the products of mixed marriages, bastard sons and daughters or adopted children raised, but not born, Japanese. Even fewer are metahuman. Do not use the More Metahumans option when creating a group of Yakuza characters. East Coast Yakuza (in the UCAS and CAS) are more likely to be metahuman, usually elves and dwarfs; trolls and orks are almost unheard-of in Yakuza ranks, and no metahuman has ever joined the Yakuza. Most East Coast metahuman Yakuza have the Human-Looking Edge at no cost (p. 32, **SRComp**).

Any metahuman or non-Japanese Yakuza member will have to work twice as hard as his human/Japanese counterparts to earn the same amount of respect. On the other hand, since most Yakuza members expect non-Japanese yaks to fail, their punishment is usually less severe when they do so.

CAMPAINING WITH THE YAKUZA

This information complements the guidelines provided in **Archetypal Adventure Plots**, p. 101 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**.

The Premise

The player characters are enlisted men, known as kobun or kumi-in (street-level operatives). They know the meaning of honor

and respect in the Yakuza, and they understand their role in the gumi. They are street warriors, the point men and women in all Yakuza operations. From enforcement to extortion to assassinations, the player characters do whatever their superiors demand of them, for personal respect and the honor of the gumi. **The Yakuza** (p. 38) and **The Business of Crime** (p. 10) offer excellent adventure hooks for Yakuza-affiliated player characters, as do any number of films and television shows.

The Goal

The player characters' goal is to keep their gumi operating and promote the interests of the oyabun. They must also follow the Yakuza traditions (see **The Yakuza**, p. 42). Honor and obligation are most important to members of any Yakuza organization.

Yakuza player characters must be especially careful of appearances. The Yakuza is always on the watch for weak links, spies, metahumans (whom most Yakuza members consider undesirable by definition) and anything else that doesn't look good to the gumi (or, more importantly, the person above the player characters in the Yakuza hierarchy). Unlike the Mafia, the Yakuza handles its internal fights discreetly, usually with assassins (ninjas). Strict adherence to its traditions, however, does not mean the Yakuza are weak—if orders come down to wipe out an entire city block of trolls, yak enforcers will do it. Yakuza soldiers never question their orders, and those who follow their orders completely gain honor. The Yakuza's veneer of civility over tightly controlled violence makes them every bit as frighteningly efficient as their reputation suggests.

Opposition

Yakuza characters will find most of their opposition coming from rival criminal organizations. The Mafia and the Seoulpa Rings have an intense mutual hatred for the Yakuza—the Mafia primarily because of business rivalries, the Rings because of the two groups' intertwined histories. The law—both corporate and civic—is another big thorn in the Yakuza's side. The Yakuza's interest in extorting money from Big Business has made them primary targets of non-Japanese corporations, especially Aztechnology, Ares and Saeder-Krupp. In return for this attention from the Yakuza, Ares subsidiary Knight Errant takes more action against Yakuza operations than those of any other criminal syndicate.

In many areas, metahumans are a primary target for the Yakuza, especially in the San Francisco/Oakland/Berkeley area of the California Free State. The Yakuza controls San Francisco's entertainment and security industries, and frequently sends out "retaliation squads" against the many metahuman-rights and resistance groups in Oakland and Berkeley. The Yakuza's legitimate ties to the Japanese corporations that, for all intents and purposes, run San Francisco are legendary and a source of considerable bad PR for the syndicate.

Complications

As with a Mafia alternate campaign, Karma awards in Yakuza campaigns work best with the concepts of the amoral campaign and favors and markers (pp. 78–79, **SRComp**). The gamemaster can decide that Karma works best if the player characters follow



their orders and do the honorable thing according to Yakuza traditions. Killing an ork businessman might not look honorable to everyone, but in the eyes of the gumi, it is right if the gumi wants it done. The gamemaster can determine the tone of his or her game by how he or she awards Karma.

Leaving the Yakuza is just as hard as leaving the Mafia. If a player character or group of characters attempt to leave, they automatically receive the Hunted Flaw with no corresponding Edge (p. 33, **SRComp**). The oyabun will send various emissaries (ninjas, assassins, physical magicians or anyone else able to kill the traitors) after the player characters. In the Yakuza's eyes, such characters become *ronin*—masterless warriors—and are universally despised. Great honor is awarded to any Yakuza member who makes a special effort to hunt down a ronin, the sooner the better. No oyabun wants a reputation for letting ronin go free; the very existence of a ronin shows a shocking lack of respect and can seriously undermine an oyabun's power. Regardless of the reasons why a player character became a ronin, the gamemaster should make that character's life a living hell. As with those who manage to escape from the Mafia, player characters who go to the Star, the feds, or any other government agency for protection will

best have names, dates, times and places that the law will regard as worth protecting. The gamemaster is encouraged to be as hard-nosed about this as possible.

CHAOS IS GOOD

The Triads are a bit of a contradiction. Like the Yakuza, they value honor and respect, but they also willingly use the all-out warfare and bloodthirsty tactics more typical of the Mafia. What really sets them apart from the other major syndicates is their use of a type of magic so powerful and secret that even other magicians orders fear it.

A Triad campaign is essentially an organized crime version of a shadowrun. Like many runners, Triad operatives will do anything and everything to succeed for the benefit of their particular Triad. Part organized crime syndicate, part mystic cult and part devoted worshippers, the Triads may seem chaotic: that chaos, however, is their strength. Paranoia keeps them alive, and they like it that way.

CHARACTER CREATION

Triad starting characters begin as Sze Kau, or 49s, for the Triad to which they choose to belong. They are street-level gangers. The gamemaster can even allow the player characters to be their own gang (with a cool name), and may decide that they know only the 432-ranked operative of their Triad until they are actually initiated into the Triad's ranks (see **The Triads**, p. 54). At that point, they meet the person next in rank above the 432. This kind of secretiveness helps keep the Triad safe from spies and traitors.

Though the bulk of Triad members are Chinese, the Triads do not discriminate against non-Chinese or metahumans. In fact, metahumans have a certain advantage when joining up because the Triads assume they're unlikely to be spies for the Yakuza. Also, men and women wield approximately the same amount of power. Non-Chinese may have to continue to prove themselves for somewhat longer than Chinese members, but that penalty is relatively minor.

Magicians and physical adepts appear in greater numbers in the Triads than in other organized crime groups. To reflect this, at least half of the player characters in a Triad group must be magically active. As the heavily magical slant of the Triads leads them to view obvious cyberware with suspicion, mundane Triad characters tend to go for bioware rather than metal, and those with cyberware invest heavily in dermal sheathing (p. 28, **Cybertechnology**) to cover it up.

CAMPAINING WITH THE TRIADS

This information complements the guidelines provided in **Archetypal Adventure Plots**, p. 101 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**.

The Premise

The player characters are gangers allied with a particular Triad or are a faction of a Triad themselves. Either way, they are fanatically devoted to their syndicate. They strive to cause chaos for their enemies, earn honor and power, and prove themselves worthy to learn more of the Triad's inner secrets. They should be prepared, even willing, to die in every fight. Any setup that makes a

good shadowrun will make a good Triad scenario, especially if the team takes on any of the other syndicates. While doing equal damage to all rivals works to the Triads' advantage, most Triads prefer to knock the Yakuza down a few notches. **The Triads** (p. 51) and **The Business of Crime** (p. 10) offer excellent adventure hooks for the player characters, and several films offer useful models for Triad gangs.

The Goal

Any Triad worth the name has a simple goal: to defend its own faction and hurt all other groups.

Opposition

The Triads tend to get more heat than other syndicates from corporate security and civic law enforcement because they rarely choose to play the balance-of-power game. If the Triads enter a market, they want total control. They become the police force, judge, jury and executioner, which understandably upsets the professionals already patrolling an area.

Because in many cases the player characters will not know everything about their Triad and its doings, they may become involved in situations where one faction is fighting with another faction from the same Triad over power, prestige and honor. Usually brutal and short, these intragang wars are big-time rumbles—all-out magic- and gun-fests that last until peace is dictated by the player characters' supervisors. Player characters usually make Enemies in the rival faction who will haunt them throughout the campaign. As for other opponents, the Triads are equal-opportunity attackers. They'll tangle with the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Seoupa Rings, the corps ... anyone. Everyone stands between them and their ultimate goals, and everyone must be made to pay.

Complications

As with the Mafia and Yakuza, Karma awards in Triad campaigns work best with the concepts of the amoral campaign and favors and markers (pp. 78-79, **SRComp**). To reflect the fact that the Triads are fanatics, the gamemaster may decide that Karma works best if the player characters follow their orders no matter what the odds against them. This "do what you're told or die trying" attitude may prove difficult for players used to playing more independent-minded characters, but it's a given for any Triad member. The Triads do what they are told, in great numbers and to the death. To them, to live outside the Triads means death and dishonor (mainly death). The moral view and tone of a Triad campaign is dictated by the Triad, through the way in which the gamemaster awards Karma.

No one ever leaves a Triad, not even in death. A player character or group of characters who try to leave automatically receive the Hunted Flaw with no corresponding Edge (p. 33, **SRComp**). No government protection is sufficient to keep an ex-Triad member alive for very long. Ritual sorcery is the Triads' primary method of dealing with defectors, and they are not afraid to use it.

MORE THAN A GANG

The Seoupa Rings are essentially gangs with a board of directors. They have enough expertise and established contacts to give

them larger scope than the typical neighborhood thugs, and they don't need to worry about making ends meet. The Seoulpa Rings are gangs with a vision and a future. Some of them believe power is their destiny and consider the Rings a dynasty; others simply enjoy accumulating power and prestige.

CHARACTER CREATION

Use the rules for gang creation on pp. 121–24 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**. The main difference between a group of Seoulpa-affiliated characters and the typical gang is that the gang leader also represents the gang in their relationship with the Seoulpa Rings.

CAMPAINING WITH THE SEOULPA RINGS

This information complements the guidelines provided in **Archetypal Adventure Plots**, p. 101 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**. The **Campaigning with Gangs** section on p. 123 of the same book will also give players and gamemasters a feel for the types of activities the player characters may want to pursue as a gang.

The Premise

As gangers, the player characters have more latitude than members of the other syndicates to establish any type of business they want. The benefit of being in the Rings is that the gang has established links to other gangs with whom they can do business. **The Seoulpa Rings** (p. 60) and **The Business of Crime** (p. 10) offer excellent adventure hooks for the player characters.

The Goal

The goal of a Seoulpa Ring and its affiliated gangs is to increase its influence, consolidate its power and hurt the Yakuza and any Japanese corporation linked to them as often and as severely as possible.

Opposition

The Yakuza is the Seoulpa Rings' primary opposition. Next on the list is anything or anyone Japanese, and finally anyone who gets in the way of the Seoulpa Rings' attempts to injure the first two. The law has had a hard time stopping the Rings because it's difficult to tell from week to week which gangs are Ring-affiliated and which are just gangers having fun. Any well-organized gang may look like a member of the Rings to the law, whether they are or not; conversely, the law may dismiss a brutal bunch of disorganized thugs who are actually Ring enforcers.

Fights between Ring gangs may start on the street but usually end in a treaty. Treaties don't mean that the combatants' mutual hatred disappears, only that someone has impressed the bigger picture upon the warring factions. If war draws out beyond a few major skirmishes, the Ring leadership usually takes a wait-and-see attitude, unless the war begins to hurt business. At that point, the leadership may choose a side and attempt to overbalance the opposition. If gang warfare spins so out of control that the Ring leaders cannot influence either faction to end the conflict, the Rings may pull their support from either or both gangs and let the

cards fall where they may. As a final solution, they may attempt to wipe out both gangs in order to regain control of their businesses and territory.

Complications

In a Seoulpa Ring campaign, Karma should be awarded per the rules on p. 123 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**. The most difficult complication for Seoulpa-affiliated gangers may be the need to occasionally swallow their pride for the good of the Ring. Treaties between gangs are usually tentative at best, but any gang that wants to succeed must respect those treaties until given permission to break them. These practical considerations may chafe some gangers, but they can always find ways to bend the treaty without breaking it. For example, if the Ring decides that two gangs are fighting too much over territory, they may impose a boundary. Either gang can use members of the other as target practice while staying on its own side, thus never actually breaking the treaty (and incurring the unpleasant consequences).

Gangs leave the Rings fairly regularly, usually when the gang leader dies and the gangers all walk (though some gangers might stick around and join another Ring gang). Sometimes gangs get caught; sometimes they are destroyed. In any case, player characters will find it much easier to walk away from the Rings than from the other syndicates. The Rings have much more important business to worry about than a few stray gangers. If other gangers have it in for the departing characters, that is no longer the Ring's concern.

COPS VS. ROBBERS

Shadowrun players may want to use this book as the basis for an entire underworld campaign, in which the player characters are the police or corporate security working to clear away organized crime syndicates from the shadows. Rules for playing law enforcement characters appear on pp. 117–19 of the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**.

The rating system for criminal organizations on p. 94 of this section also serves as a useful tool for the gamemaster of a police or corporate security campaign, allowing him to track the various criminal groups and the effects of the player characters' actions on the syndicates. While the law enforcement characters are working to tear down a powerful and established criminal syndicate in their city, a new organization can try to establish a foothold in the "vacated" area.

In this kind of campaign, morality may become an issue. Law enforcement characters won't have the leeway that shadowrunners enjoy in dealing with their opponents, which may cause players to opt for a vigilante campaign. Vengeance makes for bloody and violent game sessions, and the law tends to frown on such activities. More workable options for a fun law-based campaign include the search for evidence, solving the puzzle, linking a crime from the perpetrator to the syndicate mastermind behind the scenes, and protecting the witnesses (or stoolie). These are the elements of a law campaign, though the gamemaster can certainly throw in the occasional firefight to make the player characters understand the cost of messing with the Mob.

GANG PROFILES

As presented in the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**, gangs occupy a unique place in the society of the Sixth World. Though they stand at the bottom of the organized crime hierarchy, the gangs also have a hierarchy—perhaps they don't recognize it as such, but its standing in the gang ranks determines how other organizations, both legal and illegal, treat a gang. Like the crime syndicates, gangs can be roughly classified as first, second or third tier, based on their size and local influence. This section describes two first-tier gangs and six third-tier gangs based in various cities and other locations throughout North America. These descriptions include all the categories of information suggested in the **Companion** and add the category of Satellite Forces for first-tier gangs.

As with the gangs in the **Companion**, gamemasters may use these descriptions as is or as a template for creating gangs of their own. All the information presented here is correct as of 2058.

FIRST-TIER GANGS

Only two first-tier gangs exist in North America at the present time: the Ancients and the Cutters. A first-tier gang is vastly different from the typical local gang; they're coast-to-coast operators, not neighborhood thugs. Obviously, such gangs need street-level enforcers; for example, the local branch of the Ancients in Milwaukee may be nothing more than a typical go-gang with an Equal Rating. But even small local branches of the first-tier gangs can call in a small army if necessary, and their criminal operations are linked with others across the country. Both of these factors make them more powerful than other local gangs of comparable size. First-tier gangs function more like small criminal syndicates; they have specific markets, and certain gangs specialize in certain types of crime.

In order to be a first-tier gang, the gang must operate in at least five cities or territories, which means that mobile go-gangs can reach the first tier faster than a less mobile street gang. Which five cities or territories, of course, can make a big difference. A gang with operations in Omaha and Lincoln in Nebraska, Sioux City and Des Moines in Iowa and Sioux Falls in South Dakota is not as powerful as a gang with branches in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, New Orleans and Miami. In addition, a first-tier gang must have markets in each of its turfs.

Using the Syndicate Rating system as a guide (**Game Information**, p. 94), a first-tier gang should have a total operations and market rating no greater than 30–45 in any city in which it operates, and must have a toehold in at least five different markets. The gamemaster can shift these numbers around as he or she sees fit. The gang's grand-total ratings (for all cities combined) should never be greater than 60; they are still a gang, after all. If a first-tier gang grows big enough to be a syndicate in its own right, it may end up working with or even

joining the bigger syndicates to stay in operation. Depending on the locale in question, however, a first-tier gang can be the biggest player around—for example, the Ancients in Tir Tairngire.

A gamemaster who wants to use the Ancients or the Cutters in his or her campaign can create ratings numbers for them using the information provided below. These gang profiles match the format of the gang descriptions in the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows**, beginning on p. 121. For the Ancients and the Cutters, the information below depicts the gang's main branch, usually in its home city. All events and opposition described apply to the main group and its turf. The **Satellite Forces** entry briefly summarizes the gang's activities in other cities and gives an approximate number of members. The information below is correct as of 2058; keep in mind that these gangs have undergone many changes since they were first mentioned in other **Shadowrun** products.

THE ANCIENTS

Gang Focus: This elf go-gang was founded by political outcasts from Tir Tairngire. Until recently, the Ancients maintained strong (if obscure) ties to the Tir and specifically Prince Aithne Oakforest, who used them as a source of information about current events in Seattle and the rest of the world. The current leader of the gang, an elf named Sting, has been pushing hard to publicly distance herself and the Ancients from the Tir. Her stance led to a violent internal clash shortly after Sting came to power, which enemies of the Prince promptly took advantage of in an attempt to disrupt the gang. They attempted to use the growing schism between the Ancients and Tir to destroy the Ancients and replace them with a gang that would do for them what the Ancients had done for Oakforest. The Ancients survived, and have since broken their ties with the Tir—on the surface. In reality, the breach is a blind hatched between Sting and Prince Oakforest, both of whom realized that the ties between the Tir and the Ancients had become well enough known to be a liability. The need to keep up this fiction—which is known to no one in the gang except Sting and her Seattle lieutenant, Green Lucifer—has caused some problems in maintaining the channels of communication with the Prince, but the Ancients are as strongly tied to the Tir as ever.

Leader: Sting, an atypical elf, has been leading a dangerous double life for most of the past six years. Preaching the need to be "free from the shackles of those pompous Tir fools," she has convinced her fellow gang members to break with the Tir and go their own way (or so they think). On the surface, the Ancients are independent. In reality, they are as bound to the Prince and Tir as any loyal Tir subject. The gang's surface freedom has allowed the Ancients to branch out into new areas and given Sting the opportunity to forge them into an even deadlier force. However, the double life carries its price; should the rest of the

Ancients discover Sting's deception, they might well turn on her. All lieutenants report directly to Sting, and she can override the lieutenant of any Ancients faction at any time.

Lieutenants: Technically, an Ancients lieutenant is the leader of a gang faction. Each faction consists of 10 to 20 gangers and has its own rating, though none are less than Equal. Green Lucifer is the lieutenant for all the Ancients' factions in Seattle.

Once named Alejandro Kyllisearn, Green Lucifer was sentenced to eternity in the darkest cell in Tir Tairngire for his failed coup against Prince Aithne Oakforest, but the Prince chose to exile him to the Ancients instead. Almost immediately upon arriving in Seattle, Kyllisearn realized that Wasp, the Ancients' leader at the time, knew who and what he was. In an effort to cement his position in the gang and dispose of a potential problem, he assassinated Wasp during a turf war between the Ancients and a rival gang known as the Meat Junkies. Since then, Green Lucifer—like Sting—has led a double life, serving the interests of the very ruler he attempted to depose.

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: Approximately 100 to 200 members in Seattle.

Initiation Rituals: The Ancients initiate new members with a form of Tir Tairngire's Rite of Progression, focusing on physical testing. New recruits join in vicious and bloody games, with names like "Razor Biking" and "Head Hurling," that bear only a superficial resemblance to the physical tests of the Tir ritual. The gang's leader calls the games whenever he or she—jokingly referred to as the "Proctor of the Rite"—decides it is time. A recruit who survives the game becomes a member; the best contestants may become lieutenants. The leader need not participate in the games; once the leader, always the leader until permanently removed.

Uniforms: The Ancients wear black-and-green leather jackets with dangling chains and fingerless, studded gloves. In addition, most members put wicked razor spurs on their boots for use in bike-to-bike combat. Gang members also sport green-and-black mohawks, which most of them go to great lengths to maintain in a luxurious fashion.

Symbol: The gang symbol is a modified version of the anarchy symbol (the letter A with a circle around it). Specific modifications vary from faction to faction; some invert the letter, some paint the symbol in different colors, and so on.

Home Territory: The entire Seattle metroplex.

Satellite Forces: The Ancients operate in Boston (approximately 50 members), New York (100+ members, mostly from heavy recruiting and the creation of new factions in New Jersey and Baltimore), Milwaukee (approximately 25 members), Chicago (unknown since the Wall went up; rumor has it that some Ancients are still there), Los Angeles and Denver (75 members each), Atlanta (50 members) and Miami (25 members). Outside North America, the Ancients are in England (approximately 50 members; unconfirmed rumors claim a small faction in Tir na nÓg), Tir Tairngire (100 to 200 members, most either inactive or in training), France and Germany (50 members each), and Spain (25 members). None of these gangs have ratings lower than Equal. In addition to full-fledged gang members, the Ancients have many informants in cities throughout the NAN and in Oakland, and also in cities into which they plan to expand (such as New Orleans).

Operations: From its inception the Ancients has been a politically oriented gang, engaging in various pro-elven/pro-metahuman activities with a little weapons smuggling on the side. Under Sting's leadership, the Ancients have stepped up their smuggling activities and hired their members out as mercenaries, both of which has diminished the gang's traditional political slant.

Foes: The Ancients have acquired many enemies along with their increased power. Their intense rivalry with the Emerald Dogs is believed to spring from that group's Yakuza-backed activities in elven communities, and they have had numerous turf wars with the Meat Junkies in the past. The last such war, just over six years ago, ended in the death of the Ancients' leader and led to a savage war of revenge that decimated the Meat Junkies. The recent spectacular demise of the Silent P's, an elf gang with ties to the Ancients, may lead the Ancients to take revenge on the culprits—the all-troll Spikes gang and their elf-hating leader, Lord Torgo. And naturally, like any metahuman gang, the Ancients bash heads regularly with Humanis polidub members.

Uniqueness: An exceptionally well-trained gang, the Ancients frequently display military-style precision in their operations and in combat. Their ability to get their hands on SOTA military equipment for any operation they undertake—combined with their formidable organization and training—has given them a fearsome reputation, and gives a distinctive signature to any incident in which they participate.

THE CUTTERS

Gang Focus: Like many gangs, the Cutters are concerned with the bottom line: money. Unlike other gangs, the Cutters have taken the pursuit of money one step beyond their rivals—they have organized themselves along corporate lines. In addition to the gang leader and his two lieutenants, the Cutters have a business developer named Fahd. Fahd acts as a figurehead and occasionally convenient diversion, while the real business deals are made by a lieutenant named Vladimir and a war boss named Bubba—a big, red-necked ork who came to Seattle from the Atlanta Cutters after the previous war boss, Ranger, was killed. In their area of expertise, war bosses like Bubba answer only to the gang's big boss and occasionally to the lieutenants. Corporate-style, departmentalized thinking has become so ingrained in the psyches of most Cutters that they don't blink an eye when they fail to receive needed "resources" from the gang during an operation because of botched communications along the "correct channels." When this happens, they do what a corporate vice-president would co—work around the problem as best they can and report to the higher-ups about it afterward. Though the occasional communications snafu has led to serious problems, overall, the Cutters' ability to remain focused on the bottom line regardless of the consequences has allowed them to establish themselves as one of the largest and most successful gangs in North America—at least, until their recent setbacks. The Cutters have fallen on hard times in two of their major locations, the Great Lakes sprawl and Seattle. The Chicago Cutters pretty much disappeared after the Containment Zone went up; nothing has been heard from them since, and no one knows whether any of them are still alive.

According to rumors, the Seattle gang was apparently decimated in a conflict with Tir Tairngire or its minions, the Ancients—but no one seems to have any details.

Leader: Blake is a tall black male built like an Urban Brawler who nonetheless rarely uses his proportions to intimidate those around him. He is a supremely confident, sometimes brilliant manipulator who plays on his associates the way a master violinist plays his instrument. He reminds many people of a big cat—apparently docile, but with the threat of latent violence always lurking beneath the surface. This quality, along with his immense charisma, enables Blake to easily command obedience from all members of his gang. He survived the catastrophe that struck the Seattle Cutters, and has been rebuilding his branch of the gang by pulling members from various Cutters factions around the country.

Lieutenants: 2

Springblossom, a competent if unimaginative Deer shaman, has earned her position through dedication and service to the Cutters and to Blake in particular. She spends a lot of time in a menthol-induced haze, which she uses to “feel the spirit.”

Vladimir is a quiet and unassuming man who wears top-quality suits and looks more like a banker than a gangster. Because of his placid manner, a lot of people mistakenly think he’s soft. In reality, Vladimir has more blood on his hands than anyone else in the Cutters. He’s always looking to add another kill to his rep, provided it makes good business sense. Vladimir manages to be both bloodthirsty and extremely practical. He is the real driving force behind the gang’s corporate way of thinking, and he is also the man who puts deals together for the Cutters. He is content to let Fatid take the spotlight as the gang’s “business developer” so that he can operate behind the scenes with fewer restrictions.

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: Approximately 25–50 members in Seattle, a reduction of roughly 75 percent from its previous strength. They are continuing to bring in people from various satellite locations to rebuild their Seattle operation.

Initiation Rituals: Prospective members of the Cutters must make money. Under the watchful eye of at least two witnesses, the recruit must set up his own scam operation and then pull it off with the cred in hand—the actual amount is inconsequential. Anyone who fails this initiation can try twice more within a two-month period; after that, he or she is “let go.”

Uniforms: None

Symbol: None

Home Territory: The Cutters, also known as the Seattle Cutters, operate throughout the Seattle metroplex.

Satellite Forces: The Cutters set up in corporate-style enclaves where their actions and cons can blend in with local commerce. They have factions in Los Angeles, Denver and Las Vegas (25 members each); Atlanta, Miami and New Orleans (15 members each); Detroit and Toronto (10 members each); New York (50 members); Washington FDC (5 members); and the Caribbean League (5 members). The Cutters had more than 100 members in the Great Lakes sprawl from the Chicago, Detroit, and Toronto factions when the Wall went up, none of whom are presently accounted for. Detroit and Toronto are still reeling from the

Chicago fallout: Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Rockford and other midwestern cities have suffered sharp increases in organized crime and gang activity since the Chicago shutdown, but none of these markets show any Cutter activity at all. Each Cutter faction names itself according to its city: the Seattle Cutters, the Los Angeles Cutters, and so on.

Operations: The Cutters’ operations range far and wide, from gun smuggling and extortion to drug and chip dealing to kidnapping to freelance security work for the occasional corp. In their smuggling and dealing operations, they deal in quality rather than quantity, offering their customers small packages of the finest items available.

Foes: Most gangs respect the Cutters and rarely cross swords with them. The Cutters tend to leave other gangs alone, as gang wars are a distraction from business: they fight only when there is no alternative or when they consider their opponent too small to take on such a large organization. The only known gangs that continually bump heads with the Cutters are the Seoulpa Rings. The Cutters and the Seoulpa Rings go out of their way to harass and embarrass each other, for reasons that both sides have so far kept to themselves.

Uniqueness: Unlike most gangs, the Cutters do not identify themselves by gang colors or mark their territories with their symbol. Instead, all members go out of their way to get to know everyone in the gang and to make sure that everyone else in the neighborhood—from the pimp down the block to the Ancient riding his hog—knows they’re Cutters. Another unique quality, the Cutters’ money-first attitude, allows them to work in circles where the usual gang machismo and overriding need to keep face would normally endanger working relationships with customers. A Cutter may still cut you down in the street for looking at him cross-eyed, but he’ll make sure of getting his money first. And in any conflict between personal reputation and the bottom line, the bottom line wins.

SECOND-TIER GANGS

Though the **Underworld Sourcebook** does not establish any second-tier gangs, the gamemaster can invent any number of them. Most second-tier gangs are the main player in one small or relatively isolated city or town. Second-tier gangs provide less of a challenge for shadowrunners than first-tier gangs or gangs affiliated with major criminal syndicates. A gang that controls the Anchorage underworld is nothing in Seattle, and a group of runners could probably take them on without too much trouble. No one gang controls any of the major cities in North America, but for a campaign outside of a major North American city, a second-tier gang might be the biggest player around. Second-tier gangs operate in most cities in the Native America Nations, and such gangs are also active throughout much of the northern California Free State. Most UCAS and CAS cities have multiple gangs, none of which is large or powerful enough to be second tier. In most cases, if a gang gets that big in a major city, it attracts unwelcome attention from other players—the law, the media, other syndicates and rival gangs—who step up to destroy them.

THIRD-TIER GANGS

All of the gangs presented below and in the **Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows** (pp. 125–30) are considered third-tier gangs. The following descriptions expand on the basic definition of a gang and offer the gamemaster some examples of the diverse types of gangs that exist in the **Shadowrun** world, their memberships and activities.

THE VOODOO POSSE

Gang Focus: Unknown. The Voodoo Posse is a mysterious bunch, and they apparently like to keep it that way.

Leader: Midnight, a tall black woman with a shaved head that only enhances her striking features. She is thin, almost gaunt, and has been known to mesmerize people with a single glance from her large, luminous eyes. Rumors abound that Midnight is the incarnation of various voodoo loa, but everyone agrees on one thing: she is an extremely powerful mambo (female houngan). No one knows for certain where she came from, though people from Kingston in Jamaica and on St. Kitts Island speak of having known her as a girl. Her familiarity with the back streets of New Orleans, coupled with her fondness for cemeteries, has led a few people with overactive imaginations to insist that she arose one night from the alleged grave of Marie Laveau, the famed New Orleans "voodoo queen."

Lieutenants: None.

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: Approximately 20 to 25 members, all of whom are magicians and voodoo practitioners.

Initiation Rituals: Prospective recruits are fed "zombie dust," a concoction of potentially lethal neurotoxins that puts them into a deathlike trance state. They are then fed a second compound that restores partial consciousness but deadens the will, and immediately buried in shallow graves. Those who manage to dig their way out and shake off the effects of the mind-bending chemicals become full-fledged members. Survivors who suffer permanent brain damage from the zombie potions are fed and cared for by the rest of the gang until needed. Most often, these mindless shells are sent on wetwork assignments where brute force is desired and secrecy is unnecessary, or else used as cannon fodder on the rare occasions in which some other gang tries to start trouble for the Posse.

Uniforms: Posse members have no real uniform, but most wear some article of clothing appropriate to a voodoo loa: the top hat and cane favored by Baron Samedi, for example, or bright-colored clothing and jewelry appropriate to Erzulie, Mistress of Dreams. They wear the gang symbol somewhere on their clothing or as a piece of jewelry. They also frequently tie chicken feathers in their hair.

Symbol: The gang's symbol is a serpent swallowing its own tail, which forms a circle. From the center of the circle, a baleful eye glares out.

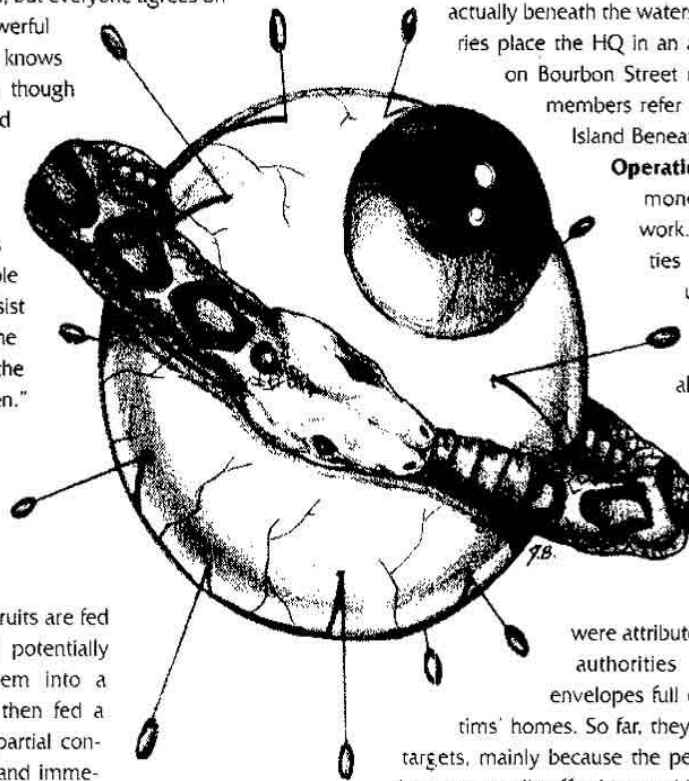
Territory: No one knows the extent of the Posse's territory for certain, but the gang appears to base itself in New Orleans' famous French Quarter. In a small section of astral space in that area, right by the Mississippi River, rainbow-colored serpent-circles strikingly similar to the gang's symbol have recently begun appearing. According to rumors among magicians who've encountered them, staring at such a circle for too long sends an observer's astral body spiraling through the center of it and crashing back down into the physical plane. Those who've been through this experience describe it "like falling down a wormhole and smacking into concrete," and tend to wake up with a splitting headache that lingers for up to a week. Rumor has it that the gang's headquarters (which is also Midnight's honfour, or temple) is actually beneath the waters of the Mississippi; other stories place the HQ in an apparently abandoned house on Bourbon Street near Jean Lafitte's Bar. Posse members refer to their headquarters as "the Island Beneath the Sea."

Operations: This gang makes its money primarily through wetwork. They use their magical abilities and various unusual (often untraceable) poisons to assassinate anyone they're paid to hit, from the local alderman to a low-level corp executive to the really annoying neighbor next door. They can reportedly kill with curses alone from a distance, and at least three mysterious deaths in the Seattle area

were attributed to them after investigative authorities found voodoo dolls and envelopes full of graveyard dust at the victims' homes. So far, they have not gone after any big targets, mainly because the people who want such targets dead can usually afford to pay hitters with a more established reputation. (The fact that an awful lot of people still regard "voodoo magic" as either too weird to deal with or a Hollywood horror-movie practical joke doesn't help, either.)

Foes: Apparently everyone; the Posse is remarkably indiscriminate in its victims. For the right price, they'll take out anybody. However, they do not kill at random or for free, with the exception of individuals unlucky enough to wander across one of their magical workings. Any such unfortunate person, if magically active, is given a choice: join the gang or die. Mundanes who see too much are slain out of hand.

Uniqueness: Midnight can call up various loa to possess Posse members, all of whom eagerly await such a chance to serve their powerful mistress.



THE SCATTERBRAINS

Gang Focus: The Scatterbrains live to make the world lighten up, forcibly if necessary. They specialize in large-scale practical jokes, always pulled in the public eye—dressing the Statue of Liberty in a giant bra and panties, flinging a massive custard pie from a huge jerrybuilt catapult up to the top-floor windows of Renraku Arcology, that kind of thing. The gang had a field day with the recent UCAS election, turning up at political speech after political speech and heckling speakers, tossing tomatoes and so on until ejected. They rarely resort to violence; when they do, there's always an element of the absurd in it, as when a small group of them beat the leader of a rival gang to death with plastic baseball bats.

Despite their general air of wackiness, the Scatterbrains aren't harmless. Most, if not all, of their members are mentally disturbed in one way or another, from simple manic depression to schizophrenia; at any time, the twisted logic of a ganger's unbalanced brain chemistry may lead him to do something ... unpleasant.

Leader: Giggles, an overweight troll. He wears bright orange Bozo-the-clown hair that sticks up a full foot above the top of his head, from which the tips of his horns can be seen protruding. He likes to paint the horn tips in Day-Glo colors, a different hue for each of his many personalities (thirty or so, at last count). Giggles wears the wildest clown suits he can manage to put together, in headache-inducing color combinations. He especially likes his floppy clown shoes, which are twice as big as normal clown shoes. Giggles escaped from an asylum ten years ago; he's a classic multiple personality, and has been known to switch identities as often as every five minutes.

Lieutenants: Unknown. There is some dispute as to whether the three lieutenants rumored to exist are actually separate individuals or merely the most independent-minded of Giggles's many personalities.

Gang Rating: Equal to Superior, depending on Giggles's personality and "the clowns" around him at any given time.

Head Count: Reportedly 50 to 60 members, though up to 30 of them may be Giggles's multiple personalities.

Initiation Rituals: Initiation rituals vary, depending on which of Giggles's personalities happens to be dominant at any given time. All initiations, however, have an element of the absurd. One of Giggles's personalities, a fast talker named Pierre, insists that new recruits come up with and single-handedly execute a prank public enough and out-there enough to rate a spot on the evening trid. Another, an apparently simple-minded soul named Prاتفall, has been known to make recruits slip on a banana peel over and over again until they "get it right" and make him laugh. At least one apparent initiation ritual involved smacking the head of Mitsuhamas's Seattle office in the face with a whipped-cream pie at the corporate Christmas party.

Uniforms: All gang members wear at least some components of the classic clown outfit—big shoes, red noses, wacky hair in impossible colors like acid green or bright orange, oversized baggy pants with suspenders and so on. Whenever they go off to pull one of their trademark practical jokes, the Scatterbrains paint their faces in traditional clown style.

Symbol: The gang symbol is a skull with Bozo-style hair and a bright red clown nose. All gang members wear it, usually painted or embroidered on an article of clothing or tattooed on an always-visible body part like a cheek or the back of a hand.

Territory: The Scatterbrains claim Seattle's warehouse district as their turf, and love to pull practical jokes (sometimes lethal ones) on rival gangs that claim the same territory. The Scatterbrains' headquarters is an ordinary dingy, beat-up abandoned warehouse on the outside; inside it's a bewildering fun-house maze piled high with all kinds of bizarre junk collected in the gang's ongoing scavenger hunt. Fun-house mirrors pop up unexpectedly all over the place, further distorting an already demented layout. An eerie, off-key rendition of "Pop Goes the Weasel" on calliope, which plays constantly, is the crowning touch of weirdness.

Operations: The Scatterbrains earn a surprising amount of cred from various policlubs and other "counterculture" groups, which frequently pay them to conduct ridiculous public protests or disrupt events like political rallies, openings of new corp-owned retail outlets and so on. This suits the gang just fine—they exist to make the world laugh, and so much the better if they can get paid for it. Sometimes they also get courier jobs, in situations where the only way to slip something past official scrutiny is to bluff through with an appearance so absurd that no one will suspect anything. They also get paid to act as diversions for the occasional Mob-connected bank heist.

Foes: Aside from rival gangers (and the occasional random person to whom one of Giggles's personalities takes an unreasoning dislike), the Scatterbrains' main foes are anyone whom they think takes life too seriously: stuffed-shirt corporate executives, dour politicians and Establishment types in general. They also have a running practical-joke feud with the Spiders gang, whom they regard as way too fragging serious about this whole kill-all-the-bugs thing.

Uniqueness: Several oddities set the Scatterbrains apart from every other gang in Seattle (or in existence, for that matter). The first and strangest is the ongoing scavenger hunt, in which all gang members constantly engage. They hunt for a fantastic range of bizarre, hard-to-get items on a list maintained by Giggles (who adds to the list whenever the whim strikes him). Required items include things like the left foot of a giant plaster statue used to advertise a popular diner, a monogrammed hand towel from the private-office suite of Renraku's top Seattle executive, menus from the ten most exclusive and expensive restaurants in the sprawl, all the S's from a specific Stuffer Shack sign (to be decided by Giggles) and so on. Individual members' standing in the gang depends on how much stuff from the list they currently possess: because the list keeps changing, a ganger's status can change rapidly from week to week or even day to day.

The Scatterbrains also favor clown-themed weapons, like giant plastic baseball bats, steel-toed clown shoes, gigantic boxing gloves with studs, oversized fists on springs (also studded), giant mallets that make a "Boingg!" noise when they hit something, and a car-mounted pie-launcher that is the gang's pride and joy. The Scatterbrains all travel in a single van, from which they come pouring out much like the classic "clown-car" gag at the circus.



THE STEPPIN' WULFS

Gang Focus: Violence. Violence. More violence. Their leader's focus—which individual gang members share, on the rare occasions that they're able to think clearly—is to bring down all the megacorporations, starting with his former employers at Shiawase.

Leader: Seymour the Invincible, aka Seymour Dudley Mencken III. Seymour is a short, weasely looking human with scraggly unwashed hair, bad teeth and Coke-bottle-bottom glasses. What he lacks in personal attractiveness (and hygiene), he makes up for in sheer brain power. Unfortunately, he also has a major grudge and absolutely no conscience.

Up until a few years ago, Seymour was one of the brightest minds at a Shiawase biotech research facility in Los Angeles. He specialized in the biological underpinnings of emotion, particularly the workings of glands and hormones in creating and suppressing emotional responses. When a major bioware project based on some of Seymour's research failed, Shiawase made Seymour the scapegoat: the corporation claimed that his research had been flawed, and fired him. Never too emotionally stable to begin with, Seymour cracked. He swiped as much of his data as he could, set up his own research lab underneath his garage, and vowed to destroy his former employers using the very brilliance they had scorned. Ever since then, Seymour has devoted his life to creating an army of super-soldiers, equipped with cyber- and bioware of his own design, to one day bring down the "evil megacorps that want to enslave all the world's brilliant minds." He intends to begin by taking over Shiawase's warehouse and research facilities in Southern CFS and go on from there. The Steppin' Wulfs are Seymour's guinea pigs, down-and-out-

ers willing to let him install experimental cyberware in exchange for a place to belong. Seymour himself does not join the gang in its violent escapades; instead, he watches and takes copious notes for further research.

Lieutenants: None as such. However, the Wulfs tend to run in groups of 5 or 6 throughout their territory, and each such "sub-group" usually looks to one ganger as its leader (until and unless they kill him).

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: Approximately 30 members, though the exact number keeps changing. New recruits add to the total, but the Steppin' Wulfs also occasionally rip each other to shreds when they have no other immediate outlet for their adrenaline-induced rages.

Initiation Rituals: New recruits must maim themselves to the rest of the gang's satisfaction in order to become full-fledged members. The gang as a whole decides whether any particular act of self-mutilation proves that the recruit "has the stuff" to be worthy of their leader's gifts (various bits of experimental cyber- and bioware). If a majority of the gang is satisfied, they take the recruit to Seymour's garage and leave him for Seymour to work on. If not, the recruit must maim himself again until the gang agrees that he's done enough. Recruits who attempt to back out get torn to pieces.

Uniforms: The Steppin' Wulfs favor black leather jackets, and often tie blood-red bandannas around their elbows and knees to simulate dripping blood. They also favor visible chrome.

Symbol: The gang symbol is two eye-slits and a Cheshire-cat grin with fangs on a black background. They wear it most often on the back or shoulder of the black leather jackets they favor, and also take great delight in carving it on the bodies of their victims. They've been known to paint the symbol in blood on the sides of buildings in their territory.



Territory: The Steppin' Wulfs control the Harbor Barrens, a blighted section of Los Angeles. They will kill anyone—absolutely anyone—who strays onto their turf. Seymour maintains several safe houses for them in the Barrens, where the gangers eat and sleep.

Operations: The Wulfs don't need much cred, as Seymour squirreled away large portions of his fat corporate paychecks in solid investments before Shiawase lowered the boom. When Seymour does need an extra infusion of ready cash, or something for some experiment that the Wulfs can steal, he sends them out to get what he needs or to knock over a bank branch or filling station. He doesn't do this often, as the Wulfs aren't terribly reliable. Mostly, Seymour sends the Wulfs out to commit mayhem so that he can tag along and "evaluate their combat capabilities."

Foes: Taking their cue from Seymour, the Wulfs hate all megacorps, but especially Shiawase. They regard anyone outside the gang as "belonging to the corps," and therefore unfit to live. The only people who don't belong to the megacorps are the Wulfs themselves and Seymour—and even the Wulfs aren't completely free of the megacorp taint. By implanting them with cyber- and bioware, Seymour is cleansing them, but it's a slow process.

Uniqueness: The Wulfs are known for their savagery, which out-matches even their most bloodthirsty rivals. This "berserker rage" is triggered by the two pieces of bioware that every ganger carries: a super-powered adrenal pump and suprathyroid gland, both experimental variations on the mainstream versions. These altered glands do everything the mainstream versions do, but much more powerfully and with fewer nasty side effects (such as cardiac arrest). Essentially, they flood a ganger's body with enough adrenaline to turn him into a crazed, unstoppable fighting machine for as long as the adrenaline surge lasts. If a band of hopped-up Wulfs kills a victim too quickly, the raging adrenaline makes them turn on anyone who happens to be nearby, including each other. Overexposure to the elevated adrenaline and hormone levels pumped out by the super-glands causes neural breakdown, meaning that the Wulfs become permanently crazed in short order.

Aside from the two super-glands, individual Steppin' Wulfs may carry all kinds of different cyber- and bioware, depending on what Seymour happened to have ready for field-testing when each ganger joined up. All such 'ware is custom-made and completely unique; only Seymour knows what went into creating it, and he's not telling anyone. Every piece of cyber- and bioware somehow enhances combat capabilities: it makes the gangers quicker, stronger, more ferocious and able to take more damage without slowing down. According to as-yet-unconfirmed rumors, some gang members may actually have an Essence of less than 0.

ISIS-9

Gang Focus: Isis-9 is a gang of otaku, the mysterious (some still say mythical) inhabitants of the Matrix. They see existence in cyberspace as the next great evolutionary leap, and they intend to control cyberspace in order to keep it free of corruption.

Leader/Lieutenants: No one knows for certain which gang member is the leader, which are lieutenants, or even if those concepts apply. One persistent rumor claims that an AI named Isis is the leader of the gang, but (as usual) no one has yet found incontrovertible evidence that any such AI exists.

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: As far as anyone can tell, the gang has only nine members.

Initiation Rituals: None. Anyone capable of slicing the electrons without a deck, as the otaku do, is by definition fit to join the gang if he or she so chooses.

Uniforms: None as such. Isis-9 members appear in the Matrix as featureless, androgynous humanoid figures in various metallic colors: gold, silver, copper, red, green, blue and so on. Those who've met them speculate that the colors indicate a gang hierarchy, but no one has the faintest idea what it might be.

Symbol: Isis-9's "symbol" turns up on computer systems, which they mark by flooding them with binary-code files. Any attempt to open a file in such a marked system—or to do anything else—results in a tidal wave of 0s and 1s.

Territory: Isis-9 claims all of cyberspace, from the worldwide Matrix to every last isolated system, as their turf.

Operations: The gangers seem to be the Robin Hoods of the Matrix. They never appear individually—only as a group. The Isis-9 don't seem to seek or use nuyen; the only common element in their "crimes" is protecting the Matrix from evil. Of course, "evil" can be defined as just about anything Isis-9 chooses.

Foes: Isis-9 takes action against anyone the gangers perceive as corrupting cyberspace—specifically, those who see it and use it as just another "place" in which to carry out criminal or harmful actions against others. Isis-9 has no use for Matrix gangs like the Doppelgangers, who run amok in the Matrix the way a meat gang runs in the streets. They have also been known to trace deckers who plant viruses in computer systems, as some syndicates and smaller gangs have done as part of an extortion/protection racket. As a warning for first-time offenders, Isis-9 floods the culprit's deck or personal matrix system with binary code. A second offense gets the decker a lethal dose of brain-fry.

Uniqueness: An otaku gang: need we say more?

RAZOR HEADS

Gang Focus: The Razor Heads are obsessed with blades, regarding them as the only "pure" weapon with which to fight. They feel driven to purge guns and other ranged weapons, which they regard as "cowardly," from the world.

Leader: Double-Edge, a part-black Amerind halfbreed who wears his hair in three-foot dreadlocks. Entwined in the long locks are several razor blades, which allow him to use his hair as a deadly weapon. His other weapons of choice are two large meat cleavers. Double-Edge hails from the worst depths of the Redmond Barrens, where he has lived since the age of ten. He lost his parents and older brother when a school janitor went postal at the brother's grade-school graduation ceremony and raked the auditorium with machine-gun fire. Ever since then, Edge has regarded guns as the ultimate symbol of evil and destruction. Edge is a physical adept, and learned sword- and knife-play from a Japanese ork rag-picker who took him in.

Lieutenants: Damocles, a dwarf of Japanese descent whose wealthy family disowned him when they finally had to accept that money couldn't buy a "cure" for being metahuman. Damocles has never told anyone, not even Double-Edge, his real name. As his street name implies, Damocles loves swords; he can and will fight

with anything from a katana to a broadsword to a sharpened fencing foil when the mood strikes him. Whenever the Razor Heads fight rival gangers, Damocles marks all those he's defeated by carving an X into their upper arms with a pizza cutter.

Gang Rating: Superior

Head Count: Approximately 25 to 30 members.

Initiation Rituals: New recruits must dispatch bare-handed an opponent who is armed with a ranged weapon. They need not kill the victim; incapacitating him is sufficient.

Uniforms: The Razor Heads shave their heads and tattoo their symbol on their scalps. Most of them also sport cyber-blades, usually hand or arm razors. All of the gangers carry at least one blade openly at all times, and some of them carry as many as half a dozen: two katanas worn crossed over the back, a hunting knife in a belt sheath, two small daggers strapped to the forearms and a *sgian dubh* stuck in the top of a boot, for example.

Symbol: The gang symbol, worn as a tattoo on their heads, is a pinwheel shape of three knives with curved blades, hits together in the center and blades pointing outward.

Territory: The gang has centered most of its action lately in Puyallup so that they can hit Yakuza- and Mafia-owned gun warehouses and roll military men visiting the "night life" in that area. The exact location of their headquarters is anyone's guess. The Razor Heads have goals bigger than mere turf, and so they don't fight petty turf wars.

Operations: Several syndicates and larger-scale gangs enlist the Razor Heads as enforcers in neighborhood protection rackets; their combat abilities and reputation for flashy knife-work enable them to intimidate people simply by playing ostentatiously with their daggers or swords while they scold Joe Citizen for failing to keep up his payments. They also take on the occasional assassination, but only if they can be persuaded that their target either poses a threat to the gang or must be removed in order for guns to disappear faster. Whenever they can, they commit acts of sabotage against manufacturers and sellers of ranged weapons.

Foes: The Razor Heads have no gangland rivals because they see such infighting as a waste of time (though they will defend themselves against other gangs that insist on provoking them). For them, the enemy is guns and other cowards' weapons, and the people who make and sell them. Gun-shop owners are a prime target, largely because retail gun stores are easier to hit than armament factories. The Yakuza (whom the Razors see as fallen soldiers of the honorable way) has been trying to distance itself from the Razors (meaning eliminate them) because most people assume the Razor Heads are Yakuza, and the real Yakuza find this intolerable. The Mafia knows of this vendetta and has recently begun manipulating the Razor Heads into more visible activity.

Uniqueness: The Razor Heads are obsessed with blades, which they regard as "weapons of honor" (as opposed to ranged weapons, used only by spineless cowards). They excel at all types of blade work and many other forms of close combat: many of them are physical adepts as well. Taking their cue from Double-Edge and reinforced by Damocles, the Razor Heads exhibit a samurai-like devotion to honor; they attack only their enemies, and never indulge in "dishonorable" random acts of violence.

NEW WORLD SOLDIERS

Gang Focus: The New World Soldiers believe that "the world is meant to be seen from all perspectives," which they take to mean chemically induced altered states of consciousness. They regard it as their mission to introduce these "new perspectives" to everyone, by any method that happens to be handy—from pushing for drug legalization to spiking the community water supply with hallucinogens.

Leader: Sugar Daddy, a skinny human geek of indeterminate age. He wears layer upon layer of oversized clothes (tattered but clean), a striped stocking cap whose puffy tip brushes the ground, and bomber goggles. Most of his garments have deep pockets that he fills with pills of every description. He spends a lot of time on street corners, handing out pills to passers-by and inviting them to "experience the Universe." Often he leaves a trail of pills behind him as he walks, because they drop through holes in his pockets and hems.

Sugar Daddy buys his vast collection of pharmaceuticals with the proceeds of his trust fund, which his wealthy family set up for him partly to make sure he would always be taken care of and partly to keep him away from their doorstep. He is the oldest son of Henk Grundland, the Grundland Peanut Butter Cookie magnate; his family regards him as an embarrassment best left unmentioned.

Lieutenants: None.

Gang Rating: Equal

Head Count: Approximately 60 members.

Initiation Rituals: The specifics of the initiation rituals vary from recruit to recruit, but all of them share a common thread. The prospective gang member must get high and then build something fantastically complex while the other gang members shout out impractical suggestions, wrong advice, or just random nonsense. In most cases, the recruit builds something with snap-together plastic blocks or a similar building set. A rigger recruit might have to disassemble and then reassemble an engine to certain performance specs, or a decker might have to build a custom deck from assorted parts.

Uniforms: Though the New World Soldiers don't have a formal uniform, they tend to dress like their leader in layers of scruffy clothes, bomber goggles and strange hats.

Symbol: The gang's symbol is a giant, bright-colored capsule crowned with a floppy, red-and-white-striped top hat, against a psychedelic spiral background. All members wear this symbol somewhere on their outermost layer of clothing or tattooed on a visible body part, like a cheek or the back of a hand.

Territory: The Soldiers operate throughout Los Angeles and consider the entire city their territory. (Actually, they consider the world their territory, but for now they're focusing on L.A.) Their headquarters is an abandoned drugstore, which they've cleaned up and painted in Day-Glo colors.

Operations: When they're not dipping into Sugar Daddy's trust fund, the Soldiers get most of their money from drug-running. They pick up a lot of courier/middleman jobs for various syndicates in spite of their burned-out appearance because they rarely let their own desire to "experience the Universe" get in the way of serious drug biz. After all, getting the chemicals to the general public is infinitely more important than getting high themselves.

Among other things, the New World Soldiers are one of the main suppliers of magical plants from the Mojave Desert. How they get hold of them, no one knows—but no one much cares, either. Their knack for getting magical plants and Anasazi “spiritual helper” mixtures out of the Mojave makes them a major link in various magical smuggling operations run out of Los Angeles to Denver, Seattle and Tir Tairngire.

They also have connections among the rich and bored of Westside, Studio City and UCLA; they provide the upper-crusters with the chemical edge that brings “happiness” to those whose only worth comes from having more nuyen than they can spend. Through these connections, Sugar Daddy has set up the occasional shop in Palm Springs and Las Vegas. He has also been seen in Denver, Seattle, New York and the Caribbean League helping some of his better customers “see the Universe’s beauty.”

Foes: The Soldiers’ few foes include law enforcement types (a bunch of uptight no-lifers who just don’t understand the benefits of drugging out) and anyone who tries to put a spike in their drug-running business. One of their favorite tricks is coating cop-car door handles with drug-laced DMSO to make the cops high. They also have a mild prejudice against corporate types, whom Sugar Daddy calls “stuffed-shirt stiflers of the creative mind.”

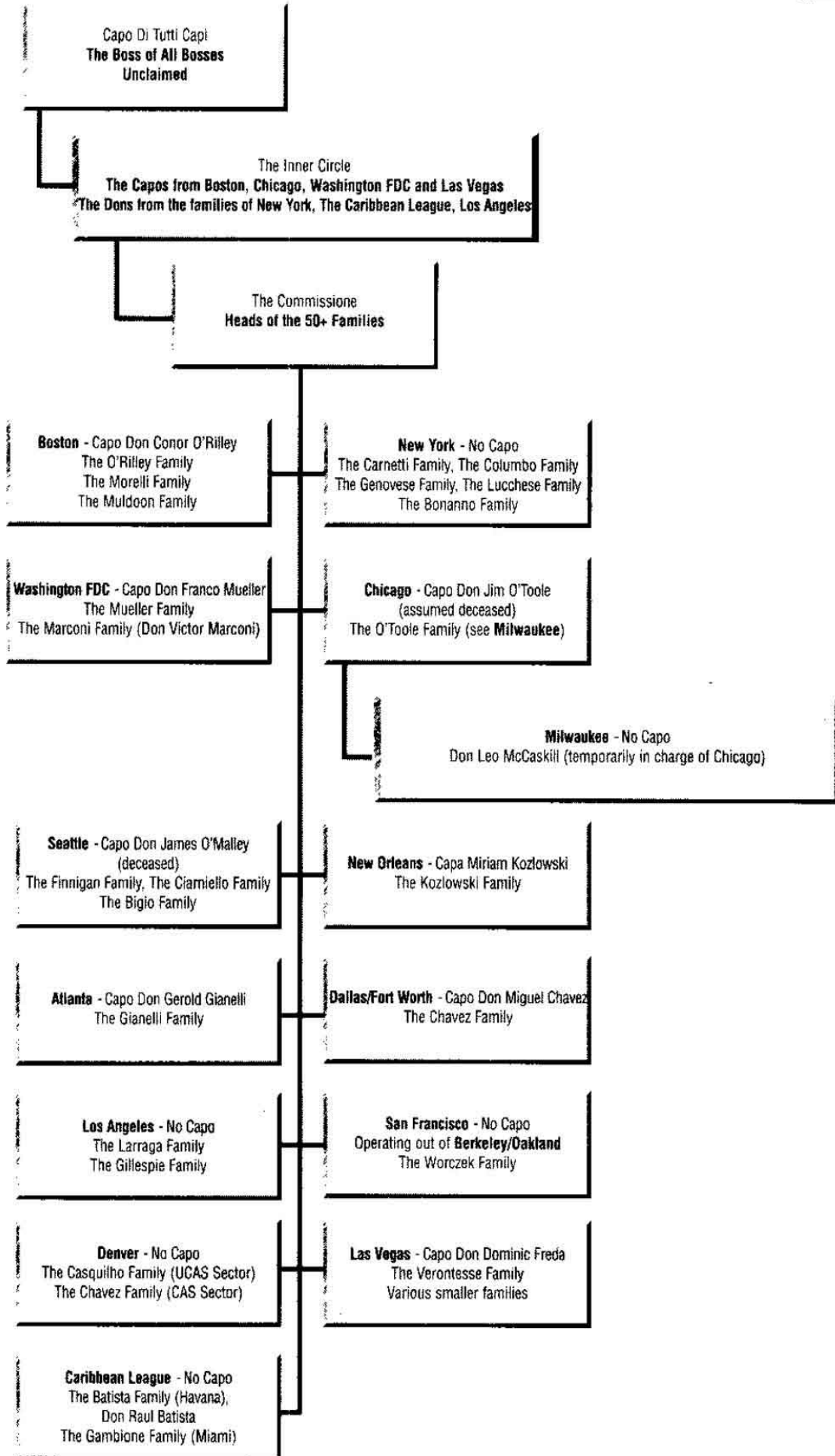
Uniqueness: The gang does anything possible to make people start tripping: handing out pill packets on street corners, painting subway turnstiles with hallucinogen-laced DMSO, and so on. In one infamously successful escapade, the Soldiers managed to spike a batch of paint used on the cans of a popular brand of soda with DMSO and LSD; reports of consumers having wild hallucinogenic episodes came pouring in to local police stations for forty-eight hours until the soda was recalled.

On the rare occasions when they fight, the New World Soldiers prefer chemical-based weapons like Narcoject guns and gas grenades. They restrict themselves to chemicals that alter perspectives, like knock-out gas or laughing gas, rather than substances like Fugu-5 that are intended to maim. They tend not to kill their enemies, preferring to “open their minds to new possibilities.”

Finally, Sugar Daddy is always looking for one more high, one more altered reality, to find the truth of it all. If he hears of a new, mind-altering drug, he will personally go wherever necessary in search of it. Sugar Daddy frequently tests new drugs before the corporate research departments concocting them even know they have anything. How he gets his hands on such “classified trade secrets” is a mystery; many people speculate that his patrons share more than the “secrets of the Universe” with him.



PRIMARY MAFIA FAMILIES





HONOR. RESPECT. FAMILY.

Without these, I'd be nothing but a dirtbag—a freaking shadowrunner. Honor and respect—these set members of the “Family” apart from the scum who want what’s rightfully ours. The smuggling operations, the protection rackets, the casinos and brothels ... our ancestors spilled their blood to build these empires. And I’ll spill mine to keep the Family strong. Weakness is not an option. It dishonors the Family. Anybody dishonors the Family, he pays with his life.

Anyone who doesn’t show us respect, or tries to take what we own, we send them a message. First we hurt them, then we hurt their business, their friends and their family. And if that doesn’t work ... we kill them.

The *Underworld Sourcebook* describes in detail the “Big Four” international criminal syndicates: the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads and the Seoupa Rings. Each syndicate’s markets, business practices, traditions, histories and secret rituals are revealed, along with loads of information on gangs, terrorists, assassins and other groups who rule the shadows through no law but their own. The *Underworld Sourcebook* includes guidelines for building campaigns around organized crime and customizing them for local settings, and alternate campaign rules that allow players to play members of organized-crime syndicates. It provides a wealth of adventure hooks, story starters, background information and rules for use in any *Shadowrun* campaign. For use with *Shadowrun* and the *Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows*.



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ISBN# 1-55560-315-7 \$15.00

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