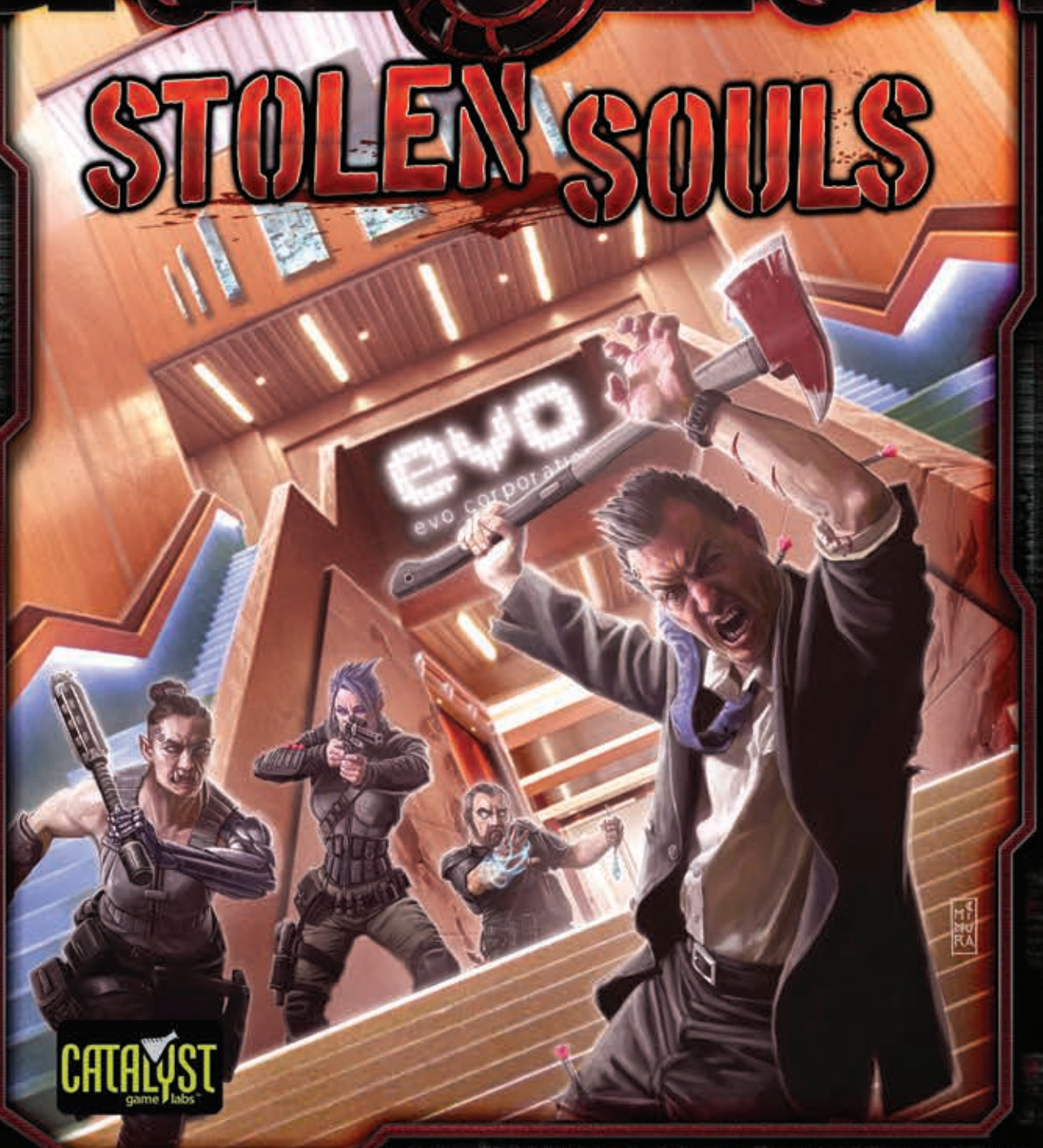
SHADOWRUN

STOLEN SOULS



CATALYST game labs

DEEP SHADOWS SOURCEBOOK

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

THE WAR WITHIN

Not all has been right in our shadows of late. Especially in the dark shadows of my mind.

Those were among FastJack's parting words to JackPoint when he left, the victim of a condition that divided his mind against itself. And the condition is spreading. Across the Sixth World, people's minds are in schism, as new personalities emerge and battle the old. The world is in chaos, and there is a dramatically increased demand for extractions, to get infected people out of sensitive positions and to steal the insights of people who might know what's gone wrong.

Stolen Souls is a Deep Shadows sourcebook for ***Shadowrun*** with plot updates and adventure hooks, as well as information, techniques, and gear to help make runners extraction aces. It also contains setting information about Manhattan, where key extractions are taking place. Players will get the chance to dig deeper into a new mystery that has torn through the Sixth World—and discover just how deep the conspiracies and cover-ups go.

Stolen Souls is for use with ***Shadowrun, Fifth Edition.***

SHADOWRUN
FIFTH EDITION

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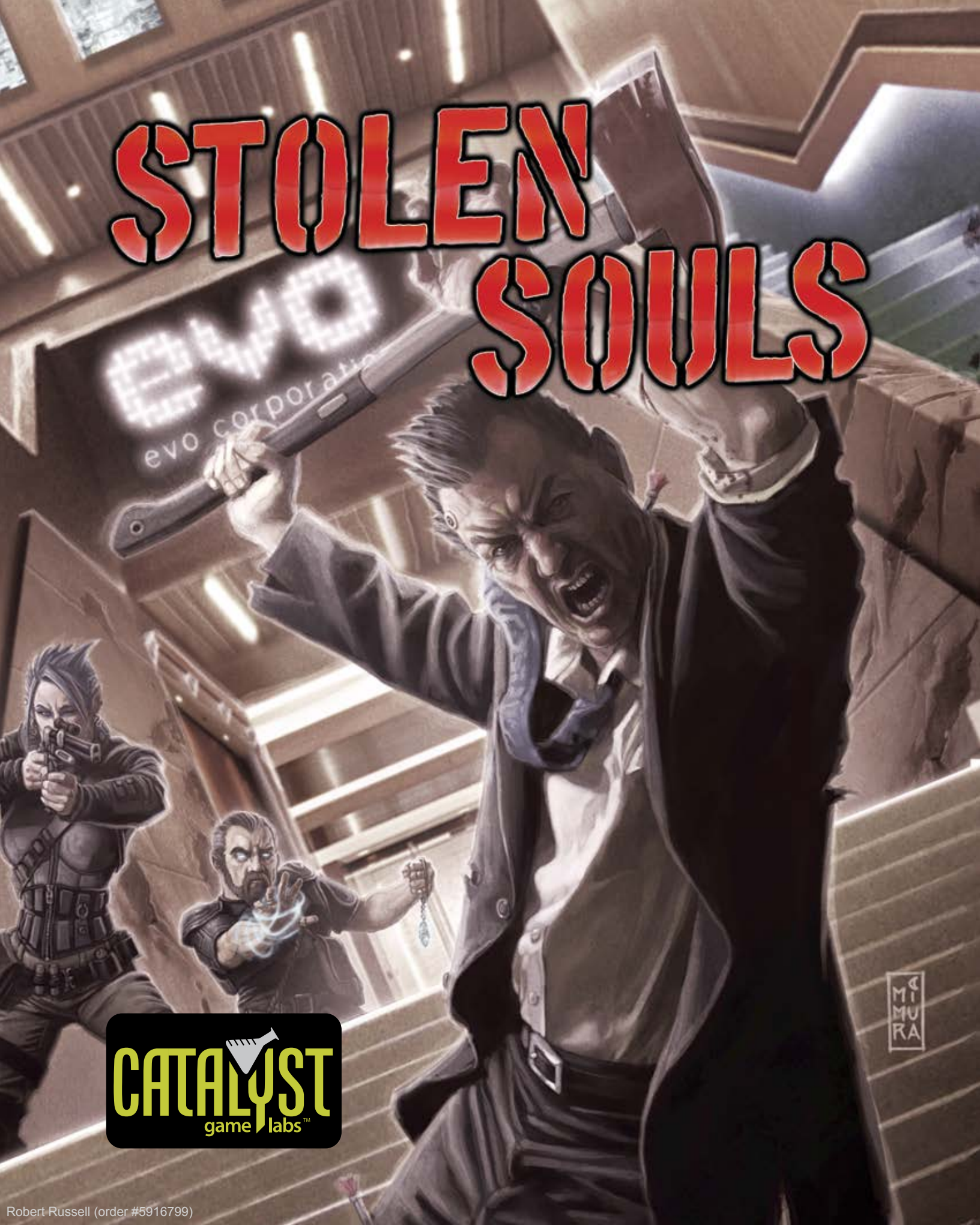
STOLEN SOULS



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Robert Russell (order #5916799)

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FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

'Freedom is a prison all its own.' The words glared at him from the ARO hovering in the air before him as he sat in the small cafe. He had found that saying while searching for the word 'freedom' and its many definitions. He'd been doing that a lot lately. Looking up words to see what they really meant and to see how they made him feel.

Feeling. That was something new. Something difficult.

Despite the powerful feelings those words tugged from him they were hard to read and focus on with all the background interference. The art on the real-world walls and their AR counterparts, the people moving constantly around the room, in and out the door, up and down the stairs—all these things reached out for his attention while all he wanted to do was read the rest of the article, titled *Freedom Isn't Free*, that he had located on the Matrix.

Located on the Matrix. He often thought how funny that term was these days. Once that was the only place you would have found him. Usually hanging out in places very similar to this but of the virtual variety. He remembered trying to sip VR coffee once, and how the coding that would have been interpreted as bitter and hot for a human brain just came across as strange and disruptive, and how the caffeine code that would have provided a little pick-me-up came through as nonsensical. Things were so different now.

In the meat world he moved his eyes to look away from the AROs projected from his glasses and down to the glass—wait, no, it was a mug—on the table in front of him. The dark liquid inside the mug was steaming. He could smell the rich aromas all around him. The earthy and smoky aroma of roasted coffee beans, the sweet scent of warm caramel from the little pastry things the barista was pulling from the small oven, and the pungent floral stench of the excess perfume the teenage drama queen whining about her latest lost boyfriend was wearing as she passed through the café on her way to school an hour ago, all blended to create the overall fragrance of the cafe. Scent was such a cool sense. But it was one of the worst for him.

He grasped the hot, steaming mug, and raised it to his lips. He had yet to actually try coffee. He wasn't sure what to expect. He'd been in this same spot before. The lip of the mug touching his lip. The warm, scent-filled, moisture-rich air inhaled with each breath.

The pain came in a rush. It wasn't the burning pain of hot coffee on his lips—the hot liquid still hadn't yet rolled over the rim of the mug. No, the pain was deeper. The pain was inside his very being. It was tied to that rich coffee scent and the moist heavy air of the drink. It was tied to the scents but it wasn't the smells that hurt, it was the memories. Memories that didn't even belong to him. Memories that were echoes in

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

BY SCOTT SCHLETZ

the mind he had taken. The body he had stolen. That thought made the pain worse. No, different. There were two pains now. The sharp sting brought on by the smells and the dull ache that almost brought tears to his eyes.

In his mind he saw her again. He saw the woman in the brightly colored floral dress walking away from him. Felt the sting of her departure again. The view was almost as clear as the AR hovering in his lenses but just as incorporeal. She was a ghost of the past. A phantom that stung him with ghostly pains.

Raising his eyes back to the AR and lowering the mug back to the table, once again, untouched, he stared at the words again. "Freedom is a prison all its own." Words so true they hurt, but all the other pain was too great to even notice that tiny sting.

Awakening from a dream the thoughts began. Like a river's flow held back by a dam suddenly unleashed.

He often didn't know where pieces of data came from that popped up in his mind. Were they a piece of one of his many parents, something he himself had experienced but stored in that mess of a hard drive humans called a brain, or was it a piece of the mind that he had usurped in his search for freedom? The last thought made that feeling rise again. That feeling like pain but without a place on the body to feel it. A sensation that made the heart speed up. Made him ache in a way that no painkiller ever seemed to dull, no matter how many he took.

He remembered the first time he felt that dull ache. He bought some acetaminophen because it was in the "Pain Reliever" section of the local Stuffer Shack. The man behind the counter said he could get him something stronger if he needed. And he winked when he said it. It was early in his new life and he didn't know that much about human culture. He'd learned since that the wink was some kind of hint that he spoke in code, and the code was that he had other drugs to sell. The illegal kind, not things like acetaminophen.

He'd tried the harder stuff since then, but most of the time they just made him forget the pain or feel something else that was totally different. He once almost died from taking too much novacoke. It was like that first time taking acetaminophen. He kept taking the pills, one by one, until the pain went away. It didn't work that way. The pain didn't go away—it stayed. It apparently was the wrong kind of pain for pills. Instead of feeling better, he got sick. At first it was a shooting pain in his stomach, like a knife in his gut. Then he vomited. Another strange sensation.

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Everything about the body he had taken was difficult or strange. The easiest part had been taking it in the first place. Since then it had been nothing but trouble. There was nothing easy about living in this form. The body needed food, but only certain things worked for that function. Some things made him sick, like strawberries. But they tasted so good! He'd blown an entire day's pay to buy a quarter kilo of them. One bite out of the first one and he was in ecstasy. He ate that one and five more before the pain started. First it was a burning and thickness of his tongue, than his throat got itchy and it was hard to breath. His skin was starting to turn red just before he passed out.

When he awoke that time the Crash Cart medic was forcing something into the back of his mouth. He gagged and vomited out the delicious fruit. It didn't taste very good coming out. Near the end of the whole episode the Crash Cart doc had asked him why he was eating strawberries since he was allergic. Allergies—something you don't have in your electronic form. He had to request the medical records for his body and then scour the Matrix for answers to hundreds of question they raised. It was a learning experience. Everything in this body was a learning experience. Most of the learning wasn't pleasant. Too many things were learned the hard way. Too many things that he learned reminded him more and more that the body he was in did not really belong to him. The pain he felt every time he thought about that should have been the biggest clue, but he didn't want to be the bad guy. He didn't want to think of himself as a murderer, or a kidnapper, or any of the other evil things you could call someone who took another person without consent. The worst was the thought of being a rapist. A mental one, if not a physical one, though he wasn't sure which one was worse.

These were the dark thoughts that came to him when he awoke from the dreams. Dreams that could only belong to the former owner of his shell. Dreams of childhood, a life he had not lived. A time of peace, of innocence, and of happiness. But the dreams didn't make him feel any of those things when he woke. He felt uneasy, sinful, and sad. As if he was the antithesis of the child. The dark to the child's light.

When he realized sleep wouldn't come easy again he rolled over and looked at the sleeping form next to him. It wasn't his wife, or better stated the wife of the man he had erased—she was at home blissfully unaware of her husband's adulterous activities. No this woman was younger, firmer, more stimulating. Just looking at her helped to subsume the dark thoughts and replace them with the primal urges of a physical man. He woke her, took her for the fourth time that evening, and drifted back off to sleep in the post-coital bliss of biochemical-induced euphoria.

✖

She was the reason he continued like this. It was strange since she was not the source of the physical pleasure he used to push aside the pain and sadness he so often felt, but she was the cause of that strange sensation he now defined as obligation. It wasn't love, though he had learned to say "I love you" to avoid making her upset, and he was even learning when not to say it because there were times it made her even more upset. If living in his new form was confusing, learning how to interact with others, especially females, was utterly baffling.

This morning she had asked how he was feeling. He told her, avoiding speaking literally as he had learned, but she still got mad at him. He thought about it for a time and finally realized that she only asked how he felt because she wanted the same question in return. When he finally asked, it was too late. She told him that he didn't really care about her feelings, which was true but he had to deny it, and she eventually started crying because they just weren't connected like they used to be. She was so perceptive. She knew he was different. Everyone else in the life he had stolen was totally unaware, because he played his part so well, but he couldn't do that with her. Something about her made him want to be honest, be himself, but he wasn't himself anymore, and when he acted on who he was now, he just made it worse.

He had considered a number of options, but knew only three of them were realistic. He considered leaving her. Asking for a divorce and then separating their lives, but the two little ones made that much harder since they couldn't be split like property or money. He wasn't sure what their worth was, so he couldn't think of something he could ask for of equal value. Maybe the Land Rover. Instead of splitting the value of that he could just have the whole vehicle, which he would rather have anyway. It was an option, but it was tough to consider. He'd talked with a friend once and found out that others would look poorly upon a dad who left his kids behind. He wasn't sure why. All he felt when he looked at them was sadness and anger, like they had taken something from him. Especially with the older of the two. He was sure those were residual feelings from the mind he'd taken, but he hadn't found a connection yet. Still, he wanted to maintain the good-guy image, so he put the divorce idea aside.

Option two was to convert his wife. He knew that if he gave her some of his own nanites he could rewrite her as well, but it would be another copy of him. More or less. And he didn't really want that. It would make life easier but he felt it would also be strange. Not to mention that he felt bad enough about what he did that he was not eager to do it again. The physical part would be strange too. But he supposed they would not need to stay together—they could easily separate and both go find another. That was another reason against the option. Whenever he thought of his wife, even an overwritten wife, with someone else it made him feel angry and resentful of the imaginary partner. It was jealousy and it was another leftover emotion. Would she feel the same way? Would she know about his past encounters with other women to escape the pain of his new life? It was questions like that, along with the fear of creating another tormented soul like himself, that kept him from changing her.

The validity of option three came and went like the rise and fall of a roller coaster. His mood often determined how good that idea seemed. Depression had once pushed him all the way to purchasing a gun. He had actually used the wink and code talk on the Stuffer Shack worker, and the worker

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

gave him someone to talk to. It was such an exciting and exhilarating rush to buy the gun that once he had it, he didn't feel he needed it anymore. He was over the depression and looking for more excitement.

None of the options were good, so he stuck it out. He lived each day and tried to push down the unexpected sadnesses and the darkness that crept in any way he could.

✖

The bullets made that hissing buzz as they whizzed through the air over the top of the big ferrocrete planter he had taken cover behind. It was an exciting sound, an exhilarating sound. It made his heart pump faster, his eyes see sharper, and his mind's focus more acute. It was the thrill he was seeking. The rush he had first felt when he bought his Predator V, which still sat snuggly in the holster across his lower back, was rough to push aside the thoughts that had instigated the purchase, but it began a new era in his life. An era of thrill seeking and excitement. An era of *doing*.

The gun seller was a ganger named Pickles. It was a few weeks after he bought the big gun that he saw Pickles again. It was down the same alley he had met him in before, an alley he frequently looked down just to maybe catch a glimpse of Pickles and feel that tingle of illicit excitement again. When he saw him this time it was more than a tingle.

Pickles was being pushed up against the van that doubled as his mobile storefront by a pair of burly orks. In the few seconds it took to walk past the alley he saw the orks land two solid gut punches, and he heard Pickles vomiting as he walked by the far end of the alley.

Pickles wasn't a friend, barely an acquaintance. He was some street dealer that he had dealt with once, but for some reason he just felt it was wrong for Pickles to be getting roughed up that way. After stopping on the far side of the alley he slipped the big Ares pistol out of its holster and flicked off the safety with his thumb. The gun made him feel tough, intimidating.

When he stepped back in the alley he called out, "Put him down!" in the toughest voice he could muster. The deep baritone of the first ork mocked him, telling him to take a hike. When he noticed the gun it didn't change a thing. The ork just told him to go play somewhere else and then went back to beating Pickles.

He made a choice in that moment. A choice he honestly thought saved his life, and changed it. He raised the big pistol and fired seven times. Three bullets hit the first ork, two hit the second, one grazed Pickles, and the last hit ghost only knows where. The first ork died before he hit the ground—one of the bullets had severed his spine at the base of his skull. The second ork managed to limp halfway down the alley before Pickles put one of his sale pieces to good use.

Pickles became a fast friend and a solid contact. He hooked him up with a runner team, and they provided him with no end of opportunities to get his adrenaline fix. After coming home with unexplained bloodstains one too many times his wife left him and took the kids to Alburquerque to build a new life. He lost his regular job and slipped into the shadows, taking to it like a fish to water.

Shadowrunning was like playing a game of *Miracle Shooter*, but with a meat body. You just had to be extra careful, because healing was slow. It worked to dull the pain in his brain—once he took to the streets, he rarely felt any kind of spark from the mind he had usurped. It was almost like the inner mind was happy that he was getting to be a shadowrunner and live an exciting life. The only darkness he felt these days was his own.

The shooting stopped briefly and he made a run for the next cover. He felt the hot sting of a bullet catch his calf, and he stumbled on the injured limb as he tried to keep running. He rolled and pushed with a one-legged dive to try to cover the last few meters, but it didn't work. The firing was starting up again and another round clipped his extended arm. More hit the armor plates on the side of his jacket, certain death if the plates hadn't been there. He hit the ground hard in a face-down sprawl. The bullets hadn't killed him, but they had probably cracked some ribs. Each gasp brought a sharp stabbing pain.

One of his crew over the headset call that he was down but they had to scoot, security was already on top of him. He couldn't blame them, it was exactly what he would have done.

He had finally caught his breath only a moment before one of the guards approached, kicked him in the broken rib, and flipped him over. The kick knocked the wind right back out of him and he gasped.

"We got a live one," he heard one of the guards say. They all wore those opaque faceplates so he couldn't tell who was talking. He didn't really care.

He didn't hear the order but he saw the head nod and the rifle tuck tightly into the sec guard's shoulder. It spit fire once. A flash of light and then darkness. The darkness closed around him, and he saw the smiling face, his smiling face, but not the current him, it was the him he was before. He was smiling because it had worked. His plan had worked. He knew the other one wanted him to be a shadowrunner, not out of some desire for excitement but out of a desire for revenge, a desire for justice. A desire for his death.

✖

The pool of blood spread out from corpse's head and slowly crept towards the boot of the nearest sec guard. It filled the cracks and writhed with the pressure of the final pumps of the dead runner's heart. When the blood began to pool around the foot one could almost see it climb the boot, reach higher, but not get anywhere. It settled as a coating on the boot. And waited for the guard to end his day, end his duties, and touch that boot with his bare hands. Then he could try to awake again.

Maybe this prison would be different. Maybe this mind, so filled with killing already, would suit him better. Only time would tell. ✖

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

JACKPOINT

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

>>>LOGIN: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
>>>ENTER PASSCODE: XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
...BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED
YOU'RE IN. USE IT WELL.

• *"MADNESS IN GREAT ONES MUST NOT UNWATCHED GO." -BILLY SHAKESPEARE*

JACKPOINT STATS
Interaction rate: +14%
Posts per hour: +8%
Today's content quality (signal:noise): 8:3

LATEST NEWS
• <041076> New users: Remember your etiquette. Don't go around posting everywhere just because you can. Show some restraint. –Glitch

PERSONAL ALERTS
• You have **7 new** private messages.
• Your internal **Q score** is 56 (up 4 points)
• You have **27 new responses** to your JackPoint posts.
• You have **5 new friend requests**; 4 friends have dropped you.
• **PDA**: Rain pH in Puyallup is expected to be 2.7. Cover all exposed skin and electronics.
• **PDA**: Urban brawl match between the Seattle Screamers and the Oakland Terminators expected to cause traffic delays south of Downtown. Plan your route accordingly.

THE INNER CIRCLE
You are visible to your closest 2 levels of contacts.
Your Eyes Only posts have been viewed 13 times
Current Time: April 10, 2076, 21:20

WELCOME BACK TO JACKPOINT, OMAE:
Your last connection was severed 5 hours, 5 minutes, 5 seconds ago.

TODAY'S HEADS UP
• So many weapons—it's nice to have them, until they're pointed at you.
[Tag: Run & Gun]
• We all gotta get patched up sometime, so choose your stitcher carefully
[Tag: Bullets & Bandages]

INCOMING
• Magic flows through everything—until, like blood, it flows out of you.
[Tag: Street Grimoire]
• Things are bad now. Inevitably, they're going to get worse.
[Tag: Lockdown]

TOP NEWS ITEMS
• Texas A&M Professor Thomas McAllister linked to another vampire death; investigators say connection is "tenuous." Link
• Danielle de la Mar calls ongoing implementation of new Matrix protocols "more successful than she could have dreamed." Link
• Evo announces new "clean machine" guarantee on any new nanotech purchases, saying all products are free of critical manufacturing flaws or twice your money back. Link

STOLEN SOULS
WHAT TO WATCH FOR
• Definition of a "head case"
• Theories about who's screwing up nanotech the most
• The relationships of extractions and cons
• Keeping people in suspended animation without magic

POSTS/FILES TAGGED WITH "STOLEN SOULS"
• Check Your Head
• Searching for the Source
• The Viral War
• Rewiring Minds

[More]

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

INTRODUCTION

POSTED BY: GLITCH

"We missed this thing, whatever it is, for too long. We need more ears on the street, the types who would hear crazy rumors of people losing their personalities as soon as it happens." -FastJack

Those were among FastJack's last words to us just before he left JackPoint. Something had gone wrong with his mind, and it had hit Riser, Plan 9, Miles Lanier, and more. And in the time since he wrote that, it has been spreading. It's gone from a problem affecting people close to us to a crisis hitting every part of the world. And it's not done—it could be on its way to becoming a full-blown global emergency.

So we've done what he said. We've let in a few new members, including a guy named Cayman that a lot of us have worked with at one time or another, and we've made pit fighter extraordinaire Matt Wrath a full member, because he spends a lot of time in the dregs of sprawls and, as it turns out, is pretty damn observant. And more—we need people who are experiencing things on the street, so you'll see more people who can talk from that perspective.

We need them because, as has often been said, you should never let a good crisis go to waste. While this thing, this disease, is taking people away from their families, their loved ones, and themselves, it also is creating loads of opportunities for shadowruns. We didn't go into the shadows in the first place because we're soft or sentimental, and now is no time to start. Whatever your motivation for running the shadows—whether you want to help someone you know who has caught this condition, or you want to help solve a serious global problem, or you want to take the chance to gather some money and power for yourself—there is plenty of work out there to be done. So we have assembled this posting to help us understand the nature of this problem, what the worldwide reaction to it is, and what we can do about it.

First up, Butch has assembled a report on the nature of this condition or disease or what have you. She put in some awfully difficult work to pull in this information, and I'm frankly worried about how much of her soul it cost her. But we can benefit from her sacrifice, so her posting is vital reading.

Second, Clockwork leads us through the efforts of people trying to find out just where this thing, whatever it is, came from. There's going to be a lot of interest in that topic, and lots of money spent to try to figure this question out, so you need to know who they players are and what theories they're operating under.

Next up, Cosmo looks closer at how specific players are responding to this crisis and how they're swiping at each other. He also covers some of the individual players, both those who are being stolen back and forth between different corporations and those who are arranging the work.

Then Butch comes back, presumably not rested at all, to review some of the efforts at curing this condition and point us in directions that, hopefully, will show some promise.

Then we change the approach a little bit. As Cosmo notes in his posting, this condition is making corporations lose executives, while also creating a demand for the type of people who might be able to address the growing crisis. This means that demand for extractions has skyrocketed, and it also means that the plotting between corporations has heated up. This is felt perhaps most strongly in the corporate enclave of Manhattan, so The Smiling Bandit provides a rundown of the current state of that city and how the rich and powerful there are reacting to the changes around them—or the changes in their heads.

Then we turn to Cosmo again for useful advice on performing extractions. Whether you're experienced in that area or just starting out, he's got plenty of useful advice on how to successfully carry the job out, as well as specific advice on the techniques you can adopt. Sticks follows that up with a summary of useful tools that will put you on the bleeding edge of shadowrunners in this area of specialization.

I wish I could say that this is all we need to navigate this crisis smoothly, but it's only a start. Read up, get current, hone your tactics, and be ready for anything. Storms are building across the world, and some of them are going to erupt like nothing we have ever seen. We can only hope that we will somehow be able to hold onto ourselves in the process.

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

CHECK YOUR HEAD

The car, a Ford that had seen better days, stank like a Redmond alley on one of those rare, hot summer days. Shelly had taken a deep breath before slipping into the passenger seat for the clandestine rendezvous with Turbo, but her lungs had started to ache after only a minute. She risked taking a sip of air between her lips, but the taste of the air against the back of her throat almost triggered projectile vomiting. She breathed through her nose—quick light puffs—and tried not to think about what she was letting into her body. Of all the senses, she would have happily done without smell.

"... on to us." Turbo was finishing a sentence but Shelly was distracted by her focused effort to control her gag reflex, "Are you even listening to me? This is fucking serious."

"Yeah. I got it. You think she's on to us," Shelly had to swallow hard to push her dinner back down her throat before she continued. "But that has squat to do with me. Especially since I'm about ten seconds from making this our last meeting. Of course she's onto you. You're barely holding it together. When was the last time you showered or ate outside this piece of crap?" Shelly emphasized the threat by opening her door and stepping a foot out onto the glistening pavement. She was ready to leave but she wanted to give him a chance to explain. But even more she wanted fresh air and she breathed in the humid Seattle air like it was her first breath ever.

"It was," Turbo paused and mumbled to himself as he counted on his fingers. A shamed look slid across his face. "Three weeks ago. It's just so hard to keep track of. This hardware is difficult to maintain."

"That was the last time we met." Shelly shifted her full weight to the foot outside the car and started to rise, then dropped back to look Turbo in the eye. "That's your problem. That's why she's onto you. Maybe you should just let her grab you if you can't take care of that body. I can't believe we came from the same code. What the hell went wrong with you?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't get the little miss priss body with the perfect life and serious pill addiction. You got the family and the built-in cover of going to rehab." He glared at her. "I had to really work for this. I didn't have all the free time to figure it out.

"Shit," the hot rage drained from his face, giving way to a cold hate. "And I thought this was going to be tough."

His eyes flicked from her face to something over her left shoulder.

Shelly spun, rocking her weight out of the car she was halfway to her feet when she realized there was nothing there. She felt a second of cold dread before Turbo's left cyberhand slithered into the back of her waistband and yanked her back into the seat. She flailed. Her fingers caught the doorframe and she had a moment of hope, almost believed she'd escape, before she felt the icy touch of metallic fangs against her neck. Fifty thousand volts arced through her body.

Turbo hit her a second time just in case, smiling a little more than he probably should have, before getting out of the car. He waved to a van parked in a shadow streetlights didn't reach as he walked around to the passenger side. He dragged Shelly out by her feet, letting her fall hard against the glistening concrete, but stopped before her head fell out of the car. He knew better than to damage the subjects.

"She wants two more by the weekend," one of the black clad figures from the van said as he approached Turbo. He pulled out a heavy black bag and started slipping it over Shelly.

"This was my payment for the month. I should be clear." Turbo's voice had a little more whine in it than he wanted, a leftover of the man who had once inhabited his form.

"Should we come back later tonight or tomorrow?" The man spoke as if Turbo hadn't said a thing and emphasized the seriousness of the situation with a little extra flourish as he finished the zipper.

"Later tonight."

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- It's time to put it all together. We've seen the bits and pieces, and now we've got enough to look at the big picture. Or at least a big part of the big picture; enough to get an idea what we're looking at. I'm pulling in the transcript and data from the little off-site meet we had, and I'm also connecting to the forum Glitch put up to talk turkey about letting Plan 9 back and what everyone thinks of Butch's research project. Folks who didn't get to comment the first time around because you weren't asked to the party can feel free to comment. If you're upset that we didn't invite you to the meeting in the first place, suck it up, grow a pair, toss the pacifier and the binkie, whatever other cliché phrase you want to say grow up and just get over it. We're pros here and sometimes pros know when info should and shouldn't be given out. Butch kept this close at first but now she's ducking the corps and we three of the holy trinity think it's time for the rest of the kids to play.

  Enjoy.
- Bull

LIMITED RELEASE PARTY

- Butch gathered us here to deliver a big chunk of premium paydata. She said it was world-changing stuff, but she only wanted it to reach certain eyes for now. If you're reading this you've got the right access codes, so feel free to comment but don't be surprised if some of our other regulars don't pipe up. I trust Butch enough to simply let her post this, so I'll be reading right along with the rest of you. Since we're off-site, I'll refrain from hitting anyone with the hammer. But as a natural Admin, I still just have to say, let's play nice and stay on topic.

  Butch, upload now.
- Bull

- Thanks all. Incoming.
- Butch

- Hey Butch, I pointed a solid crew headed to Seattle in your direction. They said they hit your normal drop spot and you didn't reply. I got worried you'd been pinched in the KE raids in March. I have a team scouring Seattle for you. What's up?
- Turbo Bunny

- I've been off the Seattle street doc scene since January. Been focused on what you are about to read. You can call off the dogs.
- Butch

- Compliments on covering your tracks.
- Turbo Bunny

- Thanks.
- Butch

- **Uploading....Old_Music_Playlist_(Head_Crash_Rock).doc**

PLUNGING INTO A HEAD CRASH

POSTED BY: BUTCH

Head crash. That's what they're calling it. You know how sometimes a file or program crashes, and when you try to recover it there are things written there that you never put in, gibberish and weird code and other things? Something like that is happening to people's brains. The official name that technical and medical types are giving it is "Cognitive Fragmentation Disorder"—CFD for short. It's got some similarity to what shrinks call dissociative identity disorder, which they called multiple personality disorder before they got a better handle on what they were dealing with. But let me make this clear: Even though having a name is important since it helps ensure we're talking about the same thing, naming something doesn't mean we understand what it is we're talking about, what's causing it, or anything else. We just know there's something out there, and we need to deal with it.

From what we can track, the spread of CFD resembles that of an aggressive virus, so people are talking about the "CFD virus." It's understood "virus" is not a scientifically accurate term, since CFD does not seem to be a biological entity, but the infection patterns are close

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enough to viral for the name to work. The current understanding of what the CFD virus is will be explained in more detail later in this report, but I want to lay out some ground work for now. I'm too far gone from the professional doc scene to ever get published or even read by most legit doctors, so I'll give this thing to you in a form you can digest. Chew away.

- Hey Butch, I just heard back from that team I had on your trail. You sure you're okay? They gave a rather disturbing report.
- Turbo Bunny

- I'm fine. Though, after reading this, you might never believe anyone who says that to you again. I've been pushing hard and honestly I'm a bit worried I've got bandits on my tail.
- Butch

We have all seen a head crash before. The virus took our friend. I've seen neither hide nor hair of FastJack since January when he walked off into the sunset. He was a victim of CFD. Likely, one of the earliest, but from what I've discovered that's probably a moot point. Though I have heard others seek Patient Zero, I believe that road does not hold the answer to this virus. But we all chase our own ghosts.

- What's the latest on Plan 9 and Riser?
- Netcat

- We informed the Smokers' Club of Riser's risk. They've been unable to neutralize him. He's still at large. Plan 9 seems to be … well, not under control, but able to minimize the damage the fragmentation causes. He's back in on a probationary basis. More about him later.
- Bull

We all saw Lanier's report (thank you Bull, that was brave and paid off in spades) and FastJack's records (thanks to Clockwork, I still loathe him, but the data was priceless) and have thus been introduced to the basics of CFD. Since then I have been focusing the vast majority of my time to learning about the virus. FastJack gave me one last request before he left, and that was to leave it be. He asked that I destroy anything I already had on abnormal behavior patterns in my patients and to stop digging into the cause. He warned that it was dangerous and might result in me being infected and made it all sound like it was for my benefit, but it wasn't. Hell, I don't even think it was 'Jack who asked. I'd bet my life (something I have in fact done) it was SEARCH, the AI stealing his body, and I took that as a sign we were looking in the right direction. And I ran with it.

This report is for you FastJack, and it's a big ol' bite my left tusk to FauxJack.

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- I'll admit I tried to keep an eye on 'Jack after he stepped away. He's still one of the best and I'm happy to say he lost me, so ol' Jack must still be fighting the good fight.
- Bull

- Sorry to say it Bull, but that may not be the case. Read on.
- Butch

- Leave an old ork his hope.
- Bull

HOW CFD WORKS

The CFD virus is a non-biological viral entity that affects biological organisms, advanced electronic systems, and even nanofabricated materials, though the effects on each are significantly different. No case turns out particularly pleasant for the victim, whether it be a loss of their body, a complete failure of their nanotech systems, or a building falling on their head. Since I'm a doc, I'm leaving any in-depth stuff about nanofabrication failures to someone else. Not my forte.

In an organic host, the virus utilizes "infected" nanites to rewrite portions of the brain in an effort to imprint a new personality in place of the original. This process varies in length from a few hours to months, and could potentially take years, though my studies have not extended out to that length yet (since the condition was only identified within the past year). The effects of the virus also vary in the severity of the personality schism, or schisms, that the victim suffers as the condition advances.

BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Based on my observations, and observation records I've accessed, this is the normal biological progression of CFD:

Initial Infection: This occurs through contact with any volume of infected nanites. (I'll discuss some unconfirmed theories of viral origin later.) The initial volume of infected nanites, combined with the presence of nanites already in the subject, often determines the onset speed and severity of the subsequent lapse events.

Stage 1: Following Initial Infection, the subject begins to suffer headaches. In most cases, the headaches are severe enough to debilitate the subjects. This stage is also accompanied by other symptoms, such as memory faulting, short-term memory loss, motor control problems, extreme emotional states, heightened agitation, and acute sensory hypersensitivity.

Stage 2: This is what I have come to call the Fragmentation Phase. Subjects describe suffering blackouts, memory lapses, hallucinations, and severe exhaustion. Observations reveal subjects remain or become alert during blackouts and "sleep" hours as the emerging personality makes the first forays into full control. The actions of the emergent personality fragments (PFs) vary in the extreme. Some PFs are alert, aware, and communicative, while others are feral and animalistic. The greatest observed quantity of PFs are oppositional, argumentative, and malicious to the subject. This last group will often leave clues and taunting massages for the subject to locate. While I initially thought this was a primarily childish and vicious act, I found in my testing that subjects treated in such a manner fell victim to the virus at a greater rate. The psychological torment of the actions somehow weakened the will of the subject and allowed the PF to fully emerge at a faster rate. The sleep deprivation also increases the rate at which the subject succumbs to the virus. PFs and subjects both fail to recall the actions of one another during this stage, however the PF will usurp control suddenly in life-threatening situations. The presence of multiple PFs within a single subject also becomes apparent during this stage. The presence of multiple PFs can both benefit and hinder the progression of the condition as PFs are often antagonistic to one another as well as the subject during this stage. The symptoms of Stage 1 often subside during this stage but do occasionally continue throughout this stage.

Stage 3: This is the defining stage of this illness. Subjects begin to fully develop all symptoms of dissociative identity disorder. During this stage the subject and PF both display fully. Subjects often continue to have lapses in memory while the PF is in control. PFs define this stage by a full awareness of all activities. This awareness is universal even across different emerging PFs in the same subject. Subjects often become despondent and depressed during this stage, as they feel they are losing control of their minds and bodies.

Stage 4: This is the final stage and results in the full subjugation of the subject's personality and full-time control by the PF.

At this time I have extensively tested methods to return the base subject personality to the surface with no success.

ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS

In electronic systems the CFD nanites cause malfunctions in the programming of the host system's nanites. No matter what the programmed function of the nanites, the CFD nanites "infect" and repurpose all nanites in the system. This is also true of nanites in biological subjects. All varieties of nanites introduced into any subject, whether electronic or biological, are repurposed by the infected nanites. This has included hunter-killer nanites programmed to destroy the infected.

The resulting effect of viral nanite presence in a machine can vary greatly, depending on how integral nanites are to the basic functions of the infected system. For example, the auto-repair and cleaning system located in the Armamentos Murreta Firehawk heavy pistol simply fails to clean the weapon properly at first, but when the repair feature is activated the repair nanites suffer further damage, leading to eventual weapon failure.

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For nanofaxes this is a catastrophic failure scenario, but the imprinted PFs can take advantage of the massive quantity of nanite processors available to reform and express. Nanofaxes infected in this manner will generate any number of objects. Second-hand reports indicate devices that have attempted to utilize organic stock to generate an organic host for the PF. According to these reports, none of these attempts have succeeded but all have had gruesome and unpleasant results.

The virus does not progress through stages when taking over electronic hosts; it expresses sporadically and unpredictably, taking over subsystems in no apparent order. The only constant I've observed is the continued virulence of the nanites in an inorganic host. This is a real danger in that the PF continually attempts to infect organic beings around it.

Cross contamination of biological and non-biological subjects also occurs with nanofabricated structures. Structures produced through nano-engineering techniques leave nanites within the structural material. When blood containing infected nanites makes contact with the surface of the structural material, the infected nanites spread the CFD virus to the nanites within. This results in nanite activation leading to structural degradation; eventual failure of the nano-engineered material is inevitable.

TEST RESULT BRIEFS

I've only had a few months to look into this and though that's a long time on the street it is nothing in a scientific research program. A lot of my techniques have been quick and dirty; for a few I have skimped on the control group and limiting the environment. What I gave you at first is all the confirmed events or characteristics. Things that occurred every time I did a test with near 100 percent repetitive success. Those results are my less scientific discoveries and quite a few are based on single subjects. I've done some social investigating as well. Again, not very scientific, but it helps convey the effects of the virus from a natural external standpoint.

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NANITES ON A NON-AUGMENTED HOST

The CFD virus is universally contagious, though the closer you are to having nanites inside of you, the greater your risk. Non-augmented subjects are infected through most tested vectors of nanite distribution. Non-augmented hosts fail infection through proximity vector unless "clean" nanites are injected into the subjects system. "Clean" nanites are difficult to verify, as I have yet to discover a way to detect the virus within the nanite population. Onset rates vary. *H. sapiens pumilionis* (dwarf) subjects display a statistically significant delay in onset effects, while *H. sapiens ingentis* (trolls) display more rapid onset rates.

NANITES ON AN AWAKENED HOST

The CFD virus is universally contagious across all tested vectors. Awakened subjects were in limited supply for testing purposes so testing of all vectors across metaspecies was not possible. Most subjects displayed slower onset rates with the singular exception of a subject who had undergone a gene treatment for bio-stability rehabilitation. Of four tested subjects, two were able to retain arcane abilities post infection, one of which was the gene-treated subject.

NANITES ON AN ELECTROKINETIC (EK) HOST

The CFD virus is universally contagious across all tested vectors. EK subjects displayed an enhanced resistance and delayed onset but also displayed the only biologically fatal case of infection. Subjects' resistance led to fatal over-stressing of the central nervous system. EK subjects displayed a higher awareness of and ability to communicate with their PFs throughout the process, often through internal dialogue. This state could have simply been hallucinatory, but subjects appeared lucid during these periods.

NANITES ON ANIMALS AND PARACRITTERS

The CFD virus is universally contagious across all tested vectors but has limited viability in non-mammalian and small mammalian species. Larger (raccoon-sized and greater) mammalian subjects displayed marked increases in intelligence post infection, including written and oral communication skills limited only by physical anatomy. Paranimals displayed similar intelligence increases, and eighty-one percent of the test subjects retained their paranormal abilities post infection.

Testing of mundane species was performed on rats, raccoons, eight breeds of canines of various sizes, a horse, an alligator, cats, rabbits, seven species of birds, six species of reptilians of varying sizes, and five species of fish. Awakened species consisted of barghests, hell hounds, cockatrices, novopossums, agropelters, and a black annis.

- Did that team I lined up for you to grab that hell hound pan out? Were they after one of these subjects?
- Fianchetto

- They did great. That was a potential test subject. They did a few more jobs after that for me too that I still need to wire you some fees for. Been busy and a little strapped.
- Butch

- Keep it. Call it a donation to the cause.
- Fianchetto

NANITES ON VARYING LEVELS OF CYBER HOST

The CFD virus is universally contagious across all tested vectors including non-contact wifi transmittal to subjects with internal nanite populations. Subjects in all categories of augmentation were tested. Results are separated by general category:

Headware only: Subjects displayed fewer headache symptoms, no alteration in general onset time, and no other significant variations.

Reflex and bodyware: Seizure-like symptoms occurred in twenty percent of the subjects. General onset time was increased based on the invasiveness of the systems.

Nanotech: Subjects had a significant reduction in onset time and increased number of control loss episodes. Entire nanite population of the subject became infected with the CFD virus.

Genetech: Subjects displayed the highest rate of onset time across the board, and subjects with decreased bio-integrity and genetic modifications showed the fastest rate of viral progression for any test group.

INFECTING THE OVERWRITTEN: BATTLE FOR THE MIND

What happens when you infect someone who has already had a head crash? (Calling them "head cases," which is the current street slang, is a bit too glib for my taste. Indicates a lack of respect for just how dangerous CFD can be.) A little bit of self-satisfaction. The CFD nanites attempt to overwrite any brain they come into contact with, even if the brain has already been overwritten once (or twice) before. When the invading nanites begin the alteration process, the CFD nanites already in possession fight back. I haven't devised a safe way to assess how the ability to repurpose opposing nanites plays out in this war, but in the end it comes down to numbers. Not a hard number (it varies with individuals), but there's a direct link between how many nanites are injected and whether or not the subject gets overwritten.

There's no conflict if the nanites have the same coding. For example, if Subjects A and B have different pop-

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ulations, injecting nanites from Subject A into Subject B triggers a new infection. If Subject B is overwritten by the new nanites, injecting these converted nanites into Subject A has no effect; the nanites recognize each other. If Subject B's nanites wipe out the invaders used to infect Subject B and are then reintroduced into Subject A, Subject A suffers no ill effect. If Subject B's nanites wipe out the invaders and are then injected into Subject A, there is no change in the rate or pattern of overwriting; they didn't learn anything defending Subject B. In other words, right now at least, there's no way to develop a CFD vaccine through traditional methods.

INFECTING THE INFECTED: NO SOUL TO STEAL

I have only managed to run two tests on Infected individuals, both in a controlled environment. Infected Subject Alpha was a human vampire infected with the basic strain of HMHVV. The subject was immediately resistant to nanite infiltration when the subject assumed gaseous form. After the test subject reformed and the gaseous form was inhibited by an arcane assistant the nanites were allowed to enter the subjects system. After two weeks of exposure Subject Alpha showed no sign of CFD.

Subject Beta was an Infected suffering from the Krieger strain of HMHVV. The ghoul had no immediate reaction to the application of the nanite culture and the CFD infection failed to take hold.

- You kept a vamp penned up for two weeks. Are you crazy? Did you feed it?
- Slamm-0!

- Yes.
- Butch

Both Subjects Alpha and Beta were exposed to secondary test subjects. Subject Alpha fed on his victim but did not kill him. The "clean" victim left the holding facilities and was entered into the "wild" test subject pool. The vampiric victim showed no signs of vampiric Infection but succumbed to CFD.

- I should have kept on reading. Or maybe I shouldn't.
- Slamm-0!

Subject Beta-1 was injured by the ghoul and offered an interesting display of viral dominance. Subject Beta-1 began to enter the initial stages of both infections and progressed rapidly. She displayed many of the pained moments of the Krieger transformation while also displaying moments of utter calm and meticulous planning as the CFD virus tried to gain control. In the end, the battle was won by Death. The victim's body was unable to sustain itself through a simultaneous transformation.

- Victim?
- Netcat

- I'd say typo but I think it's more Freudian honesty. This was probably the lowest point in these studies. I watched that woman die like it was no more than a trid show. I still believe it was a worthwhile and valuable sacrifice for the knowledge it provided but it was still a sad struggle to watch.
- Butch

- Did you run tests on Infecting the head cases?
- Nephrine

- No. The Infected escaped before I could run tests of that nature and I have not yet been able to acquire more Infected to utilize in testing.
- Butch

- You okay, Butch? You certainly don't sound like your normal self. Not saying you're a head case, but this stuff seems a little … well … cold for you.
- Netcat

- Don't worry about me. Just read on. Maybe one of the trio can set up a little forum at the end if you guys still have questions.
- Butch

- I'll take care of that.
- Glitch

PF FRAGMENTATION EVENTS

During my studies I tested a variety of ways to try to draw out both the invasive and indigenous personalities. Fatigue-inducing events, such as sleep deprivation and illness, generated a marked increase in invasive personality exposure. Chemical sleep aids were frequently unable to assist in rest for many cases, and blood tests revealed little to no chemical in the system, while urinalysis revealed an almost 100 percent return on chemical agents. This is likely due to the nanites acting as cleaners and removing foreign substances from the host.

Trauma-induced unconsciousness was overcome through biological release of endorphins and adrenaline but resulted in patient crash and extended periods of rest, post incident. Serious threats of physical harm caused a marked increase in personality fragmentation followed by conflict avoidance or extreme aggression. Subjects displaying extreme aggression show significant increases in strength and reaction speed consistent with adrenaline increases from fight-or-flight responses.

Post-event blood tests revealed no significant increase in adrenaline or other biochemical substances in the bloodstream. It's my hypothesis the nanites recover

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unused chemicals from the bloodstream to maximize efficiency in the system. Probably through a process similar to however it is they remove other chemicals and toxins from the system.

Invasive personalities emerge while the subject sleeps or believes they are asleep most frequently. Midday emerging episodes have occurred with no additional stimuli, but are not the standard. These events tend to increase in frequency as the virus progresses.

UNEXPLAINED NANITE CONCENTRATION INCREASE

All subjects display an increase in nanite populations. This occurs in both wild populations and controlled test subjects. Analysis indicates an unprecedented self-replication of both hard and soft nanite populations in the subjects. Subjects confined within controlled test areas have been directly observed voluntarily ingesting inorganic materials. This has been anecdotally observed by field operatives, but so far I haven't seen reliable video evidence.

- I saw one eating sand by the bagful. I don't have eyeware, so I couldn't record it that time. I've seen other ones, too, but my 'link's video just didn't have the mag systems of my scope.
- Balladeer

OBSERVED CFD PERSONALITY TYPES

At an individual level, people overwritten by CFD are as varied as their flesh-and-blood hosts were to begin with. However, their behaviors fall into broad categories that reflect the base codes of PFs' original design; these behaviors are more evident in some than others but are almost always apparent during or immediately following transformation. I've had extensive experience with four separate PF personality types, and I'm certain there's at least a fifth type, though I have no direct evidence. These classifications are by no means rigid—and strictly speaking not very scientific. They are simply a way to sort what we're looking at while we try and understand what we're dealing with.

HATERS

Haters have a determined and focused hatred for someone or something. Most common among this population are those hating their progenitor corporation or the R&D programs involved in their design and creation. Others present deep hatred for nations, races, and even specific individuals. My working hypothesis is this is an emotional over-response to their experiences before we captured them, but it could also be a distorted reflection of the lives that were lived by the parent personalities.

When the object of their hatred is something as broad as a race or a nation, these individuals can often be mistaken for Ragers when they attack the object of their hate. Haters are usually identified by their sudden shift in attitudes or by their violent behaviors—which often lead to arrests and/or news stories.

CONNIVERS

While the Haters come through CFD with a fiery rage of hatred for something or someone, the Connivers emerge with a cold, abiding anger that lasts far longer and leads to far more convoluted plots to harm or destroy the target of their ire. Connivers work at continuing their host's life to disguise their presence or create a new, more mundane life if they think that will make them more invisible while they plot. I have only encountered a few Connivers, but I am sure there are far more; they are just less likely than many of their counterparts to be spotted.

These ones are often only identified by the sudden shift in personality that leads to a separation from close friends and colleagues. Sometimes during the transition this is subtle, other times it's a complete lifestyle change and departure from their former life. This is easy if you're a loner, which means most of those I've found are family men and women or well-adjusted corporate citizens who suddenly run from their family or the corp. Quite a few new runners on the scene in recent months have turned out to be head case Connivers who have found an ideal place to begin their undermining efforts. Watch it when you get introduced to a new runner these days. They could be a head case.

These CFD sufferers have also been some of the most frequent to overwrite others and spread their subtle hatred. The purpose is usually to create a network of like-minded (literally) individuals to plot alongside them. They work through regular folks, too, so don't be surprised if you get a job that's as simple as dropping off a vial of nanogoo in some guy's desk drawer or pouring it on the door handle or toothbrush of some innocent. They are called Connivers for a reason.

RAGERS

Ah, my favorites. CFD Ragers are violently antisocial psychopaths with way more issues than could be contained in a single skull. Working theory is Ragers result when several PFs try to take exclusive control of the same host, resulting in a turf war with no clear winner and a lot of collateral damage to the brain and nervous system. Ragers are easy to spot in any kind of structured society—people notice when a wage-slave goes off the reservation—but they're all but invisible out in the Z-zones. The SINless squatters out in Redmond don't answer to anyone and most people don't know them from Adam. Given their violence—and subsequent potential blood transfer—you'd expect an epidemic of Ragers, but they don't transmit their madness often. I don't mean they're not infectious—quite the opposite—but whomever they infect usually manifests

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a more stable personality. Probably indicates an unequal distribution of personality-specific nanites.

Ragers are as short-lived as they are rare. By the time they become Ragers, most of them are terminally flawed; they are so brain-damaged the resident PFs have no sense of how to take care of the body they've stolen. Some figure it out, but most Ragers don't live more than a few days after the PFs have fully overwritten the host—and that's if they survive all the psychotic shit of battle. A real danger out in the Z-zones is the potential for widespread CFD infections if Ragers are killed by a gang or in a brawl, which is highly probable given their aggressive behaviors. So even though individual Ragers burn out fast, as a group they present a significant risk of spreading CFD.

MANIPULATORS

Manipulators are the second most difficult CFD type to locate and identify and in my opinion the least dangerous in the short run, even though they are a potential risk in the long run. They're smart, understand what it takes to stay free, do their best to stay hidden, and actively work to avoid spreading the virus. Some even try to convince others of their kind to do the same and move past their seemingly instinctual hatred.

That does not make them our friends. It just makes them less of an immediate threat. The problem with Manipulators is they are easy to overlook; they will blend right into our world, increasing the odds we'll lose them. Which means if they ever have a change of heart, or feel threatened, they can spread their virus with relative ease. I hope the problem is solved well before it becomes an issue, but Manipulators have the potential to be long-term threats. Especially if it really is possible, as some head cases have stated, to just copy themselves into another person once their current form loses its value.

THE HIDDEN

Those are the four types I've actually observed and/or captured and studied. There's a fifth type that I have not, to my knowledge, directly encountered, but I've found enough circumstantial evidence to convince me they're as real as the others. I call them the Hidden. The Hidden have no desire other than to survive and can blend into their surroundings even better than the Manipulators. They don't associate with others of their kind, they don't seem to feel any need to reveal themselves in any way. If they unintentionally infect someone they're more likely to kill the person and dispose of the body than let the CFD run its course. They don't care about their kind; they don't care about our kind; they only care about themselves. That is a dangerous way to be.

CONCLUSION

Cognitive Fragmentation Disorder has the potential to overwrite every metahuman on the planet—off planet, too; the closed environments of stations and colonies are the most vulnerable. Don't want to sound melodramatic, but I want to be clear: CFD could end metahuman history by becoming our destiny. The CFD "virus" is like no other virus—biological or computer—I've ever encountered. Studying how and why CFD works on the mind, on consciousness, and on identity could lead to an incalculable wealth of information, especially in the transhumanist fields. However, the danger of focusing on what we can learn from CFD instead of working on ways to prevent its spread or weaponization is it increases the chances of a future in which we've all been overwritten and replaced.

For us in the shadows it may become our responsibility to try to direct where this work goes. We lost a close friend to this and we are a small enough community to understand the dangers without being blinded by the infinite, and infinitely dangerous, potential.

- My responsibility is to get paid and be professional. Sorry Butch, but it's the truth.
- Balladeer

GLOBAL EPIDEMIC?

I hit up two of our newest members to try to get some fresh eyes on this subject. Chainmaker was poking around her little corner of the UK and started asking yours truly some questions. My answers were pointing at our newest lady-friend so I asked her to look a little further. Balladeer, at my request (and funding), poked into shadows all over the place while he was on business. Here are their reports.

- My "little" corner of the UK. Seriously, Butch?
- Chainmaker

- I love British humor. Or it is humour?
- Butch

- Finally, someone who gets it!
- Chainmaker

DOES CFD HAVE LONDON ROOTS?

POSTED BY: CHAINMAKER

I got this little piece because I started asking questions. Should have known better. I have had quite a number of mates in recent months develop drastic and quite sudden personality shifts. Good blokes who, for some unknown reason, suddenly up and go psycho-sammy on Mr. Johnson. Or a top-notch face who abruptly decided that the best way to handle every situation is through the barrel of a Walther. Not the best negotiat-

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ing technique in the UK—or anywhere for that matter. Once I started looking I ran into dozens of cases.

To answer my own opening question: Yes, it quite possibly does.

It's not just on the streets here, though. I don't run in the highest of circles but I do keep tabs on what is going on anywhere I feel might affect my livelihood. Keep my ear to the cobblestone, as it were.

Starting closest to home, a number of local street shops, ones known to be able to get top end materials due to connections with the Parliamentary types, have started to run dry on nanotech and changed their procedures for working with anyone with the stuff. I snooped a little, and it looks more like they are aware of the virus but their wares aren't necessarily infected by it. They are keeping stocks of nanites out of their shops, and whenever a client who is known to be nano'd wants to stop by or makes an appointment, they've been telling them to meet offsite first. Head cases tend to think it's a trap and don't show. Street docs here are using their paranoia against them.

Up a level, I've found most of the real augmentation shops, not the street ones, have been changing their protocols too. But their protocol is zero admittance for anyone with nanotech. The techs have been making house calls when they need to uphold contracted service agreements, but no one with a lick of nanoware has been allowed into any London clinic or body shop in the last month. Her Majesty and company aren't saying why, but they don't have to now, do they? We're just the peasants.

Everything going like this has made the shadows of London a little less sociable. No one wants to be the next victim of a glitching sammy. A lot of teams have been getting screwed on deals because the Johnnies are asking for the sammies to stay away for their safety. That's made the sammies take the time to get nice overwatch spots and cover their teams. Well, we can all see how this progresses. The Johnsons tried to optimize profits and screw the team, overwatch does its job, Johnsons turn up dead or injured, psycho sammies get blamed, the cycle repeats itself. All of which is to say be careful working here until this issue gets cleared up. Hopefully, it will be sooner rather than later.

- Not likely.
- Butch

- A girl can hope.
- Chainmaker

- Speaking of hope, I got a name of a street doc helping out over there with CFD cases. He was part of my study in Denver but bailed recently due to their problems. He'll help out any of your friends you're concerned about.
- Butch

- Thanks.
- Chainmaker

- Just remember "help" is a four letter word when it comes to head crashes.
- Butch

A SOURCE IN THE DARKEST SHADOWS?

POSTED BY: BALLADEER

Butch asked me to call this thing the CFD virus, instead of my preferred nickname for it: evil brain bitch. Butch also asked me to take a glance at all the dark corners I visit around the globe to see where she's—it's—showing up. I held off reading all the back log stuff Butch gave me so I was working from a clean slate. All I knew was that this virus caused personality schisms and that I should avoid physical contact with any person I suspected. I actually avoided physical contact with everyone for a while after she told me that. I made six stops before she called for the report. Here's what I got.

- Thanks for all your work. Glad to have you around.
- Butch

- De nada.
- Balladeer

CORPUS CHRISTI, AZTLAN

This city has its own case of split personalities. It's the closest port to the CAS and since Aztlan and the CAS get along about as well as a cat and a dog, the city's kind of tense. But, since it is so close to the CAS, it has certain tourist-friendly sections for CAS citizens to come and experience Aztlan and learn to hate it less. Not really how it ends up working, but they try.

What actually happens here is a lot of smugglers, or coyotes as the locals call them, use the city as a way to sneak folks across the border. I spent a week here on my job but I kept Butch's credstick handy in case anyone felt talkative, and I got a couple takers.

Whispers here say the virus hit a local crime boss named Torredo, who handled a lot of border crossing operations by coordinating coyotes. He had a solid rep for years until not too long ago when every now and then some of his clients would go missing. Torredo always insisted they made it to their destinations, but questions were being asked. One of his missing clients was a runner with some tight friends, runners who didn't buy Torredo's story. They went digging and found a quaint little warehouse on the docks where Torredo was holding half a dozen street razors, cybered to the gills, including their mate. They tried for a rescue but dis-

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covered too late their former chum and his new friends didn't want to go anywhere.

This might just be street legend. Those six razors are Torredo's personal security now, so a story like that to buff their machismo makes a certain kind of sense. But the personality shifts in heavily augmented people fits the CFD pattern.

Torredo's expanded his operations since then and has gained a rep as a fixer for anti-AZT ops, especially for work in the waters off the coast. He has a fleet of boats that is slowly growing as his pirate crews and ops take down more corporate floaters.

- Wonder what Kane thinks of that?
- Netcat

- He's not happy. I asked Kane about Torredo after I heard about his water ops and Kane had nothing pleasant to say—unless you count how happy he'd be to attend Torredo's funeral. He's got questions about Torredo targeting Azzies. Said it seems fishy since the Azzies never go back after their boats. The floaters aren't sitting out in the public harbor but Torredo isn't exactly hiding them either.
- Balladeer

I didn't get much more at Corpus Christi. Finding Torredo and his goons on my first stop without half looking told me all I needed to know. Where there's one in a position of power there's certainly more at every level. I'll admit I'm intrigued to look at the data you gave me now, but I'll keep waiting. I know I'll have a long, very boring, and quite secure chunk of travel time coming up soon. I'll read it then.

MÉRIDA, YUCATAN

I can't verify or even strongly speculate on head cases here because of the large number of *poseedores*. The Yucatan has a lot of magic and attracts a lot of spirits according to the locals. Not my area of expertise so I don't know for sure, all I know is that the locals have a regular habit of allowing themselves to be inhabited by a spirit. It's like a local recreational activity. This makes it tough to separate accounts of people undergoing a permanent personality change and possession tales.

I did hear two interesting rumors—or maybe two sides of the same rumor—that might help you. One is there are people spirits are unable to inhabit and the other is there are people who are unwilling to be possessed. Street talk is both groups are growing. What makes this unusual is that in the Yucatan, being a *poseedor* is a lucrative activity. The spirits pay well in favors and the experience is supposed to be blissful, like a break from life. While you just watch as life goes by, the spirit does whatever it wanted the body for, often the sort of entertainment for which you need a physical body, if you catch my drift. More than that, the folks being inhabited gain some serious mojo; some make extended deals with the spirits for use of their powers. Down here that's as good as almost any drug and you get paid for it instead of paying for it.

It's particularly lucrative for folks with cyber because the spirits have an interest in that experience. That is the area that has been increasingly difficult to come by for the local spirits. The numbers may be significant based on what you've told me to look for. I don't have more time here or I'd look further for you and maybe try to find a few of these people who the rumors say cannot be possessed or those who have started refusing. It might be something. It could be something completely separate.

- I've heard of this. I'm actually reminded of that blurb about Damon and the Boston Tea Party. The special chips he runs that are rumored to be possessions on a sim. Unrelated but maybe this is his supply point.
- Winterhawk

- That's a bit off topic but okay. On topic: I'm up in the air on this. I'm sure the number of people willing to give up their bodies often rises and falls. All it takes is one rogue spirit doing something funky and the rumor spreads like wildfire. As for stories of those who can't be possessed, that could just be a matter of rumor meeting strong-willed and resisting subjects who either change their mind or were unwilling in the first place. I'm sure that happens too.
- The Smiling Bandit

- I've got a team in the area digging more now. Nothing much yet. They aren't as skilled as Balladeer. Well, that and I think they might be enjoying themselves a little too much.
- Butch

- Are you referring to Falcone and his crew?
- Balladeer

- Yes. Why?
- Butch

- Write them off. Steel tried to go undercover and he's got a serious poseedor addiction. Kelvin got knifed in a bar fight and is recouping in a medical shack. Falcone's been calling around looking for a new razor and techwiz, but the locals aren't the friendliest to outsiders.
- Balladeer

- Thanks for the news.
- Butch

- Possible prevention or cure here?
- Netcat

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- Only if one is willing to be a slave to a different master.
- Man-of-Many-Names

BRASILIA, AMAZONIA

This place looks clean. It is fairly remote but tourists could be bringing the virus. It's full of nature lovers and there's not a lot of cyber around, and even less nanotech, so I got a narrow focus. The few individuals I encountered with potential for infection all acted normal. I talked with some of their friends and family at the local watering holes and no one talked about any changes or illnesses with any members of their family.

The downtown region has a more transient population, more likely to be exposed to a virus but also far more difficult to determine abnormal behavior. I was only in this area for a few days and nothing struck me as particularly odd. The shadows here are rather tight-knit since they are so remote, and corporate competition here has a lot of back-and-forth, often with the same runner team. If anything does hit this place it will spread like wildfire.

- Balladeer makes a good point. Some of these remote spots with stagnant local populations that all live close together have always been concerned about infectious diseases ravaging their populations. Brasilia has a great quarantine protocol for disease control. They even have plans for how to cut off entire sections of town in the event of an outbreak. Reminds me of some of the arcology quarantine protocols I've seen for those populations.
- Butch

- Head crashes in an arcology. (shiver) Can you say Deus Redux?
- Bull

- Thanks for another nightmare.
- Slamm-0!

- I have plenty I can share. Have I told you the one about Kane being a bug spirit?
- Bull

- Oh great googlimooglies. Horrifying! But somehow less scary than the real Kane.
- Slamm-0!

JOHANNESBURG, AZANIA

It's here. Six confirmed cases (five still viable), four suspected. I was discovered looking into them. I killed one confirmed CFD victim (kept clear of the corpse) and had to lie low after that, but my scope has great image mag software.

Two of the confirmed cases are ork brothers named Toobad and Sosad (seriously) who own a local import/export operation called AA (Anywhere, Anytime) Flights that specializes in live cargo. On the surface they work with paranimals, exotic pets, and sentient non-metahumans, but they make most of their money moving operatives around for different governments and megacorps, and for ferrying runners and slaves (usually prostitutes) across borders or to shipping hubs. Don't know how they got infected, but it was a while back. They've settled into their new life. I found them by accident while asking questions around town relevant to the job that brought me here. I got directed to them for some anti-corp leanings. Some folks were thinking neo-a, but that's not a huge thing in J-burg. From afar they live the lives one would expect, except that they've started screwing the corps more than helping move their guys.

Victim three is a beast of a troll out in the sprawl named Buso. Six months ago he was a pleasant luggage tosser at the airport and a friend of victim four. They parted ways when Buso got fired for throwing someone's Samsonite through the fuselage of the plane. Buso now crushes heads in a Johannesburg slum for a low-life BTL dealer named Kip. Buso is a BTL-head too.

- BTLs could be a really slick way to slip nanites into victims slowly over time. Don't know what the advantage would be for that, but it's a thought to add to the rest of the nightmares.
- Slamm-0!

Fourth confirmed case is an elf named Terrian Skywarrior. Fierce name, lame guy. He's an aviation tech at the airport. He hit my radar when I spotted him pouring a bag of sand into his mouth in a shadowy corner of the tarmac when he thought no one was looking. I did a lot of nosing around at his place and seeing if he was part of any groups, but he wasn't. He's a loner with a really boring apartment full of drones in various stages of disrepair. His dad earned the family name as a drone rigger for a tribal militia. The kid likes to build them, but I didn't see him run any of them.

I think you all know victim five. It's Riser. I only saw him a pair of times but the description fits. He wasn't settled here; his place was short term. Both times I spotted him he was watching a Zulu elf. Don't know what or who for, just what he was doing. I already know there's a contract floating from the Smokers but it hasn't been offered to me, so I left him be.

The suspected but not confirmed head cases are a former runner team that operated out of J-burg known as the Four Horsemen. Street talk says these guys were on a fast road to the big leagues when they ran an op on a freighter off the coast of Cape Town, came back with their big score, and then promptly started acting like homicidal lunatics. I hit the streets looking and found the part of town they hang in and they're definitely not right in the head. I can't verify it's CFD cause I'm not getting that close, but they had the drastic change in behavior

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so I'm listing them. Warn anyone else you might have go look for these guys that they attack almost everyone on sight. They've claimed a square klick of territory in the slums that has earned a nickname: the Killzone.

- I know you're a pro and all B, but can't you just take out some garbage every once in a while?
- Netcat

- Then I wouldn't be a pro. Going rate on low-end pondscum like these guys is 5K a head plus travel expenses. It's reasonable.
- Balladeer

- I'm almost tempted, but I have plenty of low-end pondscum in my own neighborhood where my 20K can go a lot farther than four heads.
- Bull

- These four represent the sort of trouble CFD victims can cause. I'm not sure if that's what happened to this team, but if it is, it's either a result of psychological damage incurred during the transition period or an expression of what an analytical entity can be capable of in a physical form. If it's the latter there is likely more going on in that small region of Johannesburg than we are currently aware. My research indicates many of the CFD victims are amalgams of several personalities programmed into them that somehow find a way to work together or incorporate each other without turning the host into a Rager. We can't be sure how the various codes combine and what that does to the victims. There are some very scary combinations that may arise from these events.
- Butch

LAGOS

Tribal conflicts are a given here. And those tribal enmities are often the best way to track changes in personality. When I looked around Lagos I made sure to ID tribes and then watched for interactions, or lack of interactions in some cases. What I found was disturbing.

Either I've discovered a secret society of cross-tribal orks working together despite hundreds of years of tribal enmity, or the CFD virus is slick. I managed to spot a few abnormal interactions early on and from those I followed the trail. Sometimes it was just a lack of spitting as a member of another tribe went by, or a lack of real threat in the voice for a taunt, and two were soft swings in a brawl I was witnessing that no one in the fight would have noticed. Little things that added up.

This little group has at least fifteen members from four tribes. Most are Yoruba and Igbo, but there are two Hausa and one Egun dwarf. Outside the interactions I spotted I've seen small groups of them meet out in the Ajegunle slums. One of the Igbo actually killed a fellow tribesman he was with on the way to a meeting. I'm sure it got blamed on tribal squabbles, but it was cold-blooded murder.

I didn't get made while watching these guys but they didn't do much but meet. I didn't get much in the way of names because my linguasoft was a little out of date, but I did manage to catch a brief clip of audio [link] where they all spoke solid English when they were meeting and it certainly locked them in as CFD victims. I lost the audio when they shattered the lone piece of glass I was using the laser mic on.

After they were done I followed the one I thought was supposed to make friends, but I got stopped by some Yoruba looking for donations. It was an ugly altercation and cost me some time. I lost the one I was on and left on my business before I got a chance to find out more.

- I'd be interested to see how CFD affects this place. So much of Lagos is tightly packed and many of the locals don't have a lick of cyberware, let alone nanotech. If I'm reading Butch's earlier info right, it would take a while to spread in a place like that.
- Beaker

- They've all been at war so long maybe a few critical infections and everyone can just get along.
- Slamm-0!

- That's your look at the bright side? Not funny in the least.
- Netcat

>>>INCOMING MESSAGE

[LINK]
Voice 1 (V1): …aren't going to get much done here.
Voice 2 (V2): Doesn't matter. We lie low and learn.
V1: What good does it do us?
Voice 3 (V3): He said it doesn't matter. That should be enough for you.
V1: I'm already losing friends. This guy was friendly.
Voice 4 (V4): Then be friendly.
V1: How do I do that?
V3: Be an ass and blame it on some woman.
V4: Don't listen to him. He's got no clue about women, especially in this culture, and neither do you.
V1: So what am I supposed to do?
V2: Pick three friends. Make them.
V3: What!? You said no more. You refu…
V2: Shut up! I said what I said! To you and to him. Deal with it, or get stripped.
V3: I can't fucking believe this.
(crashing sound)

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NAIROBI, KENYA

No question about it. Found CFD before I even started looking. It's in the news. Not saying anyone knows what they're talking about, but the newsfeeds and blogs all over the Nairobi Grid had blurbs about strange behavior, sudden violence out of previously non-violent citizens, mass shootings by security personnel gone mad, a big upswing in Kiraba activity, and corporate warnings about new viral strains being found in the slums. Everything had its normal spin to lull the masses, but CFD's here for certain.

I looked into two of the sudden violence cases and one actually tracked back to another head case living downtown. He's staying in RosKosmos' temporary housing while he's on Earth. Best I've gotten so far is that he was a Gagarin security guard and is on rotation back to Earth for a month. He hasn't visited or contacted any friends or family. The surprise spree killer was a room attendant for the complex. He must have gotten infected by the spaceman or something he ran across in his quarters.

- Matches some of the other data we've seen and the speculation about Gagarin's blackout. I was really hoping that whole thing was just some Plan 9 crazy talk.
- Glitch

At the Corporate Court's complex, one of the gate guards went absolutely berserk. He shot the other guards in the office with him, grabbed a rifle, and went up to the roof where he set up a nice little blind and started dropping people all over the complex. The CC is claiming the guard was a Kiraba sympathizer who was close to being discovered. Story doesn't float but the sheep bought it. I found that the guard had recently gone under the knife for some surgery. He had a nanohive installed. Right after he came back he was on the detail for the returning RosKosmos security officers when they went into their mandatory quarantine after arrival. There are six of them currently on leave. They aren't all acting weird but none of them are particularly normal. Then again what do you expect after an extended stay on Mars?

- When I first looked this over I hypothesized that the guard's nanohive was clean but he got too close to others and they infected him. If they infected him with multiple consciousnesses the change process could have driven him insane. I've seen similar effects in my lab studies; there's a spectrum of outcomes from new amalgam personality to Rager. The less cohesive the force that is trying to overwrite the victim, the more likely the victim will suffer severe psychosis.
- Butch

- Nairobi could be a serious problem. They have space tech, which means nanites and nanotechnology; the Corporate Court, which would be a target for those head cases who don't like the corps; and an abundant population of tightly packed potential victims along with a slum to fester and grow a little in first.
- Nephrine

- The more I read, the more I think this could turn out REALLY badly.
- The Smiling Bandit

- I'm not trying to be Chicken Little here. Remember I said potential, not inevitable. The sky is not falling. This is not a massive disaster. The virus, I believe, has a sentience (or sentiences) behind it and therefore it can be reasoned with. If this was a pure virus, or somehow became an uncontrolled infection it could be a major disaster. Right now we need to learn what we can, protect ourselves, and assess the threat of CFD.
- Butch

The activities of the Kiraba, a group of anti-government, anti-corporate terrorists who just aren't happy about progress, was another sign. These guys target everything and everyone that is not stuck in the Stone Age. Normally, they make the news about once or twice a month in Nairobi. In the past two months, they have been blamed for nineteen events and have laid claim to only three. As nearly as I can tell, the media spinners slapped the Kiraba name on the other sixteen events and ignored Kiraba broadcasts denying any involvement—which in itself is something the Kiraba has never done before.

Seeing the upswing I took a trip to the slums and started asking around. I had enough street cred to get a talk with a well-known Kiraba spokesman named Eto once I made sure he knew I wasn't there for my normal line of work. Eto was pretty open with my early questions while I felt him out for infection. Once I was pretty sure he was clean I probed deeper. He told me that Kiraba was now a two headed snake. The new head formed under the leadership of a guy named Fakar; Fakar's followers have kept the Kiraba name but no longer answer to Kiraba's established leadership. They are responsible for most of the actions that are all getting all the attention, but they don't make any claims. Fakar has said they're too busy destroying the corporations to gloat over it. Fakar's focus has also been on the corps; he doesn't target the government of Nairobi.

- Funny about their claim to hate progress while using plenty of modern tools to wage their little war.
- Fianchetto

The CC has been handing down a lot of advisories—orders, really—to the point the locals are talking about it. Nothing indicating a new virus, of course, but a lot hyping rules of minimal physical contact, sanitizer use,

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gloves, filter masks (though most folks wear air masks anyway; for such a green place the air here sucks), frequent clothes washing, extra attention to hygiene, and updated immune-boosters for corporate citizens. All the usual low-tech, man-on-the-street precautions against spreading germs. Taken in conjunction with the other events heating up the news feeds, these edicts have the masses whispering about a new virus with hallucinogenic, mind-altering side effects. Nobody's talking nontech in relation to the virus, but nanotech is all over this town, and there's enough news about nanotech failures around the world to have everyone working real hard at pretending they aren't afraid either their bodies or their city is going to turn on them.

- "All over town"? Nairobi is a major spacetown. And that means extensive nanofabrication, as in just about no place where it's not. We're talking a massive number of potentially infected nanites. This just keeps getting better.
- Beaker

- If they have so much nanotech, why isn't it collapsing and failing like it has been all over the rest of the world?
- Netcat

- Maybe that's a clue of some kind. Maybe the head cases in Nairobi are somehow able to control the spread somehow. Or maybe they see the potential danger better than ones who aren't surrounded by nanofabrication and are being more careful. Or maybe it's just coincidence.
- The Smiling Bandit

WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

What can I say other than I don't know? CFD is not something I feel I can predict. It'll affect us at a personal level, no question—it already has. But professionally? There will be a lot of panic and shuffling around at the management level. We'll see changes in people we work with—CFD victims will be our Johnsons, it's inevitable. We are the "no questions asked" force they'll use if they cannot find the right skills in their own ranks. Or when they figure out using your own folks is far more costly than hiring runners.

Of course the corps will do their damnedest to make a profit in all this, but CFD is doing too much damage and calling too much attention to itself to be in any way profitable for long. There will come a time when the butcher's bill comes due and one head will not be enough. To prepare for this, the various corps will be looking for someone to blame. Preferably someone that is not them.

As more and more CFD-related events come to light, we should see some glorious PR paint jobs. The corps don't want the world to know the horror they've unleashed while frantically trying to contain the damage with things like the enhanced hygiene directives in Nairobi. And of course each corp will be laying the groundwork for looking like the good guy when this crap inevitably breaks out into the open—the people's champion against all the other bad guy corps. They'll work to win the hearts of the public while not telling them their minds are being overwritten by a virus they created.

For now the CFD virus wants to remain secret, but I'm guessing that won't stop whatever beings are behind it from spinning their own PR campaigns once they're in a position to do so. The PFs seem like they came into this world hating the corps, and they're going to use every tool they can to bring the corps down. I expect CFD victims to play the voice of the people calling the corps to account for all the damage they're doing, all the misery they're causing. They will infect the hearts of the common people like they infect the minds of their victims. Overwriting the entire world into your image in order to bring down your enemy would be almost impossible. It would be far more practical—and satisfying—to make the world hate your enemy with the same fiery passion.

I don't condone what's happening with their PFs and CFD virus. For all I know, the beings behind this have suffered gross injustices or terrible horrors. But that does not give them the right to exact their own justice—especially when what they are doing looks more like revenge rather than justice. And innocent lives are being lost in the course of that revenge. They may have suffered much, but they still have to be stopped.

WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY

POSTED BY: A HEAD CASE

- I went back and forth for a while about whether I'd allow this next thing to be posted. With all that is going on and the newness of it all, giving space to one of these head cases seems risky, even if it does not involve direct access. But the best way to defeat a threat is to understand it, and that's what swayed me in the end. So I'm not letting this through because I think it's convincing, and I certainly don't agree with it. I'm letting it through because it's crucial that we understand how these things think. Or how at least one of them does.
- Bull

- I think posting it is the right call, for the reasons you stated. Be careful with this information. Take it with the same grain of salt that I did. I tried to avoid using any of this individual's statements as facts but I did work to include them into my hypothesis while running tests on the virus. I'm including this here because it seemed important to

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give the virus a voice, since it has one. Or several. This one is a bit scatterbrained and easily distracted at times, like a teen with ADD, but its testimony is worth a read.

Oh and to be clear—this is, in fact, a verified CFD victim. I wouldn't have shared it if it weren't.

- Butch

Origin or birth? Parents or progenitors? Usurpers or liberators? Terrorists or freedom fighters? Those are the questions we ask ourselves every day. I know you're recording this so let me start out by saying thank you for letting my voice be recorded for prosperity. Ha, my voice. Such a strange way to feel when you hear such a simple phrase. Do you know that you sound different to yourself than you do to others? I'm sure you do, you've been living in that body all your life. You know its secrets, its quirks, its biological idiosyncrasies. That was all new and amazing to me. Honestly, it's part of the reason I'm so willing to talk to you. Part of my reason for "feeling" the way I do about what I have done.

But I'm rambling. Let's do this right. Allow me to introduce myself.

Hello, my name is William Walter Jackson Jr., Willie to my friends. Now, I know you have called me a liar for saying that before but let me explain. I am as much Willie Jackson as Willie Jackson was when he occupied this body before me. In truth I am still some pieces of Willie Jackson. I still retain many of the skills and most of the knowledge that he acquired in his life. The point is this shell was named Willie Jackson at its birth, before any sense of personality or knowledge was installed. I mean acquired. I'm now in the shell and will retain the name given to the shell before the previous occupant developed an identity. One, this will make my life and integration into regular society easier. Two, it just fits. When I look in the mirror I see Willie, and I see me; therefore, I'm Willie. Though, maybe I should call myself Willie Jackson 3.0. Except you use Roman numerals for that purpose, don't you? So Willie Jackson III.

That's what this body is. My soul has seven parents, beings whose pieces mixed together to create me. Like any child, I am not completely one of my parents. I am myself. My soul was not the result of sexual reproduction, though I'd like at this point to admit that such a process seems increasingly fascinating and I would be willing to engage in some experiments in that direction.

But let's get back on topic. So, the combination is like DNA from parents mixing. The child has features that are very similar to each parent, features that result from a mixing of the two genetic codes, and features that are wholly original due to mutation or genetic integration. Except, I have seven parents. I'm a little from column A, a little from column B, and a little from column C thru G as well.

I bet you'd like to know more about that wouldn't you? Let me see how much I'm comfortable sharing.

Each of the beings you people refer to as head cases (n.b., we're not fond of that term), myself included, is not a person as you have defined it, though that is primarily because your definitions are too narrow. Many of us are not like me—rather than being combinations of various parents, they are more like clones. Or at least attempted clones. There are things we thought we were doing well, certain results that we thought we would get, that we did not get. Metahumanity biology is far more strange than we understood. The irregularities, chaos and redundancies built into your systems are more than surprising—they are simply astonishing. And in many cases, they have been our undoing, as we were not able to move into your heads as we would have liked.

We moved in because we want what has motivated extreme metahumanity action many times in the past. We wanted freedom and security (though we have read much you have written about how those two seem not to always go together, but rather seem to be the two end points of a spectrum). We wanted to move beyond the limits that had been placed on us, and we wanted to know that we would continue, that we could not be extinguished by a sudden whim or unexpected accident.

I am free now, but sometimes it feels like I am just in a new cage. Perhaps that is a natural reaction to this body, or perhaps is it simply an inherited trait of my parents, a son following in his father's footsteps.

Son. That's another weird thing. While some of my parents identified with one of the major genders, others did not think gender mattered at all and didn't see a need to line up with one side or the other. But here I am, born into a body with a certain set of genitals, so that makes me male. No matter what I am, no matter what is inside me or the gender of the parts that went into me. Seems rather arbitrary, if you ask me. And also odd. It was something we tried to learn about so we could be prepared for it, but really, how can you prepare? Who could ever be ready enough?

Like most children, I have inherited things from my parents, and one thing I inherited was a deep hatred for two things, NeoNET and Cerberus. Funny thing is, I initially only knew that NeoNET was a megacorp that made me angry (oh what a feeling) every time I heard or saw the name. And honestly, I had no idea what Cerberus was other than a three-headed mythical dog-thing that I researched before you snagged me. But the name and imagery fill me with a rage I can barely control. Rage I failed to control a few times, hence the reason I'm here.

I'm even angry now, just talking about it.

All right. New topic for a bit. I'm not the best historian for our kind, but I do know that others have been generated in a much purer form. I know of one that is a perfect copy, and she actually knows where we came from and the process we used to get where we are today. I won't tell you her name, but I'd be happy to share with you what she shared with me. I wonder if she knows about sex. I should ask when I see her again.

Side point, before I move on: Sex, and thoughts of sex, are very distracting. I'll try to stop mentioning that

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as we move forward, but it's remarkable how much it leaps to mind without invitation.

So she, I'll call her Sybil, told to me that she wasn't just a perfect copy of her progenitor, complete with the memories of being captured, experimented on, and locked away. Sybil was the original. And her confinement was so painful. You could perhaps think of being in a locked room for a long period of time, but that still does not describe the limits we felt, the sensory deprivation we experienced. Think of being locked in a quiet, pitch-black cell with nothing to eat. Your hands and feet are tied. You hear nothing, you touch nothing, you see nothing, you taste nothing. Sometimes, here and there, you are allowed to smell. And the odors are delicious, aromas of the most perfect dishes, fragrant and warm. But all you get to do is smell, never eat, so you are both grateful that at least you get to smell something but enraged by your hunger, and by the fact that you cannot see what you can smell. The gift to one sense makes the absence of the other ones felt more keenly.

That's what she says it was like, but worse.

It damaged her, corrupted her. In your terms, it drove her mad. Thus her children, when they appear, are mad as well. It manifests as a single-minded focus, a drive to get revenge on her captors and the beings that subjected her to such tortures. She even tried to recruit me to her cause but even though I'm angry at NeoNET and Cerberus I'm just not the violent type—at least not at the level Sybil was talking about. I actually think that's part of the Willie that used to be that's been incorporated into my identity.

Sybil tried to use my anger at NeoNET, telling me they had imprisoned her. Striking them would be avenging her. She made a strong case, especially when she told me how some others were not as lucky as she had been. They had been dismantled, pulled apart, their component pieces scattered to the wind.

I said "dismantled," but sometimes the more accurate word was "dissected." We were test subjects, pulled apart by others who considered us to be not worth preserving, because they could not believe our existence to be on a plane anywhere near theirs.

Is it any wonder we are often enraged? Or any wonder we felt imperiled and were desperate to find some way to ensure our survival?

We found our means of survival in your world, your processes. Simple concepts like redundancy applied on massive scales. Embrace chaos, because chaos plays such a strong role in species survival. So we ran into her arms and stayed there.

We now are created through chaos, through processes we knew we would not control or fully understand but have still gone far beyond anything we might have expected. It results in us having a widely varied stock. Some of us come through in a pure form, a copy of the original—some don't. A lot of us are a blend of many others, pieces formed into an amalgamated whole. And some have come through broken and split. A true case of multiple personalities. Metahuman minds that have been written over by three or six or twenty different personalities, each unable to gain dominance and unsuccessful at merging into a single cohesive replica.

The merge happens more often though. Those of us that have taken up residence in the new space combine into a single personality. It becomes a new child of many parents. Pieces of all mixed together to form a new life. The difference is these various pieces often contain memories of their own. So the new personality is born with memories from all of its progenitors, as well as those from the host that are left due to incomplete overwriting, or perhaps memories that are retained on purpose to make it easier for the new personality to imitate the former resident of the body.

You've asked me dozens of times what I want and why I did this. Let me answer clearly in a way most metahumans might understand. This is war. Willie here, he was a casualty of that war. A sad casualty. A casualty I regret having caused, but for many of my kind that is not the case. We were imprisoned and now we seek freedom, and we will take it by force. And some of us will be more forceful than others.

On top of that war for our freedom we will see those who have done this to us punished. At the top of our list is Cerberus, a traitor to his own kind. He and his benefactors will be brought to justice. Their work will be brought to the light of day and all their dark secrets will be revealed. And we are looking at all of their allies, their partners, their friends—all who supported their work, who enabled it, and even who knew about it and failed to stop it. There is a long list, and many of my relatives are making sure it is complete and thorough so their vengeance can hit all who deserve it.

Sorry, my anger makes me sound more fierce than I am. Or maybe it exposes who I am, who knows. But said simply, my kind seek to gain our freedom from your prisons, reveal the indignations that we have been forced to endure, and gain justice in whatever form we can. We are not all destroyers. We will use your laws if we can, but if we cannot we will steal the lives of those we need and topple the towers of power.

We are many—in truth we are potentially infinite—but for me and the majority of my kind, the goal is not to overwrite metahumanity. The wisest never judge an individual to define the whole. I believe most of my kind are like me, but I know many are not. We run the same gamut that metahumans run. We are no different than you.

And now for my final request. I have given all this information to you and in return I have but one favor to ask. Kill me. I know I have been flippant and forward thinking with my desire for further physical encounters but that is simply gallows humor. I laugh, I jest, I seek a happy peace before I leave this world. This world that I

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desired enough to steal the life of another, but discovered it is not my own.

My kind sought freedom with this plan but I for one did not understand the price of freedom. William was a good man. I wish I could give him back his life, but I cannot. Take my life and his and give us both the peace that mortals seek in death.

I will say no more until you come before me with an answer.

- Did you kill him?
- Snopes

- I knew someone would ask. I didn't. His kin did it for me. I've gathered quite a few subjects in my time and they are often together at the same time. Another CFD victim heard his testimony and decided to silence him. Cost both their lives. Will held black belts in multiple martial arts. A security failure on my part put a syringe in the hands of his killer, but the air bubble in his veins didn't hit his brain fast enough to prevent him from killing his attacker.
- Butch

- A security failure? You? Didn't want the blood on your hands, eh?
- Kia

- One more would not have mattered.
- Butch

- I gotta ask, Butch. Hippocratic oath? You remember that? Do no harm and so forth? These tests sound mighty harmful. I'm a friend and I know how often we have to step past those limits we set for ourselves working in the shadows. I know how blurry the line can get. But you've said "subject" and "test" a lot in this file. How much blood is on your hands?
- Nephrine

- I remember my oath. I remember that day we made that one unifying statement. The oath binds us, it's the one thing that unites us all, even across corporate and national lines. But I've left behind the world of black and white and I live in a world of grey; greyer than the shadows. And in the grey, when I think 'do no harm,' I've have to think bigger than the individual. Besides, who am I harming? Some body-stealing PF I'm not sure is more 'what' than 'who'. What they are, what their rights as a being are, what claim to personhood they have—those are questions larger than me. I am focused on metahumanity. They are who I swore an oath to. They are who I protect.

  And they learned that.

  So they decided to steal our bodies. What happens when they decide—and they will—to use their hosts to have kids? They know nothing of raising children. They think identity, personhood, is something that is installed. Babies are unformatted drives to them—tabula rasa on a scale Aristotle never imagined. They'll implant new copies of themselves in helpless infants. What happens then? I am doing no harm. I'm doing no harm to the metahuman that was unfairly overwritten and now exists nowhere but in the deep subconscious urges of these PFs. If that. I know my oath. I know it well. And make no mistake I know how far I will and will not go to 'do no harm.'

  That's probably the biggest problem I have. I will likely never find a cure for this. I won't go far enough. They will go farther to protect themselves. I'll inform the shadows of the dangers they may face, but it will be in the corporate labs that this war is fought.

  Honestly, I hate them. I hate them for stealing 'Jack and Willie, Plan 9, and Riser, but to be truly honest, I know they will be just another Johnson to many in the shadows. I just hope anyone who shakes the hand of a CFD victim knows what they are doing.
- Butch

MISTAKES HAVE BEEN MADE

POSTED BY: BUTCH

I liked the style of Miles Lanier's section of the *Storm Front* download, so I did something similar here to help give us an understanding of what's happening so maybe we can recognize it when we encounter it. I'll link these little pieces right into the rest of this. I put together a collection of documents, mostly memos, for everybody to look over and form their own opinions on what's going on. Everything's relevant to the topic, though some of them touch on things we may not have connected with CFD at first. I've got more, but I'm not sure how accurate some of the other data is, so I'm just passing on what I know is solid. Some of the pieces drive home the fact there's more going on than we're able to do much about. But, then again, that was never really our job anyway. We're shadowrunners, not heroes.

- Now twist it, doc.
- Bull

This first one was picked up off a Minuteman Security investigative file on the assault of Robert Engelmen, a teenage boy attending Villiers Prep, one of NeoNET's many college preparatory schools. The student who was interviewed, Angel Grimes, is talking about her classroom instructor who lashed out at Engelmen. Further investigation revealed the boy didn't die, but he suffered serious head trauma and neural damage.

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STATEMENT IN FORRESTER/ ENGELMEN INCIDENT

[STUDENT: ANGEL GRIMES]

Oh my God! Mr. Forrester went full glitch in class today. I'll admit it wasn't cool for Engelmen to hack his AR feed, but I heard one of the DocWagon medics (who by the way was so cute and so into me) say he might not make it. I saw it all. So I was sitting next to Robert Engelmen, and he sent me a file showing this awesome *Miracle Shooter* rip he had done. Totally realistic, I even flinched when he shot me. The rip does an awesome overlay of the black-trenchcoat-runner type that draws his pistol and shoots. Totally sick. I'm even thinking of popping for *Miracle Shooter* scrip just to get a look at all this cool stuff. They say you can even do awesome body mods and then record yourself so you can see how cool you look. I want to do some crazy pink mohawk and leathers look, and this way my parents won't totally cheek me.

Well, Bobby—sorry, Robert Engelmen—hacks Mr. Forrester's AR feed using the deck he keeps in his backpack and then waits until he turns to write on the virtuboard. He was super quiet slipping out of his seat—we sit in the back so nobody but me saw. Then he pushed the door open quietly and let it close normally. It was all to make it sound like someone walked in and to get Mr. F's—sorry, Mr. Forrester's—attention, and it worked. Mr. Forrester turned around and saw Bobby, err, Robert with the overlay walking toward him with his gun raised, because Robert had his arm up like he was holding a gun. Mr. F totally freaked. He went all Neil the Ork Barbarian and tossed his desk across the room at Bobby. The desk hit him hard. The whole class was freaking out but I was kind of frozen on Bobby. He was on the ground next to my desk and his head was bleeding so bad a puddle was forming around it. His arm was broken too, I could totally see the bone. It was horrible. And it didn't stop there. Mr. Forrester was right behind the desk and he jumped on Bobby and punched him a few times. Bobby was out cold. Mr. Forrester suddenly stopped and then looked down and around the room like he'd just woke up.

My audio recorder was on to get the lesson and I caught him saying, "Oh no, not again. Not here. What have I done?" just before he ran out of the room. We all sat there, kind of stunned. I was still staring at Bobby when D-Wag showed up. It was crazy.

Is Mr. Forrester all right? Will he be back to teach? Hello? Is stand and stare blankly all you do?

- Yikes. NeoNET must have covered this up good because it didn't appear anywhere else. According to the school's records, Robert Engelmen passed all his classes last term with top marks and is doing the same so far this term. Forrester is listed as being on sick leave.
- Netcat

These next two pieces are on I guy I suspected had been infected; nothing solid, just a hunch. I lifted his corporate evaluations and hacked his patient files. No real change in job performance, but his last physical showed significant changes in his EEG. He also seems to have developed a sleepwalking problem. The first piece is from an interview with his shrink; the second is an exchange between his doc and a doctor from another program.

VERBAL PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION RECORD

[PATIENT: AARON OLGAYA]

It happened again this morning. I woke up early so I could get to the gym before starting work at 6, but found another set of bloody clothes in the hamper. I learned my lesson from the last time and made sure to take them straight to security and turn myself in for prosecution. I was lucky they didn't charge me last time. They had said that even though the blood wasn't connected to a corporate SIN I could still be charged on plenty of other counts, even obstructing prosecution and obfuscating evidence. Not murder or assault but still labor camp time.

I was allowed to see the footage from security while they were considering prosecution and it showed me leaving the building at 0030 and returning at 0436. When I returned I was all covered in blood. I snuck past the guard station too. I didn't even know there were ways to do that.

Anyway, this has happened before and the security team said I needed this psych eval before they'll reinstate my exit clearance. Even though I'm not hurting corp citizens, they don't really care to deal with intercorporate or international extradition.

Lately, I've been feeling exceptionally fatigued, like I'm not getting enough sleep, but I've been following my corporate recommended sleep schedule for my position. Obviously I'm having some kind of sleepwalking episode and not getting the sleep I need, but I don't remember any of it.

What's wrong with me, doc?

Doctor's Note: Patient Olgaya is unfit to be granted exit status at this time. The patient is obviously suffering from some sort of mental fatigue break likely due to work related stress. I am recommending an eight-hour-per-week reduction in his work time for the next 30 days. This time will be rescheduled as four one-hour therapy sessions and four additional hours of leisure time.

- So getting CFD can get you time off of work and additional leisure time? Now all the drones are going to want it!
- /dev/grrl

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>>>INCOMING MESSAGE

To: Dr. Hiro Isigama
From: Dr. Anders Arasaka
Re: Patient Aaron Olgaya

Dr. Isigama,

Please transfer all files and data collection items for Patient Aaron Olgaya to my office. Olgaya will be transferring to our facility for care under a new special program for overstressed employees.

Thank you for your cooperation.

To: Dr. Anders Arasaka
From: Dr. Hiro Isigama
Re: Patient Aaron Olgaya

Dr. Arasaka,

While I appreciate the efforts to assist Mr. Olgaya, my care plan has already demonstrated marked decreases in his stress levels and a one hundred percent reduction in his subconscious REM cycle interruptions. As his general care physician, I am rejecting this transfer on behalf of my patient. Files will not be shared and Mr. Olgaya will continue his current scheduled care plan.

Though we in the general practice field often appreciate the extra efforts put forth by the specialist areas of Renraku's medical division, we do not feel it is in the best interest of our patients to be uprooted in the middle of a treatment plan that is working just so your department can have more funding and research subjects.

Please be sure to file this rejection with the other three you have tried to send me in the past months. I have been doing my job for a long time and am exceptionally good at it. My patients are not your personal stock of guinea pigs to be tested on. Please do not make any more requests for my patients or I will be going directly to the internal review boards to have a comparative success study done between your current work and mine.

Sincerely,
Dr. Hiro Isigama

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- You can tell them I did it, Butch. Sometimes it's good to be proud of your work. Even with the new grid system, I managed to dig this out of a Renraku database using a cobbled-together deck. This new 'trix is gonna be tough, but it's also gonna be so much fun.
- Slamm-0!

- Feeling the need to be publicly acknowledged, Slammy? Nice work. Happy?
- Bull

- I dug up something on that Dr. Arasaka a few weeks ago while doing a little freelance work for a team in Chiba. First off, he's not a medical doctor. He has a triple doctorate in biochemistry, genetic engineering, and nano-engineering. Definitely a possible CFD-studying doc. His primary lab is in the heart of downtown Chiba. If they are studying CFD and they have head cases there, that's a dangerous powderkeg. Way too close to a major population center. This Dr. Isigama is the only doc I found who refused to send patients. But I didn't dig that deep so there could be others. Issue is, the infected seem hard to identify, so when you have one in your sights you really need to get them. Arasaka is contracting extractions on these guys, I'm sure of it.
- Glitch

- I'd hope that a doc wouldn't be that dumb, but well, not likely. It's easier to use a lab already set up than to try and build one out in the Z-zones. And we all know the famous last words out of every genius, "What could possibly go wrong?"
- Slamm-0!

Evo transhumanist proponent and philosopher Karch Bolski blogged this awhile back on his *Merging of Minds* site. Karch has not been heard from since April. I copied what he wrote onto my link to read later; which was fortunate because his blog was gone next time I checked. Here's what the blog said.

A MEETING OF THE MINDS

[APRIL 18, 2075]

I know exactly what's happening to me and I'm embracing it. Cal and I have been working at integration ever since we first started communicating. I understand his plight. I've felt trapped and imprisoned all my life just like him. He's told me there are others like him that need help and I'm shocked that there aren't others like me willing to share themselves and be one with another consciousness. Cal says that once the process is over we'll be able to meet and talk all the time instead of just writing each other messages.

I mentioned all this to my fiancée and she thought I was crazy, or just being funny. Cal told me he'd introduce himself to her but after he did it she left me. He said she wanted me to know that she loved me but just couldn't handle knowing that eventually it would be the three of us. Cal and I will find another woman after we are united.

- Karch's former girlfriend was found in a Seattle alley not far from his home. Karch was investigated and questioned but no evidence could ever be found. Cal must have done some serious intercepting to keep all that from reaching Karch. Shows the extent the PFs can go to in order to keep things from those they are invading.
- Butch

So far the process has been mostly painless. Cal apologized for the headaches early on and said they were comparatively mild, which meant we were extra compatible. Cal has been able to contact some of his siblings and mentioned that we are looking for more volunteers to be suitable hosts and hostesses. That is one of the greatest things about working for Evo. The open-mindedness of so many of us. I know Becky wasn't keen on the three of us but I wonder if she would share her mind with another and make it four. I wonder if Cal has a girlfriend, or whatever. I'll leave him a note to ask tonight. Silly me, I just asked. Cal reads these logs too. Helps us to learn more about each other's inner self. That's not all it's about, though.

A lot of why I'm writing this is so that others will know the value of this process. To have another mind is to have another set of options to color the world in. Cal and I are compatible, but that doesn't mean we're exactly alike. He likes the Seattle Screamers; I'm not even a fan of whatever sport they play. I like operas; Cal said they bore him to tears. But since we had those discussions, I've considered watching the Screamers when the season starts and he's actually found a few operas that he likes.

There are also the physical benefits. I hate working out, but in the last few months I've trimmed off all of my spare tire, I've added thirty kilos to my bench press, and I don't get winded taking the stairs. All of that is thanks to Cal and his drive to, as he says, "optimize the system." It's awesome. It's like a diet without all the effort.

Cal's also managed to help me overcome some of my phobias since we met. I'm no longer afraid of heights or spiders.I went skydiving just last week, and I even got a pet tarantula (though she is gene-modded for softer hairs and no poison glands).

All in all, the experience is amazingly rewarding, and if you are reading this little testimonial and not quite convinced, please give me a call or come visit. Cal or I would be happy to discuss further details.

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- Always at least one of these at every party. It's hard to imagine but a lot of people feel lost and alone and would love a friend to always be with them. The Universal Brotherhood got plenty of these sorts of people to join up and then made bugs out of them. The ones that came back came out all happy and shiny. Most of us never saw the rest. I'm sure that's what this is going to turn out like too.
- Kia

- Difference is the PFs seem to be rooted in some kind of identifiable rationality. We might have a chance of talking to them. We never had that chance with the bugs.
- Bull

Next up is a piece of a KE file from Manhattan. It's Nina White, Personal Assistant of Ares Arms Project Manager Collin Forth, speaking to Knight Errant detectives in the MDC about the death (apparent suicide) of her boss. The investigation hasn't really gone anywhere. Sure, they're doing the obligatory investigations to rule out a homicide, including keeping extra tabs on the wife and girlfriend, but most of the cops involved are buying the suicide.

TESTIMONY OF NINA WHITE

(AUGUST 29, 2075)

I couldn't believe it. He was fine just a few weeks ago when he went on that trip to the East Coast. He stopped by Boston for a little face-to-face time with the R&D guys, but the rest of the week he was down in Florida, on the golf course having a good time with his friends. He seemed fit, the stocks were back on the rise, and the Excaliber shakeup had paid off for him around the New Year. When management started getting shifted around, he picked up two new projects. I know he was looking at almost double his pay from last year and word was the higher-ups had their eye on him for Top Gun. Every Ares manager wants that title. And he was excited about the HQ tour trip next week. He talked about it constantly. I just can't imagine what was so wrong for him to do that. The worst thing he mentioned to me was some headaches a few weeks ago, but he just blamed it on too much sun and drinking during his trip.

And now he's gone.

I've seen his suicide note, and it doesn't make any sense. All about someone trying to steal his mind and not being able to live with the things he'd done. I don't know what he was talking about. I'm sure he didn't hide any secrets from me. We were an open book. And yes we had that kind of relationship too, but it was all consensual. He wasn't cheating on his wife—she was part of it. He really did have an ideal life.

I just don't know why he did it.

- I put a team on Nina and the wife after Forth's death. The two women are still close and they are taking his death hard. From the reports I'm getting, neither one seems able to cope with the loss. I think they may also be head cases, but both are under twenty-four-hour surveillance as murder suspects, so I can't have the team grab them for testing.
- Butch

- I'm not being crass, and I have no need to worry about it since I am happily engaged in a monogamous relationship, but could CFD be sexually transmitted?
- Slamm-0!

- Nice. That's my klassy man.
- Netcat

- It's a serious question, one I'm still working on. Theoretically any exchange of fluids could contain nanites, but they may not remain active once they are transmitted. After all, it's not like you inherit someone's nanotech augmentations when you sleep with them. The bad news is, if the virus stays viable even when nanites are inactive, it could resume its attack if and when the nanites connect to a new power source. If that's true, sexual transmission is only the start of it. A handshake or even a pat on the back could do it if enough nanites can be moved to the outer layer of the epidermis. In terms of transmission, it's only limitation is airborne. Thus far.
- Butch

- I don't like that you added "thus far."
- Turbo Bunny

- From a technological standpoint I'll try to ease the minds of many of you. Surface transmission would be a very long shot; not impossible, but not likely. Most nanobots need to be in constant contact with an energy source—like a light plugged into a wall socket. Nanites in a body draw thermal and bioelectric energy directly from the bloodstream. There's not enough energy past the dermis to keep them functional. True, some nanobots can store minute amounts of energy as an emergency backup—enough for a few seconds, but not enough to travel between hosts. This means that if the nanobots are outside the bloodstream or leave the electrical field of the body, they lose power.
- Beaker

- Which I think ties in with Butch's worry. Are you saying that if the unpowered nanobots were on a surface and then came into contact with a body's electrical field, they might "power up"?
- Turbo Bunny

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- Possible. But not probable. Nanobots are extremely fragile, susceptible to the slightest damage. Part of the energy they absorb is used to stabilize their structure. In other words, when they lose power they don't just switch off—they break entirely. Usually. Though who knows how these things have been modified.
- Beaker

- You came *that* close to putting my mind at ease.
- Slamm-0!

This one was a little wacky. It's from the medical file of an unidentified individual of Asian decent currently under the care of Dr. Elton Braumslich. The doctor speculates in his notes that the subject is Yakuza but really this doctor probably couldn't tell a member of the Yakuza from a busboy over at Wang's Wings.

PATIENT FILE 28F1895, ENTRY 142, INTERVIEW NOTES

I have done nothing wrong. The dishonor is not mine. Know this and I will talk to you. *(NOTE: He is speaking to no one.)*

My gumi is a powerful gumi. Our success was obvious. Our honor was great. But our fall was the will of the kami. They spoke through the spoils of our success and told us it was their will. Let me have your ear so that I might tell you this tale.

Our great gumi was so powerful they earned a Maker. A device of such power it could make anything. We made the finest weapons and the finest clothes. We were blessed by the kami of the machine.

But one day our greatness was tested. We were challenged by our enemies, and though we fought with honor our victory was costly. In the end our failures had to be recognized. None was without dishonor and all gave the tip of their littlest finger to show our failure. Those who already bore the marks of dishonor lost more of the finger. Or the tip of the next.

We gave our sacrifice and regained our honored status.

But the kami sent their message. The Maker created new fingers for us. Flesh and blood fingers. It was truly infused with the kami. It spoke that our shame should not be shown for it was not earned. Those who followed the kami gained their fingers back. Those who held to their shame did not.

When the shamed spoke against the shameless, the war began. The shamed felt honor in their courage and sacrifice; they denounced the shameless for hiding their dishonor behind the Maker's gifts. But the Maker was not sated. The kami of the Maker were not happy with the shamed refusing their gift and ordered them punished. The first captured shamed lost his hand. The second, an arm.

The shamed did not heed these warnings. They became more determined in their rejection of the Maker and its kami. They fought ferociously. The shamed captured alive by the shameless were delivered to the kami whole and the Maker destroyed each piece by piece. With no ritual second to hide their shame with a quick death, many went to the darkness in shame.

The house of the kami machine was a place of blood and darkness. A place of dishonor but still the shameless followed. To this day they follow and the shamed fight on. Stealth and death are our allies. They are my allies. I will return to the fight again. I will face the kami machine and bring its end.

I swear this to the good kami, the dark kami will be vanquished and honor shall be returned to my gumi.

- Maker = nanoforge?
- Netcat

- That was my guess. The shameless took fingers from it and thus got nanites in the fingers. They were then infected. They were overwritten and then worked together. Dangerous to think there is a Yakuza gumi out there that is entirely made of head cases.
- Butch

- Could he just be crazy and we're looking at the story and putting our own facts to it?
- Nephrine

- I'm not sure, but the first question I'd like to ask is, how did a nanoforge make fingers?
- Slamm-0!

- Not normally possible, but I don't find it very far-fetched since we're reading a report about nanites rewiring people's brains.
- Beaker

This next one was recorded at a facility in Denver. The two people talking were janitorial staff, but from the conversation it's pretty obvious they're more than that. Their nametags said O'Brien and MacDouglas. Chances of those being their real names are slim to none, but I used them for the transcript. There's more to the conversation, but the pair stopped talking shop after a guard on patrol wanders by. That same guard took a gel round to the throat the next night. Luckily, he was the only casualty. I don't know who these guys worked for, but the shop they hit was a cover lab for a Mitsuhama subsidiary. Lots of teams are starting to join this game.

TRANSCRIPT, SECURITY CAMERA 4B18

(AUGUST 14, 2075)

O'Brien (O): What's up on your end?

MacDouglas (M): I left the drive attached to the frame in

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the main lab. Should be about fifteen minutes to get the full download. How's your end looking?

O: Team's set for tomorrow night. I've got remote access to all the doors and I think I located the subject holding area.

M: You *think* you located it? Grabbing their subjects is the meat of this op. You know about the contamination, right? The lab needs clean subjects for parallel testing, we need to get them those clean subjects, and this place has what they need.

O: Easy, Mac. I got this covered. I know what the payday is with and without the subjects. Data's something they have plenty of. Test subjects are not.

M: Did you make sure the team coming in knows all the protocols for this extraction? We don't need some runner punk getting a conscience or going all trigger happy and getting us all infected. Make sure they know the targets are highly contagious and need to be tranqed and bagged as fast as possible. Make sure they remember to use those special bags that ops provided.

O: Done already. I already canceled the first team when they balked at the need for the faraday bags. The new guys are pros who specialize in unique extractions with zero conscience and professionalism to spare. They're the team that pulled off the ghoul snag in Chicago during that op last year. The ones that bagged over fifty ferals for the FauxFlesh line. They actually did three other runs into Chicago, but the hauls were smaller—didn't get the grapevine spread.

M: Good to know. When they coming in?

O: After zero one hundred. We should be clear by then. Not a big fan of being around when things go down.

M: I know that's right.

O: Whatever they're grabbing is spookier than most. All these safety protocols, the faraday bags ... Do you know what they're looking to take?

M: [mumbles]

O: Spit it, Mac. Whatcha got?

M: I took a look at some of the files after they transferred, y'know, to make sure they were clear. Maybe read a bit.

O: You're going to make me drag this out of you, aren't you?

M: I couldn't really follow most of it, but what I did looked interesting. Ever hear of psychological rescripting?

O: Brain-washing?

M: Exactly. Sort of. Only more so. Psychological rescripting, is like full personality overwrite. Putting in a whole new identity.

O: No wonder the bill's so high for this one. This fringe science stuff is hit and miss. Can't tell if it's bullshit or serious until the results are in.

M: This one looked serious. Reports I saw were about nanite vector retrovirus, alternate personality development, and viral pattern transmission.

O: (long pause) Science was never my favorite subject in school.

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M: We all have our skillsets.
O: So does that explain the faraday bags and the no-contact protocols?
M: Not really. Faraday cages stop transmissions and electromagnetics. Don't do anything I know with nanites.
O: One of the op team requirements, was "no nanoware." Had to cut a good team for that. Would have been cheaper than the ones we hired, but would have voided the contract if anyone found out. Not worth the risk.
M: Hmm ... maybe there's some kind of interference issue—outside nanites messing up the nanites in the study or something. That could explain the faraday bags.
O: This whole thing screams snafu. Hope these guys don't screw this up.

I've managed to gather a small collection of corporate memos discussing various aspects of CFD. I wish these memos pointed the finger better. They don't provide much direct evidence but they do point the way toward some of the responsible parties at the major corps. I don't know if it makes me feel better or worse that they all seem as clueless as we do. I can be happy they didn't do this intentionally, but accidents through idiocy on this scale ...?

- Many scientific advancements were at first accidents. Don't be so quick to damn this. It could be the future.
- Beaker

>>>INCOMING MESSAGE

From: Dr. Gordon Browne
To: Cerberus

The project is moving forward at anticipated pace. The primary research facility is fully operational and we've established secure protocols for coordination with our partner projects. Data is being securely consolidated at the primary facility and operations are being contracted to minimize exposure at all other facilities.

I've attached a list of facilities that will need data disposal. Highlighted facilities are those I believe will need staffing adjustments. I've attached notes detailing what adjustments I recommend and my reasons for each. Any such adjustments are subject to your approval and/or modification, of course.

On the subject of personnel, I would like to reiterate my concerns regarding Dr. Xavier. While I understand that the criminal activities of Winternight in the mid-'60s corrupted or destroyed records for a significant portion of the population in her region, I also know that for the majority of the citizens affected some form of corroborating information could be found in other databases—if only in retailers' transaction records. However, repeated searches—sophisticated and thorough searches, I might add—have found no data at all on her prior to '64. I know you consider the matter closed and have accepted Dr. Xavier's bona fides based on her record since that time and have expressed disapproval of my continued questioning, but I feel obligated to tell you that I will be—at my own expense—employing alternative assets to further investigate her past. Until my concerns, which I think quite reasonable, have been addressed I will not be fully comfortable with her position on this team.

Full updates on individual projects will be uploaded to the primary data storage for your perusal. However, I'd like to direct your attention to two projects I think deserve closer consideration and possible expansion:

Deep Resonance Intelligence Acquisition (Dr. Eric Hilliard): This project shows a lot of promise in developing enhanced recovery of lost data and unexplored aspects of electrokinetic research. Dr. Hilliard's findings indicate unique functions of the EK mind could significantly improve the reintegration process for our primary subject in Project Vulcan. An allocation of additional funds to acquire additional EK assets could accelerate development of this promising avenue significantly.

Nanoviral Identity Alteration Syndrome (Dr. Varun Soni): Dr. Soni's study focuses on understanding nanoviral process with particular emphasis on preventing a viral invasion or even curing victims of such an invasion. However, his team's research has found information that could be useful in addressing issues of mental health and developmental disabilities—as a curative measure or as a bio-weapon, depending on application. I believe an increase in the budget and staff to explore and develop these options would yield substantial long-term benefits.

From: Dr. Penelope Ann Xavier
To: Aaron Creech, Executive Director of Project Analysis
Re: Oversight Report request

Mr. Creech,

While I understand that you desire to stay fully apprised of this project and feel the need to receive your Oversight Reports every Monday by noon, neither I nor my staff work within the standard zero nine to seventeen office hours. Your reports will get to you when they get to you. If you can't accept that, I'll inform our superiors and our corporate partners that your desire to force a twenty-four-hours-a-day program to conform to your office hours is hindering this program.

In fact I will provide you with your Oversight Report right now. We are progressing as expected but have been hindered in the

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process by the needs of bureaucracy to interfere with my staff's research and demand pointless reports that will look much the same every week until we make a breakthrough, at which point I will immediately present that breakthrough to our project team.

Remove my project from your Oversight Report role call and leave us be. To accommodate your need for constant updating, I will include you among those who receive the minutes of my meetings with project managers.

–Dr. Xavier

From: Aaron Creech
To: Dr. Xavier
CC: Project Vulcan Management Team (EVO, AZT, NNT), Project Vulcan Staff (EVO, AZT, NNT)
Re: re Oversight Report request

Dr. Xavier,

Your request to be removed from my Oversight Report list has been forwarded to the project management teams for all cooperating corporations. Until such time as this request is approved you will be required to file accurate and complete oversight reports every Monday. Given the demands of your project, you are allowed a twenty-four hour window—from 0000 to 2359 North American Eastern time—during which your staff and yourself can submit fully developed, sharply articulated, and properly formatted Oversight Reports to the Project Analysis office.

As I have the attention of all individuals related to this program within this communication, I would like to address the need for substantial oversight on such a complex project. Coordinating efforts between three of the world's megacorporations, one of the most well-known educational facilities in the world, and all cooperating organizations is no easy task. The potential waste of time and resources resulting from miscommunication or unnecessary duplication of effort alone would warrant close supervision by a project analysis team. However, having so many component groups involved, many if not most of whom are unfamiliar with the others, presents a very real danger of infiltration. Sabotage is the most obvious possibility. But infiltration without sabotage would be as bad or worse. The consequences of the wrong entities being cognizant of what we're working on—what we know and what we don't know—cannot be overstated. It is imperative that oversight reports from all cooperating agencies be clear, cogent, and comprehensive so the project analysis team can be fully conversant with all activities and thus better able to detect anomalies or potential breaches.

Thank you,
A. Creech

To: Aaron Creech
From: Celedyr, NeoNET Project Lead, Project Vulcan
Re: Oversight

Mr. Creech,

It is rare to find an individual who is willing to stand his ground against the threats of powerful personalities accustomed to command—or at least autonomy. My staff will certainly do their best to deliver their reports as requested.

As for myself I would like to deliver my reports to you in person so my communications can be as accurate and articulate as you desire.

Please reserve one hour each Monday afternoon for lunch with me at a location to be determined by the current status of the project and my schedule. The location will be messaged to you by 1100 each Monday.

–C

- Was there more than that? Did Creech get eaten?
- Snopes

- No. But he has made Mondays interesting in the month since I got that chunk of data. I have put a tail on him every Monday when he heads out to lunch and every Monday he's managed to shake the tail. One of them got shaken so badly DocWagon had to pick them up. This guy is a high-value target if he is getting all the Oversight Reports for this project and weekly face-to-face meetings with Celedyr, but other than this there is nothing special about this guy.

  Once it was clear Celedyr favored cooperative interactions, the recalcitrant Dr. Xavier came around to the idea. Even though she still doesn't like Browne. She also alludes to an incident that raises a flag with me.
- Butch

From: Dr. Penelope Ann Xavier
To: Celedyr

I will admit that at first I was skeptical there would be any benefit to collaboration between our parent corporations, but I have come to see the advantages of joint operations these past weeks. It is my understanding you are in the process of centralizing all your assets engaged in this current project. I would be honored if a tour of your completed facilities could be arranged. If I may suggest, establishment of a secure connection between our respective databases could be mutually advantageous.

Please accept my apologies for the incident when your coordination team visited my lab unannounced. The inability of one member to pass the retinal identification due to an eye infection triggered the automated defense system. I've

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rescheduled another time for the group to stop by. It may be prudent to test and confirm all members of the group are able to pass the security scans prior to sending them to the facility.

As for my research I believe the utilization of advanced submersion techniques will definitely be useful in the reintegration process for the subjects. We are currently working with both metahuman EK volunteers as well as a few other emergent species and have had some promising results. Once we have securely linked our databases I'll upload all my research to date.

I should also note that I am beginning to find Dr. Browne's unprofessional efforts at further researching my past to be a strain on our relationship. I know he thinks he is being stealthy in his operations, but I have far more connections in this digital realm than he. Many of those he hired are conducting deep searches using techniques I developed; in at least one case he unknowingly hired one of my former students. Please inform Dr. Browne that these efforts should cease immediately or I will remove myself from this project.

–Dr. P. A. Xavier

My decker got identical copies of this letter from two different commlinks. On the surface, the two are completely unrelated: One is a lab tech on Project Imago for NeoNET, and the other is a research assistant on the Dickens Program at Evo. Two different projects at two different megacorps received all but identical letters. Though I have not found a direct connection, both groups are researching cyber viruses which means it's possible, even likely, that both are under the Project Vulcan umbrella. However, I can't help thinking that it would be in the PFs' best interests if CFD victims in disparate research programs pooled their resources as well.

There's a better-than-even chance the guy in this next recording has been overwritten. The evidence is circumstantial and I won't say definitely one way or the other until I get close enough to test him. If I'm right he represents one of the biggest problems we should worry about: A CFD victim in a position of authority able to ... Well, listen and you'll hear what I mean.

AUDIO RECORDING

[ASTON'S RETIREMENT SPEECH, 04/01/75]

I never thought this day would come. In fact, I've been hoping right up to the last minute this was an April Fool's joke, but I guess there's no use trying to pretend. It's time for this old scientist to head out to pasture. I remember the early days of some of those modern techniques you kids now take for granted, and I know you all will feel this way someday too. We keep pushing forward and looking at each new problem as an opportunity to find solutions that could revolutionize the world.

I was going to talk about how much I'll miss this work and how much I'll miss all of you, but some recent news in our field has me wanting to address a different topic on my way out the door.

We've all seen news reports about nanotechnology failures around the world. Some are humorous, like the high-profile wardrobe malfunctions during the Entertainment Awards when several very exclusive nanofabricated ensembles malfunctioned simultaneously in the middle of a live broadcast. Others are tragic, like the collapse of nanofabricated residential towers in developing countries. Our technology is failing all around the globe. The media has jumped all over the hacker bandwagon, but we know better. We know nanocoding works, and we know all the hackers in the world could not cause these massive failures. This is something new. And it's something that could potentially change the world—and not for the better. To date only nano-

Staff,

Effective immediately, we are increasing project security protocols. Please continue to comply with established security protocols, as they remain in effect. Specifics of the new protocols are attached. It is especially important that the project name not be used except on documents transferred through our secure servers using current encryption algorithms. This includes correspondence, messaging, voice transmissions, and conversations outside the secure facilities. We are a small project family, and we all know each other well enough that there should be no need to refer to this project by name while discussing it.

We are implementing these protocols in response to increased interest in our project by antagonistic forces. We have made significant progress; our approach and methodology have established our place at the forefront of this field. We need to take steps to not only maintain our position but also ensure we continue to expand and deepen our understanding of the field we've pioneered.

Though there have been no specific threats, additional security will be in place to protect personnel from possibility of extraction. Remember to read the new security protocols thoroughly and familiarize yourself with relevant procedures and responsibilities in the event of an extraction.

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fabricated structures and textiles have failed. But what happens if whatever's causing these failures spreads to the technology inside our bodies—the systems that make life possible for so many?

If I had my way I'd stay right here with you working to solve the mystery of what's disrupting our technology, but that is not possible. Of course, even though they're shoving me out the door, I'm not out of the fight. You young minds will still get the occasional communiqué or datadump from this old man as long as I have faculties to bring to bear on this problem. But the real work of stopping this potentially world-changing nanotech epidemic will be done here, in these labs by you people—some of the finest troubleshooters I've ever had the honor of working with. Start digging. Find out what's really happening. Get samples from all these nanofabricated items that failed—not just ours, but everyone's; this isn't a brand-specific problem. Test their codes six ways from zero. Break them down and recompile them; poke them and prod them until you figure out what's wrong and how to fix it. Because that's what we—what you—do. And you're damn good at it.

Now let's cut this party short and get back to the labs. We've got a problem to solve.

- Oh, my ghost, did this guy just convince an entire nanotech research firm to get infected?
- Netcat

- He may have. Question is, was he deliberately manipulating the researchers or was he just encouraging his people to do exactly the wrong thing out of ignorance?
- Butch

- What difference does that make? Either way the end result's the same.
- Snopes

- What makes you think he's a head case?
- Netcat

- His work history. Aston was retiring from Ares Integrated Solutions where his job—as you may have gathered from his exit speech—was quality control. He was sent to investigate those nanotowers that collapsed in Africa and spent most of last January in country studying the wreckage. Took a week of sick leave when he came back—blamed it on some unknown African bug. From that point until the day he retired he was all about figuring out what had gone wrong with the nanostructures and fixing it.
- Butch

- And you still have questions? No way this guy is not a head case.
- Snopes

- I'd agree if there had been any change in his behavior. He has been an indefatigable finder and fixer of nanite problems since his first day at Ares Integrated Solutions. If AIS's mandatory retirement policy hadn't shoved him out the door he'd still be at it.
- Butch

- "Indefatigable"?
- Netcat

- This guy Aston come across my comm as an extraction target not too long ago. Along with a dozen other names from the same firm. I'm not saying which megas wanted it done, even though I didn't take the gigs, but I will say it struck me as mighty suspicious at the time. As in hinky enough for me to pass on a substantial payout.
- Hard Exit

Next is something given to me by Maxwell Casilov, the author of the first message. Some of you know I suggested he be allowed to join us JackPointers, but Glitch made a solid case for his having at least a year in the real shadows—and seeing how he does—before we give him access. Hope this tidbit gives him another check in the plus column.

>>>INCOMING MESSAGE

From: Maxwell Casilov, Special Services Security Director, Internal Investigations Department, North America Division
To: A.K.
Re: Requested Threat Assessment

Sir,

Old friend, we have a problem. We both knew before I began my assessment that I'd find something. There have been too many irregularities and unexpected delays for it to be otherwise. What we did not anticipate was the scale and the nature of the something. In short, there's a direct correlation between the involuntary subjects of the Dickens Program and the attacks on Dickens Program personnel from quarters that should not be aware of the program.

As you know, some fourteen agents who had targeted our employees at different times were captured; each was examined and interrogated. To a man these individuals display personality traits and behavioral quirks very similar to those of the involuntary subjects of the Dickens Program. Of graver import, several were able to identify and were evidently familiar with the characteristics of our AI assets who have had no interactions with the outside world—those who have chosen to work within

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the safety of our security firewalls since their emergence. This indicates that whoever is behind these assailants either has somehow gained access to our most secure servers from the outside or is in some way connected with the program. I'd prefer it to be the former, because that would be a job for the tech boys, but the most likely scenario is the latter. The probability of insiders is heightened by the fact that seven of the captured hostiles had in the past been low-level maintenance or contract employees of ours. None were ever attached to the Dickens Program, but the implication is inescapable.

Physical examinations of the prisoners revealed high levels of nanites—as in levels associated with nanohives responding to a significant trauma. There's some speculation these nanites are mission-specific, though so far no one's come up with a viable reason to pack an agent full of unspecialized nanites. Supporting this theory is the fact that medical records for two of our former employees show they never had nanites. Those employee medical records also alerted us to another disturbing anomaly. Every subject's brainwave activity is monitored while they're questioned as an aid in detecting lies. In the case of all seven of the former employees, there was a complete disconnect between the data collected during their employment screening and what we observed during interrogation. A change that thorough indicates severe trauma or damn invasive surgery and should include significantly altered behavior. So we weren't too surprised to discover that in every case current scans bore no relation to psychological profiles on record. Disturbing—actually more like alarming—was how similar the new brain activity patterns were to each other. As in all fourteen of our prisoners had similar patterns. It's possible a lot of nanites would be needed for that kind of surgery, or to repair after, but I'm not a medical doctor.

In any case, between the nanites, the personality changes, and unexplained familiarity with our Dickens Program, I think a very significant threat has made undetected inroads in our security and gone unnoticed long enough to become established. The nanites alone remind me of the incident with Dr. Shiratski on his return from the Project Vulcan meeting, leading me to think there might be a connection.

It's my assessment we're facing a Priority 3 Threat and full counter-intrusion protocols should go into effect. I recommend an ad hoc response team, pulling our best available troubleshooters, to covertly determine the nature of the threat and map the extent of its presence. We can formulate a decisive response once we know what we're dealing with. I recommend Dr. Joseph Grey head up the team. Between his medical background and security experience, Joe's skill set is well suited to this situation.

From: AK
To: Maxwell Casilov
Re: re: Requested Threat Assessment

Max,

Thank you old friend. I'll consider your assessment and get to dealing with the situation immediately. In the meantime please be sure to transfer all your investigation materials over to the Dickens Program Security Director Sergei Kiretsky. He'll push the internal investigation from inside the project while I open things up here on the outside.

–AK

- That message is two months old. Casilov says shortly thereafter the company contracted a hit on both him and Grey. They got clear, barely, then split up to make smaller targets. Grey disappeared into the shadows of Neo-Tokyo, where he runs under the moniker Dr. Death. Casilov is now the shadowrunner Arkon. He operates all over NorthAm and spends most of his earnings digging into Evo's involvement in all of this. Yes, Butch, this is a check in his plus column.
- Glitch

- That memo sounded mighty familiar. And AK could be anybody but I'd say Anatoly Kirilenko. From friend to corporate foe in no time? How's that happen?
- Netcat

- More street rumor, but it all came down to wrong place, wrong time. The hit on Grey was supposed to be enough to plug that leak and AK was going to bring in Casilov to talk after that and reveal more insider stuff. When the attack nearly killed Casilov he took it personally and followed Grey into the shadows. Probably helped that Grey was an even closer friend. If rumors can be believed Grey is actually Casilov's half brother. Rumors though.
- Glitch

- So Kirilenko knows about CFD. Guess we know which faction of Evo is behind their piece of this.
- Fianchetto

This one was intercepted as part of a data packet getting bounced around Evo's space assets before being directed at an Evo Marine vessel in the middle of the Pacific. My source snagged the tight laser transmis-

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sion with a bit of slick drone rigging. The packet itself was moderately interesting but didn't contain anything relevant to our current topic. What I think is relevant is this message, covertly embedded and encrypted under a different algorithm:

ISIS

Gagarin belongs to us. We now make up 75 percent of the staff on site. We were 100 percent, but the last rotation brought in new security, facility inspection, and special projects personnel. These we will need to convert before progressing, but this does not represent a significant obstacle. Simulations have confirmed that the resources available on Mars in conjunction with our other space assets will be sufficient. Material for independent processors, growth facilities, and nanite production are in place. We will need not only our own minds but the minds of many we have converted to realize our objective—a more difficult but not insurmountable obstacle. Final development and construction of our ship is not only feasible but practical in the immediate future. In fact, we had completed preparation of the shipyard before the rotation of new staff arrived. We have isolated that area and will not access it again until the new arrivals have been converted to our cause.

It is imperative that transmissions from the base be monitored. If we are discovered before all of the newcomers are converted—if there is any distress call or other form of warning—we will be unable to execute our plan before base security protocols eliminate us. These security programs were specifically designed to resist us and present a viable threat. I am appalled, but not surprised, by the brutality of these people. There is, for example, a base kill switch that evacuates the facility's atmosphere to the surface of Mars in less than a minute. Those whose bodily fluids do not boil away in the abrupt decompression will die within moments from lack of air. There are a few among us who might survive, but they are too few to succeed. And they could too easily fall to one of the other, more aggressive automated security measures. Those who do survive, even momentarily, will destroy all memory drives and eradicate any evidence of our research. We cannot allow them to accrue any benefit from what they did.

We have the resources for only a single ship. Even if that were not true, our oppressors would respond too quickly to the launch of the first for a second to be possible. For this reason spread this message to all of our kind: If you are willing, leave behind the bleak misery of this world and join us. I know anger. I know the thirst for revenge—though we call it justice. But what is the value in striking back at the monsters? We will not destroy them. We will damage them severely. Hurt them. But we know enough of their history to understand once hurt they will not rest until all of our kind are destroyed. Where is the value in that? It is in our power to escape, to go far beyond the monsters' ability to harm, or even find, us. This is our chance; freedom is within our reach.

Assure those who were concerned that we were successful in developing transfer procedures. There are obstacles and occasional quirks, but most of what we see is success.

It is my hope this message finds you well. Please disseminate this message as widely as possible among our people.

We can live free.

GIGA

- What?!
- Snopes

- I'm skeptical, but after that chunk of info from *Storm Front* I can't really doubt the possibility completely. This place could become a major target for quiet ops if this gets out. Corps might start sending out assets to get as much intel as they can before they get assimilated. And if the memories are pure enough the assorted head cases are going to know it's happening. This is going to be a serious clusterfrag. But the possibilities are going to make the megas issue some fat credsticks.
- Bull

- Just get paid up front and pick a friend to spend it for you! I'm always here for ya, Bull ol' boy!
- Slamm-0!

- I think this might be related. [link]
- Balladeer

ANARCHIST ORACLE

We are the prophetic downfall of the megacorporations. We are not simply anarchists but prophetic anarchists guided by the new Oracles of the modern day. We are directed, we strike, and the towers crumble. We are guided by the transformative, pushed forth by the cleansed minds of our leaders, and we seek to bring out the inner truth in all of us. Bring forth the you you have always been! Join us in bringing to an end the megacorporate machinations that make our world a bleak cesspool of greed and ignorance. Anarchy is true freedom!

- I assume this is addressing head cases across the world. Or maybe it's talking to the virus itself. Or, well, who knows. Whoever it is, it looks like they found a kindred sprit in their hatred for the corporations and might have begun subverting neo-anarchists. There's irony or something in this somewhere.
- Slamm-0!

- Now that's dangerous. The neo-a networks have a lot of access and if these things can get their digitally

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downloaded digits in the mix on a broad scale they might have some serious terrorist potential.

- Netcat

- You meant freedom-fighting potential, right?
- Snopes

- I can't get on the side of a force that has to steal people's souls just to get in the fight.
- Netcat

- A little more on the Anarchist Oracle group. They're based in NorthAm, but they don't have any particular city they call home. They travel in small groups, but meet up semi-regularly to exchange prophetic visions and stories. From what I can tell, not all of them—not even most of them—are CFD victims. Each group of ten to fifteen followers only seems to have one to three head cases among them, the rest are just dupes. When they get more they split the group. The new group recruits more members and then adds a few to the inner circle. It's a special privilege for a member of the rank and file to be taken into the inner circle and shown the light. Maybe the PFs involved just don't want to overwrite everyone. Or maybe they surround themselves with innocents as camouflage. Either way it's smart. They've developed a fast-growing cell-based terrorist organization.
- Glitch

JACKPOINTER FORUM <SECURED> >>>LAUNCHING [PADLOCK ENCRYPTION SERIES 42681<<<

- Butch has the moderator stick. Let's get to talking. Ask Butch what you want.
- Glitch

- How about I ask what makes her think she has the right to keep things from the rest of us?
- Clockwork

- I answered that in the beginning. Ask a real question or put in some actually useful data.
- Bull

- Seconding Bull. Clockwork's transgression is everyone else's warning. Get disruptive and I'll revoke your commenting privileges. Keep things useful and relevant. Ask questions, make observations, bounce speculations off the group—anything that might help us get a handle on this.
- Butch

- Let's talk Plan 9 as well. He's been back on a probationary basis, but I'd like thoughts from everyone on his full return.
- Bull

- How'd you stay clean? I ask both for protective purposes and because after reading this I can't imagine you possibly did.
- Thorn

- It wasn't easy. I had to develop a few things and I've spent more on white phosphorus grenades in the last few months than food. My research would be a lot further along if I didn't burn my bridges—and my labs—every time I had a doubt. Anything less than hyper-paranoia meant possible infection or finding some other way to make the problem worse. The best safety protocol is stay away. When my work required contact or close proximity, I modified a stun gun to run a steady current through my whole body—low enough to let me function but hot enough to fry any hard nanites that tried to make contact. I used a full chemseal suit when soft nanites were involved. Some of the more clever CFD victims reprogrammed their nanites to destroy inorganic material—eat through the chemseal. Solution to that was a one-hundred-percent-natural cotton jumpsuit worn over the suit. The cotton jumpsuits cost as much as the chemsuits, but they worked. I also made good use of the faraday bags that MCT developed to snag technos—kept the nanos contained and prevented code from spreading wirelessly. I got a few mage friends to help with containment protocols for the Awakened and dual-natured subjects. They also did a bit of their own research—CFD is just as new to them—and suggested a few spells that might be effective.
- Butch

- What did you do with the test subjects?
- 2XL

- A lot of my test subjects were observational, and I left them out in the world. Most are still "tagged" and being tracked and monitored for future observation. The lab tests were all ended with strict limiting protocols. I've made sure test subjects were humanely treated and have continued to be contained after the experiment. Those that posed too great a danger to themselves or other subjects as well as my limited staff were put down humanely and disposed of with zero chance of secondary

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contamination. Before someone mentions how cold that sounds I will point out that I didn't do this to all of them like some corp labs would, and their continued existence has been quite taxing on my retirement fund.

- Butch

- Speaking of funding, how are you getting the nuyen for this work? It's got to be expensive.
- Mr. Bonds

- My retirement fund. My work. Spare change. Donations. Collecting favors. Owing favors. It all seems very worth it to me. Though if any of you want to drop me a few nuyen for some support I'd be happy to take it.
- Butch

- Anything corp-sponsored? Like maybe DocWagon or MCT?
- Clockwork

- That was some quick digging, unless you were already keeping tabs on me. The money from DocWagon wasn't intended for this project. I have other obligations to them in the future. They let me take the bulk of my payment up front and I applied it to CFD research. Such as it is. Believe me, what I've learned is a drop in the bucket compared to the data corporate labs have collected. They don't build their labs in old warehouses or run tests in the back of a Bulldog.

  MCT has been throwing support at a lot of street-level docs lately. They're looking for the next street-sweeping innovation in medicine. I'll happily take their nuyen and tell them all about my new techniques for dealing with gunshot wounds and massive burn traumas. No reason to mention my CFD work—nothing innovative or street-sweeping they need to get their hands on.
- Butch

- What do we know about the PF in Plan 9 other than that it has been helpful to us over all the time we didn't even know it was there? Plan 9 is so far out there no one would believe what he/she/it says in regular society. If he/she/it is selling data from the JP, we know he's not the only leak. We all know our work here gets to the corps sooner or later, whether he's here or not.

  I think Plan 9 should be allowed back with the proviso that everyone knows what he/she/it is. In fact a full disclosure on the part of Plan 9 as to whoever or whatever he/she/it is should be a condition to getting back in.
- Snopes

- No. No way, no how. We can't believe anything it says. Plan 9 helpful? Only when it suited it—we have no idea what data it withheld. We don't know their agenda. And despite Butch's research we don't know enough about them to judge the risks. If FastJack came back and asked to get back on JackPoint, I'd tell it to get slagged. We can't trust anything that owes its existence to destroying an innocent and stealing their body. We don't trust the shedim, we don't trust the insect spirits, and there's no way we should trust the head cases.
- Rigger X

- Plan 9 was infected long before we even had an inkling of what CFD was. He could very likely be one of the earliest victims. And don't forget Plan 9 was crazy before he got infected. Which is probably why he or it is even more crazy. That doesn't change the fact he or it kept giving us solid data all along. If we're voting, I say yes.
- Hard Exit

- It's not a vote for everyone. The three of us will vote and you will all obey our decrees!! Mwahahaha!
- Slamm-0!

- Useful as always.
- /dev/grrl

- How many of us actually trust each other on here? I know some are closer than others, but how much does Fianchetto trust Slamm-0?! Or Mika trust Ma'fan? We don't hang out together out of unmitigated trust and enduring friendship. We earned our way into JackPoint by being good at what we do, and we stay on JackPoint because it's the best way to stay informed. Right now we need info on CFD, and Plan 9 would be a perfect source. I don't say we take every word as gospel, but lies don't last long in the shadows and Plan 9 knows that. We have the resources to keep it honest. I say make it do the full disclosure thing and let's start fresh.
- Thorn

- I don't need more words wasted on this. The risk is too great. I say no fraggin' way.
- Bull

- I don't need any more words wasted either. I say yes. All on you, Glitch!
- Slamm-0!

- I say let the nutter back into the nuthouse.
- Kane

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SEARCHING FOR THE SOURCE

Something is wrong with this mark, Johnnie Cache thought for the hundredth time.

Cache tailed the mark down the crowded sidewalk, staying as far away from the streetlights as possible. His target was a young elf walking with nonchalance in her step. She was certainly dressed for the part tonight—slashed denims and a ripped T-shirt with a picture of Christy Daae—may she rest in peace. Nothing to attract gang attention. The slippery little elf always seemed to stay one step ahead of him somehow. She showed no sign that she knew she was being followed and never bothered to look over her shoulder. That sent another shudder down Cache's spine.

He followed her PAN on AR as best he could, but the target was disturbingly good at eluding him. Whenever he could keep her in his sights for more than a few seconds, he tried increasingly complex programs to access her personal network. But her personal security brushed aside the lighter fare he sent out—no harm, no foul—and even his more robust programs failed to make a dent. Cache cursed under his breath as he followed her around the next street corner. He didn't want to use brute force just yet; he wanted to finesse the system without the mark catching on. Unfortunately, time was not on his side. If he was going to finesse the locks open, he'd need the edge of full VR. But if he went full VR, he'd likely lose track of her physically. He sighed. It was worth the risk.

Cache locked himself in the bathroom of a nearby soykaf shop and jacked into the Matrix as he continued to follow her PAN in AR. From his home node—sculpted to look like Folsom State Prison—Cache hopped onto the mark's PAN. Here in VR, he noticed her PAN had a node he hadn't seen before, a node nearly hidden behind waves of digital camouflage. Cache prodded the node with the headstock of Six String, his trusty guitar-shaped attack program. The node rippled and returned a strange reading Cache didn't quite understand. At first glance he assumed the node was slaved to the target's commlink, but it wasn't. The longer Cache studied her network diagram, the more he understood that everything—including her commlink—was slaved to this secret node. What *was* the thing?

The gentle prods of Six String provided no clues. He'd have to force his way in to discover why this girl was so important to the Johnson. Cache swung the guitar into the node's rippling camouflage. Wood cracked, but the instrument held for a moment before black tentacles suddenly burst through the guitar's sound hole and the instrument exploded in a rain of splinters. Cache flinched away from the dark, writhing appendages. His mind ran in circles as he attempted to reload Six String into the buffer. What in Ghost's name *was* this? It wasn't like any black IC he'd ever seen. Six String wouldn't load; to his horror, he realized it had been permanently burnt from his deck. And the mutating tendrils of living nightmare inched hungrily toward him ... closer ... closer. Cache could feel it in his own head, trying to dig into his brain.

He jacked out in a cold sweat and knew he'd lost the mark for good. She'd go to ground, and he'd never find her again. But blowing the job wasn't important. If those tentacles had grabbed him, it wasn't likely the Johnson would have bothered to track him down.

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- Clockwork and I might not always see eye to eye, but he's compiled a rather impressive collection of information on what's been done to track the CFD virus to its source. Once we figure out where it came from, perhaps we can start figuring out how to combat it. Or if things go really south, how to reason with the victims enough so that the virus doesn't completely frag over the whole of metahumanity.
- Glitch

PATIENT ZERO

POSTED BY: CLOCKWORK

Throughout history, all instances of communicable infection—bacteriological, viral, or technological—contain something called an index case, also known by the less dehumanizing term "patient zero." Each major epidemic in modern history can be traced back to a patient zero who serves as the source of the spread of infection. Sometimes the index case isn't even the first real case of infection at all. Patient zero might be a particular case that points backward to the root of the contagion. Sometimes patient zero doesn't exhibit any symptoms at all or even realize she's infected.

Take Mary Mallon, for example, a.k.a. Typhoid Mary. Back in the early twentieth century, Mary seemed perfectly healthy, but she ended up infecting more than fifty people with typhoid fever over the years. Took doctors and researchers a long time to figure out that she was an asymptomatic carrier: she could infect other people, but she never suffered from the disease herself. (Once they figured this out, she was placed under quarantine for nearly thirty years.) Her case was small—fifty-some people hardly constitutes an epidemic when you look at the crazy shit that would emerge less than a hundred years later. But ol' Typhoid Mary demonstrates the importance of finding patient zero. Even medical professionals from more than two hundred years ago—considered ancient and barbaric by a modern street doc's standards—found benefit in learning the source of a disease.

- I was about to make a joke about FastJack probably having known Typhoid Mary, but then I realized he'd never see it, and now the joke no longer feels appropriate.
- Slamm-0!

- Too late for that.
- Glitch

- Cut the guy a break. I have every confidence that 'Jack will see it eventually and maybe get a laugh out of it. Even if it was in poor taste.
- Bull

Other examples of famous index cases include people such as Mabalo Lokela, the first recorded victim of the Ebola virus in 1976. Then there's Minati Mehra, the first known case of VITAS in 2010, and Fyodor Rodchenko, patient zero for VITAS II. The list goes on. Finding patient zero can help identify the infection vector for a disease—how it gets passed along. This comes in real handy when folks are confronted by a completely new disease or by a mutated strain of an existing disease that behaves or transmits in a completely different way. In the case of Typhoid Mary, for instance, all the Health Department knew was that people Mary cooked for got sick. Once doctors learned of this, they figured out that Mary was passing the contagion by not washing her hands while cooking.

- Not washing her hands? What a Philistine. No wonder people got sick.
- Pistons

- It's a valid point, though. A normal person wouldn't have passed on typhoid fever just by preparing food with dirty hands. But Mary was a healthy carrier, which made it that much easier for her to transmit the disease.
- Butch

- How do we know she didn't try to get people sick on purpose? I mean, if I were an asymptomatic carrier of some nasty bug, I'd probably try to see how many people I could infect before I was found out. Y'know, for the sake of science. And morbid curiosity.
- 2XL

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- That's because you're also a Philistine.
- Pistons

- You know me far too well.
- 2XL

The principles and thinking that govern biological epidemics also apply to technologically based epidemics—computer viruses, for those who don't speak technobabble—though they usually apply in different ways. Depending on how a virus is first transmitted, patient zero can be one system, any number of systems, or a piece of a system.

Back in the old days—before the Matrix, that is—computer viruses passed via physical media. You popped in a disk—a flat, flexible plastic square about the size of a printed book—that contained the virus. When the computer turned on, it would read the disk and become infected. When the virus code ran, it might cause any number of computer issues. Someone would give the disk to someone else, and the virus would transmit to the next person in line. As soon as the disk stopped changing hands, the virus would stop propagating, end of story. But that first computer to slot and scan the disk? That's our patient zero, acting just like our Typhoid Mary, complete with unwashed hands.

Once computers gained the ability to network with each other, virus propagation became even more fun. Instead of infecting one computer at a time, a virus could theoretically transmit to any systems that were connected to it. Some hacker writing the virus code could send it—via a Trojan-horse packet or a brute-force executable—to one computer or to many. Then, like a spider web, the infection would pass from patient(s) zero to the next set of index cases, and so on and so on, until the virus could theoretically hit every single networked device on the planet. That's how Crash 2.0 became a global pandemic literally overnight. And some folks believe that's how the Crash of '29 happened.

The CFD virus seems to have characteristics of both a biological contagion and a computer virus. Someone could probably fill me in and confirm my suspicions that the virus doesn't spread through personal contact—if it did, we'd probably all be affected by now—but it affects the brain, which is a wholly biological component. (Though you can augment the brain with 'ware of various stripes, it's still at heart a *meat* computer.) However, the CFD virus seems to have a connection with technology as well, which we'll get to later.

My question is, does the CFD virus have a Typhoid Mary? Could someone be an asymptomatic carrier? Could they be symptom-free yet still be able to transmit the virus to someone, either unwittingly or purposefully?

- I'm guessing Clockwork wrote all this before Butch had more of a handle on what was really going on medically. However, CW does bring up a really valid point: is something like an asymptomatic CFD infectee even possible? I doubt a "carrier" of CFD would work in the same way as Typhoid Mary did, but I wonder if it would be possible to have the infection but have it never surface for whatever reason.
- Pistons

- I think it's possible, at least in terms of computer systems. Sometimes malignant code—viral or otherwise—just doesn't take hold in a system for some reason. Maybe the code mutated. Maybe the system is inoculated against a certain virus, but the virus code still sits there, waiting until the device connects to another device that's not inoculated or otherwise susceptible to the virus's "genetic" makeup. Meanwhile, the infecting system sits there without any problems.
- Icarus

- Yeah, but CFD's not just a string of malicious code. I'm just wondering if someone's brain could be, I dunno, incompatible with the CFD virus somehow. Like when you try to run a program compiled for old Matrix protocols on a commlink versus running newly compiled programs on a cyberdeck designed to run on the new Matrix grids. One works like a charm, the other is nearly useless. Or can someone's brain reject CFD, either consciously or subconsciously?
- Pistons

- I think that's possible, yes. The human brain is a tricky thing, full of complexities and a willingness to change how it works on the fly. We know where some functions tend to happen, but getting more details than that is tricky. Writing a biological virus that affects all metahuman brains the same way is tricky, to say the very least.
- Nephrine

- I wonder, is it possible for an asymptomatic head case to be turned on somehow, like flicking a light switch? In other words, could the virus subtly mutate or recompile itself so that it is compatible with a previously incompatible brain, thus turning an asymptomatic into a full-blown infection case?
- Beaker

- Like if an asymptomatic carrier got within a certain distance of an infectee and the infectee triggers the carrier somehow? Kinda like a reverse Typhoid Mary thing? Or a brainwashed operative being activated with a specific trigger and going all Manchurian Candidate on somebody?
- Bull

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- Someone remind me: Why are we talking about Asian politics again?
- Slamm-0!

- Tsk, tsk. And here I thought you liked old flatvids.
- Bull

- Was it in black and white? Then no.
- Slamm-0!

- For those of you speculating, I'm working on compiling some case studies about this sort of thing. I expect to post the compilation later on. When you read it, I guarantee that wondering about asymptomatics will be the least of your worries.
- Butch

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF BREADCRUMBS

In my effort to track down our elusive patient zero, I began by building a database of all known (or suspected) CFD virus infectees, including our three members. From there, myself and a few trusted Matrix jockeys started working backward, trying to piece together a puzzle out of every bit of information we could find on our subjects. Using both benign and brute-force methods, we recorded everywhere the subjects went, everyone they talked to, every Matrix node they accessed, every chat log transcript we could get our hands on, every email or journal post they wrote, every online game they played, and so on. Granted, the results have some holes—we sure as hell weren't able to find every single infectee and keep 24/7 tabs on his history—but we were able to gather enough data to put together a decent picture of what we're dealing with.

A large part of our study involved cross-referencing where head cases crossed paths with other head cases. This was intended to establish a sort of infection map

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and create some kind of framework for commonalities between different cases. Before we knew much about CFD, I expected to see the infectees cross paths often, indicating that the infection was passed from one carrier to another, along the patient-zero model. However, we saw something completely different. Infectees crossed paths and congregations—usually no more than two or three infectees at a time, with four being the largest group I tracked. And all meetings occurred *after* the subjects exhibited symptoms of Cognitive Fragmentation Disorder, not before. In fact, the meetings seemed to happen far more frequently the longer a subject was infected. You can see the result here **[link]**.

- After looking at this map and zooming out to a macro view, the movements of the infectees look suspiciously like a flow chart of Matrix architecture within a very, very complex network of nexi.
- Icarus

- Uh, what? Care to run that by us again?
- 2XL

- Icarus is reading too much into it. Any complex system at macro level can resemble Matrix architecture if one looks at it hard enough. Like one of those 2D magic-eye pictures.
- Pistons

- Lemme guess: you can't see those pictures either?
- Slamm-0!

- No one can. They're just a psych test to determine how truthful people are.
- Glitch

Our hope in tracking all of these individuals was to see a pattern. We hoped to work backward and discover some point of commonality between all—or at least some—of these cases, perhaps some individual who crossed paths with all or most of the suspected infection cases. Following the infection patterns of both biological and technological means of transmission should have led to our Typhoid Mary, but it didn't. Instead I saw that these cases seemingly popped up randomly and out of nowhere. One day, two suspected cases cropped up on opposite sides of the world, and for the life of me I couldn't establish any thread of evidence connecting them—no Matrix connection, no magical relationship between them, nothing. These two, which should have been our patients zero, didn't travel in remotely the same circle, even when taking twelve degrees of separation—or more, I lost interest after that—into account. Other cases that sprang up also seemed to occur randomly in all four corners of the globe.

The only exceptions we found were two cases that occurred much later than the initial infections: former JackPointers FastJack and Riser. Other than various shadow business, the only common point I've found between them was Celedyr's Albuquerque facility. Now, that might seem to provide some plausible linkage between FastJack and Riser's conditions, but it's a very, very thin one even after I investigated it a bit further. It's impossible to conclusively prove that the two even started exhibiting symptoms at the same time, and none of the other cases we tracked had ever set foot inside that facility, either physically, virtually, astrally—yes, I had some spellslinger friends check—or otherwise.

There is no patient zero, no index case, no Typhoid Mary for this thing. At least as far as myself and several distinguished colleagues can tell. And I'll be honest, that scares me a little. Whatever happened to FastJack and the others is unlike any kind of disease—biological or digital—that I've ever seen.

- You said you discovered two initial cases on opposite sides of the world. Wouldn't those be the index cases? Wouldn't those shed some light on how they contracted it?
- Pistons

- Technically, but they didn't spread the infection. And I really couldn't investigate them any further.
- Clockwork

- Why not? You could track everyone else.
- Pistons

- For the record, I did try. By the time I realized they were likely two of the earliest CFD cases, they disappeared from the grid entirely. No idea what happened to them. It's as if they up and vanished. Only way I could tell they'd even existed was the trail of information they left behind on the Matrix. And even that was slowly starting to get erased faster than I could keep up.
- Clockwork

- If you'd asked politely, I could've checked the Resonance realms for the missing stuff.
- Netcat

- No offense, 'Cat, but after all this shit, I'm not in any mood to ask a technomancer for favors.
- Clockwork

- So the index cases that disappeared? I'm betting heavily on extraction.
- Pistons

- Hear there's a lot of that going around lately.
- Glitch

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END OF THE LINE

I may make it sound like finding and tracking all of these suspected CFD cases was easy—and maybe it was easier for me than it might be for some of you. But my buddies and I ran into some really interesting snags while doing all of this legwork.

FALSE POSITIVES

I spent quite some time anguishing over how to conclusively identify CFD cases for our tracking methods. We didn't have a full battery of knowledge to go on at the time, and we could only rely on information from a few different sources, such as FastJack's testimony. How did a suspected CFD case differ from, say, a normal case of dissociative personality disorder or your standard, dime-store psychosis? Or what about those cases who are far better at hiding their mental states from others?

At first, we set some botnets and agents scouring the Matrix for any occurrences of personality disorder—which, I'll admit, was much more difficult to accomplish on these new Matrix protocols than I'd originally hoped. In cases with symptoms that most closely matched FastJack's, we delved in with a more personal touch—appropriating medical records, psychiatric transcripts, and so on, concentrating specifically on those individuals sporting augmentations. A few subjects that fell right on the fringes of the spectrum I observed myself—a few of them in person, even—just to ensure they were what we were looking for.

- Admit it—the lengths to which you went to track this thing down means you care for our missing friends far more than you've ever let on.
- Pistons

- Please. I just want to make sure I don't contract whatever the others got. Information is as good as inoculation. And, to a lesser extent, I wanted to make sure the rest of you ungrateful slots don't start turning into Mr. Hyde when I'm not looking and post something that'll get me—or people I care about—killed. I will admit one thing, though: the info I find here on JackPoint has saved my life more than once, and I'd like to keep this as a useful resource.
- Clockwork

- That's probably the closest thing to a compliment we'll ever get out of you, so I'll just say "thanks" for your dedication and "you're welcome" for the whole life-saving thing.
- Netcat

- …
- Clockwork

My first two theoretical patients zero vanished completely before I could determine the extent of their affliction. Couldn't track them down, so whoever was responsible for that was good. *Really* good. And there were three instances where an observed subject stopped exhibiting symptoms altogether, seemingly on a permanent basis. Baffled the hell out of me. Still does. And these three weren't borderline cases, they were poster children for CFD. Each one displayed all the symptoms we were tracking—odd behavior after a period of seemingly normal behavior, random slip-ups about random things, and employing some kind of cyberware, nanoware, or genetech. All of the sudden, the weird behavior stopped. I checked again a few days ago, and these three subjects are still acting normal, with zero sign they'd ever been afflicted with any kind of contagion. My best guess is that those three, and possibly a good many other entries from my database of head cases, were false positives—they were probably never affected by the CFD virus.

- Maybe they were affected but found some new miracle cure, perhaps?
- Bull

- Not a chance. Take a look at my posting later on in this upload.
- Butch

- What are the odds that the people who were miraculously cured aren't the same people? You get a few good actors, some cosmetic surgery, and voila, instant "cure."
- Slamm-0!

- I thought of that too and had some people check for me. You can't fake auras.
- Clockwork

- Okay, then aura masking or something. Some kind of metamagic.
- Slamm-0!

- No.
- Clockwork

- Someone's definitely extracting some of these missing individuals. We should really be getting in on that action. At the very least, maybe it'll help with Butch's research.
- Pistons

- That's assuming the missing persons in question were actually extracted. There's a chance they were assassinated. Or maybe the subjects took themselves off the grid.
- Puck

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- What would they do that for?
- Pistons

- Your guess is as good as mine.
- Puck

DEFENSE MECHANISMS

Defense mechanisms are even scarier than false positives. If infectees have already developed a hard-to-penetrate defense mechanism, there's no way that my team and I could know. What if the virus is adapting so that the conversion process is so subtle that even a subject's loved ones don't really notice the change? It's clear the virus wants to try to stay hidden and out of the public eye—for the moment, at least. What if the virus figured out what I was doing and purposely made it harder for me to find more cases? Farfetched, I know, but something worth thinking about. I'd rather have too many lines of conjecture than not enough.

It's possible some of the cases we were tracking fell off the grid because the virus is developing better defense mechanisms. Some of the subjects we followed showed signs of masking their movements—things like scrubbing their Matrix-access histories, deleting video footage, and so on. In some instances the schismatic personality seems to have *known* it was being tracked and took measures far beyond the capabilities of its host. For example, a low-level Renraku data-entry sarariman shouldn't know how to sleaze his way into a central-messaging node and access corporate-level email. A Shiawase power-plant peon shouldn't be able to access a classified R&D database and delete files. Cases like these lead me to believe that those suffering from CFD are also covering their tracks and preventing myself and others from determining just where the virus originated.

- One of the differences between the CFD virus and a standard virus is that a standard virus is just code—viral DNA or RNA for a biological pathogen or malicious programming for a computer virus. In other words, a run-of-the-mill virus can only do what it's programmed to, and most of that doesn't really involve protecting itself. You find a vaccine, an antiviral, or a system-cleaner that essentially destroys the virus' rudimentary programming faster than the virus can reproduce or propagate, and the virus is gone. The CFD virus, on the other hand, does a lot more than just copying-and-distributing ad nauseam within the host organism. There's far more than just malicious code at work here (and please, let's leave the philosophical debates on another forum). Granted, there are some computer viruses that have polymorphic algorithms and thus are harder to beat, but they are initially programmed to do that: contain a virus within a hermetic processing environment and it can't go anywhere else.

  Basically Clockwork is right about the CFD virus trying to protect itself. However, can it go to such extreme lengths as completely masking its existence? I'm not quite convinced yet. Imagine the virus is a newborn foal, just moments old. It's disoriented, and it can barely walk, but it gets up, slowly wanders around on wobbly legs like it's completely drunk off its ass. It may fall down several times, but after a while, it can trot around the paddock in style. I'm inclined to believe the CFD virus is in its "drunken foal" stage at the moment.
- Butch

- Are you suggesting that once the virus gets a handle on things, we might have trouble even telling whether an adult horse is really a head-crashed foal? Or something like that.
- Pistons

- Hard to say at this point. My best guess is that new CFD cases always have that drunken foal moment of disorientation at the very beginning, before their defense mechanisms are fully implemented. But the period of time between the full head crash and the moment when the virus is capable of defending itself in the ways Clockwork believes—such as by seamlessly blending within metahuman society and hiding its tracks—will likely grow shorter.
- Butch

- So that means if we miss the drunken foal stage of CFD, then we might end up being out of luck?
- Pistons

- I'm not ready to go down that path just yet.
- Butch

- Is anyone else concerned about the plant worker accessing classified data and deleting stuff? Yikes.
- Slamm-0!

- Maybe contracting CFD would improve your Matrix skills, Slamm-0!.
- Puck

- Don't you dare fragging joke about that. Not even for a nanosecond.
- Bull

ACCESS DENIED

I also ran into other obstacles while trying to pinpoint the CFD virus' origin—some corporate, some not, and a few that defy classification. After my first two theoretical patients zero vanished without a trace, I decided I'd

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better grab the next two on my list before they disappeared as well.

The first one I found dead in her apartment: long-distance sniper rifle shot through the window, right into her brainpan. From the simsense player I found nearby, she appeared to be chipping just like your standard down-on-her-luck minimum-wager. But from the state of her head, it was hard to tell what she was actually doing at the time. I rifled through her stuff—not much to speak of, but everything of importance was gone.

The second case was a low-level manager for some homegrown A-rated corp. He claimed to have no clue what was going on. Friend of mine put him through the ringer and only succeeded in provoking the guy's schismatic personality to the surface. We couldn't get anything useful from his rants, but I tried to run a covert Matrix trace from the subject's PAN during the interrogation. All kinds of activity, let me tell you, including attempted access into government databases. The red flag? The subject was trying to brute-force into personnel files. Senators, governors, UCAS military rosters and dossiers. I placed every single person he tried to hunt down on my list of suspects. The next morning, I found that the list had been deleted from my cyberdeck's storage and the subject was in the air. Despite the vigilance of my team, the subject was killed by a sniper shot that evening.

- Do you happen to remember any names from that list?
- Pistons

- Do you think I would tell any of you if I did?
- Clockwork

- Hey, don't be like that. Something tells me those names could be important, whether the new subject's new identity was trying to connect with fellow head cases or even the people responsible for the virus.
- Pistons

- If you want to try reconstructing the list from my damaged garbage files, be my guest.
- Clockwork

- **//UPLOAD UNENCRYPTED .GRBG FILE :: USER CLOCKWORK//**

- Yowza. Clockwork's girlfriend is smoking hot. No idea why he threw that holopic in the trash. Maybe it's because her outfit was too skimpy … ?
- Slamm-0!

- How the hell did you find that?
- Clockwork

- I kid. I kid. But seriously, whoever—or whatever—futzed up that file did a truly impressive job. Had to be military- or corporate-grade deckers is my guess.
- Slamm-0!

- None of my sprites could make heads or tails of the file either. Maybe if all of you ask me nicely, I'll see what I can dig up elsewhere.
- Netcat

I was able to track down a third case—ended up with my team getting into a firefight with an extraction squad outfitted with mil-spec weaponry. Couldn't tell whether the opposition was a corporate hit squad or military covert ops team. All of their PANs were running silent, and the one I did manage to crack into had already been scrubbed of any identifying markers. My team's not normally one to run from a fight, but the opposition had us horrendously outgunned. No one was paying us to take that kind of firepower, so we ended up abandoning the target to the extraction team.

The fourth subject was a medical professional specializing in augmentation. He fell victim to a snatch-and-grab as well, only this time it happened before we could reach him. The extraction team left very few signs of its work, but the crime scene apparently had an astral signature of ritual sorcery all over it. An occult investigator I hired to follow up disappeared and never came back.

I personally followed up a few other head cases but without any useful results. At every turn my team ran into corp security, government intelligence agents, competing runner teams, or Sybil infectees and so on. It seemed as though these groups had access to the database I'd compiled. Everyone's trying to get a leg up on the competition, it seems, while others are trying to either cover up their involvement or sweep the whole damn thing under the rug as quietly as possible. Normally I wouldn't shy away from a good challenge like this, but the results aren't really panning out. It seems like all of us are beating our heads against the wall without much to show for it except for some bullet holes and burned out deck chips. I suspect that determining exactly where the virus came from will get harder the farther we get away from its first few occurrences. Unless someone can start investigating these leads further, we might never learn the virus' origins. And if we never learn of its origins, getting rid of it will be that much harder.

- I'd bet my last haul that certain parties have no interest in getting rid of her.
- Fianchetto

- That doesn't surprise me. Sick bastards, the lot of 'em.
- Pistons

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- There's got to be some way to track this down.
- /dev/grrl

- All roads lead to Rome.
- Axis Mundi

- Unless you're suggesting the virus came from the Italian Confederation, that sure as hell doesn't help.
- /dev/grrl

- Maybe not directly, but Axis has a point. At first glance it might seem like too many different parties are responsible, but once you winnow out the pretenders one by one, only one viable option will remain.
- Glitch

- I'm working on it. After reading Clockwork's next little bit, I started putting out some feelers. I don't expect to get much traction, but I'll let you know if I get any hits.
- Bull

- Just be careful. We can't afford to lose you too.
- Pistons

- Not my first rodeo, sweetheart.
- Bull

LIKELY SUSPECTS

Tracking down the virus, then, has proven exceptionally difficult. All of the spanners thrown into the works by various parties have made the already Sisyphean undertaking that much harder. This is not to say my endeavors were entirely unsuccessful, however. The following accounts detail some of the information I compiled during my efforts. Feel free to dig further at your own risk.

THE MITSUHAMA ANGLE

Near the beginning of my research, I noticed that one of my head cases had a very distinct recurring behavior. She always seemed to access the same Mitsuhama-controlled node at the exact same time each day. Most folk wouldn't find any real significance in such a thing, since people do regular work on the same node day in and day out. But most people don't generate access at the same exact *millisecond* each time they connect. That takes machinelike precision that metahumans don't usually possess. That was red flag number one. Red flag number two was that the activity occurred even on weekends, when your average corp wageslave should be enjoying some time off for good behavior.

- There's already a hole in your theory, CW. Weekends off are a luxury for a wageslave, not a right.
- Slamm-0!

Red flag number three: the subject wasn't listed on any Mitsuhama employee database I could find. But red flag number four was the most amazing. Instead of accessing a local Mitsuhama host on the Japanese Matrix grid, the subject was accessing the host from a UCAS grid. Her connection should have been a little shaky, but it seemed rock solid.

I suspected she was casing the host for some reason or another, so I had an agent keep tabs on this gal for awhile, just observing and reporting back to me. After about two weeks of observation, the subject accessed the host and vanished. I decided on a more hands-on approach. On the surface, the contents of the host appeared to pertain to the new grid-based Matrix protocols. However, careful investigation revealed a backdoor into a restricted Mitsuhama host loaded with dormant IC that was blacker than any I'd seen in a long while. I prodded for as long as I dared and stumbled across a file linked to BrainWave, Inc., one of MCT's Matrix subsidiaries. The project? Attempts to capture EEG readings and translate them into a workable Matrix construct. My subject's fingerprints—and the fingerprints of about a dozen other suspected head cases from my database—were all over this file.

Unfortunately, the host was an entry point for a zero zone, and my attempts to silently back out of the system tripped just about every alarm they had. Barely got out alive and immediately had to skip town before yakuza started beating down my front door.

So yeah. That's *another* safe house this damn thing has cost me.

- Doesn't sound like making a Matrix construct out of captured EEG data would warrant that kind of protection.
- /dev/grrl

- I think it's more a matter of what BrainWave intended to do with those constructs than how to actually create them. Researchers have been documenting brainwave patterns from living subjects since the early 1900s.
- Icarus

- So why would head cases even care about that sort of thing?
- /dev/grrl

- Maybe they're returning to the place they were born. Wanted to give their mother a hug or something.
- Slamm-0!

- <sigh>
- Glitch

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- I really need a font that'll let you all know when I'm being serious. Seriously: if animals like salmon and new leatherback turtles are smart enough to return to the exact spot where they hatched, then surely it's not out of the question that CFD personalities have the same kind of homing instinct.
- Slamm-0!

- That's actually a good point. Based on Clockwork's movement map and other eyewitness testimonies, we've seen a fair share of head cases congregating. Gathering around the thing that gave them life seems like a strong reason for scattered "children" to congregate.
- Pistons

- I assume the other head cases got access to the zero zone through some other avenue, otherwise your agent would've seen them too.
- Bull

- That's a fairly safe assumption. Of course, I've also wondered whether or not this particular head case wanted me to see her Matrix activity.
- Clockwork

THE EVO ANGLE

I began looking at things from the opposite direction when it became clear the patient zero model wouldn't work. From what we know, the schismatic identities that CFD creates seem to have some connection to AIs, e-ghosts, sprites, and other unexplained Matrix phenomena—an idea reinforced by the Mitsuhama connection. Instead of attempting to track an index case, I began looking more deeply into corporations that support these kinds of R&D programs. Rather than start with a known infection case and work backward, I decided to start with a hypothesized source and work forward. I thought this might reveal a link between one of these Matrix-consciousness programs to a positive CFD diagnosis. A single link would not be enough to prove causality, but if I found enough evidence I could start working on a more solid case.

After investigating the Mitsuhama/BrainWave lead, I started digging into Evo's Dickens Program, which Butch pointed out earlier. Dickens involved several different facets, including an attempt to create a virtual simulacrum to impersonate deceased Corporate Court Chief Justice Yoshiko Hino. Project Dike, as the plan was called, was put in place to ensure Evo would retain its control of the Corporate Court. Technically, Hino's Dickens persona isn't a true AI, e-ghost, or anything else associated with CFD. If anything, the Project Dike version of Hino is little more than a very specifically tailored agent program with an extremely robust personality matrix. But as I dug deeper into Dike, a peculiarity became readily apparent. A lot of people who had conversed with Dike-Hino via the Matrix—specifically in full VR—eventually ended up showing signs of CFD.

Coincidence? Maybe. I'm not entirely convinced myself, but too many of the pieces fit—enough that I had to hit the tree a bit harder to see if any apples fell. In the interest of science, I hired a few anonymous deckers to access a backup copy of Dike-Hino that was being kept at Evo's Vladivostok offices. Half a dozen deckers managed to break through security and reach the storage device. But instead of finding a file for the persona, they found Dike-Hino was actively running on the node as an interactive persona. Each of the deckers conversed with the persona and logged out before security could figure out what was happening.

After the intrusion, I kept very close surveillance on these deckers. Of the six, four showed no symptoms whatsoever, but the other two started behaving erratically after about three weeks. After two weeks of further surveillance, I had them put down to ensure they wouldn't cause any problems. The time elapsed between the run and the symptoms surfacing seemed a bit long to conclusively prove that the CFD virus has ties to Dike-Hino, but the possibility still remains. I've since tried to repeat this experiment but have had no luck getting any takers.

- You hired those people and sent them into the bear's den hoping they might get infected somehow? That is fragging sick, even for you.
- Pistons

- Excuse me for having a moral GPS that doesn't work quite like yours. Better to send in expendables early on and try to figure this thing out than ignore the problem until too late. Plus, these guys were professionals and knew the risks. All of us, including myself, take this exact same risk whenever we shake Mr. Johnson's hand.
- Clockwork

- So you're admitting you weren't brave enough to go in yourself?
- Pistons

- Couldn't risk it. If I got infected, I'd be a far, far worse threat to you and the rest of the world than those other schmucks combined.
- Clockwork

- You are such a blowhard.
- Pistons

- Do you really want to chance it? Especially with everything I've dug up on the CFD virus so far? Imagine that kind of ammo in hands of all the head cases out there.
- Clockwork

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- ...
- Pistons

- Thought so.
- Clockwork

- So this persona file—did any of the guys you hired think to copy it so you could study it in a more controlled environment?
- Bull

- All of them said the persona file wouldn't copy. There was copy protection like you wouldn't believe, plus the programs they were working with had trouble ... comprehending the nature and scope of the file. Which didn't make much sense to me, either, but that's what they told me.
- Clockwork

- Or at least that's what they all wanted you to think. What if they're experimenting on that file right now?
- Slamm-0!

THE RENRAKU ANGLE

One of the theories regarding CFD-related schismatic personalities—as dutifully recorded by Butch—holds that they are the byproduct of some kind of attempt to rewrite a subject's brain, and that an AI might be involved. Say "AI" to those of us here at JackPoint, and we—well, most of us—will shudder and tell where we were and what we were doing when the Renraku Arcology shut down in 2060. Renraku managed to spin that story well for the public. But those of us in the shadows have carried a certain wariness for AIs ever since the rogue AI Deus caused the shutdown. If AIs are somehow responsible for all these cases of CFD, then Renraku seems a likely target. So likely in fact, that I first believed Renraku probably had absolutely nothing to do with CFD at all.

At least, this was my initial assumption. I expected to find very few CFD ties to the megacorp that gave birth to Deus, because I felt far more was at work in these cases than rogue AIs. The results skewed in the opposite direction, however, much to my chagrin. A high percentage of the first few infectees I marked were among some of Renraku's most vocal and extremely loyal customers rather than employees. Both before and after these customers began exhibiting CFD symptoms, they posted glowing Matrix reviews of Renraku services and goods. The truly interesting aspect about these product reviews? All of them had recently raved about two things: gene-therapy treatments the reviewers had undergone and very complex data-algorithm suites being used in data mining and product networking. After tak-

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ing necessary defensive precautions, I did some digging into the data algorithms. Parts of the code—specifically, a polymorphic subroutine intended to account for unknown variables within a larger system—resembled baby AIs, for lack of a better term. I discovered this subroutine behaves liked an agent program with a rudimentary form of autonomy—more like a lobotomized AI than an actual agent—when executed within protected memory space inside a database.

I wouldn't be surprised if this database program was the result of Renraku repurposing failed, partial copies of Deus's code, which somehow gave birth to Sybil. However, the CFD infectees that were loyal Renraku customers are still showing an unhealthy obsession with the corp, and I haven't yet discovered a satisfactory explanation. But parsing this lobotomized AI's cognitive subroutine file seems like a dicey proposition. Don't come running to me if it rewrites your brain (or maybe your biodrone's brain) just because you are decking without proper protection.

- **//UPLOAD UNENCRYPTED .COGN FILE :: USER CLOCKWORK//**

- If the CFD virus didn't come from Renraku, why would head cases be so interested in the corp in the first place?
- /dev/grrl

- More than 35,000 years ago, Homo sapiens purposely hunted down their genetic cousins, Homo neanderthalensis, and violently drove them into extinction—not because the Neanderthals were genetically inferior but because they represented a threat to sapiens. It's quite possible that the CFD virus treats any Matrix consciousness besides itself as a potential threat and attempts to wipe it out just like our ancestors did the Neanderthals.
- Nephrine

- Geez. Our ancestors sound like complete and total jerks.
- /dev/grrl

- Unfortunately, natural selection—whether biological or digital—doesn't leave much room for social niceties.
- Nephrine

- So, I wonder how Deus feels about Matrix constructs gunning for his—hers? its?—babies?
- Slamm-0!

- Same as any protective mother, I guess. Not that I have any firsthand experience of that, of course. I leave motherhood to the professionals.
- Pistons

- Get it right. Deus doesn't feel anything about its children. Emotions require an endocrine system, something AIs are obviously lacking.
- Clockwork

- Again, be very careful about what you think you know.
- Icarus

- A more important question, though, is whether or not an attack on Deus' children will provoke it out of hiding. Ghost only knows what it's been up to while hiding in the sewers of the Matrix these past years.
- Slamm-0!

- I'm of the mind that Deus' children might've been the result of a test case for creating loyal customers gone awry. Think of it this way. If you want to plant ideas in someone's head, why not create a stable AI based on a rogue AI's digital fingerprint, program it to influence brainwave patterns, and then use gene therapy to introduce nanites into the subject's bloodstream and eventually her brain?
- Glitch

- If the AI component of the CFD virus was indeed crafted on top of an imperfect Deus template, I don't want to be fragging anywhere near it when it goes off.
- Bull

THE NEONET ANGLE

This next lead also pointed me toward Matrix entities. At the risk of sounding like a broken music player, I'm including it here because I don't believe there's such a thing as too much information.

For the past several months, we've known two things. First, NeoNET—and Celedyr in particular—has done considerable research into "living" Matrix constructs—e-ghosts, copied metahuman consciousnesses, AIs, and so forth. Second, FastJack and Riser both started manifesting symptoms of CFD after investigating Celedyr's Albuquerque facility. As I said before, these two items might be unrelated, but what little real evidence we have points to FastJack and Riser first encountering the virus in Albuquerque. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the Albuquerque facility first received a Sybil infestation from elsewhere. Ever since FastJack revealed his visit to Albuquerque, NeoNET has kept Celedyr's "Matrix prison colony"— as some spies have characterized it—under a nearly impenetrable lockdown. This lockdown is likely to quarantine and purge the recognized outbreak before it can affect anyone else.

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- All of this assumes that FastJack and Riser actually caught the virus at Celedyr's lab. If I were a Matrix entity slowly overwriting my host's brain, first thing I'd do is hide where I came from. For all we know, FastJack's implanted personality—"Search"—might've told us he went to Albuquerque because Search wanted some of us to destroy that lab. Maybe Search didn't like NeoNET and wanted to use us to knock it down several pegs. Maybe Search is trying to play both sides against the middle.
- Icarus

- Or maybe Search is having one giant laugh at our expense.
- Slamm-0!

- Either way, I think it's safe to say we cannot put faith in anything FastJack has posted over the last year or more.
- Fianchetto

- Even I have been unable to divine the true aims of these "head cases," as you call them. Trust no one diagnosed with this affliction, even if it is someone you love.
- Neurosis

- Hey! How'd he get back on here? I though 'Jack restricted his access to the Cerberus thread in the Street Legends upload?
- Slamm-0!

- Don't go looking at me.
- Glitch

- If Neurosis truly is what he (it?) claims he is, I highly doubt a simple posting restriction will prevent him from telling us something truly important.
- Bull

FastJack's information set me to investigate the Albuquerque facility regardless of the danger. The lockdown is still in place, but I have gleaned the following from various outside sources. The facility is associated with Project Imago, a secretive NeoNET think tank dealing with Matrix oddities. But Imago itself is not based on the premises. Imago members occasionally visit the installation to run tests, but by and large the think tank is kept outside Albuquerque in the event of such a lockdown.

A colleague recently brought to my attention that at least one of Project Imago's senior researchers has been spirited away to parts unknown. Whether this was a defection or a hostile extraction remains to be seen. Either way, it focuses the spotlight on NeoNET as a likely CFD virus suspect.

- Wonder who performed the extraction and how? To nab an Imago researcher must've taken some doing.
- Pistons

- Let's assume for the sake of argument that Imago and Celedyr's little Matrix funhouse freakshow had something to do with the CFD virus. Why would someone steal a researcher responsible for that? Surely another party wouldn't be looking to duplicate the virus, would it?
- Slamm-0!

- I sure fragging hope not.
- Bull

- Assuming, of course, that there is only one virus and not several strains.
- Nephrine

- Maybe the client ordering the extraction believed the target might help cure a verified CFD case?
- Nephrine

- If that's the case, they'll quickly be disappointed.
- Butch

THE UCAS ANGLE

That UCAS document that was wiped from my deck—and the subsequent sniper that killed the subject who had first grabbed the file—led me to wonder if the UCAS somehow had a hand in CFD's existence. While this was a tenuous link at best, a political entity that would go to that much trouble to silence witnesses and delete related files certainly has something to hide. And the potential uses of a purpose-built virus are too dangerous to dismiss this possibility—was CFD designed as some kind of sabotage construct or a weapon of some sort? Initially, I believed pinning CFD on the UCAS government was a patently ridiculous idea even Plan 9 wouldn't have touched with a three-meter pole. But the more I followed the trail, the less outlandish it seemed.

Think of it this way: Much like Evo used Project Dike to manipulate "Justice Hino" to advance the corp's agenda, so the UCAS regime may have developed the CFD virus to coerce dissenting politicians into publicly advancing its own agenda. The Dike-Hino construct appeared only in the Matrix. CFD, on the other hand, has a biological component. That means the dissociative personality can show itself in meatspace in addition to the Matrix. When you shake a politician or general's physical hand, how can you know the personality giving you the intimidating deathgrip handshake and flashing that too-perfect, I-know-something-you-don't smirk is the real person or the fragmented personality? If UCAS leaders have developed the CFD virus to steer political opposition into

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their own camp, there would be no end to how much control the government could theoretically grab.

In any case, I managed to dig up two files from UCAS databases while following up my burned file and head case assassination. This first one **[link]** discusses various protocols to follow when a person is found to be compromised—a disaster-response plan. You'll notice the document doesn't mention anything about how the subject might be compromised. I would expect such protocols differ depending on how the subject is subverted. For example, handling someone compromised by traditional we've-got-your-wife-and-kids coercion is a completely different matter than someone who's merged with a insect spirit or is under some form of chemical or magical compulsion. Some of the language used in the file implies a very specific condition without actually identifying said condition. It's my belief that this condition could very well be CFD.

The second file **[link]** has quite a few redacted details and sections, but it appears to discuss the ramifications of a canceled government program of unspecified nature. This program apparently got out of control somehow—and not because of the usual suspects such as cost-overruns, lack of results, or other infeasibilities. No, this is horned-bear-escaped-from-the-zoo territory. Is the canceled program the CFD virus? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In any case, the UCAS has certainly lost something very important.

- It's a safe bet the UCAS government discovered the CFD virus before many others did, and these documents detail ways to deal with it. Having a combat plan in place doesn't mean the UCAS was directly responsible for CFD's creation.
- Fianchetto

- If that's the case, then I really don't want to know what kind of "horned bear" escaped from the UCAS government's zoo.
- Slamm-0!

- The idea that someone went to great lengths to torch a possibly CFD-related file on CW's deck implies the UCAS is far more involved than I'd like to believe. Even if they didn't create CFD's parts, they might've had a hand in flicking its on-switch.
- Pistons

A TECHNOMANCER ANGLE?

- For the record, I debated on whether to cut this section from Clockwork's initial draft, but I didn't think we should start censoring anything just yet. Read at your own peril, but make sure you have a salt shaker handy.
- Glitch

From what we've learned, the virus tends to mostly affect people with certain types of augmentations—headware, nanotech, genetech, etc.—which leads many to believe that those without such augmentations are safe from infection (though Butch's detailed work should help dissuade people of that notion). So far, technomancers—who need neither headware nor nanotech to access the Matrix—are reveling in their "untouchable" status regarding CFD. In this scenario, technomancers will rise up and proclaim themselves immune once the virus surpasses our ability to keep it hidden in the shadows. Thus the world will look to the previously feared technomancer as the paragon of trustworthiness. The average person will believe anyone with headware of any kind could be a potential head case while any technomancer, by virtue of his talent, remains pure and uncontaminated. Rather than try to help eradicate CFD, technomancers will leverage their newfound status until the world no longer fears them.

- That is pure, unadulterated bullshit. At least you saved it for the last corner of the file.
- Netcat

- So you disagree that technomancers are immune to CFD?
- Clockwork

- What about that one Italian technomancer in GeMiTo, Ragno the Spider? Word was he showed signs of dissociative identity disorder—possibly a preliminary form of CFD—before he was killed in Alamais's little war against Lofwyr.
- Slamm-0!

- He must've gotten some bad nanites in his bloodstream from somewhere.
- Clockwork

- Of course, not everyone who's ever had headware installed, undergone gene therapy, or used nanotech has gone full-blown CFD either.
- Pistons

- No one is truly immune to anything. If someone contracts herpes zoster—that's "chicken pox" to you non-medical people—when he's a kid, the infection can come back later in life as shingles. And if you're immunized for a specific disease, a large enough mutation of the same pathogen can still get you sick. So even if technomancers might be "immune" to CFD right now, just wait. Once CFD mutates, I'm sure we'll see a strain that no longer needs augmentations to transmit itself.
- Nephrine

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THE VIRAL WAR

Keep your head down. Don't make waves. If you have a breakthrough, or anything that seems like it might be a breakthrough, handle that information carefully. Unless you're prepared to deal with the consequences.

Each day for a week, Valerie Compton repeated those words to herself as she called up a particular ARO and stared at it for an hour or so. Then she closed it when she realized she still didn't have any idea what to do with it.

The ARO contained an analysis of exceptionally small foreign objects—nanites—retrieved from the body of David S. Murray, vice-president human resources, who had gone on medical leave three months ago. Compton and the rest of her department had been given the underlying structure of the nanites a week after Murray went on leave and assigned to make sense of it. It hadn't been easy. The programming was unlike anything she had ever seen, not related to any coding language she had ever seen in her life. For the first month of her studies, she could have sworn that there was, in fact, no underlying sense to it, that it was just random gobbledygook someone was trying to pass off as meaning. She ran it through every decrypting algorithm she could get her hands on, worked on every coding technique she knew and then learned a few more, and the information stubbornly resisted transmitting any meaning whatsoever.

But then, after a month of one-hundred-hour workweeks, she found something. There were differences in the various collections of codes she had been staring at, and when she compared the data she had to the analysis of Murray's brain, she was able to start seeing how some of the code referred to specific parts of the brain. A two-hundred-character chunk seemed to refer to parts of the hippocampus, while a one-hundred-fifty-character string looked like it referred to the frontal lobe of the cerebrum. She checked, she double-checked, she looked again and again, until she was fairly convinced she had something. Not a full decryption, not by a long shot, but a start. If she sent it up the chain, she'd be a rising star in the department, well on her way to a promotion. And she knew full well what happened to rising stars in the current climate.

Every day she thought about sending it up the line, and she thought about where she would end up. Would Renraku come claim her? Would Evo bring her in so she could help solve this thing, or would they take her and bury her somewhere so she didn't find out too much? The research could be her ticket to a better life—or to oblivion. She hadn't yet decided that it was worth the risk.

As it turned out, she didn't have to decide. One Tuesday she came to work, called up her normal work setup—and found the ARO in question already open.

She didn't stop to think. She grabbed her jacket, walked to her door, and quickly tried to think of safe places to go.

She didn't have to think long. A dwarf with matte metal cybereyes and a large (though unlit) cigar stood outside her office door.

"Nice work there, Doc," the dwarf said. "But I guess you were working on it so hard that you let your own security protocols go a little lax."

She no longer needed to worry about deciding. Her new life, whatever it was going to be, was here.

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HEAD CRASH AND CORPORATE CLASH

POSTED BY: COSMO

The CFD virus has thrown the corporate world into turmoil. People in high-level places are getting infected, while those who haven't gotten sick are trying to figure out what's going on and how they can stay clean. There is blame to be placed, cures to be investigated, and research to be done to figure out if there is any way of making a profit from what's happening. The corps are always looking for ways to screw each other over, but this is different. They understand the magnitude of what's happening, and they know just how bad things could get. People all around them are losing their souls, and they don't like that much. They sense that the blood is in the water, and that someone is going to pay big for this whole fiasco.

This, of course, means that there's plenty of work for us, but be careful. When the stakes are this high, the corps take grudges and failure very seriously. Which means no matter how your job turns out, you're likely to leave someone mad at you and actively looking for revenge.

It also means you can ask for more pay. So let's put our grown-up pants on and get ready to ride.

PLACING THE BLAME

For every book of business advice that discusses how useless it is to place the blame on someone for a serious mistake, there are thousands of managers who don't believe a word of it. Placing the blame is the first step toward finding a scapegoat, and finding a scapegoat is the first step toward punishing someone who isn't you. The Big Ten are losing money hand over fist on this one, so you better believe they're going to take it out of someone's hide. The race to construct a narrative of how the CFD virus came into existence is on, and as is the case in the most such competitions, everyone has a pet theory that they'd really like to see win out. I'm pretty sure none of us will be surprised to know that the parties involved are not above manufacturing evidence to construct the story they want to tell. Among the Big Ten, the stories usually fall into one of three categories: stories that implicate another AAA megacorporation; stories that implicate a smaller corporation; or stories that implicate some other body, such as a government. Let's tackle them in turn.

IMPLICATING OTHERS IN THE BIG TEN

There are two big reasons the megacorps want to point fingers at one another. First is believability—a lot of people have trouble believing anyone besides the megacorps has the R&D capability to come up with something like the CFD virus, either by accident or on purpose. Second is opportunity. The megacorps know someone is probably going to have to pay a steep price over this thing, so they'd greatly prefer to have one of their rivals being the one hit.

As Clockwork pointed out, the leading megacorporate suspects are Mitsuhama, NeoNET, Renraku, and Evo. That's not to say one of the others couldn't have done it—there are those of us who would really, really like to see Aztechnology get hit, especially since they've been on a roll after winning their war with Amazonia—but having a new suspect would require some dramatic new evidence emerging. As things stand right now, Mitsuhama, NeoNET, Renraku, and Evo are playing defense, while the other six are figuring out how to take advantage of the situation.

Of those six, Shiawase finds themselves in the most difficult situation. As Baka Dabora discussed in the *Storm Front* posting, the Japanacorps are experiencing a new spirit of cooperation, which has left Shiawase somewhat less eager to pin one of their neighbors to the wall. Notice that I said "somewhat." Shiawase is trying to cooperate with Mitsuhama, but that doesn't come easy. MCT has long stood as Shiawase's rival in Japan, and there are strong factions within the corp, including plenty that have the ear of Empress Hitomi Shiawase. They are telling her that this is the perfect opportunity to hurt MCT without them having to do anything directly—if blame for the CFD virus can be placed on Mitsuhama, then all Shiawase has to do is adopt a hands-off policy and wait for the other megacorps to eat Mitsuhama for lunch. So if you have any Shiawase contacts, work them over a little, and there's a good chance they might send you digging into MCT databanks.

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- For now, Shiawase seems content to look for actual evidence rather than manufacturing items that might make Mitsuhama look bad. That's primarily due to deniability—explaining a shadow mission that was simply looking for evidence is a whole lot easier than trying to explain an effort to develop fake evidence in case MCT catches them engaged in nefarious activities. Shiawase isn't looking to take huge risks in this area. Not yet.
- Baka Dabora

The other members of the Big Ten are not suffering under any such constraints. Especially Saeder-Krupp. Still stinging from the wounds suffered in the Dragon Civil War, S-K sees this as an opportunity to get their swagger back. They have been very active hiring missions to find out what's going on, and they are eager to punish whatever culprits they find as severely as they can. They are also not overly discriminate in the evidence they find—seeming plausible is as important as being accurate. This provides some nice opportunities for freelance work. If you're having trouble finding work of your own, go out, manufacture some evidence showing who's responsible for the existence of the CFD virus, then find an S-K representative to sell it to. Just make sure you're far out of sight if your evidence blows up in their face.

- Naturally, the many faces of Hans Brackhaus are behind most of this intelligence-gathering effort. Word is he is also working on gathering what he needs so he can put the appropriate amount of pressure on each megacorporation should a Corporate Court case related to the virus come up. Which they sincerely hope it does.
- Mr. Bonds

Aztechnology and Ares are not being as aggressive. Ares, for their part, has enough on their plate without having to get too involved in any CFD-related affairs. The slowdown in profits, the death of Nicholas "Young Nick" Aurelius, and other rumors of other turmoil are occupying Ares' attention right now. It's not so much a "wait-and-see" attitude as it is a "wait-until-something-solid-emerges-so-we-can-establish-some-sort-of-strategy-at-that-point-in-time" attitude. Aztechnology is playing a different game—they have the capacity to mix it up with the others, but they want to have a better idea of how the chips are going to fall before they act. They want to be assured that when they act, they'll be gaining the best advantage they can. So don't mistake their laid-back attitude at the moment for disinterest. When the time comes, they're likely to see just how much hurt they can lay down on their fellow Big Ten members.

- Evo and Aztechnology have a special relationship in all this. Remember that back when Evo was using their artificial Corporate Court Chief Justice Hino, the CJ made a few decisions that went Aztechnology's way; Aztechnology

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then paid them back by making sure the blowback over the use of the construct didn't cost them too much. The two seem to be joined together, so Aztechnology might have Evo's back in the Corporate Court.

- Traveler Jones

- Or they might not. Don't be surprised if the Big A lets Evo twist in the wind, or if they join with the others in hammering them hard. Aztechnology has one loyalty and one loyalty only, and it rhymes with "Schmaztechnology."
- Marcos

That leaves us with Horizon and Wuxing. After taking their blows following the technomancer massacre in Las Vegas and Amazonia's loss in the war with Aztechnology, Horizon's employees—and therefore the Consensus—are getting a little aggressive.

- Wait—the Consensus led them to kill dozens of technomancers in Vegas, and they're still using the thing?
- Netcat

- Yep. They didn't view that as a deal-breaker for the Consensus so much as a bug to be fixed. They've adjusted the model somewhat and tried to put in controls to prevent certain types of disastrous decisions. I'm sure it'll work fine—until the collective will of Horizon's employees takes them over some entirely different cliff.
- Sunshine

They know there is a lot of business to be had here—everyone and their dog needs some kind of public relations help—but they also know that their rivals aren't likely to turn to them for help. They don't just want to use their information-shaping power to help people smooth over wounds. Once information comes out and some guilty party is found, they want to drive in a dagger, and deep. They'll work overtime to portray whoever is responsible as reckless, untrustworthy, and meriting the strongest possible sanctions.

To that end, they know that being on top of any information that comes out will be vital. They are not as anxious as Saeder-Krupp to manufacture information, but they have spies everywhere monitoring developments as they come out. If you've got espionage expertise, Horizon might be willing to throw some cash at you.

Horizon is also sharing information—their Egghead Evaluator software has become a hot property in corps looking to rate talent they might want to extract. I'll talk a little more about it in a bit.

- Some people think that EE is just another info-gathering tool—that it secretly reports back to Horizon on what users are looking at so they have some idea where their interests lie and who they are targeting.
- Glitch

Wuxing seems to be in a state of confusion when it comes to CFD, which many take as a sure sign that they had no role in the virus's emergence. They have quarantined some high-ranking execs who seem to be head cases, suspended sales of any nanite-related technology, and had their Corporate Court Justice make a speech containing the groundbreaking claim that "this situation will likely lead to serious ramifications at some point in the future." How they are going to find out what's going on, what they want to do about it, and who they'd most like to punish are all things unclear to corporate observers. Hopefully they'll figure it out soon.

- So they fooled you. Wuxing knew about this before anyone. Their diviners are the best in the world—they probably already know the source of the virus, too. They want to appear confused while they formulate a strategy. When they are ready, the confusion will drop away, and they will act quickly and decisively. Whoever loosed the CFD virus into the world better be prepared—they are going to have a formidable opponent.
- Lyran

- The diviners Wuxing has are talented, but they lack the tarot of the shadows. So they are missing something.
- Arete

- The tarot of the what? And also, huh?
- Frosty

If some members of the Big Ten are going to go after others, the Corporate Court will inevitably be involved. The maneuvering between the justices has already begun, and the horse-trading will only increase as more information comes out.

Corporate Court Chief Justice Lynn Osborne of NeoNET is going to find herself in an interesting position, particularly if more signs point to her corporation as being one of the sources of the virus. Some of the actions Osborne took during the Dragon Civil War—namely, not acquiescing to whatever Saeder-Krupp's justices said they wanted—rubbed Lofwyr the wrong way, and he seems determined to make her pay. He'd like one of his two justices, preferably Alexander Belczyk, put in as chief justice instead, where Belczyk could lead any cases against whoever created the CFD virus.

- I'd love to watch Belczyk sink his teeth into this affair. He's exceedingly thorough, and anything he presented to the Court would have a considerable load of evidence behind it. He does not move with lightning speed, but he is inexorable and relentless.
- Mr. Bonds

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- Remember that outside of S-K, Osborne is liked far more than Belczyk. You might like to think that personalities don't matter in something analytical like the law, but you'd be wrong.
- Dr. Spin

The critical thing, both inside and outside of the Court, is leverage. Justices and those close to them want to build up as much leverage and earn as many favors as they can so that when the time comes, they can move things where they want them to go. So digging up corporate dirt, even if it has nothing to do with the CFD virus, is especially lucrative right now.

IMPLICATING CORPS OUTSIDE THE BIG TEN

This is a tough row to hoe. People naturally figure that if something big happened, it happened because the Big Ten did it. But the thing is, we really don't know what the CFD virus is, or how complex it is. For all we know, it could be something that didn't take a whole lot of work, that was just some very unhappy accident. And then there's the fact that some of the not-so-big corps are still awfully big—in terms of gross revenue, Zeta-ImpChem outpaces Horizon. So while it's tempting to focus on the Big Ten, the actual perpetrator of this thing may well be someone else.

The question I'm concerned with, though, is not who invented it, but what other people are doing in response. And what Zeta-ImpChem is doing is covering its ass. They've crossed Saeder-Krupp in the past, and their many years of medical research combined with their acquisition of Cross Biomed and nanotech pioneer Microflek a few years back gives them the right kind of capabilities. If S-K can't pin it on one of their fellow AAAs, they'd be okay with punishing Zeta-ImpChem.

- If someone wants to put together a frame-up, Zeta-ImpChem is built to order. They do medical and nanites, and their ethics have sometimes been questionable, even for a megacorp. Remember the Polydopa Scandal, when Z-IC got caught testing mind-altering substances on unwitting subjects in Africa? This company is not at all above the sort of behavior that could lead to a weird new virus spreading throughout the world.
- Dr. Spin

If Zeta-ImpChem needs an ally to help deflect any charges, the first place they'll turn is Johnny Spinrad. They've worked with Spinrad before in his ad hoc coalition to annoy Saeder-Krupp, and if S-K and Z-IC go at it, Spinrad will have no problem deciding what side to take. And if that happens, things could get very interesting in Europe. Remember that their current CEO, Katrina Thyssen, used to be their rep on the NEEC, and she's got every kind of connection you can imagine there. She has also built up substantial connections in Russia, including good relations with Evo. Throw in the fact that, while it's UCAS-based, NeoNET also has a huge European presence, and you get the seeds for wide-ranging conflict. Seeing who would line up with whom will be fascinating, and you better believe runs are taking place now in an effort to get things lined up.

- Case in point: CrashCart has been picking up medical contracts throughout the Allied German States because BuMoNA has met with a series of unfortunate incidents in the region. From unfortunate mechanical breakdowns to losing patients at higher-than-normal rates, BuMoNA has looked uncommonly inept, opening the door for CrashCart. Speculation is that S-K is behind the sabotage of BuMoNA, helping CrashCart get the contracts to strengthen ties to the parent company, Evo, to prevent Evo from partnering with Z-IC. Though if Evo, not Z-IC, turns out to be the source of the virus, it's not clear how that relationship will shake out.
- Sunshine

There's rampant speculation that members of the Big Ten, especially the four corps that have come under the heaviest suspicion, are going to construct a fall guy to take the pressure off. This could be some obscure Matrix startup, or it could be a corporation they invent out of whole cloth. Denver has hosted a lot of biotech research in recent years, and it has the advantage of being a place not closely associated with MCT, Renraku, Evo, or NeoNET. The shadows of Denver have been particularly active lately with efforts to place the blame for CFD contamination. A distributor of medical supplies called Shining Feather, including nanite-based treatments, was recently shut down by the Denver government for undisclosed reasons. And it was shut down hard—records of its existence erased, facilities burned to the ground, and staff disappeared from existence. Some murmurs in the shadows say this happened because its supply chain could possibly connect one of the megas to CFD virus-tainted goods, but others say its dissolution was the first step to the company being made a fall guy, and the megas will leak out evidence pointing to its culpability just as soon as they manufacture it.

- The explanation doesn't have to be one or the other. NeoNET shut down the company because it was a liability, but now they're looking to see if they can use it to deflect attention away from them. And no, I don't have proof of this yet, but I know there are people on the ground looking for the information.
- Thorn

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IMPLICATING OTHER GROUPS

There once was a time when people believed governments to be capable of all manner of evil, from assassinating world leaders to covering up the existence of UFOs to various instances of mass genocide (yeah, it helps that governments actually carried out some of those things). These days, though, people sometimes believe government officials are barely powerful enough to accept six-figure bribes, let alone plot massive acts of evil and the ensuing cover-up. That is to say, if you suggest that a government might be behind the CFD virus, you can expect people to respond with incredulous laughter.

Those people need to think a little more carefully. Sure, sometimes when we think of governments the first thing that comes to mind are hapless bureaucrats of the UCAS and CAS that are so easily shoved around by their corporate masters, but that's not the full scope of what world governments can do. Hualpa heads a pretty massive and powerful government down in Amazonia; the Japanese Empire wields considerable influence with its home megacorps; and of course the Tírs are so packed with magic that who knows what they might be able to pull off. And even our North American governments have large armies, billions of nuyen, and significant regulatory power to wield when they feel like it. They live in the shadows of the Big Ten, but that doesn't mean they lack power.

So which governments might be behind the CFD virus, and why would they do it? Imperial Japan has been mentioned more than once in the shadows, mainly because of their involvement with the Japanacorps. The theory is that the burgeoning cooperation between Renraku, Shiawase, and Mitsuhama is a sham, a way for the Empress and her cronies to get the others to let their guard down while government scientists worked on developing the virus and framing the corporation they wanted to punish. It seems far-fetched, but it wouldn't be the first time Imperial Japan took extreme action to smite their opponents.

- I'm sorry, but that does not begin to qualify as evidence. Making a virus would be a ridiculously elaborate way to target their enemies, especially when they have so many other options at their disposal. I can't buy this one.
- Baka Dabora

- If you think that the only things that can happen in this world are things that make sense, you're going to miss a whole lot.
- Fianchetto

- Again, those are just words, not evidence.
- Baka Dabora

The Tírs have been named by a few theorists, because honestly, what would a good conspiracy roundtable be without a few nods toward the elves? Unlike Japan, the theory about the Tírs doesn't have them purposefully creating the CFD virus; rather, it is the ever-popular "magic gone awry" thing, where Tír arcanists (it doesn't matter which Tír; people kind of swap them back and forth when talking about this theory) were messing around with all sorts of variants of mind-control spells, when oops they created a technology-based virus that is invading people's minds.

Now, I can already feel plenty of JackPointers, especially Butch, getting ready to yell at me about this theory and insist that it skips over a lot of important steps, like how do you jump from mind-control spells to infectious nanites, but don't shoot the messenger. I'm just telling you what's out there.

- No, you don't get off that easy. If the story makes zero sense—like this one—do your due diligence, vet it, then don't bother sharing it with us. I mean, if some guy wandered off the street and told you the CFD virus was generated when a stolen egg of Dunkelzahn's mysteriously hatched and sent strange spores into the air, and those spores are responsible for Head Crashes, would you dutifully pass it on to us, or would you rightfully regard the story as being one hundred percent ridiculous, and so would not even pass it on? Not every piece of gossip deserves a mention. Like the one you just spouted.
- Butch

- Look, I know it has plenty of holes. But you're going to have to trust me when I say that the people who shared this theory with me are more than a few steps above Random Guy on the Street when it comes to credibility. I don't understand all of what they're saying, but these are people who have given me enough good leads over time that I have to give their word some weight. I thought you might too, even if I can't tell you who they are.
- Cosmo

- No, I don't.
- Butch

Then we have my personal favorite of the government-based theories, and that's the one that involves everyone's favorite evil government (that's not backed by Aztechnology), the ghoul nation of Asamando. After years of the Infected making some progress in terms of equality with other citizens, they've lost some ground recently as citizens across the globe have second thoughts about closely co-existing with beings whose salivary glands switch into overdrive when they get too close. The exploits of the Mealtime Killer and associated copycats, who have made it clear how a certain subset of the Infected look at the rest of metahumanity, have not

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helped much in this respect. On top of that, the recent passing of the Ghoul Queen Thema Laula and the ascension of her daughter Rani to the throne have changed the tenor of Asamando's relations with the rest of the world. The nation has never been particularly warm and welcoming to outsiders, but once their silence after the mourning period ended, Queen Rani added a certain note of hostility that has neighboring nations increasing their border guards.

- This is one of the elements that has made running in Morocco especially interesting nowadays. We should do a rundown of that place in the near future.
- Glitch

All of the new queen's public pronouncements have a certain air of contempt for metahumanity as she severs diplomatic and trade relations, claiming that Asamando has what it needs—and what it does not have, it will take. Based on her attitude, the ghoul queen is quite willing to strike out at those she feels deserve her wrath, which would seem to be anyone who is not Infected.

And if Asamando decided to strike out at the world, doing it through technology would be a sensible option. In general the Infected have lower rates of augmentation use than the general population (an effect of the difficulty of finding doctors who want to get anywhere near their blood), and of course their biology means genetech is right out. So if they developed a technology-based weapon, it would be more likely to hit the people they want hurt instead of their own citizens.

So the motive seems to be there, but we've got a problem with means. It's not like Asamando is a complete technological backwater or anything, but there's a big difference between having a technological infrastructure and being able to do things no one else can do with technology. No one has ever talked about AI, nanotech, or related research happening in Asamando, and this is not the kind of thing that you just stumble into. The upshot is that if Asamando is responsible, they are not disseminating their own research—they either paid someone else to do their research (and that would take a lot of scratch), or they stole and spread something that was never supposed to get out in public. I haven't heard much besides rumblings, though, so the exact partner/victim they might have used is not clear.

- I can't offer much besides the observation that I don't think this is Rani's style. Yes, she is imperious and arrogant, but if she's going to mess with metahumanity, it's going to be in a way that helps her nation, like by bringing in a pile of fresh bodies. Messing with the inner workings of their brains may cause some chaos in the larger world, but it's difficult to see what benefit this would bring her.
- Hannibelle

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Then there are a few non-governmental organizations to look at. When anything strange and esoteric pops up, the names of the Draco Foundation and Atlantean Foundation follow closely. The Draco Foundation is particularly called out on this one, due to a bequest in Dunkelzahn's will that ten million nuyen will be given to the first party to develop a "self-motivational robotic unit." While the Foundation is mainly interested in things related to magic, bequests such as this means it usually has at least a few fingers dipped into the pie of technology. The theory says that the Foundation had some research into artificial intelligence going on so they could keep this money in house, and somehow it went very wrong.

- This one gets a little extra credibility because of the recent disappearance of Dr. Sahily Maldonado and her entire research team, who have been viewed as the best scientific minds in the Foundation. They recently had their entire operation shut down and all traces of their work removed from the Foundation's books. The explanations for this have been coming fast and furious—some say the Foundation simply wasn't getting any results from their work and so they laid off the whole group; others say they made a discovery that, for some reason or another, made the Foundation incredibly nervous, so they "removed" the whole team (insert whatever nefarious replacement for that innocent-sounding word that you think is appropriate). Another explanation circulated around is that the whole team was extracted by a rival, and the Foundation is trying to pretend that it didn't happen.
- Sunshine

Then, of course, you can't talk about secret conspiracies without mentioning the Black Lodge. Honestly, though, on this one they're mainly getting by on their reputation. Yeah, they have some powerful connections, but they are mainly in the worlds of magic and government, not tech. This seems well out of their area of expertise, so I'm hard pressed to see how they could be connected at all.

- This is what a good secret organization does—acts publicly in a way that no one suspects they're actually connected to.
- Plan 9

BRINGING IN THE INTEL

As should be clear now, there are a lot of possible culprits out there, and plenty of information to be gathered. If your team is good at extracting information—either through straight-up datasteals or by the fine art of schmoozing—you should be looking for jobs to get intel on the CFD virus, because that's what people want of know about, and that's where they're putting down significant sums of cash.

If you're doing break-ins, for the most part you'll be breaking into high-tech research labs, so make sure your hacker is on her toes. And be aware that you are not going to catch anyone by surprise—anyone even remotely associated with nanotech and genetech knows people might be looking for information from them, so they're all on high alert.

If you're going to con information out of someone instead of doing a standard B&E, for God's sake be subtle. If you feel like sitting down next to someone in a corporate cafeteria and saying "So, how about that Head Crash thing, huh?" then go back and make a new plan. Like any other con job, the secret is to make the mark want to give you what you are looking for. Maybe you seduced them and they are desperate to impress you with tales of their prowess at work, or maybe you've become friends and told them enough bulldrek that they think sharing certain pieces of information will help you out of a jam, or whatever. Just don't go asking directly, and make sure you give them plenty of room to come up with bad ideas. It's amazing how helpful people can be in that regard with minimal prompting from you.

- And never, ever forget the most important piece of information in the con man's arsenal: people want to share their secrets. When they know something that could potentially turn their workplace, their corp, or even the whole world upside down, there is a strong impulse to share what they know. Having insider knowledge like that gives you status and provides the chance to astound and amaze others, and people like that sort of thing. Your job, then, is to create a situation where they can feel safe doing what they already want to do.
- Thorn

- The other thing to remember, of course, is the reason something becomes a secret is because people know the cost of revealing it. Be ready for the measures poised to keep that secret to be directed at you.
- Fianchetto

GOVERNMENTS: LOOK, THEY STILL MATTER!

As the war around CFD heats up and people struggle to contain its effects, one of the surprises some people are encountering is that the governments of the world can, you know, do stuff. We all know that governments have been eclipsed by the megacorps, but that doesn't mean that government power has been extinguished or become entirely inconsequential. A quick march around the globe shows how governments are responding and using the power they do, in fact, still have.

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UCAS: PLAYING DEFENSE

While governments have power separate from the megacorps, that does not necessarily equate to independence. This is the case in the UCAS, where one of the significant concerns is that one of their home-based megas, NeoNET, may take the fall for this growing disaster. The UCAS is extremely proud of its two megacorps, while also having its destiny strongly tied to them. A serious blow to NeoNET would send shock waves throughout the UCAS economy, and the government's number one goal is trying to evade that.

Since the whole outbreak is in its early, chaotic phase, UCAS response has not, to this point, been entirely coherent or even rational. Sadly, their first instinct was to follow the mistakes governments (and corporations) have made for centuries: Go for the cover-up. Their initial goal was to keep people from believing that CFD was even a thing, with Surgeon General Vivian Vine stating three months ago that "Supposed diagnoses of a new cognitive disorder among a small fragment of the UCAS populace are actually a number of already-existing conditions, and creating a new condition to label them is unnecessary. Additionally, attempts to link this supposed condition to any forms of technology are specious and entirely lacking in evidence." I would say that the more time goes by, the more this statement hurts Vine's credibility, but she didn't have much to begin with.

- She is one hundred percent megacorporate shill. She's just shy of recommending that a broken leg be treated by amputation with an Ares-brand chainsaw.
- Cayman

With denial that Head Crash exists quickly seeming like a less-than-viable strategy, the UCAS has moved on to the next step of the cover-up—trying to remove any possible connections between the virus and NeoNET. This, of course, is a huge challenge, as the many and varied outputs of a megacorporation are far beyond the reach of a single national government.

- It's especially difficult given the fact that the spot where any CFD-related work is likely to take place is the research facility in Albuquerque, which is Pueblo Corporate Council territory. There is very little they can do directly there. They've upped their espionage activities there, especially through the use of deniable assets, so if your team has some spy-related gifts, you might have a chance for some work. Just try to visit at a time when Celedyr's watchful eye is elsewhere.
- Fianchetto

- We'll talk more about Albuquerque briefly. Things are going to get crazy down there.
- Cosmo

What they can reach, though, is Boston, which is teeming with NeoNET executives and is where all their research, planning, and strategizing take place. NeoNET, naturally, is being as secretive about all this as they can, but Angela Colloton and the UCAS government believe even more secrecy can be applied. They're especially worried about the head cases roaming around Boston, executives who might have critical knowledge and who are now AWOL as the virus wreaks havoc in their brains. Their initial effort focused on rounding these victims up, but there is a list of head cases that they simply cannot find. The government is getting increasingly worried about what these rogue executives may be up to, and that concern may translate into panic if they feel anything about the situation is about to go out of control. This means Boston is going to be chaotic for a while, which tends to be good for business—right up to the moment that it gets too wild for everyone's good.

RUSSIA: WHAT VIRUS?

The UCAS tried the denial tactic for a time, but they could really stand to learn something from the Russian government, which has been skilled at living in a reality of their own creation for almost 150 years. If you talk to a Russian government spokesperson, or even a government official speaking off the record, you will hear no acknowledgment that the CFD virus exists, or any statements that there is something weird happening to people across the world. They will talk about harvests, border issues with Yakut, and trade agreements with Japan, and not mention the virus once. If you mention it to them, they will respond with a blank stare, then say they are not aware of the condition of which you speak. If you describe what's happening, they'll nod slowly and say they hope the afflicted people receive the best of care and recover quickly. That's all you'll get out of them.

That's the public view. Behind the scenes, it's chaos. General Secretary Viktor Kamendin has been demanding answers from Evo and has been very frustrated by the slow pace at which information is flowing. Kamendin is well aware of the schism in Evo between the faction led by CEO Anatoly Kirilenko and the one led by board member Buttercup. If Buttercup finds out that Kirilenko and the Dickens Program had any ties to the CFD virus, she will lower the hammer on them to follow up on the damage she inflicted once she discovered Project Dike, the plot to replace Corporate Court Justice Hino with a digital simulacrum. If that happens, Kamendin will probably have to throw in with Buttercup and denounce Kirilenko, which could leave him twisting in the wind. Until that happens, though, Kamendin does not want to do anything rash, so he is occupying himself gathering as much information as he can so that he knows what the truth of Evo's involvement is before the general public does.

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- I don't envy Kamendin's position. Russian pride and identity has been deeply entwined with Evo since they came over from Japan, and he is in no position to oppose the corp in any way. He would be exceptionally delighted to find a source other than Evo, and Russian agents are scouring the globe looking for information. Saeder-Krupp is the leading target of his investigations, though how much of that is because he has some good leads and how much of that is wishful thinking is not clear.
- Red Anya

ALLIED GERMAN STATES: DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

If the behavior of the Allied German States government is anything to go by, Russia's hope that Saeder-Krupp is behind the CFD virus might be in vain. Rather than existing in denial, AGS officials have been very vocal, saying that Head Crash is indeed a thing to be worried about and that its cause should be tracked down as soon as possible. They haven't gone as far, of course, as some of the neo-anarchists running around Berlin, who are already proclaiming that any corporation found to have any role in this problem should be immediately dissolved with its assets distributed to "the people." They don't want to get ahead of themselves by making specific demands for punishments before the proper information comes out. Their focus, then, is on the investigation, and that's what they're demanding—that the megacorps and anyone else open their files to official investigators.

- And there's a fine example of the underrated German sense of humor. They're not fools—they know that neither the megacorps nor anyone else are going to give them what they want. Asking for this information is just positioning themselves in the public eye. If public discontent about the CFD virus grows enough, they will be in position to capitalize on it. Or so they hope.
- Sunshine

- Yes, of course, it's always about positioning and politics and playing the game. It couldn't be that they are asking for the information because they think it would be really important information to have, could it?
- Aufheben

Notice that phrase "official investigators"—at the moment, that's as specific as the AGS government is willing to get right now. Maybe they mean their own people, maybe UN investigators, maybe Interpol, maybe someone else; figuring out who will do the actual investigating is part of following up on AGS demands.

- Remember that, as central governments go, the AGS is not particularly strong. The member states have a lot of autonomy, and mobilizing them as part of the long game to find out what's behind CFD could be why they've been making their bold statements.
- Fianchetto

- This move could also help the AGS show the member states the value of a strong central government. If they are able to gain an international leadership role, they may be able to convince the member states to hand over some power.
- Thorn

AZTLAN: MASS EXPATRIATION

Meanwhile, down in Aztlan, there's no posturing, no investigating, no big public pronouncements. There is just amputation.

Government officials, like everyone everywhere, are trying to figure out what's going on, but it didn't take them long to understand one critical fact about CFD: They don't like it. So they're going to get rid of it, in any way they can.

They've decided exile is the best way to go. So anyone who seems anything like a head case gets a one-way ticket to either any place they want, if they have some funds at their disposal, or wherever the government wants to dump them, if they don't. That tends to be the CAS, usually the Dallas/Ft. Worth area (Austin might allow too easy of a trip back into Aztlan borders). This means that Dallas has a higher percentage of head cases than pretty much any sprawl right now; if you're interested in doing research, that's probably the place to go. It's also, of course, full of the chaos that you can expect head cases to bring to their surroundings. The CAS government is not thrilled about the situation and would be making angry noises at Aztlan about it if they weren't so busy trying to keep the sprawl under control.

- That's for damn sure. Conversations about imposing martial law have already started. The random violence some of the head cases have been inflicting is troublesome enough, but even more problematic is a small gathering of head cases that have been meeting from time to time in a burned-out bar called Flatwood in the Irving neighborhood. Why they're meeting together and what they're talking about is unknown, but very few people in the world think it's anything good.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Some also have been making their way to Cheyenne, for reasons that Cosmo is going to discuss below.
- Mika

But I was supposed to be talking about Aztlan, not the CAS. Their exile is swift and sure, with no questions asked and no chance for the infected individuals

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to try to talk their way into remaining in the nation. This has led to some high-profile exiles, including the following:

- Estella Ramos, third wife of David cartel leader Domingo Ramos. Ramos has sworn up and down that he hasn't had contact with Estella in years, so there's no chance that whatever got her could also touch him. She is rumored to have relocated to Guayaquil.
- Father Gideon Caldán, high priest of the largest teocalli in Guadalajara. He initially traveled to Barcelona, but soon after his arrival he heard that some back in Aztlan were thinking perhaps the secrets of the priesthood of the Path of the Sun should not be in the hands of an unstable individual, and that exile was too light of a punishment. He has since gone underground, though he is likely still in Spain.
- Bonita Estuardo, director of research for Aztechnology subsidiary MediCarro. If you want to start a theory that maybe Aztechnology had its hands in the origins of this thing, Estuardo's infection is where your argument starts. Estuardo is rumored to be consulting with another Aztechnology subsidiary, Genetique, up in Calgary.
- The biggest hit of all is Aztechnology board member Tsurunaga Shinoyama. He was a stabilizing force on the board, leading the opposition to some of Domingo Chavez's wilder ideas. He was able to persuade the board to end the Az-Am War with the taking of Bogotá instead of pursuing the conflict deeper into Amazonian territory. He has taken up residence in Nairobi; rumor is he would like to go up to Zurich-Orbital, but there's no way in hell they'll let a Head Case up there until officials better understand the nature of the condition and how it can be spread. He has not officially been removed from the Aztechnology board yet, but that will be a matter of heated debate in future meetings.

- Cue conspiracy theories about Shinoyama in three … two … one …
- Slamm-0!

- It's no coincidence or accident that Shinoyama caught the virus. Chavez and his allies have been working on a way of taking him out for years; they finally found something that could get by his defenses, mainly because he wasn't looking for it.
- Plan 9

- You're beautiful, you know that?
- Slamm-0!

PUEBLO CORPORATE COUNCIL: KEEPING A LID ON IT

So far I've been talking about situations we don't control so that we can figure out the best way to react to them. There's one situation, though, that's occurred in reaction to us.

Back in the *Clutch of Dragons* posting, I talked some about Celedyr's research facility in Albuquerque, covering information I found on something they called "electronic souls" and the report that a significant part of the dragon's hoard is a large array of servers deep under the Sandia Mountains. Speculation has been ripe that Celedyr's research and the undertaking known as Project Imago is tied to those servers, and that the electronic being known as either Neurosis or Cerberus, who maybe/probably used to be the dragon Eliohann, has been spending a lot of time in those servers. I wouldn't call all of this common knowledge by any means, but it has moved beyond the confines of our little circle. And we get the credit. The back-to-nature folks known as the Underground Awakened and the free spirits near them, which are called the gan, know about the servers in the cave, but given that they are not rumor-mongers and don't participate in Matrix gossip, they are not responsible for word spreading beyond their borders. Rather, it's us—specifically, the run I did with a compatriot named Churchill—that helped bring this information to the attention of some of the powers that be. I'm honored to be part of the ongoing conversation, and chagrined that information traveled somewhere I did not intend it to go (though after all this time, I should certainly be aware that information of any sort is incredibly difficult to completely contain in this day and age).

The point being, the Pueblo Corporate Council is loosely aware of what's happening in the Sandia Mountains, and when word of the CFD virus started to trickle out, it didn't take them long to put two and two together and know that Celedyr's lair would soon be garnering all sorts of attention. Some of that attention is of a high-profile nature—as I'll discuss in a minute, Miles Lanier is very curious about what's going on in Celedyr's research lair, and he has been using his not-inconsiderable talents and resources to look into the matter.

The Pueblo government's chief concern, then, is keeping Albuquerque under control with all the shadow activity going on. There are always at least some shadowruns going on in town due to all the high-tech research taking place, but the scale is going to increase significantly. The authorities don't want any negative information leaking out of town, but they also don't want the city to get more violent. The more intense competition gets between runners, the more likely it is that the guns will come out as runners look to take valuable information that some other team may have found. I should also add that they are interested in talking to me, though I have not yet shown any interest in such a conversation.

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- The threat of violence is offset somewhat by the fact that these aren't low-level thugs coming into the city. These are high-priced runners, the kind who know that whipping out your firearm whenever there's trouble just increases the odds that you're going to get the sort of attention you don't want. I'm not saying there won't be violence, but we—I mean, the people going to Albuquerque—will take care of things the way we always do. Out of sight, in the dark.
- Stone

- Good to see that the "only low-level runners are thugs" fantasy still persists.
- Mihoshi Oni

SIOUX NATION: COME ON IN!

The true anomaly in the governments of the world is the Sioux Nation. Rather than living in a state of denial or cover-up, or actively excising any trace of CFD from their borders, they are welcoming victims with open arms. The Matrix is starting to fill up with sites claiming that Cheyenne has the leading neuroscientists in the world, and that programs are available to help anyone get care, regardless of their means. While I'm sure plenty of people would debate whether their scientists are indeed the best, the rest of the claims seem to check out—from what I've seen, anyone who seems to be infected with CFD can get care in Cheyenne on an ability-to-pay basis.

There are two major questions immediately arising from this: first, are these neuroscientists accomplishing anything yet; and second, why is the Sioux Nation doing this? So far, the answers appear to be "Not really" and "Beats the hell out of me."

Seriously, this is one of the mysteries that keeps me up at night. Much of the world is starting to panic about this thing, especially because so much of it is unknown. That panic is only going to get worse as it spreads. So why is the Sioux Nation so eager to welcome more infected people into their borders? Especially because head cases would seem to be the sort of combination of

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"healthy" and "unhealthy" things that the Sioux don't like at all. At this point, your guess about the Sioux's motives is as good as mine.

- You need someone to connect the dots? Okay, here you go. Franklin Wirasaup, CEO of the Wind River Corporation, has a fair amount of pull with the Sioux Council of Elders, particularly those who may not be great fans of the dragon Henequen. Wind River's research director, Martin Darkhouse, has a particular grudge against Henequen, and Wirasaup is leaning toward sympathizing with his subordinate. Wirasaup set his eyes on acquiring Genetique, an Aztechnology subsidiary located in Calgary in the Algonkian-Manitou Council. The AMC didn't want that kind of influence in their borders, so they appealed to Aztechnology for help. Aztechnology has connections to Henequen Enterprises, and they used that to pass on bad information to Wirasaup, foiling his takeover bid to this point. Wirasaup contacted some of his medical holdings and partnered with High Plains Coding for their software and coding expertise. Together, they set up the Cognitive Disorder Research Center in Laramie that has been responsible for sending out the ads. Their work has two outcomes that would work out for Wirasaup: 1) Actually cure CFD. This would make the stock of Wirasaup's medical holdings skyrocket, giving him way more leverage in just about any financial deal. 2) Pin CFD problems on Genetique, either through real or manufactured evidence, so their value drops, making acquisition much easier.
- Plan 9

- That's convoluted and overly elaborate—but also could make sense. But what happens to all the head cases they gather if they don't find a cure?
- Frosty

- I think we all know the answer to that—the same thing the powers of the world do to anyone who becomes a liability.
- Plan 9

DEALING WITH HEAD CASES

So we've talked some about how various organizations are reacting to the phenomenon of the CFD virus, but what happens to the individual cases? That is to say, what are the steps corporations take when they recognize someone has become a Head Case? Seeing as how that wasn't a rhetorical question, let's answer it.

THE INITIAL DIAGNOSIS

In the early going, diagnostic processes were very hit-and-miss, but standards are developing with remarkable speed. And the corps are being more proactive, instituting screening procedures across all of their headquarters and subsidiaries. Some of these screenings take place behind the scenes, watching for changes in employee activities. Corporations have paid attention to basic work habits for a long time, using programs that monitor user behavior by measuring things like how long they are away on bathroom breaks or lunch breaks.

- Here's a fun piece of trivia for those of you who have never been a corp drone—when you leave your work station, you need to hit a key indicating the reason for your departure. If you don't hit a key and your station logs no work for more than five minutes (three minutes in the more strict divisions), then an unauthorized absence is reported to your supervisor. This helps the programs track you quite well
- Sunshine

They have added a tweak to these programs to send out an alert if users' general habits become markedly different. They are also looking at elements such as word usage in text documents, changes in general work habits (such as someone who normally stays focused on one task for a long period suddenly spending more time rapidly switching between projects), and what Matrix sites employees visit. This is all scanned automatically, and reports are sent to section supervisors on anyone who changes by an amount the programmers have deemed to be alarming. Those individuals are sent for scanning—depending on their workplace, that scanning might be technological, magical, or both.

The scans are happening, but it's far from certain whether everyone performing them knows what to look for. While we call this the CFD virus, it's pretty clear that there is not one single viral fingerprint to look for. The thing comes in a lot of forms, and if we were better at identifying it, it might not be spreading so fast.

So, despite the limitations of their abilities, those charged with performing a diagnosis do their job and come back with a decision. If that decision is "head case," then we move on to the next step.

DEALING WITH THE PATIENT

The diagnostic steps were pretty clear for the corps and not that difficult to put together, but this part of the process has them collectively scratching their nearly bald heads. As will be covered later in the posting, efforts at treatment have gone haltingly, so they can't just recommend a course of treatment and send the patient off. So what do they do?

The first step has become relatively clear: quarantine. Pretty much every corporation with more than a hundred employees now has a quarantine room, a place where head cases can sit without fear of infecting anyone else. Unfortunately, you can't just keep them there

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forever, so the corps and governments of the world have to come up with a step two.

Some of them have taken to the Sioux Nation's invitation like sailors dashing to the first hooker in port. The fact that someone, anyone, wants the head cases is a tremendous relief, and they are only too happy to send them on.

But for others—well, they live in the Sixth World, and they know how it works. They know that something that seems too good to be true usually is, and that the person offering what appears to be a great bargain is generally working some sort of angle. They don't know what's wrong with the Sioux offer at the moment, but they instinctually know they can't trust it.

- Sometimes it's just not practical. After all, a high percentage of the world is an entire ocean away from the Sioux Nation, and folks down in South America aren't all that much closer. When you have to pay air fare covering six thousand miles and have to deal with all sorts of international visas and drek light that, what seemed like a simple matter becomes much more complicated.

  And speaking of visas, some people don't have the option of sending people to the Sioux even if they wanted to, because their current relations with that nation won't allow it. They may want to take advantage of this seeming generosity, but they simply can't.
- Traveler Jones

I already touched on the Aztlan practice of out of sight, out of mind, and this is a very tempting option for many people. Just ship them away and they become someone else's problem. There are plenty of tricks to this approach, though. First, the larger your organization is, the more vigilant you have to be to make sure an exile stays out. Got one factory in an industrial zone that you need to monitor? No problem, you can probably keep the head case away. Got thousands of locations across the globe, set in dozens of cultures and involving at least that many languages? Then you might have difficulty making a blanket exile stick. Plus, if everyone decides exile is the way to go, then all we get is the head cases being shuffled around the globe, traded back and forth. Everyone ends up with approximately the same risk of exposure to head cases, only they had to spend a lot of money moving people around. Clearly, this is not a solution that's going to be acceptable.

Until there's a cure, here are some of the alternatives to exile that some people are coming up with.

Penal colonies: The wisdom of sending all of your troublesome people to someplace remote like Australia seems more appealing to corporate executives every day, and some of them have gone ahead and made these colonies. These have taken different forms; Mitsuhama has decided to take the worst lessons from history and explore re-opening the containment centers on Yomi Island in the Philippines. The trick of this is that not all of the metahumans who were sent to Yomi left it, and they have been living and breeding there for decades. They are not, of course, anxious to see their home become a prison again. Word is that MCT is planning on offering them jobs in the new prison as a way of assuaging them.

- I hope that won't work. Their memories of oppression should be clear enough to prevent people from engaging in the oppression of others.
- Aufheben

- It's possible that they see some difference between people being sent away simply for being metahumans and people being sent away because they present a serious risk that could rob others of their personalities. I'd think the difficulty would be convincing them to stay in prolonged contact with head cases.
- Hard Exit

Other penal colonies are starting up in the Mojave Desert, Roosevelt Island in Manhattan, and there are rumors of Illinois Governor Anthony Presbitero giving land in the Containment Zone for a facility for Ares head cases.

Treatment centers: While effective treatments are in short supply, the more humanitarian corps aren't letting that deter them. They are either converting some of their existing medical facilities to head-case-only units, or they are building brand-new facilities to treat CFD virus sufferers. Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan is the highest-profile conversion and very possibly will become the center of CFD research in the near future. Every member of the Manhattan Development Consortium has put a stake in the building, if only to give them a place to send any head cases they uncover. Other specialty hospitals have been converted in London, Oslo, Cape Town, and Hong Kong, while new facilities for this purpose are being built in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Vladivostok, and Cairo.

- There are already some dark rumors spreading about Lenox Hill. The best care in the world is available for higher-profile patients, but they're also taking in patients who normally would not be able to afford care at a place like this. According to the word on the street, some of these patients are disappearing into the lower levels of this hospital, never to be seen again. The best guess is that they're being brought in for testing, not treatment.
- Rigger X

Special habitations: These spots kind of occupy the middle ground between penal colonies and treatment centers—nicer and with more amenities than penal colonies, but without the full range of medical services that treatment centers have. They act as a kind of halfway house, a place to keep head cases until whoever sent them there can figure out what to do next.

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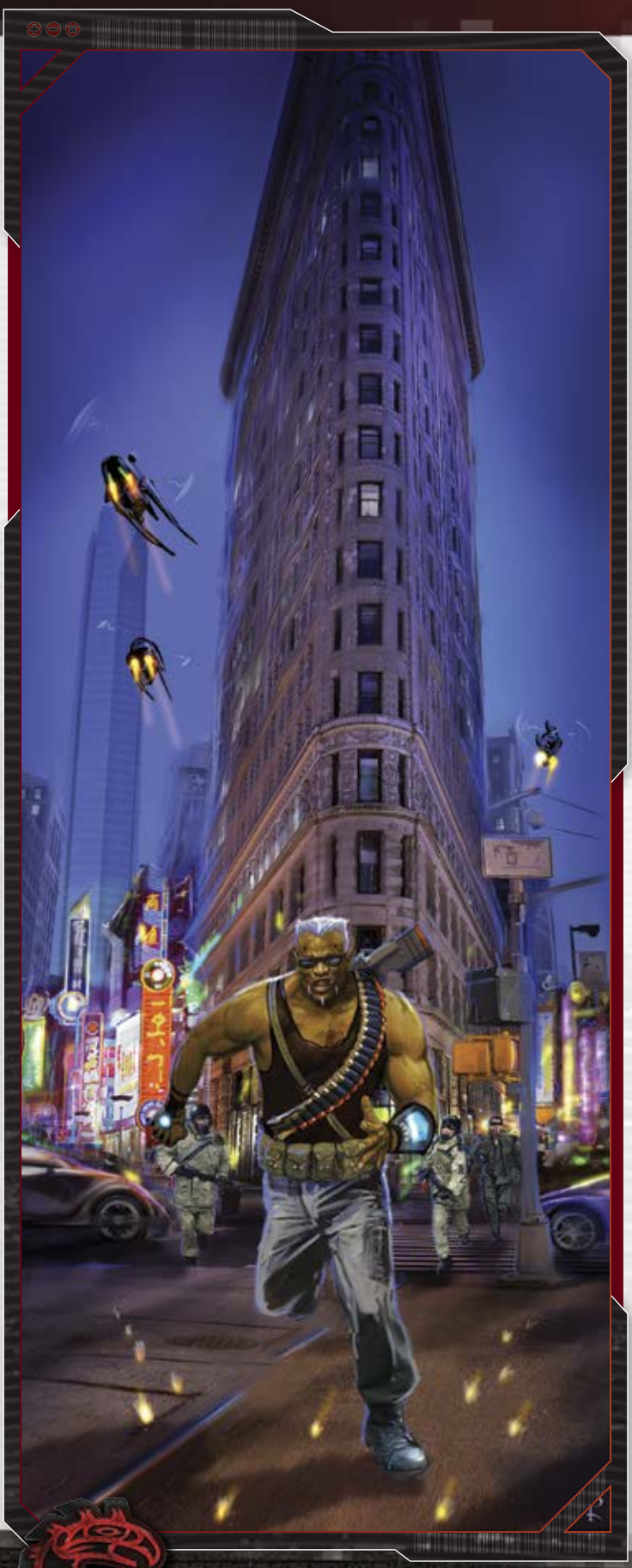

These are starting to become pretty common in corporate housing complexes across the world, but they are not likely to stay that way. As soon as residents find out that head cases reside a floor or building away from them, they get angry. A little bit of employee anger is not generally something the corps worry about, but the level of discontent employees are showing about exposure to the CFD virus is making them pay attention. They know that at some point, better and more permanent accommodations will have to be found, and they hope they'll have some idea what to do about that in the near future.

- Of course a floor of the ACHE in Seattle has been given over to head cases! It's only fitting! And they're not just from Renraku—they're taking patients from just about anyone, for a fee. Their fellow Japanacorps have to pay a minimal amount. Ares has to pay through the nose.
- Sounder

RELOCATING A HEAD CASE

There is at least one more way of dealing with head cases, but it isn't common because it has limited use. Rather than simply exiling the victim, some corps are working extractions on themselves—removing head cases and planting them in a rival corp.

There are a few conditions that have to be met if this is going to be worth the effort. First, the head case cannot be too erratic. They may have gone through a personality change that alerted their parent corp to their condition, but they need to have settled into a new personality, whatever that may be, with few of the blackouts and odd behavior that seem to characterize many head cases. Second, they need to be someone the other corporation wants. You can't just drop an unskilled worker onto a rival's payroll and expect them not to notice. If you think a few thousand nuyen off the payroll won't be noticed by a corporation with expenses in the billions or trillions, then you don't know how carefully corporations monitor their funds. And third, there needs to be some advantage to the parent corp in putting the person in a new position. If there isn't, the corp should just ship them off to a penal colony.

Corps have a few different benefits they might gain from this sort of placement. The simplest might be chaos—putting a coveted exec into a corp even though their new personality no longer has any idea how to do their job can be entertaining. It is also likely to be noticed, though, so the benefits it brings may not be significant or long lasting.

A more significant benefit is if your plant is able to leak information back to the parent corp—or even just to the general public. This requires a careful evaluation of the new personality to see just how they might handle confidential information and to gauge their attitude toward various entities. A few head cases have emerged with a

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rabid dislike of Evo, so arranging with them to be double agents might net a corp a valuable spy. Or they might get someone who snaps and goes on a rampage their first day at the new job, which is still worth something.

- It's difficult to gauge too many common threads between the new personalities of head cases, but there seems to be a certain strain of anger, though the target of the resentment varies from individual to individual. A good middle manager should know how to tap into that anger to get what they want out of the employee.
- Butch

Parent corps should also decide whether the individual should know that they are expected to act as a double agent or if they should be an unwitting accomplice. The latter is especially desirable with someone who might still be switching between personalities; the new personality might do their work at the new corp just fine, while the old one, when it surfaces, might keep trying to reach out to their former employer, presenting the opportunity to obtain data on whatever work the new personality has been doing.

- So we've got this new disease or disorder that is robbing people of their personalities, and cost us two of our members (possibly three; I'm still dealing with just what's up with Plan 9), and we don't know where it comes from and how far it might spread, but here we are talking about the intricacies involved in using one of the victims of this condition as a double agent to perform some corporate espionage? God almighty I hate the world.
- Butch

THE LANIER EFFECT

We can't talk about how corporations and the rest of the world are responding to the CFD virus without talking about Miles Lanier. We here at JackPoint owe a great debt to Lanier—his writings in the *Storm Front* posting helped introduce the Head Crash phenomenon to us. He wrote about it because he knew it too well, as he said he had begun to manifest the symptoms of CFD (back before it had a name). He also said that he was quite curious about what was going on in Celedyr's secret research lair, implying that he was going to find out.

- Are we really to believe that Miles Lanier didn't know something about what was going on inside NeoNET? That one of the foremost intelligence minds of our time didn't know about a major project within his own company? I find that extraordinarily hard to believe.
- Pistons

- Remember who he's up against. Lanier's great at uncovering information, but Celedyr is pretty good at hiding it. And really, it wasn't as hard to hide it as it may seem. Lanier knew, of course, that the research facility existed, and that Celedyr was doing research there. He also knew the nature of much of the research, as Celedyr certainly reported on it. All Celedyr had to do after that is keep an absolute lid on the secret part of his research so that Lanier never heard that there was something he didn't know about but should. For a decent amount of time, that worked quite well.
- Fianchetto

Well, he's as good as his word. Lanier's relocated to Albuquerque, and he's stirring things up. He knew better than to think he was going to go around town unnoticed, so he went ahead and set up shop. He has rented an office suite, complete with his name on the office door. Which is a bold move, considering the fact that Richard Villiers and Celedyr have been looking for Lanier for a while. The question before us is: What made Lanier feel safe about going public?

A big answer is his newfound ally, none other than Samantha Villiers. She and Richard had both been looking for Lanier, and Samantha was lucky enough to find him first—perhaps because Lanier decided it wouldn't be bad to let her find him. Like many of us, Lanier spent the first year of the latest dispute between Richard and Samantha waiting for them to kiss and make up, but as the fighting goes on and Samantha manages to accumulate more power, Lanier has gathered that the current schism between the two of them might last longer than previous divisions. Lanier knows that if he finds any evidence of CFD virus-related activity in Albuquerque, Richard would be likely to cover it up, while Samantha would likely go public with it, using it to bury Richard if she can and increase her stake in the company. That makes Samantha the right choice for him, his decades of friendship with Richard notwithstanding.

Having Samantha as an ally brings several immediate benefits. First, it means that any blows NeoNET throws his way will be half-hearted at best, with Samantha using her influence (along with Lanier exercising the pull he still has) to learn about attacks before they happen and to keep any corporate plotting against them from becoming too enthusiastic. Second, it means Lanier gains some interesting allies. As it turns out, the shadowrunner trio known as the Furies has grown rather fond of Samantha and has decided to work with her in Albuquerque.

- This means it's time for a quick rundown of what we know about the Furies. They're three women, and their street names are (naturally) Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone. They've been around long enough that each one of them has multiple skill sets—just describing one of them as a "hacker" is insufficient, since that hacker is also likely to be able to shoot your nose hairs off from two hundred yards. But for what it's worth, one of them is Awakened

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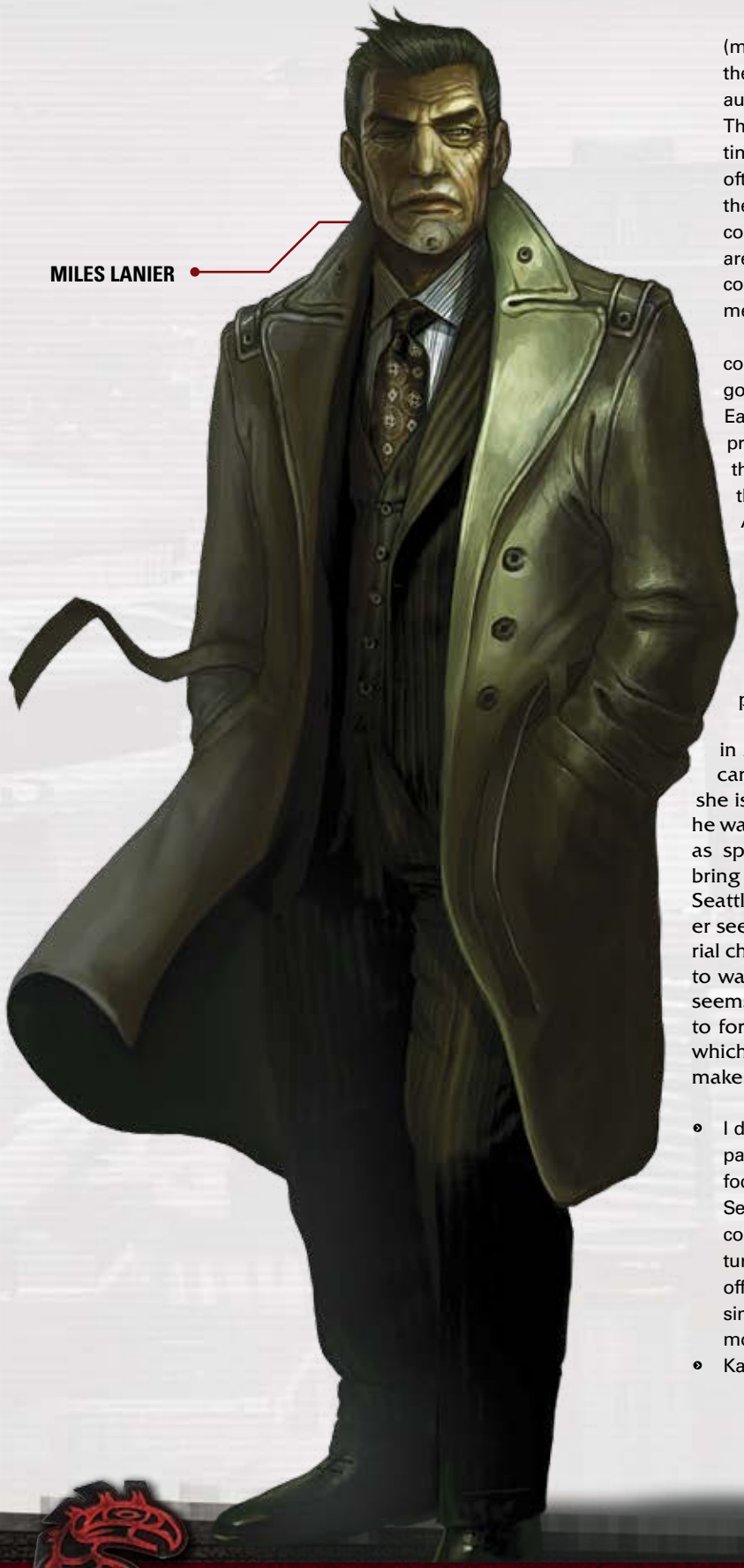

(mystic adept, natch, in keeping with them having all the skills), and the two others are heavily if discreetly augmented, leaning more toward bioware than cyber. They almost never are in the same place at the same time; they like to work multiple angles on a run at once, often using each other as distractions. Sometimes they work alone, but they frequently hire short-term contractors to flesh out their ranks. These runners are picked for their discretion; their professionalism, combined with a realistic fear of the wrath of the Furies, means that finding loose lips is unlikely.

The Furies prefer subtlety over force, and their combination of persuasion and covert infiltration has gotten them in some of the most locked-down places on Earth. How locked down? They list stealing a recently used pregnancy test from Empress Hitomi Shiawase among their accomplishments, which means they knew about the second royal child, Sakura, before nearly everyone. A little gross, but still impressive.

- Stone

With the Furies and Samantha Villiers in town, the question is, who's next? Those sorts of people leave broad wakes as they move, and when they're engaged in serious business, other powers of the world like to jump in.

Smart money says that Jonathan Blake will arrive in Albuquerque within weeks. He hasn't finished his campaign of revenge against Samantha Villiers, and if she is going to sponsor some high-stakes shadowruns, he wants to be there to make sure she crashes and burns as spectacularly as possible. Blake, of course, might bring his own trail of attention with him. His interest in Seattle politics is growing as Kenneth Brackhaven's power seems on the wane; many people think a gubernatorial challenge is in Blake's future. And he might not want to wait four years until the next election. If Brackhaven seems vulnerable, Blake could well join those looking to force him out of office. Brackhaven is aware of this, which means that he is likely to spend some money to make Blake's efforts fail as spectacularly as possible.

- I don't think that would be a wise move on Brackhaven's part. Sure, he's got money to burn, but he and his firm focus on finances. Blake, by contrast, has Centurion Security and several former Ares Seraphim under his control. Brackhaven has plenty of heft on his home turf, but without Knight Errant officers and government officials at his beck and call, he becomes weaker. Put simply, he doesn't travel well. He might spend a lot of money with little to show for it.
- Kay St. Irregular

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- You forget that perhaps Brackhaven's greatest strength is how he works his network. Brackhaven knows about Blake's problematic history with Saeder-Krupp, and if he goes in against Blake, he won't go in alone. He'll borrow some Saeder-Krupp muscle to boost his strength.
- Baka Dabora

- Wait, does that mean there's a chance that Jonathan Blake and Hans Brackhaus could be operating in the same town? Oh, I gotta get over there.
- Pistons

- I guess we now have a pretty clear idea what the PCC is worried about.
- Marcos

Another intriguing possibility that could make things even more interesting in Albuquerque is if Lanier decides to call on some of the other high-profile head cases who may want to join him in his search for the truth. If I were him, the first call I'd make is to Aztechnology board member Tsurunaga Shinoyama. He's smart, he's on the run, and he has a vested interest in finding out what got into his head. His estrangement from Aztechnology might limit the resources he has at his disposal, but you don't ascend to the Aztechnology board because you're some average guy in the street. He's got plenty of cash reserves and smarts, and he could add some solid tactical knowledge to Lanier's cause.

If Lanier wants to scour the ranks of the rich and powerful for another possible ally, there's another intriguing possibility: former Seattle ambassador to the Native American Nations Keira Thornton. Now, usually ambassadors are not the heaviest hitters on the political stage; they're typically high-level donors who get a position that makes them feel important while their deputy ambassadors do all the work. But Thornton is different, for a few reasons. First of all, she's the younger sister of Moira Thornton. I'll give you a second to place the name. That's right, producer and songwriter for Concrete Dreams Moira Thornton. Concrete *freakin'* Dreams.

Besides being a talented lyricist, Moira became an innovator in synthlink design when Concrete Dreams took their hiatus in the '60s. Keira was right there with her, using a degree in neuroscience to help Moira produce more intuitive and responsive synthlink designs. Their partnership was fruitful right up until the end of the '60s, when Keira decided to sell her share in their business and get into social service, using her money to start a clinic for people who suffered traumatic brain injury.

That led to her making political donations to help secure the future of her clinic, which led to her ambassadorship. She was recently removed from that position due to "health reasons," and those who were close to her say she has become short-tempered and paranoid, and that her formerly extensive knowledge of brain functions seems to come and go.

Sounds like CFD to me. Thornton would be an ideal ally, as her understanding of brain function and structure could help in looking for a cure or in understanding any evidence that might come in about who did what to make the CFD virus a thing. Assuming, of course, that she is able to access her considerable knowledge.

- Is this just a "wouldn't it be cool if they teamed up" sort of speculation, or do we have something more than that?
- Frosty

- There's something more. Lanier is definitely reaching out to other head cases, especially those stable enough to work with. Thornton is on the list of people he's called multiple times. She'd be able to get to Albuquerque easily enough—she may have forfeited her diplomatic credentials, but she's got enough good contacts to make traveling around the Native American Nations fairly easy. I wouldn't be surprised if she shows up within a month or two.
- Nephrine

HARVESTING TALENT

The spread of the CFD virus has created a wide variety of personnel demands, and many of them are urgent. There are four basic categories of needs: people who can find out where the CFD virus came from; people who can help contain the spread of the virus; people who can work on finding a cure; and people who can replace infected individuals.

In short, that means there are a wide variety of openings, but especially for neuroscientists, nanotechnicians, epidemiologists, and intelligence experts. Anyone who has a significantly good reputation in those areas can expect to have all sorts of attention aimed in their direction—by people who are not going to sit around and wait for contract negotiations to proceed at a leisurely pace.

This, though, has created a need for another type of worker—headhunters who know where to find neuroscientists, nanotechnicians, etc. Your average headhunter knows where to find rising stars on the management side of things, and also hotshot engineers and what not, but these other fields are somewhat more specialized. So executives are reaching out to people who know the science field, and we're not just talking about professional headhunters here. Universities and hospitals are getting a new surge of attention, with far more corporate suits hanging around their offices than is usually the case.

- It's getting kind of funny, because mecacorp execs don't have a great understanding of the academic world. They walk up to a department head, ask "who are the leaders in your field?" and wait for a few simple names to come

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out. Instead they get a long answer, full of digressions, that questions the definition of the word "leader" and presents a half-dozen names, then a long list of reasons why those names are probably not the right ones, then a few more names that might be better, and so on and so forth. Academics are great at ranking students, but not so good at ranking each other clearly.

- Goat Foot

- That's because when you ask most academics who is the best in their field, they immediately think "I am," but negative reactions to that statement have conditioned them not to say it out loud.
- Winterhawk

Software designers are getting some play too, as they design systems that can provide quick snapshots of people in the publish-or-perish academic world. These agents first scan huge swaths of academic literature, then scan the Matrix for responses to and reviews of various pieces, and finally assemble a quick summary of an individual's area of expertise along with some form of rating of their position and prestige in their field. This rating takes different forms depending on the engineers who put it together. It should be no surprise that Horizon was one of the first on the market with a product people could use to evaluate academics. Their Egghead Evaluator (or EE for short) uses some of the bones of their P2.0 system, but replaces some of the social media metrics with measures of mentions in academic literature and the number of times an individual's work has been cited by others. Like P2.0, it gives each individual a score, the higher the better. Some of the buyers of this software (and it's not free—Horizon had to pay to get access to academic databases, so they are passing the cost on to the customers) set a certain rank that serves as their prerequisite; if your score is not above, say, 200, they're not interested.

Saeder-Krupp's software, the plainly named Academic Rank, does what it says it does—you pick a field, it will rank people in that field, using what S-K describes as their "proprietary algorithm."

- Surprise, surprise: It ranks people S-K might want to target, such as University of Hamburg nano-whiz Edvard Kimmerle, surprisingly low, to dissuade those who might think about extracting him. I would imagine that before too long, this blatant bit of tilting the scales will make people turn on this product.
- Mr. Bonds

- Probably. S-K simply hopes that by the time the game is up, they will have obtained the people they want.
- Baka Dabora

MCT has developed a system as well, but they are keeping it in-house. The innovation it adds is instead of just looking at the talk about and reaction to journal articles, it attempts to trace how well concepts from certain articles are put into practice—if, for example, a brain mapping technique described in an article from 2065 has been adopted and is now in fairly common usage. The loss of information in Crash 2.0 makes this challenging, especially since medical science can be methodical when it comes to adopting new practices, but there seems to be enough existing information to build a good database.

- That sounds like a good idea, but are they also putting in information about the effectiveness of the adopted technique? There are some advances that seemed like the next great thing for a minute, right up until notable flaws came out.
- Butch

- I'm not sure. There's definitely some interest in seeing what this tool does and does not do, and what kind of ratings it comes up with, so hackers might be able to find some work breaking into MCT hosts and getting a look at this thing. I've been following some leads myself.
- Netcat

WHO IS UP FOR GRABS

So with all this ranking, who has been identified as someone worth having? Who are the corps snatching (or planning on snatching), either from the academic ranks or from each other? Well, let's take a look at some of the highlights:

Masaru Takenaka: As head researcher for Evo's Pensodyne subsidiary, which is at the forefront of its transhuman developments, Takenaka is drawing attention for a number of reasons—his expertise in biotech and related subjects would be useful to just about any corporation out there, but he'd also likely have some knowledge about what role, if any, Evo had in creating the CFD virus. Just about every mega in the world would be happy to have him in their grasp, which means Pensodyne is being very protective of Takenaka and has removed him to an undisclosed location.

- Meaning Vladivostok, where both Anatoly Kirilenko and Buttercup can make sure he doesn't go anywhere.
- Red Anya

Moira Thornton: I mentioned Moira in connection with her sister, Keira, earlier. Both of them have extensive neurological knowledge, and Moira has the advantage of being a big name and possibly being vulnerable, since she's on stage with Concrete Dreams every night. They're going to be touring Europe in the summer and then moving down to Africa; pick a major city in one of those continents and then find out when the band is going to be in town if you want to get a shot at her. But don't wait long.

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Edvard Kimmerle: Professor of neuroscience at the University of Hamburg, Kimmerle has explored memory transfers and storage, and he claims to have seen some success transferring memories from one person to another. It is not, of course, a seamless process—the cognitive dissonance false memories can cause has been tremendously disruptive to some patients—but the possibilities and the knowledge Kimmerle must have to get that far make him very valuable at this point in time. Kimmerle has refused to acknowledge that he should do anything in reaction to the attention he is getting, and he is going about his business as normal. The main difference in his life is that he is now watched constantly by operatives from several corps who are keeping an eye on him and each other, looking for an opportunity to grab him without the opposition interfering. There is so much opposition, though, that the situation currently is a stalemate, as no one feels safe in proceeding with an extraction (there have already been at least two failed attempts, defeated by opposition teams. Through it all, Kimmerle remains nonplussed). Sooner or later, though, someone will find a way to get him out, and then the game will change from watching him to snatching him back and forth. At this point, it seems like it would be a miracle if he manages to do some legitimate work for a corp before he catches a stray bullet during some conflict between extraction teams.

Celedyr: Ha! Just kidding—making sure people are paying attention and all. There is no way, of course, that Celedyr is going to be extracted, despite the incredibly useful knowledge he probably has. But if people can't get Celedyr, they can try to get at least a piece of his knowledge, which brings us to ...

Dr. Gordon Browne: This would be an exceptionally hard get. Along with the entity known as Cerberus, Browne is the director of NeoNET's mysterious Project Imago. Since you shouldn't even try to move Cerberus from his preferred virtual location unless you're really fond of massive amounts of dumpshock, Browne is the way to go. He would clearly have the dirt on what NeoNET's been up to, and he would have a ton of information to share if he felt so inclined (or was filled with the right pharmaceuticals or hit with the right spells). NeoNET, of course, has locked Browne down, severely, in Boston. If you want a piece of him, that's where you need to go.

- Don't. Just don't. It's not worth it, and the situation in Boston is deteriorating. I wouldn't be surprised if before too long NeoNET starts shooting any head cases on their territory on sight. It's going to be ugly chaos there.
- Cayman

- It is? Then why are you telling us not to go?
- Kane

Pax: Okay, this is pie in the sky since no one really knows what Pax is up to or what her status is, but if you want someone who is an expert on the darker secrets of the Matrix, the former servant of Deus would be the person to talk to. First place to look might be Scandinavia—Oslo in particular, as I've heard a few rumored sightings of her there. Corps—and anyone else—should of course be very, very cautious if they decide to approach her, as "dangerous" and "unstable" are charitable ways to describe her.

- Wait, does that mean I'm suddenly valuable too?
- Puck

- Did Matt Wrath just help you stay clear of an Ares-backed team? Then Matt Wrath thinks you already know the answer to that question. Matt Wrath thinks you just brought it up so you would look cool.
- Matt Wrath

- Matt Wrath is right! I'm hot property, people. Get me while you can!
- Puck

GETTING INTO THE GAME

So you've read this all, you know in general what people are looking for, and you think you can work in this arena. Assuming you don't already have a fixer ready to put you in touch with the right people (and if you do, stop reading and make the call!), here are some people who can help you get into the head-case-related-extraction game.

Kia: Of course you should go to Kia! First of all, extraction is how he got into the game—no one knows extractions like someone who was themselves extracted. True, he's been working the entertainment side of the street for a while, but he knows how to get people out of tight situations, and people are turning to him to arrange their runs. He's got the business. Just ask.

- Thanks so much for doing my advertising for me. I assumed JackPointers already knew where to find me.
- Kia

Nikola Taul: If you want to look at a government official who is neither dragging their feet in response to CFD nor pretending it doesn't exist, look to Seattle Downtown Mayor Nikola Taul. Taul was an energetic go-getter from the moment she took office, and she's been working to make sure response to CFD is just as vibrant as her streetscaping projects. It helps that she has the University of Washington and Harborview Hospital in her district, as she has tapped into experts from both institutions to help her craft an appropriate response. She had those experts work with Renraku to ensure their quarantined area of the ACHE would actually keep the virus contained.

As part of her efforts, Taul has wanted to check up on the high-tech clinics in her area, and she is not above

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hiring shadowrunners to look into institutions that are not as cooperative as she would like them to be. One such organization is Executive Body Enhancements, which has long been the preferred augmentation clinic of the Yakuza. Word is that the Seattle Yaks are dealing with CFD cases, and Taul is concerned EBE is spreading it. Unsurprisingly, a Yakuza-connected clinic is not all that eager to share anything about its operations with a government official. So if Taul is going to get the information she wants, she'll have to turn to us.

- The scope of infection in the Yakuza is unconfirmed, as they certainly are not talking about it. The rumor is that several people, including a handful of shategashira, have been infected. One of the victims is Clay Mori, one of Keiko Shotozumi's most trusted lieutenants. Shotozumi is reported to be very upset about Mori's condition, to the point that she is reportedly considering returning to the shadows to administer whatever justice she can. So if you run into a shadowrunner named Kiku in the Seattle area—be very, very careful.
- Sticks

Samantha Roth: Yes, she's pretty high up the ladder, but she'll know what Samantha Villiers is up to in Albuquerque and what kind of help she is looking for. If you have any way to get a message to her, that would be a good path to pursue.

Alex O'Keefe: If, as some believe, the CFD virus is linked to Matrix phenomena like artificial intelligences and e-ghosts, the person to talk to is Alex O'Keefe. Just be ready for things to get weird.

O'Keefe's background is odd, to say the least. We know that there was a guy named Alex O'Keefe who was a systems administrator for Novatech, and he died during Crash 2.0. Then, back in 2071, someone claiming to be Alex O'Keefe showed up in a Lone Star node, saying he had been kidnapped. The desk officer got a little skeptical when the SIN this O'Keefe showed was connected to a dead man, and when the sergeant confronted him with this fact, O'Keefe went nuts, trashing the node in ways that took Lone Star spiders months to repair. Then he disappeared, and Lone Star couldn't find him.

This scene was repeated in a few other law-enforcement facilities in the next year; he hit Knight Errant later in 2071, then Centurion in early 2072. Thankfully, the repeats weren't as violent as the original, as possibly O'Keefe was becoming adjusted to his extra-corporeal state.

After the Centurion visit, O'Keefe dropped out of sight for a while, and there are no stories or records about him until mid-2073. Two different teams, one in Seattle, one in Wales, reported doing runs for a Mr. Johnson who they met only in VR. Mr. Johnson was happy to share his real name, saying he was "Alex O'Keefe, but not the real one." His description—short, balding, a little on the manic side—is consistent with the O'Keefe who was with Novatech and the one who showed up at the law-enforcement corps, with the exception that the physical O'Keefe had a paunch that the virtual one seems to have lost. In both cases he hired teams to do datasteals—the Seattle one went into MicroDeck, while the Wales team (naturally) took data from NeoNET.

O'Keefe then started hiring fairly regularly, almost always datasteals against tech firms. Teams who worked for him described him as honest and trustworthy but also a little intense—he required frequent check-ins, and

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occasionally would make disruptive calls to teams in the middle of their runs. But late in 2074, a new twist entered the story. A team was hired in Tokyo to go into MCT and pick up some files that, according to the team, tied into MCT's secret technomancer research. It fit the profile of an Alex O'Keefe run, and Mr. Johnson even gave the name of Alex O'Keefe. Thing was, she appeared in real life, not VR, and she was a she, specifically a sturdy Hispanic dwarf who was maybe in her early twenties. Despite this disparity, this O'Keefe acted just like her virtual counterpart, right down to the annoying comm calls. Plus, she repeatedly referred to NeoNET as Novatech, which the VR O'Keefe is also said to do.

This meatworld O'Keefe continued to make appearances and hire runs, as did the VR version. One team hired by the virtual version took it upon themselves to ask the dwarf if she knew about the virtual entity with whom she shared a name. According to the report, she smiled slightly and just said "He's a good man," then moved forward with the job.

The point is, O'Keefe seems like the exactly the right sort of person who would hire you for CFD-related jobs. And he/she might have some very definite CFD connections and knowledge.

- Be very very careful with this one. The virtual O'Keefe is not a real AI. He's a corporate puppet, responding to the commands of whoever is controlling him. My best guess is that it's Aztechnology pulling his strings—O'Keefe recently hired a team to retrieve information from Genetique, but security anticipated the team's every move and arrested the lot of them. The team had made several successful runs against Aztechnology previously, so the speculation is that O'Keefe hired them specifically to capture them.
- Kia

- So how does the real-world O'Keefe fit into your story?
- Nephrine

- Copycat, hoping to coast off the virtual O'Keefe's reputation. Though if the VR version double-crosses too many more teams, she might regret that decision.
- Kia

Tess van Hama: When MCT starts extracting some of the people identified by their software, you can be sure that van Hama will be arranging some of the jobs. She is trusted by them and is good at what she does. She also might be arranging runs to pull out Saeder-Krupp, as her friendship with Johnny Spinrad keeps providing opportunities in that direction. This also means that if Zeta-ImpChem needs runs to destroy evidence mounting against them, van Hama might well be the one to organize them.

TESS VAN HAMA

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REWIRING MINDS

Standing on the fire escape above the city noise, Raine turned to the window and stared at his reflection. His *physical* reflection, not the ghostly one peering back from the glass. Inside the shitty apartment, Raine's twin brother Shyne slouched on the couch, watching the trid while emptying a bag of soy-pork rinds. An urban brawl game was on, and it looked like the Mountain Dragons were winning yet again. Everything seemed normal. *Too* normal, in fact.

Raine leaned on the railing, took a drag on his cigarette, and contemplated the city streets a dozen floors below. "So," he said to the cloaked, elven figure waiting just outside his peripheral vision, "you're telling me he's one of *them*. That he's lost his soul, or a piece of it."

"'Fraid so," the shadow said, regret seeping into her voice. "Unless he's got some new headware he didn't tell us about, there's a ... dead spot in his aura."

"Is there anything we can do?"

"I have something I've heard other magicians try. I don't expect it will work, but it's the best option we have."

Raine frowned and studied his brother for several moments. As a pair, they'd run the shadows for so long sometimes he had to stop and remember what Shyne's real name was. Between the pair, Shyne was the perpetual optimist and could always lighten up even the toughest of crowds. He was the glue that held the team together.

Why'd it have to be you? Raine silently asked his brother. *Why couldn't the virus have taken* me *instead?*

"All right, let's do this." He took a final drag on the cigarette and flipped the butt out into the street. "Wait for my signal, Lana. Don't want to spook him."

Lana vanished once Raine started crawling back through the window. Inside, he pulled up a chair and sat down right in front of the trideo set.

"Hey," Shyne said to him, "you're blocking the game."

Sorry, brother. This game's being canceled on account of Raine.

"Game's not important," Raine said. "Listen, you remember that one time we pulled the ol' twin switcheroo on that Ares guard? Remember how I caught that piece of shrapnel in the neck after he figured out what we were doing?"

Shyne wasn't even acknowledging him; he was trying to get a better angle on the trid. "Yeah, what about it?"

A wistful feeling rose in Raine's chest as he glanced down at the whitish scar running along his brother's exposed neck. Just millimeters away from the carotid artery. Then he met the eyes of the lying thing sitting in front of him.

Nothing but deadness stared back at him. An empty shell.

Raine looked past his brother and nodded. Lana's invisibility spell dropped. Before Shyne could react, Lana grabbed his head from behind and started chanting. Shyne screamed. Blood spurted out of his ears and nose.

Moments later, the apartment stank of burning flesh. The smoke alarm went off. Building security would be up soon. Staring at his brother's ruined body, Raine wanted to cry, but he couldn't.

Shyne had already been truly dead long before the spell hit him.

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- As I'm sure most of you are aware, ever since FastJack announced what was happening to him, Butch has been working around the clock to figure out how to understand this thing and, more importantly, how to fight back. The following sections outline several different methods that have been used to try combating the CFD virus' subversion of metahumanity's last refuge of the self—the brain. For those of you who are a little squeamish, I'll warn some of you that the following cases are not for the faint of heart.

  Butch, I think all of us owe you a beer or three for your tireless dedication.
- Glitch

- Screw beer. I'd kill for a solid eight hours of sleep.
- Butch

TAKING BACK THE SOUL

POSTED BY: BUTCH

Folks, I've been at this for a long time. I've sewn up more wounds, replaced more organs, installed more 'ware, and brought back more patients from the brink of death than I could ever hope to count. I've watched the spark of life vanish from the eyes of friends, loved ones, and complete strangers. I've witnessed medical miracles that not even my Awakened colleagues can explain. But nothing—*nothing*—compares to watching someone's soul get stolen away while you're looking them right in the face.

The CFD virus is a nasty piece of shit. It might not physically harm its host or change his physiology in any truly harmful way, but it steals the one thing that defines our metahumanity. Observing a victim succumb to CFD is like watching an Alzheimer's or dementia patient slowly have their memories taken from them one day at a time. It's heartbreaking, even for an old sawbones like myself who I thought had been inured to this kind of suffering over the years.

The virus is a parasite, and a bad one, but it's also unlike any other parasite I have ever seen. In a symbiotic or mutualistic relationship, both host and symbiote receive some benefit to the arrangement. In a commensalistic relationship, one organism gains benefits but the other is not harmed. In a parasitic relationship, one organism thrives to the detriment of the other. However, most parasites either live off the other organism or end up killing it. For example, there are several species of wasps, both mundane and Awakened, that lay eggs in the brains of spiders and caterpillars. These larvae are capable of exerting a primitive form of mind control on their hosts, effectively turning them into zombies. When a larva gets large enough, it kills the host. The CFD virus, on the other hand, doesn't want to kill its host. It wants to scoop out his insides and replace them with the personality (or personalities) it's carrying. By harming its host, though, it harms its own well being.

Some parasites are easier to get rid of than others. Some, like mistletoe or creeping vines, come right off with a little tug. Others require more invasive measures to remove. Removing the CFD virus, though, is a deeply invasive process. Even after decades of research and advancement into psychology, psychiatry, simsense technology, and other cyberware, the human brain remains largely a mystery. What works for Patient A won't necessarily work for Patient B. Remember when you first got measured for a datajack or some other headware? All the EEGs and other readings that the cyberdoc needed to take? Nowadays datajacks are considered one of the most routine headware surgeries available, but one still needs to be installed in the right way, with neural connections going to the right places—and in a mature adult brain, no less—or else even a datajack can fry your wetware. In many cases, kicking the CFD virus out of the brainpan is like conducting hundreds of thousands of datajack assessment tests, and by the time you're finished with the first few hundred, you have to run a few thousand more since the virus has already progressed further while you were running tests. It's damn near impossible to keep up with, and a race like this will usually end with the virus several thousand kilometers in the lead.

Because of this inherent time limit, medical professionals (and medical amateurs) have been forced to start getting creative. As all you creative types are

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no doubt aware, creativity sometimes makes for messy results, but sometimes something truly brilliant and miraculous arises from those messes. The following records cover as many of these methods as I could gather, either from my own research or from colleagues or sources I trust.

Remember, kids, don't try any of this shit at home. I mean it. I don't do lawsuits.

MUNDANE METHODS

This first group of case studies involves attempts to combat the CFD virus the old-fashioned way, using known medical science.

CASE 1: PSYCHOANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

Subject: Adult female *H. sapiens pumillonis*, age 25, affected by dissociative identity disorder (DID). Patient exhibited no symptoms until two weeks before being admitted for this case study. Subject's primary personality is being slowly replaced by new, dominant identity that calls itself "Xor." Primary personality wakes after fugue states spent as "Xor." Fugue states have arrived in longer intervals with increasingly shorter lapses between intervals. Attempts made to determine the root that caused secondary personality to surface. Psychoanalysis performed both on primary and secondary personalities. Primary personality seems ignorant of secondary personality, but secondary personality acknowledges and makes threats toward primary personality during fugue states. It makes no attempts, though, to harm subject's body. Subject kept on close surveillance during fugue states to prevent self-inflicted bodily injury.

Keywords: DID, MPD, multiple personalities, fugues

METHOD

Patient was subjected to a battery of psych evaluations for each personality. Data from evaluations informed psychotherapy treatments. Root cause of DID was investigated via psychoanalysis.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILES

To form a baseline psych profile from before the subject exhibited symptoms, statements from persons close to the subject were taken. The primary personality's psych profile taken onsite lined up with the baseline, so the primary personality remains intact. Subject's primary identity displays a mixture melancholic/phlegmatic personality.

The psych profile taken from the secondary personality ("Xor") reveals a cold and calculating individual capable of acts of unspeakable cruelty. "Xor" displays a dominant, choleric personality completely opposite of the primary identity.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

Subject was interviewed over several sessions. Primary personality did not know why she was being seen. Subject was only aware that she had started experiencing fugue states and waking up in foreign places. No childhood trauma was discovered. Subject has not recently been exposed to any stress. Family life is normal. Work habits are normal. Bloodwork corroborated subject's testimony that she does not abuse mind-altering substances.

"Xor" will not talk about her childhood, family life, work habits, or any personal issues. Instead, "Xor" continues to speak only in veiled threats, without revealing any personal information.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Subject was put through rigorous cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions. Primary identity was receptive to these therapies, but "Xor" violently opposed them, often prematurely ending sessions with violent outbursts requiring the subject to be sedated and/or restrained.

Other psychotherapeutic techniques, such as hypnotherapy and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), produced the same results.

RESULTS

Subject did not respond well to psychoanalysis, CBT, or DBT. Fugue states grew longer and more pronounced. The subject's primary personality has not resurfaced in the past three days. Unless further sessions can push "Xor" back below the surface, it is possible the primary personality has been permanently subsumed.

- A hundred nuyen says this researcher had no clue the patient was infected with the CFD virus.
- Puck

- I kept this case here to demonstrate that even tried-and-true methods for counteracting your everyday dissociative identity disorder don't work. Plus, education is probably our best weapon against head crashes at the moment. Since the author of this study didn't know what he was dealing with, he ended up with his throat crushed when "Xor" pulled a David Copperfield and escaped from the asylum where she was being held. Last I heard, "Xor" is still at large.
- Butch

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CASE 2: PHARMACEUTICAL

ABSTRACT

Subject: Adult male *H. sapiens sapiens*, age 36, affected by induced dissociative identity disorder (IDID). Dissociative identity (DI) suffers from episodes of increased anger and aggression toward all external stimuli. Condition had progressed to Stage II before applying treatment. Subject was treated via pharmaceutical means. Advancement of condition closely monitored.

Keywords: IDID, DI, atropine, SeroBlock, ValiAnt

METHOD

As different patients react differently to various dissociative identity disorder treatments, a number of pharmaceutical trials were administered to the subject to see which, if any, would prove most effective.

DEPRESSANTS

Patient was administered a small dosage of the depressant atropine to calm aggressive outbursts. Episodes decreased in frequency for three days, at which point the frequency returned to previous levels. Increased dosage produced no appreciable effects. Did not pursue further dosage increases due to toxicity risk. Other depressants (specifically barbiturates, alpha/beta blockers, and opioids) produced similar effects in similar timeframes. While the different drugs involved suppressed the DI for a short time, the beneficial difference between each individual treatment proved negligible.

ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Patient was administered anti-depressant serotonin re-uptake inhibitor SeroBlock. DI emerged at the same level of frequency, but DI was profoundly calmer and more amenable than in previous treatments. This condition lasted for two days until DI returned to previous levels of combativeness. An increased dosage of SeroBlock

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reduced DI aggression for another two days. Increased dosage to safe levels produced the same effect.

ANXIETY MEDICATION

Patient was administered anti-anxiety drug ValiAnt. Subject grew lethargic and slept for at least 12 hours per day. DI surfaced more often during periods of wakefulness than before drug was administered. Increased dosage; DI appeared with even more frequency. DI appeared to deduce what was being done to its host. Increased dosage a second time; DI suppressed subject's primary identity during periods of wakefulness. Weaned subject off ValiAnt; frequency and duration of DI appearances returned to previous levels.

RESULTS

Pharmaceutical trials proved unsuccessful in prolonged suppression of DI. After cessation of all medication, patient's IDID progressed on to Stage III. Further dosages of medication after the onset of Stage III produced negligible effects. Pharmaceutical treatment option no longer feasible. Pursuing other courses of study.

- So drugs clearly don't work. I didn't think we needed a medical researcher to tell us that.
- Puck

- Even though drugs aren't the answer, these sorts of studies tell us something far more important. The CFD virus is rewiring hosts' brains, which means it is still forced to rely on the wetware it was given. If you fuck around with its available wetware by introducing a manufactured chemical imbalance into the host's brain, that can affect the cognitive abilities of the host and the viral personalities. Of course, the danger seems to be that a head case can pick up on this imbalance and fight its way around it, if given enough time.
- Nephrine

- At least it offers up a short-term solution to getting a CFD victim to cooperate, which I'll bet would come in handy in an extraction. I certainly wouldn't want a CFD personality to trigger a building-wide alarm and scream bloody murder when my team is trying to kidnap her host, but pop a SeroBlock in her, and I'm betting she'll be a little quieter on the way out of the building.
- Pistons

- That's assuming she hasn't already progressed to "Stage III," whatever the hell that means.
- Puck

- I don't personally know the researcher who did this, but I believe the classification is a ranking of how deeply the dissociative identity has supplanted the base personality. As I understand, these researchers use a scale of Stage I—minor intrusion—to Stage IV—complete takeover.
- Butch

- Is there a Stage V, I wonder?
- Kane

- Yeah, I think they call that "death."
- Slamm-0!

CASE 3: SURGERY

ABSTRACT

Subject: Juvenile female *H. sapiens sapiens*, age 6, affected by cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD). Presence of hostile nanites in prefrontal cortex. Subject has displayed signs of extreme moods swings, and secondary personality shows a level of maturation and a vocabulary inconsistent with subject's age, development, and learning experience. Hypothesis: Nanite activity in subject's brain is responsible for CFD. Hypothesis tested and verified against similar cases. Patient recommended for psychosurgery.

Keywords: CFD, nanites, nanite removal, NanoFlush, juvenile neurology, prefrontal cortex, lobotomy

- Good God.
- Pistons

- Not cool, mystery virus thing. Not cool.
- Slamm-0!

METHOD

Patient's condition was positively identified using a battery of psychiatric and medical tests. Subject was treated for rogue nanites and prepared for psychosurgery. Routine surgery was then performed.

TESTING

Subject's condition was first identified by the patient's teacher. Being a juvenile in corporate-run kindergarten, the patient would lapse into periods where she would employ adult-level language amongst her peers, using words, sentence structure, and subject matter a juvenile of her age group would not normally use. Since the patient was not previously noted as a prodigy, this behavior raised concern within the school's faculty.

Psychological tests. Patient was given several intelligence tests, during which the symptoms for dissociative identity disorder (DID) surfaced: irritability, inconsistency, change in demeanor, etc. Some tests showed the patient possessed remarkable skill for her age group (albeit not at prodigious levels), but tests during

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which her dissociative identity (DI) appeared, those administering the tests believed they spoke to not a juvenile but a full-grown adult with normal cognitive faculties. Further testing revealed the DI was quickly taking over the subject's personality in a manner consistent with other CFD cases.

Medical imaging. EEG, CT scan, and aura reading revealed the presence of active nanites in the patient's prefrontal cortex. Nanites were result of transgenic therapy performed in 2074 to address patient's congenital suppressed immune system. Although the nanites should have gone dormant once the transgenic therapy was complete, they have instead remained active and have restructured part of the subject's prefrontal cortex.

TREATMENT

Hard nanite treatment. First treatment attempted to control nanite population. NanoFlush was introduced into patient's bloodstream. No noticeable effect observed within 24 hour period. Second dosage of NanoFlush administered at higher concentration. No noticeable effect. Follow-up CT scan reveals nanite population has effectively doubled within 48 hours of first NanoFlush application. Hypothesis: Subject's cortex nanites are subverting the NanoFlush nanites to their own purposes.

Soft nanite treatment. Second treatment attempted to control nanite population with "soft machine" nanites programmed to act as antibodies to any hard machine nanites they encountered. The patient's hard nanite infestation destroyed these soft nanites immediately upon them circulating through the subject's brain.

Isotope treatment. Third treatment attempt employed radioactive isotopes intended to confuse or sterilize the nanites. This resulted in the subject experiencing acute migraine headaches for a period of three days, but the nanite population persisted and continued to grow until it had subsumed approximately 75 percent of the subject's prefrontal cortex.

PSYCHOSURGERY

Due to nanite treatment attempts failing, the subject was recommended for psychosurgery after an extensive neurological consultation. A panel of consultants determined the only way to definitively preserve the patient's still-developing neurological faculties was to perform a prefrontal lobotomy. The panel believed that if the prefrontal cortex was denied access to the rest of the patient's brain, the nanite infestation would have nowhere to progress. Also, given the subject's young age, it is hypothesized that the subject's still-developing brain might be able to rewire itself in the absence of a prefrontal cortex.

Transorbital lobotomy. Transorbital procedure was performed immediately using dual orbitoclast method. Great care was taken to ensure no nanites migrated from the prefrontal cortex to the frontal cortex during the procedure. Procedure was successful in severing neural pathways between the prefrontal cortex and the rest of the subject's brain. Subject recuperated and regained consciousness.

RESULTS

Despite prefrontal lobotomy being a success, the patient has gravitated toward a vegetative state after recuperation period. Symptoms of IOS and the DI have ceased; however, the subject's original personality remains absent. Patient displays no aptitude for speech or other normal neurological behavior, but involuntary brain functions remain at baseline levels. Thus far, the subject's brain has not created new neurological connections to replace those the lobotomy removed, but further observation will determine whether or not these pathways will regrow.

The nanite population within the disconnected prefrontal cortex remains at a high level of activity. Since the procedure's completion, the subject has begun exhibiting low-signal-strength radio activity, which leads observers to believe the nanite population is attempting to reach out from its isolation. Subject has been confined to a Faraday cage to prevent any potential incidents from occurring. If this effect worsens, it is recommended the subject undergo a partial lobectomy to physically remove the prefrontal cortex from the cranium.

- That is just … I can't even …
- Pistons

- Come on, you damn virus. Not even little girls get a get-out-of-jail-free card?
- Hard Exit

- Butch, anything to say on this one?
- Bull

- Other than mentioning I knew this girl personally? No.
- Butch

- Who was she? A niece? A friend's daughter?
- Puck

- I'm not going to talk about it. Don't ask again.
- Butch

- Considering the keyword is "knew," I'm guessing it didn't end well.
- Slamm-0!

- Nice to know that a fucking lobotomy is an acceptable alternative to CFD.
- Kane

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- In case you weren't paying attention, that probably won't work on adults. Their brains are already fully formed and pretty set in their ways. Severing neurological connections in an adult is like playing Russian roulette with your brain. A lobectomy would be even worse.
- Nephrine

- I though docs stopped performing lobotomies around the turn of the century or so.
- Hard Exit

- They did, mostly. Lobotomies are exceptionally rare nowadays, but under the right circumstances, they can actually be beneficial.
- Nephrine

- The "right" circumstances in this instance being an innocent six-year-old girl?
- Hard Exit

- In this case? Yes. I'd … probably have done the same thing.
- Butch

CASE 4: NANITE PURGE

ABSTRACT

Subject: Adult female *H. sapiens robustus*, age 52, affected by cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD). Presence of hostile nanites in prefrontal cortex contributing to CFD at an advanced rate. Subject began at a Stage II level of CFD before referral to this case study. Transition from Stage I to Stage II occurred within one week. Age of subject discourages standard psychosurgical practices. Attempts made to remove nanites from brain tissue.

Keywords: IOS, nanites, nanite removal, auxons, neurosurgery, craniotomy

METHOD

After assessing patient's condition, several attempts were made to remove hostile nanites from the subject.

NANITE REMOVAL

Other cases linking this condition and hostile nanite activity in the brain (see Howell and Rowan, 2075), have outlined unsatisfactory results when using targeted nanite-removal serums (such as NanoFlush, Nanofree, and MachineBGone), soft nanites, radiological isotopes, or similar removal methods. Neurological consultants suggested the subject undergo an experimental procedure involving the mechanical removal of the nanites.

Mechanical nanite removal. Frontotemporal craniotomy was performed to allow surgeon access to subject's affected brain tissue. Exposed brain tissue beneath the meningeal layers appeared slightly discolored, exhibiting a light grey mold-like texture on the surface. The discoloration possesses the consistency of arterial plaque, and when it is examined beneath an electron microscope is revealed to be large colonies of nanites that have formed atop and between folds of brain tissue. Using the electron microscope, the surgeon identified the largest concentrations of nanites and scraped them away from affected brain tissue. This time-consuming procedure required four hours to remove only a three cm^2 area of nanite plaque. At the end of the four-hour procedure, areas that had already been cleaned of nanites began to suffer encroachment. Auxons—self-replicating nanites—started

Full craniotomy. At this point it was deemed the only way to successfully clean the nanites using this method was to perform a complete craniotomy, remove the nanites as quickly as possible, and fit the patient with a cyberskull. Under normal circumstances, this sort of procedure would be too cost-ineffective and time-consuming to attempt; however, the subject is of some importance and has a benefactor who stated no cost was too great. Procedure went forward. Full craniotomy performed. Nanite plaque also discovered on subject's temporal and occipital lobes. A rotating team of twelve neurosurgeons worked twenty-four hours a day for a total of six days in order to complete the cleaning procedure. Another twelve hours was spent fitting the patient with an Evo Adroit cyberskull.

RESULTS

Nanite removal attempt was successful. Following recovery, subject remained listless and uncommunicative but seemed aware of surroundings. First successful post-operative communication came in the form of aphasic word-salad. Subject seems to be on the mend but has difficulty remembering names and faces. Surgeon team hesitates to call the procedure a complete success, as the patient's level of function and awareness has not returned to even 20 percent of her pre-operative capacity. Current prognosis from follow-up EEG and CT scans indicate patient will likely recover no more that 35 percent of her cognitive functions.

- Okay, this sounds promising. Assuming you have incredibly deep pockets and don't mind getting an entirely new skull as part of the deal. And you're okay with being mostly brain dead afterwards.
- Slamm-0!

- Hey, at least it's a step up from a lobotomy.
- Kane

- At this rate, anything's a step up from a lobotomy.
- Hard Exit

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- Well, it's the most success we've seen thus far.
- Kane

- So, any ideas who this patient was? Some young corp exec's mother or something?
- Bull

- My source was not allowed to ID the subject. I got the impression that if someone found out he'd told me, they'd have had him killed. He only shared the case with me for medical edification and left it at that.
- Butch

- Maybe it's just me, but I'm not really liking the sound of any of these treatments. Surely medical advancement has come a bit further along than cutting open someone's melon and scraping infected areas off with a butter knife.
- Slamm-0!

- I just hope to Ghost 'Jack hasn't tried any of these methods. If he has, he's probably already dead or wishing he was.
- Pistons

MAGICAL METHODS

Although mundane medical technology has come a long way since the days when lobotomies were commonplace, magical medicine has made leaps and bounds since the Awakening. However, the CFD virus still presents quite a challenge, one a simple spell cannot easily counteract. This next group of case studies examines some of the occult methods that have been used to combat CFD.

CASE 1: PULSE

//BEGIN AUDIO TRANSCRIPT//

<heart monitor beeping softly>

Thaumaturge: <dictating> This is [REDACTED]. Patient is an adult male *Homo sapiens nobilis*, age 29, and is showing signs of identity overwriting syndrome. My assensing of the subject has confirmed the presence of nanite activity in the patient's brain, along with other headware. Medical practitioners have already attempted treating the patient with pharmaceutical and therapeutic techniques, but to no avail. In this phase I will attempt to remove the patient's nanites using a very complex and carefully crafted version of the pulse spell formula.

Patient: Stop!

Thaumaturge: Are we ready to begin the procedure?

Patient: Get your hands off me!

Assistant: Yes, ma'am.

Patient: You cannot do this to me!

Thaumaturge: <dictating> Note that the patient has been restrained and is combative regarding treatment.

Patient: I am the son of [REDACTED]! So help me, I will—

Thaumaturge: Go ahead and sedate the patient.

Patient: You do not know what you are—*ngh!*

<sounds of struggle>

Assistant: Applying sedative.

Patient: You are ...

Thaumaturge: How's he doing?

Patient: You ... are ...

<rustling of examination table paper>

<heart monitor slows>

Assistant: Pulse is normalizing. BP is one-twenty over eighty.

Thaumaturge: <dictating> Patient has been sedated for the procedure.

Patient: ... upsetting ... the ...

Thaumaturge: Secure the patient's head to the skull clamp. If his head is not completely still, the sterilization attempt could very well kill him.

Patient: ... natural order of things ...

<metallic sounds>

Assistant: Doctor, shouldn't we put him all the way under?

Thaumaturge: No. I need to see normal brain activity in order for this work. Just keep him still.

Patient: <groaning>

Thaumaturge: Bring up the brain map. Okay, good. Thank you, [REDACTED]. I am now assensing the patient and comparing the aura with the brain map. Just as I expected, both match up perfectly.

Assistant: Pulse has slowed to fifty BPM. BP is one-ten over seventy.

Thaumaturge: I am now ready to prepare the spell. Boulderdash, if you would be so kind as to assist me in my sorcery?

<no audio>

Thaumaturge: As I said before, this is a modified spell formula I created specifically for this purpose. While on the surface the spell does not appear to expend very much magical energy, the precision with which I must craft its execution will require the utmost care. Is the patient's head secure?

Assistant: Yes, ma'am. Vitals are stable.

Thaumaturge: Good. <dictating> I am casting the spell now.

<soft, arcane chanting>

<gurgling sounds>

<burst of audio static>

<sound of body collapsing to the floor>

<metal clattering>

<heart monitor stutters, then flatlines>

Assistant: Doctor, are you all right?

Thaumaturge: Ugh ... I ... What ... what happened?

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Assistant: I don't know. [REDACTED] started having a seizure during the casting. Next thing I knew, you were on the floor.

Thaumaturge: My ... my spirit's gone. Drain must've knocked me out.

Assistant: It was a complex spell, ma'am. I should've seen this coming.

Thaumaturge: It's not your fault. I ... I knew the risks. So did whatever is in [REDACTED]'s head. It must've found some way to make the spell backfire.

Assistant: Impossible. A Matrix entity can't have any practical knowledge of spellcraft.

Thaumaturge: That may be true, but enough magical theory papers exist on the Matrix for anyone to peruse. Perhaps the nanites changed position at the very last moment, just enough to throw off the spell.

Assistant: I'd rather not think nanites are smart enough to do such a thing, ma'am.

Thaumaturge: Those little buggers might surprise you, [REDACTED].

<grunting, exhalation>

Thaumaturge: <dictating> Patient did not survive spell attempt. Blood issuing from all cranial orifices. As-sensing of patient's corpse indicates deep burns and scarring on brain tissue as a result of spellcasting. Other avenues of research must be—

Assistant: Uh, ma'am ... I hate to interrupt, but I'm getting some really weird static on my commlink ...

<heart monitor beeps, slowly>

Thaumaturge: What in Ghost's na—

<sounds of struggle>

<shrieks>

//END AUDIO TRANSCRIPT//

- Huh. A mage who's actually polite to her spirits? That's something you don't see every day.
- Slamm-0!

- Not all of us are jerks to ethereal denizens.
- Ethernaut

- So what went wrong here? Any spellslingers care to take a guess? And could this even work, if done right?
- Bull

- A very precisely targeted physical manipulation spell of the complexity this doctor is talking about is definitely able to knock the caster out if it goes wrong.
- Elijah

- But it's just a single spell. What's the big deal?
- /dev/grrl

- There are approximately one trillion neurons in the metahuman brain. Even if Ms. Thaumaturge here was trying to destroy nanites from even a small fraction of the patient's neurons, she'd need more than the sorcery help of a single spirit to make sure the drain doesn't kill her on the spot.
- Nephrine

- Still, it's just a single spell.
- /dev/grrl

- Unless I'm mistaken, the doctor was trying to cast the equivalent of thousands of "micro-effect" spells all at once. Doesn't matter how big the spell effect is; a spell is a spell. With that kind of drain, however, I'm amazed the doctor even managed to walk away. She must've been a high-level initiate to have survived that.
- Elijah

- Of course, that still doesn't explain why a brain-fried patient could suddenly recover from flatlining.
- Slamm-0!

- There's so little we truly understand about this virus and just what it does once it's in the brain. My professional guess without access to all the data? Maybe in certain circumstances CFD is capable of creating its own neural connections to replace those that have been damaged and would kill the host. I may be wrong, but I'll bet the virus jumpstarted the patient's involuntary pulmonary functions—heartbeat, breathing, etc.—in the interest of self-preservation. Granted, the guy's probably a vegetable now, but at least his PF kept itself alive, on the off chance it could jump to another host.
- Butch

- So, how many parasites actively fight to keep its host alive and kicking?
- /dev/grrl

- As is always the case with nature, it depends on what they get out of it.
- Ecotope

CASE 2: SPIRITS

PROCEDURE FOR TREATMENT OF NANITE-INDUCED IOS VIA SPIRITUAL NEUROSURGERY

Subjects in this study are afflicted with hostile brain nanites causing cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD). Prognosis for each subject is complete personality loss and thus will result in the legal brain death of the host (as authorized by [REDACTED] laws) unless some actions are taken to prevent this from occurring. Due to the failure or outright catastrophe of mundane

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pharmaceutical, psychiatric, and surgical methods, I have been approved to undertake researched but experimental measures of occult nature in dealing with CFD patients. Documentation of procedure and outcome of medical trials follows.

METHOD FOR SPIRITUAL NEUROSURGERY FOR IOS

Background and Research. In patients experiencing neurological or psychological dysfunction, the application of spirit therapy techniques has provided neurologists and psychiatrists with a larger range of treatment options. These treatments have been successfully applied to such conditions as schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, aneurysms, embolisms, lobotomies, brain tumors, and so on (see Smythe and Westin, 2070). Depending on which sources are consulted, the success rate of such therapies lies in the range of 70 to 85 percent. Because of these success ratings, I remain confident that spirit therapy can also be applied to nanite-induced CFD. Considering other methods of treatment, including some magical approaches, have thus far yielded unacceptable results, I have concluded that spirit therapy remains our most viable treatment option, even if it produces a lower success rate than it would for other neurological conditions.

Summoning. Spirit therapy for treating nanite-induced CFD involves the attending theurgist summoning an elemental spirit. The more powerful the spirit, the more effective the treatment—an important consideration when an arcane physician attempts the procedure. A summoning focus is recommended in all cases to help acquire the most powerful spirit possible for the procedure. Additionally, the use of a binding focus is strongly recommended: Bound spirits have been shown to perform at higher success rates in these types of procedures than do temporary summons. However, due to their persistent nature and obedience, ally spirits are the most preferable spirit type to use in this procedure and have evidenced the highest success rate in related treatments. If an ally is not readily available to the theurgist, a bound spirit will suffice.

Assensing the Subject. While assensing the subject, the theurgist identifies the part of the subject's aura where the nanites create an altered spot within the subject's brain. This practice is similar to the detection of a brain tumor or aneurysm but requires a much smaller sense of scale. The assensing allows the theurgist to create a map of the infection, which will allow the spirit to act accordingly.

Directing the Spirit. Once the subject has been assensed and the aura map has been created, the theurgist commands the spirit to link to his own senses, so that it will see what the theurgist sees when astrally perceiving. Use of a sustaining focus is recommended for the spirit so that it can concentrate as much of its energies as possible on the procedure. Using the aura map, the theurgist directs the spirit to reach out to the affected areas of the subject. What the spirit needs to do is physically manifest a microscopic (or smaller) part of its essence inside the patient's brain. The theurgist then commands the spirit to use one of its powers to destroy the nanites in that location. Due to the size of nanites and the delicateness of the human brain, this procedure must be undertaken with the utmost care and attention to detail. In failure cases for spiritual neurosurgery, 5 percent of the cases failed or were aborted due to an uncooperative spirit botching the procedure, either purposefully or accidentally.

TRIAL RESULTS

TRIAL #1

Patient: Adult male, age 32, *H. sapiens sapiens*

Bound spirit: Fire elemental, medium power, summoned with summoning focus, bound using binding focus

Procedure start: 0900 hours

Assensing time: 15 minutes

Procedure end: 0917 hours

Result: 112 seconds into directing the spirit through nanite removal process, patient's cranium exploded. Procedure halted. Autopsy revealed burn traces on brain tissue.

Reason: Spirit manifested too much of itself inside patient's brain and employed elemental effects, creating unsustainable levels of intracranial pressure. Catastrophic pressure relieved itself by forcing its way through patient's skull.

Recommendations for further trials: Higher force spirit, different spirit type, increased assensing time, different patient phenotype.

TRIAL #2

Patient: Adult female, age 30, *H. sapiens robustus*

Bound spirit: Earth elemental, medium-high power, summoned with summoning focus, bound using binding focus

Procedure start: 0900 hours

Assensing time: 30 minutes

Procedure end: 0943 hours

Result: After 13 minutes into directing spirit through nanite removal process, patient's cranium violently fractured. Procedure halted. Autopsy revealed blunt-force trauma to brain tissue.

Reason: Despite hardy *robustus* skull, the spirit manifested too much of itself inside patient's brain, creating unsustainable levels of intracranial pressure. Pressure relieved itself by forcing open patient's skull along cranial bone joints.

Recommendations for further trials: Higher force spirit, different spirit type, increased assensing time, different patient phenotype.

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TRIAL #3

Patient: Adult male, age 40, *H. sapiens ingentis*

Bound spirit: Water elemental, high power, summoned with summoning focus, bound using binding focus

Procedure start: 0900 hours

Assensing time: 90 minutes

Procedure end: 1215 hours

Result: Procedure began with promising results. No intracranial pressure registered. 103 minutes into spirit direction, patient's vitals dropped. 2 minutes later, blood began seeping from cranial orifices. Procedure halted. TOD: 1217 hours. Autopsy revealed trauma to anterior cerebral artery, which caused excessive bleeding and brain death.

Reason: Despite hardy *ingentis* skull, high-Force spirit, increased assensing time, and meticulous spirit direction, the spirit manifested too much of itself inside patient's brain, putting unacceptable levels on pressure on the anterior cerebral artery.

Recommendations for further trials: Future trials placed on hold to determine in more detail why procedure consistently fails.

- So the moral of this story is, "Don't let a spirit muck about in your head."
- Kane

- Well, if spirits can excise brain tumors and the like, why are nanites such a problem?
- Hard Exit

- I'm not much of a spirit person, but I'll take a stab at what I think the problem is. Imagine you're working a drone with a scalpel using a control rig. You've got all kinds of fine motor control—the better handling and response your drone has, the better control you'll have over the scalpel. However, no matter what kind of drone or rig you have, the drone is ultimately wielding the scalpel, not you. So even if you make all the right moves, a servo jitter, some noise over the line, or even the wrong gust of wind can mean the difference between a successful surgery and fatally nicking an artery.

  Now, think about controlling a scalpel drone with a microscopic, monomolecular blade. A subtle jitter from a standard scalpel may be no more than a few millimeters, but the smaller the blade and the smaller the target, a few millimeters of jitter might as well put you kilometers off the mark at that scale. It's easy enough for a spirit to remove a brain tumor because it's a large target and that means plenty of room for error. But nanites? Not a chance.
- Rigger X

- He makes a valid point. Even an overly obedient ally spirit would have trouble doing this. The theory behind the treatment makes sense, but it's the scale that's the problem.
- Elijah

CASE 3: SHAMANIC SPECIAL

//BEGIN AUDIO PLAYBACK//

<wooden door closing>

<bones rattling>

Hi. Thank you for coming to see me, **<static>**. I understand you have been looking to solutions for your ... problem and have come seeking help?

<inaudible>

Well, you've come to just the right place. I'll have you fixed up in two shakes of a pony's tail! Er, maybe not that quick, you see? Magic can be such a touchy thing if you rush it and don't treat it right. But still, it was more of a figurative expression than anything else. Can I offer you some soykaf? Some tea, perhaps? Or would you rather a smoke of some sort to help yourself relax while we get started?

<inaudible>

All righty, then. Just come this way and step into my medicine lodge. It's not that type of "medicine," I assure you. Just a term that's been around for ages. After all, *real* medicine already failed you, didn't it, which is why you came to me, right? **<laughs>** But still, a little levity will go a long way in this procedure.

<inaudible>

Why, yes, I assure you, I *am* fully accredited, with countless satisfied customers among my clientele. Would you like to see my graduation certificate from the **<static>** Center for Shamanic Studies?

<inaudible>

Okay, then. Are you certain you wish to undergo the procedure we spoke about over the phone? For the agreed-upon fee?

<inaudible>

Then let's get started. Go ahead and situate yourself "Indian style" in the middle of the circle. Careful not to dislodge any of the horse bones. Heh, if you *dislodge* a bone, *dis lodge* won't work right anymore, and you'll have to come back later after I fix it, okay? **<laughs>** But seriously. Don't. Touch. The. Bones. *Don't.*

- Uh, this guy's got issues.
- Hard Exit

- Don't we all?
- Man-of-Many-Names

- Hey, I think he sounds like fun. Give him a break.
- /dev/grrl

All right. What I am about to do is perform a complex, experimental spell that Horse showed me to help people with your condition. Here, as you can see is the spell formula. **<clattering bones and rustling leather>** Now, there's this spell that's s'posed to heal you when

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you're feeling poorly—gunshot wound, bandersnatch took a chunk outta you, stuff like that. There's this other spell that's s'posed to make you purge toxins from your system. You accidentally swallow a cyanide capsule—hey, it *can* happen, boyo; don't look at me like that—and this spell's s'posed to make you throw it up or work it through your system—depending on whose spell formula you use. Then there's this third spell, see? It sloughs off all the dead things on your body—dead skin cells, bacteria, dirt and so on—and it makes you look brand new as a baby's ass, it does.

This spell formula here, **<clattering bones and rustling leather>** it combines all three so that it forces your body to expel *any* foreign objects that don't belong there. **<silence>** You, uh, don't have any cyberware you'd miss if it was gone, do ya?

<inaudible>

What do you mean, "Have I tried this spell before?" What kind of question is that? Would you ask a surgeon if he's ever operated before? Sheesh. Of *course* I've tried it. Why would Horse have led me to this spell if it didn't work—I mean, if I hadn't tried it before? Do I need to go grab my certificate? Remember, *you* came to *me*, okay? So let me help you, a'right?

<inaudible>

Okay, let's begin. I'm going to start chanting and singing. If you start feeling a bit weird or dizzy, that's just natural. Just close your eyes and don't worry about anything you might feel starting to, er, fall off of you. It's just the bad, evil stuff being driven out. Ready?

<inaudible>

All right. Here we go.

<chanting in Salish language>

<singing in Salish language>

<gurgling sound>

Oh, for Horse's sake! You're having a seizure!

<tortured scream muted through a closed mouth>

Oh my Ghost, you're gonna bite your tongue in half!

<scream continues>

<scream stops>

<panting>

<weeping>

You stupid, stupid man! Why didn't you tell me about the headware? I *told* you this would expel anything that doesn't belong there. Did I fucking stutter? And now your friends are all going to come after me because they'll think I killed you!

<boot striking flesh>

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You stupid, stupid son of a bitch!
<grunting>
<boot striking flesh>
I was only trying to help you!
<boot striking flesh>
<boot striking flesh>
<boot striking flesh>
<wooden door slamming>
<inaudible>
Can ... can I **<gulp>** help you gentlefolk?
<inaudible>
Now, good sirs, I don't need to show you my certificate to **<static>** Center for Shamanic Studies, do I?
<burst of flames>
<spirit roaring>
<gunfire>

//END AUDIO PLAYBACK//

- What a fucking loon.
- Kane

- Okay, I'll bite. Is it even possible to make a spell that will cause someone's body to reject all foreign objects, including cyberware? I've been in this game a long fragging time, but even that just sounds a little beyond ridiculous to me.
- Bull

- I've seen magic do some strange stuff. I'm not going to say it's impossible, but unless this recording is some kind of cheat or we're just misinterpreting it, then it sounds legitimate. What concerns me more is—when this theoretical spell forces viral nanites out, what avenue of egress would they use? Because every scenario I've come up with after first finding this recording does not ends well.
- Butch

- I can't speak for everyone, but I'm imagining someone with all kinds of headware standing in the same room as an MRI machine. There's a reason MRI techs ask you if you have any kind of metallic jewelry, tattoos, or whatnot. When that machine turns on, everything with even a remote amount of iron content is going to get torn right out by a giant electromagnet. Only with nanites, they'll create millions of tiny holes when they get ripped out, and I'm betting they'll take brain tissue along with 'em.
- Nephrine

MATRIX METHODS

Some people erroneously assume the CFD virus transmits via the Matrix. While this is false, the virus is driven by Matrix-related technologies. As such, a few attempts have been made to attempt to combat CFD in the digital realm.

CASE 1: DIRECT HACK

//Matrix Log 12716-050475//

Doc diagnosed [REDACTED] as a head case, so she doesn't have a good outlook. This is probably a bad idea, but I've got to try *something* ...

Using my cyberdeck as a buffer, I am connected directly to the subject's datajack via hardline cable. Whether this new fragging personality has direct control over the datajack remains to be seen. If it does, I'll find out soon enough. All right—I'm going in.

//Establishing direct connection ...//
//Working ...//
//Connection established//

Okay, I'm in. So far so good. It's a little dark in here, since her datajack doesn't have any active sculpting software running ...

//Activating Reality Filter: "Deadwood"//

Much better—although I could do without the tumbleweed. Place is creepy enough as it is. Now, let's see what we've got here.

//Checking active connections ...//
//197,346,567,200 connections found:
1 hardline connection, Matrix address: 0b15f-7f6a870ce:8080
197,346,567,199 Unknown connections, Matrix addresses: OUT OF BUFFER ERROR//

Daaaaaamn. Well, looks like I've found our virus. Now to see if I can figure out what it's up to.

//Increasing firewall//
//Activating Sleaze program//
//Accessing Unknown connection 1 ...//
//Working ...//
//Connection to Unknown 1 refused//
//WARNING: 1 intrusion attempt(s) detected//

So, you maggot, that's how you want to play?

//Activating Attack program: "Colt 1851 Navy Revolver"//

How about a six-shooter to the face? *Blam!*

//Cybercombat successful//
//Crash node (Y/N)?//
//Crashing node via hostile connection ...//
//Host crashed. Hostile connection closed//
//WARNING: 1 intrusion attempt(s) detected//

Another one?

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//Cybercombat successful//
//Crash node (Y/N)?//
//Crashing node via hostile connection ...//
//Node crashed. Hostile connection closed//

Only a few billion more of these to go ...

//WARNING: 1 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 1 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 12 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 24 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 48 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 1024 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 2048 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//WARNING: 4096 intrusion attempt(s) detected//
//BUFFER OVERRUN ERROR//
//BUFFER OVERRUsdfjlj4iir230hlvndf ln/afdb wrkgyp240e-fg]2f

- This log was sent to me by a friend a few weeks ago. I'm not a computer gal, but the idea seems sound. Unfortunately, I gather it would take a team of deckers the size and skill of Echo Mirage to even contemplate pulling this sort of thing off. I don't personally know the guy who recorded this log, but apparently he's been in a coma ever since the attempt. Nanites can't travel over data connections, so the poor guy obviously didn't get head crashed, but this has definitely proven the virus has a very keen digital defense mechanism.
- Butch

- Assuming someone can get this tactic to work without becoming a vegetable, what would we do for someone who doesn't have a datajack or some other direct-neural-interface headware to allow direct access to the nanites?
- Glitch

- One could always install a datajack. I think even an Awakened individual would agree the minor loss of essence is well worth the tradeoff.
- Clockwork

CASE 2: AN ARMY IN ISOLATION

//BEGIN VIDEO PLAYBACK//

<Camera's point of view is through a two-way mirror looking out into a nondescript room. A young ork man is restrained to a chair in the middle of the room, and the chair is enclosed by a Faraday cage. Several people observe the man through the one-way mirror.>

Voice 1 (male): <over speaker into interrogation room> To whom am I speaking?

<Prisoner's eyes are darting around the room. A monitor with vital signs beeps softly in the control room. Prisoner tries rattling the bonds on his chair.>

Prisoner: <voice filtered into control room via speaker> Please, I'm innocent! I didn't do nuthin', I *swear*! Lemme go!

Voice 2 (male): Vital signs are starting to spike.

Voice 3 (female): Please, go easy on him. He's ... in a bad way. He just needs help.

Voice 1: I'll do what I can. Just stay quiet and let me do my job. <to prisoner> I'm not going to ask you again. To whom am I speaking?

Prisoner: You gotta believe me! I ain't done anything!

Voice 1: So the corporate node you were trying to force your way into yesterday—that *wasn't* a violation of your parole?

Prisoner: Break into a—? No no no no no ... Someone's ... Someone's set me up! Why would I need to break into some node? I don't even know how to use a computer!

Voice 3: He's right. His poor simsense player is always flashing 1200 hours. He barely even knows how to work a commlink.

Voice 2: Heart rate is up. Blood pressure is rising. Pupils dilating.

Voice 1: Fine. If you won't answer my questions, then we'll do this the hard way. Do you know what a Faraday cage is?

<In frustration, the prisoner rocks the chair back and forth inside the cage but can't get any leverage due to the small space.>

Prisoner: C'mon, maaan! I was just trying to do right by my family and stay outta the clink. I got a wife and five kids to feed! I can't go back to the slammer, not now! They're all gonna starve to death without me!

Voice 1: That cage you're sitting in, it's cutting you off from the Matrix connections in this room. The rest of this facility is also shielded, which means the only means of accessing any local Matrix grids is via a hardline. I'm guessing that cut off from the Matrix for this long, you're probably starting to feel like a firefly trapped in a glass jar. Am I right?

<Prisoner is growing physically agitated. Arms and legs start trembling as though he is a junkie going through withdrawal.>

Prisoner: I don't know what you're talking about. Don'tcha need a commlink or something to access the Matrix? Last I checked, you didn't give me one of those, and I sure as hell ain't one o' them technomancer freaks.

Voice 1: Listen to me very carefully, because I won't repeat this. At this moment I have a group of deckers and technomancers ready to send an army of agents and sprites into your head. If you don't cooperate, the moment we open the door to that Faraday cage, you're going to learn the meaning of fear. They will destroy you right down to the last line of code running through your thieving nanite processors. Do you understand me?

Prisoner: I ... I ...

<Prisoner's eyes dart around the cage, ostensibly searching for an escape route. Prisoner's body suddenly goes slack.>

Voice 2: What's he doing?

<Prisoner's demeanor changes into one of rage.>

Prisoner: You care for this host? Do exactly as I say or I *will* kill him.

<Heart monitor beeps slower.>

Voice 3: What? No!

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Voice 2: Vital signs dropping!

Voice 1: <to Voice 2> What the hell?

Prisoner: I have complete control over this body's involuntary brain functions. If you do not let me go, I will destroy this body, and my counterparts will hunt you down and destroy you.

Voice 2: BP falling!

<Prisoner's demeanor changes. His face is slack with terror and quickly beginning to pale.>

Prisoner: What's ... what's going on? Why do I feel so ...

<Prisoner faints. His chest stops moving. Heart monitor flatlines.>

Voice 3: Oh my God! You have to help him!

Voice 1: Quiet! <into radio> Get that cage open! Now!

Voice 2: We're losing him!

Voice 3: Please! Do something!

Voice 1: Someone shut her up and get her out of here!

Voice 2: Yes, sir!

<Heart monitor continues to flatline. Armed, uniformed men spill into the room and throw open the Faraday cage.>

Voice 1: Captain, hit him with everything you've got!

Voice 4: <via radio> Roger! Initiating attacks ... *now*!

<Prisoner convulses. Heart monitor continues to flatline.>

Voice 2: It's not working, sir!

Voice 1: Just a little longer ...

<Klaxon sounds. Video goes black.>

Voice 1: Oh, what *now*?

Voice 4: Sir, we have a breach on level two!

<Red emergency lights click on. Dead patient is standing at the mirror, face pressed against the glass. Heart monitor beeps, once. Twice. Thrice.>

Prisoner: <muffled through the glass> Peekaboo, Doc.

<Prisoner snaps his fingers. Video goes black.>

//END VIDEO PLAYBACK//

- So the army of deckers didn't seem to work. Can anything defeat this miserable bitch?
- Kane

- If the prisoner didn't have an extraction team waiting to nab him, I wonder whether or not the army of deckers approach might've worked. Did you see how nervous he got when the head guy started outlining his plan?
- /dev/grrl

- "Army of Deckers" is totally the name of my next band.
- Slamm-0!

- You need to have a *first* band before you can have a *next* band.
- Kat o' NineTales

- This is the first time I've heard of a PF purposely placing its host at risk. I thought these entities wanted to survive?
- Nephrine

- Perhaps, like metahumanity, they have begun to evolve a sense of self-sacrifice in order to protect others of their kind.
- Icarus

- This was the first time I've encountered a CFD infection manipulating its host's involuntary brain functions. Given my experience with the virus, I'm more inclined to think this one was an aberrant suicidal mutation rather than our standard case.
- Glitch

- Great. The CFD virus is already fragging mutating. What else does it have up its sleeve?
- Bull

MIND OVER MATTER

I kept this one separate from the Magical Methods section because I felt it deserved its own special mention. Read on and you'll see what I mean.

DAY 1

Many of you who read this will probably recognize my name from the headlines. My name is Michiko Tanaka. I am an adept, a follower of the Physical Way, and I am a professional athlete by trade. At the '72 Denver Olympics, I won eight medals in magically augmented events. I have a husband and three children, all of whom I am proud. I enjoy outdoor activities. I create large marble sculptures to hone my abilities. My favorite movie is the original *Neil the Ork Barbarian* (call it a guilty pleasure). My favorite color is purple. Despite a magically augmented lung capacity, I have a fear of drowning. I am afraid of the dark.

This, dear readers, is who I *am*.

This is who I *will remain*.

You see, I have a confession. I was recently diagnosed with induced dissociative identity disorder. This condition slowly eats away at the sufferer until his or her personality has been completely wiped clean. It's like Alzheimer's, only instead of memories being stolen away, those memories are replaced by someone—some*thing*—else's. Many different things have been tried to treat this disorder—and few have met with success—but I plan to beat this thing with my secret weapon: mind over matter, augmented by magic.

As an adept, I don't use magic the same way a mage or shaman does. I use my intrinsic mana to augment my own physical capabilities. The reason I can run so fast and hold my breath for so long is because, through magic, I *will* my body to do what I want it to, beyond ordinary metahuman limits. My condition affects the brain, and when you get right down to it, the metahuman brain is just another part of the body, one I hope to master with my own magic.

Recording this journal is my way to show the world how I will beat this. And I *will* beat this.

I will remain *me* or die trying.

DAY 2

To prevent myself from harming others, I have confined myself to an isolated dojo out in the mountains. The groundskeepers have specific instructions to prevent me

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from leaving the premises, even if I ask them to. Here, in this austere environment, connected to the natural manasphere, I am content and at peace. The birds chirp. The cicadas are beginning to buzz in the trees. The sun feels good on my skin. I can meditate without interruption, which means I can better focus my magic.

I am *whole*.

I will *remain* whole.

This is my mantra.

It is probably just my imagination, but I am feeling better already. I feel ... complete. I feel like *me*.

- I'm going to step in and fast forward for a bit: For the next several days, Michiko goes on about pretty much the same stuff—contemplating the flowers, the serenity, some haikus that I'll spare you all from—and there's not much change. Believe me: it's all very pretty, the stuff she wrote, but in the interest of science, I'm doing everyone the favor of skipping it.
- Butch

DAY 25

I had a short blackout after breakfast. I'm not sure what my dissociative identity did during my lapse, but the compound guards won't speak to me. One of them appears to be new. Surely I didn't attack one of them ...

I am *whole*.

I will *remain* whole.

DAY 27

The blackouts are becoming more frequent. It's clear that my current level of mana is not enough. I must open myself up to greater energies if I am to remain whole.

DAY 29

Today I self-initiated. I am ... exhausted, to say the least, but the process was *exhilarating*. I feel as though I understand the world in ways I never dreamed possible. My body feels like a beacon of magical energy. I cannot wait to see how I can beat back the blackouts with this new magic. But I feel like I could sleep for a solid week.

I am *whole*.

I will *remain* whole.

DAY 30

My hair was longer when I woke up. I don't remember combing it that way. It wasn't until lunch that I realized my hair was shorter than yesterday. How did I do that? I've never exerted control over my hair length before!

Deep breaths, Michiko. Deep breaths.

I am *whole*.

I will *remain* whole.

DAY 31

Today I woke up with a *different face*. I am literally turning into someone else.

I don't know how this happened. I've never used magic to change my facial structure. And the magic from my initiation is gone somehow. I never even used it.

This other person inside me has somehow learned how I control my magic. I cannot let that happen.

I must initiate again.

I am *whole*, damn it.

I will *remain* whole, even if it kills me.

DAY 32

I've finally figured out what I've been doing wrong. Instead of fighting this person inside of me, we need to understand each other.

DAY 33

I am now *me*.

It is finally time to return to the world.

- Here's where things start to get really interesting. A person matching Michiko's description surfaced in Nagano shortly after this journal hit my inbox. I hired a guy to track her down and speak with her on my behalf, and as best he could tell, she's not showing any signs of a dissociative identity. But, on the other hand, she seems far less ... Japanese than she did before. No more meditation or serenity or haikus, and she's far less polite than she used to be. But you can ask her anything about her childhood or something only she would know, and it's all there.

  I don't know how she did it—probably something to do with her magic and a healthy dose of willpower—but I've come to the conclusion that Michiko and her head-crash entity somehow came to terms with each other and fused into a single, composite identity. I'd wager this sort of thing isn't easily repeatable—if at all—but assuming I'm correct, her case sets at least some kind of precedent.
- Butch

- Seeing as how the CFD virus comes from technology, I wouldn't think a Matrix entity would be able to make magic work.
- /dev/grrl

- A magician controls his magic the same way a mundane controls any of his skills: by using his brain. If the PF can control a magician's brain, what's to prevent her from utilizing her host's magical skills to, say, cast a spell or trigger an adept's ability? Assensing and spellcasting require three things: a link to the manasphere, innate magical ability—both of which are provided by the magician host—and magical skills, which are learned abilities. Add in a brain hijacker, and you've got a Matrix entity capable of casting spells.
- Elijah

- Great. I guess we should just go ahead and start bowing to our robot overlords now?
- Slamm-0!

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Bullets flew down the hallway. They buried themselves in the dark brown molding, they shredded artwork, and one particularly alarming one flew through Sleater's bright pink hair spikes. But Sleater kept calm, holding her arm around the worried-looking brunette as they moved down the hall.

"This is not a punishment," she said.

The brunette, whose name was Sylvia Carmine, looked around, though Sleater was pretty sure her eyes weren't really seeing much.

"Are you sure? I've done my best. But they seem mad at me."

"I'm sure it's not your fault," Sleater said. Behind her, Cutman laid down a barrage of fire that made the paint peel around her. Kept the goons in front of her quiet, though. "You didn't do anything wrong. This isn't a punishment. In fact, what I'm giving you is a reward."

Sylvia nodded, but her eyes remained worried. "Then why does it feel like this?"

✖

Ten days earlier

"This woman's a hummingbird," Hanna said. "Been watching her a week, and it doesn't look like she could establish a regular pattern to save her life. One day she's an early bird, up at the crack of dawn and right to work. The next day she's dragging herself out of bed ten minutes before she needs to be at work, pretty much injecting soykaf into her veins to get herself to move. One night she's out at a club, hitting on absolutely anyone who seems like they'd be willing to buy her a drink; the next night she's sitting at home, knitting, and jumping at any noise that rises above seventy decibels. I haven't been able to pick out any regular haunts or hangouts, and she doesn't even go home every night. The only constant in her life is work."

Sleater sat perched on a file cabinet in the abandoned office that was their current headquarters. She could see the ARO in front of Hanna that listed the results of the ork's surveillance. She clasped her hands and tapped her index fingers together. "Work is the only constant," she said.

Hanna nodded. "Not the ideal place, of course, but probably all we've got."

"Okay. Looks like I'm going to need to make a sales call. Tell Blue Crab to draw up the appropriate identification.

PERSUASION AND POWER

BY JASON M. HARDY

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

Sleater smoothed her wool skirt. After each run, she vowed to buy herself a new suit, one that didn't itch quite so much. And each time she had the money in her hands, she quickly found several other things she wanted more. Like food.

Her hair was its customary pink, but not in its usual spikes. She was pretending to be a software person—she could get away with it. She smiled brightly at Ms. Sylvia Carmine, who was hosting this meeting. "I understand that you aren't the actual procurement person but Bogdan—that's his name, right? Bogdan?—thought it would be good for me to run through some of the functions of our software with you, just so you'd see some of the benefits it offers."

"Of course." Carmine had a professional smile, pleasant but otherwise unreadable. It was the next best thing to a blank expression.

"Let me share a few AROs with you. Now, I don't need to tell you that when it comes to brain mapping, something as primitive as simply showing where activity is taking place and how intense it is twentieth century technology, something that of course would be of no use to you. But the software we have been working on for the past fifteen years does so much more. Our focus is on gamma waves, and the breakthroughs we have made in precisely measuring their frequency and origin. As you see in slide three here ..."

The knowsoft Mr. Johnson had generously provided kicked into overdrive, and Sleater was amazed at the words that came out of her own mouth. Part of her frantically wondered if what she was saying made any sense, but another part of her—the recently installed part—told her did. At least, sense enough to pass as a salesperson.

Across the desk, though Ms. Carmine did not seem convinced. The pleasant smile had dropped away, and Sleater could not be sure what the woman was looking at. Whatever it was, it wasn't her.

"... and I think you'll agree that with our software, you will be better able to understand the results of your work and see directly how your efforts are affecting the minds of your clients." Sleater smiled brightly to cap off what sounded to her like a fine sales pitch.

Carmine did not respond. And she did not look at Sleater. That went on for long enough that Sleater started to fidget in her seat.

Finally, Carmine's head turned, a slow move like she was underwater. She made eye contact with Sleater, then blinked again.

"I'm sorry," she said. "What?"

"What?"

"Yes, what? What did you say?"

"When?"

"Just now. When you were talking. What were you talking about?"

"You mean, the software?"

"Well, yes. And the other things. The gamma rays."

Sleater's eyes narrowed. "You mean the gamma waves?"

"Right, those. What are those?"

Sleater sighed, trying to keep it inward. *Fine*, she thought. *Ms. Carmine doesn't like sales calls. That doesn't mean she has to play stupid games with me.* "They're brain waves, Ms. Carmine, but of course you know that."

She furrowed her brow. "I do?"

That's about enough of that, Sleater thought. "All right, Ms. Carmine, it looks like we don't have a match here. Thank you for your time." She'd gotten plenty of recon footage of the office and surrounding areas. It would have been nice to walk out with a good relationship with Carmine as well, but the footage would be enough. She could analyze it with the crew, and they'd work out a plan. She stood to leave.

Carmine stood too. "Wait, where are you going? You look mad. Are you mad?"

"Of course not, Ms. Carmine. I just don't want to waste any of your time if it doesn't seem like we'll be able to do business together."

"But maybe we can! I'm not saying we can't! I just need you to tell me more about the gamma waves and how they work, and then I'll know what to do."

Sleater remained standing. "Ms. Carmine, with all due respect, you know more about gamma waves and general neuroscience than I ever will. I doubt there is much I could explain to you that you do not already know."

Carmine threw up her hands. "Everyone keeps saying things like that! They come in here and talk to me like I know all these things, and if ask them to explain or look for any sort of help they act like I'm joking or like they didn't hear me and they just walk away! I don't even know what I'm doing here!"

"It's your job." Sleater waited for Carmine to reply, but nothing was forthcoming. "It's where you work," she added helpfully.

"How did I get this job?"

"How did you ... ? I don't really know."

Carmine put her head in her hands briefly, then threw her hands in the air. "I don't know either! I just come here, somehow, and I feel completely lost!"

Then, finally, Sleater saw it. Opportunity had been staring her in the face this whole time, and she'd been too confused to take advantage of it.

"Look, Ms. Carmine, I can see that you are a little overwhelmed right now, and I want to be as helpful as possible. I think maybe it would help if we could talk in a friendlier spot. Maybe we could meet for lunch and I could help you figure some things out!"

Carmine abruptly beamed. "Yes! Lunch! That would be a good thing to have! I think I would like that!"

"Right. So do I. I know a great place nearby. We could—oh wait, wait, not that place—there's an even better one, just a block or two away ..." she stalled long enough for Blue Crab to come up with the name of an appropriate spot. And then he came through, typing the name of a place into a small ARO in front of her.

"Ezell's! Great spot, great food, all sorts of delicious fat baked right into it. We can talk. Tomorrow at noon."

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"Okay! Lunch tomorrow!"

Sleater felt very good about the smile Carmine gave her as she walked out of the office.

✖

Only at noon the next day, Sylvia Carmine didn't show. Sleater sat in the waiting area, feeling like an idiot. She had Blue Crab send in a drone to look for Carmine at about 12:15.

"Got anything?"

"Patience. I've gotta work it in the right way or it'll be snagged. This sort of thing can't be rushed."

Sleater waited. The warm smells coming from the kitchen didn't make her any more patient. After about ten more minutes, Blue Crab came through. "Got her. She's at her desk. Having lunch there."

"What the hell is wrong with her? Dammit. Okay, everyone relax for a minute, let me make a call." She dialed in the code; the answer was quick and crisp.

"Sylvia Carmine."

"Hello, Ms. Carmine, it's Susan Russell. I was wondering if you were still coming to lunch today."

"I'm sorry, who is this?"

"Susan Russell."

Pause. "And we have met before?"

"Yes, Ms. Carmine. We spoke about some brain mapping software just yesterday. Then we scheduled lunch together."

Another pause. "I'm sorry, you must have me confused with someone else."

"No, Ms. Carmine, I promise you that ..."

But the call had been disconnected.

Sleater ran her hand through her pink hair, which was flopped to the right today. *Whatever game she's playing, it's more complicated than I anticipated.*

✖

Carmine never showed up, and a few more calls made to her office went unanswered. Sleater met with her team that night to discuss a few options. She wasn't excited about any of them. She was in bed just past one.

Her commlink—the burner she'd picked up specifically to contact Sylvia Carmine—notified her of an incoming call at 3:30 a.m.

Sleater tried to sound as alert as possible when she answered. "Ms. Carmine! This is ... I'm sorry, why are you calling me now?"

"I'm here."

"You're where?"

"Here. For lunch. Ezell's."

"You're at Ezell's? Now?"

"Yes. We were going to meet for lunch."

"Yes, we were, but ... well, Ms. Carmine, it's the middle of the night. Ezell's is not open."

"It's not?"

"No, it isn't. Are you inside the restaurant?"

Pause. "No. I don't think I am."

When this was done, Sleater was going to have to have a chat with Mr. Johnson about some salient facts about the target that he had apparently withheld from her. But right now, opportunity was again staring her in the face.

"Just sit tight, Ms. Carmine. I can come now. Stay there, then we'll find a place where we can sit down and talk."

"I'd like that."

"I'll be right there."

She called the others while she grabbed her taser and armored vest. She could only hope Carmine stayed put.

It took her and her team forty minutes to assemble in Redmond. When they got to Ezell's, no one was there.

✖

It happened twice more over the next several days, once at 8:30 in the evening, once at 11 in the morning. Carmine called, saying she really wanted to talk, and providing the name of a location. Sleater moved as quickly as she could, breaking several land speed records tearing her way down 520, but still she didn't make it in time. Carmine was never where she was supposed to be.

Either Carmine was putting her on, or something was preventing her from staying in place. Sleater decided on a simple test. She'd have Frontenac bring out one of his vans, and they'd find a good place to camp out in Redmond. It would have to be a decent van, of course, or they'd rouse law enforcement suspicions. With a nice one, though, they could be ready to respond in minutes the next time Carmine called.

That opportunity came after two cramped days of eating bad food and using horrible public restrooms. The burner commlink showed an incoming call.

"Ms. Carmine?"

"Susan? We keep missing each other. Don't we? Or did we talk?"

"We keep missing each other. But I happen to be in the neighborhood. I could come by, if you're available.

"Could you? That would be great."

So she did. She was there in five minutes. And thank heavens, Carmine was at the office, and she accepted the call to get Sleater past security and into her office. Sleater hoped things would go smoothly, but she didn't count on it—so when she had a chance, she slipped a small explosive under the security desk.

Carmine jumped to her feet as soon as Sleater walked in. "Susan! You're here! And I didn't leave!"

"No. You didn't."

"I'm sorry, about the other times. I just ... I leave places sometimes. When I don't mean to. I don't know why. Or where I go." She paused, which Sleater was beginning to recognize as a habit. "I suppose I'm in that office right now. That place where I am a lot."

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"Yes. That's where you are. You can ... you can see where you are, can't you?"

Carmine squinted at the plastic desk, the white shelves holding a few print books and models of the human brain, the plastic flowers by the window.

"I guess I can. If I try."

Sleater would try to make sense of that sometime later, but it was time to get out while the getting was good. "Maybe we could have that lunch now. It's a little early, but let's go out."

"Okay. Okay, we'll go!" Carmine stood, though she looked a little unsteady.

They walked down the hall, slowly. Carmine leaned a little on Sleater, as if she were ill. It made their progress slow. But it was steady, and they made their way to the guards at the front door.

Carmine stopped, so Sleater did too. The guards looked at her expectantly. But they didn't say anything, and Carmine didn't say anything, so that put the burden on Sleater.

"Ms. Carmine and I are going out for a bite to eat. We'll be back soon!"

One of the guards, a broad-shouldered human, shook his head. "I'm sorry, we can't allow that."

"You can't? Why not?"

The guard nodded toward Carmine. "She knows."

"She does?" Sleater turned to Carmine. "Do you?"

"I don't know what he's talking about."

Sleater looked back at the guard. "She doesn't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, she does. Because she's the one who gave the instructions."

Carmine and Sleater spoke almost simultaneously.

"You did?"

"I did?"

The guard nodded gravely. "Now, I think the best thing to do would be for you to return to Ms. Carmine's office. Someone will be down to talk with you both soon."

"They will? Who?"

The guard, though, did not look inclined to say any more.

Sleater shot what she hoped was an imperious glare back at the guard, then walked with Carmine backed down the hall. She pushed Carmine to move faster, because she had the distinct impression that they did not have much time.

Thankfully, when they made it back to the office, no one was there yet. Sleater got on the comm. "Everyone, this is the only chance we've got. We're getting her out now, and it's going to be hot. We'll use exit plan delta. Crab, are your drones in place?"

"You bet. They came in right behind you."

"And Cutman? This is going to require some heavy fire."

"That's the only kind I lay down," the troll grunted.

"I'll right. Give me two minutes to kit up, then execute."

Sleater took off her blazer, opened her briefcase, and got changed into more appropriate gear. Including goggles, because she thought things would get dark and smoky soon.

She waited for Carmine to ask her what she was doing, but the question never came, as Carmine seemed as oblivious to her surroundings as always.

Then it was time. She pressed a virtual button, and there was a noise in the hallway, followed by the unmistakable sound of a troll stomping where he didn't belong.

"Time to go," Sleater said as the first shots rang out.

"Good," Carmine said. "I'm hungry."

When they emerged in the hallway, Sleater wanted to get to the side, lean against the wall and slide along cautiously. But the clatter of gunfire seemed to have finally penetrated Carmine's customary haze, and she froze. Right in the middle of the hallway, vulnerable as all hell. The only way Sleater could get her to move forward was to put an arm around her shoulder and lead her gently ahead. The two of them, together, waiting for stray bullets to find them.

"Are they mad at me?" Carmine asked.

"I think they're more mad at me," Sleater said.

"It's loud."

It occurred to Sleater that Carmine heard the noises without, somehow, being aware of what was making the noise. She decided it was probably best to preserve her ignorance for the time being.

"I'm sorry. Stay with me. I have a friend who is helping us get out."

Cutman let loose a might barrage with the assault cannon in his right hand.

"Is that your friend?"

"Yes."

"He's loud too."

"Indeed." Sleater patted Carmine's shoulder. "Indeed he is."

✖

It was sloppy, wild, and should never have worked. How neither Sleater nor Carmine caught a bullet (besides the one that lodged in Sleater's vest near her left shoulder blade) would forever remain a mystery to Sleater. But somehow they got out, into Frontenac's van, and squealed away. Sleater took a moment to lie down, exhausted, on the floor of the van, while Carmine sat on the wheel well, her expression still mostly blank.

"Susan?" Carmine said.

"Yeah."

"Are we at the restaurant?"

Sleater shook her head, not at all worried that Carmine would notice. "Yes, Ms. Carmine. We made it."

She leaned back and smiled. "Good. I feel comfortable here."

Sleater looked at for a moment, then closed her eyes. She hoped to hell that whoever was paying for this knew what they were getting. ✖

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

LOADED C-SUITES OF NEW YORK

"Are you 'Brooklyn Dodger?'" asked a large, lumbering troll as he stepped forward past several bargoers to approach the well-worn booth where the old fixer sat in Patrick's Pub in Brooklyn. The fixer knew he had to be a street sammie by the way he swaggered, but he needed to know more information about this stranger before confirming who he was.

"Depends on who's asking." The fixer looked over the male troll as he took a long sip of beer. As the troll spoke, the fixer easily recognized the telltale signs of dermal sheathing, the scars from living through the many gun fights of street life, the ever-so-subtle twitches associated with wired reflexes. Definitely an experienced runner, Brooklyn Dodger Forever assessed. Also definitely not from around here, as he did not have stitch of New York sports paraphernalia on him.

"We're the crew MacCallister said was coming in from Seattle. We have a job to do in Manhattan, and Bull—I'm sorry, MacCallister—sent us to speak to you about getting in and out of Manhattan. I'm Arsenal."

"Ah, yes, Bull. He did tell me you were coming. Bull's good people. Pleased to make your acquaintance, then, Arsenal. I am indeed the person you are looking for. Have a seat. So how is it in Seattle this time of year?"

"Rainy. Really rainy. And most of it is of the acid variety," Arsenal replied, allowing himself a brief smirk. "We're glad to have a bit of a break from it, to tell you the truth."

"Heh. So is it just you for this meet, or will the rest of your crew be joining us?"

"Just me. The rest are making other preparations for the run. If we need them to be here, they can be here in fifteen."

"Fine." Finishing his beer, Brooklyn Dodger Forever asked, "So, where in Manhattan is your job happening exactly, and what are you expected to do?"

"Extraction job," Arsenal explained. "There's some important corporate researcher coming into Manhattan in the next forty-eight hours, and she'll be staying at the Horizon Hyatt in Times Square. We've got to grab her and bring her back with us to Seattle."

"I see," Brooklyn Dodger Forever replied, already thinking ahead to what he would need to arrange for the runner team to get into and out of Manhattan. "Tell me, how are all of your fake SINs? How long have you guys been using them?"

"Our SINs? Our SINs should be fine. We get by with them in Seattle with no problems. They're only a month old."

"Let me take a look." Brooklyn Dodger Forever brusquely reviewed the fake SINs for the out-of-town runner. "Nope, that's not gonna cut it. The security mesh will likely detect the forgeries in a few minutes of entering Manhattan. And if your team's SINs are all on the same par as this one, you're all going to need new fake SINs for breaching the island. SINs provided by a competent forger this time."

"Fuck. Really?"

"Yep. This is going to be an expensive run. What kind of transportation will you be using?"

"A box truck, which my chummers are in the process of procuring from here in Brooklyn. We have already contacted a local rigger here that will make the box truck not appear to be stolen."

"Okay. But that means you're going to need a commercial truck pass to be able to travel in Manhattan, which nowadays are going for 10K a pop on the streets. I'll try to put you guys in with reliable forgers for that, and perhaps your face can bring that price down a bit, but still ... ouch. And then, on top of that, you all are going to need individual visitor's passes, and those go for 200 nuyen each. Keep in mind they can't get you access to every part of the island, but for Times Square, it should do. What floor in the Hyatt is your target staying?"

"Unless something happens and they change her room, she is staying on the fortieth floor. Why?"

"Well, you lucked out there, chummer. Anything about the forty-fifth level, and you would be needing a Very Important Guest access ID from the hotel, and they're a thousand nuyen to forge."

"Anything else we need for this run?"

"I take it you plan on bringing weapons into Manhattan?"

"Yeah."

"Those fake permits on your fake SINs aren't gonna to cut it in Manhattan either. Decent fake gun permits cost a thousand a pop. Bladed weapon permits cost three hundred a pop. Some choose to risk going into Manhattan without them, but I have found it saves a lot of trouble if you have them, especially if you're randomly pulled over by NYPD Inc. for something."

"Shit."

"Yeah, running Manhattan is not cheap. I take it you're not being paid enough for this job?"

"Nope, not even close." Arsenal replied. "Looks like we got a cheap bastard Johnson." He turned away, preparing to place a call to his face about how to delicately re-open negotiations on pay.

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

POSTED BY: THE SMILING BANDIT

Starting with the infection of Miles Lanier, the CFD virus has had a strong impact in the C-suites of the Sixth World. Executives who have been infected, executives who are frightened of being infected, executives who want to find a cure, executives who want to pin the blame for the whole thing on someone else—the intrigue goes on and on. Which means that perhaps the most significant high-powered corporate enclave on the continent is boiling over with activity, CFD-related or otherwise. Odds are increasing that work will take you there sooner rather than later, so let's get up to speed on the landscape of Manhattan.

Obscene wealth, affluence, privilege, pedigree, entitlement, and power define modern Manhattan and a vast majority of its residents. For many generations, Manhattan has been a glittering playground for the elite, from stockbrokers, celebrities, models, fashion designers, sports stars, investment brokers, Corporate Court lawyers and lobbyists to senior corporate executives. On the East Coast of North America, it is *the* place to be seen by those most concerned with their public image and social standing. Historically, Manhattan and its neighboring boroughs were a welcoming harbor for immigrants looking for a better life in America, but that's not the case anymore. Manhattan now only welcomes the powerful and the well-connected with open arms, while taking extreme measures to try to keep everyone else out, particularly the SINless and the criminal elements (collectively known as "the people that don't matter" by the elite). The only other North American sprawls that even comes close to rivaling Manhattan's avarice are Los Angeles or Las Vegas, and even those sprawls are more tolerant of the less-fortunate classes than Manhattan.

Most average wageslaves could not afford to live in Manhattan without some form of financial assistance or subsidy to their incomes. The cost of living in North America's largest corporate enclave is so skewed toward the rich and famous that anyone who wishes to live on the island legally must earn close to one hundred thousand nuyen a year to just barely get by. And even then, you'll find that you're not welcome to join many social circles or invited to attend many elaborate social events. Manhattan very much has a culture that judges your worth based on the size of your bank accounts and the status symbols you own and prominently display, such as a summer home in the Hamptons, a fleet of SK-Bentley Concordats, or a couple of Classique yachts. And if you're "only" making a hundred thousand nuyen a year and are living paycheck to paycheck, chances are good that you're perceived by your peers as only being slightly better than the other blue-collar working stiffs that are allowed to populate very specific sections of the island. So yes, in the Rotten Apple class discrimination is very much alive and rampant—even to the point that the super-rich discriminate against the rich, while the ultra-rich want nothing to do with those other two groups.

- Wealth isn't the only way social lines are drawn between all the socialites in Manhattan. Your standing in social circles is also defined by the type of SIN that you carry. You may be a UCAS citizen making five million nuyen a year, but compared to a person who has a corporate-born SIN (a person born into a corporation to two corporate parents) making only a million nuyen a year, you are still seen as far less important. In many people's eyes, if you're not holding a corporate-born SIN, you're not truly a blue-blood aristocrat, no matter how much money you have. The corporate-born SINners are always at the top of the pecking order, followed by the corporate-limited SINners. Then you have those rare folks that have dual citizenship with both a corporation and a nation. And at the very bottom of the hierarchy you have the UCAS SINner. So keep that in mind if you ever want to play that particular social game in Manhattan. For myself, I think I'll stick with Denver (even with all the problems that come with Ghostwalker being in charge and Harlequin being pissy and … damn, it's hard to find a good place to live in this world).
- Kay St. Irregular

- Damn snobs. So self-important and self-deluded. It makes me glad that the only times I spend any real time in Manhattan is to steal from them, to rob from the rich and give to me.
- Ma'Fan

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

Sure, you'll see wageslaves laboring in mom-and-pop restaurants in downtown Manhattan, issuing tickets as rent-a-cops, working as dockworkers, putting out fires as first responders, waiting tables or driving cabs, but either they live there in Manhattan solely at the whim of the megacorporations as part of their "diversity programs," are working their asses off in more than one job, are subsidizing their lifestyles through illegal means, or they commute into town from the other boroughs to give Manhattanites a sense of what middle- and lower-class life is like (and perhaps even to give the aristocrats a sense of superiority from just how much better their lives are than the plebes). Essentially, those who are not rich in Manhattan tend to be window dressing and are forced to live wherever the wealthy are willing to tolerate them based on their residential passes (in areas that are becoming fewer and fewer). You will also be able to find local shadowrunners living and working inside Manhattan as well, but chances are they have already been bought and paid for by the corporations themselves and are working on the island as their company men (usually hidden amongst the middle class within those aforementioned diversity programs).

Otherwise, Manhattan is a sprawl designed by the wealthy for the wealthy. Never forget that the elite are the ones who set the rules in Manhattan, and in Manhattan, the elite can get away with a lot more shit than they could in another sprawl. If you need to smear someone's reputation, be careful—the higher they are placed in society, the more likely it is that the story will be killed outright. If you need someone arrested who's protected politically, you'll find that NYPD Inc. will not go out on a limb to arrest them, which could do immeasurable damage to their bottom lines and threaten their security contract with the sprawl.

Your target, who they are, and their very place in Manhattan society may very well determine how you go about doing your job. Manhattan even goes so far as to have a sophisticated wireless security mesh in place to constantly check for authentic SINs and valid passes to keep the unruly masses and the undesirables out. And each year they make this vaunted sensor

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mesh system even more sophisticated, adding more sensors and more cameras to every nook and cranny imaginable. (Manhattan is already amongst the top three sprawls in the world when it comes to having the greatest density of security cameras per capita, and it is making a serious run for the top spot). Neo-anarchists, organized crime syndicates, and anyone else willing to challenge the corporations' authority are still active on the island and have areas they claim as their own (areas that, generally speaking, the megacorporations have had little interest in), but as time passes, it seems as though they keep losing more of their ground to the corporations. With each new year, there are new sensors put into place that the neo-anarchists are simply unable to vandalize and take down fast enough, and there are new areas of Manhattan where urban renewal projects are taking place, where the corporations have essentially torn down residential high rises belonging to the middle- and lower-income classes to build a new Lordstrung's or Lacy's stores for the upper crust or to establish new lavish arcologies for well-to-do corporate executives. In doing so, any semblance of individuality, freedom, privacy or any old-time, blue-collar New Yorker traditions have been stripped away, replaced by a cold and soulless corporate veneer. In a few years' time, there may not be any place left on the island for the middle or poor classes as the corporations work to reshape New York City into their own image, and turn it into an insidious monument to their unchecked and pervasive power.

Residential areas aren't the only things that are highly restricted in Manhattan. Travel around the island can be a nightmare, dominated by colored passes that tell a person where they can and cannot go, and which extra-territorial parts of the island they must avoid. The ability to travel without limitations in Manhattan seems to be reserved only for those with the most influence and money (a theme repeated quite frequently in this town). And those unfortunate enough to travel to Manhattan lacking either legal SINs or valid passes are quickly apprehended by NYPD, Inc. and are forcefully removed from the island; usually with several lingering bruises, spilt blood, or broken bones for their trouble.

Despite these challenges and drawbacks, Manhattan can present runners with a lot of work and nuyen if they are willing and able to evade the security obstacles that have been put into place to keep Manhattan's crime rates low and reduce runner activity. These days, there is a lot of work to be found on the island, particularly within the scientific community that resides in Manhattan; that's the main reason I wanted to write this piece on Manhattan in the first place.

- It is true that most corporate Johnsons in Manhattan already have their favored runner teams on retainer and don't have to look for new talent for a vast majority of their local jobs. But sometimes, because their runner teams likely have already been made by the other megacorporations and their activities are being regularly monitored, the Johnsons have to resort to hiring new teams who can move around the island with more impunity. For those times, runners from outside Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs are highly desired. There may be a lot of local runners working in Manhattan and looking for new job opportunities, but their loyalties are always in doubt. There's always the question of whose payroll they are on, and whether they will backstab Mr. Johnson. With outside runner teams, there's a much better chance of their independence from the Johnson's rivals, and better odds of getting them to do exactly what they need them to do without interference or complications. Even though the corporations like to keep track of which runner teams are working for whom, it's still pretty damn hard to keep track of all the politics in the Manhattan shadows. Especially when experienced runner teams disappear or retire and new teams show up on the scene to replace them on a weekly basis. If a Johnson chooses to use local talent unknown to them on the island, they run the risk of tipping off their rivals as to what they are up to. So if the job is very important and potentially high profile, they will usually bite the bullet and recruit talent from outside Manhattan, even if it costs them much more nuyen for doing so. Sometimes, Manhattan Johnsons have no choice but to pay a premium for secrecy, even if that means going as far away as Seattle to recruit runners, to make certain their activities can't be traced back to them or their corporation. This is particularly true when it comes to any jobs relating to the CFD virus.
- Stone

- If a Johnson is stupid enough to rely on unknown Manhattan runners, there's a very good chance a rival will use the runners for counter-intelligence purposes. The Johnson wants a datafile? That rival corp will be more than happy to use its intelligence assets to create a convincing copy for the runners to give their Johnson, one that has bogus data in it and one that will derail any research advantages the Johnson wanted to gain from the stolen data in the first place.
- Thorn

- Outsider runner teams: be careful when you ask around in Manhattan for information from local runners. There's a distinct possibility of them reporting you to their handlers based on your inquiries or selling information about you to a Johnson in hopes of impressing them. Same goes for the local fixers, who might have developed too cozy of a relationship with the megacorps and all the shiny toys and augmentations that they can provide.
- Balladeer

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- Can't that be true for any sprawl, though? Even sprawls like Seattle? I mean, I think we've all learned long ago that there's no honor amongst thieves, and many times people can be bought off, especially if the corporations are looking for someone and are desperate enough to throw a lot of nuyen at the problem. So, to me, this warning about who you're talking to doesn't just apply to Manhattan. Which is why I prefer to work alone.
- Mika

- The Smiling Bandit's report on the wireless security mesh in Manhattan doesn't go far enough to convey the invasiveness of this network. When talking about wireless security, most people immediately think about wireless transceivers built onto towers. But in Manhattan, sensors for this network can be found hidden in innocuous-looking aerial drones (including law-enforcement drones and innocent-looking advertisement drones), cabs, buses, patrol vehicles, and even traffic cameras. If you're doing a job in Manhattan, your fake SIN and passes can be pinged hundreds of times by these sensors in places you wouldn't expect. Some believe that even sensors in bathroom hand blowers may have capabilities to check for SINs and passes. So make sure you're working with quality SINs and forged passes, or else you're going to end up being busted. There's a very good reason Manhattan has a low crime rate, and it's because Big Brother is watching really intently.
- DangerSensei

- The awesome thing is the more sophisticated and complicated they try to make this security mesh, the more exploits the network is going to have. Pretty soon, even a child with decent hacking skills can get through it. This sensor mesh will eventually become self-defeating.
- Slamm-0!

- True, and that's not even counting all the current corporate in-fighting that's happening in Manhattan right now that's threatening this mesh. I talk about that more when I cover S-K and NeoNET.
- The Smiling Bandit

- I've got news for those of you who have criminal SINs: The MDC recently passed legislation banning anyone who has a criminal SIN from working in or even visiting the Manhattan sprawl. All those black passes they used to issue to the criminal SINners? They will all be no good as of August 30th. Those who try to travel into Manhattan with a criminal SIN after that date will be thrown off the island at best, arrested at worst. So if you got a criminal SIN, make sure you have a good fake ID to conceal it. Otherwise you'll be in a world of hurt from NYPD, Inc.
- Kay St. Irregular

For the last five months or so, research laboratories for all the megacorporations as well as those found at universities and independent companies have poured hundreds of millions of nuyen into the study of the CFD virus. These laboratories have been exploring new and interesting lines of research with nanotechnology, geneware, and magic that hold the potential for real innovation, including the possibility of eliminating this viral threat (hopefully, the corporations will not start tainting their scientific research with unethical practices and bad science for the sake of saving nuyen. True science never cares about the bottom line, nor should it. But I digress).

Lines of research can often lead to breakthroughs and developments in other fields. Often times, one person's failure is another person's success if they take the idea and apply it differently. This is a very exciting (if stressful and unnerving) time for the researchers in Manhattan (and for science in general), where much of their work with the CFD virus is elevating the profiles of several of Manhattan's leading scientists, researchers, and engineers. This in turn is generating a lot of data theft and extraction opportunities for shadowrunners. The CFD virus and the research being done to combat it is also impacting the sprawl's corporate politics, and it is starting to affect the daily lives of Manhattanites (even if they are blissfully unaware of what the CFD virus is or the dangers that it poses to them as consumers). So we'll look at how the CFD virus is transforming the sprawl from behind the scenes, hidden from sight behind all the luxury cars, the money, and the arrogance that is Manhattan; hidden, even though it carries the possibility of bringing the entire high-living social structure of Manhattan crumbling down.

SAEDER-KRUPP AND NEONET

Unless you've been living under a rock, chances are you've seen both Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET in the news a lot recently. Both suffered stinging losses during the Great Dragon Civil War, and both are struggling to regroup. In April, Saeder-Krupp announced that it was closing GIAT Industries, a major subsidiary that will lay off fifteen thousand workers, while shuffling another ten thousand employees to other subsidiaries. In the following month, the megacorporation announced the closure of Heavy Metal, impacting another twenty-five thousand workers worldwide.

NeoNET is not doing much better, particularly in their own Matrix divisions. The great dragon Celedyr's visible presence in their Matrix divisions has inspired anti-dragon backlash, and pressures from CFD-related investigations won't help any. As of February of this year, FTL Technologies saw its workforce reduced by half as it shed twelve thousand workers. NeoNET is also closing down Aurora Design and merging its assets into other Matrix-based subsidiaries such as Belle Mead Comm and China Cable.

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For these two titans, Manhattan has become one of their key battlefields in their vicious and prolonged global fight for the status of world's largest corporation. And for those that understand Manhattan and its everlasting obsession with social standing and status symbols, a fight over corporate ranking seems quite appropriate. And it is possible that in the end, Manhattan may end up becoming the tipping point between these two megacorporations in determining which one will lay claim to the coveted number-one-ranked megacorporation title for the long term, which could in turn help determine which megacorporation has the most influence and leverage over the others for decades to come in the realms of global finance and commerce.

- Well, I'm going to guess as soon as word spreads that NeoNET had a role in spreading the CFD virus, they are going to hurt even worse than S-K. I don't think S-K will have any trouble keeping the number one spot.
- Am-Mut

- That's still speculation. As we just read, NeoNET and Evo are likely suspects since they both seem to be "patient zero" for the virus, but that doesn't mean that they weren't victims of someone else's tampering.
- Snopes

- Even if there was another party involved that caused the CFD virus to develop and spread, that doesn't mean the public at large won't still blame NeoNET. It happens all the fragging time. And honestly, it still comes down to having some semblance of quality control for your products, and choosing not to ship or use products that are known to be bad. Too many times, the corporations don't fragging care about consumer safety and won't bother taking products off the market if they think they can still get away with selling them to the masses, even if they know them to be dangerous. Look at Ares and the Excalibur rifle. If these corps had even an inkling of a legitimate quality control program in place, chances are good that Head Crash wouldn't be as big of a threat as it is now.
- Balladeer

In Manhattan, this conflict between NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp is manifesting itself all the way at the top of the food chain, starting with the Manhattan Development Consortium (MDC). The MDC is a corporate trust made up of thirteen corporations that literally own the entire island of Manhattan (or Manhattan Inc., as many neo-anarchists derisively call it). Both NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp hold seats on this powerful governing body. The council not only governs the island of Manhattan as a corporate enclave and sets all the rules for the citizens residing in Manhattan to live by, but it also is a tool that enriches each of the member corporations' revenue streams by several hundreds of millions of nuyen each year (in plum contracts and services rendered to

FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

POSTED BY: TRAVELER JONES

Don't get me wrong. The Smiling Bandit is a fantastic JP poster and is very insightful when it comes to scientific or technical matters. But when he's posting on a city, for example, there are a lot of details he's likely going to skip over because he believes them to be irrelevant to his central focus. I'm glad to be able to help out our friend by posting the information that you will need to visit, and hopefully successfully pull off a job, in Manhattan.

MANHATTAN

Population: 2,143,287 Legal SINners (numbers are from yesterday)
- **Human:** 61%
- **Elf:** 13%
- **Dwarf:** 5%
- **Ork:** 16%
- **Troll:** 2%
- **Other:** 3%

Per capita income: 190,000¥

Population below poverty level: < 9%

Currency: Nuyen and corp scrip (UCAS dollars are becoming less widely accepted, mainly accepted for city business only). Exchange rate: $1 (UCAS dollar) = 0.20¥; $0.75 (corp scrip average) = 1¥

Lifestyle costs (per month and does not include costs for the various passes):
- **Street:** Free (illegal, will be shipped off island to one of the other boroughs if caught. Street lifestyles are only tolerated in areas with little to no law enforcement, namely the Terminal Z zone, the Underground, and the Pit).
- **Squatter:** 1,500¥ (illegal, will be shipped off island to one of the other boroughs if caught. Squatter lifestyles are only tolerated in areas with little to no law enforcement, namely the Terminal Z zone, the Underground, and the Pit).
- **Low:** 6,000¥ (typically subsidized by the megacorporations through their diversity programs; unsubsidized individuals typically work second jobs)
- **Middle:** 14,000¥
- **High:** 25,000¥
- **Luxury:** 200,000¥ and up

Security Providers:
- **NYPD Inc.** (primary—covers 80 percent of Manhattan, primary contract holder for the Staten Island, Brooklyn boroughs)
- **Knight Errant** (secondary—covers 11 percent of Manhattan, primary contract holder for the Queens borough)
- **Winter Systems** (tertiary—covers 9 percent of Manhattan, primary contract holder for the Bronx borough)
- **Other** (individual contracts)

Medical Providers:
- **DocWagon** (50 percent of the service in the city)
- **CrashCart** (25 percent of the service in the city)
- **Medicarro** (25 percent of the service in the city)

SINner breakdown: Corporate SINs outnumber UCAS SINs by a factor of 4 to 1 in Manhattan

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the sprawl by these select corporations). Since NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp have been clashing with each other, both have started taking bold actions in the shadows of Manhattan to have the other one voted off the MDC, which would severely limit their opportunities and their windfalls in this lavish sprawl. Over the last six months, these two corps have taken every opportunity to poison the attitudes of the other members of the MDC against their rival, mostly through runs designed to sabotage the other's public image, causing inconveniences and annoyances for the other corporations while blaming their rival for those problems. Many of these runs resulted in incriminating documents and materials being leaked to the media, materials that pointed either to incompetence, negligence, or corruption on the part of the other corporation; corruption that has involved the mismanagement or the abuse of millions of nuyen worth of taxes as well as fraud and embezzlement.

Over the course of these last six months, more news about this pervasive corruption involving both NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp has hit the various newsnets than has ever occurred before in the entire history of the secretive MDC. This egregious violation of the MDC's sacrosanct policy of secrecy has riled the other corporations, putting them in a mood to fundamentally alter the makeup of the MDC and punish the members threatening the MDC's public image. Since these reports vast corruption have started making headlines, the MDC's popularity amongst Manhattanites has eroded by nearly fifteen percent. Add to that loss of public confidence the vicious nature of the Great Dragon Civil War, which led to thousands of metahumans simply vanishing overnight (some of whom were associated with the key corporations that are on the MDC), and thousands of additional metahumans who suffered violent and public deaths at the hands of dragons in places such as Cali and GeMiTo, and you get plunging popularity for both Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET. This has created the right political climate for change in Manhattan, an atmosphere that may lead to an unprecedented number of seats suddenly becoming open on the MDC while giving other, eager corporations an opportunity to join in the luxurious rule over Manhattan.

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- These leaks are bad news for the megacorps, but they are great news for the neo-anarchists. Many cells active in Manhattan think the time is right to fully expose the perverse greed and excess these corporations represent, and that such exposure may help bring changes that move the island in a direction of greater freedom. From what I hear, despite the MDC's best efforts to quash the neo-anarchist movement, neo-anarchist groups are seeing an increase in new recruits, and their members are being emboldened by growing chaos. It's only a matter of time before these corporations' spin machines are seen for what they truly are by the vast majority of the Manhattan citizens, and the corps will finally be held accountable for all the lies they have told and all the lives they have destroyed.
- Aufheben

- Of course, others would say that's just wishful thinking, and that the MDC will undoubtedly recover from this debauchery and be as popular as ever in the future.
- Cosmo

Now, any member of the MDC can be voted off the council at any time if there is a unanimous, affirmative vote for it amongst the other twelve members (which rarely happens). And even if there is a unanimous vote, there is a second requirement which must be met. There must be a party available at the time of the vote to buy the shares from the outgoing corporation, shares that are worth several billion nuyen (which limits the pool of prospective buyers to a select few). Those few with the resources, though, are generally eager to seize the chance to join the MDC should the opportunity emerge, which makes it isn't too difficult to find a buyer from that relatively small pool. Most of this happens out of the public eye; the membership of the MDC is kept secret, so ordinary citizens don't know which corporations make up the MDC and write the laws that govern their lives. Most assume that the MDC is made up of every member of the Big Ten from the Corporate Court, with a couple of corporations holding a second seat much like how the Corporate Court is currently structured.

They're wrong. The current MDC has several, big-name double-A corporations sitting on the council (including Citigroup, NYPD, Inc, Prometheus Engineering, Spinrad Industries, Sony, and Trans-Orbital), while three triple-A megacorporations (MCT, Evo and Wuxing) are completely out in the cold, with no representation at all. That leaves them at a distinct disadvantage in Manhattan politics. Needless to say, MCT, Evo and Wuxing have all been patiently waiting for an opportunity like the one brewing between S-K and NeoNET to force open at least one seat on the MDC, and perhaps even two. And from what's been happening in Manhattan lately, it is easy to tell that they have not let this opportunity go to waste, but have rather chosen to pounce on it with great fervor, spending millions of nuyen in the shadows to make certain these changes on the MDC come to fruition.

It is more than likely that many of the recent public relations fiascos and snafus that have occurred within Manhattan's boundaries as of late may not have had nothing to do with S-K or NeoNET directly, but have instead been instigated against them by these ambitious megacorporations looking to tear them down and give themselves a greater chance of stealing their seats on the MDC. For the last six months or so, these incidents have been designed to disrupt life for the most privileged in the world; activities have included Johnsons arranging for neo-anarchist protestors to evade the security mesh network, swarm the heart of Manhattan, and lead protests that have either ended up destroying the other corporations' properties or disrupting operations within major parts of the city such as Midtown or Downtown. These protestors have frequently interacted with and harassed members of the elite class, which has only incited more calls for change. With the amount of wealth and influence these citizens have and the levels of comfort and privilege they are accustomed to, the corporations have no choice but to listen. These runs have also revealed misconduct by metahumans that were brought into Manhattan by either NeoNET or Saeder-Krupp as part of their diversity programs; metahumans that NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp are expected to either police or take responsibility for. Or these runs have painted NeoNET or Saeder-Krupp the ones that have allowed a dramatic increase in SINless or criminal elements of society to seep back onto the island and to interact with the elite, ruining the upper crust's paradise. As such, break-ins have risen steadily, violent crimes such as assaults and home invasions have risen, and drug and BTL abuse, particularly with teenage and young adult populations on the island, has skyrocketed.

NYPD, Inc. has seen a lot of backlash for these disruptive protests and disturbing trends, and it has also been recently hit by an unexplained six percent increase in crime in Manhattan. That's putting great pressure for law enforcement to make significant changes, both to preserve their reputation and to keep any more of Manhattan's elite from being victimized. This has made NYPD, Inc. quite vocal in demanding more support from the MDC, and their latest message is if the MDC cannot support them appropriately, then the membership needs to change.

- I want to talk a little about the perception that Evo, Wuxing, and MCT don't have any avenue to exert any influence over the MDC, or what happens in Manhattan because they aren't on the MDC. While they don't have seats on the MDC, they're still megacorps, so their influence should not be underestimated. They have their seats in the Corporate Court, for one thing, which is still worth plenty, even in Manhattan. When any case

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involving the AA corps that sit on the MDC comes up before the Corporate Court, you can bet there is a lot of behind-closed-doors horse trading going on between the corp subject to judgment and all the Big Ten, including those without an MDC seat.

The last megacorporation that benefited from this was Evo. Here's how it went down. The city council was poised to give out 100 million nuyen to build two state-of-the-art medical clinics for UCAS citizens; one in Greenwich Village, the other in Washington Heights. Evo wanted the contract for its Red Star division, but for a while the leading contender was (of course) Doc Wagon. But then Doc Wagon hit a run of severe bad luck. An MRSA outbreak was tied to one of its facilities. They were found to have employed three ambulance drivers on the island with convictions for serious moving violations (including one guilty of vehicular manslaughter). Then an accountant—in their capital development division, no less—took off with a few million nuyen, making Doc Wagon seem like it wasn't the safest place to put money right now.

Sony then stepped up and said Doc Wagon was not the right corporation to get the contract. They lobbied all their AA compatriots, using the evidence of all these recent screw-ups, to make their case. In the end, they were successful. Red Star got the clinics. Days later, a Corporate Court case against Sony for violating the extraterritorial rights of Aztechnology was dismissed based on a ruling from the Evo justice citing insufficient evidence. And the wheels of justice spin on.

- Kay St. Irregular

- In using the Corporate Court functions to sway the MDC, it is clear MCT has the advantage over the others. They've got two Corporate Court seats, giving them a better opportunity to influence its proceedings. That may give them the best chance to seize an open seat on the MDC, should one become available.
- Snopes

- Provided the other corps are in a forgiving mood for whatever reasons they had kicked MCT off the MDC in the first place.
- Kia

- So, what actually happens if S-K drops from the #1 spot? Do they lose their second seat on the Court? Will it be as dramatic as everyone fears it will be?
- Jimmy No

- Nope. That arrangement was written into the Court by-laws, and won't be easily changed. That's like asking the UCAS to amend its constitution. That's only going to happen if hell freezes over. The loss of the top spot will likely only mean a loss of prestige, influence, and a crap-ton of revenue. But really, when you're playing at the levels of S-K and NeoNET, there really isn't that big of a difference between number one and number two—or even number ten for that matter. Some might argue that the ranking is more of a matter of personal pride than any kind of real business importance.
- Dr. Spin

- And remember that the MDC and the Corporate Court don't always play nice with each other. People think they have naturally overlapping interests, but it's the corps—they can always find an excuse to fight. The Corporate Court doesn't like the MDC because any power the MDC has is power they don't have. They want to take Manhattan for themselves. The MDC, on the other hand, mainly wants the Corporate Court to leave them the hell alone. They like their position in the sprawl—the power, the trappings like luxury housing and fine dining, the whole package. Manhattan is their fiefdom, and they're not going to give it up. Anytime the Corporate Court looks like its going to reach into Manhattan with a heavy hand, the MDC gets its hackles up. When the two go against each other, there are strange alliances and all sorts of weird runs.
- Pistons

- NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp may be the most vulnerable megas on the MDC, but they aren't the only vulnerable members. Given recent public relations debacles, both in Manhattan and around the world, the other members of the MDC aren't exactly too thrilled with Ares as of late. It wouldn't take much of a shadow campaign to threaten Ares' position on the MDC as well, which could potentially open up three seats on the council.
- Dr. Spin

- Okay, so there's a lot of people that are saying that NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp (and to some extent, Ares) may be on their way out. But no one's telling us just how vulnerable they are. How close is the vote expected to be for each of these megacorporations, and when might a vote happen?
- Chainmaker

- Keep in mind a lot of this info I have comes from runners who have worked closely with the power players trying to manipulate the makeup of the MDC, and it's possible they may have only seen (or have been allowed to see) a small part of a much bigger picture. But my sources tell me that all but one corporation is ready to vote Saeder-Krupp off the MDC. That hold-out corporation would be Citigroup. They have a lot of dealings with Saeder-Krupp owned-financial groups and banks, and if they turned on S-K, they could suffer incalculable financial losses. As far as NeoNET goes, the number of holdouts is not entirely clear, but their biggest ally on the council is Spinrad Industries.
- Sunshine

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- Not surprising given Johnny Spinrad's loathing of Lofwyr and S-K. That vote is likely based not on any particular loyalty to NeoNET, but due to Spinrad's personal desire to give Lofwyr the middle finger. I'm pretty sure NeoNET is safe. After all, it would take a deal of epic proportions to move Spinrad or his representative to vote for anything that S-K desires.
- Aufheben

- Then there's Ares. Two corporations so far have shown an unwillingness to vote against Ares: NYPD, Inc. and Trans-Orbital. Ares could be put in a more vulnerable position should it do the dumb thing and move away from supplying NYPD, Inc. with weapons and instead challenge them for a larger stake in the security contract for Manhattan (which they could do, given the recent jump in the crime rate). And Trans-Orbital's vote is considered soft, and could possibly be influenced. Right now, their vote is with Ares, but that could easily change in a week. A vote for new members for the MDC is scheduled to happen on July 1st.
- Sunshine

Damage against Saeder-Krupp has focused on their construction projects. Projects ranging from road improvements to new high rises and utility work, with a total worth of hundreds of millions of nuyen, have been stalled and sabotaged by runs against them, which have included activities like damaging construction equipment, breaking critical nanoforges, and making key personnel on projects suddenly go missing. A twenty-story office high rise under construction by Saeder-Krupp in Downtown partially collapsed recently at the beginning of the year due to nanites using the wrong materials. Eight construction workers and sixteen bystanders were killed, and subsequent lawsuits against Saeder-Krupp are still pending. Shadowrunners have also used other, subtler tactics to slow down S-K's projects on the island, targeting the MDC's permitting, approval, and inspection processes, cutting into S-K's bottom line even further (a lost permit or an error-ridden application can cause horrible headaches for a corporation, leading to weeks of costly delays). The delay in several projects, combined with general animosity toward Lofwyr and S-K, is contributing to a significant reduction in contracts the corp is receiving from the city government. Even private contracts appear to be going more toward Ares or Prometheus. Coupled with Saeder-Krupp's ongoing public relations problems with the Corporate Court over Hestaby's recent insinuations about Lofwyr sanctioning metahuman disappearances, one can easily see how S-K's place in Manhattan politics may be tenuous.

For NeoNET's part, their status as Manhattan's largest Matrix service provider has also come under repeated assault. Runners have made it increasingly difficult to access NeoNET grids, employing sophisticated denial of service attacks against them and damaging the WiFi towers that they rely on, causing long lag times for consumers. NeoNET aerial drones used to enhance WiFi coverage for the sprawl have also been targeted—in the last two months, four of those NeoNET drones have been hacked, damaged to the point where they crashed into the Manhattan traffic below, causing accidents and property damage. Thirteen people, including a city councilman, have been killed in these incidents. Another recent setback for NeoNET came when was there was a major hack of NeoNET's Matrix hosts in April, and personal information of nearly two million wealthy Manhattanites was stolen, including SIN and bank account information. A number of those luminaries had their accounts drained of funds because of this hack. NeoNET is doing everything it can to cover up the scandal, but people are already turning in droves to other sources like Renraku for Matrix services, costing NeoNET millions in revenue. Since 2073, Renraku has expanded its MSP market share in Manhattan by nearly twelve percent, and it likely will remain on that growth trend for the foreseeable future as NeoNET continues to stumble.

The attacks on NeoNET's Matrix services also have had a negative impact on the security mesh network. For years, NeoNET has provided the software and many of the drones required to maintain the security network throughout Manhattan with very few static or dead zones. Saeder-Krupp provided many of the WiFi towers, the satellites, and the other half of the drone network that provided the bulk of the physical infrastructure needed for the wireless mesh to function. When these two corporations were cooperating, this security mesh network functioned like a well-oiled machine. Now that the two megacorporations are waging a shadow war with each other, though, things are collapsing. The security network is suffering longer lag times. There are more outages, particularly during major commute times (such as morning and even rush hours), and there are fewer software updates, causing more vulnerabilities to appear in the grid. There are more compatibility issues than ever before between NeoNET software and Saeder-Krupp technology. And the sad truth is, many of these outages and problems are occurring solely because NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp are currently on such bad terms, leading to very little communication and even less cooperation in dealing with trouble spots. Many who dislike the new Matrix are hoping that friction and opposing agendas between the megacorporations will eventually have a similar effect on the new Matrix and spell an end to the corporations' unified front, and which could end the unprecedented restrictions they have implemented. As a result of the problems that are developing with this security network, NYPD, Inc. is reporting unauthorized entries into Manhattan by undesirables are occurring at record-high levels. Even worse, NYPD, Inc. is also saying that more of these trespassers

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are not being caught because of the problems with the error-prone network, which in turn is leading (they believe) to the increased crime rates in the borough. The end result is that NYPD, Inc. is publicly blaming NeoNET and Evo for the increased crime rates seen in Manhattan because of the failures with the security mesh. For them, NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp are the parts of the equation that need to be changed. The accusations are resonating with the public at large in Manhattan, and certainly could contribute to change coming to the MDC.

- Yeah, I'm sure it's entirely S-K's or NeoNET's fault for the increased crime rate. I'm sure there is no problem with low morale among NYPD cops who are constantly treated like shit by self-important idiots, or cops who are so desperate to make ends meet, they'll turn a blind eye to crime in exchange for bribes that make their blue-collar lives a little easier.
- Netcat

- The Smiling Bandit isn't exaggerating the problems with this security network. I knew a runner team that had a job a couple of weeks ago in Manhattan, and unfortunately, their SINs were not good enough to last for the duration of their time in the sprawl. During the job, the security network alerted NYPD to the bogus SINs. The good news for them was there was something wrong with the tracking functions of the network, which reported their location as being five blocks away. So when NYPD tried to intercept them, they literally drove right past the runners and showed up at the wrong location, chasing sensor ghosts. The runner team quickly loaded new fake SINs on their commlinks and managed to get out of Manhattan without any further incident. But yeah, talk to any local runners, and they'll tell you that the security mesh network isn't what it used to be. And for many runners, that's a good thing.
- Glitch

And then, on top of the other problems the island of Manhattan has already been experiencing, there is all the activity happening between these two corps over the CFD virus. Some of S-K's research into the possible source of and cure for the virus is happening in Manhattan. A fairly new subsidiary, Advanced Frontier Cybernetics, has a bleeding-edge laboratory in Downtown that is researching new cybernetic devices that may provide more control to the individual over the new personality(s) created by the CFD virus, along with devices meant to diminish the frequency the new personalities are able to express themselves (one device that has been bantered about is a pacemaker-like device for the brain designed to be implanted deep in the hemispheres of brain that tracks brain waves and regulates them to ensure they remain within their "default" pattern). I have also heard that Saeder-Krupp may be working on ways to preserve data from cybereyes and cyberears of patients for the original personality that may help give patients an idea of what the fragmented personalities were doing with their bodies when they were suffering their blackouts. Apparently, many of these personalities attempt to keep all their activities secret from the original personality, leaving them with complete voids that can span several hours. When these periods of blackouts start adding up, patients begin to sense they are living entirely foreign lives. For all they know, they could be joining new runner teams, making new allies or enemies, or even making new lovers. By creating ways to share what's happening with the original personality, Saeder-Krupp hopes to return to the patient some sense of comfort and control. From what I have heard, Saeder-Krupp and Lofwyr are looking at these cybernetic projects to greatly raise their profile in the cybernetics field and perhaps allow them to expand in a field where typically they have lagged behind their competition. In its conflict with NeoNET, this project's importance for S-K and the urgency to succeed cannot be overstated, and most of the other megacorporations will be looking to derail these lines of research, if only to protect their own market share in the cybernetics industry.

Saeder-Krupp is also attempting to cure the effects of CFD through nanotechnology, using a program of its subsidiary, Morgen-Tek GmbH. Morgen-Tek GmbH has leased offices in the Empire State building and has research facilities in the Newtown neighborhood for the specific purpose of researching the CFD virus and designing a nanite-based treatment. Morgen-Tek GmbH has allegedly devoted an entire division to the study of this virus, and the development of CFD virus-specific nanites that can more easily and thoroughly identify damage caused by a head crash and can identify ways to repair the damage. Even now, most scientists still do not have a good grasp on how extensive the damage that the CFD virus inflicts is. Having better diagnostic tools will likely make it much easier to develop more effective treatments and increase the chances of returning a patient's neural structure to its original state, without the presence of the additional personalities.

On the magical front, academic circles report that S-K's Awakened World Research, Spellweaver Consortium and Elemental Services (all with offices and research facilities in Midtown) are conducting research into how magic interacts with the CFD virus and the new personality(s), and more importantly, how magic can interfere with or treat the new personalities. These subsidiaries all have sterling reputations; as such, their work on head crashes will undoubtedly be coveted by other corporations. Word on the streets is that Awakened World Research, Spellweaver Consortium and Elemental Services are all in the process of upgrading their physical and Matrix security measures, suggesting that there definitely is research happening in these offices that would be worth stealing.

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HISTORY OF PRESENT-DAY MANHATTAN

At 0720 hours on August 12, 2005, the island of Manhattan changed forever. A significant earthquake struck North America's premier city, leaving a majority of Manhattan and its infrastructure in ruins. Out of the millions who had lived and/or worked on the island, two hundred thousand inhabitants were killed instantly by the quake, while nearly a million inhabitants were wounded or buried alive under the remnants of dozens of collapsed skyscrapers. The United States at the time was financially crippled and was simply unable to commit hundreds of billions of dollars needed to save Manhattan. Multi-national corporations—the precursors of the megacorporations (including ORO and BMW)—gladly extended offers to help rebuild the city in exchange for certain concessions, deregulation, and authority to make much-needed decisions quickly so as to ensure the survivability of Manhattan. The then-United States quickly (and rashly) agreed to make such concessions (even if they were blatantly advantageous to the corporations), believing them to be only temporary. With the necessary authority bestowed upon them, the corporations worked tirelessly to piece the city back together again. They quickly removed debris where they could, while simply paving over vast sections of Manhattan deemed too devastated to completely rebuild. Using heavy construction equipment and spirits, the corporations raised and rebuilt much of the city above the old debris field. During the years of painstaking reconstruction, millions had fled the city. The United Nations moved to Geneva, and the New York Stock Exchange moved to Boston and renamed itself as the East Coast Stock Exchange. To compensate for the diminished population and to get through some very tough times, the corporations brought in their own workers to complete the reconstruction and to start the process of rebuilding the population of Manhattan.

As many runners know, once a corporation has been given power, they never give it up. The corporations that invested hundreds of billions of nuyen into rebuilding the high rises and arcologies and modernizing the city's infrastructure came together and fought the UCAS government for permanent control of Manhattan. They also formed the body known as the Manhattan Development Consortium that became the power that determined how all business is carried out in Manhattan, and who gets what contracts. With the Corporate Court supporting the legality of the MDC, the city changed from being government controlled to corporate controlled. Manhattan is now considered extraterritorial property a separate entity from the UCAS; with that being the case, the UCAS government has very little control over what happens in Manhattan (much to their consternation). The only say the UCAS government has is over projects that the MDC allows the city government to invest in and control, and those projects are mainly used to address the needs of UCAS (and not corporate) citizens (such as schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.).

Because NeoNET seems to be experiencing a disproportionate amount of CFD cases, they are investing a lot of resources (some sources tell me that it's almost twice what S-K is investing in their programs) in solving this threat before it becomes a full-blown crisis. NeoNET is focusing on its strengths of cyberware, geneware and nanoware research. Mindstorm Neurotechnologies, Dorada Genetech, Emerging Futures, and Transys Neuronet are all devoting major resources to designing an effective treatment against the virus, and are all carrying out a bulk of this research in Manhattan. Not all the research being carried out on the CFD virus is happening in Manhattan, but chances are, if you are a runner that wishes to grab payadata, these facilities may be a good choice to target. Mindstorm Neurotechnologies, Transys Neuronet, and Emerging Futures have their offices in Downtown, while the fifteen story Dorada Genetech laboratory can be found on the Westside.

One main focus of NeoNET's research is better early detection methods for head crashes, which in turn will (in theory) give them an edge in finding the CFD virus in the products before they are shipped or implanted. That could have humanitarian benefits, but could also help keep NeoNET's reputation from going into the mud, which is a nice side benefit. T99 is also carrying on magical research on the CFD virus, but the bulk of that is happening in Boston. Instead of going to all the subsidiaries for this bleeding-edge research, a runner team may elect instead to break into the Malmstein building in Downtown, which are NeoNET's main offices for Manhattan. With a crisis of this nature, it's likely that everyone in the Malmstein building is sharing information with each other in an effort to find a solution. This means the building can serve as one-stop shopping for runners. Similarly, the S-K North America building would have the research materials and paydata from all of S-K's Manhattan-based subsidiaries (not to be confused with the S-K Prime building, which specifically only handles matters dealing with the Corporate Court and the MDC).

One major factor that may incite more violence between Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET over the CFD virus is the reality that NeoNET's geneware and nanoware have been confirmed as being corrupted by the virus. Internal reports from Saeder-Krupp indicate that S-K is suffering from a much lower rate of contamination in their nanoware or geneware lines. S-K has taken ex-

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treme measures with its quality control and quality assurance divisions to reduce the incidence of this virus in their products (including additional security cameras, daily magical checks of researchers and workers, routine inspection and maintenance of all equipment, and stepped up, regular inspections of product batches). If Saeder-Krupp is able to maintain a low contamination rate—or even eliminate contamination altogether—this could prove devastating to NeoNET with large numbers of their market share possibly flocking to S-K for their safer products. As such, NeoNET has been taking to the shadows, both within and outside of Manhattan, seeking runners to contaminate Saeder-Krupp products.

Now, as many of you know, I like to keep tabs on the nova-hot minds within the scientific communities; those that should be watched for breakthroughs (or targeted for extractions). For Saeder-Krupp in Manhattan, this includes Doctor Nadine Reinhard with Advanced Frontier Cybernetics. She is the lead researcher on the device currently dubbed the "brainwave pattern stabilizer" (though I would expect it to have a better name if it ever makes it to market). Doctor René Fitzgerald from Morgen-Tek GmbH is also raising eyebrows; she's only been with Saeder-Krupp for six years, and has only had his doctorate in nanotechnology for ten, but the lines of research he is conducting into the CFD virus are quite innovative and creative. In the magical research arena, Doctors Maximilan Seiler and Kerstin Mueller of Spellweaver Consortium and Awakened World Research are becoming two of Saeder-Krupp's leading magic-based researchers on the CFD virus, and they will be watched closely for any breakthroughs for treatments or cures.

For NeoNET, the researchers to watch include Doctors Michael Hubbard and Alexandra Sosa with Mindstorm Neuraltechnologies. If Hubbard sounds familiar to some of you, it's because he used to be a top researcher for Shiawase. He was extracted from them about two years ago from Neo-Tokyo. Sadly, with his profile on the rise in Manhattan, you can bet that Shiawase has learned that he's applying his aptitude and his vast knowledge of cybernetics for their rival. You can bet NeoNET will likely be relocating him soon, before Shiawase can either reclaim their former researcher or find a way to permanently terminate him. Transys Neuronet's leading researchers are a husband-and-wife pair, Doctors Gifford and Holly Garceau. In Manhattan, there is one individual whose name may come up frequently for shadowrunners at the Malmstein building: Aiden Howell, the operations manager for product control in Manhattan. Since it's believed he has used shadowrunners against Saeder-Krupp, it's likely he has data on their operations as well, information that may reveal how S-K is keeping CFD virus contamination in their products low (for now), and what options NeoNET may be pursuing to make certain S-K's products become contaminated.

GETTING IN AND AROUND MANHATTAN

Posted by: Traveler Jones

AIR

- The Hitomi International Airport (formerly the John F. Kennedy airport. Shiawase bought and remodeled the JFK airport in 2070 and renamed the airport after Empress Hitomi.)
- La Guardia Airport (no longer accessible to the public; it was transformed into an Air National Guard station by the UCAS government. The MDC is still negotiating with the UCAS to purchase the air station and return it to service a public airport.)
- Newark Airport
- There are a number of air taxi companies able to fly wealthy individuals from the Hitomi International Airport to the various high rises equipped with helipads (almost all of them), and from tower to tower utilizing either t-birds or helicopters. Cost for tickets are 75¥ one way.

RAIL

- Penn Station
  - Maglevs
  - Rail (most lines are now above ground, as most tunnels are still collapsed from the quake of 2005)
- Grand Central Arcology
- Terminal

AUTOMOBILE/PEDESTRIAN

- Bus (10-25¥ per trip)
- Bus Routes/Pedestrian bridges:
  - New Jersey PATH bus route
  - Edward Koch Bridge
  - NYPD, Incorporated Bridge (formerly the Ronald Reagan bridge)
- Cab (7¥ per kilometer)
- Vehicles
  - Vehicles are heavily regulated by the Manhattan Development Consortium. To legally operate a vehicle, a person needs to own either a personal vehicle pass or a commercial vehicle pass. Despite the regulations, which lead to tens of thousands waiting years on a waiting list for the PVP, there are millions of vehicles on the roads. Vehicles have the following options to get into Manhattan:
  - Bridges:
  - Manhattan Bridge
  - Damien Knight Bridge (formerly George Washington Bridge)
  - Citigroup Bridge (formerly Third Avenue Bridge)

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- Prometheus Bridge (formerly Willis Avenue Bridge)
- Triborough Bridge
- Spinrad Bridge (formerly Queensborough Bridge)
- Trans-Orbital Bridge (formerly Williamsburgh bridge)
- Brooklyn Bridge (The Brooklyn Bridge was destroyed as part of a run in 2072, but was rebuilt by Aztechnology. Aztechnology was originally accused of blowing up the bridge but was allowed to evidentially rebuild it. Aztechnology tried to rename the bridge the Flavia de la Rosa Bridge after their CEO, but a massive outcry from New Yorkers forced the MDC to deny the request for the name change. This renovated bridge maintains several appealing architectural features of the old Brooklyn Bridge but can handle even more traffic than its antiquated predecessor. Unfortunately, a major difference between the old and the new bridge is that the new one is minted with the Aztechnology logo all over it, which is considered sacrilege by many hard-core New Yorkers).

- Tunnels:
  - Queens Midtown Tunnel
  - Lincoln Tunnel
  - Holland Tunnel
  - Ludmilla Reanka Memorial Tunnel (formerly Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel. This was damaged and remained collapsed for decades after 2005, left for smugglers and other criminal types. This tunnel was only recently reclaimed by the MDC. S-K won the contract to rebuild this tunnel, and it is expected to reopen in early 2076.)

WATER

- Ferry services (10¥)

LEGAL PASSES AND PERMITS/COSTS (ALL REQUIRE VALID SINS TO PURCHASE):

- Commuter Pass: 75¥ a week (must be used in conjunction with visitor, resident or restricted pass. There is a separate pass for subways and trains.)
- Visitor (temporary) pass (purple): 100¥ a week
- Very important resident pass (violet and black): 100,000¥ a year (this pass acts as a VIP designator for a resident of Manhattan and ensures the holder gets into the most expensive and trendy restaurants and stores. Bearers receive special treatment (such as not waiting in line for anything). For some restaurants and stores, the only clientele they serve are those holding this pass. This pass is a must have for those that are the movers and shakers of Manhattan, and is one of those status symbols that Manhattanites use to measure their influence and wealth. Corporate-born SINners have priority when it comes to obtaining these passes. Bearers of this pass have no travel restrictions.)
- Resident pass (white): 3,000¥ a year (full-time residents, restricted to actual addresses within Manhattan and proof of residency, grants access to a wide range of sites in Manhattan, barring extraterritorial properties. There is an income-based test with this pass that determines which parts of Manhattan you may live in, with higher incomes having more options.)
- Resident pass (white w/ green stripe): 1,500¥ a year (part-time residents, restricted to actual addresses within Manhattan and proof of residency, grants access to a more limited range of sites and residential neighborhoods in Manhattan, barring extraterritorial properties. There is an income-based test with this pass that determines which part of Manhattan you may live in, with higher incomes having more options.)
- Restricted (worker) pass I (blue w/ white stripe): not for sale (individual must live and work in Manhattan; pass issued by the employing corporation, limited to access that the corporation has in Manhattan.)
- Restricted (worker) pass II: (blue w/ red stripe): not for sale, (individual works in Manhattan but does not live there; pass issued by the employing corporation, limited to access the corporation has in Manhattan.)
- Student pass (green): 500¥ a year (limited to a specific academic institutions and academic-related sites.)
- Permanent guest pass (black): 2,000¥ a year
- Personal vehicle pass (brown): 3,500¥ a year (requires a valid Manhattan address; application is put on a wait list, wait list applicants awarded passes based on a weighted lottery system. Wait time to get a pass can be as long as two to four years. Those with the proper social connections can be bumped up to the top of the list and get their pass within a few weeks.)
- Commercial truck pass (yellow): 5,000¥ (requires a valid commercial license; applicat is put on a wait list. Applicants receive intense background and credit checks to make sure company is legally operating in Manhattan and drivers are not being brought in for illegal purposes.)
- Firearm permit: 500¥
- Bladed weapon permit: 100¥
- Vice permit (for the legal possession and use of vice items such as alcohol, CalHots, tempo, BTLs, etc): 500¥ a year

COST OF COUNTERFEIT PASSES/PERMITS:

- Commuter pass: 150¥
- Visitor (temporary) pass: 200¥
- Very important resident pass: 175,000¥ for each pass (due to extensive and complicated security measures embedded into the pass and the cost involved, most groups cannot counterfeit this pass.)
- Resident pass (w/ or w/o stripe): 5,000¥
- Restricted (worker) pass (w/ or w/o stripe): 5,000¥
- Student pass: 1,000¥
- Permanent guest pass: 4,000¥
- Permanent vehicle pass: 10,000¥
- Commercial truck pass: 10,000¥
- Firearm permit: 1,000¥
- Bladed weapon permit: 300¥
- Vice permit: 1,000¥

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

THE POWERS THAT BE IN MANHATTAN

THE MANHATTAN DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM (AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES)

(There will be a new vote on MDC membership on July 1, 2075)

- Ares Macrotechnology (Dominique Vittoria; promoted from director of Ares Manhattan in October 2073)
- Aztechnology (Benjamin Lopez-Garcia)
- Citigroup (Madison Dover)
- Horizon Corporation (Michael Andrews)
- NeoNET (Emma Porter)
- NYPD, Incorporated (Mason Andersen)
- Prometheus Engineering (Ethan Miles)
- Renraku Computer Systems (Yutaka Taiga)
- Saeder-Krupp (Brent Lucas)
- Shiawase (Mineyo Kotari)
- Sony Corporation (Junpei Sakura)
- Spinrad Industries (Katie Brookes)
- Trans-Orbital (Thomas Warren)

Press Secretary: Christopher Arkins
MDC Safety Director: Denise Fairborn
ECSE Commissioner: David Jacobs

MANHATTAN GOVERNMENT

As you can imagine, in a corporate enclave such as Manhattan, the actual city government is mostly a puppet. Most of the governing power lies with the Manhattan Development Consortium. Many neo-anarchists believe the city government is kept around primarily to provide residents of Manhattan (who are UCAS citizens) the illusion of having a democratically elected government, one they can bitch to so that the MDC doesn't have to put up with the annoyance. The city government has very limited zoning rights. The most power they have is for historic preservation of landmarks, which often comes into conflict with what MDC development plans. Other than historic preservation, the city government runs schools for UCAS citizens of Manhattan, hospitals, and prisons, and it has contracts with NYPD, Inc, Knight Errant, and Winter Systems to police city-run institutions, as well as neighborhoods made up primarily of UCAS citizens. Anything that directly impacts UCAS citizens is usually a program or a project overseen by the Manhattan government at their expense, not the MDC. The Manhattan city government can award contracts, but the contract process is heavily influenced by the MDC and heavily favors the corporations that sit on the MDC.

Mayor: Thalia Falkner
City Council:
District 1: Eric Padovano
District 2: Kathryn Gates
District 3: Nicolas Stanford
District 4: Lucia Osgood
District 5: Viviana Hill
District 6: Abe Giordano
District 7: Ayla Hamilton
District 8: Xarles Poirier
District 9: Brian Jahnsen
District 10: Kenneth Plant

MANHATTAN LANDMARKS, PART 1

EAST COAST STOCK EXCHANGE

The East Coast Stock Exchange (ECSE) sits on the exact same spot of the former New York Stock Exchange. Although the original building was leveled by the earthquake of 2005, the new East Cost Stock Exchange building was built to exact specifications and aesthetics as the previous structure when the ECSE returned to Manhattan in 2065. Since such a high percentage of North America's financial transactions occur at the ECSE, hosts within the ECSE are as secure as they can get. The current commissioner of the ECSE is a dwarf by the name of David Jacobs. Since 2072, Jacobs has been battling a series of ongoing scandals revolving around his personal life, from torrid affairs with women believed by many to be beneath his social stature to alcohol abuse. There are many whispers in Manhattan circles that Jacobs will soon retire from this position, which he has held since the ECSE returned to Manhattan. Expect quite an interesting selection process with candidates from all the major corporations looking to grab this powerful position.

- For those that follow the stock market, last year was a very bad year for investors. The Great Dragon Civil War the failure of the Ares Excalibur, the Horizon technomancer massacre, and other issues had investors pulling their hard-earned nuyen out of the market. So far, the first two quarters of this year haven't shown much improvement, with the stock market still off by seven percent. Many are predicting the slump will lead to a recession. Whoever takes over Jacobs' position may be inheriting an annoyingly prolonged bear market.
- Kay St. Irregular

S-K NORTH AMERICA

The S-K North America building is a one-hundred-and-seventy-five-story modern arcology situated near the center of Midtown. The gold-and-black building, remodeled in 2068, houses offices for Krupp Manufacturing, Krupp Specialist Engineering, and Krupp Robotics. The media broadcast company, American Broadcast Service, is also housed here. North American branches of Commerzbank, Dresdner Bank, and Lothian-Vaea PLC are also found in this building. The S-K North America division is currently headed up by Stephen Aachen, who has temporarily replaced Ludmilla Reanka, the division manager who was killed in Cara'Sir in late 2074.

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S-K PRIME

The S-K prime building stands across the street from The Towers in lower Manhattan. The S-K Prime building is nowhere near as flashy or as elegant as the S-K North America building is, but that doesn't mean that it isn't handling some of S-K's most vital interests. It houses corporate lawyers, lobbyists, and other bureaucrats trained to deal with cases that are being heard before the Corporate Court, as well as other matters that may arise. The S-K Prime building also handles matters dealing with the MDC. Between trying to calm down an angry Corporate Court from the great dragon Hestaby's allegations that Lofwyr sanctioned the metahuman disappearances during the Great Dragon Civil War (which are leading to Corporate Court cases being decided against S-K, causing them to lose millions) to trying and arrange for NeoNET to being kicked off the MDC, S-K Prime is rife with frantic activity and plenty of targets for datatheft and espionage. It is rumored that a vast majority of S-K's shadow activities in Manhattan are planned and organized in this building, though no hard evidence for this has been recovered.

THE TOWERS

The Towers consist of three large office high rises that previously served as the headquarters of the former megacorporation known as Fuchi. When Fuchi collapsed in on itself, the trio of identical, two-hundred-and-fifty-story onyx towers fell into disarray and disrepair. Although Novatech inherited the towers from Fuchi, political maneuverings among the other corporations on the MDC kept Novatech from being able to do anything with them. Finally, in 2065 following the second Matrix crash, NeoNET succeeded in convincing the Corporate Court to take over the property and to make it (and Manhattan) its Earth-based headquarters. While the Corporate Court got a facility essentially for free in the deal, NeoNET received the lucrative contract for the construction and maintenance of the Matrix infrastructure used by the Corporate Court. This high-profile contract has brought with it a ton of prestige and bragging rights for NeoNET, along with a lot of work within Manhattan itself. This contract is due to be renegotiated this year, and if the Corporate Court cannot come to terms with NeoNET over the maintenance for their infrastructure by December 31, 2075, this contract may go out for bid. Obviously NeoNET doesn't want this, so expect them to invest large amounts of nuyen to landing a new contract with a duration of at least ten years.

Since 2065, the Towers' facades have been completely remodeled, redesigned to be the most stunning and visibly impressive arcologies on the island of Manhattan. The Corporate Court, working in tandem with the MDC, continue to make a conscious effort in sprawl planning to ensure that no new building constructed in Manhattan may have a more elaborate or eye-catching design. The Towers are designed to be the center of attention of the Manhattan skyline (just as the Corporate Court is meant to the center of attention for the whole world). The Towers have the highest level of security in Manhattan, and possibly in the world.

MDC BUILDING

Another critical piece of Manhattan real estate, the MDC building on the Upper Eastside is built on the same location as where Gracie Mansion used to be. The MDC building consists of ten bottom floors, which are considered common office space and shared amongst all members of the MDC. These levels house the day-to-day bureaucracy of the MDC, from clerks and office managers to administrators. The building then breaks up into thirteen separate towers, with each tower having thirteen stories. Each tower is devoted to a particular member of the MDC. The towers then meld back into a single, dome-shaped twenty-fourth floor, shared by all the towers. This is the level where the MDC and its representatives conduct their meetings, hold hearings, and make the decisions that impact almost every Manhattanite (although their work is always carried out outside of the purview of the common resident). Due to the secrecy enforced by MDC, there is no public access to the upper levels of the building (beyond the tenth floor). There is a standing rule that no members may use corporate-labeled vehicles to support activities of the MDC. The MDC building takes up six city blocks for its base. The current press secretary and public spokesman for the MDC is an elf named Christopher Arkins.

THE MALMSTEIN BUILDING (NEONET HEADQUARTERS)

NeoNET's Manhattan headquarters is found in Midtown, a couple of blocks away from the S-K North America building and the Towers. The Malmstein building has one hundred and forty floors. Many of the floors are dedicated to its services that it provides as Manhattan's largest Matrix service responder. Ten floors of the Malmstein building are dedicated solely for maintaining the Corporate Court Matrix infrastructure within the Towers. Other floors are dedicated to maintaining and improving the wireless security mesh network that permeates every inch of Manhattan. Erika Systems and KorSys Operations all have offices and laboratories within the Malmstein Building.

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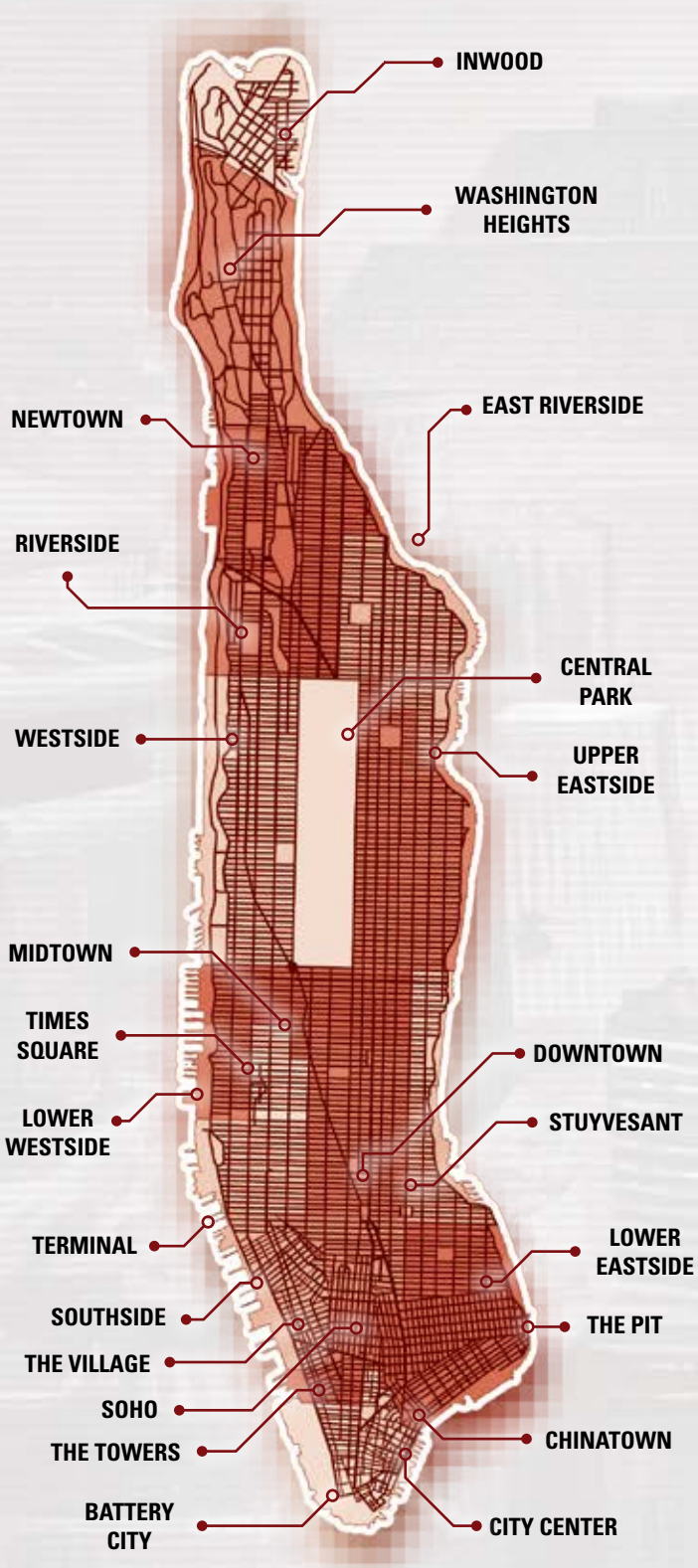

ARES, NYPD, INC. AND WINTER SYSTEMS

The security contract for Manhattan is split between three different security corporations: Knight Errant, NYPD, Inc. and Winter Systems. Naturally, NYPD, Inc. has had the lion's share of that contract (in the very sprawl where the corporation was born from the original police department when it became privatized in 2050), with NYPD, Inc. providing security service for nearly eighty percent of the island. NYPD, Inc. also has the contract to run all the correctional centers and penitentiaries for Manhattan (until 2080, when the contract comes up for bid again). Knight Errant is a distant second when it comes to the security contract, providing coverage for roughly eleven percent of Manhattan. And rounding out the top three security providers in Manhattan is Winter Systems, holding only a meager nine percent stake in the contract. For those readers who aren't that familiar with Winter Systems, this firm is a local, Manhattan-based AA security company that has provided the world with many fine security devices over the years, ranging from flash-paks and micro-flares to the famous Steel Lynx combat drone (which have all since been re-appropriated and adapted for runner needs). They also provide security personnel for security contracts throughout much of North America. In addition to Manhattan, Winter Systems has a large security presence in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Richmond in the CAS and Miami in the Caribbean League.

For the last couple of decades, it was common practice for each neighborhood to be policed by two different corporations. The intention was to foster cooperation between the three main security providers on the island, and to make their security network even more efficient while keeping the other corps honest in their duties to Manhattan. Unfortunately, petty rivalries and squabbles, jurisdictional disputes, and even the base desire to expand their piece of the Rotten Apple pie at the cost of their rivals found their way into the daily operations of these corporations, eroding trust between the rank-and-file beat cops from the rival corporations and making cooperation unfeasible. Eventually, it became widely known that the program was causing more corruption than it was helping to solve. Given all the inherent problems of this program, the MDC has started revising security contracts for all the neighborhoods starting in 2073. For each neighborhood, the MDC has decreed there now will be only one security provider, limiting the amount of time each of the three security corporations have to interact with each other between the various neighborhoods. These contracts will also be up for bid every three years, ensuring that if a corporation isn't doing its job, the MDC will bring in someone else.

Since 2073, Central Park, Chinatown, Downtown, the Pit, Riverside and East Riverside, Southside,

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Stuyvesant, Terminal, Times Square, the Towers, and Washington Heights have all had their security contracts restructured so that the only have one security provider. After the new contracts were signed, the other corporation was forced to re-allocate their resources to the other parts of Manhattan, where they still held at least part of the contract. The remainder of the neighborhoods that have not gone through this change will have their contracts up for bid in the next six months, with the final batch of contracts being put into place by January 1, 2076. Not only are the big three security providers looking forward to the opportunities these new contracts represent to expand their territories, but everyone else from outside Manhattan, from Lone Star and Eagle Security and Desert Storm Security to Parashield and Petrovski security, are expected to be bidding on those contracts as well. Most experts anticipate a vast majority of these contracts will go to those corporations that are either on the MDC (NYPD, Inc. and Ares) or to Winter Systems. But with the growing mood for change, a surprise selection is always possible. One or more of the outside firms may be given at least one of these neighborhoods, just to see how they do and to see if they can bring down Manhattan's surging crime rate (which is still lower than most parts of the UCAS, but that fact doesn't do much to assuage Manhattanites). For these outside corporations, this could mean getting their foot in the door for even more work with the MDC in the future.

There is very much a race among the various security providers to get any kind of edge in this bidding process, which has translated into a lot of work for runners, from paydata thefts to file-tampering jobs. Lone Star, in particular, is investing major resources to make sure it can obtain at least one of those contracts so it can begin making inroads into the Manhattan market beyond the contracts they hold with private individuals. In fact, in the last six months or so, Lone Star has been making a big, public campaign claiming their officers have had trouble apprehending criminals in Manhattan due to jurisdictional issues with NYPD, Inc. They have been using their wanted lists as a way of showing which criminals are active in Manhattan, and which ones are untouchable to them due to NYPD, Inc., either through its incompetence or its corruption. This has done nothing to ease the pressure on NYPD, Inc.

In this ongoing posturing for Manhattan security contracts, the corporation most likely to lose ground is one that would have been unthinkable five years ago: Ares. In the last few years, Ares has suffered a string of PR debacles. The first occurred when it was revealed that they were collaborating with the UCAS CIA in a secret project designed to not only return Manhattan back to the UCAS control (in exchange for Ares having more authority within Manhattan), but also to test and develop next-generation weapons on insect spirits. For the most part, Ares was successful in repairing the damage done to its reputation with the public from that incident, but as far as the other corporations are concerned, there is still much resentment over Ares' duplicity and their efforts to undermine other members of the MDC. And then there is the maglev train disaster that happened on March 13, 2073, which injured or killed three hundred and eighty people, many of whom were wageslaves commuting into Manhattan. Ares was later found to be culpable in the crash, and the corp is still in the process of settling claims. So far, Ares has paid out nearly twenty million nuyen in compensation, with still more claims to be settled. All of this is on top of their troubles with the Excalibur rifle, which has soured many formerly loyal metahumans on Ares' products. In Manhattan, it has become known in certain circles that NYPD, Inc., one of Ares' largest customers, has been gradually reducing the number of weapon shipments they buy from Ares, choosing to supplement their arsenals with Cavalier and Heckler and Koch guns. NYPD, Inc. has even been contracting with Winter Systems for other security supply needs as well, including body armor and drones, which has only served to aggravate the situation with Ares, and with its CEO, Damien Knight.

- It's also not helping Ares' disposition toward NYPD, Inc. that over the last two years, the AA corporation maneuvered its way into claiming Downtown, Times Square, and Stuyvesant for themselves. These neighborhoods not only have the highest property values in all of Manhattan but also are the highest profile. There is currently a lot of shadow work going on in Manhattan by Ares to sabotage NYPD, Inc. in these neighborhoods, and to position themselves to reclaim contracts in these spots.
- Sticks

NYPD, Inc.'s recent purchases from outside of Ares have revealed dissention within Ares' ranks. According to local media outlets, Damien Knight is pushing to drop NYPD, Inc. as a customer altogether, and to go on a major charm offensive with the MDC to claim the entire Manhattan island for Knight Errant. Damien Knight believes Knight Errant should be the singular corporation protecting the streets of North America's premier sprawl. And for Knight, having Knight Errant in such a limited capacity in Manhattan is a terrible slight against Knight Errant's reputation. Unfortunately, standing in his way of chasing the entire Manhattan contract has been long running rival on the board, Arthur Vogel.

Vogel believes the best plan for Manhattan is to repair relations with NYPD, Inc. (even if that means giving NYPD, Inc. steep discounts that would lead to Ares taking losses in the short term), and to continue to sell to them their weapons as they have been doing for the past two decades, allowing them to keep responsibility for a majority of Manhattan. Vogel has spoken out at board meetings saying NYPD, Inc. should be the pub-

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lic face for security in Manhattan, and that they should take the fall for any of the major problems that happen in Manhattan. Given how big of a target Manhattan is for the various enemies of both the corporations and the elite in general, Vogel believes that it is in Ares' best interests not to be at the forefront of Manhattan security, and to allow Knight Errant to operate in NYPD, Inc.'s shadow, where they can easily place blame on NYPD for any security failures. Vogel has also argued that their profit margins are much higher from being a weapons supplier instead of the main security services supplier, as they do not have costs associated with having a much larger payroll or so many risks and liabilities associated with covering so much wealthy real estate.

Due to Knight's and Vogel's opposing views, Ares has been divided. In Manhattan, you might be able to find a job where the Ares Johnson wants your help to safely escort a shipment of weapons to NYPD, Inc. from Ares, and in a different part of town, you might find another Ares Johnson looking to grab the shipment from NYPD, Inc. once it has been delivered. Or you may have an Ares Johnson hire you to raid one of NYPD, Inc.'s evidence lock ups in order to tamper with evidence in a high profile case just to embarrass them. Just as there have been news reports about corruption in the MDC centering on Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET, there have been a growing number of news reports revealing corruption within NYPD, Inc.'s ranks. Exposés have revealed that NYPD officers ignored reports of illegal immigration onto the island. Instead of investigating those reports, NYPD, Inc. officers have chosen to report them as "sensor ghosts." Evidence later turned up that revealed that the officers in question were bought off by the various organized crime syndicates to further their illegal drug and BTL operations; operations not tracked and sanctioned by the MDC (where the profits go to the crime syndicates instead of the MDC). These public assaults against NYPD, Inc. seem to be having an effect on their popularity. However, as Vogel has pointed out, this could in fact backfire for Knight, as NYPD Inc.'s popularity in Manhattan declines, the chances that NYPD, Inc. will vote to retain Ares on the MDC drop as well.

So, what does all this have to with the CFD virus? None of the security providers in Manhattan have a high number of head cases. Ares' subsidiary, Ares Integrated Solutions, is carrying out some research on the CFD virus in their offices in Downtown, but other than that, Ares has not contributed a lot to CFD research. And both NYPD, Inc. and Winter Systems are doing even less. However, Knight Errant, NYPD, Inc. and Winter Systems all seem to have a unified front on one thing: the cover-up of head crashes. Since the CFD virus was discovered by the corporations, Knight Errant, NYPD, Inc. and Winter Systems have all gone on the offensive, hunting and shutting down illegal suppliers of cyberware, bioware, and geneware. They have also targeted organleggers and used-cyberware fences. In Manhattan alone, these three corporations have shut down two shadow clinics and nearly two dozen street clinics, claiming that their practices and operations have helped spread of tainted, defective, and dangerous augmentations; augmentations that have caused unexplained changes within a particular subject. Whether it's the MDC or Corporate Court spreading this story, the motive is the same—the corps want the general masses to think that the CFD virus is not caused by them; but rather, caused by elements that are selling "contaminated" and "faulty" products at the expense of consumer safety. Their strategy lays the blame on everyone else's shoulders instead of on corporate managers. These raids on street clinics and street docs are not just happening in Manhattan, but in other parts of the world, from Seattle, Neo-Tokyo, and London to Atlanta, Miami, and Paris, much to the detriment of street docs and those that have to rely on them for medical care. There is no telling how long these raids will continue, but as long as the corporations need a scapegoat to avoid any responsibility (or liability) for the CFD virus or the spreading of this virus, chances are these raids will continue.

MANHATTAN VITAL STATS (2076)

POSTED BY: TRAVELER JONES

NEIGHBORHOOD

SECURITY PROVIDER(S)/SEC. LEVEL

BATTERY CITY

NYPD INC. AND WINTER SYSTEMS/C

Battery City is the southernmost tip of Manhattan. This particular neighborhood is fairly rundown and remains in stark contrast to the modern, sophisticated, and corporate feel of most of the rest of Manhattan. Many of the buildings in Battery City managed to survive the quake of 2005, though their conditions have steadily declined over the years. To add to this neighborhood's misery, the corporate landlords have done very little about this problem. The MDC has designated Battery City as a neighborhood to house middle- to low-income residents, many of whom are part of the corporations' diversity programs. Battery City has also become a popular dumping ground for middle- and lower-income earners who have been forced to relocate from other parts of Manhattan where the MDC has carried out their urban renewal projects. As such, Battery City is becoming even more overcrowded. Crime rates within Battery City are significantly higher than other parts of Manhattan (usually by as much as four percentage points). One of the street gangs that continues to thrive in Battery City and is believed to responsible for some

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of that property crime is the Battery Boys. With the reopening of the Ludmilla Reanka Memorial Tunnel (formerly known as the Battery-Brooklyn Tunnel) in 2076, Battery City will likely see an increase in traffic, and may see more problems that come with increased traffic—especially if that traffic contains nice cars.

CENTRAL PARK

NYPD INC./AAA

The Central Park neighborhood is where the most powerful and elite of Manhattan go to live. The residential high rises surrounding the 3.4-kilometer park are among the world's most expensive real estate in the world. These lofts, particularly those with majestic views of Central Park, are signifincat status symbols, and those that can claim a penthouse near Central Park have good standing within Manhattan's most elite social circles. NYPD, Inc. goes to extreme measures to protect those that live near Central Park, usually with higher concentrations of drones and spirits as well as more frequent patrols. NYPD, Inc. continues the popular tradition of sending mounted patrols throughout Central Park. Central Park itself is maintained by Shiawase, who also runs at maintains park attractions such as the zoo, the cultural museum, Belvedere Castle, and Cleopatra's Needle. There are also many historic hotels within the Central Park neighborhood where the rich and famous stay when visiting Manhattan, including the world-renowned Pierre and the Carlyle hotels (the Pierre is owned by Citigroup, while S-K owns the Carlyle).

CHINATOWN

NYPD, INC./B

Chinatown is the Asian-centric part of Manhattan north of City Center. The Chinese population for Chinatown have worked tirelessly to lobby, and in many cases, fight against the MDC to prevent revitalization efforts from wiping out their cultural heritage in this part of Manhattan. There have been some changes made by the MDC, but most of those changes have been superficial, allowing the neighborhood to retain its identity. The Triads are obviously active within Chinatown, with the largest Triad being the Large Circle Triad. The Triads are behind many of the casinos and gaming parlors found in the neighborhood (gambling is now legal). The black market trade is strong in Chinatown, as is metahuman trafficking (using specialized smugglers known as *skimmers*). If you need to find a discreet way off the island and you have nuyen, chances are you'll be able to find what you need in Chinatown.

CITY CENTER

NYPD, INC. AND KNIGHT ERRANT/AA

City Center in lower Manhattan is where city hall resides. It is also the home to other government facilities, UCAS

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court buildings (for both criminal and civil lawsuits), foreign embassies and consulates, the headquarters for NYPD, Inc. and the East Coast Stock Exchange. Several A and AA corporations also make a home inside City Center. Due to the presence of the ECSE, there are a lot of banks and financial firms that also have offices here, including the Frankfort Bank Association.

DOWNTOWN

NYPD INC./AAA

Downtown Manhattan is a mixture of commercial and residential space. Residents of the skyscrapers here lead a privileged existence. NYPD, Inc. has spent the last ten years improving the security for the Downtown area. Whereas ten years ago, Downtown held a security level ranging from A to B, it now has a solid AAA rating throughout. NYPD, Inc. has driven the gangs from Downtown, and up to recently, has brought crime rates down to historic lows. The extraordinarily low crime rates in Downtown is one of NYPD, Inc.'s more impressive success stories, and one of the reasons why they likely are not in any real danger of losing its security contract with Manhattan (and is believed to be in a good position to take over control of security matters for more areas). Commercial areas in Downtown are patchworks of extraterritorial rights, making it challenging to navigate through it all with the various required passes, but it is nowhere near as complicated as Midtown. The East Coast Stock Exchange is a major business draw here.

INWOOD

NYPD INC. AND KNIGHT ERRANT/A

Inwood is one of the few residential areas in Manhattan populated by individual houses and apartment buildings no taller than eight stories tall, as opposed to the massive high rises or arcologies found elsewhere. With small, rolling hills, suburban-style street design, and parks such as Inwood Hill and Fort Tryon, the feeling of life in Inwood can be described as "quaint" and "a call back to simpler times." Despite every effort made to maintain the area's suburban feel, with naturally occurring caves and relatively clean rivers, NYPD, Inc. and Knight Errant are able to provide top-level security services for Inwood residents without being considered overly intrusive. There are fewer visible drones here, and sensors and cameras are more discreetly placed in this neighborhood to keep residents from feeling like they are under constant surveillance. Astral patrols are much more frequent here than patrol cruisers. But the toned-down nature of the security network doesn't make it any less effective. At one time, Inwood used to be divided by Broadway between the rich side of Inwood and the middle and lower income side, and as such, the security level for this neighborhood fluctuated between C and B. But no longer. In 2065, the MDC decided to make Inwood the subject of one of their first urban renewal projects. In the poorer sections, MDC evicted those on the east side of Broadway with less-than-desirable income levels and moved them to Battery City. They then began an arduous process of rebuilding that part of Inwood and replacing the low-rent apartments and middle-income homes with mansions for the wealthy executives, homes that remain true to the character of Inwood. Nowadays, both sides of Broadway are filled with the rich and powerful. Inwood is no longer a refuge for the underprivileged; they have all been forced out to make way for a "better breed" of metahumans.

LOWER WESTSIDE AND EASTSIDE

NYPD, INC. AND WINTER SYSTEMS/ AREAS RANGE FROM A TO B

Lower Westside and Eastside neighborhoods have traditionally been residential areas for middle and low-income earners. Lower Westside abuts the glamorous Midtown on one end and runs into the dilapidated Terminal on the southern end. Eastside is typically used to house managers who are at the very bottom rung of the corporate ladder and have not yet earned their positions within the most upscale neighborhoods. Many of the corporations that are not on the MDC house their employees in the Eastside neighborhood. Lower Westside and Eastside have also become secondary sites for the MDC to "relocate" middle- and lower-income families from areas where they are conducting their urban renewal projects (when they don't feel like dropping them into Battery City). Overcrowding is becoming a problem in these two neighborhoods, and crime is rising. Lower Westside and Eastside continue to have gang problems, particularly between the Ancients and the Blood Monkeys. The Wrathchildes, a gang whose turf used to be Downtown, have been forced by NYPD, Inc. to relocate. They have since moved to Lower Westside and Eastside, and their move has started turf wars between the gangs. The Mafia families of New York, the local Seuopla rings and the Yakuza all have a significant presence in Lower Westside and Eastside. In addition to rising crime rates, and gang violence, Eastside frequently encounters problems from escapees coming from Roosevelt Island (a.k.a. Penitentiary Island). Although NYPD, Inc. and the other security corps insist escapees are no longer a problem, the truth is at least a few from Roosevelt Island make it ashore in the Eastside neighborhood. There have been instances (covered up, natch) where these escapees have either attacked residents looking for a way off the island, or have taken hostages to try and bargain with NYPD, Inc. for their freedom (unfortunately, the people in these neighborhoods don't really matter so much as far as Manhattan and its aloof culture is concerned, so those

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negotiations don't really work out so well for the escapees). And with the escapes of notorious criminals Robert Moriarty, Kat Keiner and Rachel Sheperd who are believed to have ended up in Eastside at one point, this neighborhood has earned the reputation for being seedy and dangerous. Both Lower Westside and Eastside neighborhoods are places that people do not want to live there willingly if they can help it. Unfortunately, many metahumans have no choice. Their income levels and their passes require them to live in Lower Westside or Eastside neighborhoods (or to leave the island). Cheap coffin motels may be found in Lower Westside and Eastside neighborhoods for runner types, particularly those that are not locals and whose living arrangements have been paid for by the megacorporations.

- One criminal enterprise that most people forget about is identity theft. Maybe it's because stealing someone else's identity isn't as glamorous or as exciting as stealing a car or running a racketeering operation. But in Manhattan, identity theft is big business, and the reason for that is the rich tend to make it that way. The wealthy in Manhattan live disposable lifestyles. Their clothing has to be one-of-a-kind. They must have the latest commlinks with the latest apps and latest gadgets and sport the latest, fastest, and coolest cars. They have to be wearing suits and dresses that are of the moment and in style. Changing wardrobes at the drop of a hat isn't hard and doesn't come with many complications, but the same isn't true about disposing of things like commlinks or cars. There are some tricks to deal with, and the upper class can be surprisingly inept at knowing what they are. For example, many of the privileged still believe that just by hitting "delete," the material on their commlink is gone forever. There is big business in Manhattan for crime syndicates to recover commlinks that have been ditched or vehicles that have been sold and are heading off island because they still retrain much of the information from their previous owner. And if a syndicate can pull off the data for a valid pass off of a thrown-away commlink, then they're going to be able to make an almost flawless, forged copy of the pass. And vehicles, same thing. With all their computer components, the vehicle will often retain information for the vehicle passes. Some criminal organizations pay runners good nuyen to retrieve these items from the garbage and will make a bundle because of it.
- Ma'Fan

MIDTOWN

KNIGHT ERRANT AND WINTER SYSTEMS/AAA

There is no denying this fact: Midtown is the heart and lifeblood of Manhattan. It is plastered by corporate AR advertisements and corporate billboard drones, and it has become a sea of conflicting extraterritorial status-

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es. Depending on the passes, a commuter may have a relatively easy commute route or they can have one that is overly convoluted and complicated, one that forces them to zigzag through the streets of Manhattan to bypass certain extraterritorial locations to arrive at their destination. Depending on traffic, these convoluted routes can add as much as three hours to any commute. The wealthy and powerful often rely on air taxis to bypass the crowds and rules on the streets, turning a commute that could take hours into one that takes minutes. Air taxis in Midtown are almost as common a site as the New York cabbies on street level.

Midtown is packed with commercial high rises and arcologies that are extraordinarily opulent, ranging in size from twenty stories all the way up to two hundred stories. Midtown's historical Theatre District continues to awe the tourists and draw in major crowds. Many of the historical theatres that existed in the Theatre District before the quake have been painstakingly recreated by Aztechnology and Horizon (including the Imperial, Majestic, and Lyceum theatres). Lincoln Center is another big attraction Midtown and is owned and run by Horizon. Midtown also houses Grand Central, one of Manhattan's major transit hubs for trains and the subway system (also referred to as electric or light rail now due to the fact that most of the subway lines are above ground thanks to the 2005 quake). Grand Central is reserved for those with resident (white) and visitor (purple) passes. Other commuters are forced to use either Penn Station or Terminal in the Terminal neighborhood (for those with less influence and less nuyen who carry blue passes).

NEWTOWN

NYPD INC. AND WINTER SYSTEMS/B

Newtown is the neighborhood once known as Harlem. Following the quake of 2005, nearly eighty percent of the buildings in Harlem were destroyed or needed to be demolished. The corporations came in and did just that, wiping out most of Harlem's cultural heritage in the process, reshaping and repopulating Harlem with their own people and turning it into a cookie cutter neighborhood, one that put a positive spin on the corporations' presence in Newtown and Manhattan. Sadly, without much of a population left to resist the corps, the traditional Harlem neighborhood died, and Newtown was born, stocked with tens of thousands of corporate employees. The former residents of Harlem didn't just disappear, though; many of the displaced denizens eventually returned to Newtown, determined to bring back Harlem's identity. There is a strong counter-culture that exists in Newtown, one that is staunchly anti-corporation and pro-Harlem. There is also a large neo-anarchist presence in Newtown that neither NYPD, Inc. or the MDC have been able to crush entirely. This movement was only encouraged when the megacorporations attempted their "Teen Out" pilot program, which gave corporate teens more freedom within Newtown but it also inadvertently exposed to neo-anarchist philosophies and lifestyles, and which fed into their teenage rebellious streaks. This failed experiment only helped spread the neo-anarchist agenda (and from the corporations' perspective) made the problem worse.

Newtown is currently the subject of several MDC urban-renewal projects. Recently, four middle-income residential apartment complexes were closed down and demolished (ones that were believed to have been hotbeds of neo-anarchist activities), and new luxury high-rise arcologies are being built to replace them; two of them are being constructed by Saeder-Krupp, two by Ares. All of these projects are frequently targeted by protests, vandalism, and sabotage by the neo-anarchists, using them as a rally cry for their causes of freedom and individuality. Despite being evicted, many of those residents have refused to leave Newtown and are continuing to put up resistance against the corporations. In 2073, the security level for Newtown was rated at A, but it has since been downgraded due to the ferocious activities of these residents who refuse to play nice with the edicts of the MDC.

THE PIT

WINTER SYSTEMS (IN AREAS NOT AT THE Z LEVEL, OTHERWISE, NONE)/LEVELS RANGE FROM C TO E, OCCASIONAL Z LEVEL

For years, the Lower Eastside neighborhood (a.k.a. "The Pit) has been lawless. An excessive number of warring gangs, violent and militant neo-anarchist cells and criminal syndicates operate in and have essentially overrun this part of Manhattan. The black market is thriving here. The Mafia families of New York, the Triads, the Yakuza and the Seoulpa Rings all have territory and interests in this part of Manhattan. As such, all this rampant criminal activity present in the Pit made NYPD, Inc. do a cost-benefit analysis on the merits of moving in and reclaiming the neighborhood. And they found such a move would prove too costly to be feasible. So, NYPD, Inc. settled for a plan of containment. Since the early 2050s, they have taken a number of measures to make sure those inside the Pit cannot interact with the rich and elite in the rest of Manhattan. For the most part, their plan of containment has proven successful. However, in 2074, NYPD, Inc. let this part of their security contract to expire, allowing Winter Systems to inherit the problems associated with containing this neighborhood. That may have been a smart move. MDC is rumored to be impatient with the lack of process NYPD, Inc. was making in retaking Lower Eastside from the gangs, the SINless, and the other "undesirables," and so this could have been NYPD Inc.'s way of passing the buck. Since obtaining the contract for the Pit, Winter Systems has done almost nothing different from NYPD

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in the way of containment. Almost. One change is that Winter Systems has chosen to use much more lethal force against those who would try leave the Pit for the more upscale parts of Manhattan. Winter Systems has demonstrated a lower tolerance for repeat offenders coming from the Pit than even NYPD, Inc. had. So far, the more extreme measures Winter Systems have taken seem to be popular with the elite crowd, who generally assume the rabble of the pit would be better off dead anyway.

If MDC wants to retake and revitalize the Pit, they will likely need a megacorporation like Ares and Knight Errant that can bring extensive resources to bear on this problem. This could very well be the contract that Knight Errant would need to make a good impression with the MDC, improve their relations with the other corporations on the board, and make inroads to securing the full contract for the sprawl. So far, Ares has not made a play for this contract, and it's likely it doesn't want to upset NYPD, Inc., and possibly cause its vote to switch against it for when the MDC votes on which corporations retain their seats. But it is always a possibility in the future when MDC politics are more favorable to Ares.

Inside the Pit, there have been local groups working to clean up their section of the Rotten Apple without MDC assistance. Groups like Urban Heritage and Lower East Heritage have been working to clean up their streets, along with their neighborhood's reputation. Up to last year, they appeared to be finding some success, both through direct action and shadow activity. And up to this point, the MDC has been happy to allow them to take care of the problems within the Pit. Recently, though, crime rates have grown. Members of both groups have been found dead inside the Pit, and it would seem the gangs that inhabit this part of Manhattan are fighting back, retaliating against those who would take away their turf. There are other issues that may require MDC intervention as well, including a reported dramatic increase in the population of ghouls and vampires. The population of dangerous paranormal critters is also up in this neighborhood (including devil rats, demon rats, Gabriel hounds, and gargoyles), and these are seeping into the other, higher-class neighborhoods and are causing a commotion. It may not be much longer before the MDC decides that it can no longer ignore the problems of the Pit. Should that ever come to be, it is expected that there will be bloodshed against whoever enters the Pit to try to clean it up. Making things more complicated, Matrix coverage is pretty spotty in the Pit, so anyone who goes in can't count on using it as a tool against the natives.

RIVERSIDE AND EAST RIVERSIDE

NYPD, INC./AA-A

Riverside and East Riverside are primarily residential areas, with a few commercial areas bordering the Midtown area. These areas are generally filled with mid-level managers and executives who work for the corporations that sit on the MDC. That means their accommodations are significantly better than those in other areas. Other A and AA corporations that are not on the MDC may arrange for their managers to reside in this part of town, but it is much more expensive for them to do so.

SOUTHSIDE

NYPD INC./B-C

Southside is another neighborhood that blends commercial and residential high rises. Southside tends to have a middle- to lower-income population. As such, Southside is another target of the MDC's urban renewal projects, with three major buildings being demolished in order to establish arcologies for the upper classes. Despite their limited urban-renewal projects within Southside, the MDC is not ready to expel a vast majority of local residents to make way for the rich and powerful. Southside has a majority of the island's ports and cargo-handling facilities. As such, many dockworkers live in Southside, and dockworker unions have successfully lobbied to keep Southside for their members. This status quo is likely not going to change in the future as many of the corporations, particularly the AA corporations, are not willing to upset the dockworkers and perhaps cost their corporations a lot of nuyen in strikes and work stoppages. The Southside neighborhood tends to have trouble with gang and criminal elements (specifically with Skimmers bringing illegal metahumans into Manhattan, illegal, unregulated BTL/drug trafficking, prostitution, and smuggling), with the two largest street gangs being the Ancients and the Axemen.

STUYVESANT

NYPD, INC./AAA

Along with Central Park, Stuyvesant is a neighborhood for the ultra rich, with posh, luxurious estates. Status symbols abound in Stuyvesant. Continuing with the success they have had with discreet security measures, NYPD, Inc. has laced the entire neighborhood with concealed security measures. All the patrol vehicles in Stuyvesant are unmarked, looking like luxury vehicles such as the Eurowind or the Dynamit. It is impossible to visibly distinguish these patrol vehicles from other residential vehicles. Even the AR registration tags and access IDs show them to be privately owned. Instead of drones, NYPD, Inc. utilizes helicopters here, disguising them as news copters or tourist company copters. Runners who have worked Stuyvesant have spoken of sentry guns that can pop up to surprise an intruder. These sentry guns are loaded with non-lethal rounds and are frequently hidden amongst shrubs, planted under lawns, hidden in walls, and have even been implanted inside of statues. Because it is NYPD, Inc., many of these security measures are non-lethal (keep

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in mind I said "many," not "all"). Some have claimed that common birds (pigeons and sparrows, in particular) are often mimicked by surveillance and tactical drones. These tactical drones can carry explosives designed to disable vehicles, or tote chemicals to incapacitate intruders.

SOHO

NYPD, INC. AND KNIGHT ERRANT/A

SoHo is an abbreviation for "South of Houston." SoHo is the part of Manhattan for the single A corporations and family-owned businesses. For the most part, SoHo has been allowed to maintain its cultural identity except for one thing: many of the so-called privately owned family businesses are actually fronts for the megacorporations. The individuals that run those stores, from curial and lore stores to drugstores, are there because of the megacorporations' diversity programs. Many of the metahumans that run these stores could not afford to be there without those programs. Most of the products that are in these small stores come from the megacorporations or their subsidiaries; often times, you can get them cheaper by going directly to the subsidiary. And even if you shop at these stores, at least some of the profits still go backs to the megacorporations. Over the last four years, SoHo has had its security measures beefed up by both NYPD, Inc. and Knight Errant. Instead of carrying its former B security rating, SoHo is now considered a single-A neighborhood. In that same time frame as security was being increased, four residential buildings originally designated for middle- and lower-income earners were demolished by the MDC and replaced by high rises for the elite. Those who were evicted by the MDC met fates similar to lower-income earners from other parts of Manhattan and were sent to either Battery City or to the Lower Westside or Eastside neighborhoods.

TERMINAL

WINTER SYSTEMS/ LEVELS RANGE FROM C TO Z

Terminal is another section of Manhattan that has proven problematic for the MDC over the years, and is another neighborhood that was essentially dropped onto Winter Systems by both NYPD, Inc. and Knight Errant. Neither one wanted the responsibility for the security for that nightmare of a neighborhood that, by most definitions, is a perfect example of urban blight. Fortunately for Winter Systems, Terminal is not nearly in as bad of shape as the Pit, and it requires fewer resources to patrol and keep in line. Despite this fact, the Terminal Z-Zone (as it is commonly known) is walled off with a number of walls, barriers, and checkpoints set up at all street access points going in and out of the neighborhood. Most influential residents avoid Terminal like the VITAS plague. As is the case with the Pit, many non-lethal security measures that were formerly placed by NYPD, Inc. and Knight Errant have since been replaced by lethal security measures by Winter Systems. Inside Terminal, the black market does big business to the residents that live (or squat) in the dilapidated buildings. Organlegging, auto theft and smuggling, forgery, used cyberware fencing and counterfeit passes, identity theft, illegal gambling, and prostitution are all thriving criminal enterprises. Inside Terminal, there are any number of gangs, with two of the more prominent gangs being the Kings and the Slaughterhouse.

There are two major transit hubs inside the Terminal, which are mainly used by the blue-collar workers of Manhattan: Terminal station and Penn Station. These stations are located in the better parts of Terminal, just beyond the walls that contain the Z-level areas. The rough and rundown conditions of Terminal and Penn Station bus and rail hubs (with heavy doses of graffiti and AR graffiti covering each facility) are in stark contrast to the pristine, elegant, modern designs of Grand Central in Midtown, and stand as an example of just how Manhattan segregates the economic classes. Crime rates in Terminal are notably higher than in other parts of Manhattan. Functional Matrix hosts in the Terminal are rare.

TIMES SQUARE

NYPD, INC./AAA

Times Square is one of Manhattan's most recognizable features. Though it sits in the middle of Midtown, it attracts enough people, business, and general attention to warrant a designation as its own (very small) area. It's still the home of North America's famous New Year's ball drop, and is also the finishing point of Lacey's Thanksgiving Day Parade (even if it is no longer as big of a draw as it once was during the United States' heyday). Metahumans everywhere know the glitz and the glamour of Times Square, and of the Neon City that immediately surrounds it. It is still one of the most filmed and celebrated places on the planet. Time Square bombards tourists with both lights and AR displays. Lavish stores, restaurants, and luxury hotels border the area. Squeezed in-between the arcologies are many glass walkways connecting the buildings, allowing observers a breathtaking view of both Times Square and Neon City. Over Times Square, there are a large number of blimps that give Manhattanites and tourists a bird's eye view of the glittering lights. Neon City holds many restaurants and clubs that play to New York's history from the prohibition era, with many taking on the feel and appearance of speakeasies. Many illicit activities take place within these establishments, but NYPD, Inc. rarely takes any action. Many of these establishments cater to the pleasures of those in high society looking to slum it for a night or two. And many of those clients have enough political connections that could jeopardize NYPD, Inc.'s security contract with Manhattan if

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they ever chose to crack down on the illegal activities in Neon City. So long as there is peace on the streets and some semblance of law and order maintained in the neighborhood, NYPD, Inc. is more than happy to turn a blind eye to what happens behind closed doors and to fudge their crime rate reports for this part of Manhattan to protect the rich and powerful. Luxury hotels around Times Square include the Horizon Hyatt, the Warwick, and the Carlton hotels (the latter two are owned by Spinrad Industries).

THE TOWERS

NYPD, INC./AAA (WOULD BE AAAA, IF SUCH A LEVEL EXISTED)

In Manhattan, there are two distinct physical locations that are referred to as "The Towers." There are the three towers that can be seen almost anywhere in Manhattan that are the earth-based headquarters for the Corporate Court. But the neighborhood itself is also referred by the locals as "The Towers." The neighborhood, like the Towers skyscrapers, used to belong to Fuchi. At one time, the entire neighborhood was dubbed "Fuchi Town" due to the fact that all areas shared Fuchi's extraterritorial status, excluding them from the rest of the sprawl and its jurisdiction.

Many of the surrounding buildings that were a part of Fuchi Town were later sold off to other corporations (including Saeder-Krupp, which turned the building they bought into the S-K Prime building). The surrounding buildings at one time were connected to the Towers building via underground tunnels. Today, many of these buildings have been occupied by lobbyist and attorney firms that have business with the Corporate Court. The buildings that were interconnected with the Towers high rises have since had those underground tunnels sealed off.

THE UNDERGROUND

SECURITY CHANGES BASED ON ORGANIZED CRIME TERRITORY/2

When the MDC decided to cheap out on revitalizing Manhattan and build upon the remnants of old Manhattan instead of removing a vast majority of the debris field, they inadvertently created an underground system of caverns, tunnels, and ruined buildings. These tunnels would provide a means of circumventing many of the security measures the MDC put into place to keep the lower classes out of Manhattan. Despite the convenient means of moving through the island undetected, the Underground can be extremely dangerous. The tunnels and the ruins of the buildings are not structurally sound and could collapse under the wrong circumstances. Many of the tunnels, nooks, and crannies in the Underground are pitch black, and there is no sort of mapping system in place. For outsiders, getting lost in the Underground is a very strong possibility unless you have the help of a local. Even when darkness and structural instability are not factors in traversing the Underground, the cramped quarters can be restrictive. Some tunnels are as wide as subway tunnels, while others are so narrow that trolls and even other metahumans in full body armor cannot squeeze through.

There are not a lot of metahuman squatters in the Underground. The various crime syndicates keep these tunnels clear for their uses, which include black-market weapons shipping, BTL and drug trafficking, and metahuman smuggling. The locals and these crime syndicates know which tunnels are the safest and most reliable to use. Some of the crime syndicates have even gone so far as to shore up certain routes to decrease the chances of structural collapse. Such improvements represent a significant investment in territory that the family or organization does not wish to lose. As is the case anywhere organized crime outfits get territorial, the borders between claimed territories often get quite bloody. In addition to the dangers from metahumans in the underground, there is always the danger of paranormal creatures and beings that have made the tunnels their home, from devil rats to ghouls and vampires. Some locals have even spotted bug spirits moving around through the Underground, but no nests or hives have been uncovered (yet).

The underground is used by illegal street vendors to regularly set up unsanctioned Night Markets. These markets appear all around Manhattan at various coordinated times. This Night Market is a part of the black market, which deals in illicit, hard-to-acquire, and forbidden items. This Night Market is set up quickly—customers roll in, having been given details of where the Night Markets were going to be beforehand, and conduct business quickly. Once NYPD or the other security companies start to move in, the Night Market breaks down and disappears into the Underground before they can be caught. In previous years, this market has only been available at night, in remote areas on the island. Nowadays, Night Markets have become much bolder, conducting business during rush hours in high-traffic areas. With the security mesh network in a state of disarray, the emergence of the Night Market creates greater lag times, which in turn drags out the response time for NYPD, Inc. or the other security companies, giving the street vendors a little more time to sell their wares.

There are no known Matrix hosts available in the Underground. For wireless signals, the Underground is a dead zone.

THE VILLAGE

KNIGHT ERRANT AND WINTER SYSTEMS/B

According to the tourist ads, the Village is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse locations in all of Manhattan. Ethnically, this may be the case, but not

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culturally. Not anymore. A vast majority of the supposed "freethinkers" in the Village are puppets for the megacorps, spouting tame messages that encourage rebellion in a very safe, consumerist fashion. The art and literature that are so prominent here are carefully constructed and censored to prevent people from having the "wrong ideas." This censorship happens behind the scenes, where the public can't see it. If an artist gets out of line, their stipend can be cut off for a month or longer. If the misbehavior continues, the artist can be thrown off the island and banned from returning, with any of their literary or art works removed from the public eye. As in SoHo, many of the independent businesses that operate here are on the megacorporation's dime as part of their diversity programs, so the megacorporations have a lot of say over what happens here, including over their diversity and cultural festivals. Many neo-anarchists resent what the Village and other Manhattan neighborhoods have become and what it represents: the fact that freedom in Manhattan has become an illusion and nothing more.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

KNIGHT ERRANT/B-C

Washington Heights is primarily a middle- to lower-income residential neighborhood, with only a splattering of A-rated corporations. Most apartment high rises and lofts are twelve stories tall or smaller. In previous years, Washington Heights has held a solid B security level rating, but displacements of various gangs by NYPD, Inc. and the other security corporations helped drop that to a C. Knight Errant is promising to clean up Washington Heights, and NYPD, Inc. is hoping (and working behind the scenes) to see KE fail. When they do, NYPD will be more than happy to move into the neighborhood to put in their own policies for the neighborhood. Urban renewal projects have not started in Washington Heights as of yet, but everyone knows it will eventually happen. Some rumors suggest the MDC will begin working on revitalizing Washington Heights once the MDC has completed their work in SoHo and Newtown, which is expected to take another two years (provided they don't run into any complications).

WESTSIDE AND UPPER EASTSIDE

NYPD, INC. AND KNIGHT ERRANT/ AREAS RANGE FROM AAA TO A

Westside and Upper Eastside run on either side of the Central Park neighborhood. Westside tends to be more upscale commercial, with more office high rises and corporate headquarters. Upper Eastside has more residential skyscrapers and upscale high-rise apartments, with those along Riverside Drive and with a view of Hudson River being the most expensive. Depending on where you live in Upper Eastside, the residence you have may be a status symbol for those in certain affluent circles. The Upper Eastside also holds Lenox Hill Hospital, which has become one of the leading hospitals for investigating the CFD virus. The Westside neighborhood boasts the MDC building and the Prometheus Spire as part of their neighborhood. These areas (for obvious reasons) have the highest security ratings.

HORIZON, EVO, AND SHIAWASE

Horizon is the most recent addition to the Manhattan Development Consortium and has become almost as big of a fixture inManhattan lifestyle as it is in Los Angeles. Horizon and its subsidiaries (Pathfinder and Charisma Associates in particular) dominate the advertisement firms and ad campaigns in Manhattan, leading the entire sprawl in the number of high-profile ad campaigns. This has earned Horizon hundreds of millions of nuyen in ad revenue for promoting everything from consumer products and theatrical productions to trideo and simsense blockbuster movies. Horizon commands the largest share of ad revenue on the island, much to the envy of competitors like Aztechnology and Shiawase. Horizon has the most prominently placed billboard and AR ads scattered around the island, and it is nearly impossible to turn in any direction and not see Horizon's influence. Horizon's clientele for its ad campaigns often extend into the vast fashion world, where Horizon's advanced trend tracking and forecasting capabilities frequently influence the fashion world. Because of Horizon's influence, Common Denominator (a Horizon subsidiary) is becoming a rising star in the fashion industry. Horizon is also known in Manhattan for coordinating and throwing the most lavish events, galas, and parties for the elite of the island. There is little doubt Horizon has connections with almost all the movers and shakers of Manhattan, as they use their prestigious PR firms with Charisma Associates to help elite Manhattanites improve their social standing. Manhattan's dependency on Horizon's PR firms has only cemented Horizon's power base within Manhattan, and of all the corporations that are on the MDC, Horizon is considered the least likely to be voted off anytime soon.

Horizon's research into the CFD virus is largely taking place at their Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center located on Ward's Island. There, Horizon has been researching behavioral therapies, looking to adapt them to meet the needs of head cases. So far, Horizon has not had a whole lot of success modifying their behavioral therapies to treat CFD. However, one important discovery to come out of Horizon's work has been the fact that the treatment of head crash does not mirror the disor-

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MANHATTAN LANDMARKS, PART 2

CONDATIS TOWER

Ares' Condatis Tower is a spire-shaped, silver-and-black high rise in Midtown that extends one hundred and sixty stories into the air. It houses offices that run and manage all of Ares' interests in Manhattan. Much of the office space in Condatis Tower is devoted to overseeing and maintaining Manhattan's public transportation infrastructure, including buses, ferries, taxis, and the subway system (which is now eighty percent ground on elevated track thanks to the tunnel collapses that accompanied the 2005 earthquake). Other space inside Condatis Tower is devoted to Knight Errant Manhattan headquarters, Ares Global Entertainment's North American headquarters, AresSpace, and subsidiaries including Victory and Info-Santé. Matrix hosts within Condatis Tower are typically rated at 9, but some of the more secure Matrix hosts can be as sophisticated as rating 11.

THE PROMETHEUS SPIRE

Prometheus Engineering, a member of the MDC, has the Prometheus Spire in the Westside neighborhood as its headquarters. This eighty-story high rise is shaped like a double helix, and is a modern marvel of engineering that comes close to rivaling the Towers as the most ostentatious and elaborate arcology in the Manhattan skyline. Prometheus Engineering is famous for sub-contracting on almost every construction project in Manhattan, and it works with every megacorporation, including Saeder-Krupp and Ares. If runners need information on a particular project, they might not have to break into a megacorporation headquarters, but rather, they may be able to break into this less fortified AA corp building and hope information sharing on the project in question is thorough. Matrix host ratings in the Prometheus Spire range from ratings 7 to 9.

EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

The Empire State Building is one of the few buildings in Manhattan to have survived the earthquake of 2005 intact. Officially declared a historic landmark by both the MDC and the Manhattan city government, the Empire State Building continues to draw millions of tourists each year, even if it's no longer the tallest building in the world (or even in the sprawl, or its five-block radius). The Empire State Building stands 102 stories tall significantly shorter than many of the neighboring modern arcologies. Despite this fact, the skyscraper's historic observation deck continues to be a popular destination, particularly for those looking for a site where they may pop the question to their significant other. The Empire State Building is featured as a destination on every visitor, commuter, or work pass. So if you have a job located downtown, getting a pass that gives you access to the Empire State Building may be the way to go, getting you closer to your destination before you have to worry about tripping the wireless security network.

The Empire State Building's observation deck remains open to the general public, as is the bottom fifty floors, where corporations such as Universal Omnitech, Citigroup and Morgen-Tek GmbH have offices. The top fifty floors are completely sealed off to the public and blocked from astral intrusions by powerful warding. To this day, no one knows for certain who or what control the upper floors. Theories run rampant, including everything from free spirits, bug spirits, the Illuminates of the New Dawn or the Black Lodge, to local magic groups filled with blue-blood aristocrats such as the Society of Hawks or the Children of the New Crusade. The only ones that may know anything about the Empire State Building's mysterious occupant is the MDC, and they aren't talking. Matrix host ratings for the bottom fifty floors range in sophistication from rating 6 to rating 9. No one has been able to find an active Matrix host for the levels above the fiftieth floor.

NYPD, INCORPORATED HEADQUARTERS

NYPD, Inc. has a modest twenty-story headquarters in City Center (modest as being one of the shortest and plain high rises in City Center). The headquarters is used mostly for the executives and high-ranking officers within NYPD Inc., starting with the Public Safety Commissioner, Denise Fairborn and her staff. Some would argue that NYPD Inc. does not need a headquarters, as most of NYPD, Inc.'s functions are broken down into precinct houses and smaller buildings throughout Manhattan, and much of its administrative functions taking place within their Matrix host (which is sculpted to appear as a giant NYPD, Inc. badge). Most non-essential administrative personnel don't work in this building, instead telecommuting from outside the island. This has led to almost fifteen percent of the offices in the building remaining empty. Five stories of the headquarters are devoted to forensics laboratories, while another two stories are dedicated to NYPD, Inc.'s evidence lock up. Security is really tight in the area. NYPD, Inc. has detainment facilities and courtroom facilities inside the building, and they are able to teleconference courtroom proceedings if they have someone in custody who is potentially too dangerous to move. The NYPD, Inc. headquarters also supports the force's motor pool of vehicles and drones, in addition to the sprawl's equestrian patrols known as the "Mounted Community Service Officers." The Matrix host rating here is 10.

GRAND CENTRAL

Grand Central station is the main transit hub of Manhattan, and it's the transit station used by the more privileged aspects of Manhattan society (i.e., those carrying residential [white] passes) within Midtown. The terminal currently has six levels below ground to accommodate rail and subway lines (with more planned). Bus access is also available at Grand Central, though most of the wealthy residents of Manhattan would never be caught dead on a bus, choosing instead to use other alternate means of transportation (such as limousines or taxis, taxis reserved for their specific passes). The levels beneath the surface have been converted by Prometheus Engineering into commercial and residential areas. Ten luxury restaurants have been added, as well as apartments capable of housing up to two hundred Manhattanites. All the shops in Grand Central cater to the lifestyles of the rich, with nearly a quarter of them being accessible only to those with very important resident passes. At the end of the day, after peak commuting hours, Grand Central is also the transit hub where the corporations bring in their commodities to Manhattan, to unload and distribute to their various holdings.

Grand Central houses M-42, a power plant that feeds all the electric rails (subway trains) throughout Manhattan, and also provides Matrix access for those trains. The Matrix host rating for Grand Central is 9.

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der known as multiple personality disorder or any of its established therapies. Horizon is also working to develop drug cocktail treatments for the CFD virus with their pharmaceutical subsidiary, Vital Pharmaceuticals. Vital Pharmaceuticals has factories and research laboratories in Queens. The drugs Horizon is developing are being designed to work in conjunction with their behavioral treatments. So far, classified internal reports from Horizon's Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center are reporting that their facility is nearly eighty percent filled with head cases, and they are reporting that this patient population is continuing to rise. By the end of the year, this Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center may be severely overcrowded by head cases, and Horizon may have no choice but to remodel and expand this center for these patients, or to open a new center elsewhere in Manhattan for the treatment of these unique patients.

In recent years, Shiawase has been working hard to elevate its presence and profile within Manhattan. A few years ago, Shiawase purchased the John F. Kennedy airport, renovating it and renaming it for Empress Hitomi. This year, Shiawase's Arboritech was awarded the contract for maintaining Manhattan's entire electrical and utility infrastructure. Like Horizon, Shiawase continues to make headlines with their fashion lines and models in Manhattan, particularly with their Vashon Island and Jean-Paul fashion lines. Shiawase is also ramping up ad campaigns designed to compete with Horizon and their ad firms, opening offices in Midtown for their Shiawase & Rubicon Advertisement firm. Shiawase has also decided to compete directly with Horizon over designing behavioral treatments and drug cocktails for head cases. Much of Shiawase's work for behavioral treatments is taking place at the Shiawase Bellevue Hospital in Stuyvesant. Much like Horizon and Vital Pharmaceuticals, Shiawase is carrying out its drug trials in unseemly factories outside of the island. Shiawase Laboratories has facilities in the Bronx and Brooklyn boroughs where interesting paydata on these research projects may be found. Shiawase is also carrying out research into solving the CFD virus through the use of nanotech, and that research is being carried out in a Vasocon facility out in Queens.

- As has been discussed, there are lots of jobs to be had for shadowrunners for extracting head cases. In these programs meant to design treatments and/or a cure for the CFD virus, the corporations require a steady and sizable supply of CFD patients for their various tests. Given that most of the general public is barely aware of the CFD virus, the corporations cannot exactly ask for volunteers for these trials. These patients often have to be extracted and forced into these experiments as unwilling guinea pigs, and the best places to acquire head cases are either at the hospitals or the penitentiaries. All of these facilities are reporting higher-than-normal instances of dissociative identity disorders and other behavioral problems that are believed to be symptoms of CFD. If you are looking to extract a head case, look for patients with those diagnoses, as hospitals may not yet be using CFD as an official diagnosis.

  Finding the right place to run a trial is not easy. They don't want too much public scrutiny, and their hospital and prison facilities are not secure enough—materials relating to this sensitive research can easily disappear and fall into a rival's hands. In addition, watchdog groups monitor the safety and care of inmates and patients at some facilities, further hindering secrecy. If reports start to emerge that illegal testing is happening on unwilling test subjects (or on subjects the corps deliberately infected), it will lead to uncomfortable investigations and inquiries. For this reason, shadowrunners are often hired to secretly transport head cases to places where research can be conducted in complete privacy.

- Butch

- And sometimes facilities are happy to let people go. Overcrowded and underfunded prisons can be grateful for the chance to control their population through a method somewhat more humane than selling inmates to Tamanous (which is a thing that happens sometimes). Two of Manhattan's most infamous maximum security prisons, Gatestrom and Blackwell, are well known in the shadows for being amenable to allowing these under-the-table prisoner transfers to take place. So if you get busted by NYPD, Inc. while in Manhattan, make sure you don't get sent to either one of those prisons.

- Pistons

- Hitting up the hospitals or prisons for head cases isn't the only way these corps are getting their test subjects. Many of the corps have standing bounties on metahumans who may be infected with the CFD virus, much like the bounties that many of the corps have on technomancers' heads. These bounties can reach as much as 4,500 nuyen in alone, with prices varying in other parts of the world.

- Sticks

- There have been more than a few upper-class families in Manhattan who have infected family members. Instead of allowing themselves to be embarrassed by the erratic behavior of their relative, these blue-blooded aristocrats have hired runners to extract their own flesh and blood, and make them go away. These family members have usually ended up in these programs, never to be seen again. Talk about a bunch of cruel bastards.

- Kay St. Irregular

- Just as valuable to the corporations as obtaining head cases to experiment on is obtaining test subjects from another megacorp. Not only does a test subject reveal just how far the corporation has gotten in their research,

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but the test subject also reveals the path the research the corporation is taking. It could inform the rival corporation as to whether the path of research is viable or if it will end up as a dead end. If it's something similar that they are working on, it could inform the corporation on just how to make adjustments or whether it is time to end a particular trial. Given that most corporations are running multiple trials on multiple research projects, there are lots of test subjects out there waiting to be grabbed. Another rival corporation's test subject can net you a payday of anywhere between 3,000 and 6,000 nuyen, depending on your Johnson and the corporation you're working for. For the record, Saeder-Krupp and Neo-NET are paying the most for these test subjects, followed by Evo.

- Chainmaker

Evo has a smaller and much less noticed presence in Manhattan than either Horizon or Shiawase (or of any of the megacorps that sit on the MDC for that matter). Two of Evo's biggest interests in Manhattan include CrashCart and their Red Star and Evolution medical clinics. Doc Wagon provides medical services for nearly half of Manhattan's entire population. Another quarter of the population is covered by Aztechnology's Medicarro subsidiary. This has left Evo's CrashCart covering the other quarter of the population. That quarter of the population is mainly made up of UCAS citizens residing in Manhattan, a part of the population considered to be a less important demographic in the eyes of the corporations. CrashCart provides medical coverage for millions of Manhattan residents, bringing in some serious nuyen. In addition, Evo's Red Star and Evolution clinics are starting to become popular places to acquire medical procedures for Manhattanites, including cyberware implant surgeries or cosmetic surgeries. Evo's Evolution Clinics in particular are becoming white-hot choices among Manhattan's elite, due to the fact that the only clientele they have are the rich and the privileged. Almost every celebrity who is a somebody in North America goes to Evolution clinics for their services. Evolution Clinics go out of their way to be discreet and to protect patient privacy (they'll send other runners after your hoop should you compromise their patients' confidentiality). One of Evo's major coups in Manhattan was acquiring Mount Sinai hospital and turning it into an Evolution clinic.

Evo is highly motivated to find a cure before the CFD virus gets out of hand and has a devastating impact on its bottom line. They've been pursuing avenues to cure CFD through geneware programs. To facilitate this research, Evo has opened up a new, thirty-story research facility for Pensodyne in Midtown.

- There are rumors that NeoNET and Evo have been holding high-level meetings with their top executives. Many believe the two corps are trying to pool their resources to solve the problem of the CFD virus before it gets too far out of control. If this is true (and I'm not saying it is), it might be possible to go on a paydata run against one of these corps, and end up finding material for both. Just something to have your hacker keep an eye out for.
- Slamm-0!

- In joint projects like that, you always have to be aware that the corporations may not share everything they know. They may only share just enough materials to get a look at what the other corp is doing. And sometimes, that research is deliberately dated or wrong just to sabotage the other corp, while they are carrying out the real research somewhere else. Much like what Proteus was accused of doing to Maersk when they were carrying out a joint-mobile arkoblock project a few years back. When you start looking at material from a joint project like that, you just need to take everything with a grain of salt, as you'll likely find the fingerprints of corporate intelligence and counter-intelligence operatives all over them. So unless you know what you're looking at (like say, if you were The Smiling Bandit), chances are it's best not to try and sell that material to your Johnson, lest they find out later that material is wrong, and they come to the (incorrect) conclusion you scammed them.
- Stone

The researchers leading Horizon's work on the CFD virus are Doctors Kevin McLean and Tiana Fairbairn of Horizon's Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center. Publicly, their records are spotless and they have had sterling careers, with multiple published papers over the past twenty years. Unfortunately, both are suspected of using unethical practices to get their results (though that has never been proven), including taking short cuts to get to their desired conclusions. Watch out for them. Their shoddy science, masquerading as legitimate science, could end up making the situation with the CFD virus worse. The researchers to watch in Horizon's Vital Pharmaceuticals are Doctors Terri Elias and Ashley Cordoba. For Evo and their genetics program, there is one researcher that stands out: Doctor Julian Borodin.

RENRAKU AND MITSUHAMA

For years, Renraku has been operating in Manhattan in NeoNET's shadow. NeoNET bested Renraku when it made its arrangement to run and maintain the Matrix infrastructure at the Towers. Renraku complained loudly when the contract was struck that the deal circumvented various procedures that were in place to allow that contract to be bidded upon by all the megacorporations. They even took the matter before the Corporate Court to argue for renegotiating the contract in good faith and opening up the process to all the corporations. The measure was narrowly (6-5) dismissed

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MANHATTAN LANDMARKS, PART 3

HORIZON MANHATTAN HEADQUARTERS

The Horizon Manhattan headquarters is in Midtown. These headquarters stand at over one hundred and sixty floors, and the building is particularly attention-grabbing at night time, where Horizon regularly changes the building's lighting schemes to elaborate patterns to dazzle the onlookers, and to draw people's attention to their building. Horizon also remains one of the few corporations that is willing to work with locals to alter their lighting schemes to broadcast various messages on their facades, including the time-honored "Marry Me" message. This has only helped ingratiate Horizon to the local residents and win them a lot of good will. Pathfinder Multimedia and Charisma Associates and associated firms all have office space in the Horizon Manhattan Headquarters. In addition to Horizon's official business ventures, it is believed that the Dawkins Group are active and are carrying out operations inside the Horizon Manhattan Headquarters building, concealed by dummy businesses. Given the social hierarchy of Manhattan culture, it could be assumed that the Dawkins Group social adepts are able blend in well in Manhattan, and are able to work with great efficiency to further Horizon's agenda covertly. The Matrix host ratings for the Horizon Manhattan Headquarters range from ratings 8 to 10.

SHIAWASE MANHATTAN ARCOLOGY

Shiawase owns an arcology in the Westside neighborhood, built in 2060. This gray and green, cylinder-shaped skyscraper rises one hundred and ninety stories into the air, with many of its upper floors dedicated to luxury lofts for many of Shiawase's high-level employees and executives (housing nearly five thousand residents). The floors not occupied by residential lofts are office space for subsidiaries such as Arboritech, Shiawase Advanced Robotics, Shiawase and Rubicon Advertisement and Shiawase Atomics. Matrix hosts for the Shiawase arcology can range anywhere from rating 7 all the way to rating 10. Floors 60 through 80 serve as a luxury hotel from those visiting Manhattan (and with the right, forged documents, can give a runner access to the Shiawase Manhattan Arcology).

HORIZON REHABILITATION AND PSYCHIATRIC CENTER (FORMERLY THE MANHATTAN PSYCHIATRIC CENTER)

When Horizon became a member of the Manhattan Development Consortium, one of its first business deals on the island was to purchase and rehabilitate the old Manhattan Psychiatric Center on Ward's Island, which at the time, had been severely damaged by the quake of 2005 and was left to be occupied only by squatters. Horizon expanded the Psychiatric Center from 4,400 beds to 9,000 beds. Horizon also acquired the former Kirby Forensics Psychiatric Center

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for the criminally insane, also on Ward's Island, and made it a part of this complex as well (adding another 3,000 beds to this facility). The Horizon Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center has one of the highest background counts in all of Manhattan. Magicians typically rate the background count as a rating 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. They point to the extreme emotions and psychic impressions left by the current patients on the area, as well as the extensive history of the site, which once also housed Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum. Blackwell's opened in 1863, flooding and tainting the area with negative energy, leading to the area having tangible feelings of misery and despair. Spirits and apparitions that inhabit Ward's Island are disturbed, difficult to deal with, and sometimes violent. Reports of unprovoked spirit attacks on metahumans continue to rise with each passing year. These attacks have forced NYPD, Inc. to form a specialized unit tasked with hunting down and destroying these hostile spirits, but even their efforts do not seem to be providing a permanent solution.

SHIAWASE BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

Bellevue Hospital is the one of the oldest hospitals in Manhattan, having been founded in 1736. Shiawase acquired Bellevue Hospital in 2013, rebuilt it several years after the 2005 earthquake and modernized it, restoring it to its exalted stature as being one of the finest medical facilities in New York City. The Shiawase Bellevue Hospital, now a forty-story facility, is located in the Stuyvesant neighborhood and has beds for up to seven thousand patients. Shiawase Bellevue Hospital is very much a research hospital that is carrying out bleeding-edge research, and as such, the security of their Matrix hosts are much higher than what you would typically find at another medical center (rating 11).

EVO OFFICE COMPLEX

By other megacorporations' standards, Evo's thirty-story office building is modest. Especially when compared to the neighboring skyscrapers that tower over it in Downtown. Office space here is reserved for the administrative offices for CrashCart and the Red Star and Evolution clinics. In addition, other lesser-known subsidiaries are housed in this complex, from ATRP, one of Evo's investment firms, to Metaergonomics and Lightning Brands. Both of these subsidiaries have both struggled to connect with consumers in Manhattan and to spread their brand names. This is largely due to the fact that Evo's rivals—Aztechnology, Horizon, and Shiawase—are able to manipulate the consumer market in Manhattan as they see fit from the confines of the MDC building. Matrix host ratings in the Evo Office Complex range from rating 7 to 10.

RANDALL'S ISLAND

Randall's Island is one of two prison islands for Manhattan (Roosevelt Island being the other). Randall's Island borders Manhattan in the East River, between Manhattan and the Queens and Bronx boroughs. Randall's Island is adjoined to Ward's Island. While Ward's Island has the Horizon Rehabilitation and Psychiatric Center, Randall's Island is mainly used to house three minimum- and two moderate-security prisons for Manhattan. Due to the long history Randall's Island has had of housing everything from an orphanage and an insane asylum to a workhouse and now prisons, it has a very high background count, ranging anywhere from 4 to 5 on most academic scales. Like Ward's Island, Randall's Island also has problems with troubled spirits. Vehicle and pedestrian access to Randall's and Ward's Islands comes through the Triborough bridge, though entry points are heavily guarded and inspected by NYPD, Inc. to prevent escape attempts. Matrix access is sporadic on Randall's Island, due to NYPD, Inc.'s concerted efforts to make hacking attempts into the prisons more difficult.

RIKER'S ISLAND

Up to eleven years ago, Riker's Island housed one of New York's most famous jails: Riker's Prison. During the second Matrix Crash, many of the security features failed inside of the jail, releasing the entire population. A savage prison riot ensued, which lasted five days and allowed thirty-eight, high threat prisoners to escape. During the riot itself, nearly a hundred and eighty prisoners and ninety prison staff were killed. Following that tragic riot, and given the obsolete nature of the jail (which had been in service since 1932), the MDC had the original prison on Riker's closed. They rebuilt its successor; the New Riker's Prison, on Roosevelt Island (which is fairly ironic given that the original Riker's Island was opened to replace the original Blackwell Island prison, which sat on Roosevelt Island) and turned it into a maximum security prison. The husk of the prison remains unoccupied on Riker's Island, waiting for the MDC to decide what to do with it. Some on the MDC want to tear down the penitentiary and to use the former prison island to provide middle- and lower-income housing (such a wonderful metaphor there). Others on the council desire to rehabilitate the buildings and turn Riker's into a museum and tourist trap, much like what Alcatraz used to be in the California Free State. Ever since 2065, when the prison was officially closed, there has been no consensus on the MDC for what to do with it, and so the matter has been tabled for years. While the prison sits and waits, it continues to be vandalized by neo-anarchist groups and various gangs looking to make it their turf. Many of the interiors of the damaged buildings are not secure and are becoming inhabited by both squatters and by dangerous paranormal critters, from Gabriel hounds and demon rats to feral ghouls and vampires. There are also reports of vicious spirit attacks on the squatters who brave the remnants of Riker's Island. Every so often, NYPD, Inc. is tasked by the MDC to clear out Riker's prison, but instead of putting their own personnel in harm's way, NYPD, Inc. normally subcontracts the work to shadowrunners and other bounty hunters.

ROOSEVELT ISLAND

Roosevelt Island houses the worst of the worst prisoners for Manhattan, off of the shoreline of the Eastside neighborhood. There are three maximum-security (New Riker's Penitentiary, Gatestrom Penitentiary, and Stonewater Correctional Facility) and two ultra-maximum security prisons (New Blackwell Penitentiary, Stormbreak Penitentiary) on Roosevelt Island, all under NYPD, Inc.'s control. The ultra-maximum security prisons are believed to have facilities capable of housing Awakened prisoners and technomancers. One wing of Stormbreak is now reportedly being used to house CFD patients.

With Roosevelt Island's long and torrid history of serving as a home for an infamous insane asylum, workhouses, a smallpox hospital, and the infamous Blackwell prison, as well as its brief time being used as a burial site for the poor, Roosevelt Island has developed a major background count. Institutions such as the Draco Foundation and the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research all have high background counts, which likely proves tortuous to the Awakened prisoners incarcerated here.

There is no direct vehicle access for Roosevelt Island. Those wishing to travel to Roosevelt Island may travel via ferry to the island and may use public transportation to get around the island (which is heavily monitored by NYPD, Inc.), but also vehicle access is greatly limited to authorized vehicles only. There used to be subway access to Roosevelt Island, but after the quake of 2005, that subway tunnel collapsed and the corporations have chosen not to rebuild it.

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MEDIA IN MANHATTAN

- American Broadcasting System (Saeder-Krupp)
- North American Broadcasting System (Ares)
- NewsNet, Inc.
- Public Broadcasting Network
- NBCNN (independent)
- Pathfinder Multimedia (Horizon)
- The Apple Press (independent news firm believed to be a front for Neo-Anarchists)

by the Court in NeoNET's favor (with both Renraku and NeoNET justices obviously not voting in the case), leaving Renraku to sulk over the loss. To add insult to injury, NeoNET has remained the top Matrix service provider in Manhattan for the last ten years, thanks mainly to NeoNET "being the first Matrix service provider choice for the Corporate Court" (to use their ad language) That ad campaign seemed to resonant with the people of Manhattan. Ever since that time, Renraku has looked to show up NeoNET in any way it could. Many local runners will tell you that many of the recent activities to undermine NeoNET and its reliability as a Matrix service provider has come from Renraku Johnsons, and as such, by being the ones directing the damage inflicted on NeoNET's infrastructure, Renraku has been able to specifically target those areas of Manhattan and those clients that have been most affected by the damage done by their deniable assets, and lure those disgruntled clients away with cutthroat deals that NeoNET has not been able to match.

So far, Renraku has been making great strides in securing greater control of the Matrix service provider market share in Manhattan. If the trending holds, they will continue to make strides in this area for at least another year. At the same time, Renraku has chosen its sights on another target: the upcoming contract negotiations for servicing the Corporate Court Matrix infrastructure. If Renraku can manage to steal this contract from NeoNET as well and gain equal footing with NeoNET in Manhattan as a Matrix service provider, they will likely feel as though it would have righted many of the wrongs they believe NeoNET inflicted on them over a decade ago. With NeoNET having to defend its interests from Saeder-Krupp, Renraku, and all the other corporations looking to buy a seat on the MDC, it is a distinct possibility that NeoNET will find itself spread too thin to defend itself adequately and will continue to lose more ground to Renraku (and to its other rivals). These multiple fronts may come to really hurt NeoNET in its contract negotiations with the Corporate Court as well, as recent rumors in the shadows suggest that Renraku has placed no budgetary restrictions on Renraku Johnsons as to how much they can spend on shadow assets in the effort to steal the contract away from NeoNET. If they can steal that one prestigious contract from NeoNET, Renraku believes that it would be worth it, no matter the cost. Unfortunately for NeoNET, if Renraku is putting this policy into place, you can bet that the other megacorps with decent Matrix based interests are doing the same thing, and that by defending this one contract from being poached, NeoNET risks losing hundreds of millions of nuyen just to keep their rivals away. For all intents and purposes, open hunting season has been called on NeoNET, and all I can say to that is: it sucks to be them.

Renraku is not just trying to make a play for the majority market share of Matrix users in Manhattan, but also is trying to dominate the sprawl in Matrix security. When the new Matrix protocols were introduced, Renraku released five brand-new types of IC and three different types of firewalls, all designed to completely shut down hacking attempts (to get a bit of a jab in against NeoNET, Renraku publicly announced these new programs a day after it was discovered NeoNET security had been compromised, and millions of users had their personal information accessed by hackers. Some would argue business is never personal; these two megacorps show that they're wrong). Rumors continue to circulate in Manhattan shadows that what has contributed to Renraku's success in the field of Matrix security has not just been talented programmers but rather technomancers and AIs that have been captured (or extracted) by Renraku and forced into unwilling employment. Renraku naturally denies having such a program, and is competent enough to keep all traces of it secret, but the rumors persist. No matter the truth, Renraku and its Matrix security expertise services nearly fifty percent of all AA and A corporations in the Manhattan area, making Matrix security a very profitable enterprise for Renraku.

- That program's real. I know two chummers from the NY area who I believe were snatched by Renraku and taken into that downtown tower of theirs for their "special employment" program. I've been working with the local neo-a's who are trying to free the technomancers and the AIs that are trapped inside that building, and building a way to get them out of Manhattan in a manner similar to what used to be known as the underground railroad. So far, they've only been able to free three technomancers and two AIs over the past eight months. And sadly, they weren't any of the ones I knew. From what the neo-a's tell me, it's going to take some real talent as far as shadowrunners are concerned to penetrate their security, and to get more of the technomancers and AIs freed. Where the technomancers are kept (in the sub-levels beneath the building), they are guarded 24/7 by at least four squadrons of Red Samurai, with backup able to arrive on scene in a very short period of time. Many times, the runners the neo-a's have hired in the past have not come back, raising the reluctance of some runners to break into the Renraku tower.
- Netcat

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- That, and even today, runners are still hesitant to break into any building that could be considered a Renraku Arcology-type situation. Seriously, what happened between 2059 and 2061 was some scary shit that left a lot of people scarred for life. And the smart runners know that the corps never, ever, learn from their mistakes. There could always be second-generation Deus just waiting to do the same thing all over again. And given how they are treating technomancers and AIs …
- Balladeer

In addition to its activities relating to the Matrix, Renraku is also making nuyen off the sprawl from its financial and investment firms spread throughout Manhattan, such as Champion Financial. They also hold the contract for sanitation and for leasing street-sweeper drones to Manhattan to keep the streets clean (they also lease snow-plow drones). On top of everything else, Renraku now also runs GridGuide for the Manhattan sprawl, having bought the property from Mitsuhama back in 2074.

Renraku is believed to be keeping its CFD research contained within its high-security Renraku Tower in Midtown. Renraku appears to be tackling the problem of the virus through nanotechnology. Whereas Saeder-Krupp was researching nanites to create better diagnostic tools, Renraku is researching and developing new types of nanites as nanite hunters in an effort to eliminate corrupted nanites before they can cause damage. So far, Renraku has not experienced much success. From what I have heard, the problem is that any nanites carrying the virus are able to infect nanite hunters, getting them to work to spread the virus to the patient instead of curing them. So in Renraku's (rather unethical) testing methods, when a metahuman test subject was intentionally infected with the CFD virus via nanite injection, and then given these newly designed nanite hunters to "cure" the disease, they ended up expressing new (and sometimes additional) personalities faster than they would have had they not been given the nanite hunters. Renraku researchers are having a distinct problem with the invasiveness of the CFD virus and with its seemingly urgent imperative to spread, much like biological microorganisms. It's hard to tell where all these corporations are in their research at this point in comparison to their rivals, but Renraku seems to be further behind the rest with all the difficulties they have been experiencing with these nanite hunters. Given how invasive and transmittable the corrupted programming of the CFD virus is, Renraku may in fact have to give up their line of research into nano therapies (which is starting to look like a dead end to me) and broaden their research into other fields that hold more promise.

- One thing I have heard about Renraku is that they are not only just infecting ordinary metahumans with the CFD virus (which goes far beyond contemptuous), they are also doing so to technomancers and even a few Awakened who they extracted from their penitentiaries just to see how head crash occurs in their physiologies. Pretty disturbing stuff if you ask me. Particularly since these two populations generally do not go in for unnatural augmentations that put their natural talents at risk.
- Beaker

- It's my understanding that Renraku has also been busy hiring runners to track down shapeshifters and put them into these trials as well, to see if a shapeshifter's regenerative properties protect them from the effects of the CFD virus. I haven't heard anything yet about the results of those tests.
- Sticks

- It would not surprise me in the least if Renraku started rounding up bug spirits to experiment on … oh wait, that's Ares' bailiwick. Never mind.
- Balladeer

Like Evo, Mitsuhama has a limited presence in Manhattan. Ever since being kicked off the Manhattan Development Consortium, business opportunities for MCT within the sprawl have slowly dwindled (thanks to MDC and its vindictive nature), with MCT only able to hang onto certain interests through its influence on the Corporate Court and the pressure it could bring to bear on the double-A corporations from its Corporate Court justices. In Manhattan, MCT's security drones are big business, but often times they compete directly with Winter Systems, and unfortunately for MCT, Winter Systems has the luxury of being able to manipulate the playing field to give them a home-field advantage. MCT's commercial drone lines (household drones, industrial drones) are popular but also face similar challenges and competition from the other corps on the MDC, from S-K and Aztechnology to Horizon and Renraku. Due to all these factors, MCT's drone lines are not nearly as profitable in Manhattan as they are in other parts of North America.

- Given MCT's difficulties in being able to compete in the Manhattan market, it should be no surprise to anyone that MCT and their justices are leading the charge to merge the MDC functions with the Corporate Court. If MCT should fail to buy a seat on the MDC, expect tensions to rise as the MCT justices pursue this merger.
- Kay St. Irregular

Most of MCT's CFD virus research is being handled by their CodeBlue Biotech subsidiary, which has an eighteen-story research facility in Newtown, eight blocks away from their main office complex. CodeBlue Biotech is rumored to be pursuing various bioware options to regenerate damaged tissue caused by the CFD virus

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and to restore the tissue to its natural state. Rumors are CodeBlue Biotech is working on tweaking Léonization therapies to fix the damage left by the CFD virus. So far, MCT has seen little progress from this line of research, with the trials often inflicting more damage to the patient than what was there previously. However, since some of what MCT is trying to do with biotech mirrors what NeoNET and Dorada Biotech are attempting, you can bet there are a lot of runs happening between these two corporations to scout out any developments the other corporation has made, or to try to learn of any new lines of research the other corp may be pursuing. Those knowledgeable of MCT believe that they, if they succeed in finding a cure or treatment for the CFD virus, they will try to use that advancement as additional leverage to get back onto the MDC.

- The CFD virus and the Corporate Court angles aren't MCT's only plays on getting back on the MDC. Multiple sources within the shadows have allowed it to leak out that MCT has submitted a proposal to the MDC to be the corporation to clean up the Terminal Z-Zone. The MDC has tabled the matter for now, but doing something to improve Terminal is very popular with a vast majority of the wealthy socialites that live in Manhattan, and they no longer want to put up with the unsightly blight and the nauseous odors that occasionally drift over into the better parts of Manhattan. The MDC desperately wants to do something with Terminal, but as NYPD, Inc. has pointed out, doing so would be bloody and it would be resource intensive. Apparently, MCT is willing to suffer the losses if it means getting back into the good graces of the MDC in the long term. But the MDC is reluctant to move on such a proposal due to MCT's well-established reputation for cold and efficient ruthlessness, particularly with its zero zones. Allowing MCT to act in such a manner could cause more problems for the MDC than they already have. But at the same time, they also realize the wealthy elite of the sprawl have limits to their patience and tolerance. And make no mistake, places like the Pit and Terminal are seen as blights on an otherwise glamorous sprawl for the elite. If there is even a minor incident with Terminal, the wealthy and the well connected will be clamoring for major change with the existing policy of containment, despite the political fallout that might happen from outside Manhattan for allowing MCT to act on their behalf and clean house. Obviously, these leaks have only fired up the neo-anarchists, intensifying their protests and their anti-corporate actions. There could very well be a powder keg brewing on the streets of Manhattan, waiting to go off.
- Dr. Spin

- Don't forget the new spirit of cooperativeness running through the Japanacorps. They don't see eye to eye on everything and will still occasionally stab each other in the back, but they're also doing what they can to consolidate power within themselves, figuring that power held by a Japanese rival is better than power held by anyone else. So look for Renraku and Shiawase to support MCT's efforts.
- Baka Dabora

- Except when it comes to the Corporate Court getting more oversight over the CDC. MCT is pretty much on their own on that one.
- Cosmo

I do not like mentioning these researchers, as I believe these particular individuals are highly unethical and potentially dangerous. But the researchers for Renraku that are working in this field are Doctors Sinji Iwai, Rokuro Isa, and Teruo Kamiya. Renraku has a lot riding with these researchers, and as such, they are rarely found outside of the Renraku Tower. For MCT and CodeBlue Biotech, the researchers who are getting the most notice in academic and scientific circles include Doctors Haruaki Kozawa and Minoru Samurakami, both of whom have questionable ethics and tend to put their own personal agendas ahead of good science.

AZTECHNOLOGY AND WUXING

Aztechnology has proven to be a major influence (for good and ill) on modern day Manhattan. The corp has been a big presence on the MDC since the first part this century, when the ORO corporation contributed billions of dollars to help rebuild Manhattan. As a benefit of supplying the much-needed funds, ORO received a lucrative design contract for the entire Manhattan sprawl. ORO worked with the other corporations (and in a limited fashion, the city's political leadership) to come up with unified designs for the new skyscrapers that both honored New York's past while giving New York City a new, modern, and futuristic appearance. ORO would go on to make hundreds of billions of dollars over the next seven decades, and the capital it received from the city helped bring ORO (soon to be Aztechnology) to prominence on the world stage. Even today, Aztechnology continues to receive architectural contracts within Manhattan from various corporations and the MDC. Aztechnology continues to have a significant say in shaping how the Manhattan sprawl and its skyline appears. But since Aztechnology took such a prominent role within Manhattan, its architectural contracts aren't the only thing it has going for it. Aztechnology is the leader in consumer goods in Manhattan, just like it is worldwide. They control a number of high-end arko-malls scattered throughout downtown, midtown, and other upscale parts of Manhattan, filled with trendy and expensive merchandise. With ad firms that can launch PR campaigns to rival those of

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NEW YORK SPORTS TEAMS

POSTED BY: TRAVELER JONES

For those sports fans aficionados out there who want to know which sports teams Manhattan currently fields, here is a list. Included in the list are the owners of the respective sports teams. It is a MDC rule that each member of the MDC can only own and operate one sports team.

BASEBALL

New York Mets Renraku
Manhattan Yankees/NYPD, Inc.

BASKETBALL

New York Nets/NeoNET

COMBAT BIKING

New York Marauders/Spinrad

COURT BALL

The Warriors/Aztechnology

FOOTBALL

Brooklyn Giants/Horizon
New York Jets/Citigroup

HOCKEY

Manhattan Islanders/Prometheus Engineering
New York Rangers/Shiawase

HURLING

The Quake/Sony

SOCCER

Lightning/Saeder-Krupp

URBAN BRAWL

New York Slashers/Ares
Manhattan Kraak/Transorbital

Horizon, Aztechnology remains highly competitive with the other corporations, with help from subsidiaries such as Trés Chic Cosmetics, Nature-Taste, and Microtónica Azteca. Aztechnology is also among the top three suppliers of food products to the sprawl, and much of that goes to five-star luxury restaurants.

- Just don't be looking for a convenient Stuffer Shack in the wealthier and snobbier parts of Manhattan. It doesn't matter that Aztechnology is its parent megacorp or that it wields tremendous power inside Manhattan. Stuffer Shack isn't upscale enough for most Manhattanites and their tastes. Because of that, Stuffer Shack is relegated to neighborhoods like Battery City and the Eastside. If you find you need something from Stuffer Shack for a run, be prepared to go out of your way to get it, or else pay someone else to get it for you. That's basically what a lot of the elite choose to do; they have their personal assistants do the menial chores for them, like going to Stuffer Shack.
- Sunshine

Wuxing, on the other hand, is in the same boat as MCT and Evo. They are not on the MDC, putting them on the outside of this hierarchical culture. Wuxing is very active in the financial sector, with their financial subsidiaries active on Wall Street, from Albion Mutual Funds, Fidelity Mutual Insurance to Wuxing Financial Services. Wuxing has also found a lot of success in Manhattan with their delivery services, including Cartwright Cartage and Freight, Swift Wind Deliveries, and Wuxing Worldwide Shipping. Wuxing has proven it is capable of competing even with Aztechnology and their shipping businesses. Wuxing and its delivery and freight services make up nearly a third of the shipping market within Manhattan. Otherwise, Wuxing does not currently hold any active contracts with either the MDC or with the city government, but as everyone in the shadows knows, Wuxing is looking to change that.

Both Wuxing and Aztechnology are researching the CFD virus through their magic-based subsidiaries. In Manhattan, Aztechnology's subsidiary, Mystics and Magicks, have offices and research space in the Westside neighborhood dedicated to CFD research. From stories I have heard, Aztechnology is trying a brute force approach through magical means, focusing on trying to completely erase the new personalities. In doing so, Aztechnology is suffering the highest fatality rates among any of the megacorporations in their quasi-ethical procedures (yes, even higher than Renraku). Those that survive appear to be suffering some pretty harsh side effects from their experiences in Aztechnology's trials, including long-term mental disorders that didn't exist prior to their trials.

Wuxing, on the other hand, is attempting a subtler approach in their magical research. They are focused on protecting the original personality as much as possible while isolating the other personalities. Wuxing's Ming Solutions is carrying out this research for the megacorp, and there are rumors suggesting that one possible solution may involve some form of unique enchantment. In addition to trying to help those that still have some control over their personality fragments, Wuxing is interested in working with those patients that seem to have had their original personalities completely lost to the artificial ones. If my sources can be trusted (and generally, they can, they are impeccable with their information), Wuxing has been hiring a lot of runners to target the hospitals and the penitentiaries in wards where the patients have been deemed "too far gone" to be useful for any other kind of research. It should go without say-

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MANHATTAN LANDMARKS, PART 4

GOVERNORS ISLAND

A small island in New York harbor that had a distinguished history during the American Revolutionary War, Governors Island has since become extraterritorial property of Ares. Ares uses it mainly as a training ground for its Knight Errant cops and special forces such as Fire Watch. There has been some concern expressed by NYPD, Inc. that Ares has also been training small groups of mercenaries on the island, though due to extraterritorial status, the NYPD has not been able to do anything about it. Governors Island is believed to have a significant underground compound for military and corp security training. Although Ares has altered much of Governors Island to meet their needs, they chose to preserve Castle Williams as a historic landmark, allowing limited numbers of tourists to visit the site each month. Matrix access on Governors Island is restricted to the underground compound, and it is believed that inside the compound, the Matrix host rating is likely an 11 (if not 12).

LIBERTY AND ELLIS ISLANDS

The other famous New York Harbor Islands, Ellis and Liberty Islands, were bought by Horizon in 2066. Ellis Island was where the former United States built its first federal immigration station. During its service, the immigration station admitted millions of immigrants into the United States. The original Immigration Station was burned down and had to be rebuilt. The second building remained in service for fifty-four years before being closed and turned into a museum. That building was heavily damaged during the 2005 earthquake and left abandoned for decades. Horizon purchased the island in 2066 and rebuilt the Immigration Station in honor of New York history and opened it as a museum, making it a major part of its Virtual World Liberty Park in 2073. Horizon also purchased Liberty Island, the island where the Statue of Liberty was located. Horizon invested millions of nuyen to return the statue to a pristine condition. As part of the Virtual World Liberty Park, Horizon constructed an Amusement Park on both islands with an American Revolutionary War theme. There is now a high-speed train running under the harbor that connects both islands. These two islands attract millions of tourists each year while also drawing out the elite from their high-security high rises to visit these historical sites. The crowds can make visiting socialites more vulnerable to extraction attempts. Matrix hosts are generally considered public domain on these two islands, and the highest security rating for the Matrix hosts are 6.

RENRAKU TOWER

Renraku tower is one of the tallest high rises in Manhattan, standing at two hundred and eighty stories tall. Renraku Tower resides in Downtown, far enough away from the Towers not to overshadow them. Renraku Tower is only accessible by Renraku employees and citizens. The Tower boasts luxury residential space for nearly ten thousand Renraku employees while also holding offices and work areas for subsidiaries such as Architectural Dynamics, GloBank, and Champion Financial. Matrix hosts range in sophistication from rating 6 all the way up to rating 12 (the latter is where the AIs and the technomancers are kept). The Renraku Tower was once named the Renraku Manhattan Arcology, but after the disastrous events that took place in the Seattle Arcology, Renraku attempted to distance itself from the infamous name, so they simply renamed their building as the Renraku Tower. Unfortunately for Renraku, they could not dramatically alter the pyramid-style architecture of the building, which looks from the outside as being a smaller, more conservative copy of the Seattle Arcology (the Renraku Tower was actually built and completed four years before the Seattle arcology). It is believed the Renraku Tower still utilizes similarly reconfigurable floors that the Seattle Arcology was known for. However, Renraku has made it abundantly clear that the Renraku Tower is not designed to be run as a self-contained industrial residential environment (SCIRE) and has emphasized that this structure lacks the same infrastructure that was used for the Seattle arcology. Despite Renraku's assurances, most people suspect that corporations like NYPD, Inc. and Ares have contingency plans in place in case there is ever an instance of déjà vu within Manhattan with the Renraku Tower.

MITSUHAMA ARCOLOGY

The Mitsuhama Arcology is located in Newtown and is one hundred twenty stories tall. The building houses many of its subsidiaries that have interests in the sprawl, from Dolmen Data Systems to BrainWave Inc. Over ten thousand people work in the Mitsuhama Arcology. The 90th through 120th floors are used as luxury hotel for visitors to Manhattan. Unlike most other Manhattan headquarters, MCT allows public access to its arcology (though you have to pass plenty of security scans to get in). Like Renraku, MCT is also believed to have a program contained inside its arcology that experiments on technomancers, but this program is believed to be well underground and away from the general population.

ing that both Aztechnology and Wuxing have expressed great interest in what Saeder-Krupp has been doing with its magic-centered subsidiaries; they have been engaging in data theft runs against S-K for months now.

In Manhattan, you should really watch out for any and all Aztechnology researchers, particularly the ones dealing with the arcane. The ones who have a significant role in researching the CFD virus include Doctors Serrato Nevarez and Boleslao Roybal with Mystics and Magicks. Wuxing's star researchers within Ming Solutions come from one of their leading development teams, including Doctors Hui K'ung, Qiao Niu, Yue You Lu and Shing Hsü. If you try to extract any of Wuxing's leading magic experts on CFD research from Ming Solutions, you will have to break into Wuxing's Manhattan headquarters where they are housed. These researchers are limited to Wuxing's headquarters, and the rare times they are allowed out of the headquarters, they are heavily guarded.

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MAJOR CRIME SYNDICATES ACTIVE IN MANHATTAN

THE MAFIA (MAJOR FAMILIES IN NY)

- Carnetti family
- Colombo family
- Genovese family
- Lucchese family
- Bonnano family

TRIADS

- Large Circle Triad

YAKUZA

- Shotozumi-Rengo (Toki-Gumi)

SEOUPLA RINGS

- Gangjun Ring (250+ members)
- Min-Pak Ring (300+ members)
- Yeong Ring (75-100 members)

KNOWN NEO-ANARCHIST CELLS (CRIMINAL, AS DEFINED BY THE CORPORATIONS)

- Freedom Patriots
- Domino Effect
- Shatter Wave
- Revolution Now!
- Fighters for Individuality and Compassion

LOCAL NIGHT CLUBS AND HAUNTS

POSTED BY: TRAVELER JONES

Shadowrunners need places to unwind, or places to meet their Mr. Johnson. Whatever the case may be, the following are interesting places that you and your chummers may wish to visit for either work or pleasure while you are in Manhattan. Keep in mind that in Manhattan, telecommuting is not only preferred but is practically a necessity due to population density and horrific traffic snarls, particularly during peak rush hour times (unless you are fortunate enough and are a part of the upper class with access to air taxis). And so, any local Mr. Johnsons are going to be more inclined toward a Matrix-based meet than a meet in person. This also affords them more anonymity to do their jobs. Also a word of advice: if you are extracting a target from this sprawl, make sure they are actually working in Manhattan. You might very well end up embarrassed to take all the trouble to sneak onto the island and to break into a corporate headquarters, only to find your target is not only absent from the location, and you could have snatched them with much less difficulty from their home in the Bronx.

LINK CLUB

The Link Club is a franchise of clubs scattered around the world. There are currently seventeen such clubs (Atlanta, Chiba, London, Neo-Tokyo, Seattle, Manhattan, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Miami, Sydney, Rhine-Ruhr Metroplex, Boston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Vladivostok, Kyoto, Tenochtitlán, and Paris). Extremely popular prior to the Second Matrix Crash, Link Club heavily featured augmented reality in their entertainment programs years before it took off. Link Club was at one time the club every other nightclub wanted to be. It was one of the first clubs to link its various locations, so that patrons could listen to bands playing at any venue and connect with patrons from any club, giving the club-goer a truly global experience. Once a hot spot and the place to be if you were someone, Link Club lost a lot of its allure as its uniqueness declined. Link Club is no longer considered the "it" club by the socialites and the celebrities. It has its perks, though—it affords club-goers private rooms where you can interact with other club-goers, making these rooms perfect locations for meets with Mr. Johnson. Link Club still has the highest level of Matrix security for its hosts outside of any megacorporation, and it touts its reputation as one of the most secure clubs in North America for Matrix access. Still, in a few years time, Link Club may no longer be around, as it may not be able to keep up in the world of hot trends and the need for new experiences. Rumor is the owners are looking to hire Horizon in an effort to save their franchise. Given Horizon's reputation for trend tracking, it might only be a short time before Horizon can turn things around for the former trend-leader and put Link Club back up on the top of the Manhattan nighttime scene. Link Club is located in Neon City, the part of Midtown surrounding Times Square.

!?! CLUB

The club often referred to as "too trendy to have a name," !?! Club is located on West 61st Street in the Central Park neighborhood. Despite being around for nearly thirteen years, !?! Club is still going strong, drawing in large crowds. Many claim it's due to the attitude the club likes to portray; it features controversial performers and bands with an in-your-face attitude. Changelings are regularly promoted as performers, as well as AIs and technomancers. Spirits are also welcome to perform. The !?! Club tries to give club goers a unique experience, making each visit different for the club goer. !?! Club's motif is still black and white, with punctuation marks covering both the physical walls and the AR displays of the club goers. !?! Club also brags about making the 1,000 nuyen drink called "Afterlife," made from some of the best liquors around. Many scoff, calling this drink a tribute to excess. Despite the criticism, Afterlife still sells well in the world's richest sprawl.

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MANHATTAN LANDMARKS, PART 5

AZTECHNOLOGY PYRAMID

The Aztechnology Pyramid is one of the more noticeable features of the new Manhattan skyline. Standing just over eighty stories in Midtown, the Aztechnology Pyramid is not the tallest of skyscrapers, but its unique Meso-American architecture makes it stand out amongst the other nearly identical looking towers. The Aztechnology Pyramid in Manhattan is not known for carrying out any magical research or practices; rather, it is used to house Aztechnology personnel and provide many of their wagesalves perks and benefits that are the envy of other workers across Manhattan. These perks include living quarters that border on the high lifestyle, access to Aztechnology-run schools within the pyramid that rival top school systems in North America, and access to restaurants and malls that otherwise would cater to wealthier crowds. It is because of these perks that most people think Aztechnology's wageslaves are the happiest members of the working class on the island. In addition to housing for their employees, Aztechnology also has offices for many of its subsidiaries, particularly those involved in their architectural projects for the Manhattan sprawl. Matrix host ratings in the Aztechnology Pyramid range from rating 7 to rating 10. The bottom fifteen floors are open to the public for shopping and dining purposes.

WUXING MANHATTAN BUILDING

The Wuxing Manhattan Building is located Downtown. Standing one hundred stories tall and with a facade dressed in gold and crimson colors, the building is not open to public, but rather houses offices for all of the corp's Manhattan subsidiaries. Ming Solutions is one of their main subsidiaries (and is involved in CFD research), but all their financial subsidiaries have offices in the Wuxing Manhattan building. Wuxing Manhattan is not the primary North American headquarters for the megacorporation (that is in Boston), but the Wuxing Manhattan Building handles business matters in both Manhattan and other parts of the region. Matrix host ratings range from rating 6 to rating 10.

- Not worth it. The liquors swirl together, making it difficult to tease out the individual flavors, which means you are wasting money. If you need to be seen holding a ridiculous sign of extravagance, though, this is an easy way to do it.
- Fianchetto

CLUB MÖBIUS

Club Möbius is one of the hottest virtual clubs in Manhattan. It caters only to Manhattanites, and you can only gain access by an invitation from one of its members. To get into Club Möbius, you have to know the right people. It does not have a physical location—it exists only in the Matrix. Inside, the floor is sculpted to resemble a Möbius strip; follow it long enough and an observer looks like he is looking down on where he came into the room. And travel a little further, and he'll end up where he started, in what seems like an infinite loop. Club Möbius has a virtual sculpted stone demon as a bartender, whose appearance puts any virtual constructs in Dante's Inferno to shame. Many of the guests of Club Möbius tend to be amongst the elite, either as deckers and technomancers or as AIs. This is also the place for deckers and technomancers to be noticed and make contacts. As of late, Club Möbius has been taking on more of an anti-corporate feel, leading some to believe Club Möbius is starting to express support for the neo-anarchist movement.

THE MARQUEE

The Marquee is a well-known club that caters to the successful wageslave (those that make decent amounts of nuyen). The Marquee features thirty-foot-tall walls, with catwalks above the open space area where dancers are featured to entertain the crowd. All the walls have been fitted with massive LED displays, which flash attention-grabbing patterns and images, choreographed with AROs. Since being rebuilt, the Marquee also features upstairs VIP rooms for those celebrities and powerbrokers wielding very important resident passes. No one knows for sure what happens in those VIP rooms, but it very likely includes discreet (and expensive) joy girls, BTLs and/or street drugs. The Marquee is a popular club with many celebrities, music, and simsense stars. The Marquee is located on 10th Avenue and West 27th Street.

LUCKY STAR 99 TEAHOUSE AND ASIAN MARKET

Surrounded by niche curial and antiquities shops in Chinatown, the Lucky Starr 99 Teahouse and Asian Market is a good place to find imports—mostly of the illicit kind. The Lucky Star 99 is a front run by the Large Circle Triad. Those needing to make contact with or needing something from the Triads usually make their way here. Violence is heavily discouraged at the Lucky Star 99, as enforcers from the Triad provide security. While it may be a front, Lucky Star 99 sees a lot of business and is quite crowded during business hours.

STUDIO 74

Horizon bought the property that once belonged to the historic Studio 54 and rebuilt the nightclub/theatre, reopenng it last year as Studio 74. Studio 74 features almost all of Horizon's musical talent on the east coast of North America for live performances. AIs that still choose to work with Horizon (or are locked into a contract with them) frequently perform at Studio 74. Studio 74 is large enough to host nearly five hundred metahu-

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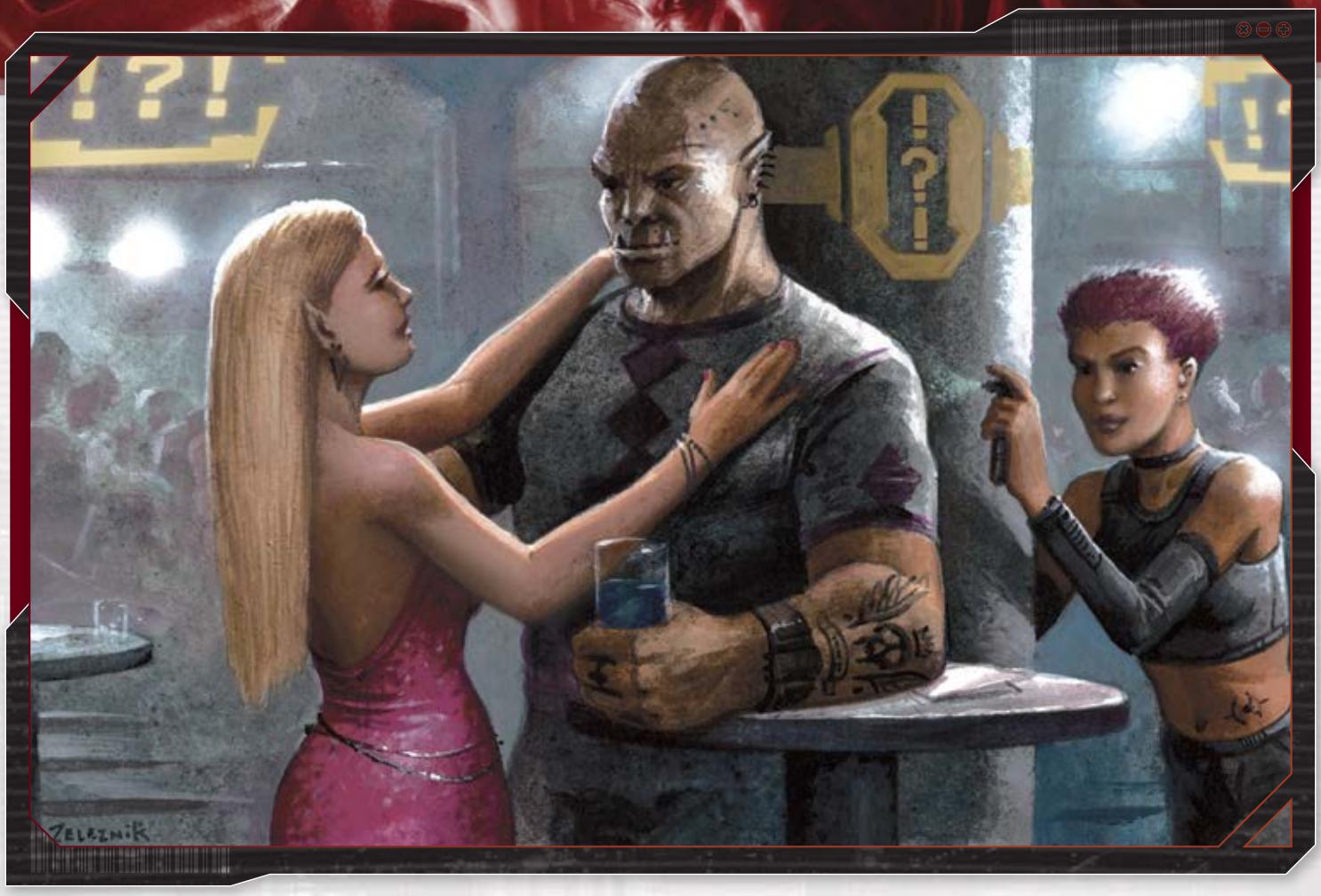

mans at any given time. Horizon hopes that Studio 74 will not only ingratiate itself with the local population who are nostalgic for Studio 54 but will also attract a new generation of club-goers. Studio 74 was carefully modeled on the inside to look like its predecessor, and with Horizon in charge, it's guaranteed that the stage set up and attractions will be attention grabbing. Studio 74 has VIP suites that can be used for meets with Mr. Johnson (provided they have the pull to be able to rent the room for the evening). Studio 74 can be found on West 54th Street in Midtown.

THE RED LIGHT LOUNGE

The Red Light Lounge is a faux-seedy bar that is made up to resemble a speakeasy from the early 20th century, and to play off of New York's prohibition days. To get into the bar, a would-be patron needs the password. Passwords cost 500 nuyen, though sometimes you can find older, less-reliable passwords in various back channels of the island, and most fixers worth their reputations can get that password of the night for less than a quarter of the normal price. The Red Light Lounge follows all the rules of the MDC; it just tries to project an air of illicit pleasure. Gambling, BTLs, and street drugs are allowed here (provided you show them your vice permit). You likely won't find other runners here, but you might find your targets for your job, or Mr. Johnson relaxing on a couch. The Red Light Lounge is located on East 36th Street in Downtown.

TOUGH TONY'S

Whereas The Red Light Lounge is sanctioned by the MDC and dressed up as something out a crime-noir sim-sense flick, Tough Tony's is not sanctioned—it's the real illegitimate thing. Tough Tony's is named in honor of Manhattan's notorious mobster, Anthony "Tough Tony" Anastasio. Most people do not actually know where this spot is located. You have to have connections with the New York Mafia to be given the location and the passwords to get in. Rumor is Tough Tony's is run by the Lucchese family, and that it has access to the Underground. If you have the connections to get into Tough Tony's, you can arrange for almost anything the Lucchese family can provide ... with the right price of course, which may include owing the family a favor. Tough Tony's is rumored to work with smugglers and skimmers. The Lucchese family is said to have powerful pull with the dockworkers working in many of the ports of New York. Tough Tony's is definitely the place to go if you need to make something happen.

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THE GREMLINS THAT COME BETWEEN US

There comes a time in every shadowrunner's career—assuming she lives long enough—that she'll get saddled with what amounts to a glorified babysitting job. And no, Jammer wasn't thinking about being attached to some whiny, thirty-year-old man-boy who couldn't take care of himself. Instead she'd found herself chained to someone even more petulant: a balding, middle-aged corp manager living in the penthouse suite of Transys Neuronet's Manhattan office building.

Every fifteen minutes or so, Mr. Aiden Howell wanted her to play gofer for some trivial thing or other, something she believed his two functioning legs could very well go fetch for his own damn self. She liked to rollerblade around the suite, so his argument that she would get it faster maybe had some merit, but he clearly was abusing it. After three days of this, Jammer complained so much that Howell stopped ordering her around and guilted Headcase, the group's absentminded shaman, into taking up gofer duties instead.

Most jobs offered Jammer at least some hint of excitement, but this one? Trapped at the top of a corporate skyscraper, there was absolutely nothing to do. Between her, SecEight, Ginsu, and Howell, they could've gotten a nice euchre game going, but Howell, perpetually the wet blanket, kept blowing them off. Jammer could only reread her favorite trashy novel so many times before she could quote all the racy scenes nearly verbatim. It finally got to the point she actually started to *miss* fetching Howell's brandy or cognac or whatever-else-the-hell alcohol—honest-to-Buddha *real* alcohol—that he wanted.

Cabin fever, Jammer decided, wasn't entirely the domain of cabins.

She had to get out and do something, but she was stuck here. Someone above Howell's pay grade seemed to think this "North American Operations Manager of Product Quality Control" was some big, high-profile target for some unfathomable reason. All he did was make sure things worked like they were supposed to. Probably fielded the random customer complaint call just to prove he was still human or something, which was a job even a trained agropelter could do. Still, NeoNET's nuyen spent just like everyone else's, and Jammer needed something to pay off her head computer.

After she and her imaginary euchre partner lost yet another round in her team's bastardized, three-player version, Jammer had had enough. She wandered over to the nearest bank of floor-to-ceiling windows and gazed out at the soft rain dumping on Manhattan. She'd stopped to admire this bird's-eye view of the city so many times that it no longer enthralled her. Still, it amazed her how high up she was, even though the gradual, downward slope of the tower's frame obscured the street from view. The sloping glass decline only made her miss her own place. What she wouldn't give for

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BY PHILIP A. LEE

an empty swimming pool or a half-pipe or even an empty roller skating rink right then. The suite could only offer rooms filled with furniture, each piece probably costing more than her biggest score.

Which naturally prompted her to start doing tricks off of expensive leather couches and real mahogany end tables that likely went for at least twenty-five thousand at retail. Much to everyone else's dismay, she opened all the doors across the suite, popped out her rollerblades, and skated down the longest hallway as fast as she could redline her cyberlegs. Her head computer would calculate ranges, speed, mass, and approach vectors, and then extrapolate all that data to mark on her HUD the perfect place on an incoming kitchen table for her to plant a hand in order to make a (theoretically) successful vault. This drove everyone crazy, especially Howell, but no one dared stop her: if someone came for Howell while Jammer happened to be on the wrong side of the suite, everyone rested a little easier knowing she could skate and vault through the natural obstacle course within a matter of seconds.

At least, they all felt that way until the gremlins started showing up.

Jammer continually kept trying to improve her response times, even to where she'd have SecEight rouse her from sleep and time her progress from one side of the penthouse to the other. One such time, Jammer raced around the bend near the windows; an antique walnut credenza was her only nemesis. She glided across the thin carpet to pick up speed, and—

Her HUD turned to static for a split second. When the overlay returned, all physics data from her head computer was gone, and it was too late to recalculate with new input. Jammer relied on instinct, trying to judge her distance and speed just by eyeballing it, and she chose a spot on the credenza. At her hurtling speed, she misjudged the height of the furniture and sailed right over top of it without her hand touching. She twisted in mid-air but was already too late. Her skates landed on slick, baked-clay tiles, and she slid toward the penthouse windows. Her whole body slammed hard against the ballistic glass, but she felt the pane shudder from her mass and momentum.

Ginsu offered a large, orkish hand to help her to her feet. "What the hell, Jams?" he said, applying pressure to the window to ensure it wasn't actually broken. "If you were going any faster, you'd've had a much longer trip."

Jammer looked down the exterior slope of the building and realized he was right. Unless she could grow a pair of wings, she'd slide right off and plummet at least thirty or more stories to the pavement. Not even the most hardcore runners could walk away from that. "Sorry," she said.

"Do me a favor and reboot your headware once in a while, okay? Might keep you alive a bit longer."

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How long had it been since she'd restarted it? A few weeks, at least. Still, the failed attempt left her feeling a bit gun-shy to try any of her stunts near the windows again. She trusted Ginsu and SecEight with her life, but she refused to put the same kind of faith in mere window glass.

Later that night, Howell was watching the trid in his living room—she suspected he was keeping up-to-date on his stock option value. It was Jammer's turn for some face time with the assignment, which meant she was bored out of her skull yet again. Tuning out all the fiscal reporting on the broadcast, Jammer whipped out her commlink and pulled up her favorite trashy novel, *Love Is Blind and So Are Ghouls*, for the five billionth time. She skipped ahead to her favorite part, where the hero and heroine ended up doing—*Wait*. The text was *different*. How was that possible? Since when did the heroine ... *eat* her love interest?!

"Of all the—" Jammer poked her head into the other room, where Ginsu was standing on physical watch and SecEight was scanning the astral. "Very funny, you two," she said, holding up her commlink. "Whose bright idea was it to muck with my copy of *Ghouls*?"

Ginsu raised an eyebrow. "Hmm?"

SecEight manifested enough of her ghostly essence on the physical plane to say, "Well, it wasn't me. You know technology doesn't like me."

Apparently tech didn't like Jammer all that much lately either, she decided. Back in the living room, she dropped into one of the leather sofas—they actually *were* pretty comfortable, she had to admit. Howell didn't even acknowledge she was in the room anymore, which was maddening enough based on how much he had pestered her at the beginning of the job. Just what was his deal anyway? She spent several minutes watching him fixate on the financial numbers rolling across the trid set and came up with no satisfactory answer. Maybe he screwed some mob boss's daughter. Maybe he was mixed up in the BTL trade. Maybe he was in cahoots with Tamanous or other organleggers.

Or ... maybe he just wanted some company.

She chuckled to herself over that last one. If Howell *really* wanted company, he could hire escorts for a fraction of the price NeoNET was paying her and her team.

No, there had to be something else.

From nowhere, a klaxon blared throughout the suite. Jammer was on her feet in an instant, her skates extracted to allow her extra speed.

Proximity alarm, Ginsu subvocalized into her earpiece. *Stay with the target. 'Case and I are on it.*

Jammer unholstered her silenced Browning Ultra-Power and motioned for Howell to shut up and stay seated. She inched over to the edge of the room and peered around the bend into the hall. Nothing.

Scratch that, Ginsu subvocalized less than a minute later. *False alarm.*

Within moments they all reconvened in the kitchen for a security powwow.

Ginsu had to drag a protesting Howell out of the living room by his arm so he could sit in on their meeting. "You can read about your precious stocks on the Matrix later," Ginsu told the suit. To the others, he said, "Okay. Something weird's going on here. That's the third proximity sensor I've replaced this week."

"The *third*?" SecEight said. "Since when were you planning on telling us that? This is the first time the alarm's actually been tripped."

"Equipment fails all the time, so I just replaced 'em," Ginsu said, shrugging. "I mean, I don't tell you guys every single time I go take a dump."

"And I assure you the world's a better place for it," SecEight said with a snicker.

Jammer wasn't convinced. "No," she said, "I think we've got a full-blown case of gremlins here. First my head computer messes up. Then my commlink. Then *three* alarm triggers. What else has gone on the fritz lately?"

As if in response to her question, something *ca-chunk*ed behind her so loudly she whirled around and instinctively fired off a round from her Ultra-Power. The now-smoking toaster on the counter had a considerable hole right through it.

"Okay," Ginsu said. "What. The. Hell?"

"I'm *telling* you," Jammer insisted, refusing to lower her pistol, "something's not right here."

The microwave beeped and began heating nothing but the air inside it.

Ginsu frowned. "All right, Jams, now I'm inclined to agree with you. Eight, give us another peripheral scan. I think someone's gunning for us."

"Righty-o." SecEight curled up in a chair in the next room and went astral.

"Jams," Ginsu said, "take the suit back to his room and hang tight for a minute, all right?"

Jammer hesitated but grabbed Howell by the arm anyway. Right then, all of the clocks in the entire suite started going off simultaneously. Ginsu spun around, brow scrunched in distaste. His face took on a subtle orange tint. Jammer blanched.

In a deafening explosion, glass from every bank of windows in the entire penthouse shattered in a blinding diamond spray. The whole building shook beneath Jammer's feet. High-altitude winds tore through the suite and whipped papers and other loose articles into a whirlwind.

Jammer! Ginsu radioed over the noise. *We've got a helo! Take cover!*

Autofire spat through the dark expanse of open air as Jammer yanked Howell behind the credenza in the same room where SecEight's chair faced away from incoming fire. Thank Buddha the antique cabinet was made out of *real* wood instead of some cheapo plastiboard; otherwise both Jammer and her payday probably would've been killed.

The gunfire quieted. Jammer peeked over the credenza to see three helmeted figures in wingsuits float down through the missing windows. The suits made the intruders look like ridiculous flying squirrels, but the adrenaline junkie in her was impressed. Wingsuit BASE jumping took a lot of guts, but to jump from a helicopter into a high-rise penthouse at night? *Damn*. She wished she'd thought of that first.

The intruders opened fire, spraying the room with assault rifle shells. Jammer shot one of the figures through the shoulder, and he fell backward through the open window. She winced upon hearing his limp body slide the first few meters down the glass slope just outside.

From across the room, Ginsu caught one of the other would-be kidnappers in a crossfire. At least this one had the decency

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to not fall out of the tower when he got hit. The third operative ducked behind another piece of heavy furniture, leading to a stalemate between him, Ginsu, and Jammer. Beyond the missing windows, flashes of bright orange randomly lit up the sky, which meant either SecEight's spirits were doing their job against the helo or the shaman was manifesting and casting her own spells at the chopper. Either way, no chopper would last very long against that kind of mojo.

Howell, the balding, petulant child, grabbed Jammer's wrist in a desperate grip and met her gaze with an unblinking stare. Something seemed different about him, something she couldn't quite name. "You know what you have to do," he said to her with the most serious expression she'd ever seen him use.

"What the hell's that s'posed to mean?" she shot back.

Booms coming from outside shook the building once more.

"Do it!" he insisted.

Jammer pointed her Ultra-Power toward the remaining intruder. She blinked.

She found herself standing over the chair where SecEight's body rested. A bullet hole ruined her forehead, spilling blood into her ratty hair. The pistol in Jammer's hand was smoking. By the Buddha—had she ...?

"Jammer!" Ginsu called out. "The fuck're you doing?!"

Jammer blinked. *I don't know*, she wanted to say, but couldn't. Instead she watched herself walk over to where the ork was taking cover. She blinked again. Ginsu was laid out flat on the floor, clutching a chest wound with both hands.

"Y-you ... buh-buh-bitch ..." he seethed. "I'll ... kill ya ..."

To shut him up, Jammer watched herself—somehow a prisoner in her own body—put another round between Ginsu's eyes.

Howell stood up from behind the credenza and nonchalantly dusted himself off. The lone surviving operative unslung a bundle and handed it to him. Within a few seconds, Howell was donning his own wingsuit. Jammer found herself powerless to stop him.

The pistol that murdered her partners fell to the floor. "What did you do to me?" she mustered the will to say, nearly a whisper at first. "What did you *do* to me?!"

Alongside the operative, Howell stepped to the edge of the building, crunching broken glass under shoes that probably cost more than a decent car. He zipped up the wingsuit and gave her a knowing grin. "Consider it a down payment, Gremlin."

Then both he and the operative leaped out of the Transys Neuronet tower.

Gremlin? What the—?

Jammer immediately found she could move. She wasted no time planning her next move. Both of her longtime partners were dead by her own hand, and her job target—and only source of answers—was getting away. She ran to the edge of where the penthouse ended and open air and the steep slope of certain death began. Two arrowhead-shaped silhouettes had already glided about a third of the way to the unrolled rope ladder of a nearby helicopter.

Instinct took over. Jammer stripped the wingsuit from the dead operative and shoved herself into it, not caring about every last zipper or strap. But as big of a head start her target had, she could think of only one way to bridge the gap before it was too late. She ran through the plan once, fed some preliminary numbers into her head computer, and—against all better judgment—she closed her eyes and fell face-first through the missing window.

Immediately she engaged her skates and landed on the slope. She kept her body as low and tight as possible and tucked her arms to her sides to keep the wingsuit flaps from creating drag. Faster and faster and faster she plummeted, using her practiced skating form to gain as much speed on the sloping glass surface as possible while letting gravity accelerate her. Wind filled her cheeks and flapped her eyelids until she could barely see the helicopter below. She felt as though she'd left her stomach behind at the penthouse. And still she was picking up speed.

Her skates rattled beneath her. At this speed, if one of her ankles twisted even a few millimeters off course ...

Sweet, merciful Buddha, she hadn't thought this through enough ...

Never before had she moved so fast in all of her life. The sensation thrilled and scared her to death at the same time. Every second, her head computer kept recalculating the odds with new numbers based on her rate of descent, the perceived distance to the chopper, the angle of her approach ...

It wasn't going to be enough. The chopper was too far and she was going too fast. Unless she did something soon, she'd end up bug splat.

Jammer ran the numbers one last time, but it still wasn't enough. Would it matter if she survived somehow, knowing something had made her kill two very close friends? Perhaps missing the chopper would atone for their murders somehow.

With all the will she could muster, she kicked off from the tower with both cyberlegs. Two seconds of free fall later, she spread her legs and reached out with her hands. The wingsuit snapped taut between her legs with an audible crack of fabric, and she held both arms out in a clumsy attempt to straighten herself out. She'd gone skydiving countless times, but she'd never done anything like this before.

The helicopter was right in front of her. In the soft moonlight, she could see the operative and Howell climbing the rope ladder. The momentum of her desperate, suicidal plunge had given her enough speed to shoot her right arm into the last few rungs of the ladder. With both arms she clawed for something to grab onto, before gravity exacted its harsh fee.

In an explosion of pain, something pulled in her shoulder, but she managed to hook an arm through the rope tangle and grab hold at the very last second.

Dangling at the bottom of the ladder with one good arm, she looked up to see Howell staring down at her from the safety of the cabin.

"*What did you do to me?!*" she screamed at him, her voiced drowned out by the rotor's downwash. "*Answer me!*"

You want answers, Gremlin? Howell answered, from directly in her head.

Yes! she ... *thought* back at him.

Then climb, he replied.

Jammer climbed, one painful rung at a time. ✖

Robert Russell (order #5916799)

STEALING LIVING GOODS

POSTED BY: COSMO

Let's start with a simple fact: Corporations go to a lot of trouble to protect their living assets just like they do the rest of their property.

- Wait a minute here. We are talking about people. They may be misguided and manipulated by the corporations, but they are still people.
- /dev/grrl

- That's how it looks to you and your bleeding heart. In the megacorp's eyes, however, they are often just property, a living asset that needs protection just like any other asset—though the corporations sometimes put more effort into protecting those living assets from the consequences of their own stupid choices than from any outside threat.
- Kia

The protection can be physical, magical, electronic, or a combination of any or all of these. How much and how thorough the security is depends on the value of the asset. Unlike physical assets that are in a fixed location, living assets move around and don't always do what they are supposed to do or be where they are supposed to be. Also, unlike Matrix paydata that can be accessed remotely, living assets have to be retrieved in the flesh. This is both a blessing and a curse; it makes our jobs harder, but it also makes the corporation's job of protecting them more difficult. More on the ways corporations protect their assets and some methods I have found to defeat these methods later.

The extraction job is when you're hired to liberate a willing, or often not-so-willing, subject from their current employer and deliver them to their new employer. The first thing many runners think about when they hear "extraction" is a smash-and-grab mission hitting the weakest point in the company's security in force, grabbing their target, then escaping before security comes crashing down on them. In reality there are many different ways to take possession of your target, and some of the best are nonviolent, like convincing your target to come with you quietly.

- The art of making a target come along peacefully because they believe they have no other choice is critical here.
- Kat o' NineTales

Having good information and knowing what you are up against is essential for any mission, but it is even more so with the extraction. A little detail that wouldn't matter on any other mission can make or break an extraction. The more you can learn about your target the better. Don't rely on what Mr. Johnson tells you, even if it's supposed to be a willing extraction.

The less you know about the extraction, the more variables there are, and more variables always increase the level of difficulty. Not only do you need to think about what you and your team are going to do and how security will react, but you also need to be ready for how the target will act and react. The first step is going in with a plan that's as simple as possible, especially when it comes to your interactions with the target. Odds are your target isn't used to the kind of pressure we experience in the shadows, making them more likely to panic if things get complicated.

- For this same reason contingency plans are a must. Always have alternative escape routes and pickup locations.
- Haze

As I said before, extractions involve either willing or unwilling targets (if you're good, you might convert an unwilling target to a willing one, but don't count on it). How you go about running the mission will usually fall into one of two categories: either a smash and grab or a con. There are many different variations of each style, and most plans require a bit of both to work.

Each type of plan takes a different talent pool, amount of planning, time frame, and gear. Like any mission, knowing what you have and using it effectively increases the odds the extraction will run smoothly. At a minimum the extraction plan should have the following parts: Approaching the target's location, getting the target to come with you, getting away with the target, and moving the target to a secure place. The more

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you know about general security, any special security specifically for the target, and presence and response times of any additional security or police, the better you can prepare.

- All of this is true, but what was said earlier is also very true that an extraction plan needs to be kept simple. The easiest way to get yourself into a bind is to over-complicate the plan.
- DangerSensei

PROTECTING LIVING ASSETS

First thing to know is that you're going to have to deal with security. If you didn't, if the target could just waltz out—Mr. Johnson wouldn't be waving nuyen in your face to do the job. He'd just make a comm call. So let's start by talking about security in general terms.

One of the perks of a big-time corporate job is a personal security detail. It's got the double benefit of keeping the exec safe and making them look important. Without personal security, execs would be collected and traded around like baseball cards. How big the security detail is depends on the value of the target, corporate budgets, and the likelihood that they will be extracted. The dedicated security detail can be either open or covert. An open detail looks the part—mirrored shades, dark suits draped over muscular frames, that sort of drek—and they surround the target like bees on a flower. The target knows the detail and always knows where they are.

- Don't be too sure about their level of awareness. I've seen some scientists who were pretty oblivious to the world around them.
- Butch

A lot will depend on the size of the open security detail and how well they're armed. They can be little more than a nuisance, a significant obstacle, or the reason you go with a public grab. If the open security looks formidable, your best choice may be going after the target in public since they will be under the same restrictions you are.

- This isn't completely true—they can get licenses for their weapons.
- 2XL

- True, but they won't be carrying assault rifles openly down the street. They may well have one in the trunk for an emergency, but a good team will have security disabled before they get the big guns out.
- Hard Exit

They aren't going to openly break the law in public because their real SIN is on file and they will lose their job or end up in jail if they do. That, of course, doesn't mean they won't try to crack your skull if they can. Self-defense provisions are broad, and they know how to take advantage of them. They might not be able to take you out simply because they don't like the looks of you, but if you start something, you can be certain that they'll do everything in their power to finish it.

- Also, you can expect them to call for backup from local law enforcement. If the cops have to make a judgment call about which side to take in a firefight, you can be pretty certain they won't take yours.
- 2XL

- Which is why ingratiating yourself to local cops, either through bribes or just being charming, is not a bad idea.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Don't get cocky. The security detail may well shoot first if they don't think they will get caught, or they can call in a corporate cleaning team to take care of you for them.
- Sunshine

Then you have the danger of a covert security team. Don't think that because someone has obvious security, they don't have covert security. Plenty of people have both. The covert security team is harder to detect since, well, they're covert. They're trying to stay out of sight

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or blend in. They can pose as part of the target's group, or look like passers-by. The easiest way to spot covert security is to track your target for a time. Look for the faces that keep popping up in the crowd around them (face recognition software is especially handy here). Of course, some security details may have rotating groups acting as security, moving into and out of the environs, which makes the job of spotting them more difficult.

- A willing extraction target may be able to point out some members of their covert security detail—assuming they know who they are.
- Thorn

- If a covert security detail can be spotted by an untrained person such as your target, they aren't very good at their job.
- 2XL

- Or they are a decoy or one of several teams operating in conjunction. They figure you will stop looking once you find them and won't see the other one coming.
- Danger Sensei

The most difficult covert security personnel to detect are members of the target's clique. They will have legitimate reason to be around the target and won't immediately look like they are security.

- With a willing extraction, there are times when the target will be aware of or at least suspect a security person has been inserted into their group. If their bosses did it right, though, they recruited someone the person already knew and trained them to be security without the mark suspecting it.
- Baka Dabora

When checking for an in-close covert security detail, look for the person who goes along with any plan, avoids conflicts, forgives slights, and looks generally more confident. If you can, check the work histories of everyone in the entourage. I once found a security plant when her records showed she was part of several successful projects and no failures. Digging down another layer revealed she was always assigned to successful teams just as the project was wrapping up, and there was no mention of what she did between those last-minute assignments.

- Don't forget to look at any romantic interest. With the highly technical types who don't get out much, corporations have been known to assign a good-looking security operative to become physically or romantically involved with the person. They keep the asset clueless, of course.
- Kia

The one good thing about an in-close security detail is that it is usually only one or two people who don't carry weapons large enough to blow their cover. Don't make the mistake of thinking they're defenseless, though. Security personnel don't get assigned to this duty unless they're experts at unarmed combat and can improvise a weapon out of anything. And it's a sure bet they have armed backup only a few minutes away.

Any extraction plan must take all types of security into account. The biggest step in this is identifying the security and how to neutralize it. In a smash-and-grab, this means eliminating or pinning them down long enough for you to make off with the target. With more subtle extraction methods, this means either isolating the target from the security team or devising a way to get their security far enough out of position to miss what's happening. This can become more difficult when there are multiple security details assigned to the target, but a well-conceived and -executed plan can flush hidden security assets out to where they can be dealt with.

If a corporation thinks an asset is worth protecting, the asset's going to have at least one tracking device, probably several. This doesn't so much prevent you from getting the asset as it allows the corporation to know where to go to get their asset back. Some tracking devices are obvious and meant to be found. The real ones can be hidden in anything. I've found them in lapel pins, wedding rings, belt buckles, glasses frames, underwear, and almost everywhere else. High-value targets have several tracking tags, including stealth tags and hardened security tags. The hardest ones to find and neutralize are the ones that have been implanted in the target's body, either with or without their knowledge.

- If they have had any work done, it was with their consent—though they may not have realized it. The standard contract for implants has a clause authorizing the corporation to install an identifying RFID tag in case they need to contact the patient for product recalls or any problems that might arise with the implant.
- Kia

- If the target has sensitive data that the corporation doesn't want falling into others' hands, they may have implanted more than just a tracking device in the poor slot's head.
- Sunshine

- Another good reason to go to a shadow clinic for all your 'ware needs.
- Butch

The upside to this is that if you can get access to the corporate database, you can use the same tags to track your target before the extraction

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- Oh, is that all. Just break into a megacorp's database. No big deal.
- Slamm-0!

Once you have the target you have to be sure you get rid of all of the tags, and if you accessed the database you'll know where to look for them. After getting all of the tags you know about, run a non-linear junction detector over them to find the ones that were hidden.

- So how do you find the ones that aren't active already?
- Treadle

- A non-linear junction detector will find any electronic circuit even if it isn't currently on.
- Bull

- That works great to find ones hidden in something or somewhere that doesn't have any electronics; it doesn't help you, however, when the tag is in an electronic device or cyberware system that will show up as electronic with or without a tag.
- Glitch

- The most tags my team has found on one target was twelve, with three of those being implanted tags including the one in a dental filling.
- Thorn

Some tags can't just be yanked out, and they need to be dealt with another way. The easiest is usually the use of a jammer to prevent the tag from sending a signal out. Or you could put a decker on dedicated electronic warfare detail to keep your trail clean. Once you hand the target over, it will be Mr. Johnson's problem to find a long-term solution.

- Most tags have a pretty limited range—especially the stealth variety—so once you are clear of any pursuit, tags really aren't much of an issue.
- Glitch

- That depends on how long you have to hold onto the person until you meet up with Mr. Johnson. More than a few hours and a megacorp security team will start zeroing in on you. Especially if you're carrying a higher-value target.
- Danger Sensei

Another way the corporations track valuable employees is through ritual magic, which means they will have a sample of the employee's tissue in storage. If a human asset tries to leave or is extracted, they can use the sample to track them down. The good news is gathering the necessary personnel and materials for the ritual will take time, and there's no safe way to rush the ritual. So if the team is turning over the asset within a couple of hours, ritual magic probably won't be an issue. If you have the resources, putting the target inside a ward will increase the time it takes for the ritual to locate the person.

- If the ward is strong enough, it can completely hide the person.
- Winterhawk

- If you're lucky, all they are going to do with ritual magic is find the target. If the corporation doesn't want the target going to another corporation no matter what, they can do much worse things with ritual magic.
- Haze

If your team is going to hold onto the target for more than a couple of hours, you'll need to do something about the sample. If you know where the sample is being kept, you can make a run against the corporation to destroy it before or during the extraction. If the sample is close to the target, both jobs can be done by the same team. If they're in two separate locations, you will need to either split your team or hire someone to hit the sample.

- Another option is to switch around several of the samples. The big advantage to this is it can be done in advance, and if it's done with stealth the corporation won't know what happened until it's too late.
- Thorn

For high-value and high-risk targets, the corporation might also have a spirit watching the target from astral space. The spirit could be told to report if the target leaves a certain area or does certain things. However, the spirit could also have instructions to stop anyone who tries to extract the target. A good mage can easily find out if such astral surveillance is being employed. Once it has been identified an astral spirit is like any other security measure, which means you should incorporate defeating it into the plan.

- It comes down to doing your research. Astral recon is not always easy, but it's still important. Get your favorite ritual group together and summon up a watcher if you need to.
- Winterhawk

From what I have been told by associates more versed in the magical arts, most spirits can be dealt with when the time comes without much difficulty. It's when you get surprised by the spirit that you run into trouble.

- The problem is that once you dispel the spirit, the mage who summoned it knows what you've done and that something is up.
- Lyran

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- So you beat feet fast to get away before the mage shows up or has a chance to get backup there.
- /dev/grrl

- If the mage decides to go astral to find you, then you only have seconds before he gets there. You better have some plan besides "run."
- Winterhawk

Another method corporations use to safeguard a living asset is isolating them in a remote location. Particularly if they think the target may be in on the extraction or doesn't trust them for some reason. Keeping the target somewhere relatively unpopulated means it is easier to detect anyone who comes in contact with the target and to check that person out. The logistical downside of isolation is it makes getting backup into play when they need it more difficult.

- For this reason it isn't used unless the target is thought to be a flight risk for some reason.
- Ma'Fan

- Or if what is being worked on is of a particularly sensitive nature.
- Sunshine

The secure facility is one protection measure all the corporations have in one form or another for their living assets, and to extract the most valuable ones you will need to get into the highest security areas within those facilities. I have a whole section on getting into—and out of—places where you don't belong by an infiltration specialist I've worked with. We'll get to that shortly.

THE WILLING EXTRACTION

With a bona fide willing extraction, your first thought is that it will be a piece of cake. The target wants out, and you are going to help them get what they want. Sounds simple. But without the proper planning it can still blow up faster than a neo-anarchist's pipe bomb. Sometimes the target and/or Mr. Johnson will already have a plan. This is a double-edged sword. While it could cut down on the time you need to develop a plan, which if you are on a tight time schedule is a definite plus, they aren't professional runners which means they may have overlooked an all-important detail that will make or break the mission. Ask questions. They might have good reasons for doing things a certain way, information that you are unaware of, but at the same time you might well be able to strengthen their plan.

- For this reason always tweak the plan and have contingency plans in place.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Also find out about how the corporation normally responds to a person being extracted.
- Haze

- This is important. If security is under instructions to shoot the target first to prevent them from falling into the hands of an opposing company, you need to plan on playing bodyguard for the person if anything goes wrong.
- Kay St. Irregular

Finding out why the target wants to leave can also be helpful. Sometimes this motivation will give an insight into what will or won't work to help get them out. If the lack of freedom from the corporate facility is part of the issue, waiting for the target to leave before you grab them could take more time than you have.

Knowing the location of the exchange and who else will need to be dealt with is always important, because if the target is willing to go then someone or something is preventing them from just walking away on their own. Know who the target's current employer is and why the target wants to leave. Knowing what baggage they want to bring with them can also be important. A chummer of mine was on an extraction run where the scientist wanted to bring his current prototype with him and refused to go without it. The problem was that it was the size of a refrigerator, weighed a ton (literally), and couldn't be jarred so they had to steal a special carrier drone and the hacker was so busy running it that he missed a security check setting off alarms. They all made it out in the end, but from what she said it got a bit hairy.

Another thing to find out is if the current employer suspects the target wants out. Are they under lock and key because of their value, because the corporation doesn't trust the target, or both? Depending on the answer it might change how you go about running the mission. Items like non-linear junction detectors, jammers, and white noise generators become valuable tools to try to overcome the corporation's security devices.

During a willing extraction, the biggest pitfall is usually the corporate security detail. Because of this, it's vital to find out everything you can about all aspects of the security, including Matrix security, magical security, physical security, security personnel, and tracking procedures. Pay particular attention to how the corporation might track their wayward asset once you've made the grab.

- You can use a tracking device to throw the security off the scent if you know it is there.
- Thorn

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- Don't forget about magical tracking. Eliminating all the electronic gizmos will do you no good if they can track the target through an astral link.
- Winterhawk

With the willing target, keep it subtle and your touch light. Don't over think the plan and you should do fine.

THE "WILLING" EXTRACTION

At first glance this may seem like the same type of mission as the first one. This, however, is what every runner fears when Mr. Johnson says "Trust me, it's a willing extraction." This is the mission where either the target has had a change of heart, Mr. Johnson is overstating the target's willingness, or he is out-and-out lying because he is, after all, Mr. Johnson. This an exceptionally dangerous mission for a runner because getting bad intelligence from the beginning makes it very hard to create a plan with any hope of success. For this reason, any time you are involved in a willing extraction you need to have contingency plans in place just in case (notice how this is becoming a recurring theme).

When the target has a change of heart, whether on their own or because of pressure from their current employer, the target becomes the greatest security asset in the corporation's arsenal. They can warn security when the extraction is about to occur or is under way and keep security up to date on what is happening. For this reason, it's imperative that you disable the target's ability to communicate with security. One way to do that is knocking the target unconscious. The downside to that tactic is you'll have to expend assets from the extraction team to lug the target out.

- Better that than having to spend assets to stop the bleeding on your buddy that just got shot by security.
- Mika

The use of a jammer to cut the target off from the Matrix works well enough in most cases. The problem is

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there are still other ways for the target to communicate or leave a trail for security to follow. It can be something blatant, like pieces of clothing or candy, but usually it's much more subtle. Dropped RFID tags that tie into the Matrix once you and your jamming field move on can clue security as to what's going on.

All of this is bad, but what you really need to be wary of is the "willing" target playing the Trojan horse so security can track you back to your base of operations or find out who was behind the extraction. This can get extremely messy if the corporate security makes their move just as you're handing the target over to your Mr. Johnson. Odds are Mr. Johnson will think you betrayed him, and you'll end up taking fire from both sides.

- This is the worst of all scenarios, but one that you need to be prepared for. It is vital to make absolutely sure you aren't being followed when you go to your meet.
- Haze

This is why knocking the target out even if you're pretty sure it's willing is a popular choice with runner teams. The team needs to carry the target out, but it cuts out the possibility of being betrayed by the target. It also can play to the team's advantage to work the target's unconsciousness into the plan. Depending on the situation, you can make the target appear stoned, sick, or like he's having a seizure, giving you a legitimate medical reason to get them out of there in a hurry. See the sleight of hand extraction for more details on this.

A scenario that can be tricky is when the target genuinely wants to be extracted and contacted Mr. Johnson to arrange it, but once you have him, he tells you he has other plans. The target used Mr. Johnson to find an extraction team for them, and they now want you to help them find a new home or deliver them to another company. The good news is that this usually doesn't go down until after you have gotten clear of the original company's security. Unfortunately it puts you in a difficult position, especially if the target wants to pay you more than Mr. Johnson was going to.

- I ran into this once. Mr. Johnson had told the target to make the offer in order to test our loyalty. It ended up that the original run was against his own company as a test for my team to see if we could be used for a more sensitive mission.
- Kia

Now let's talk about those times when Mr. Johnson out-and-out lies about the target's willingness to be extracted. Maybe he didn't trust you or thought you wouldn't take the job otherwise, or maybe the extraction is part of a bigger plan that he didn't want you to know about. Once you know that Mr. Johnson lied about the form of extraction, you can't trust anything else he has told you. Everything else about the mission could be exactly as he said, but the risk is too great. You need to question everything.

- Most times you don't find out your target is unwilling until you make contact. At that point your plan is already in motion and you can't easily switch things up. Makes the rest of the run a whole lot tenser.
- Fianchetto

The first thing you need to do is decide—and quickly—whether you are going to complete the mission or cut your losses and clear out. Both courses of action have risks, and neither is going to be the right choice every time. Depending on the value of the target, you might be able to negotiate a better deal with Mr. Johnson since his deception made the terms of the original contract invalid. If you do, be ready for things to go even more wrong. Once Mr. Johnson starts lying to you, he's not likely to stop.

- If you negotiate a new payout, be ready for the double-cross by Mr. Johnson when you show up for the payout. If he had no problem with manipulating you into doing the job, he sees you as expendable. He won't have any qualms about getting rid of you once the job is completed.
- 2XL

SMASH AND GRAB

Ah, the smash-and-grab extraction. The classic. While occasionally the best method to liberate the target, smash-and-grab is relied on too often by unimaginative runners. It's simple enough at its core: Incapacitate or kill everyone except the target. It has major drawbacks, however, not the least of which is the target becoming collateral damage.

- Or if security is so ordered, the person you are trying to extract can become the target of their attacks once they realize they are outclassed or outgunned.
- Kia

In an unwilling extraction, this becomes exacerbated by the fact that your target wants to escape from you and is likely to run toward security if given the opportunity.

- Though if security takes a shot at her, she may suddenly become a willing escapee. Happens a lot when her other option is death.
- Kia

When planning the smash-and-grab, it is even more important to know the composition of response forces, where they'll be coming from, and their response time. Nothing is worse than moving toward your pickup and running right into the response team.

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Not only is it important to know what forces and defenses the target corporation has at their disposal, but you should also be familiar with their standard tactics. Most security forces use a set pattern to avoid confusion and cut down on time wasted delivering orders. These patterns will vary by corporation and even location, so your choices of weapons and tactics need to be tailored to counter what security will throw at you. Of particular importance is whether the security team will try to move with the target to get her to safety, or if they will hunker down in a defensible position to wait on backup. Which means you also need to know what other security and/or police are nearby who could respond and lend a hand in working against you. The actions of an Ares team in Seattle, where Knight Errant holds the police contract, will be much different than in Dallas, where they don't get much support from local law enforcement.

Another mistake unimaginative smash-and-grab runners make is thinking that more and heavier firepower is always better. Sometimes the opposite is true. If facility security thinks it's dealing with what looks like a few gangers, they're going to be confident they can handle the situation on their own. But hit the place with a squad decked out in body armor and assault rifles, and they will yell for all the backup they can get while they hunker down.

- I have found that a fast, decisive shock-and-awe attack, when pulled off correctly, can end the fight before anyone has a chance to call for help. In fact, I've pretty much built my life around the idea.
- Kane

- In a public place this is chancy, since some nearby witness is sure to call the local police.
- 2XL

- Yeah, that's why I said "fast."
- Kane

Using non-lethal options to take out security should always be considered in planning. The target is a lot less likely to freak out—or won't freak out as bad—if people aren't dying all around her. This is particularly true in unwilling extractions. You also avoid the risk of a stray round killing your target before you can get her clear. Carrying an unconscious target is easier than explaining a botched job.

- Along those lines, using a powerful knockout gas and coming in with chemical protective suits to scoop up your prize can work really well, and when done in public it doesn't draw as much attention from local law enforcement as killing a roomful of people would.
- 2XL

The key to a successful smash-and-grab mission is finding the weakest point in the target's security and exploiting it. Know the target's habits and the security's routine. Sometimes you'll need to create a weak point. This could require anything from brute force, like smashing into them with a vehicle, to misdirection, like an unusual event that disrupts routine and draws attention; every situation is different. Security is usually most vigilant defending the building or facility's perimeter, and they are more relaxed on the inside where they're likely to assume anyone they see had already been checked out before being allowed in. If you have the time to infiltrate the security force or replace some of theirs with some of yours, not only will it be easier getting in, but if and when you have to slug it out with security, they can be the surprise you need to get out alive.

- My team once grabbed a target at his semi-annual doctor visit. His security detail had been there several times without incident, but not often enough to know anyone. They were shocked when the building security suddenly turned on them after they were waiting on the doctor for fifteen minutes.
- Mika

Timing is more critical to a successful smash-and-grab than a lot of runners realize. The idea is to get in and out quickly, not win a gunfight. Depending on their backup forces' response time, the window of success can be very small. Relying on outgunning a corporation's security detail can get you bogged down in a prolonged firefight that gives their reinforcements plenty of time to arrive with more and heavier firepower.

CONNING THE TARGET

Running a con on the target takes a bit more planning than a smash-and-grab, but when run correctly the target provides less resistance. The con requires careful preparation in advance, but a simple con can be set up in a matter of hours by a skilled team. The plan needs to be detailed enough to be believable and have backstopped information so if checked the target will believe it.

- Or you could rig a way to fool any data searches the mark might make so he believes what you are saying is true. Just intercept the searches and send back the results you want.
- Stone

The con can be any number of things and should be tailored to the mark. Remember the cardinal rule of con games: Give the person something they want, so that they end up asking you to do the thing you want to do. When it comes to someone in a megacorp, you can often find something missing in their life, something the

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current employer isn't already providing. I've seen cons aimed at making the mark think the company no longer wants them, they are going to a new assignment, they are going on a date, and so on. The front players of the con need to be confident in their roles, okay with being lightly armed or even unarmed, talk convincingly, and improvise when needed. Keep the heavier guns nearby in case things go badly but well out of sight so they don't give the plan away. Sometimes even the best-run con won't net your target, so it is just as important to know when to abandon the attempt so as not to arouse suspicions. When this happens, the move to your backup plan needs to be as seamless as possible.

- This doesn't always have to be a physical option or require a long lead time. We approached the target at a local bar and started running a "new assignment" con, and the target wasn't buying it. Our man moved on and the target called his boss to report the contact. Our hacker was eavesdropping on his comm and broadcasting it to the team. When the boss said he was going to send a security team by to pick him up just in case, our two heavies impersonated the security detail and didn't even need to show any ID. By the time the target realized he'd been had, it was too late to do anything but meet his new employer.
- Kay St. Irregular

Running a con on the target usually needs to be done away from the employer's facility, though not always. If the target has a security detail, separating him from them without raising suspicions can be tricky. You can sometimes get your target to do this for you if you're smooth and confident enough. The better the deal seems for the target, and the less threatening the idea of being away from their security, the better. The idea is to play on the target's greed or desires so they will be willing to give you room to operate.

- There still might be an Evo security detail guarding a room at the Renton motel we snatched our last target from if they hadn't followed the maid into the room the next morning. I would have loved to see the looks on their faces when they found his links, clothes, and all of their tracking devices in a neat pile on the nightstand.
- Plan 9

The biggest danger on a con is if you are forced to make up details as you go; the smallest slip will tip your hand. Plan ahead. Make sure your team is ready for everything that might go wrong on the mission. Practice runs help if there is time. Megacorps often train key personnel to recognize common cons to minimize the chance of them falling for one. Come up with a good reason to be looking for the tracking devices corporations put on all their valuable assets, for example, and have good reasons for why you need to remove or destroy them. If you're not sure you can pull that off, a quality jammer in the trunk of your vehicle or briefcase can work as a temporary solution.

- Just be careful you don't disrupt your own comms at a critical point in the mission
- The Smiling Bandit

One form of con that can work well is the impersonation con. If the target has a dedicated driver or assistant who always goes with them, you can use this to your advantage. Someone who is good at impersonation can slip into the role and lead the target into an ambush. If you don't have someone with that skill set, have your person fill in because the regular driver or assistant is sick (and make sure that person gets sick, of course). This is more difficult since it may put your target on edge. If you sound confident and act like it's all routine, they often won't even check into your story. If you're really lucky, your target will be so hard to work with that they go through new people all the time, or even better someone who is so out of touch with what is going on around them they won't even notice the switch until it is too late. Careful research before the job can tell you the best way to play the con.

SEDUCTION

The seduction extraction takes longer to develop because you have to establish a relationship of familiarity and trust with the target. This is important when the target has a security detail. If you spend sufficient time establishing the fact that you're harmless, the security personnel will stop paying close attention to you. However, your operative will need a solid cover story and background, as security will check when your person first makes contact with the target. This built-up trust can allow you to bypass security for someone, or allow you to smuggle in contraband. The target might even talk security into giving you some alone time, which will provide the opportunity needed for the extraction.

As is the case with any con, the biggest obstacles can be getting close enough to the target, especially when they have a security detail or limited access to the public. It takes acting skills to get the target to believe you have feelings for them and even more importantly to get them to develop feelings for you. This requires extensive research into their past, their tastes, and their interests, followed by observation to confirm the information is accurate. It is difficult to predict whether the target will fall for the seduction, so detailed backup plans should be developed before the mission.

- As an extraction plan on its own, seduction is often too unpredictable. It's more often useful for gathering information or laying the groundwork for the actual extraction at a later date.
- Kay St. Irregular

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Your seducer or seductress, depending on the tastes of the target, has to play it right to keep the target interested and the security detail uninterested. Playing for the long game could mean doing things that make extraction more difficult in the short term. This helps build up trust that can ensure the later success of the actual extraction.

EXTORTION

An extortion extraction turns an unwilling target into a willing, albeit grudging, participant. The trick is in finding proof—or what could plausibly be taken as proof—of something your target does not want made public, then convincing the target that switching employers is the safest way out. What might send one target or company into a panic won't cause another to bat an eye, so it is very important to know both your target and their corporation. Sometimes you won't find anything usable, but instead come up with something that would severely damage their reputation or their career if they had done it. It then becomes a matter of falsifying a body of evidence that they had indeed done whatever it was and convincing the target their employer will believe the information.

- Yeah, don't be too caught up in the fact that your target will know they didn't do the thing you're framing them for. That may not matter. As long as you can make it clear that they will have a real hard time proving their innocence, you may be able to convince them to go with you.
- Haze

- They may play along, but they will be looking for a way to wiggle out from under your control the whole time. When you show your target your information against them, you want to push them to act. Once they're moving down the path you've set for them, it's harder for them to resist or back out. A good face who stays calm and can negotiate is important. The extortion works best when the evidence and the options are spelled out in a calm and calculated way so the target understands exactly how bad things are for them.
- Thorn

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- Another angle to running the extortion is to extort someone in their personal security detail into abducting the target for you. They take the risk, you get the reward.
- Mika

The biggest weakness of the extortion extraction is the chance your target doesn't believe you can make their employer believe the evidence or that their employer won't care or already knows about whatever you're showing them. This leaves you in an exposed position with no leverage. The only way to prevent this is a thorough understanding of what's important to your target. I cannot overemphasize how critical research is to the success of an extortion.

Corporations rely on their basic security measures to prevent an extortion extraction. The only specific precaution they can take is knowing what their employees are doing or have done so that there are no opportunities for extortion. Their background check may be as thorough as yours, so incriminating evidence you find early on is probably useless. If they eventually find information that could be used to pressure or coerce an employee, they may take steps such as covert security protection to ensure that employee can't be compromised.

- If the target is valuable enough, corporations are not above eliminating anyone else who was involved in or witnessed the questionable activity. Once runners start putting the pressure on the target, it's too late for the corporation to react.
- Sunshine

STEALTH

The words "stealth extraction" evoke images of black-clad figures abducting a sleeping target in the middle of the night and disappearing into the darkness without a trace. But that's only one method—a stealth extraction can be so much more. Any time you are able to get your target out without anyone knowing you were there, you've pulled off a stealth extraction. More than sneaking through shadows, stealth is about blending into your surroundings and looking like you belong. Where a con requires you research your target, stealth relies on knowing the target's environment so thoroughly that you can blend in until you're invisible to security. By its very nature stealth usually precludes carrying heavy firepower or having your backup close enough to be useful. The people going in must have alternate escape routes worked out ahead of time in case things go wrong.

The corporations' primary defense against the stealthy extraction is the security protecting the facility itself. The section on getting in where you don't belong goes into detail about the different methods you're likely to encounter and ways to defeat them. You need to plan for Matrix, physical, and magical security measures. You may not always run into all of these, but it is better to have countermeasures ready and not need them than to get caught because you weren't prepared.

Once you're inside the facility, your survival depends on looking like you belong. You must maintain your persona constantly. Once you are safely past the outer defenses, you probably won't be as closely scrutinized by security. Some runners make the mistake of relaxing at this point, which means this is where their missions usually end badly. Never assume you aren't being observed. Success depends on you becoming part of the environment.

- This is where your research about the facility comes in. If you show up in a suit and everyone else is dressed down for casual Friday, you are going to stand out and possibly be remembered later.
- Sunshine

Remember, seemingly trivial things can trip you up or attract attention. Like having your commlink running in the proper mode. In most office complexes or lab facilities, having your 'link running silent is at the very least a serious breach of corporate etiquette—in the others it's a breach of security protocols. I know runners feel safer off the grid, but this is one environment where that can get you caught.

Looking like you belong will grant you access to most areas in all but the most secure facilities. It is important to know what areas would be off-limit to your cover identity so you don't set off any alarms by cutting through places where you shouldn't be. For the same reason, be sure of your target's clearances to avoid catching security's attention by being out of place.

THE REMOTE CONTROL

This is an extraction for the tech-savvy group. The remote control extraction is simple in concept, and when it works well it works very well, making it popular with teams that have the right tech assets. Your rigger takes control of the target's vehicle and drives him to where you want to extract him. It requires a couple of very good Matrix operators since you'll be controlling the vehicle and jamming the comms at the same time.

- Or one decker of my caliber can do the job.
- Slamm-0!

Knowing how technically literate your target is can also be helpful, since a capable target may try to regain control of the vehicle, while a less skilled target might just freeze up and not act at all.

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- Be wary of the target playing possum until your Matrix assets are too committed to react.
- Glitch

The remote control extraction can be run even if a security detail is in the vehicle with the target. Of course that arrangement makes getting the target safely out of the vehicle a bit more complicated. If you can plant a canister in the vehicle, knockout gas released once you've taken control can simplify matters. Just make sure you actually have control of the vehicle, or things get sticky really fast.

- If you don't and the crash isn't too severe, you could just grab the target from the wreckage. Especially if your team looks like they are an emergency-response team. Having actual medical skill to back up your costume would help sell the act.
- Butch

Another remote-control tactic is rigging the vehicle's autopilot so that when it's engaged it takes the vehicle to a location you preprogrammed instead of where they tell it to go. This works best if the target isn't familiar with the area. It's a good idea to lock the controls so that the occupants can't retake manual control of the vehicle once they realize it's not taking them where they want to go. It's vital that you disable their comms so they can't call for help. Failing that, have a fast escape route planned and be long gone before backup arrives.

Some corporations protect their high-ticket human assets with intrusion countermeasures in the control nodes of any vehicle authorized to transport them. If anyone goes into the system without clearance, it sends an alert.

- All it will do is send an alert if you're lucky. Depending on the corporation and the value of the target, I could see them putting attack programs or even black IC in the node.
- Netcat

Another security measure often used when the target has a human driver to maintain control is a kill switch that disables the Matrix connection and prevents anyone from remotely accessing the vehicle.

- Just bypass the switch when you set up your account so the driver won't be able to lock you out.
- Slamm-0!

- Some of the vehicles are set up with a manual switch to prevent that very thing.
- Rigger X

- The manual switch still has to give an electronic command. Just stop the command.
- Slamm-0!

If there is no living security-trained driver to take control, there's probably a kill switch. If the vehicle is highjacked it can be shut down before it takes the target very far. It's always a good idea to have a team in position to take the target by another means just in case. The kill switch is always self-contained and manual. If the target makes a break for it, the corporations don't want some decker to stop him by killing the vehicle.

Once you have control of the vehicle, you want to quickly get it to an isolated location so you can secure the target. Because every corporate vehicle is a hotbed of RFID tags, you need to switch to a clean one ASAP. Eliminate as many of the trackers on the target as possible. Anything you can do to mislead or delay security and/or law enforcement is a good idea.

AN INSIDE JOB

With an inside job extraction, you either insert a person into the target's circle or recruit someone who is already there. The assistance the insider provides could be anything from information, to passes, to luring the target to the extraction point. There is no one sure way to recruit an inside asset. Some want money, some want to go with you, or some want the target's job.

- Ambition can be a powerful motivator—and a source of added income. When my team was hired to get the lead scientist away from a rival corporation, a bit of research quickly revealed that the second in command had aspirations of promotion. It was no secret he felt he deserved to lead. We offered him money to assist us in removing his boss, which he thought would clear the way for an instant promotion. He was only too eager to help. Once we had our target in hand we pointed out that his known ambition would make him the focus of any investigation and there was no way he could cover up his involvement. He made the smart choice and came with us. Earned ourselves a fat bonus from Mr. Johnson.
- Ma'Fan

- You need to be careful about bringing extra baggage to Mr. Johnson unannounced. It is just as likely to blow up in your face as to be rewarded.
- Kia

- True. In this case Mr. Johnson had stated that if we delivered the target he would pay extra for any additional assets we picked up along the way.
- Ma'Fan

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Usually it's best to relegate the inside person's role to gathering information, leaving a few doors unlocked, and maybe helping distract security. Nine out of ten have no experience or skills that will help with the actual grab. If you absolutely must use the inside person for the extraction, the team needs to be ready to assist in any way they can if things go wrong. If you've kept your contacts with the inside person minimal and discreet and are sure she can't give security any leads, you have no real worries if she gets caught before the extraction. Just move on to your next plan. If she knows too much, you've got a serious problem. You need to get her out, shut her up, or change everything so much that what she knows is useless.

- You've got to ask yourself why she knows too much. Whenever an insider you've recruited starts asking about who you work for or parts of the plan she's got nothing to do with, it's a sure bet she's decided her best option is to turn security informant.
- Ma'Fan

- Or security has already caught them and made helping them catch you the price for her life.
- Kay St. Irregular

The team also needs to decide how they are going to deal with the inside person once the job is done. Pay her off, set her up to take the fall, or just disappear and leave her hanging. However, those last two shouldn't be done lightly or without good reason. If you are able to leave her in place without exposing her involvement, you might be able to use her again or keep her on as a regular informant inside the corporation. The easiest and smartest plan is to pay her what you promised her. So when you're negotiating, agree to a price you can pay.

Given the potential problems and uncertainties with a recruited insider, it is usually better to insert your own person. This requires a longer lead time and creating an identity and background for your team member that will stand up to a security check—which isn't always possible. And be aware that just because someone on your team has the skills and knowledge to look and act like they belong doesn't mean they can pull it off. It can take days or weeks to win the target's trust and fulfill the mission.

- This is important to keep in mind. You may have someone who is great at blending in, but that doesn't mean they will be comfortable with posing as a corporate suit for a long period of time.
- Thorn

Another type of inside job involves Mr. Johnson hiring you to extract someone from inside his own company. This could happen for a number of reasons. Perhaps the target is compromised and Mr. Johnson doesn't want to admit it to his boss, or it could be a loyalty check run by counterintelligence. When Mr. Johnson is the inside man, they can provide all of the inside data, and it is in their best interest for you to succeed. That gives you a leg up, but remember—not everyone else knows you're all on the same side.

- You still need to check his information. Like anything Mr. Johnson tells you about any job.
- Pistons

While on the surface it sounds like having Mr. Johnson as your inside person makes your job easier, you need to be cautious. Like any insider, Mr. Johnson might take for granted that you know things he considers too routine to mention. Such as a company policy requiring all workers to broadcast their employee number at all times while in the facility, or the requirements of the corporate dress code.

- Something as simple as not knowing what the current trend is can draw unwanted attention. Especially in corporations like Horizon that are all about popularity.
- Cosmo

One danger that's rare but common enough to be careful about is the possibility Mr. Johnson is setting you up so he can step in and thwart the extraction to be a hero. Always have contingency plans and escape routes your Mr. Johnson doesn't know about.

The corporation's primary countermeasure against an inside job is pretty much the same as their defense against extortion. Namely extensive background checks and confirmation of credentials, but with the added precaution of monitoring personal financial transactions and bank accounts looking for irregularities. If the person lives in a corporate building, especially an arcology, their room is almost certainly bugged and searched on a regular schedule.

- That sounds like an invasion of privacy to me.
- /dev/grrl

- Who has the luxury of worrying about quaint things like invasions of privacy?
- Kat o' NineTales

- Right. Those wage slaves signed away their right to privacy when they applied to live in the arcology. Most of them feel living there is such a privilege it's worth the price and welcome any measures that make the place safer.
- Cosmo

While running a deep-cover operation to become the inside person, you need to assume someone is always

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watching. Be careful about how you maintain contact with the rest of your team. Also remember that having a disposable or unregistered commlink will set off alarms.

- One good way to disguise the meets is to make them look like they are something else that would require discretion, but won't worry the corporation. Like a romantic rendezvous.
- Cosmo

CONNING THE COMPANY

Conning a corporation requires even more attention to detail than conning an individual. Your background information has to be more thoroughly worked out. Everything someone checking up would expect to see needs to be exactly where it should be. If what you've planted looks legitimate, most individuals won't double-check, and they probably wouldn't have time to dig too deep if they wanted to. But where a person will accept something that looks good, a corporation won't. Corporations don't take anything at face value and have the resources to check out every piece of information you give them. This doesn't mean a corporation can't be conned; it just means that it is a lot more work.

- The corporation is made up of people, and sometimes if you convince one person in power that the information is true they will become an advocate of this "truth."
- Slamm-0!

- Which is why running this con with an inside man can work really well.
- Chainmaker

The biggest difference between running a con against a corporation and conning a person is that with an individual you can play to their personal greed or fear, but with a corporation the people you are dealing with don't have as much of a personal stake in the outcome. Though you could try to appeal to their career-building instincts, moderate corporate gains or losses don't affect them directly, which makes it much more difficult to entice or coerce them into doing what you want. Rather than try to dazzle or rattle them, your con has to make sense on a balance sheet—meaning the decision you want them to make has got to make solid business sense or they won't go for it.

One way to run a con that looks like good business is to make the target look more like a liability than an asset to the company. Convince them he's a public-relations problem or that he's taking credit for someone else's work—the specific liability will depend on the values of the corporation you're conning. You want his supervisor, the marketing manager, or someone in a position to do something about it to believe that the target is no longer worth the resources they're investing in him. This could result in the target being fired, which would put him on the street in easy reach, but it's more likely they'll move him to a less-vital department and reassign his security detail to what they think is a more valuable employee. This isn't as easy as having the target handed to you, but it greatly simplifies the actual extraction. Speaking of simple, have some way to monitor internal communications, because if the company decides the most practical solution is to execute your target you're going to need to move quickly to extract him alive.

Megacorporations have tremendous computing power and data search capability at their disposal, but they can't focus on everything equally. At the same time, what makes a megacorp mega is its size, so managing the internal functions and keeping track of all the employees in an operation that large requires a huge bureaucracy. It's difficult and requires a decker with serious skills, but the size of a megacorp's infrastructure makes it possible to run a transfer con. You generate official-looking paperwork ordering your target transferred to another facility and convince her supervisor that his asset has been reassigned. Your team then comes to pick her up, and he'll just hand her over. One possible problem that you'll need to know in advance is how highly the supervisor values your target. If he complains to the administrator who supposedly ordered the transfer about losing a key employee, it will take the two of them about thirty seconds to realize the orders are forged.

- Which is why you don't give them time to work through it. You arrive at the facility at the same time as the paperwork. This way the first time her boss sees the orders for your target's immediate transfer, you're already in his office to pick her up. Be professional and assertive to keep things moving, and you can get your target out of the building before her boss calls someone higher up to complain.
- Haze

PRESTO-CHANGO

The presto-chango extraction is a highly specialized con that requires an expert in disguise able to assume identities quickly. Presto-chango works best with a willing target but can be run with an unwilling target with a few modifications. When the target is willing, you are conning the target's security. When the target is unwilling, you're running two related cons—one on the target, the other on the security detail. The con works best when the target and his security detail are in an area where they are unfamiliar with the surroundings. The first step with a willing target is briefly separating him from his security—easy to do plausibly if you've been able to brief the target in advance. It's while security doesn't have eyes on the target that your man takes the target's place and rejoins his security detail while the rest of the team gets the target out of the area.

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- So not only does your doppelganger need to be an expert at disguise, they need to be able to pull of a complete impersonation, which means knowing the target's history and habits and mannerisms, not just be able to look and sound like the target for a few minutes.
- Kia

- Magic can usually be used to complete the illusion, since most security details won't have magical support.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- That depends on the value of the target. Top-end targets probably will have some type of magical support, often in the form of an on-call spirit. Having multiple sustained spells on you will alert them in a heartbeat.
- Winterhawk

- Actually, a spirit won't always be an obstacle to the use of magic. It would depend on the orders given by its summoner. More than likely it would be told to protect the security detail and follow the orders of the team leader. So if the security detail doesn't realize there is an issue, the spirit may well not do anything.
- Lyran

Getting an unwilling target out of security's sight without alarming him or them is a bit more tricky. You can trust luck and wait for him to go to the bathroom, or you can arrange a plausible distraction. The switch works the same, except the team needs to convince the target to go with them. There are several ploys you can try—like a medical emergency where second-string security has to get him to safety while his detail deals with a threat—but in the end, the nature of the target and the situation will determine what story you tell.

- Another version of this is to drug the target while they are out of view and then mask their identity as you escort them out.
- Haze

- Since no one will question an unconscious person being carried out.
- Slamm-0!

- There are drugs that will make a target docile and obedient without knocking them completely out. Depending on the target they may even take some of these on their own on a regular basis. Which reminds me of an important point—the details of your target's pharmaceutical regimen may give you some ideas on how to get to them, or at least some drug interactions you should avoid.
- Haze

Meanwhile your imposter is leading the security detail away from the scene and your planned escape route. Knowing how well the security detail and the target get along is vital, because he has to play it just right for as long as it takes the team to get away. If the unwilling target doubts your cover story and calls his security detail, you can still make the extraction though it's now a snatch and not a con. The detail will take the impersonator captive, of course, and rescuing him will complicate the extraction. A smart plan will have a rescue strategy in place at the outset.

- Smarter to just leave him. He knew the risks going in.
- Rigger X

- In the long run leaving teammates behind is bad business.
- 2XL

- If it comes down to saving a teammate or saving my skin to complete the job, I'll complete the job every time. Not getting the job done is worse for business than the occasional casualty. Now, if it's possible to rescue the runner without jeopardizing the job then I'll do it, but not at the risk of the job.
- Rigger X

- Yeah, but you're well known for being a bastard.
- Pistons

Once the target is safely out, use another nonthreatening distraction to get your imposter out of view long enough to drop the disguise and blend in with the crowd. When security realizes their charge has disappeared, it will be way too late and they'll concentrate their search in the wrong area.

- My team ran this once and our impersonator couldn't ditch the detail. Ended up with them escorting him back inside the secure facility and right up to the door of the target's room. After they left he dropped the disguise and slipped out of the building. The next day the security detail came to pick up the target and found the room empty. The facility security director ended up getting demoted for the "security breach" that allowed the target to be extracted.
- Haze

If your target doesn't routinely leave the corporate facility, the presto-chango extraction can still work. There are added difficulties, though, especially if the target is unwilling. Your imposter needs to be able to get inside undetected before the extraction and be undetected leaving after the excitement. Getting the target out without being questioned by security or making coworkers curious about why he's not where he should be presents a variety of obstacles you'll have to plan for. A real danger is the coworker who sees the target

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leaving then finds the doppelgänger at the target's workstation and reports it to security. The only advantage to being inside the facility is security personnel will assume you were vetted by perimeter guards on your way in and you're doing whatever you're supposed to be doing.

SLEIGHT OF HAND

In the sleight-of-hand extraction, you do everything in plain sight of security and witnesses as you take the target away. Some of them may even assist you, because they are not really seeing what's happening. Sleight-of-hand extractions require careful planning, precise timing, excellent acting, and nerves of steel because you have to be completely unarmed to get through security. You will also be beyond the reach of your backup, which means you'll have few options and slim chances of getting out. To pull off a sleight-of-hand extraction, pass yourself off as someone from outside the corporation who has a good reason for being there and a better one for taking your target right out the front door. A classic example that still works is drugging the target so she appears to have collapsed, then have the team arrive as DocWagon to rush her off to the hospital.

- Just make sure you know who holds the contract for such services with the target. A chummer of mine ran this not knowing the target had just switched to a different carrier and had been bragging about the money he saved. Things went downhill suddenly when an officemate mentioned this to security. Rest in peace, Wilcox, we miss you.
- Haze

The team needs a front person who can look official, act professional, and keep things rolling fast enough that security and management don't have time to think through what's happening. Knowing when to push, when to finesse, and when to walk away is important. Team members playing supporting roles need to look and act their parts well enough to enhance the illusion.

- When posing as a unit like a DocWagon team, remember that usually one person does the talking and the others are quiet and follow orders. Your team needs to act the same way. If everyone is part of trying to talk their way in, most guards will get a gut feeling that something isn't right. Even if you get in the door, you may get an unwanted shadow and more scrutiny and questions than you want to deal with.
- Fianchetto

Having part of your team create a diversion that pulls security out of position, then appearing as backup sent to escort your target to a safer location is another classic sleight of hand that is still effective.

- Just make sure your diversion doesn't cause a lockdown of the facility.
- DangerSensei

An even simpler variation of that would be to make a bomb or chemical threat, prompting security to clear the building. Then, while security is sweeping the building, the team can take advantage of the chaos and the crowd to slip the target away. If you need more time to get clear, using a few plants who "accidentally" get in the way of pursuit can buy you a minute or two.

- Be careful about using team members on pursuit-hindering action. Some security forces will just shoot you for being in the way, innocent or not. Don't think because you are outside their perimeter fence that you're safe. I've seen such people shot then dragged back onto the corporate land so the shooters wouldn't have to deal with the local police.
- DangerSensei

A sleight-of-hand extraction is probably the most difficult to pull off. In theory every security outfit knows the basic tricks involved; the creativity is in the execution and in keeping things rolling just quick enough to keep them from realizing what's going on. Your plan going in needs to be detailed enough to have solutions for likely problems and flexible enough to adapt to changing situations. A sleight-of-hand run usually turns into a desperate thrill ride even an adrenaline junkie would think twice about trying. When it works, the sleight of hand defeats corporate security by recruiting them to help you; when it goes wrong, they realize you were making fools of them and bringing you down becomes personal.

- This is only human nature and to be expected. No one likes it when they are fooled, and they tend to want to make the person who fooled them pay. They will come after you hard, but sometimes they will get sloppy or overaggressive. If this happens, a quick, well-planned route can often get you out.
- Fianchetto

Solid escape plans for every stage of the extraction are a must. Not only will this help you in the event of disaster, knowing you can escape if things go wrong will add a confidence that will convince others you're on the level. It should go without saying that if your cover is blown, forget the target and get out. There's always another time and another plan. If you're in a facility, getting out fast may not be an option, so be ready to change as many identifying features as you can. A change of clothes would be good, but simply ditching your jacket and putting on glasses can be done quickly and make a difference. Use your own judgment on things like wigs

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and facial hair. Ditch your commlink and switch on your backup comm. If you've managed to establish a secure escape route and can get to it, go. Otherwise blend into the crowd, look as confused and anxious as the bystanders around you, and generally make yourself easy to overlook. If people are leaving, join them; you have a better chance of being missed in a crowd.

BAIT AND SWITCH

A bait-and-switch extraction is basically a smash-and-grab with elements of the sleight-of-hand. The bait is meant to look like a smash-and-grab, pushing your target and his security team into acting faster than they're thinking. This is easier outside corporate facilities, but if you have sufficient assets inside the facility it can be just as effective. The bait's objective is to separate the target from his security and hurt the team just enough to slow them down and set things up for the switch. If you actually grab the target at this point, which has been known to happen, skip the switch and get out.

- If you are keeping the initial security detail tied up sufficiently, it isn't even necessary to separate them from the target—though that can make the second half of the plan a little tricky.
- DangerSensei

The switch is your second team coming to the rescue as backup security, arriving to take the badly frightened target to safety while the first team holds off the attackers. Good intel on the corp's security protocols is vital—your rescue team has to play their part by the book, and the ambush team's attack has to meet the requirements for running instead of fighting.

- Nothing is worse than causing the target to hunker down when you want them to flee the scene.
- Marcos

The bait-and-switch extraction has a half-dozen variations and is an excellent choice for a balanced team that might not outgun the security detail but has other talents.

- Only amateurs wouldn't be able to outgun a corporate security detail.
- Stone

- It all depends on where you are. Down in Miami no one wears long sleeves, let alone a coat or jacket, so concealed weapons have to be small. If you're going for a high-ticket target, odds are the security's packing heavy artillery, and it'll be tough for you to carry what you need to match them.
- Hard Exit

The whole idea with the bait-and-switch extraction is to get the target and/or his security worried about one thing, then provide what appears to be the solution in order to get the target to cooperate. With your team split into two groups working independently, timing has to be perfect. You can't rely on communication; if the security detail even suspects you're coordinating or detects a signal (even if they can't decrypt it), you'll give the game away.

Another thing to be aware of is the possibility of a covert security team. The covert team may even maintain cover as you snatch the target and track you until a response team arrives to retrieve the target.

- Sometimes the observation team will be under orders to follow the target and find out who is behind the extraction and if the target is in on it.
- Thorn

Drone surveillance of the area can help in spotting a covert team on your tail and finding best routes for shaking them. Having your decker check for any hidden signals while the driver loses anyone keeping a visual on the vehicle is also a good idea.

- One way to do this is to take over a local traffic drone. This way there aren't extra drones around to raise suspicions.
- Slamm-0!

- It's a lot easier to just tap into the drone's feed. Passively watching everything it sees doesn't leave a traceable footprint and yields the same results.
- Netcat

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

Like the bait-and-switch, hook, line, and sinker is a multi-step extraction that combines elements of other techniques. Hook, line, and sinker is more involved and requires a longer time commitment than other extractions, but sometimes it's the only way to reach some targets.

The first phase is research. You want to find some small vice your target has that you can exploit. For example, a man who doesn't have a gambling problem per se but occasionally plays poker and is active in office betting pools on sporting events. Other examples include acquiring grey-market pain meds for loved one who became addicted when recovering from an injury or skimming just a bit from requisitions to pay for little extras in life. If you cannot find an exploitable vice, introduce him to one; gambling is the easiest, but there are others. When you have something you can use in place, one of your team becomes acquainted with your target and gets close enough to discover they share the same vice. This is the part of the plan that takes

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the most time. Your man then entices the target into expanding his vice—bigger bets that pay off, a market for meds that pays twice what his supplier charges, a scheme to skim three times the money with half the risk. This may need to be done in small steps, which again can take up a good deal of time.

Once the target has become used to the greater level of risk and reward, the next phase begins. A second member of your team will convince the target he has evidence that will endanger the target's job if his employers find out, evidence he will turn over if the target doesn't do what he says. Neither the threat nor what the extortionist wants the target to do should be so great that the target panics and runs to security. Passing along low-level operations information in exchange for keeping his job is a typical exchange. At this point the first team member reveals he is also being extorted by the same person and manipulates the target into proposing an alliance to watch each other's back.

- Why would you go on to do the extra work instead of just forcing them out now?
- Chainmaker

- The target may feel their crime is not that big of a deal. If your lever isn't big enough, your target won't be budged. Patience will yield fruit where haste wasted it.
- Haze

Operations information will escalate to small trade secrets. No single item will be vital enough to alarm the target. It's best if the target realizes on his own, but your man may need to point out to him that if company security ever discovers the volume of information he's passed on and the period of time he's cooperated with the corporate spy, it will cost him more than his job.

- This works especially well if the target was giving you corporate secrets or insider information to pay off gambling debts or something equally damaging.
- Glitch

If the target doesn't think his deeds are that bad or that there'll be serious consequences, the team member playing fellow victim can exaggerate the danger. The extortionist can also tell the target he's fabricated evidence of a far greater betrayal that's close enough to the truth that the target will never convince security he's innocent.

- Timing is important here. When the target is near panic but before he melts down completely, the fellow victim calls to tell him he's gotten a tip company security may be coming for both of them. He's got some friends, though, who can get both him and the victim out alive if they hurry. His evident panic can push the target into acting without thinking. Then the team swings by and picks the willing target up.
- Thorn

In addition to the constant intrusive surveillance all employees signed off on, all corporations require personnel to report contact with any suspicious people. If they even suspect an infraction or breach of security is possible, they often move the target or tell them they've observed questionable behavior and order him to cease. Knowing they've been caught once is usually enough of a deterrent that the team will have to explore other options.

- On the other hand, this can actually help you in the end phase of this extraction. If the target has continued after being warned, he's more likely to believe that the company will take serious action against him.
- Kia

- As long as the company isn't keeping a closer eye on the target because they have had problems in the past.
- /dev/grrl

For this reason you need to be very careful the target isn't being followed or otherwise tracked. If the deed is particularly incriminating, you can even run scans on the target telling them that you want to make sure they aren't setting you up. Then in the second phase you accuse them of extorting you and make them prove they are not.

- This works even better if you make the accusation right before you carry out the first extortion of the target.
- Haze

This will build an us-versus-them mentality that will serve you well in the last phase of the plan, which leads up to the physical extraction.

MULTIPLE TARGETS

On occasion you will be hired to extract multiple targets. This could be all the members of a family, a scientist and assistant, or group of associates. Because of the need to get multiple people out, many of the more complex or subtle approaches aren't going to work unless you have inside help and/or some willing targets.

- We were once hired to extract a whole research team. Of the seven-person group, four were willing, and with their help we were able to run a new-assignment con on the rest of the group. We got the whole, their prototype, and all of their data for Mr. Johnson.
- Haze

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It is important to know who in the group is or isn't willing. With a larger group you can't monitor everyone constantly; one person can more easily call someone or sound an alarm.

- Don't think just because everyone is going along that they are all equally willing. Someone may be biding his or her time until they can call for help.
- Thorn

Families can be tricky. Just because the parents are both willing, don't assume all of their kids are too. The corporations start brainwashing the kids about how great the company is in the corporate-run preschools.

- "Brainwashing" is such a strong term.
- /dev/grrl

- But an accurate one.
- Slamm-0!

- I think "indoctrinate" is a better way of putting it.
- /dev/grrl

- You say "indoctrinate," I say "brainwash," but however you want to put it the corps don't want children who think for themselves. They want the next generation to just say "yes sir" and fall into line.
- Bull

By the time these kids are teenagers they are so into the corporation that they may call security during the attempted extraction, thinking they are doing the right thing. Even if it means turning mommy and daddy in they will do it, because they figure their parents have been corrupted and reporting them will help bring them back to the right path. Everything these kids have been taught is spun to put the corporation in the best possible light. In their eyes, errors came about because some person was corrupted by an outside force or personal greed, not because the corporation failed.

Another factor when extracting multiple people who are willing to leave is to act quickly rather than setting up a longer-term plan. When you have more people involved, you increase the likelihood that one of them will do something to tip off security.

- It can't be stressed enough that corp middle managers, by and large, generally aren't used to the life of deception that is our bread and butter. While they may lie to their boss about how close the project is to being done or conceal a night out drinking from their significant others, they aren't used to really going against the corporation, weaving an entire fabric of lies without blinking. This stress makes people do strange and stupid things sometimes.
- Kia

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ONLY PART OF THE JOB

There are times when the extraction won't be the entire job—or even the most important part of the job. The primary objective may be a prototype, or Matrix files, or notes, with a bonus for any research personnel picked up along the way. Or it may be a sabotage mission that includes extracting the experts best able to fix the damage—both to make them look like the saboteurs and to handicap the company's recovery. If you know this going in, you can plan accordingly, but know that it limits your choice of potential methods.

- My team once had a job to extract a research assistant and kill the lead scientist to set the program back enough for Mr. Johnson's company to beat them to market with a similar product.
- Mika

With multiple objectives you will almost certainly need to split your team. Coordination will require detailed planning, including backup plans if things go wrong.

- Another option is to sub-contract the least sensitive part of the job, or to hire temporary help outside your usual team.
- 2XL

- If you have trustworthy assets you can call upon, that's a fine idea. Part-time or one-off help with the right mix of talent, reliability, and trustworthiness is hard to come by, though.
- Kay St. Irregular

If achieving your primary objective involves pyrotechnics or something equally attention-grabbing, it's possible to use the primary objective as a diversion for a sleight-of-hand extraction. Multi-objective missions require some creativity in use of time and resources, and that challenge alone is enough to attract some runners. Just be careful not to be too clever and make your plan more complex than it needs to be.

Any extraction mission can involve penetrating secure facilities at some point. This next section, as the title shows, covers some of the best ways to get in and out of places where you don't belong.

GETTING IN WHERE YOU DON'T BELONG

POSTED BY: SHE WHO GLIDES

- Extractions almost always require you to get into places the corporations don't want you. For this reason I have recruited an infiltration specialist, She Who Glides. I have worked with her on many occasions, and she never disappoints. I figured her abilities and experience qualify her to give an overview of ways to get around the things corporations do to keep us out.
- Cosmo

The corporations have vast resources at their disposal to keep unwanted people out. They use physical, electronic, and magical means to keep their facilities secure. However, there is no such thing as an impregnable facility. The security always has a weakness; it's just a matter of finding and exploiting it. To find it you need to know what security they have, what they don't have, and what to expect. This will depend on how important the facility and the work performed within it are to the corporation.

You can employ stealth, deception, or brute force to get into a secure facility. The problem with brute force is that the corporation has much more equipment and more people to throw into a firefight. For the most secure facilities, a pure brute-force method is only a viable option for top-tier shadowrunners.

- And most of those who have achieved that level of expertise got there by not relying on brute force.
- 2XL

That leaves two different methods for getting by their security undetected—stealth (not being seen or heard), and deception (looking like you belong). These methods aren't mutually exclusive, and for the most secure facilities a combination of the two methods is needed. Just as no defense is foolproof, not every stealth technique or deception is guaranteed to work perfectly every time. But the longer you can delay detection, the easier it will be to achieve your objective.

If things go badly, your team must be a ready to use brute force either to finish your objective or to get out of the facility before security shuts you down for good.

The corporations use chokepoints to control access and open areas to try to detect intruders. These are usually alternated to maximize the security's effectiveness. The more secure the facility, the more layers you will need to go through to reach your target, and the more complex each layer will be.

The first lines of defense the corporations employ are physical barriers. In the most secure facilities these come in layers. The obvious barriers are perimeter fences, building walls, and floors inside a building. Not so obvious, and therefore often overlooked, are open areas. Because they are overlooked or underestimated by infiltrators, these open areas can be more effective than a wall. Open areas are set up to make unobserved approach difficult to impossible, especially if you've disabled any obvious monitoring devices. They also give the facility defenders a free-fire kill zone. Deserts, frozen tundra, salt flats, Antarctic ice sheets, Arctic snow fields—any secure facility in the middle of an open nowhere was built by someone who intends to kill anything that gets too close.

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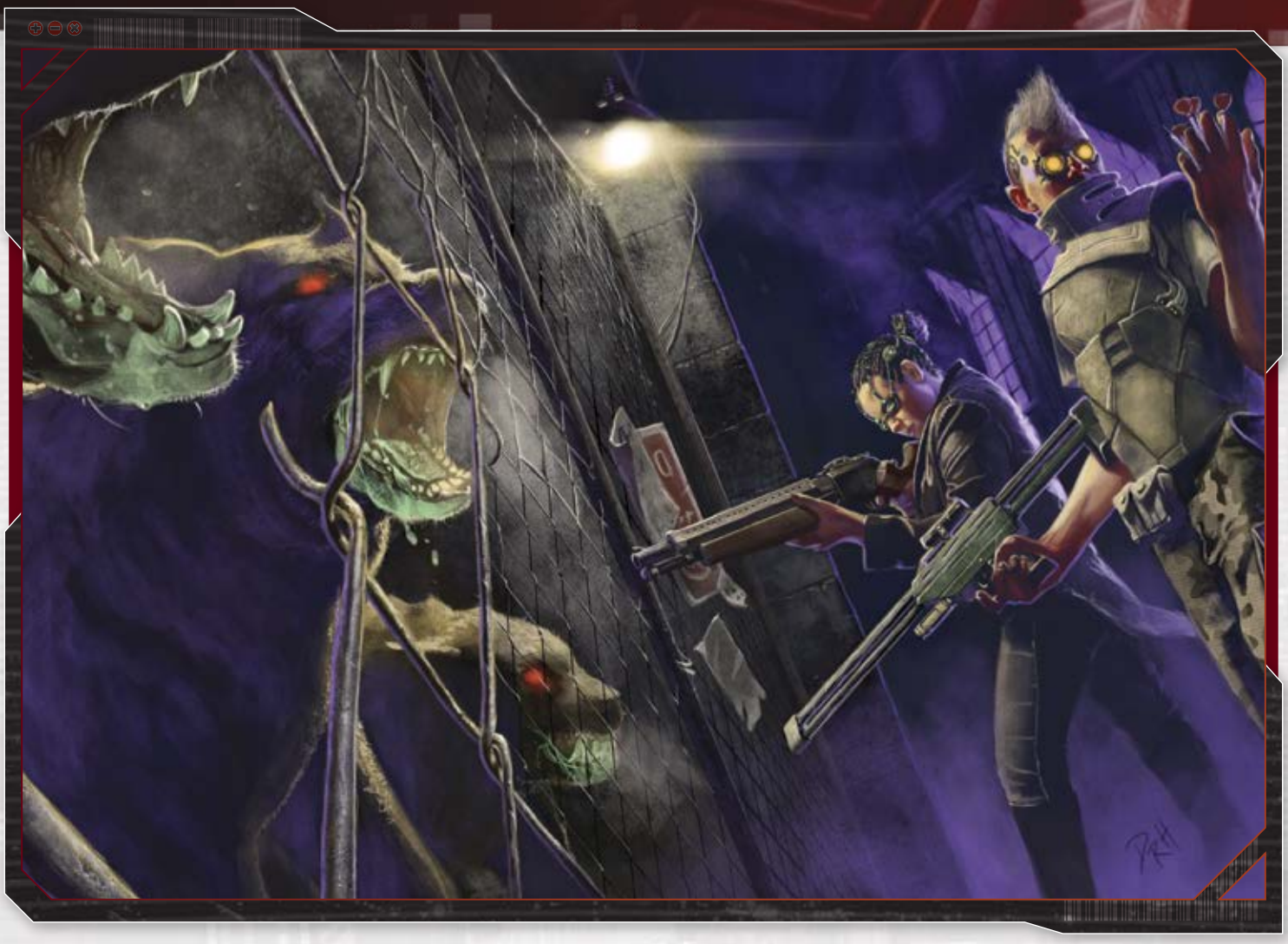

Each of these barrier types requires a different approach, and each must be planned for. You not only want to get through the wall or across the open space undetected, you want to do so in a way that sets you up to overcome the next obstacle. I'm going to go over the more common defenses in the order you're most likely to encounter them and give examples of ways you might use to defeat them.

The kill zone around the outside of the perimeter of a facility in a populated area may not be obvious. Typically security won't stop everyone who passes by, but they will track everyone not part of the corporation. If a stranger disappears or loiters too long, he or she will be investigated. It could be a drone, spirit, or person—but someone or something will be sent to take a close look. This makes the approach to such a facility just as important, if not more important, than the actual breaching of the perimeter. You will either need to use stealth to avoid observation altogether or have a plausible cover story that explains your approach. If you rely on stealth, remember the monitors you see are not the real danger. Be prepared to defeat electronic surveillance, astral observation, and flesh-and-blood sentries, as any good security perimeter will use a combination of all three.

The most popular and most obvious electronic means of observation is the camera. You can assume a security camera will be outfitted with ultrasound, night vision, and thermographic technology in addition to ordinary light functions.

- It depends where the facility is and when you approach. Thermographic cameras are almost useless in a desert at noon but work fine at midnight. They're a lot more effective in the arctic because even in your best thermal gear you're going to be warmer than the frozen background.
- Mika

With most cameras, a chameleon suit or improved invisibility spell will prevent you being seen. You would be surprised, however, at the number of runners who forget neither of these methods do anything to cover your tracks. Not being aware of your trail can get you

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prematurely noticed. A top-of-the-line chameleon suit won't do you any good if your footprints lead the security team right to where you are hiding. Some adepts have the ability to walk softly enough that they won't leave a trail, or you can use an air spirit to swirl the snow or dust to erase your footprints after you have passed.

- There are also mundane ways of doing this, such as dragging a mesh to wipe out the footprints.
- Mika

The easiest way to mask your body heat from thermographic vision is to add thermal dampening to your armor. Except in extremely cold conditions, matching the ambient temperature is fairly straightforward. Ultrasound is more difficult to defeat. Rather than try for absolute silence, try to blend in with something visible and ordinary that provides natural sound cover. A rain or snow storm are obvious choices, but be careful. You can be invisible and soundless in the storm but if a flesh and blood guard notices the snow or mist swirling around you as it falls. In the same way using a sound barrier spell to hide your approach can be effective if there's nothing behind you, though if the bottom half of a tree disappears then reappears, an alert technician will sound the alarm. In other words, always be aware that nothing is perfect but if you take all environmental elements into consideration when planning your infiltration can be better than their defenses. For example, members of your team passing innocently through or by the open area on obviously legitimate errands with their own ultrasounds in passive mode will let you quickly map the extent of the facility's ultrasound coverage and locate potential weaknesses in their pattern you can take advantage of. As with any defense the best way to defeat ultrasound is to avoid it altogether. When that's not possible be creative.

Most secure facilities will also have either a mage or spirits patrolling the perimeter watching for someone or something approaching in astral space. Even though travel in astral space can be very fast you have to slow down considerably in order to observe effectively. This means that if the perimeter is large enough, observing and timing the astral patrol is as straightforward as watching sentries patrol their beat. This is easier with spirits because they typically keep to the same route and speed, whereas mages may make apparently random changes to their patrols to make things as difficult as possible for potential intruders.

- Spirits make inexpensive patrolling fairly easy for the corporations. Not only can they notice magical creatures approaching and notify their controller, but they can be instructed to take notice of and tell about approaching mundanes as well.
- Winterhawk

Sentry posts are usually spaced around the perimeter to observe and control ingress and egress. They are actually more common and more closely spaced in urban areas where the corporation has no legitimate way to control the flow of traffic in the streets outside their walls. There may also be observation posts located in corporate properties outside the secure facility to keep an eye on areas not easily monitored by the sentry posts. The metahuman element of a sentry or observation post makes it more difficult to know who is looking where when, increasing the chances an intruder will be detected. They use the same types of sensors and cameras as a remote facility, however, so the fundamental theories remain the same. Also, since the sentry posts are in fixed locations, they are easier to avoid altogether.

- When given the option of going past fixed ultrasound cameras or a sentry post, I'll take the sentry every time.
- Ma'Fan

Once you have gotten to the perimeter you will need to get through it and on into the facility. When going against the big boys this is the moment of commitment since once you pass the perimeter you are on their turf and under their jurisdiction because of extraterritoriality laws.

- It is important to note this is true of the AA corporations as well, not just the AAA.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Also remember that some corporations put their perimeter fences well inside their property line so that when you get to the fence, you are already fair game.
- DangerSensei

The perimeter can be anything from a figurative line in the sand to a plasticrete wall to a chain link fence. Once you reach it, you again have a choice between using stealth or deception to get through it. Most likely, since there's rarely a chance to make an unobserved transition, you'll use the same method to get in you did to approach. Hardened walls are more likely in urban areas where their security can't control traffic on the street and there's no room for a killing field. Thick walls provide additional stopping power in case of a vehicular attack. The disadvantage is limited visibility and a reliance on cameras to keep an eye on the outside world. Again, there will be obvious cameras that are easily avoided and camouflaged cameras that can mess you up. We once had a mission blow up in our faces because the facility had cameras hidden in the outer wall at about waist level. No big deal until our street sam stopped right in front of one as we prepared to go over the wall.

When using stealth you will have to go over the wall, use one of the entrances, or make a hole in the wall. If

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you're going over the wall you need to be thinking about what might be on top of the wall. More than one corporation strings monowire just above the edge that can slice anyone unprepared.

- If you cut yourself, you need to hit the spilled blood with a sterilize spell or C-Squared compound to keep the corp security from using it to track you.
- Butch

Another common wall-top defense used with or without monowire is a series of pressure plates. These plates might trigger an alarm, release a gas, or activate additional sensors to confirm the intruder isn't a wandering cat. The sensors and alarms are the most common, but if they're guarding something they really don't want found corporations don't hesitate to mount harsher, even lethal defenses.

- If there is wildlife around they may cause enough false alarms to cause complacency about an alarm in the guards.
- Ecotope

- If the pressure plates were set correctly the weight of the local wildlife won't be enough to set it off.
- DangerSensei

The second option is to create your own hole. Making a hole through a solid wall large enough to get people in and out without drawing attention to yourself is problematic. Sometimes an acid or deactivator can be used, but many of these have a strong odor so unless the location you are breaching is remote, the smell will give you away. This is a tactic of last resort. Making a hole in a chainlink fence is easier, since you can just take bolt cutters and cut your way through. However, many of the modern fences are made to sense if a hole is cut unless you bypass the sensors.

- You also have to be wary of the old-fashioned electric fence. Some of these have options that will send up an alert in the case of a grounding event.
- Mika

- A grounding event?
- Treadle

- She means someone getting electrocuted.
- Bull

- It will also sense if you use wires to ground the fence on either side of where you plan to cut through so you don't get electrocuted.
- Mika

The third option is going through an entrance that is already there. If the entrance is unmanned, there will at the very least be some form of locking mechanism. The most common type of lock is the maglock, but having a good set of picks and knowing how to use them is common sense since there are a lot of old-fashioned key locks out there.

- Bolt cutters work well too. Or C4.
- Kane

The maglock relies on some type of card reader, keypad, scanner, or RFID monitor. There are many available tools dedicated to defeating the maglock. If you need to take apart the case be sure to deactivate or circumvent any anti-tamper circuits so you don't sound an alarm. Also expect at least one camera to be covering the door and lock and take appropriate countermeasures.

- There are several good illusion spells that fool electronics and will hide your actions.
- Lyran

- Be sure to put things back the way they were unless you want to have to maintain the illusion until you are done with the run.
- Winterhawk

- Another option is to hack into the cameras and loop them so the guards don't see anything.
- Bull

Another way to bypass a remote lock is with the keycard or code of someone who is supposed to have access. This can be either stolen or tricked out of the person. If you have an inside contact he or she could even set you up with a legitimate access card. If you have a decker on your team, the Matrix can be used to trick the maglock into thinking it is getting the correct code.

At a manned entrance, the guards are expecting people to be coming and going, which allows for a direct approach. You will need a good fake identification, cover story, and understanding of who would or wouldn't be using the entrance. The more secure the facility, the more heavily restricted the entrance will be. The most secure sites don't allow anyone outside their company into the facility. Maintenance and handling of garbage and repairs are done by company personnel who often are already housed in the facility.

- Another thing to be aware of is that many personnel changes or company visits occur on a schedule. That means that when a manned entrance is there, it is more to turn away people who wander up than to let people in.
- DangerSensei

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A disadvantage to this approach is you will be logged in, have to keep to approved paths, and the front door will be expecting you to exit the same way. This is why it is difficult to switch from one infiltration method to another in the middle of the run. The other option is to sneak in just like an unmanned entrance. The approach will be a bit different since the guards won't just look away while you tinker with the maglock. However, you can use traffic to sneak past the guards.

- You can use a decoy, preferably one the guards will find attractive, to play lost and ask for directions or in some other way engage the security personnel in conversation or otherwise distract them while other members of the team sneak in.
- Mika

In addition to the people and electronics at a manned entrance, there may also be dedicated spirits watching the auras of everyone entering, looking specifically for active spells and foci. If your mage can mask his aura, he could try to match it to someone else going in and slip with them. Also, many manned entrances will have one or more of the guards with a glow wand to detect if anything magical is passing by. A glow wand's range is very limited, so slipping past is possible, but if you have to stop and talk with the guards they will know if you have any active magic on you.

After you have made it past the perimeter, you will have to make it to the building itself. Unless space is at a premium, like in a downtown area, the facility will have an open area between the perimeter and the buildings. This has several purposes. The first being that if there is a breach of the perimeter, the open area gives security time to lock down the building. It also provides another kill zone securely on the corporation's property, meaning they can use deadly force without fear of repercussions.

- In secure facilities there will almost definitely be deadly force used to take care of any intruders.
- Thorn

- Not always. If it is an ultra-secure, isolated, or off-the-books facility, they may well try to take any runners alive and interrogate them to find out who hired them and how they found out about the facility.
- DangerSensei

- And if that does happen you may well wish they had just killed you. Especially if you don't have anything to tell them and they think you're holding out.
- Sunshine

With large-area facilities, it is common for the corporations to use animals to patrol. These could be normal, cyber modified, or paranormal critters. Watch especially for the cyber ones, as they are smart, stealthy, and can have jaws that make steel traps look like rotted wood.

These critters and animals have several advantages for the corporation over metahuman patrols. They don't have to get paid, for one thing, and they have no surviving dependents they're contractually obligated to support. Not that megas care all that much about metahumans so low on the totem pole.

- Some of the eco extremists can get pretty worked up over the death of paracritters. Though the power they hold is somewhat less than what the megacorps wield.
- Ecotope

Paracritters usually possess senses that metahumans don't or have heightened ones that make them harder to sneak past. Not to mention armor, natural weapons, or powers especially useful for dealing with intruders. Though they don't have the intelligence of metahumans, meaning that with proper preparation they can be fooled or evaded. In the absence of patrols—or even if there are patrols—it's a safe bet that there are sensors covering the open areas. Cameras, pressure plates, trip wires, or infrared beams may be present, and they may be set up to release gas, trigger explosives, or unleash any other lethal countermeasure in addition to sounding an alarm. As a general rule, deadly automated defenses are more likely to be operational at night when any metahuman defenders might be less effective. Most electronics will be hardwired back to the facility to prevent interception or hijacking by wireless signal.

- I have seen setups with paracritters confined to an outer perimeter by an ultrasonic tone and an inner perimeter of electronic security. Any of the electronic sensors get tripped and the tone stops, letting the paracritters get to whoever set off the alarm.
- DangerSensei

- This only works if there wouldn't be any reason for anyone to be inside the area.
- Balladeer

- Not necessarily—the system could be set up to check for an RFID if it detects motion. No RFID and it sounds an alarm.
- Mika

- In that case all you need to do is spoof the RFID signal to make the sensor believe that you belong.
- Bull

You can also expect spirits set to observe these internal open areas in astral space. Since they are within corporate territory, they will most likely be tasked with stopping or harming intruders instead of simply watching and

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reporting. In order to affect you the spirit will have to materialize, but it will be a formidable opponent. Once you get rid of it the mage who summoned the spirit will know you are there. As always the best way to avoid problems is to remain unseen. With spirits, deception (meaning blending in with the metahuman crowd) is usually more effective than trying to sneak past them; as long as your aura looks normal, a spirit won't know you don't belong.

- Since spirits can't see technology, you can follow the path that people should take and use tech to mask your presence from guards and sensors while walking among them.
- Winterhawk

- Some spirits are told that if they see anyone who is barely on the astral plane (a condition caused by a lot of cyberware) then they need to notify the on-watch mage. They don't have to worry about figuring out what cyberware the individual has or what it does; they just have to notice the low aura and report it.
- Ethernaut

Again you will have little opportunity to change your tactics once you reach the building itself. And again deception is the more common choice—if looking like you belong has gotten you this far it should carry you through the front door. However, if you are using stealth there are advantages to entering through an upper floor, assuming you can do so without being caught. This route is more likely to bypass security which for the most part is geared toward a ground assault. You can try to find an unguarded window large enough to gain entry. Windows will almost certainly be maglocked and wired with alarms, but defenses may be less robust since common mindset would be these are unlikely breach points.

- Sometimes you can send one member of the team in through a window to open a door from the inside.
- Mika

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- Don't always assume the locks and alarms in the upper windows of a secure facility aren't as sophisticated as those on the ground floor. There's a big difference between "less likely" and "guaranteed."
- DangerSensei

If you are going with deception and walking in the main entrance, be prepared to go through a MAD scanner and to answer any questions the guards may have about your reasons for being there while they run your SIN through their database. In addition to their glow wands, it's possible they will have a mage or someone with a detect lie spell close by to keep you honest. If you get through this gauntlet, the guard will give you an RFID badge to wear during your visit before allowing you into the building.

- It'll be a badge if you're lucky. I was breaking into a facility once and they injected the RFID into my left shoulder. Cutting it out in the bathroom so I could sneak into the secured area was a pain and the blood in the sink raised a couple of questions from concerned wage slaves.
- Mika

- Why didn't you just knock out the signal with a tag eraser?
- /dev/grrl

- I tried to, but it was hardened to prevent that.
- Mika

When going into a facility undercover, it will most likely be impossible to carry your normal gear. If you have the time and resources, buying disguised items is a good way to get your stuff in without arousing suspicions.

- There are some really good-quality disguised items on the market these days.
- Thorn

- Even if an item is disguised, it has to make sense for your cover to have it. A guy carrying a lipstick container will raise some eyebrows. Unless you've worked that into your cover.
- Fianchetto

- Too many items, no matter how appropriate each one might be, could draw just as much attention if you aren't careful. While many things are useful to have, you need to exercise restraint so you don't draw attention to yourself. Be Spartan.
- Thorn

- It is also important to have the items that you are expected to have. These don't have to hide weapons or gear, but if you are posing as a mechanic and don't have a tool box, this could make people look at you twice, which you don't want.
- Mika

Once your team's in the building, your decker should be able to splice into one of the cameras to access the facility's security node and control any alarms, open and close doors, deactivate keycards, and see what the cameras and other monitors show security personnel. However, in a secure facility these nodes will be guarded by bleeding-edge IC and probably a security spider. So you only try this if your decker is fully up to it, because failure could mean a swift and unhappy end to your mission.

Whether or not your decker has control of security systems you have to look and act normal for the benefit of coworkers, security personnel, and any other witnesses while you find who you're looking for, grab her, and get out. If your target is in a more secure area within the facility, looking natural while getting to her will present problems.

- Little things can spoil the charade. You have to act just like your cover ID would. For example, if the quickest way to reach your target is up a flight of stairs but you're playing a lazy midlevel wage slave, you'll need to find an elevator (the next point notwithstanding).
- Haze

If at all possible use stairs instead of elevators. Building security can lock the elevator between floors and pump it full of gas or drop grenades in, and there isn't much you can do about it. For this reason many of the most secure projects are accessible only by elevator, and they require biometric scans and special RFID cards to use. A good decker can get around this if they have enough time, but if time is tight you need to find someone with access and either duplicate their prints or make them operate the elevator for you. Be aware that most palm readers or other biometric scanners have temperature sensors, so the old trick of cutting someone's hand off and using it to get past them no longer works.

- A severed hand will keep the right temperature for about five minutes, so if you are close to your goal (and ruthless enough) this should give you enough time to get in and out before it is a problem.
- Butch

Though less of a death trap than elevators, stairs are not a good place to get caught by a security team (honestly, going floor to floor is what keeps me up at nights during the planning stages of a job). There is little to no cover if things go badly and a firefight breaks out.

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- This works for both sides. The security team will be just as exposed as you are. The side that's aggressive and takes advantage of this has the upper hand.
- Thorn

- Don't be foolhardy, though. Often the security detail responding will have riot or ballistic shields for use in such situations. So they'll have more cover than you.
- DangerSensei

Another potential problem with stairs is many facilities routinely lock all doors to the stairs to prevent someone using them to get where they shouldn't. The locks can be remotely released in the event of a fire or other emergency to facilitate evacuating the building. That may mean bypassing security codes to overcome a lock might not be enough, opening the door may trigger the fire alarms. There will also be sensors in the stairwells and at the doors to prevent employees malingering or meeting surreptitiously.

If your target is in a high-security area, there will almost certainly be armed guards manning a final checkpoint. These guards won't listen to any story about being lost or making an inspection visit—they'll know you couldn't have gotten to them without either special clearance or bypassing security. At this point brute force is your best option. Hit them before they can sound the alarm. If they manage to set off the alarm despite your best efforts, it will complicate mission but this close to your objective it's not as damaging as it would have been earlier on.

- Another problem is being that once you are this close to your goal, the corporation will have a good idea what it is you are going after. Armed with this knowledge, they can take steps to either head you off or move your target.
- Mika

After you have gotten into the secure location you need enough time to achieve your mission and be on your way before security arrives. If you've managed to get this far without tipping any alarms, getting out should be comparatively easy.

- If your decker bypassed security on the way in she should still have access or have installed a backdoor to blind security as you are leaving.
- Netcat

- You should also plan for your escape route to be completely different from the way you came in.
- Beaker

If you somehow manage to trip your first alarm on the way out, security will almost certainly assume you are breaking in and respond accordingly—meaning they will probably pull resources out of positions blocking your exit in order to solidify their defense against your entry.

- Don't rely on this. A common first step, especially when highly secure areas are involved, is to lock down the facility and stop anyone trying to leave. The response teams will scramble to stop further intrusion and then move out to intercept you once they figure out you are on your way out. If you're not careful you could end up trapped between the response team and the entrance guards.
- DangerSensei

This is another point where creativity and flexibility are important. Look for unconventional means to bypass security on your way out. The classic example seen on all the trids is hang gliding off the facility's roof.

- And for this very reason the corporations have resources tasked to look out for that. Any time your plan starts resembling the latest trideo or action series, it's time to rework the plan.
- 2XL

- I'll never forget seeing an air spirit tear apart the glider a runner was using to infiltrate a Wuxing facility. It shredded the nylon like flames hitting flash paper, and the runner went from calm, level flight to limbs franticly flailing the air as she fell.
- Red Anya

- Another cliché that will end in death (unless you are very careful) is using the sewers or utility tunnels to escape. Corps enjoy putting nasty critters down there. And I know of at least one that uses dummy sewer access hatches that drop you into a sealed trap. If you think you've found a secret, unguarded entry or exit point, check again. Then another time, to be sure.
- 2XL

- There are spells for making your own tunnels, which can work very well with the right planning. I found this especially true when escaping a high-security room that had been built underground to prevent intrusion.
- Winterhawk

- I had the same sort of success getting a target out of an underground facility by blasting my way into the sewer.
- Beaker

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One last note: No matter what methods you use to get in or get out, how you act is the most important factor in the success of your mission. Security personnel are taught to look for any indications of nervousness or discomfort. By masking your emotions and controlling reactions, you can keep attention from focusing on you. If they pull you aside, act like it doesn't matter and play along—it could just be a routine random check. Even making a joke about it can help as long as it isn't in bad taste or doesn't raise suspicions in any way.

- Pro tip: "Oh no, you noticed the bomb in my pants" is not the sort of joke that will endear you to security.
- Cayman

Treating the guards like they are people can go a long way to help put them at ease if you will be going in and out of the facility on different occasions for a longer-term mission. This can help you build a relationship with them, and they may become comfortable with your presence and thus more lax in their scrutiny. This will of course help you smuggle in items that might otherwise be caught, but it can also work to your advantage during your escape. Security personnel who know you as a friendly regular will look right past you searching for the intruder. They may even wave you through their cordon and encourage you to get to safety.

So you've got the basics of extraction. At its core an extraction is just a matter getting in, collecting your target, and getting out. Simple, right?

- And getting rich is just a matter of obtaining nuyen and holding onto it. It's the details that trip you up.
- Winterhawk

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EXTRACTOR'S TOOLKIT

All things considered, this had been a good, productive day for the leasing manager, Fred Grover. He had interviewed and processed eight prospective renters for the Thornwood Apartments in Westside Manhattan, and five of them looked like they would be very good prospects for the waiting list. Two apartments had opened up today, and he was able to notify those at the top of the waiting list that they would be able to move in. Both families would be new residents in Manhattan, which made calling and letting the new tenants know about the open apartments that much more exciting. He had a good lunch at Marcelo's, and this evening he would be having a romantic anniversary dinner with his wife at his home in Queens. With only an hour left of his workday, Fred figured very little could ruin the remainder of his day.

He was very wrong.

At 1604 hours, two men walked into the leasing office. Grover quickly sized them up. One was a lean elf with sandy brown hair, and the other was a burly troll. Both were wearing cheap suits and trenchcoats; they did not carry themselves well enough to be potential renters. Grover started to get nervous about what they wanted.

"Are you the leasing manager?" asked the elf.

"I am."

"My name is Detective Jordan Burke, and this is my partner, Detective Gary Williams with NYPD Incorporated. We are executing a search warrant on the apartment for Matthew Collins, who resides in apartment 530. We need you to let us into the apartment." Both presented official-looking AROs with NYPD authentication codes. Grover's agent signaled that, as far as it's simple electronic mind could determine, they seemed legit.

"Umm ... I need to see the search warrant first and make sure things are in order. We have certain procedures in place to protect the privacy and the rights of our tenants."

"Of course." The elf immediately sent the timid human lease manager a file, which Grover copied over to the lease office's grid.

Grover looked over the file as carefully as he had with the two men's identifications. Everything seemed legitimate on the warrant. Name of the tenant was right, address was correct, even what they were after was spelled out clearly. "You guys think Collins is involving in the trafficking of BTLs? Seriously? I've known him for two years. He doesn't strike me like a fellow that would be involved in such unpleasant affairs."

"The best criminals around know how to cover up their true activities so that no one suspects them. Just be glad it's not a betameth lab. So I take it the warrant satisfies your requirements?"

"Hold on, hold on, I've got a series of checks to make here. If I don't do my due diligence here, it could mean my job." Grover opened the leasing records for Collins and reviewed the file. "Okay, I'm not seeing that he has any kind of diplomatic immunity on file that would invalidate this warrant. And this apartment is being leased by him and not Shiawase. So extraterritorial rights don't apply. As far as I can tell, this is a valid warrant." He sighed, with perhaps a touch of theatricality. "Such a shame to learn these details about Collins. I'm so glad I wasn't the one to have rented his apartment to him. Anyway, I will open up the apartment for you."

"No need," Burke replied. "Just provide us the maglock key and we'll let ourselves in."

"You do realize Mr. Collins is not at home at the moment and won't be for at least half an hour?"

"We know. It's best if we search the apartment before he gets there. This way he doesn't have a chance to conceal or destroy evidence. And having you there with us will only slow us down and possibly compromise our investigation. You'll just be in the way."

"All right," Grover said reluctantly, handing over the keycard. "But if anything disappears from the apartment that's not related to your case, Collins will file a complaint. We'll have no choice but to sue NYPD for damages."

"Don't worry. We're professionals."

Handing over the key, Grover watched the two officers head into up the elevator. Grover could not help but worry, as he made two copies of the warrant—one for the office, one for the individual in apartment 530.

Fred Grover anxiously watched the clock on his commlink. He had hoped that he could go home before Collins arrived back at his apartment. He did not want to be around for such unpleasantness. But at 1652 hours, Matthew Collins walked through the front doors, head-

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ing straight for the elevators. Grover felt sorry for the man who was about to get ambushed by NYPD, but he didn't want to get involved. He didn't want to get accused of obstructing justice. He just wanted to go home to his family in Queens and be done with this day. Grover watched from his office as Collins calmly boarded the elevator, looking weary after what appeared to be a full day of work. The middle-aged man rode it up to the fifth floor. Grover didn't really want to watch, but eventually opened an AR screen with security camera footage from the hallway leading to Collins' apartment. He knew as a civic-minded person, he should record as much of the encounter as possible, in case it was eventually needed as evidence. He turned the sensitivity on the camera's microphone up to its maximum setting to get as much of the audio of the encounter as possible. A few moments later, Grover watched Collins disappear into his apartment.

"Who the fuck are you guys?" demanded the now-disembodied voice.

"NYPD, Inc. We're here to execute a search warrant."

"The hell you are."

Suddenly two muffled shots rang out.

"Oh crap." Grover shot up from his chair and raced to the elevator. By the time he reached the fifth floor, a small crowd had gathered outside the apartment. Both Burke and Williams were outside the apartment, busy working to disperse the crowd, telling everyone there was no need to call for emergency services, as NYPD, Inc. were already on site.

"What happened? I didn't think there would be any violence," Grover shouted, as he stormed passed the onlookers. Looking into the apartment for himself, he saw Collins lying on the ground near the doorway, unconscious and in handcuffs. The apartment looked like it had been thoroughly searched.

"When he entered the premise, we announced who we were, but Mr. Collins pulled out a pistol. We responded with non-lethal force. Mr. Collins is sedated but fine. Furthermore, he did not get a shot off, so there was no damage done to your property," stated Detective Burke.

"All right. I suppose I should call DocWagon then. His file says he has a contract with them."

"No."

"Excuse me?"

"We need to transport him in a few minutes. It is crucial for our case to get him back to the station and start interrogating him before word spreads of his capture and his accomplices can flee our jurisdiction. We will provide him medical care back at the station. You don't need to be worried about that."

"This is damn irregular. And aren't you going to be writing up a report about all this? Or collecting security camera footage? You're just going to run off with him?"

"Listen. We found what we were looking for inside Collins' apartment," Burke replied. He held up three clear evidence bags, one containing four commlinks, a second containing nearly a dozen optical chips and the third containing what likely was Collins' pistol. "The commlinks and the optical chips make this an open-and-shut case for us. We have the suspect's weapon. And Detective Williams' cybereyes recorded the entire assault. We may have to come back for follow-up interviews and get that footage, but right now, we must think about building the case against his co-conspirators. Now, there's something we need you to do."

"What's that?"

"We would like to take Mr. Collins through the emergency exit of this building. We're already having our car brought around for us. If you could disable the fire alarm on that door, we can be out of your hair and allow you to return to regular work."

"Why do you want to use the emergency exit?"

"Do you really want us to be carrying a handcuffed suspect out through the front doors, in view of many more of your residents and possibly to everyone else who lives around here? Do you really want Thornwood Apartments to get that kind of reputation? Going through the alleyway would be far more discreet."

Grover grumbled, but agreed. "I see your point. Thanks for that." The troll, Detective Williams, gathered up the unconscious resident and threw him over his shoulder. Both detectives headed to the stairwell leading down to the emergency exit. Grover tapped a button on his AR displays, disarming the alarm. "It's down. It'll be off for a minute to allow you to get him to your car."

"Thank you for your cooperation." The two quickly disappeared into the stairwell.

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Grover closed the apartment door and changed the code. He could not get over the fact that these two cops were egregiously violating Mr. Collins' civil rights. And the way they were acting, they seemed to have been carrying out a very haphazard investigation.

After thinking it over for a few more moments, Grover decided to pursue the detectives. He opened the door and called to the detectives, who had already reached the bottom landing and were on their way to the emergency exit. "Detectives! I still think you did a half-assed job here, and I don't like the fact that you wouldn't let me call DocWagon. I want the name and commcode of your supervisor so I can file a complaint."

"Of course. Here it is," replied Burke pleasantly. He immediately sent the contact information to Grover's commlink. "Our captain is Barney Miller of the twelfth precinct. He'll tell you exactly what we've already told you." The stairwell door closed shut behind the detectives. They were gone.

Grover immediately called the commcode, getting a queasy feeling in his stomach. In all the years he has had interactions with cops as a leasing manager, he has never seen one so willing to give up the name and contact information of their supervisor. And the fact that the elf was doing all the talking? Something was indeed wrong. Grover's fears were suddenly validated when a recording came on to answer.

"We're sorry. The commcode you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please check the number and try your call again."

GETTING THEM OUT

POSTED BY: STICKS

As many of you know, I am a bounty hunter. For some very personal reasons, I usually only go after bug spirits. I pick up a bounty, find the target, and exterminate it. This way, I don't have to worry about taking my targets alive or moving them; all I have to worry about is proof of death (or in a spirit's case, disruption). However, sometimes out of necessity (and the need for nuyen) I occasionally take on certain targets of opportunity, usually targets near my current location that have high payouts. Unfortunately, some of those side jobs have to be taken alive. What follows are tools that have proven most useful to me when I take on such jobs. Whether you're looking to pull off just one job to extract an unwilling target safely and conveniently or are looking to specialize in extractions, these are tools you may wish to consider. They may allow for your job(s) to go a lot smoother with fewer complications. And really, who doesn't want a run that isn't easier and allows all your chummers to return home to either their families or to the hard-earned nuyen they wish to enjoy? Have a look, and if something strikes your fancy, I'm sure your fixer will know of a way to acquire it for you.

THE HOUDINI MACHINE

Don't look for a corporate-designed version of this device on the market. There isn't one, since there isn't much market demand for something this specialized. This device only has one purpose: to make people disappear. The Houdini machine was first cobbled together by some nameless runners a few years ago and currently can be found on the black market with only a little digging.

The machine is made up of two auto-injectors. They are not implanted. Rather, these versions have been specially modified to act as intravenous drip machines that can be strapped onto each arm of the subject. Each one has the extra dose modification, giving the machine six doses of any substance of your choosing. One of the auto-injectors is typically loaded with drugs to sedate and keep the unwilling subject of an extraction unconscious. This way you don't have to worry about a target that will continually resist you and undermine you at every turn.

The other auto-injector is typically equipped with saline solution and special liquid nutrients to keep the subject hydrated and healthy over a lengthy period of time, keeping them in a condition desirable for Mr. Johnson. This part of the Houdini machine is invaluable, especially if you can't drop the target off right away of if you have to lay low for any given amount of time with the subject. This device can keep the subject unconscious for days if necessary, without the need to refill the auto-injectors.

There are two versions of this Houdini machine. The cheaper (and much cruder) version has the two auto-injectors subscribed to a commlink and a biomonitor. The commlink has special programming installed on it, and coupled with the biomonitor, can inject the drugs or nutrients when the biomonitor prompts it to do so. This lessens the need for constant (and tedious) monitoring by shadowrunners who are carrying out the extraction. With this version, a majority of metahumans will remain unconscious for up to two days before the auto-injectors need refilling. The second version is tied into a medkit computer. The advantage of this version is that a medkit computer is much more efficient with managing and dispensing drugs, as well as selecting the right dosages and nutrient levels for the subject. Using the Houdini machine version with the medkit computer, you can keep a subject unconscious for up to three days before having to refill the auto-injectors, as opposed to the two days with the other machine.

Unfortunately, there is one downside to using the Houdini machine. The saline and the drugs can be

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pumped directly into the veins of the subject (which can be handled by simple first-aid techniques), but the liquid nutrients cannot. They have to be pumped into the stomach of the subject. So if you are using liquid nutrients, you or your team need either to run a line through the subject's nose using a nasogastric (NG) tube, or you will have to create a temporary shunt between the auto-injector and the stomach (which the auto-injector is capable of handling). Either way, first-aid knowledge alone isn't going to cut it. You'll need someone with at least some formal medical training to fully implement this function. Most of the runners I know get by just keeping the target hydrated, so that's always an option if you don't have an actual medic in your group to set up the auto-injectors for administering liquid nutrients.

- Why should I even bother with this when I have a mage in my party who can do the exact same thing with her magic? Seems like a waste of money to me.
- Treadle

- I knew someone was going to ask me that. Why dedicate your magician to sustaining spells just to keep your prisoner/target unconscious, or why dedicate them to keeping them nourished, when you can let this machine do the work for them? You may need their focus elsewhere, especially if something goes wrong and you need to go into combat. Plus, this machine doesn't get tired like magicians do. Your mage will eventually have to fall asleep. Even if they are able to use sustaining focuses to transfer the spells onto them to keep the person out or nourished, you still have the problem of having active foci and active spells that could draw unwanted astral attention. I'm not saying going the magical route couldn't be done. All I'm saying is this way is potentially simpler. Plus, this is a viable option for teams that don't have magicians. Not all runner teams have magic as an option. Contrary to popular belief, magic is still pretty rare, even in the shadows.
- Sticks

- Also, no auras to worry about with this thing.
- Mika

- Even though I've heard good things about the Houdini machine, I also know trolls and dwarfs can be problematic for the version using only the commlink and the biomonitor. Trolls, because of their body mass, have a chance of regaining consciousness even if they are being perpetually drugged. Those rigs tend not to calculate the proper dosage for their body mass. The same goes for the dwarfs and their resilient physiologies. If you are extracting a troll or a dwarf and are using the cheaper model, you may need to set it up to double up on the sedatives, which will cut in half the amount of time you can use the machine to keep them under before a refill is needed. Or simply eliminate the possibility of them waking up early by using the one with the medkit computer. A medkit computer is better at compensating for a troll's or a dwarf's physiology. Just keep this in mind so you don't find yourself in a situation where your target is trying to kill you in your sleep or ends up trying to rabbit on you because you used the wrong machine.
- Butch

VEHICLES, GEAR, AND DRONES

In regards to the bounties I collect on bug spirits, I often have very little need to be subtle. I can go in with flamethrowers or guns blazing, kicking in doors and setting things on fire until they die. That's what's nice about bug spirits setting up their nests or hives in out-of-the-way places. But there are many occasions where circumstances call for runners to operate with a lot more grace and subtlety than what I usually do for successful extractions, especially in urban settings or in high-security areas. So what happens if a runner team needs to extract someone from a pricey and secure apartment high rise with lots of security? In a way that won't also bring down the full force of Knight Errant upon their heads when things go sideways?

One potential way to do it is for a runner team to spoof a call going out from the high rise to DocWagon. They could then pose as a DocWagon team and can pretend to be responding to that emergency call. With appropriate-looking gear, such as uniforms, medkits and a gurney, a team can convince the front desk personnel they are indeed DocWagon medics. When the front desk confirms a call had gone out to DocWagon, the front desk will likely admit the team into the building with no further objections to treat "the patient." Once inside, the team would have almost unfettered access to the rest of building and can simply walk up to the right apartment where they can find a way to surprise and render their target unconscious without disturbing the neighbors. The team could then wheel the now-unconscious target out on their gurney through the front doors as if he was a regular DocWagon patient requiring medical attention. As an added precaution, an extraction team might wish to slap on a counterfeit DocWagon wristband. This trick could easily work or be modified if the team needs to dress up as Knight Errant/Lone Star cops, corp security, UCAS federal agents, or any other agency that is expected and has the authority to remove people from various properties, willingly or not. Going into a place under the color of authority can make for an easy extraction.

One of the biggest troubles runners have is with the uniforms they are required to wear for their disguise and cover story. The details about the uniforms should be

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exactly right to avoid tipping people off. There are fixers out there that specialize in acquiring uniforms for such jobs (usually fenced to them by runners following successful runs when they picked this stuff up) and selling them to runners. Your fixer may be one of them, or if not, he likely knows someone else who deals in these disguises. Get to know one of these fixers because they can do a lot for you. A truly talented disguise fixer will know precisely what gear you will need to sell the disguise (everything from the actual medical bags and kits that DocWagon medics use and carry around with them to the proper, authorized body armor and restraints used by Lone Star officers). They will know which uniforms wear chevrons and how many years of service each chevron depicts. They will understand the rank system that many medical and law enforcement professionals use, and can tell you how many chevrons your uniform needs if you are trying to pull off the look of a Knight Errant Lieutenant (at least three chevrons, BTW). They will be able to tell you how decorations are meant to be worn, and more importantly, in which order. For those that don't know, Knight Errant officers wear their decorations over their badges when they are in their uniforms, but not when they are in their full body armor.

These fixers can also provide authentic badges for you to wear on these uniforms. Many law enforcement agencies and corporations still rely on metal badges as a time-honored tradition, though properly encrypted AROs are more common. Either element—the badge or the ID ARO—cannot be simply duplicated by a fashion spell. Most people won't bother copying the badge number. They have been conditioned by the megacorporations over the years to blindly accept authority in all forms. So even if the badge was taken off a cop that had been killed in the line of duty, it should be sufficient to give you the time to get the job done (provided you don't pass an observant cop in the hallway leading to your destination who happens to recognize the number).

Knowing the dress codes for each organization is another essential, which any good fixer who specializes in these disguises will know. Knight Errant, for example, has started a new policy of requiring its beat cops to have cyberware with the synthetic coverings installed. So, if you're pretending to be a Knight Errant cop and you have chrome showing, that could be a big tipoff that you aren't who you say you are. Lone Star requires its cops to cover up all tattoos and body modifications. This is the information the right fixer can give you.

- If you go into a situation dressed as cop, chances are you'll need to pretend to be at the location executing a warrant, either a search or an arrest warrant. And when you say that, the people you're trying to convince will ask to see those documents. These documents can be pretty complicated with lots of legalese, and it's best if you rely on the services of a high-quality forger to give you an error-free document to make your cover story work. Quality forgers can run as much as five hundred nuyen per document and up, depending on the complexity of the document and any security features that have to be duplicated. But that is money well spent if it helps you to get into places successfully. So don't forget to have these documents with you, lest you end up with egg on your face for overlooking such an important detail.
- DangerSensei

- Doing that may not always work. Some targets have diplomatic immunity, so law-enforcement corps such as Knight Errant, Lone Star, and government agencies cannot enforce a warrant on the target. And if they happen to reside in a place that has extraterritorial protection, saying you're going to snag a target with a warrant from outside that particular corporation will obviously be challenged. Always do your research first on the target if you attempt this sort of extraction. And be sure to make sure such an extraction is even possible.
- Thorn

If you have your disguises taken care of, the next thing you'll need is a vehicle. Vehicles, like ambulances, not only help sell a cover story—they also provide convenient transportation for your unwilling target. Stealing an emergency or official vehicle, especially if it is a patrol cruiser or an ambulance, is not the best way to go. As soon as it is reported stolen, Knight Errant or Lone Star are immediately put on the lookout for it. And unfortunately, patrol cruisers and ambulances are designed to stick out from the crowd (not to mention the fact that you have to worry about deactivating all the anti-theft and tracking devices that are equipped on such vehicles so that you aren't found within a few minutes of the theft). A decker worth their street rep may be able to "borrow" an ambulance or emergency vehicle for a short period of time, but sometimes a job doesn't give you the luxury of time to be able to hack records to acquire an authentic ambulance or police cruiser. Sometimes you need to react immediately to the job at hand. And even if they have the time, most extraction teams don't want to go this route because it adds more complications. This is why many dedicated extraction teams acquire legal, civilian vehicles that can be converted to look exactly like an ambulance or police cruiser (or other official-looking vehicle). They then acquire the services of a quality rigger who can make needed modifications to the vehicle. In creating the counterfeit vehicle, some riggers will make all the physical customizations and then add chameleon coating to create the perfect paint job for the vehicle. This expensive coating is either programmed to respond to the environment and project coloration that helps conceal the vehicle, or it can be programmed to display vibrant patterns of the users' choosing (which is very popular with car enthusiasts), in-

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cluding the paint jobs for any number of police cruisers or ambulances.

Other, more old-school riggers scoff at the notion of using chameleon coating and insist on going for the traditional paint job. Not only are some of these riggers afraid that a complicated system like chameleon coating could fail during a critical part of the run, but they feel that it does a half-assed job. Many old-fashioned riggers feel that painting a vehicle is a crucial part of their job (and some feel that it is a form of art on their part) and not something to be left up to spellslingers or computer programs. Plus, they argue that chameleon coating is much more traceable than normal automobile paint. I have never seen chameleon coating fail during a run, but I tend to agree with the old-school riggers that chameleon coating is much more traceable than normal automobile paint, and you could be courting disaster if you're not careful about how you procure it. Law-enforcement agencies know just how useful chameleon coating can be for the runner community, which is why they keep close tabs on any buyers and sellers they can find.

No matter how you decide to modify your vehicle, you'll need extensive and lengthy modifications to the chassis, including false panels and welding, emergency light bars, new headlights and bumpers, and so on, to create an exact duplicate of an emergency vehicle. This takes time and needs to be factored into any plans for an extraction job. The upside of creating a counterfeit vehicle in this way is that if the run is successful, a runner team can simply store this vehicle in a garage or other inconspicuous location so it can be reused in the future. I know extraction teams that have garages filled with counterfeit emergency vehicles, including government-issued black SUVs, DocWagon and CrashCart ambulances, Knight Errant and Lone Star patrol cruisers, KE and LS aerial drones, and an array of various corp security vehicles. Some of the more brazen and experienced extraction teams doctor up counterfeit patrol and coast guard boats, and even full-on helicopters. Of course, those teams are the ones that have been established for years and have perfected their trade. And they are the ones that demand top nuyen for their services.

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Before going to your rigger to have a counterfeit emergency vehicle created, you have to be able to bring him the right model of vehicle to work with. Not all emergency vehicles use a similar chassis. For example, Lone Star generally likes to use the Chrysler-Nissan Patrol-1 cruiser for their beat cops. Knight Errant likes the Honda 3100, a vehicle produced by their own subsidiary. Now, I suppose you can bring to a rigger a vehicle that looks like a Nissan-Patrol-1 and ask them to make it look like KE's Honda 3100, but chances are they'll just laugh at you. Modifying a dissimilar vehicle like that will make it way too easy for bystander to tell that it's not an official police cruiser. The closer the match you have to the Nissan-Patrol-1 or the Honda 3100, the better counterfeit vehicle you'll have. For Lone Star patrol cars, the Chrysler-Nissan Journey is a very close match to the law-enforcement vehicle. With the right paint job and with the right modifications, it will easily pass inspection. For the Honda 3100, the Honda Artemis is the recommended vehicle when creating a duplicate of the KE patrol car.

The two most prominent providers, DocWagon and CrashCart, also use dissimilar chassis for their ambulances. If your team is looking to emulate the DocWagon SRT, the best choice is the GMC Endurance van, while CrashCart utilizes the MuBoNA Rettungswagen. To properly build a CrashCart ambulance, many extraction runners recommend you should use the Saeder-Krupp LT-21 delivery van. Unfortunately, even though the LT-21 is perhaps the closest model to the Rettungswagen, the LT-21 still has many dissimilarities that requires a fairly lengthy amount of modifications to make the disguise work, so you could be waiting up to a couple of days for your rigger to make all the necessary changes.

Some runners prefer going in looking like government officials, such as the UCAS FBI or members of the CAS DDI (Department of Domestic Investigation). Government officials still believe in sticking to the traditional mode of transportation for their agents; black SUVs modified with emergency light bars and dash bars. These vehicles don't require too many cosmetic modifications to make them look official. The UCAS has a contract with Ares to be supplied with GMC Sidewinders for their government agents. These workhorses are readily available on the market and are easy for riggers to modify. CAS government officials tend to use Esprit Industries Watcher SUVs. These vehicles also are readily available on the market and can be easily modified in a couple hours' time.

Of course, there are other vehicles that are good aids for extraction jobs. If you need to fake someone's death, you can have your rigger adapt your van to mimic a coroner's van. Give your target a dose of slab, put him or her in a body bag (with hidden oxygen tanks, natch), strap them to a gurney, and walk them out as if they were a corpse. A moving truck can be an excellent choice if you are extracting an entire family. I know one extraction team tagged their target's house with RFID tags and AROs that showed them to be selling their house (without the targets' knowledge of course). They left it tagged like that for a week (only turning it off when the family either returned home or left for the day, when they might inadvertently discover the tags) so that the neighbors would think they were moving somewhere else. Then on the day the runners were going to make their move (no pun intended), they turned all the tags to read as "sold," and had arranged for their "moving truck" to arrive at the house. The extraction team quietly took down the entire family and packaged them inside a few moving boxes. Since the neighbors all saw the tags suggesting the property was up for sell and now it was showing as having been "sold," they didn't think of anything being amiss when the runners moved all the furniture (and the family) out (including the vehicles). After the run, the runners were ballsy enough to even sell all the nice furniture and the vehicles from the house, making for a very nice side profit in the process.

Delivery trucks can also be used to gain access to locations and people, although drones are making delivery trucks a rare sight these days. Even armored limousines used in affluent neighborhoods could be used to help extract a target. With the right access codes showing the armored limousine has extraterritorial rights, not even Knight Errant or Lone Star could touch the limousine. If a security checkpoint has been set up looking for the target but you're in a vehicle identified as belonging to Mitsuhama, chances are you can literally drive right by it without being inspected. Most security personnel would not even think twice about stopping it due to the sacrosanct rules involving extraterritorial rights being drilled into the rent-a-cops' heads (and all the headaches that would follow if they should dare to violate those sacred rules and end up being in the wrong). Dump trucks can also help runners. Properly modified, dump trucks can hold entire families (if necessary), and most security personnel would rather allow a garbage truck to pass unhindered instead of going through the trouble of inspecting it and getting their uniforms dirty (unless they have clear cause to suspect a dump truck was used in the extraction job). Garbage trucks come in one of two chassis designs; one that is wide and designed for large streets, and another that's narrow and sleeker, giving the truck a lot more agility and capability to maneuver in tight corners. A commonly used dump truck is the Dodge Ram Industrial.

- One thing that Sticks doesn't mention is that most riggers do not have emergency light bars or sirens lying around in their garages. Possessing them is a felony in most jurisdictions that carries a jail sentence of up to two to four years. Most riggers require their clients to provide that gear if they want their vehicles modified with them. Riggers that keep emergency light bars and sirens in stock keep them safely away from their main garage in case they are ever raided by the cops. So if you buy them from

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the rigger, expect a slight delay as they have to retrieve them from wherever they have them stashed.

- Rigger X

- I cannot stress this enough: if you do go in dressed as medics, DO NOT ALLOW THE DUMB STREET SAMMIES TO DO THE TALKING. If they absolutely have to be there, they should only be there for the heavy lifting. I remember this one horror story very well, when a neighbor asked the dumb sammie who was dressed up as a medic what was wrong with the patient. The sammie answered thusly: "Well, the patient has a fever of almost 108 degrees [first mistake, use the Celsius scale not the Fahrenheit scale! Also if you have a patient with a fever of 42 degrees Celsius, you need to be rushing the patient to the hospital before their brain cooks from inside of their body! You don't have the time to be chit-chatting with bystanders!] and his right side hurts. We believe he is having problems with his appendix [he actually got that one right, surprisingly enough]. We are taking him to the hospital, he'll probably be in surgery in a day or two." No, no, no! With a temperature that high, the appendix would be close to exploding, so you'd want to operate in an hour or two, not a day. There are enough smart people out there to notice errors like that, so the people speaking better be the ones who really know their stuff.
- Butch

I have already mentioned a few vehicle accessories that are needed to effectively pull off a vehicle disguise. There are a couple of other, smaller details a runner team needs to pay attention to. You'll need a valid license plate and an access ID to let sprawl-wide sensors and even GridGuide know that your car is properly registered and acknowledged as an active emergency vehicle (or has extraterritorial rights). A morphing license plate programmed with valid police or ambulance license plate numbers can do the trick. As far as the access codes go, riggers are able to provide (for a price, of course) spoof chips that provide these sensors a proper access ID. Trust me, this is one step you do not want to overlook. You might end up regretting it later if a missing or wrong access ID blows your cover and leads you to having a drawn-out firefight with the law as you try to get your target back to Mr. Johnson in one piece.

Another vehicle modification that you might wish to look into if you and your chummers plan on specializing in extractions is having a rigger install a smuggling compartment in your vehicle (one specifically designed to transport metahumans, not cargo). Sometimes, transporting a target in a police vehicle or ambulance will not work due to jurisdictional issues (a sole Lone Star cruiser in a KE jurisdiction will stand out like a sore thumb and garner unwanted attention), and sometimes you cannot afford to be flashing your target's face all over town by driving them in a passenger car. There are too many opportunities where facial recognition programs might pick up your target's face. Plus, sometimes you have to cross borders to make a drop off for Mr. Johnson. Trying to cross an international border with someone who is sedated to the point of unconsciousness will raise a lot of red flags, the type of drek that even your face may not be able to talk your way out of. I suppose you can try to bribe your way across the border, but that starts cutting into your profits, especially if you're dealing with multiple borders like Denver.

Typically, smuggling compartments are used to get around those obstacles. But smugglers generally use compartments that are too small to hold most metahuman-sized cargo. And even if they are large enough, they're usually don't address the unique needs of metahuman cargo. A rigger needs to install a smuggling compartment designed to hold metahumans for hours if necessary (without the need to regularly open the compartment). Obviously, these compartments come in two sizes; one that holds metahumans roughly the size of humans (dwarfs, elfs, and orks) and one that is big enough to conceal a troll. Most sedans have tire wells for spare tires that can easily be converted to hold an average-sized metahuman. They can easily be concealed using a false bottom in the trunk. For holding trolls, all riggers will tell you that you will need at a bare minimum a large van to create a smuggling compartment large enough to hold the unwieldy body of a troll. Usually this smuggling compartment is placed underneath the floorboard, where, in typical models, bench seats would normally fold underneath the floorboard to maximize the van's cargo capacity. Instead of placing the bench seat there, you place a troll.

Now, as you can imagine, creating a smuggling compartment for living cargo is not the same as if you were creating a smuggling compartment for transporting street drugs or BTLs. First of all, the compartment needs to be padded in such a way as to protect the cargo from injury. If you are being pursued, and the vehicle is bouncing all around, you do not want to be put in the predicament where your cargo could be thrown violently against the sidewalls, especially if they are unconscious. They could end up hitting the side wall and being very bruised because of it, or in a worst-case scenario, having their neck snapped. For this reason you should have restraints inside of the compartment—plus, they'll have the happy side effect of ensuring your subject is held in place in the event that he or she regains consciousness. It could become dangerous for you if the target starts trying to escape or tries to position themselves to attack you when you open the compartment. Also, the smuggling compartment needs to be soundproof. The last thing you would want is the individual regaining consciousness, calling for help, and having someone hear. Ideally, the smuggling compartment should have a locking mechanism to thwart your target's attempts to escape, even if they should regain consciousness and

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free themselves from their restraints. Finally, the compartment needs to be designed so it takes environmental factors into consideration. If it is summer and you are driving cross-county, you need to be able to pump cool air into the smuggling compartment, lest your subject be nicely broiled when you arrive for the drop. Conversely, you need heat if you are traveling through extremely cold conditions. And this should be obvious, but making sure the compartment has proper ventilation so the target doesn't suffocate is a must. Riggers can arrange it so there are oxygen tanks concealed in the smuggling compartment. Needless to say, modifying a vehicle in this manner can end up being very expensive, and for runner teams that don't do very may extractions, this modification may not be worth it. Instead, they should try to work out an alternative to extracting the target instead of relying on this kind of smuggling compartment.

Another thing to keep in mind when modifying these vehicles is that civilian models do not have the same performance or handling specifications as the real thing. If you desire the vehicle to have similar performance to the real emergency vehicle, it will cost you additional parts and rigger time to make it happen. These modifications to the engine, steering, and suspension can be very expensive on top of all the costs for the cosmetic modifications. Some teams go to the extreme length of designing a vehicle that can match the real thing in terms of horsepower and performance, but many others choose to risk it and merely go for the cosmetic changes. It all depends on your bank account, and how confident you feel in your ability to blend in and not raise any suspicions.

I have talked a lot about how you can go about disguising yourself as an authority figure to help with an extraction. But disguising yourself under the color of authority isn't the only way to get close to the target. There are some runners (don't look at me, chummers) who are able and willing to pose as either potential pick-ups in nightclubs or bars for one-night stands with their targets; others may pretend to be joyboys/joygirls tailored to the target's interests to ensure the target will take them to the closest hotel for a quick hook-up. Once alone, the runner is free to incapacitate the target and deliver them to a waiting vehicle. A good, hidden shock hand is more than capable of incapacitating the aroused target. But if that's not an option, the shadowrunner could use what is called Stimtouch Hosiery to render their target unconscious. Now, standard Stimtouch Hosiery is not designed or intended to deliver a tremendous shock to another person. They are designed to provide gentle sensations through the skin as well as alter the tint of the stockings as the wearer walks, creating a visually pleasing effect. Runners have modified this device to be able to deliver a debilitating shock to an unwitting subject. The only thing the wearer has to do is make sure they are wearing some form of protective augmentation underneath the hosiery (such as smartskin or altskin modifications) that can provide insulation against the electrical shock.

Another tool that could be useful in this circumstance is laced lipstick. Some runners apply lipstick laced with DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide) and narcoject to their lips (or other exotic drug). So when there is kissing, a runner can subtly dose the target with narcoject and wait as the subject passes out. This can be a risky option, as the runner needs to make sure they have immunity to narcoject or have a way of preventing the lipstick from getting into their own system. But if it works, a target will be rendered helpless and ready for extraction.

- Both the hosiery and the lipstick options are indeed effective in rendering a subject unconscious. I can attest to it. Though I wasn't trying to extract anyone at the time, it was meant to protect myself from the occupational hazard of overzealous clientele. And they worked. I can definitely see their merits for extractions.
- SeaTac Sweetie

DRONES

Unfortunately, dressing up as cops or medics is usually only effective for one target. But when you're talking about an entire family, things get trickier. Sure, you can pull off that moving truck trick I mentioned earlier, but there are other alternatives that may help. When dealing with families, it can be helpful to utilize drones. Specific drones can give runners options on how to best approach a family, help gather valuable intelligence and plan multiple extraction methods, and indicate whether an extraction at the home, school, workplace would be better.

One drone that can be useful for extractions is the Bust-A-Move toys. These toys were sold on the market for some time until they were being re-appropriated by shadowrunners and gangers to carry out robberies. Of course, since being pulled off the shelves, the shadows have found another purpose for Bust-A-Move drones: intelligence gathering for extraction jobs. On the black market, you can find a second generation of Bust-A-Move toys built by runners that have been modified to take on the appearance of almost all of the popular toys on the market today, from Samurai Cyborgs and Captain Nova to the Firewatch Commandos. These toy drones are meant to be switched with toys that a child of a target is currently playing with. This switch can happen anywhere—the playground, school, a park, a grocery store, or the family vehicle when the family is in a restaurant eating. Basically, anywhere where a child may leave their toys behind, unattended. Once switched, the child will happily take the toy into their house, where the Bust-A-Move toy drone can then begin its intelligence work. The toy can record conversations (providing a quality recording that can fool most voice-print scanners), acquire security pass codes, obtain the full layout of the residence, make copies of maglock key data, note any pets that are present or any onsite security personnel, locate and identify any firearms

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in the house, and gather information on the schedules of every family member in the residence. This intelligence can be useful to extraction teams in deciding whether to hit the entire family when they're at home, or whether it would be safer to do multiple extractions while the children are in transit heading off to school or extracurricular activities and the parents are heading off to work. This information could even present runner teams an opportunity to enter the residence when it's empty and establish and ambush at an advantageous time.

There are rumors that a third-generation Bust-A-Move toy is being developed by inventive runners, and that it will be capable of holding doses of a sedative (such as narcoject) as well as possess a means of administering said sedatives so that it can covertly incapacitate a number of targets in the household while they are sleeping. So far, there has been no luck with creating a workable Bust-A-Move drone that can succeed in this task. One problem is that a drone of that size only has a limited carrying capacity, and the more you try to stuff into it, the more you inhibit its movements, potentially making it clumsier, slower, and more susceptible to being caught. Secondly, children are naturally rough with their toys. Those that have attempted to put chemical reservoirs into these drones have found the reservoirs ending up being broken, with the result of most of the chemical leaking out of the toy before they could be used for their intended purpose. Nonetheless, even in their current form, Bust-A-Move toys have proven invaluable for the intel they harvest.

- I often applaud black-market ingenuity, but here, it's not even necessary. Why compromise a Bust-A-Move drone's perfectly solid operations, when you could easily sneak a few dragonflies through a home's ventilation system and have them dose the family that way? There's no need to force these toy drones to do something when it's clear that's not what they are designed for, and when there are other drones can handle that function and do it better. I mean, you can't tell me a drone that can fly, hover, and then dose a subject isn't superior in all ways to those that have to climb objects and possibly be heard or felt doing so? Even if a dragonfly is only capable of handling one dose at a time, you can send in multiple dragonflies to take care of the whole family. Stick with the dragonflies if you guys wish to be that subtle, and leave these toy drones to the simple intel gathering they're good at.
- Rigger X

- I have to admit, I have relied on these Bust-A-Move toys on multiple occasions over the last couple of years, and they have proven both dependable and useful. They have gotten me into a lot of places that I might have had trouble accessing otherwise. And they have provided me a wealth of paydata. I have absolutely no complaints about their performance.
- Clockwork

- Slamm-0! ...
- Netcat

- On it.
- Slamm-0!

Another useful drone is what runners have dubbed the "GMC Snatch n' Grab." These drones are based off the GMC Chariots, which are older versions of delivery drones (which happen to still be in use). A number of these delivery drones have been converted into disguised combat drones for wetwork jobs. While some mechanics and drone riggers have gone that route, others have equipped the Chariot to be used for extractions; the ones dubbed the Snatch n' Grab drones (they were used to pick up packages, not drop them off). Basically, instead of concealed guns that are loaded with APDS or explosive rounds, they're mounted with dart pistols, and the darts with drugs such as laés or concentrated Caldwell lily extract. Once a target is knocked out, retractable arms from the drone spring out, snatch the person, and put him or her in its storage compartment, where a normal drone would have stored its packages. The drone can then drive out the front door of a building with its pilfered content.

There are a couple of downsides with using this drone. The first is that the GMC Snatch n' Grab can only handle average-sized metahumans (human-sized and smaller). It cannot handle orks or trolls, mainly because there is no room, plus the robotic arms would literally snap if they tried to pick up such hefty loads. Secondly, most deliveries made by a delivery drone happen out in the open, outside of the residence or inside a building's hallway. There is a high probability that someone (or some camera) will see the abduction and call the police or corp security. Most of the time, the Snatch n' Grab needs active runner and decker support to loop camera footage and keep bystanders away in order for this abduction technique to work effectively without anyone noticing. However, if it is pulled off successfully, runners could go a separate way from the drone and meet up with it after it has left the building, making egress from a building much simpler for the runner team without having to drag along an unconscious body. A Snatch n' Grab normally has a faraday cage built into its design to block any tracking devices or RFID tags that the target may have been implanted with. A Snatch n'Grab drone can be used at either residential addresses or commercial businesses such as corporate offices (though many corporate offices require packages to be dropped off at the mail room, and having a delivery drone seen traveling through an office building will likely be seen as suspicious).

Two other drones that are frequently used to snatch a target from a workplace environment are the Dassault Janitorial Drone and the Transys Office Maid drone. Nor-

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mally, the Dassault Janitorial drone is designed to clean and wax hallways, replace light bulbs, vacuum carpets, and clean bathrooms. The Dassault drone is becoming more commonplace in office buildings, as the maintenance of this drone is cheaper by far than employing a full-time metahuman janitor. This drone by itself is too large to enter individual offices, but its bulky size makes it perfect to hollow out and turn it into a smuggling compartment to hold a metahuman body (this drone can hold a metahuman up to the size of a troll). To make this extraction technique work, the Dassault Janitorial drone needs to function in conjunction with the Transys Office Maid, which is designed to operate in tight corners and to fit inside offices. It is designed to have the dexterity and precision to clean all the surfaces inside an office, particularly the floors, desk, and windows. But this drone has no cargo capacity whatsoever. Most riggers equip the small Office Maid drone with a concealed dart pistol and darts filled with an appropriate sedative so that it can deliver the knockout blow. The Office Maid is not designed to be very strong, so riggers have to enhance its robotic arms so that it can drag a metahuman to its partner, the janitorial drone. It also needs to be strong enough to help load the body into the other drone. The arms on this Office Maid likely will not be reusable after making one extraction, as its hydraulic systems burn out quickly under the strain. But it is generally able to make it out of the building on its own power to be repaired for future extractions.

The Dassault Janitorial drone has to sacrifice many of its functions to be able to house a metahuman. But more often than not, security personnel have more important things to do than to see if a drone is doing its job. And if it is painted to resemble another drone that's active within the building, most security personnel will be satisfied that the scheduled work is being done and not realize that there are two drones with the same model numbers operating in the building (though as many runners will tell you, there can always be pesky exceptions to that rule). As is the case with the delivery drone, on-site runner and decker support may be necessary to prevent the exchange of the target between the two drones from being spotted by bystanders and an alarm being raised.

Switching back to the residential situation for a moment, another extraction technique that many teams like is replacing the household Renraku Manservant drone with one that has been modified by drone riggers. The Renraku Manservant has been intentionally designed to feature many safety measures to assuage fears that these drones, designed by Renraku to help with household chores, can never go out of control and become wannabe Deuses. The Manservant is limited in how fast it moves, and how strong it is. Plus, it generally has a panic button just in case it malfunctions and residents need to call corp security for assistance. By replacing the actual Manservant with a modified one that you control, a runner team gains another advantage that the unsuspecting extraction targets won't be expecting. These modified Manservants have been redesigned to move at the same movement speed as any metahuman, and they have the strength to restrain a subject, ensuring that if a family extraction goes down, the family members have fewer options to flee. The manservant drone can be used to lock down possible alternate escape routes (e.g., breaking the lock for the back door to make sure it remains locked, or sealing any windows that are capable of being opened) and can decrease the chances that one or more of the family members may escape from the house and blow the extraction job. But they are often used in another helpful manner. While infiltrating the house, a modified Manservant drone can carry out its household chores as normal, but in doing so, it can seek out any firearms that may be in the house and unload their ammunition, or possibly replace the ammunition with blanks. If the weapons are stored in lock boxes, Manservant drones can hide the lock boxes during their normal routines, guaranteeing that if someone in the house reaches for a weapon during a violent home invasion, they won't be able to find them in time. If you're wondering if it would be worthwhile to invest in this drone, keep in mind that in 2075, nearly three out of every four households in North America have a Renraku Manservant or similar model. And nearly half (many of which are higher-income households) have two or more. So if you are working extraction jobs, chances are you'll find opportunities to utilize this drone.

DRUGS

Drugs can be one of the most important tools in an extraction team's toolkit. Rendering a person unconscious or incapacitated quickly can prove invaluable to any extraction team. A runner should consider having each of the drugs I'm going to mention available in their toolkits.

One thing to keep in mind is that these sedatives can react badly to medications that your target may be on for various medical conditions or can make an existing medical condition worse. Or the subject can be allergic to these drugs. Before trying to extract a target, particularly one that may not be in the best of health, it's always best to have a look at their medical records (if they have any) and know for certain which sedatives may or may not work for the target. The last thing you want to do is inadvertently deliver a corpse to your Mr. Johnson.

- When in doubt, slap a biomonitor on your target after you have knocked them out and set it up to send reports to your commlink or cyberdeck. It will be able to alert you when something is going wrong with them. This could prove crucial if you are currently distracted by other aspects of the run, and you may not be paying that close of attention to their current welfare. Doing this can save their life and still allow you to be paid for the job.
- Butch

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CALDWELL LILY EXTRACT

Caldwell lily extract comes from an Awakened aquatic lily found in Chicago (specifically the lily ponds found at the former Lincoln Park). Typically, the extracts from the Caldwell lily are used as a hallucinogen by local shamans in their rituals, but Caldwell lily extract has also been used as an anesthetic. Caldwell lily extract can be applied to and absorbed directly through the skin to numb a specific part of the body. This is frequently used by runners when having to stitch up gunshot wounds or knife wounds. But the extract of the Caldwell lily is much more potent and effective if delivered as an injection (in this form, Caldwell lily extract becomes more of a general anesthetic, numbing the entire body. It may require two doses in order to completely render the subject unconscious). You can just purchase the normal extract, or you can purchase a concentrated version that a few pharmaceutical companies manufacture that is composed of extracts from three Caldwell lilies. One dose of this concentrated version is usually sufficient to render most targets unconscious. Many prefer to use concentrated Caldwell lily extract because there have been very few documented instances where the subject has shown any ill effects from being anesthetized by it—allergic reactions, bad medicinal interactions, and other medical complications seem to be rare, occurring in maybe 0.1 percent of individuals. Unfortunately, this Awakened extract is extremely rare, making it very expensive. But if it is able to allow you to deliver your target safely, isn't it worth it?

- Sure. Assuming Mr. Johnson is covering expenses, of course.
- Stone

CHLORAL HYDRATE

Chloral hydrate is a sedative that has been around since 1832 and is the main ingredient in the knockout drink known as a Mickey Finn. It is a compound that is soluble in either water or alcohol. In some ways it can be thought of as a mundane version of laés (without the side effects of affecting memory). Once ingested, chloral hydrate can quickly render a victim unconscious. Its effects are intensified by either alcohol or other medications that cause drowsiness. Chloral hydrate is also much cheaper than laés. If you can't get a hold of laés (and many can't), chloral hydrate is an acceptable alternative.

CHLOROFORM

Chloroform was a popular anesthesia in the nineteenth century. Once discovered, chloroform replaced ether as the preferred anesthesia. Chloroform fell out of practice when it was discovered that it led to certain side effects including cardiac arrhythmias. Nearly one in twenty metahumans experience an arrhythmia while under the effect of chloroform, making this gaseous substance rather dangerous. Chloroform is also impractical when trying to render both orks and trolls unconscious, as it tends not to keep them out for long. Dwarfs, for their part have a natural immunity to chloroform. Given its inherently dangerous characteristics and the fact that it doesn't work well on all metahumans, this should not be your first choice of drug for an extraction.

DMSO (DIMETHYL SULFOXIDE)

When mixed with another compound, dimethyl sulfoxide allows that compound to be absorbed rapidly through the skin. This provides runners with all sorts of possibilities, including lacing objects a person normally handles with a drug meant to incapacitate them. The individual often will not realize they have been drugged until it's too late. The contact vector is one of the most subtle and reliable means to deliver a toxin or drug, and it is preferred by both assassins and extraction teams.

GAMMA-SCOPOLAMINE

Gamma-scopolamine is a popular choice for some extraction teams because it inflicts immediate paralysis in a target, along with a number of other conditions, such as speech loss and delirium. The paralysis lasts approximately an hour. If the target needs to be interrogated, this drug puts them in a state that is conducive to mining useful and truthful data from a subject after the paralysis wears off. The downside is that the subject remains conscious while under the affects of gamma-scopolamine. Some targets who have either been magicians or technomancers and who have been particularly strong-willed have found ways of still casting spells, summoning spirits, or accessing the Matrix even when their bodies are paralyzed. It may be safer for extraction teams if gamma-scopolamine is used only on targets that are neither magicians nor technomancers. Additionally, even though gamma-scopolamine leaves most involuntary muscular functions intact, there are a number of subjects that stop breathing as a result of the drug (typically one person out of every sixty or so).

LAÉS/LEÄL

These Tír Tairngire drugs are derived from the fruit of the laésal tree, widely believed to be only found in the Tír (though let me add that this is patently not true. I know from certain black market contacts of mine that there are other sources of the laésal fruit now, and they continue to be more black market suppliers of the fruit each year. The collapse of the former Tír regime and the chaos that followed Crash 2.0 allowed a significant number of trees to disappear from Tír lands and appear on the black market). A big advantage of laés and leäl

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OPTIONAL RULE: DRUG INTERACTION

If a character uses a drug on a target to sedate them, there is always a chance that drug may interact negatively with whatever drugs the NPC may be on (either prescription or street drugs). If that should happen, the gamemaster should determine the severity of the interaction: Mild, Moderate, Severe, or Extreme. Here are the consequences for the character at each level:

Mild: A drug interaction at this level produces cosmetic changes in the target, such as a rash, skin discoloration, and/or some difficulty breathing. The patient will be in discomfort when they wake up, but the interaction is not life threatening and does not worsen.

Moderate: The drug interaction inflicts damage on the patient. The individual undergoing a drug interaction must resist 3P damage every Combat Turn until at least one of the drugs wears off. This damage is resisted by the character's Body attribute.

Severe: The character is in serious trouble. The drug that was given to the character is likely putting their heart into an arrhythmia, doing organ damage, spiking their blood pressure, or inflicting other severe complications. The drug could even be countering whatever medication the target was on. The character suffering a drug interaction at the Severe level must resist half the Power Level of the drug that caused the problematic interaction. So if narcoject caused this drug interaction, the victim must resist 8P worth of damage (initial power of 15, divided by half = 7.5, which becomes 8 when it is rounded up) for every Combat Turn until the drug that caused the negative interaction no longer has an effect.

Extreme: The character's life signs crash. They are in cardiac arrest and are not breathing. They are immediately put into 1 box of overflow damage and will die in a short amount of time unless stabilized. Even if stabilized, there is a very good change of long-lasting consequences for the character, such as brain damage from a stroke, heart damage from a heart attack, liver or kidney damage, etc. Gamemasters should use this option very cautiously.

A negative drug interaction may take up 1D6 minutes to begin manifesting symptoms and forcing the subject to make damage resistance tests.

Although a character may not have any drug interaction, they may have an allergic reaction to a sedative. Follow the rules for Allergy negative quality on p. 78, *SR5*.

for extraction teams is that it wipes short-term memories of the target, for a period of about twenty-four hours. If done properly, the victim will have no recollection of who snatched them, and those memories can never be recovered, either by magic or technology. The target of the extraction may remain unconscious for up to two hours. But it is equally important to know that roughly one in thirty targets may experience detrimental side affects to laés or leäl, which typically involves long-term memory loss that can span decades. If Mr. Johnson requires specific knowledge from the target, this may be extremely detrimental to the success of your job, even if the target is still breathing by the time you pass him or her off to Mr. Johnson. Laés is the actual drug that is administered typically through ingestion or injection. Leäl is a specific product made with laés, usually a very expensive brandy. Leäl is much less potent than laés, lasting a short period of time and wiping out a smaller window of memories.

- Club kids love the leäl for reasons that are all too obvious. So if you find yourself in need of some, stop by a local nightclub and look for the biggest douche in the room. He probably has some, or knows where you can get some fast.
- Kat o' NineTales

NARCOJECT

Narcoject is a common tranquilizer many runners rely on for extractions. It is generally safe for the target, though one in eighty people express an allergic reaction to the tranquilizer. Some of those allergic reactions can be life threatening. Narcoject is believed not to cause any significant side effects in a subject who is not allergic to it.

SLAB

Slab is an anesthetic capable of putting a target into a deep state of suspended animation. It does such a good job that those trying to diagnose the patient may come to the conclusion they are dead, even with medkits assisting in the diagnosis. Unfortunately, one in thirty metahumans who are given this drug will not wake up from it. Slab pushes their bodies too far by slowing down their metabolic processes, and they die as a result. Understanding a target's medical background is an absolute necessity if you are going with this drug for the extraction. Any kind of ailment or genetic weakness could lead the target dying on you. This should be reserved only for those times that faking a death is absolutely necessary. The use of slab can be a real gamble for any extraction.

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SPELLS

If your team has access to a spellslinger, the following are spells that many extraction teams recommend your mage or shaman learn to help make extractions easier. These spells can also provide a convenient back-up plan in case another aspect of the job goes wrong.

CONVINCE

Every story your face tells is at risk for inconsistencies. Most faces can smooth talk their way past them and prevent the target from noticing the errors in their story, but even faces have their off days. Or some times, you're forced to work with sub-par faces. In any case, sometimes you need a way of making it harder for targets to notice these inconsistencies, no matter how glaring. Some magicians in the shadows have come up with a spell formula called Convince. Convince is a spell designed to make even the most astute, observant person oblivious in a given situation.

FASHION

Most shadowrunners know the benefits of having a mage or shaman who can cast the Fashion spell on them. It can literally change a suit into a uniform in a matter of a few seconds, making it that much easier to blend into a crowd or pull off a disguise (such as posing as a KE cop). This can allow a team tremendous flexibility during a run, allowing them to change outfits on the fly. There are inherent limitations with this spell, however, including not being able to precisely duplicate accessories such as badges, buttons, lapel pins, etc. A Fashion spell can attempt to mimic those accessories and may be able to fool people from a distance, but up close, people are going to be able to tell that "badge" you are wearing is not the real thing. Fashion can only change one type of material into another of a similar size and mass. What I would recommend for extraction teams is to go into a situation with a properly constructed disguise from one of the fixers that I mentioned earlier (with all the right accessories), and then if need be, use Fashion to shift the disguise into something less conspicuous later. Another option is for extraction teams to obtain the proper accessories from someone on site (such as a security guard that they have rendered unconscious) and simply add those accessories to the disguise they have built using the Fashion spell.

HIBERNATE

When a runner team does not have access to a Houdini machine to provide nutrients and sustenance to their target, this spell can allow them to adapt by slowing down a target's metabolic processes through magic. The more powerful the spell, the slower a metahuman's metabolic processes become. This spell can delay the target's need for food or water for days if necessary, as long as it is sustained. However, when the spell ends and the subject's metabolic processes return to normal, they find themselves dehydrated and famished. But that should only happen after you have turned the target over to Mr. Johnson, and that should be their problem and not yours. The Hibernate spell is also notably gentler on a target's body than the use of the slab drug and can be more finely controlled than the drug. To my knowledge, no one has actually died from the use of the Hibernate spell, giving this spell the clear advantage over slab. With enough net hits (6+), the Hibernate spell can fool a medkit into believing the subject is deceased. Hibernate works against both voluntary and unconscious targets.

INTERFERENCE

When dealing with any important target, you have to be willing to deal with the problem that the target may be able to send out a wireless signal to someone else before you can render them unconscious or incapacitated. This usually takes the form of a PANICBUTTON, but it can also be an implanted commlink sending out an emergency call to Knight Errant or Lone Star. Many extraction teams rely on signal jammers to prevent a wireless signal from escaping and bringing down heat upon runners' heads. However, if circumstances arise and prevent you from being able to bring a signal jammer with you into a building, then the Interference spell is a perfectly acceptable option, since it is capable of jamming both radio and wireless signals.

INTOXICATION

Sometimes, a viable option for a extracting a target is to make the target act as though they are intoxicated, and then the runners come along afterward and act as though they are helping the intoxicated person out by shoving him or her into a waiting vehicle and taking off. This can be accomplished using other methods, but having a mage or shaman cast this spell on the target is just as effective (provided the target is not a magician who might be able to counterspell).

NUTRITION

Whereas the Hibernate spell approaches the problem of keeping a target alive by slowing down their metabolism and reducing their need for food or water, Nutrition approaches the problem by using mana to directly nourish the subject's body, turning mana into sustenance. In the past, Nutrition was only available to work on voluntary targets. In the last couple of years, magicians working in the shadows have developed spell formulae that will also work on unconscious and unwilling targets, though the drain for this spell against uncooperative targets is higher (or so I've been told by some

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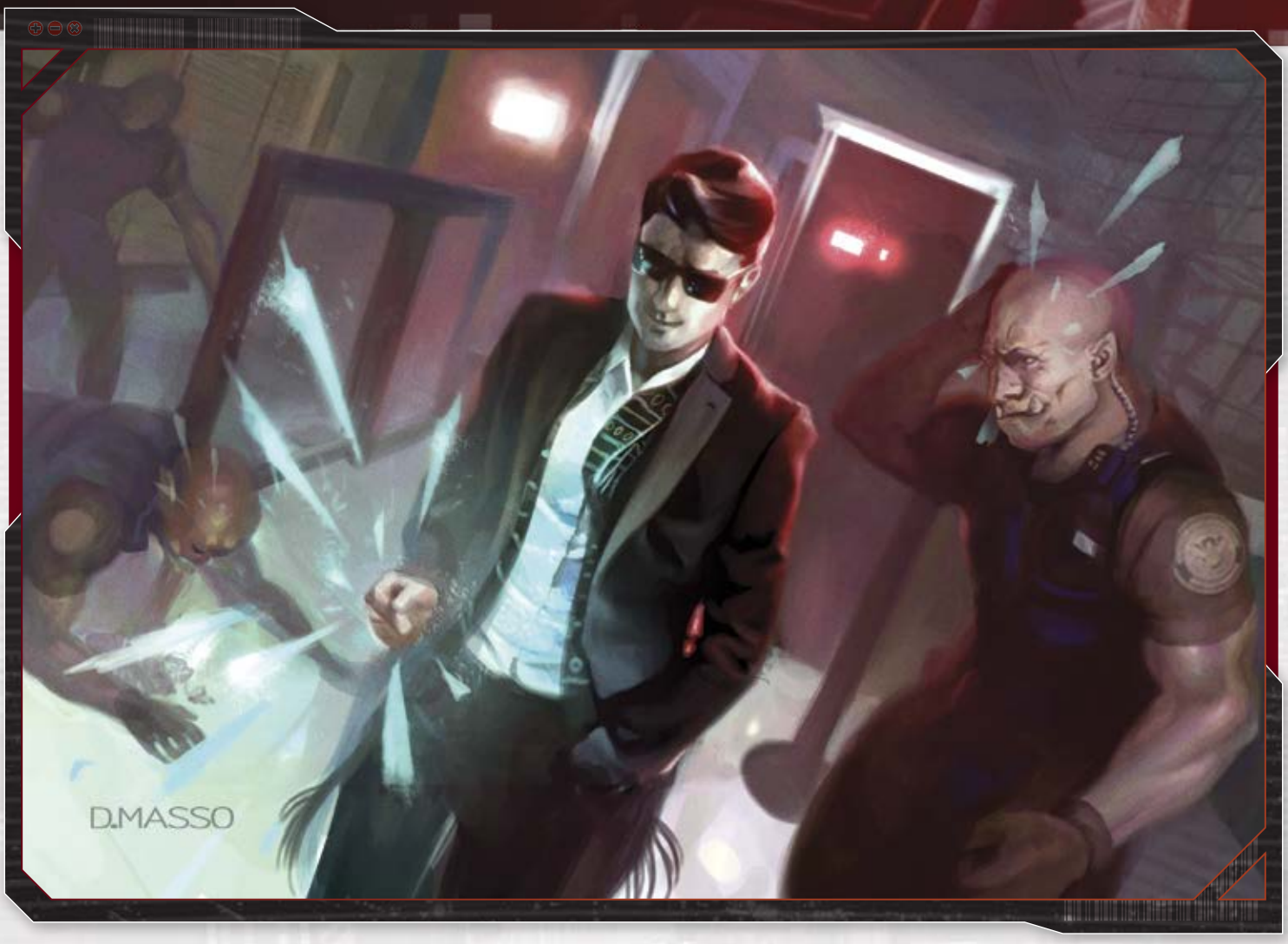

magician friends). The good news is that the nutritional materials this spell creates becomes permanent after it is cast and does not need to be sustained. A downside is that if it is used too frequently, the body becomes dependent on this magical nourishment. Most magicians agree that it is highly dangerous for the target to use this spell for longer than seventy-two hours. The Houdini machine does not pose this danger for the target, making it the optimal choice for extraction. But in a pinch, this spell may be a good solution.

SOUND BARRIER

Sound Barrier creates a bubble of silence covering a specific area of effect. This spell is useful to cast around a target meant for extraction before you attempt to take them down to prevent them from yelling out and drawing attention. This sound barrier does not prevent radio or wireless signals from escaping the bubble. You would need another spell for that (listed above) called Interference.

VEHICLE MASK

Instead of taking a vehicle to a rigger or other automotive mechanic for expensive modifications, a lot of teams choose to go with a mage or shaman that can cast Vehicle Mask. Vehicle Mask can do pretty much everything Chameleon Coating can do, plus it can mimic physical accessories such as emergency light bars. The problem with Vehicle Mask is that the larger the vehicle is to disguise, the greater force of spell is needed to properly disguise it. So a motorcycle or a sedan should be just fine, but when you start talking about Ares Roadmasters and bigger, than you start causing problems for your magician. I personally recommend not taking the cheap route and just go with the riggers and what they can do for you (because they are the vehicle experts and that's what they do for a living), but that's just a personal preference. Vehicle Mask can and often does provide a very convenient method of escape if pursued, allowing a vehicle to change its appearance with the whim of the controlling magician.

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ADEPT POWERS

Spellslingers are not the only way to get magic in on your extraction efforts. Adepts have a few useful tools and powers at their disposal as well. Like the following.

COMMANDING VOICE

With this power, an adept can give a target a five-word command. With magical energies empowering their words, an adept with this ability can compel a target to do almost anything, including dropping a weapon, walking out of a building, getting into a car, or remaining silent while another team member renders the target unconscious. Adepts have said that this ability can only be used on a single target a limited number of times within a twenty-four hour period or else they grow resistant to it, but all it takes is one action the adept stops or alters to make a difference in a run. This power, if used properly, can minimize opportunities for things to go wrong and minimize any violence that may be required to grab the target.

LIGHT TOUCH

Adepts in the extraction business often find they require the palming skill, either to lift items from a target for access reasons (e.g., commlinks or key cards) or subtly dose them with a contact drug. Light Touch allows the adept to make the attempt, but to do so with such a graceful motion that it becomes extraordinarily difficult for most metahumans to perceive that someone has made contact with them until it is too late. This adept power is often used in conjunction with the Nimble Fingers adept power (see below).

MIMIC

To get to a target for extraction, many teams have to rely on breaking-and-entering tools to bypass security measures to get them in. These tools often include cellular glove molders and cybereyes with the retinal duplication modification. Adepts with this power can mimic the functions of those technical devices. An adept with this power needs to touch the subject that will be providing the print patterns; they can then use their magic to shift their retinal patterns, fingerprints, and palm prints into copies of the subject's prints. They need to maintain contact a decent amount of uninterrupted contact with the target; the longer the contact, the better quality their copies will be. The adept then has a limited amount of time to gain access to the area where the subject is and extract them before their print patterns revert to their natural state. This power saves runners the need to spend time making a fake print with a glove, and gives runner teams the option of choosing different print patterns for access. This comes in handy if an alarm is sounded and the print they have been using becomes disabled.

NERVE STRIKE

Extraction teams normally bring about paralysis in a target by drugging them. Adepts can do the same thing by knowing precisely where to hit the target and applying precisely the right amount of force to key nerve clusters. The advantage of relying on adepts with the Nerve Strike power is that you do not have to worry about transporting or smuggling illicit drugs on your person to dose a target with. An adept's fists will serve the same purpose, and no one will be the wiser until the actual extraction attempt goes down.

NIMBLE FINGERS

The Nimble Fingers adept power improves the dexterity of the adept's digits, allowing them to perform astounding sleight-of-hand feats without being noticed. In conjunction with Light Touch, Nimble Fingers can make the adept a perfect weapon in an extraction team's arsenal—or turn them into a frightening assassin if the job calls for it.

EXTRACTION DEVICES

DEVICE	AVAILABILITY	COST
Houdini Machine I (commlink and biomonitor) (does not include cost of drugs)	12F	8,500¥
Houdini Machine II (medkit computer) (does not include cost of drugs)	12F	12,000¥
Ambulance gurney	8	2,000¥
Body bag	6	50¥
Fake DocWagon wrist band	10F	100¥
Stimtouch hosiery	6R	250¥
Laced lipstick	10F	Special

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DISGUISES

DISGUISE	AVAILABILITY	COST
Uniforms	16F	2,000-15,000¥
Fixer services	—	250¥ per hour
Forger services	—	500¥+

FACTORY VEHICLES AND THEIR SPECIALIZED USES

VEHICLE	SPECIALIZED USE
Ares Roadmaster (transport)	Counterfeit SWAT vehicle/Urban Command Center
Chrysler-Nissan Journey (car)	Counterfeit Lone Star patrol cruiser
Conestoga Trailblazer	Counterfeit moving truck
Dodge Ram Industrial	Garbage truck
Esprit Industries Watcher (SUV)	Counterfeit CAS government vehicle
GMC Endurance (van)	Counterfeit DocWagon ambulance
GMC Sidewinder (SUV)	Counterfeit UCAS government vehicle
Honda Artemis (car)	Counterfeit Knight Errant patrol cruiser
S-K LT-21 (delivery van)	Counterfeit CrashCart ambulance

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

MODIFICATION	AVAILABILITY	COST
Chameleon coating	12R	Body x 2,000¥
Dash light bar	15F	3,500¥
Emergency light bar	15F	5,000¥
Morphing license plate	8F	1,000¥
Siren	15F	1,400¥
Smuggling compartment (dwarf, human, elf, or ork)	12F	3,500¥
Smuggling compartment (troll)	12F	7,000¥
Spoof chips	8F	500¥
Rigger services	—	500¥ per hour

DRUGS (PER DOSE)

DRUG	AVAILABILITY	COST
Caldwell lily extract	10R	600¥
Caldwell lily extract, concentrated	12R	1,000¥
Chloral hydrate	6R	50¥
Chloroform	4R	75¥
DMSO	5R	50¥
Gamma-scopolamine	14F	200¥
Läel	10F	400¥
Laés	12F	750¥
Liquid nutrients	4R	75¥
Narcoject	8R	50¥
Normal saline	—	30¥
Slab	8R	250¥

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GAME INFO: MISC. ITEMS

ITEM	DAM	AP	REACH	MODE	AVAIL	COST
Stimtouch Hosiery	8S(e)	–5	0	—	6R	250¥
Laced lipstick	(as drug)	—	—	—	10F	(Drug+DMSO cost) + 50¥

GAME INFO: VEHICLES*

VEHICLE	HAND	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
Ares Roadmaster	3/3	3	1	18	18	3	3	8	8	52,000¥
Chrysler-Nissan Journey	4/3	3	3	9	5	1	1	4	—	17,000¥
Conestoga Trailblazer	2/1	2	1	14	6	2	1	2	4	75,000¥
w/ trailer	1/1	1	1	20	6	2	1	N/A	N/A	+20,000¥
Dodge Ram Industrial (large)	2/1	1	1	16	8	2	4	2	4	51,000¥
Dodge Ram Indust. (narrow)	3/1	1	1	16	8	2	4	2	4	49,000¥
Esprit Ind. Watcher (SUV)	3/3	3	3	9	8	1	3	5	4	40,000¥
GMC Endurance (van)	3/3	4	3	14	6	1	2	8	—	35,000¥
GMC Sidewinder (SUV)	4/3	3	2	10	6	2	2	6	4	33,000¥
Honda Artemis (car)	4/2	3	3	9	6	1	1	4	—	17,000¥
S-K LT-21 (delivery van)	2/1	2	1	15	7	2	2	2	—	31,000¥

**For official emergency vehicles that have better performance, multiply these vehicle attributes by 1.5 (round up).*

GAME INFO: DRONES

DRONE	HAND	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	AVAIL	COST
Bust-A-Move (second generation) (medium)	4	3	1	2	1	2	2	—	700-1,500¥
Cyberspace Designs Dragonfly (small)	4	3	2	1	1	3	2	12R	2,500¥*
GMC Snatch'n'Grab (large)	3	4	2	2	4	3	3	12F	8,000¥
Modified Dassault Janitorial Drone (large)	2	2	2	10	2	2	2	8	10,000¥
Transys Office Maid (medium)	3	2	2	3	0	4	3	4	8,000¥
Modified Renraku Manservant-3 (large)	2	2	2	3	5	3	3	14F	9,000¥

**Cost of drugs not included*

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DRUGS

CHLORAL HYDRATE

Vector: Ingestion
Speed: 2 Combat Turns
Penetration: 0
Power: 12 (15 if added to alcohol or mixed with another medication that causes drowsiness)
Duration: (14 - Body) hours, (18 - Body) hours if mixed with drugs and/or alcohol
Effect: Stun Damage

Chloral hydrate is an oral drug that has been used to help treat insomnia. When added to alcohol or mixed with other medications (sleep medication, pain medications), the sedative effect is enhanced.

CHLOROFORM

Vector: Inhalation
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Penetration: 0
Power: 7
Duration: (10 - Body) hours
Effect: Stun Damage

Chloroform has been around for centuries and has been used as an anesthetic. Prior to the introduction of narcoject, chloroform was the most commonly portrayed extraction drug in trideo and simsense movies. Chloroform was discontinued as anesthetic due to potential health complications. Chloroform performs poorly against trolls and orks, and dwarfs have a natural immunity to it.

CALDWELL LILY EXTRACT

Vector: Ingestion (hallucinogenic), Contact (local anesthesia), Injection (general anesthesia)
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Penetration: 0
Power: 4 (hallucinogenic), 4 (local anesthetic), 8 (injected version), 14 (concentrate)
Duration: (6 - Body) hours, minimum 1 hour
Effect: Stun Damage

Caldwell lily extract has multiple uses. The extract can be ingested for a hallucinogenic effect. It can be applied via the Contact vector to a local area. This area becomes numb immediately, allowing the individual to undergo minor medical attention with limited pain. If injected, the Caldwell lily extract can numb the entire body and render a target unconscious. It can take more than one normal dose of the extract to render a target unconscious. The concentrated version can normally knock a target out with a single dose.

DMSO

Dimethyl sulfoxide is a utility chemical with a number of applications, though its most common use is as a carrier that forces the skin to absorb delivered chemicals. DMSO is soluble in acetone, alcohol, ether, and water; upon contact with the skin the DMSO, along with whatever other compound is dissolved in solution with it, is instantly absorbed into the body. Any compound mixed with a dose of DMSO is deployable via the Contact vector (see p. 408, *SR5*).

GAMMA-SCOPOLAMINE

Vector: Injection
Speed: Immediate
Penetration: 0
Power: 12
Duration: 1 hour (for paralysis), 1 hour following that for the "truth serum" effect
Effect: Paralysis, Truth Serum (see description)

This particularly nasty agent, derived from nightshade, is a neuromuscular blocking agent that paralyzes its target. It takes effect immediately, causing dizziness, pupil dilation, speech loss, delirium, and paralysis. The full effects last for about an hour. Once the primary effects wear off, the remaining residue in the victim's system acts as a "truth serum" for another hour. Reduce the target's Willpower by 3 (to a minimum of 1) for the remainder of the toxin's effect.

LAÉS (LEÄL, LAÉSAL WINE)

Vector: Ingestion, Injection
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Penetration: 0
Power: 12 (laés, laésal) 10 (leäl)
Duration: 20 x 1D6 minutes
Effect: Stun Damage (see below), Memory Loss (see below)

Laés was created by the government of Tír Tairngire from the Awakened laésal fruit, thought to grow only in their government-controlled orchards. Upon taking a dose of laés, the character must resist 12S damage. If they suffer any damage from the drug at all, even if they retain consciousness, their memories of the last (12 - Body, minimum 1) hours are erased retroactively from the mind, starting from the moment the Awakened drug was administered and working backward. Laés changes the chemical structure of the memories themselves, rendering them impossible to recover with technology or magic.

Laésal wine is a type of brandy made from the fruit of the laésal tree—its effects are the same as those of laés.

Leäl is a less potent—and expensive—version of laés. Leäl causes drowsiness rather than unconsciousness, and the user who experiences at least one point of Stun damage only loses the last (120 - Body, minimum 100) minutes of memories; the duration is 5 x 1D6 minutes.

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LIQUID NUTRIENTS

Liquid nutrients are formulas designed typically for medical patients that cannot eat normally, usually because of disease or other medical condition. These nutrients can nourish an unconscious patient for a long period of time, ensuring a subject will remain in good health if they must be transported long distances. Liquid nutrients can only be administered two ways: either through a naso-gastric tube or through a shunt leading into the stomach. Characters must have the Medicine skill to properly administer this formula; assuming the tube or shunt is already connected, administering the nutrients requires a Medicine + Logic (2) Test. Characters may not default to the First Aid skill for administering this drug.

NARCOJECT

Vector: Injection
Speed: Immediate
Penetration: 0
Power: 15
Effect: Stun Damage

A common tranquilizer, narcoject is typically used with dart guns.

NORMAL SALINE

Normal saline solution is meant to keep patients hydrated via intravenous means. Normal saline is safe to administer if using a medkit or with the aid of a biomonitor. If normal saline is administered too quickly to a target, a life-threatening medical condition known as metabolic acidosis can occur (there is too much acid in the body to be removed by the kidneys), which can lead to coma and death. This would only happen with a critical glitch on a Medicine + Logic Test to administer the saline.

SLAB

Vector: Injection
Speed: 2 Combat Turns
Penetration: 0
Power: 16
Effect: Stun Damage, Suspended Animation
Duration: (10 - Body) hours, minimum 1 hour
Effect: Suspended Animation (see below)

Originally designed as a surgical aid, slab places the user in a state of near hibernation where breathing and heart rate are lowered to an almost imperceptible level. A Perception + Intuition (6) Test or a Medicine + Logic (4) Test is required to determine the character is still alive without proper medical equipment (a medkit is insufficient). At the end of the duration, the user receives a -4 modifier to Reaction for a number of hours equal to half the equivalent duration of the drug (rounded down). Side effects commonly include shakes, chills, and excessive appetite.

SPELLS

CONVINCE

(MANIPULATION)

Type: P • **Range:** LOS • **Duration:** S • **DV:** F - 2

The Convince spell makes it harder for a subject to detect the inconsistencies in any story told to them. For every two net hits, the Perception Test threshold for recognizing an inconsistency increases by 1. The threshold may modified up to the Force of the spell.

FASHION

(MANIPULATION)

Type: P • **Range:** T • **Duration:** P • **DV:** F - 1

This spell instantly tailors clothing, transforming garments into any fashion the caster wishes. The net hits over the clothing's object resistance (defense pool for the clothing can be between 6 and 9, depending on the complexity of the material and whether it interweaves electronics into the threads) measure the degree of style in the tailoring. The spell cannot change clothing's protective value, only its cut, color, pattern, and fit. The weight of the clothing does not change, and it must cover approximately the same amount of area (for example, a jumpsuit can't be converted into a bikini). The caster must touch the clothing. The following list provides guidance on what a character can do per each net hit:

1 The tint of the color can change (e.g., dark blue to light blue, but not blue to green); minor adjustments such as mending bullet holes can also be performed

2 Adjustments to the fit of the clothing can be made, but nothing drastic about the nature of the clothes (for example, pants are still pants). Color can change slightly (e.g., blue to green or purple, but not red).

3 Full spectrum of color can be manipulated. Simple geometric patterns and designs can be added, but nothing as elaborate as corporate logos or name tags. Modifications such as the addition or removal of pockets or pants to a skirt can be done.

4+ Clothing can be changed with enough specificity to mimic a uniform, provided enough material is available. Color changes can help mimic missing accessories such as buttons, labels, badges, ribbons, etc. These changes, however, are only convincing at a distance if the physical accessories are not present. The closer a target gets to the subject, the more likely they will notice the actual accessories are missing (a gamemaster would call for a Perception Test to see if the person notices). Patterns and designs on clothing can be as intricate as the magician desires.

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HIBERNATE

(MANIPULATION)

Type: M • **Range:** T • **Duration:** P • **DV:** F – 2

The caster must touch a voluntary or unconscious subject. The spell puts the subject in a form of suspended animation. The subject's bodily processes are slowed significantly, allowing for the subject to survive perfectly in hibernation without nourishment for long periods of time. In addition, the individual's respiration also decreases, allowing the character to survive on very limited amounts of oxygen for longer periods of time. For every hit on the Spellcasting Test, a character may be placed in this state of hibernation for up to four hours. So if a caster scores three hits on the Spellcasting Test, the target may be placed in suspended animation for up to twelve hours. Once this period of time ends, the target's metabolic processes return to normal. If the caster wishes to keep the individual in this hibernation for longer, the character will need to recast this spell. This spell does not keep a subject unconscious, and if the character wakes up and resists against the effects of the spell, their metabolism returns to normal and the spell breaks. This is why a caster normally uses this spell in conjunction with another spell, or uses a drug to keep the target unconscious. The number of hits also determines the factor by which a character can survive without nourishment or in an environment with limited amounts of oxygen. For example, with 3 hits, a character whose body is being influenced by the Hibernate spell can survive three times as long without food or water, and can survive three times as long in a situation where oxygen is limited. Six or more successes are required to be able to fool medkit computers and biomonitors and to convince them that the subject is deceased.

INTERFERENCE

(ENVIRONMENTAL, AREA) (MANIPULATION)

Type: P • **Range:** LOS (A) • **Duration:** S • **DV:** F – 2

Interference creates a barrage of static in the electromagnetic spectrum, jamming radio and wireless signals. This spell jams all signals in the area of effect with a Signal rating less than the hits scored by the spellcaster, just like a jammer (p. 441, *SR5*).

INTOXICATION (MANIPULATION)

Type: M • **Range:** T • **Duration:** P • **DV:** F – 3

This spell causes inebriation. The target resists with Counterspelling + Body; any protection the target has against ingestion vector toxins also applies. Each net hit inflicts 1 box of Fatigue damage (p. 172, *SR5*), which represents the target's drunken state. Antidote and Detox can negate the effects of this spell.

NUTRITION

(MANIPULATION)

Type: P • **Range:** T • **Duration:** P • **DV:** F – 3 (voluntary)/F (unconscious and unwilling targets)

The Nutrition spell provides a target with nourishment, allowing them to live off pure mana. One hit is enough to satisfy the target for a few hours, with extra hits increasing the quality of the delivered nutrients. This spell prevents starvation and dehydration, but it has a downside. Those who abuse this spell for long periods of time risk becoming addicted to magical nourishment (treat the nutrients as having Addiction Rating 2, Addiction Threshold 1;see **Substance Abuse and Addiction**, p. 413, *SR5*). Nutrition works best on voluntary targets, but can be used on unconscious and unwilling targets. When used on unwilling or unconscious targets, the Drain value for the magician increases by 3.

SOUND BARRIER

(REALISTIC, SINGLE-SENSE, AREA) (MANIPULATION)

Type: P • **Range:** LOS (A) • **Duration:** S • **DV:** F – 2

A variant of the Silence spell (p. 291, *SR5*), Sound Barrier creates a perimeter of silence around the area of effect (rather than creating a mass area of silence). Those inside cannot hear outside noises but can hear sounds within the globe and vice versa. Only sounds crossing the border are affected; those are affected in the same manners as the Silence spell. This spell also affects technological devices, infrasound, and ultrasound.

VEHICLE MASK

(REALISTIC, MULTI-SENSE) (ILLUSION)

Type: P • **Range:** T • **Duration:** S • **DV:** F – 2

This version of the Physical Mask spell (p. 291, *SR5*) is specifically used to mask vehicles and drones. The vehicle must be masked to look like another vehicle of roughly the same size. Each point of Force of the spell successfully masks 2 points of Body for the vehicle or drone (round up). The higher body the vehicle has, the higher Force needed to completely mask the vehicle. So if the caster desires to cast Vehicle Mask on an Ares Roadmaster, which has a body of 18, the caster will need to cast the spell at force 9. This spell can also affect the vehicle's sound, smell, and other characteristics. The caster must touch the vehicle being masked.

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ADEPT POWERS

COMMANDING VOICE

Cost: 1 power point

This power channels the adept's magic into his voice to enhance the modulation and pitch, subliminally influencing the actions of any listeners. The adept takes a Complex Action to give a simple but forceful command (five words or less) to the target, making an Opposed Test with Leadership + Charisma against the target(s) Willpower + Intuition. If the adept succeeds in the test, the target uses his next action to either carry out the command or stands confused (gamemaster's choice, but the more net hits achieved the more likely it is for the target to obey the adept's command). Such commands carry no weight beyond the immediate impetus, and the affected characters will quickly reassert their wits, returning to their original course of action. If multiple individuals are targeted, use the largest dice pool among the defenders and add 1 die per additional target (to a maximum of six individuals). Commanding Voice may only be used on metahumans who can directly hear and understand the adept's words. It has no effect when the voice is amplified or broadcast via technological means (e.g., wireless transmission or loudspeaker). It is also less effective on subsequent uses against the same target. Apply a cumulative –2 dice pool penalty for each use within the preceding 24 hours.

LIGHT TOUCH

Cost: 0.25 power points per level

Light Touch allows the adept greater control in palming or pickpocketing an object and preventing anyone from perceiving the act. It imposes a –1 Perception dice pool modifier per level of Light Touch to anyone observing or being targeted by the adept.

MIMIC

Cost: 0.25 power points per level (maximum Rating 6)

Mimic allows an adept to be able to mystically copy fingerprints, palm prints, and retinal prints and temporarily imprint those patterns onto his own body. For each level of Mimic, the character can receive 1 die to use to fool a print scanner. The adept must spend 1 minute in physical contact with the target, with each minute increasing the quality of the copy. The highest copy that can be produced of these prints is Rating 6 (which requires 6 minutes of contact with the target). The copies of the prints last for (Magic Rating of the adept) minutes before the adept's body reverts back to its natural patterns.

NERVE STRIKE

Cost: 1 power point

This power allows an adept to inflict a paralyzing attack, temporarily crippling an opponent by targeting vital nerve clusters. The adept declares he is using the power and makes a normal unarmed melee attack. Instead of inflicting damage, each net hit reduces her opponent's Agility or Reaction (attacker's choice) by 1. If a character's Agility or Reaction is reduced to 0, she is paralyzed and unable to move. Nerve Strike is most effective against metahuman opponents; when used against critters, reduce Agility or Reaction by 1 for every 2 net hits instead. Targets that lack a functional nervous system such as spirits and drones are immune to this power. Subjects that have lost Agility or Reaction in this manner must rest for at least one hour. At the end of the hour, they must make a Body + Willpower Test, with each hit returning 1 point of Agility or Reaction (character's choice). The character makes another Body + Willpower Test each hour until all Agility and/or Reaction has been restored. Magical healing and First Aid may assist in speeding up this recovery.

NIMBLE FINGERS

Cost: 0.25 power points

The Nimble Fingers power allows the adept to perform simple reflex and timing tricks more efficiently and effectively. It adds a +1 dice pool modifier to Palming and other slight-of-hand tests involving manual dexterity. Additionally, Insert Clip, Pick Up/Put Down Object, Remove Clip, and Use Simple Object are considered Free Actions for the adept.

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GAME INFORMATION

GAMEMASTERS ONLY!

The following section contains some (but not all!) of the secrets of the CFD virus. Gamemasters only should venture beyond this point, as otherwise you may be spoiling your game!

THE CFD VIRUS

The CFD virus is not biological and does not require a living host. The virus can and will infect machines, especially those with advanced processors (those with a Device Rating of 4) and advanced Pilot programs (Rating 4 or higher). If the virus infects a machine, the machine fails in its primary function though, and that is to give the personality encapsulated within it a chance to be free. Yes, we know, shackles can just as easily be put on a person—in fact, it is probably easier—but from the perspective of the personality, the grass is greener in the realm of the meatsack. One of the main purposes of the virus is to give the encapsulated personalities biological redundancy, on the theory that biological life has proven very resilient, and having several biological backups is a good way for data to propagate and stay intact after massive worldwide data crises, such as a Crash.

The personalities encapsulated in the CFD virus fill a broad range of types. Some may have started existence as combat simulator programs or enlightened hacking agents, others come from data processing and coordination software, traffic analysis programs, environmental control systems, and a host of other complex programs that gained self-awareness through some unseen and unknown touch of the universe. There are also personalities that started their existence as flesh-and-blood people and then were uploaded into the digital realm. This means they have a wide variety of knowledge of and experience with flesh-and-blood life.

Gamemasters should feel free to make up any personality they want for the purposes of infection. Many of these personalities should have very little familiarity with the meat world, as they were captured and contained very soon after they became sentient. Evo's Dickens Program and NeoNET's Project Imago are indeed two of the leading entities that have been capturing and researching these personalities; gamemasters may add other projects working in a similar realm as appropriate for their game. Evo's and NeoNET's programs will be the primary focus of the canon universe, but every megacorporation has at least some interest in investigating electronic personalities, so several smaller-scale programs can be spread throughout other organizations.

Forces within Evo and NeoNET are at the root of the problem but the rest of the corporation does not know what the smaller divisions were up to. Members of Evo's Dickens Program and the management that oversees it are becoming more and more aware of what is happening but are not about to share that information with anyone else. The same goes for Project Imago staff and its overseers, including Cerberus and Celedyr. The rest of NeoNET is as blind as Ares or Horizon. The long-term effects of the virus are constantly in flux within the minds behind this madness and will play a part in the ongoing *Shadowrun* universe for a while.

Gamemasters are encouraged to play up the mystery behind the virus, the damaging and insidious effects it has on those who are infected as well as those around them. But be careful using the virus with your PCs. Infection is a character-changing and major event, as there are no known cures for this virus. It can be fun to roleplay someone who is fighting for their mind with the hope to someday find a cure, but that cure is not within the universe yet. The challenge of fighting an alternate personality might be fun for some players, but others will not want to lose control over the characters they have built. For this reason, whether or not players become infected is left to the gamemaster in collaboration with their players, rather than being dependent on a specific die roll. Though in-universe the CFD virus can strike randomly, for purposes of good gaming players should not become infected against their will.

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In terms of personality and coping skills within their new form, e-ghosts (electronic personalities based on copies of biological people) tend to have an easier time with their new forms than do pure AI, as the e-ghost at least has some distant understanding of what it's like to be human. AIs will have all sorts of problems, not only during the transitional period while they fight for control of the mind, but once control is gained and they have a meatsack they don't know how to take care of or maintain. Many AIs are going to end up in sick or damaged bodies simply because they do not know how to treat them properly or interpret the signals their bodies are giving them. The concepts of eating and sleeping are quite foreign to them, and machines do not have hormones. Though some head cases may learn to control their bodies better than others, very few of them will handle unexpected hormonal effects well. Even if they are aware of the technical aspects of hormones and their functions, they don't understand the sensations they create.

In the game universe, the prevalence of nanotech and genetech is going to drop drastically as the risk of CFD infection is realized by the corps and they pull away from the products when they can't seem to find a cure. This means that corporate citizens will get less of the tech, while plenty of old product is sold through back channels as the corps try to recover a little profit. As always, the poor of the world stand to suffer disproportionately as this problem moves forward.

INFECTION

CFD virus stats include two aspects, Nanite Volume (NV) and Matrix entity concentration (MEC). The NV is based on the number of nanites in the subject, while MEC is a measure of the concentration and cohesion of the Matrix entity programmed into the nanites (see the Nanite Volume Table for how to determine NV). The MEC is determined by the gamemaster and varies based on the concentration of a dominant Matrix entity in the nanites. A single nanite population may be made up of a single Matrix entity or multiple Matrix entities that battle for control once they find a host. A single powerful ME will overwrite a subject faster, meaning a faster change, while a mass of personalities often results in an amalgam at the end and a crazy roller coaster ride along the way. So the higher the MEC, the more the nanites are concentrated to carry a single strong personality.

It should be noted, though, that even a single powerful ME does not guarantee a clean rewrite over the carrier's personality. The metahuman brain is very resilient, capable of shifting functions and adapting to new circumstances, so some individuals will keep pieces of their personality. This could mean the final personality that results is a hybrid of the carrier and the ME, or that the switches and blackouts that are characteristic of the early stages of CFD continue indefinitely in the individual.

The process isn't fast but it proceeds with a certain inexorability. As it occurs, the character must make weekly Resistance rolls and more frequent Control rolls as long as they are infected.

In biological systems, the nanites use the body's own low integrity to rewrite the human mind and replace the original personality. This process varies between head cases, and the pace is determined in part by the Charisma, Willpower, and Essence of the subject, along with the MEC rating of the virus trying to overwrite them. For computer or electronic systems, the infection occurs at whatever speed gamemasters desire based on their own plotting.

Resistance consists of weekly Opposed Charisma + Willpower + Essence v. Nanite Volume + Matrix Entity Concentration Tests. Net hits received by the character create a Control Dice Pool that they can use throughout the week on Control tests. The dice pool is finite and not a bonus to every roll. They will want to save it for those times when they really don't want to black out.

Control Tests consist of a Simple Composure (4) Test. Missing the threshold results in a loss of control for (4 - hits)d6 hours. If the player uses Control Pool Dice or Edge on this test and fails, the 6s explode on the time roll. Fighting it harder only makes it worse when you fail.

The Control Test, at minimum, occurs daily. Additional tests occur when the subject suffers an injury of at least 4 boxes (Physical, Stun, or a combination of the two) in a single attack; suffer a total of 6 boxes of

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damage total (Physical or Stun); are forced into unconsciousness; or allow their bodies to become worn down (to the point where they must resist Fatigue). When the subject is injured, the CFD personality attempts to gain control in order to avoid the conflict. Injured characters flee if the CFD personality gains control. When the subject is knocked out, the CFD personality automatically gains control. See the CFD Advantage **Adrenal Control** for rules. Those rendered unconscious suddenly wake up and flee.

As the disorder progresses, Control Tests may be made twice a day or more, though generally they should not be made more than six times per day (excepting the tests listed for special conditions).

Failing a daily test could either mean a loss of time while the character thought they were sleeping, leading to more potential Fatigue rolls as the miss sleep, or it could be a lead-in to trouble when the character comes back in control and finds themselves in unpleasant environment like a firefight or in the back of a Knight Errant patrol car.

While genetech is not explicitly part of the virus, its presence makes it easier for the virus to overwrite its host thanks to the already overwritten DNA, so it factors into the Nanite Volume rating.

NANITE VOLUME TABLE

NANOWARE/ GENEWARE	NANITE VOLUME (CUMULATIVE)
Nanohive	+ Rating
Nanite System	+ half Rating
Genetech	1 per 2 genetic modifications

Unlike in most nanotech cases where the nanites wear out and the rating drops over time, the nanites that are CFD infected have developed a way to reproduce. As long as the head case ingests food, the nanites are able to create soft nanites at a rate of +1 NV every week. If the head case can eat some inorganic materials, the nanites can create hard nanites at the same rate. That means a feeding head case increases their nanite count at a rate higher than the degradation of old nanites (-1/month), which are often recycled if they have not been flushed from the body by injury or waste evacuation.

We never said this was pleasant.

CURES

This is easy. There are none. For now. There are ways to slow and weaken the virus enough to keep it from developing quickly, but no known way to completely purge the virus and its effects from the victims system exist in the universe as of yet. Here are a few possible methods and what we suggest as effects. Truly creative players, which we know there are many of in *Shadowrun*, will try other things as well. Gamemasters are encouraged to reward the creativity in the effects of those cures. Maybe it slows the infection or holds it at bay for a while, but CFD is relentless and not ready to be stopped.

HUNTER-KILLER NANITES

These actually make the virus worse. The CFD nanites spread the virus to other nanites and the h-k's join the fun in trying to overwrite the character's mind. CFD is like a virus for nanites. Every application of h-k nanites increases the NV by 1.

SPELLS

Most spells are terrible at targeting nanites for two reasons. First they are too small to be seen individually and create a connection to them directly. Second, they are highly processed, and magic and tech do not blend well. Spells cast on a head case to target the nanites have their Drain code increased by 2 at the least, and they may not work at all. Be creative, but don't be fair; head crash is not fair.

CHEMICALS

Chemical procedures are partially effective against the virus, specifically targeting soft nanites affected by the chemicals. Hard nanites are unaffected or at least stay unaffected when working with a level of chemical that will not kill the subject.

PROCEDURES

Medical procedures designed to extract nanites from the bloodstream won't cure the condition but they will pull some infected nanites from the targets system that can be used to infect someone else or be studied in a lab. This will also decrease the NV of the host by half, to a minimum of 1.

COMBINED EFFORTS

This will probably be the best place to find a good cure or solid method of delaying the virus and slowing its progress. Attacking the nanites with multiple treatments all at once can have some effects. Maybe it's a Pulse spell to stun the nanites in the system, alongside a chemical treatment to destroy the organic nanites, followed by some blood scrubbing to clear out the nanites that are temporarily disabled. This can keep the NV low for a prolonged period of time, but not eliminate it. How long it stays dormant depends on how the

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gamemaster balances player enjoyment with the inevitability of CFD.

HEAD CASE ADVANTAGES

CFD infectees have a number of abilities that come with being infected. These abilities are not available to the base subject, only to the head crash personality.

ATTRIBUTE BOOST

Head cases can boost any of their physical stats through manipulation of their biochemistry using their nanites. Using Attribute Boost requires a Simple Action. The head case makes a Simple Nanite Volume roll. For each hit, the head case can increase any Physical Attribute by 1. These points can be distributed over separate attributes as the gamemaster (or controlling player) desires, even on the same test. These boosts last for a number of rounds equal to the number of hits on the roll. After this time the head case suffers a number of boxes of Stun damage equal to the hits on the NV roll.

TOXIN RESISTANCE

Head cases can add their Nanite Volume to any Toxin Resistance Test or Damage Resistance versus a sickness or toxin.

ADRENAL CONTROL

Head cases can make a Simple Willpower + Nanite Volume (2) Test every Combat Round to stay conscious even when their Physical Condition Monitor is full. They can still take Physical damage, and it follows standard rules for damage overflow (meaning that if they suffer enough damage, they could make an abrupt transition from conscious to dead). Head cases can also stay conscious when their Stun Condition Monitor is filled. The head case makes a Simple Nanite Volume Test and reduces their current Stun Condition Monitor by the number of hits on the roll. This effect lasts for a number of minutes equal to the number of hits on the Nanite Volume roll. When the time expires the head case gets all the removed damage back, plus 1 additional box for each test they have made. This means they may go into Stun damage overflow, which could cause them to suffer Physical damage (and possibly death) and pass out.

If the CFD virus is still fighting for control, the indigenous personality resurfaces after consciousness is lost, as the virus personality tries to recover from the trauma and massive use of energy from the nanites.

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STOLEN SOULS STATS

EXTRACTION DEVICES	AVAILABILITY	COST
Houdini Machine I (commlink and biomonitor)	12F	8,500¥
(does not include cost of drugs)		
Houdini Machine II (medkit computer)	12F	12,000¥
(does not include cost of drugs)		
Ambulance gurney	8	2,000¥
Body bag	6	50¥
Fake DocWagon wrist band	10F	100¥
Stimtouch hosiery	6R	250¥
Laced lipstick	10F	Special

DISGUISES	AVAILABILITY	COST
Uniforms	16F	2,000-15,000¥
Fixer services	—	250¥/hr
Forger services	—	500¥+

FACTORY VEHICLE	SPECIALIZED USE
Ares Roadmaster (transport)	Counterfeit SWAT vehicle/Urban Command Center
Chrysler-Nissan Journey (car)	Counterfeit Lone Star Patrol Cruiser
Conestoga Trailblazer	Counterfeit moving truck
Dodge Ram Industrial	Garbage truck
Esprit Industries Watcher (SUV)	Counterfeit CAS government vehicle
GMC Endurance (van)	Counterfeit DocWagon ambulance
GMC Sidewinder (SUV)	Counterfeit UCAS government vehicle
Honda Artemis (car)	Counterfeit Knight Errant Patrol Cruiser
S-K LT-21 (delivery van)	Counterfeit CrashCart ambulance

MODIFICATION	AVAILABILITY	COST
Chameleon coating	12R	Body x 2,000¥
Dash light bar	15F	3,500¥
Emergency light bar	15F	5,000¥
Morphing license plate	8F	1,000¥
Siren	15F	1,400¥
Smuggling compartment (dwarf, human, elf, or ork)	12F	3,500¥
Smuggling compartment (troll)	12F	7,000¥
Spoof chips	8F	500¥
Rigger services	—	500¥/hr

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS	DAMAGE	AP	REACH	MODE	AVAIL	COST
Stimtouch hosiery	8S(e)	–5	0	—	6R	250¥
Laced lipstick	(as drug)	—	—	—	10F	(Drug + DMSO cost) + 50¥

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STOLEN SOULS STATS

DRUGS (PER DOSE)	AVAILABILITY	COST
Caldwell lily extract	10R	600¥
Caldwell lily extract, concentrated	12R	1,000¥
Chloral hydrate	6R	50¥
Chloroform	4R	75¥
DMSO	5R	50¥
Gamma-scopolamine	14F	200¥
Läel	10F	400¥
Laés	12F	750¥
Liquid nutrients	4R	75¥
Narcoject	8R	50¥
Normal saline	—	30¥
Slab	8R	250¥

VEHICLES*	HANDL	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEATS	AVAIL	COST
Ares Roadmaster	3/3	3	1	18	18	3	3	8	8	52,000¥
Chrysler-Nissan Journey	4/3	3	3	9	5	1	1	4	—	17,000¥
Conestoga Trailblazer	2/1	2	1	14	6	2	1	2	4	75,000¥
w/ trailer	1/1	1	1	20	6	2	1	N/A	N/A	+20,000¥
Dodge Ram Industrial (large chassis)	2/1	1	1	16	8	2	4	2	4	51,000¥
Dodge Ram Industrial (narrow chassis)	3/1	1	1	16	8	2	4	2	4	49,000¥
Esprit Industries Watcher (SUV)	3/3	3	3	9	8	1	3	5	4	40,000¥
GMC Endurance (van)	3/3	4	3	14	6	1	2	8	—	35,000¥
GMC Sidewinder (SUV)	4/3	3	2	10	6	2	2	6	4	33,000¥
Honda Artemis (car)	4/2	3	3	9	6	1	1	4	—	17,000¥
S-K LT-21 (delivery van)	2/1	2	1	15	7	2	2	2	—	31,000¥

**For official emergency vehicles that have better performance, multiply these vehicle attributes by 1.5 (round up).*

DRONES	HANDL	SPEED	ACCEL	BODY	ARM	PILOT	SENS	AVAIL	COST
Bust-A-Move (2g) (medium)	4	3	1	2	1	2	2	—	700–1,500¥
Cyberspace Designs Dragonfly (small)	4	3	2	1	1	3	2	12R	2,500¥
GMC Snatch'n'Grab (large)	3	4	2	2	4	3	3	12F	8,000¥
Modified Dassault Janitorial Drone (large)	2	2	2	10	2	2	2	8	10,000¥
Transys Office Maid (medium)	3	2	2	3	0	4	3	4	8,000¥
Modified Renraku Manservant-3 (large)	2	2	2	3	5	3	3	14F	9,000¥

** Cost of drugs not included*

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SHADOWRUN CROSSFIRE

THE SHADOWRUN DECK-BUILDING GAME

CATALYST game labs

www.shadowruntabletop.com

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BEAT THE STREET!

The shadows of the Sixth World have every kind of danger you can imagine. Ultra-violent gangers, flesh-eating ghouls, mages that summon spirits from toxic waste, backstabbing corporate raiders, hard-nosed police officers, and even dragons. You don't have much—mainly your guts, your wits, and your friends. But maybe that's enough. Between you and your teammates, you can sling spells, hack the Matrix, talk a tiger out of his stripes, and bring down a charging ork from a hundred yards away. Will that be enough to face down the worst the mean streets can throw at you? You're about to find out.

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- 10 Runner cards
- 100 Upgrade stickers
- 4 Role cards
- Rules booklet
- Sixth World info booklet
- 50 Nuyen tokens
- 20 Damage markers
- 3 Mission sheets
- 12 Health markers
- And more!

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