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SHADOWS OF ASIA™

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SHADOWS OF ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

Shadows of Asia explores the largest continent in detail for the first time in *Shadowrun.* Like the previous *Shadows of North America* and *Shadows of Europe,* it delves into the corporate intrigues, political struggles, underworld dealings, strange magics and dark shadows of each country in Asia.

Shadows of Asia is presented as a series of electronic documents posted by Captain Chaos, sysop of the vast Shadowland archive and data haven—the number one source for shadowrunners on what's going on in the world of *Shadowrun.* The documents come from a variety of sources, underground and mainstream, but are directed towards an audience of shadowrunners. These sources are each unique in outlook and perspective, influenced by their own particular prejudices and interests. Each article is marked up with a running commentary by shadow denizens who add to, revise and contradict the original post. These inserted comments add innuendo, allegations, opinions, rumors, misconceptions, misinformation, lies and sometimes even the truth to the information presented. It is left up to the gamemaster to decide what information is correct and which is just filling, as appropriate to his or her game.

The first chapter, *Neo-Asia,* examines two primary facets of the East: business and spirituality. First it provides an overview of the major corporations' activities throughout Asia, focusing on the struggle between the dominant Japanacorps and the rival Pacific Prosperity Group. It then delves into the wide range of religions, beliefs and magical traditions practiced by the various Asian peoples, from Buddhism and Daoism to Hinduism and Islam.

The chapters that follow each take a close look at the countries in one particular region of Asia. *Chinese Puzzle* examines the dozen plus Chinese splinter states, from the industrial Canton Confederation to the communist stronghold of Henan. *The Indian Subcontinent* introduces modern India and its surrounding states, including the Kashmir Wastes and mysterious Tibet. *Japan* provides an overview of this changing country, from the policies of the new boy emperor to its interesting cultural trends. *The Middle East* covers the turbulent struggle between a militant Ibn Eisa and his former allies, and how it affects each of the countries there from Arabia to Israel and Palestine. The numerous factions struggling for power are the main focus of *Russia,* as well as the internal strife between metahumans and shapeshifters in Awakened Yakut. *Southeast Asia* details a wide range of war-torn countries and their turmoils, including the naga uprising in Cambodia and the ongoing revolution in the Philippines. Finally, *The Rest of Asia* touches upon various countries that didn't fit snugly into other region write-ups, from Matrix-savvy Korea to the widespread islands of Oceania.

A Game Information section wraps up the book, providing advice to gamemasters on how to use the information on each country and including a selection of plot hooks to play with. Rules are also given for employing Eastern magical traditions as well as the standard checkpoint, border crossing and Matrix statistics for each nation.

LOOKING TOWARD THE RISING SUN

It's not easy to forget how much influence Japan has over the world today. Everywhere you look, you'll find products made by Japanese megacorps and media trends influenced by Japanese culture. Japanese corporate practices are imitated the world over, and their sway over international world affairs is unmistakable. Yet for many years Japan has been closed off to the international shadowrunner community, as outsiders found it hard to break into the xenophobic ranks of a tight-knit group of masterless ronin. All that is changing now, as Japan opens up in more ways than one. The empire's new cultural policies are making it a lot easier for gaijin runners to score work there—even metahuman runners.

It's easy to look towards Japan and get blinded by its holo-lit prominence—but there's a lot more going on in Asia that deserves our attention. From the current faction fights brewing in the Middle East and Russia to the never-ending demand for corporate datasteal jobs in Malaysia and Hong Kong, there's an entire continent full of opportunities to keep even the most aggressive shadow crews busy. Whether you're looking for merc work (Indochina), smuggling runs (Turkestan), underworld deals (China), Matrix hacks (Korea), or even a piracy gig (Oceania), Asia has it for you.

More than anywhere else, however, Asia is a place where you'll need to keep your wits about you. Though Asia is a source of some of the world's leading technological developments and home to some of the world's most modern business centers, it is also a place steeped in tradition with much reverence for old religions and customs. Expect a lot more in the way of cultural differences—don't forget that the people you're dealing with may consider feng shui, centuries of tradition or the advice of their long-dead ancestors far more important than nuyen, reputation or business opportunities.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 5:55:33 (PST)

In this age of global megacorporate giants, shadowrunners don't look at corporations as products of their national origins or distinct regional entities. In an extraterritorial, cosmopolitan city like Seattle, the global view makes some sense, but it's not the whole story. In Asia, the corporations tailor their operations to local demographics and essentially "feel" like local corporations because most of Asia is still a relatively exclusive society. And while business is business in Seattle, business in Asia is often tied to centuries-old regional or racial attitudes, and taking the global view can leave you unprepared to deal with the realities on the ground. I've asked Otomo, from Singapore's Morgue, to give us those local realities on Asian business.

» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:00:05 (PST)

THE CORPORATE EAST

by Otomo

For decades after the Crash of '29, it was the common view that Asia set the bar by which the rest of the globe judged their economic prowess. The nuyen is the standard monetary unit of the business world, held up by the general stability and pervasiveness of the Japanese megacorporations. But that assumption is no longer safe. The Japanacorps have taken some beatings and a new giant has risen in Asia: the Pacific Prosperity Group. Now a trade war is underway over who will emerge as the ruling pantheon of Asian business.

JAPAN, INC.

Unlike shadowrunners, business loves stability. Nothing makes a stock tank quite as fast as the unexpected. So when VITAS, the Awakening and the Crash brought the United States and most of the globe to its knees, Japan found itself in the enviable position of being an oasis of stability in an upside-down world. The nuyen became the de facto world standard, the Japanese megacorporations became the most powerful economic bloc in the world, and all roads led to Japan. And Japan planned to keep it that way.

The Japanese corporations backstab each other as often as any others, but they like to keep it in the family, so to speak. Anyone who comes in from the outside and threatens a

Japanese corp faces a protective front of Japanacorps that will use every trick in the book to keep the interloper out. It is not uncommon for one Japanese corp to act as a "white knight" for another or to buy up a threatened Japanese subsidiary temporarily to protect it from a foreign takeover, then sell it back when it is no longer under threat. For the longest time, this kept Japan distinctly Japanese, and by extension, kept Asia under Japanese dominance.

» What makes all these dirty tricks possible is a gentleman's agreement between the Japanacorps. When Fuchi was on the rocks, its subsidiaries were drawing all sorts of foreign corporate predators. Fuchi Asia sold many threatened assets to Renraku with the understanding that Renraku would sell them back when things stabilized. Fortunately for Renraku, Fuchi never stabilized and they never had to part with any of the assets.
» Renraku Fox

PACIFIC PROSPERITY GROUP

Because the Japanacorps were so protective of each other, life was hard for non-Japanese Asian corporations. These disadvantaged corporations repeatedly tried to form coalitions to fight Japanese control, but Japanese sabotage and internal bickering always brought them down. That is, until a few years ago, when three things made a coalition possible. The first was a load of cash that Dunkelzahn's will dropped on the PPG's architect, Wu Lung-Wei. The second was Yamatetsu stabbing the Japanacorps in the back, moving to Vladivostok and agreeing to join Wu Lung-Wei's fledgling coalition. The third was Wuxing catapulting itself from AA to AAA status, ensuring the power of two AAA megacorporations backing the new Pacific Prosperity Group. The status quo went out the window.

Unlike the Japanacorps, the PPG isn't really an old boys' club. It is a trade and investment organization, focused less on protecting its own existence than in transforming the nature of business in Asia. It encourages investment in underdeveloped Asian markets, essentially building future markets for PPG members while undermining the dominance of the Japanese market. It also facilitates joint business opportunities between members and acts as a single lobbying force for its members in the Corporate Court and with national governments.

» It's a common myth that the PPG is anti-Japanese. While some members are, the organization itself has no real anti-Japanese bias, but their goal to develop Asian markets outside Japan certainly threatens the Japanacorps and has created a rivalry between the two entities.
» Keynesian Kid

» Hell, the PPG even counts some Japanese corporations as members. These tend to be corporations that have found themselves unwelcome in the Japanacorp Club for whatever reason or are gambling on the idea that non-Japanese markets will end up stronger than Japanese ones, and they want a piece of the pie.
» Reid

» Tzu Cheng, the Chairman of the PPG's board, will likely not be re-elected in June. A number of members have been critical of Wuxing's haste in feeding on the remnants of other members brought down by the Japanacorps. The top contenders for the spot are Taheiji Kato, who managed several joint ventures for Shibata and PacRim Communications, and Amira binte Aman, the director of MIB's Department of Investment Analysis. Kato is known for championing the idea of working with the Japanese corporations whenever possible and Ms. Aman has been vocally critical of some of Wuxing's more cavalier business decisions.
» HK Kid

THE ASIA TWENTY

Here's the list of the twenty biggest movers and shakers in Asia. Keep in mind that this list doesn't include all of each corp's subsidiaries—only the most significant and public ones.

Baihu Corporation
Headquarters: Guangdong, Canton Confederation
CEO: Teng Di Wei

A powerful Chinese heavy-industry conglomerate, Baihu is also the main military contractor in the region (a thriving business in the Chinese states). Baihu's operations largely revolve around South and Central Asia, India and Pakistan, but lately they have been expanding operations into South America. It is also rumored that Baihu is conducting very discreet magical research.

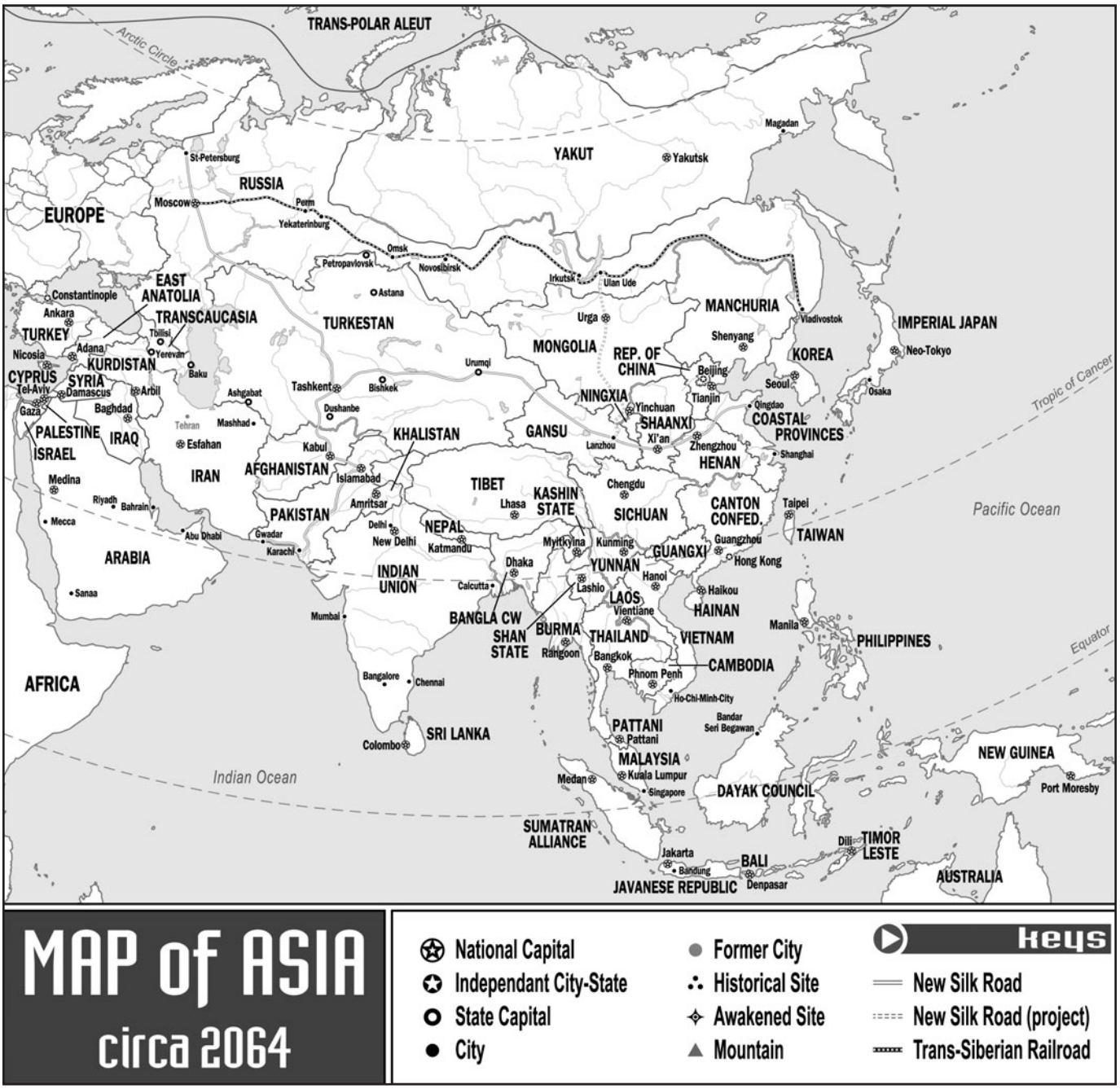
» The PPG is courting Baihu of late, but Baihu remains aloof. For the most part, their competition comes from Ares and Saeder-Krupp, which aren't corporations the PPG focuses its attention against.
» Ma'fan

JAPAN'S TEN LARGEST CORPORATIONS

1. Shiawase Corporation
2. Mitsuhama Computer Technologies
3. Renraku Computer Systems
4. Monobe International
5. Yakashima Technologies
6. Pacific Rim Bank & Financial Services
7. Sony Corporation
8. Komatsu Limited
9. Yokogawa Corporation
10. Daiatsu Inc.

PACIFIC PROSPERITY GROUP MAJOR MEMBERS

Eastern Tiger Corporation
Federated-Boeing
Gaeatronics
Malaysian Independent Bank
Pacific Rim Communications
Shibata Construction & Engineering
Universal Omnitech
Wuxing, Inc.
Yamatetsu Corporation



Chrysler-Nissan (C-N)
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
CEO: Douglas Attwood
Major Brands: Chrysler-Nissan, Dodge, Jeep, Mercedes-Benz, Toyota

Chrysler-Nissan is the world's largest automaker in terms of market share, but mostly due to internal posturing it lags behind GM and Ford in profits. When it withdrew from the indebted German conglomerate IFMU, it bought back and re-integrated Daimler-Benz at considerable cost. An influential bloc of Japanese shareholders balked at the expanding power of C-N's western offices, and the jockeying caused them to lose a bid on Messerschmidt-Kawasaki to Saeder-Krupp. Furthermore, the Japanese bloc then pressured C-N into purchasing Toyota, leaving the corporation to struggle with how to pay off its new acquisitions.

Daiatsu, Inc.
Headquarters: Osaka, Japan
CEO: Goro Inoue
Subsidiaries: Caterpillar, Dowdell Water Technologies, Electrical Transport Corporation, Geologis Development

Daiatsu is a global specialist in hydraulic systems and industrial vehicles and drones, equipping a majority of the world's mining and land clearance operations. In 2063, Daiatsu scored a major coup by signing to supply Mitsuhama-Benguet for the extension of their mining operations in Tsimshian. They've also been saddled with a major international lawsuit, however, concerning a deadly Indonesian landslide said to have been caused by negligent Daiatsu earthworks operations.

Eastern Tiger Corporation (ETC)
Headquarters: Pusan, Korea
CEO: Se-Jong Lee
Subsidiaries: Daewoo Corporation, LG-Haas, Pohang Iron & Steel, South Korea Energy, Haiu Biotek

The largest Korean corporation and one of the biggest Asian corps outside of Japan, Eastern Tiger is a diversified concern with strengths in heavy manufacturing, chemicals and energy production. Though it brought a great deal of stability to the PPG, lately increased competition with Japan is straining relations. Further, a bidding war against Wuxing over Hyundai has led to Eastern Tiger's threat to leave the PPG. So far, ETC hasn't backed up its threats, but no one believes it's bluffing.

Kolkota Integrated Talent and Technologies (KITT)
Headquarters: Kolkota, Indian Union
CEO: Vasant Almavala

KITT is India's only AA megacorporation, a service and consulting company based on India's vast pool of Japanese- and English-speaking educated citizens. It performs services for hundreds of megacorps that wish to outsource customer service, software development and testing, technology consulting or dozens of other requirements of day-to-day corporate operation. KITT is in the unique position of having relationships with nearly all of the Big Ten megacorps.

• Aztechnology is a big exception there. They have their own "unique" methods of operation that they'd rather not outsource.
• Corona

Komatsu Limited
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
CEO: Eizo Kobayashi
Subsidiaries: Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, Asahi-Takeda PharmaChem, East Japan Railway, Ajinomoto Foods

Komatsu, once a leader in heavy industry and mining equipment, reinvented itself along the idea that chemicals and nanotechnology would one day replace traditional heavy machinery. It sold off most of its assets to Daiatsu and MCT and immediately reinvested the capital in acquiring Asian chemical companies. It was a large gamble, but it has paid off, with Komatsu being the fourth largest chemical company on the globe and remaining competitive even against Big Ten rivals.

• Komatsu is faring better in the Japanese Reconstruction than most Japanacorps. It seems that the Emperor is interested in Komatsu's new research on nanotech architectural construction arrays.
• Neon Flower

• There's a secret division in Komatsu that studies the relationship between chemicals in the environment and the manasphere. I doubt anyone knows more about exactly how an area becomes toxic than these guys.
• Marley

Malaysia Independent Bank (MIB)
Headquarters: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
CEO: Zeta Ahmad Aziz

The MIB is a completely online bank; its brick-and-mortar operations are largely limited to a mailbox in Kuala Lumpur and a server farm in Hong Kong (though no doubt there are backup servers in other locations). In addition to being unique in that it operates entirely in the Matrix, it also follows Islamic law in relation to money-lending, resulting in a unique system of asset-trading as the basis of its lending. Its rising influence makes PacRim Bank extremely nervous of late, and sabotage against the MIB's investment assets is on the rise.

• The MIB is laundering money for something big, but I don't think it's the Triads anymore. I was digging around and got close to some heavily encrypted communications tied to a flurry of Asian asset trading, but as I was trying to make off with the paydata, I got slammed by a pair of very hi-rez icons. They sliced me up something fierce so I cut and ran, and never did figure out what exactly they were. They weren't your standard IC or decker stuff, that's for sure.
• Snow Tiger

• Probably some drek-eating otaku punks worshipping the Almighty Electronic Nuyen.
• The Allochron

Mitsuhama Computer Technologies (MCT)
Headquarters: Kyoto, Japan
CEO: Toshiro Mitsuhama
Subsidiaries: Mitsuhama Automatronics, Mitsuhama Computers, Mitsuhama Industrial Technologies, Mitsuhama Magical Services, Mitsuhama Media

The Asian leader in robotics, electronics and heavy industry, MCT continues to make its many Yakuza investors happy. Recently they've been focusing on increased mining operations in Tsimshian and elsewhere to prevent a stock price slide from their operational losses in the Philippines. They are also shifting most of their Philippines operational personnel to Japan, California and Tsimshian.

» The increased mining efforts mean that MCT has a lock on the trade of some minerals like manganese. Shiawase has not been at all happy with that result.
» Mr. Fusion

Monobe International
Headquarters: Matsuyama, Japan
President: Toshio Mitsukuri
Subsidiaries: Cryptec, Designer Genes, Herstal, Mapen Technologies, Monobe Biotechnical, Monobe Engineering, Société Suisse Technique, Vantage Partners, UCAS Compustat

Monobe is known for an aggressive acquisition strategy geared toward vertical distribution, purchasing their suppliers and distributors across Asia and the globe. They aggressively compete with Yamatetsu and Aztechnology in the realms of engineered foods, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, but they've left themselves without much of a cash reserve safety net in the process.

» Monobe is still lobbying for inclusion in the Corporate Court, angling to take Yamatetsu's non-permanent seat when it comes up for election in 2067. Obviously, the Japanacorps would love to punish Yamatetsu by replacing it with one of their own, but it's far from a sure thing.
» Turner

Pacific Rim Bank & Financial Services Corporation
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
President: Endo Kyoji

The PacRimBank has quietly kept the Japanacorps' club running for decades, benefiting the Japanese corporations with preferential loans and insurance and making sure they have the funds and backing to conduct their financial protectionism. For decades this has ensured PacRimBank a reliable and powerful set of customers, but lately that isn't so certain. The shift in the Asian markets has put PacRimBank in competition with the MIB, and their past protectionist policies have caused rising corporations to seek other options. PacRimBank is at a crossroads, trying to decide whether to open themselves up to new customers or continue to protect their old faithful.

Pacific Rim Communications Unlimited (PRC)
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
CEO: Choi Kun

The pan-Asian PRC group maintains telecommunications networks in major cities all around the Pacific Ocean from Kuala Lumpur to Seattle. PPG membership ensured them new deals in Asian cities and with the MIB grid, as well as a joint PRC-Shibata satellite constellation. This PPG allegiance, however, has led to intense protests at their home offices, criticism from the Japanese government and even sabotage of their Japanese assets by Japanese nationalists.

» Rumor has it that PRC was spurned by the Japanacorps way back, when they were competing for Japanese city Matrix grids against Fuchi and Renraku. They were forced to seek business opportunities outside the Japan Club and when the PPG came around, they didn't hesitate to take up the offer.
» Link

Renraku Computer Systems
Headquarters: Chiba, Japan
CEO: Haruhiko Nakada
Subsidiaries: Adams-Westlake Mediaworks, Architectural Dynamics, Champion Financial Group, Eurosoft, FactFiles, Festival Foods, Fuchi Corporate Services, Genecraft, Izom Armaments, Ultimax, Wakatta Software

Renraku is trying hard to put the legacy of the Seattle arcology behind it and move on. "Interim" has been removed from Harry Nakada's CEO title after Huang's failure to steal the top spot, and ol' Harry has been sweeping through Asia with handshakes and smiles, sealing new deals for the megacorp. Their goal is to look at their reliable old products and services through new eyes, capitalizing both on their traditional reliability and their fame for innovation. Of course, all of this is run through a spectacular public relations filter.

» Here's a name to watch out for: Dimitri Misato. Half-Slovenian, half-Japanese and 100% Renraku-bred, he's a brooding, sexy and smart rising star who is currently the CEO of Adams-Westlake Mediaworks. He turned that subsidiary from a flagging media research center to a novahot advertising agency and marketing consultation firm when the rest of Renraku was knee-deep in drek, through some creative use of memetics research.
» The Gypsy King

» The shareholders like Misato because he's a success story. Nakatomi likes Misato because he goes toe-to-toe with Novatech's lean, mean PR machine. Watanabe likes Misato—well, no one really knows why, but there are rumors that maybe Misato's been able to get through Watanabe's cast-iron exterior in the past. *wink wink*
» Cyn

Sandstorm Engineering Conglomerate
Headquarters: Riyadh, Arabian Caliphate
CEO: Aziz Ibn Yusuf Shammar
Subsidiaries: Tiamat, Inc., Euphrates Solutions, Mohit Development, AgoraTech

SEC consists of a grouping of successful construction, development and high-tech corporations brought under one umbrella by the Shammar family to become the largest native corporation in the Middle East. Their specialties are construction and land development, and most of the growth of Middle Eastern urban centers revolves around the work of Sandstorm's companies. Not only do they construct buildings for others, but in following Islamic banking law, they invest much of their capital in real estate assets, transforming the money into resorts and communities that they build and maintain.

» The management at Sandstorm is firmly in the back pocket of Ibn Eisa. They've been longtime supporters of his and the Shammar family knows they owe him for some of their successes.
» as Sadiq

Shiawase Corporation
Headquarters: Osaka, Japan
CEO: Tadashi Shiawase
Major Divisions: Shiawase Armaments, Shiawase Atomics, Shiawase Biotech, Shiawase Envirotech

The Shiawase family runs this corporate empire, and that family even includes Emperor Yasuhito and Korin Yamana by extension of marriage. A family-based corporate culture permeates Shiawase at every level, even extending to tempestuous family conflicts that can result in surgical purges handled by the MIFD, Shiawase's own intelligence branch. The rumor mill is watching for what Shiawase intends to get from its newly crafted links to the Japanese emperor, but corporate eyes are cast in the direction of the South China Sea, where Shiawase has been getting into some skirmishes, apparently over mineral rights.

» Despite animosity against her from the living Shiawase clan, the medium Jerri Howard is still managing to cling to her precarious perch of power on the board, representing the late Ryoi Shiawase. A little bird told me that this is due in no small part to backing from Rhonabwy, who is a major shareholder in Shiawase.
» 0111011001

Shibata Construction & Engineering
Headquarters: San Fernando, Philippines
CEO: Shibata Takako

Shibata C&E is a diversified engineering corporation that secures most of its profits by taking up outsourced projects from other megacorporations. They do manufacturing work for Yamatetsu's MetaErgonomics, operate Aztechnology's space assets and handle design tasks for some of Mitsuhama's drone research. Shibata often finds itself pulled in one direction or another by the competing interests of its megacorporate partners, and that pressure has only grown since Shibata helped to found the PPG.

» Shibata has an interesting past that goes to the root of some of the long-time animosity between the Japanacorps and Yamatetsu. In the 2030s, Shibata was Mitsuhama-owned, but came under a hostile takeover bid from Ares. MCT, unable to match the bid, turned to another Japanese Shibata shareholder to help. Buttercup agreed to outbid Ares, with the implied agreement that she'd then withdraw her bid after Ares lost interest and leave the cheap shares to MCT. Well, Buttercup never withdrew that bid, thus making her both the largest single shareholder of Shibata and a traitor to some in MCT.
» The Chromed Accountant

Sony Corporation
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
CEO: Tokie Hara
Major Divisions: Sony Automation, Sony Biotech, Sony Cybersystems, Sony Dataworks, Sony Entertainment

Sony prides itself on remaining a small but highly competitive corporation. They focus on high-tech consumer goods, keeping well ahead of the tech curve. Sometimes their gambles have gone sour, and each rocky patch has invited numerous takeover attempts, but somehow Sony has managed to come out of each one intact. At present, they are riding high on a number of consumer favorites and are so popular that their corporate headquarters has become a tourist attraction.

» You have to wonder where Sony is getting the money and savvy to avoid the dozen-plus takeover attempts that have come its way in the past three decades. Glancing at the major shareholders (none of which own any major portion of the corp), I don't see any that set off alarms.
» Nuyen Nick

» What did set off alarms was the day Sony had to call in an Ares Firewatch team to help them deal with a bug spirit that had been operating in their corporate headquarters.
» Grey Knight

Wuxing Incorporated
Headquarters: Hong Kong
CEO: Wu Lung-Wei
Subsidiaries: Wuxing Financial Services, Wuxing Worldwide Shipping, Lotus Multimedia, Red Wheel Engineering, Soba Foods

Wuxing rose from a Chinese shipping and finance group to a highly diversified conglomerate that pushed its way up into AAA status and founded the Pacific Prosperity Group. The current CEO, Wu Lung-Wei, has a consuming interest in feng shui, which observers have noted translates into increased Wuxing investment in magical research and services. Whether through shipping and transportation, financial investments or even research into local magical traditions, Wuxing manages to capitalize on the growing development throughout Asia.

» As mentioned, Shiawase and Wuxing are currently skirmishing in the South China Sea, but it's not entirely over mineral rights. Shiawase is in the area looking for a source of manganese not controlled by Mitsuhama, but Wuxing is there for the collection of alchemical materials that would be destroyed by Shiawase's mining. Neither side plans to budge an inch.
» Li Hsen Chang

Yakashima Technologies
Headquarters: Yokohama, Japan
CEO: Hiroshi Yakashima
Subsidiaries: Agrex International, Biogene, Farm-the-Sea, Medican, Sakura Security, TK Armors

The infamous hostile takeover king, Yakashima is known for speculating into the next big industry and changing direction to exploit it. Well, it seems they may have done it again, since they sold their highly profitable chemical industry assets to Komatsu for a large sum and have been acquiring small biotech, agribusiness and medical companies with the capital. The change is already starting to pay off, with new patents in genetech and medical research and procedures.

» Dark rumors have been following Yakashima too, indicating that they are engaged in some unethical medical and biotech research, including research on metahuman subjects and the manufacture of biowarfare agents. Nasty stuff, but most of the rumors haven't been proven, natch.
» Widow

» Even worse than the rumors that they're making this stuff are the rumors that they're using it. After Yakashima failed to take over Lami Look Pagkaon, there were reports of widespread food poisoning from aquafarms supplying the Asian market. It almost seems that Yakashima wanted no one to have the Asian fishing industry if they couldn't be in on it.
» Soylent Green

Yamatetsu Corporation
Headquarters: Vladivostok, Russia
CEO: Saru Iwano
Subsidiaries: Crashcart Medical Services, MetaErgonomics, Pensodyne, Tsuruga International, Xiao Technologies

Yamatetsu prides itself on its primary business concern of building the things that make people's lives easier—especially metahuman people. Their studies into metahuman-environmental interaction led to significant advances in biotechnology and cybertechnology, but it also led to their involvement in the space sciences. It's in the latter area that Yamatetsu just scored a major success: landing the first manned mission on Mars. And in Yamatetsu's move from Japan to Vladivostok, they've succeeded in changing the landscape of Asian development more than any other corporation in the last two decades.

» Not everyone is happy about the changes Yamatetsu has caused, either. There are still sizable elements in Yamatetsu's power structure that are Japanese traditionalists and not fans of the PPG, Buttercup or the metahuman influence in the cor-

poration today. They are a minority right now, but it's believed that some of them are in contact with like-minded individuals at an old corporate rival, Yakashima.
• Blackguard

Yokogawa Corporation
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
CEO: Manobu Watoga
Subsidiaries: Andcom, Emeral Crisis Management, NPI Instruments, Yokogawa Fire & Marine Insurance, Yokogawa-Honeywell Solutions, Yokogawa Power & Switchgear

Yokogawa is an unusually quiet corporation for its size, specializing in industrial and scientific instruments and crisis/emergency management companies. It has always been a mainstay employer for Asia's blue-collar middle class, but it recently got some fantastic press when the heroism of its Emeral firefighters in responding to the chaos in Asia in 2061 was broadcast live around the world.

• Yokogawa's CEO, Manobu Watoga, is a koborokuru, or Japanese dwarf. That he's a metahuman CEO in Japan is unusual enough, but there's the added fact that he's not a champion for metahuman rights. Watoga-san sees his "condition" as shameful, so he is trying to redeem the shame on his family's name by committing himself to his duty at Yokogawa.
• Takanoba

• What about the other Big Ten? They must have some presence in Asia.
• Ex-pat

• Absolutely. Asia's too big a market for them to ignore; it's just that the native Asian corps tend to have a larger sway in the region.

Ares Macrotechnology rakes in some sizable cash butting into Asia's military and security disputes. They don't advertise their presence much, but if you know where to look you can find them in Central Asia, the Middle East, China and Southeast Asia, usually acting through local shells to arm one side or another. Their most prominent Asian presence is through IMI in Israel and Crystal Optics in Singapore.

Aztechnology's Asian division is one of its smallest, but that's been changing. Asia let out a collective gasp when the Azzies applied to the PPG, and even the possibility of the deal's ever going through plays into the fears of the Japanese corporations. It isn't likely, though, and the PPG keeps stalling; too many of the existing members have problems dealing with the Big A. In the meantime, though, you can still see their Stuffer Shacks and Carrefour's dotting most Asian sprawls.

Cross Applied Technologies has a presence in Asia, but mostly in the form of research labs. They maintain two large research campuses in Singapore and Seoul as well as a number of smaller laboratories in Russia. It's hard to say exactly how many CATCo labs there are in Russia, since more than a few of them are extremely isolated.

Samantha Villiers personally manages Novatech's minor holdings in Asia, through Novatech Seattle's offices. They own a few small companies in Korea and the Canton Confederation, but all their attempts to establish major connections in Asia have been thwarted by Shikei Nakatomi at Renraku.

Lofwyr's byzantine Saeder-Krupp empire has claws embedded throughout Asia, of course. Most of Saeder-Krupp's Asian holdings relate to natural resources, such as the oilfields in Russia, the Middle East and Indonesia, but in Japan they maintain significant clout through ownership of Messerschmidt-Kawasaki and Nippon Credit & Trust.
• €spion

EASTERN SPIRITUALITY

• I'm assuming that for most of you, your biggest experience with the religious traditions of the East is discovering which sim starlet has converted to Buddhism according to this week's sleazy 'trix tabloids. The rest of you are probably dismissing a file on Eastern religions as useless for shadowrunners. Well, listen up: belief binds the peoples of East Asia together in a way that shapes how they do business, how they react to you and how they view the Awakened world. To help give us a better understanding of how this came to be and what it means for runners in the East, I've asked Wu Wei, a Daoist sorcerer currently based out of San Fran, to give us the lowdown.
• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:02:54 (PST)

I'll spare you the traditional Chinese greeting, since I'm guessing that picking up the local languages isn't why you're here. The Captain suggested that I give you a rundown on how many people follow a given tradition, but since a lot of Easterners don't identify with only one tradition in a clean "I'm a Catholic and that's all I am" sort of way, that doesn't really work not going to quite do the job.

Take me, for example. I consider myself a Daoist, having trained at the White Cloud Monastery, but I also pray to the various Bodhisattvas of Buddhism. I share many of the same rituals with the shamans of my home village and I honor my parents in a properly Confucian manner.

Many of the people of East Asia are pragmatic when it comes to religion, and most incorporate elements from several faiths into their practice. Even though I find the meaning of my existence in the Dao, like most of my countrymen I also keep a small shrine to the Buddha in my home. And of course, I would never neglect to make proper offerings to my ancestors and the spirits that inhabit my home.

The religions of the East are more than words in a book or services on holy days—they are complete ways of being that structure our everyday lives and determine what we eat, what we wear and how we live. Much of this is grounded in the old ways, which never truly disappeared here. The return of magic has only served to reinforce what many believed in their hearts all along.

There are thousands of beliefs that belong to no religion and all religions at the same time. This is part of the mystery and allure of Eastern religions to Westerners.

BUDDHISM

Buddhism began thousands of years ago when an Indian prince named Gautama became the Buddha and founded a new religion. The most important beliefs of Buddhism are the four noble truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by attachment, you can end suffering by ending attachment, and only by following the Middle Path (Buddhism) can you end attachment. "Attachment" for Buddhists refers not only to property, but also to the desire for metahuman contact or even the wish to be successful. Any kind of desire, in fact, gives rise to suffering. A little negative, perhaps, but given the state of the world, it's unsurprising that Buddhism remains a popular religion.

All forms of Buddhism teach that your soul reincarnates depending on your karma—the sum of good and bad deeds you committed in your life. For Buddhists, the goal is to achieve nirvana, a state of non-being where you finally leave the world behind. Many Westerners have trouble wrapping their heads around the concept that a religion's ultimate goal is to bring its followers to a state of nonexistence, but you have to remember that attachment to this world is what leads to suffering, and that non-being is the only escape from suffering. Even the heavens contain suffering in the form of desire and attachment.

The Awakening didn't shake up Buddhism as much as it did other religions—after all, Buddhists have been around for a long time and they've seen a lot. One thing that Buddhism was quick to embrace, for example, was the Matrix. Many Buddhists saw the virtual reality of the Matrix as a reflection of the illusory reality that they perceived in the real world. It is not unusual to find Matrix uplinks even in smaller shrines, and online meditation parlors are popular with the faithful.

» It's also not unusual to find rural shrines inhabited by spirits of man that protect local villagers. When they manifest, these spirits will often take the form of Buddhist saints or demons.
» Uncle

Like other modern religions, Buddhism comes in a variety of flavors: Theravada, Mahayana and Tantric. I won't bore you with the doctrinal differences here; instead, I'll briefly tell you where you can expect to find these different flavors, along with how to identify each.

When most people think about Buddhism, they're thinking of the Mahayana variety. When your favorite sim starlet proclaims that she's become a Buddhist, this is what she's talking about. Not only is it the most popular brand and followed by the most people, it is also the most progressive strain of Buddhism and thus doesn't have a discriminatory view regarding metahuman reincarnation. The exceptions to this are some Japanese monasteries that preach that being born meta is a despised state, proof of sin in a past life.

The second flavor is Tantric Buddhism, practiced in many of the mountainous regions of Central and South Asia. The major center for Tantric Buddhism was, and presumably still is, Tibet—when the Maya Cloud went up, most Tantric Buddhists were cut off from the center of their faith. Those stuck outside ended up following their own path, which has made for some interesting interpretations.

» He's not kidding, either. Tantric Buddhism enjoyed a lot of popularity all along the west coast of the North American continent during the end of the last century. When the Dalai Lama and the church hierarchy sealed themselves away, some of these guys decided to go all loose cannon and start their own sects. Many of them are run-of-the-mill crazies, but some can be a bit dangerous.
» Greenhorn

The oldest (and supposedly purest) strain of Buddhism is Theravada, still found in many parts of Southeast Asia. Of all the sects of Buddhism, these guys are the most conservative. They still live most of their lives as monastics or as simple villagers. Theravadin followers believe that metahuman souls have been chosen to be particularly tested in this life. Unlike the Japanese, however, Theravada metahumans often seek positions in the church to atone for their past sins.

» They may not be as widely discriminated against, but there is still some social stigma attached. Metahumans rarely rise far in the temple ranks.
» Koo Rang

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is not exactly a religion to most East Asians unless one is a bureaucrat, but it is a system of belief for billions. Confucianism can trace its origins to the writings of Master Kong, the historical Confucius, over three thousand years ago.

At the core of Confucianism are five guiding relationships, which provide the basis for orderly society. The most important of these relationships is that of ruler to subject, followed by father to son, elder brother to younger, husband to wife, and friend to friend. While these are hierarchical relationships, Confucianism stresses that even the ruler has an obligation to rule well lest his subjects rise up in revolt. This is the basis for the mandate of heaven: a just ruler rules well and is supported by heaven.

Many governments have used Confucian ideals to attempt to gain some kind of legitimacy. A passing knowledge of Confucianism is useful if you plan to do business with any officials or corporate types, since most of them make at least a token attempt to follow Confucian decorum.

» You should know that a lot of corp execs in Asia believe firmly in Confucian principles and expect the same from their wage slaves. I've seen departments that are virtual medieval fiefdoms, ruled by a Confucian project manager who expects absolute loyalty from his underlings.
» Masterless Kong

• What you have to remember is that in Confucian relationships, the higher-status person calls the shots. Status usually means social position, but it can also include age, gender or metatype. So if your party leader is a scrappy young elf girl from the streets, there ain't gonna be no one who'll listen to her.
• China Doll

DAOISM

Daoism is often called China's only major native religion. It has been around for thousands of years, but didn't rise to prominence until it was embraced by many southern noble families and intellectuals during the Six Dynasties period.

There was a period in China's history when Daoist priests were in competition with the Buddhist church to influence the Emperor. The Daoists eventually lost out, and their power in the imperial court dwindled; eventually most of them retreated to small monasteries and hermitages.

According to legend, many of the most powerful Daoist sorcerers and alchemists retreated to the most isolated and holy places, and would only pass on their knowledge to a select few. A handful of Daoist monasteries were created, including the renowned White Cloud Monastery and the notorious Black Mountain Monastery.

• If you ever run into a Chinese spell slinger who claims to have been trained at Black Mountain, be very wary. These guys have reps for being the blackest of the black magicians in Chinese lore and are said to know forbidden rituals. They are often followers of toxic or twisted paths.
• Uncle

While there wasn't a formal church, the Daoists were well respected by the peasantry for our lore and the mystic knowledge we were rumored to have. Many of the secret societies that rise up from time to time in China are loosely based around Daoist beliefs, and some even have the backing of local sages or hermits.

Like Buddhists, we believe in the reincarnation of the soul; however, all of this reincarnation is not directed at ceasing to exist, but rather toward reaching immortality. Only by acquiring knowledge over several lifetimes can one hope to unlock the secrets of eternal life. The primary way to achieve immortality is through mystic study and alchemical practice.

By alchemy, I mean something slightly different from the Western concept. Alchemy to a Daoist is the manipulation of the elements of creation, not just a simple form of magical chemistry. We believe that at the core, the universe is composed of two primal forces: yin and yang, the female and the male. These two forces can manifest as any of five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The combinations of these elements—along with yin and yang—in differing amounts create everything that exists in the universe. A skillful alchemist can manipulate these forces to his benefit, ultimately unlocking the secrets of immortality through the proper balance of elements and primal forces.

Alchemy can take two forms: internal alchemy, or Wai-dan, which emphasizes rituals, mathematical formulae and the manipulation of chemical and mystic materials to produce an elixir that will provide immortality. I myself follow this path, though most Westerners call me and others like me wujen. Contrasted with Wai-dan is Nei-dan, or inner alchemy, which seeks to achieve immortality through meditation and the use of physical exercises such as Tai-qi.

» Scan this. One of the more respected members of the Seelie Court is a Nei-dan mystic by the name of Li Xu, who claims to be the reincarnation of a famous Daoist mystic of the same name. Also, a lot of the Danaan families have started a new trend of hiring Daoist "meditation instructors" for their households. What do the pointy-ears know that we don't?
» Green Pixie

After the Awakening, there was a sudden increase in the number of Daoist priests and monks wandering the countryside preaching and offering their services. We have always been quick learners and have adapted to the cities of the Sixth World, particularly Shanghai, where we maintain a strong presence. The fragmenting of our homeland has been something of a boon for us, since it allows us to move around in a way we were never able to do under the old communist regime.

Likewise, we have embraced the Matrix. A number of my brothers and sisters meditate upon the wonder of the Matrix and seek to transcend the bounds of the mortal world and obtain immortality through the machine.

» This goes both ways. Many otaku in the Shanghai sprawl hang out around some of the Daoist shrines and spirit halls. I've heard some of 'em talking about the Resonance being a new kind of alchemy and the direct manifestation of yin and yang.
» Bottlecap

HINDUISM

Like Buddhism, Daoism and many followers of the native shamanic traditions of Asia, the Hindus believe in karma and the reincarnation of the soul. Hinduism sees the divine in all things and holds that reincarnation can result in being reborn in nearly any form—some more holy than others.

» Boy, is this ever the truth. That old saying about sacred cows is particularly true in India. A lot of animals are considered sacred and not to be killed under any circumstances. I once saw a Hindu attacked by a cobra, and he just stood there rather than hurt what he considered a sacred animal.
» Uncle

Predating even Buddhism, Hinduism is arguably the oldest of the major Asian religions aside from some localized shamanic practices. It's difficult to say when exactly it started, since it grew out of Vedic traditions and is a refinement of this earlier religion.

The most important thing to remember about Hinduism, for both Hindus and non-Hindus, is the caste system. Technically there are four official castes in Hinduism, as well as the Untouchables—those who are separate from, or outside of, the caste system. That's the historical story, at least. By the time the British arrived on the scene, the only important things were whether you came from one of the Brahmin families that called most of the shots politically and that you weren't an Untouchable.

» This distinction continues today, kiddies. The Brahmin families still run the show and the Untouchables still live in drek, quite literally in some cases. Certain Hindus believe that even speaking with an Untouchable pollutes you, so be careful who you're seen talking to.
» Manjur

The Awakening shook Hinduism to its core. Sacred sites that had lain dormant for millennia exploded with power, and the common people flocked to yogis and other Awakened individuals who were suddenly less hesitant about displaying the power they had always claimed to have.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the Awakening was that a large number of Awakened individuals were born into Brahmin families. Even those who were not born into these privileged families often found themselves adopted into them. As a result, the political clout of the Brahmin caste gained a strong guiding hand over most of India's magicians.

» While the Brahmins have a monopoly on the spell-slingers, the Kasatriyas, or warrior caste, have been getting a lot of laws passed regarding bodmods. They've convinced the Brahmin mystics to declare that most cyber is unclean for the lower castes. Unsurprisingly, a lot of Kasatriya families own local cyber and bio clinics and production facilities.
» Shivan

Today, Hinduism still plays a dominant role in the everyday life of Indians. Beliefs in the all-pervading spiritual world were reinforced by the return of magic and the expression of metatypes. It should be noted that dwarfs enjoy special status in Hinduism and a favored place in modern Indian society due to their resemblance to a mythical race that once held the favor of the gods.

» Now that's what I'm talking about. People showing us proper respect.
» Bottlecap

Hindu nationalists continue trying to whip their followers into a frenzy in opposition to the IUM's attempt to mobilize further in India. They have had limited success, since Hinduism still keeps many of its followers in a state of near-constant poverty and deprivation through both religious and civil law. The recent increase in aggression by the IUM has spurred a mobilization radical Hindus, however, particularly as the media broadcasts clips of Muslims engaging in the desecration of holy sites and the murder of sacred animals.

ISLAM

Islam is one of the three great Religions of the Book, along with Christianity and Judaism. Arising in Arabia around the seventh century, it quickly spread throughout the Middle East, across Northern Africa and down the eastern African coast, as well as east as far as China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

As many of you may know, Islam comes in several varieties. The three most common are Sunni, Shi'ia and Sufi Islam, with Sunni claiming the vast majority of Muslims. The main difference between the three is that the Shi'ia believe that government should not consist solely of Islamic law, but that those who govern, the Imams, should be religious as well as civil leaders. The Sunnis take an interpretation of the Qur'an that calls for the separation of secular government from religious authorities. The Sufis, one of the smallest sectors of Islam, are mystics who are often located in small groups in wild desert areas.

» It is also worth noting that while the Shi'ia hate the Awakened world and the Sunnis are distrustful of it, the Sufis see magic as a sign of God's grace. Many of the Sufi whirling dervishes have adept-like abilities.
» Omar

At the end of the nineteenth century, Islam saw a dramatic rise in fundamentalism, a rise that has continued virtually unabated over the last two centuries. After fundamentalists secured holds in traditionally Muslim countries, they began to expand outward, first using terrorism to strike at a Western world that they saw as corrupting their youth and destroying their way of life. In the 2030s, the Islamic world rose against the West in an organized fashion, invading Europe as the Alliance for Allah. Their defeat by combined European forces prompted many Islamic leaders to reconsider their internal politics.

Islamic leaders held several conferences during this period, and the Islamic Unity Movement (IUM) and the Islamic Renaissance Movement (IRM) grew out of these discussions. The stated goals of both are to bring the Muslim world together and smooth over differences that exist in their global community, but they are otherwise quite different.

As detailed elsewhere, the IUM has undergone changes recently with Ibn Eisa's death and resurrection. Ibn Eisa has decreed that the time of community building is over; his calls for jihad are being carried out by the New Islamic Jihad (NIJ), a fact that does not bode well for the Western world. We may be seeing a new rise in religious warfare, as several NIJ leaders are outspoken in their opposition to Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, not to mention their traditional opposition to magic and the Awakened world.

By contrast, the IRM has a more moderate and pragmatic view of both the Awakening and relations with the rest of the non-Islamic world. This view has placed them in opposition to both the NIJ and the IUM of late, and has led to several incidents of Muslim-against-Muslim violence.

While the NIJ is most powerful in Arabia and North Africa, the IRM has built up a power base in Europe, Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Both sides have agents that operate in each other's backyards. Many IRM agents are metahumans, particularly hobgoblins—an especially repressed metatype in the Islamic world, viewed as cursed, unclean beings. Many towns by law require metahumans to live outside of the main city center.

SHAMANISM

When I mention the word "shaman," you're probably thinking of some slot in moccasins dancing around a fire in the middle of the woods, or perhaps you've got a vision of the Raccoon shaman who lives in the dumpster near your bolt-hole. Either way, you've got the wrong kind of shaman if you're traveling in the East. There, unlike in most of the Western world, the old shamanic traditions never really died out or became marginalized.

Shamans have been a part of life across Asia since before recorded history. Even before the Awakening, shamans advertised on billboards and people were as likely to go to a shaman as a doctor for medical advice. In the early part of the twenty-first century, you could visit villages in China and Japan where local shamans performed rituals for exorcising demons.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Western and Eastern shamans lies in ancestor worship and the ability of nearly all Eastern shamans to summon the spirits of their ancestors. Many of their conjuring rites make use of Confucian trappings, since veneration of elders and ancestors is so central to Confucianism. The role of our ancestors is vitally important: not only do they watch over us, but we, the living, likewise have an obligation not to dishonor our ancestors.

» So what's the story here? These are just normal spirits that take the form of some shaman's mythical ancestor, right? They're not really the dead come back to the land of the living, are they?
» Doc

» That's a dispute that has clogged many a magic theory discussion board. I read a paper by some guy out of MIT&T that

said ancestor spirits are just "cognitive thought forms" that use the shaman's subconscious beliefs to manifest.
» Talon

» Only a know-nothing hermetic gwai-lo would believe such things. I have called my ancestors and they have told me the lore of my family and clan—lore no book has ever recorded. Could your "cognitive thought form" do that?
» Ancestral Recall

» Is it possible, AR, that what you're actually experiencing is a kind of shared ancestral memory pool that your mind shapes into a form that is familiar to you?
» Talon

Another central aspect of Eastern shamanism—aside from the belief that spirits reside in every living thing as well as in natural phenomena—is the idea of a nether realm, or hell, that constantly seeks to influence our own world. This nether realm, with which we can interact, is often seen as the cause of many illnesses and small misfortunes—shamans have traditionally dealt with these by manipulating the ghosts and demons that reside there.

I know many Western mages who will tell you that this concept of the netherworld refers merely to toxic or corrupted spirits, and that only those who are corrupted or toxic themselves can control these forces. I stand here today to tell you this is not true.

» Drek! Is this guy saying that he can summon or control toxic spirits? I only know two types of people who can make that claim, so he's either crazy or toxic. And if he's toxic, I'm on a plane to 'Frisco to claim me a bounty.
» Thrasher

Though I do not claim to be adept in such matters, I myself have bargained with the demons of the underworld for services, and my master was quite skilled in this art. This is not something undertaken lightly, since the entities in question are cunning and deceitful. It requires a quick mind and an able tongue to negotiate successfully; many shamans train for years under a master to gain the abilities to drive off and compel the denizens of the nether realms.

SHINTO

Shinto is a form of Japanese shamanism that has managed to become a state-supported religion, something that no other Asian shamanic tradition has ever done. Shinto has the same relationship to Buddhism in Japan that Daoism holds in China, and the practices of the two are closely entwined.

Like many of the other Asian traditions, Shinto priests—called miko—revere the spirits of their ancestors. Miko are traditionally, but not always, female

They are widely known to be experts in summoning, banishing and communicating with spirits of all types. Miko shamans are heavily influenced by Buddhism, and their rituals and practices often reflect this.

The modern Shinto church still has the patronage of the Japanese royal family and the favor of much of the Japanese population. Partly this is because the church has embraced many of the policies of the new Japanese state, particularly in regard to metahumans. Further, the contribution of the kami to the rebuilding efforts in Japan has aided significantly in building goodwill toward Shinto.

ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroastrianism got its start in northern Persia, when a holy man named Zarathustra claimed to have received visions from the one god, Ahura Mazda. This happened around two and a half millennia ago, right around the same time Buddha and Confucius were making noise in their respective nations. It is worth noting that this is one of the few major world religions that is monotheistic but not related to ancient Judaism.

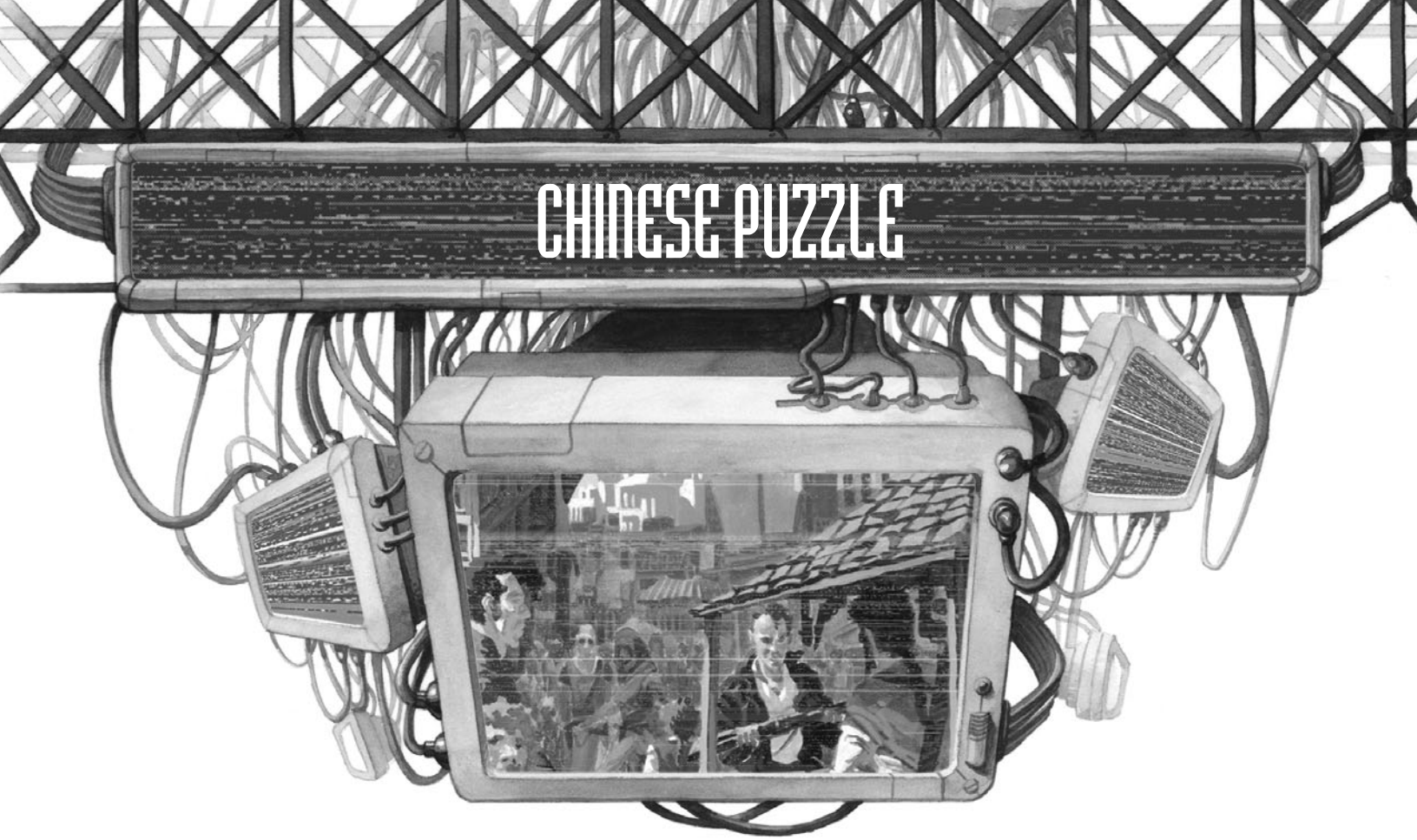
Zarathustra preached that mankind was in the center of a battle between good and evil, as personified by Ahura Mazda on the side of good and Ahriman and his hosts of daevas on the side of evil. The way you came down on this issue in your lifetime determined where you would end up in the afterlife—heaven or hell.

Zoroastrianism spread as far as the Mediterranean to the West and into India to the East. With the coming of Islam, it all but vanished from Persia, and by the time Persia had become Iran most Zoroastrians were living in India. The Awakening changed this, however, when Zoroastrian priests, called magi, found that Ahura Mazda once more answered their prayers and granted them power. The Parsis of India and the Gulf, the Azeris and Dagestanis in Azerbaijan and Karabakh Mountain, and more than 10,000 people in Iran practice Zoroastrianism today.

» Ahura Mazda's magi were not the only ones who found their power had returned. Visitors to the highlands of Central Asia would do well to listen to warnings any locals can give you about followers of Ahriman in the area—they can summon malevolent spirits of considerable size.
» Mag Maga

Zoroastrian priests are rumored to have the ability to cross the bridge that spans hell. This magical aptitude might be represented in the form of the pure natural substances that Ahura Mazda has created, notably fire but also water, air and earth. The care taken to avoid contaminating these natural substances demands great elaboration of the purification ritual. The Zoroastrian magi acquire great power by their command of the techniques of elemental manipulation.

CHINESE PUZZLE



When the Chinese Communist Party collapsed in 2018, China splintered into warring states. Four major powers—the Canton Confederation, Sichuan, Henan and Shaanxi—emerged as legitimate contenders to succeed the People's Republic as rulers of the Middle Kingdom. Then the Year of the Comet hit, whose fallout still reverberates through China. The power of the Five Sacred Mountains has created a three-way standoff among Sichuan, Henan and Shaanxi, while the retreat of Japanese Imperial Forces from the Pacific Rim emboldened the Canton Confederation to flex its muscles, much to the concern of its neighbors. The emergence of a few wild cards threatens to further upset the balance. A nutjob proclaiming himself the new Emperor of China seized control of the Forbidden City and established Beijing as an independent imperial city-state, while the great dragon Lung emerged from hiding and took roost on T'ai Shan, the most prominent of China's Five Sacred Mountains. And then there's Manchuria, an Awakened Land adapted to modern urban life.

I convinced some of the natives to put together a document that summarizes everything going on in China. Seems to me they might appreciate living in boring times for a change … but hey, "interesting times" are better for biz.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:05:13 (PST)

FALL OF THE HOUSE OF MAO

by Lo Fu Chee

An old Chinese proverb says, "An ant may well destroy a whole dam." Well, when it comes to the People's Republic of China, a dollar may have destroyed a whole nation.

Everyone points to 2018 as the year China collapsed, but the seeds of destruction came almost twenty-five years earlier, when Chairman Deng Xiaoping instituted market reforms in the 1980s as a rebuke to the disastrous economic experiments of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. By doing so, he also unwittingly undermined the Party's political and moral authority.

Deng's market reforms empowered the provinces to make their own trade deals with foreign governments. Many of the southeastern provinces took advantage of this chance to broker deals with their capitalist neighbors: Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as

Chinese emigrants to southeast Asia, Hawai'i and the United States. During the Resource Rush, these southern provinces formed a trade alliance, the Greater Canton Economic Development Council. While paying lip service to Beijing, the Council effectively took control over all day-to-day administrative decisions, weakening the central government's authority in the area.

» Normally the Party would have squashed it flat, but they chose to turn a blind eye. The Canton provinces were bringing in a lot of revenue and investment that Beijing badly needed to maintain control elsewhere, particularly in the underdeveloped and restive western provinces.
» China Hand

» The Canton provinces also had ties abroad through emigrants fleeing the communists to Taiwan, Macao and Hong Kong (then European colonies), Southeast Asia, Australia and the United States. These emigrants, sometimes known as the Diaspora, fostered business contacts and brokered investment opportunities in the Canton region.
» Li

Interpreting the Party's inaction toward the Canton Council as tacit approval, the other provinces began to chafe against Party rule from distant Beijing. After the Chinese failed to penetrate the Veil that separated Tibet from China, Xinjiang Province declared independence in 2013. Two years later, Hong Kong rejected the "one China, two governments" policy agreed to in its 1997 handover. With help from Great Britain, Hong Kong declared itself an independent Free Enterprise Zone.

» The megacorps, particularly the Japanacorps, also had a hand in the independence movement. After the handover, Hong Kong's fortunes went gradually south, which the megacorps eventually pinned on Beijing's meddling in local affairs. They hoodwinked Great Britain into backing Hong Kong and then moved quickly to support Hong Kong's free city status before the Brits realized what had happened.
» Chan

» Lung had a hand in it as well. When Hong Kong started making noises about independence, a lot of local Party officials who could have quashed the whole thing got caught in the midst of Triad drive-by shootings.
» Dragonslayer

The unraveling of China picked up speed when an earthquake in the Tai-Hei Mountains buried China's primary nuclear arsenal, detonating a few warheads in the process. With the Party deprived of most of its nukes, the member states of the Canton Development Council withdrew en masse and formed the Canton Confederation. Sichuan and Shaanxi also formed their own nations, dissatisfied with the Party's preferential treatment of the eastern Coastal Provinces. All these secessions created a corridor of independence that cut off the other western provinces, which subsequently went their own way. Most important, the withdrawal of these provinces created a crisis of confidence that resulted in a coup, throwing the Communist Party out of power in China.

» Unfortunately, independence didn't help Shaanxi and Sichuan all that much. The weak provincial governments collapsed within a few years, leading to two decades of civil war, military juntas and death squads. Not until strongmen like Liang Hong and Michelle Chou appeared did any stability return.
» China Hand

THE REPUBLIC CIVIL WAR

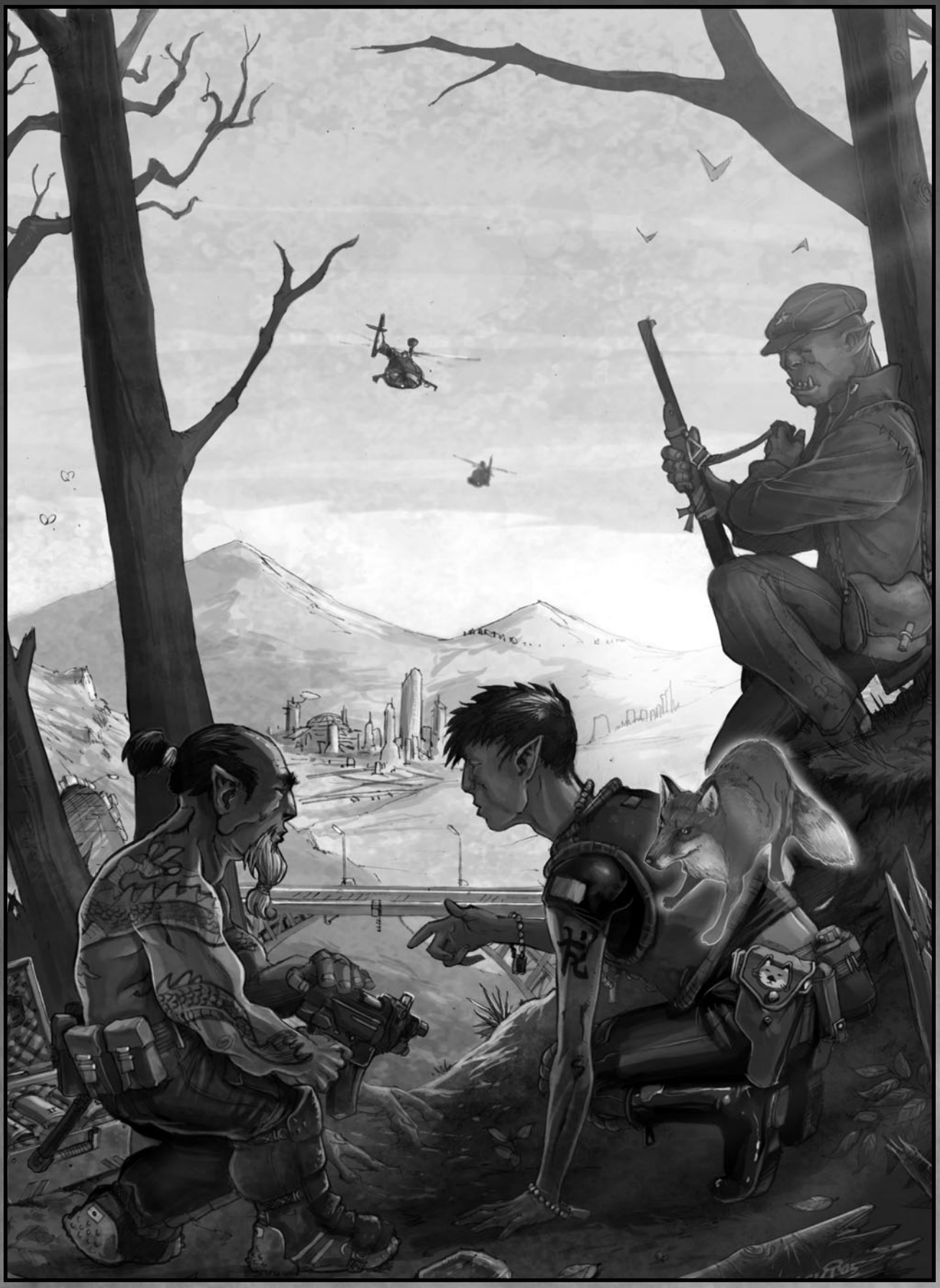
Replacing the communists was the New Progress Party, a group of businessmen and rising apparatchiks kept outside the Communist Party leadership by the old guard. Upon taking power, the New Progress Party renamed the regions Beijing still held onto as the Republic of China and initiated purges to politically obliterate the old guard. A core of hardliners managed to regroup and solidify power in Henan, however, and loyalties were divided from prefecture to prefecture in the remaining eastern Coastal Provinces. Some supported the New Progress Party, while others remained faithful to the old-line communists. The result was an eight-year civil war that split the eastern coastal regions into microstates. These small, weakened mini-nations received support from various extraterritorial AA and AAA megacorps, who manipulated them into loosening anti-sweatshop regulations. Meanwhile, the residents of Manchuria, with the aid of urban spirits, used the chaos to withdraw from China. Once the dust settled, the Republic was a rump state.

THE NATIONALIST WAR

What about Taiwan, you ask? Where were the Nationalists while their archenemy was falling from grace?

When the Confederation broke away from China in 2018, it invited Taiwan to join. At the time, the Nationalist Party had faded somewhat from Taiwan's political scene, and the current regime had no intention of rejoining the mainland, communist or not. Nevertheless, trade had made the two states co-dependent, serving as an uneasy truce between them. The Nationalists, still a force to be reckoned with, responded by sponsoring reunification-minded policlubs in the Canton Confederation, scoring particular success in the coastal provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian. Things came to a head in 2040, when Nationalist factions won elections in both those provinces and in Taiwan. Rather than Taiwan joining Canton, though, Zhejiang and Fujian promptly seceded in the other direction.

The Confederation declared war on this breakaway alliance, and civil war erupted mostly on the Nationalists' turf. After two years the Confederation recaptured Fujian and began massing forces to invade the rest. Two assaults against Taiwan failed. Meanwhile, to the west, Liang Hong had seized power in Sichuan, and the new regime threatened the Confederation's western borders.



CHINA TIMELINE

2006: The provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan and Zhejiang form the Greater Canton Economic Development Council, to deal with the increased foreign investment and economic boom caused by the Resource Rush.
2011: Tibet withdraws from China and erects a large magical barrier isolating it from the rest of the world.
2013: Xinjiang secedes from China.
2015: Hong Kong secedes from China and declares itself the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Zone. Great Britain is duped into using its influence to aid Hong Kong, but corporate interests swiftly take over.
2017: A major earthquake hits the Tai-Hei mountain range, which also serves as China's main nuclear weapons stockpile. The quake triggers several underground nuclear detonations, which collapse the entire underground arsenal. Aftershocks reverberate throughout northern China; one creates deep crevasses in Tiananmen Square and topples several monuments.
2018: The member provinces of the Greater Canton Economic Development Council secede from China, and the Council transforms into the Canton Confederation. Sichuan, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia also withdraw, effectively cutting off western China from Beijing and prompting the western regions to secede. These sudden losses force a coup in Beijing, as reformers throw the Communist Party out of power. The rump nation is renamed the Republic of China.
2019-2027: Republic Civil War. Fighting breaks out as the communists regroup in Henan and attempt to regain control of Beijing. The provinces between the Yellow River and the Canton Confederation splinter into microstates, forming the Coastal Provinces region. Communist hardliners solidify their hold over Henan and withdraw it from the Republic. Henan absorbs a portion of Hubei Province, while the province of Shaanxi merges with the independent Shaanxi state. Manchuria also withdraws from the Republic of China.
2021: The Sichuan provisional government collapses as incursions from its neighbors spark civil unrest. Intermittent warfare disrupts the Chinese heartland.
2039: Monarchists seize control of Shaanxi and restructure it as a parliamentary monarchy. Michelle Chou is crowned Queen of Shaanxi.
2041-2044: Nationalist War. Fujian and Zhejiang declare independence and break away from the Confederation to join Taiwan. The Confederation wages war and reclaims Fujian. Zhejiang fragments into multiple microstates that are subsequently lumped into the Coastal Provinces.
2044: The mage Liang Hong seizes power in Sichuan.
2047: Sichuan annexes most of Guizhou and parts of Yunnan.
2060: Li Tianzi organizes a coup in Beijing that forces out the republican government. Occupying the Forbidden City, he declares himself Emperor.
2061: The Republic of China and Emperor Tianzi sign a peace treaty, in which the Republic recognizes Beijing as an autonomous region politically independent from the Republic. The Republic capital moves to Tianjin.
2062: The great dragon Lung lands on T'ai Shan Mountain and declares it his lair.

Caught in a tight place, the Confederation negotiated a truce with Taiwan. Under its terms, Fujian returned to the Confederation fold, while the Confederation relinquished territory seized from Zhejiang. Taiwan was recognized as an independent state, while Shanghai owed reparations to the Confederation.

The war cost plenty for all involved. Zhejiang fractured under war reparations, and its remnant states became yet more micro-nations in the coastal region. Meanwhile, the Confederation economy sagged under reconstruction, forcing Canton to abandon its regional presence and allowing the Imperial Japanese Navy to move into Southeast Asia.

• It also created a new surge of Diaspora Chinese from the Confederation, Taiwan and the Coastal Provinces into Southeast Asia. This second wave helped the Triads expand their power base into the Golden Triangle, Australia and North America.
• Times Three

Then came the Year of the Comet—a subject best dealt with region by region, as each had a unique response to the staggering events of that time.

THE CANTON CONFEDERATION: EAST MEETS WEST

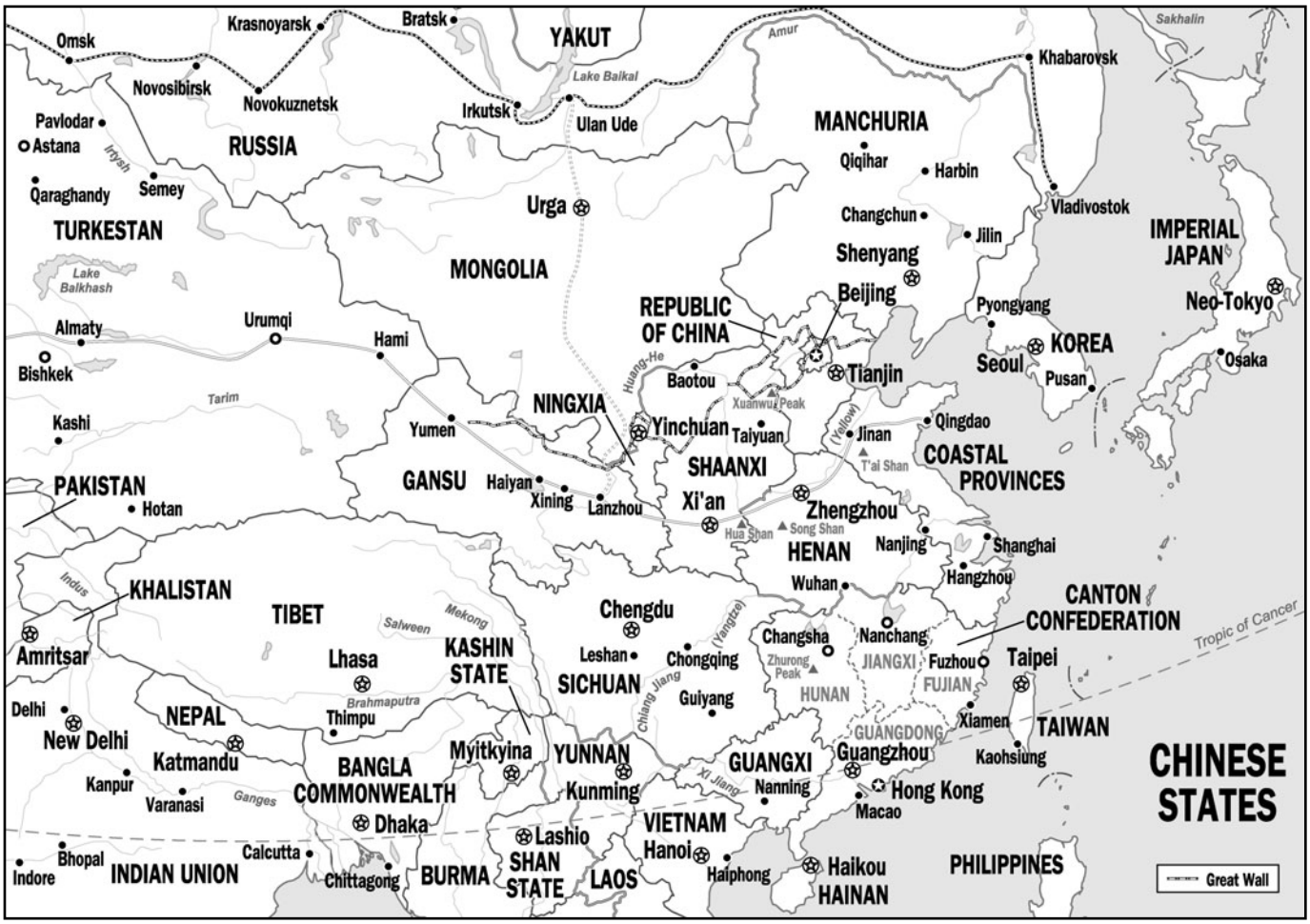
Population: 220,230,000 (Han 94%, Tujia 2%, Miao 2%, Other 2%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (60%), Cantonese (50%), English (10%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and ancestor worship

The Canton Confederation is the most economically powerful entity to emerge from the ruins of the People's Republic of China. Consisting of the industrial provinces of Guangdong, Jiangxi, Hunan and Fujian, the Canton Confederation has recently jumped into the void left by Imperial Japan. They may just succeed at this audacious move—if they can quit arguing among themselves.

Originating from a trade alliance, the Confederation has embraced modern corporate capitalism and representative republicanism (such as it exists in the Sixth World). Politically, the Confederation's member provinces hold more clout than the central government. Though the central government still maintains control over the military, legislature and infrastructure (roads, power grids and such), the provinces hold the economic advantage because they can negotiate their own trade deals separately from the Confederation.

• The megacorps often strike separate deals with provincial governments to undercut the Confederation's power. Back in the 2040s, when Wuxing Corp. was still establishing itself, it ran into a lot of resistance from Confederation ministers in Guangzhou. So instead, the corp went straight to the provincial government of Fujian, where Wuxing's most important facilities were located. Once they established extraterritoriality there, it was a breeze convincing the central government to extend Wuxing the same rights in the rest of the Confederation.
• The Chromed Accountant

• There's plenty of biz pitting the central government against the provinces, or vice versa, and even one against another. A few months ago Tan Tien was negotiating with the province of



Hunan to set up a research facility in the capital of Changsha. Talks broke down when several Hunan negotiators went missing for a few days. Meanwhile, Jiangxi comes in with a better offer. No sooner had the ink dried on the contract than the Hunan negotiators showed up again. They never did figure out who snatched them.

• Tai Ho Leng

Given the Confederation government's decentralized structure, it shouldn't surprise anyone that the real movers and shakers are the corps and the Triads. Corp-wise, the Canton Confederation is home to facilities from nationals to triple-As, and also leads the rest of China (and a good part of the Pacific Rim) in research and technological innovation. Its technology base is comparable with the CAS or Europe, though not quite approaching elites like the UCAS, Pueblo or Japan.

• Industrial espionage is a popular work assignment in these parts. Many PPG member corps maintain research and development facilities in Canton territory, because education is fairly good and it's far from the Japanacorps' power base.

• China Hand

• Let's talk for a minute about biz in Canton. (This applies to most of China as well, but I picked the Confederation because Macao and Hong Kong attract so many gwai lo runners.)

The first thing you have to understand about doing biz here is guanxi, or connections. Like the saying goes, it's not what you know, but whom you know, and in a land of more than a billion and a half people, everyone knows someone. The strongest connection is family: not just immediate family like Ma, Pa, Big Sister or Baby Brother, but grandparents, siblings of grandparents, in-laws and cousins twice and thrice removed. If you make an enemy, more than a hundred people may come after your hoop.

Related to guanxi is the notion of hierarchy, knowing who your betters are. Confucian thought strongly influences Chinese society, and Confucius was big on everyone keeping his or her place in society. Around here, everyone has an invisible social scorecard, and they're always keeping mental tally as to whose score is higher.

• Ma'fan

• What, commie equality didn't dent this at all?

• Southpaw

» Confucius' ideas were around for a lot longer than Mao's. Hell, plenty of Chinese saw Communism as just a different version of the whole hierarchy thing, only with different folks at the top and the bottom. Plus ça change …
» ShowMe

The second important thing is etiquette: specifically, how polite you are. Look, China's always been crowded, so they learned early on to be courteous to each other. A guy may forgive you for robbing him blind, but if you're rude about it, he'll curse you to your dying day. Then there's face: honor, rep, street cred, stuff like that. In a place like this where everyone knows about a hundred people minimum, losing face can be worse than death.

» If you frag someone over, give him an opportunity to salvage his reputation; it'll save you from making another enemy.
» Ma'fan

» The Japanacorps farm out some of their development to the Confederation. Japan's so crowded that sometimes it's hard to keep a secret, particularly if it isn't that important. A lot of proprietary but noncritical development projects come to the Confederation when a Japanacorp doesn't want local competitors to find out about them.
» BizGirl

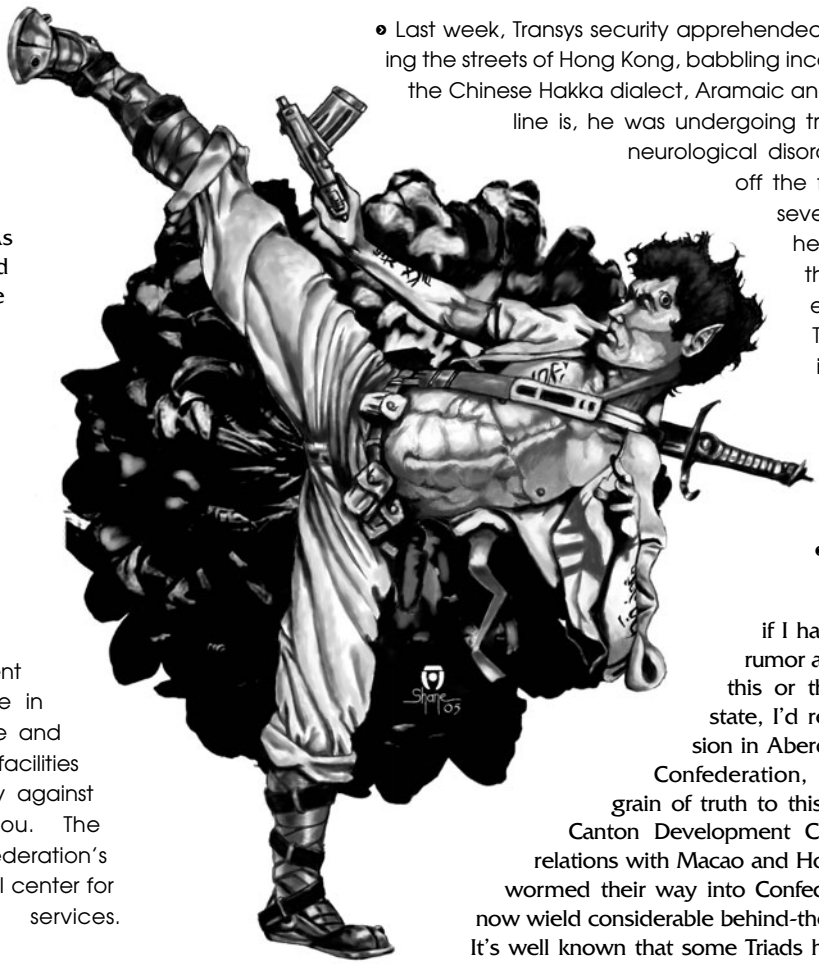
Practically all the triple-As and all the PacRim double- and single-As have a presence in the Confederation, but two corps in particular dominate the local scene: Wuxing and Transys Neuronet. With its headquarters in nearby Hong Kong, Wuxing is Canton's largest extraterritorial resident. Most of Wuxing's non-manufacturing interests (like magical research and development) take place in the Confederation.

» With the recent entanglement between Wuxing and Shiawase in the Paracels, a lot of sabotage and wetwork jobs against Wuxing facilities are floating around, particularly against their shipyard in Guangzhou. The Guangzhou yard is the Confederation's largest, and it's also the logistical center for Wuxing's maritime support services. Sabotaging Wuxing's support services puts them at a disadvantage in the standoff with Shiawase. The money is good, but the risk is high: the Confederation Navy bases its primary fleet out of Guangzhou.
» Kinkaid

Transys Neuronet is the only Eurocorp with any significant presence in China. Most of its Confederation facilities are geared toward the company's core businesses, computers and software—primarily farm work for their linguistics and encryption programs. They also have some biotech labs, often working with other PacRim biotech companies as a partner or client.

» Not all Transys encryption projects out here are "farm work" for the eggheads at Silicon Glen. I've heard rumors of black projects in the Confederation that report directly to Transys headquarters in Caerleon rather than the regional HQ in Shanghai. From some of the reports on the Morgue, they involve not only linguistic and encryption software development, but also some deep neuromagical research. I don't know what to make of this, but it sounds like Celedyr's got something ambitious in the works.
» BizWatcher

» Last week, Transys security apprehended a fugitive wandering the streets of Hong Kong, babbling incoherently in a mix of the Chinese Hakka dialect, Aramaic and Navajo. The party line is, he was undergoing treatment for a rare neurological disorder and wandered off the farm. According to several shadowrunners, he's a test subject that someone wanted snatched offsite. The leading suspect is Aden, but Saeder-Krupp and the Information Secretariat are also being mentioned.
» HK Phooey



As for the Triads, if I had a nuyen for every rumor about a Triad running this or that Chinese splinter state, I'd retire to a nice mansion in Aberdeen. Regarding the Confederation, though, there's a grain of truth to this story. Through the Canton Development Council's early trade relations with Macao and Hong Kong, the Triads wormed their way into Confederation society and now wield considerable behind-the-scenes influence. It's well known that some Triads have a working rela-

tionship with the dragon Lung or Wuxing, but interestingly enough the most influential Triad in the Confederation is the **White Lotus Society.** Historically, the White Lotus dates back to the Qing Dynasty, but in recent times the Society received an influx of new members, led by strident Falun Gong practitioners who believed in taking direct action against the Communist Party to stop its persecution of their movement. They allegedly have ties to Tan Tien, which the corp vigorously denies. Word from some TT insiders is, this time the corp is telling the truth … sort of. At least some of Tan Tien's head honchos tried like crazy to keep the Lotus out, but the Triads are patient and stubborn. The truth now? Anybody's guess. Most syndicate experts believe the head of the White Lotus is Xong Guangiie, the famous Hunan surgeon.

• He's more than just a doctor. Xong Guangiie is a free ancestor spirit, and his reputed "miracle" treatments are his spirit powers at work.
• Shen Yang Li

• And "Shen Yang Li" must mean "conspiracy theorist" in Chinese.
• Skeptic

Opposite the White Lotus Society are the **Red Dragons,** whose enmity against the White Lotus dates back at least to the Boxer Rebellion. Concentrated in the southeast near Hong Kong, many believe the Red Dragons have connections to the great dragon Lung. The Red Dragons also have a strong international presence, with chapters in North America, South America and Australia.

Another Triad deserving mention is the **Phoenix Lodge,** prominent mostly in the northeastern Confederation, and also in Shanghai and the Coastal Provinces. Allied with the White Lotus, the Lodge specializes in criminal fields where the White Lotus has no interest, namely Matrix crime and racketeering. The Phoenix Lodge is one of the few Triads where women dominate the top leadership positions.

• A dead giveaway, considering that the phoenix is the metaphorical symbol of the Celestial Empress.
• P

Recently, a rising Triad called the **Black Chrysanthemums** has gained attention in southeast China. Originating in Macao, the Chrysanthemums specialize in gunrunning and organlegging, and they've made serious gains against the White Lotus and the Red Dragons. Some wags think Lofwyr is behind the Black Chrysanthemums, because many of the weapons they smuggle originate from manufacturers owned by Saeder-Krupp.

• Nah, not Lofwyr's style. All Triads employ heavy magic to some degree, but a few folks who've survived a run-in with the Black Chrysanthemums swear this gang wields a distinctly corrupt astral signature.
• Penry

• During one clash with the Red Dragons, witnesses reported seeing a Black Chrysanthemum magician summoning a blood spirit. Makes you wonder.
• Shang Tsung

MACAO

Sitting in the shadow of Hong Kong, its sister city across the Pearl River, Macao is a rough-and-tumble town known for gambling and mercenaries. The recent relocation of the merc group Combat, Inc. to Macao has raised the city's visibility, as clients seeking merc services—from the warlords of Gansu to the gangs running things in the jungles of Burma—flock here with contracts in hand.

A Portuguese colony before returning to China in 1999, Macao retains business and political ties to Europe, particularly Portugal. The New European Economic Community recently opened a diplomatic consulate in Macao, which serves as the hub of NEEC diplomacy throughout Asia. Many second-tier Eurocorps, particularly Lusiada and Spinrad Industries, maintain branch headquarters in Macao for their Asian operations.

• Spinrad's Macao office is Johnny's ace in the hole against Lofwyr. Asia's a little bit beyond the dragon's reach, so Spinrad can move a little more freely. Spinrad Macao keeps a low profile, quietly amassing profits and making subtle acquisitions that don't hit the front pages. Totally out of character for the flamboyant CEO, but sometimes a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.
• Shane

Because of its strong European ties, Macao is also the one place in Asia where the Mafia can flourish. The del Greco Family is the strongest of the European Mafia syndicates, smuggling chips from Europe and drugs from the Golden Triangle, and running white-collar crime on behalf of the Baptistas of Portugal. The Russian Vory also have a syndicate in Macao, run by Sergei Konstantin, who reports to Otsana Kovalenka in Vladivostok. The local Vory specialize in street crime and gunrunning. At best, they're roughly equal to the local Triads.

• The Mafia-Vory war in Europe has put pressure on the del Grecos and Konstantin to follow suit. The Mafia and Vory have a sort of truce in Macao; their specialties don't compete and they share a mutual concern about the Triads. However, the Baptistas are pressuring the del Grecos to turn on the Macao Vory in a flanking attack.
• Johnny Hotel

• The recent rise of the Black Chrysanthemums has cut into Vory revenues. Sergei is as ruthless as his boss Bloody Otsana, so if they go down, Sergei'll take several Triads with him.
• Malenko

ZHURONG PEAK

Overlooking the west banks of the Xiangjiang River in Hunan Province, Zhurong Peak is one of the fabled Five Sacred

Mountains that have garnered so much attention lately. Zhurong is part of the Heng Shan Mountains, which in wuxing tradition are associated with the element of Fire, representing the yang reaching fullness. In the creation cycle, Fire is fed by Wood (new yang), which has been associated with T'ai Shan, Lung's new abode.

Like T'ai Shan, Zhurong Peak is a dragon lair, abode of an adult Eastern dragon known locally as Yat Gwan. The residents treat Yat Gwan as their unofficial lord, who returns the favor by providing protection and support. The only tribute Yat Gwan demands is an annual present of thirty red rubies on the summer solstice.

» Many people also think Yat Gwan serves as caretaker of Zhurong Peak on behalf of Lung. When Liang Hong threatened to invade the Confederation, Lung personally warned the general-mage to abandon his plans, lest the invasion jeopardize the mountain's status. Considering the Confederation's disdain for Lung, it's ironic that they owe their safety to him. Apparently Lung allows Yat Gwan great latitude in his service, which is why his connection to Lung is inconspicuous.
» Hei Yu

» Interesting that Lung, who identifies strongly with yin, lairs on T'ai Shan and appoints Yat Gwan as steward of Zhurong Peak. Both these mountains represent yang. Is this his way of maintaining balance?
» Xiao Renwu

One notable item on Yat Gwan's agenda is his fascination with nuclear technology. The dragon sponsors many nuclear research programs in Asia, particularly a subcritical research facility in Hunan. Yat Gwan is said to own a majority stake in Nucor Energy, which sponsors nuclear-related projects from energy production to nuclear medicine.

» Yat Gwan's interest in nuclear energy doesn't win him many friends among the treehugger crowd. On one occasion TerraFirst! staged an attack against Nucor's subcritical facility. They learned the hard way that dragon fire poses a more immediate problem than nuclear irradiation.
» DragonDance

» Nucor also controls many of the old nuclear weapon production facilities in western China, including the gaseous diffusion plant and centrifuge in Lanzhou and the plutonium breeder reactor in Jiuquan. They've converted some of these to more peaceful applications, but a few are still tooled to produce weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, along with other critical components.
» Butterfly

SOUTH CHINA SEA

After Emperor Yasuhito ordered Imperial Forces back to Japan, a power vacuum occurred across the South Pacific, including the South China Sea. This region may test the Confederation's ability to suitably fill that void.

Historically, the South China Sea is a disputed area. China, Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines have all squabbled over legitimacy of this important sea lane, its islands and its undersea resources, such as oil and manganese. Until recently, Imperial Japan had the upper hand, allowing the Japanacorps to treat the South China Sea as their backyard.

Several months ago, the Confederation gave Wuxing undersea rights to exploration offshore from the Paracel Islands. When they got there, they found Shiawase subs prowling the area; the Japanacorp was apparently doing its own digging for manganese nodules. Shiawase had obtained permission from Vietnam to drill in that location.

» Not just any manganese nodules—a particularly unstable isotope known as manganese-56. Recent research has shown that manganese-56 emits muon particles when it decays, which many scientists believe are instrumental in facilitating cold fusion. Up until now muon particles could only be seen artificially in atom-smashers, so finding a naturally emitting source would revolutionize the nuclear power industry.
» Mr. Fusion

» From what I've heard, Wuxing discovered an alchemical water radical, which they call longlei (dragon tears), in some of the South China Sea's underwater gorges and pools. As with any other alchemical radical, though, general industrial mining will ruin it, which is why Shiawase's presence is a big problem.
» Li Hsen Chang

Now the Confederation, Vietnam, Wuxing and Shiawase are all tied up in admiralty court as they see who has the most effective lawyers and judicial bribes. Meanwhile, the Confederation and Vietnamese navies have stepped up patrols in response to a sudden, recent increase in "pirate raids."

» The Shiawase-Wuxing case is a convenient excuse for the Confederation to rattle its saber at Vietnam. Having all those warships out there is an invitation for all the Asian military intelligence agencies to come out and take a look. I hear the collection cells on the independent island of Hainan have been going crazy trying to track ship movements and collate all the naval communications traffic.
» Kinkaid

NEIGHBORS

The Confederation doesn't exactly maintain a good-neighbor policy. It regularly fights with Sichuan and Henan for the honor of succession over the Middle Kingdom, and it continues China's historic antipathy toward Vietnam. And then there's that Nationalist War with Taiwan….

Taiwan: Dire Straits
Population: 23,650,000 (Han 95%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (85%), English (15%)
Major Religions: Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, shamanism and Christianity

Following the communist victory in 1949, the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-Shek fled to Taiwan, where they re-established the Republic of China. Still maintaining its claim of legitimacy over all of China, the Taiwanese Republic was recognized by many countries until the end of the century as a legitimate government. By the time the People's Republic broke up in 2018, however, Nationalist dreams of reunification had come and gone. The Nationalists briefly returned to power in the 2040s under a wave of reunification sentiment, but a bloody war with the Confederation put the Nationalists down for good.

• That remains to be seen. Nationalist policlubs remain strong in Taiwan, the eastern half of the Confederation and many of the coastal provinces. Also, Taiwanese agents on the mainland have infiltrated separatist movements in Fujian, in hopes of enticing it to break away again.
• Polly Sci

• Lately Renraku's Taiwan offices have been targets of a power play by Noriko Sakai, Shikei Nakatomi's daughter-in-law. Nakatomi exiled Sakai to the Confederation for her subpar performance while both were still with Fuchi. Nakatomi also appointed Masamoto Shigeru, who runs Renraku's operations in Taipei, to make sure she stays in line. Sakai is determined to get back in her father-in-law's graces, so unseating Shigeru is the first step to returning to Chiba.
• Renraku Fox

Guangxi: Ethnic Chop Suey
Population: 49,005,000 (Han 60%, Zhuang 35%, Other 5%.)
Major Languages: Mandarin (85%), English (15%)
Major Religions: Islam, Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and shamanism

As part of the People's Republic, the autonomous region of Guangxi got special treatment because of the numerous Chinese ethnic minorities living there, such as the Zhuang, Miao and Yao. When China broke apart, this region succumbed to bloody infighting as the various minorities battled for control.

Since then, Guangxi has become a bandit haven, sandwiched between Canton, Sichuan and Vietnam. Local warlords reign over the small gaggle of towns and cities their militias can control. Guangxi is a general nuisance to its neighbors, as bandits and pirates cross borders in search of loot and plunder. None have gotten fed up enough to send their armies in to clean up, however, mostly because of mutual hostility between the Confederation, Vietnam and Sichuan.

• Actually, none of them want to see Guangxi cleaned up. With its local warlords and divided loyalties, Guangxi makes the perfect back door to send raiding parties against their foes. I'll bet the large majority of border raids by "Guangxi bandits" are actually Sichuan, Confederation or Vietnamese partisans. I hear Sichuan has established a "Liang Hong Trail" to smuggle arms and contraband into the Confederation.
• Mekong Michelle

HONG KONG FREE ENTERPRISE ZONE

Population: 7,878,000 (Han 95%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: Cantonese (85%), English (50%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, shamanism and Christianity
by the Hong Kong Cavalier

Ask anyone (outside of Japan, that is) where the business center of the Far East is, and they'll say Hong Kong. Ever since the British took over this territory after the Boxer Rebellion, Hong Kong has evolved into *the* major commercial center of the Orient.

The megacorps, with their new powers of extraterritoriality, ultimately rescued Hong Kong from communist drudgery and helped it become a Free Enterprise Zone. At first the megacorps tried to run Hong Kong by themselves, but they found out the hard way how much of a pain in the hoop it is to manage a city. So they set up the Board of Governors, a group of corporate regents whose primary job is to deal with the drek and make sure trivialities like taking out the trash or enforcing the law don't interfere with the corps' money-making schemes.

Right now, the board includes more than 25 corporations. Of those, eight serve on the Executive Council, which takes the lead in key decision-making. All board representatives take turns sitting on the council for a four-year, rotating tenure. Here's a quick rundown of current Executive Council members:

Kent Zhouling (Wuxing): Zhouling, now entering his final year on the Executive Council, serves as chairman. He's seen some good things happen under his watch; Wuxing got elevated to AAA status at the same time he landed on the Board of Governors. However, with Zhouling scheduled to rotate off, Wuxing worries that his departure may affect business in their own backyard. The two leading candidates to succeed Zhouling are Hiro Izawa of Monobe and Adrian Cheung of HKB. Though the council elects which of them will serve as the next chairman, Zhouling's opinion as the departing chair carries a lot of weight. There's intrigue aplenty as Hiro and Adrian jockey to win Kent's favor.

• From what I've heard, Wuxing doesn't want Izawa to take the job, because the corp doesn't like Monobe's attempts to usurp power within the PPG. On the other hand, Zhouling can't stand Adrian Cheung. Council meetings the past three years have been particularly spirited, as the two go hammer and tongs at each other.
• Reno

Julia Park (Eastern Tiger): As representative for the Korean conglomerate, Julia Park is also in her final year on the Executive Council. Park recently announced her intention to retire from the Board once her term is complete. Eastern Tiger hasn't yet picked their next representative.

• The leading favorite is Byung-bo Jin, who currently works for Eastern Tiger's Seattle offices. Jin is a rising star, so a stint on the Board of Governors should help her climb the corporate ladder.
• Perfect Tommy

• I've heard Eastern Tiger's Hong Kong branch is under a lot of pressure to promote one of their own candidates, Chundoo Seo, to take Julia's place. From what I gather, Seo has connections to the Jo-pok, and the Rings hope that placing Seo on the Board of Governors will help them expand their presence in Hong Kong.
• Penny Priddy

• With Wuxing and Eastern Tiger both losing their council seats, the PPG's got to be worried. Bet the Japanacorps are salivating at the prospect of getting more of their number elected.
• Pung

Geoffrey Weston (Ares): Weston is a British expatriate whose family lived in Hong Kong prior to the handoff and returned shortly after Hong Kong became independent. As one of the few Westerners on the Board of Governors, Weston's presence representing Ares Macrotechnology is something of an anomaly. An advantageous one, it seems; since Weston came on board, Knight Errant won the contract for running the city's law enforcement.

• Knight Errant is facing some competition as primary police contractor. Middle Kingdom Security, a local A-level corp, is looking to enhance its status by bidding for the municipal contract. MKS has (well buried) ties to Ryumyo, Lung's protégé-turned-rival. Also, Petrovski Security, whom Knight Errant replaced, has not gone quietly. Mitsuhama owns Petrovski, which has led to some clashes between Weston and Akiko Rhys-Harding, MCT's Board representative.
• Red Lectroid

Akiko Rhys-Harding (Mitsuhama): Once one of Mitsuhama's top wage mages, Akiko Rhys-Harding went the Way of the Burnout and got shuffled off into management, seeing that her business acumen is still sharp as ever. Akiko, however, resents her "exile" to Hong Kong. She's doing just enough to please her corporate masters and mark time until the first opportunity to get out.

• Don't believe it for a second, chummers. Akiko is a plant for Ryumyo. Akiko's magic did burn out, but she has enough mojo left to be the dragon's eyes and ears.
• Lord Whorfin

Watanage Sato (Shiawase): The recent conflict between Shiawase and Wuxing has put Watanage Sato in a somewhat uncomfortable position, as a Shiawase rep in Wuxing country. So far Sato has kept a low profile and deflected attention from Shiawase. Once Kent Zhouling steps down, though, Sato's likely to push Shiawase's agenda hard.

• Strangely enough, Sato and Zhouling are good friends even though their superiors are currently enemies. I think Sato's kept quiet partly because he doesn't want to choose between his friendship and his career. This has created some infighting with-

in Shiawase ranks; many in the corp think Sato isn't doing enough for Shiawase. Wouldn't surprise me if someone made a move to replace Sato as Shiawase's representative.
• Scooter Lindley

Adrian Cheung (HKB): Like many British-based Eurocorps, Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal does solid business with the former British territory. Ever since HKB lost its dominance in Transys Neuronet, Cheung has been hard at work strengthening HKB's position in Hong Kong. Transys may be deeply entrenched in the Canton Confederation and Taiwan, but in Hong Kong HKB has the upper hand; in fact, Transys is almost invisible within the Free Enterprise Zone.

• It's not Transys Neuronet that HKB should worry about in Hong Kong. Hard feelings may exist over the breakup, but business is business, and Transys doesn't see a lot of profit in trying to force HKB out of Hong Kong. The Knights of Rage have been popping up a lot in Kowloon back alleys, though, and I don't think anyone needs to guess what they're after.
• Yoyodyne

• That's why Cheung is lobbying hard to be Executive Council chairman. Having support from the other 24 corps in Hong Kong will go a long way toward ensuring HKB's survival.
• Mei-mei

Yang Lin Fat (Shibata): Fat's recent promotion to the Executive Council is a big boost for Shibata. Though the company has a big presence in outer space, on Earth it's fairly anonymous outside the Philippines. Shibata is using its new status to expand its presence in southern China, winning more construction contracts in Hong Kong, Hainan, the Canton Confederation, Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

• Did anyone notice that Shibata recently got permission to build a giant radio telescope array on Hainan? Officially the project supports Shibata's space exploration program, but I think it's also a cover for covert electronic espionage. The thing is a giant antenna; wouldn't you be a little tempted to use it for some local eavesdropping?
• Radar Blazer

Hiro Izawa (Monobe): This is Izawa's second term on the Executive Council; he served on it about twelve years ago, and his experience makes him a favorite to succeed Kent Zhouling as Council chairman.

• Not if Wuxing has its way. Monobe has always resented Wuxing's beating them to AAA status, and recently they've been disrupting PPG summits with jibes at Wuxing. If Izawa becomes chairman, Monobe may see that as an open invitation to go against its rival.
• China Hand

• The Canton Confederation is also paying attention to Izawa's bid. Monobe does a lot of business with Vietnam, an enemy of the Confederation. Increased status for Monobe in Hong Kong might lead to closer ties with the Vietnamese.
• Blue Blazin' Irregular

VICTORIA HARBOR

Victoria Harbor is the narrowest portion of the channel between the island of Hong Kong and the Kowloon peninsula. The shorelines on both sides serve as Hong Kong's "downtown" district. The southern shore on Hong Kong Island (particularly the Wan Chai, Causeway Bay and Central Hong Kong neighborhoods) is the business district, with its towering skyscrapers. Shopping and entertainment are on the northern peninsula shore, with most of the high class, high-profile establishments clustered in Tsim Sha Tsui—the neighborhood where Hong Kong's Beautiful People and Movers and Shakers hobnob.

• If you're looking to load or unload hot goods or legally dubious equipment, you'll want to get to know the back alleys around Cameron and Granville roads. Both are crammed with boutiques, vendors and peddlers hawking everything from cheap Eurotronics knockoffs to rare herbal remedies. If you know where to look and who to talk to, you can find a really good ICbreaker or rare herbal telesma at a decent bargain.
• Emilio Lizardo

One famous feature of downtown Hong Kong is its exotic skyline; practically all the skyscrapers incorporate geomantic elements in their architecture. Hong Kong residents are big believers in geomancy, and companies prompted by a geomancer's objections have spent thousands (sometimes millions) making last-minute changes to blueprints.

• This geomantic obsession can result in some unusual shadowruns. A couple of years ago, me and some chummers got hired to break all the picture windows overlooking the lobby of Baihu's corporate office on Percival Street. Over the next few weeks Baihu saw a string of bad luck that ended in the firing of some top executives. A geomancer I knew later told me that breaking the windows caused all the execs' chi to flow out of the building, resulting in bad karma.
• Pinky Carruthers

• Over the years, numerous "geomantic sabotage" runs have severely frayed the local astral space, resulting in the wild magic for which Hong Kong is infamous. Our team magician found this out the hard way when he tried to cast a fireball. After a lot of flash and bang, all he got was a Zippo cigarette lighter in his hand.
• John Bigboote

ABERDEEN

Aberdeen sits on the southwest flank of Hong Kong Island, separated from downtown Hong Kong by Mt. Kellett

and Victoria Peak. Wu Kuan-Lai laid the cornerstone here for what eventually became the megacorporation Wuxing.

Part of Wuxing's success derives from its location. According to several geomancers I know, Wuxing headquarters sits at the intersection of two major dragon lines. After Wu Lung-Wei inherited the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire from Dunkelzahn's estate and brought it here, Wuxing's fortunes skyrocketed further, as the statue apparently amplified the good chi being tapped from the dragon lines.

» Incidentally, the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire isn't a dragon. It's three carp playing in a river. The story about it is probably still on Shadowland somewhere.
» Penny Dreadful

Last year, however, a party of shadowrunners broke into Wuxing's penthouse suite and cast a geomantic ritual on the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. Since then, Wuxing has encountered several minor setbacks that have curbed its sudden rise to power. No one knows for sure who did it, but the leading suspects are Lung and Ryumyo. Both of them know the power of the dragon lines, and they both have an interest in making sure Wuxing doesn't abuse it.

KOWLOON

Kowloon in general refers to the lowlands adjacent to Victoria Harbor south of Lion Rock Mountain. Except for the glamour streets around Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon is dense urban sprawl inhabited by Hong Kong's teeming masses of wage slaves, most of them crammed into the high-rise tenements of Mong Kok, Kowloon City and Jordan Valley. Additionally, Kowloon Bay to the east hosts a crowded boat community, where thousands eke out a living on the junks and houseboats floating in that giant cesspool.

» It doesn't stink that bad. The boat community is also a great place to hide out if you're on the run. There really aren't any fixed abodes on the harbor, so it's easy for your friendly boatman (you do have a friendly boatman, right?) to get lost in the crowd.
» HK Phooey

As Hong Kong's low town, Kowloon is the center of attraction for the Hong Kong underworld and serves as the personal domain of the Red Dragon Triad and the White Lotus Society. The Red Dragons have the upper hand at the moment, following the drek-kicking they gave the Yellow Lotus Triad, but recently the Black Chrysanthemums have been making inroads.

» That's not to say the other syndicates aren't in Hong Kong. The Jo-pok and the Vory have a small presence here, the Rings mostly on the western banks of Kowloon around the Mong Kok neighborhood and the Vory in a small enclave at North Point on the island. Even compared to an average syndicate in a typical sprawl, though, they don't do much. The Jo-pok mostly engage in low-level loan sharking and fencing, while the Vory specialize in satisfying the vices of Hong Kong's significant Western minorities.
» Lei Kung

» One syndicate has no presence in Hong Kong, and probably never will: the yakuza. The yaks represent the only real threat to the Triads, so the Triads drop everything to squash any yak who dares show his tattoos in Hong Kong.
» HK Kid

LANTAU

Lantau is the largest island in the territory of Hong Kong, even larger than Hong Kong Island proper. The island is mostly a nature preserve, but it's also home to a lot of Buddhist and Taoist temples and monasteries. Just beyond Lantau's north shore is a smaller island, Chep Lak Kok, which opened in 1998 as the site of Hong Kong's new expanded airport.

» I've heard hints lately that Lung may have a mini-lair in or near one of the monasteries. Lung is a spiritualist and supports various religious organizations (financially and otherwise). There's talk that Lung has made a lot of incognito visits to Lantau to meet with priests and monks. I'd guess Lung is looking to repair some of the wild magic caused by the extensive geomantic hazing in downtown Hong Kong.
» John Ya Ya

» I don't think so. Most of these rumors started cropping up after that run at Wuxing. I think either Lung was responsible and is further rearranging the dragon lines around Hong Kong, or he wants to know who did it and put a stop to it.
» Mei-mei

THE NEW TERRITORIES

The Kowloon sprawl comprises about ten percent of the mainland peninsula claimed by Hong Kong; the remaining ninety percent is known as the New Territories, mostly mountainous communities with several secluded valleys. Suburbs cluster around the river valleys, linked to the sprawl by twisting mountain roads or the regional rail lines that tunnel under the mountains. The area's relative remoteness makes it a suitable location for secret corporate research labs, nestled in out-of-the-way valleys that are hard to spot and easily defended.

» There may also be several bug hives in the more remote valleys of the New Territories, particularly those around the sub-sprawl of Tsuen Wan. Back in the 1950s, the hills around Tsuen Wan (Lin Fa Shan) were the target of a tungsten craze; thousands of prospectors dashed into the hills in a sort of mini-gold rush. I hear a couple of Ant and Beetle hives have established colonies in the various pits, connecting them to form an underground warren.
» Rayd

MANCHURIA: POWER OF THE PEOPLE

Population: 110,869,000 (Han 70%, Manchu 20%, Korean 5%, Mongol 5%)

Major Languages: Mandarin (85%), Manchu (10%), Korean (15%), Mongol (10%)

Major Religions: Buddhism, shamanism, Confucianism and Daoism

by Weng Chiang

Manchuria: perhaps the most inscrutable of lands among the inscrutable Chinese. Known in Mandarin as *Dongbei*, this large region of mountains, rivers and forests of wondrous beauty also sustains a strong industrial base and dense urban sprawls. Manchuria is one of few nations in the world to refuse the Business Recognition Accords, and the only one that nonetheless sustains an active industrial and technical economy. Manchuria is an Awakened Land, but unlike Amazonia or Yakut, the land's Awakening derives not from nature, but from its people.

SHEN YAO-XIANG AND THE THREE WISE MEN

To understand how this all happened, one only need look to the not-so-distant past, when the communists and the New Progressives fought for control over a crumbling China. The story begins in 2028 far from Manchuria's borders, on the outskirts of Nanjing, where a young Republic officer, Lt. Colonel Shen Yao-Xiang, rallied his forces in preparation to attack a communist stronghold.

On the eve of the strike, three elderly Chinese walked into Shen's command tent unannounced and undetected. They warned him not to attack with all four of his companies at the break of dawn (5 AM) as Shen had planned. Instead, they suggested, attack with three companies and wait until after sunrise, at eight in the morning. After Shen heard these words, the three men vanished as mysteriously as they had arrived. Seeing this as a sign from heaven, Shen changed his plans as instructed, attacking with only three companies at eight in the morning. The battle was a rout; Shen's forces wiped out the communists with hardly a casualty.

• If it weren't for the war footage captured by NewsNet, I'd swear this was some ancient myth Weng dug up from a book of Chinese fairy tales. In all the Chinese dialects, numbers have important meanings, because they sound similar to certain words. Four and five are unlucky because they sound similar to "death" and "nothing," respectively. Three and eight are very lucky, because they respectively sound the same as "giving birth" and "fortune." So if Shen attacked with four companies at 5 AM, he would die for nothing, but by attacking with three companies at 8 AM, he creates great fortune.
• Tai Ho Leng

On the night after his victory, while the troops celebrated, the three men appeared to Shen again. Kneeling before them, Shen asked how he could show his gratitude. They told him to go back to Shenyang, capital of Liaoning province and Shen's homeland. Once there, he would lead his people, the Manchu, to break away from China and form their own nation, one ready to face the challenges of the future. Shen duly returned to Liaoning, raised a larger army than before, and declared the independence of Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, and also a part of Inner Mongolia. These regions formed the new nation of Manchuria. Shen became Manchuria's first president, guiding the country through eight years of peace and prosperity before stepping down.

• Word out of Shenyang is, Shen's son Kai-Xiang plans to run for president. Kai-Xiang has followed in his father's footsteps in the army, leading some ambitious raids over the border into Yakut against the shapeshifters. Kai is popular, but he's also made some powerful enemies—in particular the Russians, who don't appreciate him skipping across the Trans-Siberian Railroad to get into Yakut. I've heard the Russkies are looking for a few helpers in scuttling Kai-Xiang's campaign before it gets rolling.
• Ms. Chen

SPIRITS OF THE PEOPLE

Since that time, Manchuria has never been the same. In one of his first acts, Shen declared the spirits of the people equal to human beings and recognized their legal rights. Almost overnight, Manchuria's population swelled as ancestor spirits and Spirits of Man began manifesting in the streets. Spirits play an active role in Manchuria's daily life, materializing to do everything from giving directions to helping change a tire to shoplifting from stores or hanging on street corners looking for trouble. Ancestor spirits often show up at big family occasions, and woe to the wedding guest who inadvertently snarks off long-dead Auntie Lin. Free spirits in Manchuria hold jobs, own businesses and even run for public office; the capital city recently broke ground for a public park designed by a city spirit who works as a city planner, and at least one smaller city is rumored to have a spirit for mayor.

• "Rumored" is right.
• Skeptic

• Why couldn't there be a spirit mayor? If Buttercup can run Yamatetsu …
• Jing-mei

• I've had hearth spirits chat me up at local bars. The one at The Moon Lady is quite the charismatic gent—not much to look at when he first starts talking, but after you've looked into those amber eyes awhile … whew!
• Pepys

• All this spirit activity might explain the lack of shedim activity in Manchuria. Maybe the "spirits of the people" help out against magical threats like that.
• Silicon Mage

• In addition to laws against unrestricted summoning, it's harder to summon some types of spirits in Manchuria: Spirits of Man, ancestor spirits and certain other spirits associated with cities and folks. There's no restriction against or difficulty with summoning nature spirits, though. In fact, magicians can make good money banishing "undesirable" spirits.
• Manchu Fu

• It is not the act of summoning, but the method. If you order a spirit around like an underling, as the megacorp wage mages

do, the spirits bristle at such rudeness. If you treat the spirits with courtesy, they gladly return the favor.
• Kwan Yin

• Ever since Shen's victory at Nanjing, rumors have abounded that the three wise men who advised Shen were some kind of spirits. (Some of the more outlandish rumors suggest they're one spirit materializing in three bodies.) During Shen's tenure as president, people occasionally spotted them in the background, but they only spoke to Shen. Even after Shen left office, every now and then rumors spread that the three wise men had come to visit a president on the night before an important decision.
• Manchu Fu

• Interesting. It sounds like these three wise men were a kind of avatar, mentoring the presidential office rather than a magical group. Was Shen a magician?
• Silicon Mage

• No, nor were any of the presidents that followed. If it weren't for that, I'd agree with the avatar theory.
• Manchu Fu

Just as Manchuria is open and free to all kinds of spirits of humanity, the nation has also attracted an unusual share of magicians, in particular shamans. Manchu culture historically had a strong shamanic tradition, but in modern times the culture diluted as the Manchus intermarried with the majority Han Chinese. After Shen established independent Manchuria, interest in Manchu shamanism experienced a renaissance. The renewed interest in shamanism adapted to Manchuria's urbanized lifestyle, with a disproportionate majority of urban and street shamans. Dog, Snake and Rat are popular totems, largely through their role in the Chinese Zodiac; Carp, Cat and Fox shamans are also common.

• Idol followers are here also, though much rarer. Most Idol followers are ancestor shamans and commune almost exclusively with ancestor spirits. Creator, Fire-Bringer, Great Mother and Wise Warrior are the most common icons.
• Goethe

• You want lucrative biz in Manchuria, go for talislegging. The wilds are chockablock with potent stuff, and it's also a great place to find telesma favored by city spirits.
• Wildrose

THE TA'REN

Many visitors to Manchuria, as well as natives, claim to have "felt" an invisible presence moving among the Manchurian population. Sometimes as they walk amid the throngs down the street, they feel as if they're watched. At other times, if they walk into a room with ten people inside, they see an *eleventh* person from the corner of the eye.

• We have a similar thing here in Seattle. It's called paranoia.
• Daric

In other parts of the world, people think someone with an invisible friend is a little crazy. In Manchuria, most people accept the idea as normal. Manchurians even have a name for these invisible friends: Ta'ren ("others").

As far as anyone can tell, the Ta'ren are Spirits of Man. They take an intense interest in certain people, though no one's yet figured out any pattern to the attraction. Ta'ren who take a liking to you may follow you around for hours, even days—mostly just watching the objects of their attention, but occasionally playing little pranks at their target's expense.

• Okay, that explains why I kept ending up on the same damned street corner by the Dai Ho Noodle Emporium after walking around for damned near two hours!
• Gaijin Girl

• They're not just pranksters. A few really powerful Ta'ren have been known to possess a host and attack enemies physically. Some say a Ta'ren can also subsume a host's memory and personality and impersonate the host without anyone the wiser.
• Ms. Chen

• I'm not sure, but I think these Ta'ren may have an agenda against the Yakut shapeshifters. Quite a few of them have been heading north through Russia into Yakut.
• Kwan Yin

MANCHURIA AND EXTRATERRITORIALITY

Along with Amazonia and the two Tirs, Manchuria is one of the few nations that refuses to accept the Business Recognition Accords imposed by the Corporate Court. Blame it on Manchuria's strange magic, or Shen Yao-Xiang's mysterious advisers, but Manchuria is the only highly industrialized, urbane high-tech nation to make the megacorps blink. Manchuria does recognize extraterritoriality, but only for certain corporations chartered in Manchuria that meet stringent (and sometimes pretty weird) criteria. These extraterritorial Manchurian corps also impose limits on how much voting stock outsiders can hold, including through holding companies and other corporate shell games the megacorps ordinarily play.

A flesh-and-blood native Manchurian can hold any amount of stock in one of these extraterritorial corps. Case in point: Yamatetsu doesn't own its Manchurian division. Instead, it belongs to Haifeng Zhou, a Manchurian native employed by Yamatetsu. As this illustrates, the megacorps try to get around the voting stock limitation by employing someone who's a major shareholder in a Manchurian company.

• This is a risky move. Because the shares are in the individual's name, said person could skip to another megacorp and take his Manchurian subsidiary with him. Last week Renraku Asia took a major stock hit when Shin Kwantung, owner of Xhitsao Technologies and a one-time Renraku executive, submitted his

two-weeks' notice and jumped, subsidiary and all, to Mitsuhama.
• The Chromed Accountant

• How did he manage that? They make 'em sign licensing agreements to prevent exactly that kind of dodge.
• Corp Watcher

• Yeah, but they have to get them enforced in a Manchurian court. Not exactly a sympathetic venue. The megacorps are already dancing on the edge of shady, and they know it. So they tend to settle for token financial compensation. It's not like this happens often enough to pose a major threat to the bottom line, after all.
• The Chromed Accountant

• Speaking of Haifeng, he's incredibly lucky to be alive right now. He was on his way to the Shenyang airport for a business trip to Seoul when a drive-by shooting ambushed his entourage, causing him to miss his flight as he fled his attackers. The plane he was supposed to be on crashed into the Yellow Sea, with no survivors.
• Pung

Most of the AAA megacorps have some presence in Manchuria, though relations with the government range from cool to tense. The largest megacorp is Yamatetsu, whose relationship with the Manchurian government warmed when Yuri Shibanokuji ascended to power and moved corporate headquarters to Vladivostok.

The biggest native corp in the nation is Shangui Corporation, which operates as a Manchuria-based multinational in the surrounding region. Shangui has an active presence in other northern Chinese states, such as the rump Republic, Shaanxi and some of the Coastal Provinces, and even Mongolia and Korea. The corp's primary industries include mining, magical research and materials engineering, and it dabbles in heavy industry.

Largely because of Manchuria's extraterritoriality laws and unusual magical environment, Shangui is one of the few Far East corporations that have remained independent of the Japanacorps and the Pacific Prosperity Group. Shangui invites friction from both of those factions, as its core businesses often compete with MCT, Monobe and Eastern Tiger.

• Shangui has also been attracting attention from Ruhrmetall and IFMU in Europe. Though Shangui doesn't have much of a presence outside Asia, their products sell worldwide and have been undercutting Ruhrmetall and IFMU's market share and revenues. Both have hired shadowrunners to penetrate Shangui and assess how much of a threat it is.
• Bizwatcher

• Some people in Manchuria think a Ta'ren or a small group of them may be involved with Shangui, whispering instructions into the top execs' ears. A few business experts in the Far East have noted unusual unity of thought among several key decision makers. If these spirits really can possess people, that could explain it.
• Tiger

• At least one Shangui magical research facility has a pair of spirits handling astral security. If you believe the rumors, the spirits get paid in cheesy trid reruns. Allegedly, they like cheap comedy shows and infomercials best.
• Shanghai Sue

SHAANXI: GREAT UNDERGROUND EMPIRE

Population: 40,414,000 (Han 99%, Other 1%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (99%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, shamanism and Daoism
by Hei Yu

An academic chummer once said to me, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it has a tendency to rhyme." If so, then the Kingdom of Shaanxi is waxing poetic.

Many scholars consider the region of Shaanxi as China's historical core. In ancient times, Shaanxi was part of the Western Xia Kingdom; after assimilation into Imperial China, it became a thriving part of the empire. In fact the Shaanxi capital of Xi'an (from which the name China derives) was the imperial capital for several dynasties before Beijing took its place.

Some four millennia later, monarchy is again the rage in Shaanxi, but it's adopted some distinctly modern trappings like a constitution and a parliament. And the head wearing the crown, Queen Michelle Chou, wields considerable influence over Shaanxi—one of the few Far East states governed by a woman.

MONARCHS TO BEHOLD THE SWELLING SCENE

To understand how Shaanxi became a modern monarchy, one must understand the monarch, Queen Michelle. She is half Chinese, the daughter of Chiangsiu Chou and Vanessa Fitzroy (a distant cousin to the Duke of Grafton). She and her family lived in Xi'an, where her father worked as an executive for China's privatized industries. When Shaanxi seceded, Party loyalists murdered Chiangsiu for allying with the new government, and Vanessa fled with Michelle back home to Great Britain.

Back in merry old England, Michelle studied law at Oxford and became an accomplished barrister. She maintained ties with many of her father's associates, who had been forced underground by a military coup. Using her mother's family connections, Michelle funneled support to the rebels, helping them overthrow the military junta and seize power in Shaanxi. Afterward, she used her legal training to draft a new constitution, modeled after the parliamentary systems of Britain and other European states. In gratitude for her assistance, the new Shaanxi government crowned her queen.

• There's more than propaganda at work here. Michelle has blue blood from both sides of her family. Of course, everyone knows about her mother's connections to the Duke of Grafton, but a genealogical study also showed her father's descent from a minister serving the Qing dynasty, the last of the Chinese emperors.
• China Hand

• The study took place after the coronation, to legitimize her claim to the so-called throne. And Vanessa Fitzroy's claims to nobility are thinner than the soybeer at a bar in the Squeeze.
• Skeptic

AND ROUSE AT THE NAME OF SHAANXI

To drum up support for the new regime, Queen Michelle has sponsored numerous cultural heritage projects commemorating the ancient Western Xia Kingdom. After years of war and oppression, these projects give the people of Shaanxi a sense of identity and pride, and her efforts have largely succeeded.

• Anything to take their minds off the fact that the government tramples all over their rights.
• Antifa

A significant number of these heritage revival projects are high-profile archaeological digs at the many historical sites in the Kingdom. Her Majesty has begun to worry, however, that this may be an invitation for grave robbers like the Atlantean Foundation or Apep Consortium to make off with valuable Xia artifacts.

• Shaanxi has had spectacularly poor relations with the Atlantean Foundation after one controversial dig in Xi'an. The queen expelled the AF from Shaanxi at gunpoint. Since then, the number of Foundation jobs in the Hong Kong shadows has shot up.
• Bizwatcher

A KINGDOM FOR A STAGE, PRINCES TO ACT

Officially, the queen is mostly a figurehead with ceremonial duties and only a few real powers. On the other hand, Michelle Chou helped draft the Shaanxi constitution and so exercises considerable personal influence among members of Parliament and ministers. Her active involvement in parliamentary politics has brought her several enemies, the most noteworthy being Prime Minister Da'shr Feizhir, elected less than two years ago. Once a backer of Michelle's father, Da'shr has lately grown resentful of the queen's distant support of the revolution and has wondered aloud whether she deserves the throne without having risked life or limb. (Da'shr was severely injured during the revolt and survived only through extensive cybernetic augmentation. Watching him preside over parliamentary debates can be a little terrifying, as his artificial breather punctuates his speech with heavy mechanical exhalations.)

• A few of Da'shr's surviving comrades suspect he was a stooge for the Japanese Empire. Shiawase and Renraku have factories and offices galore in Shaanxi, and the Empire (pre-Yasuhito, anyway) has always wanted to conquer China. In fact, Da'shr's connections with Keruba (Renraku's predecessor) enabled him to acquire armaments from Renraku at discount prices and minimum hassle.
• Senator Pencilface

• Which leads many to believe Da'shr's crippling injuries weren't inflicted by the junta, but by people on his own side.
• Jing-mei

OCCASIONS AND CAUSES IN ALL THINGS

The upcoming Queen's Silver Jubilee has prompted debate on the monarchy's future. After coronation, Queen Michelle married Fanqua Tsen, now recognized as the Royal Consort, and bore a son, Jingqi Chou-Tsen. Now approaching his twenty-second birthday, Jingqi is being groomed to assume the throne when Michelle dies or abdicates.

In the midst of preparations for the twenty-fifth coronation anniversary, Dominic L'Auvaigne arrived in Xi'an. Dominic is Michelle's son from a previous marriage to Pierre L'Auvaigne, whom Michelle divorced after less than two years. Dominic's decision to remain at court throughout and after the ceremonies has many pundits worried. Though Michelle waived custody of Dominic after the divorce, his claim to the throne is as legitimate as Jingqi's. Additionally, by constitutional law, the upper house—the House of Magistrates—chooses the heir to the throne. Quite a few magistrates share Da'shr Feizhir's disdain for the queen, so they might choose Dominic out of spite.

• It's worth noting that Dominic sits on the Board of Directors for Esprit Industries, the French miltech manufacturer. Given the three-way standoff between Shaanxi, Henan and Sichuan, having Esprit backing the kingdom couldn't hurt.
• Politix

• Jingqi isn't happy about his half-brother's sudden appearance. Even more than the political implications, the heir apparent sees Dominic's slick European charm as a threat to his public popularity. Word in the Xi'an shadows is, certain "interested parties" are looking for dirt to use as ammunition for character assassination.
• Moon Lady

A PEOPLED KINGDOM

Given the region's ancient history, Shaanxi has plenty of places worth seeing, and even more profitable opportunities to exploit. Doing a little history homework never hurts when running here.

Xi'an

Xi'an, the capital, is an eclectic mix of old and new. The city proper is a major industrial center (with sizeable factories belonging mostly to Ares, Shiawase and Renraku), but the ancient capital (known as Changan) lies a few kilometers to the northwest of the city center. Ancient monuments and structures abound in Xi'an and its immediate surroundings.

• With the tense situation at Hua Shan Mountain to the south, Ares and Renraku are competing hard to win defense contracts with the Shaanxi government. Dominic's recent arrival complicates matters, however.
• Politix

With the queen's emphasis on cultural revival, many of the city's ancient monuments have undergone significant renovation. One particularly interesting site is the Forest of Steles, a repository of more than a thousand stone tablets depicting the history of the Xia kingdom in ancient Chinese calligraphy and artwork. Because of the site's historical value, the government severely limits access to outsiders.

• Not all outsiders. On several occasions, visitors of Celtic and African ethnicity turn up at the Forest and chat with government curators. Some suspect these people are members of the Knights of Rage. If Celedyr is secretly sponsoring the royal archaeological projects, this might explain why Shaanxi has so far resisted the "persuasions" of the Atlantean Foundation.
• Conspir-I-see

• I think it's more than that. I did a little digging into Queen Michelle's past. While she was practicing law in Britain, her legal firm served as counsel for Transys Neuronet on certain contract issues. Everyone talks about the queen's personal influence over the government, but I have to wonder if the wyrm is the real power behind the throne.
• Dragon Bone

Hua Shan

As the westernmost of the Five Sacred Mountains, Hua Shan has created a three-way standoff ever since weird magical activity started on its summit after the Year of the Comet. Just after this happened, Henan military forces crossed the border in a drive toward the mountain. Shaanxi's armed forces mobilized against this invasion, meeting the neo-Commies in the mountain's shadow. Meanwhile, Sichuan troops also headed toward the border. If not for Lung's sudden appearance on T'ai Shan to shift attention away, we'd likely be in the midst of a major war right now.

• There's been some dissension in the Henan ranks as well. The troops are getting tired of maintaining the holding pattern, but the old men back in Zhengzhou are flip-flopping on what to do. My guess is, they realized they made a mistake rushing in, but pride won't allow them to slink back home. When confronted with a difficult decision, bureaucrats avoid making one. That doesn't sit well with field commanders, so it's only a matter of time before one of them takes things into his own hands.
• Radar

Despite the three-way face-off, no one really controls Hua Shan. The mountain is a no-man's land no side wants to breach, for fear the other two will pounce. On several occasions monks and pilgrims have passed through to worship at the various temples on the mountain, but with nerves getting frayed on all sides, more and more pilgrims are being detained.

• He's not kidding. A couple of weeks ago me and a few others got called for a job by Wuxing. Mr. Johnson flew us up to Hua Shan and told us they needed to extract a pilgrimage

party detained by the Henan army. Turns out one of the pilgrims was a powerful geomancer Wuxing needed to sanctify a new office in Australia.
» Bungaree

Hua Shan represents the element Metal, which in wuxing symbolizes new yin. Metal is also associated with autumn, grief and courage, and intuition. In the wuxing cycle, Metal also dominates over Wood, as a metal axe can fell a wooden tree. T'ai Shan is associated with Wood, so I doubt Lung is happy about all the fracas over Hua Shan.

The Tomb of Shih Huang Ti

The tomb of Shih Huang Ti, Qin dynasty emperor, is the famous one where peasants digging a well discovered the terra cotta soldiers buried as part of the emperor's entourage. Over time archaeologists excavated parts of the underground tomb, which contained a replica city of Changan, the ancient capital. To date, only a portion of the massive tomb has been excavated; archaeologists speculate that the entire tomb may span an area as large as 32 square kilometers.

The People's Republic never really supported the project, and after the country fell apart any privately financed projects dried up in the midst of civil war. Since Queen Michelle ascended the throne, the Kingdom of Shaanxi has continued excavations as part of the heritage revival agenda, but Michelle still has about thirty years of catching up to do.

Apart from the terra cotta soldiers, there's plenty of speculation about the tomb's contents. Many priceless treasures have been unearthed, and historians believe more may be found. Impressive structures may also remain, though record of them exists only in tales passed down through generations. One legend suggests a chamber of black jade, adorned with pearls mapping out the constellations. Another legend suggests one chamber contains a topographical scale map of ancient China, with streams of mercury marking out major rivers.

» Legends also warn that Emperor Qin guarded his tomb with elaborate booby traps, such as crossbows aimed to impale would-be intruders. I've heard of more than one shadowrunner team hired to help an ambitious excavator overcome the traps, never to be seen again.
» Digger

Public excavation is ongoing and supported by the government, but some sections are closed to public access. Some of these I know are secret excavations the government is hiding from other interested parties. Other sites have been permanently closed, with no one allowed to enter.

» The Knights of Rage often participate in these secret excavations. Perhaps part of the tomb touches on a secret lair.
» Templar

» I'm not so sure. I got hired to bodyguard an archaeologist who broke into one of these closed sites. Turns out he hired me to protect him from Knights of Rage who took exception to that. I doubt my client broke into a dragon's lair; from the few artifacts I saw, I think he stumbled on an ancient underground city that predates known Chinese history.
» Digger

» Interesting. So what about that site had the Knights so interested?
» Templar

» Not to take, but to prevent from taking. Sometimes it is wise to leave the past buried.
» Tsangara

The terra cotta soldiers have their own odd story. A few years ago, Shaanxi demanded the return of certain statues on display elsewhere in the world. Government officials also removed several statues recently unearthed. So far, no one knows why.

» The soldiers are homunculi for a spirit army. The Shaanxi government wants to reanimate the soldiers, to protect them from Henan and Sichuan.
» Lindo

» A magician chummer of mine had the chance to assense one, and he thought they looked like spirit foci. Perhaps the statues are fetters for spirit guards, who protect astral space against things like shedim and proteans.
» Qianlong

The Great Wall

Though the Great Wall of China spans other nations (the Republic of China, Ningxia, Gansu and parts of Manchuria), the most interesting and most visited sections lie in Shaanxi. Built by the sacrifice of thousands of Chinese laborers, the Great Wall is the only artificial structure visible from space.

Given the history of its construction, one shouldn't be surprised to learn that the Great Wall leaves an imprint in local astral space. Magicians report that the wall's aura is as solid and impassable as the material object. Furthermore, during the Year of the Comet, portions of this astral wall have materialized at random to fill the gaps left in the material world. Once the comet left Earth's vicinity, however, these spontaneous materializations ceased.

» Not for good. I've heard reports that localized magical activity triggers the astral walls to temporarily re-materialize in the physical world.
» Tiger Mage

» The Great Wall is manned in astral space. You can't see it in the material world, but ghost guards regularly patrol the wall, dressed in armor and carrying weapons dating from when the wall first went up. They ignore anyone passing from the China side north into Mongolia, but they get aggressive toward intruders projecting from Mongolia into China. It can ruin an astral recon, when you have to add another hundred thousand kilometers going around the Great Wall in astral space.
» Liondog

• Considering its prominence in astral space, the Great Wall has effectively become a mana line running through China. Being manmade, it's not a dragon line; in fact, it probably cuts through numerous dragon lines. The Emperor of Beijing and the Triads have both shown unusual interest in the wall lately. The Shaanxi government is keeping a wary eye on all of them.
• Pearl

Tai-Hei Mountains

The Tai-Hei Mountains, splitting the border between Shaanxi and the Republic of China, once housed communist China's primary nuclear arsenal. Now, almost fifty years after the earthquake of 2017 that buried the weapons bunkers and detonated a few warheads, the Tai-Hei Mountains provide an effective barrier against the Republic of China, not only because of the terrain, but also because of the risk of crossing a contaminated region. Shaanxi troops patrol nearby, just to make sure no mischief-makers get any bright ideas.

• There was nothing natural about that disaster. The Party elders chose the Tai-Hei Mountains because they were seismically stable. Also, isn't it a coincidence that just enough nukes detonated to seal the stockpile—not the entire cache, which would have destroyed most of northeast China? We know what caused this earthquake: Lung. He saw that without its nuclear leash, the wayward provinces would put the final nail in the Party's coffin!
• Dragonslayer

• There's a problem with your pet conspiracy theory. Magically inducing earthquakes isn't Lung's style, or his particular specialty. The circumstances are suspicious, granted, but I don't think you can lay this at Lung's feet.
• DragonIX

• Celedyr specializes in earth magic, and his agents are active in China. Transys Neuronet has a strong presence in the southeast, while the Knights of Rage move about freely in Shaanxi. You scratch my back, I scratch yours.
• Wyrm Watcher

• From what I hear, Shaanxi's been doing a lousy job. A couple of friends on a smuggling run were stupid enough to pass too close to the Tai-Hei arsenal, and attracted attention from the Shaanxi patrols. While trying to lose them, my chummers went by the remains of a recent camp, with foot and tire treads leading from the campsite directly to the mountains.
• Lindo

• What about the prints that led out of the arsenal grounds? According to the person who found them, they're anything but human.
• Seeker

XUANWU PEAK

The northernmost of the Five Sacred Mountains, Xuanwu Peak is part of a larger range known as Heng Shan (not to be confused with the Heng Shan in the Canton Confederation, where the other sacred mountain sits). Like its southern counterpart, Heng Shan north consists of multiple peaks, the highest being Xuanwu. The summit is the site of the thousand-year-old Beiyue Temple. Other features include the Huanging Temple, constructed over a precipice halfway up, and the Ying Wood Pagoda.

In feng shui tradition, Xuanwu Peak represents Water, symbolizing yin at its fullness. Water is also associated with winter, midnight, death or dormancy, and the mental qualities of spontaneity, fear and calmness. Water represents the concept of conserving energy, and so magicians, adepts and other magical beings might come here to "recharge their batteries," so to speak. The mountain's mystical resonance causes spirits in possession of people or objects to fall dormant, making it easier to exorcise and banish them. Consequently, few shedim maraud anywhere around Xuanwu Peak.

• Don't bother working any mojo at Xuanwu. The place is such a big mana sink, it's almost impossible to grab enough mana to weave a spell before it slips away.
• Cat Dancer

Lately wujen and geomancers living near the mountain have noticed an unexplainable ebb in the mountain's chi. In simple terms, someone or something is siphoning magical energy from the mountain. A number of shapeshifters have been spotted in the region, leading some to believe Yakut may be involved in the draining of Xuanwu Peak.

• Whether or not the rumors are true, the Manchurians have taken this development seriously. Being in the mountain's presence creates problems for them, so they've resorted to proxies—read shadowrunners—to investigate.
• Bizwatcher

BEIJING: MANDATE OF HEAVEN

Population: 15,653,000 (Han 96%, Other 4%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (99%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, shamanism and Daoism
by Mr. Sin

Translated as "northern capital," Beijing used to be China's seat of government, before Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionaries deposed the boy emperor Pu Yi. Almost a century and a half later, Li Tianzi sits in the Forbidden City, claiming the title of Emperor … of the city of Beijing.

In 2058, with Beijing crumbling under shoddy leadership and antigovernment unrest, Li Tianzi—a wujen magician—appeared out of nowhere. Tianzi's origins remain a mystery; he claims lightning struck him while walking home one night, and he awoke with no memory of his life before that event. As told in the official court biography, he remembers only an inner calling to reverse the injustices visited on

the people of Beijing.

» Come on. With all the SIN databases and personnel registries on the Matrix, it's practically impossible for someone to appear out of nowhere. Tianzi has to have a history somewhere.
» Skeptic

» How do you account for the millions of SINless in the world? People do slip through the cracks. Especially if some enterprising decker erases their SIN for them.
» One-eye

Leading a militia of ex-policemen and soldiers, augmented by several spirits, Tianzi stormed the Zhongnanhai, the governmental complex, and threw the politicians into the streets. After seizing the complex, Tianzi's forces fanned out into the city, driving out all government workers. Once Beijing was bureaucrat-free, Tianzi entered the Forbidden City, where he proclaimed himself Emperor.

» Tianzi must have had help. You don't overthrow corporate puppet states without somebody sponsoring you. I'll bet Lung is behind this somewhere.
» Dragonslayer

» Not even close. From what I've heard, Tan Tien backed the Emperor, and he's made them rich in the process.
» China Hand

Naturally, the Republic mounted a counterattack, but without much success. Meanwhile, the new emperor was finding his fickle subjects difficult to govern. After a year of fighting, Beijing and the rump Republic negotiated a truce in early 2061. The Republic recognized Beijing as an autonomous region, administratively part of the Republic, but politically independent, with its own judicial system and diplomatic embassy.

» Sounds like Denver, under Ghostwalker.
» Southern Cross

» Except that there aren't multiple nations, and it isn't so one-sided. The Emperor still controls all the important stuff, like police and city militia, but municipal services such as Matrix connection and power are still outsourced to the Republic's corporate subcontractors. If they wanted to, they could strangle Beijing by turning off the power and water.
» China Hand

» Yeah, and then Tan Tien would shut down the Republic economy and crash the Tianjin RTG.
» The Chromed Accountant

EMPEROR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Li Tianzi's claim of authority over Beijing derives from the famous Mandate of Heaven, which says that Heaven (the spirit world) selects the ruler of China. If a ruler abuses his authority and mistreats his subjects, Heaven withdraws its mandate and bestows it upon a worthier successor. In Li's case, Heaven has repudiated the authority of the Republic and appointed him as Heaven's servant.

» On the other hand, Li wasn't totally successful in claiming power even over Beijing, so one might say Heaven isn't behind him 100 percent.
» Pung

Plenty of indications exist that Li's claim of the Mandate of Heaven is more than figurative. Li says he's a wujen, but magicians who have observed him astrally say his auras and spell signatures are radically different from any other wujen; instead, they more greatly resemble spirit abilities in their astral signature. Also, Li always seems to have an entourage of spirits around him, but no one's ever observed him summoning them or employing conjuring techniques.

» Some magicians I know think Tianzi might be possessed, if not a spirit himself. This may also explain why no one knew him before he appeared, because before then he didn't exist.
» Moon Lady

THE FORBIDDEN CITY

The Forbidden City is the Emperor's palace, and is so large that in ancient times its massive army of servants rivaled most towns. With the Matrix, drones and automation, the new Emperor gets by with a smaller staff, but the Forbidden City is still crowded.

With the new imperial regime ruling the Beijing sprawl, the Forbidden City has once again become the imperial residence. However, it is no longer the administrative center; the bureaucrats and bean counters maintain their offices in the Zhongnanhai across the street. Only a few highly placed ministers and their staffers have offices within the Forbidden City. These include the typically important Ministries of State, War and Justice, but also some unusual ones: the Ministry of Temples, the Ministry of History and the Ministry of Spellcraft, to offer a few examples. In fact, a large number of ministries in the Forbidden City deal with magic, ancient lore or matters of faith, spirituality or philosophy.

» Watch out for the oddball ministries. In a lot of cases, the emperor has charged them to undertake special missions outside Beijing. A couple of months ago, I got hired with several others to assassinate the high priest of the Soul Valley Temple in Nanjing, in the Coastal Provinces. I did some backtracking and found out our Johnson was a magistrate for the Beijing Ministry of Temples.
» Kweilin K

» Shaanxi seems to take particular exception to the various ministries' external meddling, since they often interfere with the queen's heritage revival projects. Shaanxi's intelligence agency, the Wanguo Anbu, often butts heads with Beijing Ministry personnel.

• China Hand

• The Ministry of Spellcraft has an open bounty out for practitioners of blood magic in China. Doesn't pay as much as the Draco Foundation, but it's a heckuva lot easier to get from anywhere in China to Beijing than DeeCee.
• Bizwatcher

On a related matter, Beijing has an unusual presence in astral space. In addition to its noticeable background count, the Forbidden City actually exists on the astral. The buildings and other structures are astral constructs, as solid and impassable to spirits as their physical counterparts are to metahumans. Moreover, spirits inhabit some of these astral constructs and perform functions similar to their material-world counterparts. For example, one temple in the palace is empty on the physical plane; no one enters except the occasional caretaker. On the astral, that temple is a courthouse where spirits of all kinds gather to petition judges and file grievances.

• I'm beginning to see a method to this madness. Li Tianzi claims to be Emperor of China, but he only rules Beijing. What if the China over which Tianzi claims dominion isn't physical, but spiritual? Maybe the Forbidden City is the capital of the Celestial Bureaucracy.
• Moon Lady

• And I thought Li Tianzi was a loony!
• Mr. Sin

TIANANMEN SQUARE

Tiananmen Square is also interwoven into the Mandate of Heaven. In Chinese legend, Tiananmen is the people's square, where they assembled to petition their grievances openly. (Two marble pillars, called huabiao, stand on either side of the square as symbols of the signposts outside the palace where the people posted their petitions.) As befits the legend, Emperor Tianzi and his magical spirits are powerless within the square's domain, and the square also hinders hostile actions taken by authorities.

• Big deal. The jackbooted thugs can't beat you up, but they can still go in as long as they don't act like cops. Besides, no one can live in Tiananmen Square forever. Sooner or later, you'll have to leave, and when you do, the cops'll snag you.
• Pung

Protected from repression by the square, Tiananmen has turned into a countercultural meeting place where activists gather to protest, proselytize and swap stories and advice. From a shadowrunner's point of view, Tiananmen Square is a good place to do legwork and make deals. The activists frequently squabble with each other, rarely appearing as a unified front. As the people's square, Tiananmen reflects China's fractured nature in miniature.

• Some say the fractured state of China is imposing itself on Tiananmen and preventing any unity. Some activists believe that if they can overcome their differences and make common cause in the square, China itself will follow suit.
• China Hand

Early in 2017, an aftershock triggered by the collapse of the Tai-Hei range shook Tiananmen Square. The rumbling toppled the central monument and created several large crevasses. Some wonder if this disaster has something to do with the fractiousness of gatherings at Tiananmen.

TAN TIEN CORPORATION

Aside from a ripple of publicity after receiving a 50 million-nuyen disbursement from Dunkelzahn's Will, this little multinational has kept a low profile. Which is probably good, because at the rate it's progressing, it may end up becoming a big threat to the Japanacorps.

Extremely small by megacorporate standards, Tan Tien barely qualifies as a third-tier megacorp; its cash flow and asset totals meet the bare minimum for Corporate Court filings, but aren't large enough to warrant extraterritorial status. So Tan Tien makes do by getting in bed with the various host governments where it has facilities. Manchuria is a particular favorite, as that nation's refusal to go along with the Business Recognition Accords levels the field in Tan Tien's favor. Tan Tien also has a presence in the Canton Confederation, though how it survives there without getting eaten alive by Wuxing is beyond me.

• The protection money they pay the White Lotus Triad likely has something to do with it. The Triad also provides them an outlet for raising additional capital by developing bioengineered drugs.
• Corp Watcher

• Tan Tien has also opened several new facilities in Shandong ever since Lung took roost on T'ai Shan. Big surprise.
• Dragon Dance

Tan Tien primarily does research, mostly in computer technology, electronics and biotech. The company makes money by licensing out its research to the Japanacorps and its PPG brethren. MCT, Renraku and Shiawase have all attempted takeovers, without success so far. Tan Tien's most recent development is Parallel Thought, an innovative multi-user cyberdeck interface that went into production earlier this year after some major delays. Considering the new system's rave reviews, Tan Tien may have a real winner that might push it to AA status.

• Tan Tien made a controversial move by licensing Parallel Thought only to other PPG companies. Additionally, Tan Tien let many of its licensing contracts with the Japanacorps expire. Pretty brazen for a company that still doesn't have extraterritoriality. Tan Tien had better hope Parallel Thought succeeds beyond their wildest dreams, or they may be in trouble.

» Corp Watcher

» That explains why Tan Tien is so supportive of Emperor Li Tianzi. After Tianzi came to power, the corporation got a lot of special tax breaks, as well as legal favoritism amounting to de facto extraterritoriality. They need each other right now to legitimize themselves among their respective peers.
» China Hand

As CEO of Tan Tien, Sau-kok Chu is as enigmatic and reclusive as the company he leads. A longtime resident of Beijing, Chu is highly respected throughout China, and many of the larger Chinese corps, such as Baihu and Shangui, use Tan Tien's business practices to guide their own. Chu has a passion for Chinese opera; he's a major patron of the world-famous Peking Opera troupe and attends every premiere performance.

» The Peking Opera is also Chu's primary venue for business meetings. Its worldwide reputation attracts many high-profile attendees, including Emperor Tianzi, Wu Lung-Wei of Wuxing and even Lung (whom I heard attended a performance in human form).
» Dragon Dance

» Recently the Peking Opera house has picked up some buzz in the Beijing shadows. According to the rumors, the opera house commissioned a new opera about the breakup of China, and part of the script apparently contains a prophecy about its eventual reunification. Furthermore, the entire script is supposed to be the formula for a grand ritual that will actually bring reunification about. Many of China's wannabe successors would no doubt love to "edit" the script so that events turn in their favor.
» Mikado

THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA: RUMP STATE
Population: 70,354,000 (Han 96%, Manchu 3%, Other 1%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (99%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, shamanism and Daoism

It's bad enough to lose nine-tenths of your country in less than half a century. When you lose your own capital to an upstart loon, like the Republic of China did, you become the joke of the world community.

» Meh. Doesn't even come close to California.
» Cali Girl

Reduced to the province of Hebei and the Tianjin metropolitan district, the Republic of China is a shadow of what it was when Sun Yat-Sen overthrew the Qing dynasty a century ago. Diplomatically, the Republic has fairly good relations with non-Chinese nations, particularly Japan, Korea, Salish-Shidhe and the UCAS. Its relations with its Chinese neighbors are generally poor, especially with Henan and Manchuria. The Republic's military gets a lot of aid from the megacorps, who don't want to see it overrun by anti-megacorp states like Manchuria and Henan.

» Smuggling is common, particularly on the Henan-Republic border. You can get good rates smuggling capitalist luxuries into Henan and smuggling Henan covert agents into the Republic.
» Bizwatcher

Tianjin

With Beijing autonomous, the Republic's capital moved to the port city of Tianjin. Originally a military garrison, Tianjin became an important trading center. In the Boxer Rebellion it served as the stronghold for Western forces, which had virtually taken over the place during the nineteenth-century trade boom. Nowadays, all three Japanacorps, as well as Yamatetsu, maintain important corporate arcologies in Tianjin, which they use to coordinate their operations in China.

» The megas in the Republic rarely cooperate, so shadowrunners have plenty of opportunities to make money in Tianjin. Most corporate runs are business-oriented, like hacking marketing data and business plans or extracting the occasional suit. Tech-oriented runs (such as stealing prototypes) or sabotage are more likely to occur in the Confederation or the Coastal Provinces.
» Ma'fan

HENAN: GREAT LEAP BACKWARD

Population: 105,700,000 (Han 99%, Other 1%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (99%)
Major Religions: None
by Che Gorilla

Communism is like ideological herpes: it never seems to go away. After getting thrown out of power in 2018, the hardline factions of the Chinese Communist Party regrouped in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan. Throwing out or executing local reformers and modernizers, the hardliners struck back at Beijing, triggering the Republic Civil War. By the time both sides wore themselves out, the communists ended up controlling the provinces of Henan, Anhui and most of Hubei. The regime in Henan has since become a throwback to the days of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution.

THE LITTLE RED BOOK (2064 EDITION)

Just as Karl Marx originally intended, the state runs Henan's economy in a planned command system. The only private industry in Henan is extraterritorial megacorporate enclaves. Their presence grates against the hardliners' ideological sensibilities, but the politicians have little choice about accepting this state of affairs. Henan puts up passive resistance, usually by dragging its feet over extradition requests and obstructing corporate security in pursuing malcontents.

» From a shadowrunner's point of view, this makes running in Henan somewhat easier. Once you cross into Henan territory, you're pretty much scot-free, since Henan law enforcement will considerably slow down corp security with jurisdictional disputes and bureaucratic obstruction.
» Pal Joey

• Avoiding a shakedown from the secret police is another matter altogether.
• Lucky Lee

THE BOURGEOISIE

Few of Henan's extraterritorial enclaves belong to the Japanacorps. The only one with any significant presence is Renraku, probably because the communists approve of its tendency toward social engineering. Renraku's local activities generally revolve around their peripheral businesses: agriculture and food processing, biotech, chemicals and consumer goods. They operate a large agricultural arcology outside of Bengbu where they work on genetically modified crops and research new food processing methods that'll make you swear off eating altogether.

• If you think that's bad, I'd suggest you avoid the "reject farm": the valley on the other side of the Huai River where they dump all their genetic modification failures.
• Orwell

Henan's largest extraterritorial client is Aztechnology, since Henan sees the Azzies as the corporate enterprise of the Aztlan government. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the giant Aztechnology pyramid in the midst of the state capital in Zhengzhou. In fact, Henan is one of few nations to enjoy mutually cordial relations with Aztlan/Aztechnology. Other North American megacorps like Ares or Novatech are distinctly unwelcome as blatant representatives of the capitalist bourgeoisie.

• Henan has it completely backward, but the Azzies aren't about to spoil a good thing.
• Pyramid Watcher

CHAMPIONS OF THE WORKERS

Henan's antipathy toward the megacorps attracts a number of anti-corporate policlubs, including a few radical environmentalists like Greenwar and racial policlubs like the Sons of Sauron, whose radical views foster a general hostility toward anything corporate. Many also believe Henan provides covert support to anti-corporate terrorist groups around the world.

• Bad example linking those Greenwar sickos to the rest of us freedom fighters. Greenwar maintains a training camp in Henan, but these bastards don't limit their misanthropy to corporations. The mass poisoning at a Sons of Sauron stronghold outside Huainan had Greenwar all over it. If Greenwar doesn't rein in their "deep ecologists," the rest of us will have to do it for them.
• Urukhai

On the other side of the coin, the communists come down hard on organized crime (mostly because they hate having competition). Government pressure produces a surprising amount of cooperation among the syndicates in Henan: the Triads, the Jo-pok and (surprise!) the yakuza. Because they're all in the same boat, the syndicates find it in their common interest to band together in working against the government.

• Up to a point. While the Jo-pok in Henan won't attack the yaks on sight, they still wouldn't work side by side with them unless someone pointed a gun at their heads.
• Little Bill

• Lung uses the Triads to undermine the communists from the inside. The Onyx Turtle Lodge in particular has earned a place on Henan's Most Wanted because of its close ties to Lung.
• Dragon Dance

PARTY APPARATCHIKS

As leaders of the Communist Party, the top dogs in Henan are the Party officers. The king of the hill is Chairman Xientai Zao, leader of the communist factions during the Republic Civil War. Just shy of eighty, Zao still rules the Party with an iron grip. With all the advancements in modern medicine, he'll likely be calling the shots for at least another decade.

Though Zao runs the overall show, day-to-day affairs fall to the premier, Jianshin Huan. Huan is being hailed as the next generation of Party leadership, and standing as Zao's right-hand man certainly doesn't hurt his image. Now in his early fifties, Huan is perfectly placed to step up as chairman when Zao retires.

• Huan wants it to happen sooner rather than later. Despite the façade of solidarity, there are tensions between him and Zao. Huan is perfectly capable of assuming the chairmanship right now, but Zao isn't ready to quit. Things may be fine today, but if Henan runs into adversity anytime soon, don't be surprised if a power struggle breaks out.
• China Hand

Ministry of Internal Security

The Ministry of Internal Security, or MIS, serves as Henan's investigation/law enforcement agency, as well as its intelligence-gathering service. Led by spymistress Jun Xipang (called "Dragon Lady" by her subordinates), the MIS makes it a point to know everything about Henan, within and without. One division, the Ye Luo, serves as Henan's secret police and employs inquisition and terror tactics made infamous by predecessors like the KGB, the East German Stasi and the Gestapo.

• The Russians pretty much gave up on Communism after the Soviet Union, but the Russian UGB maintains close contact with the MIS and regularly shares information with them. The MIS provides plenty of information on China and lots of neighboring Far Eastern states, in exchange for info about the various Eurocorps operating in Henan.
• Eye Spy

Ranking at the top of the MIS agenda is its ongoing crackdown against the Triads. It's an open secret that the great dragon Lung loathes Communism, which makes Henan the primary target of his hostility. Lung uses Triad syndicates to infiltrate Henan, and the Triads in turn support and shelter religious and dissident groups within Henan from the MIS. Additionally, Triad syndicate connections give Lung influence over Henan's

active black market, further undermining government control over the economy.

» The Onyx Turtle Lodge has attracted particular attention from the Ye Luo. The Turtles specialize in fencing and smuggling, which means they can get anything into or out of Henan for the right price. More than once the Turtles have flooded the market with cheap knockoffs of government-sanctioned consumer products, wrecking the economic command plan for that quarter and most of the fiscal year.
» Lucky Lee

SONG SHAN

Song Shan, one of the Five Sacred Mountains, sits deep in the heart of Henan. The mountain is home to several prominent temples that remain active despite the government's best efforts. This island of faith and spirituality has attracted many pilgrims who risk capture by the MIS to worship and pray at Song Shan.

» Song Shan has escaped persecution partly because it's protected by powerful ancestor spirits who reside in the temples. Every time Henan tries to oust the priests, the government bullyboys suffer some bizarre mishap that sends them packing. Last year, the tear gas the Henan thugs planned to use exploded in transit, getting inside their uniforms and protective equipment. Even the normally somber priests had a good laugh watching those troops strip off their clothes and jump into a nearby lake.
» Sid Hoffman

In wuxing tradition, Song Shan is associated with Earth, representing a balance between yin and yang, as well as the transition from one state to the other. Additionally, the mountain's magic serves as a sort of hospice that treats all sorts of ailments and injuries, whether physical, astral or spiritual. Many incurable maladies go into unexpected regression when the patient arrives at Song Shan to pray and meditate. Similarly, many magicians on the verge of burning out have experienced rejuvenation while recuperating at Song Shan.

» From what I understand, the effectiveness of healing depends upon and draws primarily from the person's own faith and spiritual fortitude. Consequently, it's pretty much useless to atheists in Henan.
» Bonhoffer

SICHUAN: WARRING STATE

Population: 40,414,000 (Han 95%, Yi 3%, Other 2%)
Major Languages: Mandarin (99%)
Major Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, shamanism and Daoism
by Hei Yu

Suddenly everything starts to make sense. With the Dragons download last year making the connection between the great dragon Lung and Liang Hong, warlord-for-life of Sichuan, we finally know how a mediocre popinjay junior officer like Hong managed to become the leader of one of China's most powerful armies while turning a formerly lawless region into the geographically largest Chinese successor state.

Initially among the most developed western provinces, Sichuan got fed up with the preferential treatment shown to the eastern coastal regions, particularly the Greater Canton Development Council. When the Council withdrew to form the Confederation, Sichuan, Shaanxi and several other western provinces seceded, seeing that Beijing didn't or couldn't care. Independence proved a tough road, though, and the weak provincial government collapsed. Not until Liang Hong showed up did Sichuan start getting its act together, later conquering Guizhou and parts of Yunnan.

Sichuan is a hinterland nearly surrounded by mountains, with most of the west on a plateau that opens into a basin looking eastward. Sichuan's relatively mild climate supports lush forests and a variety of wildlife, including the panda bears that are China's unofficial mascot. (Most pandas reside in northeastern Sichuan, near Jiuzhaiquo).

» With the Awakening the wildlife has gotten wilder, so runners can find work backing up big game hunts in Sichuan. Often, you're extra firepower for dealing with extra-tough critters or beating back Awakened scavengers attracted to the hunt. Sometimes hunters hire you to protect them from animal-rights loonies like the Animal Liberation Front. They often try to sabotage hunting camps by stealing equipment, tampering with weapons or even setting up "hunter traps."
» Binoc Bill

» The Sichuan government clamps down hard on hunting exotics, because they want a kickback from the hunters. I've gotten a lot of calls for poaching jobs, to bag Sichuan exotics and bring them back without Chengdu finding out and levying a massive hunting fine.
» Yessir Eeriefit

THE BARREL OF A GUN

Chairman Mao once said, "Political power grows from the barrel of a gun." Sichuan is a perfect case in point. Though nominally a democratic republic, the army holds the real power.

Despite the façade of a civil service and general assembly, the real movers and shakers have all served at one time or another as high-ranking army officers, particularly division commanders and staff officers who reported directly to Liang Hong during his campaign to seize Sichuan. For example, Senxian Jianqo, mayor of Chengdu, served as Liang Hong's chief of staff during the conquest of Guizhou.

» Military politics provides plenty of running opportunities. Whether lieutenants competing for their company commander's favor or colonels smearing their competitors before the promotion board, officers are happy to hire shadowrunners to get dirt on their peers.
» Jafo

Furthermore, Sichuan does not have a civilian police force; a separate army branch handles law enforcement, and criminals face court-martial. In almost all areas of real responsibility,

regional garrison commanders have more authority than their civilian counterparts, the prefect administrators. The prefecture governments exist mostly to handle routine annoyances, such as civil works administration, civil lawsuits and contract arbitration, and so on.

• The prefect administrators aren't powerless, though. Frequently they use shadowrunners against the garrison commanders, to get paydata the administrators can use for blackmail or to stay a step ahead of the army. Occasionally, wetwork comes into play.
• Chun Li

MAGICAL MERITOCRACY

The Sichuan government favors magical folk over mundanes. Civil service application and promotion exams give bonus points if the tester is an adept or a magician, and certain high-level civilian *and* military positions are impossible to attain unless you're Awakened. Not every pencil pusher and bean counter is a magician, but magicians and adepts serve as the ministers, secretaries and chiefs of staff for most of Sichuan's major state ministries, as well as commanding the major army divisions.

• That's discrimination! Where are the metahuman rights activists to protest this?
• Plain Jane

• Where have you been, chummer? The advocacy policlubs don't care about some backwater Chinese banana republic when there's good money to be made shaking down First World governments and corps. Besides, most of them (*cough*IOND*cough*) favor this kind of elitism and only protest because they're not the elites in charge.
• Cynic

Of course, with Sichuan so top-heavy with mojo slingers, questions inevitably fly about magical cabals and other conspiracy theories. The government denies such rumors, though it has admitted that some officials participate in magical initiatory groups—strictly for personal development, of course. Liang Hong, the senior grandmaster, belongs to the Order of Zhang Daolin, an apparently harmless group that spends most of its time discussing Taoist devotions and personal faith. However, two other members include Xiao Donglu, Minister of State, and Wu Hsiaomen, Army Chief of Staff. One has to wonder how harmless they really are.

• Everyone assumes that since Liang Hong is head of state, he's also head of the Zhang Daolin, but that's not true. Sure, he's the order's public spokesman, but in one very private meeting, Liang Hong and the ruling council got called on the carpet before an old man who appeared in Chengdu out of nowhere. Given Liang Hong's association with Lung, everyone assumes it's the wyrm, but Lung has never used that form in previous meetings with Liang Hong or anywhere else.
• Lao Hu

• Speaking of which, how much is Lung involved with Sichuan? We know he helped Liang Hong take control, but how much is he involved with things day-to-day?
• Lucky Lee

• Surprisingly little. Lung drops in from time to time to visit his old lair near Leshan, but neither he nor his "children" interact much with Liang Hong or the government. Whenever he does visit Liang Hong, people pay attention, such as the incident a few years ago when Lung made the warlord violently ill to prevent him from invading the Confederation.
• Hei Yu

ATOMIC ENLIGHTENMENT

Along with Henan, Shaanxi and the Confederation, Sichuan has inherited a share of China's remaining nuclear arsenal, but Sichuan inherited a lot of production facilities as well. Most of China's nuclear development took place in the western provinces, particularly Sichuan and Gansu. Many facilities were destroyed by warlords fighting for control, but a sizeable number survived when Liang Hong consolidated his hold over Sichuan. The nuclear industry remains Sichuan's only nationalized industry, resisting privatization efforts from Nucor, Shiawase and MCT.

• Now I understand why Lung wanted Liang Hong to reunify Sichuan.
• Dragonslayer

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

Biz turns up in quite a few places in Sichuan. Here are some of the more noteworthy locales.

Chengdu

The capital of Sichuan for almost 2,400 years, Chengdu has a robust shadow community, playing politics and espionage just like the capital of any important nation. While conventional political intrigue circulates as usual, military intelligence is the prime choice, given its prominence. The usual suspects—the Canton Confederation, Henan, Shaanxi and Vietnam—are all present, as are spies for Japan, Russia and India.

• The controversy with Baihu Technologies has gotten a lot of play in the Chengdu shadows. Baihu's headquarters are in the Confederation, but it made a lot of money supplying arms to warlords fighting for control of Sichuan in the 2030s and still maintains military contracts for tanks and artillery with the current regime. Baihu is extraterritorial, so the Confederation can't stop it from supplying the enemy. Instead, the Confederation hires shadowrunners to sabotage Baihu manufacturing plants in Sichuan.
• Bizwatcher

• The most interesting news lately concerns Shin Qao Hien, the warlord general from Gansu. With the Veil around Tibet weakening, he's been mobilizing to reconquer Tibet, and he's sent delegates to Chengdu requesting assistance from Liang Hong. Given the current quagmire around Hua Shan and Hong's obsession with the Confederation, I don't know how much Shin will get, but a lot of interesting second-hand intelligence on Tibet is making the rounds.
• Lhasa Lama

• Tsen-lung Ho, one of Lung's "sons" from T'ai Shan, recently arrived in Chengdu and summoned Liang Hong to a meeting with Major Zhongwei Yao, Shin's liaison officer to Sichuan. Also, Red Dragon Triad soldiers are guarding geomancers surveying the Yellow and Yangtze rivers near the Tibet border. Something about Tibet has piqued the wyrm's attention, and if Lung ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.
• Wuo Juen

Historically Chengdu is venerated in Sichuanese history and throughout China. Originally known as the City of Brocades for its exquisite textile artistry, Chengdu also served as the western kingdom's imperial capital before its conquest by Emperor Qin. Unfortunately, twenty-odd years of infighting destroyed many ancient monuments before Liang Hong's rise to power, but the government has undertaken an ambitious restoration project to rebuild the ancient glories of the Lotus City.

Chongqing

Sitting at the junction of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, this mountainside city serves as the commercial and industrial heart of Sichuan. Besides the riverways, three major rail lines converge at Chongqing, enabling land and water access to most of the Chinese interior.

Because of its commercial and industrial value, Chongqing is a giant sprawl, surpassing Shanghai and Hong Kong in size. Just about every megacorp has a presence in the city, thanks to nearly twenty years of peace imposed by General Liang. (Naturally, Wuxing and other members of the Pacific Prosperity Group have the most installations.) Its shadows are just as busy with megacorporate and Triad intrigue, as well as political espionage, since the Confederation border lies less than 200 kilometers eastward.

• Like any other big sprawl, Chongqing has its share of pollution—more than its share, as a matter of fact. Odd thing is, you wouldn't know it seeing the city from the astral. Usually a lot of

pollution brings with it high background counts and toxic domains, but not here. Chongqing's astral space "tastes funny," but that's about it.
• Magister

• From what I've heard, a lot of it has to do with the unusual building and development codes the city imposes on the corps. Apparently the codes are designed to balance the pollution-linked yang with counterbalancing yin. Enforcement is unusually strict, even though they gladly allow the megacorps to otherwise abuse their extraterritoriality. The megacorps generally get free rein in the city, so they're willing to put up with these "eccentricities."
• China Hand

Leshan

The town of Leshan sits in the shadow of Mt. Emei, where Lung woke up back in 2013. Though Lung now lairs on T'ai Shan along the coast, he maintains an active presence here, keeping several spirit guardians watching over his lair. Also, one of the wyrm's "daughters," Mei-Lung Choi, runs a school for magically gifted students in Leshan. While many of its graduates find successful careers throughout the Far East, the cream of the crop inevitably go to T'ai Shan for "graduate" training.

• Mei-Lung generally avoids politics and sticks to teaching, but lately she's been drawn into her master's feud with Ryumyo. Several months ago, Shinto mikos from the Susano-o Society came to Leshan requesting assistance from Mei-Lung's pupils in rebalancing the Japanese mana lines Ryumyo had upset. Mei-Lung politely declined. A few days later, several yakuza showed up, assassinated the mikos and almost killed Mei-Lung before some spirits arrived from Mt. Emei to dispatch the assassins.
• Chun Li

• Mt. Emei is one of four mountains sacred to Chinese Buddhists. Twenty or so surviving monasteries and temples are on the mountain, dating back to ancient times. The summit is famous for its "sea of clouds" view, as smaller mountain peaks poke out of the cloud layer like islands. Some witnesses swear they've seen a white palace nestled in the clouds from the summit, but attempts to locate it by aircraft have been largely unsuccessful. Some think it may be one of Lung's palaces in the clouds. An alchera, perhaps?
• Gere

OTHER SPLINTER STATES

Not all the surviving Chinese provinces got swallowed by the various successor states. A few managed to survive unfazed, but most of the remainder dissolved into a collection of lesser dominions, generally clumped together into one giant lawless region.

COASTAL PROVINCES: MADE IN CHINA

The coastal region between the Canton Confederation and the Republic of China is a crazy quilt of Chinese microstates, known collectively as the Coastal Provinces. During the eight-year Republic Civil War, the primary provincial governments collapsed under repeated assaults from the communists and the Republicans, throwing the region into anarchy. Sensing an opportunity, the corps stepped in to protect their extraterritorial holdings and propped up puppet microgovernments sympathetic to their particular corporate causes. With these weak banana republics in their pockets, the corps manipulated the Coastal Provinces to deregulate labor and commerce in their favor.

Today this region is Asia's sweatshop, where the corps use the fractured political landscape to drive down labor costs by keeping the minimum wage low and cut corners on safety and environmental regulations. The Coastal Provinces are highly industrialized, with an emphasis on heavy industry and traditional electronics; many corporations maintain factories here. Unlike their southern competitor, the Canton Confederation, the Coastal Provinces don't sponsor a lot of research and development; the corps invent elsewhere and bring the final designs here for mass production.

• Biz in this region is geared less toward industrial espionage or stealing prototypes. Sabotage, wetwork, intimidation and structural hits dominate the jobs. Competition is cutthroat, and the corps have killed for every nuyen made.
• Bizwatcher

• Labor disputes are also money jobs around here. Given the sweatshop conditions, job dissatisfaction abounds, and every now and then a few wage slaves get it into their heads to unionize. Unfortunately, the unions went the way of the dodo, so the corps send in strikebreakers to put the workers in their place. Not bad work, if you can live with the blood on your hands.
• Pinkerton

Most of the corps in the Coastal Provinces belong to the Pacific Prosperity Group, in particular Wuxing, Eastern Tiger and Yamatetsu. Monobe and Yakashima also have a strong presence, the Japanacorps less so; they're outnumbered by the PPG.

• The PPG is as fractious an alliance as any in the Sixth World, especially in the Coastal Provinces. In these parts it's every corp for itself, and Wuxing will frag over Eastern Tiger just as ruthlessly as either of them will do MCT.
• Corp Watcher

Privateering

One unusual characteristic of the Coastal Provinces is the resurgence of privateering: state-sponsored pirate raids of ships flagged to hostile nations (and in the Sixth World, corporations too). Unlike the Canton Confederation, most of the microstates can't support a standing navy, so instead they

issue letters of marque to various pirate gangs for a cut of the spoils. Most states are puppets of various PacRim megacorps, and so this often extends to corporate sniping as the various megacorps try to cut into each other's profit margins.

» East China Sea privateers aren't as flamboyant as those in the Carib League, or even the Koreans in the Sea of Japan, but they do carry a bit of swagger. A lot of local privateers make ample use of air support: surveillance mini-blimps, aerial combat drones and an occasional armed helicopter or single-engine craft.
» ZoomZoom

» The two best privateers in the region are the Black Kestrels and the Fortune Hunters. Intense rivalry between the two derives from the relationship of the two leaders: Anastasia "Nasty" Swann of the Kestrels and Na'tang Zakli of the Hunters. They've had an on-again, off-again romance, and relations between the gangs tend to reflect the leaders' volatile personal chemistry.
» Titania

Shanghai

Sitting at the mouth of the Yangtze where the river empties into the Pacific, Shanghai has always been a major port city. In the 1990s the Chinese government promoted a major modernization campaign for Shanghai, and by the turn of the millennium it had become a cosmopolitan metropolis rivaling Hong Kong in glamour.

The Republic Civil War dimmed a bit of Shanghai's luster, but the city soon found fame in another arena. With all the piracy along the Chinese coast, Shanghai has become a pirate haven, a modern-day Tortuga. Some businesses set up shop in the territory (Transys Neuronet, for example, has its regional headquarters here), but the spoils of privateering are the real moneymakers in Shanghai.

» Because of its strategic location, Shanghai is generally regarded as neutral territory: it has no extradition treaties with other nations or megacorps, and the pirates observe an unwritten code of not attacking one another. Consequently, pirates and privateers can walk the Shanghai docks with relative freedom while acquiring supplies, fencing loot or seeking letters of marque from various sponsors.
» China Hand

» So if you've got a beef with another pirate, you resort to spying and then hire deniable shadowrunners to stab your rival in the back.
» Grania

Shanghai's sudden ascent to stardom has provoked bitter rivalry with its southern neighbor, Hong Kong. Both locales are modern, Western-oriented city-states, but they have significant cultural differences, from dialect to cuisine to customs. The quickest way to start a fight in Shanghai is to flash your Hong Kong credentials around.

» The Shanghai-Hong Kong rivalry can get intense, and parties on both sides have plotted spectacular pranks to make the other side look bad. During the last Chinese New Year, a couple of Hong Kong shadowrunners sneaked into a popular runner hangout in Shanghai and set off a quickened stink bomb spell. The Shanghai runners retaliated by redirecting the SAN for Hong Kong's Shadowland node to take deckers into the host for Renraku's Kuala Lumpur arcology.
» Hei Yu

Shandong

Ever since Lung took up residence on T'ai Shan, Shandong has garnered serious attention. Prior to the dragon's arrival, influence peddling in Shandong's government tilted between two megacorps: Mitsuhama and Eastern Tiger. Lung's arrival threw a spanner in the works, and many a megacorp puppet has since disappeared (no doubt after Triad "persuasion"). Local politics have stabilized somewhat, with some of the neighboring microstates seriously considering rapprochement or even reunification.

» The dragon's influence has many corps concerned. Shandong is an important piece in the Coastal Provinces jigsaw puzzle. It contains the port city of Qingdao, the terminus of the New Silk Road transcontinental line. Qingdao also specializes in sea trade, and quite a few oceanographic centers are located there.
» Nien Ting

WESTERN CHINA: WILD, WILD WEST

When Sichuan, Shaanxi and the Confederation withdrew from China, the remaining western outlying provinces (Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia and Qinghai) found themselves politically isolated. Once cut off from Beijing, most of them went their own way. Mongolia absorbed most of Inner Mongolia, except for the Huang He valley, which Shaanxi annexed. Most of Qinghai and Gansu degenerated into bandit country. Gansu Province has a semifunctional central government, and so politically the area is recognized as Gansu. Beyond the capital of Lanzhou, however, local warlords hold the real power.

» Eastern and southern Gansu are home to many exotic animal and plant species. Gansu is noted for its abundance of wild plants, many of which have medicinal uses. Talislegging and talispoaching have become pretty profitable venues for smugglers who survive out here.
» Bizwatcher

» The abundant exotic plants in this area have attracted the attention of AG Chemie Europa, which wants to establish a facility in southern Gansu near Min Xian. They've been advertising heavily for merc contracts in Lisbon and Macao; in addition to local warlords and wild paracritters, the corp has to contend with interference from eco-activists and Sichuan raiding patrols.
» TalisMan

• Be careful of abandoned camps and towns in the wastes of Qinghai. Back in the bad old days of the People's Republic, China maintained forced-labor prison camps in Qinghai for political prisoners, particularly Tibetan independence activists. During the interim between Tibet's secession and China's collapse, the Chinese wardens at some of these prisons executed their Tibetan inmates to prevent a revolt. When the shedim started appearing several years ago, neighboring towns vanished as the dead walked the ground of Qinghai.
• Moon Lady

Lanzhou

Any semblance of orderly civilization in what's left of western China exists in Lanzhou, capital of the region. The New Silk Road transcontinental railway passes through Lanzhou, linking it to Urumchi (and the rest of Eurasia) in the east and Xi'an in the west. This makes Lanzhou a key transit point for distributing Gansu's natural resources (primarily nonferrous metals and petrochemicals) to European and PacRim industrial centers.

The corps invest heavily in Lanzhou's governmental infrastructure to maintain a quasi-stable atmosphere where they can conduct business. Nucor, IFMU and Ruhrmetall all have significant industrial presence in Lanzhou. Ruhrmetall operates a massive engine yard building and servicing the train engines running along the eastern stretches of the New Silk Road, while IFMU runs many of the oil and ore refineries on the city's outskirts. Nucor obtained many of the area's nuclear production facilities and converted them from weapons production to regular reactors.

• Nucor's Gansu reactors have brought it into conflict with Sichuan, which inherited the other half of China's nuclear program. Sichuan raiding patrols often cross the border to incite unrest around Nucor's facilities in southern Gansu. Nucor hires a lot of mercenaries out of Macao to protect these facilities and halt the cross-border raids.
• Johnny Hotel

Ningxia

Once a part of the western Xia Kingdom, Ningxia under the People's Republic was an autonomous zone populated by the Hui and other Chinese ethnic minorities. Relying on mining (particularly coal and natural gas), Ningxia has had to fight for its independence, warding off encroachments from Gansu warlords and the Shaanxi monarchy. Its most pressing current problem is the accelerating desertification of its once-fertile northern reaches. This creeping desert has been accompanied by some unusual background count; many assumed it was related to the Year of the Comet, but unlike other phenomena, it has increased rather than faded since the comet's passing.

• Nothing unusual about it. Ningxia's abuse of the land has destroyed its fertility and poisoned its manasphere. Once our compatriots halt corporate exploitation, the land will heal itself.
• Deep Green

• Sorry, DG, but your eco-dogma doesn't hold up. In almost all cases this unexplained desertification has occurred where there's been no development of any kind: agriculture, mining or industrialization. Also, the astral hazing isn't consistent with the background count from toxic or polluted areas. Something other than "corporate rape" is causing this.
• Magister

• Locals near the desert-ized areas report seeing individuals they call huangren (desert people) roaming the wastes alone. When they try to talk to them, disfigured desert spirits materialize to attack. Perhaps the huangren are some kind of toxic desert shamans expanding the desert for their own twisted reasons?
• Moon Lady

Haiyan

Sitting a few dozen kilometers east of Lake Kokonor, the city of Haiyan recently gained renewed attention as the central headquarters for warlord Shin Qao Hien. Originally the site of the "Ninth Academy," one of China's secret nuclear research centers, Haiyan fell to Shin after his forces were repulsed from Tibet in the 2050s. From Haiyan the warlord has been quietly rebuilding and rearming his forces for an eventual return to Tibet, and with holes appearing in the Veil surrounding the country, the time looks right for Shin to make his move. Considering how he might significantly alter the regional balance of power, a lot of parties, from Russia to the Canton Confederation, have sent scouts and spies to Haiyan to figure out which bets to hedge.

• I wouldn't want to be in their shoes. Lake Kokonor is a toxic wasteland, polluted from radioactive runoff and exacerbated by Shin's own depredations. The background count is atrocious, and occasionally Shin's forces run into problems with toxic spirits and mutant critters.
• Mysterium

• I've heard Shin's been putting a lot of effort lately into capturing some of the mutants and using them in his upcoming Tibet campaign. Apparently, he's enlisted a double-A genegineering corp to "refine" the mutations and help breed new generations, in exchange for preferential treatment once he claims power in Tibet.
• China Hand

INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Separated from the bulk of continental Asia by the biggest, baddest mountain range in the world, the Indian subcontinent is home to cultures whose roots date back to the very first known civilization—that of the Indus valley and its Aryan conquerors—and a handful of culturally and ethnically distinct nations. Like many areas in the turbulent landscape of Asia, the subcontinent has gone through many dramatic changes and bears the scars to show it in tainted Khalistan, remote Nepal, troubled Pakistan, verdant Sri Lanka and of course the Land of Three Million Gods itself. Your guides will be GaneXa, editor of the underground newsfax Subversive Karma, and his correspondents.

» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:09:28 (PST)

INDIAN UNION: SPICE OF LIFE

by GaneXa

I'm kicking this off with a passage from Satyajit Mehta's bestseller "Spice of Life" for a reason. I'm hoping its portrait of urban life strikes a chord; that it sounds unnervingly familiar one minute, bafflingly different the next. That is India, a spicy masala of a million rumbling voices, dazzling colors, overwhelming smells and outlandish tastes; boasting no less than seven major religions, fifteen major languages and hundreds of dialects.

Despite self-imposed isolation, India hasn't stood still in time, but rather has embraced the powers-that-be of the Sixth World; there cultural mores and cutthroat agendas inexorably assimilated and melded with a bewildering kaleidoscope of local beliefs and realities. The implausible and contradictory are taken in stride in a land where ascetic saddhus (renunciant holy men) chant sutras in praise of the Divine Host of Thousands, a street from where a labor union rally shouts neo-communist slogans denouncing corporate oppression. A land of great promise and tolerant ideals, where the economic and religious tensions of centuries flare all too often and appalling squalor still haunts the reborn sprawls. My generation is caught between the two great cogs of conservative millennial culture and relentless feudal capitalism, railing against the blinders imposed by both and ready to make our voices heard.

INDIAN UNION AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Bi-Cameral Parliamentary Democracy
Population: 965,778,000
- Human: 78%
- Elf: 4%
- Dwarf: 5%
- Ork: 11%
- Troll: 1%
- Other: 1%

Per Capita Income: 10¥
Estimated SINless: 30%
Below Poverty Level: 25%
Corporate Affiliation: 22%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 43%
- High School Equivalency: 12%
- College Degrees: 26%
- Advanced Degrees: 19%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Indo-Aryans: 72%
- Dravidian: 25%
- Mongolian & Others: 3%

Major Languages Spoken:
- Hindi: 60%
- English: 20%

Major Religions:
- Hindu: 84%
- Sunni Islam: 11%
- None/Other/Unaffiliated: 5%

Currency: Indian Rupee (INR), Nuyen accepted in urban areas
- Exchange Rate: 1 INR = 0.4¥

DocWagon/EuroMedia/Pala Health Coverage: Major urban centers only
- Guaranteed Response Time: 15 Minutes

CHAOS RESPLENDENT

To begin to understand India, you really have to grasp that it boasts close to a billion inhabitants. Scale factors into everything; the faster you adjust your sense of proportion, the easier it will be to come to terms with life here. A good trick is to walk out to the shanty towns on the edge of Calcutta or New Delhi where the people living in abject poverty number millions rather than thousands. Go to a political rally, any political rally, and you will find thousands upon thousands of people rather than hundreds.

» This isn't really news: back at the turn of the century India had population densities that dwarfed Western megaplexes.
» Arkitect

» Scale trickles into everything in India like it does in China. An offbeat cult in Denver numbers a few hundred members, but in Benares it could number many thousands—several actually do. Popular artists and politicians hold sway over tens of millions of people. That's why elections are so turbulent: when tensions flare, thousands of people can get drawn into street battles.
» Socio Pat

Next you have to realize that a significant portion of those billion—about 80 percent in fact—are Hindus. Islam claims about 10 percent of the population and other beliefs make up the remainder. Though Buddhism was born in India and flourished for more than a thousand years, it's no longer a significant force in Indian life. Consequently understanding India has a lot to do with understanding Hinduism.

To put contemporary Hinduism in context, it's important to understand that even though Hindus believe the final days of the Kali Yuga are still far off, the knowledge that we have many lives yet to live was of little consolation before the sheer magnitude of the VITAS Plagues, the most devastating events in Indian history. Almost half a billion succumbed before the epidemics ran their course, and the destruction didn't stop there. Massive funeral pyres raged out of control, devastating vast tracts of sprawls. India burned, generations were lost and Kali danced on the ashes. Today, we can barely comprehend that loss and grief. Hindu and Muslim alike took it as the ultimate test of faith, a sign of the gods' displeasure.

Both faiths came out strengthened, particularly Hinduism, which flourished as people looked to spirituality for explanations and cathartic release. Not many realize how deep the festering wounds of those tragic years run. The revival of the castes is just the obvious sign; others include the rampant nationalism that led to the Kashmir exchange and international isolationism that is just beginning to fade.

For the Hindu a spark of braman (the omnipresent godseed, mana) is present and awake in everything, from the high gods on down to the ubiquitous banyan trees and lowly rats. The divine is not abstract; separation between the secular and the celestial is nonsensical. Monotheistic, pantheistic and polytheistic all at once, Hinduism stubbornly refuses to conform to Western conceptions of religion. Tolerant and transcendent in philosophy, it remains eminently practical and worldly.

» This is why religious imagery is commonplace even in the most secular contexts. Hit the streets and images of the gods share billboards and walls with the mugs of filmstars and the latest consumables. Instead of the usual neutral black background, the Hindustani grid has colossal images of Brahman, Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti looking down on you from among thousands of lesser gods and godlings. In fact, elephant-headed Ganesha, Opener of Doors, is the unofficial patron of Hindu deckers and otaku.
» Demonseed Elite

» Shocked me a bit the first time I walked into Yamatetsu Central in Bangalore and found they have a dozen shrines in niches off the main atrium, most of them stacked with offerings of all sorts—prasada, they call them. I later discovered some of the shrines are dedicated to ashura guardians who protect the building.
» Kaliya

» Yet another reason for Indian Muslims to be up in arms! We don't even get time off for our daily prayers, let alone places to practice our faith.
» Mohammed X

• Reminds me of an anecdote about a couple of British writers touring India. When they heard that climbing all the stairs of a certain mountain temple in one go would fast-track you to a better incarnation, they decided to give it a shot. When they got to the top, though, they were dismayed to find that a plethora of knick-knack peddlers had beaten them to transcendence.
• Eric Blair

A Question of Caste

As a European Orientalist once surmised, "Hinduism is simply what Hindus do." For all practical purposes, Hinduism is as much a way of life as it is a religion. It is grounded in a complex cosmology based on spiritual purity. People are born into one of four varnas (castes) preordained by their karmic purity: brahmin (traditionally priests, scholars and magicians), kshatriya (warrior-rulers, politicians, civil authorities), vaishya (executives, merchants, artisans) and shudra (lit. "slaves," servants, unskilled laborers, factory workers).

"Untouchables" and followers of other religions fall outside the caste system and are tolerated or simply ignored. For those who don't know, Untouchables, or harijan (children of god) as Mahatma Gandhi called them, are the lowliest of the low, rating only above mere animals in the grand scheme. Born outside the castes, they're supposedly blocked from spiritual development and social integration because they are thought of as tainted from birth! Perpetual outsiders, they're a problem India has failed to deal with in all its incarnations—and one reason why left-wing and neo-communist movements boast so much support on the fringes of society.

The pecking order reflects the moral hierarchy of existence as dictated in the divinely inspired Bhagavad Gita, part of the Upanishads (one of the essential Hindu scriptures). Movement from one varna to another during a lifetime is out of the question, and caste dictates many fundamental aspects of everyday life: social status, conduct, familial duties, marriage, eating requirements and especially one's dharma. The system promises a better life in the next incarnation for those who accept their place and role in society.

• Fascism by any other name... Don't rock the boat and if you fulfill your function in society, next time round you'll come back as one of the privileged. Nice setup.
• Antifa

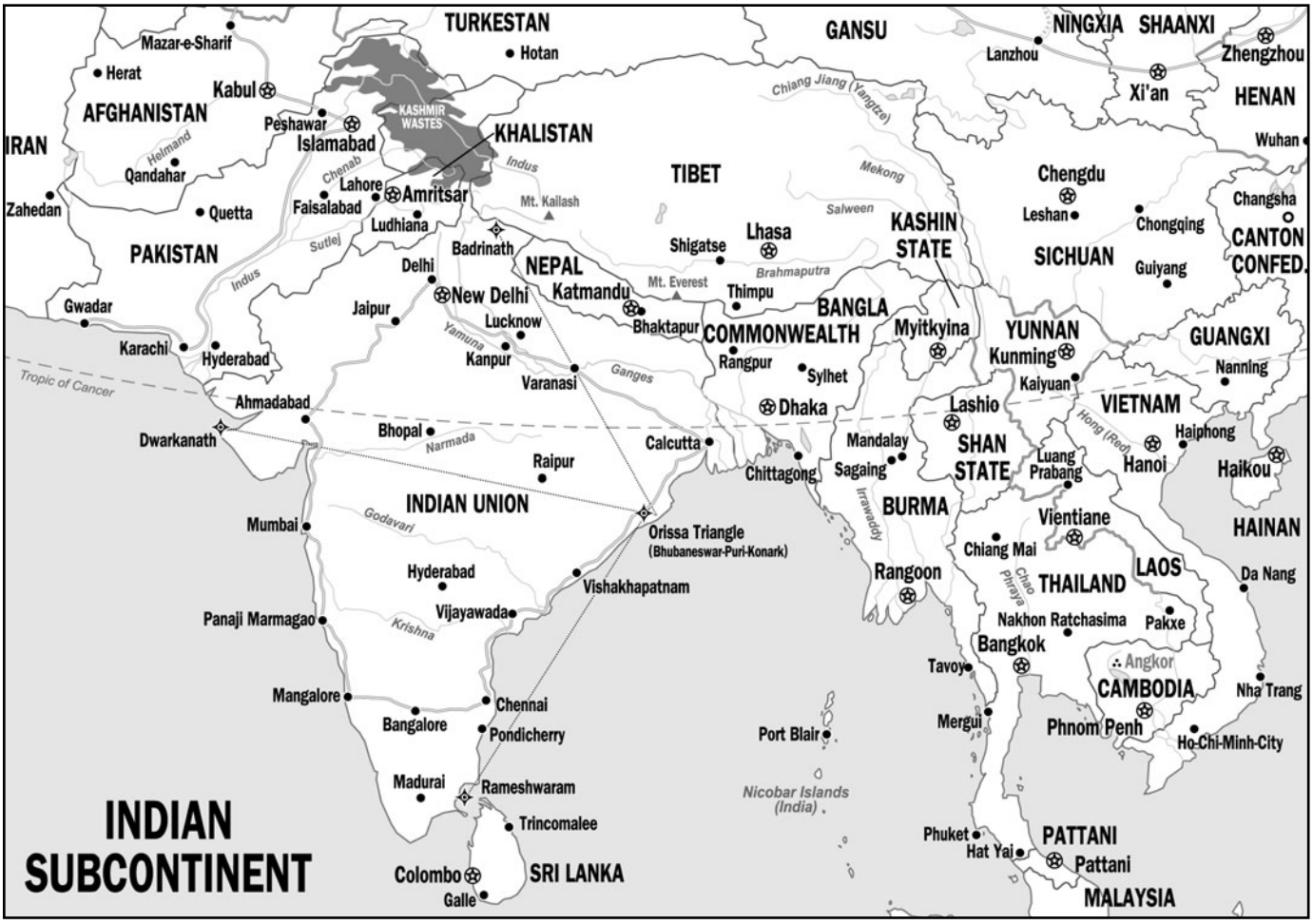
• Deference to a higher varna and contempt for a lower one is drilled into most young Hindus, either by their parents or the school system. Younger generations try to break the mold, but they're swept along by the sheer pervasiveness of the system in everyday life: arranged marriages, school cliques, work opportunities.
• Asian Minor

• The better-off vaishya and shudra try to circumvent discrimination in the educational system by sending their offspring to school in Europe or America, or by putting them through corp sponsored e-learning courses.
• Homesick Hindu

• Caste stratification breeds resentment and resentment breeds unrest. Radical groups such as the Novi Gita Bakti (Hindu reactionaries), the New Islamic Jihad, and more than a few cults use this as a recruitment tactic, drawing lots of the bitter and impressionable into the fold by preaching radical change and little in the way of practical agendas.
• Avantika Mukherjee

INDIA TIMELINE

4500 BC Kali Yuga Begins: The age of chaos descends, the last great age before Lord Shiva ends his dance, entropy swallows all and the Wheel begins anew.
2010 Kali's Harvest: VITAS strikes, 450 million die. Signs of the gods' displeasure, the Plagues and the Awakening herald a Hindu revival.
2011 Vishnu Awakens: Many sacred sites Awaken. The Ganges, Indus and Jamuna are purified, becoming powerful manalines, and the sacred jyortlinga (pillars of light) flare at ley nexi.
2021 Kali Returns: VITAS returns. India feels abandoned in unprecedented tragedy and turns its back to the world, pulling out of the UN. Several secession attempts fail.
2029 Shiva's Dance: Kali Yuga goes into overdrive as the Virus seeds chaos. Bangalore's service and tech industries are decimated. Government net-based alphabetization projects suffer devastating setbacks.
2030 Agni's Elemental Fire: Sikhs in Kashmir and Punjab make independence bid, forming Khalistan. Pakistani intervention in support of Kashmir separatists leads to limited tactical nuclear exchange. Fallout affects newly independent Khalistan.
2031 Jagganath Strides: An emanation of the god Jagganath, Lord of the World, is believed to have walked with pilgrims during the Holi festival, signaling a change in national spirits. India begins picking up the pieces—work on new urban, rail, road and Matrix networks begins.
2035-45 Parvati Reconciles: Indian Unity Coalition ascends to power, ending decades of provincial bickering, and makes overtures to the rest of the world. BRA signed with Corporate Court.
2055 Lakshmi's Favor: Calcutta replaces Bangalore as the economic capital. Seeking greater representation on the world stage, India lobbies for and gets Balaji Padiyar elected Secretary General of the UN.
2056 Rakshasa Strike: Insect rakshasa (demons) break out in several cities. Brahmin mages and kshatriya authorities lead a grueling fight to clear out hives, reinforcing their varnas' (caste) status.
2061 Ganga Ma Rises: Hundreds of saddhu and regular Hindus bathing in the Ganges SURGE as an astral flashflood courses down from the source in the Himalayas. The phenomenon repeats later at Varanasi and recurs at irregular intervals.
2062 Gods Descend: Scandals occur involving radical cults devoted to self-proclaimed avatars and ashuras (spirits), including Kalithugee, Kama Sutrans and Ori Bashians.



• The rupee doesn't stop there. Some megas are hip to the pent-up frustration the system generates and buy loyalty by not discriminating based on caste, while others offer people positions that would normally be above their station.
• Bagheera

The traditional roles of the varnas have been subverted; brahmin and kshatriya dominate the state apparatus and wield considerable influence, but the other castes have found ways to influence decision-making. While brahmin and kshatriya occupy high offices in government, military and police, the vaishya have managed to carve a power niche in boardrooms of corporations large and small, and the shudra are the true force behind labor unions, so numerous no amount of corporate repression will suppress them. Though India remains a democracy, the prejudices and social customs of the castes riddle the system from high politics down to the deepest shadows.

Caste relations add to the ethnic and racial dynamics, and religion remains a problem. The Muslim minority has railed for centuries against exclusion, and foreigners will always be outsiders. That's why Hinduism and Indian nationalism play off each other so well.

• Society used to be pyramidal with the "purest" and fewest brahmin at the top, and the most numerous and lowly shudra at the bottom. It still is, but much less so. VITAS threw a spanner in the works by wiping out immense numbers of poor shudra and "untouchables."
• Socio Pat

• Right. India is still trying to find a new balance. Even though you get educated members of lesser castes working side-by-side with higher castes in certain professions, the "high-born" still get extra privileges and are deferred to over the others.
• Bindi Babe

• Refreshingly, UGE and goblinization went over well. To people who believe you can come back as a tiger, a flea or a godling, being born brahmin is far more important than whether you're 4 feet high or have horns. Caste is divine judgment and metaexpression is simply a new variable in the cycle. Assuming you're a Hindu, that is. If you're not, all bets are off.
• Kipling

After a while, you learn to pick out different varnas on sight, based on the colors they wear or use to accessorize Western garb. Brahmin white calls for deference and respect, and might warn of a Hindu magician. Kshatryia favor reds and oranges, and boast an arrogant warrior strut even when they're wimps. Vaishya opt for yellows and earth tones, using rich and colorful silks and brocades to emphasize wealth. Blacks, grays and dark browns are the mark of the shudra, both those that accept their menial role and those that don't. The latter, be they reformists or neo-communists, wear the dark shades as a symbol of all that is wrong in Indian society.

• Listen to the man: while they're not absolute rules, learn the telltales and they'll serve you well.
• Rakesh

• A high-born brahmin will rarely stoop to dealing with the underworld filth on the streets, and if he does the purification rites are time-consuming and demanding. Much easier to hand the dirty work to some vaishya middleman. Heh.
• Seditious Sahib

• Which means if you ever find yourself across from a brahmin or kshatryia Johnson, it's either something they absolutely can't trust to anyone else or something deeply personal.
• Rama2

• Most Indian runners are either young kshatryia ne'er-do-wells or lower-caste pariahs who've forfeited their dharma. You can often tell the difference by the recent trend among kshatryia to go for cyber augmentation, opting for visibly ornamented enhancements—etched with traditional designs or fluted into weird shapes.
• Karma Singh

Among traditional Hindus, magic is a blessing of the gods, a sign of divine favor, reserved to the brahmin and exceptional heroes of each caste. Genetics have upset the Hindu paradigm, but with characteristic resilience Indians simply "promoted" low-born Awakened into brahmin extended families by adoption. Few lower caste families refuse the privilege, giving up their children willingly.

• Extended households are still a big thing in Indian culture. Relatives often live and work communally in families numbering more than a dozen individuals. More than a few small corps are run and staffed by entire families. Nepotism is less of an issue when family businesses reach a certain size.
• Socio Pat

Dharma and Karma

Integral to the varna system are the twin concepts of dharma and karma. Dharma translates not to "destiny" but to "duty," a natural or spiritual path of "righteousness" defined by numerous elements including your caste, family and even astrological factors. Following this path to self-fulfillment draws karma, which in turn allows an atman (soul) to be reborn in a higher varna, eventually attaining moksha (release from the eternal cycle). Defying one's dharma draws negative karma and means you incarnate as a lower varna or life-form.

• You know what this reminds me of? Tir Na nOg's Paths of the Wheel. Could there be a connection? We believe the Celtic civilization descended from the mysterious Eurasian culture known as the Aryans, an offshoot of which conquered the Indus Valley civilization, producing what would become the Hindu culture. There are enough similarities between Celtic druidism and proto-Vedic cults to beg the question—is there a missing link?
• Elijah

• If there is a link, unearthing it is beyond your paltry means.
• Hecate

• A great scribe once said, "The past isn't dead. In fact, it isn't even past." Underestimate our young friend's resourcefulness at your own peril. Elijah and others like him search for the key to the ages, the elusive Grail. The true question isn't if they will find it, but what will be when they do.
• Wordsmyth

• Even if you do believe in a link between the Aryans and some imagined long-lost elven people, there's no particularly high elven population in India. In fact the numbers are below average. I don't see a connection.
• Reality Czech

• Means nothing, nobilis genes could have been bred out over the centuries.
• The Smiling Bandit

• Fools. If anything, Vedic beliefs are a pale imitation of the Wheel. Far more likely this is what happens when a short-lived human culture tries to emulate something it can never truly understand or experience.
• Fear-Tèarmainn

• The power of belief and delusion never fails to amaze.
• The Laughing Man

Other Faiths

Despite the perpetual strife with Hindu nationalists, Indian Islam is relatively moderate, peaceful and well integrated. Both the Sunni and Ismaili sects are present and particularly active in the corporate sector where they sometimes use their economic influence to compensate for their lack of political representation. Construction sector giant West Indian Works and the influential Bank of Bengal & Calcutta are local heavyweights owned by Mustafa Sen, an eminent leader of the Muslim community. Sen is also a patron of the Islamic Renaissance Movement and has sponsored several chapter-

SPICE OF LIFE BOOK EXCERPT

Looking out of my window onto a sunset-tinged Calcutta backstreet, I am always humbled. It is rush hour, and I gaze down at the hypnotic tide of people home. My cramped apartment is high enough that I can see the stain of squalor beyond the new city, the plastic-roofed shantytowns to the west, hazy in the orange pall of smog only the Monsoon seems to ever wash away.

The overcrowded redstone sidewalks of my street teem with people. Businessmen bustle by, adorned in modern-cut tan dhotis and silken sashes in the vivid colors of their castes, datajacks gleaming in their temples. Women in bright-colored saris, salwars and delicate brocades jostle vendors of savory and spicy ghewar and pakora and roil around a slow-moving white sandbank of Jain pilgrims like technicolored surf. An untouchable street urchin dodges through the crowd, palming an oblivious mark's credstick.

Cycle-rickshaws, gaudy in baroque gilding and holo-images of Krishna, Ganesha or one of the trimurti, wind between the grid-guided procession of brightly-colored commuter minicars on the main street beyond. A couple on a foreign motorbike weave through the traffic, ignoring the city speed limit; the girl wears jarringly revealing Malaysian styles, the boy proclaims his kshatriya caste with a garish orange jacket, a Sutran icon flashing on his back.

An ash-skinned saddhu sits in front of the burned-out husk of the neighborhood temple to Vishwakarma on the corner, the ruins a testimony to last week's clashes between Hindu extremists and a Muslim rights rally. Tensions have ebbed and across the street Hassim is back to peddling soma and bhang to work-weary vaishya and shudra, snubbing the far-off call to prayer from the district mosque. The wall behind him is a paper mosaic of gaudy ads, filmstars and gods, still splattered red in warning where the Mansur company executed an upstart moving in on their turf.

The family trideo blares from the kitchen and the mouthwatering smell of thali and the sounds of the latest greatest Bollywood hit flood the two rooms, a soundtrack to the daily ritual outside my window. Song and music are as integral to life as beggars and ashuras. Like India itself, the sprawl is a living, breathing tapestry, at times elating, at times tragic.

houses in major sprawls hoping to counter tensions being inflamed by elements of the New Jihad.

• The Muslim minority is not entirely without political clout. Hari Kunzru, Minister of the Interior and Vice-President of the Indian Unity Coalition is a convert to Islam. There are also Muslim rights activists high up in the labor union movements in Calcutta, Chennai and Bangalore.
• Pala

Christianity retains a foothold in Bengal and Calcutta, as well as in western provinces like Goa, but it is fading from the Indian religious landscape. Jainism, one of the smaller religions, numbering only a few million followers (remember scale?), has a different take on karma and transcendence. Jains believe karma is a negative force, generated by humanity's base emotional and physiological needs; therefore to rid one's self of karma is to transcend. Their strict pacifism and conviction regarding the sanctity of all life channeled Jains away from base physical and manual professions and into cerebral and craftsman occupations like banking, goldsmithing, the arts—and these days microtronics and nanotech. The community has become exceptionally wealthy and well educated by Indian standards; recently they've taken to investing their "superfluous" riches in corporations, think-tanks and even utopist collectives exploring transhuman applications of state-of-the-art technologies in the hope of developing anything that might put an end to their all-too-human limitations.

• Besides the groups above I know for a fact the Jains sponsor a couple of otaku tribes based in and around Calcutta and Bangalore. Jains seem to think the virtuality of the Matrix reflects their philosophy of "advancement through abstraction" and otaku are an evolution in the right direction. Whatever the reason, their rupees are paying for a lot of SINless kids' first 'ware.
• Demonseed Elite

URBAN CHAKRAS

In certain respects, it seems the whole country has changed beyond recognition, though deep down I'm sure that if my grandfather were alive he'd point out how wrong I am. Truth is, though the greater picture remains untouched, many of the fine details have changed. Ashuras (spirits) conjured by brahmin magicians manipulate the weather and because of this the water supply problems and seasonal droughts have been assuaged. Dams have been decommissioned, replaced with fusion reactors paid for with the funds from the economic boom of the Teens. With stable power and water supplies, rural life is slightly better.

• And you're forgetting the damage those "corrective" measures have done to the ecosphere. Substandard maintenance makes the reactors as big a problem as the dams were. Disruption of natural cycles, displaced populations and damaged floodplains are replaced by hazardous nuclear waste and the potential for another Cattenon. Two wrongs do not make a right.
• Ecotope

• Green activism is thriving here too; Sierra Inc. is active in New Delhi pressuring the government toward long-term eco-friendly solutions and a couple of GreenWar cells are around making sure the worst offenders pay.
• Mogli

• Not to say life in the countryside is actually pleasant. No decent roads, facilities or regular water supply. Most villages use generators running on dung bricks for power! Good place to get lost for a while, though.
• Kargan

• Apologies if I'm being insensitive, but VITAS relieved India of one of its greatest problems: overpopulation. The government has done a good job of keeping population under control since, and magic has tamed the worst of the Monsoon and pollution problems, making life more bearable.
• Ambassador

• Just means more time in their corporate masters' sweatshops and plantations for the shudra, earning barely enough to survive.
• Devamore

Throughout the Awakening, the Plagues, the fires and the Crash, the vast urban chakras (tantric energy nexi in astral bodies) have suffered and changed the most in the dysfunctional body that is India.

NEW DELHI: POLITICAL CAPITAL

Relatively untouched by the devastation seen in other sprawls following VITAS, the Union's capital is still as rundown and overpopulated as ever, swarming with refugees from Punjab and Kashmir. The city is the usual haphazard patchwork of corporate office parks, all types of commercial and business districts, rundown residential areas, government and ministerial complexes and sumptuous fenced enclaves for the powerful and wealthy, with all of this multiplied in size and chaos to an Indian magnitude. Dingy neighborhoods are crammed next to posh government offices and corporate highrises, and a ubiquitous layer of dust covers everything. The capital is also the focus of much of India's political and underworld strife.

Government itself has stabilized into a corporate-backed quasi-bipartisan system. Numerous small parties compete for the crumbs while the lion's share of Sansad (Parliament) seats go to the Hindu nationalists of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the moderate Indian Unity Coalition (IUC).

The IUC wrested government from the BJP 16 years ago and hasn't let go since. Its rise ended a period of regional division and failed secessions, and reversed a nationalist policy of isolationism which blamed the "international community" for the extent of India's VITAS tragedy. The IUC also instigated the return to the UN and the implementation of new educational programs to restore India to global preeminence. All is not well, though; many pundits claim the IUC is dancing to the tune of corporate masters these days.

• The Muslim People's Front and the Communist Reformist Alliance are the biggest of the dozen minor players, with solid

bases in Western and Eastern India, respectively. They're also the regular target of smear campaigns by wealthy political rivals and their corporate backers. With the interests vested in politics here, things can get really dirty.
» Rajiv

» Don't get me started on simstars cashing in on their popularity to get elected.
» Smeeta Smitten

» What about Mahmet Khan? Convicted-mobster-cum-Senator? Notoriety seems to work just as well.
» DelhiKC

» Delhi is home to some of the Indian kingpins, greasing the corrupt bureaucracy and political cogs. Politicians' ties to organized crime are as universal as kickbacks from megacorp lobbyists.
» Kalki

The current hot issue——besides brewing North/South antagonism, Muslim rights and the air pollution bill that has corps up in arms—has to do with the privatization (or not) of major stretches of the Golden Quadrilateral, a debate destined to turn vicious. Concluded after immense delays during the Thirties, a huge diamond of highway, rail and fiberoptics was laid around the nation, branching highways linking to major cities not on the route. Mounting maintenance costs are allegedly behind the IUC's proposal to privatize (more likely lobbyists from Saeder-Krupp, Renraku and Shiawase). The BJP are radically against the move, arguing extraterritorials already control too much of the nation's wealth.

» Good, Indians' favorite pastimes have always been cricket, religion and politics.
» Bindi Babe

» S-K and Renraku see the Quadrilateral as a "Golden" opportunity for expansion, but MCT and Shiawase aren't just going to roll over. The inevitable logistics and network opportunities have even Transys and Wuxing waiting in the wings, and since neither has much local presence, they're bringing talent in from abroad to ensure a piece of the action. The backroom dealing and black ops are going to be a boon for the local shadowscene.
» Chamunda

I should mention that India's criminal underworld is particularly violent. Loyalties are easily bought and kidnappings, murders and so on are everyday affairs. Some of the players prefer to bring in outside talent as bodyguards and security, thinking they'll be more reliable.

» Downright lucrative is what it is.
» Noma

CALCUTTA: ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

India's crown jewel and high-tech hub, Calcutta (also known as Kolkota) took over as the economic capital of India after Bangalore was crippled by VITAS and the Crash. It's without doubt the country's most developed sprawl, mixing colonial West with high-tech East. But it's also a study in modern India's successes and failures.

The heart of the city, picture perfect with its opulent corporate arcologies, towering skyscrapers and constant development projects, encircles the preserved Victorian grandeur of the granite and red sandstone colonial center, now the seat of provincial government. Walk a mile in any direction, though, and you'll find yourself in one of the shanty towns that wrap around the city and press in like a cancerous growth. The twilight residential and leisure neighborhoods, buffering downtown from the impoverished masses, are starting to show the strain.

» Calcutta's air pollution problems haven't been totally resolved despite regulations, and there's a major ghoul problem in the outskirts. So no, the Jewel of India isn't without its blemishes.
» Humphries

» Calcutta is also shadowrunning central for the region. Not only where a lot of the action is concentrated, but the perfect place to pick up corp work all over the Union.
» Bhima

» Yeah. As long as your kshatryia fixer doesn't play favorites and hires his own caste rather than shudra or vaishya!
» Nikula

» That's why Indian runners gather in jatis—think of them as vocational sub-castes—that look after their own. Runner society is just as stratified as regular civvies, though it's also slightly more flexible when necessary.
» Yudhishtira

» Foreigners have it a little easier. That whole thing about being outside the system means you can get together with any jati. Remember: running the shadows in India isn't an issue of falling through the cracks. It isn't inherently "wrong," because the Hindu "moral compass" is entirely different. Many modern kshatriya youths see it as the only way they're going to live up to their varna's warrior dharma, and vaishya think it's a good way to turn a rupee and put their skills to the test.
» Arjuna

» This also reflects a trend in Indian, and occasionally Asian, society, where augmentation doesn't have the same negative social and cultural connotations it has in the West. In a cosmology where all are part of greater whole, implanting cyber frees a part of one's atman (soul) to return to the cycle, so it is not "lost."
» Sahadeva

The Red Mile

Calcutta boasts the biggest megacorporate presence of any Indian metroplex. Renraku divides the roost with Saeder-Krupp. Their subsidiaries, Simscapes and RajGrid, are respectively India's two biggest MSPs and network providers. Yamatetsu, Tan Tien and Shiawase also maintain operations; major labs and research centers take up Calcutta's famous "Red Mile" (for the red sandstone used in most buildings), alongside the assorted local software development concerns that are constantly cropping up and vanishing.

Kolkota Integrated Talent and Technologies (KITT) is India's single AA-listed corporation. It's a multifaceted concern capitalizing on Calcutta's and new India's prime asset: the pool of educated and tech-savvy workers born of the government's multi-decade plan to make Calcutta a shining example of India tomorrow. KITT provides services in a vast range of fields from biotech and pharmaceuticals research to software development, financial consulting and think-tank services. CEO Vasant Almavala has built it into India's fastest growing multinational, constantly branching out in unexpected directions and forming lucrative partnerships with major players like Mitsuhama (upgrading MCT's CitiNet gridlink system), Shiawase (developing their SXT software suite) and CATCo (for whose Asian affiliates it handles marketing and financial analysis).

• Calcutta sees a lot of shadow action. Fortunately, with the heavy megacorporate presence, foreigners don't stand out as much as they do elsewhere, and the whole caste thing is less obvious. Since corps control the local airports, Johnsons can arrange easy entry into the country, too.
• Skanda

• The Red Mile and other corp enclaves are the jurisdiction of private security firms, so tread carefully. Calcutta itself is one of the few sprawls to use non-govpol cops, contracting policing out to ProTek, a subsidiary of Petrovski Security/MCT.
• Karma Singh

• Calcutta's also home to an underground counterculture developing from bohemian Sutran and bhangtrance youth culture bent on undermining the traditional order. This finds echoes in the numerous Jain-backed otaku clans and the neo-communist policlubs that boast ever-increasing popularity.
• Harijan Cool

THE MBC AXIS: OPEN HEART

The MBC Axis, otherwise known as the Mangalore-Bangalore-Chennai corridor, is a major three-sprawl project put forward by the MBC Consortium (involving Renraku, Shiawase, Zeta-ImpChem, HKB, Yamatetsu and Transys, among others) to revitalize the old southern Indian tech hubs. The high-tech real estate developments and a new high-speed monorail link are designed to maximize the potential of local expertise. Bangalore still excels in cyberware and software design, Chennai is a mecca for pharmaceutical and genetech developers and Mangalore is world-renowned for advances in holistic medicine and biotech. In Mangalore, Zeta-ImpChem, Yamatetsu and Cross Biomed currently lead the pack, but Pala Health and Pharmaceuticals, a local up-and-comer, is causing a lot of buzz by delving into both traditional and unconventional medical and biotechnologies.

• I've heard through the grapevine that Yamatetsu is working on something they're calling "chakraware." Anyone have more?
• Kephalos

• Dr. Aishwarya Nair was doing some theoretical work on curative and somatic enhancing abilities of the chakras at Calcutta University before she was kidnapped last year. Her insurance company paid the ransom, but Nair was never returned and her body never showed up. Makes you wonder.
• The Smiling Bandit

• Any news on the Shiawase/Pala project down in Chennai to develop a HMHVV vaccine for India's ghoul problem?
• Dr. Magick

• Vaccine my hoop! I got a peek at some reports from a friend of a friend. They've decided since they can't nail the damn thing, they'll use it instead—working on an HMHVV cannibal variant of the Jarka-Criscione strain. You heard it here first, boys and girls: a vamp that eats vamps.
• Lone Gunman

• Will be interesting to see how some react to the news.
• DeVries

BOMBAY: BOLLYWOOD MELODRAMA

For the most part, the coastal media capital of South Asia isn't very inspiring to look at. Life in Mumbai (also known as Bombay) is almost exclusively geared toward the entertainment world. With hundreds of different productions going on at the same time, the city has a perpetual boomtown-type atmosphere of relentless activity and business. It's a frenetic hub of all kinds of chaotic and stressful showbiz-related enterprises and activities, against which the city's rundown colonial stateliness and turn-of-the-century upmarket urbanism seems rather drab—except for a few high-class neighborhoods where the stars make their homes, of course.

Inevitably, Mumbai hosts India's biggest media corporations and producers. Foremost among these is Regency Productions, which has a hook in every form of media imaginable: sims, trid, Matrix entertainment, print, music, fashion, advertising and so on. Asia's insatiable hunger for just their type of melodramatic all-singing, all-dancing extravaganzas has made Regency and its competitors multi-billion nuyen concerns that export their productions to every country from Egypt to the Canton Confederation.

• Regency's thing is layered media. They squeeze every nuyen they can out of each production: the sim itself, trid broadcast

prequels, sequels and spin-off serializations, music compilations, printed novels and holonovellas, product placement, starpower advertising, drekcetra.
» Satyajit Ray

» Available in 252 languages!
» Kid Code

Mumbai also boasts an exceptionally seedy underbelly. Bollywood is the focus of an incestuous orgy between media stars, politicians and crime lords, all dipping into each other's ponds. Not only do vices and excess abound, but the city is home to some of the most powerful crime clans in India. Organized crime involvement in Bollywood dates back decades, and all the big studios, including powerhouse Regency, number underworld kingpins such as the Dawood among their shareholders.

» You'd think the biggest buzz in town would be the casting for the Envy sequel or the epic Ramayana—but no, everyone's gossiping about the marriage of Shirdi Bedi, son of Regency's President/CEO Kabir Bedi, and Nandita Kumar, daughter of Vinoud Kumar, boardmember of Germany's DeMeKo. Both belong to major kshatriya clans and the marriage, arranged when the kids were 12, is the typical Hindu approach to strategic business alliances, only bigger. The union seals Regency Production's alliance with DeMeKo's world distribution network.
» Smeeta Smitten

» This is why I love the Tour! I wonder if Mr. Bedi knows his daughter-in-law-to-be was at Opening Night in Cannes wrapped on the arm of Princess Caroline's ex, the delectable Jurgen Meiers? Cellophane-tight and very friendly. Shouldn't she have been sitting exams at her Swiss finishing school? Or is daddy Kumar keeping things hush-hush?
» Gossip

» My-oh-my, the rumormill's going to love this one. Just the sort of nasty bit of family melodrama everyone loves from Bollywood. Some love songs, a dance number or three, a happy ending and we have a hit. As in, Bedi is going to hit the roof.
» Bombay Bombshell

» Wait! You forgot the mandatory last minute twist! Rumor has it that old man Bedi has always fired blanks, and Shirdi isn't his son—he was discreetly adopted. Mommy even dropped out of circulation for nine months to keep up the façade!
» Rakesh

» Anyone remember old Jalundar? Big player back in the thirties? He was killed a few days back and I was paid to look into it. I found out why in Jalundar's hidden datastash. Turns out the fixer handled a lot of action for Bedi. The interesting thing was a file copied out only a couple of days before: an 18-year-old order to "acquire" a newborn child of kshatriya caste. Since adoption isn't unheard of, I'm starting to think Jalundar was whacked for getting something wrong—inferior product, if you get my meaning.
» Sandokan

» Once word reaches Bedi, things are going to flare real fast. Caste purity is something not be trifled with.
» Lady Durga

CRIME PAYS

Indians have a strange relation with criminal endeavors, given their supposed spiritual leanings. Despite the high-minded mores of dharma and duty, crime is an omnipresent fact of life, be it petty theft or government corruption. While it isn't as blatant as in the West, it is a persistent and pervasive problem that shows no signs of diminishing.

The Dawood, Mansur and Latif organizations are the biggest local powers, organized like big specialized gangs rather than multi-faceted international syndicates. The companies—as they've taken to calling themselves—owe nothing to the Triads and Yakuza in blood thirst. They coexist under an uneasy truce because their interests rarely overlap. When there's friction it tends to get ironed out quickly, publicly and bloodily.

Since they're more active in Mumbai and the south I've just covered, I'll start with the fallen brahmin: the Dawood crime clan. For some reason granddad Lal Dawood turned on his dharma (no one really knows why, though rumors abound) and used magic to carve himself a slice of the Bollywood underworld. He even took to wearing all black! Now the Dawoods have branches in Bangalore, Chennai and Delhi, and have a lock on most talislegging as well as soma and bhang (popular Awakened drugs) traffic in southern India.

Next are the infamous Jamil and Riposhe Mansur. Sons of a savvy Afghan arms dealer, the boys built up the fortune daddy made selling prohibited weaponry to the Alliance for Allah into the largest drugs and smuggling network on the subcontinent. They've cajoled, bought and intimidated politicians, cops and even the military from Islamabad to Dhaka into doing their bidding.

» They're brutal and ruthless and enjoy employing overkill to scare off potential competition. Try running one of their routes and you'll see what I mean.
» Khajuraho

The vaishya Latif clan (after boss Ajoyendra Latif) controls most of the money laundering, loansharking and white collar crime through a network of underground banks and dodgy credit companies. They have no problems cracking a few heads to get some point across, but they use one of the many gangs that handle their rackets rather than get their hands dirty.

» The Latif and the Mansurs have been trading dirty tricks for years to ensure control of the right politicians and bureaucrats. The latest casualty was Nirav Suryavanshi, Minister of Defense

and Mansur toady who was wraithed in a drive-by on the way to work. Bookies are running odds on which of Latif's cronies is next.
• Kharmic Singh

• A lot of fixers in India are actually fronting for the syndicates rather than independent operators. This can lead to all types of complications, so make sure you know who you're really dealing with.
• Bagheera

LAND OF WONDER

Indian mythology is replete with gods, demons, spirits and heroes. Traditionally, India is famous for its brilliant and saintly teachers, sages, philosophers and reformers of all kinds. However, possibly the most important Awakened power is the country of India itself, a land where not only certain towns, rivers and trees are held sacred, but also cows, snakes, rats and vultures. It is a land of placid magic, where ashuras and godlings dwell everywhere.

Brahmin, Bodhisattvas and Godmen

Historically, the trimurti were the three higher gods that embodied the Cosmic forces at the heart of the Hindu universe: Brahman the primal creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva, lord of change. In contemporary Hinduism, while Brahma is still accorded special reverence, he is often replaced in devotion by an aspect of the great goddess Devi/Shakti—the closest Hinduism comes to a Mother Goddess figure. Arranged in complex families and alliances below these stands the Host of Thousands: all the gods of Hindu devotion, including the manifold avatars or emanations (incarnations) of the trimurti itself. Ashura are minor deities and nature spirits.

It's no accident the modern trimurti reflects the three major traditions of modern Indian mysticism. Each trimurti god represents a different path of spiritual advancement. The Vishnuvite tradition is Hindustani high magic, whose fierce devotion and elaborate ritual is almost exclusively the province of the brahmin—its lore transmitted orally exclusively to members of the caste. Among the brahmin, there are those who believe their magic, given its divine nature, should only ever be used to aid the twice-born members of the varnas (post-adolescent brahmin, ktratriyas and vaishyas). Though pantheistic, Hindustani magic is closer to hermetic than truly shamanic.

» Holy imagery and ritual are important parts of this magic style. Complex mandalas are used as hermetics use ritual circles. Kolamas, simpler geometric mandalas made in patterns of colored sand, are used for warding areas.
» Silicon Mage

» Dance, music and sound in general play a vital role in all forms of Hindu magic. The sounds of certain words are believed to distill the natural vibration of the braman, the tempo of Shiva Nataraja's dance and the heartbeat of the Universe. Combined, these divine syllables form mantras which are essential to most ritual and spellcasting.
» Lady Sita

The Shivaite traditions are the paths of Yoga asceticism, adopted by yogi and saddhus. Technically, Yoga can refer to any spiritual path that aims to harness the senses in the search of divine enlightenment and any dedicated practitioner can be called a yogi. Like the brahmin, not all followers of this path are Awakened. Those that are tend to be what the West calls adepts. The best known paths are Raja Yoga (spiritual and mental transcendence), Hatha Yoga (bhakti or illumination through physical self-control) and Tantra Yoga (release of kundalini energy through the harnessing of the subtle body chakras.)

The final tradition shows devotion to Mahadevi and her many emanations. More visceral than brahmin ritual magic and more ecstatic than yoga, it is similar in many ways to animistic witchcraft found the world over. Hexes, spirit possession and dances play an important role, and its female practitioners are respected and feared by Hindus of all varnas.

» Devi (or Shakti) is worshipped directly as the female "essence" that sustains the universe and makes life possible, and also through her various emanations, which can be beneficent, as Uma and Parvati, or destructive, as Durga or Kali.
» Osho

» All the traditions invoke ashuras, a term no longer strictly associated with demons, but which reverted to its original sense of describing spirits in general. Some Hindu witches also claim to be able to contact the dead during their brief stay in bardo (limbo) between incarnations.
» OmRAM

»Ghosts are known as petras. Demons and evil spirits are rakshasas, and shedim are betala.
» Digital Guru

Another peculiar Indian phenomenon deserves special mention: "Godmen." Charismatic gurus, esoteric yogis, divine avatars and bodhisattvas (gods incarnate), we have them all, each with their own cult and thousands of followers. Some are brilliant scholars and philosophers, others are conmen and frauds, and still others are genuine free spirits. Since the comet-craze of 2061 more and more have crawled out of the woodwork. Since most are magically active in some way, the problem is making out which is which.

Many of these would-be saints and bodhisavas have shady sides. A powerful ashura, calling itself Kama, restored the hedonistic Kama Sutrans. Sutrans tread a fine line; their counter-establishment campaigning is almost as infamous as the drug- and drink-enhanced sexual antics meant to shock conservative Indian society out of complacency. Others, such as the cult of the self-proclaimed Brahma-incarnate Ori Bash, not only fleece the flock but use underage devotees to bait and compromise politicians and execs.

» Ori Bash's spontaneous miracles are definitely impressive, even to a mage, but they're by no means "divine." Plus his fondness for the tender flesh is the telltale of a predator, not a saint.
» Bai Saba

» Other cults walk the dark side and make pacts with rakshasa. Such are the Thugee cult of Kali, reborn in the wake of the Plagues and dedicated to spreading chaos and dissenstion, accelerating Kali Yuga, in the name of the Black Goddess.
» Osho

INDIAN PILGRIMAGE

It seems fitting that a nation with the millennial traditions of spirituality, mythology and mysticism should host a plethora of unique mystical sites. Unfortunately, not being Awakened myself, I'm at a loss to fully describe them, so I'll stick to what I know as fact and visit the most common rumors. Here are some highlights from around the country.

The Ganga Risen

Hindus believe the goddess Ganga descended to Earth in the form of a great river to ease the suffering of humanity. Then again, there's another tale which tells of how Ganga's anger savaged all in her path until Shiva brought her under control by weaving her into his hair. Such is the contradictory nature of the blessed Ganges: to be a metaphor of both life and death, sanctified by legend and religion.

On the night of January 12, 2012, the Ganga awoke from slumber, its waters glowing for a night and a day. When the dazzling light faded, the river was miraculously purified and had become one of the most powerful known manalines in the world.

» The Ganges is not alone: several major rivers with sources in the Himalayas manifested as manalines (or dragonlines as they are known locally). Whether this has anything to do with Tibet remains a mystery, but several pass beyond the Maya Cloud.
» Silicon Mage

» It's still debated whether the purification was the natural product of the area's intense ambient mana getting spontaneously imprinted by half a billion souls believing in the purity of the sacred river. Of course, most Hindus believe Ganga Ma has simply risen and taken back her blessed waters.
» Kumar

Though the snaking course of the Ganges has become peppered with dangerous powersites and astral shallows, the traditional pilgrimage tracing the Ganges to its source continues to draw ever more faithful. In 2061, however, events took an unexpected turn when hundreds of saddhus bathing in the holy waters at Haridwar found themselves transformed by a massive pulse flowing down the great Ganga manaline. The effect, believed by researchers to be SURGE-related, has been hard to fully explain given the peculiarly "Hindu" expressions manifested: blue and golden skins, multiple new limbs, elephant and monkey features and third eyes. The phenomenon has recurred a handful of times since, in Haridwar and Varanasi, leading specialists to speculate some powerful mana source is discharging through the Ganga.

• Ganga Ma touches all, but grants her blessings to only a few. She can be benevolent or wrathful. Bathe in her waters and touch the divine. Purify your spirit and experience bhakti.
• OmRAM

• SURGE doesn't work like that, does it?
• Curious George

• It's just possible the intense ambient mana, aspected over time by the concentrated conviction of so many believers, might have affected the process. However, it still doesn't conform to the current genetics model for SURGE.
• Magister

• Junk DNA? Don't think so. Something else is going on here.
• Conspir-I-See

Varanasi (Benares)

Mark Twain once said "Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together." The holy city of Varanasi, glorified by myth and legend, is at the very core of Hindu beliefs—a city steeped in traditional classical culture filled with ancient and half-rundown temples, shrines, ashrams, schools and magical sites sprawling on the banks of the holy Ganges. Pilgrims have flocked to Varanasi by the thousands since time immemorial and the city is believed sacred by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains alike—so much so that no corporations are allowed more than retail outlets within city limits.

For a Hindu, being cremated on one of the city's many ghats (steps) and having one's ashes spread over the Ganges is a way to swift ascension and higher rebirth, speeding the way out of samsara (the cycle). Over the past couple of years, the pilgrims have only become more numerous, after bathers at the festival of Nag Nathaiya suffered transformations similar to those in Haridwar the previous year.

• A new trend is for changeling wannabes to travel to Varanasi to try their luck with a dip in the Ganges. Personally, I don't get the point of sprouting another arm or scales, but hey, whatever butters their toast. Anyway, there's no predicting when the Ganga will smile on them, and the pulses have diminished in frequency and magnitude.
• Racine

The Golden Triangle of Orissa

The site of numerous Awakened phenomena almost as far back as the Awakening, the Triangle represents three immense complexes numbering more than two hundred shrines including the temple of Jagannath, the magnificent towers at Konark and Bhubaneswar, and the sacred lake of Bindusagar. The whole area is crisscrossed by minor manalines forming a complex network of astral energies. Astral shallows and alchera are common and the area draws a fair number of free spirits and naga. Also significant is the fact that twelve powerful manalines radiate out to link to the sites of the other three Great Dhams (holiest of pilgrimage sites, as important to Hindus as Mecca is to Muslims) and the twelve holy Shivan jyotirlinga ("pillars of light") shrines.

A jyotirlinga is a Shivaite relic. The upper portion, called the Shivalingam, appears in various shapes: cylindrical, elliptical or phallus-shaped. Though some have been destroyed or lost over time, each shrine's priesthood possesses detailed oral instructions on how to recreate its particular down to exact measurements and materials.

• Orissa, the Dhams and the shrines are conveniently located on a manaline nexus. Unusually, at each, a powerful manaline rises into the skies. Researchers have found that these manalines reach the upper limits of the manasphere, beyond the point where human astral projection is sustainable. The phenomena represent one of the great mysteries of contemporary thaumaturgy; a lot of people would like to know what is up there and why it's there.
• Magister

• Rumor is if you remove the shivalingam, the nexus stops feeding the "pillars." Not that anyone's going to test it. A non-Hindu even touching a relic would be torn apart by the throngs of devout pilgrims that surround the place 24-7.
• Hanuman

• Much as they'd like to let them in, the brahmin make a point of forbidding corporate interests from getting anywhere near the holy shrines. The exception, oddly enough, is a small corp called Etherlux, which has exclusive permission from the Delhi government to examine the jyortilinga network.
• DelhiKC

• The company dates back to the mid-Fifties. I tracked some of the startup funds back to a Renraku black bag account, but apparently Etherlux is actually owned by a twenty-something prodigy called Salai Mazim, hailing from Iran of all places. Couldn't dig up a single fact on the guy anywhere, though.
• Warewolf

• Legend also has it that there were originally 13 shivalinga. One was stolen and its shrine razed by the Golden Horde dur-

ing their heyday. Maybe the puzzle is simply lacking a piece.
» Hanuman

Besides being mystical power sites, the remaining Dhams also deserve special mention given their immense spiritual significance to Hindus, who believe that in order to ascend, one must visit all the Dhams in a lifetime.

Of the Great Dhams, Rameshwaram is particularly popular; a masterpiece of Dravidian architecture on the island of the same name, the temple complex boasts the largest mandapa (temple corridor) in India. Built over several centuries, it includes twenty-two purifying wells; the water of each tastes different, and allegedly grants strange siddhri (magical gifts) such as new senses and immense longevity. It is believed those who walk the mandapa on certain days can walk to the heavens. The temple of Dwarkanath, in Dwarka on India's west coast, is dedicated to Lord Krishna. Archaeology reveals Dwarka is the sixth city on the site; the earlier five were swallowed by the sea, with the earliest carbon-dated to pre-Vedic times. Finally, Badrinath is one of the most revered Hindu shrines dedicated to Lord Vishnu and has become the dwelling of seers, saints and yogis and home to the foremost schools of brahmin and yogic magic.

» Pilgrimages are an important part of Hindu religious life, and with the way dangers abound in the Sixth World, there's plenty of well-off Hindus willing to fork out serious money for private security and bodyguards to escort them during their travels.
» Col. Kinkaid

Taj Mahal (Agra)

The magnificent mausoleum is not only one of the great wonders of the world, but it's also become one of the strangest sites in a land famous for oddities. Appropriately for a building of such beauty, the Taj radiates peculiarly powerful positive emotions—nothing you would associate with a sepulcher—evident even to a mundane, since the site has become what magicians call an astral shallow.

Since a benign and powerful ashura, now known as Mumtaz, took up residence in the Taj in the spring of '62, things have become even stranger. Though the spirit speaks to no one, whenever she is seen walking the vast halls and gardens, visitors have reported the ability to see and speak with recently deceased loved ones in bardo, the limbo between incarnations. Another riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

» Someone once said, "Not a piece of architecture, as other buildings are, but the proud passions of an emperor's love wrought in living stone." Particularly apt, I think.
» Vasant

BANGLA COMMONWEALTH

Government Type: Islamic Parliamentary Democracy
Population: 140,400,000 (Bengali (98%, Other 2%)
Major Languages Spoken: Bengali, Urdu, Chakma, Marma, Garo, Khasi, Santhali, Tripuri, Mro.
Major Religions: Islam (Sunni 80%, Shi'ite 5%), Hindu (12%)
by Ripon Bey

A new constitution ratified on the fiftieth anniversary of Bangladeshi independence (2021) established the Commonwealth as a modern Muslim nation bordering India and Burma, which, despite a history of endemic poverty, is today one of the region's most stable and growing economies.

» By modern he means metahumans have it easier than in many Islamic states and they have civil law rather than sharia.
» Mahisha

» One peculiar phenomenon that has no doubt colored the moderate Islamic approach is the strangely high expression of dwarves among the Bengali ethnic group (both in the Commonwealth and in India).
» Tropical Cancer

The VITAS plagues hit us as badly as, if not worse than, our neighbors, but we suffered none of the backwash of civil unrest and religious fervor. In fact, support for the ruling hard-line Islamist movement was hard hit by VITAS, and later by a series of corruption scandals involving top officials. Losing the moral high ground, the Islamists' support dwindled and the National Reform Party, building on a platform of Bengali national identity and culture supported by Islamic moderates and religious minority leaders, rose to power and started cleaning house.

With a country in desperate need and unwilling to increase dependence on megacorporations, Prime Minister Hossen Masud appealed to the 25-million-strong Bangladeshi immigrant community worldwide to come to their homeland's assistance. Spurred by nationalism and family ties, the response was overwhelming. Four generations of immigration started paying off, and money flowed back from the diaspora's worldwide network, filling private and public coffers.

» Look for the government's dependence on the Big 10 in financing and building these national megaprojects to increase as the coffers start to dry.
» Sheeba

» S-K Asia is located in Dhaka, and with Miss Carstairs at the helm and friendly toward Masud, I don't see the treasury running dry as long as S-K gets all the big government contracts. MCT and Wuxing don't like to follow S-K's lead, but they can't really back an Opposition of rabid nationalists and radical Islamists either. Instead, they're insinuating themselves in the NRP second tier and hoping to remove Masud in the near future.
» Mamoud K

» The Bangla Commonwealth's biggest economic rival isn't India but Malaysia, and mid-level corps trade blows on a regular basis. If you're ever in Dhaka, try to get a bead on either Khalid or Ghuddi, the two fixers who handle most of the international action and will line you up with work if you're on the up and up.
» Kumar

• While Dhaka isn't yet up to the level of Singapore or Kuala Lumpur (or Calcutta for that matter), it is one of the rising stars of the Asian high-tech scene. There's a significant amount of talent poaching, data procurement and sabotage ops bouncing round between all four cities.
• Pragma

Masud invested wisely, modernizing the capital Dhaka and five major regional capitals, establishing a compromise form of corporate Islam, creating a job boom, revitalizing the economy and offering the country much-needed hope all at once. Dhaka's skyline of corporate skyscrapers (on revolutionary floating foundations) rivaling Kuala Lumpur's, the massive canal and bridge network devised to assuage the seasonal flooding and the elevated highways all attest to how far the Commonwealth has risen from the muck. Don't get me wrong, the legacy of centuries-old corruption persists and poverty still claims millions, but things have never been this good and the standard of living is rising every year.

• Well, if 0.04¥ an hour to 0.05¥ could be considered an improvement…
• Antifa

• Corruption is as rife as ever. The Mansur brothers have high-ranking military in their pockets here too, helping them keep a stranglehold on drugs out and arms traffic in to the SEA hotzone.
• Ganga DNI

• Factoid: That immigrant network mentioned above doubles as a parallel distribution, contraband and money-laundering operation for South Asian syndicates like the Mansurs.
• X-Star

KHALISTAN

Government Type: Neo-Communist Democracy
Population: 135,100,000 (Punjabi 70%, Sindi 10%, Pashtun 12%, Mohajir 5%)
Major Languages Spoken: Punjabi (60%), Urdu (50%), Sindi (10%)
Major Religions: Sikh (87%), Hindu (8%), Islam (Sunni 3%), Christian (2%)
by Majit Singh

There is much bad blood between Sikhs and Hindus, more so even than between Indians and Pakistanis. The Hindus feel deeply betrayed by the Sikh separatists declaring independence while the country was reeling from the Crash and the Indian army was committed to the escalating situation in Kashmir. Sikhs have a deep-seated hatred of India for what happened next. Sikhs from all over India were still relocating under immense harassment and outcry when they heard the fateful news: India had ordered a tactical nuclear strike against Pakistani forces aiding insurgents in the Kashmir valley. Pakistan retaliated with tactical launches at Indian positions before the situation was contained by warnings from the UN and Corporate Court to both capitals. Left unsaid was that prevailing winds would carry the dreaded fallout south, over the newly-founded Sikh nation.

Most Sikhs believe the nationalist BJP government made the decision while fully aware of the consequences, as underhanded retaliation for the Sikh "betrayal" as much as to counter Pakistani aggression. Khalistan, "the land of the pure," would never be truly pure now. Though India has since relinquished claims to Khalistan and tried to make amends for what has become a matter of national shame, the damage is done and the rift may never be healed. Cancer rates have increased tenfold in the last two generations and many children have been born diseased or deformed.

• Majit is Subversive Karma's correspondent in Amritsar and the fact that he is a friend carries some hope for the future.
• GaneXa

• Sikhs are easy to spot. They're the ones with the unshorn hair, turbans, kara (iron bracelets) and kirpans (ceremonial daggers) in their belts. They claim to be "completely different" from both Hindus and Muslims, but maintain the same hard-line patriarchal society.
• Almond White

Khalistan is a new and struggling nation, one that doesn't possess particular resources and isn't naturally prosperous. Khalistani Sikhs and our brethren across the world are a religious community founded by Guru Nanak as a third path beyond Hinduism and Islam, which he saw as too aloof from the fundamental issues of humanity. Traditionally, our culture has prized enlightenment—spiritual, scientific and intellectual. Brutal repression, however, led Gobind Singh, the tenth and penultimate Guru, to reorganize the entire community into a martial Order known as the Khalsa, with its own codes and symbols.

• "Penultimate" because the highest living religious authority in Sikhism is a book, the Guru Granth Sahib, the eleventh Guru. When I say "living," I mean that it's treated as if it were a person. It boasts an honor guard, is awakened by servants, accepts tributes and even holds court … and has since before the Awakening.
• Elijah

• The code's full name "Sikh Khalsa Panth" translates loosely to the "Way of the Warrior-Saint."
• Karmic Singh

This militant aspect, integral to the very fabric of our beliefs, was what allowed the founding of Khalistan to take place in '31. Armed barricades were raised within minutes while rail links, road traffic and communications were broken with New Delhi—an impressive feat, impossible without the discipline and dedication of the Khalsa. It remains a dominant aspect of our culture and has led our "great experiment" to develop into a self-reliant communal society bordering on true communism.

• Remittances from a sizeable emigrant community provide some income, but most people barely scrape by. Corp investment would be much appreciated, but there's not much there to lure them, so the country has taken to hiring out its able men as mercenaries to anyone willing to pay them—except India, of course.
• Picador

KASHMIR WASTES

by GaneXa

Nobody truly knows exactly what triggered events in 2030—many communications and official systems were still down courtesy of the Virus—and it's probably better that way. The official story is that a rogue Pakistani general exceeded his authority to aid Islamic insurgents in a running battle with Indian forces near the border. The situation escalated beyond control and the result was a brief nuclear exchange that left the beautiful Kashmir valley a scorched and radioactive shadow of its former self. Three tactical nuclear devices exploded and though the Himalayan valley contained much of the heat and shockwaves, the whole region is now irreparably irradiated and unsuitable for life.

Few have risked the high radiation to explore the area, which is overrun by twisted and mutated plant life and warped fauna. Occasionally reports get out of communities in the valley surviving despite contaminated water supplies and irradiated soil, but who they might be and what they are up to is anyone's guess.

• Believe me, the valley is still glowing hot. I've been as near as anyone can get and there's no sign of life, let alone civilization. No chance in hell people can survive that rad count!
• Glowrat

• More things in heaven and earth.
• Gaia's Orphan

NEPAL

Government Type: Hinduist Parliamentary Monarchy (under State of Emergency)
Population: 22,000,000 (Chetri 16%, Brahman 13%, Magar 7%, Tharu 7%, Tamang 6%, Newar 5%, Other 46%)
Major Languages Spoken: Nepali (59%), Maithili (15%), English (15%)
Major Religions: Hindu (86%), Buddhist (11%), Islam (Sunni 4%), Animistic (4%)

What's an old-style monarchy still doing nestled in the valleys of the Himalayas in this day and age? Getting by under corporate occupation. When the King was taken mysteriously ill in early '62, civil unrest followed suspicions of a palace coup. Promptly, high-ranking palace officials invited several corps in, ostensibly to help maintain the peace, in exchange for mining rights to particular sites located by satscans during what became known as the Orichalcum Rush.

A major airlift operation allowed a PPG taskforce to set up a base outside Katmandu with the government's blessing. This was quickly followed by a Saeder-Krupp/Regulus joint deep mining operation in Okhaldhunga, under the shadow of Mt. Everest. However, by the time the corps had stabilized the situation and begun seriously digging, the deposits had started to dry up. Coupled with mounting attacks from Yeti tribes and shamans apparently offended at the prospectors' invasion of their highlands, the mounting costs of the operations led outsiders to believe that they'd be shut down soon. However, four years later they remain in place and corporate presence in the kingdom has only increased.

• Corporate presence has been incalculably harmful to the average Nepalese. All the modern comforts and commodities they've been seeing on the trid for years but could never afford are now being unwittingly rubbed in their faces by the people in the corporate compounds and encampments. Serious trouble is brewing.
• Ambassador

• Awfully quiet regarding this on all the Asian data havens. I wonder what they're really doing up there.
• Digital Guru

• Maybe the veins didn't fade like others?
• Grunt!

• Or maybe they're looking for a backdoor into Tibet?
• Conspir-I-See

• Or perhaps they found something best left buried.
• Script Diver

PAKISTAN

Government Type: Military dictatorship
Population: 145,000,000 (Punjabi 50%, Sindi 15%, Pashtun 15%, Mohajir 8%, Other 12%)
Major Languages Spoken: Urdu (80%), Punjabi (50%), Sindi (20%)
Major Religions: Islam (Sunni 77%, Shi'ite 20%), Hindu (2%), Christian (1%)
by Hazim Mansur

In case you missed International Politics 101, Pakistan is the war-torn hellhole to the west of the subcontinent, the one that was involved in "that" nuclear incident with India back in the Thirties—the one no one talks about. The one that's been on a slippery slide to hell since the turn of the century boom days. Remember us? Thought not. I'm sorry to say it's become a footnote-in-history sort of place.

So here's the current sitrep: Pakistan is an impoverished and underdeveloped nation with barely any resources, and what passes for industry is laughable. You'll be hard pressed to figure out what everyone is fighting for, but Gen. Jehangir's military junta has been maintaining a prolonged civil war with Islamist insurgents (or is it counterinsurgents?) and local warlords in the west of the country almost since it came to power two decades ago, after a succession of bloody coups toppled one elected government after another.

• The real reason for the Army coup was the government's failure to respond to a covert op by a Corporate Court taskforce with UN backing—one that relieved Pakistan of most of its remaining nuclear stockpile shortly after the Kashmir debacle. For those who don't know, two of the four missiles Pakistan fired on Kashmir exploded at launch, irradiating large portions of desert around their launch sites.
• Echec

• Foul play?
• Half-baked

Seeing himself a patriotic visionary, our good Gen. Jehangir began by nationalizing what remained of Pakistani industry and, hoping to draw megacorporation investment, signed the Business Recognition Accords—a move his predecessors, mostly Islamists, had actively resisted.

• Some megas did buy in, just not on the scale Jehangir expected. Saeder-Krupp, Renraku and Shiawase own isolated research installations and a few miltech factories and test ranges in the middle of nowhere, safely away from prying eyes and idle hands. Shiawase and Renraku subcontract mercenary garrisons, though S-K uses its own house troops.
• Kahlil

Things started to go wrong almost immediately. Jehangir's overtures failed to attract the investment needed to jumpstart economic revival and draw public support for the regime. It also prompted supporters of the previous government—hardline Islamists based out of Afghanistan, sponsored by Iranian allies and backed by the Jamil Islamyah brotherhood—to whip up insurrection in the western provinces. His next move—violent repression—failed miserably, and revealed how badly equipped and ineffective Jehangir's line troops were. This in turn led unaffiliated local warlords to stake claims over parts of the territory,snowballing the three-way clusterfrag we all know and hate today.

• Jehangir's rank and file still stinks. However, his Special National Guard are crack troops trained and equipped with the best means money can buy. They keep the Army in line and double as the state's secret police. Nasty customers.
• Hotzone Harry

The final nail in the coffin came when an increasingly desperate regime sealed deals with the Mansur brothers and the Kabul maffiya: Pakistan's poppy fields would be reseeded to feed the syndicates' drug trade, and the regime would open up the border to the Mansur's smugglers. In return, the syndicates would ensure government coffers remained topped up and the Army paid, armed and entertained—an economic boon for Islamabad and the port of Gwadar. They've become a thriving smuggling crossroads and bazaar for international arms dealers, black marketeers, profiteers and drug lords from all across the region.

• Islamabad isn't too bad compared to other backwaters I've been in. There's plenty of nightlife and entertainment courtesy of the Mansurs, and there are always headhunters looking for talent around town for one side or another.
• Picador

• There's a group of ex-pats trying to get international support for a UN/CC intervention. They've already made some overtures and enticing promises to the megas if they sign up. Time will tell how fragged up this situation might still become.
• Poly Tick

• Word is it's a front. S-K, Shiawase and Renraku have found some rare mineral deposits in the Pakistani wilderness and want an excuse to stabilize the region to exploit them without letting the competition on.
• Rubik

SRI LANKA

Government Type: Presidential democracy
Population: 19,100,000 (Shingal 74%, Tamil 18%, Moors 7%, Other 1%)
Major Languages Spoken: Shingal, Tamil, English
Major Religions: Buddhist (71%), Hindu (13%), Christian (8%), Islam (Sunni 8%)
by Avantika Suryavanshi

After a protracted insurgency pitting the Tamil minority against the majority Shingalese, a peace agreement was brokered by the island nation's influential Buddhist monastic council, the Sangha. With the world becoming increasingly turbulent and unsafe, the island cashed in on its newfound peace, tropical climate and scenery to market itself as a safe haven for business and pleasure. Erecting several world-renowned conference and resort centers, Sri Lanka has become a sophisticated (and secure) environment for brain-trusts and corporations to hold thaumaturgical, scientific and academic conferences.

Always geared toward complementing the changing needs of their regional partners, and less dependent on the vagaries of international trade, Sri Lanka's local industries have taken the nuyen influx from their specialized and high-end tourism venture and capitalized on it, returning to preeminence as a major port of call on Asian and Indic sea routes.

The vibrant, pleasure-seeking portlife of the free-going coastal areas, especially around Colombo, contrasts with the landscaped glitz and touristy golf courses of the inland and east coast resorts. The schizoid aspect of the island's culture only makes it more appealing to many.

• The (controlled) discussions and exchanges that take place at these conferences and meetings are still essential to the scientific community so the corps have adapted to them. Using out-of-the-way and high security venues like Sri Lanka's resorts helps limit exposure of top talent and restricts extraction opportunities.
• Hangfire

• And Colombo fixers and kingpins are raking it in greasing the right hands and providing logistics and intel to runners willing to take big risks extracting big names.
• Mogli

TIBET

• In my line of work, I've learned not to look a gift horse in the mouth—especially when it's literally a horse. This missive came the old-fashioned way, straight off the back of a riderless horse that wandered into the camp of a friend of mine, working in southern Gansu. I've gotten dozens of wildly different reports on Tibet over the years, each one crazier than the last, but it's hard to argue with a note that you obviously weren't meant to see. The warlord this refers to is a serious force in the area, and his men are said to have come north from Tibet themselves.

With word that the magical defenses around Tibet are weakening, it could be a new frontier for shadow ops. Before you start checking the rates for shadow-friendly sherpas, though, you'd best get whatever reliable information you can. I can't say I'd bet my life on this particular information, but the source is reliable enough that I'd bet yours.
• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:13:39 (PST)

To: Major General Qao Hien Shin
From: Lieutenant Colonel Tai Xu
Subject: Tibet Reconnaissance

Major General Shin, I am pleased to report that my unit safely entered Tibet and we've been monitoring the situation in the nation for three months. It is certain: there is truth to the rumors that the Cloud weakens! I apologize for not sending word earlier, but our infiltration is tenuous and I did not want to risk being discovered. When Captain Yu reaches you with these notes, we should be able to plan appropriately for the liberation of Tibet.

My men will remain here, where we will be in position to sabotage the monasteries when we hear word that you have entered the nation. The mystical brainwashing the monks have used on the Tibetan people will not hold for long when we march onto the plateau again.

• Propaganda speech aside, these guys are dead serious. Qao Hien Shin has been operating as a warlord in southern Gansu

for twelve years now, solidifying his power in the region and selling access to mining deposits to the megacorps.
• Hei Yu

• Shin's an old world idealist, a real Han patriot. He realizes the old Republic of China isn't coming back, but he wants to see China as a unified superpower again—under his control, naturally. He took his duties in Tibet in the name of China very seriously; the exile he's in now is a personal affront. He's gearing up to go back and I hear he's hiring runners for high-pay, high-risk jobs in Tibet.
• Tai Ho Leng

• Jobs in Tibet? You might as well look for jobs in Atlantis. Tibet is sealed off, there's no work there.
• D Bunker

• But if this is true, could you imagine? Tibet opening up would be a goldmine for smugglers, not to mention runners working for every outfit with sudden interests there.
• Carver

• And, of course, assuming you feel confident working with some of the worst butchers and betrayers in that corner of the world. But I guess there's no reason to think he'd be happier fragging some inconvienent witnesses than he was to kill Tibetans, right?
• Himalaya Playa'

• Keep perspective, chums. Tibet's been sealed off from the world for half a century. While I'm sure it's well stocked in yak butter and prayer wheels, it won't have most of the stuff you need on a daily basis—oh, and no Matrix either, most likely. Stock up before you head out.
• Hangfire

THE MAYA CLOUD

You will be pleased to hear that the effects you and I both remember experiencing within the Cloud have lessened with time. The effects our troops experienced while passing through the Cloud to the outside in 2052 have persisted to our present exile, but to my surprise, the reports from those we captured near the border are correct. Despite the surge of power in the Cloud after the passing of the comet, it appears to have recently weakened. That we passed through the Cloud three months ago with only minor incidents supports this.

• I'm going to guess from the riderless horse that it didn't work out so well on the trip back.
• Bung

• Let me get this straight: this Shin guy and his troops escaped from Tibet 12 years ago? Why haven't I seen him featured on the cover of the Atlantean, or working the talk-show circuits?
• GnuB

TIBET TIMELINE

2010: The Tibetan-proclaimed 11th Panchen Lama dies under Chinese house arrest. The Chinese government allows the 14th Dalai Lama to return to Tibet to quell unrest.
March 2011: Strange magical phenomena manifest around the borders of Tibet, making operations difficult for the Chinese military and encouraging protests from the native Tibetan population.
September 2011: As the magical manifestations increase, the 14th Dalai Lama releases a pre-recorded video message stating that the manifestations are non-aggressive, but warns against those who would intrude on Tibet without permission.
October 2011: The Chinese military responds to the Dalai Lama's message with overwhelming military action, mobilizing a response out of Yunnan Province. The magical manifestations flare as the military marches in, forming the Maya Cloud that exists today and cutting off contact with the military force.
2012: The 14th Dalai Lama dies of natural causes while the new nation of Tibet is still forming. Contact with Tibet effectively ceases.

• He's kept a low profile, and stayed busy building his own fiefdom in Gansu. From the sounds of it, he's spent the decade since looking for a way to get back in. Once word gets out that he's seen the inside, though, some other players may be interested in, ah, "interviewing" Shin about his experiences.
• Mouse

• More to the point, what was Shin doing inside Tibet in the first place? I did some research, and here's what I've found.

The Cloud was a catalyst for a lot of instability in the region during the Awakening. It didn't appear overnight, but when its effects started to manifest, the Tibetans took it as a sign. The Dalai Lama led the Tibetans in protests against China and the Chinese responded in typical heavy-handed fashion by ordering troops out of Kunming to suppress the uprising. It is said that the Cloud flared up around the soldiers and that was the last day anyone heard from them or Tibet. Many of the soldiers never made it through the Cloud.

Here's the kicker: one of the top officers in that military force was our own Qao Hien Shin. That means he and his troops were holed up inside of Tibet for forty years, before they were sent into "exile." There's a lot of unanswered questions here. So what happened to them? Who exiled them?
• Duy uy Minh

• Though you wouldn't expect it of a warlord, Shin demands that his men burn offerings to honor the spirits of those lost soldiers.
• Tai Ho Leng

• Shin's scout skips the basics of the Cloud. It's a massive, churning astral storm that manifests visibly in both the astral and physical world. Some of its manifestations include extreme

weather conditions, complex illusions, spirit harassment, and magical misdirection. There are also some Tibetan predators (normal, paranormal and metahuman alike) who take the opportunity to prey upon any outsiders trapped within the Cloud. The Cloud itself forms the new borders of the nation of Tibet, wrapping around it along lines that don't exactly correspond to the pre-Awakening borders, but are fairly close.
» Kensai

» It's an electromagnetic nightmare, also. The Cloud causes sensitive electronic gear to fail, and the interference from the Cloud blocks transmissions passing through it.
» Kino

» Such is the nature of maya. Those who would know enlightenment should have the sense to avoid its dangers.
» Lhasa

» What the hell is that supposed to mean? Fraggin' "more-enlightened-than-thou" posters.
» Joey

» Maya is a Sanskrit word meaning "illusion." It's a central theme in Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism—maya is the nature of the world we can see, but enlightenment lies beyond maya.
» Magister

» Great. Existential magic fog.
» Joey

» And yak butter. Don't forget the yak butter. Tibet, land of a thousand delights. *grin*
» Hangfire

» The icing on the cake is that the Tibetans don't take credit for the Cloud. From what I gather, they take it as a blessing, but are just as clueless where it came from as the rest of us.
» Ley Lo

» So, if the Tibetans aren't behind the creation of the Cloud … who is?
» Cho

» I was on a pilgrimage in the Himalayas a few years back, and I saw a dragon swimming through the air among the snow-capped peaks toward Tibet. I'd be it's dragon magic.
» Himalaya Playa'

» I'd bet that either the thin air got to you or the Cloud's illusions did.
» Skeptic

» The Cloud is no joke. My team took a job to sabotage a Wuxing surveying team operating near the Tibet border. Before we could do the job, our instruments all went haywire and a snowstorm left us with zero visibility. We came upon the Wuxing camp but someone had beat us to it; the staff was torn to pieces. Only time I've seen anything like it was during a tangle with wendigo that I'd rather forget. We cut our losses and headed back to Nepal, but not before one of my team mumbled about seeing the way to paradise and wandered out into the snows by himself. If anyone offers you work near Tibet, my suggestion would be to stay clear.
» Brick

THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

After clearing the Cloud, my men and I surveyed the area. While the climate and terrain were as harsh as ever, I was pleased to see that it is otherwise much the same as I remembered. As much as I know you have yearned to return and liberate Tibet, sir, I feel confident that you will not find it amiss if I admit that I had missed it as well. To see my home again—for I do think of it as my home, even after all these years—was a singular experience.

On the surface, it is still very much the same: dry grasslands and deserts on the northern plateau, vast lakes and agricultural land along the Yarlong Tsangpo River in the south, and lush, primeval canyon forests to the east. Our wujen, however, pointed out that massive change has taken place in the astral plane. He says that complex astral objects stretch across Tibet and appear to be concentrated around Mount Kailash. The only references we've found to this construction are cryptic mentionings of the "great mandala of Tibet."

» A mandala is a ritual circle constructed of colored sand in a complex design. It represents the universe and the person's place in it. Any guesses as to why they would be building a giant astral ritual circle in Tibet?
» Xiao Renwu

» I don't think I want to know.
» TomTom

» MagickNet has been hopping with reports of increased magical phenomenan along the paths of Asia's major rivers. I don't know if there's any connection, but nearly all those rivers have their sources on the Tibetan plateau.
» Ang

The monks who led the passive uprising against us twelve years ago with their trickery and magic have placed themselves in power. The work our forces did for four decades to advance the Tibetan people and reunite them with the China we once knew has been replaced with a primitive theocracy. Since our imposed exile in Gansu, we've seen how far the world has developed. Instead of moving with the times, however, the monks have chosen to insinuate magic into the lives of the people instead of technology, thus keeping the nation dependent on them.

• A non-violent uprising should not be mistaken for passive. The power of the Tibetan plateau does not require the spilling of blood for its secrets.
• Tsangara

In the past decade, the monks have reshaped Tibetan society to revolve around the monasteries. The magically talented are adopted into state care and often moved to the urban centers in the capital of Lhasa or nearby Shigatse. An industry revolving around the harvesting of alchemical materials has grown in Tibet, often handled by mundane farmers but overseen by the local monasteries. It is not nearly as prevalent as herding and farming, but it apparently adds profit to the monasteries' coffers.

The influence of the monasteries on the people of Tibet cannot be overstated. The population shift toward urban areas leaves the rural Tibetans dependent on the monasteries for magical assistance with farming and herding. Local monasteries therefore have a great deal of popular support; it will be difficult to win the loyalties of the rural areas away from the monks without a significant level of persuasion.

THE SEARCH FOR THE DALAI LAMA

Our timing could not be more fortunate, however; as we plan our return to Tibet, the theocratic government is dealing with the loss of its leader. The 15th Dalai Lama died in his sleep just three years ago. Without his direction, the theocracy is divided and will not match the power of our liberating army. Even should they find the next incarnation soon, the child will not be prepared to lead his nation for some time.

• No one on the outside ever saw the 15th Dalai Lama. The last known public contact the Dalai Lama had with the outside world was in late 2011, and that was the aging 14th incarnation. He appeared on a pre-recorded taping, issuing a statement that the sealing of Tibet was a non-aggressive act and that those on the outside should stop trying to enter the nation, for their own safety.
• Kino

• In addition to being the traditional spiritual and political leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama is said to be the reincarnated manifestation of Buddha's compassion for mankind. I shudder to think what effect the Awakening may have had on someone who has accumulated at least fifteen lifetimes.
• Ordo Veritas

• Knowledge and compassion such as this require more than one lifetime to cultivate.
• Ambrose

After a prophecy from the State Oracle, the monks have expanded their search for the next incarnation of the Dalai Lama beyond Tibet's borders, where they are more vulnerable. This duty has been given to the monks of the Lotus Throne sect. While they are the most worldly of the Tibetan monks, this still plays to our fortune. Outside of Tibet, their support structure is weak and they are not in their element. If we are subtle, we may be able to hinder or influence the selection of Tibet's next leader. Also, the Lotus Thrones are using the Five Seals to move through the Cloud safely. If we can acquire any of the Seals from them, it would help immensely with our penetration of Tibet's defenses.

• I met one of these Lotus Throne monks, outside of Tibet. Quiet chummer, but I did learn that the Lotus Thrones have operated outside Tibet for decades. It is their duty to minister to Tibetan Buddhists throughout the world, as the Dalai Lama ministers to the ones inside the Cloud.
• Eclipse

• The comment about the "Five Seals" matches something I turned up during investigations after Dunkelzahn died. While looking for information on the Seal of the Green Gloves that Dunkie left to Renraku CEO Inazo Aneki, I turned up a note that dated back to around the Awakening, before Tibet was fully sealed off. It described the unearthing of a hidden cache of items believed to have belonged to the infamous 5th incarnation of the Dalai Lama. What's interesting is that it included four traditional Tibetan monastery seals—and those four also matched descriptions of the Seal of the Green Gloves very closely.
• Snow Tiger

• Looks like these Lotus Thrones already have enemies. There was an armed robbery and shoot-out recently at the Takya Monastery in Bellevue, and the Yaks were the prime suspects. The monastery is a Vajrayana Buddhist monastery, also known as Tibetan Buddhism. Also, there's been a string of violence against Tibetan communities in a number of Asian cities. The newshounds paint it as old Han/Tibetan racial violence, but it specifically looks like Triads are the ones behind it.
• Kiku

• Dodging Triads and Yaks isn't all they are up to. I've heard they've been scouring the squatter populations in the housing projects that have been set up in the lower levels of the Renraku Arcology. It's largely metahumans and refugee immigrants down there, but it's also the favored spot for the corporations to send Redmond residents who are in the way of their latest urban renewal programs.
• Slant

• The Atlantean Foundation, Apep Consortium and DIMR all have a sudden interest in Tibet. All three have stations set up outside the borders to study the Maya Cloud. Less officially, I hear they are paying well for anything magical that comes out of Tibet and hiring shadowrunners brave (or stupid) enough to go inside.
• Silicon Mage

• Don't forget Wuxing. They've been setting up research camps on the Tibetan border, under the cover of providing

advisory surveys for DeBeers mining research. But why would surveying teams need so many staff members with the Talent?
• Lei Kung

• Don't forget hiring all the sherpas they can find to do cross-mountain treks, smuggling in teams via air (hell, I wouldn't put it past them to be digging a damn tunnel in, if they thought they could get away with it.)
• Himalaya Playa'

• Remember when I mentioned earlier that Shin Qao Hien was selling mining rights to the land under his control? Well, nearly all the buys trace back to front companies and shells owned by Mitsuhama. There is more to that relationship than just mining deals, if you ask me.
• Hei Yu

THE STEWARDS OF TIBET

Two stewards oversee Tibet until the 16th Dalai Lama can be found. Fortunately for us, these two advisors are preoccupied with their own affairs and rarely agree, a weakness we can exploit. The first of these two figures is the 12th Panchen Lama, Jangbu Tak-Shin. The "Great Scholar," as his title means, is traditionally the tutor for the young Dalai Lama, but for now he is essentially running the nation. He is a stern old man who grew up in the Buddhist resistance. From his seat of power in the city of Shigatse, he argues a strict isolationist agenda for Tibet. He believes that the outside world contains only hardship for Tibet and that the monasteries should investigate how to reinforce and strengthen the Cloud.

• Just before the Awakening, there was a bit of lama drama going on. There were two 11th Panchen Lamas: the one the Chinese put forward and the one the Tibetans claimed was the true lama, who ended up dying mysteriously under Chinese house arrest in 2010. The death of the young lama is what prompted the 14th Dalai Lama to return to Tibet, though the impeccable timing of his return just before the appearance of the Cloud has made people wonder if he knew what was going to happen.
• People Watcher

His paranoia is a concern for our efforts, but even more alarming is the secret Buddhist sect he is said to have founded. The Diamond Eye Sect is looked upon as a myth, but I fear they are more than that. They supposedly believe that a pure path to Enlightenment for Tibet means a world free of distraction and suffering, and so it is whispered that they take it upon themselves to patrol the borders of the nation and keep out anything the Cloud might miss. The Diamond Eye monks have achieved a sort of quiet hero worship among the Tibetans, who consider them demon hunters. It is said that people trying to intrude on Tibet are among the least dangerous things they combat at the borders.

• Like that "mountain-sized fire elemental" that witnesses claim destroyed a train and killed 122 Han who were trying to leave Tibet for Gansu in 2055? I guess there's a reason the trains haven't operated in Tibet since the nation sealed itself off.
• Mole

The other steward, the Nechung Kuten, is even more of a mystery. Nyimabumo, whose name means "Daughter of the Sun," is the State Oracle of Tibet. Traditionally, she delivers annual prophecies while possessed by Dorje Drakden, the protector spirit of the nation, and advises the Dalai Lama on spiritual matters. She is extremely private and only rarely makes appearances at the capital city of Lhasa to deliver the prophecies or to try to influence the Tibetans to be more open toward the outside world. Her last prophecy foretold that the 16th Dalai Lama would be Tibet's bridge to the outside world, so she has been trying to prepare the people for that eventuality. Most of her time is said to be spent at her retreat at the base of Mount Kailash or in deep study of the Maya Cloud, with which she seems very concerned.

• Mount Kailash is a holy site to a number of Eastern religions and is also called Mount Meru, which is seen as the center of the universe in Eastern cosmology. Even the Hopi Amerinds consider Mount Kailash to be the other pole of their Black Mesa, which together form the spine of the world.
• Otomo

Nyimabumo is unmistakable in her appearance. She towers over other Tibetan women and is strikingly beautiful, with her black hair tied back in a single long braid and unusual eyes that are the color of the bronze monastery bells. Her history is unusual too; it is said that she appeared suddenly among the Buddhist resistance in 2038 with the full backing of the 15th Dalai Lama, who claimed that she descended to him from the sun in the palm of a radiant dragon. The rumors about her are numerous: she has not aged a day since her appearance, she floats above the earth never touching the ground, and she is a powerful wujen who can turn stone into gold.

• I call bulldrek on this whole thing. I piggybacked on a Yamatetsu spysat a few months ago while its footprint passed over Tibet. There was no evidence of any civilization there. It was empty. I don't know where they went, but there's nothing there.
• Ginsu

• I agree that this is all wrong, but it's definitely not empty. I flew close to the tibetan border once to avoid sichuan patrols, and I could see a crystalline city floating in the mountains, shimmering in the sunlight. Never seen anything like it before.
• Llama Mama

• Shambhala ...
• Demonseed Elite

• Bless you.
• Bung

The land of the rising sun has always been a topic of interest for the shadow community. From the ancient ideals of the samurai to the slew of corporate employers coming out of the area, Japan has touched all of us in one way or another. Recently a series of natural disasters "touched" our nation, shaking up the government and blowing the shadow community wide open. A lot of changes are going on here, and the slow rebuilding process has brought more problems than our local talent can handle. For the first time I can remember, Japanacorps are actively recruiting gaijin runners to handle black ops and rein in the growing number of independent gangs threatening areas the police won't protect. On top of it all, the Japanese Matrix is the hottest thing since cellphones, so everyone's looking to hire extra net jockeys just to make sure their back doors stay shut.

Our poster is right in the thick of the party: he's a junior sysop from our very own Honshu node of Shadowland—but I knew him when he was running code for Monobe under the name Slashbit.

» Janus

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:20:12 (PST)

EMPIRE AT LARGE

by Slashbit

In the last century the world turned on an axis of the Americas. In our lifetime it spins upon the actions of the Japanese Empire. Three of the ten AAA-rated megacorporations make their home in Japan—more than any other nation. When scientists speak of technological advancement, they look to the work being done in Chiba factories or Kyoto labs. We are a nation of innovators living along a skyline ribbed with architectural wonders. Yet underneath the polished chrome veneer beats the heart of an ancient culture. It is a society born from honor and guided by a set of principles that have unfortunately eroded with time, like rocks left upon a beach. Japan changes dramatically as the years pass, but one constant remains: we have always prided ourselves on being a nation of adaptability and honor. Our flexibility has spared us from destruction more than once. In the Meiji era, many foreigners came to Japan to teach the science of the west. Our ancestors learned quickly enough not to be colonized by American thoughts and values; thus we said *Wakon-Yosai* (Japanese spirit, combined with Western sci-

JAPAN AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Constitutional Monarchy
Population: 141,000,000
- Human: 84%
- Elf: 3%
- Dwarf: 4%
- Ork: 6%
- Troll: 2%
- Other: 1%

Per Capita Income: 28,700¥
Estimated SINless: 4%
Below Poverty Level: 18%
Corporate Affiliation: 78%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 2%
- High School Equivalency: 55%
- College Degrees: 29%
- Advanced Degrees: 14%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Japanese: 89%
- Korean: 5%
- Chinese: 3%
- Other: 3%

Major Languages Spoken:
- Japanese: 95%
- English: 40%
- Korean: 15%

Major Religions:
- Shinto/Buddhist: 85%
- Ainu: 2%
- Unaffiliated/Other: 2%
- None: 11%

Currency: Nuyen (¥)
CrashCart Coverage: 50%
- Guaranteed Response Time: 7 Minutes

Monobe Medical Coverage: 70%
- Guaranteed Response Time: 8 Minutes

ence) and drank all the knowledge they had to offer. We worked hard to catch up to the Americans, and in time we surpassed them.

Honor guides our success. From our earliest days, the honor of samurai who swore their blades to their *daimyo* protected Japan. Our first constitution of 1889 considered the Emperor to be Lord Son of Heaven, chosen by the gods to lead our people in spirit and action. When the Second World War ended, however, so did the Emperor's power. The Emperor became just another media monarch, a powerless symbolic figurehead.

» Just as an aside, there's been a movement afoot for many years to allow a woman to become Emperor. It hasn't happened since sometime in the 1400s, but support is growing.
» Suiko

With the Emperor's dethronement, Japan lost a major element of its idealistic heritage—and also to a degree its sense of honor. But we adapted, and in its place we set a foundation of excellence and management in the economic world. As the samurai once conquered the field of battle, so did *jitsugyōka* (businessmen) conquer in the boardroom. With a robber baron mentality, Japan rose to an unquestionable level of power in the business world.

RISE OF THE JAPANACORPS

It is easy to lose yourself in the glory of the Japanese corporations (popularly known as "Japanacorps"). Bolstered by the Seretech and Shiawase decisions, by their peak in 2030 the Japanacorps' influence had spread across the known world. The corporations were a symbol of the nation itself: explorers sent forth to discover and ultimately capture new territory.

The Japanacorps asserted their dominance in part due to the support that they gave each other in their early years. Before World War Two, the Japanese economy was dominated by the *zaibatsu*—family-owned monopolies. The American occupation broke these apart, but a new wave of *keiretsu* arose in their stead. Keiretsu are similar to conglomerates, except that the members have interlocking ownership—they buy large shares in each other to tie themselves together for mutual interest and protection. "Horizontal" keiretsu are formed around a central bank, and typically also included a trading firm, an insurance company and various industrial interests. "Vertical" keiretsu are designed to dominate a particular distribution chain, comprising all of the companies from raw materials to manufacturer to distribution and retail—thus minimizing costs.

» The Yakuza-run Nagato Combine, for example, is a keiretsu, as are Mitsubishi, Sony and Chrysler-Nissan. And the zaibatsu have made a comeback, as emphasized by Shiawase.
» The Chromed Accountant

Many similar forms of Japanese cartels exist. Along with Japanese expertise in management and exploitation of new technologies, these cooperative practices have ensured that most Japanese corporations remain strong and "untainted" by foreign influence. Very few Japanese corporations have succumbed to hostile foreign takeovers, for example, simply because Japanese shareholders refuse to sell, no matter the price.

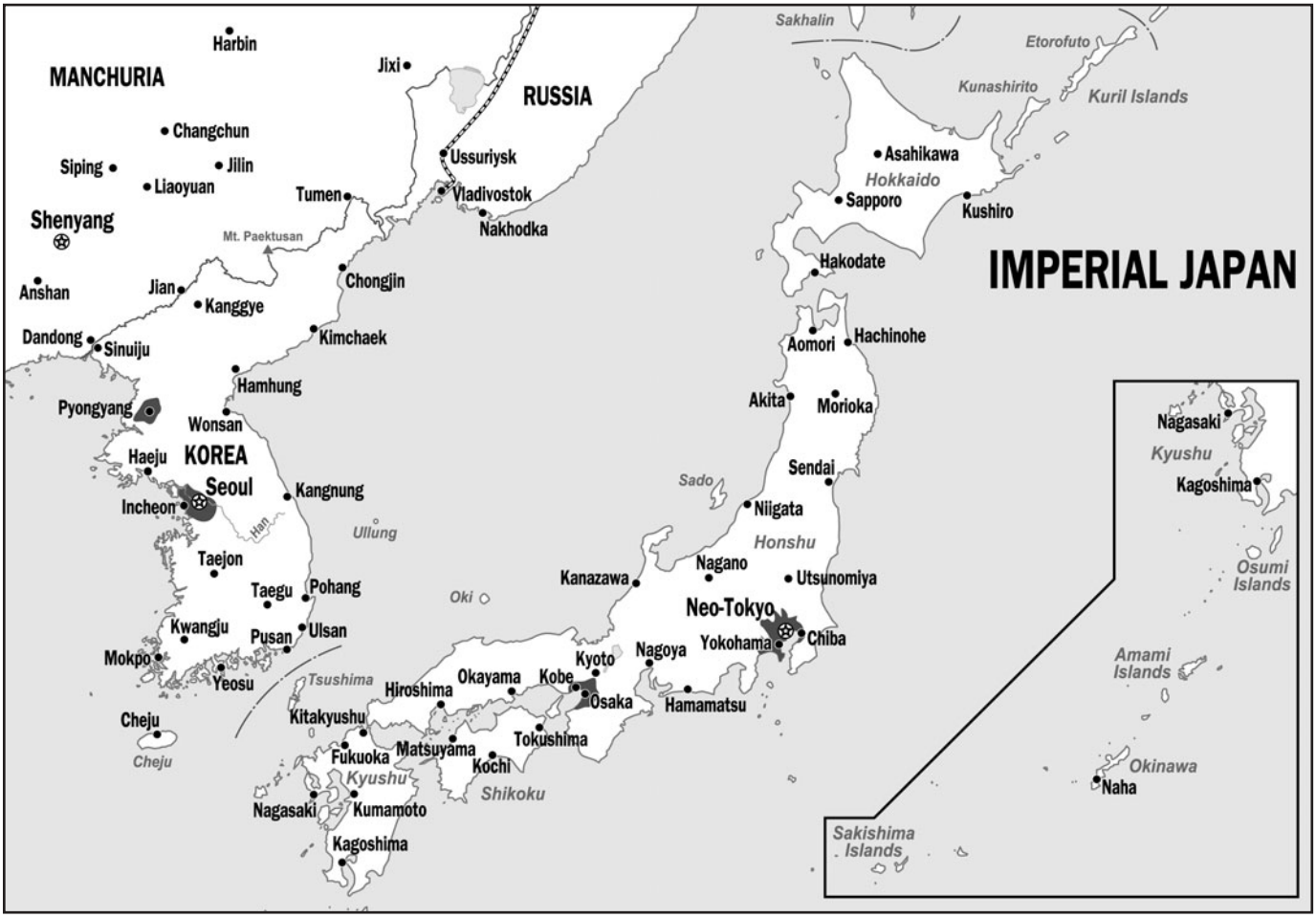
» They're often willing to reconsider this stance when you point a gun at their daughter's head.
» Ruthless

The Empire Returns

Though Japan's constitution after World War two forbade the maintenance of military forces, Japan still founded a Self-Defense Force (SDF) ostensibly as protection against communist aggression in Asia. By the turn of the century, Japan had become the second largest military spender in the world, with an army larger than Israel's, and Japanese troops were sent on peacekeeping missions under UN leadership.

Nationalist political leaders pushed our nation's military policies to the limit. As a result, in 2005 the Japanese military backed South Korea's invasion of North Korea, presumably to protect Japanese citizens from the fallout of war. North Korea proved that Japan's motives were more than just hot air by lobbing a nuclear volley at several major cities. Miraculously, none of the missiles detonated. These events sparked a national shift in perspective, leading to the re-founding of the Japanese Imperial State in 2006.

As Japanacorp influence expanded across the globe, the *Diet* (Japanese Senate) quickly transformed corporate victories



into victories of state. Former Prime Minister Takai Kazama and the Party of Divine Heritage passed the Yamato Act in 2012, encouraging expansionist policies and abolishing almost all remaining anti-monopoly restrictions. This freed the major Japanacorps to swoop down like hawks on smaller interests, snatching up what they could in order to solidify their holdings in Japan and give them the financial power to invest heavily overseas. The first of the true megacorporations grew into international prominence, with five Japanese megacorps later earning seats on the Corporate Court. The Yamato Act also officially changed our national currency to the nuyen, deepening the country's economic dependence on its largest corporations.

Wherever the corps went, the Japanese military was close behind to protect their people and their interests. In 2021, the Japanese Imperial State invaded the Philippines and in 2027 made it Japan's 48th prefecture. That victory spurred corporate-military expansions into Peru, Australia and even the California Free State.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Like many things, the Japanese attitude toward the Awakening was split. On one hand we saw the emergence of Ryumyo near Mt. Fuji as a portent, a divine omen of Japan's greatness. The return of magic brought power to the Shinto and kami spirits once again, further reinforcing the Emperor's power. Metahumans, however, were seen as a disgrace to their families. Many considered them no better than *gaijin* (foreigners), while others saw them as *oni* (demons) to be feared and despised.

In 2027, these prejudices became official policy. Under the orders of Emperor Kenichi, many metahumans were sent to an island in the Philippines created by volcanic eruptions, called Lagu-Lagu. Renamed *Yomi* (Hell), this prison camp allowed the Japanese people to transfer our national shame out of sight, where we would not have to face it.

» Not all metahumans in Japan were rounded up—mostly those sent were criminals, poor or exiled by their own families. Many went of their own accord, internalizing the shame. Those that remained in Japan suffered extreme prejudice, often serving as little more than indentured servants to corporations.
» Izanagi

» In areas the Japanese occupied, however, internment was more forced; military leaders saw it as the best option for undermining local resistance and cleaning up the occupied territory to make it more desirable.
» Metsuke

Turbulence

In February of 2059, the first major blow struck against Japan's economic might. In that month, an ork named Yuri Shibanokuji became CEO of Yamatetsu Corporation. Raised in Russia, where attitudes toward metas were more relaxed, he had little tolerance for the pressure put on him and Yamatetsu by other Japanese corporations and institutions, which were unwilling to accept a *kawaruhito* (changed person) in such a public and important position. Yuri's first act as CEO was to relocate Yamatetsu to the land he called home, making Yamatetsu the first megacorp to leave Japan.

To make it worse, in July 2059 Yamatetsu joined with Wuxing and a range of other Asian corps to form the Pacific Prosperity Group, carefully designed to challenge the interests of the Japanese corporate bloc. Overnight, the hemisphere they once controlled unilaterally became an economic battleground.

A third hit was already in the making: Fuchi had been a shaky prospect ever since Dunkelzahn's will shifted control of the corp's stock. By September of 2059, panic had spread among shareholders. They sold their shares of Fuchi and Fuchi-related stocks in a frenzy dubbed "White Monday"—the worst single-day stock market drop in 70 years. By 2060, Fuchi was gone, subsumed under Novatech or cannibalized by the remaining megacorps. The Japanese economic juggernaut was finally showing cracks.

» 2060 was just the end of the era—the weaknesses of the Japanese economic model had been exposed long before then. In the decades prior, the Japanacorps had seen a slow but steady decline in terms of buyer trust vs. non-Japanese products. Despite extraterritoriality law, many host nations were becoming uncomfortable with the fact that they opened their doors to the Japanacorps but Japan wouldn't return the favor. Other corporations (including the non-Japanese members of the Corporate Court) were very vocal about the incestuous links between Japanese corporate and military interests. Throw in the problems many consumers had regarding Japanese policy toward metas, and you can see why their empire was less stable than it appeared.
» Nuyen Nick

» Let's not twist the truth, though. Japanese corps are still very much among the top dogs. What we've really seen here is the world economy saying that business as usual isn't going to work. The world is changing and it was clear to many that Japan wasn't willing to change with it. I'll bet they're reconsidering that right now.
» Corp Watcher

RING OF FIRE, SEA OF ASH

As if the Heavens themselves were expressing their displeasure, the cataclysm with the Ring of Fire in 2061 shook our public perceptions. The official death toll from the events surrounding the eruption of Unzen Volcano, the tsunamis and the earthquakes across the islands was confirmed at nearly 240,000 people. This number does not include figures from Saotome and other hard-hit corporate arcologies, since these were not publicly disclosed out of shame. It is the largest loss of life in the history of Japan; greater even than the World War Two bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Hardest hit was the Island of Kyushu, ancient birthplace of our civilization. Most of the devastation struck Shimbara and along the Mizunashi and Nakao rivers, where lava, tidal waves and earthquakes wiped out surrounding villages and small towns. Other major cities suffered as well, as we were ill-prepared for earthquakes of this magnitude. The largest tremor registered at 7.2 on the Richter scale, enough to split streets and send buildings crashing to the earth. The skies were choked with ash as black and dim as our hopes that Japan could emerge from this crisis as strong as it had been.

A New Era

Yet the fear besieging our hearts was lifted when our new Emperor assumed the throne. Emperor Yasuhito and his Sessho wasted no time beginning the rebuilding process—starting with recalling all of Japan's military forces from overseas in order to help relief efforts. The government also hired Mitsuhama to supplement their police and recovery forces in case of internal strife. Deals were struck quickly, and within days of the Emperor's ascension there were plans in place for the care and lodging of those displaced by natural disaster.

» Not all of Japan's units heeded the recall order. We hear a lot about General Saito's occupation of San Francisco, but he wasn't the only commander to defy the Emperor. A Japanese special forces platoon in Peru refused to return to service, remaining on the ground to protect Renraku assets there. Rumors are that other AWOL units were absorbed into certain corporate militaries.
» Volando

» These were the earliest signs of an anti-Emperor faction. Some corps had even gone as far as trying to assassinate Yasuhito before he could rise to power. There were at least ten separate high-level attempts on his life, none of which ever came close to succeeding. The smart assassins refused to take the job.
» Seta

The government was forced to make hard choices about which cities to protect and which to leave to the wolves. Days after his ascension, the Emperor declared a permission of *Gentei Busou* (right to bear arms) in Nagasaki and other smaller Kyushu cities as a response to the degradation of public

JAPAN TIMELINE

2006: Following successes in the second Korean War, Japan proclaims itself the Japanese Imperial State and begins military expansion toward the Northern Territories.
2011: Hundreds of people witness the first appearance of the Great Dragon Ryumyo as they pass Mount Fuji on a bullet train.
2012: The Yamato Act eliminates monopolization barriers, encourages expansion and establishes the nuyen as Japan's new currency.
2021: Japanese Marines seize control of the Philippines.
2027: Goblinized Filipino and Japanese citizens are forcibly banished to Lagu-Lagu, renamed Yomi Island.
2037: Imperial Japanese forces seize control of San Francisco in order to protect Japanese lives and corporate assets.
2039: Fuchi sponsors the Tokyo Universal Matrix Specifications Conference to establish standards for the future of Matrix programming.
2056: The Olympic games are held in Tokyo. Due to the Yamato Ideal, metahumans are not allowed to compete with humans. 60% of the nations invited refuse to attend. In response, the IOC cancels the 2060 Olympics.
2059: Yamatetsu announces the relocation of its corporate headquarters to Vladivostok, Russia. This development—in addition to difficulties at Fuchi—triggers "White Monday," the Tokyo Stock Exchange's largest single-day drop in 70 years.
2060: Fuchi Industrial Electronics officially dissolves. It is the second AAA corporation that Japan has lost in as many years.
2061: The Ring of Fire erupts. Emperor Kenichi and most of the royal family die in the Unzen Volcano catastrophe. The blast and subsequent earthquakes and tsunamis claim over 200,000 lives.
January 2062: 14-year-old Yasuhito is named Tenno Heika and the Gen-Yu era begins. Mitsuhama registers a formal protest to the appointment of Taro Yonekura as his Sessho.
2063: Emperor Yasuhito announces an alliance with Shinto shamans and kami spirits to direct rebuilding efforts in the Tokyo sprawl and other areas. The proposed new city is dubbed Neo-Tokyo.
March 2064: Mitsuhama sponsors the Wireless Matrix Initiative Conference in Hong Kong and announces that Neo-Tokyo will be a wireless sprawl. At the conference, Transys Neuronet unveils large-scale Matrix overlay efforts in downtown Neo-Tokyo, Kansai (Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe sprawl), Sendai and Sapporo.
April 2064: Emperor Yasuhito marries Shiawase Hitomi in a public ceremony.

security caused by reassignment elsewhere. With the new edict in place, a city teetering on the edge of poverty became in essence an extra-legal zone. *Bosozuko* (go-gangers) spilled into the ashen streets of Nagasaki, creating their own justice.

The changes did not end with Nagasaki. While the Diet argued over priorities, a war was brewing in the streets of Tokyo. Mitsuhama and other corporate forces were given temporary police powers over much of what remained of Akita and Niigata on the northern coast of Honshu. Under the guise of cleanup and rescue operations, Mitsuhama began seizing local assets from rival corporations. A conflict sparked when Mitsuhama seized control of a Renraku laboratory that it claimed had fallen prey to computer malfunctions that threatened the local populace—using fears of the Seattle Arcology situation to fuel public support. By the time control of the facility reverted to Renraku, all of the research data was replicated or stolen. Publicly, Renraku thanked Mitsuhama for assisting them during a national crisis, but in the shadows the corp mobilized assets for a retaliatory strike. Two days after the incident, a top Mitsuhama scientist was gunned down in what appeared to be a gang-related accident. We in the shadows knew better. Our nation had barely survived a natural disaster and now we hovered on the brink of a corporate shadow war.

Not long after that conflict began, representatives from the top Japanacorps met in a special forum with the Emperor, Prime Minister and top Shinto priests. In a session that lasted over six hours, the Prime Minister and Sessho negotiated with these corporate giants, hammering out the final details of a plan that had been forming since the disaster took place. The Emperor revealed his intentions to abolish parts of the Yamato Act, specifically the portions pertaining to metahuman discrimination and corporate domain. From that day forward, foreign competitors would be entitled to the same rights as local corporations. The Emperor personally thanked each of the corporate representatives for supporting the government in its bid to change the way that Japan does business.

» The Shinto priesthood spoke of little else after that day. It was the first time the Emperor himself had spoken to anyone outside of his circle since his rise to power. For some, his words served to reinforce their belief in his power. For others—specifically those who view Ryumyo as their patron kami—it was seen as working against their own. During the meeting, Akane Ishino, Ryumyo's spokesperson, had quietly suggested that corporate restrictions were none of the Emperor's business and he should focus on the rebuilding efforts.
» Geppu

The plan to rebuild the country was not what the corporations had expected. Mitsuhama, Shiawase and Renraku had each approached the Diet with separate plans to rebuild cities destroyed by the disaster. The government rewarded each with significantly smaller contracts than they had asked for, and none of the primary reconstruction contracts for Honshu Island. The Shinto priesthood believed that the fall of Japan's cities had been inevitable due to the taint that hung over them from Japan's avaricious business practices. If the same corporations that tainted the largest cities were allowed to rebuild them, then the balance would never be restored. Instead, the Shinto priesthood would lead reconstruction efforts and also recruit the services of the kami. The corporations were asked to offer logistical support where needed, in exchange for contracts to rebuild locations that the spirits could not or would not touch.

» Read: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and other outlying areas that are plagued with a significant astral taint. All the rebuilding of Honshu Island was put in spirit hands. Hokkaido, Kyushu, the Kuril Islands and the Philippines fell to the corps.
» Magister

As part of the reconstruction plan, Tokyo prefecture was officially merged with the surrounding prefectures of Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba, turning the Tokyo sprawl into an official prefecture called Neo-Tokyo. The city itself remained the capital and a new palace was constructed for the royal family at its epicenter. The palace is a symbol of the changes that are to come for Japan. Hope was born in the destruction of our cities; a rose grown in rubble.

We are a nation in heavy transition. The rise of a new Emperor traditionally marks the rise of a new era. This is the second year of the Gen-yu era and change has already begun. The changes that will come with the Yasuhito Ideology will shape the Asian world for years to come.

IRON TRIANGLE: THE POWERS THAT BE

Part of what makes our land so inviting to shadowrunners is its multi-sided leadership system. We are not led by one voice but rather by a chorus of voices all battling to be heard over the din of the crowd. On the surface, Prime Minister Hisei Kazama and the Diet rule Japan as its highest organ of power. Quietly, however, the true leadership is divided among three groups: The Emperor and his advisors, the Diet and the Japanacorps. The way to be heard is for one of the three seats of power to gain leverage over the other two. In our history the shadows have always been the place to find that leverage.

The Emperor's Faction

The Emperor surrounds himself with a loyal group of advisors. Key among them are Sessho Taro Yonekura, the Emperor's new wife Shiawase Hitomi and a mysterious visitor known only as the Wraith.

EMPEROR YASUHITO

Though only a boy of fourteen years, Emperor Yasuhito instantly won the respect of a majority of the people. His quick rise was fueled by the support he received from the honorable Shinto priesthood. Rumors abound that the Emperor had actually been swept up in the lava slide that killed his family, but somehow he miraculously survived. His legend grew as he survived attempt after attempt on his life.

At first his opponents believed that Yasuhito was a pawn of other powers, that he was too young to understand the sweeping changes he was demanding—and achieving. Given a succession of failures in opposing him, they now realize that the Emperor is driven by his own will. Those who have met him in person can attest that Yasuhito has a remarkable presence and intelligence about him—which some say is unearthly, or even divine.

» Back when he was just the previous Emperor's son, Yasuhito was essentially a non-entity. He was quiet, demure and obedient. Something changed that day he survived the volcano's fire.
» Oshiri

TARO YONEKURA

When Taro was appointed Sessho, Mitsuhama registered a formal protest, citing his inability to gain

popular support. Quietly they believed that the regent was under the influence of Yamatetsu and they were unwilling to have a corporate agent so close to power.

» Yeah, unless it was their own agent, that is. Mitsuhama has spent the last two years stuffing legislators' pockets with money in order to ensure that their influence is felt throughout the Diet. Once they realized that they couldn't sink their teeth into Yasuhito, they doubled their efforts in trying to find a way around him or through him.
» Oni

Contrary to what some believed, Sessho Yonekura has proven to be an honorable regent who has guided the Emperor without any clear corporate bias. He and the Emperor share a passion for forward thinking. While the Emperor is focused on creating an "us" that is unified with his policy of Kawaru ("Change"), Yonekura's mind puzzles over the intricacies of free trade and a national military that's spread far too thin to be effective. As a regent, Yonekura handles necessities that could never be considered by the throne.

» That means shadowruns, boys and girls. Yonekura is the man in contact with all of those fixers that work in service of the national interest. Emperors need shadow talent too—especially when you're a young boy pulling megacorps around by their leashes. Be careful when you're working for the throne; there's so much anti-Emperor sentiment being drummed up by the corps right now that there are fixers running around hiring loyalists and sending them on suicide runs just to eliminate potential problems.
» Woodward

» I was hired by one of Yonekura's people to deliver a briefcase to a house in an Osaka slum called Yentown. Five minutes after I get there a team of Red Samurai kick in the door and geek the guy I'm delivering to. I was lucky to get out alive. It turns out that I was delivering stolen Renraku research specimens to a Mitsuhama agent. Yonekura was stoking the embers in that budding shadow war.
» Just Johnny

HITOMI SHIAWASE

Not long before this posting, Emperor Yasuhito wed Hitomi Shiawase, ushering in a new royal family. The short service took place at Ise Jingu and was attended by corporate leaders and heads of state alike. Everyone who was there was surprised at how regal Hitomi looked. Netriders like me know of Hitomi through her association with Vox Populi; she has been active on the net since her early teen years and has gained quite a reputation as a talented decker. It is said that while at MIT&M, she formed her own Matrix gang in an attempt to get her father's attention. Surprisingly, she consented to an arranged marriage before even meeting her husband-to-be.

During the reception, Hitomi made a big splash by inviting Akane Ishino to perform for the guests. Ishino obliged and gave her only public performance since becoming Ryumyo's mouthpiece. The performance was a testament to Hitomi's influence. Though young, Hitomi is a shrewd player who has the mental and physical tools to influence her husband. The only question is: what are her motives?

Many of course expected that Tadashi Shiawase would use his daughter as a pawn to gain favor with the Emperor. It is clear that his plan backfired, however, as Hitomi argued that Transys Neuronet, not Vector Matrix Services, should be awarded the Neo-Tokyo Matrix contracts.

» Hitomi's a natural rebel, but Tadashi has too much riding on this maneuver to let her slip out of his grasp. I suspect he has some method of keeping her loyalty that he's saving for a crucial moment.
» Otomo

THE WRAITH

Emperor Yasuhito's last advisor may not exist at all. According to rumor, this entity appears only at night and generally in the privacy of the Emperor's quarters. Dubbed "the Wraith" by household staff, no one has ever met this entity and precious few can claim to have glimpsed it.

Some believe that Sessho Yonekura introduced the Emperor to our mystery ghost soon after he took the throne. Since that time, palace servants have whispered about the Emperor talking to shadows in the hallways and speaking aloud to himself in his quarters. On three separate occasions, he has been seen speaking with a raven-haired young woman who always manages to obscure her face. When servants approach, the visitor mysteriously disappears. Perhaps coincidentally, each of these visits has corresponded with policy shifts in the administration.

» A ghost, or an astrally projecting visitor? Perhaps Yasuhito is visited by the spirit of his lost mother, who died in the Unzen eruption. Or perhaps he has a secret backer who prefers to keep a distance.
» Magister

» I suspect this so-called Wraith is actually Buttercup. Consider the modus operandi: she has the ability to sleaze past the Emperor's magical defenses to gain a private audience with him. She advises him to make moves that strengthen the position of her company within the nation. Worst of all, she makes a point to hide herself whenever anyone else is around. It has to be Buttercup! Who else would have that much to hide?
» Conspir-I-See

» I regret saying this already, but you may be on to something, Conspir-I-See. There've been rumors floating around for years that the Emperor is in Yamatetsu's back pocket. When Buttercup gave Yasuhito a priceless pre-Awakening sculpture of an ork as a wedding gift, the Japanacorps muttered a collective "I told you so." All the corps gave the

Emperor lavish gifts, but Buttercup's suggested an intimacy that the others lacked.
• Corp Watcher

• Then again, it could have been Yamatetsu's way of showing support for the Yasuhito Ideal. After all, what other Japanacorp has an ork as its CEO?
• Tenchi

THE NATIONAL DIET

The Diet, our primary judicial legislature, is composed of two houses: the 256-member House of Councillors and the more powerful 490-member House of Representatives. The group elects and is led by the Prime Minister. Diet members represent the closest thing that the people have to political power. Though recent changes to the laws have even allowed metahumans to serve on the Diet, only one has done so—Mina Sato, an elven representative from the Aomori prefecture. Ms. Sato has met with criticism from both sides of the fence—many kawaruhito feel that she is a traitor to our kind, placed in the Diet to placate the growing number of us unwilling to accept discrimination as a way of life. Members of the traditionally stiff Diet see her as an elf first and are often unwilling to work with her on legislation. Regardless, she is a pioneer who holds the full support of our Emperor for her courage.

• Like most politicians, Sato comes from old money. Her father Yasuo made it big in the late thirties with a startup company called Freewave Enterprises. He sold his business to the Nagato Combine soon after his daughter was born. No one knew at the time why he sold out. Mina was educated in France where metahumanity was not the issue it was in Japan. She only returned to her homeland ten years ago, winning a position on the Diet just this year.
• Yas

For more reasons than merely her race, Sato is an exception to the rule in Japanese politics. For one thing, she funded her own campaign. Most candidates prefer to rely on corporate contributions rather than paying election costs out of pocket. The unfortunate effect of this common practice is that many in the Diet become indebted to the corporations that helped them win their seats. The role of the corporations in the election process is no secret; however, no one inside the system has ever introduced formal legislation that would seek to restrict the contributions an individual or organization can make to a candidate. To do so would suggest that there may be corruption in the Diet, a topic no one is willing to publicly discuss.

• There's a saying on this side of the pond: those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. If one politician opens his mouth, he'll end up in the gutter with the whole crooked bunch of them.
• Poli-Scion

• Moreover, it's a system that actually works. Corporations aren't the only group feeding money to politicians. Special interest groups, lobbyists, organized crime and even Ryumyo himself all have members of the Diet on their payroll. With so much competition among those who control its members, the Diet is no different than any other political system.
• Inari

JAPANACORPS

The samurai were masters at creating Zen gardens. Sasaki Kojiro once wrote that a Zen garden is a metaphor for a warrior's life. Though appearing to be art, the circles, lines and rocks born in the sand are in reality a complex series of feints and lunges, pushing upon each other to maintain peace. It is that same balance that governs corporate interplay.

In Japan today, the balance is being tested from many different angles. The work of our Emperor has enraged many of the corps, drawing them together into a union that seeks to dethrone him. Despite a common enemy, however, they make enemies of each other. Mitsuhama and Renraku continue to trade blows, while the others seem unable to maintain a united front against the Emperor, the PPG, or pressure from around the globe.

The anti-Emperor movement began with Mitsuhama. Given its military assistance to the nation, MCT expected to receive a large share of the reconstruction opportunities. Renraku joined the cause soon after, as did Yakashima, Monobe, Sony, Yokogawa, Komatsu, Daiatsu and many others. None of them has publicly denounced the Emperor, but in the shadows the coalition has been mobilizing assets to undermine every move he makes.

• In order to kill the man, you first have to kill the image of the man. It's a battle of public opinion when it comes to dethroning an Emperor, and in this case it's an uphill battle. Emperor Yasuhito is seen as an idol and a kami by a majority of the populace. That idolatry must be removed before anything else can happen.
• Green Ripper

In reality, the coalition is a bubblegum alliance, something that appears to have substance but is very difficult to digest. Dethroning the Emperor will create a vacuum of power that every corp will want to fill with its own candidate. Beyond that, the corporations are competitors by nature, always looking for the slightest advantage.

• Many conflicts boil down to a matter of honor. Take the recent MCT-Renraku tiff. Renraku officials felt disrespected by Mitsuhama's actions and authorized a bit of payback. So a Renraku team snuck into an Osaka Parashield facility and released all of the paracritters trained there. Thirty-seven citizens died before the animals could be corralled. The incident caused Mitsuhama to lose public face. After that, the war was really on.
• Datura

Adding to the chaos of the Japanacorps is the re-emergence of Yamatetsu. Persistent rumors abound that Buttercup has the Emperor's ear. Whether it is true or not, Yamatetsu has experienced a revival in Japan since the Gan-yu era began. The corporation recently opened new offices in Neo-Tokyo, including a MetaErgonomics facility that has attracted many metahuman workers.

» Additionally, Saotome was rewarded with a number of power contracts when the Shiawase plants in upper Hokkaido had to be shut down due to threats of nuclear contamination following the earthquakes. The government decided it was safer to use hydropower.
» Snow Tiger

The role of smaller corporations has expanded following Emperor Yasuhito's free trade edict. Many of the corps once pushed aside by the giants are now fighting for their places at the table. Corporations like Hisato-Turner Broadcasting and Nagato have found themselves in a much stronger economic position in Japan, thanks in part to government contracts formerly held by the AAA corps. These next-generation keiretsu hope to capitalize on the rebuilding efforts as a way to vault themselves into a seat of power.

The media darling these days is a small keiretsu called Shishi Operational Mechanics. The group is funded through the PacRim bank and composed of Suichini Magical Mechanics, Furin Inc. and Shishi Conglomerated. Collectively, the companies can provide all levels of logistical support, a job description that won them an unusually high number of assistance contracts for the Honshu Island reconstruction. In fact, Shishi will be performing more jobs in the Neo-Tokyo redevelopment than any of the megas.

» It could have something to do with the fact that Ryumyo has agents in all three of the corps that make up the keiretsu.
» Mushin

It is often smaller organizations like these that are the main employers of new shadowrunners coming into the area. These corporations want to play on the same field as their larger predecessors and are willing to steal, cheat and kill to do so.

» The Nagato combine has always raised eyebrows when it comes to the way they do business. Nagato is a Yakuza-owned organization that has historically broken ranks with traditional Japanese values by employing a metahuman brigade known as the Green Serpent Guard. These black marks made the Nagato an outcast in the past, but lately everyone wants to be their friend.
» Faisal

» Those Green Serpents are tough fraggers too. They're mostly elves sent to Nagato as part of some sort of exchange program with Telestrian. From what I've seen of them and of Tir toughies, I'd say the Green Serpent Guard is on par with the Tir Paladins.
» Highwire

Other Powers

Many other forces are at work, hoping to steer Japan's future in their favor. Two require mention: Ryumyo and the Shinto.

RYUMYO

The great dragon has remained surprisingly passive over the last few years. Though he denounced the Emperor's involvement in corporate policy, he has publicly declared his support for Emperor Yasuhito's reign. They give the impression of being allies, but a source of contention between them is their command of the kami. Prior to the Emperor's rise, Ryumyo was the most loved figure in all of Japan. Now he is number two. It is unclear whether the dragon views this new public opinion as an insult. He has instead focused his attention on extending his reach deep into the shadows, where he has found new competition.

Ryumyo's new rivals are the Red Dragon Triad, who have been waiting for years for an opportunity to break into Japan. After the earthquakes, the group sent representatives to offer money to small businesses that didn't have enough insurance to get back on their feet. Most were cajoled into accepting the loan, and once they had done so, their businesses were under Triad control. That scenario repeated itself all over Japan. This may be the first sign of a new conflict between Lung and Ryumyo, and it couldn't come at a worse time. With the upcoming vacancy at the top of the Watada-rengo pyramid and the influx of new shadowrunners, Ryumyo's agents have been working long hours to forge new alliances and feel out potential enemies.

» There's something else going on with Ryumyo. A couple of weeks ago I was hired to acquire an unusual-looking piece of rock from a Chilean shadowrunner who called himself Diego. I sensed something was weird about the whole deal, but nuyen is nuyen so I went along with it. When the hit went down, Diego was begging me not to go through with it. He claimed that whatever I was stealing belonged in the hands of spirits and not dragons.
» Rapture

» Ryumyo hasn't been focused on Japan since the Emperor took the stage. He's been spending a lot of time in places like Siberia and Australia. What he's up to is anybody's guess.
» Perry Stroyka

SHINTO AND THE KAMI

Scan Wu Wei's primer on Eastern religions for an explanation of the Shinto tradition. Shinto is one of the two dominant religions in our country, and the only one sponsored by the state. We are a religious society: nearly 90% of Japanese people practice some form of religion. 85% of those practice Shintoism, Buddhism or both. When a new Emperor ascends the throne it is a Shinto priestess, or miko, who swears him in.

The kami, spirits summoned by Shinto priests, are taking an active role in the reconstruction efforts going on across Hokkaido. Japan has often been referred to as the land of 8 mil-

lion kami, but that may be an understatement. Kami spirits are conceptualizations of what their believers feel is important to life. A kami may be a tree or a river, a rock or bird; even a living being can be a kami. Since his first appearance, Ryumyo has been viewed as a kami by many Shinto priests. Even the Emperor is a kami to some. The number of people who worship him is growing.

» I've noticed some disturbing trends in Shintoism. A tribe of so-called net-listeners has begun to herald Kaiya as a kami. The strange thing is, she doesn't exist. Kaiya is an algorithm—a computer-generated idoru (virtual idol) who has become wildly popular in the teen music scene.
» Ami

» You can't really call anything a trend when it comes to Shinto. The church is not as organized as, say, the Christian church. Shinto shrines are loosely affiliated and divided along the lines of the kami they worship. Two magnet groups have begun to form: those who worship Ryumyo and those who worship Yasuhito. I've heard about the net-listeners as well, but they're not large enough to be called a magnet group; not yet, at least.
» Giselle

IN THE SHADOWS

No discussion of modern Japan would be complete without reference to the renowned Yakuza and the legendary ninja societies.

YAKUZA

Yakuza crime syndicates have existed in Japan since the 1600s, claiming to be the descendant of the honorable machi-yokko (protectors of the town). They are the only type of criminal syndicate worth noting in Japan, as they are united in keeping foreign syndicates (especially the Triads and Vory) out, even while tearing each others' throats out. Their racket is still the same—protection schemes in which citizens and business owners pay not to be terrorized by criminals.

» A lot of people don't know this, but the Yakuza are not just criminal organizations. In addition to their underworld activities, Yak clans are involved in many legitimate businesses—in fact, one of the largest supermarket chains in Japan is Yakuza-owned.
» Neko

Our predominant Yakuza clan is the Watada-rengo, led by Akira Watada. It's common knowledge in Chiba that Watada is ready to die. He has lived a full life and only continues living in order to find his successor. This has sparked a number of squabbles among the affiliated gumi (clans), each of which feels that their leader is best suited to run the rengo (syndicate). It is also known that Ryumyo has considerable influ-

ence over the Watada-rengo, but the dragon has left the appointment of a new leader to the syndicate's membership.

» The various gumi are hoping that Akira names his successor soon. The Seattle Shotozumi-rengo, former affiliates of the Watada-rengo, even made a bid to claim leadership. The group sent reps to meet with members of the Watada-gumi but something went wrong and the meet descended into violence.
» Lady Tsung

» I heard it was a setup. Hitori Hanzo, rising star of the Watada-gumi, invited Shotozumi to discuss the future leadership of the rengo. When Shotozumi arrived, Yakuza ninja swarmed in. Shotozumi escaped, but one of his top aides died in the fight. Now Hitori is looking like the frontrunner to win Akira Watada's favor.
» Blackguard

The Yakuza's primary threat is the Triads. The Red Dragon Triad has attempted to no avail to infiltrate the local crime scene for years. Lately, however, it seems like the destabilization in the country has opened the door for the Red Dragons to sneak in. Add in interest from the Vory and the crime shadows are getting thick.

» Other prominent Yakuza clans in Japan include the Kihara-rengo (Nagasaki), Mita-gumi (Tokyo), Wanibuchi-gumi (Tokyo), Ingawa-kai (Tokyo), Tsukigata-gumi (Shikoku), Yamaguchi-gumi (Kobe), Yamada-gumi (Osaka) and the Kodachi-gumi (Yokohama)—and those are just the start! A lot of smaller gangs, including bosozuko go-gangs, run the Yaks' smaller jobs.
» Yakkity Yak

NINJA SOCIETIES

No discussion of Japan can be complete without a mention of ninja. Ninjitsu began in the mountainous regions of Iga and Koga where great daimyo (warlords) sought out eta (outcasts), the only individuals willing to perform the dishonorable tasks that samurai were forbidden to attempt. The ninja arts survive to this day, modernized and well suited for covert operations and assassinations.

Ninja organize their schools into three levels. The genin are the low level "grunts," usually assigned to do most of the spying and assassination work. Chunin serve as middle managers or specialists. It is often chunin who are given tasks such as infiltration and assassination. The final level is jonin, the school masters. These are both the teachers and the leaders of the school.

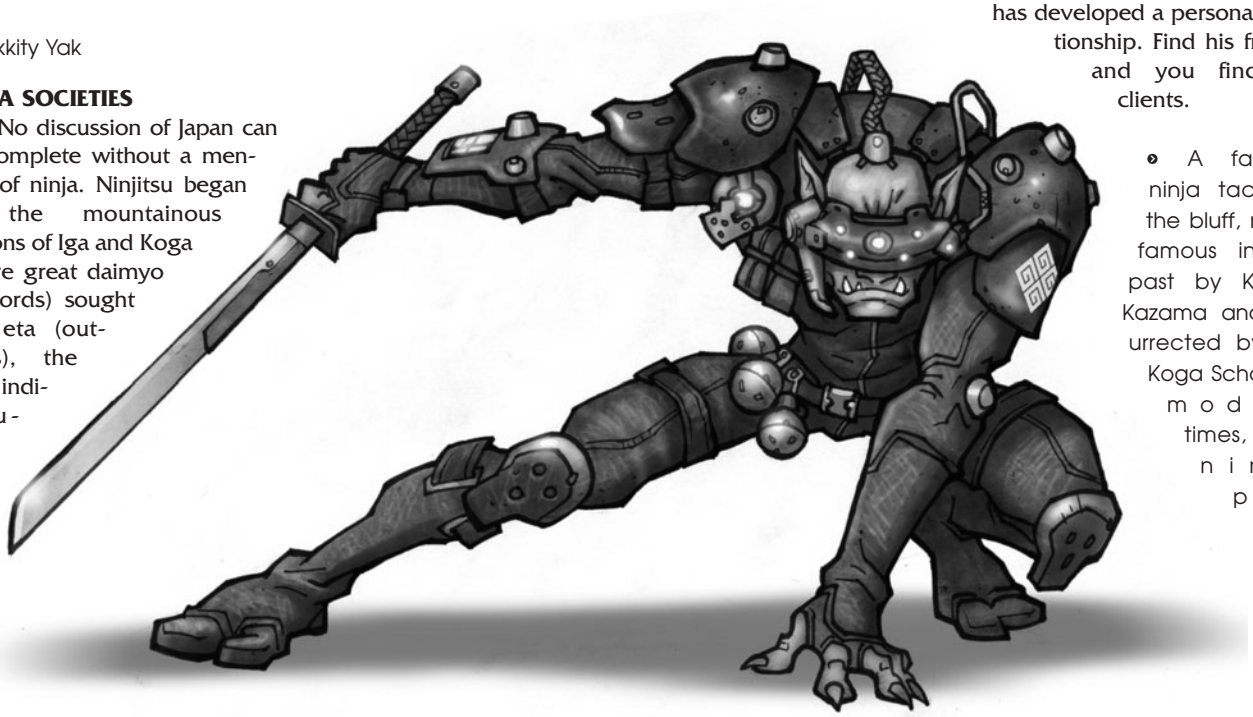
The locations of the great ninja schools have changed but their philosophy has not. Today, it is often the kawaruhito who have taken up the cause of ninjitsu, as well as adepts who follow the Invisible Way. From Yomi Island to the slums of Kansai, ninja societies have sprung up across our land. Some operate under well-hidden corporate funding while others are independent. I will share what I know of both.

KOGA

The Iga and Koga mountains were home to the legendary ninja schools of the Tokugawa era. While both have survived in some fashion, it is Koga that receives the most attention. Koga are the classic old world ninjas skilled in spying, infiltration and assassination. The school is led by Ryoichi Musashi, a legend in the Japanese shadows. Musashi is credited with over two hundred assassinations, and he trains each of his ninja to reach that level of proficiency. If a Koga assassin has been sent for you, your death is assured.

Koga is not corp-affiliated, but they do have a longstanding relationship with several smaller organizations like Hisato-Turner and the JETRO group. Musashi will only allow his people to work for clients with whom he has developed a personal relationship. Find his friends and you find his clients.

» A favorite ninja tactic is the bluff, made famous in the past by Kotaro Kazama and resurrected by the Koga School. In modern times, the ninja poses as a



member of the location's security force or as some other service employee and fast-talks her way into the facility. It's often Kunoichi, or female ninja, who specialize in infiltration. They use their charms to get close to male targets by posing as their geisha.

• Kun-chan

ONI-DO

This school takes its cue from Japanese mythology where oni are seen as demons. Oni-do means the "Goblin Way," a practice of creating fear in your enemies before you even arrive to consume them. The modern Oni-Do came together after several kawaruhito ninja were recruited, following ninja tradition of recruiting from the lowest classes in society. The tradition spread quickly, with new jonin forming schools on each of the Japanese islands, and the Oni-Do becoming the largest of the ninja schools. Many Oni-Do were recruited from Yomi Island, and they include many oni and koborokuru (Japanese dwarfs) in their ranks.

Oni-Do often serve corporate daimyo, despite the corps' historical prejudice against metas. It is an unspoken rule of our people that even those who, like myself, are considered human can still be useful in performing certain roles.

Yagyu

The Yagyu school is famous for training the fiercest swordsmen in the western world. Noted assassin the Green Ripper was trained by the Yagyu school, as were several Western assassins. Over the past few years, Yagyu has gained a reputation for accepting Western adepts who wish to learn the finer points of swordsmanship.

Among the many trials a Yagyu swordsman must face is the test of steel. Each swordsman crafts a personal blade upon achieving the rank of genin. It is said that from that moment a piece of each swordsman's soul becomes a part of what he or she has created. If the swordsman cannot create a blade that withstands a blow from the blade of his or her jonin, he or she is not considered worthy. Failed ninja are forced to take their own lives with their broken blades. You leave with your blade or you die by it.

• There have been those who refused to commit seppuku. It then falls to the jonin to take your life, if he can.

• Broken Sword

CODE OF THE SALARYMAN

by Slashbit

Like the Bushido Code that tied samurai to their daimyo, the Japanese businessmen of today follow a code that ties them to their employers. A samurai was expected to follow his master into hell itself, even if it was morally wrong to do so, and so goes the businessman in Japan.

Central to the Japanese business philosophy is shushin koyo, permanent employment. When a worker joins a Japanese company, he makes a pledge to stay with that company for his entire life. You may not actually say the words, but either through accrued debt or a similar vested interest, the company ensures that you'll be with them for the long haul. This is the most important aspect of the Japanese business philosophy. An employee that views his corporation as his family is not only more productive, but willing to face any risk in order to protect that family.

• Sorta makes corporate extractions a moot point, doesn't it?

• GnuB

• Quite the opposite, actually. Extraction is the only honorable way to leave a corporation while you're still breathing. As such, extractions are an accepted practice between Japanacorps. It's a double-edged sword, though—when a corporation "loses" an employee, it sends a message to the corporate world that the company has highly coveted personnel. Unfortunately, it also sends the message that the company does not have the security to protect its employees from extraction. Such skirmishes have become a regular part of business negotiations, with companies performing extractions on one another not just for the quality of the captured employees, but to cause their opponents to lose face in the eyes of the business world.

• The Chromed Accountant

Another critical concept is amae, a word that translates as "indulgent dependency" but means much more. Amae is seen as a way of behaving—a reflection of an authoritarian system where everyone knows their roles and adheres to them. Women, for example, know that their public role is to be cute. This is why the streets are filled with women, some as old as fifty, wearing Hello Kitty earrings and purses with manga images of Ryumyo. Even Akane Ishino, Ryumyo's translator, falls back on her image of virginal purity. Image is an expectation in the business world, and everyone is expected to act their parts. This term feeds into the tenet of politeness. Acting your role means being polite and never speaking out of turn. Our business negotiations are built around etiquette. It is this skill above all others that one must possess to survive in Japan.

Finally, Japanese business has borrowed from the samurai tradition of seppuku (suicide), though in the business tradition it comes as a result of giseisha (scapegoating). There must always be a victim for failure, and usually it is the guy below you on the ladder who suffers. Several Fuchi VPs took their own lives following the events of White Monday, a practice required in order to allow the company itself to save face. We live in a "death before dishonor" culture. Committing suicide is amae; it is the definitive apology and the decisive way of saving face. Many kill themselves by jumping in front of bullet trains or tumbling from skyrakers. Suicide in our business culture has become a part of accepted behavior because one cannot be expected to live with the shame of failure.

• FYI, if you're planning to jump in front of a train, make sure it's a public train or subway. The private lines make suicide victims' families pay for cleaning up your remains.

• Ryu

» A term I became familiar with when I worked in Japan was the nemawashi run. It literally means cutting around the roots of a plant before it is transplanted. In terms of what I do for a living, it meant extracting the key support staff around an executive as well as the executive herself. This way when she went to work for the new corporation she had the people she needed around her to succeed.
» Argent

» Sounds like a lot of work for one crew, Argent.
» Jaz

» Which is why the Johnson would hire two or three teams at a time. It took a lot of coordination to get the job done. We usually ended up stepping on each other's feet or tipping off the corp in question, making it harder for us to get the targets at all. It was rewarding, though. Nemawashi always paid twice the standard rate.
» Argent

JAPAN: AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW

by Kai-lin

I survived for two years in Japan before returning to the UCAS and a way of life that I understood.

I came to Japan believing that I knew everything about my people. My mother was from the Haida tribe and hid her identity behind the Takahashi name. My father was a mid-level executive at Mitsuhama's Tsimshian Arcology. He told me about home, how the highways twisted and turned, disappearing into skyrakers or arcologies and reappearing on the other side. He told me about special places where kids could enter Matrix video games and find a thousand other children waiting to play with them. He stressed politeness as though it were the center of Japanese thought. I swallowed his words; they were candy to a child who knew so little about how the world worked. I read everything by Dai-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, believing that his philosophies were an integral part of the Japanese culture. I disappeared into the shadows as a teen and took to those principles as a code of honor. Any runner knows that honor in the shadows can be as transparent as honor among thieves. Like a small number of us, I prided myself on my ability to stick to a code and live by it. Still, there was something missing. I needed to see my father's homeland for myself. I needed to go to the place where the samurai were born.

» Ueshiba is the founder of Aikido, a Japanese martial art that is often viewed more as a religion than as a form of combat. Its four great virtues of bravery, wisdom, love and friendship encompass the ideals to which adepts aspire. A number of Japanese adepts who walk the Path of the Warrior practice Aikido as a centering influence in their training.
» Lei Kung

When I came to Japan as a man, I discovered that things were not quite the way my father described. Everything he said was true on the surface, but there were more rules he had chosen not to tell me and others he couldn't have known about that existed in places where light could not reach.

The first thing I noticed about Japan was the difference between natives and foreigners. I look Japanese but when I moved or spoke it was evident that I was not from Japan. Even my name, Kai-lin, put space between myself and the natives around me. It wasn't a Japanese name, so I could not be Japanese. I was branded a gaijin, or foreigner. Some businesses and restaurants made it clear that they would not sell to me because I was a foreigner. That discrimination even spilled into the shadows: I found that certain fixers wouldn't work with me, and some black market operators wouldn't deal with me. It was often the older, more established individuals who had the poor sense to turn me away. Those new to the shadow scene, more in line with the Yasuhito ideal of openness between foreigners and natives, didn't think that way. No matter their ideology, the one thing everyone agreed upon was politeness.

I was fortunate enough to have experienced Japanese politeness as a child. Had I not been raised in that sort of formal environment, then dealing with the Japanese would have made me uncomfortable and perhaps even quick to anger. Most of us come from places where being polite means saying "thank you" or "bless you," or holding the door for a lady. Politeness in Japanese culture is a dance that doesn't stop until the communication has ended. You must be respectful of all those around you, even flattering to those with whom you are doing business. Be careful not to overdo flattery, though. If the person becomes embarrassed, then they will have to apologize to you. Apology is constantly necessary, even in situations in which you do not believe an apology is called for. It isn't important what you personally believe; you never want to force the Johnson hiring you to apologize to you. It upsets the balance of the negotiation.

» Learn this rule before all others. Shadowrunners in Japan are judged by the quality of their etiquette. This is unlike other nations like the UCAS, where runners are commonly brash. Everything in Japan is a matter of delicacy. Should you upset the balance, you run the risk of becoming the elephant in the china shop.
» Hokkaido Hari

Other friction points separate Japanese culture from that found anywhere else in the world. Despite the relatively close quarters that have come to be a symbol of Japan, the Japanese themselves require large amounts of personal space. When dealing with Johnsons, fixers and the like, take care to observe that space. Bow to people from a distance as opposed to moving in to shake hands. Locals go to great lengths to avoid appearing confrontational, so you should too.

A chummer once joked to me that Japan is the birthplace of the "poker face." There's truth in humor. Japanese natives are easy to spot by their blank faces, because showing negative emotions is a no-no for adults, especially businessmen. Therefore, they greet you with false smiles and lapse into blank stares when things aren't going too well. People are constantly judging you by your expression and even your attire. Japan is a businessman's arena and everybody dresses for the game.

Sebiro, or a dark suit, often worn with a simple white shirt, is a common form of dress even after work hours. What you wear is taken as what you are. If you wear a sebiro, then you are marked as a businessman, while if you wear leather and long sleeves (especially in the summer) you're Yakuza.

» Japanese uniformity is a staple of the culture. It starts as early as elementary school, where all kids are required to wear school uniforms. After school the kids change into street clothes and spike up their hair, but the next morning it's back to conformity. The message to conform is repeated over and over throughout their lives. Priests have uniforms, as do doctors, policemen, businessmen, go-gangers and fishermen. Each uniform is functional to its task, but it is also a cultural control mechanism to remind you of who you are while informing others of who you're supposed to be.
» Seville Row

» Interesting to note that all this stuff about politeness and reserve can go right out the window when visiting other countries. A group of salarymen, dark-suited and deferential in Japan, might turn into a crowd of wild men while on vacation—drinking, carousing and generally acting like your typical Western-style party hounds. This is partially a coping mechanism—nobody can be that stoic and buttoned-up constantly without blowing an emotional gasket—but partially due to the fact that, because they consider Japanese culture to be superior, they don't need to exhibit the same level of etiquette and control when dealing with us gaijin. Keep this in mind, because catching them like this is often your best chance of getting what you need from them.
» Kori

As I said earlier, I had some trouble breaking into the shadow community. I went in without contacts, hoping to establish myself on some short money runs and eventually work up to the kind of drek I'm known for in the UCAS. I spent my nights in akachochins, red lantern nightclubs where folks go to drink and do business. This was my first mistake. It was like going to Café Noir in hopes of running into a fixer when you should've walked over to a dive like Matchsticks. Red lantern drinking shops are a prime place to cut business with your Johnson after you've already set up with one. Nomiya drinking shops are the places where runners hang out. It was such little cultural differences that made the transition difficult at first. Once people came to know who I was, Japan started to feel more like home. The basic rules are the same wherever you go: stick to who you know, do the jobs that you know won't make too much noise and of course, never ever deal with a dragon—or his underlings.

» You want to find work in Japan? Go to Bar Psy, a rabbit bar (what I call those 10-seats-or-so Japanese bars, since they're small enough to be rabbit holes) in Shinjuku. Oshiri and Yukio behind the bar can hook you up with whatever you need, and they're friendly with gaijin.
» Green Pixie

JAPAN: AN INSIDER'S VIEW

by Nitoh-Kaii

Japan is a nation of cultural hegemony. We are taught to view ourselves as a unified ethnic group. It is the principle of uchi-soto, or us vs. them. At the most basic level, that viewpoint is the distinction between natives (uchi) and foreigners (soto). If you are not Japanese, you are already faced with a level of discrimination. This happens in the shadows as well as everyday life—the Japanese are less willing to trust someone who is not one of them.

» For a long time, the Japanese shadows have been small and tight. Few outside runners could survive long here, so it was mostly former company men or other ronin who would work the shadows.
» Yas

Uchi-soto also exists within our people. We tend to divide ourselves into groups or subcultures. A subculture can be your company, school, city, neighborhood, religion or anything else that serves to separate people. Two notable subcultures living within Japan are that of the Ainu people and that of the kawaruhito. The Ainu, the aboriginal people of the Northern (Kuril) Islands, are a very small shamanic culture that is largely overlooked by the Japanese people. Kawaruhito, on the other hand, are a constant target of oppression. Despite the new Yasuhito Ideal, many people are hesitant to accept kawaruhito as normal citizens. There are many places they are forbidden to go, and stores that will not sell to them because we still view metahumanity as a curse.

It is also important to understand that we view ourselves as having a superior world culture. This is an unconscious facet of all negotiations with outsiders. It is true that we admire the superficial qualities of other cultures, and many Japanese youth dye their hair blonde and get facial reconstruction in order to be more moe (cute) with perfect Westerner blue eyes. Remove the veneer, however, and we remain Japanese—culturally and often morally superior. This mindset is partially responsible for the Korean Reunification War. We believed it was necessary for Korea to be unified, in part to protect our corporations on Korean soil but also to maintain the cultural influence we felt we were having on South Korea.

What confuses most newcomers is the perception that as an Asian culture we will be similar to other nearby Asian cultures such as the Koreans and Chinese. These comparisons fall flat for a number of reasons. For starters, Japan is isolated from the rest of the world and has been for its entire existence. Other Asian cultures were forced to deal with multiple dialects and drew up very clear, concise meanings for specific words. When communicating with others, language was often associated with specific gestures to emphasize meaning. Since we all speak the same tongue, our language is less concerned with rhetoric and more concerned with sasshi (empathy, or guessing) and haragei (belly play, or more implicit signals) where tonality makes the difference in how words are perceived. Language is just the beginning. There are several aspects of the Japanese culture that we find unique but others see as profoundly strange.

POP CULTURE GONE WILD

by Sumire

Things are just different here. I have been many places across the globe and none possess the same level of cultural mania as Japan. Everything we do is big, be it our trends, our games or just our fetishes. Japan gave birth to the terms idoru and otaku (before the latter had anything to do with computers). Our cities look like something carved out of a manga script, and maybe they are; our culture lives on the cutting edge of just about everything except normality. Try naming another place where you can walk down a crowded street and see groups of people dressed as their favorite netgame characters. Japanese youth culture is driven by obsessive behaviors—so much so that there are slang terms for the clinically obsessed. I should know. I've been a techno-fetishist (techno-fet) since I could hold a deck.

Welcome to a land where shadowrunners are the dark heroes that fill the trideo every night at eight, skulking between corporate megaliths in search of their own personal justice. Japanese culture means mega-yen for those who know how to take advantage of it. You can make a living smuggling antique milspec gear, or turn a quick yen as a body-mod actor for the newest netgame. You are what you say you are in Japan, as long as the way you act matches the façade you put on. After all, image is everything.

IDORU

In case you missed the last century, an idoru (aidoru in the Japanese language) is a flash-in-the-pan pop star. Japan might as well be called the land of 8 million idoru. Unfortunately, idols rise and fall very quickly here, no matter if they're real or electronic. For instance, there was some excitement a few months back about Akira Date, a descendent of the Kyoko Date virtual idol program. Akira had the number one hit song for eighteen weeks, a lifetime by Japanese standards. Everyone who bought the album knew she was a computer program created by Hisato-Turner but nobody cared.

» Turns out that a lot of the idoru lately have been courtesy of Hisato-Turner. Some are real, while others are simulations. Whatever formula they have for selling their product is working well right now. I'd bet that a lot of competitors would like to get their hands on that formula.
» Slamm-0!

The majority of Japanese idoru are Japanese natives. The country has no affinity for foreign stars unless they are international superstars like Maria Mercurial. Usually the international stars who make it big here are those who meet a preconceived Japanese ideal of what should be adored. That means a beautiful woman who comes across as polite, well-mannered and, of course, virginal. Idoru wield a lot of power while they're on the top of the hill. If you can hold on to that power, then anything you want can be yours. Akane Ishino used her idoru status to earn a job as Ryumyo's translator.

» It's all memetics; selling products that appeal to the collective unconscious. Idoru are carefully marketed to reach a selected demographic in exactly the same fashion that the previous idoru reached that market. Without knowing it, the people are getting the same thing over and over, and it usually originates from a small group of sources.
» Conspir-I-see

MOE OBSESSIONS

Having a fetish is similar to having a chip addiction without the "better than life" high. In Japan, we call it moe, meaning obsessed with how cute something is as opposed to the sexual attraction or mania that fetishism implies. Being cute is extremely important in our culture, especially for girls and women. An example of moe would be the pleated-skirt uniform every school-age girl is required to wear. Girls have been known to select schools based on how cute the uniform is, knowing their popularity with their moe-affected peers will depend on their choice. For men, moe can also manifest itself in an obsession for women with body mods such as neko-mimi (cat ears). When SURGE hit Japan, the kids went wild. It's cool to grow a tail or pink fur. The closer you come to the look of the popular manga characters, the more potential you have to tap into people's moe.

» Body mods are a big thing in Japan. Youth thrive on the opportunity to look unusual, so you'll run into kids with saber-

tooth fangs, cat eyes and the like. The mods are usually removed by the time they hit adulthood, creating a steady supply of refurbed bio and chrome.
» Cyclops

»There's a darker side to the whole moe thing, too—many men in Japan are sexually obsessed with youth and cuteness, and particularly young schoolgirls. The manga is full of it, and when it's combined with the violence that's pervasive in a lot of Japanese erotic material, it can result in some pretty sick stuff. This is fine when everybody's willing, but sadly there's a thriving black market trafficking in young girls for the sex trade.
» Jenner

»And let's not even get started about some of the even stranger Japanese obsessions. Tentacle porn, anybody?
» Oktorok

Tekuno-Feto

With so many major tech corporations operating in a relatively small space, Japan has become a haven for tekuno-feto (tech fetishists). A lavish black market exists for experimental tech goods. Tekuno-feto covet all forms of technology—the particular type of device coveted depends on the tekuno-feto you're talking to. I'm into cyberdecks. So far I've manage to rack up 118 different kinds, from the CDT-1000 on up. A chummer of mine has a broader obsession with handheld devices. If it can be shoved into a pocket, he wants it. He has a warehouse full of PDAs, phones, handgames, bioscanners and so on.

» Tekuno-feto are often confused with the milder technophiles. The difference is, tech-fets have an addiction that drives them to possess and to know everything about each new piece of tech that comes off the assembly line. Just like addicts, they'll do what it takes to get what they need.
» Nano Flower

» Tekuno-feto make great contacts if you can find one. There's not a device built that they don't already know about, and if by chance there is, they'll work tirelessly to learn everything about it. Tekuno-feto spend a majority of their time on the Matrix researching new products. When they do come up for air, it's usually to post their findings, get a new toy or speak to a small circle of people they trust enough to call friend.
» Captain Chaos

» Kinda like you eh, Cap?
» Fastdos

Ani-Ota

The ota groups are born out of anime-obsessed youth. Some stick to their love of anime. Others grow from that to focus on the subjects of the vids they watch. This includes the robot-obsessed mecha-ota and ili-ota who are discussed below. Ani-ota are very common in Japan. They tend to dress up as anime characters on a regular basis. An ani-ota will profess absolute knowledge of the anime genre—if they don't own all the vids, they expect to at some time in their lives. Most ani-ota are aware that their favorite characters are not real, but this isn't universally true. There are ani-ota who will even tell you that Ryumyo's ally spirit Jurojin is actually an anime hero brought to life.

Mili-Ota

War never goes out of style, especially here where our military is constantly on the offensive somewhere around the world. Warmongering paved the way for the mili-ota, fans obsessed with military history and gear. Local smugglers will tell you that a high number of their clients are mili-ota. Though the strict gun laws throughout most of Japan make it difficult for these ultra-fans to get ahold of vintage weaponry, mili-ota seek out anything pertaining to the military, from uniforms to guns and even tanks.

» I did a job back in '58 hijacking an ancient YF-23 stealth fighter from a museum outside of Shanghai. The client lived in Osaka and had a hangar full of old combat planes. Believe me, as hard as the job was, it was worth it. These mili-ota folks pay well.
» Gyo-Gaku

Mili-ota are also fountains of knowledge on military tactics dating back as early as Japan's feudal period. Most mili-ota focus on one period or one nation and collect everything they can pertaining to that army. Others focus on modern militias, keeping detailed notes on the Desert Wars teams, national troops and corporate armies. Similar to the ani-ota, they often strut across the city in full military dress. On lazy days they stick to fatigues.

Netoge-Hai

There's a reason that Japan is in the forefront of Matrix technology: it's a plugged-in culture. Nine out of ten kids have their first datajack implanted by the age of eleven. Students are as likely to do group projects with a net buddy in Bangladesh as they are to work with the student sitting next to them. When class is over, many of them stay in the Matrix, reporting to netgame LTGs to do battle with an equally obsessed number of Korean youth in Matrix simulations. The netgames range from racing to sports to all-out war games.

Part of the appeal of netgaming is the ability to become someone completely separate from who you are. For instance, you see a lot of boys taking on the role of Japanese schoolgirls in games like "Shudder." The net is escapism at its best.

» For some it's as if Korea 2 never ended. Kids replay battles in dangerously real simulations that can from time to time bleed over into reality when they leave the netgame rooms. The most popular war simulator is "Spectrum Delta: The Forever War," where you're part of an elite JIS strikeforce fighting against an inhuman army that's infiltrated Korea's military.
» Azuma-Miyako

Once upon a time Japan was the center of the gaming world, but these days Korea's replaced it at the top. Most of the big developers run their labs in Korea now, save for industry giant Jam-Bo Games—they operate a high-security testing facility in

Aomori that recruits the best players in Japan. Given the sensitive nature of Jam-Bo's business, the Aomori facility is completely isolated from the Matrix. The only way to play the beta test games is to earn an invitation.

The loss of jobs caused by the rise in the Korean game industry is a real sore point for nationalistic Japanese. They feel like they were knocked off the mountain, and every time they go up against a Korean gamer it's as if they're fighting to win their pride back.

» I've seen kids take their squabbles into open areas of cyberspace and fight them out like we real net jockeys do. Sometimes it's a culture feud and sometimes it's recruitment. Netgangers and even corps roam the game LTGs looking for anyone who shows a hint of real talent. When they peg a target, they lure them out of the game room and see what they're really made of.
» Kusanagi

ROBOTS

Drones are everywhere in Japan, with an amazing concentration in Neo-Tokyo. They're used for many different tasks—mostly those considered degrading, such as sweeping streets or collecting garbage.

» Even for collecting piles of drek, the Japanese would rather see a robot than a metahuman. And with so many metas deported from Japan, there was a serious need of manpower in this unappealing sector.
» Dr. Digits

Robotic pets have been common since the Twenties, and with the advance of technology, it didn't take long to see anthropomorphic drones arriving on the market and taking their place in rich families as governesses, maids, chauffeurs and so forth. At the other end of the social spectrum, brothel owners soon understood there was a customer base for compliant sexual dolls.

» The robo-feto are a sub-category of the tekuno-feto. Most are borderline cases of technophiles literally in love with their drones, treating them as real people. Crazy bunch if you want my opinion.
» Deku no Oni

» Ai-chan understands me. She is faithful. She loves me. You are jealous of this relationship's purity—you cannot understand it and it will remain out of your reach forever.
» Yamada-hikari

The complexity of these robots' AI is improving with each new model, and they can now perfectly mimic human behavior in the typical situations for which they've been programmed. Outside of those predefined situations, however, their artificiality and limitations become more apparent.

» According to recent stats, robotic crime is on a sharp rise, proving that some canny riggers have found a way to hack those machines.
» Ashura

» Urban legends abound about rogue robots having achieved consciousness, but no one's ever caught one of those.
» Dr. Digits

PLACES OF NOTE

Despite its small size, a full shadow exposé of Japan would take up terapulses. I've focused on a few key areas here: Neo-Tokyo, Ise Jingu, Nagasaki and the Nippon Matrix.

THE NIPPON MATRIX

Not all the greatest places in Japan exist in the physical world. The Nippon Matrix has become a mecca for net enthusiasts. Japan is attempting to bring the wireless Matrix to life and we're doing it with the flash and pop for which our country is known.

The Design

Technically, the city is built as a point-to-point representation of Japan, except that you must pass through chokepoints to enter a city grid. Once through, you can navigate the streets and find the LTG you're searching for. Thanks in part to the Matrix overlay found in cities like Neo-Tokyo, many of the Matrix representations are built to the scale of their physical counterparts. Even the streets are represented pixel for pixel. Live images are fed from GridGuide and police cameras directly into the Matrix.

» When a decker enters the grid, she has the option of paying a small fee to have her image beamed into the street. The system was meant as a tourist attraction to allow a limited number of visitors to virtually tour the city. It works on two speeds: normal and Matrix. When a persona is racing through the Matrix, it doesn't appear in real time, but whenever that decker stops to look around her image appears at the place she's paused. You can use this function to communicate with people in the real world. Unlike flesh walkers, a decker can use her sleaze utility to remain invisible to the real-time cameras.
» Netwalker

Go Wireless?

Japan is taking the whole nation wireless. During the March WMI conference, MCT discussed the national wireless infrastructure. Hot-mode decking still isn't quite there, but the cellnet is pretty extensive. There's smartphone, pocket secretary integration and even limited deck links available almost anywhere in the nation. MCT wasn't able to work the kinks out of routing drek-loads of two-way ASIST feeds, and that's where Transys Neuronet came in. MCT invited Transys to help them move to a true WMI system like Transys has been working on in the Scandanavian Union. Neo-Tokyo is in line to be the first sprawl to upgrade to a completely integrated wireless linkup. Presently, beta test hotspots around the city are running an I/O speed of anywhere from 150 to 250, a fraction of what Transys promised on the Scandinavian network.

» Japan's WMI is really a Transys project subsidized by Mitsuhama. The MCT boys invited Transys into the project in order to get a look at the proprietary WMI hardware. Transys turned the tables with

some pretty tricky maneuvering. They were able to structure their activity so that Mitsuhama's contribution would primarily be on-site. Transys would build the transmitters in the Scand Union and transport the finished product to Japan, where MCT techs would assist in the implementation. When MCT threatened to back out of the deal, the Diet offered the entire project to Transys. That changed their minds quickly.

• €spion

The Look

Every visible system in the Japanese grid is sculpted. Some of the more traditional sites, such as those of the government and the megacorps, do their interiors as elaborate pagodas with IC built as representations of the standard defenses of the time. Other systems borrow from manga tradition, presenting themselves as ultra-futuristic buildings. Exteriors tend to reflect the actual exterior look of the building in order to preserve the overlay feel.

Manga characters are the most popular form of icon in Japan, and quite a few users choose icons of the opposite sex. You may find a man whose persona is a Syleena Croft variant, or a woman who chooses to be Ryushi on the net. All of the personas are very detailed—users take pride in their personas the same way others might be proud of a motorbike.

Top Spots

Everyone's heard of the Moonlight Hentai Garden, a local brothel. Less known are the net club Six-Oh, and our local dueling arena, The Forum. If you're looking to make some nuyen, the grid is chock-full of paydata. Everything from independent gaming firms to biotech startups in the Nippon grid. Before you go getting all full of smiles, though, consider that Japan is a major tech market. You'll probably run into something you haven't seen before and it might just have a mind to frag you.

NEO-TOKYO

Kansai has been getting a lot of attention with all the gaijin corps setting up shop there, but Neo-Tokyo is the eastern capital of the world. Each of the Japanacorps maintains a presence in the city, though most have their home offices elsewhere. The white-capped Tokyo tower looks out over a massive sprawl that is divided into two main sections, each of which has numerous subsections. Everything north of the Emperor's newly built palace is the Yamanote (High City), while everything south of the palace is Shitamachi (towns below).

The governor of Neo-Tokyo is a man named Ishihara Kano. Fiercely conservative, he has fought the Yasuhito Ideal every step of the way. Publicly the governor accepts the will of the Emperor like everyone else, but his agents are major players in the shadow scene, negotiating with corps and criminals alike to strengthen his base of power and perhaps to help him make a run at the prime minister's seat in the next election.

Ishihara runs a city that is a mix of new technology and old world laws. The city defense force relies on a network of surveillance sensors and fast response drones. In the downtown areas, most koban (corner police booths) have been replaced by a Matrix kiosk and a drone hutch. This doesn't mean that there aren't any real officers on the street, though: Ishihara supplements the technology by putting officers on the trains and on motorbike patrol around the city.

Firefights are usually pretty one-sided in Tokyo; guns are completely outlawed. You must be an officer in order to own one. Citizens have responded to the law by carrying a variety of blades, and thus far every attempt to have these blades outlawed has been denied. Further, private police forces are also not allowed in Neo-Tokyo—corporations are permitted to have armed officers on extraterritorial grounds, but once they leave corp soil they are considered to be normal citizens.

• There's a difference between policy and reality. Since Yasuhito took office, the government has been relaxing its rules on corp security. With corporations like Mitsuhama often supplementing the police, the corps are allowed to use their weapons off-premises more and more these days.

• Corp Watcher

Neo-Tokyo is perhaps the most technologically advanced city in the world. It will be the first to have a wireless Matrix infrastructure with predicted I/O speeds upward of 500. Full-ASIST wireless hot spots are difficult to locate, so there are still a number of manga-kissa (Matrix cafés) around the city that offer affordable jackpoints starting as low as 1¥ per hour. Be aware that these sites are monitored by the local police, so if you plan to do anything illegal, you should also plan to cover your tracks well.

In addition to a future wireless Matrix, the city now offers Matrix overlay in the more tourist-friendly central core as well as in areas like Ikebukuro, Shibuya and Ueno. It's a big draw watching someone stroll down the street alongside the digital representation of someone else who is actually a world away.

• Part of the reason for the advanced tech is that the country is so small. They can afford to put the necessary sensors and holo projectors in a few neighborhoods. Try making the same infrastructure work in an area as large as Aztlan—it would require 800 times the memory and database size.

• Dr. Digits

Neo-Tokyo is also the most mechanized city in the free world. You're more likely to deal with a robotic vendor than to see a person. Vending machines have replaced Stuffer Shacks in most sections of the city. People in Tokyo also use robots for basic tasks from household chores to walking the dog. The GridGuide system interfaces with drones to offer sidewalk guidance in addition to road help. It's years ahead of anything in the UCAS. It's reached the point where a third of the people who own a car don't even know how to drive it.

• There has been talk of a mechanized police force, but so far it's just hollow words and faulty schematics. Security mecha are a Japanese fantasy unlikely to ever come true.

• Chu-mok

• No way—you haven't seen the stuff Renraku is putting together. Mecha is here, man! I'm not talking about drones; I'm talking

about bipedal combat units and functional mechanized bodysuits. Renraku was working on the technology in Seattle when the arcology shut down. Afterwards, they moved everything they could rescue to Japan and spread it out among their secret research facilities so they could continue development.
» Puddle Jumper

» Yeah, and my sister married a Mecha pilot. You're off your meds, Puddle Jumper.
» Lady Black

Since the earthquakes killed so many in the underground train stations, everything has been moved above ground. This transformation has left behind a damaged subterranean tunnel network that has become home to kawaruhito and others displaced by disaster.

» One underground area that avoided destruction was the G-Cans project, a network of water redistribution pumps designed to help prevent flooding during typhoon season. The G-Can tunnels look like something straight out of a netgame. They were built to survive anything, and apparently did. Last anyone heard, a tribe of ghouls had taken up residence in the tunnels. Local officials have been offering big bounties to anyone who cleans them out. Be careful though, the G-Cans are full of little nooks and crannies where creepy things can hide.
» Ichiro Suzuki

ISE JINGU

The Ise shrine complex on the Shima Peninsula is the most sacred of all Shinto shrines. The complex consists of an inner (naiku) shrine dedicated to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, and an outer (geku) shrine devoted to Toyouke, the kami of clothing, food and housing. The two are located several miles apart. The buildings themselves are simple wooden structures built in the traditional Japanese style. Strangely, the shrines are actually rebuilt every 20 years according to Shinto tradition. The new site is always on an empty lot next to the original site. The 65th sites are scheduled for 2073, and will be the first actually performed by the kami themselves.

» The entire site is built atop powerful intersecting manalines. One line is usable by the priests, but the other is aspected toward dragons. The intersection of these two aspects makes accessing the power of the lines difficult. I suspect that this is why the temples move every 20 years. When they move, they realign themselves to the most powerful point on the line.
» Talon

Ise is a tourist attraction, though out of respect for the gods, tourists are no longer allowed to enter the actual buildings. They are free to tour the surrounding Zen gardens planted throughout the complex and visit the auxiliary sanctuaries situated at the edge of the property.

NAGASAKI

Nagasaki is best remembered as the site of an atomic bombing that led to the end of the Second World War. We Japanese see Nagasaki as a symbol of survival. As many times as the city falls to ruin—be it by bomb, sword or even lava—it always rises from the ashes to live on. Today, however, this heroic legacy is challenged by the reality of Japan's current situation. Nagasaki is at the bottom of a long list of reconstruction priorities for the government. Today it is essentially a dead sprawl that has fallen into the hands of the corps to rebuild and the gangs to control.

At the core of Nagasaki's population are descendants of the hibakusha—survivors of the bomb. Generation after generation of these survivors stay in Nagasaki. No matter what calamity occurs, they will weather the storm. It is, after all, their home.

» Nagasaki is a slum overrun by bosozuku go-gangs with nonsensical English names. The Bleeding Stars and Apple Rot are the two largest gangs in the area, but there are at least fifteen smaller gangs terrorizing the neighborhoods.
» Mawdryn

When the military pulled out of Nagasaki, the local police were left short-handed. The city itself was a smoldering ruin of ash and lava rock marked by pockets of surviving enclaves. The Yakuza took the limited police force as a sign to enforce their own justice. Several of the middle class neighborhoods that the police could not patrol are now run by Yak thugs. The few upper class neighborhoods and enclaves are well policed by local or corporate forces.

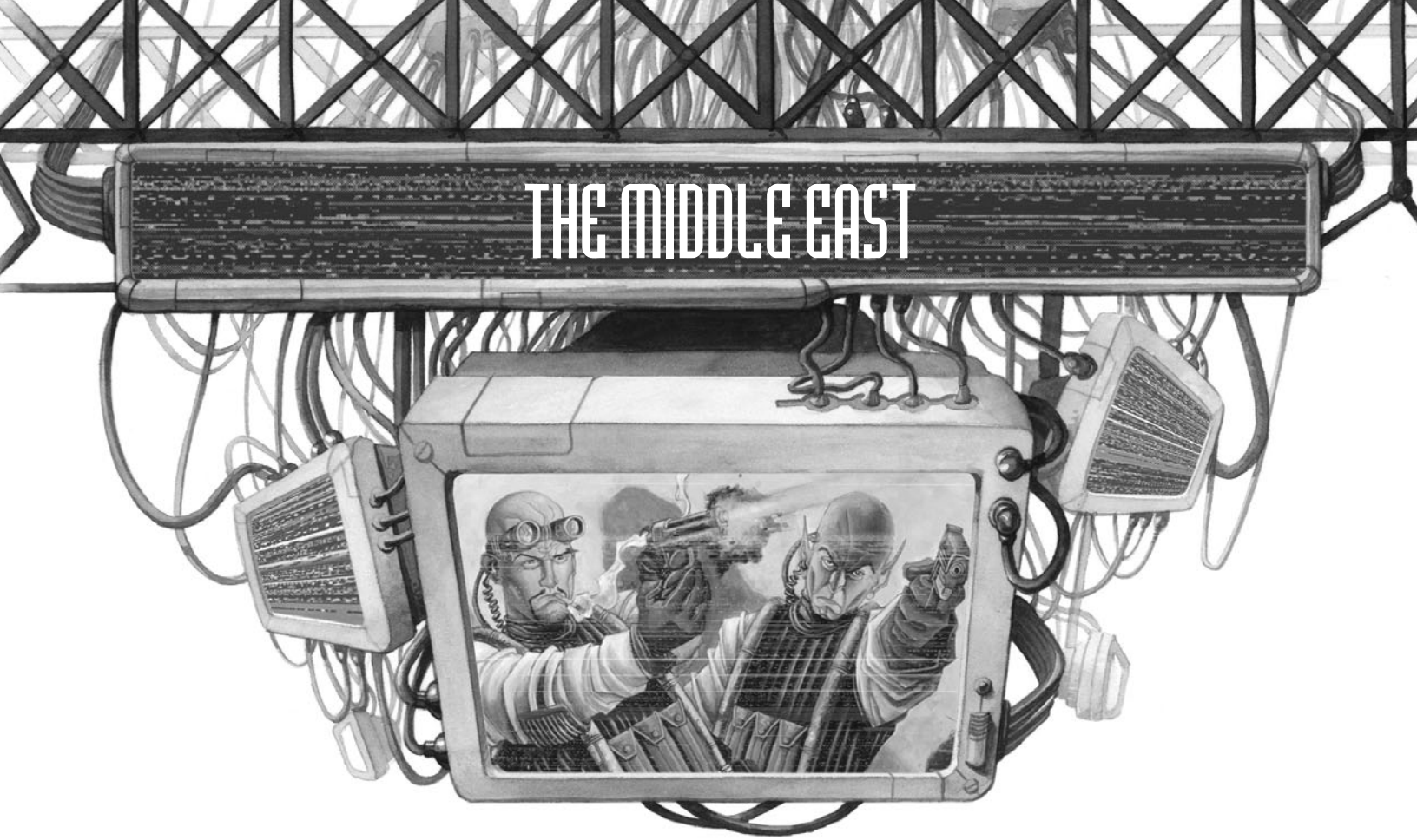
» Nagasaki won't be a slum for long. Several foreign corporations, including Tanamyre and Lone Star, have filed plans to build in the city. Transys Neuronet already has agents in some of the upper class enclaves, laying the groundwork for wireless Matrix nodes.
» Yas

» Komatsu recently announced plans to build its first arcology on a site near downtown Nagasaki. The proposal received sharp criticism from Monobe who, prior to the announcement, had been bidding with city officials to do road reconstruction throughout the area as a precursor to building their own facility.
» Corp Watcher

» It's really a tale of two cities in Nagasaki. I checked it out firsthand and what I saw disgusted me; chewed-up bodies decaying in the street and loose dogs, nothing more than skin and bone really, crouching in alleys waiting for me to turn my back. I couldn't find one person who would come out of his home after dusk. They say they're afraid of being eaten by the cannibals that roam the night. Furthermore, there's a serious taint on the astral space here. I'm not even a mage and I can feel it. It's worse here than Redmond ever was.
» Steel Lynx

» Are you sure you're not just dealing with a ghoul problem?
» Miss Tick

THE MIDDLE EAST



Hoi, chummers! I'm the Spectral Shah, sysop of the Persepolis Shadowland node in Iran. Captain Chaos asked me to give you the latest info for the Middle East. There's a lot going on in the shadows, and plenty of opportunities for runners, but things are getting more dangerous by the day. If you're coming here, you'd better know what you're getting into. So I've talked a few nice people into telling us what's up.

» The Spectral Shah

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:30:48 (PST)

by as Sadiq

Greetings, my friends.

First, let me thank you for this opportunity. The Middle East has a poor image in the rest of the world. The Great Jihad began here, and conservative countries like Arabia and Iran don't improve outsiders' impressions. As always, though, things are not as simple as you've been told. Let me tell you our history so that you can better understand who we are.

I'll begin with the Awakening … which did *not* ignite Islamic fundamentalism. Sure, Muslims were scared of VITAS and UGE, but so was the rest of the world. No, the spark that began the Great Jihad came when Aden razed Tehran: two million dead and eight million refugees. Had it happened to your people, would you not want revenge?

» No fundamentalists after the Awakening, eh? What about Ayatollah Hamidullah's jihad against metahumans? That's why Aden attacked Tehran in the first place.

» Junior

» Hamidullah's jihad was empty, chummer. The Iranians were in the streets calling for his head, and he needed something to grab their attention. Tehran did the job pretty well.

» Jameelia

Muslims in the Middle East saw the Tehran assault as an attack on all Islam. Coupled with backlash against the Awakening and dwindling oil revenues, it fueled the rise of Islamic fundamentalists during the 2020s. Their alliance with terrorist groups made the situation even more dangerous. Many countries became police states, and the Crash of '29 delivered the

MIDDLE EAST TIMELINE

2008: Israel grants full autonomy to Palestine.
2010: The European Union bars Turkey's membership.
2020: The dragon Aden destroys Tehran.
2032: Islamic fundamentalists take over through elections in Turkey and Iran and through violence in Iraq and Syria.
2033: The United Islamic Conference in Damascus breaks down. Jordan and Kuwait join the Federation of Islamic States. The rest of the Middle East joins the Alliance for Allah.
2034: The FIS dissolves under pressure from the AfA.
October 13, 2034: The Great Jihad begins. The AfA attacks Israel, Russia, India, the Balkans and the Iberian Peninsula.
2035: Sayid Jazrir, leader of the AfA, is assassinated in Istanbul. The AfA dissolves amid infighting.
2040: The Islamic Unity Movement negotiates an end to the Iran-Iraq war.
2043: Kurdistan becomes independent.
2046: The United Nations takes control of Jerusalem and establishes the Ecumenical Council.
2055: Nations in the Arabian Peninsula unite to form the Caliphate of Arabia.
2062: IUM leader Ibn Eisa is assassinated, then mysteriously resurrected. His policies change as he calls for a New Islamic Jihad.
December 2063: Arabia absorbs Jordan; Syria takes over Lebanon.

final blow. Three years later, fundamentalists took power throughout the Middle East. Soon afterward, they called a conference in Damascus to decide the region's future. They created the Alliance for Allah to "liberate all Muslims living under the infidels' thumb," in the words of their spiritual leader, Mullah Sayid Jazrir.

» Sayid Jazrir was also the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda, which became the real power behind the Alliance. Al-Qaeda wanted to create a new Caliphate, by force if necessary, and they got backing from conservative Muslim groups worldwide. They also brought the Islamic fundamentalist governments together in a temporary loose alliance.
» Farah

» Jazrir had access to a lot of funds, which he used to support Al-Qaeda. Rich families in Saudi Arabia supposedly donated the cred, but it was a poisoned gift. Al-Qaeda spent itself in the Great Jihad; afterward, the Saudis could influence Arabia as they saw fit.
» Riyalpolitik

In 2034, Alliance forces crossed the Dardanelles to take on a weakened Europe. This was the Great Jihad, or the Second Ottoman Jihad, as Europeans call it. Five hundred million Muslims mobilized for war; the Alliance was a jumble of Arabs, Turks and Persians, all glued together by Jazrir's charisma. Alliance leaders knew Israel's destruction was essential for the Jihad's success, but none wanted to wait before attacking their pet enemies in North Africa, India and Central Asia.

Israel resisted the onslaught, thanks to judicious use of tactical nukes, intelligence operations and some unexpected support from the Palestinians. Israeli forces soon threatened Alliance supply lines running through Egypt and Syria. Instead of uniting to face the threat, Alliance leaders blamed each other for this disaster. Then Jazrir was assassinated and the Alliance broke down. The rest, as they say, is history.

» Aden's move really backfired, eh? He stops a little jihad against metahumans and ends up creating a big one.
» Junior

» Five million Muslim soldiers strike at the heart of Lofwyr's power. Does that look like a miscalculation?
» Riyalpolitik

By 2040 the Middle East was in chaos, with Muslim fighting Muslim. Iran and Iraq warred over who ruled the Shi'ite Muslims, and the Kurds declared independence, bringing Turkey and Syria into the conflict. Before the fighting could spread further, Badr al-Din Ibn Eisa used his Islamic Unity Movement to broker a peace deal that kept the Kurds inside a new Iraqi federation. Middle Eastern leaders were impressed, and the IUM became a force to be reckoned with.

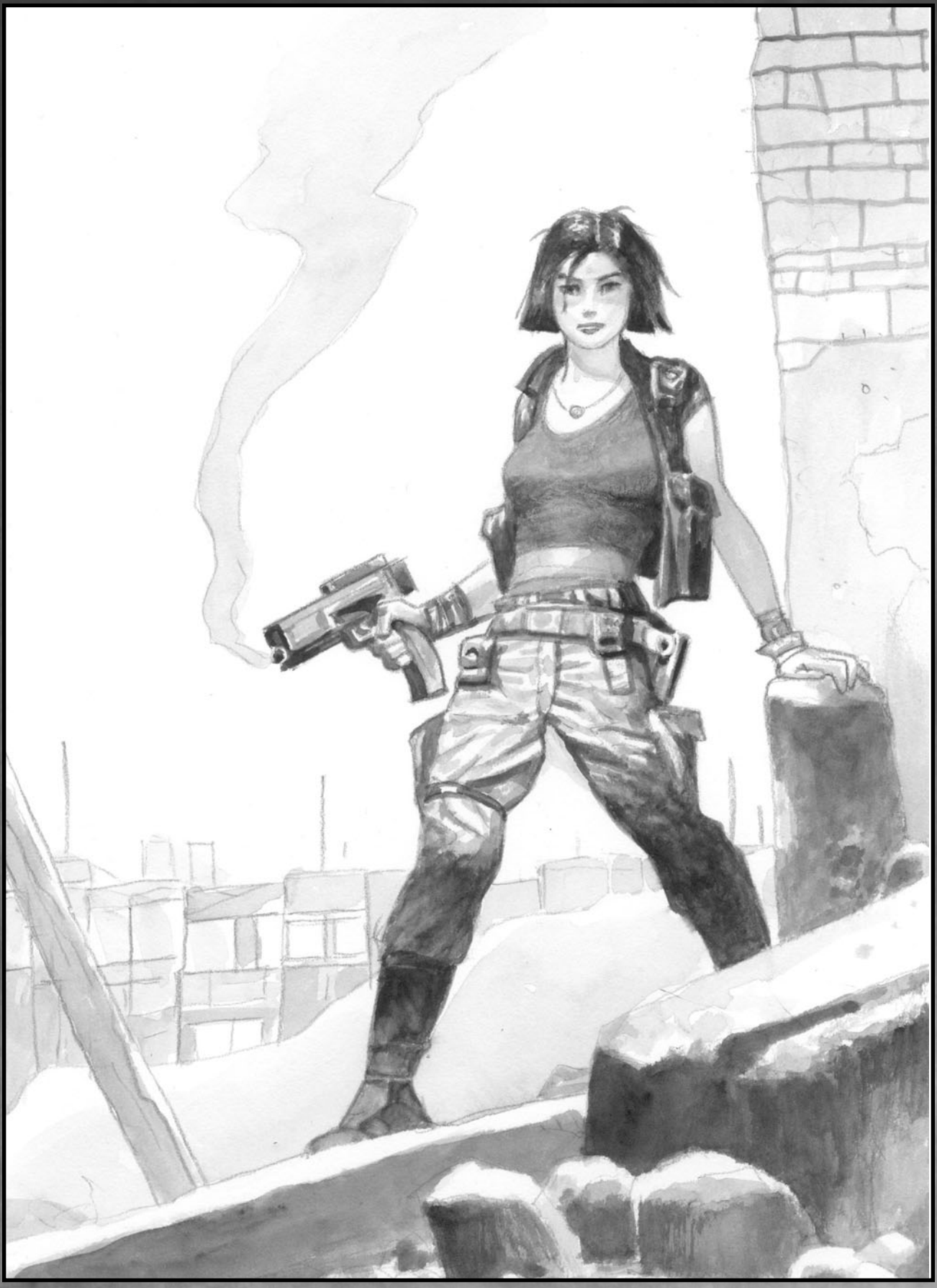
» The deal in Iraq didn't go as planned. The government went broke and couldn't keep Kurdistan from leaving. Then Saeder-Krupp stepped in. Soon, S-K had the country in its pocket, together with the last oil reserves in the Middle East.
» Maghrebi Monster

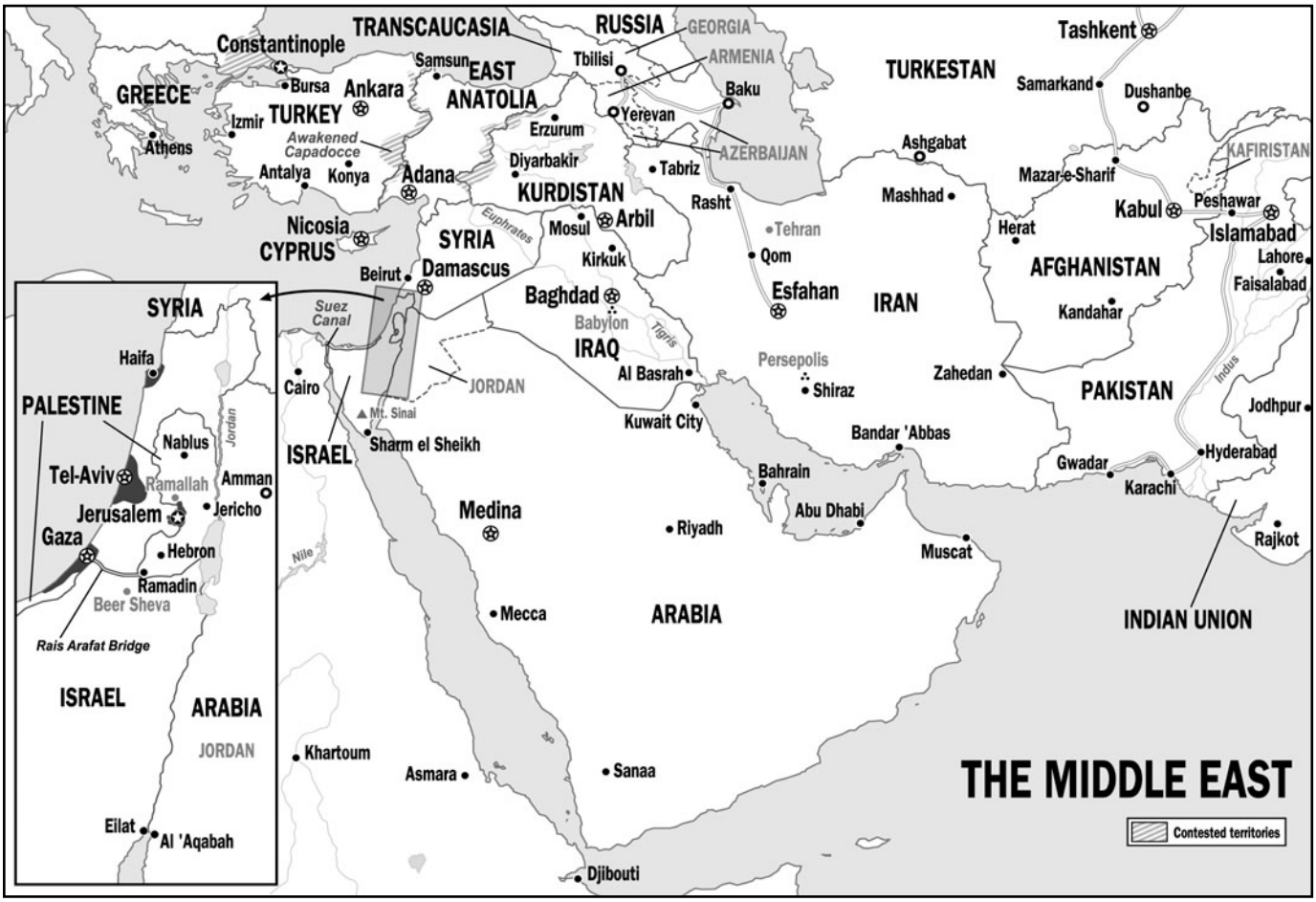
By 2050, the Middle East was finally on the road to peace and prosperity. The IUM was growing, Iran was developing swiftly under Ayatollah Abdallah and Turkey once again had a secular government backed by the megacorporations. In 2055, an ancient dream came true: the nations of the Arabian Peninsula united in a revival of the Caliphate. For the first time in one hundred years, a Caliph ruled an Islamic state.

Unfortunately, the arrival of the comet in 2061 proved a bad omen. Ibn Eisa was assassinated, but rose from the dead—changed. The moderate leader had vanished; the new Ibn Eisa called for a New Islamic Jihad, soon to become the name of an infamous terrorist group.

» Many Shi'ites think Ibn Eisa's resurrection proves he's the Twelfth Great Imam. The return of this mythical figure will supposedly bring all Muslims into the Shi'ite sect and start a new Islamic golden age. Just the kind of belief that starts holy wars.
» Almond White

» Many Shi'ite ayatollahs have spoken against this claim, including Ayatollah Abdallah of Iran. Don't worry; we Shi'ites won't fall at the feet of the first false prophet that comes along.
» Republican Rashid





• We don't need Shi'ite unbelievers to tell us what to think. Ibn Eisa's resurrection was the will of Allah, and He has destined him for great things. If Ibn Eisa can throw the Zionists back into the sea, he is clearly fit to become the new Caliph—the leader of all faithful.
• Crescent Moon

The Caliph appreciated Ibn Eisa's new vigor for a time, until Ibn Eisa's call for war against Israel contradicted the Caliph's wishes. Many Muslims want Israel gone, but Sunnis won't disobey their Caliph. This tension threatens to split the IUM between the two leaders, and it might tear the Middle East apart.

• This is Lofwyr's opportunity, chummers. S-K's public policy is to back the IUM and Arabian unification—if Ibn Eisa steps out of the way.
• Maghrebi Monster

THE ARABIAN CALIPHATE

Population: 26,200,000 (93% Arab, 7% Other)
Major Languages: Arabic (95%), English (74%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (94%)

• Birthplace and stronghold of the Islamic Unity Movement, Arabia and its Caliph rule the faithful from the Prophet's home city of Medina and control Mecca, the center of Islam. Though not exactly a bright herald of Islamic cultural splendor, Arabia's the place to run if you're involved in the region's current affairs. Jameelia is a Dubai street doc; she delivers the basics so you won't dive naked into the Arabian shadows. She also promotes her business a bit, but the lady cuts a mean bargain.
• The Spectral Shah

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:32:44 (PST)

by Jameelia

I heard Shadowland published a profile on the Arabian desert a while back, but it lacked essential information on the culture gap between you "Western infidels" and us "evil Muslims," as well as the low-down on current affairs in the restored Caliphate and our cities. (Yes, cities. We don't all live in tents and ride around on camelback.) I'm here to help remedy that. Just call me your friendly cultural attaché.

BLENDING IN

In this day and age, it should go without saying that Islam here is deeply conservative—especially in the heartland, but

less so in the coastal cities, which have a more liberal tradition. Being a meta, a woman, an infidel, Awakened or sporting obvious cyberware are potential sources of trouble, in decreasing order of aggravation. Not only do you risk getting busted by sanctimonious authorities, you also stand out, and locals distrust you. Not good in our line of work. So—what are the ways around this annoyance?

First off, if you're what locals call an "undesirable," conceal your metatype if possible, but avoid outright lies. Contrary to popular opinion, we don't stone metahumans on sight and people appreciate it if you do your best not to shock them. After all, you didn't choose to be born tainted. If you're a woman, expect to be looked down on in public, less so in private. Use the veil, keep your eyes down and *never* upstage a man; when Arabian men need to reassert their power, women usually suffer. If you play by their rules, men show you respect and you get more leeway than they'll ever publicly admit. Don't get me wrong: I studied here, I work with men, I'm a successful surgeon, and I still believe in a religion I love and that is part of me. It needs a shakeup, but you don't change traditions in a day—or a decade, for that matter. If you're an infidel and a foreigner, you'll have to live with the stigma unless you convert. Learn local customs and respect Arab ways, and you'll avoid most trouble.

Mages should be fine if they respect Islam's religious precepts … but any sign of un-Muslim behavior, fancy spellwork or shamanistic and idolatrous practices will bring the *Mudaween* (religious police) breathing down your neck. If you're chromed, tread carefully. You're blaspheming because you tried to improve Allah's design—so keep it concealed.

CULTURE GAP

So now that you're here, what's it like? The undisputed heart of the Islamic world, Dar al-Islam, the Caliphate is one of the Sixth World's subtle powers, holding sway over millions worldwide. Most Muslims, especially Sunnis, feel a spiritual allegiance to the Prophet's homeland. Shi'ites, Ismaelites and the more independent Central Asian communities are the only ones who fail to recognize the Caliph's authority. The Caliphate is a spiritual domain supplemented by a thriving economy, perfectly adapted to traditional realities.

• Thing to keep in mind about trade in Arab countries: nothing has a fixed price. It all depends on your face, your bargaining skills and the merchant's mood. Bad news if you're not in tune; you'll pay five times the price. If the vibe is right, though, you'll easily get 40 percent discounts.
• Xunga XL

Under *Sharia*, Islamic law, which serves as constitution and moral, penal and civic codes, the Caliphate recognizes the equal rights of all Muslims, regardless of provenance. Sharia is strictly enforced, and it isn't pretty no matter how devout I feel. It can be biased in practice as well, because local *ulemas* serve as both religious leaders and magistrates.

Protected by law, *dhimmi*—non-Muslim citizens (mostly Christians)—are allowed to live in enclaves and to convert (as long as they pay a poll tax). Declared atheists, pagans and Jews merit exile or death. You won't burst into flames in Riyadh or Sana because you worship the Great Donut, but things will be harder for you, since virtually everybody here is Muslim—not necessarily hardcore, but fundamentally *different* from you.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in the Sixth World, runners in Arabia hate the oppressive system, and their business doesn't mesh well with Islam's legal and moral strictures. Some runners are hardcore Muslims, but most boast their own personal version of Islam tailored to their professional requirements. They're more tolerant than your Average Ahmad, but keep in mind: what you actually believe is less important than what you *appear* to believe. To blend in, everyone tries to look and sound like another faceless, faithful Arabian citizen.

• Islam is the cement that holds the society together. Convert, speak a little Arabic, be kind to people and pray—or pretend to—at the right times; you'll make tons of friends quickly and be five steps ahead of any other foreign talent. The local Muslim shadow scene is pretty tight, and converting is the best way to get contacts, information and gear.
• Cynical Paul

I can provide you with an *Aslama* package: one-week accelerated e-courses in written and spoken Arabic, seminars on Islamic culture, history and religion, a selection of datachips on local, cuisine and fashion, and a crash course in bartering. Eventually we'll offer you a free conversion; the necessary e-learning programs and surgery are handled by me and my team of highly qualified PhDs from the prestigious Al-Azar and Sana universities.

• She actually means conversion, down to its … most clinical aspects?
• Brick

• This calls for another comment: it is the duty of every faithful Muslim to expand the influence of Islam by converting new believers. Jameelia does it her own way.
• Ammar

Alternatively, I can hook you up with the small foreign runner community through our special InFeed-El information seminar. This includes basic details on Arabic and Islamic culture and religion, as well as contacts with European, Asian and American fixers operating in the shadows of the corporate enclaves and the cracks of the system. Though this may look like the easiest solution, it's limiting, because once you hit the street and deal with the locals, you're an obvious outsider. And remember: if you're a Jew, we'll feel it and know it, and we won't tell until it's too late.

• A good sample of the perpetual Jewish-Arab love affair. If you've got an Israeli e-stamp on your documents, beware of treading on Arab soil.
• Ambassador

TRIBAL ALLEGIANCES

Here's who's who in the Arabian Caliphate.

Loyal Houses

Noble houses follow a traditional clan structure, meaning you owe your first loyalty to your family—hence the necessity to place relatives in key positions or use marital unions. Three noble houses hold the most power in the Caliphate, and a few others deserve mention. Whole parts of the economy belong to these houses, kept in check by the Caliph's iron hand. Should the pressure relax, vicious infighting would raise its head.

The House of **Saud** is the peninsula's uncontested ruler, having battled all the other tribes into submission in the 20th century and held Arabia ever since. **King Kalim Saud's** masterpiece was the undermining of the coastal emirates' families, already bled white by the deaths of many of their sons during the Jihad. First, he ensured Israel's destruction of Bahrain's and Kuwait's militaries; then he helped his allies in Houses **Sudayris** and **al-Sheikh** maneuver into key positions in the shifting financial and corporate scene, which no longer revolves around oil. Today, **Hafiz al-Sheikh** owns 45 percent of A-rated finance and energy specialist Ifrit Services, based in Abu Dhabi, while **Hassan Sudayrin** is CEO of Arabian Future Industries.

» The honeymoon's over. As long as al-Sheikh bolstered cooperation between the Caliph and Ibn Eisa, he was among the king's favorites. Now al-Sheikh risks losing everything. He's severing ties left and right between Ifrit and IUM factions and individuals. Runners are in high demand.
» €spion

» Saudi investors have always been active in North America, and a recent assessment shows about 8 percent of the UCAS and CAS corps in their hands. Naturally, they're also the Muslim world's premier investors. They don't necessarily own the corps, but they own lots of shares and influence decisions.
» 00110001

Ibn Eisa's Power Base

Peacemaker turned fundamentalist after his "resurrection" in '61, **Ibn Eisa** is a controversial figure in Arabia. His popularity and charisma are uncontested, but many have grown tired of his warmongering speeches. He still draws many to his cause, though, because plenty of people hope he'll rid us of the Zionists for good.

Rooted in the radical wing of the Islamic Unity Movement, Ibn Eisa's power reaches across the Muslim world from Syria and Egypt to Nigeria and Indonesia. Locally, he has the allegiance of the Mudaween, who supposedly answer only to the Caliph, but are also loyal to Ibn Eisa and the hard-line ulemas. The recent schism means Caliph Ibn Saud will have to deal with Ibn Eisa's personal empire, testing the loyalty of the houses and the army.

The **Shammar** family in particular has remained loyal to Ibn Eisa and controls the powerful Sandstorm Engineering Conglomerate. **Aziz Ibn Yusuf Shammar** is Ibn Eisa's fiercest follower and wields immense power on the Islamic-Corporate Cooperation Board (ICCB), which establishes corporate operating rights in Arabia.

Islamic Renaissance activists, like myself, are active in Arabia, especially in Sana, and hit the IUM as often as possible. Coordinating opposition to the IUM was Farid al-Mansoor's job until several NIJ *fatwahs* were placed on his head and he had to relocate, possibly to Beirut or back to Europe.

» The IRM has sympathizers in the Riyadh regime. Good to know, if you're planning runs in heartland Arabia.
» Almond White

» The IRM also has contacts with various independent movements across Arabia and the Middle East: anarchists, technofreaks, meta and feminist activists, etcetera—including many who've started to raise their voices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Some runners are members or former members of these groups.
» Maghrebi Monster

Other Houses

After their eviction from Arabia in 1926, House **Hashim** finally ascended the throne of Jordan. Ibn Eisa's influence drove the Hashim away from the Sauds, but it remains uncertain which side moderate but weak-willed **King Muhammad Abdallah** will take.

» If there's a chance Ibn Eisa can destroy the Zionists, Abdallah will follow him.
» Crescent Moon

The families of the former coastal emirates are mostly subdued or scattered, but as the Jihad gets fiercer, resentment grows in the most liberal cities. Living off tourism and finance from the oil and gas industries, they feel the Saudis take the lion's share while impeding economic growth with strict religious strictures. The Caliph's break with Ibn Eisa should ease tensions in the Emirates.

» Another local feature: religion, state and corporations are under the thumb of the same families—which doesn't necessarily prevent infighting. When they want to compete, they do it through their respective corps.
» Riyalpolitik

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

We still produce token amounts of oil, but the biggest source of revenue now comes from participation in foreign oil companies in Central Asia and Russia. Arabian families are well entrenched in energy companies and used their expertise to exploit gas fields all over the Middle East, adapting the infrastructure originally designed for oilfields. Many corps exploiting gas are foreign, like Yamatetsu, Saeder-Krupp and Exxoco, but Arabians hold the highest posts in the local branches, which benefits the ruling houses immensely.

Financial services is another one of Arabia's top fields. Integrating the Gulf Emirates helped build up the banking sector as well as opening trade routes to Asia that Arabia historically lacked.

The Islamic-Corporate Coordination Board

You know you're someone on the corp scene if you have influence on the Islamic-Corporate Coordination Board. A bureaucratic abomination, it gathers government officials, religious figures and corporate representatives (almost all Arabs) at its Riyadh headquarters to monitor corporate activities, oversee respect for Sharia and promote "the only true Islam."

The Board acts as a moral censor, overseeing a strict code of corporate conduct at A-rated corps operating in Arabia, with the exception of the coastal cities. Corporations must respect a stringent interior and exterior architectural code (for instance, no art featuring living creatures). All signs and documents, physical and electronic, must be in Arabic. The director for Arabia must be a Muslim. On-site mosques are mandatory, as are distribution of government press releases and information channels. Foreign corps have little leeway; the Mudaween inspect them on an irregular basis and an oversight agent is present at all important meetings. Not surprisingly, non-Arab corps without extraterritoriality are almost nonexistent here.

• Cameldrek. I've worked for at least three Indian and Turkistani companies, none of them real big. They're doing pretty well, believe me.
• Tom-Two

• Do your homework, sweetie. Odds are, two out of three are fronts for Saeder-Krupp.
• Cynical Paul

As a signatory to the Business Recognition Accords, Arabia allows AA corps to operate semi-sovereign enclaves, in a fashion dating back to the previous century. These huge industrial and office parks come with residential areas. The corps pay taxes determined by their turnover and domain of activity. Reductions are allowed if large numbers of staff convert to Islam, or if the company undertakes some remarkable effort to promote the faith. Inspections and ICCB requirements are the same in the enclaves, but oversight agents are usually bought by the corps, and so they enforce the rules less strictly. Even the Mudaween can tolerate a touch of heresy if it keeps the economy afloat.

The ICCB is roughly divided between local and foreign corps. The Board offers an opportunity for both, enabling the Arabian corps to keep an eye on foreign activities, draw taxes, block takeover bids and keep cautious watch on the implementing of religious requirements. Foreign corps must go through the Board to do business in Arabia; for the biggest ones, a presence on the Board means having a foot in the door and being able to circumvent restrictions.

Here's a list of the most prominent corps on the ICCB:

First and foremost, **Saeder-Krupp** has interests in the extraction business, from oil to gas to biomass. S-K's Fatima Petrochemicals controls a quarter of the country's remaining

oilfields, and recently announced the discovery of a new oil blanket off the Aden coast.

The **Islamic Development Cooperative Bank** may not be the leading finance corp, but it's the most powerful on the ICCB. The Sauds initially created it with private money to act as the Board's financial heart, and it retains its dominance. In fact, the IDCB grants most authorizations for foreign corps to operate in Arabia.

» The IDCB is a Trojan horse, part of the Frankfurt Bank Association, Europe's second financial leviathan. The bank was part of the Saud financial empire until Gideon Schreiber—aka, the great dragon Nachtmeister—bought it piecemeal in an attempt to counter Saeder-Krupp's influence in the Middle East. Most of the staff are Arab, but some key managers come from Europe. Nachtmeister's death and subsequent fallout changed the FBA's priorities, and its control over the IDCB slipped. After threatening hostilities, Lofwyr forced the FBA to accept a deal involving voting shares and information sharing, then used it to infiltrate a few Arabian-grown corps. All in all, the IDCB gives the FBA and S-K an invaluable edge on the local scene.
» 0111011001

Though its interests are spread out, **Global Oil's** bastion remains Kuwait City, where it controls three massive refineries that process gas and the region's remaining oil.

» Global Oil's troubles in Iraq extend to Arabia, and S-K is trying to kick the corp out. Global Oil had to side with Sandstorm to resist S-K's attacks: the rumor mill goes that a merger is in the works, making the future AA-corp the biggest local group in the Middle East.
» €spion

Xenel-Oman is based in the south of the Caliphate and has expanded thanks to the opened coastal cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It specializes in banking, brokerage and capital risk, as well as in microtronics. It has active branches in Egypt, Sudan, Nigeria, Bangla Commonwealth and India.

» The 15-million nuyen contract for renovating the Suez Canal may well slip through Mitsuhama's fingers, as Xenel-Oman's bid leads the field. Having half the Blue Helmets there come from Nigeria must help …
» Corpshark

Ifrit Services also deals in banking, but its interests include tourism, entertainment (don't laugh) and security services. It boasts major policing contracts with sprawls in Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Iraq. Though technically a private enterprise, its front man is Samir al-Sheikh, a member of Ibn Saud's inner circle. For now, Ifrit mostly exports its services, since Arabia uses its own police.

» Ifrit is a political tool. Ibn Saud and al-Sheikh are discreetly replacing neighboring countries' police forces with loyal corporate units.
» Riyalpolitik

» Ifrit has a deal with the Jamal Islamiyah mujahedin brotherhood to provide it with Awakened personnel from their Bahrain madrassah. The brotherhood has been pulling its support from Ibn Saud recently, which doesn't bode well for Ifrit's magical security.
» as Sadiq

» What's up with that? Islamiyah mages and adepts used to line up to volunteer for Ibn Saud's Djinn guard and now they're cutting relations? Something smells fishy.
» Lone Gunman

Arabian Futures (AF) is the region's leading high-tech company, second only to Checkpoint Software in Israel. Specialized in engineering biomass into energy sources, they've developed new refining processes to save natural gas. AF has expanded in the past year, particularly around Sana in Yemen, a parageology hot spot. Research centers have popped up there since the Comet passed by, and AF runs a foundation that offers scholarships to Muslim researchers willing to come and study there. Wuxing's been petitioning for years to join the research teams and finally got accepted last month after a shady deal with CEO Samir Sukayri.

» You bet! Some runners just happened to "uncover" dirt involving Sukayri, 9-year old Malaysian kids and an HHMVV-infected panda bear. That was enough.
» Media Watcher

» One of AF's top projects is the development of renewable magical power sources. Famous MIT&T thaumaturgist Kobe Bergson left Boston ten days ago to join AF's new research team, but he never landed in Dubai.
» as Sadiq

» He ended up in Damascus instead. But not for long.
» Xunga XL

The Shammar family founded **Sandstorm Engineering Conglomerate** as a transnational initiative involving construction and high-tech companies from Arabia, Iraq and Syria, such as Tiamat, Inc. and Euphrates Solutions. They provide almost 31 percent of the region's construction, ranging from small desert shelters to semi-autonomous habitats. Last month, the corp signed a big tech-exchange contract with Proteus for a second arcology in Riyadh, designed as S-K's new Middle East HQ, replacing the current facilities in Istanbul.

» House Shammar is strong in Iraq, and it's firmly in Ibn Eisa's camp. Strange that S-K's dealing with them on something so

important, since they're not too friendly.
• Riyalpolitik

• That's why Proteus is part of the deal. Nothing like having a friend in your enemy's bed, heh?
• Junior

UNDERWORLD AMONG THE DUNES

Here's the dirt on some factions to keep an eye out for.

The Bedouin

These desert nomads can take you anywhere throughout the Middle East along with their shipments of smuggled goods, from Egypt to Syria through Gaza or the Negev north, south to the Arabian desert or east to Baghdad, and then connect to the New Silk Road. The Bedouin have no allegiance; they'll ship chemical weapons to Hamas activists in Gaza one day, and the next they'll scout the mountains of West Jordan for the Israeli Defense Forces.

• The Bedouin I know might deal with anyone, but they honor their deals to the letter.
• Ammar

The last trick they pulled prompted a crackdown from the Caliph. It seems they tipped the Israelis about troop movements near the Jordan border. Mossad hired some Bedouins to scout military positions deep within Arabian lines, and sent operatives to sabotage the construction of an intelligence outpost not far from Akaba. At the same time, the Bedouins helped Jordanian forces under King Abdallah's command to reach strategic positions in Petra across the Jordan valley. The Caliph wanted to send his own Saudi troops to these positions because he grows wary of Ibn Eisa's influence over Abdallah, and now he's seriously pissed off at the Bedouin.

• Don't miss the Bedouin "Tentown." Led by Sheikh Yusuf and his lieutenant Khaled, this giant traveling fair pillages the villages through which it travels and presents endless business opportunities. This is THE place to go to score gear or info, or have some fun. Lots of overpressured Muslims go there to get chipped or experience the latest Romanian joygirls for one night. Ask around, because the Tent never stays more than two days in one place.
• Abdul

The New Islamic Jihad

The NIJ has slowly taken over leading positions in all local IUM branches, from North Africa to Iraq. They keep in touch with the Al-Akhira syndicate and terror network in the Maghreb and Spain, Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Syria. Rumor also says they have someone among the Ottomans in Eastern Turkey.

• Al-Akhira tried to step onto NIJ turf in Arabia, but failed. Their leaders in Algiers and Tunis woke up one morning with their envoys' heads stuck on poles by their front doors. The NIJ welcomes cooperation, not takeover bids.
• Farah

SAND CASTLES

Lucky for runners, no one can watch thousands of kilometers of shoreline. From Asia, come by sea to Muscat or Abu Dhabi. From Africa, come to Aden from the Ethiomalian Territories across the Red Sea rather than through the Israeli-controlled Sinai; no authorities will bother you. As a rule of thumb, consider the coastal cities geographic and cultural gateways. Use these sprawls (Kuwait City, Muscat, Dubai) to adapt. If you plan to go further in-country to Oman, Riyadh or Amman, be careful and find a Bedouin guide, unless you're familiar with local customs.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai

These ultramodern glass and steel metroplexes are the twin hearts of Arabian finance. A less restrictive atmosphere rules, and most residents live and work in conditions closer to the Western world. Foreign megas like S-K, Exxoco and Global Oil, who supported the unification of Arabia, exercise special privileges here; they control the major harbors and the remaining refineries, as well as the thriving microtronics industry, even though X-O still leads the pack.

Riyadh

Rundown poor neighborhoods envelop this ultra-modern sprawl, with two arcologies and large underground facilities to resist the wild sand winds from the desert. At Riyadh's heart stand the Caliphate's Palace and the Islamic-Corporate Coordination Board HQ. Riyadh's survival depends on its water supplies, provided by irrigation facilities that pump clean water deep underground or bring it from the sea.

• These underground aqueducts are particularly well protected, but exceptions exist. Some older ones got sealed off; now smugglers and runners use them. Linking Riyadh and other cities to the coastal desalinization plants, some sections have collapsed or are maintained by their users. The main tubes are dark and obstructions block vehicles, and frequently something feral finds its way in, but maintenance tunnels sometimes allow for electric scooters. Leave before the section that leads to Riyadh's water processing plant, because it's well guarded. Feel free to use the camp sites set up by the regulars, but leave them as you found them and supply them when you can.
• Fernster

• Or you can go the regular way, with Bedouins from Doha or Dubai—though word will spread.
• Abdul

• Or use one of the many clandestine airfields scattered across the area—concrete flats on rocky ground with a small bunker hangar under camouflage nets at one end.
• Kafir

» If you're running infiltration in Riyadh, using the underground is a must. Six plants lie beneath the city, sewage collection hubs, shipping water and treating it, processing air and filtering sand. Most buildings are connected to these underground facilities—even the arcologies have emergency access points.
» Fernster

Mecca

Holiest of Islam's holy places, Mecca is the spiritual heart of the Islamic world. Millions upon millions of Muslims flock to Mecca every year for the *Hajj,* the pilgrimage every Muslim must undertake. The holy city is barred to infidels; projecting mages who dare approach astrally are relentlessly hunted by *mujahedin* mages and spirits hired by the Mudaween. The city and shrine are aspected toward the Muslim faithful, since the Kabah stone is a potent symbol and powerful relic to true believers.

» Where've I heard of a big black rock with golden veins before?
» Elijah

Amman and Jordan

Supported by S-K, the Islamic Development Cooperative Bank and several smaller corps, Arabia peacefully gobbled up Jordan. Last December, NIJ activists forced the moderate king to name a hardcore government. This move benefits Ibn Eisa, whose influence reaches the east bank of the Jordan river, and the corps, who finally see their opportunity to create a large corporate free-trade zone encompassing Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, that will hopefully bring peace to the region.

» They think including Israel in the zone one day will ease tensions. I say there will be tensions as long as a Zionist state exists.
» Crescent Moon

The entire Jordanian royal family left for Morocco to escape NIJ pressure, and finally the king gave in. Many IRM sympathizers in Jordan have since grown into a powerful political opposition movement. Not necessarily powerful enough, though; Ibn Eisa has massed Jordanian troops along the Israeli border and hopes to drive the Jews into the sea.

Amman until now had avoided a significant corporate presence and successfully mixed tradition and modernity. It has a reputation as a center for art and culture, but this may change with the IUM/NIJ rise to power. Sim-theatres as well as music and painting festivals are on the verge of shutting down, and pretty unveiled girls will soon disappear from the streets if the IRM keeps losing ground. An underground movement is forming among students and the middle class, but it isn't organized—so far.

IRAN AND IRAQ: SAINTS AND SINNERS

by the Spectral Shah

I decided to take care of this section myself, since I was born in Iran and Iraq is my adopted country. You might know Iran and Iraq as the Muslim heaven and corp haven, respectively, but things are happening that may change both countries for good. Corp execs are paying attention, and sending assets in to move things their way. If you plan to come, read on; I'll show you how to navigate the local scene and come out on top. And don't forget to visit the Persepolis Shadowland node for the latest intel on this region.

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Population: 77,620,000 (Persians 54%, Azeri 26%, Kurds 7%, Other 13%)
Major Languages: Farsi (70%), Turkic (26%), Arabic (10%), English (8%)
Major Religions: Shi'ite Islam (93%)

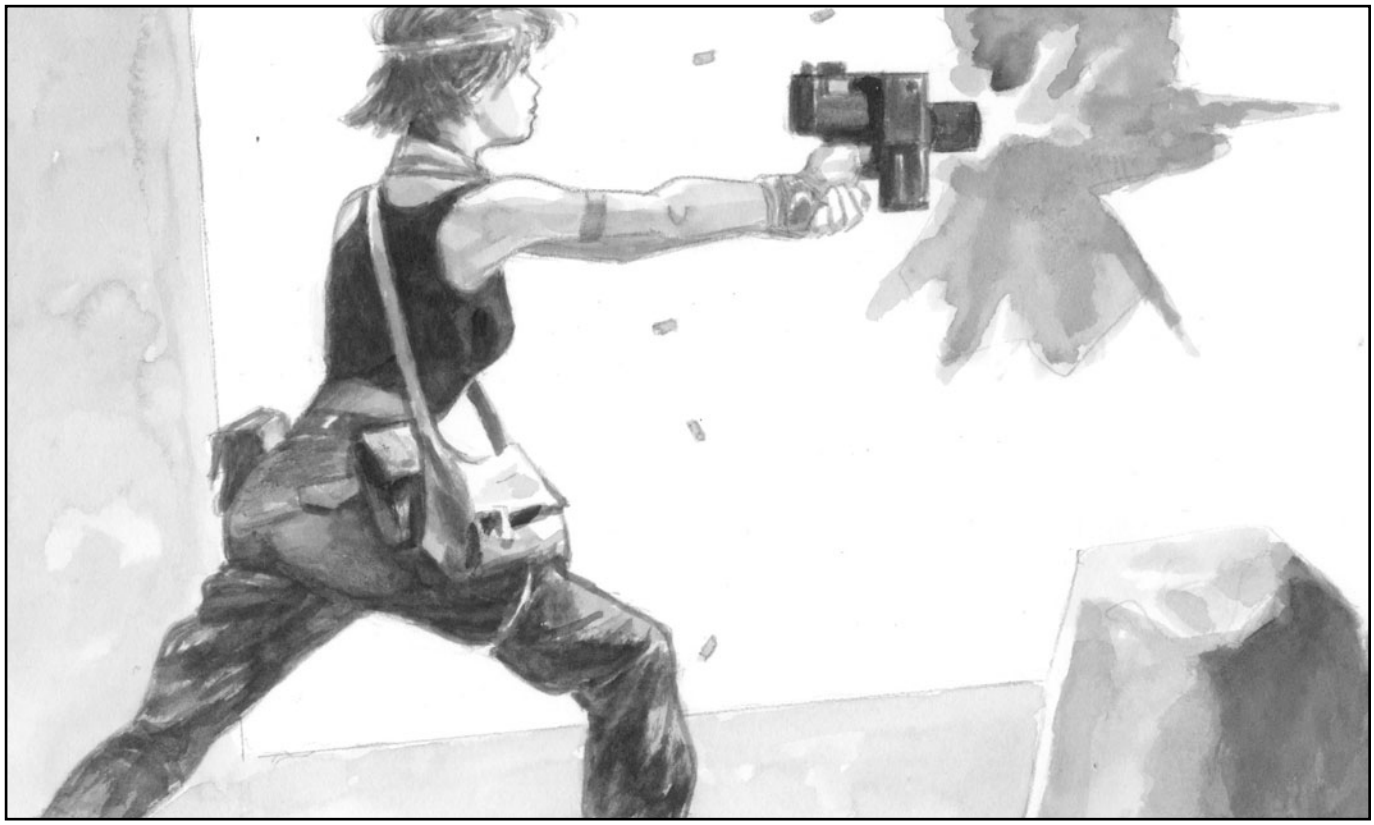
Iran is one of the world's most conservative countries. It's also a democracy, which means Iran follows strict Islamic law because Iranians want to. Most Iranians saw Tehran's destruction as a test of their faith in Allah, and they've followed Islam by the book ever since. Don't get me wrong—I believe one day we'll get rid of all the mumbo-jumbo. After all, most people got over Aden's attack and came to accept magic and cyberware. We even built a new capital at Isfahan, and left Tehran to rot. But the Tehran trauma is really strong, and it keeps coming back. SURGE was enough to turn many people back to fundamentalism.

Before we go on, let me clarify something about Iranian democracy. We can vote for Parliament, but the candidates are not that different when it comes to religion. And if a moderate gets elected, the Guardian Council can veto any law not deemed Islamic enough. Council members have to be top Shi'ite clerics and graduates in Islamic law, so yes, they're biased. But **Ayatollah Abdallah** has led the nation ever since the war with Iraq, and at least he gave the liberal government from the Moderation and Development party some leeway.

» Liberal by Iranian standards. They were all for religious rule, but also friendly with the megacorps, especially Yamatetsu.
» Felix

After SURGE, the people voted the moderates out and elected **Muhammad Kashani** Prime Minister. He hails from the radical Society of Assertive Clerics (the *Mobarez*), and they have two policies: tougher Islamic laws and getting the megacorps out. The PM is the chief executive, but the Guardian Council can veto his decisions, so Abdallah and his cronies have tied Kashani's hands—so far. Abdallah is a master opinion-maker and he's managed to convince Iranians that he's just being cautious, but he's running out of excuses, and no one's sure what he'll do next.

» He might call for early elections, but the Mobarez will win them, especially with backing from the Islamic Unity Movement. They're claiming Ibn Eisa is the Twelfth Great Imam, and you can't underestimate the power this idea has with Shi'ites.
» Almond White



• Iranians are too afraid of change to vote the Islamists out of power. They need re-education with a strong military dictatorship.
• Padishah

Corporate Powers

Abdallah is worried because he knows Yamatetsu East and other megacorps own most of Iran's industry. They export cheap electronics and machinery all over the world and make up the backbone of the Iranian economy. Iran never signed the Business Recognition Accords, but the megas that own local corps can sidetrack all the restrictions that apply to other foreign businesses. This approach used to be discreet, which suited the megas and the ayatollahs. But Kashani spent most of his campaign exposing the issue, and now he wants to stop foreigners from owning more than 25 percent of Iranian corps.

• He's buying a war with the Corporate Court.
• €spion

Yamatetsu owns some choice assets in Iran. Sasadjah Industries dominates the envirotech market in Arabia and India, and just won a major contract to operate Arabia's water desalinization plants. Will the Caliph let an Iranian corp keep the business if Iran goes fundamentalist, though? Not likely. So Yamatetsu has plenty of reasons to keep Abdallah in control. Their local troubleshooter is **Turan Azad**, known to have ties with Azeri independence activists in his native city of Tabriz. He uses this connection to smuggle deniable assets into the country to hurt Kashani's public image.

• Here's how it usually works. Many Iranian politicians have a few non-Muslim habits, like drinking with friends or seeing a mistress. Get some hard evidence and you have them in your pocket. If your mark is clean, well, you'll just have to make something up.
• Felix

Newcomer **Exxoco Petrochem** recently bought Pars Energy, and they now own the trans-Iranian pipeline that runs from the Tenghiz oil fields in Turkistan to refineries at Bandar Abbas. The oil and gas they're transporting belongs to Saeder-Krupp, but S-K can't operate in Iran because Lofwyr is *persona non grata* … as are all dragons since Aden razed Tehran. Kashani exposed this deal, putting Abdallah in an uncomfortable situation. The government will probably shut it down in the near future.

Last month, Exxoco put **Morteza Kashavarz** in charge of Pars. He's a retired general and head of the ultra-nationalist Kargozaran party. These guys might be small, but they have contacts inside the military. Rumor has it Exxoco is sponsoring a nationalist takeover of Iran, financed by S-K.

• As if Lofwyr didn't have enough problems. This kind of rumor is sending Iranians to the streets protesting the pipeline. My question is, who's spreading them?
• Riyalpolitik

Operating in the Islamic Republic

The corps are getting worried these days, and they're hiring runners and paying lots of nuyen. Why the extra cash? Iran's a fraggin' difficult place to operate. Do something anti-Islamic, like showing too much skin or drinking alcohol, and you get a few dozen lashes. Get caught stealing and they cut off your hand. Have sex with a stranger and you get sentenced to death. Islamic laws are not simple, and you might break some out of ignorance. In many cases, the police define "unlawful behavior," and they tend to get tough on foreigners. Iranians are a proud people, which can pose a real problem.

» We're not savages. Trials are fair and you'll have a lawyer to protect you from abuse.
» Republican Rashid

» True, but that doesn't make the laws any softer.
» Almond White

The secret in Iran is to lay as low as you can. Women might have some problems, but if you keep your hair covered, you'll be fine. Metahumans stick out like a third cyberarm. Plenty of locals blame them for Tehran's destruction, and sometimes one gets lynched after showing up in the wrong neighborhood. I'm an Iranian dwarf, so I know what I'm talking about. Iranian law protects metahumans, but the cops couldn't care less. If you're an elf or an ork, better get a thick beard implant or wear a full-body veil. If you're a troll or a dwarf, try dressing like a beggar; at least no one will come near you.

Mages need permits to cast spells, and you'll only get one for the simple stuff. Get caught without one and you might get lobotomized; you'll never cast another spell again. Shamanic magic is forbidden under pain of death. The only way around these restrictions is to get a forged permit and avoid spellcasting in public.

» Unless you work for a megacorp; they have special permits for magic and cyber, and your Johnson might get you one.
» Felix

» Don't think Iranians don't use magic. They're fraggin' paranoid when it comes to magical protection. Even small businesses can have decent security, government-subsidized.
» Intifada Papa

Avoiding the police is easy if you want to lay low; the cops are everywhere, but they're no match for enterprising runners. And Iranians are sticklers for privacy, so they won't bother to get search warrants or tap your Matrix link unless you've seriously pissed them off. The big threats will catch the eye of the *Pasadaran*, Iran's Revolutionary Guard. A mix of internal security and religious police, they can count on heavy resources. Keep them off your tail and you'll do fine.

» Pasadaran agents are extremely religious. They might go easy on you if you're taking on the corps, but if you're taking on the ayatollahs, get ready for a tough fight.
» Felix

Most corps have their headquarters in Isfahan, Iran's capital. All those arcologies covered with arabesque patterns are corporate turf and heavily guarded. Also, the city is crowded and has an edge to it, so nervous cops might overreact to simple breaches of Islamic law. Be extra careful when you operate here.

The Fringe

Some Iranians don't fit in the conservative mainstream. Maybe they're not Persian, or they're fed up with the system, but they usually end up in one of Iran's many policlubs. Many groups operate openly and can be useful in a fix. For example, the Islamic Renaissance Movement offers free legal help in religious cases, and the Zoroastrian Order can help get spellcasting licenses.

» They'll also put you in touch with black-market talismongers; there's a huge underground market for forbidden stuff like fetishes and cyberware.
» Xunga XL

Other groups keep a low profile; they'll open Iran's back door for you and keep you out of the Pasadaran's way. Many fringe policlubs operate in universities in Shiraz, my favorite Iranian city. The cops there aren't strict upholders of Islamic law, so the atmosphere is more relaxed. College students even have underground clubs where you can find alcohol and listen to forbidden music.

» Shiraz is also close to the ruins of Persepolis, capital of ancient Persia. Alexander the Great razed the city 2,500 years ago, and people have sought the lost treasure of the Persian emperors ever since. Ancient ghosts supposedly haunt the ruins and they might give some answers, but speaking with them is against the law, much to the chagrin of the Atlantean Foundation.
» Nephilim

» I heard about a Russian merc who managed to call the ghost of a Greek general. He went to Afghanistan in such a hurry that he got caught by the locals with his pants down. He's dead, and as far as I know he took his secret to the grave.
» Felix

More radical student groups of every shape and color also abound, from Sabz Hayeh deep ecologists to Tudeh neo-commies. Most of these groups meet and plan action in the Matrix, especially around the **Persepolis Shadowland node.** It's safer than you'd think; Iranian law is keen on privacy, so dissenters have some room to maneuver, even if we're always on the lookout for Pasadaran deckers. Persepolis has organized the fringe groups into a real reformist movement; we're growing fast and we're almost ready.

Let's leave it at that for now. If anything important happens, you'll know it in the node.

» Rumor is, this movement gets a lot of help from the IRM, including funds and connections with the outside world. If any

solid evidence of this ever surfaces, Iran will probably expel the IRM.
• Republican Rashid

Finally, some groups operate completely outside the law. Regular crime-for-profit is usually in the hands of the Kabul *maffiya*, but the terror networks cause Iran's government the biggest headaches. The **New Islamic Jihad** is strong near the Iraqi border, but now looks interested in the holy city of Qom, just south of Tehran. Last month they killed old Ayatollah Shahroudi, a harmless scholar. We at Persepolis would love some intel on this bizarre incident.

• I have a few friends hiding in the ruins of Tehran. They've seen IUM clerics around, who claim they're laying the city's ghosts to rest so that people can live there again. Imagine Tehran back on its feet! The IUM could win Iranians' hearts with this.
• Sheba

The mysterious **Black Scorpions,** a terrorist group based in the Lout Desert, operates all over Iran and Iraq. I know the Pasadaran supports them, but as far as I can tell they're not under Pasadaran control. No one knows much about this group, beyond the fact that they're going after the IUM with a vengeance.

• Abdallah must be terrified of an IUM takeover in Iran to be sponsoring people like the Black Scorpions, especially since no one can figure out why they're after the IUM and they ain't telling.
• Intifada Papa

• Islamic unity is a worthy goal. But Ibn Eisa is Shaytan in the guise of the Mahdi. We will drain his New Jihad of its strength, and when it is weak enough, we will deliver true Islamic justice to his wretched soul.
• Fida'i

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF IRAQ
Population: 30,940,000 (Arab 92%, Other 8%)
Major Languages: Arabic (96%), English (30%)
Major Religions: Shi'ite Islam (76%), Sunni Islam (17%)

Iraq's always been a mess. They're all Arabs now that the Kurds are independent, but the country remains split between Shi'ites and Sunnis. Saeder-Krupp supports the Iraqi government in return for access to the Basra oilfields, the last significant oil reserves left in the Middle East. President Shari'ati dances to S-K's tune and is popular only with the rich and corrupt.

With the oil almost gone, S-K is gradually taking its nuyen elsewhere. Less money means fewer resources for Shari'ati's government, and the economy is slowing down. Iraqis are calling for change; some want to join the Arabian Caliphate, others want an Islamic Republic, and quite a few want the megacorps to take over. A civil war is brewing here, and things can get ugly fast. Until that happens, though, Iraq is a great place for runners. Everyone's maneuvering for power, which means lots of jobs around. I really like it here. You can cast whatever spells you want, there's no Islamic law and no religious police. Best of all, I can walk my dwarf butt down the streets of Baghdad without someone kicking it.

• Kicking it for being metahuman, you mean. Baghdad is a rough city. Come visit, but don't forget your body armor.
• Felix

Power Brokers

President Shari'ati has held power for twenty years now, and his government is a technocratic dictatorship in Lofwyr's pocket. The Islamic Unity Movement, however, has the support of most Sunnis and many Shi'ites. Their dream of reuniting all Arabs strikes a deep chord, and many Iraqis don't want to be left out. I expect Iraq to join the Arabian Caliphate in the next few years.

Saeder-Krupp still owns a significant part of the country, mostly through local subsidiaries, but the truth about who's in charge is obvious even to the common Iraqi. Most Iraqis work for S-K or for businesses that depend on the corp, but everyone knows S-K is leaving. Those in its pocket—including most cabinet ministers and government officials—want to grab whatever they can get their hands on before it's too late.

S-K is already getting rid of its less profitable assets. A triple-A might not care about owning small corps throughout Iraq, but buyers like Exxoco Petrochem, United Oil and Global Oil have shown up, and Arabian corps (especially Sandstorm Engineering and Ifrit Services) are also showing some interest. These corps will probably lie low while Lofwyr can still throw his weight around. Once he's gone, they'll make sure to become the powers behind the throne.

• I'd bet on Exxoco Petrochem. They've been favored in almost every deal, culminating in the purchase of Baghdad Electrics last month. S-K must be getting something in return.
• €spion

• Yes, but that deal cost Exxoco three execs and a few million nuyen to cover sabotage damages. The fight to succeed S-K is getting nasty, especially now that Global Oil is tired of getting the low end.
• Maghrebi Monster

• Don't discount the Arab corps too fast, chummers. Sandstorm and Ifrit are less aggressive, but they're playing with Arab family ties, which cross the border into Syria and Arabia. Oil Minister Rashid al-Sheikh belongs to the family that runs Ifrit Services. Wonder where he'll turn when S-K stops paying him off?
• Jameelia

Shari'ati's major problem is the swiftly deteriorating relationship between S-K and the IUM. This is only happening in Iraq; S-K has a problem with Ibn Eisa, not with the IUM as a whole, and Ibn Eisa has been active here. The situation got worse two weeks ago when S-K's Middle East strongman, **Saied Bey**, hinted that the corp would support a union

between Arabia and Iraq with the help of the IUM if Ibn Eisa was out of the picture. This caused quite a stir, especially among Iraqi Shi'ites in the south, and the specter of another Shi'ite uprising is coming back to haunt Shari'ati.

The Shi'ite clerics are a wild card. They're independent, and still followed by Shi'ites living in southern Iraq and in Baghdad's poorest neighborhoods. Only a small part of the top Shi'ite clergy (the ayatollahs) supports the IUM or S-K directly. Iraqi ayatollahs have a tradition of independence, but a growing number are personally devoted to Ibn Eisa as the Twelfth Great Imam. These clerics, led by Iranian **Ayatollah Juvayni**, have strong ties with the ruling Mobarez party in Iran. So far they've supported the IUM; but if the IUM and Ibn Eisa break up, this faction will follow Ibn Eisa.

Most of these political-religious games play out in the holy city of Najaf, inside the walls of the Religious Institution (*al-Hawzah al-`Ilmiyyah*), where most ayatollahs in Iraq study. Part of Juvayni's power comes from being one of the Institution's four Great Ayatollahs. He can sway a lot of young and impressionable clerics to his side, and nowadays every radical cleric has a few militant followers. Some of these radicals have ties to terrorist groups. Juvayni seems to have built some connections with the New Islamic Jihad.

» Sometimes Juvayni's rival ayatollahs have unfortunate accidents with NIJ written all over them. Of course, Juvayni's suffered a few assassination attempts himself. The last one was probably a Black Scorpions attack, and a lot of people thought they'd got him until he showed up a few days later almost unscathed.
» Intifada Papa

» A wave of bombings and kidnappings has hit central Basra these past few weeks, all claimed by the NIJ. They're targeting S-K, and Saied Bey supposedly has taken a personal interest in this situation.
» Maghrebi Monster

» Newsflash: Farid al-Mansoor is in Najaf to deal with the NIJ. This guy is a legend in the Middle East, a Robin Hood type working for the Islamic Renaissance Movement. Looks like Bey's links with the IRM finally paid off …
» Riyalpolitik

Operating in Iraq

If you come to Iraq, you'll likely end up in Baghdad or Basra. **Baghdad** is a cosmopolitan sprawl with ten million people, both Sunni and Shi'ite. Nowhere else in the Middle East will you see a greater mix of peoples, religions and ideologies. Most residents live in a maze of suburbs known for dusty streets and blind alleys. The city center is corp turf, with large avenues and lavish mosques. Some date back to the Baghdad Caliphate, others were built by the new Caliph in Medina. All the action starts late in the afternoon and goes on through the night. This is the place to relax and have a good time.

» Good time, indeed. The music plays so loud that you can't hear the calls for prayer. Egyptian whores wiggle their bellies in the streets; men and women walk together filled with alcohol and drugs. No righteous Muslim can support this filth in the city of the Caliphs!
» Crescent Moon

Baghdadis have long held high hopes for Shari'ati's government. Most of them work—or worked—for S-K and other corps, or the small businesses that gravitated around them. Now, unemployment is rising, along with social unrest. The last few months saw increasing demonstrations demanding jobs and food. Crime is also on the rise. Desperate youths are joining new and violent "Ali Baba" gangs who are taking control of the streets from the Turkish *maffiya.* Shari'ati's police force is understaffed and overworked, so the gangs can operate openly and loudly.

» The NIJ is trying to take over these gangs, but the IRM is strong here, too. Our friends are flocking here and getting ready for a battle. This is our chance to face the fundies head on and show them what real Muslims can do.
» Goat-Footed Lady

» The IUM has capitalized on Baghdad's poverty; their charities are active all over town. Coincidence or not, you can see people calling for "United Arabia" in almost every demonstration.
» Farah

Basra is the seat of S-K's power. All of Iraq's heavy petrochem industry is concentrated around the city, and its seaport is the major export route for Iraqi oil. Basra has horrific pollution problems, and you don't want to get caught outside during one of its toxic sandstorms.

Basra is dominated by the Ziggurat, a huge arcology built on a sea platform just off the coast. Other corps also boast HQs in flimsy chrome-and-glass towers around the city center. Most locals are Shi'ites who work in the city's factories and ports. So far they've been spared the worst of Iraq's economic crisis, but they know their time will come; the oil unions are already preparing for a fight.

» One reason to visit Basra is the shadow clinics. Cyberware is difficult to get in Iran, so Iranian execs flock across the border for implants. You can get a good deal if you know what you're buying. A lot of stuff is stolen from corpses, and something delicate might get broken in the process.
» Xunga XL

» If you're traveling between Basra and Baghdad, check out the ruins of Babylon. They've registered on the astral ever since the comet passed, and locals say angry ghosts took the place over. While the scholars in Najaf discuss the Islamic thing to do, the ruins are more or less open to the public, and there's no telling what you might find.
» Babylonian

• Angry ghosts of Babylon, right. I only saw one and he looked lost; tried real hard to tell me something. Can anyone find me an Akkadian linguasoft?
• Nephilim

Various tribes dominate the rest of Iraq. They often own territory around oil fields and pipelines, and almost half of Iraqis belong to one tribe or another. Many place allegiance to their tribal leader (the s*heikh*) before their government or their religion. Tribal bonds have grown stronger since the Awakening; during times of chaos, these ties were often the only thing standing between common folk and starvation.

The IUM has little support here; their appeal for Muslim unity implicitly attacks tribal bonds. S-K always had free room to maneuver, and they made sure every tribal sheik got a cut from their business. Now that they're shutting down the nuyen valve, the most powerful tribes are becoming bigger players. Currently, the tribes of the Dulaym federation are S-K's favorites. They own everything between Baghdad and the Syrian border; their desert farms have the latest satellite-supported agrotech and their militia has SOTA firepower.

• I worked for Sheik Mazlum al-Dulayimi of the Abu Nimr tribe. They're part of the Dulaym, so I found contacts all over Dulaym territory: cops, judges, corp execs, clerics, you name it. I'd hate to make an enemy of one of these sheiks.
• Felix

• They've got cousins in the Bedouin tribes of Jordan, too; lots of smuggling going on through that border.
• Maghrebi Monster

• Other tribes are getting indebted and looking for partners elsewhere, and some Arabian corps got interested. Sandstorm Engineering has great no-interest loans for the Shammar tribes. This no-interest thing is very Muslim, but what's in it for Sandstorm?
• Riyalpolitik

• Interesting. The Shammar family is powerful in Arabia as well, and they've gotten into trouble with S-K because the Shammar support Ibn Eisa … who might well be behind this move.
• Jameelia

ISRAEL, PALESTINE AND JERUSALEM

Population: 6,800,000 (Israel: Jews 95%, Other 5%)/3,100,000 (Palestine: Palestinians 97%, Other 3%)
Major Languages: Hebrew (Israel, 91%), Arabic (Palestine, 98%); English (64%), Russian (23%)
Major Religions: Judaism (Israel, 83%), Sunni Islam (Palestine 84%)

• How did it survive the Jihad? Everyone asks that question when they see Israel still on the map. Hametayelet, a former smuggler and reliable fixer in Jerusalem, can answer it, and also tell you how to run in the Holy Land.
• The Spectral Shah
Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:33:56 (PST)

by Hametayelet

Shalom alehrem, goyim.

I've traveled every inch of this land of mine I love, and I'm writing this lowdown because I fear for Israel's existence. Never forget one thing when running here: know who you run for, because you may end up sawing the branch you're sitting on.

OLIVE TREES AND NUCLEAR WARHEADS

This land is smaller than your average UCAS state and Most of it, making the populated area even smaller. When the Jewish state was established in 1948, Arab countries attacked and the local population had to move. The second part of the 20th century saw a succession of religious and territorial wars, ending with the formation of "Palestinian Territories" occupied by the Israeli Defense Forces ("Tsahal") for security reasons and the establishment of a powerless Palestinian Authority accused of supporting terrorism. A wobbly peace process began in the 1990s, but for a long time three thorns prevented its success: reluctance to accept the "two-state solution," the status of Jerusalem, and the presence of settlers outside Israel's early borders.

Both sides had trouble with the idea of two states, even though it was the only sane solution. Many Palestinians wanted Israel gone, and Israel wouldn't countenance a Palestinian nation next door. After Palestinian leader Arafat's death in 2004, and sharp political change in Israel soon afterward, positions changed radically on both sides. Arafat's successors genuinely accepted Israel, and Palestine finally got its autonomy.

Both peoples claimed Jerusalem as their exclusive heritage. In early 2012, astral disturbances and random spirit attacks forced the authorities to evacuate the historic Old City and close it for forty days. Evacuations of the Old City occurred regularly in the following decades, but neither we nor the Palestinians were ready to leave the place for good despite the dangers. After the terrible 2046 mana warp, the Holy City fell out of Israel's hands: the phenomena suddenly stopped, catching everyone unawares except the United Nations. They seized it before Tsahal could, and have kept it ever since.

Israel survived the Jihad thanks to aid from miltech corps, effective intelligence sources throughout the Arab countries, its nuclear capabilities and unexpected support from some Palestinians. A good fraction of the Palestinians refused to join the Alliance for Allah; on the verge of getting their own state, they didn't want to destroy decades of painfully built hopes. Israel threatened to detonate suitcase nukes in Arab capitals after a first onslaught was contained at atrociously high cost. They bombed Turkish-occupied Cyprus in retaliation, then hit several Arab command centers, refineries and supply routes with small tactical nukes. The Alliance got the message, the Jihad's command structure in Palestine crumbled and the combatants signed a cease-fire. Fighting continued for months

against disorganized AfA troops, mainly in the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

» Magic was another edge Israel had over its enemies. Qabbalist mages aspected power sites like Masada and Mount Sinai, and activated a network of power sites to channel mana.
» Echec

» One defense project was dubbed "Zion's Shield." They planned to use Jerusalem as a hub to power these sites, and perform a ritual nicknamed "Masada Staïm" with which to cast high-powered spells on the battlefield.
» Eyal

» When you know the story of Masada, this is scary … especially considering the leanings of some Qabbalists toward blood magic …
» as Sadiq

After the war, Israel funneled millions of nuyen toward rebuilding Palestine, and the remaining Israeli settlements were dismantled.

Palestine and Israel 2065

Relations have improved between Israel and autonomous Palestine ever since, partly thanks to the security fence that separates us from them, but that is easier to cross legally than before. Talks are scheduled in October for putting the finishing touches on the creation of sovereign Palestine. If things go well, the Republic of Palestine should be born on January 1st, 2065. Tensions are high on both sides, and we don't really trust the Palestinians, whose political landscape is infested with extremists. The NIJ has gained ground among the poorest classes, and the Palestinian government lacks supporters. We have our own bunch of morons, the ultra-orthodox community that thrived during and after the war. They've become a big political force, threatening the mutual agreement between Israel and Palestine.

Atmosphere-wise, Israel offers an original blend of Western and Eastern tradition, with a touch of post-apocalyptic ambiance, all in a language spoken nowhere else—Hebrew. Luckily for you foreigners, everyone speaks English too. The typical Israeli city is built functional and solid, so you'd better like the Bauhaus style.

» People call it "Blockhaus;" half the buildings in Tel Aviv and Haifa are ugly blocks of concrete more than a century old. The rest are small, traditional Arab and Turkish houses or glass-and-chrome towers in the worst taste imaginable. Palestinian cities are quite nice, freshly rebuilt and not spoiled yet by industrial activity. The IDF still controls two main highways crossing the West Bank to the Jordan River, but otherwise there are no checkpoints except in the fence that separates both countries.
» Ambassador

Palestine is closer to an underdeveloped Arab country, but decades of peace and contact with a Western democracy have done a lot to improve living standards. The Matrix helped, and the country thrives on a blend of high tech and agriculture.

KINGS, PROPHETS AND THIEVES

You'll also need to know who the big boys are. Here's a quick list.

Prime Minister Efrat Tal

Israel's politicians always come from the military. Prime Minister Efrat Tal, who heads the left-wing Shalom Alehrem Coalition (SAC), is no exception. She's used to working with Palestinians and her bent was always toward peace, but security measures had priority. This 51-year old lady is a war hero, having led the defense of besieged Bethlehem while Jihad forces threatened to roll over the Judean desert to Tel Aviv.

» The big talk in the Knesset these days is whether to launch a pre-emptive strike at the Arabian forces gathered along the Jordan border. Doing so would spark another regional conflict, but maybe we can't avoid it.
» Barak Streak

Qabbalist Rabbi Shlomo Ben-Yehuda

A secretive but major figurehead of the Qabbalist faction, and the most active representative of the Jerusalem Council, Rabbi Shlomo belongs to the Shas-Gush Torah religious party. He's made statements rejecting the legitimacy of the Palestinian government, and threatens the balance of the Council. Fraggers like this guy and his friends could cost us this long-awaited peace.

While most practitioners of the Qabbalah are just following a different hermetic tradition, the most conservative Qabbalists impose tight strictures: practitioners must be men over 35 and faithful readers of the holy texts.

» Unfortunately, far-right Qabbalists have lots of influence because Israel needs their mojo to ensure its protection. These guys want the historical land of "Eretz Israel" to be exclusively Jewish, which means getting rid of Palestine.
» Barak Streak

Palestinian President Ahmad Rabbo

Rabbo is 72 years old, and has handed most of his political powers to his prime minister, but remains a leading national figure. Compelled to deal with extremists, he managed to muzzle them while keeping his legitimacy as a sincere advocate of peace. Now Hamas is back, though, partly because Rabbo cajoled them into supporting local elections, and Israelis are starting to distrust him. No one knows what trick Rabbo will use to save his Arab ass.

» Tal never liked him, because he accused her of putting Palestinian asses on the first lines during the Battle of Bethlehem. His biggest mistake, though, was offering Hamas an alliance for local elections, playing too much on the "us vs. them" angle.
» Barak Streak

TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Before running here, learn the runner's Torah: you don't want to get caught by Mossad.
2. Know who you work for. Threaten Israel's strategic interests and it's open season on your ass if someone learns it.
3. Know your target, for the same reason.
4. Get the scope. The shadow community is small and tight—a few hundred at most, with a tenth of that real pros. Everyone knows everyone, so take care of your rep and contacts.
5. Keep it quiet. Israel is highly militarized, so forget the heavy hardware for any op performed outside of no-law or remote zones.
6. Beware the Average Moshe. Every man and woman went to the army for years and serves one month per year. Don't forget that when you take hostages.
7. Palestinians and Israelis are better kept apart. We may respect each other, but we still don't get along that well.
8. Respect Shabbat. Don't take runs on Friday nights or Saturdays.
9. Speak Hebrew if possible. It'll help you make friends and get discounts.
10. Above all, don't get caught by Mossad.

» The situation is far more complicated. Rabbo tried to draw Hamas out of the dark, because they were getting too powerful as a crime syndicate. He planned on crushing them forever by infiltrating them and killing the movement from the inside. Rabbo HAD to lure them with blunter speech than usual, but he succeeded too well; they won the mayor's office in three big cities.
» Almond White

Palestinian Prime Minister Mehdi Zatar

The current president's designated heir, Zatar was more or less democratically elected. He's respected by all Palestinian political factions, and Israel regards him as its main interlocutor. He's doing his best to ensure re-election, but local politics is so volatile that people here say his victory is no sure thing.

» Zatar faces the difficult task of overcoming Rabbo's stature, while preventing Hamas and the NIJ from contesting his authority. He has an edge, though; he's a former Palestinian representative at the Jerusalem Ecumenical Council and has solid contacts with Jewish and Christian authorities.
» Babylonian

Hamas

Under the leadership of **Abu al-Khadira,** who's already survived five assassination attempts (including two via Israeli drones), this terrorist organization became an international crime syndicate along with the Syrian Hezbollah. They're largely supported by the Islamic Unity Movement and a growing segment of the population, particularly in Gaza, with its staggering unemployment and poverty rates. Hamas smuggles weapons and people from Egypt as well as drugs from Lebanon and Syria.

» Hamas was completely discredited in the first decades of the 21st century, when other factions and Israel agreed on a political solution for Palestine. Hamas lost most of its activists and turned criminal, though it maintained its prior social and humanitarian concerns. When it reappeared on the political scene two years ago thanks to millions of nuyen from the IUM and various Muslim relief organizations, Rabbo failed to outmaneuver the group.
» Echec

Other Syndicates

The *Maagen David Adom* ("Red Star of David") syndicate headed by Vor **Yossi Jabotinsky** dates back to the massive wave of Russian migrants who arrived in Israel in the late 1990s. They've run most of the country's "regular" crime ever since, and now face local Thai and Filipino syndicates in the big ports of Haifa and Eilat. The European Mafia also has many ties to Israel, mostly through white-collar crime and influence peddling.

» Maagen David Adom's name is a play on words (the MDA is the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross), because they perform most of their break-ins and violent ops in rescue vans and choppers—one of the few vehicles allowed to go everywhere in Palestine and Israel. They're more careful now, but remain the noisiest syndicate around. Given police paranoia, everybody wonders how they pull such stunts.
» Xunga XL

» Because the syndicate sometimes works with Mossad, thanks to its connections with the Russian Red Vory, and so gets some leeway. Recently, the Russkies used their Siberian connections to evacuate Jews there and bring them to Israel, but the op failed miserably. Yossi didn't get his money and the truce between him and the authorities is over.
» Skarn Ka

MERCHANTS

After the Crash, Israel nationalized most of its industrial assets into the huge and now defunct Gush Hata'assia (Israel Bloc), not unlike Lusiada in Portugal. Over the past decades, however, the Gush fell prey to foreign corp buyouts, deemed necessary to bring the economy back on track. Today, foreign investors control Israel's economy. The only local champion is **Checkpoint Software,** which sells programs across the globe.

The Frankfurt Bank Association

FBA's Israel head is Grand Tour regular Avi Bergmann. FBA owns companies such as Hapoaleumi Bank and Migdalor Insurance, along with FBA-affiliated IDB Holdings. The latter company is deep in the diamond business, long an Israeli economic staple.

» IDB keeps its Frankfurt affiliation discreet for several reasons. First, confessing that large chunks of the Israeli economy lie in German hands is a little messy. Second, the FBA is well implanted in Arabia through the Islamic Development Cooperative Bank … and no one in Tel Aviv wants to acknowledge that some of their strings get pulled by the same people who are calling the shots in Arabia.
» Corpshark

» The high-end pro-Israeli intelligence networks in the Arab countries were partially built by Nachtmeister through the dragon's FBA assets, and he informed the Israelis. In return, he got a quasi-monopoly on Israel's lucrative diamond biz. Israel lost one precious source of intel when he bit the dust.
» €spion

» The FBA's recent weakness explains the inroads made by DeBeers-Omnitech on the Israeli diamond scene through the buyout of Clal Industries. DB-O is on the verge of reclaiming its worldwide domination of the trade, and this move may be fatal to the FBA's dominion.
» 01100101

» The Israelis need a new dragon friend, and Aden suits them perfectly. Mossad has links with him through pro-Israeli Christian militias in Lebanon, who are buddy-buddy with the Armenians in touch with Aden. Soon the wyrm will take over the Jewish state!
» Dragonslayer

Ares Macrotechnology

Ares was one of Israel's main backers during the Jihad, and Ares Arms bought Israel Military Industries under special exclusive clauses. Most of Israel's miltech industry belongs to Esprit or Ares.

» Ares Arms and Ares Integrated Solutions had an interest in keeping Israel alive because a lot of their research was and is performed in Israeli labs and think tanks. No Cell-X BalPal device in your Smartlink-2 without them. Also, some influential people in FDC and Ares weren't ready to drop Israel for various personal reasons. In a way they took over the former role of the US, striking a major PR coup.
» €spion

Ares and the FBA seem on suspiciously good terms for a country's top corps, but their different focus makes them complementary rather than antagonistic.

» That, or some affair the Corp Court dealt with last summer …
» Huygens

LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Here are places you're likely to visit. If you stop in 'Zalem, drop by at the *Strudel* on Monbaz and ask for Sarit.

Yerushalayim

My precious Jerusalem, both holy and sinful, is a place of great faith and suffering. Israel used to control the whole city, but now Jerusalem lies under direct UN administration–which means the Corporate Court has its nose there. The city is renowned for magical oddities linked to its various faiths.

• During the `30s war, we recorded peak spirit activity in Jerusalem—I worked in the labs studying the weird stuff that went down inside the Old City during the magic alerts. Fighters in Bethlehem and Beit Jala reported soldiers on both sides wandering helplessly, severely wounded and attacking their friends. Back then, officials blamed combat gases. But witnesses on the battlefield swore they'd seen their dead comrades walking … And one of them used the term "shedim" to describe them.
• Eyal

• Hey … I thought the shedim first showed up with the comet, three years ago?!
• Brick

• Your sources need some serious editing, then …
• The Laughing Man

The UN installed the Ecumenical Council that opened the city to all the religions claiming it as home, turning the place into a giant fair where all kinds of sects and cults have their offices. Only Christians, Muslims and Jews have representatives on the Council, but the streets are alive with weirdos and religious fanatics from all over the world, a blend of ultra-orthodox dogma and complete heresy. The "skyline" has changed since the UN accepted vertical additions under strict requirements of architectural harmony, and spires and towers now rise high above the Temple Mount in the Muslim Quarter.

Astral rifts and mana storms sometimes appear in and around the Old City, causing mayhem and disorder. Unlike foreigners, the inhabitants are used to it, and find shelter in various power sites like the Western Wall, the Al-Aqsa Mosque or the Holy Sepulcher. The Council's main purpose besides ruling the city is to cleanse local astral space and cancel the mana warp, as yet to no avail. In fact, all the factions are trying to aspect the city's power to their own faith, and they've all failed miserably.

Corporate presence is minimal within the city, but those with a magical agenda are all present one way or another. The Blue Helmets have their headquarters in the old Knesset building west of the Old City and keep a watchful eye on the holy places, entrance roads and airspace.

Tel Aviv

Israel's capital is its political and economic center, a modern metroplex home to more than half of Israel's population. Concrete blocks and towers dominate the skyline. The old Arab city of Jaffa lies to the south and is to Tel Aviv what Bellevue is to Seattle. Two other big neighborhoods got hit by Libyan chemical attacks and haven't yet reopened; the first comprises the Florentin and Shapira districts, the second the former business district of Ramat Gan with its abandoned skyscrapers.

• Unlike most other sprawls, Tel Aviv has its slums and Barrens in its center rather than at its periphery. This is both good (you don't need to travel far to reach a safe hideout) and bad (the places are closed off).
• Barak Streak

• More accurately, these districts are closed off, but you can get in easily through underground passages on foot or with a light aircraft that can hop in from the outside—locals call it the 20-second ride. Or you can break in via the big streets, like Rehov Herzl or Menachem Begin, preferably with a bike rather than a car. Security is present but not always efficient, and certainly not unbribe-able.
• Menorah

• Repopulation should start by 2073, which means it's already begun for the SINless fringes of society. You'll find everything you need in FloPira and Ramat Gan. Corps are already drawing up plans for rebuilding the sites, and they're hiring runners to scout the areas and clean out the mutated critters who've thrived there. Some juicy contracts are being negotiated now, and corps are at one another's throats.
• Hametayelet

Palestine and Gaza

The West Bank sits between the security fence in the west and the Jordan Valley buffer zone in the east, with Hebron and Nablus as major population centers. By the Mediterranean, the Gaza sprawl counts over 2 million people, two-thirds of the Palestinian population. If Tel Aviv is where you'll run, the Gaza Strip is where you'll enter the Middle East and get your gear.

The Gaza Strip now extends all the way to Suez, where much shadow biz takes place since Sinai now belongs to Israel. The Strip is very narrow and has grown *downward*, with an underground tunnel and makeshift train running from Suez to Gaza proper. Pit stops have grown into small villages where Bedouin traders and smugglers often stop for fun and biz.

Suez

Israel took over the Sinai Desert awhile back and evacuated most of its Egyptian population so the desert could become a buffer zone with Egypt. The world accepted this move because the Suez channel remained under international control; the UN gained administrative control of it in 2046.

• That is, the CC in disguise. While the Corp Court probably pulls the strings, having countries like Azania and Nigeria as main providers of Blue Helmets for the Suez International Zone is interesting.
• Ambassador

The STOLZ

Special Toxic Off-Limit Zones are hardly Israel's pride. They're mostly what remains from the 2004 Libyan attacks, while others date back to the 2030s war. Most of them lie in the Negev Desert, where there's nothing but camels, Bedouins and secret bases. One exception is the city of Beer Sheva, now a toxic hellhole, as is the Palestinian city of Ramallah (probably a miss). About a dozen of these areas are scattered across Israel and are prime stops for smugglers or wanted runners.

TURKEY

• Turkey is not your average Middle Eastern Muslim nation. First of all, its people are Turkic, not Arab. Second, the bigger part of this divided country is more secular and atheist than most Western nations. And if my word's not sufficient, Sümbül's presentation should do the job. She teaches history in a Turkish secondary school, and I'll let you judge her viewpoint.
• The Spectral Shah

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:37:11 (PST)

by Sümbül Arslan

Modern Turkey is not one nation, but several. You need to know its dividing lines if you want to run here and survive to spend your pay.

ISLAM VS. SECULARISM

Most people still see Turkey as an extremist land of fanatics who drenched Europe in blood thirty years ago. That image is both true and untrue. The Jihad that laid waste to Eastern and Central Europe was dubbed "Ottoman" for a reason: it was born in Turkey, had strong popular support and used the renowned Turkish army's infrastructure as its framework, in coordination with the Syrian and Iraqi military commands.

Nowadays, though, you cannot compare the modern secular state of West Turkey with the fistful of fundamentalists who still lick the imams' feet in Adana and the East—just as you cannot compare the Allied German States with the Westphalian extremists. Okay, my country was responsible for the worst bloodbath in Europe since World War II, and is fully guilty of its crimes. But must it still be ostracized decades later, when no comparison is possible between then and now? Was Germany's name still cursed in the 1970s?

The people in charge in Ankara today are probably less Muslim than Lofwyr, and an overwhelming majority of the population will tell you how wary they are of religion. What else does the international community need to clear the name of my homeland?

• Secularism is a strong feature of present-day Turkey. In reaction to the horror of the Jihad, and in fear of international—and Christian—retaliation, many Turks severed their links to Islam. Turkey's once-pervasive secular tradition is back with a vengeance, even tending toward extreme atheism.
• Echec

• Westerners may appreciate it, but believe me, it's not that good. You cannot discard a people's cultural and religious heritage, especially when they are Muslims. Turkish society has turned schizophrenic, seeking redemption in atheism. But the worst consequence is a huge spiritual void, and a void is no good in such matters.
• Dying Muse

HISTORY

Accelerated history lesson: back in the 1920s after WW1, Mustapha Kemal, called Atatürk (Father of the Turks), crushed various rebellions and Islamic movements. He suppressed the century-old Istanbul Caliphate and launched a wave of reforms to Westernize Turkey (which meant adopting a French-style administration, a German-style army and British economics, as well as secularizing Islam by separating the state from religious institutions). This cherished memory of a Turkey that was more advanced than many European nations is dear to our hearts. Living in a fake democracy with the military holding effective control was a necessary evil so that we could one day become a real Western country.

• You couldn't truly advocate both secularism and democracy in Turkey at that time, simply because democracy must respect the majority and that majority was pro-Islamic. Things may have changed now, but at what price? A people's identity is being negated in exchange for peace and a pro-Western society.
• Veteran

From the day the military let go, Muslims began to rise again, slowly but steadily. When in 2009 the European Union turned our backward country down, the Islamic party joined the governing coalition following a fundamentalist resurgence brought on by the Awakening. They finally rose to power after the Crash of '29, started the Jihad, and sent us back more than a century into the past from which Europe had pulled us. Damn them.

• Does progress have to mean Westernization? A founding myth for the Turkish nation lies in religion or nationalism. The Turks are denied both possibilities, because the West fears both. Thus the Turks are kept unsure of themselves as a people, for the sake of the West's security. Problem is, this identity crisis won't last forever.
• Poly Tick

After the war, European armies rolled into Constantinople and kept going east to Ankara, toppled the bad guys there and secured the land for a few months, after which they withdrew their exhausted soldiers. They freed Constantinople and installed a provisional government in Ankara, liberating us from the Islamic threat.

• "Freed." "Secured." Try "occupied." The identity of this "provisional government" was a mystery. Usually, the UN handles these situations, but the UN was pretty much dead at the time. The only Turkish member of this government was the young Kenan Gazneli, our current President of Parliament. The other famous members were Enver Koprülü, a Kurd, and Vladimir Ioukachenko, who's since been appointed VP for Bioenergetica's PR department in Ukraine.
• Ambassador

• The Corporate Court was in control, along with the Allies' military administration. And today's "Neo-Atatürk" is its offspring in disguise. Many Turks are raised to worship the West, and this girl Sümbül is no exception. Look at her words carefully. Gazneli still owes a lot to those who brought him to office, and Koprülü, though officially retired, remains the driving belt between Ankara and Arbil, Kurdistan's capital.
• Goldstein

• Ioukachenko's position in West Turkey made it possible for the Ukraine to push for Istanbul's independence. Surprisingly, the Ukrainian media reported a break-in at the veep's Odessa dacha last month. The trail leads back to the Grey Wolves … maybe the old stories are still hot.
• Die-Hard Straits

Current Affairs

By 2039, after years of domestic unrest, the forces of the scattered Jihad had been subdued in most of Turkey, with token resistance in the hills of the East and around the city of Adana. Parliament drafted a new constitution, banning Sharia from legal texts and eliminating all references to Islam. All private schools were closed; national education moved to public, secular institutions with a rational take on religion. Members of the European elite were granted Turkish nationality, offering us the chance to be raised in a modern and free state. Many Turkish scientists and scholars prominent today were born in Western Europe. Our nation was also allowed to maintain limited armed forces.

• In the name of cultural openness and enlightenment, Euro politicians and corp execs took several key positions in education, the economy, politics and the military, establishing effective corporate-colonial leadership in West Turkey. In fact, Europe is one of West Turkey's main backers.
• Class Fighter

Our biggest problem today is the fundamentalist insurgency in the East. We have fought for years to dismantle the terrorist-infested hills and the volatile city of Adana, but the limited Turkish military forces cannot crush them for good. Nevertheless, the number of terrorist attacks against West Turkey's population and army has dropped by 25 percent over the past five years. The efficiency of counter-terror operations has likewise improved, with 400 terrorists arrested over the past two years and seven figureheads eliminated. The threat remains, but it is steadily weakening.

• That's open to debate. A report I got from intelligence corp Aegis Cognito revealed that the official figures published by the Turkish authorities are edited regularly, with constant revision from previous years' figures.
• 001101010

• Yeah, right. And no proof of the original figures is available elsewhere? No, the real problem is how you read the statistics: while the number of attacks has decreased, they're more carefully planned, and cause more casualties and damage.

While more terrorists have been eliminated, the number of terror cells active in urban centers has increased.
• Cynical Paul

• The current Turkish problem has a lot in common with early 21st-century Israel; terror attacks, suicide bombings and car bombs are part of daily life, which goes right on. On the other hand, the government plays up the "existential threat" to maintain a national cohesion that otherwise would be at risk.
• Hametayelet

The aid we get from our Kurdish friends east of Adana also helps keep the insurgents in check. The fundamentalists are caught in between and have no chance to recover.

• You bet. The Western Turks hate the Kurds as much as ever, but they're counting on the enemy-of-my-enemy effect.
• Novichok

Our homegrown fundamentalists frequently spread their fanaticism via the Matrix, pirate trideo and other mass media. Emailboxes in Turkey probably get the most spam in the world, and the Matrix is host to some of the toughest gang wars and vandalism, with attacks and hostile graffiti a common sight even on corporate hosts. Last month, the fundies tested some new brainwashing techniques with the help of aircraft pilots; they fooled the air defense into dropping hundreds of thousands of leaflets over West Turkey's main cities, calling for a Jihad and a new Ottoman revolution, in the name of Turkey's national heritage. At the same time, a cyber-assault crashed about a dozen Matrix hosts simultaneously. Pirate broadcasts also sometimes disturb regular programs and steal air time in an obscene demonstration of zealotry.

This propaganda is unbearable, and Neo-Atatürk does its best to bring a tolerant voice to the masses through all the means at our disposal. It is our civic duty to send lists of contacts to the government-sponsored **National Foundation for Freedom of Information,** to better distribute Turkey's ideals through **Aksakal Teks.**

• Aksakal is Turkey's biggest corp, a big-A media group that is also the country's main MSP. Weird as it may sound, "Teks" doesn't stand for "Techs," but for "Tekstil," Aksakal's former primary business back in the early 21st century. How it became the local media king-of-the-hill is lost in the troubled Crash and Jihad times.
• €spion

THE SECULAR REPUBLIC OF TURKEY (WEST TURKEY)

Some say we have lost our identity in rejecting political Islam and have sold our soul to the West and the corps. We see things differently. The West clearly has the answers we need, and there is no shame in acknowledging this. There are cracks in our system and society, but we can live with them as long as peace is ensured.

People here are either atheists or moderate Muslims, and the Islamic Renaissance Movement has some of its most radical supporters in Ankara and Constantinople. If you come here from Europe or North America, you'll feel almost at home.

Neo-Atatürk and the Seculars

The original Atatürk brought Turkey into the 20th century, just as his present-day incarnation brought it into the 21st. Neo-Atatürk maintains good relations with Europe and protects our right to live in a free, secular state. Rather than an individual strongman, Neo-Atatürk is a collegial body that acts as a single entity in leading the Secular Republic. Parliament assists Neo-Atatürk in its task and provides it with expertise on various topics when needed. Many people form Neo-Atatürk, but its public face is a Matrix persona resembling a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features.

• It's hard for an outsider to understand how important this paternalist figurehead is. Nobody mistakes him for someone real, but West Turks see the Neo-Atatürk persona as the avatar of dedicated people working together for the country's greater good. The present generation, stuffed full of Neo-Atatürk propaganda, lacks spiritual references. Some simply consider N-A a symbol for society, while others use him to fill their spiritual void. Others don't believe in anything, and are deeply disillusioned by the system. Drug abuse has skyrocketed among that last crowd, which is a lot larger than most avowed secularists will admit.
• Die-Hard Straits

• Rumors about Neo-Atatürk's identity abound. The people behind it hold the real power and keep Parliament leashed through subtle loopholes in the Constitution, but their own identity remains secret for "security reasons." Parliament is supposed to nominate the folks who make up N-A, but because the real control works the other way around, the whole system is screwed.
• Poly Tick

• That's easy. Corpers run the show. Some corps have "observers" in Parliament who call the shots through puppet politicians acting as proxies.
• Class Warrior

• There's more to it. The New European Economic Community has proxies in Neo-Atatürk, making the whole Turkish executive a pro-European and pro S-K puppet.
• Riyalpolitik

• S-K isn't that strong. N-A's members were chosen by the victors in the EuroWars, and S-K wasn't all-powerful at the time. Euro players in N-A need not have an agenda exactly matching the wyrm's …
• Synner

Corporations

It's a fact of modern life that corporations deal in politics and have the power and reasons to do so. As long as our nation prospers and remains free, Neo-Atatürk willingly includes a few corporate representatives. As of 2064, the official observers come from a few accredited corps: **Saeder-Krupp, Mitsuhama, HKB**, **Meridional Agronomics** and local company **Aksakal Teks.** The latter handles centralized media broadcasts, based on information sent by independent channels all over the country.

» The problem is, President Gazneli is handcuffed, and the poor bastard can't help but let his country and people live an illusion of practical and spiritual freedom. He sees this as a necessary evil, a vital re-education in order to avoid repeating past errors, and that maybe one day Turkey will evolve into a real democracy.
» Riyalpolitik

» Aksakal is a proto-totalitarian entity that centralizes all information in Ankara and is controlled by N-A. This is the regime's main organ of opinion control. You should see how people idolize Kenson Gavral, AT's star anchorman. They even sell his action figure. The guy came from the Czech Republic after a casting call, with no journalism background. He was wounded in a terror attack and spent a month in a hospital.
» Die-Hard Straits

» Sure. He had to be very badly wounded to require a delta clinic for his hospitalization …
» Cynical Paul

Izmir

The corps and the *maffiya* call the city of Izmir home. On the shores of the Aegean Sea, Izmir was leveled by quakes in 2048 and has since been completely rebuilt. Almost nothing standing is older than twenty years, and the central business district resembles any other in North America or Europe. Sometimes it's hard to say where the line exists between legitimate business and criminal enterprises, considering the amount of illegal traffic conducted in Izmir by the corps and the syndicates. They have a rough mutual agreement; the corps pay for protection, and the maffiya uses its connections to persuade authorities to close their eyes on sensitive issues.

You don't change a century-old tradition in a few years, and corruption at the local level is endemic. Several police services reportedly deal with the maffiya; the state clamps down hard on it, but ties between the syndicates and local authorities remain strong.

» Bühlent fiah heads the maffiya. Back during the Jihad, his father handled most of the refugee business. Fiah tried to take over Daddy's specialty, but the Grey Wolves made him an offer he couldn't refuse: leave the refugee trade and concentrate on other sectors of activity or visit an empty desalinization pool along with a dozen hungry ghouls. Fiah accepted the deal and has done well over the past few years, cultivating contacts with local authorities.
» Xunga XL

» This could change. Ever since Ronan Menderes—who led the neo-fascist Grey Wolves faction—bit the dust in a pirate clash on Cyprus, new Grey Wolves leader Aziz Arbas has had enough on his plate avoiding internal bickering. He hasn't had the energy to keep fiah in check, and the old fragger may be planning a bold move against the Grey Wolves in Greece.
» Islander

Unlike many other urban cancers, criminality remains relatively low in the sprawl and the harbor districts. An unwritten law forbids mob bloodbaths, and the Grey Wolves efficiently handle any necessary killings of competitors or rebellious mobsters. The Wolves also control the immigration network. This infamous group inspires enough terror to settle even the hottest crackhead on the docks.

» The Grey Wolves mostly handle refugee flows to and from the Balkans, rather than goods, because they have agreements with the corps for those. If you need to be smuggled into or out of Turkey, choose the Wolves for efficiency, but keep your mouth shut. They have a reputation for torture and can be extremely violent, especially when making examples of talkative folk. The Albanians who tried to cross them near Athens last year will remember their mistake for decades.
» Xunga XL

As for the corps, all corporations with observers in Neo-Atatürk have their HQs in Izmir, except S-K. Other major corps in Izmir include S-K Prime, Zeta-ImpChem and Lusiada.

A local curiosity is the unburied ruins of Troy, which lie not far from Izmir. The ruins were the scene of intense activity by the Atlantean Foundation, at least until recently. Last week, however, the AF packed everything up and hurriedly departed, claiming there was nothing left worth finding.

» Even though most of the mission flew back to Atlanta, a small team of researchers set up discreet digs a few kilometers away from the original site. They pretend to be excavating a secondary road dating back to the Trojan era, but they avoided any open publicity.
» as Sadiq

FREE CITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE (ISTANBUL)

Constantinople, as we and the Europeans call it, became a free city after the Euro Wars, thanks to Ukrainian and corporate support. The Philike Hetairia, a multinational organization of local states, and the 10,000 Daggers mercenaries ensure its stability and independence. Today Constantinople is a model of multi-religious cooperation and peaceful community.

» Say it quickly. East Constantinople (that is, the Muslim quarter on the Asian side) still has its share of fundies, and it's a

prime recruiting ground for the Eastern insurgency. Half the suicide bombers since January originated from the eastern district's slums and sneaked into Turkey through the many illegal gateways out of the city.
» Almond White

The city-state's government is composed of political figures from the various communities represented in the local parliament–mostly conservative and moderate Muslims, Orthodox Christians and seculars, who push for corporate interests and have good relations with West Turkey.

» Everyone but the eastern insurgents wants Constantinople to remain independent. The city is an outpost of Western interests and a gateway between the Middle East and Europe. West Turkey acts as a second, devoted buffer.
» Picador

The Religious Great Game

I don't like to talk about religion, but something interesting has been going on recently. Leila Khales, an activist for the Islamic Renaissance Movement, made a surprisingly bold move to start talks with the papal nuncio to Constantinople and the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew IV, who have always advocated ecumenical understanding between the world's major religions. On February 5th, 2064, in a historic accord, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople recognized Islam as a "kindred faith" and agreed to consider imams and scholars close to Khales as the rightful spokespersons of that religion.

» The diplomatic world has bustled with activity ever since. The Christians are ready to recognize the Islamic Renaissance and to "share" the region between Christians and Muslims, provided the Muslim part falls under the IRM's influence. A campaign of deadly shadow ops has begun that pits conservatives and moderates of every faction against one another. Khales' aide was wounded in a magical attack in late April, for which the Templars are probably responsible. On the other hand, Russian Orthodoxers from Moscow are doing their best to thrash Bartholomew's reputation even while he gains popularity in Kiev.
» Churchman

» Shadowrunners are needed in Constantinople. A "secret" delegation of Catholics, Orthodoxers and IRM representatives is about to leave the Free City for Medina. Looks like they plan to open relations with the Arabian Caliphate, and they need an experienced crew to baby-sit them.
» Reek

Corporations

Saeder-Krupp has its Middle East HQ in Constantinople, but the rumor mill claims that Lofwyr wants to move it to Arabia. A sad decision, but not surprising.

» For sure. With Constantinople safe, it's time to move the center of gravity deeper into the Middle East. Lofwyr's ultimate strategy is to unite Europe and the Middle East into a common market, curbing fundamentalism in the process.
» Riyalpolitik

Bioenergetica, a leading force in the the Philike Hetairia, has a strong presence in Constantinople, backing the secular faction in parliament, with strong ties to Neo-Atatürk in West Turkey. Finally, **10,000 Daggers,** hired by Constantinople's government with NEEC backing, provides most of the city's security.

» For now. But the authorities are sweating blood now, because the Daggers are interested in a juicy contract initiated after the bombing of Sarajevo last month. The Balkans have erupted in a full-scale war and the Daggers can't miss it. They'll probably have to remove some of their troops in Constantinople, which means weakening the city's defenses. That's got to look like an opportunity to somebody …
» Die-Hard Straits

EAST ANATOLIA (EAST TURKEY)

This region unfortunately belongs to the insurgents, who still dare call themselves the Ottoman Empire. They are the remains of the Jihad and they want the return of the Istanbul Caliphate. They need to roll over us first, so they try to terrorize us, but so far they're failing.

The Land

The insurgents control territory between the Içel-Samsun Line and the Kurdish Autonomous Zone, with their capital in Adana. The Line is a no-man's-land patrolled by the West Turkish army, which controls all roads outside the mountainous region east of the Line.

Most of the area controlled by the insurgents is a huge mountain range, rural areas where people live wretched lives under fundamentalist rule. West Turkey's army has no reason to go there; we prefer to keep them away rather than smoking them out.

» Anyone familiar with the war in Chechnya during the early 21st century, or more recently the Kurdish war for independence and the Moroccan guerrilla conflict, can understand that sentiment.
» Veteran

» Cappadocia is an Awakened region halfway along the Line. This beautiful area is home to all kinds of metas, changelings and Awakened people and critters. Pariahs fleeing successive regimes have gathered there, and make massive use of illusion spells and spirits to get rid of intruders. Cappadocia itself is made of fully underground cities built inside caves. Some of the artifacts recovered there are really old, and the crazziest rumors abound on how they've been magically sealed ages agoStill, the region is huge, and a few daring smuggler crews

manage to use this no-man's-land between Western Turkey and the lawless lands leading to Syria and then to the Middle East. Some of them even shoot across the Black Sea and through the Caucasus into heartland Russia.
• Rigger X

The eastern border of East Anatolia gives the fundamentalists the most concern. They often get caught in skirmishes with Kurdish soldiers protecting the borders of the Autonomous Zone, and Peshmerga commandos allegedly perform operations inside the fundamentalists' territory. The Kurds play an important role in the region, acting as a buffer between the insurgents and other religious extremists in Syria. Though the two groups don't seem to get along, Hezbollah is rumored to have made a few inroads into East Anatolia, reactivating older traffic routes.

• Hezbollah's "ambassador" to East Turkey is Fuad Amar, who's been disgraced in Damascus. I don't know whether they sent him here as punishment or if they REALLY don't want to improve their relations with the Turks.
• Xunga XL

The disorder that reigns in East Anatolia led the corps to abandon the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which sustained severe damaged in several quakes since the Awakening. Instead, the corporations have invested their energies in the more reliable Baku-Supsa pipeline, which opens onto the Black Sea.

• This makes control of the straits even more important, because Caucasus oil has no more direct access to the Mediterranean Sea.
• €spion

Adana

This city, stronghold of the insurgent leadership, swelled in population after the Jihad, when the fundamentalists all fled there along with remnants of the Turkish and Syrian armies. In Adana, Turkish leaders tried to rebuild their forces and resume the war. Though this effort ultimately failed, Adana has remained a conservative city, ruled by a self-perpetuating council of ulemas originally elected by the various communities throughout the towns and villages of East Anatolia. Nowadays, the council chooses its members from a pool of "faithful" religious mullahs. **Mullah Ammar Abd-el-Kham** currently leads the council. He has a reputation as a wise and respected scholar, but he lacks charisma, and may not see the next Ramadan if things go the right way.

Otherwise, the city is home to half of East Anatolia's population, a large majority living in the slums circling the city's more developed central districts where what little corporate activity exists in the country takes place. While most of the city looks like a backwater town, it's stuffed with high-speed Matrix access jackpoints, both public and private. Cellular and radio links are also common, and the authorities provide free trideo and telecom units.

• Mullah Ammar keeps a low profile because former figureheads in Anatolia have been prime targets for West Turkish mercenaries, assassins and Kurdish Peshmerga commandos over the years. Half a dozen Anatolian leaders have been killed since 2060. The killing spree has led them to be less public–and to rely more on the Matrix.
• Picador

• Adana is a paradox: a poor fundie city with unusually high Matrix connectivity (for a country like this one). Everybody wonders how Islamic extremists can be running such a city, and how they stay in power in spite of Adana's Matrix linkage.
• Die-Hard Straits

• A big Arabian corp is behind the deal, and I'm sure you can guess which one. They fund the insurgents and support their view of radical Islam in exchange for exclusive deals on corp products and additional inroads in Turkey.
• Riyalpolitik

• That doesn't explain how the extremists thrive even though the population has access to information, resources and knowledge from all over the world, instead of being kept ignorant and controlled by the religious authorities.
• Brick

• You have to know the right people, but for anyone interested in taking runs for East Anatolian employers, you can get through Syria or Cappadocia and get hired, especially if you're good with electronics and broadcasting equipment. At least three groups of trid pirates are working in Adana, jamming and invading Western Turkish trid programs and Matrix hosts. I won't tell you who pays for the fundies, but it's good.
• Ba-bush

OTHER MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES

• The Middle East has a few other interesting spots you might end up visiting. These countries might be small, but some play a big role in the region. After all, we all know where Aden lives, don't we? I'll let Maghrebi Monster fill you in on the details.
• The Spectral Shah

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 6:41:52 (PST)

AFGHANISTAN

Population: 31,200,000 (Pashtuns 45%, Tajiks 23%, Other 32%)
Major Languages: Dari (60%), Pashto (37%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (80%), Shi'ite Islam (19%)
by Maghrebi Monster

This country is a cesspool. Each city is in the hands of a different warlord and they constantly fight each other, while ordinary Afghans live and die in misery. Most locals live in dusty villages and are simple shepherds and farmers. The lucky ones work for the warlords, growing opium or making counterfeit copies of designer clothes and the like. The warlords sell this stuff to the Kabul maffiya, which exports them all over the world.

The **Kabul maffiya** is Afghanistan's true ruler. This secretive criminal organization first appeared in the 2040s and quickly asserted control over the country. Warlords who dealt with the Kabulis got rich; the others disappeared, and their heads eventually showed up stuck on the ends of poles. The maffiya is using the same violent methods to expand along drug-smuggling routes into Iran, Turkistan and Pakistan.

» Some warlords deal with corps like AG Chemie and Shiawase, giving part of the profits to the maffiya. They fit some locals with third-hand skillwires and work them in sweatshops making cheap electronics for export to India and Pakistan.
» Socio Pat

The maffiya is organized in independent cells, each reporting to the organization's elders back in Kabul. When a cell wants to expand, the elders "lend" them some assets: nuyen, firepower, whatever. They're supposed to pay everything back with interest when they start turning a profit. Little is known about the elders except that their leader is a deeply religious Muslim named **Babrak Amin.**

The only corporate asset in the country is the trans-Afghan highway, built and operated by Saeder-Krupp. It starts in Pakistan and goes north through the Khyber Pass and Kabul until it links with the New Silk Road in Turkistan. S-K uses Kabul as a supply depot and a base for the mercs who keep the road open. How the maffiya and S-K can coexist in Kabul is hard to imagine, though I've noticed the maffiya can smuggle cargo all along the highway without problems.

» This deal with S-K doesn't explain why the maffiya has so much money. They've got enough funds to pay off Pakistan's rulers and still take over two other countries. Interpol has been trying to prove connections between Babrak Amin and rich families in Arabia, but how likely is that?
» Almond White

» Go to the Blue Mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif and ask for Karmal. You'll be surprised at what he can tell you.
» as Sadiq

In fact, the only place the maffiya can't reach is the Hindu Kush mountain range; this land belongs to the **Kata tribes.** Supposedly they descend from the soldiers of Alexander the Great, and converted to Islam in 1895. After the Awakening they reverted to their animistic beliefs. Nowadays they live in primitive villages up in isolated valleys, worshiping ancient gods and relying on the spirits of their ancestors for help and

protection. Stories abound of lost Kata villages that made evil pacts with ancient spirits, but it's tough to get any hard intel, as the Kata are hostile to outsiders. Afghans call this land Kafiristan, the land of the infidels, and avoid it like the plague.

• I once found this half-dead Russian merc when I was climbing the Hindu Kush. We took him back to Kabul, but he'd completely lost his wits. Last time I saw him, he was begging in the bazaar, mumbling something about being cheated of treasure by the ghosts of Macedonia.
• Nephilim

CYPRUS
Population: 193,000 (Turks 85%, Greeks 13%, Other 2%)
Major Languages: Turkish (93%), Greek (13%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (82%), Greek Orthodox Christianity (12%)

The island of Cyprus is still recovering from the Euro Wars, when Turkey invaded it to secure the Eastern Mediterranean and cut off sea routes into Israel. The Israelis retaliated by bombing Cypriot cities to the ground. Neither country gained much from this battle, but the Cypriots died all the same. Turkish occupation forces were especially hard on Greek Cypriots, and many died at their hands; many more fled to Greece. When the war ended, neither Turkey nor Greece was ready to pay for any rebuilding. With a lot more Turks than Greeks left on Cyprus, the Turkish maffiya took over the island as a base. No one has yet reclaimed it; a crime-ridden pile of rubble is more trouble than Athens or Ankara can handle.

Today's Cyprus is a forsaken rock in the sea, visited only by smugglers and criminals. The remaining Greeks own the few profitable businesses and live in fortified ghettoes, while the Turks subsist on fishing and make extra money smuggling drugs to Izmir and taking weapons from the Balkans to Gaza. Everyone in Europe and the Middle East wants Cyprus cleaned up, but nobody wants to pay the price.

• Cyprus is turning into the Med Sea's first pirate haven. Rumor mill says Trogoo, the pirate king in exile from the Carib scene, is setting up his base of operations on Cyprus after turning down a proposal to join Chocolaté's crew.
• Blue Parrot

KURDISH AUTONOMOUS ZONE
Population: 25,190,000 (Kurds 98%, Other 2%)
Major Languages: Kurdish (99%), Turkish (30%), Arabic (15%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (90%), Yezidi (5%)

After twenty years of independence, the Kurds are firmly entrenched in their mountains, self-sufficient and self-reliant. No one recognizes Kurdistan (the local name for the KAZ) as a nation, but the Kurds' neighbors respect their borders and trade with them, partly because no one wants to mess with Kurdistan's military force, the Peshmerga. They proved themselves in the Great Jihad and during the Kurdish struggle for independence. Whenever East Turkish forces test Kurdistan's defenses, the Peshmerga give them a tough lesson.

It's not difficult to enter Kurdistan; the Peshmerga help smugglers going from Turkey to Iraq or Iran for a cut of the profits. The problem is entering Kurdish villages and towns. The Kurds don't trust outsiders, and the neo-Communist Kurdish Labor Party (the PKK) maintains tight control over daily life. **Ahmed Massoud** remains in charge of Kurdistan, but the country's economy has stagnated thanks to his policies. I visited Arbil, the Kurdish capital, late last year; the city, grey and bleak, is slowly falling apart.

Despite the KAZ's hardships, Massoud remains popular. After all, he liberated Kurdistan after centuries of repression. He has also kept Aden at bay, even though the dragon lives in Mount Ararat deep inside Kurdistan. Some dissenters claim Massoud made a pact with the dragon, but the Peshmerga quickly takes care of them.

• I've heard Massoud abandoned Islam and joined the Yezidi sect. Supposedly, most top Peshmerga officials are Yezidi and this sect is the force behind Kurdistan. Yezidi religion has the same roots as Islam, with a twist: they worship the archangels, in particular Lucifer, whom they call God's chief archangel. Muslims call them Satan worshippers, and these rumors are certainly fueling dissent.
• Riyalpolitik

• You're speaking about the "new" Yezidis. They worship Aden as an incarnation of Lucifer, so they're nothing more than a dragon cult. Aden's followers hijacked the Yezidi sect, and most "new" Yezidis are converts like Massoud. True Yezidis are either in hiding or have left Kurdistan.
• Dragonslayer

• Finally, someone gives Aden his proper name.
• Crescent Moon

Many Kurds live abroad, in Kirkuk and Mosul in Iraq or in emigrant communities throughout the world. Kurdish mercs are particularly renowned, especially after the Constantinople campaign and their counter-insurgence ops in Morocco. Many mercs are former Peshmerga, and you'll probably cross their path if you're operating in the Middle East. If you go up against them, be careful; these guys are tough and know their business.

• Yezidi communities (who don't worship Aden, mind you) are common among exiled Kurds. The Yezidi in Kirkuk have a huge database on Kurdistan, including some interesting intel on Aden's activities—stuff you'll never see posted on DIVE. They'll share it with you if you can prove your worth.
• Dragonslayer

SYRIA
Population: 24,145,000 (Arab 90%, Other 10%)
Major Languages: Arabic (95%), English (23%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (56%), other Islamic sects (24%), Christianity (16%)

Syria is a power base for the more radical factions of the Islamic Unity Movement. President **Bashar al-Ibrahim** and most of his cabinet are vocal IUM members, and Ibn Eisa is said to have huge influence with Bashar. The government gets more belligerent by the day, as shown by their recent military takeover of Lebanon. Syria always treated Lebanon like an offshoot, so the invasion is mostly symbolic. The corps didn't like it at first, especially knowing Ibn Eisa's influence in Damascus, but they reconsidered their position after obtaining extraterritorial status for Beirut's business district.

» The Syrians didn't stop in Beirut. Their forces are currently locked in a stand-off with Israel in southern Lebanon, and threatening to retake the Golan Heights, the region's prime source of water. The Israeli Defense Forces are stretched thin; they're also deployed along the Jordanian border, so they can't do much beyond holding their ground.
» Intifada Papa

» People have spotted Mahmud Fakhsh a couple of times in Syria. If the top boss of the New Islamic Jihad is there, he must have his hands pretty deep in what's going on.
» Farah

The Syrians replaced Abdul Karami's multi-religious government and have begun implementing pro-Islamic policies. Many Lebanese Christians have gone underground, and a few are turning terrorist under the leadership of Paul Romanias. The Syrian Shi'ite community is also in turmoil; they back Ibn Eisa, but for different reasons, and want his favor against the Sunnis. The Iranian consulate is said to support them, but both sides deny this vehemently and there's no evidence to prove it.

» Local Christians have sympathies with the Armenians and thus with Aden, so they've been playing intermediary between Israel and the dragon. Nothing official, of course. But Israel faces an existential threat and can't play without Aden's help, however reluctant the Qabbalists are to deal with him.
» Riyalpolitik

If you're running in Syria, you'll probably deal with *Hezbollah,* a terrorist organization turned crime syndicate that controls the Syrian underworld. Hezbollah's rise to power started in Lebanon but extended to Syria with help from the Bedouin nomads. Ties between it and the current government are unclear. Both have similar ideologies and goals, but Hezbollah's criminal activities are starting to worry President Ibrahim.

Hezbollah has its seat of power in Damascus, Syria's capital. For a sample of the sheer chaos of the place, try visiting the bazaar in the old city. This permanent giant fair extends over more than three thousand square meters, and you can buy and sell anything at very low prices, from weapons to slaves to mind-benders coming direct from Afghanistan. A special corner of the market is reserved for ultra-hot stuff: WMDs, Matrix viruses, implants, extraction targets and so on.

» The "special corner" only works because these "products" remain available for just a few hours, and always in a different place. Corruption and the bazaar's messy structure halt any attempt by authorities to clamp down on this trade. You'll need a well developed contact network to find good deals in the Damascus market. Once you're connected, though, you can strike the best deals on the planet.
» Xunga XL

» The bazaar has one unique feature. Runners can select a hot extraction target, execute the operation without a prior assignment, then come to Damascus and sell their target to the highest bidder. The whole process of setting up and finishing the auction only takes a few hours. Most corps have people in Damascus ready to buy back their guys or take advantage of unexpected opportunities.
» Flak Jack

» Of course, there's also more typical smuggled stuff coming from all over the Middle East and beyond. Hezbollah has strong ties with almost every smuggling network in the region, but the Bedouins are clearly dominant.
» Abdul

UPDATE
» Hey guys, I reopened the compilation because this may interest you.
» The Spectral Shah

Transmitted: 15 August 2064 at 11:04:18 (PST)

///Begin File
Israel Strikes as Ibn Eisa Is Ousted

(Al-Djazira News)—After weeks of tension, Israeli Defense Forces launched pre-emptive strikes against Jordan and Syrian troops stationed along the Jordan River at 5:00 AM this morning. Israeli Prime Minister Efrat Tal stated that "No interference with the Palestinian issue will be tolerated. We have proven our determination in the past and will not hesitate to repeat it."

Meanwhile, unconfirmed news reports from Medina state that Caliph King Kalim has removed Badr al-Din Ibn Eisa from command of the Islamic Unity Movement, which is backing the Jordanian and Syrian action. He has also ordered Jordanian forces to pull back from the Israeli border.

Reactions from the field remain unclear, but rumors are spreading that King Abdallah of Jordan will follow the Caliph's command, while Syrian military officials are considering retaliation against Israel. Ibn Eisa is said to have commented: "No one can go against the will of Allah—not even his King on earth."
///End File

» Wow. I'm packing right now. Big biz ahead.
» Deadwin RCTM

RED STORM RISING

When Synner sent his compilation about Europe, I asked him why Russia wasn't included. Bandwidth and time constraints were part of the reason, but he also said Russia hadn't engaged much with Europe since the Euro Wars. Instead, they've focused their attention toward Asia, against the natives running Yakut. In fact, Synner suspected something big might happen against the Siberians real soon.

Looks like he was right, judging from recent events. So it seems like the perfect time to take a peek at the land of the Bear. Stormavik, an ex-Army intelligence officer, has the dirt on what's going down in Russia. Meanwhile, Bogatyr, his comrade in Irkutsk, gives us the lowdown on Yakut.

» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:11:18 (PST)

OF MICE AND MEN

by Stormavik

So much for the best-laid plans of General Secretaries.

Arkady Korolenko, previously the General Secretary of the Russian Republic, stepped down earlier this year, citing a diagnosis of liver cancer. Being the same clever bastard as when he first took power in 2049, he'd managed to conceal his cancer for most of 2063, so that he could find a successor while avoiding the political landmines of the New Soviet Reconstructionists. By the time his cancer worsened to the point where he couldn't hide it anymore, he'd settled on Dzhermiya Ogurznev, chief political officer for Russian forces in Poland. The announcement came in the nick of time; Korolenko died less than six weeks afterward.

» I still can't understand why Ogurznev, of all people. Russian forces in Poland had a bad year in 2063, culminating in the failed Summer Counteroffensive. Anyone remotely associated with that disaster didn't dare show his face within Moscow city limits.

» Invisible

» Politics, chummer. As a political officer, General Ogurznev belonged to the GRU, Russian military intelligence and chief rival to the UGB. Word out of the Aquarium (GRU headquarters in Moscow) tagged Ogurznev as a rising star in the GRU, bound to become First Deputy Director

RUSSIA TIMELINE

2006: Russian forces intervene in Belarus, responding to international pressure against the Belarus dictatorship's attacks on Poland and the Baltic States.
2009: The Sovereign American Indian Movement (SAIM) seizes an American nuclear missile silo and launches a missile at Smolensk, but no nuclear detonation results. Russian president Nikolai Chelenko closes Vladivostok, Rostov and other strategic cities to civilian traffic in preparation for possible military action.
2012: An earthquake severs the Kamchatka peninsula from the mainland by creating a kilometer-wide channel.
2016: President Chelenko is assassinated, during a three-week period in which the leaders of the United States, Great Britain and Israel are picked off as well. MVD forces kill Chelenko's assassin during a violent confrontation. News reports later paint the assassin as delusional, but conspiracy theories abound.
2018: The Trans-Polar Aleut Council claims a portion of northeastern Siberia.
2026: Boris Kropunin becomes General Secretary.
2030–31: Indigenous forces assisted by shapeshifters take over the autonomous region of Yakut, declaring independence from Russia. Interior Army forces fail to retake the territory.
2031–33: Euro Wars I. Russian forces invade Poland and drive into East Germany before being halted by the Nightwraith air strike.
2034: Euro Wars II. Alliance for Allah forces drive north through Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russia redeploys forces in Eastern Europe southward into the Caucasus Mountains. The AfA drive stalls following the assassination of mullah Sayid Jazrir.
2035: General Secretary Kropunin resigns over the failure of the Euro Wars. The Democratic Recovery Alliance takes power and initiates halfhearted reforms. Vladivostok, Rostov and other strategic cities closed since 2009 reopen.
2037: The National Soviet Reconstructionists defeat the Democratic Recovery Alliance in national elections after the Alliance fails to bring about economic recovery. Viktor Kantemir becomes General Secretary.
2049: Arkady Korolenko succeeds Kantemir as General Secretary.
2059: Yamatetsu relocates its corporate headquarters from Kyoto, Japan to Vladivostok, Russia.
Jan. 6, 2064: Korolenko announces his retirement due to health concerns. General Dzhermiya Ogurznev is tapped to succeed him.
Jan. 23, 2064: A Siberian rebel force known as the Sagan Zaba Brigade seizes control of Yakut territory around Lake Baykal. Rebels also secure isolated pockets of resistance in portions of western Yakut.
Feb. 11, 2064: Arkady Korolenko passes away from liver cancer. Dzhermiya Ogurznev officially assumes the title of General Secretary.
Mar. 15, 2064: While visiting Novosibirsk, Ogurznev is killed by the dragon Booryazmei in a surprise attack against Red Army forces.

in a matter of months. By tapping him as the next General Secretary, Korolenko (1) gains the Red Army's support, (2) checks the UGB and (3) prevents the GRU from becoming a future threat to the political balance. Of course, all this is academic now.
• Spinmeister

• I guess it's too late to bring up rumors that Ogurznev had Korolenko offed once the announcement went public?
• Conspir-I-See

Unfortunately, to paraphrase Robert Burns, the best-laid plans of mice and General Secretaries often go wrong. Barely in office, Ogurznev met with the generals in Novosibirsk to discuss how to use the recent Sagan Zaba uprising in Yakut to Russia's advantage. While Ogurznev was visiting a troop garrison, an adult western dragon known locally as Booryazmei ("Storm Serpent") descended out of the clouds, strafed the base and disappeared as suddenly as he had come. The dragon's surprise attack killed Ogurznev, along with fourteen other soldiers and officers.

• So what does this dragon have against Ogurznev?
• Curious George

• Nothing, as far as anyone can tell. Booryazmei's been around awhile, according to local stories, but officially there have only been a few unconfirmed sightings until the Novosibirsk incident. He's sporadically attacked Russian and Yakut settlements on a few occasions. No one's yet managed to communicate with the dragon and live to tell about it. As best anyone can tell, this attack was random.
• Bogatyr

So in less than two months, Russia has seen the death of two General Secretaries, a span even shorter than the transition between Brezhnev and Gorbachev. Predictably, various factions are scrambling to fill the resulting giant power vacuum. At the moment Igor Sharilov, Prime Minister of the National Supreme Soviet, serves as interim General Secretary, but even he knows he won't be there permanently.

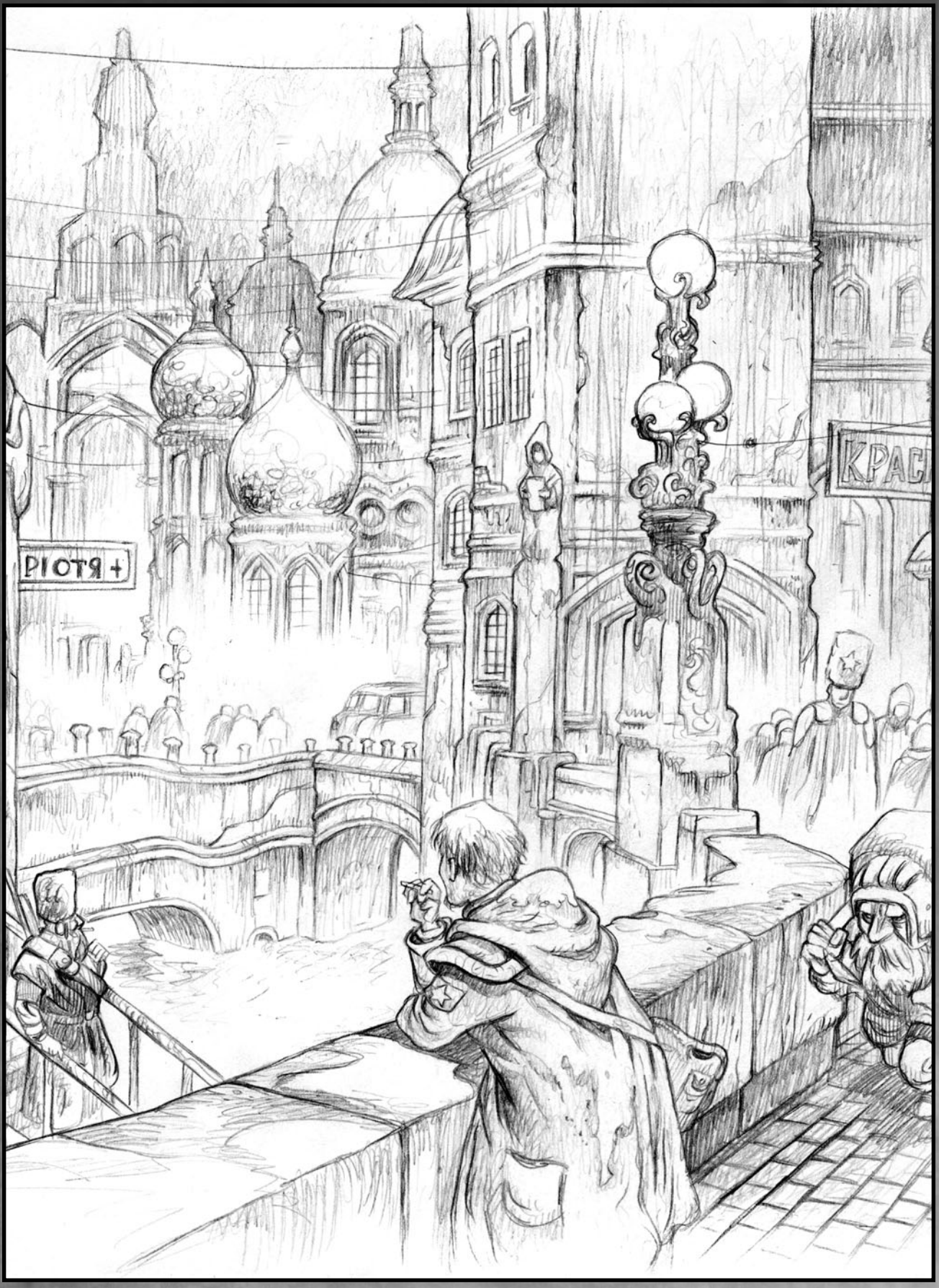
RUSSIAN ROULETTE

Authoritarian state or no, Russia is beset by intrigue, backroom deals and conspiracies. Ever since the collapse of the original Communist Party back in 1991, Russian politics has been a complex web of intrigue, where various factions compete for influence over the government and Russian society. With the death of Korolenko and his successor, the behind-the-scenes struggle among these factions has risen to the surface.

ULTRA-NATIONALISM

We Russians are a proud people and generally don't look too fondly on outsiders. Bigotry and racism are as problematic here as in North America or Japan, but among Russians they revolve around ethnicity rather than metatype. A Russian troll may get stares in Moscow, but everyone will trust him more than a human Georgian, or even worse, a Jew.

• Metahuman hate groups fare well enough in Russia; the Humanis Policlub and the Sons of Sauron both have several thriving local chapters, though they're less visible than in North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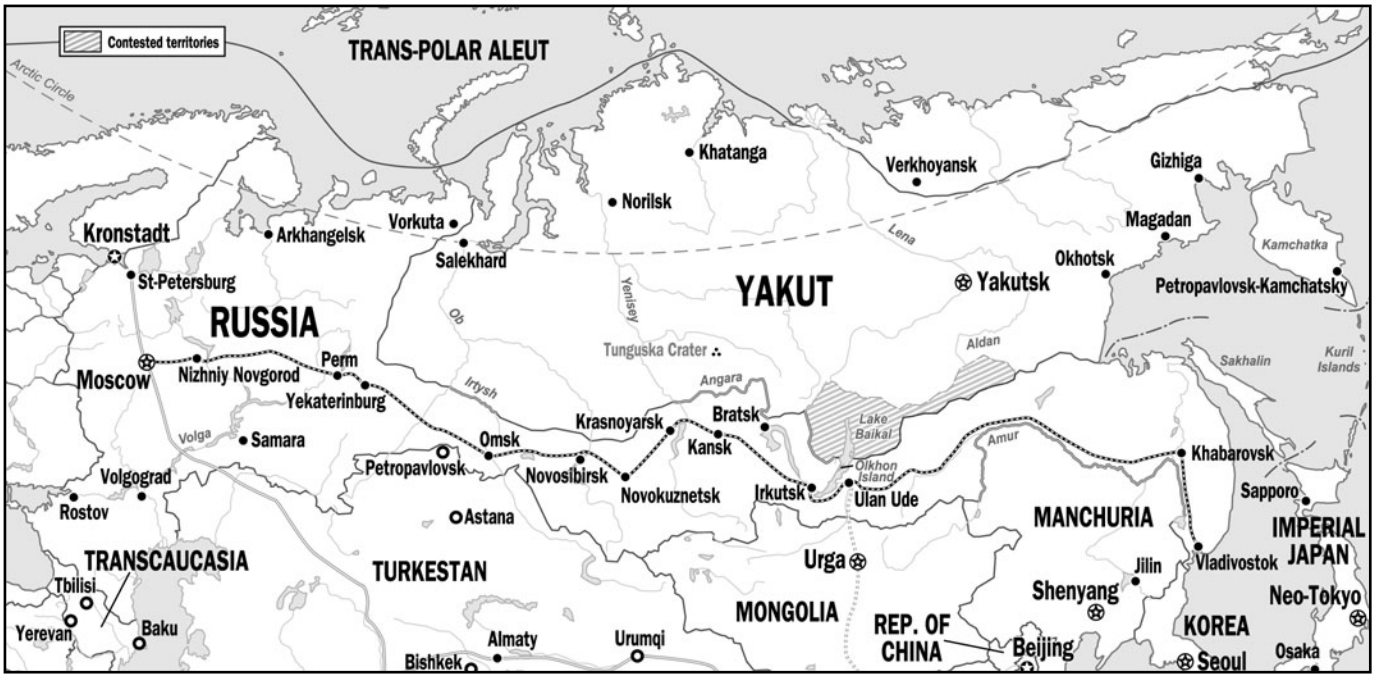


America. However, they still follow ethnic biases. For example, Humanis usually passes over Russian metas to pick on those from the Caucasus or the Russian Far East.
» Gorky

» The Russian Sons of Sauron are slightly different. Rather than Russian trogs, their membership consists mostly of Ukrainian, Baltic and other Slavic orks and trolls, who fight against Russian prejudice. The Russian Sons of Sauron still show a lot of bias against Armenian, Georgian and Chechen trogs; though they won't raise a hand against their "brothers," they also make it clear that certain ethnics aren't welcome.
» Tuskadero

In the grand hierarchy of Russian bigotry, the Russians stand at the top. The next step down are European Slavs, like the Ukrainians, Belarusians and Baltic peoples; though not held in high regard, most Russians tolerate them. Below that are the ethnic minorities of the Caucasus regions (known derisively as *churkas*), such as Georgians, Tatars, Armenians and Chechens; most Russians look on these with suspicion. The lowest of the low on the ethnic totem pole are the Jews, who remain the scapegoats for everything wrong with Russia. Ironically, Jews hold some of the highest positions among the extraterritorial corps within Russia's borders.

» There's also a lot of discrimination against indigenous natives in the Russian Far East, like the Buryats, Mongols, Kazakhs and Uzbeks. They're on the same par as the Caucasus ethnics.
» Gorky

» Mossad maintains an extensive "Aliyah Road" underground network in Moscow, St. Petersburg and many other cities in Russia, helping Jews escape persecution and providing safe passage to Israel and other Jewish havens around the world.
» Davita

» Well, they made it a lot harder on themselves to run black ops in Russia. Two weeks ago the GRU arrested several technicians working at the Svobodniy launch center. Apparently the techs were Mossad agents trying to infiltrate the UGB field office in Svobodniy. (I'd say they were trying to piggyback onto the UGB's spy satellite feeds.) Not only did the sting blow Mossad's cover, but the GRU scored points for the Red Army by embarrassing the UGB. Expect a few retaliatory UGB black ops against Israel.
» Maimonides

NATIONAL SUPREME SOVIET

The National Supreme Soviet is the primary body politic of the Russian government, similar to Parliament in Great Britain. The NSS appoints the ministers who run the various government agencies. A Prime Minister serves as the nominal head of state, but the office is primarily a figurehead, an office manager. The real power lies with the General Secretary, a member of the NSS elected as the head of that body. The General Secretary sets national policy, particularly in matters of national security and foreign relations.

» While the National Supreme Soviet adopts a lot of trappings and customs from the old Soviet Union, technically it's not a communist government. The old-style "planned economy" only exists in key industries, and the government no longer adopts offi-

cial atheism. The Soviet icons are more reflective of the "good old days" when Russia was feared as a world superpower.
• Gorky

• The government still meddles in business and religion, though, usually to ensure the dominance of the various factions pulling the strings. During the Year of the Comet, the government cracked down hard on comet cults in Russia, to please Russian Orthodox members in the NSS.
• Yelena

• All this talk of factions makes it sound like real political opposition exists here. Not so. The Reconstructionists let a few groups play opposition parties on the trid, but they keep a tight enough grip so that no existing party can become a real threat.
• Russia House

Within the scheme of the Russian power play, the NSS is the primary factional battleground. Because the next General Secretary will be elected from among their peers, faction members have already begun choosing candidates from the National Supreme Soviet to push for their cause.

THE RED ARMY

The Russian military holds a special place in many Russian hearts for defending the *Rodina* (Russian motherland) from invaders such as the Nazis and the Alliance for Allah. So it's not surprising that they're one of the major players in the National Supreme Soviet.

"Military service is the sacred obligation of Russian citizens"; so reads the Constitution of the Russian Republic. All Russian citizens are subject to conscription, but many see it as a sacred trust. Russian society is highly militarized, more so than any other European nation.

• Lately the Red Army in and around Volgograd has been working closely with the Atlantean Foundation. The brass has been unusually cooperative in granting the AF permission to dig in areas across the Caucasus; in some cases they've reassigned whole companies of grunts to guard Atlantean excavations from intruders (competitors like the Apep Consortium and Saeder-Krupp operatives). No one knows what the Russians get in return: money, magical support, influence in the West? Anyone have any more info on this?
• Russia House

• Recently, Red Army forces guarding AF dig sites near the Ukrainian border have clashed with commandos from Tir na nOg's Republican Corps. Both sides deny the incident ever occurred, but I've heard the Atlantean Foundation uncovered a relic suggestive of an elven nation from a previous age that may have spanned from eastern Ukraine into southwestern Russia up to the Volga. Don't know what the relic was, but I'll try digging more.
• Rikki

The Red Army's favored candidate as the next General Secretary is **Vladimir Danko,** retired marshal and hero of Euro Wars II. During that struggle, Danko's corps of under-equipped and exhausted troops not only repulsed the onslaught of overwhelming Alliance for Allah forces at Stavropol, but destroyed the retreating remnants in a daring counterattack. This campaign earned Danko an unprecedented three Hero of the Russian Republic medals.

His heroism makes Danko wildly popular and the leading favorite. Unlike many other politicians in the NSS, Danko is a true Russian patriot motivated to serve the best interests of the Russian people. This stance has often brought him into conflict with various extraterritorial megacorps operating in Russia, particularly Saeder-Krupp. Only his popularity has kept a Saeder-Krupp assassin from taking him out.

RUSSIA AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Bureaucratic Dictatorship
Population: 144,000,000
- Human: 79%
- Elf: 3%
- Dwarf: 6%
- Ork: 8%
- Troll: 3%
- Other: 1%

Per Capita Income: 16,900¥
Estimated SINless: 15%
Below Poverty Level: 18%
Corporate Affiliation: 38%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 12%
- High School Equivalency: 51%
- College Degrees: 25%
- Advanced Degrees: 12%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Russian: 81%
- Tatar: 4%
- Ukrainian: 3%
- Other: 12%

Major Languages Spoken
- Russian: 98%
- English: 10%

Major Religions:
- Russian Orthodox: 40%
- Islam: 5%
- Unaffiliated/Other: 14%
- None: 41%

Currency: Ruble (RUB), nuyen also accepted
- Exchange Rate: 1 RUB = 0.33 ¥ (3 ¥ = 1 RUB)

CrashCart Coverage: All major cities
- Guaranteed Response Time: 10 Minutes

Monobe Medical Coverage: Moscow only
- Guaranteed Response Time: 15 Minutes

• Are you sure? Considering how much of a thorn Danko's been in Lofwyr's side, it's a miracle his political career has thrived for the past twelve years. There's got to be something else, or the wyrm would have eliminated him years ago.
• Dragonslayer

• You forget, Lofwyr takes the long view. What's twelve years when you've lived for twelve thousand?
• Dragon Dance

THE GRU

The GRU (*Glavnoye Razvedovatel'noye Upravleniy*) is the Red Army's military intelligence agency. As with other militaries around the world, the GRU collects and analyzes battlefield intelligence and advises field commanders. Additionally, the GRU appoints political officers, ideological counselors assigned to a military unit to make sure the troops toe the Party line. A political officer (such as the late General Ogurznev) can overrule a field commander if he feels the commander is a loose cannon.

» The continued use of political officers has sparked antagonism between the GRU and the military high command. Political officers during the Soviet era stood outside the normal chain of command, reporting only to their own superiors. Field commanders often resent this undermining of their authority. Every now and then I hear of someone organizing a shadowrun to prevent a political officer from reporting something to his or her GRU higher-ups.
» Russian Blue

Because of the GRU's intelligence specialization, Red Army brass has also employed the agency to counter the inquisition of the UGB, the Red Army's archrival in the National Supreme Soviet. The Red Army and the UGB have never gotten along, dating all the way back to the Cold War when Russia was still the Soviet Union. Right now, the UGB stands in higher favor in the eyes of the National Supreme Soviet, so their reputation carries more weight in session than the Red Army's. So the Red Army has tasked the GRU to run dirty tricks against the UGB to make up for this.

SPETSNAZ

The *Spetsialnogo Naznacheniya*, or Russian Special Forces, have garnered a certain legendary reputation, much like the Green Berets or the Wildcats. As with all Special Forces, the Spetsnaz engage in unconventional warfare, particularly in low-intensity conflicts, guerrilla tactics and black ops.

» Legendary, as in mythical. During Euro Wars I, Spetsnaz did mostly superficial damage to rear operations targets. And they still haven't recovered from the severe budget cuts under the Democratic Reform Alliance. Their reputation has been grossly overrated since the Cold War.
» Kzeentch

» You just keep telling yourself that, doorak.
» Horror Show

According to Russian military doctrine, Spetsnaz forces deploy deep into enemy territory to strike high-value targets, such as command centers, airfields and nuclear stockpiles. Creating diversionary terror attacks to confuse and distract enemy leaders is their secondary mission. To accomplish this, Spetsnaz personnel rely on blending into the crowd. Spetsnaz operatives shun obvious augmentations, such as cyberlimbs or body armor, in favor of less conspicuous ones—bioware is a particular favorite, being practically undetectable short of an astral aura scan. Spetsnaz personnel don't even wear an official uniform; when behind enemy lines, they often wear enemy uniforms or impersonate civilians so well that they even fool the natives.

» Spetsnaz operatives are notorious masters of disguise. Lately, Spetsnaz recruiters have been looking hard for adepts, particularly those dedicated to the Speaker's Way. These social adepts are so good at fitting in, they could pass through a security chokepoint wearing only a handwritten "security" badge.
» Daina

Because of their secretive nature and missions, the Spetsnaz fall under the exclusive command of the GRU. It's an open secret that the Spetsnaz have two brigade headquarters in the Russian Far East, one at Chelyabinsk and the other at Khabarovsk, mostly because so many Spetsnaz are infiltrating Yakut that it's impossible to conceal their nerve centers. Many also believe the GRU has a Spetsnaz cell nested in the Rhine-Ruhr megaplex in Germany and one in Constantinople, the latter mostly to keep an eye on the Ukrainians and the Straits of Bosporus.

» South of the equator, a rumor's making the rounds that the Russians sent a Spetsnaz cell to the Metropole urban region in Amazonia. Not sure why, though.
» Decker del Sur

THE UGB

The Directorate of State Security is the latest incarnation of the infamous secret police that have terrorized Russians since the time of the tsars. As the masters of information on *everything* that takes place inside (and often outside) Russia, the UGB use that power to blackmail certain NSS members to vote in their favor.

Somebody else wrote a comprehensive overview of the UGB in the *SOTA: 2064* download, so I won't repeat all of that here. Instead, I'll provide some insights on the people running or associated with the UGB during the current power play. If you know how the players think, you'll go a long way toward understanding how the UGB acts.

The place to begin is with **Viktor Kamendin,** the UGB candidate for General Secretary. Kamendin served as the head of the UGB before the current one and stepped down in 2053 to pursue a career in politics. Kamendin's primary achievement was his systematic operation to eliminate the Der Nachtmachen policlub. Sometime around 2045, Kamendin obtained information identifying one of the group's key leaders as Alexander Komroff, a former Spetsnaz commander who

went rogue in 2033 and was subsequently assassinated near the Crimea. With a little outside help, Kamendin ruthlessly dispatched Der Nachtmachen one cell at a time.

» That incident also sparked allegations linking Kamendin to Fuchi. During 2045, Fuchi was Der Nachtmachen's prime target; by taking out the policlub, the UGB did the corp a favor.
» Corp Watcher

» You sure about that? Right before Kamendin stepped down, rumors were flying that the UGB participated in a black op to assassinate the great dragon Alamais in Germany. From what I heard, Alamais was Komroff's puppet master, and he apparently brought Komroff back from the dead to revive Der Nachtmachen (one of Alamais' favorites). Given the well-known feud between Alamais and Lofwyr, that suggests a Saeder-Krupp rather than a Fuchi connection.
» Nemesis

» Kamendin is merely taking credit for someone else's sweat and tears. He's too strong-willed to bow to any corporation.
» Priest

» Careful, old friend. The dead only haunt if they're not allowed to rest.
» Shiva

If you think the current UGB is scary, you cannot begin to comprehend the frightening efficiency with which Kamendin ran the directorate. The consummate politician, Kamendin has one interest: acquiring more power.

» Kamendin commanded total loyalty from his followers when he ran the UGB, and he still has some insiders in the organization who keep him apprised of ongoing events. Given the UGB's internal divisions, that gives him better odds than any of the UGB's current leadership.
» Gorky

Kamendin's ambition to become the next General Secretary puts the current UGB chief director, **Rassily Romanov,** in an uncomfortable position. Kamendin's protégé, Romanov was a shoo-in to assume the vacancy his mentor left. He also had help from Saeder-Krupp in staving off other UGB factions seeking power. Kamendin and Romanov remain close friends, and I'm sure Romanov would like to see his mentor ascend to the top position. However, Saeder-Krupp is fielding its own candidate—**Dmitri Baichik**—and is probably putting pressure on Romanov to betray Kamendin. I don't envy the dilemma he faces.

» Kamendin's too wily to allow a former pupil to betray him. I'd guess he is betraying Romanov, by feeding him false information that his Saeder-Krupp handlers are sure to pick up.
» Raskolnikov

Another player worth watching is **Anastasia Becherzvezda,** head of Department K (domestic intelligence). In the past, Department K has taken kickbacks from the Vory to look the other way while the mobsters go about their dirty business. Since Ogurznev's death, however, the UGB has been going after the Vory. Interestingly, a lot of the busts have shut down minor operations, and the arrests generally target low-level lieutenants. My guess is that someone got to Bechervezda, but I can't tell you who or why.

» It has to be Kamendin. The Vory were slow in deciding whom to back in this race, and Viktor still has a lot of pull within the UGB. Besides, I heard he doesn't like Becherzvezda much; if the Vory decide to teach her a lesson about loyalty, so much the better.
» Raskolnikov

» I'm not so sure. Becherzvezda spent a lot of time in the UGB's St. Petersburg offices before being appointed to head Department K. The St. Petersburg Vory haven't been happy with the Moscow gangs of late. I think there's a mob war brewing, and getting to Department K is a pre-emptive strike.
» Gorky

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Even during the Soviet era of religious persecution, the Russian Orthodox Church retained strong loyalty among the Russian people. After the Cold War, the Church experienced a resurrection in its reemergence from underground and the rapid restoration of its patriarchate. Just in time, as the upheavals before and after the Awakening sorely tested the Russian people's resiliency.

» Despite the post-Cold War restoration, a lot of bad blood exists between Russian Orthodoxers who stayed in Russia and those who fled abroad, especially to North America (concentrated primarily in Seattle, Athabaska and Manhattan). The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) believes its counterpart sold its soul to the Kremlin, and has refused any attempts at reconciliation. Normally, this would just be boring church politics, but the ROCOR managed to spirit away a lot of important religious artifacts during their exile, some of which apparently hold mystic power. The Patriarch of Moscow is very interested in getting them back.
» Haskell

Having firmly established its hold on the hearts and souls of faithful Russians, the Church has used its popular base to establish continuing influence in the government. Technically, no active clergy serve in the Supreme Soviet, but plenty of retired clergy have entered politics and hold positions in that body.

The most prominent of these clergy-politicians is **Ilyana Bogdanova,** retired bishop, practicing magician and the Church's leading candidate to replace Ogurznev. Bogdanova is

a shaman, a rarity in Europe, but she's also a follower of the Theurgist school of magic and follows the Earth Mother Idol rather than an animal totem. Bogdanova is a fierce advocate of the war against Yakut, which wins her a lot of followers. On the other hand, she's also committed to metahuman rights, not only for dwarfs and trolls, but also for many sentient paracritters, including sasquatches, leshy and even spirits. Even for the Orthodoxers, these are radical notions.

• Both of these positions stem from Bogdanova's tenure as a bishop in Irkutsk. While Russians love her anti-Yakut stance, her pro-meta position has created friction, particularly with Athanasius II, the Patriarch of Moscow and head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Only political opportunism made Athanasius II give her his grudging endorsement.
• Svarog

• Athanasius isn't the one Bogdanova should worry about. Try Ivan Belukhin, bishop of St. Petersburg, the most likely candidate to replace Athanasius as Patriarch when he retires. Belukhin takes a harsher view of non-humans; he got in trouble a few years ago for ordering St. Petersburg's priests not to serve the Eucharist to changelings.
• Snowbird

THE MVD

In addition to the retired clergy in the National Supreme Soviet, the Russian Orthodox Church holds dominating influence over the MVD (*Ministerstvo Vnutrenniy Del*), Russia's primary law enforcement agency. While the UGB serves as the secret police, the MVD is its public enforcement division; less secretive but just as fearsome.

• Also more corrupt. I guess cops on the take are a universal constant, like death and taxes.
• Petrov

• You're asking for it, slot.
• SPD

Unlike many Western law enforcement agencies, the MVD runs its own military branch, known as the Interior Army. While the Red Army mainly deals with outside threats, the Internal Army assumes a lot of homeland security duties, such as securing national food and oil reserves, guarding public institutions like power stations and municipal buildings, and quelling internal revolts and riots. The Interior Army also runs the infamous gulag prison camps, which still exist no matter how loudly the National Supreme Soviet denies it.

• A sort of reverse discrimination is happening within the Interior Army, as most of its troops consist of churkas and metahumans. Because Russians fear the churkas as much as they despise them, putting them in the role of bootstompers makes it easier for the MVD to keep an unruly population in line.
• Chukchi

When Yakut seceded from Russia in the 2030s, the Interior Army assumed a leading role in that conflict, which the Moscow government considered an internal revolt. After a few years stalemate, the IA had to swallow its pride and bring in the Red Army. Lately, many Interior Army units have been rotated out and replaced with Red Army forces. I don't know if the current power scramble in Russia has anything to do with this, but something isn't right.

• Not the big one to fill Ogurznev's spot. Many of the redeployed Interior Army forces were originally stationed in areas where Prelate Bogdanova has influence. It definitely has something to do with her antagonist Belukhin, but I can't determine who's making the move on whom.
• Novichok

THE VORY

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the *Vory v Zakone* syndicates moved quickly to carve their niche in Russia's power dynamics. At the same time, they took advantage of Russia's reopening to move westward through newly liberated Eastern Europe and into the European Union.

• The Shadows of Europe download provides a more comprehensive analysis of the Vory in Europe.
• Synner

Up until now, the Vory have primarily been fighting the Alta Commissione in Europe, which has provided a strong defense against Vory incursion. However, the power scramble following Ogurznev's death has given them the opportunity to strengthen their position at home. This has put the Vory in a collective quandary; should they consolidate power at home and lose ground to the Alta Commissione, fight Mafia influence abroad and get outmaneuvered at home, or divide their efforts and make little headway in either direction?

The Moscow Vory

Residing at the center of Russian authority and power, the Vory gangs of Moscow have become the effective leaders of the Russian syndicates. If the Moscow bosses say "jump," gangs from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok ask, "How high?"

• We'll see how long that lasts. With the Moscow Vory preoccupied by the power struggle, some of the other gangs are testing their limits. Already the Vory in the Caucasus and Turkistan are showing signs of insubordination; the Russian bosses have sent some of their metahuman gangsters down to impose order, but it may be too little, too late.
• Ivanova

• Watch St. Petersburg. The Vory there have always competed with the Moscow gangs in a sometimes-unfriendly rivalry. The moment they think this power struggle will detract from the fight against the Alta Commissione, the St. Petersburg Vory will turn on the Moscow bosses faster than you can say "Anna Karenina."
• Gorky

Caught up in the struggle for power, the Moscow Vory sense that they might be the wild card to tip the balance. They've kept their cards close to the chest and have not endorsed any candidate… yet. Viktor Kamendin and Rolf Bremen have made discreet visits to Vory gangs in an attempt to win their support. Ilyana Bogdanova and Vladimir Danko, on the other hand, have publicly denounced the Vory. I don't know yet where the other candidates stand.

• The Vory made an enemy out of Danko. Several years ago, his daughter Anastasia died as an innocent bystander during a Vory drive-by. After that, Danko swore a personal vendetta against the Vory.
• Ivanova

Of the various Vory mobsters in Russia, the most powerful and influential is **Andrei Petschukov,** an Avtoritet boss oilier than the Caspian petroleum fields. Petschukov knows everyone in Moscow, and I do mean *everyone*, from the highest-ranking NSS Party officer to the lowest street doc. Very little passes through the Moscow shadows without Andrei hearing about it.

• Petschukov isn't the man to fear. Worry about Aleksander Bilotkiy, Petschukov's personal hatchet man. The shestiorka soldiers call him "Terminator," because he's cybered up the ying-yang. If you find Bilotkiy on your tail, bend over and grab both ankles, `cuz pretty soon you're going to be kissing your hoop goodbye.
• Russia House

» Terminator may yet be Petschukov's undoing. I heard one night Bilotkiy got quietly snatched by someone who implanted some sort of spyware or other bug into his senseware. Don't know who did it. (Really, Andrei, I don't, so don't send Terminator after me.)
» Doc Zhivago

The St. Petersburg Vory

With the port of St. Petersburg opening onto Europe via the Baltic Sea, the local Vory naturally focus on Europe. Their pull with the various European gangs rivals Moscow's, and many of the European Vory answer first to them.

» Except Luka Jankevitch, the boss of the Lobatchevski syndicate, which runs Vory operations in Scandinavia and northern Britain. Jankevitch has a personal connection with Andrei Petschukov and deliberately ignores the St. Petersburg Vory. This pisses them off no end, so they've made efforts to remove Luka.
» Gorky

The unification of the European Mafia under the banner of the Alta Commissione worries many of the St. Petersburg Vory, and they're demanding increased support from the Vory in Moscow, Smolensk and many other cities. The Moscow Vory, however, are playing down the threat, and openly rebuked St. Petersburg for creating an unnecessary panic during an online gathering. This public humiliation angered the St. Petersburg Vory even more, and a rift is growing between the two cities.

Of the St. Petersburg mobsters, no one took it more personally than **Vasily Romanenko,** arguably the most powerful Vory boss in St. Petersburg. Romanenko, one of the "New Aristocracy" Russians, went over to the syndicates when his family's fortune dried up. He fought tooth and nail for everything he's got, and the fear that the Alta Commissione will take it all away has him on the brink of rage.

» The Romanenko family made their fortune by buying into Yukos, the Russian petrocorp that emerged after the Iron Curtain fell. Vasily saw his family's wealth collapse when a paranoid Kremlin arrested Yukos' top leadership, causing a stock nosedive and the company's eventual buyout by Saeder-Krupp. He hates the government and Saeder-Krupp and occasionally goes out of his way to take shots at both.
» Ivanova

The Vladivostok Vory

The Vory of Vladivostok have mostly gone their own way, considering how far removed they are from the rest of Europe. As long as they brought in money and didn't create problems, the Moscow Vory were content to let them handle affairs as they saw fit.

Hints of Siberian instability and the buildup of Russian military forces, however, have triggered a small internal schism among the Vory ruling Vladivostok's underworld. **Burugar Yunggart,** an Udege tsar running most of their smuggling operations, has lost a noticeable amount of business because of the Siberian crisis. This inspired **"Bloody" Otsana Kovalenka,** a fierce Russian nationalist and tsarina boss, to act against Yunggart (whom she suspects of being a Siberian sympathizer). The feud puts **Sergei Byelmodin,** head of Vladivostok's most dominant Vory gang, in a bad position as he tries to prevent this latest squabble from devolving into another mob war.

» Meanwhile, the Rings and the Triads are using the opportunity to gain new territory in the Vladivostok underworld. The Rings specialize in high-tech crimes, which the Vladivostok Vory disdain somewhat, while the Triads are locked in cutthroat competition with Yunggart for the smuggling business. The Triads have a big stake in this fight, which makes them unlikely allies with Bloody Otsana.
» Raskolnikov

» Preventing Yunggart and Kovalenka from going at each other isn't Byelmodin's only problem. Byelmodin originally came from Moscow to whip the Vladivostok mobs into shape. Now his Moscow bosses want him back to help with their power struggle in the National Supreme Soviet. Not only does it force him to leave the current mess, but in Moscow Sergei is a little fish in a big pond. Considering how far away Vladivostok is, Byelmodin could just say "nyet," but that's still a pretty big risk.
» Pretty Molly

SAEDER-KRUPP

Last year wasn't good for Saeder-Krupp in Russia. The megacorp once held a dominant position, but has recently seen its power eroding. Yamatetsu stalks its fellow megacorp like a Siberian tiger, and S-K's other main rival, Zeta-ImpChem, recently scored significant victories in the Russian business sector. Also, Rolf Bremen, Lofwyr's right-claw man as chief of Saeder-Krupp Prime, went AWOL in Moscow for a few days in 2062. That disappearance has yet to be explained.

» The latest word around Kalinin hints that the elves of Pomorya may have been involved. Why, I don't know.
» HeadKase

» If you ask me, it was Beloit getting in one last shot at the wyrm, probably with an assist from Spinrad. How better to mess with Lofwyr than by casting doubts on Bremen?
» Nemesis

» I don't think so. I think Korolenko was involved. He must have known he was dying by that point and was looking for a successor. He might have had Bremen kidnapped because S-K found out in advance, and Korolenko didn't want word leaked until he was ready.
» Svarog

• Wasn't Aithne Oakforest spotted in Pomorya recently? There's a lot of bad blood between him and Lofwyr, and since Oakforest is now persona non grata in Tir Tairngire, he might be establishing a new power base in Europe. Pomorya's sufficiently far away from both Tirs, after all.
• Aegis

• This is a crazy idea, but what if Lofwyr had it done? The wyrm's crafty enough to figure out Korolenko's game. And having Bremen disappear in Moscow makes everyone else think S-K's in a weak position, giving them a false sense of advantage.
• Jester

For the most part, S-K's influence is concentrated in the southwest, around the Caucasus Mountains and the lower stretches of the Volga River. S-K's primary interests in Russia revolve around heavy industry and natural resources, particularly oil. The oil pipelines from Kazakh pass through this region en route to tankers in Rostov on the Black Sea coast, so Saeder-Krupp has a vested interest in protecting those pipelines. Unfortunately, those same pipelines are frequent targets of sabotage, by ecoterrorists and by Chechen and Crimean partisans fighting Russian occupation.

• Saeder-Krupp's pipelines also come under fire from rival petrochemical companies in the area. Mostly, though, eco-terrorists are the only ones crazy enough to carry weapons and explosives in an area tightly patrolled by the Red Army.
• Gorky

• The Aral pipeline has recently suffered attacks by partisans. The raiders ignore the other lines, even though usually the partisans strike randomly at all the pipelines in the array. Anyone know what's up with that?
• Yelena

• Interesting rumor: S-K is allegedly using the Aral pipeline to smuggle stuff out of Kazakh. They put the goods in modified pipe maintenance drones and shoot them down the pipeline to Rostov. Any ideas as to what they're smuggling?
• Nina

Saeder-Krupp has nominated its own candidate for General Secretary: **Dmitri Baichik,** a Party official from Smolensk. Smolensk is a Saeder-Krupp factory town, and Baichik served on the Smolensk City Council before being promoted up the ranks to the Supreme Soviet. In terms of politics, Baichik doesn't carry a lot of prestige or sway, but he's a gifted policy wonk, so I guess S-K is backing him for the nerd factor.

• This choice really puzzles me. Lofwyr believes in survival of the fittest, and some of his best underlings are ruthless bastards; just look at Rolf Bremen, Marianne Carstairs or Jean-Claude Priault. Baichik, with his balding head and bug-eyed glasses, inspires about as much fear as a wet hamster. Next to Danko or Bogdanova, he's nothing.
• Brekhov

• Maybe not in the meat world, but in the virtual world he's a real terror. Before he became a bureaucrat, Baichik was a notorious hacker—yes, hacker, as in the pre-Matrix Internet. During his days on the Smolensk City Council, he was responsible for the city grids and Matrix security, and even now he keeps up with the state of the art.

I think this is a strategic move on Lofwyr's part. The Erika-Transys partnership with the Wireless Matrix Initiative is progressing nicely, and it's only a matter of time before they start carving out their own territory in the European Matrix. Putting Baichik in power must be a pre-emptive strike to keep them out of Russia.
• Dragon Dance

ZETA-IMPCHEM

During the Resource Rush, the British company ICI made its entry into Russia when it bought out a newly privatized ore refinery. ICI used its early entry to establish itself firmly in the Russian business world, and when it became Zeta-ImpChem after merging with Clariant Syngenta and Ciba-Lonza, it used its newfound muscle to buy the loyalty of several Russian politicians, who passed laws favorable to Zeta-ImpChem and made it an indelible part of Russia's political landscape.

• Saeder-Krupp tried hard to knock Z-IC off as number one in Russia, but the corp was too well entrenched for even the wyrm to take down. Z-IC hasn't forgotten that, so I have a feeling they'll use the current chaos to return the favor.
• Corp Watcher

• With Bremen's short "leave of absence," don't you think they already have?
• Ivanova

• Though Z-IC has its fingers in just about every aspect of the Russian government, the corp focuses most of its efforts on the UGB. Boris Petuchkin, head of the UGB's foreign operations, is a Z-IC puppet. He's used his position to instigate black ops against Z-IC's competitors, not only in Russia, but abroad in Europe and Asia.
• Gorky

• I'm sure they're irked that Saeder-Krupp got to UGB head Rassily Romanov before Z-IC did. Lofwyr may not have knocked Z-IC off as number one in Russia, but bending the ear of the top UGB official makes a good consolation prize.
• Dragon Dance

While the rest of the company pursues "sexy" industries like pharmaceuticals and biomed, Zeta-ImpChem's Russian division concentrates on the industrial side of the chemical industry. Z-IC

Russia has also branched into other forms of materials development and production, such as mining and metallurgy, taking advantage of local expertise in working specialty nonferrous metallic alloys such as titanium, osmium and platinum. One pet project is the production of room temperature superconductors, which often use Russian metallurgical expertise to turn the lanthanides and other rare earth metals into workable alloys.

» Many of the best lanthanide veins lie east of the Urals, in Russian Siberia and Yakut. Z-IC hires a lot of merc help to protect their strip mines from Yakut shapeshifters and Interior Army shakedowns.
» Raskolnikov

» Z-IC Russia doesn't invest a lot in pharmaceuticals or biotech, but they've taken particular exception to CrossCorp's recent entry into the Russian business scene. It's pretty irrational; Cross isn't putting a lot of effort into pharmaceuticals and is more invested in the "squishier" parts of biotech.
» Corp Watcher

» I think Z-IC just likes picking fights because they're so firmly entrenched. They better be careful, though. Overconfidence has brought many others low. Look at Fuchi.
» Eyeball

In fact, Zeta-ImpChem is so confident of its unassailable position in Russia that corporate honchos have nominated one of their own as the next General Secretary: **Sacha Folyin,** a retired Z-IC executive who decided to "change careers" and enter politics. Folyin's old school and an ICI alumnus from the pre-merger days.

» Folyin and Z-IC also know a lot of aristos around Europe and can draw from them blue-blood money and other capital. Folyin recently hit the Grand Tour, meeting and greeting nobles, dignitaries and VIPs, all in a drive to support his bid for the General Secretary's seat.
» Gorky

» He spent a lot of face time on the Grand Tour with one particular face: Johnny Spinrad. Folyin met Spinrad in the meat at least a half-dozen times, and after Spinrad's "accident" in Salzburg last December, the old Russian sent him an interesting "get well" e-card that I heard included a lot of juicy info on Saeder-Krupp's moves in Russia.
» Corp Watcher

YAMATETSU

Almost five years ago, Yamatetsu Chairman Tadamako Shibanokuji suffered what would become a fatal stroke, causing the chairmanship to pass to his son Yuri. Because Yuri is an ork, his ascension to the board brought heated opposition from corporate headquarters. To overcome it, Yuri moved Yamatetsu headquarters—lock, stock and barrel—from Kyoto, Japan to Vladivostok, Russia. The Big Y already had a substantial business presence in Vladivostok and elsewhere in Russia, so the move made excellent business sense in more ways than one.

Since then, Yamatetsu has gone out of its way to ingratiate itself with its new landlord, investing in numerous joint projects in the Russian Far East. Whether reviving Russia's space program at Svobodniy or modernizing the Pacific Fleet with Yamatetsu Naval Technologies, Yamatetsu was more than willing to help out. These efforts paid off. Yamatetsu has entrenched itself firmly in the Russian power scheme, and now looks ready to spend some of its accumulated favors.

• East of Lake Baykal, Yamatetsu is the authority in the Russian Far East. They're more than willing to let the various Russian militaries fight the Yakut rebels, but for ordinary Russians, Yamatetsu provides everything they need. Best advice: don't work in the Russian Far East if you've got a Yamatetsu bounty on your head.
• Bizwatcher

In an effort to increase its stature in Russia, Yamatetsu is backing **Sonia Mikhalina,** a former cosmonaut and technical consultant to the Svobodniy launch center. Mikhalina gained acclaim in the 2040s for her explorations of the dark side of the moon, at a time when the Russian public felt depressed about its losses in the Euro Wars and the ineptitude of the Democratic Reform Alliance. "Sonia Stargazer" became a Russian media sensation during the Probe Race from her numerous news appearances explaining the technicalities of that unofficial megacorporate competition.

• Sonia may be a whiz when it comes to space, but she doesn't know the first thing about planet Earth. If it weren't for her Yamatetsu media handlers, Vladimir Danko and Prelate Bogdanova would have walked over her like a red carpet on premiere night.
• Spinmeister

• That's exactly what she wants them to think. Sonia discovered the power of celebrity as soon as she got back down, and she's spent her time refining her craft. She may need some policy wonks to make up the substance, but Sonia's got the media public feeding from the palm of her hand.
• Starstruck

Trouble at the Top

Since Yuri's first year as chairman, when he withstood a board challenge and moved the corporate headquarters, he's kept a low profile, letting CEO Saru Iwano and his new business partner, the free spirit Buttercup, soak up publicity while Yuri worked quietly behind the scenes. Publicity is once again coming his way, however. Early last month, Yuri announced that he had been diagnosed with Methuselah's syndrome, a genetic disorder common in many orks, in which the body ages at an accelerated pace. In his statement, he remarked that Yamatetsu was already developing a treatment plan requiring months of genetic therapy at the corp's Shibanokuji Orbital. Yuri expected to begin treatment by the end of the year, and a transition plan is in the works to handle the succession during his absence.

• Holy drek! Nobody saw this coming. Hang onto your hats, folks, it's going to be an exciting six months.
• Corp Watcher

• Actually, if you compare the footage from the press conference to when Yuri announced Yamatetsu's move five years ago, you can see it's already started. I guess he's been undergoing Leonization, because some of the symptoms appear out of order. Other than that, he could have pulled off the charade until he had to leave. I wonder why the advance notice?
• Rikki

CROSS APPLIED TECHNOLOGIES

Cross Applied Technologies is a relative newcomer to the Russian scene. After the fallout from the Corp War subsided, Cross decided to establish a presence in Russia's biotech sector, a region Lucien Cross sees as a vast untapped market ready for exploita—er, development. After establishing a beachhead in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Cross moved eastward into the western Ural Mountains to set up development laboratories and production centers, primarily located around Perm, Kazan and Kirov.

• Development laboratories? More like hunting lodges, where Cross expeditions suit up before crossing the Urals to pursue exotic paracritters and rare Awakened plants in Yakut and the Timen Ridge in northeast Russia. Of course, in a place this wild, many times the Cross hunters become the hunted, particularly by Booryazmei and his wyverns.
• Kraven

So far, CrossCorp has stayed out of the current power play in Moscow. The corporation had to fight an uphill battle to penetrate Russia and has faced particularly fierce opposition from Zeta-ImpChem (which hates competition, particularly in the interior) and the Russian Orthodox Church (which opposes Cross's biotech research.) The corp devotes what little influence it has with the National Supreme Soviet to making sure it doesn't lose any strategic ground.

• I heard Cross cut a deal with the Red Army to back Danko in the Supreme Soviet, in exchange for future concessions.
• Nina

• Forget it. Danko wouldn't compromise his principles dealing with Cross, and he doesn't need their political support. According to my sources, the Vory are interested in buying Cross's allegiance; they want to expand into Awakened and bioengineered drugs, which are an increasing success for the Ghost Cartels in South America. The Vory think BADs are the

vice of the future, and they want to corner the European market before the Alta Commissione catches on.
» Pretty Molly

THE HUMAN NATION

This group is a mystery to me. Given the level of bias and racism in Russian society (not only against metahumans, but also against ethnic minorities) as well as a passionate fear and hatred of Yakut, the Human Nation should find Russia ripe recruiting ground. Yet the hate group has a minor presence here and doesn't show rapid or strong expansion.

» Russians are quixotic when it comes to bias. They hate a Jewish human more than a Russian ork, yet it's nearly impossible to tell the difference between a Jew and a true Russian other than culture and behavior. I sometimes wonder if Russians aren't nuanced enough to buy into the Human Nation's agenda.
» Hood

» I think you answered your question: culture and behavior. The Russian members of the Human Nation strike me as crusty old guard Euro-aristocrats right out of tsarist times—definitely not in touch with the current Russian zeitgeist.
» Gorky

» Speaking of aristos, if you want to find the Human Nation in Russia, try the high society circuits in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other major cities. Ever since the Iron Curtain fell, a lot of Euro-aristos with tsarist roots have been slowly coming home. A lot of them have ties to Konigsberg and the Grand Tour, and at least two are known Human Nation members.
» Chekhov

So far the Human Nation's primary influence in Russia comes through its contacts in the MVD. Though the Russian Orthodox Church holds influence over the MVD's top leadership, the Human Nation has a secondary influence, particularly with specialty departments like the Procuracy (public prosecutors). One important department with Human Nation ties is OMON: the *Otryad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniya*, or Special Police Detachment, the MVD's version of SWAT.

» The Black Berets (as OMON troopers are sometimes known) are little more than glorified thugs. Raised as riot control troops in the 1980s, they moved to a SWAT role to combat increased terrorism from Caucasus minorities. These guys are poorly paid, even by Russian standards, which makes them notoriously corrupt.
» Gorky

» They're also more machines than men. The MVD lavishes OMON with cyber and bio because of the risky situations they go into.
» Yelena

» Watch out for Konstantin Vilyavich, the chief judge for the Moscow district courts. I can't find any direct links to the Human Nation yet, but his courts are definitely biased against metahumans. A lot more metas get shipped off to the gulags coming out of Vilyavich's courts on charges that would get a light sentence elsewhere.
» Nemesis

ACROSS THE RODINA

Russia's a big country, spanning five time zones, with plenty of places where biz can take you. Here's a quick summary of the most important ones.

MOSCOW

For a place that gets damned cold in the winter, Moscow's shadows are hotter than a forger's fire right now. Except for most of the megacorps, practically every faction vying for power has a headquarters in Russia's capital. Shadowruns here are more layered with intrigue than the most intricate *matryoshka* doll.

» Speaking of these famous Russian nesting dolls, someone broke into the Russian National Art Repository last week and made off with a jeweled nesting egg that Carl Fabergé commissioned for the Russian royal family. I'm not sure why, but you might want to keep an eye out for it.
» Guggenheim

In addition to the current controversy surrounding the General Secretary's post, the Russian national capital also invites plenty of international espionage. With the fragmentation of North America putting additional separation between the UCAS and Russia, Russia's top spy rivalry has moved to Great Britain's intelligence services, as MI-6 and the UGB maneuver their agents around Red Square in an international game of political chess. Russia plays a similar game with Imperial Japan, though the new body on the Imperial throne has somewhat reshuffled the Japanese deck.

» Don't forget the Native American Nations. With the Athabaskan and Trans-Polar Aleut councils relatively near, Russia keeps a sharp eye on what they're doing. The Athabaskans in particular aren't happy about Russia's presence around the Bering Straits, and worry that the Russians might try to reclaim Alaska.
» Blue Dolphin

» It's not quite on the same level, but the Draco Foundation is trying to establish an office in Moscow, opposite St. Basil's Cathedral. With many more claims originating in Russia and Central Asia, the Foundation wants to increase its presence in this part of the world. The Russians haven't exactly been falling over themselves to cooperate, though.
» Gorky

Right now, with summer around the corner, running in Russia isn't that bad. (However, with sunset taking place as late as ten in the evening, there's not a lot of darkness to cover your tracks.) Come November or December, the Moscow winter can be brutal. During the winter months, the sun sets as early as three in the afternoon and sometimes doesn't rise until after nine in the morning. Also, the snow and ice makes it hard for vehicles and drones to get around.

• The neighborhoods and suburbs on the outskirts of the city have had problems with paracritters roaming around during the winter. All the heat generated by an urban setting throws off the hibernation cycle and causes critters like horned bears and grandfather elk to wander the streets. Also, Russia is a land brimming with fairy tales, and incidents get reported throughout the city involving leshy, domovoi and many other fae appearing in Moscow.
• Baba Yaga

ST. PETERSBURG

Known as Leningrad during the Cold War, St. Petersburg is Russia's primary port on the Baltic Sea. Built during the reign of Peter the Great, St. Petersburg mimics many historical cities of Old Europe. Shadowrunners used to working the streets of Paris, Brussels or London should feel right at home here.

As the second largest city in Russia and the largest Baltic seaport, St. Petersburg holds offices and factories for all the AAA megacorps, as well as the major Eurocorp players. St. Petersburg is also a Russian Navy stronghold, site of the Baltic Fleet headquarters.

• Baltic Fleet HQ has been taking some fire lately from the Scandinavian Union. The Union, led by the rabidly anti-corporate Swedes, places tight restrictions on armed corporate forces. The Russians, by contrast, allow the corps to use their shipyards and shore services freely, in exchange for lucrative kickbacks. A lot of corps use the Russians to get around Union restrictions, refueling in St. Petersburg and then sending corp vessels into Scandinavian waters to stand guard over corporate shore facilities.
• Davy Jones

In addition to the Navy, the Russian Orthodox Church is also a force in the city. With all of St. Petersburg's museums

and universities, the city serves as the Church's academic forum. While the Church wages its political battles in Moscow, the academic battles take place in St. Petersburg. Many museums and libraries are sponsored by the Church, which gives them privileged access to some of the Church's vaults, archives and repositories.

» Right now the dispute between Bishop Ivan Belukhin and would-be General Secretary Ilyana Bogdanova is the front line in Church battles. Championing Bogdanova's cause in St. Petersburg against Belukhin's anti-meta doctrine is Prelate Pavel Melkius. Melkius has his own stake in Bogdanova's bent toward racial and ethnic reconciliation; he's a dwarf and a Lithuanian expatriate.
» Gorky

» Belukhin isn't Melkius' only adversary. Some of my friends in Vilnius tell me that Melkius' pro-monarchist views got him in trouble with the technocratic government and forced him to abdicate his position with the Orthodox Church of Lithuania.
» Yelena

» Given the close ties between the Church and the St. Petersburg museums, lots of people speculate that the Russian Orthodox Church has a secret treasure vault like the Vatican's, full of forbidden lore, holy relics and the like. Hardly a week goes by without the shadows passing word of this or that talismonger trying to steal something from the Church-backed museums.
» Chekhov

» The Apep Consortium apparently believes the stories. Their "historians" and "appraisers" regularly scout the museums and archives looking for anything even remotely interesting.
» Nina

KRONSTADT

Sitting a few dozen kilometers from St. Petersburg on the island of Kotlin, the anarchist city of Kronstadt serves as a stark contrast to Russia's authoritarian regime. Originally a military base, the soldiers and sailors stationed on Kotlin mutinied, motivated by years of resentment for poor supplies and frustration over the incompetent top brass in the European campaign. After repelling several Russian government attempts to retake the island, Kronstadt became a haven for policlubbers, mobsters, dissidents, smugglers and others seeking escape from Russian repression.

Today, almost thirty years later, Kronstadt remains as anarchist as ever. A loose council of engineers and administrators keeps the infrastructure running, but otherwise everyone goes their own way, bound only by the implicit understanding that, between the Russians and the corps, they either all hang together or they all hang separately. Smuggling is the main cash cow, though people can also make good money passing around black information. The Akula, renegade Russian submarine crews, defend the island from Russian and corporate reprisals, when they're not out hunting for money targets as undersea pirates.

» Saeder-Krupp also. They're the only corporation on the island, mostly because they poured a lot of nuyen into revitalizing the shipyards and regularly contribute to the infrastructure fund. In exchange they got a lot of leftover military materiel and a portion of the dock.
» Felix

» That doesn't add up. Most of that materiel was outdated when they moved in during the 2040s, and there's nothing left for them now. Sure, the shipyards are useful, but they can get that in St. Petersburg without much trouble. Why are they still around?
» Curious George

» Information, chummer. Smugglers canvas most of Europe and Russia, and they hear things. The pirates also need good 411 to know where the cash cows are. Why else do you think Saeder-Krupp Prime pours millions of nuyen into this place?
» Rikki

» They're not the only ones. Argus, the spymasters of MET 2000, also operate from here, spying on training camps for the Green Cells, Rote Zora and Nationale Aktion. Argus keeps their presence under wraps, because most of the anarchists don't trust the "corporate Stasi."
» Peet

» Don't look now, but there's a gang war brewing in the Baltic between the Akula sub pirates and the Viking gangs out of Sweden. The Vikings engage mostly in smuggling, but lately they've been expanding into piracy and trespassing into Akula hunting waters.
» Ivanova

NIZHNIY NOVGOROD

Known as Gorky during the Cold War, Nizhniy Novgorod is Russia's third largest city and sits squarely in the heart of European Russia. At the intersection of the Oka and Volga rivers, Nizhniy Novgorod serves as Russia's crossroads, easily accessible from St. Petersburg in the north to the Black Sea in the south.

During the Cold War, Nizhniy Novgorod served as the center of Soviet military research and production, but after the Cold War most of those facilities were privatized and converted to civilian endeavors. The megacorps snapped up most of the privatized facilities during the Resource Rush, with Zeta-ImpChem being the biggest winner. Most of Z-IC's operations revolve around industrial chemicals and commercial products, and emissions from Z-IC's "smokeless" chimney stacks have given the city its notorious sunset purple haze.

• The Red Army still has a few weapons research centers in Nizhniy Novgorod, usually run by corporate defense contractors like Ruhrmetall and IFMU. Recently, Mesametric, the Sioux industrial company, has made a few runs in Nizhniy Novgorod against Ruhrmetall. Mesametric wants to expand out of North America, and scoring a few Russian defense contracts may be their big break.
• Gorky

While Zeta-ImpChem is the dominant player in Nizhniy Novgorod, it's not the only one. Shiawase, Aztechnology and Renraku all have facilities here, as well as the Eurocorps Renault-Fiat and Erika. Shiawase's presence is particularly notable: in addition to facilities owned by Shiawase Atomics (which maintains a local radiological lab), Shiawase inherited several facilities previously owned by Fuchi Pan-Europa. Though they all fall under the same corporate umbrella, rancor still exists between the two divisions.

• Nizhniy Novgorod has been one of the uglier scenes of the Fuchi-Shiawase marriage. Before the merger, Fuchi's Earl Watkins and Shiawase's Rihito Masakae, heads of their respective divisions, were bitter competitors. The merger forced the two into a partnership as co-vice presidents. It worked for a while, but now the old hatreds are coming back. There's only room for one top executive in Nizhniy Novgorod, and it looks like the loser will leave town in the proverbial pine box.
• Corp Watcher

VOLGOGRAD

Formerly called Stalingrad, Volgograd sits on the Volga River in southwestern Russia. This industrial city, lying relatively close to the Turkistan border, also serves as front headquarters for Red Army forces in the region. Saeder-Krupp maintains a strong presence here, guarding its oil pipelines that run from the Caspian oil fields to refineries and tankers on the Black Sea coast at Rostov.

Heavy industry isn't the only moneymaker in Volgograd. The past few years have seen a surge in archaeological expeditions, sponsored primarily by Saeder-Krupp, the Atlantean Foundation and the Apep Consortium. Most of the expeditions focus on the region between the Black Sea and the Volga, and many also extend westward into parts of Ukraine and Moldova. The Foundation and the Consortium have sent expeditions into the Caucasus Mountains, but harassment by ethnic partisans has delayed many projects.

• Mitsuhama's getting into the act nowadays. One of their core businesses is magical research, and Mitsuhama's research edge is fading a bit after discoveries by S-K and the Foundation enabled them to catch up some.
• Corp Watcher

• Lately the Apep Consortium has devoted significant resources to one particular expedition far to the northeast, near the Kazakh border. Nobody knows what they're looking for, and I don't think they know for sure. They've been wandering around in the middle of nowhere, following one of their magicians using a divining rod or something to guide their meandering.
• Magister

• Last week the Atlantean Foundation halted a dig near the town of Serafimovich after their main power generator got blown up, which also took out their primary supply tent and wounded a dozen workers. Since that incident, word's been filtering out of Russia that the Foundation wants information about the Knights of Rage. We all know the Knights work for Celedyr, but what's his connection to this area?
• Dragon Dance

• They're barking up the wrong dragon. I heard proselytizers from the Cult of the Dragon have popped up in the region around Volgograd, including Serafimovich.
• Madgalene

In the past couple of months, unexpected mana storms have hit the area. Their intensity varies; sometimes it's nothing more than a light astral drizzle, other times the storms erupt with killer ferocity. The storms tend to move around the region; they started somewhere in Ukraine on the Black Sea coast and have wandered eastward into Russia, then back into Ukraine, then back into Russia and so on. The Russians are downplaying the storms as "minor disruptions," but under the surface they're worried.

• They ought to be. Lots of intelligence agencies have detected increased Winternight activity in Russia. The storms might be part of a black magic ritual the group is planning, and they may be using southwest Russia as a test run.
• Night Stalker

• I was the only survivor of a smuggling ship that wandered into a mana storm's path. We were offshore from the Crimea when it engulfed us. I saw many terrors that drove my shipmates insane, but the worst of it was the thing that came at me before I blacked out. I don't know if it was a dragon, a monster or a demon from the depths of Hell, but it spoke incomprehensible words to me that are seared—seared!—into my memory.
• Boatswift

• Surely it's not the Despoiler he sees?
• Miss Tick

• If it is, then let Sunset Blossom take care of him. Her mess, her responsibility.
• Feng Xiansheng

NOVOSIBIRSK

As the largest Russian city east of the Urals, Novosibirsk has become the provisional capital for what's left of Siberian Russia (from Sverdlovsk to Irkutsk). This is the front line for Russia's standoff against Yakut, and the area is crawling with Red Army, Interior Army and UGB Border Guards.

» The three services don't cooperate, so you might be able to catch a break if you know how to play one service off the other two.
» Bizwatcher

In addition to being a stronghold for Russia's various militaries, Novosibirsk survives on a steady diet of heavy industry, particularly metallurgy, industrial cryogenics and power generation. Ruhrmetall and IFMU have facilities here where they can compete without too much interference from Saeder-Krupp. One of Russia's best technical universities, the Akademgorodok, also resides in Novosibirsk; among other prominent schools here are Novosibirsk State University, the Sobolev Institute of Mathematics and the Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics. The Budker Institute won recent acclaim for its breakthrough discoveries in subatomic particle physics.

» Some of that research is quite interesting. One hypothesis theorizes that the Awakening increased the overall energy state of the universe, thus allowing many particles (particularly muons and lambda particles) that previously could only exist in an atom-smasher to stabilize naturally. This could have powerful implications in energy production, since some theories on cold fusion rely on the existence of muons and other heavy particles.
» Mr. Fusion

» Their research has attracted a few interested parties. Gaeatronics has made some inquisitive leads. Back in 2057 their Seattle labs got a bunch of nuyen from Dunkelzahn's will for research into the link between magic and nuclear energy. And Yat Gwan, the dragon from Hunan, also sent a few representatives to come calling.
» Janey Neutron

» I'm not sure if this is wild speculation or not, but a few weeks ago the Vigilia Evangelica were in Novosibirsk hunting for Black Lodge agents discovered lurking around the Sobolev Math Institute.
» Cornwell

» Please be kind, and share whatever you're chipping with the rest of us.
» Skeptic

IRKUTSK

Once a vacation resort on the shores of Lake Baykal, Irkutsk has transformed over the past thirty years into a military garrison. With the Trans-Siberian Railroad passing so close to the disputed border between Russian Siberia and Yakut, Irkutsk is the strategic linchpin connecting the Russian Far East to the motherland. If Irkutsk falls, then Russia loses Vladivostok and the Pacific.

» Irkutsk also holds a lot of significance for the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition to being the sponsor for Ilyana Bogdanova, it's also home to Saint Innocent the Miracle Worker. Innocent helped spread Christianity into Siberia and over the Bering Strait into Alaska. Even now, the Church has strong ties in Athabaska and Tsimshian, and the bishopric at Irkutsk keeps close contact with its churches there.
» Magdalene

With the recent uprising against the shapeshifters in Yakut, the territory around Irkutsk and Lake Baykal came under rebel control. Given the power struggle in Moscow, Russian forces in Irkutsk have orders to hold position until the new General Secretary can rise to the top. The rebels, mostly anti-Russian Evenks, don't trust the Russians, and border skirmishes are common between Russian and rebel patrols.

» Lots of smuggling is going on between Irkutsk and the rebel-controlled territory to the north. The rebels need supplies and arms for their fight against the shapeshifters, and where better to get them than from Russian supply depots in Irkutsk? The MVD's Interior Army employs many ethnic minorities, and quite a few sympathize with the rebels.
» Yelena

VLADIVOSTOK

Sitting on the Pacific Ocean, Vladivostok has become a lot more visible on the world scene in recent years. Headquarters for the Russian Pacific Fleet since tsarist days, Vladivostok has also been home to Yamatetsu since Yuri Shibanokuji became CEO in 2059. This hilly town of winding streets, sometimes known as the "San Francisco of the East," has gained a reputation rivaling the Seattle Metroplex.

In many ways Vladivostok is a Russian version of Seattle, a modern frontier town on the Pacific Rim where multiple cultures merge. The sprawl is a mixture of Muscovite, Korean, Chinese and Siberian ethnics, along with a large influx of metahumans fleeing persecution in Japan. There's plenty of work for everyone's tastes, whether smuggling telesma from Yakut, spying on Yamatetsu or the Russian Navy, or getting caught up in the mob wars between the Vory, Rings and Triads.

» Don't forget Mosaic. I know, it's pretty gutsy setting up a data haven in a triple-A megacorp's backyard, but they've survived with a little assist from the Northern Star Jo-pok Ring. If you need to find out what's going on in the Northern Pacific, Mosaic is the place to go.
» Slipstream

• Mosaic is about to get in trouble with its sponsors. Though the Northern Star Ring helped them get set up, the Vory are the big dogs in town, and having a Ring associated with a data haven comes across as a major challenge. Tenchi, one of Mosaic's sysops, has kept the Vory off his back by feeding intel on the Triads and Yakuza in Vladivostok to Sergei Byelmodin, boss of the biggest Vory gang. This is a dangerous balancing act, and last week Tenchi fell off the tripwire. He's gone into hiding while the Northern Star is looking for a piece of his hide. Mosaic is still up and running, but the techs have stayed up late making extra backups just in case.
• Decker Sue

PETROPAVLOSK-KAMCHATSKY

Located on the severed peninsula/island of Kamchatka, Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky once held strategic value as a major sub barn for the Soviet Pacific Fleet. Nowadays, this oversized fishing village serves as a stopover for trans-Pacific smugglers hauling Siberian and Mongolian telesma from Vladivostok to Seattle, returning with the latest in UCAS and Pueblo electronics. Be careful, because the Russian subs are still around. Fortunately, they're usually busy watching the Japanese and the Siberians.

• Some profitable short-run smuggling also takes place around here, hauling sugar to Athabaska and the T-PA, hot tech from Japan and simchips from Korea. Right now a lot of Haida sympathizers and anti-Tsimshian operatives in Athabaska are ordering Russian weapons from smugglers out of Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky for the struggle against Chief Deborah and her MCT overlords.
• Red Feather

During the past few months, Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky has seen an upswing in syndicate activity. About eight or nine months ago, a bunch of Chinese Triads entered the area, posing as smugglers and fishermen. A few months later, yakuza agents started appearing, tailing the Triads. The Vory in Vladivostok are scratching their heads; why would the two major Asian syndicates want to come to this backwater town? Everyone wants to know.

• I think it has something to do with the Valley of Geysers, a canyon full of geysers and hot springs that's also a magical power site. It's on the Ring of Fire, so likely there are a bunch of dragon lines crossing the valley that Lung wants a closer eye on. Of course, Ryumyo responds to anything Lung does, though Ryumyo's yak agents are about three steps behind the Triads.
• Maier

• Good luck to both of them. The Valley of Geysers is crawling with paracritters, particularly basilisks and fire salamanders. A free fire elemental also supposedly calls the Valley home, and last I heard it wasn't fond of visitors.
• Sinsk

SVOBODNIY

After the Soviet Union lost the Tyuratam space center to Kazakhstan in 1991, the Russians decided to build a backup launch center in Svobodniy, only a few hundred kilometers northwest of Vladivostok. Throughout the first half of the century, Svobodniy languished while multiple government changes and the Crash stalled the Russian space program. When Yamatetsu relocated to Vladivostok, however, the corp entered into a joint partnership with the Russians, and now Svobodniy is abuzz sending launches up to the Shibanokuji Orbital.

With the news of Yamatetsu's manned landfall on Mars last September, shadow activity involving Svobodniy has skyrocketed; Ares, Proteus and the other space corps want a peek at the footage beamed back from the *Tereshkova* to Yamatetsu. Security has tightened since the beginning of the year, when the expedition left Mars. They're not expected to be back until June, and Yamatetsu wants to make damn sure nothing screws it up.

• The space corps aren't the only ones interested in the Mars mission. The Russians tried to keep this quiet, but the expedition also figured out the location of that dragon skeleton from the photos in Dunkelzahn's will. The Draco and Atlantean foundations have been sniffing around Svobodniy and Vladivostok for an advance scoop on the discovery.
• Walker

• From what I've heard, the cosmonauts retrieved several bones and are bringing them back, along with other artifacts. Couldn't tell you what they are, because my source got flatlined in mid-transmission.
• Dragon Dance

• How convenient. Excuse me while I clean out my bulldrek filter.
• Skeptic

• NEWS FLASH!!! The *Tereshkova* disappeared just as it was entering the lunar orbital zone. The spacecraft was about a hundred thousand kilometers from the moon when radio communication abruptly ceased. Svobodniy's gone crazy trying to figure out what happened.
• Janey Neutron

• Okay, that was weird. The *Tereshkova* showed up again six days after it disappeared. The crew denied losing contact and doesn't seem to remember the past week. Yamatetsu's been scrambling to get a rescue ship up and intercept the spacecraft, before anyone else tries to mess with it. I'll keep you updated as things develop.
• Janey Neutron

YAKUT: CALL OF THE WILD

Population: 19,000,000 (Yakut 41%, Russian 38%, Other 21%)
Major Languages: Russian (69%), Yakut (55%)
Major Religions: Shamanism 55%, also Buddhism, Islam, Russian Orthodox

by Bogatyr

An old Russian proverb says, "*Volkov boyat'sa—v les ne khodit":* If you're afraid of wolves, don't go into the woods. Perhaps the Siberians should have considered this before getting carried away with their desire for independence. Instead, they made a deal with the devil that bought them thirty years of suffering.

With help from the shapeshifters and other mythic creatures of the Siberian wilderness, the Siberians broke away from Russia. Until recently, however, no one knew the Siberian shamans obtained that alliance by bargaining with a powerful spirit that claimed all of Siberia as its domain and, as the Siberians later found out, hated metahumanity and civilization.

- *gasp* You mean ancient native magic used against Western technological oppressors isn't noble and just? Better not let the NAN propagandists hear that!
- Hood

- Stop comparing apples to oranges, you Anglo racist.
- Saguaro

For many years the Siberians had no choice but to suffer under the spirit's tyranny, enforced by the shapeshifters that worshiped it. A recent discovery around Lake Baykal gave them a new hope, however, and a rebel militia has unleashed a so-far successful revolt. What happens now, especially in light of the infighting in Russia, is anyone's guess.

REVOLUTION GONE AWRY

Few people outside the Russian Far East know much about this conflict, so here's a short history lesson. During

the Cold War, the Soviets closed most of Siberia to outsiders for military reasons (like its long, sometimes-contentious border with China, as well as the Soviet naval yards at Vladivostok and Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky). After the Soviets fell, Siberia opened up, and many indigenous minorities in Siberia and the Russian Far East reasserted themselves, throwing off years of attempted Russification. They slowly built up their depleted populations and exercised increasing local autonomy.

Unfortunately, after the Lone Eagle incident and the breakup of China, the Russians reverted to authoritarian form, closing Siberia and re-imposing hardships on the natives. After word of the Treaty of Denver spread from North America, some of the newly Awakened Siberian shamans formed their own resistance, but the Siberians lacked a unifying figure like Howling Coyote to rally them around the cause.

That changed as the 2020s drew to a close. A cabal of Siberian shaman guerrillas organized an independence movement and launched their attack in 2031, while Russia reeled in the wake of the Crash. Wielding powerful magic, the Siberian shamans summoned nature spirits to assist them, and their promise to restore the land brought the shapeshifters to their side. This huge magical advantage assured their victory.

Or so goes the official story. According to the Sagan Zaba, the truth is different. While Siberian shamans did organize the independence movement, the bit about powerful magic and noble causes is an exaggeration. In reality, the shamans contacted a great spirit of the Siberian wilderness, known as Vernya, and it agreed to help if they agreed to protect the land. Assisted by nature spirits and shapeshifters, the Siberians broke away from Russia, though they failed to completely eject the Russians from the Far East.

- "She" is a more accurate pronoun than "it."
- Chebeldai

In the process of establishing the new state of Yakut, the Siberians found out just what Vernya meant by "protecting the land." Large portions of the Siberian interior were declared off-limits to metahumans, and a significant number of villages had to relocate from the Siberian heartland to the fringes, where they often suffered Russian border raids. Use of "inappropriate technology" was severely restricted, as were certain types of magical practices, like conjuring. These restrictions prevented Siberia from developing a vibrant, self-sustaining economy. Finally, to make sure the Siberians honored their end of the bargain, the shapeshifters that had once fought side-by-side with them became their overseers, infiltrating Siberian society as spies, informants and secret police.

- It's a sad commentary on the state of society that xenophobic fear should tear apart an aspiring nation. A conspiracy theory that scapegoats the dual-formed is an illusion the Yakut dissidents create to avoid confronting their own inadequacies.
- Deborah

- The most difficult lies to dispel, and the ones that do the most damage, are the lies people tell to themselves. Deborah is a case in point.
- JKeller

FREEDOM ROCK

Some Siberians resisted the new order, but as with the struggle against the Russians, the resistance was disorganized and incoherent. That changed a little over a year ago, when many Evenks (indigenous Siberians native to the Lake Baykal region) started joining up.

At the break of this year, an organized rebel group calling itself the Sagan Zaba seized control of the region around Lake Baykal. It later announced its presence to the world with a trideo message delivered to the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS, in which an off-screen announcer read the group's manifesto while the camera focused on the bodies of several shapeshifters impaled on pikes of white stone. The Sagan Zaba statement declared their commitment to overthrow the "tyranny of the animal people and Vernya." This was the first time anyone mentioned the spirit.

SPIRITUAL CIVIL WAR

With the revelation by the Sagan Zaba, battle lines are being drawn in and around Yakut. The locals are choosing sides, so it's important to know the main contenders in this fight.

Shapeshifters

After Yakut became an independent nation, the government granted shapeshifters the same legal rights as regular humans and metahumans. The government in Yakutsk insists that shapeshifters are merely equal co-citizens and refutes the Sagan Zaba's claims that government officials are shapeshifter puppets. As any Yakut resident knows, though, local authorities may look like they're in charge, but the shapeshifters are the *real* authority. Many who complained about the government's overly stringent environmental laws have disappeared in the middle of the night, only to have their mauled bodies found deep in the woods the next day.

Most Yakut shapeshifters are bear or cat shifters (in particular, Siberian tigers and snow leopards). Many other types of shapeshifters are also running amok in Yakut, including elk, owl and kestrel shifters. Many Yakut natives believe certain types of shapeshifters have specific duties. For example, many bird shifters seem to function as spies, while cat shapeshifters almost always serve as hunters and assassins.

» I heard some of the shifters are specially trained to disguise themselves as normal metahumans so they can infiltrate metahuman groups. If so, the Sagan Zaba better watch their backs.
» Onedin

» And they manage this how? They're dual-natured. That'd show up in an astral look-see.
» Skeptic

» Look, I just post what I hear. Don't ask me if it's true.
» Onedin

» What about super-shifters—beings who can assume the form of any animal or metahuman? There aren't many of them, but whenever one shows up, something significant happens. I think the super-shifters are elite agents for this Vernya spirit.
» Prospero

» I think you're spooked by the shapeshifters. I've seen one in action, and I'd say it's more like some kind of animal spirit. (And no, I'm not going to elaborate on the circumstances. I'd like to stay breathing.)
» Gelfman

As for Vernya, most ordinary Siberians are unaware of the spirit and know only that the government shares power with the shapeshifters. Even now the majority of dissidents and rebels believe the shapeshifters control the government; they don't realize that someone else controls the shapeshifters.

» Word is filtering down to the frontline troops, though. In Irkutsk, the shadow market is booming for fetishes and protection charms against evil spirits and spirit magic. Not that it would help against Vernya, if the rumors about the spirit are even half true.
» Onedin

Sagan Zaba

The Sagan Zaba takes its name from a landmark on the shores of Lake Baykal. The real Sagan Zaba (meaning "White Rock") is an outcropping of white cliffs on one face of Olkhon Island, a large isle approximately 250 kilometers northeast from Irkutsk. Prior to the Awakening, Russian archaeologists discovered primitive drawings in cave dwellings adjacent to the cliffs, and also some fragmentary relics, including what appeared to be a sacrificial altar. After Yakut broke away from Russia, the shores close to Olkhon Island fell into Yakut hands. Now the Sagan Zaba controls the area around Lake Baykal, including Olkhon Island.

» No one sets foot on Olkhon Island because it's haunted. The Siberians and Russians both tried sending forces to the island, but within two weeks they vanished without a trace.
» Golomyanka

» Until this year. UGB border patrols in rebel territory reported seeing people on the island in the past couple of months. They tried to send scouts to see if whatever curse had been lifted, but no one ever heard from them again. The Evenks aren't talking.
» Onedin

» Has anyone noticed that Sagan Zaba lies at the longitudinal opposite of Crater Lake in Tir Tairngire? I wonder if that means anything.
» National Geographer

The majority of the Sagan Zaba are native Siberians, along with some Russian expatriates, most descended from the survivors of the Soviet gulag system. The driving force behind the Sagan Zaba are the Evenks, indigenous to the Lake Baykal region. Nearly wiped out by the Soviets half a century ago, the Evenks have clawed their way back from oblivion. Originally reindeer herders, Evenk culture and lifestyle resemble that of the American Plains Indians (whose ancestors migrated from Russia over the Bering ice caps). Evenk magical tradition bears a striking similarity to Native American ways, both exhibiting a strong shamanistic streak revolving around animal totems.

» Bear and Wolf are common totems among Evenk shamans. Owl and Eagle are also favored, but rare. A few Coyote shamans turn up pretty regularly—probably another one of Grandfather Coyote's tricks.
» Wili

Because they share a name, a connection clearly exists between the Sagan Zaba movement and the Sagan Zaba landmark. From what I've pieced together, a group of disaffected Evenk shamans sent a team (probably shadowrunners) onto Olkhon Island to retrieve an artifact their folklore said would help them fight the shapeshifters. The artifact they brought back, however, revealed a lot more; it clued the local shamans in to Vernya's existence. The rest of the story is obvious.

» So what is this artifact? Some kind of anti-shifter tool? A special spirit focus attuned to Vernya?
» Curious George

» The Russians definitely want to know. The UGB has posted a big reward for anyone with information on this relic or the details of that expedition.
» Stormavik

Considering this fledgling rebellion's success so far, the obvious question is who's backing the Sagan Zaba. Right now, only one candidate can safely be ruled out: the Russians. The Evenks hate them as much as they hate the shapeshifters. Manchuria is more likely, given their mutual hatred of the Yakut government, but Lake Baykal is a little bit out of Manchuria's reach. The Japanacorps and the Pacific Prosperity Group are possibilities, but it's risky for either of them to stick their necks out on this while the rest of the Pacific Rim is up for grabs.

• What about Lung or Ryumyo? If this rumor is true about a free spirit with Siberia as its personal domain, I think both of them may have a vested interest in countering it.
• Wyrm Watcher

• My money's on Buttercup. Maybe this Vernya spirit is competition—and Buttercup has Yamatetsu's Russian assets at her disposal.
• Spiderhawk

THE SAVAGE LAND

Yakut is a vast land with few means of getting in or around, and little to see other than trees, more trees, wild beasts and shapeshifters. A few areas in Yakut, however, have garnered significant attention lately.

Yakutsk

Officially, Yakutsk is the capital of Yakut, center of government administration. As mentioned earlier, though, the real decision-making power lies with the shapeshifters; Yakutsk merely maintains the façade of a legitimate political entity. Not much biz to be had, either; the shapeshifters are everywhere in this town, and no one has the guts to work against them.

• Not entirely true. Plenty of politicians and bureaucrats sympathize with the Sagan Zaba but fear being found out. They funnel important information to dissidents and rebels, but are paranoid about secrecy. The methods and runners they use are so sophisticated, it puts the UGB to shame.
• Yelena

Lake Baykal

Russia's fight with the Yakut natives in the 2030s split control of Lake Baykal, with the Russians controlling the southern half and Yakut controlling the northern half. The Sagan Zaba have since replaced the Yakut government by the northern shore, but little else has changed. Border skirmishes with the Russians remain an everyday occurrence.

The Sagan Zaba's recent success in driving the Yakut government out of the area has prompted a lot of interest, particularly in the White Rock. If the Evenks found one artifact around which to rally their rebellion, then others may await discovery—including ancient spell formulae that target shapeshifters or conjuring rites useful for binding, trapping or even banishing Vernya.

• Even before the rebellion, Lake Baykal attracted its fair share of archaeological looters, such as the Atlantean Foundation and the Apep Consortium. The Atlantean Foundation's close ties with the Red Army enabled it to get some protection for runs into the Yakut-controlled portions of Lake Baykal.
• Ivanova

• Talislegging is lucrative too, particularly in the Barguzin Mountains northeast of the lake. Firebird feathers are especially hot, but be careful. The area has some wild mana surges and ebbs, so any kind of sorcery or conjuring is risky business.
• Gusli

• Lately, folks in DeeCee have been speculating that Dunkelzahn meant the White Rock when he wrote "where the Rock meets the Sky" in his will. The Draco Foundation won't confirm or deny this.
• DeeCee Insider

• Speaking of the Draco Foundation, on Olkhon Island, people apparently have started seeing rock-beings wandering around. I think it's fake, but a lot of serious people seem interested, including the Draco Foundation and the Apep Consortium.
• Magister

• What, you've never seen an earth elemental?
• Wycche

• It's not an earth elemental. I saw one of these rock-things further east, past Ulan Ude. Sorry to burst your bubble, but it's just an Evenk variation of the Stoneskin spell. The astral signature was weird, though.
• Baba Yaga

Tunguska

Yeah, I hear you: what, *that* conspiracy theory again? For those of you who avoided the UFO loonies, back in 1908 something from space crashed around the Stony Tunguska River, so hard that train passengers near Irkutsk—a thousand kilometers away—saw it. Conventional wisdom says it was a comet or meteorite, but people have observed weird magnetic effects and biological mutations in the area for decades.

The Sagan Zaba rebellion is bringing Tunguska renewed attention. The rebels have taken an interest in it, which suggests they know something. After the Awakening, persistent

claims came up of orichalcum and alchemical mineral radicals at the Yakut blast site, but none of the stories are consistent.

» The object that hit Tunguska may have been the prison of a powerful magical being. Radiological decay estimates of samples obtained from the site (by shadowrunners) confirm its terrestrial origins and suggest the object may have been launched into space twelve to thirteen thousand years ago. If true, the White Rock rebels might find some clues from Tunguska to building their own prison for the Siberian avatar.
» Baba Yaga

» Likewise those interested in powerful spirits, like Buttercup, Tutor, the shattered spirits of Denver and so on.
» Magister

» If this story is true, what happened to the spirit entrapped in the prison? Where is it now and what is it up to?
» Curious George

Magadan

Magadan is a port on the edge of the Sea of Okhotsk. At the height of the Cold War, it served as the hub of the Gulag Archipelago, the collection of prison labor camps where the Soviets sent political prisoners to mine for minerals, cut timber and fish. After the Cold War ended, Magadan was opened to international travel. Nowadays it sees frequent traffic to and from Alaska. It remains a primary center of natural resources, serving the megacorps rather than the Soviets. The Yakut shapeshifters have kept Magadan open to outside trade, raising funds to purchase weapons and supplies for their ongoing struggle against the Russians. Many megacorps have turned a lot of the old gulags into industrial centers, primarily gold and uranium mines, as well as refineries for extracting refined metals from those ores.

» All this takes place under the watchful eyes of the shapeshifters, who make sure the corps don't overstep their bounds.
» Corp Watcher

» Magadan is also a short hop from the Trans-Polar Aleut, so there's quite a bit of polar smuggling. Corporate shuttle runs from Magadan to the various work camps screen most of the smuggling, which makes the risk fairly reasonable for the potential reward. The Aleuts are more than happy to sell arms to use against Yakut, and the corps find the Aleuts pay well for sweets from the Far East.
» T-June

Yamalia

Yamalia lies along the northern Ural Mountains, adjacent to European Russia. Russians on the other side of the mountain shun this region, which is home to several dangerous predators, particularly wyverns and firebirds. One newsworthy predator recently put Yamalia on the map again: Booryazmei, the blue adult Western dragon who killed Dzhermiya Ogurznev.

Given Booryazmei's recent attention-getting appearance, no one knows much about him outside of some local fireside tales. The name means "storm serpent" in Russian, because the wyrm's arrival is always accompanied by fierce storms and he breathes lightning rather than fire. On several occasions, storm spirits Booryazmei presumably conjured have assisted the wyrm, and twice a few wyverns joined the dragon in his attacks.

Though Booryazmei is clearly intelligent (judging from the way he fought the Russian air force), he apparently has refused all attempts at communication. Booryazmei has attacked Russians and Yakut natives in equal measure, so he's probably no friend to Yakut, the shapeshifters or Vernya. As far as anyone can tell, Booryazmei is a true wild card in the current conflict between Russia, Yakut and the Sagan Zaba.

» Because of the number of paracritter attacks, local powers and corps sponsor a lot of "pest control" runs into Yamalia to hunt predators. The bounty on wyvern heads is particularly attractive.
» Kraven

» I wondered what happened to the Wild Child. Pity he survived.
» Orange Queen

» Ah, but if Wild Child is around, then You-Know-Who can't be too far away.
» Laughing Man

» Not a pleasant thought.
» Script-diver

SOUTHEAST ASIA

There's a lot happening in the hot zones of Southeast Asia, from shakeups in Indochina to revolution in the Philippines to some lucrative research and development in Malaysia. There are too many shadowrun opportunities to count, but it's hard to keep track of who's who in the ever-shifting balance of power.

» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:15:50 (PST)

INDOCHINA

» Continental Southeast Asia, or simply Indochina, is better known by merc veterans than our shadowrunning kind because of its seemingly never-ending border wars. As Gunpowder will tell you, this is bound to change with the recent evolutions in the area. He's one of those mercenaries turned shadowrunner when the dust settled in the SE Asian war zone. Picador checked his refs out, and she assured me he knows his trade and the region thoroughly.

» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:17:08 (PST)

by Gunpowder

Those of you who only imagine Indochina as a scene from those old Vietnam war flat flicks are in for a shock: druglords, underworld kingpins, megacorporate schemes and shows of strength by Awakened forces mix with the old jungle guerrilla clichés in a land that seems stuck in 2010.

GENERALITIES

In case you didn't pay attention, Indochina's under the tropics. That means 3 seasons: cool and dry (November-February), hot and dry (March-April) and monsoon (May-October). Some will tell you to avoid jobs during the hot season because of its searing temperatures, but frankly, the rainy season is much worse: flash floods and sticky muddy terrain can ruin your day and your vehicle faster than you can download the latest sim-starlet trid, while mosquitoes and disease are more frequent.

• It usually rains during the evening and the night, but the emphasis there is on "usually." You can plan a run under a blue sky and have a downpour 2 hours later. Don't leave home without a rainy day backup plan.
• Phi Daeng

Tropical countries come with the standard collection of exotic illnesses and dangerous critters. If you leave the major cities, pack a medkit that caries all the med care and inoculations you need, including mosquito repellent and buckshot rounds for the most hostile jungle beasts. The Southeast Asian woodlands have Awakened and now flaunt the lush splendor of a primeval forest. The creatures that live there were likewise affected; the jungle is a mysterious place, full of danger and untapped potential. Expect the unexpected there.

• Indochina's forests are on par with Amazonia's remotest spots. The jungles teem with life and are a parazoologist's wet dream. Naturally, protection jobs for scientific exploration teams are aplenty. Of course, you'll have to deal with the local critters: reticulated pythons, tigers and elephants along with aitvaras, gomatia, griffins, harpies, phoenixes, thunderbirds, bloodbats, golden cicadas, ghost tigers and thousands of others yet undiscovered. Sentient species include merrow, naga, shapeshifters, the rare white dours and many free nature spirits.
• Doc Savage

• Don't forget the giant insect spirit hives!
• Rabid

To the despair of Phi Daeng, my team's Thai decker, the Indochinese Matrix is almost nonexistent. You'll only find a working Matrix network in the major 'plexes, and those are still subject to grid instabilities or slow transfer rates. Even in Thailand and Burma, the countries with the best networks, large areas of the hinterland remain disconnected. This makes remote corporate facilities even more difficult to reach, as they're connected to the Matrix only via their own (possibly rented) satellite link.

Aside from those remote labs or secret facilities, foreign corporations only started to explore the local markets during the last decade, when most of the conflicts quieted and the economies were able to generate enough purchasing power to arouse the corps' interest. Even so, they mostly sell vehicles, mobile phones, household appliances and food. The cybertoys can be found only where there are buyers able to afford them—the major cities. In contrast, you can get weapons almost everywhere at a discount—a legacy of the wars—though they'll be weathered second-hand models.

Through the whole region, law enforcement varies from "mild annoyance" to "non-existent." You'll be able to bribe your way out of trouble with nuyen in most places—if you didn't attract too much attention. If you did, though, hole up somewhere and play dead for a while, unless you want to participate in the police's next PR operation.

• Vietnam is set apart with its tough police and its Bô Cong An (secret police), keeping an eye on both Joe Nguyen and the cops.
• Revolviet

• You'll only find private security in the large cities' rich residential and corporate quarters. Even there, the cops are open to "negotiations" so long as it doesn't threaten their job too much. They drive a harder bargain, of course, but it's a part of the culture. No matter how hard the corps try, it's impossible to stamp it out completely.
• Phi Daeng

• That is, of course, what they'd like you to think. More than one job has gone bad when the expected bribes turned out to be little more than a beacon telling the corp goons "Fresh Shadowrunner Meat Here!" But then, Phi Daeng's loyalty is beyond question, is it not?
• Pho

Running the various states' borders is very dangerous. There are military installations on both sides of most borders due to the longstanding hostilities. While they are more lightly staffed than they have been in previous years, the volatile nature of the current peace ensures that they remain operational.

Under these conditions, most smugglers prefer to bribe their way through. It's more expensive and not always 100 percent reliable, but a lot more secure and effective. With money or some barter, almost anything (or anyone) can be smuggled in or out of the country, so long as price isn't a concern.

• Don't forget to bring your linguasofts. Very few people get a real education and even fewer speak clear English. Translations into the Western alphabet (for languages other than Vietnamese) are unreliable and not always consistent: no two maps have the same English wording for streets and cities' names, so be careful when locating your next target to avoid showing up at Uncle Nguyen's wedding.
• Breaker

SOCIETY

Remember when dealing with locals that politeness and moderation matter here. When negotiating, be firm but not aggressive. Try to respect the customs, religion (especially the monks) and monarchy (in Thailand and Cambodia) and you'll be respected in return, which can earn you a great deal of help if you need it later.

Numerous antagonisms have always plagued the relationships between nations. To name only a few oppositions: Burma/Thailand, Thailand/Cambodia, Cambodia/Vietnam, Vietnam/China, etc. This bad blood had an important role in the tensions that eventually led to open war, and it's even stronger now.

• That's damn true. A Khmer fixer will lie to you because of your Vietnamese teammate, or a Thai fence will offer you

INDOCHINA TIMELINE

2010–2011: VITAS, typhoons, severe droughts and floods strike the region harshly. Death tolls are exceptionally high in Laos, Cambodia and Burma.
2012: King Rama XII of Thailand dies without a direct heir. The noble caste falls into turmoil as numerous "direct" heirs of the royal bloodline claim the throne, leaving the Thai people in confusion.
2013: Serious skirmishes erupt on the Burmese-Thai border, as Shan freedom fighters use Thailand as a safe haven to launch their attacks on the Burmese regime. The Burmese army pursues them onto Thai territory, initiating a long border war that quickly turns into a battle for control of the poppy fields. Cambodian refugees flee mass starvation and the resulting nascent civil war toward Thailand and Vietnam, provoking serious civil unrest in the bordering regions.
2014: In the highlands straddling Cambodia and Vietnam, the increase of paracritter attacks in the forested areas scare the settlers but spare the villagers, leading to violence between the two groups. The angry settlers flee the highlands, burning the forest to the ground behind them. The burnt forest quickly regrows, thicker and more wild than before. Soon large areas become too dangerous for woodcutters to continue working.
2019: The former Chinese province of Yunnan is isolated during China's decline into civil war and declares its independence shortly thereafter.
2020: Hostilities between Thailand and Burma come to an end as the conflict takes a toll on drug production and distribution, drying up the money that fueled the continuing war. Neither side manages to get an advantage.
2021: In Burma, the pro-democracy movement gains momentum and launches a grassroots revolution. It eventually deposes the weakened junta, but at the cost of thousands of lives.
2022: Intending to stop a decade of border troubles and chaos in Cambodia, Vietnam invades the country, aiming at Phnom Penh to get rid of the Sino-Khmer Mafia. The Mafia-controlled Cambodian army offers surprising resistance and the conflict turns into guerrilla warfare in the southeastern part of Cambodia. In Burma, the new democracy allows the Chin, Kachin, Shan and Kayah states to gain their independence, while other minorities choose to stay within the Union.
2024: In Burma, the former junta leaders regroup and install their stronghold in the north of the Shan state, where most of the poppy fields are. They use the Golden Triangle's wealth to rebuild their forces, extending their zone of control over western Yunnan.
2029: The Crash. Thailand banking companies are ruined, and consequently most of the regional mafia also are ruined. The army returns the political stage and brutally seizes power. Taking the opportunity to strike its competitors when they are weak, the Thai army crosses the northern border. It invades the Shan state and Laos to take control of the Golden Triangle.
This sparks a multilateral war as the Thai army fights both the Burmese former junta's troops and a Laotian army reinforced with Vietnamese troops. Yunnan, stuck between two large conflicts (Chinese civil war in the North, Golden Triangle war in the South), is left to struggle for economic survival, its territory encroached upon on all sides.

Continued on page 149

interesting discounts because your next mission targets Burmese assets.
» Mahmut

For a long time, Buddhism was the only thing the people of the region really had in common. Today, they also share a past made of devastating epidemics and bloody wars. Most of the adults had to fight for survival their whole life. When the Awakening came, people around the world had to adapt to the change. The racism and xenophobia that swept the rest of the world had little effect here, though; it was far less important whether your neighbor was an ork or a troll than whether they would try to kill you for being Cambodian. Concepts like race had little value during wartime—anyone was good enough to fight and die. In the end, all that mattered was life or death.

The trauma of goblinization was just another drop in the bucket of problems; today's metahuman's parents are all metahuman themselves. The different metatypes are gathering in separate settlements or city blocks, without any coercion involved.

» That's not altogether true. To be metahuman is believed to be the result of accumulated bad karma from a previous life. For that reason, many metas turn to monkhood to atone and cleanse their karma. You don't have to be locked away when society convinces you that you're a pariah because of an accident of birth.
» Dragon Lady

One's ethnic birthright has always been of prime importance in Asia. The addition of metaspecies further divides those ethnic groups: where once you could find Hmong tribes, now there are elf Hmong, ork Hmong, etc. Given the role ethnic origins played in the region's various tensions, I can only wonder if Buddhism will be able to keep everyone peacefully coexisting, or if more troubles are on their way. Only time will tell.

THE UNDERWORLD

The Triads are the biggest players among criminal organizations. The Chinese Diaspora, which has seen its number increase due to the influx of Chinese fleeing the civil war, is more present than ever in Indochina, and the Triads are the first to benefit from this expatriates' international network. Most of them are based abroad, either in Singapore (Hai San), Macao (Black Chrysanthemums) or Hong Kong (Yellow Lotus and Red Dragon) and extend their control over all Southeast Asia. They deal in all illegal activities, though their main income derives from the Golden Triangle's drug trade.

» Bangkok's Hai San branch, the Sino-Thai Mafia known as the Nine Tigers Organization, is turning into its own independent syndicate under Apirak Chuaymapohn's rule.
» Phi Daeng

The Yakuza have been a fixture in Bangkok and Hanoi for some time, but their quick rise to the second rank of criminal

organizations only occurred in the last decade. As soon as the bulk of the conflicts quieted, most of the megas came to "help" rebuilding, competing to grab the best position in the nascent markets. The Japanacorps (especially Renraku and Shiawase) were unsurprisingly among the quickest to react (followed by Saeder-Krupp and Wuxing) and took the largest pieces of the cake. The Yakuza arrived in the wake of this new "resource rush" and are particularly well established in Thailand and Burma. Their newcomer status makes them very edgy, though, and consequently they're much less subtle than they would be elsewhere.

• The Yaks want the Golden Triangle and they'll get it by any means, be it government buyout or all-out mob war.
• Silver Fox

The military frequently has tight ties with the Triads or the Yakuza, so be cautious with the average soldier. More often than not, army men are involved in some kind of illegal activity, from simple rackets to large-scale organized crime focusing on prostitution networks and drug trafficking. Messing with one of them will expose you to the same kind of retaliation the larger syndicates would dish out.

• The Jo-pok and the Vory are really far behind when it comes to members and funds, but they managed to find a niche market here and there. The Koreans compete with the Triads for high-tech items and BTL smuggling, especially in Bangkok and Rangoon. The Vory run an efficient international prostitution network, importing Russian women in the region and exporting Asian to Europe and the Middle East. The old Vietnam-Russia ties made Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City their logical base of operations.
• Contraband

The Golden Triangle: Opium Wars

The Golden Triangle is an area whose boundaries are fluctuating. At the beginning of the century, it referred to the region where the Thai, Burmese and Lao borders met. Today, it's a larger zone that loosely encompasses the Shan state, the northern strip of Burmese land, Thailand's northern region of Chiang Mai and most of Yunnan. It's still infamous for its opium production, though it also hosts many synthetic pharmaceutical factories (methamphetamines) and genetically enhanced experimental opiates.

While the Triangle seems to be in a state of relative peace at the moment, looks can be deceiving. Yunnanese, Lao, Burmese, Shan, Vietnamese and Thai troops stopped fighting each other directly thanks to the mounting toll the conflict was taking, but that doesn't mean they've decided to share their toys and play nicely together. The conflict's merely gone underground.

Instead, the most influential armies (Thai, Burmese and Shan) covertly support local druglords to expand their domains and take their share of the profits in exchange. The Triads thrive in such a chaotic and lawless environment. Some operate only through their contacts in the various armies (such as the Nine Tigers), but the most powerful deal directly with the druglords and have their own smuggling routes out of the Golden Triangle (Hai San through Burma, Yellow Lotus through the Shan state and Thailand, Black Chrysanthemums and Red Dragon through Guangxi and Guangdong to Macao and Hong Kong). Usually, the competition between the various underworld players goes smoothly, with each organization preferring to work with the druglords rather than raiding the competitors' convoys, convincing them with money, threats or both.

INDOCHINA TIMELINE CONTINUED

2033: In Burma, corruption has grown rampant in the last decade; the Thai army is on the verge of crushing the former junta's last forces, and Mafia-linked senators urge the government to send troops to push the Thai army out and retake the lucrative poppy fields. In Thailand, the military puts a puppet king (Rama XIII) on the throne; the population reluctantly accepts him.
2034: Fights in the Golden Triangle change focus as the Thai forces confront the regular Burmese army; Vietnam partly withdraws to deal with raids from Yunnan and Guangxi, while maintaining the fight on the Cambodian front.
2034–2054: The region remains in chaos. Borders shift regularly, but the warring factions avoid damaging vital cities or infrastructures. The numerous conflicts become individual challenges and shows of strength in a continental game of chess.
2039–2041: Burma retakes the Kayah and Chin states to secure its borders.
2043: Cambodia suffers so much damage that eventually Vietnam withdraws.
2047: The Pattani Islamic Republic gains independence from Thailand.
2054-2064: The countries begin rebuilding as tensions die down and borders settle, relying heavily on corporate support.

• The Kuroiban-gumi in Bangkok is the exception to this rule. They aren't interested in sharing the city with anyone else and have gone so far as to take on the Triads directly. Going odds on the street are 3 to 1 against them, if you're the gambling sort.
• Oddsman

• And what's your cut of that, omae?
• Silver Fox

INDOCHINESE URBAN CENTERS

Rangoon has replaced Bangkok as the sin capital of Asia, and the gaudy brothels are ubiquitous, rivaling in suggestive neon signs in the street. The competition pushes the mamasans to offer younger and younger children to satisfy the sick needs of the rich Indochinese businessmen and the sex tourists. Corruption's effect can be seen at every level of the city, from drug factories (opiates and methamphetamines) and BTL farms (including porn-sims and snuff-sense) operating unhindered right in the city, to a chaotic urban development disregarding any city planning or building security concerns. Consequently, Rangoon now hosts the worst traffic jams of Indochina, quasi-permanent from 7am to 11pm, and is almost helpless when a fire starts somewhere.

• If you thought kids used as sex toys was disgusting enough, know that Tamanous's primary base of operations in Indochina is in Rangoon. The gap is so large between the poor and the rich that often the latter feel like they're not even of the same species. I heard stories of a hidden cannibalistic restaurant where the deranged ultra-loaded eat young people alive, not because they need it (they're not ghouls or wendigo), but just because they can.
• Laot

Bangkok has tried to clean its image in the last decade and turn into a regional economic center able to rival Kuala Lumpur. So far, it's been a partial success. While the brothels are more discreet, they're still here, and though Bangkok's already regained its position as Indochina's financial hub, the anticipated economic boom always seems to be coming next year. Growth is steady and allows the junta to correct some of the city's endemic problems such as the traffic jams and unregulated development, thanks to the Royal Thai Heritage Commission. Most foreign corporations willing to tap into the young Indochinese markets have installed their regional HQ's in Bangkok, bringing in their feuds—such as the ongoing PPG/Japanacorps duel—and providing numerous running opportunities.

• The local runners, like our friend Gunpowder, are mostly former mercs. They're good at demolition runs, but when the corps need real pros for more subtle ops, they prefer to call in foreign talent with proven records.
• Bubba

• Come with me in the jungle and I'll show you who's the pro.
• Gunpowder

• The shadows like Bangkok for two reasons: its amazing black markets and the Hive, a huge barge on the Chao Phraya river used as a merc bazaar. Combining a convenient location at Indochina's heart and the closest thing to a modern megalopolis in the region, Bangkok naturally became the international meeting point for runners and mercs looking for a job.
• Mahmut

Hanoi is dark and gritty, as befits the capital city of a communist nation. There's a rusting industrial revolution feel there,

and the mold growing everywhere because of the high moisture and moderate temperatures certainly doesn't help. Hanoi is Vietnam's monstrous administrative center, home of the country's pen pushers and masters of red tape.

• If you can have a decker peeking in the administration's servers, you'll find it extremely useful to get heat off your back. Even odd orders, if coming from the top with the appropriate faked credentials, will be diligently carried out. Don't try to mess directly with the secret police, though. They won't be fooled that easily.
• Red Tape Surfer

Ho Chi Minh City, also called by Saigon (its former name) Saigon by the separatists, is Vietnam's economic powerhouse. Foreign corporations install their factories around Hanoi, but their Vietnamese HQ and R&D facilities are often in HCMC (except for Aztechnology, which likes to keep its presence as close to the communist leaders as possible and thus is in Hanoi). The contrast with Hanoi is striking: willing to keep a tenuous link with the rest of the world, mostly through tourism, the communists let HCMC keep its "Westernized" way of life. It's the only place in Vietnam where you'll find large shopping malls filled with luxury goods and tall corporate glass towers. HCMC is probably the easiest entry point in Vietnam.

• The Cholon Triad made good use of the open door to their international network and thrives as much as possible in such a totalitarian state. But now they want more, and the attacks from the Dega Alliance in the North might opportunely distract the Vietnamese authorities and allow them to set in motion their plans for an independent South Vietnam.
• Drackenfelts

Phnom Penh perfectly reflects the Cambodian kingdom's ruined state. With its dusty, pothole-peppered, unpaved streets, it looks like a central African city lost in Asia. With barely over a million inhabitants, most of Phnom Penh is still made of low dilapidated buildings and shantytowns, legacies of the wars that ravaged the city.

• The Khmers are an extremely proud people. Even in such tough conditions they try to make a living by themselves rather than being content with the international help coming to the country. Be careful where you go, especially at night: most of the city is a giant Barrens.
• A-Plomb

• Tamanous agents and slave traders consider Phnom Penh a big shopping mall, because no one notices when one tramp or street kid goes missing.
• Laot

• Racist groups like the Human Nation can easily recruit lots of support here and in Cambodia as a whole. They focus on ethnicity rather than metatype, cashing in on the hatred toward Vietnamese and Thai, but anti-meta action isn't rare. With the naga in the north, they have even more backing from the country's leaders. Of course, the naga oppose them, mostly through the Four Winds Triad they control. Still, it can make things a wee bit uncomfortable, especially if your grandparents came from the wrong nation way back in the day.
• Bubbles

BURMA: CORRUPTED DREAM

Population: 46,128,000 (Burman 75%, Karen 8%, Chin 6%, Mon 5%, Other 4%)
Major Languages: Burmese (91%), English (14%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (86%), Christian (4%), Muslim (3%), Shamanist (3%)
Major Corporate Backers: Shiawase, Renraku, Mitsuhama, Eastern Tiger, Wuxing
Major Underworld Players: Triads, Burmese Army, Yakuza, Jo-pok

Burma is a rotten democracy, much like a South American drug-state of the early 21st century. The democratic dream of the twenties quickly turned sour as corruption spread like wildfire among the new political elites.

• Many point at the drug cartels as the corruption's source, but the involvement of the corporations shouldn't be minimized.
• The Chromed Accountant

• Who's to say they aren't one and the same?
• Conspir-I-see

Traditional opium culture in the northeast is still important, but competition from the Shan state pushed the syndicates to produce more modern drugs (synthetic drugs and BTLs) in Rangoon. Most of the drugs produced in Yunnan and the Golden Triangle pass through Burma for refining before being exported. Genetically enhanced opiates are in high demand across the region, as their cost remains low and thus better adapted to the local market. All the syndicates fight ruthlessly for their share and the 28 Cranes Triad has a hard time keeping its top-player position.

The media tycoon Suthi Pam Maung is a rising popular political figure. The CEO of Mandalay Icon, the country's main media operator, recently took a more active role in politics to "offer an uncorrupted alternative to the Burmese people." Even rumors linking him to the underworld do little to curb his popularity.

• Handing cash to the farmers and poor during his provincial trips doesn't hurt either.
• D-Bunker

• Neither does having your own media monopoly. The rest is just PR.
• Burmashave

Maung is actually even worse that the average corrupt senator, as he's directly involved in drug trafficking with the

Burmese Army. He's using his media corporation to cover his associates' activities and discredit competitors. If he wins the 2065 presidential elections, the last remnants of democracy in the country will likely be lost. Anti-corruption and anti-Mafia groups strongly oppose him. Corporations also oppose him, as his arrival to power would certainly mean a sharp increase in the bribes involved in any contract, significantly reducing profits.

» Only Mitsuhama backs him, as the Yakuza offered a partnership to secure a better control of the local drug production.
» Yakkity-Yak

» An amusing name. Such impudence is unbecoming against a hero of the Burmese people, however. I would not say such things openly if I were you.
» Iconic

» Obviously, I'm deeply concerned.
» Yakkity-Yak

The Karennis and Chin Enclaves

Independent after the 2022 referendums, the Karennis enclave in the east and Chin enclave in the west (formerly the Kayah and Chin states) were forcibly re-annexed by Burma to secure its border. Today, the democratic path to self-determination is gone as the corrupt government wants to keep the profits coming from corporate exploitation in those areas.

In response, Karennis and Chin freedom fighters have taken the fight to the next level. Just like the Shan did decades ago, they coordinate attacks from "refugee" camps, respectively in the mountains on the Thai side of the border—renewing tensions between Burma and Thailand—and the Bangla Commonwealth.

CAMBODIA: COVETED RUINS

Population: 8,947,000 (Khmer 85%, Chinese 4%, Thai 3%, Vietnamese 3%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: Khmer (95%), Thai (12%), Chinese (4%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (79%), shamanist (8%), Muslim (4%) Christian (4%)
Major Corporate Backers: Esprit Industries, ShinSiam, Saeder-Krupp, Wuxing
Major Underworld Players: Triads, Cambodian Army

Cambodia's politicians try their best to rule the country properly—that is, prying out the maximum amount of money for themselves from the already crippled nation as usual—but a new menace threatens them: Angkor's naga. Most of the intel I've gathered on the mysterious naga comes from an old shaman that I'm sure knew much more than she told me.

Here's the story: the Cambodian royal line is said to come from the union of a Khmer prince with a female naga. In fact, the naga are quite unhappy with how the Kingdom has been ruled in their absence. They don't feel the same urges as metahumans such as greed or power-hunger, but they want two things: due respect from metahumans (who should know they are lesser beings) and peace in their domain. Led by a mysterious 7-headed naga raja (king) named Vasuki, they plan to rebuild the Naga Kingdom—whatever that is—and then offer their righteous rule to the land in exchange for an oath of fealty.

» There are good chances that the whole country will beg for membership in snakeland. Since the naga comeback around 2013, peasants worship them as sacred rulers of rivers and rain. With a wrecked economy, recurrent famine and leaders who couldn't care less, no wonder they're willing to try some change.
» Krama

The aging king, Sindarath Sisowath, actually wouldn't mind handing the crown to the naga for the good of his people, but his son, Prince Naradorom, strongly opposes this possibility. Prime Minister Mak Sok and his cronies are directly threatened by this insurrection and intend to put an end to it. Without a decently equipped army to crush it, however, they have turned to their corporate benefactors.

» Who in turn will hire mercs and runners to do the dirty work. I can't wait for my new pair of naga boots.
» Flak Jack

The naga have formidable magical powers, but their true force is the veneration they inspire. Many Awakened species, such as the Tonle Sap merrow, have joined their ranks. I've heard rumors that some naga can shapeshift into humans to infiltrate metahumanity, or even that one or more dragons support them. One sure thing is that if fighting for a cause has no appeal to you, they pay very well, primarily in rare naga emeralds.

» The naga emeralds are really fascinating. They don't match up with normal emeralds, at least not according to scientific analysis. Their crystalline structure actually shifts within the stone, producing the unique swirling effect that puts them in such high demand. There are all sorts of theories as to how the shifting occurs, much less with no outward effect. Some locals claim they have magical properties, but no one's been able to prove anything yet.
» China Doll

» That's because they aren't stone. They come out of the naga somehow. I don't know yet if they're tears, piss or sweat, but I'll find out in time. The naga can then use these stones to control their owners. It's like a drug of some sort.
» Telesmina

» I heard naga agents created the Four Winds Gang, a new Triad based out of Phnom Penh. They're currently battling Cambodian crime lords for control of the country's underworld, hoping to further destabilize Cambodia so that the naga expansion plans won't meet much organized resistance.
» Legionnaire

• Something gave the naga and their allies a big magical boost. One monk told me the Great Mekong Spirit is now on their side. Their merrow allies are not your run-of-the-mill, primitive-spear-brandishing type anymore. The ones I met were wearing armored jackets and holding harpoon guns. They were levitating out of water and they could talk.
• Jungle Mage

• And I saw some that had legs and looked like lizardmen! Either that or I missed my monthly meeting. Or you did.
• T-totaler

The naga are all about symbols. Their most prized artifact still eludes them: the magic sword symbol of the Khmer Kingdom's strength and unity, the Preah Khan, was lost in 1971. Sophie de Rochefort, a French Esprit Industries corpgirl, claims to have the sword and intends to use it to bargain for a position of greater power in Cambodia for her corporation. The naga deny that the sword she possesses is the real Preah Khan and strongly oppose her.

• Sophie is a talented mage and the French Army's backing her. France never really let go of Cambodia after its independence, and won't miss the opportunity for a big comeback in the region.
• Fleur-de-Lys

THE KASHIN STATE: THE GREEN DOVE

Population: 3,501,000 (Kashin 62%, Lisu 9%, Tibetan 8%, Hkamti 5%, Other 16%)
Major Languages: Kashin (70%), Burmese (55%), Tibetan (9%)
Major Religions: Christian (68%), Buddhist (19%)
Major Corporate Backers: Yamatetsu
Major Underworld Players: Triads (very limited)

The Kashin are at the crossroads of the Himalayan, South and Southeast Asian cultures. Christianized in the nineteenth century, their faith has always been a mix of all those influences. Lots of Tibetans fled Tibet around the turn of the century. They went to Nepal and India, the most commonly thought of destinations, but also to northern Burma. When the Kashin state became independent, Buddhism flourished once again. Its teachings were combined with the Christian faith by those in the area, and the resulting mix held so much sway over the people that they completely abandoned the traditional poppy crops, as well as the culture of drugs and money that surrounds such enterprises. Instead, far from the main urban centers that

might impede the Kashin's decisions or tempt away its young people, the Kashin renounced technology and returned to a simple farming life.

» There is a secret link between the Kashin state and Tibet. The fact that the Kashin state's the easiest way in or out of that secretive country, through the Salween Valley, is often overlooked. The Tibetans have probably used this passage for decades.
» Shadow Monk

» The number of missions in Kashin land offered to runners has steadily increased in the past year, but their purpose remains mysterious. Something to do with some monks, as I heard.
» Poyo

LAOS: SHAKING THE LEASH

Population: 4,348,000 (Lao 80%, Viet 11%, Thai 2%, Chinese 2%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: Lao (98%), Thai (46%), Vietnamese (26%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (93%)
Major Corporate Backers: Ares, Monobe, Khouang Combine, Gaeatronics
Major Underworld Players: Triads, Vietnamese Army

Laos, a communist country, is virtually a Vietnamese colony. It still needs Vietnamese troops to help defend its western and northern borders, but otherwise would really like to get rid of the cumbersome "big brother" and the omnipresent Khouang Combine (see Vietnam later in the document for more information there). President General Villaysak Voraphan plays a dangerous game with Ares and Monobe, granting them extra freedom and real estate in exchange for an economy less dependent on Vietnam. He hopes the two corps will keep each other in check, preventing either from achieving a position that might return Laos to a position of dependency similar to what it had with Vietnam.

» You can imagine Khouang won't stand idle. Sabotage and wetwork jobs have already started. Keep an eye open for Vietnamese Com Chim (plainclothes secret police agents) operating in Laos to protect Vietnam's interests.
» Hando

» And by the same token, don't look too foreign, rich, dangerous or corporate when you're on the street. They love to nab people and "take them in for questioning" as a means of inconveniencing the corps. Naturally, questioning leads to kidnapping, which leads to ransom, which can go all sorts of places.
» Traveler Jones

Laos suffered greatly during the war, and is only now beginning to rebuild. The huge dams they had built were damaged in the war, rendering them nearly useless and quite dangerous. Gaeatronics showed up and bought them, however, repairing the structures and refreshing those resources. The corp now makes a nice profit selling electricity to Laos and Thailand. Gaeatronics plans more dams on the Mekong, but all constructions seems blocked by a bizarre string of calamities.

» That's no coincidence. The Mekong's denizens won't let their home be further defiled.
» Liquid Shimmer

PATTANI ISLAMIC REPUBLIC: SMUGGLING HAVEN

Population: 1,784,000 (Thai 50%, Malay 40%, Chinese 2%, Other 8%)
Major Languages: Thai (75%), Malay (50%)
Major Religions: Muslim (86%), Buddhist (10%)
Major Corporate Backers: None
Major Underworld Players: Pirates and smugglers, Triads

The Pattani Islamic Republic (PIR) was born in 2047, after most of the Buddhist population moved North to flee the Muslim separatists' terror campaign. The Thai junta grew tired of losing precious resources in this conflict. Soon after independence, with a crippled economy, the PIR unsuccessfully petitioned Malaysia for membership. Since then many inhabitants have turned to piracy along the coasts and smuggling between Thailand and Malaysia to survive.

» The Jinsalih is the top dog of the pirate/smuggler rings. Sajak, its boss, is a powerful, merciless adept who welcomes other Awakened in his gang, including spellcasters that other Muslim groups tend to shun.
» Redfoot

» Sajak isn't a he.
» King of Siam

» The PIR is the best place to buy cheap high-tech items smuggled out of Malaysia. Be careful when dealing with the locals though, as they're a proud, trigger-happy people. They don't take lightly being double-crossed, looked down on or insulted in any way.
» Picador

THE SHAN STATE: THE NEVERENDING FIGHT

Population: 5,426,000 (Shan 53%, Wa 21%, Burman 8%, Chinese 7%, Other 11%)
Major Languages: Shan (80%), Burmese (66%), Wa (18%), Chinese (12%), Thai (8%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (75%), shamanism (22%)
Major Corporate Backers: Shiawase, ShinSiam, Wuxing
Major Underworld Players: Triads, Shan and Yunnanese druglords, Thai Army, Yakuza

At first, you might think the Shan state and Yunnan are the same opium-producing dirt holes, and you'd be close to right—as long as you didn't say that to anyone from either of them. The big difference is ideological. The Shan patriots claim to use drug money to finance their fight to stay independent from Burma. Rangoon's corrupted politicos covet the region's best poppy fields, though, and regularly launch raids "to eradicate the drug producers threatening Burma's children."

• Don't believe the NGOs' propaganda, Shan druglords are as cold-blooded as anywhere else. Patriotism is good as long as it grants the population's support and keeps the profits out of Burmese hands.
• A-plomb

• It doesn't matter whether you believe it. It only matters if the locals believe it, and by and large they do. Bring that sort of attitude with you to Shan and you can count the hours remaining in your life on one hand, assuming you even have that left by the time the druglords get done with you.
• Crimson Poppy

• The Wa are the nation's largest minority, mostly settled east of the Salween River. They're the biggest opium and methamphetamine pill producers and intend to use the money to finance their own independence.
• Ethnolock

Biotech and agribusiness corporations with need of discreet remote labs favor the Shan state over Yunnan because it's less chaotic and uncaring when it comes to bio-ethics. Rumors abound of secret partnerships between ShinSiam and Shan druglords to create new genetically enhanced opiates.

THAILAND: LITTLE JAPAN

Population: 64,221,000 (Thai 75%, Chinese 11%, Lao 6%, Khmer 3%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: Thai (95%), Japanese (36%), English (12%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (90%), Muslim (3%)
Major Corporate Backers: Shiawase, Renraku, ShinSiam, Monobe
Major Underworld Players: Yakuza, Triads, Thai Army, Jo-pok

Thailand came out of the war stronger than it went in, significantly enlarging its territory and reasserting its regional economic might. The junta has relaxed its rule, and pro-democracy movements have gotten bolder, all without too much of a reaction from the government. It seems prosperity has a way of softening even the hardliners. Of all surrounding countries, Thailand has the fastest growth thanks to its natural resources, educated workers and the return of tourists.

• Selling the country to the Japanacorps also helped a lot.
• Phi Daeng

• ShinSiam is the only Thai corp that survived both the Crash and the wars. Chakrit "Charlie" Shinawat runs his company with an iron hand, buying or crushing local competitors before they could even be a threat, while his brother General Chaiyud Shinawat makes sure the law won't be an impediment. Specialized in telecoms and consumer electronics, the corp also has assets in banking, biotech and food-processing. ShinSiam makes the largest part of its profits as a subcontractor for Shiawase, Renraku and Monobe. How "Charlie" can manage to simultaneously have three megas as clients is a mystery, and unverified stories crop up frequently listing ShinSiam a subsidiary of one and spying on the other two.
• €spion

SHINSIAM CORPORATE PROFILE

World HQ: Bangkok
Chairman of the Board: Pongpan Tang
CEO: Chakrit Shinawat
Corporate Status: Private (AA)
Main Shareholders:
- Chakrit Shinawat (60%)
- Chaiyud Shinawat (25%)
- Yuppadee Kiatkirakajorn (10%)
- Pongpan Tang (5%)

Major Divisions: Chang Bank, Charoen Phokphand Foods, Sanook Electronics, Sino-Thai Engineering & Constructions, ShinSiam Telecom

KHOUANG COMBINE CORPORATE PROFILE

World HQ: Hanoi
Chairman of the Board: Phi Linh Nguyen
CEO: Vo Nhan Cuong
Corporate Status: State Corporation (A)
Main Shareholder:
- Vietnamese State (100%)

Major Divisions: KC Arms, KC Chemicals, KC Electronics, KC Farming, KC Heavy Industry, KC Manufacturing, KC Motors, KC Oils

• That's because it's true. Shiawase owns it lock, stock, and barrel.
• Nguyen

• And last week it was Monobe holding the reins. Bets on the next flavor of the week?
• €spion

• I'd be a lot more convinced by your words if I hadn't noted your handprints all over a few ShinSiam datastores in my last visit. You wouldn't have a small stake in this, would you, ?spion?
• Phi Daeng

The Canal of Kra project (a "Panama-like" canal joining the Andaman Sea to the Gulf of Thailand through the Kra Isthmus) has once again been pulled out of the drawer. This time Saeder-Krupp's backing it, so odds are good it will finally become a reality, diverting much of the sea traffic from the pirates infested Malacca Straits.

• Which seriously worries Sumatra, Singapore and Malaysia, prompting black-ops sabotage operations.
• Molyneaux

Last year, a new challenger appeared during a pro-democracy rally, claiming to be the rightful king of Thailand. Known only as Niranam (the "nameless"), he's gaining popular support as he campaigns for more freedom and the junta's removal. Apparently Awakened, he's able to control the ferocious garudas (a local sub-species of harpies named after the mythological Thai creature, Garuda, symbol of the royal servants) and uses them as very effective bodyguards.

• If he's still alive, it's because he has some serious backing from Wuxing and Eastern Tiger. The PPG would like to see Thailand more open to its members.
• Lei Kung

• Angkor's naga don't like Niranam at all. I guess it's because of his garudas, the naga's traditional enemies.
• Jungle Mage

VIETNAM: APOCALYPSE NOW

Population: 85,686,000 (Viet 71%, Lao 10%, Chinese 8%, Other 11%)
Major Languages: Vietnamese (98%), Chinese (9%), English (8%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (46%), Christian (9%)
Major Corporate Backers: Khouang Combine, Aztechnology, Shiawase, Mitsuhama
Major Underworld Players: Yakuza, Vietnamese Army, Triads, Vory

One of the region's most promising countries at the turn of the century, Vietnam is on the verge of explosion. The slow economic opening initiated at the end of the twentieth century went into a sudden tailspin thanks to the war and the Crash. The government returned to harsh militaristic policies, wrapping itself in communist ideology to make it all a bit more palatable. It nationalized all the Vietnamese companies into a single state-controlled entity, called the Khouang Combine, in 2032.

The country is now very isolated, with xenophobia and paranoia the new state-sponsored religions. Engaged in ongoing hostilities with Guangxi and Yunnan, still at odds with Cambodia and no longer welcome in Laos, Vietnam's last allies are Russia and Aztlan. Communism is used as a red herring to justify repressive law enforcement and the pervasive secret police (*Bô Cong An*), but the tactic is becoming far less effective with the local populace.

In serious need of currency, the country reopened its economy to the megas in 2057, allowing them to open joint-ventures if Khouang owns at least 51% of them. The corps gladly accepted, as they got an abundant, dirt-cheap, qualified and compliant labor force in return. This allowed Khouang to join the Pacific Prosperity Group in 2060.

• Aztechnology was the first to install factories near Hanoi. Seems that the Vietnamese leaders and the Big A's board realized they had much in common in matters of "human management strategies."
• Pyramid Watcher

• Shiawase was second, and the mess in the Vietnam Sea (or South China Sea for you foreigners) demonstrates the amount

of leverage the corps have now. Down with the corrupt traitors that govern us!
• Revolviet

• Tran Van Binh, aka Revolviet, disappeared 12 hours after his post. Remember this lesson: in a system where information control is vital to its maintenance, the Matrix is a battlefield. Vietnam's limited Matrix network allows the corporate-trained police deckers to exercise very efficient anti-insurgent control.
• Otomo

The south, Vietnam's most dynamic area, feels overly pressured by a pointless and resource-consuming war effort. Ho Chi Minh City and its influential Chinese community wants to secede and pursue full-fledged capitalism. Business concerns are not the only reason, though, as the communist regime heavily cracks down on the Chinese minority (the old China-Vietnam hatred).

• HCMC's Cholon Triad is willing to invest in the future, sponsoring operations to advance the separatists' agenda.
• China Doll

The Dega Alliance

The Dega Alliance is made of the remote forested highlands that straddle Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Officially still part of those countries, it's in fact an independent territory that none can rule. The Awakened forest protects its native inhabitants, the various hilltribes; only they know its secrets and how to survive without provoking the forest spirits' anger.

Among those secrets are the ancient knowledge of the plants' pharmacopoeia. Corporations are extremely interested in the forest's wonders and the antidotes, therapeutic drugs and poisonous substances produced by its flora. The tribes don't forget they were conquered once when divided, and are now allied to defend their sovereignty.

• Tribes like the Hmong or the Mnong have a long history of armed resistance. They're the dominant voices in the Alliance. Don't believe that the tribes are now living like a big happy family, though. Old tribal feuds still exist and won't disappear overnight.
• Ethnolock

The tribes recently accepted an alliance with Angkor's naga. Though they don't worship them—they worship forest and ancestor spirits—they acknowledge the naga's power. The tribes started to expand their territory to the forest's edge, where woodcutters operate, particularly disrupting Vietnamese operations. Those attacks are launched from the *Dak-Lak* plateau and are intended to eventually form the Dega republic. In the meantime, their first priority is to effectively cut Vietnam in two.

YUNNAN: THE DRUGLORDS' GARDEN

Population: 35,870,000 (Chinese 62%, Vietnamese 4%, Lao 4%, Thai 3%, Shan 2%, Other 21%)
Major Languages: Chinese (93%), Thai (6%)
Major Religions: Buddhist (66%)
Major Corporate Backers: Wuxing, Tan Tien
Major Underworld Players: Druglords and warlords, Triads, Vietnamese, Thai and Shan armies

Essentially Yunnan is split between various crime orgs and warlords. The weak government has little success in trying to control the large underground economy—actually the only active and lucrative part of Yunnan's economy—run by the druglords of the Golden Triangle.

The area is an ethnic hodge-podge, with about a quarter of its population made of dozens of mountain-dwelling ethnic minorities. Most druglords are either Chinese or members of those ethnic minorities, and they tend to work with their own people, adding the racial issue to the competition between them.

• Kalokdam, an influential Thai druglord based in the south of Yunnan, successfully developed his own variant of Awakened poppy. The Red Orchid—that's the name of the drug—is already making a killing in Thailand, Burma and Sichuan. All the Triads are wooing Kalokdam to distribute his drugs, despite stories about people turning into zombies after smoking.
• Bog Bug

• Yep, that's drugs. Move along, nothing new here.
• Bung

• It seems the Black Chrysanthemums are very chummy with Kalokdam. A bit bizarre, since drugs are usually not their main concern.
• Tai Ho Leng

SHATTERED INDONESIA

• Dipping and rising across the equator for nearly 5,000 km are the islands of Indonesia. For many centuries, Indonesia has drawn the attention of outsiders for economic and scientific reasons. Since colonial times are far from over, at least in the East Indies, Indonesia is still a magnet for every shade of entrepreneur from the East and the West—a stamping ground for corporate lackeys, pirates, smugglers, druglords, black market traders, wayward shadow dwellers and dropouts.

Laot is an old hand from the Asian shadows, but has settled down at Mompracen for reasons that are his own. He knows Indonesia like the back of his hand and is the most reliable contact I could dig up in this primal region, despite what you may think about his unsavory profession as a slave broker.
• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:19:51 (PST)

by Laot

One has to understand that Indonesia has changed very often in the previous centuries due to the influence of outsiders. Once the world realized the abundant resources therein, there has been no shortage of forces trying to tap into this potential. Dr. Mohammad Yusif, the founder of the Islamic

SHATTERED INDONESIA TIMELINE

1999: Timor-Leste secedes from the Indonesian Republic and becomes independent.
2010: VITAS outbreak. The plague spreads like wildfire within the archipelago, killing more than 40 percent of the population due to bad health care systems and poor distribution of pharmaceuticals.
2011: The Awakening activates the Ring of Fire, leading to massive eruptions of several volcanoes located within Indonesia and killing 10 percent of the remaining inhabitants. Smaller islands sink into the ocean, new ones appear. The jungles of Borneo Awaken and depose human settlements through accelerated growth. The withdrawn animist tribes of the great islands recapture their homelands. The Indonesian Republic declines under pressure of pandemic, natural catastrophes and the Awakening.
2012: After killing the Sultan of Brunei during a hunt, savage Dayak forces invade Brunei and the Malaysian territories on Borneo. The new sultan, Muhammad Alauddin II, flees with the royal family to Sumatra.
2012: The Pandawa Lima appear at the Besakih temple during the pratima ceremonies held before Nyepi festival on Bali.
2014: The old Indonesian Republic collapses as the result of the catastrophes, the Awakening, shattered economy and religious and ethnic conflicts.
2015: The Enlightened Kingdom of Bali is created.
2018: China breaks apart, plunging Southeast Asia into chaos.
2019: In response to the military putsch on Java that creates the Javanese Republic, allied Sumatran forces instigate a rebellion that leads to the formation of the loose Sumatran Alliance shortly after.
2020: Javanese armed forces dispatched to occupy the former provinces of the old republic are repulsed by the Dayak Tribal Council of Borneo and the Sumatran Alliance.
2029: The Javanese junta bargains with Japanese corps to rescue their battered economy, granting extraterritorial rights even to smaller corporations.
2025: Papua New Guinea assimilates the Indonesian province Irian Jaya, creating the Independent State of New Guinea.
2035: After the Euro Wars, several European corps muscle into the Indonesian markets and contest Asian corporate domination.
2035–2050: Ongoing raids by military units and rogue privateers on neighbouring islands and states, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Australia, lead to international conflicts and enforcement of a UN mission by the Security Council in the '50s.
2060: The PPG acquires the islands Pulau Batam and Pulau Bintan from the Sumatran Alliance—to build the Pelawangan Space Port—in exchange for further economic cooperation.
October 2061: The Sunda Trench of the Ring of Fire erupts, leading to sea quakes and volcanic eruptions on Java and Sumatra. Tidal waves and tectonic plate movements strip away whole sections of western Indonesian coastline. Thousands are missing and believed dead.
December 2061: Spirits of unknown origin burst from the interior of the Borobodur monument on Java.
2064: Australia annexes Guinea as part of the ANZAC to bring peace and stability into this region, installing an Australian-controlled puppet government to control the island's resources.

Renaissance Movement, once compared Indonesia to a lump of clay, which has adopted several forms throughout the centuries depending on its shaper—some more unpleasant than others. Going with this metaphor, today's Indonesia is the most primal form since the beginning, mostly shaped by VITAS and the eruption of the *gunung api* (fire mountains) lying within the Sunda Trench of the Ring of Fire, that changed the face of the archipelago forever and led to the collapse of the Indonesian Republic in the twenties.

» The Indonesian Republic always was rotten to the core with strong ethnic and belief conflicts, corruption in the governmental body (so-called KKN—korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme, meaning corruption, collusion and nepotism), human rights abuses, a discredited judiciary and the abuse of military forces. There has never been enough unity to allow the republic to overcome catastrophe.
» Poyo

BREAKING APART

The old republic never recovered after the destructive impact of the outbreaks of 2011. Shattered Indonesia—how it is called today—has become a patchwork of several smaller associations that formed in the aftermath of the collapse. Though these state-like structures reside mainly on the large islands of Sumatra, Java and Borneo, they have never regained true control (or never choose to) over the untainted wilderness of the archipelago that has risen as a natural but very primal and sometimes hostile paradise from the ashes of the fiery eruptions.

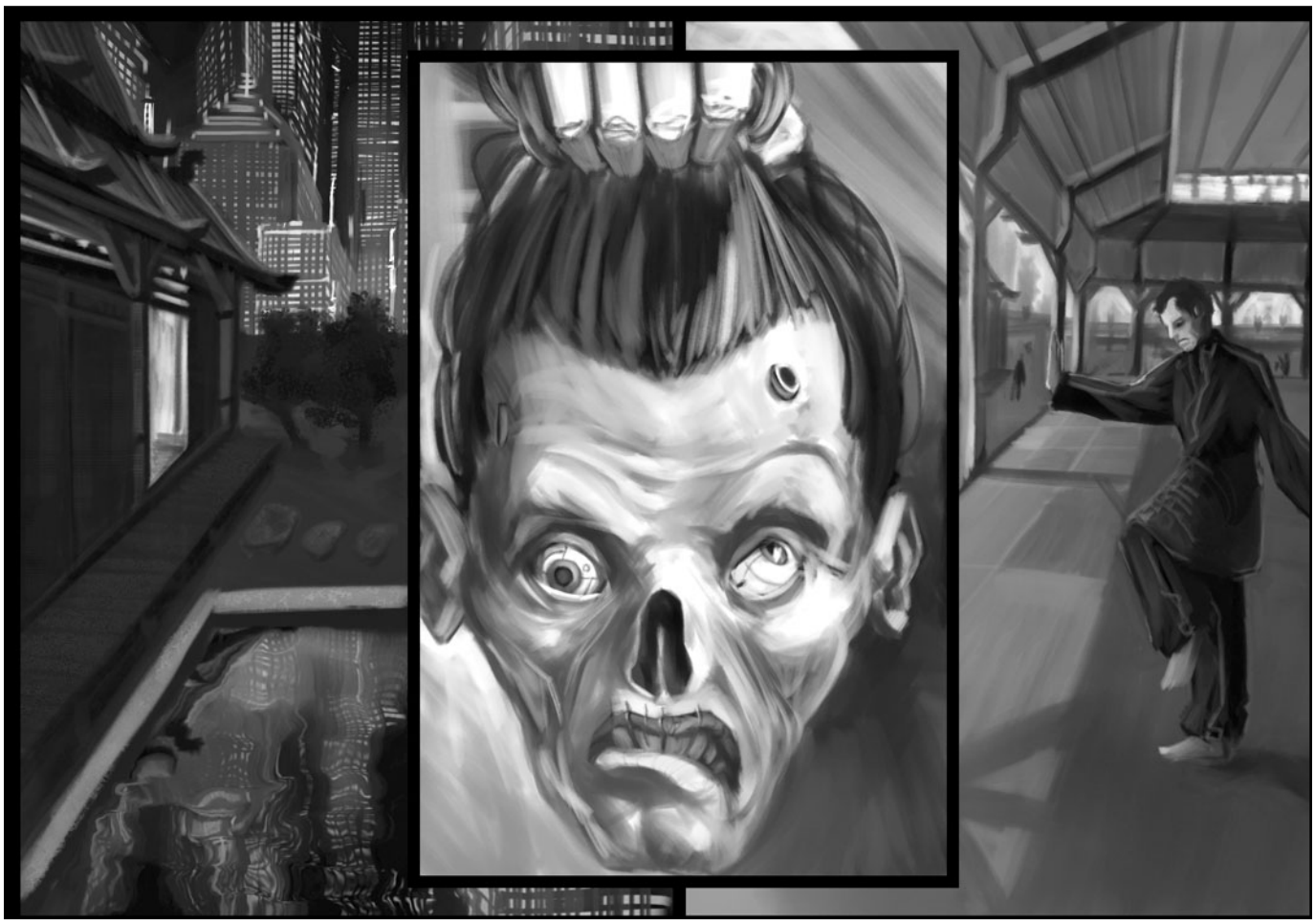
» The whole region is still in constant flux. Indonesia was lucky that only a third of the nearly 200 volcanoes in the area belched during Halley's Comets passing. The disaster was largely contained, wreaking havoc mainly on the Sumatran and Javanese west coasts where most of the volcanoes are located.
» HK Kid

Since the collapse of China and problems elsewhere in Asia, criminals, eco drop-outs, cultist fanatics and wanna-be warlords have been drawn here in spades to run their own little Eden on one of the uncountable islands. Most of them are very reclusive and won't bother you as long as you leave them alone.

» But some are major freakos. When we got hired to extract a Japanese exec's daughter who had entered an eco-dropout colony somewhere in the Banda Sea, we sussed out that the whole community had been taken hostage by some lunatic fringe that wanted them to appease their whatever-god by way of living sacrifices.
» Dalgleish

INDONESIAN ISLAM VS. AWAKENED ANIMISM

Over 70 percent of the Indonesian population is of Islamic belief. Compared to Middle Eastern Islam, however, Indonesian Islam is moderate, accommodating and the least Arabic. Because of its slow, peaceful penetration over centuries



and integration with local beliefs and customs, along with the less rigid structure of Indonesian traditional society (including the active role of women in public), this form of belief is more tolerant and has been often referred to as "Islam with a smiling face." It is not surprising that the Islamic Renaissance Movement (IRM) has a strong support in urban areas here. Indonesia is the IRM's shining example for the Western nations that not all Islamic countries are as fundamentalist as the sims enjoy showing. That's why they are trying to eradicate all radical Muslim cells within the archipelago, using shadowrunners to kill or silence leaders and financial backers.

Since the Awakening, animism has experienced a revival here. The belief that all animate and inanimate objects have their own particular *semangat* (life-force or soul) was kept alive all these years despite the "penetration pacifique" by Arabs and other Islamic immigrants. Though it is practiced mostly by the primitive people inhabiting the secluded areas of the three main islands and the rural population, a growing percentage of Muslims have converted to animistic belief out of fear or reverence of the "gods" ever since nature spirits began to materialize.

- What complete drek. A spirit is a spirit is a spirit.
- Zephyr
- Don't think you could ever persuade someone that what you call "just" a spirit is not a god. Understanding of magic is not widespread in this part of the world.
- Myst

- When dealing with animists and native people, don't forget to hire a local guide, or even better, someone capable of magic translation. With more than a thousand known indigenous languages in the Indonesian archipelago (including New Guinea), your standard tourist linguasoft won't get you very far.
- Legionnaire

THE JAVANESE REPUBLIC

Population: Unknown (80,576,000 estimated)

Major Languages: Bahasa Indonesian, Japanese, English, Sundanese, Javanese, Madurese

Major Religions: Indonesian Islam (80%), Balinese Hinduism (8%), Animism (8%)

Major Corporate Backers: Monobe (Designer Genes), Zeta-ImpChem, Regulus Joint Industries

Major Underworld Players: Indonesian druglords, Yakuza, Moluccan pirates, Australian crime syndicates

The Javanese Republic literally rose from the ashes of the old Indonesian Republic. After the economy had hit rock bottom and the government proved incapable of solving the problems left by the catastrophes, high-ranking military officers took control over the administrative bodies and proclaimed martial law for the whole territory. The military regime commanded widespread public support in the face of the collapsing nation. Since then, the junta has been reviving the *dwifungsi* (dual function) doctrine of the past Suharto era, which promotes a role for the army not only for security reasons but also social and political "responsibility."

» The Indonesian Army has always played a big role during the archipelago's history, though typically not a nice one. They have never lost their influence, even in "democratic times." They remained major behind-the-scenes players until they saw their chance for their big comeback.
» Dalang

After a short consolidation period, peace was restored in Javanese cities and reconstruction began. The armed forces were soon dispatched to the renegade provinces for re-occupation. The republic's forces were still off balance, however. Unsuspected resistance by the Sumatran Alliance and the Dayak Council dealt a heavy blow to the republic's revenues. Unwilling to risk inciting unrest among the Javanese population by taking more ruthless actions against the secessionist Indonesians, the regime's leaders looked for juicier prey. With Australia weakened from mana storms, Indonesian units invaded Australian and Malaysian territory several times to ensure the Javanese Republic's own survival. Only the formation of the Australia and New Zealand Allied Confederation (ANZAC) put an end to the raids.

» This put Java in hot water, but they didn't have much choice when their economy was hitting rock bottom. Even today, Australia is still subjected to attacks by pirates and privateers operating in secrecy from New Guinea for the Javanese generals. That's why the UN enforced an intervention mission to Indonesia in the '50s after nearly a decade of cautions and embargoes. Besides having a lever on the junta in case they decide to double cross them, the corps have been constantly using the armed forces to put pressure on the "evil" Sumatran Alliance and the Moluccan pirates.
» Ambassador

Since the takeover, General Sudarso has been the undisputed head of the junta. He uses most of his comrades-in-arms to retain the status quo, just like a puppeteer pulling strings. In public he likes to play the role of the tragic Javanese national hero who lost his whole family during the first volcanic eruptions and has taken up the sword to save the nation. Using this false reputation, he is able twist the people's opinion in any direction most suitable for the junta. With the recent eruption of the Gunung Krakatau in 2061 that sent parts of the southwestern coastline toppling into the sea, Sudarso has gained even greater support from its own population.

» Some have speculated that he had the talent to become a corporate master player in the Big Ten if he had been born Japanese rather than Indonesian.
» Mission

Euro vs. Asia Corps

Desperately trying to rebuild their nearly non-existent economy, the junta made a deal with several Japanese corporations, granting extraterritorial rights even to smaller corporations in exchange for economic support and weapons technology. With the end of the Euro Wars, however, European corps also took an interest in the recuperating republic. Remembering old contacts from colonial times, Dutch, Portuguese and British companies created the European Javanese Development Cooperative (EJDC), granting investment and rebuilding support.

» These weren't no-name companies. Royal Dutch (now Regulus Joint Industries), Z-IC and Lusiada still hold nearly two-thirds of EJDC's stock.
» Nittems

Since then, skirmishes between Euro and Japanacorps have been day-to-day business. Fighting mainly over the tobacco industries and genetically modified plantations that are Java's main source of revenue, the junta has been catering to both corporate factions to maximize the payolas that fund their expensive lifestyles. Both factions reside at different places on the island. The Japanese sector mainly covers Jakarta and parts of Bandang, while the European sector is located around Semarang. With Java in desperate need of economic resources and support, both corporate factions have upped the ante repeatedly, competing to see who can be the first to own the junta lock, stock and barrel.

Jakarta

With state-of-the-art economic centres like Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in proximity (at least to the Indonesian way of thinking), Jakarta has lost its importance for the Southeast Asian economy. That does not mean it is of no importance at all, of course. The rich biodiversity of the region has drawn several renowned genetech companies to move their research centers to the city.

Dominating the cityscape from their research tower near Merdeka Square (the place where the national monument once stood), Monobe's Designer Genes subsidiary has become top dog, mainly due to the recent worldwide success and acceptance of gene art culture. Second-tiers like Biogene and Pensodyne are also running sophisticated labs to exploit the yet unexplored potential hidden in the unspoiled rainforests.

» Of course, no one here is interested in following the Copenhagen Accords or other restrictions on their research. General Sukma, Sudarso's right-hand man and a ruthless but science-minded warmonger, won Biogene's support for R&D of biogenetic weaponry. Rumour goes that they already have some nasty prototypes in stock.
» Sagan

• The Karimunjawa islands north of Java have been dubbed "Monster Islands" by local fishermen. Biogene is breeding war-monsters on the islands for the junta that are then bio-modified and trained for combat.
• Crichton

• Don't watch so many old Godzilla sims, omae.
• Cymotec

• Don't jump to conclusions. There have been suspicions about the Javanese military being supplied with biowar agents from an unknown source that the junta is planning to use against either Sumatra or East Timor; that's why several UN agencies are carrying out investigations. From what I've have heard, some observers still have not returned from a secret mission to Karimunjawa.
• Ambassador

• There are lots of reasons shadowrunners go missing. Giant war monsters aren't among the top ten.
• Cymotec

Borobodur

The Borobodur temple complex is one of the greatest Hindu monuments of the world. Erected on a hill in the form of a stepped pyramid with six stories, three circular terraces and a central stupa forming the summit, the whole structure appears like a giant lotus flower. While Borobodur was just a prominent tourist spot in the past, the complex was suddenly sealed off by the Javanese military and members of the Astral Space Preservation Society (ASPS) when the Gunung Merapi erupted. It is rumoured that a great number of disembodied spirits suddenly burst from the stupa's interior.

• Though these spirits were classified as shedim at first, experts have concluded that they are different. From what is known so far, they have the ability to possess metahumans against their will, suppressing the host's personality and replacing it with their own. The ASPS is worried that some of these entities got out before they stepped in and has classified them as a serious threat to metahumanity.
• Silicon Mage

SUMATRAN ALLIANCE

Population: Unknown (32,065,000 estimated)
Major Languages: Malay, Bahasa Indonesian, Acehnese, Batak, numerous tribal/regional languages
Major Religions: Indonesian Islam (90%)
Major Corporate Backers: Pacific Prosperity Group
Major Underworld Players: Malaysian Triads, Indonesian druglords

Since the Acehnese lost their sultanate in the 16th century, they have called for autonomy. When the Indonesian Army seized control of Java, the members of the Free Aceh Movement instantly sparked a rebellion to free Sumatra, thereby putting it out of Javanese reach.

• The Acehnese religion is in fact Islamic in the orthodox tradition, with mystical elements such as a belief in spirits. Though the Acehnese have been staunchly following their own kind of Islam without much tolerance for other non-Muslims like the Christian Batak groups of Northern Sumatra (being the cause of the alliance's internal problems), doctrine has grown moderate through the influence of current khilafah Umar Abdurrahman Mahendra, who is an active supporter of the Islamic Renaissance Movement.
• Almond White

A full-scale military assault of rebel forces on army and governmental offices was followed by widespread death and destruction. Even today, it is unclear how the Acehnese militias managed to ward off the superior forces that attacked Sumatra after the Javanese putsch. Rumor goes that the Sultan of Brunei provided both his private army and money to hire mercenaries for the defense of the island.

• Bulldrek. Have you seen what Sumatran warriors skilled in the art of Silat are capable of? No common soldier could stand against such training.
• Ballidou

• Pencak Silat has a long tradition on Java and Sumatra. It is still not clear why the Sumatrans had a number of Silat adepts on their side while the Javanese had none. Some believe an Acehnese ancestor spirit reawakened the forgotten knowledge in the adepts.
• Dalang

Since then, the region's diverse ethnic groups (Batak, Minangkabau, Mentawaians, Kubu and Riau nomadic tribes) have tried to co-exist in the different provinces with Medan as the Alliance's capital and neutral ground. Controlling about 40 percent of Indonesia's exports, the Sumatran Alliance has been the prime target of the neighbouring Javanese military regime.

The Sultan of Brunei

Sultan Muhammad Alauddin II has been living in exile with his royal family since invading savages from the Borneo jungles forced him to leave Brunei. They also killed his father, the former sultan. Though he owns large properties secured by his private forces in Bengkulu Province, along with billions deposited in bank accounts in Zurich and Kuala Lumpur, these represent a fraction of what he had to leave behind in Brunei.

• Former denizens of Brunei who fled to Sumatra and Malaysia talk about a private underground bunker system. It was supposedly built on behalf of Muhammad's father somewhere near the Bukit Pagon Mountain at the border between Brunei and the former Malaysian territory.
•Æther

Pelawangan Space Sport

Due to good relationships between Sumatran planters and landowners and food companies such as Yang-Su Enterprises and Lami Look Pakgaon with, the PPG recently acquired both Riau Islands—Pulau Batam and Pulau Bintan—to begin construction of the Pelawangan ("Gateway") Space Port, the mission control center of the new PPG space program and all ongoing space operations. The first launch of a space plane is scheduled next month.

» Federated Boeing, Shibata Construction and Red Wheel Engineering created a shared consortium that runs the space port and all designated missions from other launch pads leased by the PPG. From what I've heard, they're planning to seize Nerva station and construct their own space station on its remains in the near future. Because of that, Trans Orbital has been offered membership in the PPG.
» Dezibel

THE ENLIGHTENED KINGDOM OF BALI & LOMBOK
Population: Unknown (estimated 2,768,000)
Major Languages: Bahasa Indonesian, Balinese
Major Religions: Balinese Hindu (95%)
Major Backers: The Pandawa Lima
Major Underworld Players: None, minor presence of Indian syndicates and Indonesian druglords

During the eruption of the Ring of Fire in 2011, the Gunung Agung—the island's holy mountain and seat of Siva (Shiva)—burst in a titanic volcanic eruption, killing hundreds of people and shrouding the island and the nearby Lombok in ash. It took weeks until the pall disappeared and the volcano stopped spitting lava. During this time, the *Pandawa Lima* (also called Five Pandawas) appeared at the Besakih temple, rising from the ashes during the *pratima* ceremonies. When rumor spread about the arrival of these *bodhisattvas* in Indonesia, Hindus from all over the world and all professions got attracted to Bali for spiritual enlightenment.

» After colonial times and religious reshuffling in Asia, Bali became a big enclave for Hindus in the Southeast Indies. The Balinese religion—the Agma Hindu Dharma—is actually a potpourri of Hindu elements and the old Aga culture. Aga's an old form of animism where every hole in the swamp has its own swamphole god.
» Rajiv

Though a lot of people (especially the Javanese generals) have taken them for charlatans and frauds at first, the spirits have been running the show. After replacing the local administration in Denpasar with trusted *dukuns* (Brahman mystics) that act as their speakers, they declared the area as the Enlightened Kingdom of Bali and invited anyone seeking a place of spirituality and peace to the kingdom. The Pandawa Lima themselves have rarely appeared in public since then.

» The Five Pandawas are mythic Indonesian heroes. Their motivation regarding the island and population remains unclear, though. Since their arrival they haven't done anything questionable, but imagining spirits running a government gives me the creeps.
» Redfoot

» Some arcane experts have been arguing about their nature for a very long time. They seem to be some kind of free spirits, but whether they are truly the Pandawas known from Balinese mythology or not remains a mystery. Because of their rare appearances, it is hypothesized that they can't materialize for long.
» Magister

Today, the kingdom is a meeting place for the spiritually interested and the number one spot of the wellness-tourism industry. Several of the Hindus that immigrated into the kingdom set up resort complexes for wellness holidays of body and mind, in which they offer healing, anti-aging and meditative treatments (including respective diets) native to Asia (ranging from Chinese acupressure to Indian ayurveda). Several corporations—especially the Japanese ones—have been sending their employees to Bali for stress management for years. This may be one reason why they have not meddled in the kingdom's affairs so far (or allowed Java's leaders to do so), instead even helping them hook the resorts up to the Javanese Matrix grid.

» Rumor on the Grand Tour is that the Balinese have a true fountain of youth. They can provide treatments that yield massive longevity, which is why several rich Europeans take a beauty trip here before the tour starts. Apparently the treatment is somehow connected to a substance unique to Bali called the "Ash of Siva," which rained down when the Gunung Agung exploded.
» Baroness

» I don't believe any of this spiritual shit. The Pandawas are preparing for some kind of conflict, that's for sure. They have been training warrior adepts (called the Puputan) in an ancient martial arts technique (maybe an ancestral form of Pencak Silat) that focuses on battling spirits. Until the comet's return, their task had only been safeguarding Bali as some kind of Awakened task force (wielding kris weapon foci of unknown origin). Lately, however, they have been spotted throughout the whole archipelago gathering information for the Pandawas—about what is beyond my knowledge.
» Phi Daeng

» Puputan is a warrior's honorable but suicidal fight to the death when facing an unbeatable enemy—which says something about the foe these warriors were trained for, eh?
» Dalang

» The myth relates to an ancient feud between the Pandawa Lima and their 99 mischievous cousins, the Kurawa. Maybe

these are the spirits that appeared at the Borobudur monument on Java.
• Sasak

THE DAYAK COUNCIL OF BORNEO & SULAWESI
Population: Unknown (8,000,000 estimated)
Major Languages: Variations on indigenous Malay-Dayak, Sulawesi tribal languages (Makassar most prominent)
Major Religions: Animism (98%)
Major Corporate Backers: Renraku (Malaysian and Brunei territories)
Major Underworld Players: Indonesian druglords and Moluccan pirates operating at the islands' rims

For the Dayak Council and its dealings with its neighbouring powers, I added an extract from a corporate report recently intercepted by an Antz gang contact of mine from Kuala Lumpur. It was compiled at Renraku Australasia's main facility in Bandar Seri Begawan in the contested Sultanate of Brunei.

//Begin File //

It is, however, hard to pinpoint the exact location of the assailants within the jungle. Since the Awakening of the rainforests of Sulawesi and Borneo and the formation of the so-called Dayak Council—a council of the different animist tribes native to those islands—human settlements have been taken back by the aggressive vegetation, which forced the former residents to move to either Java or Sumatra (though a few coastal villages exist where people have been allowed to persist).

Our arcane department suspects that the tribe's animists—who in previous times were forced to retreat into the deep hinterland due to slash-and-burn agriculture—have found a way to cooperate with indigenous nature spirits.

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Any attempts to bargain with the council have so far been refused by tribesmen who act as a rudimentary foreign affairs committee. From the questioning of some radical environmentalists (provided by the hired shadowrunners, as explained in my previous dispatch), we have gathered the information that the council has given advice to all tribes not to deal with outsiders of any sort. Infiltration of their jungle villages or bribery of tribesmen have been discarded as future options due to their strict native way of living—these tribes simply have no interest in civilization or opening themselves to the world.

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Despite our difficulties with the native tribal population and their rampant attacks on our installations in Brunei, we have nevertheless come to the conclusion that further allocations of corporate funds and military support are needed to gain control of the island's vast natural resources. The Sultan of Brunei has again assured us of Brunei's "brotherly friendship" toward Renraku when the sultanate is liberated from those savages. The Malay foreign minister has also been very cooperative by giving us carte blanche to solve the situation for them. If the supervisory board agrees, I will initiate the deployment of several runner teams to Borneo for further intelligence. I have already established contact with a Z-IC envoy regarding a shipment of æ-Blaze to eradicate major tribal settlements.

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• I don't think it is wise of Renraku to anger these people. An arcane anthropologist working for the Atlantean Foundation in Dili recently undertook an expedition into the green heart of Borneo to study the Dayak hunters. According to his report, the tribes only rarely produce true medicine men, but the population has an unnaturally high percentage of people who exhibit the innate ability to cast a single spell.
• Elijah

• I wish we'd known that before. We didn't notice those fraggin' bastards even though they were standing only an arm's length away from us, using some sort of camouflage magic. I'll never forget their horrid masks and the shrunken heads dangling from their belts when they attacked us from out of nowhere.
• Tanker

• Alam takambang menjadi guru—the surrounding nature is our teacher.
• Ora

Regardless of what you may think, the savages are far from the only threat on Borneo. Pirates and runners tell about Awakened apes (even sentient ones), animals of gargantuan size and all sorts of nasty Awakened flora (including carnivorous plants). What truthfulness you attach to these stories is up to you to decide.

THE REMAINING MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

This part of Indonesia—encompassing the Moluccas and the Lesser Sunda Islands—has never been densely populated and contains no major settlements. Since the collapse of the former republic, the islands' native inhabitants have found new (or should I say re-invented old) ways to make a living. Some of them live off what the soil and sea have to offer, using small catamarans to fish in the Banda Sea or till the soil growing manioc and rice (still using slash-and-burn agriculture). The cacao and tobacco farms existing on these fertile islands can produce two or even three crops a year, if not destroyed by earthquakes, eruptions or ravaging tsunamis, and are usually owned by Sumatran or Javanese *expat* (rich Indonesian) planters. Agricultural corps from all over Asia have been trying for years to lay hands on this fruitful soil without much success because of the pirates and Indonesian druglords that have their stronghold within this region of the archipelago, operating mainly from the city of Ambom, on the island of Seram.

• Ambom is the Budak syndicate's dominion. The druglords have been doing business with the South American Andes Cartel for a very long time, using the islands for fast cultivation and harvesting of drug plants.
• Duy uy Minh

• They are also breeding an interesting orchid species native to Indonesia, whose pollen is a powerful and highly addictive aphrodisiac named galak (hot-blooded), which causes lecherousness and sensitivity to sexual stimuli. Only available for barflies and party-goers in Jakarta's brothels and strip-clubs so far, but the Triads and Indochinese opium farmers have started taking their Indonesian competitors seriously.
• Coral Walker

The pirates and privateers are the predominant stock you will find on the different waters surrounding the Malay Archipelago. Many of the pirate crews were founded by rogue soldiers or Indonesian freedom fighters and are often led by their descendants. Some are low-tech pirates like the Barong, who use modern catamarans for quick raids on the inland seas; others, like the submarine pirates, are better equipped and operate in the Indian or Philippine Sea where they sink freighters and transport ships to salvage the cargo.

Between the smaller islands, gangs with smaller boats and water-jets are more common. They board yachts and smaller transports while undersea smugglers work for the druglords, employing drones and remote controlled underwater sleighs to get their valuable packages past the Javanese military controls.

• The pirates also use zeppelins and air drones to scout for targets. They evaluate the target's expected resistance and strength first and then close in with sea vessels when they determine the prey is no measure for them.
• Boonrai

East Timor

Less affected by the eruptions that shook the major part of Indonesia, the former East Timor has instead suffered more from political unrest, religious conflicts and civil disorder since its secession at the turn of the century. Under the pressure of encroachments by Indonesian military units and bombings by militant and radical Muslim cells (like the Laskar Jihad or the Majelis Mujahedin Indonesia, who target the Timorese because of their predominant Catholic belief), the Timorese had no choice but to ask the Portuguese government for help. With growing support from Lusiada's Foreign Operations, Naval Interests and PetroGas subsidiaries, this cooperation has become a fruitful coalition.

• The Balsemãos financed democratic, non-Muslim parties like the ruling Associacao Social-Democrata Timorense even before Lusiada was formed, receiving control over Timor's vast oil and gas resources in return.
• Restelo

The current head of operations, Joao Baptista Gregorio, was appointed by Emanuel Salles directly. He and current president Constantino Xavier have been bargaining with negotiators from other Eurocorps like AG Chemie and Sol Media to float businesses in Timor's capital, Dili. He's attracting them with contracts for communication, Matrix and other branches to strengthen the Eurocorps' position in the Asian corps' own backyard.

Besides being a sentry for the Eurocorps, the Atlantean Foundation has taken an interest into this small insular state and asked for authorization to excavate on the island and the surrounding archipelago. Independents on Mompracen claim to have unearthed several bodies of a dwarf species that seems genetically related to the Menehune of Hawai'i.

• Interesting, since Indonesia has neither a high percentage of dwarfs nor any kind of unique metaspecies. It seems that the AF's archaeologists again know more than the average Awakened anthropologist and historian.
• Elijah

INDEPENDENT STATE OF NEW GUINEA

Population: Unknown (estimated 8,050,000)
Major Languages: Melanesian Pidgin, Bahasa Indonesian, more than 700 indigenous languages
Major Religions: Animist (34%) Catholic (22%), Lutheran (16%)
Major Corporate Backers: None
Major Underworld Players: Indonesian druglords and Moluccan pirates, Australian crime syndicates

Since the formation of the Independent State of New Guinea, the region is constantly in the news because of ongoing violence and bloodshed. The main problems arise from ethnic and religious differences between the Melanesian Papua and Indonesians living on both sides of the islands, leading to street battles with ascending brutality. Though the UN intervention mission in Jakarta has sent neutral observers and peace squads into the region, they failed to enforce stability and peace in any ongoing fashion, much to the Security Council's chagrin.

Because of repeated encroachments on Australian citizens in the area as well as pirate raids on cities and factories owned by Australian megacorps like Tanamyre, the ANZAC held an emergency meeting in Melbourne. There ANZAC members decided that the instability in New Guinea posed a threat to the entire region and must be stopped at all costs. Declaring the state a protectorate of ANZAC under a state of emergency (until such time as the region is stabilized and recovered), Australian Peace forces went to New Guinea. There, they have occupied vital government and rebel strongholds, disarming or absorbing units of the weakened New Guinea defensive force and local militias.

Prime Minster Lez Tagobe has declared the annexation an act of war, but has not yet ordered opposition to the ANZAC forces, instead going into hiding to evade capture. Papua resistance cells oppose the invaders as best they can, but the high-tech ANZAC forces (and high levels of training) have reduced the Papua rebels to little more than an annoyance. Though the ANZAC's ambassadors have been admonished by the United Nations, several states have welcomed the ANZAC's initiative to solve the internal problems island's, including the Javanese Republic and Malaysia.

• This annexation was planned for months. The Aussies depend on New Guinea's natural resources, though exploitation is hampered by the rugged terrain and the high cost of developing infrastructure. Tanamyre agreed to give the government a helping hand in exchange for further privileges, so the resolution was quickly passed.
• Glaive

• This "peace" mission encountered some setbacks recently. Supply ships and boats anchoring in the harbor of the island's capital, Port Moresby, were destroyed by a titanic unknown critter, though a lot suspect the involvement of a sea dragon that the native population called on for help (at least this is the tale I have heard more often than others). Could be just a gorgon or saltwater anyhow.
• Rabid

• Riiiight. Because dragons react really well to being summoned hither and yon by humans. Sorry, omae, but even I don't buy that one.
• Dragonslayer

MOMPRACEN: THE FLOATING MARKET

Somewhere southeast of Sumbawa lies my current home, a playground for runners, smugglers, pirates and entrepreneurs of all shades, colors and origins: Mompracen. Residing in a major ship-graveyard on top of a volcanic coral reef, this *pasar terapung* (floating market) is the place to go for illegal business in the archipelago. The pirate haven was given birth by a seaquake that led to the destruction of several ships. Those ships were in turn dragged onto the reef here and left to rot. Freighters, container ships, luxury liners, yachts, tankers—you name it. Sometime not too long after that, the water people settled down on the reef in the old shipwrecks. Didn't take long for the pirates, smugglers and outlaws to follow.

After reconstruction of the ships' interiors and exteriors to fit in living quarters, shops and on-deck snack booths, they connected the ships with pontoons, rope bridges and planks. Today it is one of the most renowned black markets in Southeast Asia, selling or trading anything you can imagine—and likely quite a bit you can't.

• I don't know, I've got a pretty big imagination.
• Slamm-0!

» Like maybe metahuman slaves, Laot, you fraggin' callous people-dealer?
» Hildegarde

» Several things are easy to buy in Indonesia, including people. Besides the giant slave auctions held here by dealers like Laot, there is a great demand for exotic critters for pet shops and pit fight arenas in Japan and Korea. Most of the arms dealers and gunrunners also come to Mompracen to sell goods to revolutionaries like the Huk or Guinea resistance cells.
» Smokin' Jo

» The water people are the descendants of sea nomads; they call themselves orang laut. Formerly living in pile dwellings on ocean reefs, they co-exist peacefully here with the other scum that's been washed ashore.
» Dalang

» Every time I visit Mompracen it reminds me of a vast hive. All those small extensions that have been added to the larger ships fit together such an organic way, the whole structure looks like a self-developing organism.
» Tikbalang

» A hive, is it? You don't say...
» Rabid

» Hey, that's not funny. The water people are as good as anyone anywhere else. There is not one that won't take you in and feed you, even if it's all they have left. I had the best seafood stew there I've ever tasted.
» Dalang

» Are you sure it was seafood?
» The Smiling Bandit

» Aw man … I'm gonna be sick. Urp.
» Joey

Certified credsticks and hard currency can be used to purchase the finest goods between Singapore and Neo-Tokyo, but bartering is the preferred way of exchanging commodities and information inside the ship graveyard.

Mompracen is a coarse community. Regarding social interactions, there is only one rule: survival of the fittest. Watch out whose toes you might be stepping on, especially if you are *bule* (Caucasian). Several of the inhabitants have formed alliances or gang-like organizations that don't like each other very much but stand shoulder and shoulder when taking action against foreigners. Most fixers, runners and pirates who stop by on an irregular basis are not bothered with, as long as they pay their landing fee.

Though Javanese intelligence discovered this outlaw community some years ago, they did not dare put a stop to this criminal colony. The reason behind their tolerance is no secret: Mompracen hosts many unusual—and influential—dwellers that have used their connections to protect the place.

» Like Ular, a naga related to the Angkor naga. Or Captain Suling of the Kala pirates, one of Masaru's Filipino spies.
» Tikbalang

Recent botched operations, deals and a wave of arrests within Indonesia's *bayangan* (shadows) have raised suspicions about traitors and collaborators among our own ranks. Though we have avoided witch-hunting has been avoided until now, this condition is alarming. Should this be confirmed, these wire-pullers will have to learn the hard way that Mompracen does not take threats well.

MALAYSIA

» The Morgue is one of the largest data havens on Earth—considerably bigger than our little corner of Shadowland. Kuala Lumpur and Singapore are both hubs for the Asian corporate scene, meaning that the Morgue is at ground zero for some of the juiciest political, Japanacorp and Pacific Prosperity Group paydata and shadowbiz anywhere. When it came to information about Malaysia, I contacted the Morgue's sysop, the Allochron, for suggestions about who might be a good source on the area. Naturally, when he offered to do the write-up, I jumped at it. If you're looking to travel to a more exotic backdrop, I advise you to listen carefully.
» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:23:36 (PST)

by The Allochron

Malaysia has always been a cultural meeting-point, largely because of its pivotal position on the maritime trade routes between the Middle East, India and China. As is the nature of nexus points, however, conflict is as much a part of its history as trade. Its neighbor, China, tried multiple times throughout history to annex Malaysia and lay claim to the profitable nation. Malaysia has always managed to resist invading forces, however, in part due to the support of its partners in trade, including corporate players, all of whom have a vested interest in making sure Malaysia remains an independent nation.

Throughout the years, Malaysia has developed a diverse population, far more so than most other nations in Asia. Indian and Chinese cultures mix with the native Malay people, resulting in an open, tolerant atmosphere that attracts metahuman immigrants from throughout the world. Couple that welcoming atmosphere with the economic force that Malaysia can bring to bear, and you have a combination that's made Malaysia one of the rising stars of the Pacific. Though the official language is Bahasa Malay, English is the common tongue.

Religion plays a large role in Malaysia. Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism all flourish here, with a smattering of Christian churches as well. Islam is the official national religion (less widespread than it once was due to communist influence), though the country's diverse population has spawned a fabulous juxta-

MALAYSIA AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Constitutional Monarchy
Population: 35,847,000
- Human: 51%
- Elf: 9%
- Dwarf: 12%
- Ork: 21%
- Troll: 3%
- Other: 4%

Per Capita Income: 22,500¥
Estimated SINless: 18%
Below Poverty Level: 24%
Corporate Affiliation: 29%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 26%
- High School Equivalency: 45%
- College Degrees: 20%
- Advanced Degrees: 9%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Malay: 60%
- Chinese: 25%
- Indian: 10%
- Other: 5%

Major Languages Spoken:
- English: 60%
- Malay: 57%
- Chinese: 36%
- Tamil: 10%

Major Religions:
- Islam: 45%
- Buddhism: 25%
- Hindu: 7%
- Unaffiliated/Other: 5%
- None: 18%

Currency: Ringgit and Nuyen
- Exchange Rate: 50R$ = 1¥

CrashCart Coverage: 24%
- Guaranteed Response Time: 10 minutes

position of mosques and temples and panoply of festivals. The majority of Chinese follow the supernatural, Mahayana branch of Buddhism and the majority of Indians are Hindu.

• Malaysia's one of the few places in Asia where even orks and trolls can find a reasonably warm welcome. So long as you don't go out of your way to piss off the locals, nobody here gives a damn.
• Bull

• The place really does have its own unique vibe. As an example, Malay adepts have a tendency to use this funky Malaysian martial art called Silat, which takes its forms from the fighting styles of the local fauna. If you haven't seen it before, it can be a real challenge to fight against.
• Traveler Jones

POLITICS

The country's sovereign is elected every five years by and from the nine hereditary rulers. Since Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy, the role of the king, called Tan Sri Andy Lau Tek Wha, is largely ceremonial. In an additional twist, the Constitution makes the king the head of Islam in Malaysia.

• The king is traditionally reticent on larger Islamic issues. Because of Malaysia's unique cultural mix, it's in the monarchy's best interest to keep things tolerant and calm. Though he technically holds the power to call his country's Muslims to jihad, the last one put in place was thirty years ago—a call for personal integrity in response to a spate of financial corruption uncovered by the media. Moderate is the name of the Islamic game here.
• Mohammed

• There are two things that Malays abhor most: Islamic radicals and communists. Both are bad for business.
• Snow Tiger

MALAYSIA TIMELINE

2012: The constitutional monarchy is overthrown by a military coup. The king is killed in the palace siege.
2016: The Malaysian Communist Party stages a counter-revolution, using its base in the rural areas to stir up revolt. The military forces are demoralized by the unexpected resistance and desertions are common. The communist forces take control of the country.
2018: Communist forces move to annex Singapore, but corporate forces led by MCT hold the Malaysian troops at bay. After a four-month siege, corporate forces deliver a decisive blow. An appeal to the Corporate Court by the Malaysian government is overruled. MCT subsidiaries are heavily penalized in Malaysia and forced to pay heavy tariffs to stay in the country.
2029: Driven by desperation after over a decade of continuous fighting and religious and racist oppression by the communist government, the Malaysian People's Front leads an uprising with the aid of Federated Boeing troops and equipment, ending communist rule.
2030: The constitutional monarchy is re-instated and King Abidin is chosen to lead the nation in the first open elections in Malaysia in twenty years.
2031: Singapore incorporates itself, becoming a refuge for corporate interests and petitioning for membership in the PPG. The petition is rejected.
2056: The neo-communist movement takes hold in Malaysia's urban centers, including Kuala Lumpur. The movement begins gaining ground, especially among the poorest segment of the population. Official investigation of these groups reveals insect spirits at the root of the movement, sparking a panic and causing riots in the most heavily affected neighborhoods.

The Constitution specifies that the Cabinet exercises executive power, led by a prime minister. The current prime minister is Tunko Mohamad Rahman, the leader of the nationalist Alliance Party. Though Malaysia has made enormous and rapid economic progress under Rahman, political stability is maintained by restricting political freedom, a choice that has generated a non-trivial amount of carefully phrased dissent. No one wants to get arrested, after all.

Once Rahman was comfortably in charge, he set out to realize his vision of Malaysia as a regional economic powerhouse. He promoted free-market growth by courting Western and Japanese corporations, especially in the fast-growing micro-electronics industry. All this has not come without a price: the nation's rainforests are getting hacked down at a prodigious rate. The Straits of Malacca have become a murky cesspool, debt has exploded and pointless megacorporate projects litter the land. The nation's ties to

the megas, however, have helped it to preserve both the monarchy and its autonomy. In addition, the environment has an odd champion in the royal family, all of whom at least pay lip service (and sometimes even nuyen) to keep ecological damage contained, if not cleaned up. While there's little the king can do legislatively to mandate change, he uses his position as a figurehead to rally public support for cleanup and anti-polluting policy.

» It's easy to tell Rahman isn't thrilled by this, but so far he's put up with it. He doesn't yet have the power to silence the royals. That day is coming, though.
» Malay Tiger

» Don't be so sure, darling. What better way to play both sides at once? Rahman gets to make the corps happy, and the king appeals to the disaffected masses, letting them know there's someone (no matter how ineffectual) on their side too. Everyone stays complacent and satisfied, while the Straits get used as a biochemical toilet. It's brilliant.
» Jade

Friction still exists between the Chinese and Malay, in particular between the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action party and the Islamic Party of Malaysia. Though the majority of the population is Malay, the Chinese community dominates the economy. With more than 22 million people, Malaysia has one of the highest standards of living in Southeast Asia, largely because of its expanding industrial sector. The government and the relevant ethnic institutions undertook the task of developing a common Malaysian identity, integrating metahumans and the culture of the Sixth World, but the dominant cultural force has undoubtedly been money.

» Rahman's greatest political success has been his adroit balancing of the demands of the country's two main ethnic communities. He entrenched a Malay-first policy with preferential treatment for Malays in jobs, university placements and lucrative business deals. But he also gave the Chinese a measure of economic autonomy and has used the threat of an Islamic state to subdue their demands.
» Otomo

MALAYSIA ONLINE

Enough about the politicos. The meat world may pay the bills for some of you, but it's the Matrix that's home to me. Malaysia's Matrix is a magnificent electronic topography rife with scientific splendor, commercial attractions and exciting entertainment. Malaysia is used to being the place this corner of the world comes to for … well, everything. Between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, more than half the wealth in Asia has a home here, and the same goes for data. Whereas other nations are doing well to have a jury-rigged RTG and a few hosts in urban areas, Malaysia's virtual presence is firmly established and available even in less populated areas.

» Every mom and pop surfs the 'Trix. My mom drops into the Lotus Palace, a virtual mall, while Pop trashes his wageslave bonus gambling online.
» Singapore Slinger

Virtual Malaysia is more than just an extravagant collection of organic and mechanical forms and themed hosts; it is also home to a polyglot civilization of wildly varied institutions and overlapping cultures. The hosts and companies that call it home rarely limit themselves to standard iconography. Here in particular, appearance is critical; who you are and how much money you can afford to invest in your virtual company profile affects everything from brokerage stock evaluations to how long you have to wait for a table at a top-end corp friendly restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. Chinese neon, Muslim art, Indian and Malay iconography—historical forces get together with corporate architecture in the nexus point that is Kuala Lumpur's LTG.

Kuala Lumpur has been aggressive in its use of Matrix technology. It was the first city to deregulate telecommunications after the Crash, giving PacRim Communications (PRC) the opportunity to step in with a new network plan that could lease capacity to government institutions and private corporations—part of an overall plan to render the city indispensible to every major and minor player in the region. Kuala Lumpur became an example of a metroplex with a mission to make itself a global information hub.

» PRC's regional director, Lim Krishnan, has turned into a celebrity in Kuala Lumpur. Diversifying the PRC's interests into services and interactive media, he made a fortune with his Malaysian-based Maxis Communications, a corporate tool for marketing and propaganda.
» Snow Tiger

» Yeah, but he throws a great party.
» Mei-mei

In the past, dedicated point-to-point Matrix connections were required to ensure security, making them cost-prohibitive for small corps and government institutions. The re-emergence of Renraku's virtual private networking solutions has changed that. Using encrypted technology, Securitech International—a Renraku subsidiary—established a secure remote connection (and encrypted "tunnel") to corporate hosts over the LTG. Securitech integrates VPN solutions into SANs and firewalls, together with virus protection and intrusion countermeasures.

» Privacy and data protected by advanced encryption and nasty black ice. I suspect that Renraku is ready to release a safety package for wireless networking.
» Neon Samurai

Yamatetsu Corporation

One example of the heavy 'Trix presence in Malaysia and the extent to which the nation is happy to shack up with the

corps is Yamatetsu's MetaMatrix. Yamatetsu approached the government with an ambitious online sim-learning project. The setup improved Malaysia's educational foundation and established a Matrix-enabled learning model that included integrated support for all the country's different languages. The technology-based education program, provided by MetaMatrix, really contributed to peace and stability in Malaysia. With the use of shared translation memories—parallel databases of previous translated content—MetaMatrix has been gaining on PacRim Com, a fact that has Rahman a bit nervous. He has a cozy relationship with PRC and they're only so interested in tolerating competition.

• Machine translations are also included in Transys Neuronet's portfolio. Expect future updates.
• The Mighty Buddha

Going wireless, Yamatetsu plans to contest with PRC by offering mobility and cutting-edge applications. AngelSat needs to graduate fast to make the most of its single biggest growth opportunity. While the networking market it dominates settles into maturity, Transys, S-K and Erika are beginning to make massive investments in the new wireless technology. After decades of building separate satellite networks to deliver simsense, trideo and Matrix links, Yamatetsu is especially eager to find product applications for AngelSat's theoretical findings.

• Eager to spy on Transys, you mean. I've heard that Jacques Barnard has moved to Kuala Lumpur and is scouting for local talent.
• China Doll

BANKING

Malaysia is a center of Asian banking, due in no small part to the success of the Malaysian Independent Bank.

Malaysian Independent Bank

It's a violation of Shariah—Islamic law, as interpreted by Islamic jurists—to charge interest on a loan or be paid interest on an investment. Despite the constraints of Shariah on interest-bearing instruments, a fierce banking rivalry has developed in Malaysia. Nobody has a good sense of the size of the Islamic financial market, but the Malaysian Independent Bank has always been at the forefront of innovation in Islamic finance. Arab and Malay jurists found a way out: to deal only in asset-based securities. Very early on, the MIB developed an interbank money system for certified Islamic bonds. The growth of Islamic finance in Malaysia is a reflection of the gravitation of Shariah-compliant funds to Malaysia from markets like Cairo, Dubai or Tashkent.

• The size of the Malaysian economy is a huge attraction. The race for the international money market is now between Switzerland and Kuala Lumpur. It's the gradual Islamization of the financial sector.
• €spion

» Unlike most online banks, the MIB doesn't require a SIN to access an account. Runners need only retain a minimal balance of at least 10,000 nuyen to open an anonymous account.
» HK Kid

The shadow of the Triads no longer lingers over the MIB thanks to CEO Zeta Ahmad Aziz, who has moved the bank to the forefront of the corporate game. Since 2059, it has been the backer of the Pacific Prosperity Group (PPG). Today the MIB holds an important share of the megacorp Wuxing—through director Zhang Shi Lin. Its most seething competitor is the Japanese-controlled Pac Rim Bank.

» Under Zhang Shi Lin's aegis, Wuxing is investing in Mangadyne and funding its research on real-time, online simsense.
» Neon Tiger

Wuxing Financial Services

For the bankers back in Wuxing HQ, Cheng Pao is Mr. I-Ching businessman. He studies kung-fu from a master in Hong-Kong and delves into wujen mysticism. Legends tell how Mr. Cheng got snatched from the Market Research Group to Wuxing to run a portfolio of high-risk derivatives contracts. Some believe he has invented a new kind of algorithm that excels at predicting market changes.

» Every day someone discovers a new model that looks better than yesterday's. It's a fact of life. To those who buy into Mr. Cheng's theories, I've got some lottery tickets and real-estate investments I'd love to sell you. Your chances of getting rich from them are nearly the same.
» The Chromed Accountant

Mr. Cheng made most of his money out of venture capital—funding Eastern Electronics and Jam-Bo Games—and asset management. It involves spending a lot of time pressing flesh to get rich people and insurance companies to give you their money to manage. Among Cheng's clients were Brunei's sultan and some investors from India. They made so much money that they were afraid other people would find out how they did it, so Cheng developed strict confidentiality agreements with his clients.

» Some say that the penalties for breaking these agreements go far beyond legal issues and fines. The last client who opened his mouth, in fact, had Cheng acting as executor for his estate not two weeks later. They say he burned up from the inside out. Nasty.
» Pho

THE TRIADS

Of the world's cartels and criminal enterprises, Chinese Triads are perhaps the most ruthless. Their influence is widely felt, their tradition is long established and their crimes are particularly brutal. Malaysia is no stranger to the Triads, though their grasp over the area has grown stronger of late.

Some Malaysian Triads opt to work under a corporate structure with a chairman and assistants, rather than using traditional organization. Cheng Keng Koii is believed to be the leader of a Hakka-dominated secret society called the Hai San. Connected with both the Octagon and the Hong Kong Yellow Lotus, these Triads are notorious for producing and smuggling BTLs, porn-sims and snuff-sense. They also maintain a reputation as organ harvesters in the Chinatowns of Kuala-Lumpur and Singapore.

» Minh-Pao Exports is nothing but a front for the Triads. If you have a contact inside the Hai San, you've got a safer way into the Singapore shadow scene.
» HK Kid

KUALA LUMPUR

The bustling city of Kuala Lumpur (KL) is one of the world's largest commercial centers. Its high-tech business zone stretches from the Petronas Towers to the international airport. Your first impressions of Malaysia's high-tech, fast-growing west-coast capital are likely to be of a vibrant and colorful, if crowded, place. Despite much modernization, much of Kuala Lumpur's appeal—markets, temples and historic mosques—remains untouched. Chinatown and Little India are the two main traditional commercial districts. You'll find carved heroes and demons in battle in the Chan See Shu Yuen shrine, depicting monumental events in Chinese mythology. On the other side of town, you'll hear refrains of Bollywood dance sims and see the gold and gem-encrusted Sri Maha Mariamman Temple—the breathing center of Hindu worship. KL also contains many expensive hotels, nightlife locations, modern malls and arcologies for Renraku, Mitsuhama and Yamatetsu.

The government created the famous Putrajaya Multimedia Supercorridor, a massive, state-of-the-art business and technology complex to encourage leading technology corps—including Wuxing, Transys and Mangadyne. It employs more than 500,000 knowledge workers that deal with information technology, finance, simsense, interactive media and Matrixware.

SINGAPORE INC.

To arrive in Singapore is to step into a world where the muezzin call to prayer competes with the bustle of capitalism; where Chinese fortune-tellers and high-priced management consultants advise the same entrepreneur. High technology remains in vogue—you can't miss the Science Park—but Singapore is turning to chemicals and biotech to offset its dependence on electronics.

Singapore is the largest and most modern port of Asia. It's a free port that re-exports more than half of what it imports. With more than 30,000 factories and deepwater wharves, the Jurong Industrial Estate is Mitsuhama's largest industrial complex. It and the Changi Airport are built largely on infill over marsh and shallow waters of the straits. Keppel Harbor is one of the world's largest container-handling facilities.

A small island with a short history, Singapore can easily be explored in a matter of days. Contrasts abound: dizzying skyscrapers are just a short walk from crowded ethnic areas—Little India, Arab Quarter and Chinatown—where you'll get a

real feel for the tropics. Today, nineteenth-century mosques, restaurants and shops are home to a jumble of Indonesians, Middle Easterners and Malays. As the area's main drag, Arab Street is brimming with shops selling carpets, jewelry, telesma and electronics. Singapore is also the only city-state to have a rainforest within its borders—and the jungles and swamps that once covered the island can still be experienced at many places like the Parazoological Gardens. Outlying islands and unsightly chem refineries dot the landscape, but there's also a resplendent new waterfront buzzing with cafes and bars, connected by river taxis.

• Travelers beware. The city upholds seven different excuses for killing you, including drug trafficking.
• Traveler Jones

The Lee Dynasty

Under the stern, fatherly guidance of the Lee family, Singapore incorporated itself to weather the millennium crises and was transformed into a rich, high-technology export success. Its economic maneuver, based on an odd mixture of free markets and state meddling, looks set to continue. While the city-state is the freest place to do business, its people have to put up with restrictions on their social and political liberties. The Lee family's rules over the board of directors and has long used its unshakeable grip on power to harass its opponents.

• It should be noted, though, that your average native Singaporean is quite attached to his way of life, and looks upon the rest of the chaotic "civilized" world with a certain degree of horror and pity.
• Deprogrammer

• The board of directors recently announced a review of Singapore's strict sex laws, under which homosexuality was a criminal offense, after official researchers noted that cities with lots of gay residents tend also to be centers of innovation.
• Snow Tiger

Today the city-state is an extraterritorial corporation within Malaysia. Its main holding company, Temasek, is run by the President's wife, Ho Ching Lee—adding to the impression that Singapore is essentially a big family firm. Temasek has investments all over Southeast Asia and owns stakes in other corps, like Tan Tien and the MIB.

Corporate Playground

Singapore is a paradise for tech innovation. So many corps have high-stake labs and interests here that it'll make you dizzy trying to keep track of it all.

When Mitsuhama opened its **Singapore Science Park** early on in the century, it was among the first wave of corporations to invest in research here. They banked that their research here would tap into the scientific brainpower of Southeast Asia's largest reservoir of skilled yet inexpensive scientists, and create new products for Asian consumers eager for new technology. With its canyons of universities, labs and high-tech ventures, MCT was able to lure scientists from government-run labs in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok—where they weren't paid as well and didn't get to work on the latest developments. Other corps followed suit, establishing their own labs. Over time, Singapore has become a vortex of tech research, pulling in some of the most dazzling scientists from around the world. Zhang Jiang's penthouse offices in **Mitsuhama's Quad Towers—**in the center of the Science Park**—**may be the best seat to witness the next stage of Singapore's rise as an economic powerhouse.

• This is the sort of place tech geeks and scientists have wet dreams about. There are a lot of really good scientists and engineers coming also from China, as well as skilled metahuman talent from Japan. Scientists are treated like royalty here, with well-funded facilities and all of their needs catered to.
• HK Kid

• Unless any of them want to leave, that is. It may be a paradise, but it's also a prison. And that means it's also a hotbed for espionage and extraction.
• The Smiling Bandit

It's also worth heading down to Sentosa Island to see the **Tan Tien** sea-surface arcology. Inside there's a tropical oceanarium—a submerged 80-meter acrylic tunnel, with over 2,000 marine creatures swimming around you. The biotech division of Tan Tien has devoted just over half of its total outlays to future-oriented activities, with the intent of creating a new generation of biotech patents and processes.

• Zeta-ImpChem also has a biomed lab here that specifically tailors its output to the East Asian customer base. Their R&D spending is ranked near the highest in the city. To stay in the game, other corps like Wuxing are pouring more nuyen into their own sophisticated facilities—particularly nanotech and miniaturized medical tools.
• The Smiling Bandit

Other corps have recognized Malaysia's growing importance and sophistication as a market for Matrixware technology, so the likes of **Transys Neuronet** and **Cross** have opened research centers and code development offices here. Most notably, **Mangadyne** churns out their sculpted host software suites for large institutions and corps from Singapore. These suites integrate everything from accounting and databases to human resources, customer relations and manufacturing. Thanks to the efforts of Ms. Kazuko Yoshiyuki, Mangadyne's Chief Technology Officer, Mangadyne has also joined forces with smaller corps like Eastern Electronics and X-Venture to challenge Renraku's dominance in Asia's software market.

• And they're having an effect. The current trend with the Matrix cognoscenti is to snub Renraku and Novatech persona programs and reality filters in favor of Mangadyne utilities.
• Neon Tiger

Finally, no mention of corporate Singapore is complete without a nod toward the business of data mining—the process of analyzing bits of information collected from customers, public databases or internal systems to enhance marketing and sales opportunities. Singapore, Inc. itself runs **The Market Research Group (MRG),** an A-level data-mining corp that puts all similar operations to shame. It produces valuable market research, demographics, financial analysis and intel-gathering operations, and even compiles information on corporate policies.

» Data mining tools make it easy for intel-gathering corps—including Shiawase's MIFD, S-K Prime and Aegis Incognito—to slide-and-dice corporate data and understand other corp strategic operations.
» Red Wraith

» The MRG's most interesting factoid, however, is that the Morgue data haven is secreted away in its darkest depths. Thanks to the Morgue's presence perhaps, the MRG is a flashpoint for corporate intrigue. It still stands as a fierce competitor to the MIFD and attracts the attention of other corporate intelligence sharks.
» Otomo

THE STRAITS OF MALACCA

Facing west from Singapore's shores, it is hard to make out the Straits of Malacca, thanks to all the boats and islands scattered across the water. An endless procession of tankers, container ships, tugs, fishing boats, ferries and cruise-liners sails between tiny islets, through a shipping lane that narrows to as little as one and a half nautical miles at one point.

A quarter of the world's entire maritime trade, including about half of all seaborne chem and gas shipments, passes through the Malacca Straits. The straits and the seas around it are therefore infested with well-organized, armed and ruthless pirates who prey on the sea trade (when they aren't chased off by local corp muscle, anyway). It's estimated that nearly 100 ships a year go missing here, likely hijacked and "repurposed" or else just scuttled at the bottom of the straits. That number doesn't even touch the countless others attacked and raided on their journeys.

» Many of those piracy incidents don't even get reported—no corp wants that sort of bad publicity or to advertise that it can't protect its own shipments. Fine by me, as it makes my job easier.
» Strait Jacket

THE PHILIPPINES

» This isn't the first time we've brought you a dispatch on what's going on in the Philippines. Since our first rundown on the rebel pirates and our dubious pleasure of relaying the great dragon Masaru's manifesto, we've dropped by on a regular basis to catch a glimpse of the progress in the ongoing fight of the dragon-backed Filipino underdog against the keiretsu-greased Imperial master. Since Halley's passage kicked the Japanese overlords firmly in the family jewels, the liberator has seized the opportunity for new rebellion. After calling in some favors with our virtual friends from Limbo, I finally tracked down a more or less neutral observer on the local scene. While Judy had some ties to the environmentalist faction of the Huk in her past, she changed camps awhile ago and works as a decker for Global Watch in Southeast Asia now. Her compilation on current affairs arrived only hours ago from Manila before Renraku began confining public access to the Filipino Matrix and sending Securitech deckers into the grid to patrol the system. It seems the corp is taking this "threat to their affairs" seriously.
» Captain Chaos
Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:28:24 (PST)

by Judy

During my youth on the suburban streets of Manila I could never understand why people, native Filipino and Japanese alike, treated me differently, why people from both groups looked at me with shame and revulsion. Why it was never easy to find friends. Now that I'm older and have read several books about Native American half-bloods of previous centuries, I understood that Filipinos have been like Native Americans before the Great Ghost Dance changed their fate: a population oppressed because of the abundance of their homeland.

Born a half-Filipino, half-Japanese so-called "souvenir baby" in a sleazy Yakuza brothel in Quezon City, I never stood a chance of feeling at home in either world. There was always a part of me from one world that was disliked by people from the other. While it's a good parallel to the continuing relationship between our nations, it's also the reason why Captain Chaos selected me and not some members of the Huk to provide an unbiased account of the current situation in the Republika ng Pilipinas.

» Masamang babae'ng hapon. Your mother should have killed herself rather than give birth to a child tainted with the blood of the enemy.
» Fury

» I said it before and I say it again. Racism … the two-way street of the damned.
» Apocalyptic Blues

LAND OF BROKEN PROMISES

There is no denying that since their arrival the Japanese have exploited our land and its people. With our republic ravaged by the eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis of the Awakened Ring of Fire, they came as scavengers under the guise of angels of mercy. Their *keiretsus* spread like parasites on the isles, devouring what natural resources our archipelago once had to offer. But who am I going to blame? We invited them, our elected leaders blinded by greed for corporate capital.

» Corruption among the elites has long been the scourge of our nation. Plenty of our people were educated abroad (mainly Japan and NorthAm) and whenever they come "home,"

neither scruple nor moral obligation keeps them from exploiting their brethren for their own or their corporation's profit. To us they are the same as the hapon.
• Kalapaw

We should have known better after the Japanese invasion of the last century, but it turned out that was only the beginning. When six divisions of Imperial Marines took control over the archipelago to fight the "goblinization plague" and to protect "corporate business interests" in 2021, the republic ceased to exist. What took place was nothing less than the brutal annexation of foreign soil, the colonization of a weakened nation that was unable to defend itself. Don't believe it can't happen in this day and age—look to Guinea and see how history repeats itself.

The outcome was forty years of tyranny and exploitation. After bringing more and more immigrants, corp execs and criminals to our *kapuluan* (archipelago), they first segregated metahumans out of fear, later expanding the practice to our native Filipino population for the "preservation of cultural purity." While metahumans of both nations had to bear condemnation to Yomi Island, we too faced daily hell under the watchful glare of the Imperial prefecture and its totalitarian police state. When rebels like the Huk resisted them across the islands, the Japanese used it as further justification to tighten the screws, stripping us even further of civil rights. We were called *hinin* (non-persons) by our oppressors.

• Why didn't the UN interfere? They could have sent peace forces to stop this.
• Sand Bat

• At the time the UN was a rotten corpse waiting to be revived—and even today that political show still has three major Japanese puppet masters. Don't see any Filipinos there.
• Noh

If that wasn't enough, they restricted any technology that could be used against them: weapons, Matrix and communications gear, chemicals including strongly needed pharmaceuticals, even combustion engines. Whoever refused to bow to Imperial supremacy was re-educated or silenced. Is it any wonder that *hapon* (Japan) has become synonymous with "enemy" in the Philippines? In the end, I am nothing more than the result of a Yakuza way of cleaning the "impure" Filipino gene pool by introducing whatever genes Japanese suitors had to offer.

» After all these years of oppression by Imperial Japan, the flame of hatred burns scorching hot in a great number of Filipinos, not only in members of the Huk. Such fires are not easily extinguished.
» Socio Pat

Turn of the Tide

Times are, however, changing … though to what end remains to be seen. I heard a lot of people saying that Filipino history is turning into a true underdog story; that the Filipino rebels have finally beaten the *manlulupigs* (oppressors). Again it was the Ring of Fire that turned the tables, this time against the Japanese. The Imperial forces had to leave the archipelago and Yomi is no more. Though my sympathies lie with my homeland and those fighting for it, I know that the war is far from over.

The Night of Liberation had been declared too early. It is true that the prefecture and its backers have been losing ground for almost two years since the revolution began, but the corps will never let go of one of their victims until it's bled white, and that's what they're doing to the Philippines these days. When I look out the window of my motel room over Manila, I see Renraku guardsmen and Imperial soldiers prowling the streets, monitoring the new curfew. Since the killing of Governor Saru and the appointment of new crisis-Governor Ryoichi Kuroda, the tension has become almost unbearable.

While everyone, naturally, is blaming the rebels, they have not confessed any involvement.

» As if we had something to do with that. That is what the corps and our beloved puppet president want the world to believe. This assassination of Saru was the worst thing that could happen. It gave our enemies the opportunity to pin the blame on us and stopped the revolution in its tracks.
» Tonkin

» Masaru has been spinning around like crazy for the past few weeks to bring the situation back under control. From what I've heard, he had come to an agreement with Yasuhito about the terms of complete withdrawal of Japanese families and corporations from the Philippines before Saru was killed. Now while the emperor's hands are bound by public outcry in Japan, Masaru is trying to defuse the situation and has told his Huk allies to maintain a low profile until this matter is resolved.
» Naginata

» Masaru's got something to lose almost everywhere he turns. The butiki gave an interview recently during Wyrmtalk in which he said "the oni in question is most likely a misguided soul who sought revenge for the exile and terror endured in Meifumado prison on Lagu-Lagu." The recent attacks of former Yomi residents on Yakashima installations made it handy to pin the blame on them and make the assassination look like a metahuman issue. That didn't win Masaru much sympathy from global pro-metahuman groups, though.
» Ambassador

FILIPINO ONI KILLS JAPANESE GOVERNOR

Posted 02-28-64

MANILA (AP)—Governor Fukatsu Saru was killed by a Filipino assassin during festivities held in Manila to celebrate the upcoming imperial wedding of Emperor Yasuhito. Guests attending the party reported that a single oni set the governor on fire using some kind of white phosphorous weapon after sneaking into Malacañang Palace undetected. While arcane security did everything possible to extinguish the fire quickly with the aid of air elementals, Governor Saru succumbed to third-degree burns at the scene. Using the ensuing confusion to his advantage, the oni managed to elude security and escape.

President Consuni publicly condemned this attack and urged the Huk to lay down their weapons. This attack is another piece of the open revolts against the Imperial Prefecture that have become increasingly frequent since the declaration of the Night of Liberation in September last. While there has been a spate of attacks by Huk cells against corporate and Japanese settlements during the past months, there has been no major bloodshed until this attack.

KURODA NEW GOVERNOR OF FILIPINO PREFECTURE

Posted 03-14-64

MANILA (AP)—Since the killing of Governor Saru two weeks ago, the situation in the Philippines has degenerated further. A police and corporate crackdown followed within hours as news of the assassination spread across the islands. Bloody clashes between Filipinos and Japanese have become daily business in the cities of the archipelago. Shortly after the enshrinement ceremony for Fukatsu Saru held at the Yasukuni Shinto shrine in Neo-Tokyo, Admiral Ryoichi Kuroda was appointed new Filipino governor by the Diet. The great dragon Masaru has expressed his regret to Saru's family and Emperor Yasuhito about the killing of the governor, while the Diet sent Kuroda and a company of Imperial Marines back to the Philippines to manage the crisis. The Corporate Advisory Council has also brought corporate reinforcements to the archipelago to protect their property.

PHILIPPINES AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Contested Military Dictatorship
Population: 86,694,000
- Human: 72%
- Elf: 6%
- Dwarf: 7%
- Ork: 11%
- Troll: 2%
- Other: 2%

Per Capita Income: 8,500¥
Estimated SINless: 22%
Below Poverty Level: 44%
Corporate Affiliation: 21%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 38%
- High School Equivalency: 35%
- College Degrees: 20%
- Advanced Degrees: 7%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Malay: 95%
- Other: 5%

Major Languages Spoken:
- Filipino: 96%
- Japanese: 25%
- English: 70%

Major Religions:
- Roman Catholic: 65%
- Islam: 8%
- Protestant: 5%
- Buddhism: 5%
- Unaffiliated/Other: 5%
- None: 12%

Currency: Nuyen

» Some stories with legs to them say the assassination might have been lined up by the Sumiyoshi-Kai or the Japanacorps themselves. Both have been losing ground in the Philippines for about two years and both are jonesing for the old status quo. But they haven't been able to bring in new reinforcements since the pan-Asian shadows started stuffing them at every turn, thanks to funds generously provided by Masaru. Now, though, the assassination let Kuroda get through with his boys, and there was nothing Masaru could do about it. Sacrifice a pawn to nail the king. Wonder if the assassin was really an oni?

» Tikbalang

The oni—supposedly an adept of some sort—is still on the run, and from what I've heard Masaru has given strict orders to all of his Huk factions to turn him over to Imperial jurisdiction should he ever reveal himself.

Fate of a Nation

While I could spend tons of megapulses to introduce you to the country, the beauty of our islands and the Filipino cultures, none of these things are essential to the current state of affairs. After exploitation by the corps, several beautiful spots on the islands have been turned into uninhabitable slagheaps. Forests of precious wood have been cut down for furniture. And after forty years of prohibition of our cultural heritage, such as the practice of Arnis de Mano, the latest generation of Filipinos, educated by Japanese teachers, deny or have forgotten their roots.

All that matters at the moment is a dangerous game that has turned the Philippines into both board and prize—

PHILIPPINES TIMELINE

2011: Hibok-Hibok, Taal and Mount Pinatubo erupt due to the awakening of the Ring of Fire, killing tens of thousands of people and forcing millions to evacuate their homes. Earthquakes and tsunamis ravage the islands, killing even more inhabitants.

2011-21: Using UGE and the catastrophes to their advantage, the Japanese Empire together with the most powerful keiretsus prepare to seize Filipino territory under the guise of supporting reconstruction. The Filipino president and church leaders are eliminated by black ops to simplify the takeover in 2019. Along with the influx of Japanese immigrants many Yakuza enter the archipelago.

April 15, 2014: Masaru awakens under Mt. Mayon (Luzon) during a full lunar eclipse.

2021: Due to the "goblinization plague," the Japanese corporations appeal to the Imperial Diet for emergency support. As result, six divisions of Imperial Marines land on Philippine soil on April 28th, 2021. Under pressure, the Filipino government is forced to approve the installation of an Imperial prefecture under the command of "advisor" Fukatsu Saru.

Metahumans are initially segregated by island, but in later years all metahumans (also those from Japan) are consigned to a prison colony on the newly formed volcanic island Lagu-Lagu, nicknamed Yomi (meaning "Hell").

2025-29: After consolidation of the Japanese prefecture, Fukatsu Saru is appointed governor of the Republika ng Pilipinas, establishing a police state. Media and foreign broadcasts (except Japanese ones) are controlled and censored. The manufacture, sale and possession of firearms and long melee weapons by private individuals are prohibited by law. Under the cloak of environmental interest, "dangerous" technology is gradually stripped from the native Filipino population as are metahuman rights.

2029: Nationalists launch an ill-planned rebellion in the wake of the Crash, which is brutally repressed by Japanese military and corporate forces.

2030-2058: Corporate task forces spearheaded by Fuchi rebuild the Philippines, installing Matrix servers and communication grids, and constructing geothermal power plants. With the governor's consent the corporations exploit the natural resources of the archipelago and suppress the native Filipino population for nearly thirty years.

February 2059: Though no remote vote system is used during the elections, the results are manipulated in favor of the Japanese prefecture by Fuchi, which is overseeing the vote. Carlos Consuni of the Liberal Catholic Voters Party is voted president of the Philippines.

September 2061: Changelings are treated like lepers and deported to Yomi Island. A large number of Japanese changelings commit suicide because of their "impurity."

October 27, 2061: The Ring of Fire erupts; six volcanic eruptions and a major earthquake wreck the Philippines. Chaos, civil disorder and diseases ravage the archipelago.

October 29, 2061: The Japanese Diet orders the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Filipino bases.

Continued on page 176

PHILIPPINES TIMELINE CONTINUED

February 2062: The new boy emperor rescinds the Yomi Island decree. With the sudden reversal of Japanese fortunes in the Philippines, the Huk immediately spark a revolt, securing the liberated Lagu-Lagu as new headquarters. As a consequence, Carlos Consuni renews martial law over the islands.
September 2063: Declaration of Liberation. After encroachments on several corporate installations and military bases by the rioting population and former Yomi residents, corporate forces retreat to their major enclaves. The Huk re-occupy Mindoro Basilan and parts of Mindanao.
February 2064: After the murder of Governor Fukatsu Saru by an oni assassin, Admiral Ryoichi Kuroda is appointed new governor of the Imperial prefecture. A company of Imperial Marines and corporate reinforcements land again on Filipino soil.
April 2064: Governor Kuroda imposes a new curfew for all major cities on the archipelago and passes supervision to Renraku corporate squadrons and the Imperial Marines.

and on which rests the fate of our nation. Some, like the *kaingineros*, are in it just out of greed, while some struggle for their freedom and the survival of their culture. Some are in for revenge. But all of them go at it with hammer and tongs for the big prize.

THE HUKBO NG BAYAN LABAN SA HAPON

Known as the Huk for short, the "People's Anti-Japanese Army" is the heart of the revolution. One has to understand that the Huk isn't a single organization. It is a catchphrase for all those opposing the hapon. Its structure is similar to direct action policlubs like TerraFirst! or the Critter Liberation Front, in which independent cells unite under a common banner—in this case the liberation of the Philippines from Japanese oppression. The numerous groups differ from one another in their chosen route to this goal, and they often have direct relationships with factions that are more hierarchical. New members normally join one of these factions through personal interest or vocation.

» A big problem in the Huk has always been collaborators among their own ranks. With the conflict dragging on and on, the Japanese have raised rewards to persuade members to turn in their own. But bribery is only the tip of that iceberg—Japanese forces have been known to kidnap or pressure family members of identified Huks to gain leverage.
» Higonna

Philippine Nation Party

Born in 2051 from the old Kaakbay, Partido ng Bayan and Nationalista parties, the politikos of the PNP had to endure the most setbacks during the past thirteen years. They managed to force the Japanese to an election in 2059, using the charming Filipa Salonga as a figurehead for their campaign, only to see the results fudged by the Japanacorps. Salonga recently replaced Julian Ocampo as party chairman in Manila.

» There's no ignoring the stories about Ocampo and his personal vendetta against the current oyabun of the Kinsei-Kai. Atsuro Nishimoto turned Ocampo's daughter into a chip-head as punishment for not cooperating with his organization. Now that Ocampo's got some free time on his hands, several high wakagashira-hosa have bit the dust.
» Death Angel

» Keep an eye on Salonga—she came out of the 2059 election bitter but determined to beat the Japanacorps at their own game. Word out of Geneva says the UN's Commission on Megacorporate Affairs (COMA) has approached Salonga offering to help her out whenever the next elections come up. COMA would be plenty happy to have the current representative from the Philippines replaced by someone who isn't in the Japanacorps' pocket.
» Ambassador

Anti-Corp Faction

This ethnically mixed faction made of Filipino workers and Chinese and Japanese immigrants brought to the Philippines by the corps agrees the least with Masaru's vision for the Philippines. While Masaru has made overtures to members of the PPG (especially homegrowns like Lami Look Pakgaon and Shibata C&E) for the future environmental and economic restoration of the archipelago, both the Negros Island Factory Workers' Union and separate anti-corp cells refuse to cooperate even with non-Japanese corporations.

» The trick of fighting corps is finding money to do it, since most funds in the world are tied up in … well, you know. One good source out here is Attack! The Philippines gives them a shot at nailing three megacorps by their cojones, so they send money and monkeywrenching "consultants" into the archipelago for a spot of sabotage and demolitions.
» Roter Oktober

Environmentalist Faction

Mostly consisting of deep green conservationists, the environmentalist faction is probably the best known in the Huk. Their raids on factories and attacks on polluters have given corps nightmares for years, and they're supported by several green organizations like Sierra Inc. and Save our Seas.

» Green Cells, Terrafirsters and GreenWar radicals often jump into bed with Huk members to help their common cause. And—surprise, surprise—these guys often work with the anti-corp faction.
» Ecotope

• Edtami Mansayagan, the faction's captain, was caught recently during the raid on Tev Greenwaldt's mansion on Negros but "miraculously" managed to escape his guards. Any getaway like that makes people talk about the escapee being turned, and there are mutters that Mansayagan's been sent back to sabotage the faction from within.
• Naing

• You should know better than to listen to gossip.
• Mansayagan

Metahuman Rights Faction

The greatest victory of the Metahuman Rights faction without a doubt has been the liberation of Yomi Island. However, hints of dissenstions have arisen within the faction lately, when Captain Briones conveyed Masaru's orders regarding the fate of the oni assassin to the different cells assembled at their new HQ in the former prison complex on Lagu-Lagu. Many of the pirates think of the oni as a hero and would rather aid him than hand him over to Masaru.

• Take Captain Mangahas, the troll pirate who spearheaded the seizure of Yomi Island. Guy blew up like a powder keg and immediately abandoned the headquarters when he was told to nab the oni. Now here's the real drek—Mangahas is hiding the terrorist on one of his ships somewhere in the Celebes Sea, and Masaru has some agents coming after him to extract the oni.
• Boonrai

• "Real drek?" Please. Masaru wouldn't act like that against his own followers.
• Arimonga

• He's a great dragon. What did you expect?
• Dragonslayer

Terrorist Factions

While there are "terrorists" in any of the aforementioned factions (it is often hard to pin a specific attack on only one faction), the members and cells of this wing have no agenda beyond the complete removal of Japanese presence from

Filipino soil by any means possible. A lot of these lunatics will attack anyone and anything Japanese, regardless of position, age or even religion.

» They're nutjobs. What they're doing is genocide, nothing less. And it doesn't stop in the Philippines. There have been several bombings in Japan attributed to Filipino terrorists, and those won't stop even if the Huk wins this war.
» Higonna

Of all the factions, they're also the most skilled and best equipped, which makes them a ruthless bunch. Most of them are pirates, keeping their attacks and raids to sea-based operations though exceptions exist. One of the most notorious leaders is Clarita Simpao, a dwarf conjurer who's been utterly devoted to her cause for almost forty years.

» Talk about a toxic personality—in both the mundane and the Awakened sense. I wonder why Masaru lets her persist.
» Dalakitnon

» As far as she is useful, why shouldn't he?
» Tikbalang

Independent Pirates and Shadowrunners

Besides the factions themselves, numerous independent Filipino and Southeast Asian buccaneers work for the Huk, though their main goal is to make money for themselves. The same goes for Filipino shadowrunners, who are often caught between the neutrality of their business and their own feelings for their nation.

» As a foreigner it's better to contact these independents when you're in need of gear or information. Despite what you may think, they're still quite numerous, and they try to stay on the sidelines of the conflict.
» Mekong Michelle

Masaru

There's not much to add to what has already been said in Shadowland's exposé on the great dragon's plans: he may share some interest in the Filipino population and want to help them in their struggle for freedom, but I for one am not buying that he's just doing it out of charity. Time will tell whether the Filipino population that placed their trust for a better tomorrow in the talon of a dragon will be disappointed again.

» Though your fears may not be without grounds, Masaru is still young and full of youthful idealism—not like others of our kind I could name.
» Orange Queen

Regarding his leadership, he seems to know better than anyone else what is going on within the various factions of the Huk, but he is by no means able to control them all. The movement runs itself; the only thing he regularly does is use his influence to put it on the course that suits him most. Interestingly, there have been rumors that the dragon's efforts go beyond involvement with the Huk; many Filipinos believe he has personal agents scattered within the pro-Japanese faction to tear down the prefecture from inside.

THE IMPERIAL PREFECTURE

The times are over in which the Imperials controlled the whole archipelago from Malacañang Palace in Manila. Shortly after the revolution ignited, both Fukatsu Saru and Carlos Consuni fled the Philippines, but returned after the first riots and demonstrations ebbed away in Manila and order was restored. The Japanese side of the Philippines government has been living in fear of assassinations and encroachments for almost two years, a fear that has increased with the murder of Governor Saru.

» Not only the Japanese should worry. All Filipinos in the Ministries and the Assembly who have willingly cooperated with the hapon are guilty of collaborating with the enemy and will be punished accordingly for their crimes.
» Wirwir

Carlos Consuni

Carlos Consuni and his Liberal Catholic Voters Party have always been nothing more than a puppet for hire to the highest bidder. After his career as a prominent Asian dram-sim star, several corps made him a well-paid figurehead, putting him forward first as the candidate for the LCV and then as the new Filipino president during the election swindle of '59. Until Governor Saru's sudden death, Consuni was infamous for kissing Imperial ass for his own protection. Since the appointment of Admiral Kuroda, however, he suddenly dissociated himself from the prefecture for unknown reasons. After confronting Kuroda in public several weeks ago, he was placed under house arrest in Manila.

» Rumor has it Rome sent a legation to the Philippines to have a word with Consuni and some of the other members of the "Catholic" party. Rome has never been happy with the treatment of Catholics in the archipelago but never chose to intervene. Wonder what changed his Holiness' mind to the point that he sent over some New Jesuits?
» White Friar

» Consuni's in too deep with the Japanese to ever completely dissociate from the prefecture, but it's clear he's not supporting the Japanese faction anymore, especially when you read between the lines of the speeches he made in recent months. If he's really turning against the Japanese, he doesn't have many outs. One of them might be suicide—the necessary elections would throw a monkey wrench in Kuroda's plans in the Philippines, especially with the Emperor watching.
» Kalapaw

Admiral Ryoichi Kuroda

Nothing much is known about former Vice-Admiral Kuroda. He's a loyal but quiet soldier, and there is nothing notable in his military record except for his recent promotion to Admiral, which mainly came because he was ready for duty during the recent catastrophe. Since his arrival in the Philippines, he hasn't made many friends among the existing prefecture officialdom. Several bureaucrats have been sent back home to Japan, and he has made it clear that he does not trust men who have betrayed their own country (read: Filipino government collaborators).

• He's a bird of prey. His first order out of the gate was the public execution of all Filipino dissidents imprisoned in Manila. The second was the new curfew for all big cities, and he promptly contracted the supervision of the curfew to, naturally, Renraku.
• Tikbalang

• This new governor is a wolf in sheep's clothing, that's for sure. He's from an old and influential family, and there has never been any reason to doubt their honor or loyalty to the Empire. A Japanese newshound raised suspicions that the family is deep in an anti-metahuman brotherhood, but the article was never printed (we have it in our vaults) and the reporter disappeared. For me it stinks of Human Nation.
• The Allochron

• Of all the candidates for the position, Kuroda was the one with the cleanest record, including no incidents with metahumans. What I don't understand is, why should the Human Nation put one of their agents in this position? Yomi's gone, and one admiral won't bring it back.
• Holly

KAINGINEROS

The term *kaingineros* was the name for slash and burn farmers in previous times and is used as a synonym for all types of corps and wageslaves nowadays. Since the Resource Rush, corporations have dominated the economy of the Philippines. Mitsuhama became the largest employer, processing minerals everywhere on the islands and the sea floors, exploiting Philippine oil reserves and cutting down forests. Shiawase followed second with their control of geothermal power, medical installations and consumer goods. The remaining vital infrastructure branches like the Matrix grids and trid stations were left for Renraku, Fuchi and Yamatetsu to divide, though some second tiers like Daiatsu, Yakashima (which raided several former Filipino companies) and Komatsu also got a share of the haul.

These days the situation is quite different. Renraku's star has risen since the Corp War brought them several of Fuchi Asia's smaller assets. With its takeover of Philippine Broadcasting Network from Yamatetsu, Renraku has seized control of broadcasting and Matrix communications as well as the entertainment sectors.

• Nakatomi has big plans for Renraku in the Philippines. Since the Renraku arcology disaster in Seattle, there have been plans for a whole underwater city off the coast of Luzon in the Philippine Sea. Though there had been arrangements with outside suppliers like Mitsuhama-Benguet Mining and Automatronics to begin construction soon, the revolution delayed the start. That's why division head Greenwaldt was ordered to support Admiral Kuroda by giving him a reliable PR rep to work over the Filipino population.
• Renraku Fox

• Maintaining a high level of media control is tough, and Renraku's got problems holding up their screen of censorship that keeps the populace fooled (or at least confused). Matrix and trid pirates operating from offshore ships have become a serious problem, hijacking channels to broadcast parlous material about the methods of the prefecture. Renraku's striking back, restricting Matrix access and roping in a Securitech specialist to track down the position of the transmitters.
• Haring Ibon

The other Japanese corps faced more setbacks from agitators and their non-Japanese competitors. Yakashima has been the target of several vengeance strikes by Yomi refugees. The same is true for Filipino workers who have been squeezed out for years in MCT's factories and now demand reparations. While both corporations battle the rebels, Shiawase has begun to retreat back to Japan. They've already sold some of their installations to PPG members like Gaeatronics and Shibata, enraging their former partners in crime.

• With Shiawase's toadying to the emperor because of the marriage, tensions between them and other Japanese traditionalists have been escalating every day.
• Fletch

The members of the Pacific Prosperity Group, however, are perfectly willing to replace the Japanese corps as soon as possible. Masaru has brought in several PPG members (beyond the homegrown ones of which he owns shares) like the Malaysian Independent Bank and Eastern Tiger, and the newcomers keep a close eye on their enemy, hiring foreign shadowrunners to foil their schemes, in hopes of ending the ongoing conflict in their favor.

• The MIB in particular is channeling money into the Philippines to fund the revolution by giving "loans" to Lami Look Pakgaon.
• 0111011001

TYPHOONS OF CHANGE

The conflict between Filipinos and Japanese doesn't stop in the archipelago's underworld, where an assortment of Yakuza gumis practice their own brand of nationalism. But now, after forty years of exile from their homeland, the major Filipino Yak organizations are the only Japanese on the isles who cannot go back home.

» Why, you ask? Simple—the Watada-rengo sent the major oyabuns (except for the Yamaguchi-gumi, which is still active in Japan) a clear warning not to return to Japan. So now their backs are against the wall.
» Hari

Several of the Huk leaders have been thinking of their own future after the revolution and have decided to find their fortunes in markets currently controlled by the kais and gumis: the Philippine opium fields, the gambling dens, the brothels and the sex bars. Several rebel pirates have been using Huk resources to drive the Yakuza out of business—under the excuse of fighting the enemy, of course.

But it's not yet time to count out the Yaks. From what I have heard, there have been secret meetings between the Ichiwa-Kai, the Kinsei-Kai, the well-connected and influential Sumiyoshi-Kai and the wealthy Inagawa-Kai to unite as one Filipino-Japanese syndicate that can oppose the Huk. Since the Sumiyoshi maintains good relationships with both the Malaysian/Indonesian syndicates and the Triads from the Chinese mainland, they may call in help if needed.

» The Ichiwa-Kai has their own big chip at this table—they dominate the sex market, making Olangapo the prime destination for sex tourists from all over the world. But widespread violence and chaos is bad for business, and they want a pacified archipelago by any means, even if that means making concessions to the Huk.
» Higonna

» Naheka, Ryumyo's representative in Hawai'i, has temporarily withdrawn from his lair on Kauai and traveled to the Philippines to secure his master's interests in this region with the support of the Sumiyoshi-Kai. To underline his determination, Naheka killed the old oyabun Asako Tsuburu in front of the assembled Kai and has seized control for now. Wonder how Masaru will respond to that?
» Tikbalang

BREEDING IN THE SHADOWS

» I ripped this from a private host at the infamous solicitors' office of Stark, Theissen and Van der Mer in Munich. Don't ask me why I was there, but rest assured, it was purely business and not personal choice. I think the file speaks for itself and reveals more about this Filipino restaurant chain than you ever wanted to know.
» Grid Reaper

//Begin File//
From: Spriggan
To: Dr. Johan van der Mer
Date: 02-15-64
Re: Bahay Ng Isa

As you wished, I picked up the trail of the "banker" as soon as he surfaced in Basle. His driver brought him directly into the EBZ, from which he took a suborbital to Manila. I followed as you had ordered and arrived just in time to see his gofers unload some big containers at the harbor, living presents for the host from what I could scan. The bodies were transported to one of the Bahay ng Isa's restaurants in Puerta Princesa on Pilawan, where the meeting took place a few days later in secrecy. Unfortunately I was forced to call on a team of local runners to ensure surveillance during the meeting, but be assured, I left no evidence of them or their activities afterwards. As you suspected, all factions sent negotiators. From what I gathered from the surveillance, the envoy of the Black Chrysanthemums was the only human in the room, though he watched impassively as his partners from Tamanous, the Body Bank and the Bahay Ng Isa enjoyed the meaty buffet the Swiss had provided. After the meal, a gaki—a rare breed of Asian ghoul—and his master, a pennaggolan (even scarcer), addressed the reason for their invitation. While the restaurant chain they had set up was able to feed their appetite for the living and the dead of their kind in Southeast Asia and parts of Japan for several years, they fear discovery with the withdrawal of the Japanese, in whose shadow it was easy for them to dwell. From what I have interpreted with my poor understanding of Tagalog, they wish to relocate to Japan. Tamanous and the Body Bank have been asked for help because of their global connections and vast resources, respectively. What the Bahay Ng Isa has offered them in exchange eludes me at present. We should advise our clients to approach them with an offer. This might form a quite fruitful alliance, allowing our clients the foothold they so desire in Asia.
//End File//

THE REST OF ASIA

Asia's a big place to cover, and some of the more interesting spots aren't easily crammed in with similar locales in easily digestible info-chunks. So here are all the places that didn't fit elsewhere in the file collection.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:45:18 (PST)

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

• With several factions struggling for supremacy and a society that welcomes both magic and technology with open arms, job opportunities in Korea are at an all-time high for people like us. The following comes from Mugunghwa, a local decker who, unlike many others, seems unaffected by the hyped-up rhetoric that has engulfed the peninsula. She has also thrived in Korea's shadows for years—no small feat in this day and age.

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:46:59 (PST)

by Mugunghwa

People of Korea, awake!

Years ago, while our heroic troops were winning the Patriotic War of Unification, our nation suffered a most shameful betrayal. General Yoon's government sold Korea, piece by piece, to its puppet masters in Japan.

They said the Japanese were our friends, that we had a common future. They said we needed their help to rebuild our nation. They said all that and more … and we believed. For almost six decades, these insidious lies have cost us dearly. Our country has been pillaged, while millions live in poverty and despair. Our youth is corrupted and our traditions mocked by their media. Those who dare protest are silenced by their accomplices.

We've been a nation adrift … but we still have a chance. It's time to reclaim what was ours, to restore our country's dignity and return to our rightful place in the world.

It's time to change.

Sounds pretty scary, right? I bet you can even picture lynch mobs clashing with the riot police after reading that. In fact, the situation isn't that bad on the ground, though we're certainly

KOREA AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Parliamentary Republic with Military Presidency
Population: 98,136,000
- Human: 52%
- Elf: 15%
- Dwarf: 8%
- Ork: 16%
- Troll: 5%
- Other: 4%

Per Capita Income: 21,000¥
Estimated SINless: 12%
Below Poverty Level: 20%
Corporate Affiliation: 61%
Education:
- Less Than Twelve Years: 15%
- High School Equivalency: 42%
- College Degrees: 30%
- Advanced Degrees: 13%

Major Ethnic Groups:
- Korean: 83%
- Japanese: 12%
- Other: 5%

Major Languages Spoken:
- Korean: 94%
- Japanese: 43%
- English: 35%

Major Religions:
- Shamanist: 31%
- Buddhist: 24%
- Christian: 18%
- Confucian: 5%
- Unaffiliated/Other: 10%
- None: 12%

Currency: Won (nuyen also accepted)
- Exchange Rate: 1,000W = 1¥

CrashCart Medical Coverage: 80%
- Guaranteed Response Time: 10 minutes

Truth be told, through most of the twenty-first century, President-General Yoon and his successors have managed to keep a dangerous balance between kow-towing to Tokyo and placating Korean nationalism—not an easy feat given the long history of enmity between our countries. It's been a mutually profitable relationship so far, but now our people want a bigger share of the pie. Just who will eat it is anyone's guess.

living through some interesting times—would you believe me that the above leaflet is government-sponsored propaganda? Yeah, I drek you not, this is the latest attempt by Yoon's successors to drum up nationalist sentiments, part of the age-old ploy of uniting people against a common enemy.

Way too many people believe that Japan plotted Korean War 2 to ruin us, that the Japanacorps stole the lion's share of the reconstruction efforts, or that we've suffered a second, subtler occupation. Unsurprisingly, things weren't that black and white.

» You dare to take our national flower's name, yet still stick to the Big Lie? Everyone knows that President Rhee was murdered by a Japanese-trained terrorist!
» 1919 Forever

» Get over it, will you? Whatever happened sixty years ago is old news by any standard.
» Mugunghwa

RIDING THE TIGER

President-General Kang-ho Lee comes from a fine line of military dictators, the fifth after Yoon's coup. Sure, the Prime Minister and the National Assembly are still there, but they're not worth a frag in the grand scheme of things. The former makes a convenient scapegoat when needed, while the latter is always stacked with loyal toadies (aren't constitutional amendments grand?).

» Here's how the scam works: the opposition usually wins most of the available seats during the elections (which should give you an idea of Lee's real popularity), but then there's a bucket load of "special representatives" from the government, whose sole mission is to ensure that the status quo remains unchanged. Neat, huh?
» Socio Pat

» It's not going to last. Sooner or later, Sang-Kun Ahn and his Korean Democratic Alliance chummers will realize they need to get dirty to kick out the dirt … and that's going to mean lot of work for us.
» Pusan Kid

The last few years have been troublesome for the government. With social unrest eroding his power base, President Lee tried to distract the nationalist hardliners and the average Kim by adopting a more aggressive stance against Japan. Gone are the past decades of good old Big Brother helping its little sibling, replaced with media reports about atrocities in the Philippines, racial discrimination or the latest scandal at Mitsuhama—not to mention old favorites like World War Two docudramas.

The tough-guy charade has been working like a charm so far, to the point that President Lee faces an interesting dilemma. He can't keep pumping up the volume without risking a serious incident with the Japanese, but he can't turn it down either, unless he wants to alienate his supporters at home.

» You mean Lee's faking it? I've heard of wag the dog stories before, but this is pushing it.
» Cigar Bill

» It used to be that you could almost see the Japanese strings attached to the president, but no one's so sure now. Maybe he turned 180 degrees, maybe he's still on the Japanese's payroll, or maybe he just found another master to yank his chain.
» Mr. Kim

» The saddest part is that this is happening just when Japan's trying to shed its bad reputation. Plus ça change …
» Janus

Hail to the Chief

President Lee's biggest fans are in the national security apparatus. It's huge, well-funded and trained, not to mention loyal to

KOREA TIMELINE

2005: South Korea's President Rhee murdered by a communist dissident. Backed by Japanese interests, General Yoon takes power and invades North Korea.
2006: North Korea tries to neutralize Japan with a nuclear attack, but the missiles fail to detonate. The regime is defeated by the end of the year, finally unifying the Korean peninsula.
2007: Several newly privatized North Korean companies merge, creating Kwonsham Industries.
2011: First spirit village reported in Chejudo Island.
2023: After President-General Yoon dies, the military's top brass selects Admiral Park as his successor.
2030: Samsung-LG, Daewoo and SK Energy merge into Eastern Tiger Corporation, Korea's largest chaebol (megacorp).
2040-50s: BTL abuse in Korea reaches epidemic levels but is eventually contained by efforts from socially conscious groups like the Church of Unification (aka the Moonies).
2055: The Moonies are banned by the government after being exposed as a bug spirit front. Many high-ranking officers who had backed the group are purged from the military.
July 8, 2059: The PPG is formed, with ETC, Samyung Corp. and Kwonsham as founding members. Several smaller Korean corporations soon join them, making Korea centrally important in the PPG.
2060: President-General Hwang retires, following a financial scandal. He is replaced by General Kang-ho Lee.
March 2064: Kwonsham files for bankruptcy protection.

him. The National Intelligence Service keeps tabs on everyone and everything, allowing Lee to stay one step ahead of his rivals.

» Back when Tokyo wasn't a bad word, the NIS did a lot of dirty jobs for the Japanese. If you need to blackmail someone, the NIS' archives can be a fascinating source of information.
» Spavin

Part of the military is stationed near the Manchurian border, but most assets are concentrated in Pusan and Yeosu. Isolated incidents between ROK and JIS patrols are common in the Korea Strait, with quite a few smugglers and pirates pitting one side against the other while they slip away with the goods.

REGIME CHANGE, KOREAN STYLE

Fortunately for President Lee and his cronies, the moderate opposition parties haven't been able to organize a solid political bloc (yet). The real headache comes from the extremists, both left and right.

Forward to the Past

The monarchy fell in 1910, but uppity aristocrats are a diehard breed. The best example is Soo-hyun Shin, a powerful *mudang* (shaman) and a direct descendant of the last dynasty. Thanks to an archconservative platform, her Celestial Path Party has become a powerful force, drawing many Koreans who are sick of being flooded with Japanese pop culture.

Now, before anyone blows a fuse trying to understand how an "archconservative" politician can prosper in meta-friendly Korea, remember that we're talking about a nationalist who advocates a return to tradition, rather than a racist agenda like Kenny Brackhaven and his Humanis pals. It doesn't matter if you have horns, pointy ears or fangs; as long as you're a Korean with a grudge against Japan, she'll welcome you with open arms.

» The NIS tried to grease her twice, but its attempts were foiled by a weird looking mojo-guy with four fingers on each hand, who goes by the name of Dangun. I heard rumors he's Shin's ally spirit, advising her on every important decision. Now, Dangun is also the name of Korea's mythical founder … Perhaps Shin summoned the mother (er", father) of all ancestor spirits?
» Woo-Dong

» Didn't Korean dragons have four fingers according to legend? That could explain why the Celestial Path's mudangs follow him like lemmings.
» Dragonslayer

» Bulldrek. He's just Shin's bodyguard and personal joyboy. Don't ask me how I know that, though.
» Silk Doll

Smells Like Teen Spirit

Originally a student movement, the March 1919 Policlub remains a constant thorn in the government's back, targeting government and Japanese officials. Though they claim to follow the steps of the original independence movement, these fascists are out to topple the regime. Understandably, President Lee didn't lose time outlawing them as terrorists, but efforts to destroy the M1919 have been fruitless, as new cells grow like mushrooms after each raid. The M1919 has grown more and more sophisticated in its operations, to the point that many suspect a larger power backs them.

» Everyone suspects they're a recruitment front for the Celestial Path. They do all the dirty work, while Shin remains squeaky clean.
» Pusan Kid

Those Lovable Commie Traitors

After North Korea went south (pun intended), most communists traded their ideology for the ROK's capitalist prosperity, but quite a few hardcore reds kept on fighting the Glorious People Revolution™. The outlawed Korean Communist Party has survived by recruiting leftist students, trade unionists and North Koreans who feel the winners left their side of the country to rot. Maybe it's just a matter of unfinished business, but the NIS enjoys hunting down commies. Immensely.

• The KCP is constantly butting heads with enemies of the working class like the M1919 fascists and the corps. The latest battleground is Wonsan, as the corps are finally moving in to rebuild the war-torn city (in their own image, of course). This has led to an uneasy alliance between the Reds and the Wonsan pirate syndicate.
• Poly Tick

• A lot of support comes from Henan, usually smuggled across the Manchurian border or the Yellow Sea. Knowing who's backing the neo-commies in Henan, I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of that gear carried a "Made in Aztlan" label.
• Hei Yu

• They also enjoy goodwill from the Japanese refugees living in Korea—the commies are equal opportunity revolutionaries.
• Che

DYNAMIC KOREA

We take pride in being a very open people. Despite some early xenophobic outbreaks in light of some folklore stories, the Awakening was fairly benign in Korea and accepted by the general population. Our progressive stance has attracted so many metas from countries like Japan that, for the first time in our history, Korea has a large foreign minority.

• Progressive stance my hoop. Racial discrimination might be low, but radical nationalism is strong in Korea. Even Japanese metahumans like me, who despise the JIS regime as much as Koreans do, have to fight twice as hard to get half as much respect.
• Chiba Tusker

Technophilia

The Matrix is an omnipresent, familiar aspect of a Korean's everyday life: we use it for everything from groceries to religion. Matrix gaming is huge in Korea, with the best players becoming trideo stars and crushing Japanese competitors. Even runners do a lot of their biz online—some people I know have never met a Mr. Kim in person. For my part, I can't remember a day I've been completely offline since I got my first 'trodes when I was four (not that I would want, anyway).

• Mugunghwa is a good example of a serious problem in Korea: Matrix addiction. What's the point in socializing with your neighbors, when the net provides most of your needs? Bread and circuses, rice and 'trix games. I won't even mention how rampant BTL abuse is in Korea.
• Wobbly

• Korea's RTG was significantly upgraded two years ago, after Samyung snatched it from Renraku. The grid's new design is a mountain valley, crisscrossed with rivers and small roads leading to shrines and palaces. Avoid the "tiger packs" at all costs—Matrix gangers love to prey upon unsuspecting victims.
• Kimchi

The technophile attitude extends to other parts of society as well. SOTA augmentations are standard and many people sport visible or cosmetic 'ware, especially if it makes them look a little more like their idols (orxploitation is the current fad). Though this ain't Chiba, local clinics are very good and focus on headware. Combat cyberware is harder to acquire, though, as the government is pretty strict about it. Your average Korean runner packs lighter 'ware than a foreign one, but knows how to keep a much lower profile—essential in Korea's shadows.

• Speaking of Korean runners, not only are women the majority in the shadows, but they seem to have cornered the Awakened market—probably because the mudangs are mostly women. Men are usually riggers, razorguys and, of course, deckers.
• Yoon-Ah

• Perhaps more important for us foreigners, this is a tight community. Most locals only do biz with a single fixer, creating a strong degree of trust and friendship. It took me a while to understand that working for several fixers barred me from getting the best jobs. Oh, and if you frag a fixer, you can be sure his runners will come down on you. Not pretty.
• Taipan

Overall, if your enhancements are of common usage, you're not going to be stared at like I was in the UCAS once. Seriously, what's wrong with having fiber optic hair, mirrored eyes, nanotattoos and a 'jack?

• Nothing at all, my dear. Now, if I was ten years younger …
• FastJack

• You'd still double my age, grandpa.
• Mugunghwa

Traditions

While we are a state-of-the-art society, traditional values like respect for elders remain at the base of our culture. In the shadows, this means older runners are usually treated with greater respect and get better jobs, even if they're new to the scene or their performance is sub-par.

• Ooohhh, do I notice some bitterness here?
• Halabeoji

• It never hurts having your group's old-timer deal with Mr. Kim. Speaking a little Korean can also help you make many friends if you're an outtatowner, but watch the tone: Korean has subtle changes when addressing someone of different social standing.
• Taipan

A World of Spirits

I know that Christians have been making their best efforts to reverse the damage done by early bigotry during the Awakening, but Korea seems a lost cause. In the Sixth World,

mudangs are once again *the* spiritual advisors for the common and not-so-common folk—some chaebol execs I've met never make a decision without consulting their preferred mudang. Some mudangs end up as mistresses for the rich and powerful; they're very influential and can be useful contacts, as long as you don't threaten their position.

» Take Yoo-jin Hong, for example. Plenty of people resent the inordinate influence the First Joygirl has over President Lee. They blame her for quite a few controversial decisions that have done nothing to calm public unrest.
» Voyeur

Mudangs call upon the gods, ancestors and Nature, harnessing their spiritual power for the *kut* (ritual), in which they appease the spirits. A kut can be a humble affair or an awe-inspiring ceremony, including dances, music, storytelling and chants. The spirits possess the mudang's body, enabling them to communicate with mortals. Staples of Korean shamanism include fortunetelling, charms (like coins) and geomancy. The latter is especially important when burying the dead—woe be unto whoever buries his ancestor in the wrong place.

» Believe it or not, Yeosu's Naval Academy always hires a mudang for graduation day. She summons the spirit of Admiral Yi, an ancient Korean hero, who then publicly blesses the next cadre of officers. This year's ceremony was a shock for everyone, when Yi refused to do so because of an unspecified offense.
» Jia

Cults

It was a national embarrassment when the Moonies turned out to be a front for bug spirits, but we seem to have forgotten the lesson. These days you can't walk through Seoul without being harassed by some wacko.

One such group is the Virtual Utopians, a Matrix gang that believes the net is the be-all-and-end-all of metahumanity. They preach (yes, preach) that our problems can be solved if we all manage to get linked in an online thought gestalt (whatever that is), so that we can understand each other.

So why bother with these crackpots at all, you ask? Well, for starters, they range from anarchist otaku to corporate sarariimen and everything in between, which means they can be a very good source of information or gear. Second, they can pay good money for the weirdest kind of runs. I've done a few jobs for them and don't regret it (yet).

» The Utopians recruit heavily from the younger generations. A friend of mine joined them a few months ago at a videogame festival … I don't know how to put it better, but she just isn't the girl I knew before.
» Nam-Ok

Corporate Battlefield

Korea is an economic powerhouse, with much of its wealth concentrated in the foreign megas and the local chaebols. It is also a hotspot for the conflict between the Pacific Prosperity Group and the Japanacorps, as evidenced by Kwonsham Industries' latest problems. The story is complex and dirty, but it boils down to Kwonsham getting cocky and trying to seize Shiawase's Hephaestus Technologies. By the time the Japanese buried the hatchet, Kwonsham's stock made for good toilet paper.

Shiawase was moving in for the kill when the government came to Kwonsham's rescue. In an effort to stabilize Kwonsham's finances, the Korean Agency for Economic Security has loaned billions of wons to CEO Kim Jae-kyung. Shiawase has threatened to take the matter to the Corporate Court, citing unlawful government interference or some drek like that.

» They might have a point. The KAES' public goal is to secure Korea's economic prosperity, which usually means helping the local chaebols and covertly messing with the Japanacorps. Wonder what President Lee got for helping Kwonsham?
» Keynesian Kid

» Who says it was Lee who gave the order?
» Tutu Tango

While the loan was good news for the PPG, the recent struggle between Eastern Tiger Corporation and Wuxing certainly isn't. See, Wuxing is keen on strengthening its industrial power base by taking over Hyundai's assets, but ETC has long seen the latter as a fundamental step toward becoming a triple-A mega. Unless cooler heads prevail, there might be a civil war within the PPG.

» Wuxing has offered an economic olive branch through Jam-Bo Games and Wuxing Worldwide Shipping, but ETC ain't buying it. They want Hyundai and by God they're going to have it.
» Miss Teja

Last year saw an internal shake-up in Yang-Su Enterprises, when Melissa Kwan ousted the previous management and became the most influential woman in Korea's economy. Kwan has played a careful game since then, opting to strengthen Yang-Su's position through new joint ventures with other PPG members rather than butting heads with the Japanese. Her only surprise move was taking over Hynix Semiconductor.

» No surprise at all. Hynix supplies chips to all major computer manufacturers in Asia and North America. If Kwan wanted a safe investment, she couldn't have picked a better corp.
» Mr. Kim

» Kwan is a foreigner and a Catholic, which doesn't make her terribly popular with the nationalists. On the other hand, she has a worldwide network of contacts from her Grand Tour years and a sharp, dragon-like mind for business.
» Muckraker

» Funny you say that.
» Weaver

All the major Japanacorps have some presence in Korea, from Shiawase's gigantic steel mills in Pyongyang to Sony Entertainment's Matrix games division. They've sunk their claws far too deep to leave the country unharmed if they pull out, something they never forget to insinuate when meeting with President Lee.

• Sure, but if they ever leave, their bottom lines are going to be deep red for a long, long time.
• Chromed Accountant

• It's not uncommon for the Japanese to hire foreign talent for operations in Korea, because many local runners and Jung-gae-in (fixers) refuse to work for them.
• Snow Tiger

• Renraku has a training center in Korea for its elite security forces. Most of these are females, metahumans or non-Japanese troopers, all folks who didn't stand a chance of joining the Red Samurais. Keep that in mind when raiding Renraku's local subsidiaries.
• Renraku Fox

North American corps have a smaller presence but enjoy a much warmer welcome. Ares has grown in influence at the expense of the Japanese, selling weapons at a loss to the Army to hook them up and win friends within the top brass. Federated-Boeing has long been active in Korea, supplying civilian airplanes to Asiana Airtech and ETC's Korean Airlines as well as combat aircraft to the Air Force. As a matter of fact, most of the military's contracts are handled by non-Japanese corps; right now, Ares and Yamatetsu are fighting over the Navy's contract for ten new coastal warships.

• Ares' Stuart-class corvettes are a little better and cheaper than Yamatetsu's Potemkin-class boats, but supply logistics favor the latter. As usual, none of this matters as much as having the best deniable assets …
• Arctic White

The Fringe

If you're thinking Seoulpa Rings-uber-alles, you're in for a surprise—remember they started in Seattle, *not* Korea. What we *do* have are vast networks of small gangs known as Jo-poks. Though it might seem they're independent from each other (an idea reinforced by their constant power struggles), the truth is that each Jo-pok rules a certain district within a pyramidal organization.

The two biggest factions are the Wonsan pirates and the Park Syndicate. The former rules Wonsan and has a death grip over maritime activities, while the latter is spread all over the south, challenging every Yakuza operation it can. "Halabeoji" Park has very good political connections—I heard his p-sec has President Lee's phone number.

• Could it be because they're distant cousins? Nah, impossible …
• Ki-Duk

When not fighting against each other, the Jo-poks like to make the Yaks' lives utter hell. They've succeeded in breaking the Yamashita-gumi's previous rule of Korea's shadows, but the Yakuza is far from defeated. The group is probably the most open-minded syndicate in Korea, having embraced Koreans and the Awakened from day one. That didn't win many friends in Japan, but it sure as hell gave them a solid position in Korea—despite Watada's purges in Seattle, the Korean oyabuns remained loyal to Yamashita-san here.

• Come on traitor, say it once and for all …
• 1919 Forever

• The fact that I've worked for Yamashita-san and I like cool tattoos does not necessarily make me a Yakuza or traitor.
• Mugunghwa

PLACES TO GO, PEOPLE TO FRAG

Tourist visas are the easy way to get into Korea if you have a SIN. If you don't, try entering through the Manchurian border or the scores of small islands dotting Korea's coast. Whatever you do, avoid being noticed by patrols (that is, unless you want a live-fire exercise with the military).

Seoul-Incheon Megaplex

Korea's capital is a sprawling megalopolis of 30 million inhabitants. The SIM features a huge number of attractions, from the NIS headquarters to the fashionable Myeong-dong district and the port of Incheon. Myeong-dong is where the vice is: corp suits relaxing at exclusive nightclubs, thrill-seeking rich teenagers, etc. Its cosmopolitan nature also attracts a good portion of the foreign runners living in Seoul.

• Myeong-dong is fragging tough to crack or live in, with security cameras on every street and police watching for any sign of trouble that could scare away tourists. I'd rather live in Itaewon—it isn't that flashy, but it's quieter and half the residents are foreigners.
• Johnny Hotel

Incheon concentrates maritime and aerial activity through its harbor and international airports, not to mention a good deal of manufacturing activity conveniently close to them. If you're thinking of sabotaging a factory or stealing a prototype, you'll probably end up there.

Seoul is also the center of the war between the Park Syndicate and the Yamashita-gumi. Lots of people end up floating in the Han River every week.

Pyongyang

Northern Korea is a Japanese stronghold. Post-war reconstruction was so expensive that the government had to loosen regulations and let Japanese corps step in. While the corps certainly pumped a lot of money into the North's economy, the locals have seen barely any of it.

Pyongyang is as dirty as Seoul is glitzy. The former communist capital is an industrial nightmare, heavily contaminated

and impoverished. Local and foreign corps take advantage of the cheap workforce and corrupt authorities, who turn a blind eye when it comes to abuses and crimes. You can taste the despair in the air.

» Pyongyang is prime ground for toxic mudangs. Some are corporate managers, forcing the wageslaves to work till they die. The corps don't care what happens to the cogs, as long as they get results and the machines keep working.
» Woo-Dong

Yeosu

Famous for being the HQ of the ancient Korean Navy, Yeosu is a nexus for maritime trade, the fishing industry and maritime research, making it an ecoterrorist target. Shipbuilding is big too, with corps like Hyundai, Wuxing, Shiawase, Yamatetsu and Maersk constantly trying to ruin each other's projects.

» Yeosu's shadows are hot-hot-hot nowadays, with Ares sabotaging Yamatetsu's shipyards and ETC arguing with Wuxing over Hyundai's future.
» Prime Runner

Chejudo Island

Korea's tourist Mecca is a charmed place, where the weather is fantastic, the economy is great and spirits live side by side with mortals. Yeah, you read me right. Don't ask me why, but there are literally thousands of spirits roaming the island since the Awakening, sometimes pretending to be normal people. They're even available for photo-ops (I have an autographed pic).

» Scan this. I was running from the cops one night when I stumbled into a small village. It looked positively ancient, with no traces whatsoever of technology. The villagers were curious but helpful, so I spent the night in a hut … only to awake and discover that not only had the village vanished, but four weeks had passed by!
» Serious Paul

» I don't know about people gone missing, but I heard stories about visitors forgetting their identities after staying for too long. Memories fade one by one and new ones come to mind—eventually, people come to believe they've been living in these places all their lives!
» Chihiro

» Wow, BTLs must be a real plague over there.
» Skeptic

Chejudo is a bastion of Korean shamanism, with folks believing in *musok* as a way of surviving, attempting to appease spirits to avoid drawing their wrath by making them offerings to solve problems. Every village has an altar, sometimes several, where the *simbang* (shaman) performs the

Tangsin (altar god) ceremonies. When people need help from a different god, they visit another village, though it isn't uncommon for one community to steal another's good luck by taking away their *Tangsin* symbol.

• Many villages look for help and advice from the simbangs rather than the town mayor (if they're not the same person, that is). Trust me, it pays to be on good terms with the simbang.
• Yoon-Ah

The island is also brimming with telesma, especially near Mt. Hallasan and its crater, but talislegging isn't popular here. Mitsuhama's Pentacle Distributing learned that the hard way some months ago, when a huge mountain spirit called the Sansin sided with the locals after MCT started pushing them. Same happened with experts from the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research and the Atlantean Foundation.

Mount Paektusan

Mountains makeup two-thirds of Korea, but this one stands out. Paektusan ("Ever White Mountain") sits on the border with Manchuria, the Yalu and Tumen rivers originating in it to form the country's border. It's a dead volcano with a huge crater called Chonji ("Celestial Lake") on top of it. Paektusan has tremendous symbolism for Koreans, as this was the seat of the first Korean kingdom 5,000 years ago. This was a paradise for shamans and talisleggers alike, until Halley's Comet turned the whole area into a trap with hostile spirits and shapeshifters roaming the mountain—I still have yet to hear of anyone coming back from there.

• Don't worry, you will.
• Voice of the Ghost

MONGOLIA

Population: 6,300,000 (Mongol 83%, Other 17%)
Major Languages: Mongol (90%), Chinese (45%), Russian (39%), English (11%)
Major Religions: Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism (80%)

• Most of you probably equate Mongolia with yaks and primitive nomads. Our friend Mazaalai is here to reinforce that, but he slips in some good paydata to make it more interesting than you'd expect.
• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:48:08 (PST)

by Mazaalai

Hello, friends.

Cross Mongolia and you're as likely to run into the wild creatures that live in the steppes and deserts as you are to find a human being. Still, the Mongols are proud of the nation they have built. Inner and Outer Mongolia are united after five centuries of Chinese rule, and the Awakening helped move Mongolia away from poverty. Mongols have embraced the Sixth World and all its possibilities to build a brighter future.

THE MONGOLS

Magic is a way of life both for steppe nomads and city dwellers. Nomadic clans have revived ancient shamanic rites; ritual drums once again summon the spirits of the four sacred mountains to protect the nomads' herds from the cold winters. The guardian spirits of the *ovoo* stone mounds listen to and answer travelers' prayers after years of silence. Free spirits are worshipped side by side with Buddha, and some have taken entire clans under their protection. So even with less technology, modern nomads live far better than their ancestors of the Fifth World.

• Less tech? Most clans have enough weapons to defeat your typical Russian smuggler gang or Turkic raiding party. Their combination of magic and firepower is quite deadly.
• Dmitri

• You mean the smuggler clans. They need the firepower; the borders with Russia and the Chinese states are well-guarded and the guards tend to shoot Mongols on sight.
• Finis

• Of course, most nomads aren't smugglers and are friendly to travelers; just make sure you don't offend them.
• Kiku

But it's in the cities that you can really feel the magic pulse. Walk the streets of Urga, once called Ulan Bator, and you'll see shamans selling their magic and foretelling your future while they shiver and foam. You'll also see many Vajrayana Buddhist monks. Most of them are experienced mages, and their constant presence shows the power the Living Buddha has over Mongolia.

The Living Buddha, or *Bogd Khan*, is the third religious figure in the Vajrayana Buddhist hierarchy, after the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama (Vajrayana Buddhism is also known as Tibetan Buddhism). Traditionally he lived in Mongolia, but when his eighth reincarnation died in 1924, the ninth wasn't found. This situation changed dramatically when Tibet retreated behind the Cloud. Feeling abandoned by the Dalai Lama, Mongol monks frantically searched for the tenth Living Buddha, and when he was found in 2015 he quickly became Mongolia's religious leader.

Nowadays, the eleventh Living Buddha rules silently from his winter palace in Urga. He possesses no official political power, but the Mongolian government is weak, while the monks have a temple in every town. This brings many visitors to the winter palace, including government officials, corp execs, and, if the rumors are correct, Tibetan monks looking for the sixteenth Dalai Lama.

• So the Living Buddha has been in touch with Tibet all these years? I bet a lot of people want to get their hands on what he knows…
• Kiku

» You're probably right. Koshiro Ishiyama, one of Renraku's most ruthless troubleshooters, was spotted in Urga two weeks ago. Renraku never got over the Aneki affair, did they?
» Finis

» C'mon, chummers, skip that. The only good reason to visit Urga is the talismongers. They can get you stuff like those weird Evenk mirrors or magical jade from the Gobi Desert. You can't find them anywhere else in the civilized world, at least not this cheap.
» Xunga XL

Mongols are also friendly to metahumans, which isn't surprising since orks make up 23 percent of the population. Recently, ork rockers from North America began to make an impact in Urga's tent suburbs, and now traditional monks and shamans walk side by side with young orks speaking Or'zet slang and listening to "orxploitation" music. Local "tusker rockers" like Tchoi Khan and the Mongolorks are making waves outside Mongolia; in return, ork rights groups like the O.R.C. are paying more attention to the Mongol ork community.

» Mongolia is the best chance we orks have of getting some respect in this world. If elves have their homelands, why not us?
» ORCin Man

THE CORPS

Beyond Urga, Mongolia is owned either by nomads or foreign corporations. You'll find a number of industrial and mining towns scattered throughout the steppe, usually owing their existence (and their loyalty) to Yamatetsu or Eastern Tiger. Their main assets are the oil and natural gas reserves of the Gobi Desert.

Yamatetsu's position in Mongolia grew a lot stronger when the corp moved to Vladivostok. They have recently begun building a trans-Mongolian railway to link Vladivostok with Lanzhou in Gansu, where it'll meet the New Silk Road. However, work has all but stopped due to constant sabotage, coupled with a heavy dose of bad weather. The most likely culprit for the sabotage is Saeder-Krupp; they certainly don't want any more competition in Turkestan and the Middle East, and they've been hiring runners to operate in Mongolia.

» Ruhrmetall is also hiring runners to sabotage this project. A trans-Mongolian link in Lanzhou would make it a transport hub as big as Tashkent, and Yamatetsu wouldn't leave the city in their hands, would they?
» Finis

» No one is listening to the shamans' advice. The spirits of the sky will not allow this taint to cross their domains.
» Mopa

Yamatetsu has also recently begun a survey of the steppes west of Urga, in cooperation with Wuxing. They're following a similar operation launched by Renraku three months ago, and they seem to be in a hurry to catch up (both corps seem to be operating in a mirror image of their recent operations in the Taklimakan Desert). No one knows much about the real goals of this survey except that the Atlantean Foundation is watching closely, and that its focus is the ruins of ancient Karakorum. My friends with the nomads have reported a few firefights in the city, and the archaeological camp from the University of Urga is gone. I'm still trying to find out what's going on, but I'll keep you posted.

» Karakorum was the capital of Genghis Khan, right? It probably sits over some source of power. I mean, why would a guy who conquered China keep his throne in the middle of the Mongolian steppe?
» Conspir-I-see

» Perhaps because he was the emperor of Mongolia?
» Skeptic

» Give him a break, Skep, he might be on to something. The ruins of Karakorum have a weird effect on visitors. There was a Russian general, Roman Fiodorovich von Ungern-Sternberg, who visited the place in 1911. A few years later he converted to Buddhism, started calling himself Ungern Khan and decided to restore the Mongol empire. He even raised a rag-tag cavalry division and invaded the Soviet Union. Whatever he found must have been powerful!
» Elijah

» Ungern Khan was shot by the Soviets in 1921, so even if he found something, it was probably worthless. And whatever he found is probably hidden away in the Kremlin, not in some ancient ruins.
» Skeptic

OCEANIA

» "What's Oceania got to do with Asia?" I hear you chorus. Well, chummers, this vast realm of H_2O is all that stands between many freelance trade entrepreneurs here in Seattle and lucrative payoffs throughout Asia. Looking for the lowdown on Oceania's opportunities, we got in touch with our contacts at the Morgue, who eventually sent us this compilation. Howie's a resident South Seas rigger-cum-reprobate who's been trawling paradise's backwaters for decades, and reputedly, a "bloke who knows his stuff." He'll give us a peek at what passes for the shadows beneath the glare of a tropical sun. Bon voyage!
» Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:51:27 (PST)

by Howard Blackstone

Strewth, the things I end up doing for a bet. Still, Tiger-lilly won that hand fair dinkum. So, whilst Darlene's getting repainted, I guess I can spare some time to give you pinkos a crash-course in how not to get your sprawl-coddled backsides buggered eight ways to Sunday whilst paddling willy-nilly around Oceania's wopwops.

ISLANDS ON THE EDGE OF TOMORROW

Alaska to Antarctica, the Orient to Amazonia, and Aztlan to Australia—the Pacific Ocean is our planet's most challenging environment. Larger than every continent combined, it's truly a wild frontier. Some folks say living out here's a primal existence, but me, I think of it as the last remaining bastion of freedom. With a good boat you can go where you want, when you like. No barriers, no rush, no worries.

• Doesn't sound too bad? Wait until you're stuck out there with nothing but endless sky above and fathomless deep below. Its a different reality when the nearest solid land is a thousand leagues down and everything you've grown accustomed to is days away across the horizon—civilization, fresh supplies, human contact, the rat-race and the sprawls that spawned it.
• Landlubber

• Remember this is wilderness through and through. Prioritize your needs, pack the appropriate gear, and always, always keep your basic survival tools at hand: a knife, medkit, emergency rations and water bottle. Acquiring a large-capacity canteen with an integral water-filter/purifier is also recommended—even empty they're decent buoyancy aids. Stocking up with broad-spectrum toxin antidotes and disease precautions is another wise decision
• Argent

• Survival Rule One = Knowledge. Learn about your environment: the weather, the ocean tides and currents, the terrain, its geology and ecosystems that sustain life—because they'll sustain yours if you get stranded. Oh, and knowing how to swim wouldn't be a bad thing, either.
• Solly

Scattered across this huge watery expanse are thousands of volcanic islands, sandy atolls and coral reefs. These are the life rafts of metahumanity that comprise Oceania's member-nations—not to mention the numerous megacorporate aquacologies and mining rigs. Most are uninhabited specks of sand, nothing more than coconut palms and a lagoon that offers little but a shipwrecked sailor's salvation. The rest consist of rugged islands inhabited by semi-tribal family communities, where you can refit, refuel and resupply, or just seek refuge from the elements and those frisky maritime critters.

• The only frisky marine life you encounter around here are the jarheads on shore leave.
• Mamma Guam

Having your own boat is one thing. Successfully navigating your way about and avoiding danger is another. Even with SOTA satnav and cascading GPS chart updates you should never wholly rely upon any autopilot. There'll be occasions when you need to do stuff without techno-toys around: sea conditions change rapidly, with storms often manifesting due to pesky spirits or paranormal phenomenan. Not quite as bad as the Outback, but I've yet to discover the dogbrain that effectively outmaneuvers pirates on treacherous shoals. Speaking of which: keep your guns oiled, cleaned and protected—salt, sand and moisture are a firearm's worst enemy. The same goes for other essential pieces of gear, particularly electronics.

• Thus, cranial cyberdecks come into their own. Unfortunately, the toughest obstacle facing Oceania's deckers is finding a jackpoint! Matrix infrastructure exists primarily on large islands, and much of it is prehistoric. Corporate enclaves have better facilities but accessing them presents a challenge.
• Tigerlilly

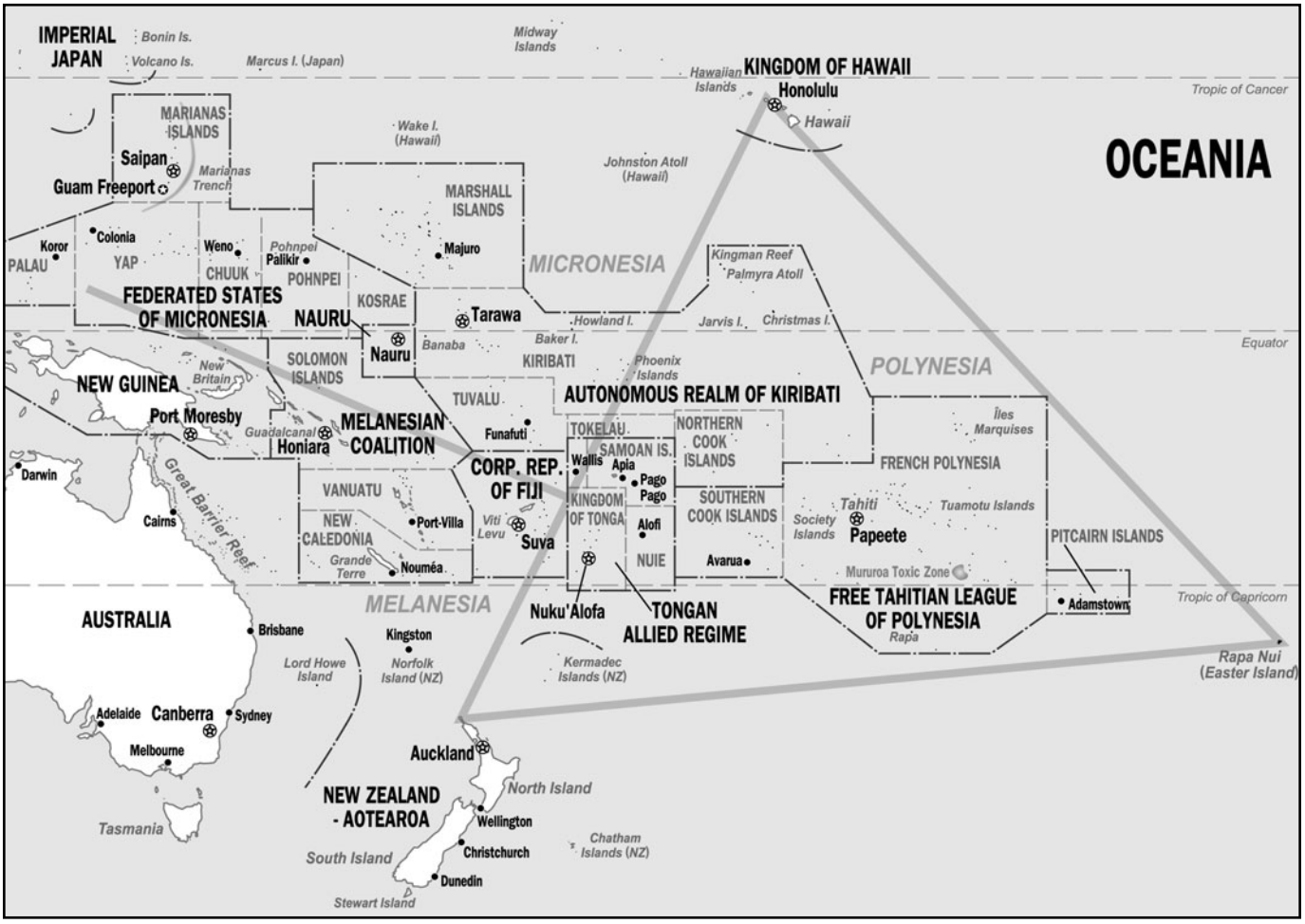
• Cyberware is also scarce. Prevalent attitudes are against personal enhancement technologies as they reduce a person's mana. Few clinics are available for repairs and many implants are detrimental in water. Chrome flashes attract predators, whereas dermal armor, bone lacing and cyberlimbs reduce buoyancy severely. Designer biosculpt jobs, sunblock genetech and ultraviolet-resistant eye covers are commonplace around Hawai'ian beaches, though, and bioware is readily available in New Zealand.
• Shard

If you expect Oceania to be a pristine tropical paradise, with crystal-clear waters lapping against white-sand beaches fringed with coconut palms, then you'll not be disappointed. Over millennia, volcanic castaways have drifted from their prolific fiery origins, gradually eroding away to become idyllic spots of tranquility. Well, until "civilization" screwed them over, they were. Blackbirding, missionaries, Western diseases, corporate greed, war, nuclear testing, the Awakening and global warming have all made their mark—and made it hard.

Life on the Ocean Waves

It's worth noting that pretty much all of Oceania's native inhabitants originated in Asia and traveled eastwards—flora, fauna, human and island alike. Biodiversity correspondingly dwindles the further east you go. Not only do island ecosystems lead to the adaptive evolution of species that can't fly or swim away, but they isolate the gene pool too. This explains the profusion of single-race tribes within the region. Oceania also displays an abnormally high ratio of goblinized natives: orks are commonplace in Polynesian cultures, whereas trolls are the predominant metatype among the Maori. Aside from the Hawai'ian *menehune* variant, dwarfs are more frequently encountered in Melanesia. And of particular note are the elusive *kakamoras* who dwell throughout the Solomon Islands. Strangely enough, the few elves out here are generally of European ancestral legacy, although New Zealand has a large dryad population in South Island.

• Oceania registered a significantly high rate of Class 2 SURGE traits, spawning rumors of fish-people dwelling in the Marquesas Islands.
• Cthu Lou



Scurvy Dogs

You can bet your arse there are pirates out here. Wherever there's water you'll find 'em, and thriving alongside 'em are the major smuggler rings.

These days the **Filipino Huk** are mostly too busy getting things sorted out at home, now that the nips have moved back home. More smugglers than pirates, they specialize in people transit.

» These are the folks to talk to if you need to get metahumans out of Yomi or Japan. No questions asked, and they won't geek you and take your stuff once you get offshore.
» Sargasso

The **Cutty Sharks** are nasty customers. These blokes from Nauru are backed by the Azzies, and when I say they like to play games with their hostages, I'm not talking about canasta.

» A chummer of mine lost some mates to this outfit. Apparently nobody told the Sharks that keel-hauling went out of style years ago.
» Pearl Squirrel

The Redbacks are a smuggling group that operates across most of Oceania. Streamlined, organized and very good at what they do, they use an extensive network of abandoned World War II bases and airfields. They get their name from their leader, an Aussie ex-SAS bloke.

» Rumor has it these chummers located a cache of WWII data on Johnson Atoll that the Crash missed—hence their established routes.
» Sea Snake

MELANESIA: THE "BLACK ISLANDS"

Population: 1,913,823

Major Languages: Melanesian Dialects (79%), English (52%), Hindi (14%), French (10%)

Major Religions: Christianity (75%), Hinduism (15%), Pacific Paganism (7%), Islam (3%)

Stuck at the arse-end of Indonesia, Melanesia was the first stepping stone toward Oceania's colonization. These days it's mainly in the pockets of the corps and beholden to tourism. Even so, it's the most organized, internationally renowned, and easiest-to-access group in the South Seas.

Corporate Republic of Fiji (Fiji and Futuna)

This would be a great place to visit, with luxury resorts that begin at hedonistic and work their way up to downright decadent—except for the fact that the folks there don't take too kindly to non-natives. There's a large corp presence here, including several megacorp arcologies, but all the land (including private islands) is leased, since it's illegal for non-natives to own land. Culture-wise Fiji is Melanesian, but Polynesian influence is evident.

» Nadi-Suva, the capital city, is the biggest urban area in Oceania. With the strong corp presence, this is a good place to pick up some biz.
» Short Islander

Melanesian Coalition
(New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu)

This continental archipelago split from the Australian continent yonks ago. It's the highest, largest and most biodiverse island chain out here, with dense rainforest, mangrove swamps, steep mountain ranges and frequent volcanic activity. It's richest in natural resources too, which the megacorps haven't failed to notice. It's so isolated that there's nobody to regulate the oil-drilling, strip-mining and timber-felling operations.

» Or to witness the slaughter of entire villages by "epidemics" (read: biowarfare agents) when they object to the rape of their habitat.
» Deep Green

» New Caledonia houses the world's second-largest barrier reef, but erosion run-offs are destroying its abundant ecosystem. Now I feel unwelcome, like an intruder, and the spirits leave my calls unheeded.
» Ti-Va-Ouere

» I've heard reports of Awakened shark packs hunting metahumans around Vanuatu. Maybe it's connected with the native shark-riding traditions?
» Shamrock

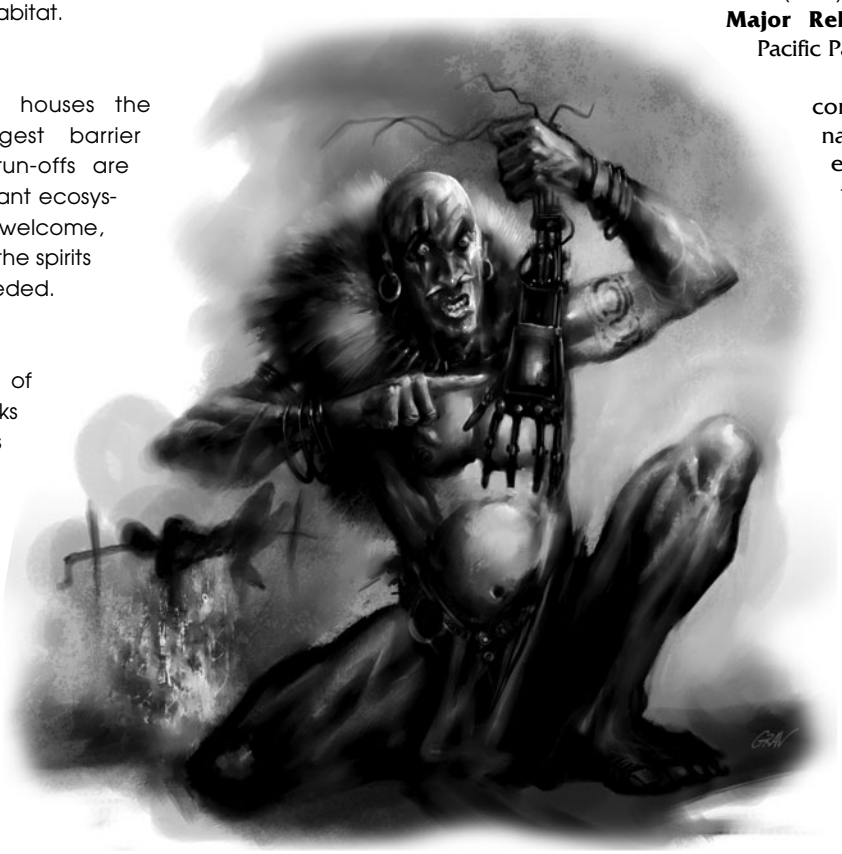
Europeans named Melanesia after the indigenous, dark-skinned people who are related to Oz's aborigines. Adverse terrain fragmented these tribes and made them xenophobic toward outsiders. Explorers discovered this to their detriment and dubbed the region the "Savage Isles" due to the natives' preoccupation with cannibalism, headhunting and ritual human sacrifice. This kept the missionaries at bay quite nicely, for a time, and also forged a deeply traditional society with the most diverse selection of languages you'll ever hear. Following their strong sense of *kastom*, over three hundred distinct languages are still spoken today, which is the essence of *wontok*.

» "One-Talk" tradition unites people who share the same local dialect with tight bonds of tribal loyalty. Akin to giri or blood-brotherhood, this embodies communal obligation, conferring responsibilities and fraternal assistance between members wherever they may meet.
» Shard

» Sounds like any two-bit gang talking tough in cityspeak lingo or the endemic, self-rubbing, nepotistic, corper co-operative to me. Loyalty can always be bought and discarded afterwards.
» Cynic

MICRONESIA: THE "SMALL ISLANDS"
Population: 571,000
Major Languages: English (83%), Micronesian Dialects (66%), Japanese (19%)
Major Religions: Christianity (84%), Pacific Paganism (13%), Shinto (2%)

Patrolled by numerous corporate and governmental navies (particularly Japan) and exploited by pirates (notably the Huk), these islands' existence on the fringe of the civilized world make them an ideal haven for smugglers. A place of great natural beauty and abundant resources, Micronesia often finds itself the site of sudden invasive battles between rivals—megacorps, governments, freelancers and even local tribes with differing points of view.



Autonomous Realm of Kiribati

Kiribati includes the Gilbert, Line, Marshall, Northern Cook and Phoenix Islands, as well as Tokelau and Tuvalu (among others). Kirabati's trying to become more

high tech these days without sacrificing their harmony with the natural environment—no easy trick, but they're pulling it off. The first of the Oceanic nations to get together and come up with a plan to avoid being evicted by rising sea levels, they pulled in resources from their various members to set up huge aqua-arcologies, semi-submerged arkoblocks similar to what Proteus AG has set up. These floating atolls ply the ocean, following nutrient-rich currents. They use enclosed aquaculture pens to raise schools of fish in the deep waters, which they trade upon arrival at established market zones. These slags might sound like tempting targets for pirates—not to mention the draw of their swimming larders for the ocean's predators—but the *tohunga* shamans onboard are known to be absolutely wicked when it comes to wrangling spirits.

» Those arks range from floating cities of lashed-together boats to revamped supertankers to one or two floating arcologies—though any semblance of cleanliness or high tech on these arks was sold off or broken a long time ago.
» Nautilus

» Kiribati's natives have good business and financial savvy—the realm's funding comes from diverse sources including financial manipulation, tax havens, reparation payments from the old U.S. nuclear testing and business success due to the fact that the corps overlooked the area for a long time.
» The Chromed Accountant

Confederated States of Micronesia (Caroline and Marianas Islands)

If you're looking to do the tourist thing on the cheap, you could do worse than this area—you can get cheaper package deals here than the more exclusive resort complexes like Fiji. Consisting of the islands of Chuuk, Kosrae, Palau, Pohnpei and Yap, the area integrated in the early 2020s to resist Japanese expansion. It's now known as a refugee station for metahumans—especially escapees from Yomi Island.

» A lot of rumors float around about strange things in Micronesia's waters. Everything from merrow tribes colonizing Palau's Rock Islands and forming a council to coordinate defense of their hunting territories, to sightings of some large, bioluminescent, reptilian thing living down in the Marianas Trench.
» Credeiki

Guam Freeport

General Saito wasn't the first soldier to disobey orders, and I doubt he'll be the last. Admiral Wallis did exactly that back in the thirties when the good old UCAS was up to its neck in secession turmoil. When the brass sounded the Pacific retreat, he and his supporters remained to defend the place they had come to call home, giving them time to establish local allies and entrench themselves upon the island. Today, Guam is *the* port of call for adventurous backpackers, megacorp shipping firms and scientific research vessels, as well as practically every free trader, smuggler, pirate and lowlife mercenary to paddle the Pacific—and I wouldn't want it any other way.

» Just y'all play nice now, y'hear?
» Admiral Wallis

» Admiral Wallis hails from Texas and you can bet your bottom nuyen that his "unauthorized presence" is routinely overlooked by the CAS military command. The strategic advantage of a friendly berth that monitors vital shipping lanes is well worth the odd "mislaid" batch of supplies.
» Nemo

» How else can the CAS Navy accost Azzie interests in the Pacific?
» Southern Belle

Narau Protectorate

This area's best known as an Aztechnology penal colony, but there's more to it than that. You'll find a lot of Shibata-Azzie space launches lifting off here, since it's bang on the equator. Aztechnology also maintains an underwater naval base here, and is reputedly involved in underwater resource extraction, though exactly what they're digging up down there is anyone's guess.

» Universal Omnitech has transferred significant resources here in the past few years including neural network specialists and a cadre of mages skilled in cybermancy. Rumors abound of twisted experiments performed on prisoners and paracritters alike.
» Beowulf

» Gengineered cybersharks with frickin' lasers attached to their heads?
» Dr. Evil

» The Azzies are digging something deep underwater—pockets of rare gases as I heard—and they don't hesitate to use prison manpower. The weirdest thing is that I swear I saw some Wuxing corporate wujens collaborating—or spying?—with the excavation preparations.
» Deep Six

POLYNESIA: THE "MANY ISLANDS"

Population: 685,322
Major Languages: Polynesian Dialects (69%), English (56%), French (42%)
Major Religions: Christianity (84%), Pacific Paganism (8%), Buddhism (8%)

This place has a bloody apt name—hundreds of isles exist inside a rough triangle between Easter Island, New Zealand and Hawai'i. The remotest of the Pacific islands and the furthest from unwelcome interference, it's an ideal location for quiet research outposts and any other hush-hush projects you'd prefer not to have discovered.

» Don't venture out without good intel, though—some of the smaller islands are popular atomic testing sites. On the other hand, the variety of peculiar mutated critters you can find

around there make them ideal spots for field-testing new weapons.
• Rabid

• There are frequent reports and signs of mana storm activity around some of these remote, unnamed islands. Nobody's wanted to risk getting too close so far to find out what it's all about.
• Deep Six

Kingdom of Tonga

Awhile back, the tribal chieftains of the Nuie, Samoan, Tongan and Wallis islands formed an alliance to defend against corp incursions in neighboring Fiji, and so far that's been working out well for them. They maintain good relations with other Oceanic nations looking for independence against outside influences, but they've got a well-trained military to make sure nobody takes advantage of them. The king allows the megas to set up limited operations in the area in exchange for the latest goodies—especially weapons.

• If you're smuggling anything in the area, they've got good connections and refuel/refit operations. Ares and Federated Boeing gear are easy to score.
• Errant Knight

Free Tahitian League of Polynesia

Left in the lurch when the French pulled out of the area earlier in the century, "French" Polynesia, Pitcairn and the Southern Cook islands tried to cobble themselves together in the face of climatic changes and megacorp exploitation. Still scattered and divided for the most part, they've got good ties with Hawai'i and New Zealand, and ANZAC vessels often patrol the area. They're getting to be a desirable tourist destination—not as hot as Fiji or Hawai'i, but getting there.

• Full independence was negotiated during the "scandal years" that preceded the 2029 military coup in France. The French politicos literally sold the archipelago, island by island, to the nascent megacorps and their local cronies. The French army didn't leave the area completely, though. The generals in Paris firmly opposed a complete withdrawal from this strategic zone, and when Tahiti got its independence, they ensured that the military bases on this island (Taravao, Arue, Faaa and Fare Ute) remain French territory enclaves.
• Fleur-de-Lys

• Free Tahiti, ah! That's a joke! With four army settlements on the island, Papeete looks like a besieged capital. Let's get rid of the French and cut the leash once and for all!
• Vahine Bazooka

• A lot of eco cells have training camps here—they're too scattered for intensive satellite surveillance. The government tends to look the other way as long as they don't cause too much trouble.
• Deep Green

• And because many of the cells in question have ties to Amazonia. Would you want to argue with Hualpa?
• Te Ava'e

Moruroa Toxic Zone

I wouldn't recommend this as the spot for your next tropical vacation. As the name implies, the place is full of fallout and mutated local wildlife left over from French nuclear testing, not to mention periodic toxic typhoons that make your typical sprawl-based acid rain look like a spring shower. The local shamans are working on the problem along with some eco-warrior types from New Zealand, but they haven't had much success as yet.

• I was lucky to get out of there alive—our boat got attacked by some kind of fragged-off sea serpent and nearly capsized. It was dark so we didn't get a good look, but I've never seen anything like it before or since, and I've sailed more seas than I can count.
• Dread Naut

• Fraggin' great. How long before some Awakened monster evolves into a nasty, giant mutant and stomps across Neo-Tokyo?
• Larvae

THE KINGDOM OF HAWAI'I

Population: 1,898,000 (Asian 60%, Caucasian 25%, Polynesian 10%, Other 5%)
Major Languages: English (93%), Japanese (74%), Hawai'ian (18%)
Major Religions: Christianity (33%), Shamanism (7%)

The Kingdom of Hawai'i is a place of contradiction and conflict. On the surface it looks like most people's definition of paradise: beaches, palm trees, tourists and sun. Pull up this layer, though, and you'll find yourself in the midst of an ongoing struggle between numerous forces. Literally torn between the East (the Yakuza, Japan and the great dragon Ryumyo) and the West (the UCAS, Kawaru-gumi and San Francisco freedomfighters), Hawai'i regularly finds itself caught in the middle while these and other factions constantly shift the balance of power.

Always a game of politics and powermongering, Hawai'i's current situation is heating up. Here's a quick rundown on some of the places and players you should know about before venturing into this land of sun and surf.

Oahu is home to Hawai'i's capital city, Honolulu, which an overwhelming majority of the island's inhabitants call home. These days the area is best known as a popular tourist destination for Japanese salarymen, who value the safe environment of Waikiki Beach with its luxury hotels and resort complexes.

Hawai'i is the place to go if stargazing is your thing. *Mauna Kea*, the highest summit in the kingdom, boasts a dozen SOTA observatories, taking advantage of the high altitude, clear skies and lack of light pollution to get the best possible look at what's out there.

• This place was a Mecca for comet-watchers back in 2061. The clinics in the area did good business treating altitude sickness—Mauna Kea's almost 4,300 meters.
• Ad Astra

If you get your fun a little closer to the earth, the Hawai'i' Volcanoes National Park houses Kilauea, the most active volcano on the planet, along with five other vents.

Maui is where you'll find *Haleakala* (House of the Sun) National Park and the world's largest dormant volcano.

•The Haleakala crater is believed to be some kind of energy vortex, a natural power point for cosmic and magnetic forces. Whether that's true or not, it's a fact that the Hawai'ian kahunas consider it a spiritual center.
• Mother Goose

• Oh, I believe it. I'm about as magical as a rock and even I felt something at Haleakala. Our mage called it "a sense of omnipresent power." For me, it just felt like a place you did not want to frag with.
• Prime Runner

The **megacorps** have a heavy presence in Hawai'i—partly in exchange for their assistance when the kingdom sought independence, and partly due to some of the most lax trade restrictions anywhere in the world. The Japanacorps are top dog, of course—particularly Monobe, MCT, Sony and Yokogowa—though Yamatetsu continues to kick sand in their faces here on a regular basis.

The balance of power within Hawai'i is strangely interlocked—so many factions are pulling in so many ways that it somehow manages to balance out, with no one gaining ground—much to **King Kamehameha VI's** relief. Though Hawai'i is dependent on Japanese business and support, Yamatetsu serves as a foil to Japanese domination, supported by the king and the Kawaru-gumi Yakuza faction.

• The metahuman Kawaru-gumi are transplanted from Valdivostok—thanks to Yamatetsu—and work hard to counter the influence of the traditional (read: racist) Japanese Yakuza

factions here. They even have a female oyabun here, Megumi Aoi, which really makes the other gumi squirm.
• Yakkity-Yak

• Saito has agents looking to make inroads into Hawai'i as well, and they've joined forces with MCT and the Japanese Yaks to cook something up.
• Neon Rose

King Kamehameha VI faces many challenge to his throne, including an ongoing terrorist campaign from **ALOHA** (Army for the Liberation of Hawai'i). Rumor has it that the dragon **Naheka** runs ALOHA on behalf of his master Ryumyo, but Kamehameha knows that Naheka has plenty of other schemes in place to undermine his authority, and is waiting for the bell to toll.

AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND
Population: 4,320,000
Major Languages: English (98%), Maori (42%), Japanese (5%)
Major Religions: Christianity (58%), Pacific Paganism (22%)

Think New Zealand and one stereotype immediately stands out from the crowd—environmentalism. Aotearoa, the largest archipelago on the planet, is globally hailed as the original clean, green eco-machine and the kiwi government sincerely advocates environmental awareness and renewable resource management. The Department of Conservation (DoC) maintains strict policies toward agricultural practices, eco-management, sustainable energy production and wildlife protection. They've shown that with time and effort it is possible to live in harmony with our planet.

Dual Nationalities

Split in twain with several satellite cultures, New Zealand's society is a distinct reflection of its geography. The dominance of the *pakeha* (non-indigenous New Zealanders) is gradually being eroded by Maori population growth, and metahuman refugees from Asia have established numerous cultural enclaves within the nation.

The Maori discovered "Aotearoa" about a thousand years back whilst seeking to escape overcrowding in Polynesia. They promptly settled the uninhabited North and South islands, gradually flourished into an agricultural society and then fought between themselves when land and resources started to get scarce again. This led them to develop a highly ritualized warrior society that remains culturally evident today, minus the cannibalism.

Maori tribes take their heritage very seriously. Genealogy is incredibly sacred to them as it defines an individual's social status and, more importantly, *mana.* Since before the white fella's arrival, each tribe could trace its roots back to the *waka* they arrived in and were named after that giant migratory canoe. Some still exist today—being reservoirs of a tribe's mana, they are extremely well guarded and subject to *tapu* status ("taboo/sacre,") meaning they may not be touched by human hands.

• Maori warriors dealt with NZ's Universal Brotherhood hives. They took extreme offense at the bugs' desecration of their ancestral lines. Stick a horde of Maori troll warrior adepts with weapon foci and a severe mad-on, and it's bug-busting time.
• Eighteen-Twelve

• Many have since formed into mercenary groups who hire out their specialized skills around the globe via Combat, Inc. They're renowned as spirit-busters extraordinaire and are routinely assigned to deal with spirit and shedim infestations.
• Horopito

Land of the Long White Cloud

Holding the majority of NZ's population, North Island is Aotearoa's political epicenter and the cradle of Maori cultural heritage. Comprised of forests, mountains and waterways, its temperate-tropical climate is ideal for fruit farming and viniculture, as well as tourism.

• New Zealand's residents enjoy more fresh natural produce than most other places in the world. Remarkably few dangerous critters, too—no native snakes, for example.
• Doc Savage

Following a joint decision, the *pakeha* Cabinet, led by current Prime Minister Ian George, the and newly empowered Maori Tribal Council relocated the government seat, so **Auckland** is the capital once again. Built upon a thin isthmus that separates the Tasman Sea from the Pacific Ocean, its twin natural harbors have earned it the title "City of Sails." Accommodating half NZ's population and most of its manufacturing industry, it's the largest city in Oceania and *the* gateway to the South Pacific. Aside from that, it's the heart of DoC administration, and the World Wildlife Fund's shiny new Devonport HQ is located across the harbor. Nestled into North Island's southernmost tip is the city of **Wellington:** chock full of corporate skyscrapers and micro-arcologies, it remains NZ's financial and business center. Only a third of Auckland's size, it nevertheless retains a reputation for wealth and the finer arts.

• Armando DeLuca, head of the local WWF branch, loves animals far more than his fellow metahumans. He'll use any means necessary to protect endangered species, which often puts him at odds with Elise Jackson, the much more moderate DoC director.
• Z-lander

South Island is Aotearoa's larder, foremost a producer of crops and livestock. The Southern Alps dominate its entire length, separating lush, verdant rainforests from the east's drier, leeward plains. Mighty glaciers crawl from snowy peaks, whilst whitewater rivers rush toward the sea. As the kiwi's environmental jewel, it contains many conservation sanctuaries and national parklands, including spectacular Milford Sound—the alleged haunt of an elusive *taniwha* (a legendary sea serpent). The majestic landscape and NZ's lack of dangerous critters have created an international playground for adventurous

outdoors types who tramp, ski, raft, dive, climb and bungee jump their vacations away here.

» The perfect premise for extractions or bodyguard details.
» Blank

Christchurch, "The Garden City," rests amidst Canterbury's agricultural farmlands on the Pacific coast and is NZ's second main destination for international air-travelers, predominantly tourists. However, its quaint and peaceful appearance innocuously harbors several laboratories and think tanks specializing in SOTA bio/genetech research.

Lurking off NZ's southern coastline is Stewart Island, a DoC wildlife sanctuary like the uninhabited Subantarctic Island Groups (Antipodes, Auckland, Bounty, Campbell and the Snares) and the Ross Dependency in Antarctica. As part of Aotearoa's jurisdiction, ANZAC forces patrol these regions to enforce environmental laws and prevent poaching. Major naval bases on the Chathams, Norfolk and Pitcairn Islands have also been established to monitor border traffic and protect commercial shipping from piracy.

» Kermadec Marine Reserve recently became the site of ongoing clashes between Japanese fishing vessels and kiwi eco-activists. Things escalated last month when eco-saboteurs sank one of the two JIS missile cruiser sent to intervene.
» Atamarama

» If you believe the rumors, the "ecoteurs" had brand new SOTA gear, courtesy of the ANZAC's brass.
» Eighteen-Twelve

» Don't look that far to find where they got their gear. Masaru doesn't have as much control over the Maori radicals and the WWF as he'd like. While both the NZ gov and the JIS try to cooperate to catch the culprits and defuse the situation, the area is becoming pretty hot to sail.
» Z-lander

Finally, no account of Aotearoa is complete without mentioning the Ring of Fire. North Island is slap-bang on a volcanic fault line running from Tongariro, straight up through Rotorua and out to Whakaari in the Bay of Plenty. Geothermal

plants harness the constant activity, which generally remains a tourist attraction rather than a danger. Minor earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, like Mt. Ngauruhoe, do happen occasionally but rarely pose significant threats and Maori *tohunga* often sense when something big is imminent.

• So, which wizwyrm controls those manalines?
• Dragonslayer

• We're 100 percent serpent free, and proud of it!
• Smaug

• "If it isn't broken—don't fix it," summarizes Lung's stance. The kiwis have harmonized their society and landscape well—without a resident guardian, however, Aotearoa remains a tempting prize.
• Tsangara

• Which is why the recent "fishing incidents" reek of MCT. After ravaging Tsimshian, this is the next move in their scaly puppetmaster's Pacific chess game.
• Kapowai

• Maori tribes consider lizards as symbols of death and misfortune, thus we scrutinize Masaru's influence on the WWF.
• Haka Hobbit

TRANSCAUCASIAN FEDERATION

Population: 15,552,000 (Azeri 45%, Georgian 25%, Armenian 20%, Others 10%)
Major Languages: Azeri (45%), Georgian (25%), Armenian (20%), Russian and Ukrainian (10%)
Major Religions: Eastern Orthodox Christianity (39%), Shi'ia Islam (25%), Zoroastrianism (16%)
Major Corporate Backers: Bioenergetica Ukraine, Zeta-ImpChem
Major Underworld Players: Vory, Armenian *Maffiya*

• Transcaucasia is a little understood and increasingly important part of the world where oil, Islam and the corps converge to create havoc. After spending years maneuvering in the Caspian's draughty capitals, our guide to the Caucasus, Mr. Aghasi, is now a soft-spoken Zoroastrian mage who has served the Iranian Ayatollah and Georgian President. Aghasi has crisscrossed the Caucasus region, meeting oil barons, politicians and warlords, and the fact that he's survived it all means he's worth giving a listen to.
• Captain Chaos
Transmitted: 02 April 2064 at 7:53:35 (PST)

by Mr. Aghasi

The modern history of Transcaucasia begins shortly after the Awakening, when the republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan saw thousands of metahumans and non-Muslim refugees arrive, fleeing persecution from Islamic countries and rising fundamentalism. A decade later, the Alliance for Allah invaded the Caucasus and reached Russian borders in Chechnya and Dagestan.

• The metas that had just fled the fundamentalists were none too pleased to see them again, and many of them organized pockets of resistance. Other metas found the reborn Zoroastrian cult appealing and signed up.
• Stan

Ukraine used the war on the AfA as an excuse for a massive military build-up in Istanbul and the Caucasus, altering power equations in the region. The war served as a pretext to further Bioenergetica Ukraine's oil interests in the Caspian, and the Ukraine moved far ahead of its sometime rival, Russia, in grabbing power in the Caucasus.

After the Euro Wars, the Caucasus countries struggled to reinvent themselves as nations, and they formed the Transcaucasian Federation to help resurrect their collapsed economies. In the cities there was a thirst for modernity and a hunger to be recognized as Asian Europeans, and our emerging middle classes entertained high hopes for corporate influence. Consequently, the federation quickly became a corporate client state. As global oil consumption kept surging and many oil wells outside the Caspian neared depletion, the Transcaucasian oil industry kept expanding its share of the world market. At the same time, Zeta-ImpChem moved to compete with Fatima, hoping to contain S-K's influence and tighten the noose around Yamatetsu.

As the Caspian oil supply grew increasingly important, pipeline routes to ship oil from the landlocked region to seaports became sources of bloody conflicts. Russia, still regarding itself as imperial overlord of its former colonies, tried to keep the new extraterritorial powers at arm's length by promoting pipeline routes through its territory, while the corps championed pipelines that would circumvent both Russia and Iran. BU and Z-IC tried to outsmart S-K by embarking on a joint venture to build pipelines running through Azerbaijan and neighboring Georgia to the Black Sea, hoping to skirt S-K territory while completing their route first.

• All this maneuvering, and all the blood spilled from it, should make it clear why the Caucasus people often call oil "the devil's tears."
• Stan

• The whole situation gets even worse when you add the growing power of the great dragon Aden to the equation, along with the constant worry that radical Islamic countries could reignite another jihad.
• Babylon

The largest ethnic group in the federation's population is the Azeri, a Turkic-speaking, Shiite Muslim people of Persian culture. Many of these Azeri are relatively late converts who tend to wear their religion lightly and tolerantly. The great majority shares the detestation of Islamic extremism and has cause to fear it. They also accept increased corporate involve-

ment in their country, hoping some corp riches will eventually seep down through the entire populace. It hasn't happened yet.

THE CASPIAN SEA

Between Europe and Asia is the Caspian Sea, the biggest lake on the planet. Bordered by Russia, Turkestan, Iran and Azerbaijan, the sea has the world's largest remaining oil reserves beneath it. The four surrounding countries, along with S-K, Yamatetsu, BU and Z-IC, all have heavy interest in the region, jockeying back and forth to see who can get their hands on the most oil and decide what pipelines will carry it where. On paper, the situation between the corps is more stable than the international setup, as the corps have all signed territorial agreements while the nations continue to argue heatedly over who controls what land. The routing of pipelines, though, still causes major disputes, with Russia and Yamatetsu trying to push the oil north to their territories, Iran hoping it flows south and Bioenergetica Ukraine and Zeta-ImpChem putting as much oil as they can into the pipes heading west to the Black Sea.

» There's enough fighting going on that the corps have hired outside help, and mercenary outfits from Istanbul and parts beyond are flocking to the area. The only way things are going to calm down is if all four nations bordering the Caspian agree to an oil production deal, and getting the four of them to see the same way is like getting your eyes to look backward and forward at the same time.
» Big Tzar

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is presently the largest oil producer in the Caspian, thanks in part to the economic and technological assistance provided by the joint venture of Bioenergetica Ukraine and Zeta-ImpChem. As long as Azerbaijan dances to their tune, the corps will keep the partnership alive.

» Wherever ZIC has business, you can bet there are UGB agents around. In fact, the Russian foreign operations' head, Boris Petuchkin, is rumored to have a base in Baky.
» BigTzar

» Don't forget the agents of Yamatetsu, known as Yuris in Transcaucasia. I did a job for a Yuri once, and even though he was pretty good at covering for the people above him, I suspected the whole thing was tied to a deal between Sonia Mikhalina and the Zoroastrian Order.
» Stan

The largest oil center in the Caspian, the city of Baky is part museum and part boomtown. The balconies of nineteenth-century mansions overlook modern sprawl. The newer business section coexists with the old quarter, which features narrow, twisting streets, several mosques, a Muslim university and a bazaar. There is also a famous place of worship for the Zoroastrian Order, the Fire Temple, which has been burning a flame fueled by ancient natural gas seepage for more than 2,000 years.

The latest beneficiaries—both native and foreign—of the country's wealth glide through the city in four-wheel drives and Armanté clothes. On the other side of the economic heap are Chechen, Dagestani and Iranian minorities, scraping along in the shadows of the new money.

These days, Baky is considered an ideal training ground for intelligence agents. Cosmopolitan, corrupt, a center for arms running, dope smuggling, vice and bribery—Baky has it all. The Russian Vory, of all people, has made the seamier elements of the city slightly more palatable by applying a patina of civilization, working with the Armenian *Maffiya* to divide up the city cooperatively instead of competitively and keeping underworld activities from interfering with the development of the region's resources.

» Baky ain't easy to navigate, with about a dozen pairs of eyes watching every move you make, but it's usually worth it—the town's full of fixers and infomongers who can identify and sell any hot item you bring them. Sure, they try to rob you blind, but what fixer doesn't?
» The Ossetian Spy

» There's been a story going around about talent diggers for Atlantean and the Apep poking around Azerbaijan. They're supposedly digging for some legendary drek—Solomon's dungeon, Noah's ark, Achaemenian tombs, that sort of thing—but the growing strength of Zoroastrian mages is making life trickier for them.
» Babylon

» What do the Zoroastrians want?
» Crescent Moon

» Short answer: all good, no bad. Somewhat longer answer: there's about 100,000 Zoroastrians in the world, and they believe there's a war going on between two spiritual hosts—the good ahuras, led by Ahura Mazdah, going up against Angrha Mainyu and his evil daevas. The goal of a Zoroastrian is to purify of evil and be completely on the side of good. They've got a number of rituals to help them to that end, many of them focusing on fire, which they see as a symbol of Ahura Mazdah. As a result, ever since the Awakening, Zoroastrian mages have had special gifts with fire. They try to use their abilities in the service of good, which can be tricky if they identify you as part of the world that needs purifying. And greedy corps often fit into that category.
» Enigma

GEORGIA

The oil of the Caspian Sea isn't going to do the rest of the world much good if it can't get to major shipping lanes, which is where Georgia comes in. One set of pipelines from the Caspian leads to a Black Sea terminal at Supsa in Georgia, meaning the big corps and the surrounding nations have paid close attention to the area. Located in a mountain-ringed basin, the Georgian city of Tbilisi serves as the admin-

istrative and cultural heartland of the Transcaucasian Federation, which allows the Eastern Orthodox Church to influence the policies and destiny of the federation and oppose corp-backed politicians.

• Aghasi is not telling the whole story. Even before the Orthodox Church, the Zoroastrian Order was already pulling the strings and covering their tracks.
• Stan

• Not anymore. The Georgian and Armenian Orthodox patriarchs are now united to strengthen their congregations against the Azeri majority and any other challengers.
• The Ossetian Spy

The relationship between Georgia and big neighbor to the north is long and troubled, and Georgians still have poor diplomatic relations with Russia. The tension isn't helped much by the great strides toward prosperity Georgia has made thanks to its focus on economic liberalization. Not only has this made Georgia seem like a rich plum for Russia's picking, it's also caused some unrest among the poorer citizens of the Caucasus who see their corporate-backed rulers growing rich while they remain in deep poverty.

• Ukraine maintains a strong military base in Georgia, described as a peacekeeper, and occupies the Adjaria Autonomous Enclave bordering Turkey. This, along with accusations that the Georgians are sheltering Chechen insurgents, just adds to the long list of reasons why Russia still doesn't like Georgia.
• Big Tzar

ARMENIA

The landlocked country of Armenia is in a region of extinct volcanoes that left large deposits of all kinds of minerals, providing the basis for a chemical industry headed by Zeta-ImpChem.

Reckoned the oldest Christian state in existence, Armenia suffers from considerable friction between Armenian nationalists and Muslim Azeri immigrants. As with many other nations in the region, the religious clash is a mere backdrop for the ongoing battle for oil wealth. The city of Yerevan has been particularly hard hit recently by a surge in organized crime, with the Armenian Maffiya leading the way. Yerevan's fabulous palaces, gardens and tree-lined streets were once the meeting point of merchants' caravans from Persia and India, but now serve as bases for organized crime.

The Maffiya has gathered an array of dealers, fixers and smugglers, functioning within Armenian communities as well as throughout the region. In countless communities, shiny trucks mingle with camels and donkey-carts, while the marble mansions of drug-dealers have mushroomed among mud-brick houses. Rural Transcaucasia remains an ideal drug country: poor, lawless and close to the borders with Russia, Turkestan and Iran.

The Russian Vory, while influential in the rest of Transcaucasia, has lost considerable power in Armenia in recent years, with the Maffiya taking over narcotic routes. The Vory watched helplessly as the Maffiya grew richer and then used their heroin cash to buy more weapons. Armed conflicts in Yakut, the Mideast and Indonesia have only increased the value of the Maffiya's copious stockpiles of weapons and mil-tech hardware.

• It's good to be on gracious terms with the Armenian Maffiya. Whenever and wherever you want military weapons, they'll come through for you. Name the place—be it an airport, church or secured border—and they'll supply. Remember Kurdistan?
• Big Tzar

• Don't count out the Vory in this fight. They've been using ethnic Circassian warriors as their agents in Transcaucasia, and these guys are known for their ruthlessness. They've been chosen by countless kings and presidents to act as bodyguards, and the Vory is hoping their skills can give them a much-needed boost against the Maffiya.
• The Ossetian Spy

TURKESTAN: CROSSROADS OF ASIA

Population: 86,400,000 (Turks 65%, Russians 12%, Tajiks 7%)
Major Languages: Turkic languages (official; mostly Uzbek, Kazakh and Uighur; 80%), Russian (40%), Chinese (15%), English (30%)
Major Religions: Sunni Islam (54%), Nomadic ("folk") Islam (30%), Orthodox Christianity (10%)

• If you've heard about the New Silk Road, you know that the main crossroad is in Turkestan. This is a country of cosmopolitan cities and tough nomads, with a fresh corp war to spice things up. Since many of you guys working across Eurasia will probably pass through here sooner or later, I asked Winter Storm to tell us what's going down in the steppes.
• Captain Chaos, April 2064 at 8:23:35 (PST)

by Winter Storm

Greetings. Central Asia may be a vast and empty steppe, but throughout the ages it has been the meeting point for the Christian, Muslim and Chinese worlds. Nowadays it is the meeting point for megacorps from Europe to the Pacific Rim. You might come here to work for them, or perhaps you are hiding from your enemies in Russia or China. Whatever the reason, the steppe is wide and open. Know it well, and it will welcome you.

The steppe has changed much in the last fifty years. Long gone are the croplands, dried up by the climatic upheaval just before the Awakening. Nomads have rediscovered how to call the spirits, and they again ride proudly, their numbers swelled by city folk fleeing famine and VITAS. Muslim fundamentalists spent their last breath on a futile war against Russia, and modern Turkmen have an easygoing approach to Islam. But the most important change is that the Turkic peoples resurrected an idea with almost 200 years of history: they have united in one nation, the Commonwealth of Turkestan.

TURKESTAN TIMELINE

2013: Xinjiang secedes from China and is renamed Uighurstan. Chinese are massacred in Urumqi and Kashgar.
2034: Islamic regimes take over several Central Asian nations and invade Russia.
2035: Generalized revolts against Islamic regimes; war with Russia ends.
2041: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uighurstan and Tajikistan unite under the Commonwealth of Turkestan.
2049: The New Silk Road is completed by a consortium led by Saeder-Krupp.

» Things are not that romantic. The Commonwealth has a president and an elected senate, but the national government subcontracts most government services, including law enforcement. In the cities they use private operators, i.e. the corps; in the steppe, the nomadic tribes rule themselves. However, the government isn't strong enough to control the subcontractors, so they end up making their own rules.
» Socio Pat

Alas, the corporations built Turkestan and now their hands are everywhere, from the economy to government services such as police and health care. They owe their prosperity to the **New Silk Road,** a railway and highway that links Qingdao (in Shandong) with St. Petersburg (in Russia). The major crossroads is in Tashkent, where the main Trans-Caspian branch meets with a trans-Afghan branch going toward Gwadar (in Pakistan). So Tashkent is linked with ports in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, which makes it the perfect base for corporations with pan-Asian ambitions. They still move large cargoes by ship, but small and valuable items like cyberware and electronics can cross Asia much faster by rail or in road-trains. Saeder-Krupp operates this stretch of the Road, which makes it the dominant economic power in Turkestan.

» I can already see you guys calculating the profits of hijacking a freight train. They're good, chummers. If you can handle the heavy security.
» Dmitri

» Scan this, then. In the last few weeks, Yamatetsu freights have been forced to stop along the road because of unscheduled repair work or odd maintenance problems. Someone is intentionally causing these problems and you can buy info on the trains beforehand, along with estimates of the freights' security. Interested?
» Finis

Unfortunately, ever since the comet passed things are changing for the worst. Earthquakes have rocked Tashkent, and the instability in Russia and China means that traveling the Silk Road is not as safe as before; corporate profits are going down. S-K is focusing on the war with Yamatetsu in Russia; rivals like Shiawase, Zeta Imp-Chem and Eastern Tiger are taking advantage of the situation to strike at the giant's feet. These tensions filter down to the Turkmen, as unemployment rises and the prosperity of the '50s fades away.

On the other hand, all these things create many opportunities for shadowrunners to make a profit. But if you plan to operate in Turkestan, you'll need to know something more about its people.

THE TURKIC PEOPLES

Turkestan is two countries in one. The cities along the Silk Road belong to the modern techno-corporate world, while the steppe nomads retain their traditional lifestyle. Let us review each of them in detail.

THE NOMADIC HORDES

Turkestan's hordes join together many different tribes under one leader, the *Khan*. The hordes are the legal authority inside their territories, and they enforce their own laws with heavily armed militias. One horde exists inside every Commonwealth state, so you have the Kyrgyz horde, the Uighur horde, and so on. Kazakhstan holds three hordes: the Kuchuk in the west, the Orta in the north, and the Buyuk in the south. Tajikistan is the exception to this general trend; the Tajiks are Persians and have no tradition of organizing themselves as a horde. Many Tajiks want to become independent and their views have some support in cities like Samarkand and Bokhara, but they are still too disorganized to break with Turkestan.

Most nomadic tribes drive their cattle during summer and spend the winter in collective farms. Many tribes also earn extra revenues by protecting the Silk Road or corporate mining operations, usually from the raids of other tribes hired by rival corporations. Unfortunately, poorer tribes have also turned to crime. The Turkmen horde in particular is little more than a gang of smugglers and thieves operating across the Kara-Kum desert.

» Not to mention growing narcotics and hiding slaves in their "desert farms." Ubaydullah Khan, the Turkmen leader, is nothing more than a pawn of the Kabul Maffiya.
» Intifada Papa

The nomads rely heavily on their shamans, who call the spirits of the steppe for protection and guidance. Here, shamanism and Islam have always been two sides of the same coin. Spirits are feared and admired, but only Allah is worshipped. Mosques are built on powerful sites where shamans are said to call upon the ghosts of noted Muslim scholars for guidance. The Kyrgyz and Uighur shamans are especially renowned; they have braved the dangers of the Tian Shan Mountains and the Taklimakan Desert searching for their famed magical gemstones and have returned with many strange stories. If you ever meet one, ask him about the storm leopards that stalk you unseen and then freeze you to death, or the glittering ice palace in the midst of the glaciers where Lung himself is said to live.

• The peaks of the Tian Shan are full of sky spirits, and they're not nice to intruders. No one's going to get the truth about that ice palace 'till someone mounts a serious expedition.
• Elijah

• Do you really believe in these tales? The "folk Islam" of these savages is nothing but superstition, and it is rightly despised by the city Muslims.
• Crescent Moon

This magic is usually supplemented by modern technology. The nomads move by truck and motorcycle, live in heated tents and control their territories through satellite observation. When they need new equipment, they visit the monthly gatherings that each horde sponsors. These are wild affairs, a mix of festival and fair. Merchants and corporate sales reps gather in enormous tents, selling the latest weaponry and bio-engineered livestock or buying fetishes and foci from Turkic talismongers. If you ever need to make friends within the tribes, these gatherings are where you should be.

• Don't be afraid to show off your bravery, the Turks will love it. You can try everything from wrestling contests to polo matches. Both men and women can join, but be careful not to wrestle with someone of the opposite sex; if you're defeated, you might end up married to your opponent.
• Xunga XL

• Yamatetsu has been pulling a huge propaganda stunt in these gatherings for the last few years: combat bikes. The nomads are wild about them! And they're good, too; "Killer" Kunayev grew up with the Kazakhs and ended up as a Seattle simstar.
• Dzhingit

CITIZENS OF THE SPRAWL

Turkic cities are described by tourist guides as a beautiful blend between ancient and modern where many cultures live side by side. Do not be swayed by the sweet talk; this is corporate territory. Almost 50 million people live crowded in two narrow strips of land. One starts in the Aral Sea, flows up the Syr Darya River and snakes around the Tian Shan Mountains right up to Torugart Pass; the other snakes along the Amu Darya River. Every bit of space left is taken over by heavy indus-

try or greenhouse farms, but in the east, the desert starts right at the cities' edge. You can see their distinct form at a distance: a line of arcologies surrounded by ugly apartment blocks, then a narrow strip of farmland, then the steppe. The Turkic people have a passion for arcologies, and with such harsh winters and summers, they are a necessity.

» They are also a complication for runners; usually your marks live under several tons of heavily guarded steel.
» Finis

The **Tashkent sprawl** is the quintessential Turkic city. It boomed after the Silk Road was completed, but nowadays it is still recovering from the '62 earthquake. The architecture combines styles from different ages, from the ugly grey boxes built by the Soviets to the latest fantastic skyscrapers inspired by Hong Kong and Shanghai. This is where the corporate executives control their operations, and it is a prime location for doing business with the upper echelon of society.

The city owes its existence to enormous dams, fed by glaciers in the high reaches of the Tian Shan Mountains. Last year, they were acquired by Shiawase Envirotech. This major victory gave Shiawase huge leverage with the city's government, an advantage it has used to take the power and services industry away from S-K's hands. Both corps are fighting a dirty war on the streets; these days, even simple things like sewage repairs are bogged down by sabotage. As the corporations spend their resources in this struggle, unemployment is rising and the citizens are starting to protest.

» And since law enforcement corps are also busy fighting each other for contracts, crime is on the rise.
» Dzinghit

City dwellers are usually highly educated corporate employees, with a modern outlook on life and a taste for the latest trends from Tokyo. Although they usually follow Sunni Islam, their attitude is quite liberal; they might be more orthodox than the nomads, but they are certainly less devout. And prayers are often led by women, a legacy of Soviet rule. Many sympathize with the views of the Islamic Renaissance Movement, which, for a newcomer, has attracted a large following. The Sufi orders have been here for far longer, and they too are well respected.

» Not for long. People tend to be more tolerant when they have the luxury of material comfort, and with the economy going down, some Turks are looking for scapegoats. Radical mullahs like Islam Jumagulov are getting new followers, and the word is that the New Islamic Jihad is giving him a hand.
» Tamerlane Troll

• Not to mention all the "charities" the Islamic Unity Movement set up; they're nothing more than a front for the NIJ.
• Goat-Footed Lady

• Look on the bright side. Anti-corp groups are also growing fast; Attack! has been doing a great job in Tashkent and Almaty. You don't really believe that after all these years of freedom the Turks want to go fundamentalist?
• Rainbow Warrior

• Never underestimate the power of an economic crash.
• Socio Pat

There is also the lower rung of society, the many immigrants that came to Turkestan during the '50s. They usually came from Russia, China or Iran and brought with them their culture and beliefs, giving every city its "little Russia" or "Chinatown." Criminal organizations also arrived to prey on the weak. The dominant forces are Russian Vory and Chinese Triads, especially the Red Lanterns; they usually oversee local crime lords while profiting from the drug smuggling routes between Afghanistan and Russia. They have recently agreed to an uneasy truce to face a growing threat: the Kabul Maffiya is rising from Afghanistan, sweeping all in its wake. You see, the Vory and the Triads have usually relied on immigrants, but the Kabulis have gained the sympathy of the growing youth gangs with their Muslim rhetoric and their violent methods.

• The Vory were really caught with their pants down. They were always too racist to let Turks in their outfits, and now the Kabulis can count on a few enterprising people who're tired of being the underdog.
• Tamerlane Troll

• Yeah, but the Kabulis never took a fish this big. If they get away with it, though, they might grow powerful enough to go global.
• Dzhingit

Beyond Tashkent, I should also mention the ancient city of **Samarkand,** which still evokes memories from the golden days of the Silk Road; something that the local delegation of the Atlantean Foundation will never let you forget. The ancient mosques and palaces contrast with the narrow streets and the gleaming arcologies (though the incorporation of Islamic architecture styles in the latter is renowned throughout the world). The city is also known for its bazaar, where people from many Asian ancestries trade under neon signs and tri-D ads. If you ever want to buy anything special, from Russian SOTA surveillance equipment to genetically modified Afghan opium, the bazaar is almost certain to have the item waiting for you.

• The city is also the headquarters of the Kabul Maffiya in Turkestan. You might have a problem with their secrecy and their smugness with non-Muslims, but these guys can take you and your cargo anywhere in South Asia, no questions asked.
• Xunga XL

Another peculiar place is the city of **Urumqi.** It is the stronghold of Eastern Tiger and notable enough for that reason, but what I enjoy the most is the citizens' attitude toward the Awakening. You see, Islam in China evolved in near isolation and incorporated many elements of Taoism and Confucianism, resulting in a philosophy that embraces every characteristic of the Sixth World, including metahumanity and magic. The Islamic Renaissance Movement has taken considerable interest in this city and is helping the local mullahs set up a theological council to rival the IRM's own in Seville. Muslims need new lights such as these now that the fundamentalists are again rising in the Middle East, and I only hope that the New Islamic Jihad does not attack here as it has done in so many other places.

• The most prominent Muslim scholar in Urumqi is Ablikim Sidke, and he is unusual in many ways. It is already rare to find a mullah is also a mage and a dwarf, but when you hear him explain the Qur'an as a basis for a free and egalitarian society, you know you are in front of a genius.
• Almond White

POWERS AND CONFLICTS

If you ever operate in Turkestan, never forget this simple rule: laws are not enforced unless someone with power wants them to be. Let us review who is turning the wheels of the economy and pulling the government's strings.

SAEDER-KRUPP

S-K is the most powerful corporation in Turkestan. It operates the Silk Road and the Tyuratam spaceport, and holds the rights for most of the oil and natural gas fields at Tenghiz. These three strong points support an extensive petrochemical and advanced polymer industry held by Fatima Petrochemicals. Much of S-K's research in this field is conducted in the city of Kosmograd, near Tyuratam; laboratories there take advantage of an easy access to orbit to conduct free-fall research. The corporation has huge weight in the nation's economy, as many Turkic corps are dependent on S-K subcontracts.

• So far, no other corps have touched S-K's three assets. However, Yamatetsu is building a trans-Mongolian branch linking Vladivostok with the Silk Road. Perhaps they hope to own the Road's western branch in the near future?
• €spion

As we have seen, S-K faces severe competition from Shiawase in Tashkent. But local runners say that S-K is ready to get tough, especially now that Sergey Kirov is heading its security. Kirov comes from the Virgin Lands, a strip of cropland on northern Turkestan inhabited mostly by Russians. He has close contacts with the Vory in Petropavlovsk, made when he was involved with a local nationalist policlub. So both corporations are preparing for a big battle in Tashkent, and I assume that there will be many business opportunities for shadowrunners in the coming months.

» The game is on! So far, S-K is winning with three "terrorist attacks" on the Tian Shan dams versus one "industrial accident" in Tenghiz.
» Finis

» I hope they don't take things too far. Take out Tashkent's water and power and the whole city will riot. No Silk Road and no profits for a very long time …
» Tamerlane Troll

THE MINING WARS

Many other megacorps have increased their presence since the construction of the Silk Road. Most of them operate industrial complexes and supply depots that support exports along the Road, but there is some ferocious competition over mining rights. Turkestan has rich deposits of almost every element in the periodic table, including very large reserves of chrome, zinc, magnesium and sulphur. For a while even orichalcum could be found here. Things were stable for almost a decade; Zeta-ImpChem's subsidiary Kazkhrom had mining rights for Kazakhstan, Monobe operated in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Eastern Tiger operated in the rest of the country. But Monobe recently began a very aggressive expansion into the other corps' territory. The three corps are currently bogged down in an attrition war with hundreds of miners regularly dying due to sabotage. This war is also expanding into the heavy industry around Tashkent.

» Monobe suffered a major blow last week. Someone infiltrated their arcology in the Taklimakan desert and blew up the advanced research labs; their research was supposedly thrown back months. They're looking really hard for the guilty party, but with no success as far as I know.
» Dzhingit

» I've heard it was an inside job. Monobe is working on a bioweapon so devastating that the researchers preferred to blow themselves up with the lab rather than releasing it into the world.
» Conspir-I-See

One curious aspect of these mining wars is that Yamatetsu (through its subsidiary, Sokolov-Sarbai) and Renraku have been engaged in their own competition. Yamatetsu joined Wuxing in a vast survey of the Taklimakan Desert for minerals and archaeological ruins. This combination might seem strange, but their interest in the area seemed justified when Renraku initiated a survey of its own. Determining the interests of three megacorps in the Taklimakan and the reasons they are suddenly concerned with archaeology has baffled a number of onlookers. The desert has a few gemstones with arcane properties, but they hardly justify all the money that the corps have put into this project.

» Newsflash: both parties have officially finished their survey and are packing. But they're showing a lot of interest in the Gobi Desert. What are they doing, desert hopping?
» Dust Devil

» I know that Yamatetsu found something; I extracted it for Renraku but hadn't enough time to dig in deep. Some photos of weird-looking mummies, some translation notes on a lost pattern, and some talk about Indian power sites. Make sense to anyone?
» Dzhingit

» The Atlantean Foundation must be quite angry with Yamatetsu and Renraku. How could they find something big and leave the AF in the dark?
» Elijah

PROJECT ENDGAME

Turkestan holds many toxic zones. The Kara-Kum and Kyzyl-Kum deserts have been used by S-K and other corps as dumping grounds for nuclear and biochemical wastes. The Polygon was once the test site for Soviet nuclear weapons, and after the Awakening toxic spirits appeared in the ghost city of Konechnaya ("The End") and invaded the surrounding steppes. And there is also Vozrozhdeniye ("Rebirth"), a Soviet biowarfare site back when it was an island sitting in the middle of the Aral Sea. Now the sea is all but gone and the site is a peninsula. Mutant strains of anthrax and smallpox cross the isthmus and the Aral-Kum Desert, and when the death wind blows, they reach as far as Tashkent.

AG Chemie has formed a joint venture with Kazakh and Uzbek shamans to contain and clean these sites. It's the famous "Project Endgame" and it is creating a stir. The corporation has been experimenting with some really advanced bionanites that will supposedly terraform the worst spots. If it works, it'll be a beautiful thing; but if the nanites run out of control, what could happen to the rest of Turkestan?

» Those GreenWar ecofreaks must have asked the same question. They're already hanging around Tashkent, ready to stop this thing. I just hope they don't release something worse in the process.
» Tamerlane Troll

» This project is a cover-up. Remember when someone on Shadowland blew the whistle on AG Chemie's biowarfare lab under the Kyzyl-Kum? Now they say that they were making bacteria that eats toxic waste, and for no profit, too. Yeah, right.
» Conspir-I-See

» The Kazakh nomads say that experiments with toxic spirits are going on, and that the Russian military is taking part. Chummers, this is not good at all.
» Dzhingit

GAME INFORMATION

Shadows of Asia (*SOA*) describes in detail the entirety of Asia for the first time for *Shadowrun.* It focuses primarily on aspects of interest to shadowrunners: political intrigues, corporate machinations, organized crime, magical oddities and the Asian shadows themselves. This chapter provides an overview of plot hooks, some basic rules and suggestions for incorporating this material into your *Shadowrun* campaign.

In addition to the *Shadowrun, Third Edition* rulebook (*SR3*), gamemasters will find the *Matrix* and *Magic in the Shadows* (*MITS*) rulebooks, as well as the *Critters* sourcebook (included with *SR3 Gamemaster Screen*) helpful when using some of the material presented here. The plots introduced in *Year of the Comet* (*YOTC*), *Target: Awakened Lands* (*TAL*), *Threats 2 (T2)* and *Dragons of the Sixth World* (*DSW*) also tie in heavily to this book.

TRADITIONS WITHIN TRADITIONS

Each of the Asian religions has its own views toward the Awakened world, magic and spirits. This section provides general guidelines, and should be used in accordance with the suggestions given on pp. 10-11, *MITS.*

BUDDHISM

Buddhists can follow any of the common paths of magic in *Shadowrun*. Buddhists who follow a shamanic path most often worship bodhisattvas, or saints who are linked to animals or ideals. Many Buddhist monks, such as the famed Shao-Lin monks of China or the Zen archers of Japan, are formidable somatic adepts.

The Buddhist church keeps an open mind toward metahumans, seeing them as another form (and to some, a lesser form) of reincarnated human.

Tibetan Magic

Nearly all Tibetan monks are Talented, recruited into the monasteries at a young age. The monasteries make a point of recruiting and training every Talented individual they can find. Most are eager to accept the training, as it represents a far better life than that to which most Tibetans have access.

Tibetan Buddhist magicians follow the Path of Wuxing (p. 17, MITS), with one notable exception. Instead of hermetic circles, Tibetan Buddhists utilize mandals, intricate paintings

made with colored sand. Mandalas follow most of the same rules as hermetic circles, but physically are one-third the size of hermetic circles (though they are the same size on the astral plane) and take three times as long to construct. To symbolize the impermanence of the world, each mandala is used for only one ritual before the colored sand is swept up and poured into flowing water, preferably a river dragon line in Tibet. Because Tibetan monks follow the Path of Wuxing, they do not need mandalas to summon spirits. The increased time of construction and single-use policy only really come up when mandalas are used for ritual sorcery or during astral quests.

CONFUCIANISM

The rigid structure of hermetic study appeals to Confucians, so they are much more likely to follow this tradition. It is unusual to find Confucians who follow a shamanic path, as this requires a mindset that is often at odds with the highly ordered world set forth in Confucian principles.

Strict Confucians see metahumans as a lower, flawed order of humanity. Some neo-Confucians have advocated for a sixth relationship, that of human to metahuman, to reflect this.

HINDUISM

Brahmin magicians are considered followers of a hermetic school or paradigm (albeit one that boasts a pantheistic cosmology and highly religious ritualism). Two idiosyncrasies distinguish them from standard hermetics, however: brahmin magicians conjure elemental *ashuras* (using Spirits of the Elements statistics, see p. 106, MITS) and they use mandalas instead of hermetic circles. Hindu mandalas are complex geometric and symbolic representations of the spell or ritual being performed, traditionally made in colored sand, but these days executed in a variety of materials. Generally simpler than their Tibetan counterparts, Hindu mandalas follow similar rules (see p. 207-208) and grant the same benefits.

Awakened yogis and saddhu are typically adepts and magical adept followers of the Way of the Yogi. This way professes spiritual development and enlightenment through intense mental and physical self-control, strict asceticism and material renunciation. Such adepts have been known to develop latent magical abilities after advanced initiation; to reflect this they may buy Magical Power (p. 22, *MITS*) after their second initiation, rather than at creation (though they gain no spell points).

Finally, the predominantly female magicians following Devi/Shakti may use the rules for traditional witchcraft or alternatively those for Wicca (replacing the God/Goddess figures with the Hindu trimurti), at the gamemaster's discretion. Rules for both traditions can be found on pp.123–125, *SOTA:2064.*

Hindus often see metahumanity as a sign of bad karma in a former life. The sole exception to this is dwarfs, who are accorded a great deal of status in Hinduism due to their association with a mythical past.

Ashuras

The term *ashuras* is used to group all the varieties of native spirits in South Asia. In game terms ashuras are identical to their spirit of the elements and nature spirit counterparts in abilities and attributes; however, they are more free-willed and harder to control. During the initial Conjuring Test, treat the ashura being called as if it had +1 Force for the purpose of determining successes and Drain. Conjuring a nature spirit ashura (and only nature spirits) at an appropriate local shrine allows the conjurer to call forth a Great Form spirit without requiring Invocation metamagic. Due to centuries of devotion from, local populations, however, such ashuras always demand some sacrifice or tribute before acquiescing to a magician's bidding (though mostly symbolic, the tribute/sacrifice should never cost less than 100¥ times the Force of the ashura).

ISLAM

The majority of Muslims condemn both magic and metahumanity. This is particularly true of Shi'ite Muslims, who see the Awakened as abominations. Sufis, however, have a long tradition of mysticism. Most Sufi mystics are adepts or hermetic magicians who practice a form of mathematical divination. Sufis have a more open mind toward metahumans, but still are not overly tolerant of them.

EASTERN SHAMANISM

Shamans in the East differ from their Western counterparts in one important aspect: the summoning of ancestor spirits rather than Spirits of Man. Aside from this aspect, Eastern shamans follow the same sorts of totems as shamans in other regions of the world.

The attitude of Eastern shamans toward metahumans varies from country to country, region to region. In general it is negative—many shamans see little difference between an ork and a demon.

SHINTO

All Awakened Shinto priests are shamans. Most of them are female and are called miko. Practitioners of Shinto share, and in many cases reinforce, the Japanese distrust and distaste for metahumans.

DAOISM

Daoists have two internal traditions. *Wai-dan* Daoists are almost always hermetic mages or wujen, and are also the Daoists most likely to dwell in cities and be part of modern urban life in the Sixth World.

The other tradition, *Nei-dan,* claims mostly adepts and shamans who follow Nature totems (all), Mythic totems (Griffin, Phoenix, Pegasus/Unicorn—called Qi-ren in China—Leviathan and Wyrm) and Idols (all *except* Bacchus, Horned Man and Wild Huntsman). *Nei-dan* Daoists also have a large number of Magician's Way adepts at their monasteries.

Daoism sees metahumanity as merely reflecting the diversity of the universe, and Daoists often regard metahumans as those who have inhabited one of the many spirit realms in a former life and have been marked for their deeds in these realms. This often affords metahumans extra respect among some Daoists.

ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroastrians are almost always hermetics, though occasionally they are shamans who follow the Bull, Sun, Fire-Bringer, Sky Father or Wise Warrior totems. Zoroastrians have an enlightened view of elves but tend to regard dwarfs, orks and trolls as tainted.

CHINA

Like the United States, the People's Republic of China has fractured into splinter states, each with its own distinct personality. The four largest states—the Canton Confederation, Shaanxi, Henan and Sichuan—all have ambitions to reunify China under their own vision. Minor players like Beijing, Manchuria, Hong Kong and Taiwan may act as wild cards to upset the balance of power. Meanwhile, centralized government has virtually disappeared in the Coastal Provinces and western China, leaving warlords and corporate manipulators to govern their own micro-fiefs.

GETTING IN/OUT

Passage into and out of any Chinese state varies with the state or region in question. In general, the major states covered in this book have visa requirements and travel facilities comparable to other First World nations in North America and Europe, such as the UCAS, France or Germany. Border security tends to be more stringent and more heavily armed, as most Chinese splinter states have poor relations with their neighbors—especially authoritarian regimes like Sichuan and Henan.

Passage through the stateless fringe regions of western China and the Coastal Provinces is considerably less controlled, but also riskier. Because these areas have little central government, visa requirements are practically nonexistent. (Since many microstates in the Coastal Provinces are essentially corporate puppets, however, a corporate passport may be highly recommended.) The infrastructure in these regions tends to be poorly maintained, except for major arteries run by the corps. Characters may find it easy to cross borders in these regions, but are likely to run into bandits, warlord patrols or other hostile parties.

RUNNING IN CHINA

Shadowruns in China vary by locale. Some regions lend themselves to certain types of shadowruns, while other areas may be better suited to a different style of shadowrunning, or even mercenary- or magician-oriented campaigns.

Canton Confederation, Taiwan and Hong Kong

China's southeastern states have openly embraced Western capitalism and representative government, enhancing these ideas with their own brand of Chinese thinking. In many ways, a shadowrun in the Confederation, Taiwan or Hong Kong resembles one in Seattle, Boston or Frankfurt. Many adventures that work in Seattle, like corporate intrigue or mob war, also work in southeastern China.

Gamemasters and players should not regard such adventures as merely "Seattle in a foreign language," however. To give this region a distinct flavor, the gamemaster can emphasize certain themes prevalent in Chinese culture and social interactions.

1.Family Ties: The Chinese respect family bonds far more than most Western cultures. Though Chinese families can be just as dysfunctional as Western ones, Chinese people tend to be more loyal to their kinfolk and show favoritism to relatives and family friends. Even in the shadows, nepotism can be common.

2.Hierarchy: Chinese society derives heavily from Confucianism, which teaches respect for one's betters. Children show more respect for adults, older siblings take precedence over younger, and senior members of a profession (including shadowrunning) demand deference from juniors.

3.Etiquette and Face: Because of China's dense population, politeness is paramount to reduce social friction. Face, or reputation, holds similar importance for Chinese, even more than life and death.

Manchuria

Manchuria is often regarded as an Awakened land, but not in the same fashion as Amazonia or Australia. Instead of nature magic and back-to-the-land movements, Manchuria's magical atmosphere favors urban magic and populist zeitgeist. The magic derives less from the land than from the people.

Because Manchuria does not accept the Business Recognition Accords laid down by the Corporate Court, the megacorps cannot rely as much on extraterritoriality. This tends to level the playing field in favor of smaller corps, like Tan Tien and Shangui, who in some cases can be bigger players in the Manchurian shadows than the Big Ten. Many corp-related shadowruns should revolve around the tables being turned on the nominal kings of the hill.

Shaanxi

Shaanxi is reminiscent of ancient Chinese kingdoms, but adapted to modern times. Instead of an imperial bureaucracy, Shaanxi is run by a parliamentary monarchy. Though facing modern challenges, it's also in the midst of a cultural renaissance and is unearthing many secrets of its past.

One main theme of running in Shaanxi revolves around court intrigue. The ruling monarch, Queen Michelle Chou, is a strong personality with lots of influence in government. She has garnered interesting allies and powerful enemies. The recent, unexpected appearance of her son from a previous marriage has complicated the royal succession, leading to shifting alliances and behind-the-scenes power brokering.

The other main theme of Shaanxi shadowruns involves the excavation and study of ancient Chinese sites in Shaanxi, such as the Forest of Steles in Xi'an or the famous Tomb of Shih Huang Ti, where archaeologists discovered the terra cotta army of Emperor Qin. Many chambers of this vast tomb remain unexplored even after a century, and so shadowrunners may find themselves involved in a Chinese-themed "dungeon crawl."

Beijing

Beijing shadowruns primarily revolve around Li Tianzi, the enigmatic Emperor of Beijing. The Emperor claims to derive his authority from the Mandate of Heaven, and he seems to wield the mojo to back it. Additionally, magical phenomena around

the Forbidden City suggest that the Imperial Court may also serve as the capital of the Celestial Bureaucracy in astral space. Whatever the truth, Li Tianzi is a powerful figure, attracting support from Tan Tien and fear from the Republic of China.

Henan

Henan is a throwback to Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution. Its loathing of capitalism has attracted many anti-corporate terrorists and policlubs, and the Party, through the Ministry of Internal Security, retains an iron hold on society. Paradoxically, it's also home to Song Shan, a haven of spirituality and healing in China.

Sichuan

Sichuan is a modern-day state led by a self-styled warlord. It's also a mage-ocracy, where magicians and adepts hold the highest positions in government and society. Warlord Liang Hong's ties to the great dragon Lung frequently draw the country into draconic plots.

Coastal Provinces

This region is Asia's sweatshop, where the corps take maximum advantage of the fractured political landscape. Shadowruns in this region fall along the lines of industrial sabotage and structure hits. Labor disputes are another favorite theme, reminiscent of strikebreakers and picket lines from the early twentieth century. Additionally, the lack of central authority makes the region prone to piracy and privateering.

Western China

Western China is completely lawless, where bandit gangs and warlords hold sway over the locals. The most noteworthy is Shin Qao Hien, who is massing forces in an attempt to retake Tibet. Wild paracritters, magical phenomena and the remnants of China's nuclear program are other potential wild cards in this region.

HONG KONG WILD MAGIC

Astral space around Hong Kong, particularly the waterfront district around Victoria Harbor, has been strained by repeated attempts at geomantic manipulation and sabotage. Use the rules on pp. 87–88 of *Magic in the Shadows* to determine the effects of wild magic. In general, frayed astral space occurs primarily around downtown Hong Kong, fades past Aberdeen and Kowloon, and is practically nonexistent in the New Territories.

MANCHURIAN MAGIC

Magic in Manchuria is aspected against conjuring Spirits of Man and ancestor spirits. Wujen and other magicians native to the area may learn to attune themselves to Manchuria's astral space and avoid this penalty. If a character wishes to possess this attunement, the gamemaster may require him to purchase an Edge (typically 1 point) to represent it.

Ta'ren Spirits

The Ta'ren ("The Others") are native to Manchuria. Their intense interest in seemingly random people has sparked rumors that they can temporarily possess metahuman hosts, using the host as a conduit for the spirit's physical powers. The gamemaster decides whether or not the rumors are true; if so, the following rules apply.

Ta'ren have a power similar to the Inhabitation power used by shedim (p. 151 *Year of the Comet*), but it only works on living metahumans. If a Ta'ren successfully inhabits a host, it can use Sense Link (p. 109, *MITS*) to perceive what the host perceives and Telepathic Link (p. 109, *MITS*) to communicate with the host. Most Ta'ren are shy, however, and prefer not to communicate with their hosts unless absolutely necessary.

If a Ta'ren feels threatened, it may attempt to possess its host to fight the threat. To do so, the Ta'ren makes an Opposed Test, rolling its Force against the host's Willpower. If successful, the Ta'ren takes control of the host, replacing the host's Mental Attributes with the spirit's Force. Ta'ren have a Sorcery skill equal to their Force and can cast spells normally. The gamemaster determines which spells a Ta'ren knows. More powerful Ta'ren may have access to other spirit and free spirit powers as well.

THE FIVE SACRED MOUNTAINS

The Five Sacred Mountains are power sites with a minimum Rating of 4. During certain times of the year, the rating may increase, depending on a site's significance in the wuxing cycle. The Five Sacred Mountains are aspected to wujen and other practitioners of wuxing magic. Each mountain is also associated with a certain element and enhances magic corresponding to that element.

Each of the Five Sacred Mountains is likewise associated with yin or yang energy flows. As an optional rule, wujen may declare whether they are attuned to yin or yang. Whenever a wujen is on a mountain with a similar attunement, increase the rating by 50 percent. If a wujen is on a mountain with an opposed attunement, decrease the rating by 50 percent.

T'ai Shan (yang): T'ai Shan is associated with Wood and enhances detection spells. T'ai Shan's power rating increases during the spring.

Zhurong Peak (yang): Zhurong Peak is associated with Fire and enhances combat spells. Zhurong Peak's power rating increases in the summer.

Song Shan (balance): Song Shan is associated with Earth and enhances health spells. Song Shan represents a balance between yin and yang and so neither favors nor hinders a wujen aspected to either side.

Hua Shan (yin): Hua Shan is associated with Metal and enhances manipulation spells. Hua Shan's power rating increases in the autumn.

Xuanwu Peak (yin): Xuanwu Peak is associated with Water and enhances illusion spells. Xuanwu Peak's power rating increases in the winter. For non-wujen magicians, Xuanwu Peak serves as a mana ebb (p. 100, *T:AL*) equal to its rating.

Xuanwu Peak also forces spirits possessing a material body (such as shedim or loa) to fall dormant. Whenever a possessed person or object comes into the mountain's vicinity, make an Opposed Test rolling the spirit's Force against the mountain's power rating. If the mountain wins, the spirit is ejected from the person or object.

BACKGROUND COUNT IN WESTERN CHINA

Certain places in western China may have a Background Count of 1 or 2 because of pollution generated by nuclear weapons testing and development in the area. Additionally, the region is home to several mutant and toxic paracritters (see p. 54 of the *Critters* booklet for rules on toxic and mutant critters).

INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

The Sixth World's India and remaining nations of South Asia provide a particularly exotic setting, even by Asian standards, for runs of all sorts. Like other areas in Asia, the region is troubled and wracked by ethnic, religious and economic conflict. Unlike other areas, borders have remained relatively stable and the strife is mostly internal.

GETTING IN/OUT

South Asia counts on natural obstacles to provide a degree of physical isolation: to the North, the Himalayas and the Maya Cloud of Tibet; to the East, the perilous jungles of Bengal and Burma; to the South, the Indian Ocean; and to the West, the lawless wilderness of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Land borders between India, Pakistan, Khalistan and Afghanistan are heavily militarized and carefully watched (by all sides). However, even in militarized areas where checkpoints and roadstops are routine, borders are porous if you can overcome the natural hazards.

Customs authorities at maritime ports throughout the region are notoriously easy to circumvent or bribe, and generally it's a safer insertion method (forgetting for a second the pirates prowling trade routes of the Indian Ocean).

India and the Bangla Commonwealth are the only two countries with airports capable of transcontinental (suborbital and semiballistic) flights, but both boast the strictest visa restrictions and stringent customs and data verification controls.

ATMOSPHERE

The single most important aspect to roleplaying this setting is establishing a uniquely "South Asian" tone. To enhance the atmosphere and distinctiveness of the background, gamemasters should consider playing up certain aspects of life on the subcontinent:

1. Scale: South Asian urban environments provide a particularly interesting backdrop. Sprawls feature the street life seen in the West and are home to a riot of colors, noise and bustling people. Sheer numbers and lack of urban regulation, however, mean the streets often lack functional socioeconomic segregation: temples share blocks with office buildings, squalid low-rent slums are just around the corner from Embassy Row. Play up the patchwork potential of these environments.

2. Sensory Overload: Life in a South Asian sprawl, particularly Indian or Bangla, is a constant multisensory barrage. Characters with heightened or augmented senses (visual, auditory, olfactory), as well as those with reflex enhancements, are subject to constant environmental distractions. Consider applying modifiers to these characters when in particularly crowded and colorful South Asian environments (+1 or +2 as appropriate).

3. Family Matters: The extended family is the building block of modern Indian society. Not only does it color family and social life, but whenever possible, businesses are kept within an extended family. This isn't seen as nepotism, but is instead based on the belief that blood ensures loyalty (which sometimes turns out to be faulty logic).

4. A Question of Caste: Among most Hindus, caste not only dictates social and spiritual hierarchy, but also numerous essentials of daily life, from dietary restrictions to acceptable behavior to marital opportunities and career choices. As such, caste opens the door to numerous roleplaying opportunities, both in terms of unexpected complications (a brahmin egghead the team was hired to voluntarily extract unexpectedly refuses to let foreigners touch him) to interesting plot developments (when a brahmin Johnson calls without resorting to a traditional vaishya or kshatriya fixer something must really be up). The behavior and prejudices of the castes also provide interesting roleplaying opportunities when played as stereotypes (an aloof, arrogant brahmin) or against the grain (a cowardly kshatriya). And remember, not recognizing one's place in the world is a telltale of an outsider.

RUNNING IN INDIA

Foreign runners will find their greatest difficulties are standing out and fitting in. Though some fixers show bias toward talent, preferring locals and playing caste favorites, a lot of underworld types have given up on the "old ways"—the trick is finding which is which. To make competition even less equal, local runners, like local fixers, are often well connected and pay kickbacks to the syndicates in exchange for favors, intel and logistics support.

Though local police are a discreet and unobtrusive presence—leading many to assume they are ineffectual—they're quick to bring out the big guns if public peace is threatened (less so for misdemeanors and corp-related crime). Consequently, corporate security has learned not to depend on police as a complementary force and often runs tighter protocols than their Western counterparts. This means runners have more leeway and more jurisdiction fuss on the streets than in typical Western sprawls , but they should expect tougher internal security and overwhelming police force if they step over the line.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Whether they're getting caught in political clashes between corp-backed Hindu nationalists and neo-communist unions in Kolkota, participating in intercorporate black ops in Dhaka, or aiding hard-line Islamist insurgents against the military dictatorship in Pakistan, runners can find a wealth of running opportunities on the subcontinent if they're willing to hazard its idiosyncrasies.

India exists in a permanent morass of shifting agendas and intrigue, and has for centuries. From the latest powe rplays and mob moves in Delhi to the feverish wheeling and dealing, starmaking and mudslinging of Bollywood, there are opportunities for everyone. To draw characters to the land of Three Million Gods, Kolkota—with its major corporate presence and conflict-

ing agendas—represents a convenient and familiar stepping stone into India. Kolkota's thriving local shadow community is as competitive as any Western counterpart. For tech-oriented adventures, the corporate facilities in the MBC Axis are churning out some of the most innovative developments in genetech, biotech and pharmaceuticals, not to mention groundbreaking advances in hybrid technologies that provide interesting targets for datasteals and extractions.

The emerging economic powerhouse that is the Bangla Commonwealth is starting to draw the covetous attentions of Triple-As and the regional powers alike. Increasing competition with Malaysia, Singapore and Kolkota means shadow talent of all kinds is in heavy demand.

The situations in Khalistan, Nepal and Pakistan are particularly suited for mercenary- and smuggling-oriented adventures, but they also offer a wealth of opportunities for other campaign styles. Each potentially provides a unique set of environmental, cultural, religious and logistical challenges that should put even the most hardened runner team to the test.

THE GANGES

The Ganges is an immense manaline crossing India, and under normal circumstances its rating fluctuates between 4 and 6. During the past few years, however, the Ganges manaline has swelled with irregular (gamemaster's discretion) mana surges that rush down its course from west to east. Whether this phenomenon is linked to the rumored breaches in the Tibetan Maya Cloud or is something else entirely remains to be confirmed. Such "flash floods" travel down the manaline at a

rate of 1km/h and should be treated as localized mana surges (pp. 86-87, *MITS*) for purposes of all magic use.

Additionally, anyone in direct contact with the waters of the Ganges at the time of a flash flood should make a SURGE Test (p. 138, *Year of the Comet*), applying an additional –5 modifier to the target number. Note that the Negative and Positive SURGE Effects resulting from this test always follow a Hindu theme. Appropriate traits include: monkey, elephant or bird features, prehensile tails, third eyes, multiple limbs, blue- or green-colored skin, scales, horns and even expression of the dwarf metatype.

THE ORISSA NETWORK AND THE JYOTIRLINGA

Sprawling across several hundred square miles, the Orissa complex is crisscrossed by major and minor manalines and boasts dozens of power sites of all magnitudes. Additionally manalines (Ratings 1–2) radiate out to the 4 great *Dhams* and the twelve (or thirteen, if rumors are true) major manaline nexi/power sites (Ratings 2–3) from which the *jyotirtlinga* "pillars" rise.

Skirting the fringes of the void, on the farthest reaches of the manasphere (mana warp Rating 7), these unique manalines branch out, forming and feeding an intricate field of astral energies, so tenuous that Sensing is required to discern it. Fed by a complex geometry of power sites spread out across India, the construct's body hovers over Orissa. A number of smaller "pillars" link the incredibly ancient temples and shrines there to the construct. It is believed these represent some sort of interface that might allow control of whatever the construct contains. Some of the most common theories as to the nature of the construct are:

- It is a containment field or astral prison of some sort—possibly for powerful spirits, possibly for something far worse.
- It is a sophisticated thaumaturgic analog to a computer network, an *akashic* record of knowledge left by the ancients.
- It is a magical reservoir, weapon or power source of immense potency, a dormant remnant of a long-lost civilization.

A covert race is on between the powers-that-be of the Sixth World to unlock and tap the mysteries of the Orissa network, complicated by the millions of devout Hindus who do not wish to see their sacred sites desecrated by impure foreigners. As such, the exception made for, and the agenda of, Etherlux represents yet other mysteries needing answers.

India Adventure Ideas

- The American Mafia, losing ground to the Yakuza in the chip trade, is attempting to diversify into the "natural high" market of Awakened drugs. They send a discreet emissary to make overtures to the Mansurs or Kabul Maffiya in Pakistan, and obviously the city-slick "diplomat" needs protection.
- A vampire cabal hires unwitting runners to uncover the truth about the cannibal HMHVV strain allegedly being developed in the labs of the MBC Axis.
- A Sikh envoy presents himself to the runners and humbly requests they journey with him to Amritsar for a meet. The meet turns out to be an audience with the *Guru Granth Sahib* himself …
- The runners are hired by an independent intelligence agency, such as Argus or Aegis Cognito, to track down information on Salai Mazim, the mystery man behind the small corp Etherlux.

TIBET

Tibet is a magical nation sealed off from the world for over five decades, becoming somewhat accessible for the first time at a moment when it might be most vulnerable. Gamemasters should note that Shin's file about Tibet may or may not be entirely true or accurate; Tibet is literally a nation obscured by illusion. Due to its own nature, Tibet is more open to change by gamemasters than most Sixth World locales. Shin's memo shouldn't eliminate creative possibilities.

Getting In and Out

As a previously sealed nation, there are no easy or legal ways of entering Tibet. The Maya Cloud effectively prevented most travel in and out of Tibet, and therefore Tibet never worried about legalities such as visas or ID verification systems. Tibet did inherit border checkpoints from the Chinese military, which are now used as monasteries for Diamond Eye Sect monks. These checkpoints exist only to turn away those who might manage to pass through the Cloud via the old mountain pass highways (Sichuan-Tibet, Qinghai-Tibet, Xinjiang-Tibet, Yunnan-Tibet, Nepal-Tibet). These five mountain passes rely largely on magic rather than high-tech sensors to detect intruders. Computer technology in Tibet is far behind the curve, and there is no modern Matrix to be found.

Tibet has two airports, one in Lhasa and one in Qamdo, but neither has been operational since 2011. Due to the Cloud, the entire Tibetan plateau has been declared a no-fly zone. No commercial air traffic will enter Tibet. Tibet's one railway, the Qinghai-Tibet Rail, was completed in 2007 but officially shut down in 2011. It has operated since then on rare occasions, but there is no regular service and it is exceptionally dangerous (as noted by the 2055 wreck that killed 122 people).

The Tibetan border patrol consists entirely of Diamond Eye Sect monks, but is largely limited to observing the common mountain passes or areas that have indicated some sort of disturbance. These monks are nearly all wujen or somatic adepts with very limited access to modern technology.

Running in Tibet

Tibet is a new frontier for shadowrunners, opening up for the first time in half a century. It is an appealing destination for many potential employers, but it is as dangerous as it is tempting, with unwelcoming terrain, hostile magical defenses and mysterious monks.

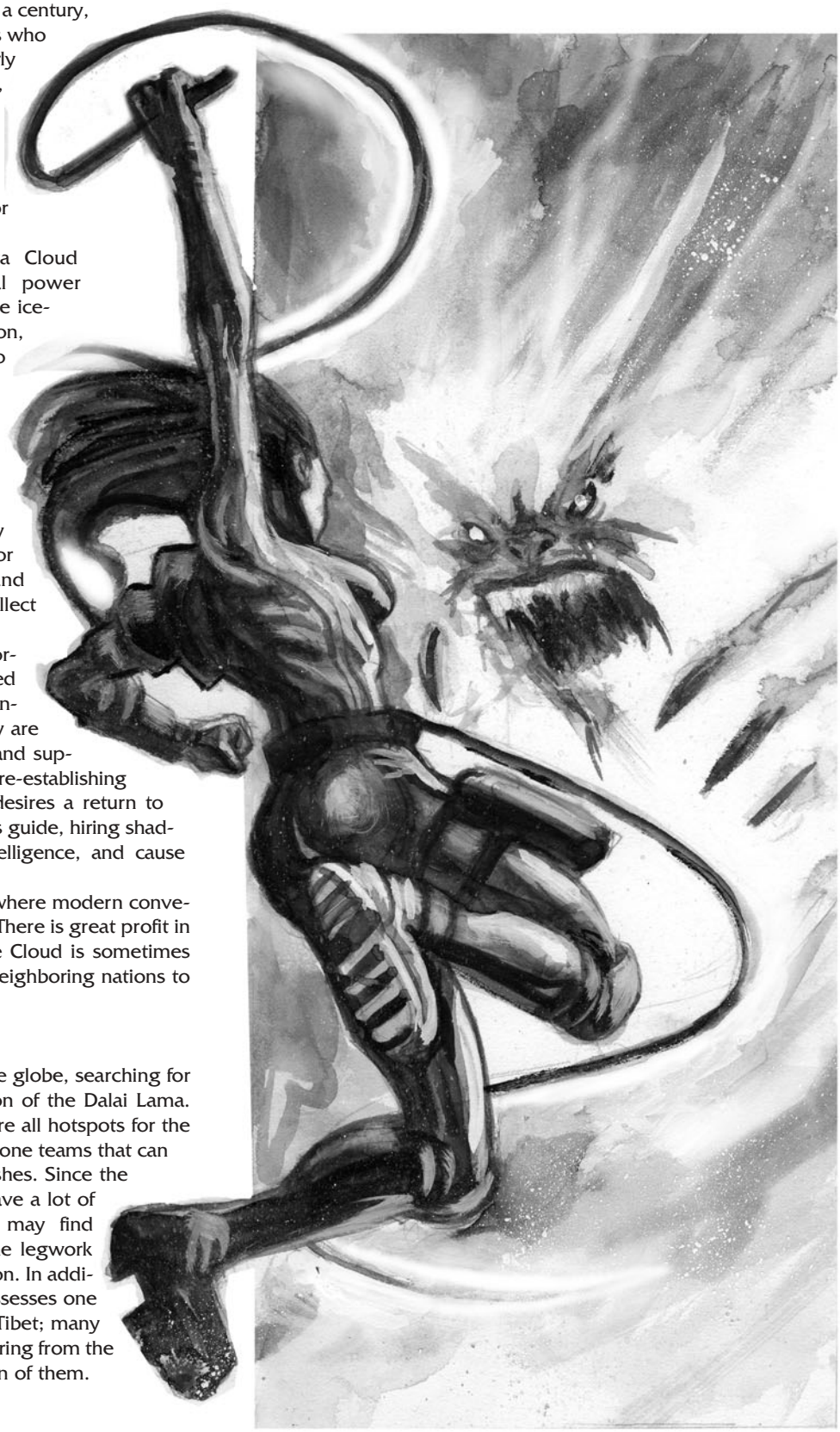
Untapped Resources: The Tibetan plateau is rich in mineral deposits, including gold, copper, lithium and uranium. Southeastern Tibet is covered in old-growth forests, and the nation is perfect for hydro-electrical power collection since the Tibetan plateau is the source for most of Asia's rivers. These

resources have not been available for half a century, and now there are dozens of corporations who would love to get ahold of them. Nearly every corporation with interests in mining, chemicals, land development, tourism or energy production is angling for power in Tibet, offering the nation development deals and employing shadowrunners to put pressure on the government or hurt their competition.

Magical Mystery Tour: The Maya Cloud demonstrates the mysterious magical power native to Tibet, but it's only the tip of the iceberg. Groups like the Atlantean Foundation, the Apep Consortium and the Draco Foundation have all hired shadowrunners to conduct magical investigation of the Maya Cloud and Tibet—and to sabotage competing research. Representatives of Lung and Ryumyo have hired shadowrunners to investigate potential dragon lines in Tibet, but they risk running afoul of Tibetan monks or Nyimabumo. Also, talismongers and wealthy collectors are hiring teams to collect exotic materials and rare artifacts.

Inside and Out: Shin Qao Hien's former military regime in Tibet has been forced into exile in Gansu, living as bandits pandering to corporate pillagers. Of late they are selling their land in Gansu for weapons and supplies, however, and are obsessed with re-establishing their power in Tibet. As much as Shin desires a return to Tibet, however, he is letting caution be his guide, hiring shadowrunners to infiltrate Tibet, collect intelligence, and cause trouble for the current powers.

Tibet is also a smuggler's paradise, where modern conveniences are extremely rare and valuable. There is great profit in smuggling modern items into Tibet. The Cloud is sometimes used by "cloud-hopping" smugglers in neighboring nations to hide from border patrols.



The Search for the Sixteenth

The Lotus Throne Sect is scouring the globe, searching for the child who is the sixteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama. Hong Kong, northern India and Seattle are all hotspots for the search, and there are two other Lotus Throne teams that can be placed wherever the gamemaster wishes. Since the monks are limited to small teams and have a lot of work ahead of them, shadowrunners may find themselves hired to take on some of the legwork without knowing what they are working on. In addition, each of the Lotus Throne teams possesses one of the Five Seals that grant safe entry to Tibet; many organizations and private collectors are hiring from the shadows in an attempt to gain possession of them.

MAYA CLOUD TABLE

Magical Aspects:

1D6 Roll	Type of Effect (roll again for specific spell)
1–2	Mass Confusion (1–3) or Chaotic World (4–6)
3–4	Phantasm (1–3) or Trid Phantasm (4–6)
5	Influence (1–3) or Mob Mood (4–6)
6	Foreboding (1–4) or Mass Agony (5–6)

Physical Aspects

1D6 Roll	Type of Effect (Visibility modifiers apply, p. 112, *SR3*)
1–3	No physical aspect
4	Light snowstorm/rainstorm/sandstorm
5	Heavy snowstorm/rainstorm/sandstorm
6	Total white-out conditions (+8 Visibility penalty)

High Altitude

The entire Tibetan plateau stands roughly 5 kilometers above sea level; those not used to the thin air can suffer drawbacks until they adjust. Visitors to Tibet resist toxins and diseases as if their Body rating were 1 less than usual, and unaccustomed magicians resist Drain as if their Willpower rating were 1 less than usual. Acclimating to the thin air takes 12+1D6 days (the Rule of Six does apply). Characters with extended volume bioware (p. 66, *Man and Machine*) do not suffer these penalties.

The Five Seals

The Seal of the Green Gloves mentioned in Dunkelzahn's Will was only one of five known seals that allow entry into Tibet. The seals are all small metal stamps roughly 6 centimeters tall and made of meteoric iron, similar to the seals used by monks in ancient Tibet to mark items with their official sigil. They are worn at the waist by a loop of dyed silk, each seal being identified by the color of the silk (the Seal of the Green Gloves has a green silk loop). The other four seals are the Seals of the Red, Blue, Yellow and White Gloves; the five match the symbolic colors of Tibetan Buddhism, but appear to be from a time that predates Buddhism's foundation.

Each seal is a Rating 5 Spell Defense Focus (p. 45, *MITS*). In addition, each seal acts as a protective bubble from the effects of the Maya Cloud, even without bonding or activation. A sphere 8 meters in diameter from the seal is unaffected by Cloud effects, either physical or magical.

The Maya Cloud

The Maya Cloud is a churning dome of magical energy that envelops Tibet. It varies from 50 to 100 kilometers deep and follows the borders of the new nation. The Cloud itself is invisible on the physical plane, but it often manifests extreme weather patterns or projected illusions that can be seen by those observing Tibet from outside. The Cloud has a Background Count of 3, and appears on the astral plane as a magical fog enveloping Tibet.

Another passive effect of the Cloud is that it distorts electromagnetic fields. In addition to confusing compasses, the Cloud imposes a Flux range modifier of –4 (p. 137, *SR3*) and adds +3 to the Signature of any vehicle in it. The weather manifestations of the Cloud and the mountain ranges also tend to restrict line-of-sight based communication.

The most significant aspect of the Cloud is when it physically and magically manifests. In the past, the Cloud always manifested at least once when entered, but now it is weakened and sometimes does not manifest at all. In game terms, when the characters enter the Cloud, roll 2 dice with a target number of 5. Even one success indicates a manifestation. Make this roll again for each day the players spend within the Cloud, which may result in multiple manifestations at the gamemaster's discretion.

Each manifestation has a magical aspect and may have an associated physical aspect. Each manifestation also has a Force Rating, which is equal to 1D6+3. Spell effects are cast with Sorcery Test dice equal to twice the manifestation's Force on all characters in the spell's area of effect and the effects are sustained as long as the characters remain within the area of effect.

To determine the nature of the manifestation, roll two dice and consult the Maya Cloud table. One die determines the magical aspect and the other determines the physical aspect, if any. The gamemaster decides the exact nature of the magical effect, and the physical aspect may vary based on the climate where the characters are in the Cloud.

Wild paracritters and predatory tribes of madmen and HMHVV Infected also roam along the Cloud's range, using the manifestations of the Cloud to find new prey. Visitors to Tibet should not expect to be able to reason with those who live within the constant, maddening effects of the Cloud.

JAPAN

Japan is changing more rapidly than it is equipped to deal with. Recent political shifts have opened the country to international business, creating many job opportunities for shadowrunners. Organized crime groups, Japanacorps and even the government are all railing against each other and themselves to establish dominance in a new Japan. Gamemasters should play Japan as a fast-paced, futuristic society whose undermanned shadow community is struggling to handle the demand that faces it.

GETTING IN/OUT

Japan has nine major public airports split among the main islands, two of which are largely domestic. In contrast,

there are over 600 major public seaports, 106 of which are considered main ports in their respective areas and are controlled by prefecture administrations. The remaining ports are run by cities or special interest groups. It is possible to enter Japan illegally by air, but clearly the easiest way for runners to enter the country is by sea, where the overworked coast guard is vulnerable to evasion and bribery. Foreigners who want to reach Japan legally must obtain a visa from an embassy, consulate or corporate office *prior to entering the country*. The exceptions to this rule are international shipping and flight crews whose travel credentials allow them free access to the cities.

Haneda Airport (also known as Tokyo International) is Honshu Island's main airport. Suborbital traffic is routed through here or Nagoya outside of the Kansai sprawl. Okinawa is home to a corporate-sponsored international airfield called Naha. On Kyushu, the primary airport is Fukuoka, a sprawling series of airfields located near the center of Fukuoka City. Sapporo, on Hokkaido Island, boasts New Chitose Airport as a major international hub, but it mostly services Russian, Chinese and Korean travelers. Japan's domestic air travel consists of private helicopter services and a network of commuter airstrips, which are for the most part unequipped to deal with larger aircraft.

The Japanese prefer to travel throughout the country by train. Everything in Japan is networked by an inter-island bullet train system. The cities themselves have extensive maglev lines as well as the much cheaper bus services that move within and between cities, a ferry system for travel between the islands. The Japanese highway system is privatized and run by Shishi Conglomerated, Tsuruga International, Yakashima and Monobe.

Because Japan is so small (slightly smaller than CalFree), the border patrol has been able to supplement its manpower with drones. Naval riggers use aquatic and airborne drones to create a spot-and-track sensor net around Japan. The military has a standing contract with Mitsuhama as a drone supplier. The navy primarily uses Silent Wind UAVS (p. 175, *Rigger 3*).

The drones are outfitted with basic defensive weaponry but they are not designed to confront predators.

VISAS AND LANDING PERMISSION

In Japan, a visa alone doesn't get you anywhere you want to be. In order to move about the cities freely you must receive a stamp of landing permission from the immigration office. The "stamp" is actually a state-certified identity stick that contains a person's status of residence, port of entry and date of arrival. Status of residence determines the activities in which the visitor may engage while in Japan, as well as the amount of time he is allowed to remain in the country. Some examples of permissions are sightseeing, departure, shore leave and corporate dispensation.

Sightseeing passes are the most commonly used. Visitors can travel throughout Japan for up to fifteen days before applying to have the pass renewed. Departure passes last only three days and allow the visitor to move from one port of call to a neighboring port of call within the same or an adjoining prefecture. Shore passes are brief 72-hour shore leaves granted to passengers in transit through Japan. The pass restricts its bearer to remain in the vicinity of the port of call from which the pass originated. Finally, corporate dispensation passes allow the visitor to move freely throughout Japan with no specified time limit. The holder is considered to be a citizen of the corporation that provided the pass. These are the most expensive passes to forge.

THE NIPPON MATRIX

Wireless Matrix implementation is a big deal in Japan. Companies like Renraku are desperate to get their hands on the Transys Neuronet technology and bring it to market before anyone else. The precarious relationship between MCT and Transys has the former looking for ways to steal the technology and cut Transys out of what they believe should be a Japanese innovation. Transys is using the technology's early rollout as a way to work out its kinks and discover ways to improve it before Erika Corporation can corner the market on the innovation.

The Nippon Matrix itself is heavily laden with checkpoints and IC, some to ensure that the fragile wireless Matrix portions of the network aren't overwhelmed by users and some to combat the numerous otaku gangs that roam this part of the Matrix.

RUNNING IN JAPAN

The majority of Japanacorp disputes are solved in the shadows. With recent levels of corporate unrest so high, shadowrunners have become a valuable asset. Runners will often find themselves working both sides of a corporate war. They may be hired by corp A to break in and steal a formula from corp B, whereupon corp B might turn around and hire them to steal it back.

The shadows get darker when you move into the denser sprawls like Nagasaki, Neo-Tokyo and Kansai (Kyoto/Osaka/Kobe). Nagasaki runs will likely feature smaller corporations vying for political leverage, as well as protection missions that pit runners against organized crime and the ever-present world of smuggling. Neo-Tokyo is a political nightmare. Runners can find work from any number of factions working for or against the Emperor. Magical runs are prevalent across Honshu, as the Shinto kami work toward rebuilding the nation.

Kansai engages runners in intelligence gathering. The sprawl boasts more independent research facilities than anywhere else in the nation, with everything from genetic research to magical exploration going on there. Not only can runners make a profit working for corps in Kansai, but they can direct their own futures by acquiring secrets and selling them to the highest bidder.

JAPANESE MAGIC

Magic is style in Japan. Shinto philosophy, geomancy and feng shui lead a list of trends at the top of pop-culture magic. The Japanese enjoy magic almost as much as they enjoy technology: the number of talismonger shops throughout the nation is evidence of this. Still, it can be difficult to locate authentic magical goods in Japan. Genuine magical goods tend to cost more because of the number of shops selling fakes.

Japan also has a number of unusual magical spots. Kyushu Island, which suffered the most during the eruption of the Ring of Fire, was left with a general Background Count of 3. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sites of the WWII atomic bombings, still carry an astral taint, giving them a Background Count of 5. Not all the peculiarities of Japan are negative, however: the Shinto shrine Ise Jingu sits upon a powerful manaline with a Background Count of 4.

THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East's best attraction for runners is the brewing war between Israel and the combined forces of Arabia and Syria. Ibn Eisa has prodded the Syrian president and King Abdallah of Jordan to make aggressive military maneuvers close to the Israeli border, against the wishes of the Caliph of Arabia. The Caliph retaliated by removing him from command of the Islamic Unity Movement. This situation might have lasting consequences for the Middle East.

The falling out between Ibn Eisa and the Caliph happened for two reasons. First, Caliph Ibn Saud has grown tired of Ibn Eisa's bellicosity, and he wants the IUM to once again be a force for peace and stability in the region. He dreams of using the IUM to convince Syria and Iraq to join the Arabian Caliphate, hoping this will bring back the golden days of Islam. Second, Saeder-Krupp is tired of the instability Ibn Eisa has been causing in what it considers its turf. S-K has supported the Caliph in his decision, hoping to strengthen its influence within Arabia and eventually in the enlarged Caliphate.

GETTING IN/OUT

The Middle East is linked to the world by numerous international airports. The usual choices for travelers are Riyadh (for Arabia), Ankara (for Turkey), Basra (for Iraq), Tel Aviv (for Israel) and Esfahan (for Iran). Beirut (in Syria) is a popular choice for those looking for poor security and bribable airport officials.

All visitors need a tourist visa to get into a Middle East country, except for Afghanistan and Cyprus where no formal

government is established. Visas for Iraq are easily available by paying a small fee. In contrast, Israel and Kurdistan require thorough background checks and a valid reason for visiting. Visas for Iran are nearly impossible to get for metahumans; magicians and people with obvious cyberware will need to buy an expensive permit before being allowed across the border. The discriminatory attitudes of Arabia and Syria also pose problems for metahuman visitors.

Smuggling In/Out

Asian runners wanting to enter the Middle East illegally usually use the Kabul *Maffiya*'s smuggling network. Their extensive smuggling network runs from Samarkand (in Turkestan), to their center of operations in Kabul (in Afghanistan). From there, runners can go to Iran and onwards to the rest of the Middle East. American and European runners usually choose the *Al-Akhira* syndicate, the Turkish Grey Wolves or the Turkish Maffiya; all have extensive smuggling networks running from various European countries to the Middle East. The Turkish Maffiya specializes in smuggling difficult cargo through their base in Cyprus.

Runners can also work with local smuggling networks. Moving between Arab countries (Arabia, Iraq and Syria) is easy; the territory of the Arab tribes often extends across borders, and the tribesmen can smuggle runners without too much trouble. If the runners want to smuggle heavy cargo, they can resort to the Bedouin tribes (see p. 38, *Target Wastelands*). The borders of Iran also cut through the territory of nomad tribes; runners can cross from Turkestan by hiring Turkmen tribesmen, or from Pakistan using Baloch guides.

Kurdistan is a special case. The Peshmerga handle the smuggling of persons and cargo from East Turkey to Syria, Iraq and Iran, always through mountain routes inside Kurdistan. However, the Peshmerga won't take runners inside the Kurdish cities. Israel is also a special case; smugglers take a tortuous route through the Gaza Strip and Palestine that ends in the international zone of Jerusalem.

Finally, runners might want to cross borders on their own. Arabia, Turkey and Syria have average border security, which becomes flimsier in the Arabian desert. Iraqi border patrols are scarce and are very open to arrangements outside the law. Afghanistan and Cyprus have no border security to speak of; on the other hand, Iranian and Israeli border patrols are everywhere and they usually shoot first and ask questions later.

RUNNING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ibn Eisa has the backing of many Shi'ite Muslims who believe him to be their Twelfth Great Imam, returned after centuries of hiding to once again lead Shi'ites to greatness. He is already consolidating his power in Iran through Prime Minister Kashani, though he is being opposed by Ayatollah Abdallah and Yamatetsu. He also has a lot of support in Iraq through Ayatollah Juvayni and other Shi'ite clerics, enough to start a secessionist movement that could lead to a civil war. Runners are being hired by Yamatetsu, S-K and the Arabian corps to sabotage Ibn Eisa's alliances in these regions.

Ibn Eisa is also supported by the radical IUM faction in Syria. This influence extends to the Hamas movement operating in Palestine, threatening the stability of Israel. Israel is so worried that it might launch a devastating retaliation against Syria, triggering a major war. S-K and the Frankfurt Bank Association are working hard to prevent this, hiring runners to take out key Ibn Eisa supporters inside the Syrian government.

In Arabia, house Shammar is allied with Ibn Eisa and he can count on the financial backing of the Sandstorm Engineering Conglomerate. The Caliph wants to take him out soon and bring his organization down with him, before they grow powerful enough to achieve their goal. Runners are getting hired to work against the SEC and its subsidiaries all over the Middle East.

Finally, Ibn Eisa's final goals are still unclear. If the rumors are true, Ibn Eisa may be under the control of an alien spirit, perhaps even a master shedim (see p. **XX**, *Threats 2*). Some people have noted the New Islamic Jihad's interests in the cities of Jerusalem and Tehran. Jerusalem is known for its religious and magical significance, while Tehran saw one of the largest massacres in the twenty-first century; runners are being hired to learn more about Ibn Eisa's activities in these places and to put a stop to them altogether.

Arabia

Islam, bargaining locals and cultural gap are the key words a gamemaster should have in mind when setting a game in Arabia. The local corps are still competing among themselves, but the competition is being polarized by the growing power of Sandstorm Engineering, on the verge of becoming AA. On the other hand, the Caliph has big plans for the Middle East that include joining together Arabia, Syria and Iraq. With Ibn Eisa out of the picture, S-K, the Islamic Development Cooperative Bank and other smaller Arabian corps are behind this project since it'll create a large free trade zone in the region. They are working in Arabia and the Middle East to remove all obstacles to the union.

Iran

The political mess in Iran presents many running opportunities. Yamatetsu and Ares can hire runners to discredit or sabotage the Mobarez Party, or they can be fighting Ibn Eisa's power base in Iran. Missions might involve subtle attacks on the reputation of important politicians and corp execs, especially on their failings to keep up with Iran's Islamic laws.

These laws also present some unique problems for runners, especially for females, metahumans, mages and those with extensive cyberware. Use them as an opponent; there are many ways to circumvent them, but if runners choose to ignore them, hit them hard with the Pasadaran. The laws are also plot hooks, as runners looking to evade them might get involved with Iran's underworld. The Persepolis Shadowland node is a place to get intel on Iran and all the Middle East.

Iraq

Runners can get involved in the corp war created by S-K's dwindling interest in Iraq. In particular, Global Oil is hiring help to deal with Exxoco's growing influence, and Arabian finance

corps are trying to buy up assets anticipating an Arabian takeover of Iraq. Runners might be hired to sabotage new projects and convince tribal sheiks to support some corporate deal. Baghdad and Basra can be good places to introduce runners to the Middle East without giving them the full force of Islamic law. They should feel like modern cities, even decadent, with neon, prostitution and gambling in the air.

Israel

A good deal of the Israeli economy is controlled by foreign interests. The FBA and Ares are especially powerful allies there and have been dictating their rules behind the scenes. This is a wobbly situation for Israel, because if the corps find greener pastures elsewhere, nobody knows how the Israeli economy may recover.

The Old City of Jerusalem is a Rating 7 mana warp (p. 85-86, *MITS*), except around the various magical sites throughout the city, aspected toward one faith or another, acting as safe havens for magicians. Examples of such power sites include the Western Wall (Jewish), the Al-Aqsa Mosque (Muslim) and the Holy Sepulcher (Christian). Their ratings vary between 3 and 5, with higher peaks up to 7 during religious feasts.

Since many cults have stepped into Jerusalem, the gamemaster should feel free to add magical sites aspected toward one faith or another, such as the Seventh Seal or even the Aleph Society (see *Year of the Comet* and *Threats 2*), and to play up the cosmopolitan and mystical feel, with crazy architecture and people as numerous factions all try to advance their agendas. The Ecumenical Council is exclusively ruled by representatives of all three monotheist religions as well as a special envoy from the UN—but for how long?

Turkey

West Turkey is an unsettling place. Westerners are welcomed, but the Turks are intoxicated by propaganda and their country is manipulated by the corps and European interests, twisting society's fabric.

The fundamentalist East is caught between the Kurdish Peshmerga and West Turkey's repression, not faring well. The propaganda campaign is a major issue, as terrorist cells are more and more numerous in West Turkey. East Turkey's backer or backers is left up to the gamemaster: it may be the Sandstorm Conglomerate, a dragon, the New Islamic Jihad or another player with an interest in weakening West Turkey. With some tweaking, it might even be Aksakal Teks.

Constantinople/Istanbul is an island of stability and spirituality east of the war-torn Balkans and the schizophrenic West Turkey. As the interests of many factions collide there (mercs, S-K and the NEEC, the Ukraine and Bionergetica, Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox factions), this fragile balance may be broken if one or the other decides on a bold move (the 10,000 Daggers reduce their troops, the churches find a daring agreement, S-K moves its Middle East HQ to Arabia …).

The Rest of the Middle East

The Damascus bazaar is a wonderful place to find second- and third-hand information and gear. The gamemaster should design special bargains and deals according to his campaign's needs.

The bazaar has a special corner dedicated to extraction targets from all over the world. If the shadowrunners work as independents, they can consider Damascus as a prime place to sell their target. The gamemaster should emphasize the short period of time during which this solution is available and present the players with some risky challenges.

MIDDLE EAST ADVENTURE IDEAS

- Hassan Sudayrin hires the runners to find out more about Ibn Eisa's supporters in Arabia. They should start by looking at the financial backers of Ayatollah Juvayni in the Iraqi city of Najaf. The Islamic Renaissance Movement and the Black Scorpions are also investigating Juvayni, and they can become allies or competition according to the runners' actions. Eventually the runners should track down Juvayni's connections with Global Oil and the SEC back in Arabia. If they manage to infiltrate SEC's new Riyadh arcology, runners might learn enough information about their targets' ties to Ibn Eisa to send them on runs all across the Middle East.
- The runners are hired by a Eurocorp and have to "convince" an Arab official working for the Islamic-Corporate Coordination Board to grant the corp the right to do business in Arabia. They must first get to Dubai and meet some contacts, then reach Ryadh—where their target is missing. Asking around, they learn that he joined the Bedouin Tentown, where he actually fried his brain with chips. The runners have no choice but to cancel the run or find another person to negotiate with.
- The Palestinian representative at the Ecumenical Council is worried that extremist elements in the Qabbalist faction and Hamas may try to spark a new intifada in Jerusalem, with the hope of overthrowing the UN administration. The runners have to investigate in Tel Aviv and in the Ramallah STOLZ to find a former Hamas activist who knows the organization's plans, but they're caught by surprise when Israel strikes at Jordan and all gates between Palestine and Jerusalem are closed.
- The runners are hired by the folks at the Persepolis Shadowland node, in the Iranian city of Shiraz. Professor Shabastari is under arrest for anti-Islamic preaching; if he is convicted or escapes, the government will have an open door to clamp down on dissidents in Shiraz. They must make the trial go Shabastari's way, but Iranian judges are well protected and difficult to bribe.
- Exxoco's Baghdad Electrics power plants are located in the lands of the Dulaym tribes in Iraq. Global Oil hires runners to bring the tribes to their side, so they'll have to play tribal politics. Sheikh Mohammed al-Dulayimi of the Abu Issaf tribe has been insulted by Ayatollah Nabavi, an important cleric in Najaf, and if the runners would only restore his honor …

RUSSIA AND YAKUT

The following information pertains to shadowrunning in Russia and Yakut.

RUSSIA

The general theme of Russia is a power play. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the Soviet Union during the mid-1980s, between Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. From 1982 to 1985, the Soviet Politburo saw three of its General Secretaries (Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko) die in office, accompanied by behind-the-scenes power struggles among the KGB, the Communist Party and the Red Army. Russia in 2064 is experiencing this same kind of atmosphere.

Getting In and Out

Travel into Russia is tightly monitored. Except for a favored few, visas are mandatory, and granting a visa almost always requires a background check. Additionally, the UGB border guards watch all ports of entry for suspicious or potentially dangerous characters. On the upside, many border guards are poorly paid and susceptible to bribery.

Characters trying to enter Russia illegally (such as smugglers) run the risk of interception by a border patrol, particularly on a hot border like those with the Caucasus Mountains or Yakut. UGB border guards patrol the border in light military vehicles, such as combat helicopters, armed patrol boats and light armored vehicles. The border patrols have a lot of ground to cover, and so player characters have a decent chance of finding a gap in coverage. Those who bet wrong, however, can find themselves in a world of hurt.

Running in Russia

Plenty of shadowrunning opportunities revolve around Russia's current political vacuum. Several different factions wield undue influence in the Russian government, and all of them want their man in the top spot. Additionally, many of the candidates are pursuing their own agendas. Several factions are also riddled with internal squabbling, creating additional layers of treachery, deceit and backstabbing.

Russia has a long history of totalitarian rule, and its secret police have maintained their infamous reputation throughout history. Russia's citizens genuinely fear the secret police, leading to a situation in the shadows where everyone suspects everyone else. Criminals often cut deals with the police to stay in business, selling them secrets so that the police will overlook the criminals' own activities. Players unfamiliar with this style of doing business will find themselves hunted not only by the law, but also by their criminal "allies" looking to make a big score.

Gamemasters shouldn't overdo these elements, however. The vacuum at the top has thrown off Russia's power balance, with alliances shifting among the various factions. This uncertainty presents many cracks through which shadowrunners can evade the eyes of the law.

As far as racism goes, Russia has as many problems as any other country, but discrimination based on metatype takes a back seat to ethnic discrimination. A human from a disfavored ethnic group may suffer as much or more prejudice than a metahuman belonging to a favored one.

The Valley of Geysers

The Valley of Geysers is a magical power site with a Background Count of 3. It is aspected in favor of fire and earth-based spells but against conjuring fire and earth elementals, as well as spirits of the land and the ground (p. 105, *MitS*).

YAKUT

Like the Native American Nations, Siberia's indigenous ethnic tribes rebelled against the Russians and broke away with magical help. To do so, however, they made a proverbial deal with the devil, trading an authoritarian regime enforced by the UGB for an anti-society spirit imposing its will on the natives through its shapeshifter followers. Several dissidents finally had enough and recently organized a counter-rebellion, aided by mysterious powers deriving from the Sagan Zaba landmark on the shores of Lake Baykal.

Getting In and Out

Except for Yakutsk and Magadan, no major transportation routes connect Yakut to the rest of the world. Yakutsk, the capital, has an airport capable of handling conventional aircraft, but not long-distance craft like HSCTs, suborbitals and semiballistics. Secondary roads, but no major highways, lead from it into Yakut. Magadan is a major seaport that can handle most types of air and sea travel, and it boasts a few rail and road connections to corporate work camps in Yakut. All of Magadan's traffic routes, however, are undersized, particularly compared to major sprawls in North America and Europe.

Penetrating the borders is relatively easy, as most of Yakut is untouched wilderness. Characters may have to worry less about border patrols, but they also must brave the challenges of survival away from civilization, especially when it seems the entire land is against them.

Running in Yakut

Yakut is a totalitarian back-to-the-land regime, a wet dream for society-hating, deep green eco-extremists (as long as they don't have to live there). Shapeshifters serve as Yakut's secret police, keeping the people in line and enforcing the will of Vernya, the powerful free nature spirit that gives the shapeshifters their marching orders.

Some of Yakut's ethnic tribes lately realized the truth and are organizing to fight the spirit. Just as Vernya aided the Yakut natives in revolting against the Russians, these rebels have found assistance from a magical power site on the shores of Lake Baykal. Adventures in Yakut generally revolve around this campaign, where magical and mysterious forces are at work on both sides. Merc and magical campaigns are particularly well suited for Yakut; critter hunts are another major theme, as many exotic flora and fauna thrive in Yakut.

Background Count and Power Sites

Yakut is an Awakened land, and many of its locations resonate with magical power. Most of the Yakut wilderness has

a Background Count of at least 1. The background count is aspected against conjuring, so add it to the target number for all conjuring-related tests made in the wilderness. Some places may have a Background Count of 2 or even 3. The Siberian wilderness also has a Power Site Rating that fluctuates between 1 and 3. This acts as additional Spell Pool dice for magicians "attuned" to the area (usually shapeshifters and certain shamans). The gamemaster may adjust these numbers up or down as needed.

Lake Baykal

Lake Baykal is a power site attuned to the Sagan Zaba, or the White Rock of Olkhon Island. Olkhon Island itself has a Rating of 4, or higher if the gamemaster so desires. The rest of the lake and the surrounding land have ratings between 1 and 3, depending on location. Only the rebels, who have learned to tap the power of the Sagan Zaba, are attuned to Lake Baykal. For everyone else, the lake has a background count equal to the local power site rating.

Tunguska

Tunguska was the site of a massive extraterrestrial impact in 1908, resulting in all sorts of weird phenomena. The Tunguska crater site has a general Background Count of 3, and the area is considered a wild magic zone (see pp. 87–88, *MITS*).

Magadan

The city of Magadan and many of the work camps around it have Background Counts between 1 and 3, deriving from Magadan's past as the center of the Soviet gulag system. This is a general effect not aspected against any particular magic usage.

Booryazmei

Booryazmei is an adult western dragon that has intermittently marauded around the Ural Mountains for years, attacking Russians and Yakut natives equally. Until recently, however, the attacks came sufficiently few and far between that stories about this dragon never made it out of the local area. Booryazmei's motives are a mystery, as he has refused any attempts at communication. Use the statistics and powers for western dragons on pp. 177–178 of *Dragons of the Sixth World.* Unlike typical dragons, Booryazmei does not have Flamethrower as an innate spell, but instead attacks with various lightning-based Elemental Manipulation spells such as Lightning Bolt. Booryazmei also possesses the Conjuring Skill and specializes in conjuring Spirits of the Skies.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia is a land of diversity. While most of its nations could be considered Third World level, some rose to a higher development stage, such as Malaysia and Singapore, or to a lesser extent Thailand and parts of the Indonesian archipelago. The majority of Southeast Asia is way behind on the SOTA curve, due to incessant wars that tore it apart for about 40 years. Now that relative stabili-

ty is in place, however, it finally gets the international attention it deserves.

GETTING IN/OUT

All the capital cities of the region have an international airport (except for the Kashin state in Indochina, Borneo and most parts of the Malay Archipelago), though only Bangkok, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, the Pelawangan Space Port, Rangoon and Singapore accept suborbital planes. Land travel to Indochina is possible, though it is slow and exhausting as most roads are unpaved or damaged by the wars—some are also impossible to drive on during monsoon season. Travelers should also be aware of road banditry risks, particularly important in the Golden Triangle, southern Laos and Cambodia.

Within Indonesia and the Philippines the use of boats or small hoppers for transportation between the islands of the archipelagos is common, although there is always the risk of being raided by Huk or Guinean rebels or Indonesian buccaneers.

Visas are required by most South Asian countries that have a constitutional government. They can be acquired at any embassy or consulate abroad, or on arrival at the immigration office. The Dayak Council, the Kashin state, and Yunnan have no foreign representation, while Pattani maintains only two embassies (one in Bangkok and one in Kuala Lumpur). The average cost for a three-month tourist visas is 40¥ ; one-year work permits can be obtained for 100¥ but require corporate or governmental sponsorship. The bureaucratic process can be very long, especially for visas to Vietnam and Laos, unless one pays "fast lane fees" (read: bribes).

Visas for the Philippines must still be acquired through Japanese embassies as Filipino embassies worldwide are closed since the formation of the Imperial prefecture. Since the annexation of the Independent State of New Guinea, Guineas IDs are governed by the Australian government.

Cyberware, weapons and magic restrictions follow international standards (or are lower, because cyberware is less known an common), though it isn't difficult to discreetly bribe customs officials. As a rule of thumb, bribes are about 5 percent of the worth of the smuggled items.

Credstick readers are only available in the tourist zones (and Japanese enclaves in the Philippines), and when accepted are typically only used for money exchange (not ID) except for Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore. Everywhere else, it's still paper banknotes and metal coins. Only the Javanese Republic, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam use an equivalent of the SIN, though it's far less comprehensive (High-tech centres like Kuala Lumpur and Singapore even exceed international standards). In most cases it is just an ID smartcard, containing only basic information required for identification. In all other countries, the administration still delivers paper documents for ID card, passport and so on. This makes fake ID production easier and cheaper (half the costs for fake IDs given on p. 239, SR3).

Very few nations outside of Southeast Asia will accept these rudimentary IDs, which further limits the possibility of legal travel abroad for Guinean, Indochinese, Indonesian and Malaysian natives.

Identification of Filipino natives is even more restricted, as only few Filipinos are granted Identification and the appropriate Travel papers by the Imperial prefecture. In order to use her local ID out of SEA, the player will need to submit it for upgrade to either a megacorporation or foreign embassy (but even in this case the embassy will require a corporation's sponsorship with solid justification for the request to be processed). Note that in most South East Asian nations, citizens working for extraterritorial corporations are automatically issued a complete standard corporate SIN and ID.

RUNNING IN INDOCHINA

Indochina offers a large variety of shadowrun opportunities, from drug wars to Awakened insurrections or even standard corporate intrigues.

The Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is a dangerous land, ruled by ruthless druglords and linked to powerful international criminal networks. The Triads have long been the uncontested number one syndicate operating there, but the second-rank Yakuza are challenging this status quo. Runners can easily find work as henchmen for a syndicate or powerful druglord, or they can discover the hard way how these mob wars interfere with other activities in this troubled area. The druglords are the key player characters, either wooed or threatened by the syndicates to secure their allegiance. Each has his own agenda and the players will have to deal differently with a Shan patriot, a Yunnanese warlord or a Burmese ex-general.

Kalokdam is a unique druglord, as he's actually a master shedim (see p. 54, *Threats 2*) controlling a small army of regular shedim (it's easy to find bodies in an area that saw 40 years of warfare). Kalokdom uses these minions as relentless workers in his poppy fields, growing a special Awakened variant he magically created. Red Orchid is highly addictive and mildly dangerous—like the Australian Altyerre, it forces the user to astrally project to unusual metaplanes (usually providing quite an interesting trip), but sometimes (a result of 2 on 2D6) the projecting user draws the attention of a shedim spirit that immediately possesses his empty body. If the user is mundane, there's very little chance that he will survive.

The Naga Kingdom

A new Awakened nation is in the making in Cambodia. The naga uprising took Cambodian leaders by surprise and they're now trying to fight it any way they have at their disposal. The player characters may find themselves employed by the Cambodian government, the Triad-linked army or their corporate allies to lead reconnaissance, assassination or attack missions against the naga. They may also be on the other side of the conflict, employed directly by the naga or their agents for the same kind of missions. The naga seek aid in recovering the Preah Khan from Sophie de Rochefort (whether or not it's the genuine article is left to the gamemaster's discretion) or in negotiating with the hill tribes of the Dega Alliance.

PPG vs. Japanacorps

The competition between the Pacific Prosperity Group and the Japanacorps is a worldwide affair, but Indochina is one of the primary battlegrounds. Japanese corporations like Shiawase, Renraku and Monobe currently hold the best position in Indochinese markets, but PPG challengers are on the offensive. In Burma, Eastern Tiger and Wuxing are slowly but methodically making inroads, while in Thailand the PPG-sponsored Niranam contests the power of the junta in a growing propaganda war.

RUNNING IN SHATTERED INDONESIA

Shattered Indonesia is a place where runners will face untamed wilderness and hidden hostility. The archipelago's high population is mainly located in coastal urban areas, and many islands are only barely inhabited. The region has suffered through numerous geological disasters in the last fifty years, causing several islands to rise or sink—maps are often inaccurate. The islands (especially smaller ones) are rife with dropout communities, drug barons and cultists, among the regular peasants and villagers seeking to eke out a living.

Monster Island

Biogene and the Javanese junta do in fact have a program to breed and modify existing critter species. While the junta's main goal is to conquer their nearby enemies (Sumatra, New Guinea) with these critters and thereby raise their own fortunes, Biogene's primary interest in this is mainly business, as they hope to exceed MCT's Parashield branch with their own stock of genetic and bio-modified guard critters.

Biogene has also been experimenting with biowarfare here, though it is officially forbidden through the Copenhagen Accords. Both the United Nations and anti-genetic modification policlubs like GenePeace (see *Loose Alliances*) have been keeping a close eye on research installations in Jakarta and on the Karimunjawa Islands, giving the characters excellent job opportunities in the region. The Karimunjawa Islands in particular are perfect for a genetic freakshow scenario, where runners can encounter a menagerie of genetic abominations.

An Ancient Feud

The spirits that escaped the Borobodur monument on Java are in fact the Kurawa, the mythical enemy of the Balinese Pandawa Lim. The old feud between them, dating back far beyond the current age, has been revived. In contrast to the Pandawa Lima's ability to materialize, the Kurawa only have an astral form. This is also the reason they have been mistaken for shedim. They can mount people by using a power similar to Possession (see p. 13, *Critters*). The Kurawa can inhabit even an unwilling subject if they win an Opposed Test between the spirit's Force vs. the victim's Willpower. Possession also grants the Kurawa access to its victim's memories in a fashion similar to a master shedim's Inhabitation power (see p. 54, *Threats 2*).

The main goal of the Kurawa is the ultimate destruction of the Pandawa Lima. To achieve this, they are establishing power bases among the buccaneers and druglords of the Malay archipelago and throughout Indonesia, using shadowrunners to gather information in Bali or deal with the Puputan who have been sent out to hunt down the Kurawas. The Pandawa Lima, on the other hand, have also instructed their trusted Dukuns to hire shadowrunners to assist the Puputan or eradicate Kurawa power bases.

RUNNING IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia features one of the most tolerant and diverse cultures in Eastern Asia. A melting pot of ethnicities, religions and metatypes, it attracts many who seek refuge from religious or racial discrimination elsewhere. Though Islam is the official state-sponsored religion, traditional Islamic prejudices are not expressed here, making Malaysia a likely growth spot for the emerging Islamic Renaissance Movement.

Online Nexus

Malaysia's high-tech Matrix is a focal point for online activities of all stripes, from recreation to finances to data-mining. As one of the world's banking centers, Malaysia's banks remain on the cutting edge of virtual transactions and Matrix security, led by the PPG's own Malaysian Independent Bank powerhouse. This makes Malaysia a hotspot for financial fraud and economic battles between the PPG and the Japanacorps, particularly PacRim Bank. Likewise, Singapore's Market Research Group leads the world in data-mining techniques, making it a prime target for anyone seeking interesting research data, personal profiles or even analyses of business trends that could affect the future of corporate affairs in Southeast Asia.

Corporate Playpen

Both Malaysia and Singapore have poured vast resources into transforming Kuala Lumpur and Singapore into two of the world's foremost research centers. Aggressive recruiting programs, corporate sponshorship, extravagant benefit packages and some of the world's hottest labs have drawn top scientists and researchers from around the world to this brainiac heaven. Naturally, competition is fierce to develop new methods, processes and patents, and otherwise exploit new technology to its furthest. Runners will find no shortage of work pursuing industrial espionage, extractions or datatheft.

Spectre of Communism

Though Malaysian communists have suffered two drastic defeats in the area this century, there are still enough poor and dispossessed in Malaysia's rural areas and in the fringes of its cities to keep the movement going. The bulk of the population strongly opposes any notion of communism regaining a hold here, not only because it threatens the capitalist paradise urban Malaysia has become, but also since the neo-communist movement was discovered to be a front for bug spirits just under a decade ago. Fragments of those neo-communists survive as well, though they are no longer trusted by other communists, and may in fact still be under the influence of bug spirit hives.

RUNNING IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines are going through a time of upheaval. Since the revolution began, the nation and its population are fighting for their ultimate freedom from their Japanese oppressors.

Supported by the great dragon Masaru and opposed by anti-metahuman factions and the great dragon Ryumyo, the Philippines present many opportunities for runners to get involved in this war on either side. As the island of Luzon harbors the primary lair of the great dragon Masaru, runners might be drawn to the Philippines with a different motivation (maybe on behalf on another dragon) while the war is going on. More information on the motivation and agenda of Masaru can be found on pp. 119-131, *Dragons of the Sixth World.*

Oni Hunt

In an attempt to calm troubled waters, Masaru has put out a bounty on the oni that assassinated the governor. Since there are factions in the Huk that supported the attack, this move is controversial, and any attempt to find the assassin is likely to be countered. The gamemaster has a choice of options to pursue here. Does Masaru really want the assassin found, fearing that some other agency is trying to influence his plans for the Philippines? Or is the bounty merely an act of appeasement, while Masaru secretly wishes to aid the assassin in avoiding capture? Perhaps Masaru plans to produce an assassin no matter what, thus discouraging any retribution from Japanese forces.

Eating the Living

Around the world, most of those unfortunate enough to be infected with HMHVV dwell in the shadows and outskirts of metahuman society. A group of pan-Asian Infected, however, are using the Bahay ng Isa (Coral Reef) restaurant chain to supply themselves with blood and meat. With the ongoing revolution by Masaru and his Huk rebels, the Philippines have become too dangerous for them to carry on as before. Asking groups like Tamanous or the Body Bank for help, they plan to relocate their operations (to Japan or Indochina). Other groups may try to prevent this alliance, as they have other plans for the Asian Infected community.

REST OF ASIA

Each of these regions has its own plot hooks and flavor.

KOREA

Korea is an Asian paradox: it has a love-hate relationship with Japan and a tech-addicted society that holds dearly to ancient traditions. Government propaganda to the contrary, Korea is a military dictatorship modeled after Chung-Hee Park and Doo-Hwan Chun's regimes in the 1970-80s. Foreign runners might face challenges adapting to Korean society and its shadows.

Getting In and Out

As an air/sea transport hub and a tourist-friendly country, Korea receives many legal visitors. The country has several international airports, including Incheon, Pusan and Chejudo. Visa requirements are low, though local officers usually harass Japanese citizens with additional red tape.

Smugglers and pirates don't ask questions as long as the nuyen is good, but they might charge an extra fee when the military is in high gear. The Korea Strait in particular is a favorite site for the Korean Navy's war games.

Walking the Tightrope

President-General Lee's new nationalist stance might be mere political bravado or a real change of heart. What he gained by helping Kwonsham Industries and alienating Shiawase is also a mystery, though his mistress might have something to do with it. Each gamemaster should decide which particular truth fits his campaign.

Virtual Addicts

Gamemasters might want to highlight Korea's endemic Matrix abuse by emphasizing the tech craziness. Players wishing to create a Korean character should consider taking the Matrix Addiction flaw (p. 26, *Matrix*) even if not playing a decker or otaku.

Korean Shamanism

Most mudang are women, though it's still unknown whether this is due to a strong cultural tradition, true magical predisposition or some other reason. Several places in Korea are magically aspected toward Korean shamanism, most notably Mt. Paektusan and Chejudo. Background count in Chejudo varies between 1 and 3, depending on proximity to Mt. Hallasan. Meanwhile, Mt. Paektusan has a Background Count of 4.

Treat spirit villages as a "collective" free spirit, using the rules found on p. 113, *MITS.* Each village should have a distinct character particular to those spirits. The memory loss incidents can be treated as an Alter Memory spell (p.144, *MITS*), cast every night with the Sorcery skill (p.118, *MITS*). Gamers should understand that a character affected this way does not consciously know this—as far as a character is concerned, those are her memories. This could become permanent if all memories and skills are affected.

Korean Adventure Ideas

- The Yamashita-gumi has been in retreat for some time, but enough is enough. Though "Halabeoji" Park's political connections cannot be ignored, an object lesson is deemed necessary. Foreign runners are needed, as their lack of local knowledge is actually a boon for the Yakuza.
- A top Renraku exec decides to jump ship and join Eastern Tiger. While visiting Chejudo Island, he slips past security and hides in a small village. Unfortunately, by the time runners arrive he seems to believe himself a local landlord. Runners must not only bring him to Eastern Tiger unharmed, but they'll also have to dodge Renraku's Korean forces and perhaps the suit's new spiritual friends …

MONGOLIA

Runners visiting Mongolia will likely be involved with the construction of the trans-Mongolian railway, either sabotaging it or hunting rival runner groups in Urga. They might also be exposed to Mongol magic; a fatalistic prediction made by

a seer is a good way to send them on their next run. Perhaps they also get involved in probing the link between Mongol and Tibetan monks.

Getting In and Out

It's not hard to enter and leave Mongolia; visas can be obtained at the Urga international airport for a small fee and background checks are not very thorough. The borders are porous and illegal visitors are more likely to meet a friendly nomad tribe than a border patrol. The main problem for runners is transportation. There are few roads, and most transport is handled by airplane; but the sudden winter storms can ground most planes and bring all transport to a halt.

Archaeological War

Renraku and Yamatetsu are competing to take over the Karakorum archaeological site in Mongolia, as both are very interested in the nature of the Indian magical artifacts known as jyortirlinga (see p. 63). The Indian government never gave them access to the twelve jyortirlingas located there, but the corps managed to track down a thirteenth artifact stolen by Genghis Khan's raiders during their Indian campaign in 1220-25, and they think it's still buried in Karakorum. Runners may be hired to sabotage the other corp's archaeological site, kidnap their main scientists or steal their equipment. In the process, they can learn something about the artifacts that sends them to Turkestan and India in search of ancient mysteries.

OCEANIA

This region's openness makes it one of the freest, unregulated locations to run the shadows and the perfect place to set adventures without concern for the legal niceties and restrictions of sprawl-bound scenarios.

Getting In and Out

Oceania is the Sixth World's most accessible region. The majority of it is classified as international waters and though its size precludes any serious attempts at border control, within its expanse there exist a few destinations that take this task seriously. These spots of civilization are the hubs of inter-continental transportation and bastions of law and order—elsewhere law enforcement is restricted to independent judgment.

Very few locations in Oceania can handle (or have space for) semiballistic or suborbital transports. Only Hawai'i, New Zealand and Australia are options for this type of travel. Other destinations have conventional airports, though many international airlines fly across the region using only a few major hubs—Fiji, Hawai'i, Tahiti and Tonga—as stopovers. For the rest of the area, runners have to make do with small local airlines and private operators.

Running in Oceania

Characters will likely pass through the Pacific at some point in their careers. Oceania offers the perfect excuse to run brief excursions or act as the setting for a full-blown *Cyberpirates*-style campaign. Crisscrossed by major shipping lanes, seeded with isolated megacorp installations and home to unique Awakened critters, headhunting tribes and nomadic pirate fleets, it has a great scope for a variety of shadowruns. Runners may be hired to infiltrate remote aquacologies, extract VIPs on vacation, protect corporate drilling rigs from eco-activists, hunt rare paracritters or locate exotic magical telesma. Alternatively, the runners may find themselves stranded on a (not-so) deserted island full of strange mysteries.

Treat Oceania like a regular metroplex: consider the various islands as different neighborhoods of the same city, each possessing their own unique features and localized inhabitants. The binding factor of the Pacific people's lifestyle is a legacy from the one thing that keeps them all apart—the ever-present ocean. Like the sprawl itself, this becomes the essential ingredient to portraying Oceania's atmosphere.

Mano-a-Mana

Oceanic adepts offer a variety of non-standard Paths and have great potential for uniqueness. There are rich cultural traditions to draw inspiration from. The Maori trolls have refined their own distinct martial arts style – very aggressive and suited to their large physiques. It incorporates close-quarter grappling, melee weapon techniques (clubs, mainly ceremonial weapon foci) and spiritual fortitude.

Maori Magic: Maori *tohunga* follow shamanic practices common among other Oceanic cultures, such as the Hawai'ian *huna* tradition. They are *tapu*, along with their house and all their possessions, and thus are extremely respected by other Maori. A player wishing to play a Maori *tohunga* will have to keep in mind the many social and religious taboos and duties that come with this calling, especially when dealing with other Maori.

Traditions: *Tohunga* are shamans who commonly follow the totems of Fish, Gecko, Shark, Turtle and Whale. Instead of Spirits of Man, they summon Ancestor Spirits or Salamanders (player's choice), reflecting genealogical tribal customs and the region's extensive volcanic activity.

Tools and Trappings: Often *moko* (Maori tattoos) are used to indicate grades of initiation and are a measure of the warrior's mana. Many use the *haka* (traditional Maori dance) as a centering technique and observe *tapu* restrictions as geasa. Other trappings include canoes, masks, kava bowls, shark/whale's teeth (*tabua*), cannibal forks, feather cloaks or greenstone tiki charms.

TURKESTAN

The New Silk Road may be the hottest event in Turkestan right now, connecting far Europe to East Asia. Escort or smuggling jobs may start in St. Petersburg and end in Qingdao, with some of the key action going on in Tashkent. Don't forget to stress the crowded and multicultural nature of Turkestan cities, and contrast them with the cold, empty steppe beyond. Other plots likely to attract foreign runners are Shiawase's bid for power in Tashkent and the mining wars between Z-IC and Eastern Tiger. Once inside Turkestan, they can stumble upon AG Chemie's Project Endgame, which is in fact a cover-up for extensive bioweapons testing.

Getting In and Out

Getting in and out of Turkestan is easy, as visas are not required for short stays and are rarely checked after entry. Runners can enter through the major airports in Tashkent, Samarkand, Urumqi and Petropavlovsk, or take the scenic route

via the New Silk Road. In either case, they will rarely be stopped by Customs. If they still decide to enter illegally, they will have to face the nomad tribes, though they're usually easy to bribe.

Turkestan Adventure Ideas

- The runners are hired as bodyguards for a Johnson's teenage son/daughter traveling along the Silk Road; their job is to keep him/her out of danger while remaining unseen. Their mark decides to hitchhike into Samarkand, so the runners will have plenty of opportunities to meet Tashkent's underworld factions and the Uzbek nomads.
- S-K knows that an old man named Mr. Fang is financing the activities of anti-corp groups. The runners are hired to pick up his trail in Baku, Azerbaijan, follow him and take him out. But Mr. Fang has many friends along the way. First he'll lead them across the Caspian Sea into Turkestan, into the hands of the Red Lanterns Triad waiting in Tashkent. If that doesn't work, he'll try to lose them in the steppes of Mongolia where he has friends among the tribal shamans. Finally, they can face him and his Triad friends in Seoul; perhaps he will be so impressed by the runners' persistence that he will offer them a few interesting jobs …

BORDER CROSSING

The Checkpoint Verification Table below and Unauthorized Border Crossing Table (p. 228-229) provide the statistics gamemasters need for judging character attempts to pass through Asian checkpoints with fake IDs or run borders illegally. For further information, see *Border Crossing,* pp. 203–206, *Shadows of North America.*

CHECKPOINT VERIFICATION TABLE

Nation	Verification System Rating
Afghanistan	—
Arabia	3
Autonomous Realm of Kiribati	2
Bangla Commonwealth	4
Beijing	3
Burma	2
Cambodia	1
Canton Confederation	3
Constantinople	4
Corporate Republic of Fiji	3
Cyprus	—
Dayak Council	—
East Turkey	2
East-Timor	1
Enlightened Kingdom of Bali & Lombok	2
Federated States of Micronesia	1
Free Tahitian League of Polynesia	2
Guangxi	1
Henan	4
Hong Kong	3
Indian Union	4
Iran	4
Iraq	1
Israel	5
Japan	3
Kansai	4
Nagasaki	2
Neo-Tokyo	5
Javanese Republic	2
Jerusalem	3
Kashin State	—
Khalistan	2
Kingdom of Hawaii	—
Kurdistan	5
Laos	3
Malay Archipelago	—
Malaysia	—
Singapore	—
Manchuria	3
Melanesian Coalition	4
Mongolia	1
Nauru	4
Nepal	2
New Guinea	1
New Zealand/Aotearoa	3
Pakistan	3
Palestine	5
Pattani Islamic Republic	—
Philippines	4
Republic of China	2
Russia	5
Shaanxi	4
Sichuan	4
Shan State	1
Sri Lanka	4
Sumatran Alliance	1
Syria	2
Israel Border	4
Taiwan	3
Thailand	3
Tongan Allied Regime	2
Turkestan	1
Vietnam	4
West Turkey	3
East Turkey Border	4
Yakut	2
Yunnan	—

UNAUTHORIZED BORDER CROSSING TABLE

Nation	Sensor	Flux	ECCM	ECD	NPC/Pro. Rating
Afghanistan	—	—	—	—	Inferior/2
Arabia	3	4	2	—	Equal/3
Israel Border	4	5	3	—	Equal/4
Autonomous Realm of Kiribati	7	6	4	4	Equal/3
Bangla Commonwealth	6	8	4	4	Equal/2
Beijing	5	4	—	—	Equal/3
Burma	5	6	3	3	Equal/4
Cambodia	3	3	—	—	Equal/3
Canton Confederation	6	6	4	3	Equal/3
Sichuan Border	8	8	5	4	Equal/4
Constantinople	4	5	4	2	Equal/3
Corporate Republic of Fiji	7	7	4	4	Equal/3
Cyprus	—	—	—	—	Inferior/2
Dayak Council of Borneo & Sulawesi	—	—	—	—	Equal/3
East Timor	1	1	—	—	Equal/2
East Turkey	2	3	—	—	Inferior/3
Enlightened Kingdom of Bali & Lombok	6	7	1	—	Superior/2
Federated States of Micronesia	5	4	—	—	Equal/3
Free Tahitian League of Polynesia	6	6	4	3	Equal/3
Guangxi	3	3	—	—	Inferior/2
Henan	6	8	3	3	Equal/4
Hong Kong	8	8	5	5	Equal/3
Indian Union	7	7	4	2	Equal/2
Khalistan Border	8	8	5	4	Equal/3
Pakistan Border	8	8	5	4	Equal/3
Iran	7	9	5	4	Equal/3
Iraq	3	3	3	—	Inferior/3
Israel	8	10	6	6	Superior/3
Japan	7	8	7	7	Equal/2
Javanese Republic	5	5	1	1	Equal/4
Jerusalem	3	3	2	2	Equal/3
Kashin State	—	—	—	—	Inferior/2
Khalistan	5	4	—	—	Superior/3
Kingdom of Hawaii	—	—	—	—	—
Korea	7	7	6	5	Equal/3
Kurdistan	6	7	5	4	Superior/3
Laos	6	7	3	—	Equal/4
Malay Archipelago	—	—	—	—	Equal/4
Malaysia	—	—	—	—	—
Manchuria	6	6	3	3	Equal/2
Melanesian Coalition	6	7	4	3	Equal/3
Mongolia	3	3	2	—	Inferior/3
Nauru	7	8	4	4	Equal/4
Nepal	6	6	—	—	Inferior/2

Continued on page 229

UNAUTHORIZED BORDER CROSSING TABLE CONTINUED

Nation	Sensor	Flux	ECCM	ECD	NPC/Pro. Rating
New Guinea	—	—	—	—	Inferior/3
New Zealand – Aotearoa	6	8	4	3	Equal/4
Pakistan	5	7	4	3	Inferior/3
Palestine	enclaved: see Israel				Equal/3
Pattani Islamic Republic	—	—	—	—	Equal/3
Philippines	6/4	8/6	4/3	4/3	Superior/2 / Equal/3
Republic of China	5	5	2	2	Inferior/2
Russia	6	6	6	5	Superior/4
Shaanxi	6	8	4	3	Equal/3
Hua Shan corner	8	8	5	4	Equal/4
Shan State	3	4	—	—	Equal/3
Burma Border	4	5	—	—	Equal/4
Sichuan	8	8	5	5	Superior/3
Sri Lanka	7	8	5	5	Equal/3
Sumatran Alliance	3	3	—	—	Equal/3
Syria	4	3	1	1	Inferior/2
Israel Border	5	4	2	2	Equal/3
Taiwan	6	10	5	4	Equal/3
Thailand	5	7	4	3	Equal/4
Tongan Allied Regime	6	5	3	3	Superior/2
Turkestan	3	4	3	2	Inferior/3
Vietnam	7	8	5	4	Superior/2
Laos Border	6	7	4	3	Equal/3
West Turkey	4	6	2	2	Equal/3
Yakut	3	3	—	—	Superior/3
Yunnan	—	—	—	—	Inferior/2

ASIAN MATRIX RTGS

RTG	Security	Access	Control	Index	Files	Slave
Afghanistan	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Arabia	Green-5	6	5	6	6	5
Abu Dhabi	Orange-5	8	6	6	7	7
Rlyadh	Orange-4	7	6	6	6	6
Autonomous Realm of Kiribati	Blue-2	3	3	2	3	2
Bangla Commonwealth	Orange-5	8	9	7	7	6
Beijing	Orange-4	9	6	7	8	5
Burma	Blue-2	4	4	2	3	2
Rangoon	Green-3	6	8	6	6	5
Cambodia (Phnom Penh only)	Blue-2	5	5	2	3	2

Continued on page 230

ASIAN MATRIX RTGS CONTINUED

RTG	Security	Access	Control	Index	Files	Slave
Canton Confederation						
Fujian	Green-4	6	7	5	5	5
Guangdong	Green-4	6	7	6	5	5
Hunan	Green-3	6	5	6	5	5
Jianxi	Green-3	6	6	5	5	5
Macao	Green-4	6	7	5	5	5
Constantinople	Orange-5	9	7	6	7	6
Corporate Republic of Fiji	Green-4	6	8	6	7	6
Cyprus	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
East Turkey	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Adana	Orange-7	9	8	6	7	6
Federated States of Micronesia	Green-3	4	4	2	3	2
Free City of Kronstadt	Orange-3	7	6	6	6	6
Free Tahitian League of Polynesia	Blue-3	4	5	3	3	2
Guangxi	Blue-3	4	4	4	3	2
Henan	Orange-4	8	6	7	6	6
Hong Kong	Orange-6	8	9	8	7	7
Indian Union	Orange-4	8	9	7	9	6
Iran	Orange-4	8	9	7	7	7
Iraq	Blue-2	4	4	2	3	2
Israel	Orange-6	8	6	7	7	8
Japan						
Aomori	Orange-4	10	9	9	8	8
Hiroshima	Orange–3	6	8	7	8	7
Kansai	Orange-5	8	8	7	9	7
Matsue	Green–5	6	8	8	7	6
Nagasaki	Orange–3	8	7	8	8	6
Nagoya	Green–5	7	8	7	7	8
Neo-Tokyo	Red–6	12	9	9	8	9
Sapporo	Green–3	6	8	8	8	7
Seagaia	Green–3	6	8	8	8	7
Sendai	Green–3	5	7	6	6	7
Java (and regions of Bali and Lombok)	Green-4	8	8	7	7	6
Jerusalem	Orange-4	7	7	8	6	6
Kashin State	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Khalistan	Blue-4	4	5	4	4	4
Kingdom of Hawai'i	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Korea	Orange-5	8	8	8	8	8
Kurdistan	Green-3	5	7	4	4	4
Laos	Blue-2	3	4	2	3	2
Vientiane	Green-2	5	6	4	5	4
Malaysia	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Manchuria	Green-2	5	6	4	3	4
Melanesian Coalition	Green-4	6	7	6	6	6

Continued on page 231

ASIAN MATRIX RTGS CONTINUED

RTG	Security	Access	Control	Index	Files	Slave
Mongolia	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Urga	Blue-3	3	4	3	2	2
Nauru	Orange-2	8	8	8	7	6
Nepal	Green-5	4	8	4	8	4
New Zealand – Aotearoa	Green-3	6	6	4	5	4
Pakistan	Green-5	7	9	7	5	5
Palestine	Green-4	4	4	4	3	5
Gaza	Green-5	5	6	4	5	6
Pattani Islamic Republic	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—
Philippines	Orange-6	8	10	6	6	8
Republic of China						
Tianjin	Green-3	6	6	6	5	5
Outlying	Green-2	5	4	5	5	4
Russia						
European	Green-2	5	4	5	5	5
Moscow	Orange-2	7	6	5	5	6
Trans-Siberian	Green-3	4	5	4	4	3
Vladivostok	Orange-4	7	8	6	7	7
Shaanxi	Green-3	6	7	6	6	6
Shan State	Blue-2	3	3	2	2	2
Sichuan	Orange-5	7	8	8	7	7
Sri Lanka	Orange-4	7	10	6	6	5
Syria	Green-4	6	4	3	3	5
Beirut	Orange-6	6	7	6	6	6
Taiwan	Green-3	6	8	6	6	6
Thailand	Blue-3	4	5	2	3	2
Bangkok	Green-4	6	8	6	7	6
Tongan Allied Regime	Green-3	5	5	2	3	2
Turkestan	Blue-2	2	3	2	2	2
Tashkent	Green-4	5	6	4	3	3
Vietnam	Green-3	4	4	2	3	2
Hanoi	Orange-3	8	8	8	8	7
Ho Chi Minh City	Orange-2	7	8	8	7	6
West Turkey	Orange-4	6	5	6	7	8
Yakut (AS/YAK)						
Yakutsk (YT)	Blue-2	3	3	2	2	2
Magadan (MG)	Blue-3	4	3	3	2	2
Yunnan	No Matrix	—	—	—	—	—

tradition vs. progress

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