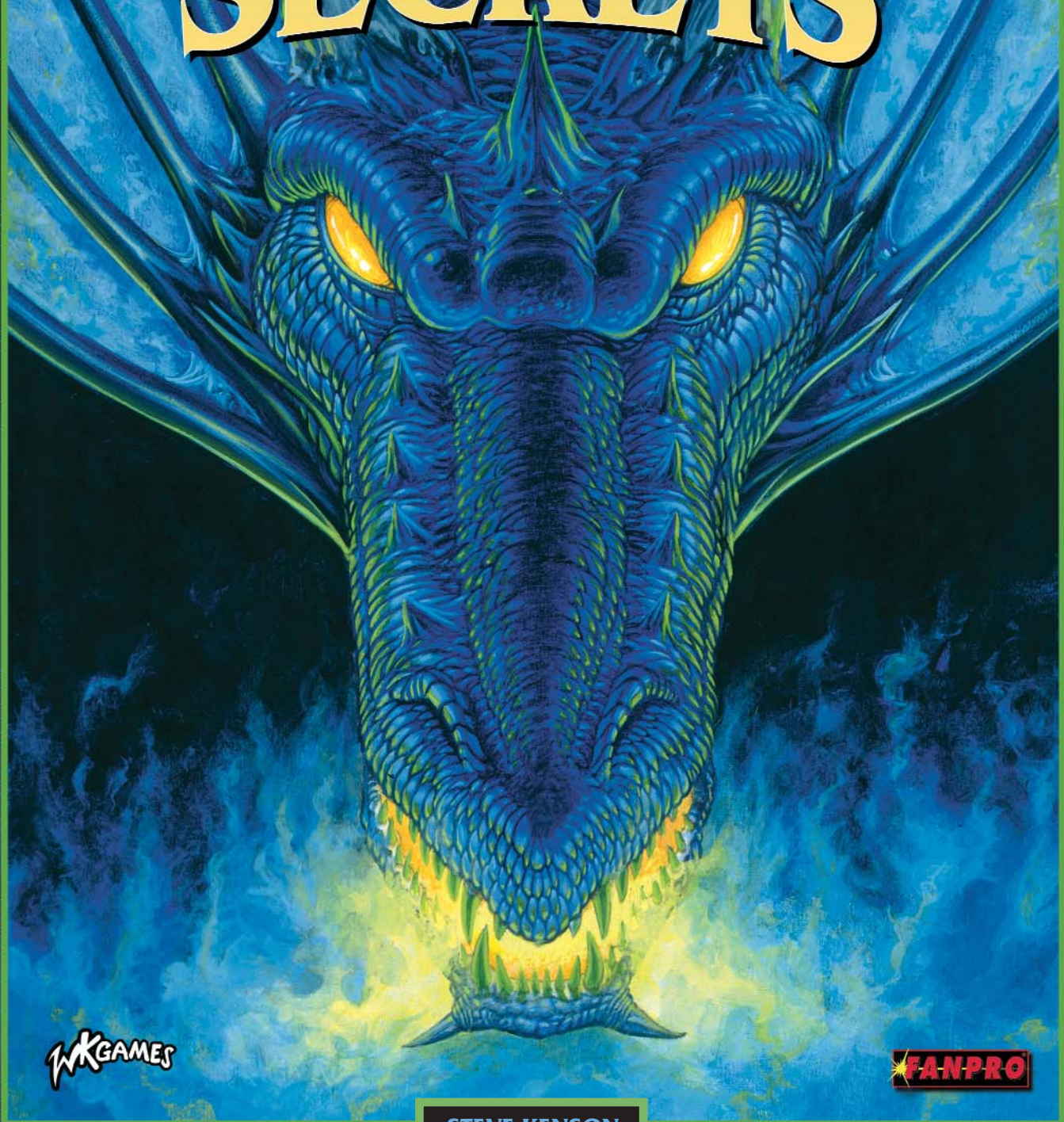


PORTFOLIO OF A DRAGON: DUNKELZAHN'S SECRETS™



WKGAMES

FANPRO

STEVE KENSON

PORTFOLIO OF A DRAGON:
DUNKELZAHN'S SECRETS™



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PORTFOLIO OF A DRAGON: DUNKELZAHN'S SECRETS

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SHADOWLAND V2.1

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

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

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR:

A word from our sponsor:

Even today, I can still be shocked by the speed of events. I signed on to announce our new on-line format—easier on the eyes, simpler to read, and much more user friendly. Instead, I have to give you some really bad news. Our friend Dunkelzahn was pronounced dead by the UCAS Government at 11:58:59PM. As if we didn't all see the explosion on our trid sets. As if some of us weren't there. As if the world didn't just become darker, blacker, colder. We here at Shadowland will be observing a moment of on-line silence from 0:00:00 August 11 to 00:01:00 August 11 for our departed friend. Please watch our boards—someone took down one of our own, and we *will* find out who did it.



THE BACK STOCK

New Magic Download (The Awakened World all spelled out)
Threats (Paranoia, conspiracies, and secret stuff)
California Free State (From Tir to Aztlan and everything in between)
Campaign 2057 (Vote early, vote often!)

GO TO COMPLETE LIBRARY ARCHIVES



THE DAILY SPECIAL

The Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn the Great Dragon

Y'know, we were planning an expose on Dunkelzahn ... but we got a helluva lot more than we expected. Specifically, Shadowland received a hardcopy of Dunkelzahn's last will and testament ... and believe me, it's quite a piece of work. Magic, nuyen, secrets, and enough riches of various kinds to pull your sorry butt out of the coffin hotel and into the penthouse—if you've got the cojones to go after 'em. Plus, our experts dug up some ... interesting ... additional tidbits.

GO TO COMPLETE LIBRARY ARCHIVES



COMING SOON

Organized Crime (Exposing the secrets!)
Flash Points (Hot spots for those who live on the edge)
Riggers Need Help! (Drones, drones and more drones ...)

GO TO COMPLETE LIBRARY ARCHIVES



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S



CONCESSION SPEECHES

The losers speak (and we keep the quotes to a minimum). Read between the lines and watch as the bitter try to smile. The five losers ain't going away, chummer, so learn something from them. Check out the Candidates' Page!



UCAS MILITARY ON RED ALERT

Be careful out there! The UCAS military is on red alert, and that means even the shadows may not be safe. Pick your battles carefully—they're shooting first and not bothering to ask questions. Click here to see what units are where.



MESS IN FDC

Haeffner's sworn in and the UCAS capital is a police state. The military has shut down private and public airports, the train station and all the roads leading in and out. There's an astral rift or something near the site of the explosion. Kinda like Chicago, only politicos are swarming instead of bugs. Deja vu all over again ... Click here for more info on FDC.



WEIRD STUFF

For those of you watching some of the threats (from the last post of the same name), here's an odd one—KSAF, those boys and girls with the news, were down in Miami interviewing some guy about an undersea city and they did not get a scrap of footage on Dunkelzahn's death. Guess they ain't a Big-Time Threat no more.

It's 13:54:06. Do You Know Where Your Meat Body Is?

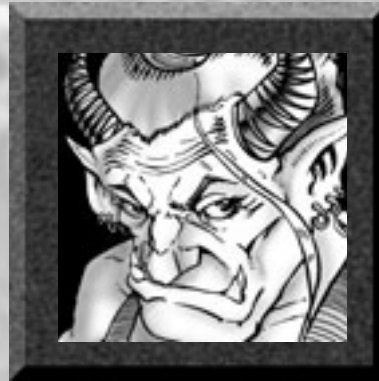
CANDIDATES' PAGE



ARTHUR VOGEL

"To my victorious opponent, President-elect Dunkelzahn, I offer my congratulations ... along with the sincere hope that his administration will follow policies that treat Mother Earth with the respect she deserves. Gary and I, and many of our fellow citizens who care about the world we

all live in, stand ready to aid the President should he call on us to do so."



ANNE PENCHYK

"On behalf of the Republican Party, and of all the good citizens of this nation who cast their votes for me, I heartily congratulate Dunkelzahn on his victory. We fought a good fight and lost fair and square—so have a seat in your new chair, Mr. President, and do your best job for everyone in the UCAS."



DR. ROZILYN HERNANDEZ

"I just hope all you people know what you're doing, voting a dragon into office when you could have had ... oh, forget it. Just don't come crying to me when things don't work out quite like you expected."



KENNETH BRACKHAVEN

"It is said that the darkest hour comes just before dawn. This is that darkest hour, my friends ... for us and for our nation. But the dawn will come if we keep faith. We have lost this battle, but we have not lost the war. We will—we *must*—continue to fight for Truth

and Right in any way we can. Keep faith—keep fighting—and we *will* prevail."



JAMES BOOTH

"James Booth didn't waste all these years in public office to get blitzed by some overgrown chameleon! James Booth demands a recount!"



DUNKELZAHN

"This is not my victory. It belongs to everyone who voted for what I represent—hope, progress, a brighter future for us all. Many of you did not find it easy to accept a dragon as a fellow citizen, let alone as the leader of our nation ... yet you lis-

tened to me with open minds and open hearts, and in the end overcame your fears to take a stand for hope. I promise you, your act of courage will not be in vain ...

INTRODUCTION



Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets is a unique supplement for the **Shadowrun** game universe, a book unlike any other published **Shadowrun** product. It describes an event so momentous that it could change the world of **Shadowrun** forever—the assassination of the great dragon Dunkelzahn, President of the UCAS, on the very night of his inauguration. **Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets** offers readers the slain dragon's last will and testament, a startling document in which he reveals his hopes for the future of metahumanity and distributes his vast stores of wealth to a remarkable variety of people and groups in an apparent effort to shape the future of the world he has so suddenly left behind. But what kind of future did Dunkelzahn intend? Did his mysterious killers murder him to prevent it coming to fruition? Who could possibly have the resources to kill such a powerful great dragon, and why would they undertake this terrible scheme? Toward what secret truths does his will point, and what will Dunkelzahn's enemies do to keep those bodies buried? What will be the ultimate consequences of the dragon's legacy? Who will win, who will lose, and what will it all mean for the average runner in the shadowy streets?

Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets provides gamemasters with a smorgasbord of information, plot hooks and potential story lines with which to create adventures and campaigns across the UCAS and elsewhere in the Sixth World in the aftermath of Dunkelzahn's untimely death. Scattered throughout the text, players and gamemasters will find a wealth of facts, rumors, advice and warnings that they can use to create compelling plot lines in a world where shadowruns now represent carefully considered moves in a deadly, high-stakes game—and the runners possess greater potential than ever to change the status quo.

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

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

"When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."
—From *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

It's late 2057, and the world of **Shadowrun** will never be the same. Dunkelzahn, a well-known and (mostly) beloved great dragon with a soft spot for metahumanity, is dead at the hand of person or persons unknown. The consequences of his death are wide-spread and incalculable, affecting everything from politics to economics to race relations, and threatening to expose secrets that certain powers in the Sixth World would pay dearly to keep buried. All those who embraced the highly emotional issues of the eight-month campaign for the presidency have begun to express their grief, fear and anger in the most violent way possible. Allies of the great dragon have temporarily stepped in to fill the power vacuum the president's assassination left at the highest levels of the UCAS government, but can they possibly hold a fearful, fractious nation together long enough to achieve their dead leader's agenda? Do they intend to carry out that agenda, or make a few changes of their own? Do they even know the full extent of the dragon's plans for the UCAS (and possibly the world)? And what about Dunkelzahn's many opponents, who will surely take advantage of the unstable climate to grab more power for themselves?

The event that promised to change the world for the better has turned ugly. While Dunkelzahn offered hope to a disillusioned nation, his enemies fought to maintain the status quo—and the result of that struggle has left the world asking a multitude of questions no one seems willing or able to answer. **Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets** was intentionally designed to allow gamemasters and players to create their own answers to those questions. Dunkelzahn's death expands and levels out the playing field, blows open unexpected doors, drops hints for gamemasters to elaborate on and insinuate into their games, and ultimately offers new and interesting ways to play **Shadowrun**. The themes that have been gaining attention in recent products now come to the fore: tensions between the Awakened and the non-Awakened, the rise of the mid-size corps, rapid advances and recent successes in technology, the effects and side-effects of the increase in the use of blood magic, and a whole host of political, economic and magical issues to which the dragon's will has given financial urgency and importance. **Portfolio of a Dragon** provides both gamemasters and players with practically unlimited options, allowing them to play any kind of **Shadowrun** game they choose, from political-thriller stories with heavy emphasis on roleplaying to big-gun shoot-'em-ups, from detective stories to rescue missions, from low-profile stakeouts to high-profile network to the proverbial snatch-and-fade.

Runners will face the upheaval caused by the election and Dunkelzahn's murder everywhere they turn: the gamemaster can use dozens of different ways to involve his characters in the issues of the times, from in-their-face confrontations to muted rumblings in the background stories of the runners' lives. This book simply provides the grist for the mill, allowing the gamemaster to judge how heavily these events affect his campaigns and player characters. For example, the death of the dragon has split the political fault lines of the UCAS wide open. Already simmering from the

tainted election of 2056 and the bruising campaign of 2057, racial unrest has exploded into riots across the country. Radical groups, from Humanis-style hate-mongers to militantly pro-Awakened terrorist cells, are springing up almost everywhere. All the passionate feelings aroused by the dragon's death are ripe for exploitation by anyone who might conceivably use those feelings to get some kind of edge—policlubs looking to become major players, corporations interested in sabotaging their rivals, or even lunatic-fringe types bent on becoming the new Messiah, just to name a few. All these forces can have an impact on the street level in any **Shadowrun** adventure. Player characters may meet an important contact in a bar that used to be a safe haven, but is now the unofficial "headquarters" of a "Saint Dunkelzahn" cult. Or they may tangle with the local ork go-gang, whose members have begun targeting humans because they're convinced that a human-supremacist group did the dragon in. Or a corporate Johnson posing as a "freedom fighter" may hire runners for a job that he knows will spark a riot when publicized—that riot taking place conveniently near a rival corp's major R&D laboratory. The possibilities are limited only by the player's and gamemaster's imaginations.

Just as important as Dunkelzahn's death is the legacy he left behind. The dragon accumulated vast amounts of wealth and valuable possessions over the years, much of which has fallen into carefully chosen laps according to his last will and testament. Small companies and mid-sized corporations across all fields of enterprise have received windfalls from the dragon that may vault them into the big time ... if they can survive the megacorps' attempts to crush them. Bequests intended for the "first party" to develop the latest magical or scientific thingamajig may spark more and deadlier competition for the prize than even Dunkelzahn expected. Certain individuals, most notably his translator Nadja Daviar, have become brand-new players on a global scale thanks to the dragon's largesse. The movers and shakers of **Shadowrun** have changed, and it's anyone's guess how those changes will ultimately play out.

Meanwhile, all kinds of people will be hiring shadowrunners to find out who killed Dunkelzahn and why ... and to dig up the whole truth behind the tantalizing hints Dunkelzahn dropped about the secrets of dragons and elves. Still others will be doing whatever they can behind the scenes to make sure those secrets stay that way.

New names, new power players, new cults, and new "rules of engagement" have emerged in the wake of Dunkelzahn's death. Dunkelzahn's testament and will provide literally hundreds of avenues for player characters and gamemasters to explore, each of which could easily lead to dozens of adventures, both immediately and in years to come. Some of these threads could serendipitously connect to themes and plot lines established in past adventures and campaigns, and some may neatly tie into current plans for the characters' futures. The **Fallout** section offers theories and predictions made by denizens of the **Shadowrun** world regarding the ramifications of these events and what will happen next, providing a sort of jump-start for the conspiracy theorists in every **Shadowrun** game. In addition to the factoids, rumors and wild assertions contained in the black information, the

INTRODUCTION

Players section provides a handy reference for gamemasters who wish to add new people, places and organizations to their game.

The final three sections in the book, **The Sleeping Dragon**, **Who Watches the Watchers?**, and **In the Cards**, offer online posts of runners' investigations into specific items and people mentioned in the will. These represent three different ways characters might become involved in Dunkelzahn's affairs and outline several different ways of conducting a run. Obviously, these are not the only options; the fact that the will was posted on the Shadowland BBS gives shadowrunners the opportunity to choose their own runs. Rather than always waiting for a fixer or a Mr. Johnson to contact them with a job, the team can voluntarily join the race to be the first to claim any number of prizes. Though this may mean no money up front, the potential financial rewards are far greater—not to mention the sense of well-being that comes from a job well done and the pleasure most people take in having greater control over their own lives and fates.

USING THE WILL

Dunkelzahn's last will and testament includes more than 200 bequests of money, stocks, magical items, valuable artworks and more intangible gifts to various people and organizations, from famous people like the head of Fuchi to the most obscure man-in-the-street. Each of the bequests can serve as the linchpin of a complete adventure, and many can become the basis of an entire campaign. The investigations at the end of the book focus on three of the bequests, demonstrating various ways that gamemasters might flesh out these brief plot hooks into full-fledged adventures. Gamemasters have complete freedom to create story lines around any of the bequests, limited only by their imaginations. The will is intended to generate adventure ideas—there is no "right" or "wrong" way to use any of its elements in your **Shadowrun** game.

Of the 200-plus items, groups, individuals and events mentioned in the will, FASA currently plans to use only ten or so in future products. Though we cannot guarantee that our authors won't someday use something in the will differently than your group did in a given campaign, the sheer number of items and the potential for variations on similar themes makes such an outcome unlikely. And even if we someday publish a novel that focuses on the same item you've chosen for your campaign, published material does not, and should not, invalidate your gaming group's story line. **Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets** is intended to open up the **Shadowrun** universe to all kinds of possibilities, with gamemasters and player groups in the driver's seat.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

The events surrounding Dunkelzahn's election and assassination, including the fallout from his death, take place over several months. The following timeline places the most significant events in a framework for the gamemaster's use.

Mid-2056—The UCAS Congress formally recognizes the great dragon Dunkelzahn as a legal citizen of the UCAS. Famous "handshake" between Dunkelzahn and President Thomas Steele sends the Technocratic ticket to the top of the polls.

November 2056—President Thomas Steele and Vice President James Booth overwhelmingly re-elected to office in "the dulllest election of the 21st century."

December 2056/January 2057—Election results of 2056 found to be rigged; House Speaker Betty Jo Pritchard declares the election null and void and announces new elections. Congress approves short campaign season of under eight months, with Election Day rescheduled to Tuesday, August 7, 2057.

January/February 2057—Assorted people declare themselves candidates for president. Five of them are widely regarded as viable contenders: Arthur Vogel, a dwarf eco-lawyer; Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez, noted academic and mage; James Booth, former Vice President fighting for a political comeback; General Franklin Yeats, a retired soldier with staunch pro-military views; and Kenneth Brackhaven, Seattle businessman with ties to human-supremacist groups.

1 February 2057—Kenneth Brackhaven formally announces his candidacy at a rally in Seattle.

28 February 2057—Booth and Yeats face off in a "town-meeting" debate in New Hampshire. Booth loses.

15 March 2057—Dunkelzahn announces his intention to run for President on a historic broadcast of "Wyrms Talk!"

March/July 2057—Campaign season rocks the UCAS. Five top contenders jockey back and forth for the winning position, with Booth running a consistent dead-last (well behind Undecided).

10 July 2057—General Franklin Yeats assassinated in a Seattle hotel room.

18 July 2057—Yeats's running mate, Anne Penchyk, declares that she will honor Yeats's memory by fighting on as a Presidential candidate.

1 August 2057—Deadline for receipt of absentee ballots. Any absentee ballots received by the UCAS Election Board after this date are considered invalid.

7 August 2057—Election Day. Dunkelzahn is declared the winner by a narrow margin, at 11:23:34 p.m. EST.

8 August 2057—Metahumans and other pro-Awakened citizens celebrate Dunkelzahn's victory in cities across the UCAS.

9 August 2057—President Dunkelzahn and Vice-President Kyle Haeffner are formally sworn into office in Washington, FDC. Inauguration parties galore are held throughout the Washington, FDC sprawl.

10:23:08 PM (EST)—Dunkelzahn is assassinated in the Presidential limo as he leaves the Watergate Hotel.

10:24:57 PM (EST)—An astral rift appears above the site of Dunkelzahn's death.

10:28:01 PM (EST)—FBI headquarters receives the first of more than 500 claims of responsibility for the killing of Dunkelzahn, from the terrorist group Red Dawn. FBI authorities label their claim a hoax because the caller refers to having “fired the fatal bullet.” This claim sets the pattern; most subsequent claims are equally obvious falsehoods.

11:14:46 PM (EST)—Tanya Reilly, a UCAS military mage, becomes the first casualty of the strange magical phenomenon over the death site when her astral body is sucked into it during her investigation of the area from astral space.

11:31:20 PM (EST)—A section of “public” astral space near the site is blocked off as a hazard to anything in the astral plane. Government mages post astral “warning signs.”

10 August 2057 at 02:32:37 AM (EST)—Kyle Haeffner is sworn in as President of the United Canadian and American States.

10 August 2057 at 07:35:12 AM (EST)—President Kyle Haeffner meets with Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Richard Scott to form the Scott Commission on the Assassination of President Dunkelzahn.

10/11 August 2057—Riots begin and gather momentum in most major UCAS cities. Rumors of a second Night of Rage are quickly squelched as the UCAS military, local police and rumored support from Ares Macrotechnology Security Forces quell the heavy violence. The riots show no signs of ending.

12 August 2057—President Haeffner goes before Congress to nominate Nadja Daviar to the Vice-Presidential position. This announcement comes as a shock to the Congress and to most UCAS citizens, but the announcement does begin to slow the violence in the streets. The President declares, “Daviar was the voice of Dunkelzahn, and now must serve to speak to us of his heart and soul.” A vote to confirm this appointment is delayed until the Scott Commission can begin its hearings.

15 August 2057 at 09:31:00 AM (EST)—Nadja Daviar reads Dunkelzahn’s will at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, FDC. Certain items are distributed immediately to those in attendance, but the bulk of bequests will be disbursed beginning in September.

15 August 2057 at 9:31:07 AM (EST)—The will appears in various on-line user groups, including the Neo-Anarchist’s Shadowland node. No indication exists to even hint at where this text version came from or who sent it.

15 August 2057 at 04:53:34 PM (EST)—Nadja Daviar releases her first press release as Chairman of the Board of the Draco Foundation.

18 August 2057—President Haeffner, in another surprising move, proposes a complete list of names to fill his Cabinet positions, a radical departure from the traditional system of proposing one candidate at a time. Again, Congress chooses to wait until the Scott Commission can interview Haeffner and Daviar.

22 August 2057—The first “shadow information” on the will is uploaded onto the Shadowland BBS by system operator Captain Chaos.

25 August 2057—The names of the Scott Commission are released. They will start hearings beginning with President Haeffner on September 5th.

31 August 2057 at 02:55:23 (EST)—The Players (of the Awakened World) is uploaded to the Shadowland BBS by system operator Captain Chaos.

1 September 2057—Chairman Daviar releases the names of the Board of Directors of the Draco Foundation. Most are individuals who previously held no public position.

3 September to 10 November 2057—The Draco Foundation begins operations at its newly christened headquarters. The movers and shakers of the world converge on Washington, FDC to receive their inheritances.

5 September 2057—The Scott Commission begins its hearings with President Haeffner. Chief Justice Scott announces that the Commission will release transcripts of the hearings after each witness is interviewed and the Commission reaches a majority decision.

2 October 2057—Captain Chaos begins to upload a series of investigations into the items bequeathed by Dunkelzahn’s will.

11 November 2057—The Draco Foundation closes its doors until December 3rd. On the 3rd of each month, the Foundation will open for exactly 7 days to deal with inheritance claims and other public business.

8 November 2057—The Scott Commission publishes its first official statement, labeled Alpha Interview #1, which clears President Kyle Haeffner of any involvement in the assassination of President Dunkelzahn.

12 November 2057—The Scott Commission begins questioning Nadja Daviar.

14 November 2057—Congress begins its approval process on President Haeffner’s Cabinet appointees.

THE DRAGON'S LAST DANCE



//BEGIN FILE//

Transcript 104A, B-roll to "Inaugurating History: The Dunkelzahn Story." No promo, trailer attached.

//(FRAMING NOTE: IRENA IN FRONT OF WATERGATE HOTEL, INSERT CROWD SCENE BEHIND)//

“This is Irena Naylor, reporting live from the nation’s capitol. Inside the Watergate Hotel, the festivities are in full swing at the Mrs. Grundland’s Peanut Butter Cookie Inaugural Ball. The President arrived here just a quarter of an hour ago, making one of his many appearances at inauguration-night parties being thrown in his honor all over town. Washington FDC is in a party mood tonight—champagne and good will are flowing freely. The city seems reborn, brimming over with possibilities. As they say, there’s ‘something in the air’—perhaps the beating of silvery-blue dragon wings. Whatever the source of all this good cheer—Dunkelzahn’s amazing triumph at the polls, relief that this long and bitter contest is finally over, or a little of both—the people of Washington FDC are welcoming it with open arms.”

//CUT TO: MAN-ON-STREET CLIP 1—DWARF CABBIE

"I been livin' in this town a long time, and I've never seen so many smiles on people's faces. It's great. If things feel this good when the Prez ain't hardly been in office a day, then I say more power to the dragon."

//CUT TO: MAN-ON-STREET CLIP 2—HUMAN, HOLLY-HAPPY-HOMEMAKER TYPE

"I was just a little nervous about him, you know—I'm sure I'm not the only one who finds dragons intimidating—but after seeing him at the swearing-in ceremony, I feel so much better. He looked like such a nice man. Distinguished, dignified ... but friendly, too. I think he'll make a good President."

//CUT TO: MAN-ON-STREET CLIP 3—YOUNG ELF MALE, STUDENT

"He's given us hope when we most needed it. This crazy world has got to change, and Dunkelzahn's the one to do it, God bless him."

//CUT TO: GRAND BALLROOM, WATERGATE HOTEL

"Here in the Grand Ballroom, the good cheer is even more apparent. All the movers and shakers in Washington have turned out to honor Dunkelzahn being sworn in today as President of the UCAS and leader of the free world. A new-minted UCAS citizen, a great dragon, an entity who's lived longer and seen more than everyone in this room put together ... and now he's embarking on a whole new venture, governing the vast and diverse nation of humans, metahumans and even stranger beings that all of us call home. The Presidency of the UCAS, the most powerful political office in the land, has been won in a free and fair election by a being that our grandparents wouldn't have believed existed. No doubt about it—this is one for the history books! //(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)// Point the camera over left, Joe, there's something—oh, they're clearing the dance floor. Hey, that's Lorelei Angel! Since when does she sing jazz?! Wait, I know this song ... ohhh, beautiful! Lynn, how's your pickup? Can you sort out the lyrics from all the background noise? I've got an idea for the *perfect* touch—and with that voice, too ... OK, Joe, roll it."

INTERNAL EDIT MEMO: Play with the sound mix. Applause, happy babble, then Angel's alto HIGHLIGHTED over sax for following line: 'This will be my shining hour/Warm and happy and bright...'. Trail off, cut to voiceover, insert dance-floor shot.

"The President has just led Nadja Daviar, his chief personal assistant, out onto the dance floor ... and quite a handsome couple they make. It's somehow reassuring to know that a dragon can dance, even if only in human guise. Tomorrow, Dunkelzahn will take up the burden of governance that the voters of the UCAS have given him ... but for one last night, he can enjoy himself. And he's making the most of the opportunity.

//HOLD CAMERA ON DANCE FLOOR TILL SONG ENDS, THEN INSERT WORKING-THE-ROOM FOOTAGE—GLADHANDING WELL-WISHERS, SIPPING CHAMPAGNE. FIND MOST FLATTERING THREE-QUARTER PROFILE OF D'S SMILING FACE. VOICEOVER

"Tired though he must be from the endless ceremonies of this long Inauguration Day, the President seems to have a warm smile and a few kind words for every well-wisher. Whether sharing a dance with Nadja Daviar or quaffing champagne with the volunteer chairwoman of Poughkeepsie Orks for Dunkelzahn, the newly anointed leader of the UCAS looks like he's having a wonderful time. Tonight of all nights, no one is beneath his benevolent attention—not even a lowly journalist!"

//CUT TO: DUNKELZAHN INTERVIEW

NAYLOR: How does it feel to be President, sir?

DUNKELZAHN: (Big smile, emphatic "thumbs-up" sign.) Wonderful. Of course, I may not say that after a few sessions with Congress. I've noticed they have a tendency to turn Presidents' hair gray.

NAYLOR: On a more serious note ... this hard-fought campaign exposed some deep divisions in this country. How do you plan to overcome them?

DUNKELZAHN: Healing is a long process, Irena. All we can do is take it a step at a time. From the first day of my term to the last, I will do everything necessary to safeguard the rights and well-being of every UCAS citizen. Those who feel apprehensive now about being governed by a dragon will see by my actions that their fears are unfounded ... once they do, our differences will cease to divide us.

NAYLOR: Do you have any message for the people of the UCAS as you begin your term of office?

DUNKELZAHN: What can I say but thank you? Thank you all for your trust in me. I assure you it is well placed.

//CUT TO: CROWD SHOT, IRENA FOREGROUND

"So there you have it, straight from the horse's—or should I say dragon's?—mouth. But what about the dragon's opponents? What are the other candidates doing? For the first of the many answers, we go to Judy Kamura of KNUT-Toronto."

//CUT TO: TAPE FEED 1—VOGEL CABIN, VOGEL SPLITTING WOOD IN FOREGROUND. JUDY VOICEOVER

"With the campaign finally behind him, Arthur Vogel has returned to his beloved woodland retreat to plan for the immediate future. He may be down, but he's definitely not out—especially not if the rumors are true that Sierra, Incorporated wants him to take over its helm."

//CUT TO: INTERVIEW, JUDY/VOGEL AT KITCHEN TABLE

VOGEL: It was quite a ride, I'll say that. Enjoyable, in its way. But I don't feel inclined to go through that again. To be honest, I think Dunkelzahn's election is a good thing for the issues that my supporters care about—he may not make the greening of the Earth the same priority I would have, but it's definitely high on his list. For myself, I can do more good operating on a smaller scale. After all, conservation begins in our own homes, our own backyards.

KAMURA: So you'll keep fighting the megacorp in court?

VOGEL: Oh, yes. But there's a lot more to be done. This election taught me that.

KAMURA: What about Sierra, Incorporated? Is it true they've

approached you about taking over the leadership of that organization?

VOGEL: I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't comment on that right now. I can tell you what the One World Party will be doing. We'll focus our energies on local elections, building enviro-awareness at the grass roots until we've educated enough people so that every elected official—on every level of government—will have to listen to us. After all, Dunkelzahn won't be in office forever ... and there's no guarantee that the next President of the UCAS, or any other powerful official, will understand the importance of preservation over short-term profit. The only way to really keep our leaders' feet to the fire is to make sure they can't afford to ignore the Green vote.

KAMURA: You sound as if you're looking forward to the challenge.

VOGEL: Definitely. (Laughter) What lawyer doesn't relish the prospect of a good fight?

//CUT TO: EXTERIOR, BROWNSTONE BETWEEN 2 OFFICE BLOCKS, DOWNTOWN SEATTLE. VOICEOVER

"Arthur Vogel isn't the only one looking forward to 'a good fight'. Anne Penchyk, who gave Dunkelzahn quite a run for the top spot after the shocking murder of Presidential candidate Franklin Yeats, intends to keep her hand in things as well—

//ZOOM IN ON BROWNSTONE FRONT DOOR; HIGHLIGHT "EMPOWERMENT COALITION" NAMEPLATE//—and hopefully, to keep women's rights on the front burner.

//CUT TO: PENCHYK WORKING AT DESK. PAN AROUND OFFICE—FIREPLACE, BAY WINDOW, GENERAL IMPRESSION OF UNDERSTATED GOOD TASTE. VOICEOVER

"Working out of a converted two-flat, Anne Penchyk and a small circle of like-minded friends have founded the Empowerment Coalition, an organization dedicated to raising funds for women candidates at all levels of government. These women have poured their own money into the Coalition, and are willing to work hard to achieve their agenda."

//CUT TO: PENCHYK INTERVIEW

PENCHYK: When Franklin chose me as his running mate for this campaign, he caught an incredible amount of flak. Some was race-based; certain parties saw an ork on the ticket as a definite drawback. I'd expected that, so it didn't bother me much. What bothered me was the opposition I got for being female. Quite a few prominent Republicans found it far easier to accept my race than my gender—in this day and age, when more than a few women have run strongly in races for the Presidency. Frankly, I was shocked. I'd always believed gender bias in the Republican Party was confined to the small remnant of the so-called 'Religious Right' that got so much attention a generation ago. To find so many people against a woman Vice President—people whom I'd have sworn knew better—well, it opened my eyes. And I promised myself that somehow, some way, I'd do something about it.

NAYLOR: So you founded the Empowerment Coalition?

PENCHYK (Nodding): Myself and a couple of friends, sitting around my kitchen table one night. It was just a few days after Franklin's death. I'd announced my intention to carry on with the campaign, and the party opposition was fierce. Which made me furious—it was a slap in the face, not just to me, but to Franklin, and to the legions of women who'd given the Republican Party their loyalty for years. We decided that if the party refused to accept me as their Presidential candidate, or if I lost the election, all of us would turn our energies toward achieving real equality for women—in the Republican Party and everywhere else.

NAYLOR: Many people regard women's rights as a settled issue. Aren't metahuman rights the real controversy of the twenty-first century, and are you bowing out of that fight?

PENCHYK: No, I'm not bowing out. It isn't a matter of metahuman rights versus women's rights. It's a matter of equal rights for all whose voices remain unheard. Metahuman, female ... it doesn't matter. We have a common interest in speaking out, in helping each other get our share of the power to shape this nation. The Empowerment Coalition recognizes this common interest, which is why we plan to fund women candidates of all races. Ork, elf, human, dwarf or troll, our common experience as women has helped make us who we are. Now we offer that experience to the UCAS. (Light laugh) We'll see if they're smart enough to take it.

//CUT TO: EXTERIOR, UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. VOICEOVER

"And what of the other woman candidate for President? Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez declined our request for an interview, but the founding chapter of the New Century Party sent us the following press release. //INSERT PRESS RELEASE LOGO W/HIGHLIGHTED PORTION. CONTINUE VOICEOVER 'The New Century Party, in accordance with the mandate given by many UCAS citizens, intends to conduct seminars and teach-ins around the country for the purposes of educating the electorate-at-large and building party membership. We believe in our issues, and will continue to be an active force in UCAS politics.' //INSERT LEGAL-BRIEF LOGO W/HIGHLIGHTED PORTION. CONTINUE VOICEOVER That may be easier said than done, however. KSAF recently learned of a lawsuit filed by the Ohio chapter of the New Century Party against the founding chapter, alleging violations of the party charter and misuse of funds."

//CUT TO: BRACKHAVEN CAMPAIGN HQ, KNOT OF SUPPORTERS WATCHING ELECTRONIC UCAS MAP. VOICEOVER AS LAST THREE STATES LIGHT UP BLUE, PUTTING DUNKELZAHN OVER THE TOP.

"Kenneth Brackhaven, Dunkelzahn's most vociferous opponent, has been remarkably quiet since Election Night. When I visited the Brackhaven estate in Snohomish, I found it uninhabited except by guard patrols and large dogs with healthy-looking teeth. When asked for Brackhaven's whereabouts, the gate guard replied "On vacation. Indefinitely," and slid back the safety on his high-powered rifle. In lieu of an interview, KSAF therefore offers the following excerpt from Kenneth Brackhaven's last public statement: his concession speech." //INSERT CONCESSION-SPEECH CLIP

"It is said that the darkest hour comes just before dawn. This is that darkest hour, my friends ... for us and for our nation. But the dawn will come if we keep faith. We have lost this battle, but we have not lost the war. We will—we *must*—continue to fight for Truth and Right in any way we can. Keep faith—keep fighting—and we *will* prevail."

//CUT TO: LOBBY, WATERGATE HOTEL. FRAMING NOTE: IRENA FOREGROUND, WIDE ENOUGH SHOT TO CATCH HAPPY PARTY-GOERS PASSING BEHIND

"And finally, what about the Technocratic ticket—doomed from the start by association with the tainted election of 2056? VP candidate Brandon Ekimatsu has been demoted from his position with Mitsuhama, for unspecified reasons ... and James Booth, never a quitter despite his drubbing at the polls, is still demanding a recount. //(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)// The President's leaving already? *Of course* follow him, Joe! I'll babble off-camera if I have to. You just follow that entourage. Winslow, dash upstairs a moment and see if Daviar's still there—maybe she can tell us why he's taking off. Late for another shindig, I guess. Okay, okay ... time for my exit lines.

"As this festive evening draws toward its close, the President departs the Watergate for the next stop on his FDC victory tour ... while the nation-at-large begins to come to terms with this most historic Inaugural Night in the long and checkered history of the Presidential office. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this night, and the significance of the election so recently held. The stunning victory of the being named Dunkelzahn, the first Awakened entity to be granted such wide acceptance by society, has the people of the UCAS reeling in amazement and happiness. It seems that democracy can once again say, along with Mark Twain, that reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated. One more time, the electoral system that has received so much attention in this contentious election has proven itself AAA.[.]85// (CONTINUITY INTERRUPT) FILE CORRUPTION//

"Good God! Good God! Get the camera on that! Hurry! Oh, my God! Something terrible has happened! The dragon's limousine has vanished in a huge explosion! People are running in all directions ... there's glass all over the street, some windows must have blown out ... I don't see the car *anywhere*! Joe, are you on this? Where's the fragging *car*? Good God. Look at the street. Was the car there?! We need to get over there—come on, KEEP THAT FRAGGING CAMERA ROLLING OR I'LL KILL YOU MYSELF!//(FRAMING NOTE<<STABILIZE AND TOUCH UP FOOT ZOOM)//Are we set, do we have vid and sound? OK, get this over my shoulder.

"This is Irena Naylor, reporting from the capitol, where a major catastrophe has just occurred. The President appears to have been ... God, I can't believe I'm saying this! ... appears to have been assassinated as he was leaving the Watergate Hotel. We ... we can't say for certain what's happened ... there are no identifiable pieces of the Presidential limo anywhere—all the wreckage in the street is the twisted remains of the escort vehicles, and there is no sign of the dragon. The massive explosion occurred only moments ago, and even as we speak security personnel are surrounding the area. It's all happening so fast, no one

knows anything yet, but we—//(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)// HEY!! Hey, pal!! We're press, get off him! We're shooting live here, you fragging goon, *let go of* //END FILE

//INTERNAL EDIT MEMO// Don't forget to access Bethany's records. This is beginning to look like a real fragging mess. Ought to net me an Eye Spy Award if I'm lucky. Or it may get me killed. Whichever<<<//CLOSE MEMO//

//ATTACH FILES{} ENCRYPT ao;bnwerfg-923w8475t
Transcript 104B, No B-Roll, promo attached

"The preceding sounds and images are the best on-scene recordings of the assassination of Dunkelzahn that have survived the governmental and corporate coverup. The killing of the President has been so thoroughly shrouded in mystery that no one is even entirely sure what happened, never mind why, or who ordered the assassination. This reporter has heard every kind of farce and fabrication surrounding the death of the dragon. Some people claim the explosion was an accident, a buildup of sewer gas. Others say Dunkelzahn died because of a corporate conspiracy aimed at seizing the dragon's immense financial assets. One large contingency has even declared that the dragon reached some kind of cosmic critical mass and, in true Biblical fashion, ascended into Godhood.

"Regardless of what you believe, the known facts are few and easily summed up.

"Fact: Dunkelzahn unexpectedly left a scheduled inaugural event at the Watergate Hotel, departing twenty-one minutes earlier than his staff had originally planned.

"Fact: Dunkelzahn received a phone call immediately before he left the Watergate.

"Fact: As his limousine drove away from the hotel, a device apparently buried under the street exploded.

"Fact: The explosion destroyed the limousine, along with the security personnel escorting the vehicle. Their bodies were recovered; no trace of Dunkelzahn's body or the driver's body has yet turned up, nor has any other trace of him been found or reported.

"Fact: Above the site of the explosion there has appeared a mysterious magical phenomenon that has so far resisted all attempts at definition or analysis.

"And that, as they say, is that. Everything else—all the reams of information and speculation, all the hysterical accusations, are fabrications or dreams ... or, possibly, pointers to the as-yet undiscovered truth.

"This reporter has come into the possession of exclusive secret datafiles, obtained at great cost by an associate of mine. My fellow reporter is to be commended for her courage and skill in obtaining the following information."

//INTERNAL EDIT MEMO// Go back over this and polish it up a bit. Work on timing and transitions, see about a score, look for more stock footage. Stay away from graphics. People will try to bury this anyway—why give them more ways to pick it apart?//END MEMO



//BEGIN FILE//

///(EDIT NOTE: ALL VID NEEDS TO BE GENERATED FOR THE FOLLOWING FILES. INCLUDE DISCLAIMERS OF VERACITY.)//

Death of a Dragon: The Assassination of Dunkelzahn

Irena,

Like I promised, here are some of the preliminary notes and framing info for the canvassing interviews you wanted. You'll have to handle the Big Corp Guys, since a flack like me can't get close enough to smell 'em. Girl, you'd be amazed at all the rif-raff and bums who hang out in the Federal District! Lucky me, I managed to dig up a fraggin' ton of eyewitnesses to Dunkelzahn's last ride. I've attached a few of the best—a lot of the others are really wacked-out, and I didn't want to spend time we haven't got editing all the chipheads and crazies. The ones I'm sending are pretty good—I took out all of my mutterings and questions, figuring we'll shoot all my counters later. I also put some notes with each of these, since I think they're the best ones we're going to get off the streets. I don't want to send their names and ID's over the Net. Some of the competition was out there prowling the streets at the same time we were, and I don't want to give them any ideas. I'm betting you'll get the real gold from the glitterati. Let me know what you think when I get back into town. I should be hitting the runway in a few hours—I'll call with the flight number from the plane.

See you,
Bethany



Transcript 3A, no B-roll, promo attached//

>>Notes: This guy looked like a derelict, but he believed every word he told us. I looked up his military service record, and he was hell on wheels in his younger days. I tend to believe most of the early stuff, but at the end of the interview he started

to ramble pretty badly. Wait'll you see the footage we got of this guy! He's amazing!

"Whaddya fraggin' wan'?"

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Yeah, I stay aroun' here most days, but I ain' no fraggin' bum. I godda job, workin' at the shelter aroun' the rotunda, y'know. I got papers, y'know, cause I, I'm a vet. You guys're from a pirate vidgroup or sumpin', huh?"

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//>>

"Hey, chummer, tha's fine w'me, I know how it is to have th' fraggin' corps or feds on ya. Huh! B'lieve me, I fraggin' KNOW! Just lookit this big fragger scar I got here ..."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Oh yeah, a bite'd be good, I learned in the service never ta pass up food or sleep. You said you wuz lookin' fer good info about th' bomb that killed the dragon? Well, come over here an' I'll tell ya what I saw."///(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)//

"Oh yeah, tha's nice ... this's fraggi' tasty! Mmmp! An' coffee to wash it down! I ain't had real coffee since I dunno when ... But, anyhow, I wuz walkin' along th' street headin' back from treatment, plannin' on swingin' over to a friend of mine's place who lives on th' other side of the District Border. I wuz walkin' along an' I saw the crowd up ahead, an' I thought maybe there wuz a parade or sump'n, so I walked on up. A buncha security guys had the street closed, but I flashed my vet's ID an' they let me on in, since I'm a good citizen, y'know. Anyhow, I wuz workin' my way along when this big limo goes rollin' by, with these goons all aroun'—big, mean fraggers even fer aroun' here. I'm a car buff, so's I wuz payin' attenshun ta th' limo, y'know, cuz' if ya pay attenshun ya c'n tell how much armor they got by how they ride on their shocks."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Oh, man, wuz that baby armored! Like a fraggin' Stonewall from the way it took th' bumps in the street. An' I c'n guarantee *somethin'* wuz funny about that bomb what killed that guy."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Becuz I wuz lookin' right at th' fraggin' car when it blew up! I had my eyes turned up all th'way when th' whole road blew out all over it, so I saw it real good."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Yeah, they's pretty old now, but they still work all right. I got b'noc'lars an' lowlight built in, and I wuz usin' both of 'em. Y'know, it wuz funny that I c'd see th' bomb at all, cuz a bomb that big ought've killed me outright, but it didn't feel like nuthin' when it hit me. There wuzn't no flash, either, but I know it wuz a big fragger by th' way it blew th' limo aroun'. I seen some fraggin' big bangs in ma milit'ry days. I's in the CZ one time when a whole stick'a laser-guided 2,000 pounders took out a platoon'a Banshees. A guy next ta me, name wuz Axle Banger, come all apart from th' fraggin' blast waves. Yeah, big ol' armored Banshees come apart like tin cans hit with a combat axe, you drop big enough fraggin' bombs on 'em. That wuz the biggest bombin' I ever figgered I'd hafta worry about, but the one under that limo wuz at LEAST as big as any 'a those. That bang woulda wrecked most tanks, but th' president's limo wuz in purty good shape when it hit th' ground."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"No, chum, that ain' right. I'm tellin' ya, I saw it. The bomb blew the car about a hunnerd feet inna air an' took all th' wheels off it, but it come tumblin' back down an' hit the ground still in one piece. I toldja it wuz armored up real good, r'member? Anyways, it hit the ground and took a bounce back up inna air about ten feet, an' tha's where th' weird stuff happened."

///(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Better b'lieve it chum! There wuzn't no blast from th' first bomb, an' I c'd see it clear as day. All's I c'n think of, there musta been another bomb inside th' fraggin' car, cuz it opened up as purty as ya wan' an this big black blob come rollin' out, with alla

these big ol' worms squirmin' aroun' inside it. Th' limo blowed all ta' shreds all aroun' it, then it just went ZHOOP! an' it wuz gone, all excep' fer that weird cloud tha's out there still."

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"I'm try'n tell ya, tha's how it *happn'd!* Don'cha think I know how it sounds? If what I'm sayin's so crazy, then how d'ya explain that thing still hangin' inna air next t'the Watergate, huh?"

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"How'm I s'posed ta know what the frag they wuz? They wuz wormy kinda things. It all happ'ned real fast, an' I wuz jus' starin' like I wuz hypnatized or sump'n, so I know I saw it. You don' wanna b'lieve me, you c'n jus' pucker up an' kiss my"//(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)//



Transcript 8A, no B-roll, promo attached//

>>Notes: This guy called me up on an encrypted line in the middle of the night, refused to give a name, and practically begged me to meet him. Most of what he said was boring as drek, the usual trust-no-one kinda jet-wash, but the military stuff

he talks about in here is enough to give me the willies. I mean, what else do professional military goons have to do but dream up drek like this, huh? Have you ever heard of anything like this, because I sure haven't. The footage on this guy is pretty plain, but he must be a trained speaker—he's got a nice delivery. I've cut most of his rant—he went on for fragging ever-and-ever—but this guy was not afraid to point fingers and name names. Could be a lot of good stuff to follow up.<<

"I have excellent information about what killed the President-elect. I know the weapon used to kill him. And no, I won't reveal my sources, so don't ask.

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"I work in the defense industry, and I am outraged at this crime against the country. I have a good idea who was behind it as well—a secret cabal, hidden deep behind layers and layers of the Establishment. They are the only people who could have gotten their hands on such experimental and dangerous weapons, the kind that should not exist outside of a maximum-security laboratory. I have placed my life in jeopardy by telling you this, so I will hold nothing back. The truth must and will come out.

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Unfortunately, I have no hard information about the specific individuals who authorized the assassination and acquired the weapon. But based on descriptions I have heard, and especially on the bizarre magical phenomenon it left behind, I know for a fact what the cabal used to kill the President. I don't want to get too technical, but have you ever heard of a self-forging fragment?"

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"I'll keep it as simple as I can. A self-forging fragment is part of an explosive warhead that is designed to ride the shockwave of the blast created by the warhead's detonation. It is accelerated to a high velocity, equal to the detonation velocity of the explosive used ... say, about ten times greater than the velocity of a rifle bullet. Self-forging fragments are ideal for penetrating thick armor. They can be precisely aimed to destroy targets at long ranges. They are a well established, time-tested technology, unlikely to go unexpectedly wrong. So—we have a self-forging fragment. Are you with me so far? Good. Everyone knows, of course, that magic can be used to generate explosions ...

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"A very perceptive guess, but wrong. The assassins used a magical technique known as astrally interlinked cascading spell fragmentation. The technique is confined to astral space, using linked spell foci and quickened astral constructs. We're talking advanced theory here, you realize. Very advanced. In practice, however, the technique is extremely dangerous. The effects are hugely powerful, but to the best of my knowledge no one has managed to produce a stable astral array without severe side effects. One of the side effects I know of is the creation of a stable astral vortex, similar to but smaller than the rift over the spot where the President was killed.

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Military mages are working on many other types of astral constructs—for reconnaissance, interdiction of astral space, and any other purpose the Pentagon can dream up. There is no doubt that only the highest echelons of the military have access to that technique. They are the only ones who would even know about it, much less be able to use it. So it follows that the military killed him—on their own initiative, or at someone else's orders. You should be looking for those people.

//(DELETE COUNTERTEXT)//

"Oh, I seriously doubt that the mages who cast the astral self-forging fragment are still alive. The sheer effort of casting something so earthshaking probably killed them ... or their superiors did, if the mages survived the operation. Look for the masterminds, the evil people who conspired to kill a fine being and the duly elected leader of our country. Surely someone in the press can use what I've told you to find the perpetrators of this—"

//(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)//



Transcript 11D, no B roll, no promo//

>>Notes: This guy was one of a crowd of media hacks we pulled in. Like he says, there isn't any bomb footage that I could get my hands on, but that doesn't mean it's not out there somewhere. I say we go hunting for it—and also for the audio file this

guy mentions, because Drac-boy's last words would be really nice to get.<<

"I was working tech for the press detail. I had a good view of Dunkelzahn's limo pulling away, because I was operating a mike. The President was talking to himself as he got into the car, and I was hoping to pull something out of the limo as it drove off. Words for posterity and all that, y'know?

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"I got the file, all right. He was talking real soft, though, so I couldn't make out what he was saying. I figured I'd enhance it later—but of course I didn't get the chance. The FedPol yanked it right away as evidence. I don't know what happened to it. But I know I was getting a good feed, because I could hear it through my earphones.

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"No, I just have meat ears. I've been planning to get a jack installed, but you know how it is ... never do today what you can put off till tomorrow ...

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"He had a phone out when he got into the car. If we had the sound file off the mike we could get it, I'm sure, because I was using a really good mike. If it was putting through enough signal for my plain meat to hear it, a decker could have picked it apart to the point where you could hear his teeth grinding.

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Yeah, I had the mike on the car when the bomb went off. It was so weird—I'd swear no sound came through the headphones. Maybe I'm remembering it wrong, but the noise was muffled—like I only heard it through the air, not through the mike. I know some camera operators who were on-scene, and they said nobody got any film of the explosion, either. Nobody. Weird, neh? All the news guys are using graphics to show the explosion because there isn't any live film of it.

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Yeah, sure. We do it all the time, re-creations and simulations. You're a news hack—you know the deal, right? Anyway, after a few seconds the mike started working again. Of course, by then all sorts of drek was in the fan and the crew chief was screaming for us to get closer, get closer ...

//(TIME DELAY)//
 "I'll tell you, that was one hairy night. The most serious drek I've ever been mixed up in, bar none. Frag, I'm sorry. I'm a little shook up, y'know? Don't mean to embarrass you ... just give me a second ...

//(TIME DELAY)//
 "I really liked the Big D. He had the right stuff. I don't care if he wasn't human, he had a real soul to him. // (TIME DELAY) // The atmosphere, the aura, there where he died, it felt—I don't know. Holy, in a way. I mean, I'm not sensitive to drek like that, but I really felt it.

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"I'm fine, really. Don't worry about it. I guess it upset me a little more than I thought. But I've been thinking about the dragon. He was larger than life, you know? I just can't believe some evil fragger would hate him enough to slaughter him like ... like a stray dog or something. His death should mean more than just some twisted metal in the street. It's just not right, you know?"

//(CONTINUITY INTERRUPT)//

Transcript 34A, no B-roll, no promo//

>>Notes: This old lady pissed me off at first with her patronizing attitude, but I kinda got to like her. I don't think she meant anything by it, I think she was just daffy. But daffy or not, wait 'til you see the vid we got of this lady! She's this apple-cheeked old grandma, but what charisma! Nutty as a fruitcake, but she fragging near had me ready to go to bat for her. It's too bad we probably can't use this because it sounds so wacko, but it might correlate with some of what our old vet saw. Our government-leak guy might even be able to verify some of this, who knows? And there's always the "Saint Dunkelzahn" angle if all else fails. An awful lot of people went off the deep end about the Big D that way right after it happened ... maybe a whole 'nother story there, huh? Could be bigger than the Elvis and Jetblack stories combined Anyway, we already know *something* weird is going on. Ready to play crusading-reporter again, girl?<<

"Yes, dear, I was watching when the Astral Lords came to the Dragon. Now don't give me that look—I was old and wise and dealing with magic when you were just an itch in your momma's panties. I was a witch when I was a young girl, back before the Awakening. When I was a girl, most humans would have called you and your ilk monstrous if they had bothered to believe you were real ... but I believed even then. I'll never forget the night when the Magic came, and my lover and I realized that our spells suddenly worked So I'm afraid you haven't earned the right to roll your eyes at me, dear, no matter how addled I may sound. Are you ready to listen with your ears and mind open?

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Well, aren't you the little charmer. Actually, the big brawny charmer, eh? But with such pretty eyes ... do you have a love in your life, dear? You should, with eyes like that.

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"So the little charmer has a catty side to her as well. I like your spunk, so I'll forgive your youth and ignorance and tell you about the miracle I saw. Besides, I've been bursting at the seams to tell somebody.

"I was here in my little shop when I heard that the Dragon had been elected. I thought, 'Well, what *about* that! The norms have dived into fantasy for true now.' When I heard the Dragon was to be feted nearby, I decided to go and see him. Are you blessed with the Talent, by any chance, dear?

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"That's a real shame. The astral world is more beautiful than words can say. I've assensed Dragons twice before that night, and I wanted so much to see one again before I pass into the Astral forever! So I dragged my wrinkled old self out into the streets and waited in front of the Watergate Hotel with all the other supplicants to see the Dragon. He came out almost as soon as I got there, much earlier than I thought that he would. Dragons have protean flesh, and he had shaped himself as a man on the mundane plane. But I assensed him, and oh! the glory of him! What a noble creature, standing there with his dragon glory cloaked so that we little, fragile people would be less fearful of him.

"He stepped into his car, but I could still see his astral form, so I watched him like some blushing schoolgirl as he drove away

... //(TIME DELAY)//

"My child, are you familiar with the theory that the universe exists on different levels, each one as vibrant and alive as our own?"

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"I don't know why I'm surprised. What *can* they be teaching you young things in school these days ... but never mind. Listen, now. Beings exist within the core of every atom that are as self-aware as we are, and other beings exist that use galaxies as we use the cells in our body. Did you know that the mathematics of a black hole's event horizon can describe our whole universe, so that every black hole could be *another* universe? If that's true, then every one of us carries entire universes of sentient beings within our own cells, and so does every speck of matter all around us. At the same time, we are embedded in the bodies of vast entities of higher orders than we can imagine. I find the whole notion comforting ... it rather handily answers all sorts of questions about God, Life, and other things that old people worry about."

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Well, at least you're polite enough to pretend to be interested. I'll tell you what I saw, and let you decide what it was."

"I stood there, watching the Dragon and clutching my little purse to my chest, when suddenly he lit up like a glorious fountain. As I watched, amazed, he shook himself free of his flesh, like a moth husking itself free of a cocoon. Then, above the freed Dragon, a door opened suddenly in the Astral Plane. As if some Godlike hand was reaching down from an incredible distance, beckoning to the Dragon to come, come ..."

"He soared up toward it, straining to reach the Portal! He flew high, so high, up toward that glory //(TIME DELAY)//
//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"I don't know what happened after that. I didn't see it. I'm just an old, old woman, weak like all of us ordinary mortals. I became afraid. I felt the pull of that glorious Summons, and the wonder and terror of it made me close my eyes before the Dragon reached the Portal. How pitiful I am. How pitiful we all are."

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Why do I call myself pitiful? Silly child, do you think miracles like that happen every day? In my lifetime, I've watched almost every fantasy of my childhood become the bland, everyday reality of your world. When I was your age there was no magic, no matter how I yearned for it. Then, against every chance, the magic came into the world. And then I became a magician! I thought I had been blessed more than I could ever say—but now, in the twilight of my life, I was given a chance to watch the greatest miracle of all, and I flinched away from it like a doddering old fool. To be given so much and have it all turn to ashes in my mouth because I could have had so much more ..."

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"Child, child, do I have to spell it out for you? The Dragon was transforming himself, an act that drew the attention of the Beings of the Higher Planes. I call them Astral Lords, but God would do as well. I saw the Dragon receive his invitation to Ascend, to reach the next level of existence, to become a god."

"Do you understand now? I could have watched the birth of a god, and I chose to close my eyes instead. I won't get another

chance to witness such a miracle. I doubt another Dragon will happen to Ascend right around the corner from me any time soon, and I won't be here much longer."

//(COUNTERTEXT DELETED)//

"All the spirits bless you for listening to an old woman. Travel swiftly and safely, dear. I see a darkness upon you deeper than the one I'm headed for, and I would hate to see such pretty eyes closed forever."

>>INTERNAL EDIT MEMO: Add following to script—"The preceding files represent the final post sent to me by my friend and colleague, Bethany Trane, a reporter for the Ork Underground Network. Two hours after she posted this message, the plane carrying Bethany and her crew, along with 132 others, suffered engine failure on its approach to Sea-Tac Airport and plunged to the earth. There were no survivors. All the records referred to in Ms. Trane's post were lost in the crash. All my attempts to locate the people she interviewed have so far been unsuccessful."

//INSERT ENDING FILE AND B ROLL//

Transcript 115A, no B-roll, no promo.

"So the mystery deepens around the death of the Dragon. This murder was a crime of unbelievable magnitude, carried out by people who apparently had no fear of the world's mightiest and most subtle of creatures. Who are these mysterious people who can kill a great dragon and live to savor their dastardly accomplishment? Who could possibly hope to kill a dragon as powerful as Dunkelzahn, at the moment of his greatest triumph? Whoever they are, they have so far covered their actions with a thoroughness and subtlety that beggars the imagination. So far, the death toll among guests at the fateful Inaugural ball, Dunkelzahn's staff, those investigating the murder, and innocent victims stands at two hundred and twelve—that we know of. The range of this conspiracy clearly reaches further than we know at present, but this reporter will not rest until the truth is revealed and the culprits exposed to the glaring light of day. Until my next report, this is Irena Naylor, signing off."//(CONTINUITY BREAK)//

// [CLOSE FILE??ENDITALL]//
//DECRYPT:ENCODE:RECODE//
//END FILE//

❶ It's Hernandez and her fragging New Dawn cronies. The Explosion That Wasn't, a magical vortex no one knows anything about ... plus, everyone knows you can only kill a magical being like a dragon with stronger magic. It's Doc Roz and her magician cabal. Gotta be.

❷ Randi

❸ Interesting logic, Randi. Statement A: Magic killed Dunkelzahn. Statement B: Rozilyn Hernandez and the Illuminates of the New Dawn use magic. Therefore, Conclusion: Hernandez et al. killed Dunkelzahn. That's probably the best example of A COMPLETELY FRAGGED-UP, PATHETIC EXCUSE FOR THINKING THAT I'VE EVER READ ON THIS BBS!!!!!! How many other folks on this fragging plan-

et do you suppose use magic who might have wanted Dunkelzahn dead? How many of them are probably a helluva lot more powerful than the New Dawn? How do we even know that magic killed him? We can figure magic had something to do with it because of that vortex thing, but how do we know it isn't just some elaborate smokescreen to get us all thinking "magic did it, magic did it," so we won't find the real weapon they used (whoever they are)? And did I mention how sick I am of the word "cabal"? If I see it one more time, I'm going to go out and kill something. Preferably the next idiot to use it.

❖ Voltaire

❖ It wasn't Roz Hernandez. Brackhaven did it. I have proof. He's got lots of big-shot contacts in the defense industry—ten to one he's got some high-up military fraggers under his thumb. And he hates anything magical or metahuman or different from him. He was practically calling Dunkelzahn the devil in the last few days before the election. Just like that one guy said, only the military could've pulled it off. But the military-at-large had no reason to kill the President. Brackhaven did, so he got his military buddies to take action.

❖ Deep Throat

❖ Gettin' deep in here ... ! Even assuming that the defense industry "source" quoted above is telling the truth (and knows what he's talking about), there's two big problems with the Brackhaven theory. First, I can't see a diehard magic-hater using magic to kill the dragon. If he wanted to off Dunkelzahn as a way of symbolically killing the Awakening, he'd have made a point of finding non-magical means. Second, I doubt even Brackhaven has a large enough wad of ready cash or enough power on other fronts to buy that kind of hit. No one would've done something that major just on his say-so.

❖ Tin Lizzie

❖ It's the bugs. Gotta be bugs. What else is powerful enough?

❖ Chi-Boy

❖ What's that old saying about every problem looking like a nail when all you've got is a hammer ... ?

❖ La Marquise

❖ Dunkelzahn was assumed into Heaven, and will come again to judge us all when the time is right. All you who mourn for the Great Dragon's passing, come to the Church of the Dragon-Soul at [//xx.yy.829-CCD.ytl.//](http://xx.yy.829-CCD.ytl.//). Under the Dragon's sheltering wing shall you be comforted.

❖ RevTed

❖ Nowhere near Christmas, and the fruitcakes are out already!

❖ D. Bunker

❖ DUNKELZAHN ISN'T DEAD!!! The aliens took him. We've got to get him back!

❖ Dragonkin

❖ I just know I'm going to hate myself for asking ... ALIENS?!

❖ Tin Lizzie

❖ You know. The same ones who took Jetblack. And Elvis. They swoop down in ships made of light so bright we can't look at it, and they take whoever they want. They do this kind of stuff all the time.

❖ Dragonkin

❖ Like I said ...

❖ D. Bunker

❖ Ms. Naylor's got her finger on the button, and she doesn't even know it. The assassination was a corp hit. The whole kit'n'cabal (sorry, Voltaire, but it's the only word that'll do) got together and offed the Big D so they could split up his assets between them. And Lofwyr led the pack. Set a dragon to cack a dragon—Lofwyr has a unique understanding of dragon weaknesses, and he's ruthless enough to use them against a rival.

❖ Stoney

❖ I don't buy it. Sure, Lofwyr would've loved to get his talons on Dunkelzahn's stuff—but he's also smart enough to know that a hit would've meant exposing dragon weaknesses to people who might well turn around and use them against him. He couldn't have wanted Dunkelzahn's assets that badly.

❖ JMS

❖ Especially when the twists and turns of corp law offered him so many potential ways to skim Dunkelzahn's holdings slowly. Dragons have a lot of patience.

❖ Legal Beagle

❖ How do we know Lofwyr didn't handle it all by himself?

❖ Wyrn Watcher

❖ Hmmm. You may have something there.

❖ JMS

❖ Whoever did it had some reason. Nobody goes to the trouble of cacking a fragging *great dragon* just because. So the big question is, WHY did they do it ... and what are they planning for an encore?

❖ Dangerous Liaisons

THE LAST TESTAMENT OF DUNKELZAHN



If you are reading this, then I am dead. Undoubtedly, my death has generated a media frenzy the likes of which the world has never seen—a media frenzy that will fade away just as quickly as it erupted. So while my fifteen minutes of fame last, I'd like to make the best use of my notoriety. I'd like to speak frankly about the future of metahumanity. I'd like to lay it on the line and say everything that I couldn't while I lived. (And I'll keep it short so that your attention doesn't wander before I'm finished.)

To paraphrase one of your own writers, you're living in the best of times and the worst of times. On one hand, you've achieved a level of technological and intellectual development unequaled by any of the civilizations that have passed before you. At the same time, more people have been consigned to lives of malnutrition, hopelessness and fear than ever before. A privileged few enjoy the fruits of "progress," while the SINless and most metahumans—who make up the vast majority of the world's population—struggle simply to feed and clothe themselves.

As some of you may already suspect, the world is seriously out of balance. Megacorps continue to despoil the Earth in the name of profit. Nation fights nation, the mundane among you fear and loathe the magically talented, humans have turned on their metahuman brothers and vice versa. If things continue unchanged, it's all going to come crashing down, probably sooner rather than later. And when it does, no one will escape unharmed. That's right. Regardless of how much nuyen you have stashed away or how many street samurai you have at your beck and call—you're not going to escape. From the most powerful corp exec to the lowliest gutterpunk, all of you are in the same boat—and if that boat starts to sink, you'll all go down with it. Trust me on this, I've seen (meta)humanity come dangerously close to kicking the proverbial bucket before.

The good news is that you have the power and the means to restore the balance of the world. As I've already said, you've achieved a level of technological and intellectual development that any of your predecessors would envy. Plus, you're rapidly rediscovering the ancient art of magic—and magic is the key. For with the twin arts of science and magic at your control, you truly have the power to reshape the world in some fundamental ways. Of course, this power could just as easily be used to throw the world even further out of balance, but that's less likely to happen because of the very nature of magic. Every good magician knows and respects his limits. He knows that his power comes from the universe around him, comes from working with the natural order of the universe rather than against it. And it's that kind of wisdom that will help metahumanity turn things around.

Quite simply, I'm telling you to GROW UP. In this age, you've got more power at your fingertips than your ancestors ever dreamed was possible. Continue to push the envelope of knowledge. Continue to dream the big dreams, by all means. But you must begin using your knowledge and power wisely, because thousands of years may pass before metahumanity regains the strength and tools needed to successfully weather the coming storms—and you may not get another chance.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 August 2057

For more information, contact:
Sandra Daniel at the Draco Foundation

Nadja Daviar Pledges To Execute Dunkelzahn's Last Wishes

For much of his time in the Sixth world, the great dragon known as Dunkelzahn used his great wealth and greater power to the benefit of metahumanity. Though Dunkelzahn's untimely death prevents him from pursuing his goals and plans personally, the Draco Foundation will continue to carry out his wishes.

As directed in his will, the Draco Foundation will be solely responsible for executing the provisions of Dunkelzahn's will. The Foundation, in turn, will operate under my personal direction, and I pledge to carry out my duties to the best of my abilities.

As is evident in Dunkelzahn's testament, he had a high regard for and felt a kinship with metahumanity. Alone among dragonkind, he recognized the strengths and weaknesses of metahumans and took an active interest in the metahuman race. From his awakening to the day he died, the curiosity and thirst for knowledge that characterize our race continued to fascinate and delight him, while our collective short-sightedness and irresponsibility continued to concern him. Even as he studied our actions and reactions, he generously funded a myriad of enterprises that he believed would benefit metahumanity in both the short and long term.

The Draco Foundation has accepted the responsibility and privilege of carrying out Dunkelzahn's last wishes. Guided by the directives in his will, the Draco Foundation will invest in various technological, scientific, magical and social enterprises that Dunkelzahn himself deemed necessary to the survival of our race. By doing so, we hope to honor Dunkelzahn's memory and ensure that metahumanity eventually restores harmony and balance to its troubled world.

• I received an upload of the following conversation between two of the commentators from the Aztlan post—anonously, of course, and routed through so many nodes that I gave up trying to trace it on my second trip through Zurich-Orbital. Fascinating stuff, and I'm sure very revealing, if we could figure out exactly what they're talking about. It seems some really big players have some very different opinions on the Prez's death. Let me hear your theories, and maybe we'll post a speculation compilation. The future, it seems, is going to be even more interesting than the present (if that's possible!).

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 21 August 2057 at 15:27:32 (EST)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] As the humans say, what a complete load of drek! How dare he post such lies and drivel—he's obviously doing it just to embarrass the rest of us. "... you've achieved a level of technological and intellectual development unequaled by any of the civilizations that have passed before you." How can he say such things with a straight face? By the Paths! He was a dragon! His primary interest in humanity was as a tasty snack! Of the deceptions that have been perpetrated on the lesser races, this rivals them all as the most thorough and least amusing. We are well rid of him.

::::[WORDSMYTH] My dear, you are deceiving yourself if you believe Dunkelzahn's influence at an end. His interest in the intellect and spirit of the human race was completely sincere. You would have no way of knowing, but he was a strange one even in the old world, always pursuing interests that seemed contrary to the other dragons' goals and insisting on including the other races in the big decisions. I believe the wyrm finally got his way, even though he had to accomplish it from wherever dragons go when they die.

That he created a will for disposal of his property is strange in itself. My understanding of the rituals surrounding death in the dragon race is that whatever remains behind belongs to the dragon that proves itself superior in a contest of will and strength. That oddity aside, if you look closely at his will you can see his plan in quite amazing detail simply by tracing the bequests he made. Dunkelzahn beat us at our own game long before we chose to play that game.

::::[LADY OF THE COURT] You've always been a bit naive, old man, and a bit too fond of conspiracy theories. The only thing I see in the dragon's will is the same overweening pride for which I always despised him, and which was ultimately his downfall. Attempting to force our hand using the pathetic ploy of worming his way into human affections by playing according to their rules, and ruling them from plain sight rather than from behind the scenes simply shows that he never really understood our intentions, or the baseness of metahumankind. The only threat he ever posed to our future plans was the potential for unnecessarily panicking the commoners into uniting against us—for though we are their betters in every way, there still is strength in numbers.

::::[WORDSMYTH] Lady, please listen while I try to explain what I see. The pattern of Dunkelzahn's bequests weaves a complex tapestry of encouragement, rivalries, rewards, pay-offs, revenge, whimsy and wiles that was many centuries in planning and many more in execution. No matter how many times we rebuffed his plans, ignored his pleas and even forced him to bow to our terms, in the long run, it seems, we were duped; he simply anticipated our objections and switched to plan B or plan C or whatever version of his master pattern we fit into. I think he has always believed that metahumanity held the key to the final defeat of our enemies, and has always worked to help metahumankind realize its potential.

::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Believe what you like, you stubborn old goat. Your gentle vision of the world simply whitewashes the truth. The dragon had a master plan, all right, but it wasn't to anyone's advantage but his own. He thought that if he could enlist to his cause the sympathies of this and future generations of metahumanity, he could eventually destroy the others that stood in his way and remake the next world in his own image. All his apparent concern for

the lesser races was nothing but an act, a cover-up for the might-makes-right strategy the dragons have always used.

::::[WORDSMYTH] If you will not hear my words regarding his intentions and his efforts to preserve the world as we know it, then consider this: what Dunkelzahn gave away in his will was only a tiny fraction of his wealth (as you know), and his knowledge was vast beyond the imagining of any of our race. A committee of those you consider to be the equivalent of cattle control all that wealth and the power such riches bring, and at least one of them has access to whatever knowledge, opinions, speculation, instructions and schemes he chose to record. Have you fully grasped what that simple fact means, my Lady?

::::[WORDSMYTH] Lady of the Court?

::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I had not considered this ramification. It seems I have been looking only at the short view, at least as far as the dragons are concerned, and we may have celebrated the death of our adversary prematurely. I cannot take everything you say at face value, Wordsmyth, but you have given me food for thought.

But what of you? Do you undertake the plans he obviously had for you?

::::[WORDSMYTH] I will gladly fulfill my appointment to the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research, if that is what you are asking. I cannot pretend to understand what Dunkelzahn intended to accomplish, but I am curious to learn more of his goals and will do my part to help forward his wishes out of friendship, if from no other motivation. To be honest, when we were last together I sided against our late friend with great reluctance. Now I see that, unlike the rest of us, he really meant what he was saying. He believed so strongly in the validity of his position that he set in motion plans that even we may not live to see fulfilled. Quite possibly, my young one, Dunkelzahn was right. That possibility is worth my time, my effort and my loyalty. And, oddly enough, I think he counted on me recognizing that.

::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Then we must part as adversaries, for I will not so easily abandon all we have worked for and the rewards we have gained through our efforts.

::::[WORDSMYTH] I think the wily old wyrm even knew that. Sleep well.

I DUNKELZAHN ...

**... being of sound mind and body, do hereby
declare this to be my last Will and Testament
o (12.32 Mp deleted)**

o In an effort to "get to the good stuff" that we're all interested in hearing about (in other words, who gets what), I have skipped over all of the legal mumbo-jumbo that every such document includes and cut right to the bequests. Because the will consists mostly of short bequests to a broad variety of individuals, I have kept the file read-only in order to keep it from getting cluttered with a lot of babble. Discussion of the will can be posted in the related SIG linked to this file. Once in that area, keep your posts related to the topic at hand or they will be nuked without mercy. This is your only warning.

o Captain Chaos

Transmitted on 15 August 2057, at 12:46:19 (EST)

ON THE EXECUTION OF MY WILL

I have managed to accumulate considerable possessions over the course of my lifetime, almost against my will. That, I suppose, is the nature of dragons, to acquire and accumulate physical representations of our long memories and pasts. We are sentimental creatures at heart; I have yet to know a dragon who can simply throw away anything possessing even the smallest amount of meaning to him.

To see to the Herculean task of administering my ridiculously vast estate and assure that my wishes are carried out, I authorize my executor, Nadja Daviar, to use what funds are necessary from the balance of my estate for the establishment of the Draco Foundation. This Foundation will have a Board of Trustees consisting of Ms. Daviar and six others to be appointed by her. The trustees will oversee the administration of the Foundation and the execution of my last wishes as described in this will.

I suppose it is necessary that I acknowledge how dramatically I have broken from the traditions of my race by arranging for my effects to be distributed according to my own instructions. I will simply say that this is an eminently sensible idea I borrowed from humankind with the sole intention of avoiding the traditionally destructive events that almost always follow the death of one of our kind. I hereby warn my fellow dragons against contesting this document in the usual way, for doing so will reflect poorly on our reputations in this Awakened age.

I have been compiling and updating this document off and on for many years, always striving to make my will accurately represent ... well, my will. (My understanding is that most humans use their wills as instruments of encouragement and revenge, and it seemed like an excellent idea.) If I appear to have missed the mark, then please view my efforts charitably, and keep in mind that I take the very long view of things. In addition to designating specific recipients for the many things I have accumulated that will serve a better purpose in other hands, I have made bequests that I hope will foster the development of some of my favorite metahuman characteristics.

I have always wished to aid metahumanity in its quest for knowledge, but have been reminded by a friend that I should not deny them the joy of discovery in doing so. Therefore, I have committed certain assets to encourage the most noble endeavor of the human intellect. I have found in my long life that truth is quite often a matter of opinion, and that it is possible for many truths to be held by many people at the same time without one truth being necessarily greater than another. It is my wish to advance the cause of truth in the world only as much as I can advance understanding. The concept that all beings are equal in the eyes of the Universe, regardless of their appearance or origins, without concern for their beliefs, goes against millennia of human history in which slavery, torture and murder were the order of the day for those where did not conform to the will of the State. More amazing still is that a nation founded upon such a radical principle was able to survive and prosper. Therefore, I have committed certain assets to honor the revolutionary dream that sparked a vision of a world where justice prevailed for all.



To Nadja Daviar, my faithful translator and assistant, keeper of my hopes and dreams for the future, who spoke for me to millions around the world, I leave the bulk of my estate, save for those items named in this will. I name Nadja Daviar the executor of my estate and Chairman of the Draco Foundation, in which capacity she will appoint a board of trustees to oversee the execution of this will in accordance with my wishes.

To Akira Kageyama, I leave my Vancouver condoplex and the monies in the trust fund established in his name.

After much research and hundreds of bags of burned Nuke-and-Pop, I leave 20 million nuyen to the holder of the patent for the twentieth-century process that produced popcorn capable of being popped over an open flame (this dragon's method of choice). I believe it was called Speedy Pop, or Quick Pop, or something similar. The patent holder must use this money to renew the patent and resume production.

Because we who occupy the physical world do not live here alone, the Draco Foundation is directed to establish the Astral Space Preservation Society. The goals of the ASPS are as follows: to monitor potential abuses of astral space and its denizens; to protect the rights of denizens of astral space; to establish a set of parameters that will facilitate a working relationship between spirits and metahumanity; and finally, to create a sanctuary in astral space for beings in search of a safe retreat. The ASPS will be administered by the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research (DIMR) in cooperation with any and all free spirits interested in joining this project.

To VisionCrafters, I leave the sum of 20 million nuyen for research into advanced optics.

For research into magical phenomena considered dangerous to (meta)humanity,

such as the foveae in Aztlan and the recent tragedy in Chicago, I leave 4 million nuyen, to be administered by the Draco Foundation.

To Markus Dammembraum, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

For the establishment of the Ancient Wisdom Fund for Education, I leave 10 million nuyen. This fund will offer scholarships to students in scientific and technological fields, and will be administered by a board of trustees appointed by the Draco Foundation.

I offer ownership of the First Key of Power to the government of either Tir Tairngire or Tír na nÓg, whichever nation first publicly discloses the complete personal histories of all of its high government officials. This disclosure must be supervised by the Draco Foundation in accordance with my instructions. *Speratemel rel timaan perest? Hellon Sperethiel.*

To Aden, I leave the Shroud of Shadows. May its shade cool the heat of your desert home as well as the tempers that flare around it.

In order to reduce the number of innocent bystanders who die each day as a result of security officers firing on criminals, I leave a five-pound brick of orichalcum to either Lone Star or Knight Errant, whichever first develops an inexpensive, effective, non-lethal stun technology accurate at 100 meters.

In memory of John Timmons, my first voice to the people of the 21st century who died because of hatred and misunderstanding, I leave 12 million nuyen to create the John Timmons Memorial Foundation for the Advancement of Equality. This organization, headed by a board to be appointed by my executor, will advance the cause of equal rights for all peoples, regardless of physical appearance, beliefs or origin.

To NewsNet I leave 2 million nuyen for an investigation into the circumstances of my death (whatever they may be) and the production of a comprehensive documentary on the events surrounding my demise.

To Lorelei Angel, whose voice is like that of the stars, I know from our conversations that you have no further need for wealth. So I leave 3 million nuyen to be donated in your name to the charity of your choice.

For the study of magic in all its aspects, I earmark 100 million nuyen for establishing the DIMR. The Draco Foundation will appoint a management team, to consist of one member from each of the following: MIT&T, the Atlantean Foundation, the Native American nations, Tír na nÓg, the University of Chicago, the universities competing in southern California and the People's University in Berkeley, the Lagenzell Institute, the Oxford Royal College of Magicians, and my old friend Ebran, also known as the Scribe.

For purposes of research, I leave my body to the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research.

To Yakashima Technologies, I leave the sum of 150 million nuyen, to be used for biotechnology research and the development of products to benefit the people of the world.

To Aithne Oakforest, I leave the Rose Crystal, in hopes of soothing old wounds and healing the rifts they have caused.

To the first party that develops a species of plant hardy enough to flourish in and eventually clean the smog-choked atmosphere of such cities as Tenochtitlán, I leave 20 million nuyen.

I leave 100,000 nuyen for each of the following people to be rescued from the Chicago Containment Zone: James Delany, Dr. Edward Oden, Gregory



Armtwister, Protacio Corcoran, Katherine Sitsu and Sissel McCarthy.

To Brock Higginbotham, I leave my controlling interest in the Pleasure Dome Hotel in Palm Springs, CFS, on the condition that he stay at Ubehebe Crater in the Mojave Desert from one full moon to the next.

To Alamais, I leave the fruitcake we have exchanged every Christmas since 2020. Unlike you, I'm really dead.

To the party who finds the bones of the dragon skeleton for which I possess the head, I offer two options. You may keep the bones, or turn them over to the Draco Foundation for a reward. All discoveries must be independently verified as dragon bones, such identification to be made by any living dragon. The Draco Foundation will assemble all pieces of the skeleton it receives and display the result in the Smithsonian Institution for the edification of the general public. My admittedly incomplete research indicates the following coordinates as likely locations for dragon bones: Latitude 41°, Longitude 121°; Latitude 41° 50n, Longitude 87° 45w; Latitude 47° 21n, Longitude 122° 12w; Latitude 19° 24n, Longitude 99° 9w; Latitude 65°, Longitude 130°; Latitude 39° 44n, Longitude 104° 59w.

To Amy Park, I leave the title to the Buhne Building, in appreciation for the best burgers in the California Free State.

[This following paragraph is to be placed in the public-access area of the Matrix.] ATTENTION! To any and all persons capable of discovering "where a Rock meets the Sky," the 2 million nuyen, amulets and weapons at that place are yours for the keeping provided that you accomplish the task described in the enclosed datachips within 1 year of my demise. The anime will accompany you to make sure the job is done properly. Because this endeavor is of special personal inter-

est to me, I have taken numerous precautions to assure its completion.

To Ryumyo, the first of our kind to be seen in this modern age, I leave my envy at stealing my chance to be the very first dragon as well as the Ring Ouroboros, since it is the early bird who catches the worm.

I leave 1 million nuyen to any group or individual who ensures the safe return of Mary-Beth Tyre to her home. Mary-Beth was kidnapped April 30, 2051, just after her sixth birthday. She was last seen in Roanoke, Virginia. Her survival is critical.

To any person born on December 8, 1980: present yourself to the Draco Foundation at any time, and the Foundation will grant you one wish. This century should mourn for the losses of that century.

In the name of the Misguided Six, I give 250,000 nuyen to establish a fund to assist victims of magical crimes, as well as their families and loved ones.

I leave 500,000 nuyen to the American Association for the Advancement of Thaumaturgy, to educate the public about the nature of magic. Magic and science are equal parts of humanity's heritage, and there need be no quarrel between them.

To Robert J. Hemedes, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To any person who can prove he or she shook hands with John F. Kennedy, present yourself to the Draco Foundation at any time, and the Foundation will grant you one wish. He seemed like a nice person.

To Beatrice Wilder of Paris, I leave my mountain retreat at Rikon, near Zurich. May it give you the solitude you seek.

To any person who possesses a ticket stub to Maria Mercurial's only foray into country music, performed at My Brother's Place in the Nashville sprawl: present yourself to the Draco Foundation at any time, and the Foundation will grant you one wish. I believe the saying is, be careful what you wish for—you may well get it.

To Robert Khamdeng, I leave the Weeping Stone of Ta'bel and the optical chip labeled "BK-924" found in the second drawer of my writing desk at my residence in Toronto.

To Sean Lavery, I leave my estate in Tir Tairngire. The garden there is quite beautiful and I hope that it will remain so.

To George "Locomotive" Fenamore, wherever he is at present, I sadly bequeath the locked steel box number 412 from my private vault at the Manhattan Citibank Depository. The box is not to be opened until he deems it absolutely necessary, or until my comrade manages to successfully "survive" another Double Tuesday. I pray the darkness ends for you someday.

To the executor of my will, Nadja Daviar, I grant full disposition of the other fifteen boxes marked for George Fenamore, or his descendants, should any of them ever ask. If not, upon your own demise, they are to be summarily destroyed UNOPENED in the main microwave blast furnace of Bethlehem Steel, Pa.

To Bethlehem Steel, I leave 2 million nuyen for the purpose of the immediate destruction of fifteen steel boxes, UNOPENED, when and if they are delivered to the main furnace crew boss, and the additional amount of 500,000 nuyen to the crew boss as danger money to be distributed to his crew in the event of injuries resulting from this task. If the task is accomplished without mishap, the crew boss may keep the full amount or disburse it as he wishes.



To Alachia, I leave the Everliving Flower. I have no more use for it.

To the first party to develop a self-motivational robotic unit that meets the specifications laid out by the Draco Foundation, I leave 10 million nuyen for continued research.

To David Lloyd Ford, I leave 2.5 million nuyen, to be used to continue his ministry. May such faith always enlighten the world.

To Buttercup of Yamatetsu Corporation, I leave my complete collection of comic books with respect for our mutual appreciation of the art form. Not manga, I know, but you could stand to develop a taste for some of the classics, my dear.

To Casey Williams, I leave 4 million nuyen. Good hunting!

To the first one thousand SINless metahumans to show up at the Seattle offices of the Draco Foundation at 10:00 a.m. on the 12th of October, 2058, I bequeath one valid SIN apiece.

To Dr. Miles Swinburne, I leave my antique tarot deck. May you benefit from the insights it can offer you.

To Captain Chaos, I leave the encrypted file JackBNimble. Whatever rewards it reveals are yours. I had no success trying to decrypt this thing, but I've always believed it contained some communication from another world. Of course, I could be wrong. I've also notified the Draco Foundation to provide for your well-being in the event the file deals you a debilitating injury.

To the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research, I leave one year's worth of talon clippings.

To Mothers of Metahumans, I leave 1 million nuyen to continue their valuable

work in promoting social acceptance of metahuman children born to human parents. By loving and accepting your different offspring, you have shown wisdom that all of us would do well to emulate.

To Noriaki Ikeda, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To Carla Brooks, my skilled security advisor and aide, I leave the dagger Wyrmsooth along with the sum of 5 million nuyen. I hope you will continue to serve my estate as well as you served me.

To Eddie Samuelson, I leave the deeds to my La Bella Italia restaurants in New York, Prince Edward Island and Lake Louise. Thanks for picking up the tab one last time.

To Darius Vemizelos, curator, and Scholar Zaimis Kaphandaris of the Crete Occult Museum, I leave steel box number 212, which contains the ancient bronze blade that I have dubbed The Spear of Destiny. Whether or not that name applies is for them to prove. Or disprove. Personally, I have never quite had the time to find out.

To further encourage an end to the use of blood magic by Aztechnology and other parties, I offer a bounty of 1 million nuyen on any blood mages captured alive and delivered to the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research for the purposes of studying the effects of blood magic use on metahumanity. I further authorize the Draco Foundation to provide suitable rewards for the receipt of verifiable accounts of blood magic use, the rewards to reflect the usefulness of the information provided.

To Wuxing, Incorporated, I leave the sum of 200 million nuyen per our previous agreement.

To Yee Chan, I leave the Tome of Terrin.

To Damien Knight, I leave my antique chess set, except for the black king piece. I hope you find another worthy opponent. It was only 60 seconds, old friend, but what a ride!

To Gaeatronics' Seattle laboratories, I leave 250 million nuyen for the purpose of research into Dr. Dawn Crowfeather's treatise, "On the Relationship between Mana and Nuclear Energy."

To Darrick Erding, I leave the Banner of the Red Dragon out of respect for his heritage. Use it well.

To the corporations and governments of the world, I leave the formula for an infant vaccination that should be administered to all children born after 31 October 2060.

To Dr. Alan Gordon, I leave my First Folio edition of *Al Azif*. Use it well, when and if you must.

To the first party to identify the victim in the accompanying photo and bring his five perpetrators to justice, I leave the access codes to my property in Paris. The Draco Foundation will release the codes upon receipt and verification of a complete account of the investigation, including the fate of the victim and the perpetrators.

To Ebran the Scribe, I leave my library of rare first editions, including my Shakespeare folios.

To Juan Atzcapotzalco of Aztechnology, I leave the contents of the sealed box held in trust at the Houston Premier Bank. It must be opened on the first day of the next Festival de Muertos to occur in Aztlan (though legally banned, we both know the festival still occurs). I swear on my name that the box and its contents pose no danger to you or Aztechnology.



Do not disobey these instructions, or the results could be most unfortunate.

To Universal Omnitech, I leave the sum of 120 million nuyen to continue their research in genetics and bioengineering.

To the band Shield Wall, I leave 10 million nuyen for the completion of their rock opera, "The Mother of the Sea."

To Federated Boeing, the land and mineral rights to the volcanic island that will erupt 301 kilometers due west of Petrolia on October 3rd, 2060.

To Dagnaitiowski'sk'owsrin, I leave the simchip catalogued as "Epoch of Blood" located in my private vaults at VisionQuest.

To the United Talismonger's Association, I leave the node NA/NOCAL/RED-0789, all associated hardware and software, and my contract for the support of Etheric Computing Services. Should UTA not have brought the Matrix Monocle onto the market by 1 January 2060, this bequest will revert to Xerxes Positive Research Tank's Mendocino Laboratory.

To Fionnuala O'Donnell, I leave my Chivas Regal bag full of gold pieces. (Not quite the standard, I know, but a whole potful seemed ... excessive.)

To Helena Rossum, 10 million nuyen and my sincere apologies on the hand Fate has dealt you this time.

In order to discourage the proliferation of toxic shamans, I offer a bounty of 1 million nuyen on any toxic shamans captured alive and delivered to the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research for the purposes of studying the effects of toxicity on the physical and astral presence of such shamans, and how they in turn impact the physical and astral world.

Because I believe that we will not eliminate the poison of toxic shamans until we eliminate the poisons fouling the

earth, I further offer substantial rewards to those parties willing and able to detoxify polluted areas across the globe. Interested parties should contact the Draco Foundation for funds and a description of the conditions accompanying those funds.

To the first party to create a perpetual motion machine without the aid of magic, I leave the heretofore undiscovered notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.

To Smedley Pembrenton III, I leave the Avalon nightclub in Boston and all deeds and titles associated with it.

To Henry Higgins, I leave my bottle of Chateau Lauren 1862. *A votre sante, mon ami.*

To Joseph Runk, I leave 200,000 nuyen for the express purpose of attending MIT&T, on the condition that he major in Cognitive Sciences or Thaumaturgical Studies.

To Hestaby, I leave the encryption key to my private datastore on board the Zurich Orbital Habitat. Use the knowledge you find there well, as I know that you will.

To Leonard Aurelius of Ares Macrotechnology, I leave the black king of my antique chess set. May you prove a worthy opponent.

To the Randall Grant Memorial Scholarship Fund, I leave 1 million nuyen to further the education of worthy but financially deprived applicants with magical potential.

To Inazo Aneki of Renraku, I leave the Seal of the Green Gloves, which will permit you or your proxy to enter Tibet. Use your time there as you will, but do not abuse the privilege or you will suffer for your misdeeds.

To Bob Cardino, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To James Telestrian III, I leave the Gainsborough original and Shakespeare's "The Tempest," Second Folio edition, from my collection as proof that all beauty in the world has one true source, but many outlets of expression.

To Giselda Harby, I leave my house in Myer's Flat, together with all its defenses.

To Jane Foster, I leave you the dragon ring that you wear, a small token from an old wyrm, as well as my everlasting respect. You are indeed worthy of your heritage and I hope that you are proof of what is to come for us.

To the first ghoulish community to be legally recognized by the United Nations, I leave 2 million nuyen, to further understanding and tolerance of ghouls as a race and allow them to live in peace with other metahumans.

To Jill Taylor, I leave the Tradeus Manual—if you can find it. Start in Canal Park.

To the Tokyo Shoe nightclub in Seattle, I leave my complete first-printing collection of Godjira and related films. Long may your club roar.

To Hualpa, who has already achieved so much, I leave the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar. Though they are not our work, there is much wisdom to be learned from them. May your continued efforts to protect what others would destroy be successful.

To Tan Tien Incorporated, I leave 50 million nuyen and all data relating to my experiments with direct cerebral series linkage.



To Jeremy Goldsmith, I leave the recipe to Ms. Grundland's Peanut Butter Cookies, as well as related trademarks and copyrights. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did.

To Laura RedFeather, location unknown, I bequeath one SOTA Firelight. I also assign 1 million nuyen to hire personnel, preferably from D Team, to deliver the Firelight to her if she has not surfaced to claim her inheritance before one month has passed.

To Janet Chee, I leave my property near Devil's Hat, on the condition that the hills and canyons remain undeveloped. Should any development take place on these lands, the property will immediately revert to the Ute Nation for purposes of establishing a national park.

To Matthew Taylor, I leave my vintage 2017 Thunderbird Turbo Coupe. May it amuse you as much as it did me.

To Lionel George Astor, I leave the Maltese Falcon, in gratitude for having introduced me to the film of the same name. I also leave 30,000 nuyen for the Friends of Film Noir—I hope your vid-to-simchip transfer project goes well.

To Miles Lanier, head of Fuchi Internal Security, I leave 4 million shares of stock in Renraku Corporation, plus the board seat to which said shares entitle him.

To the first party to develop an efficient and effective Matrix connection for dolphins, elephants and/or satyrs, and dragons, I leave the access codes to four Zurich-Orbital accounts and a personal visit from Lofwyr.

To Lofwyr, I leave the Jewel of Memory and a bit of advice: consider your works and the possibility that, in the eyes of the Universe, you are no more or less than any of the Earth's creatures. I tried it, and it works wonders.

To Toshi Akimura, I leave my property in the French Quarter of New Orleans and access to the trust fund I have established in his name.

To Manadyne Corporation, I leave the sum of 80 million nuyen to further their magical research in accordance with our standing agreement.

To Kara Lazear, I leave 160,000 nuyen and the deed to 1428 Elm Street, Phoenix, Pueblo Corporate Council.

To Niall O'Connor: I salute your devotion to spreading the truth and so I leave you the Ring of Truth. May it give you the voice of prophecy like the bards of old.

To the first party to determine what lies behind the door of room 5B78 of the Aztechnology Pyramid in Tenochtitlán and file a report of their findings on Shadowland, I leave 5 million nuyen or medical care for the remainder of their natural life, whichever seems most appropriate.

To Lung, I leave the Second Coin of Luck in hopes that he might benefit from the long view as I have.

To Karl Kochvar, I leave the Goodman Theatre chain. May your designs grow ever larger.

To Padraic Byrne at the University of Galway, 130,000 nuyen and apologies for the broken picture window.

To Maureen Williams, I leave the trust fund at Silicon Valley Virtual Bank, account 0456 967 0145 8620, for the purpose of establishing a free school in Orkland.

To James Meiers, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

In order to promote harmony among the races, I authorize the Draco Foundation to establish and administer endowments for schools that have successfully created a multiracial learning environment in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the following cities: Seattle, New York, Atlanta, Denver, Dallas/Fort Worth, New Orleans, and Milwaukee.

To Rebel Enterprise Investments, I leave the sum of 20 million nuyen for their continued investment and growth.

To Mealla Del Marco, I grant the custody of Morgan Leroy Hall until he reaches his majority at the age of eighteen, on the condition that he is to be raised and schooled in the United Canadian American States. If this condition cannot be met, his custody shall return to Kara Lazear. I trust that you will care for him in a fitting manner, and perhaps you shall in return get the son you deserve.

To Morgan Leroy Hall, on the occasion of his reaching his majority at eighteen years of age on June 28, 2071, I leave all stocks in my Florence portfolio. Until this time, no transactions may take place involving these stocks. Any votes to which these shares are entitled shall be undertaken by Morgan's legal guardian. I also leave 1 million nuyen in a trust fund to be managed by his legal guardian for his care and schooling until his twenty-first birthday, the remainder of which will transfer to Morgan Hall on his twenty-first birthday.

To the first party to determine what the accompanying photos of Mars, taken by NASA just prior to the Ares Macrotechnology buyout, represent and who can prove their theory to the Draco Foundation, I leave 1 percent interest in Ares.

To Meynt-Zai Industries, I leave all rights of ownership, funds and stock in Proteus Subsystems on the condition that Adam Goines is granted the position of Co-President/Chief Executive Officer.



To the first party to successfully explain the existence, abilities and origin of the children of the Matrix, known as the otaku, I leave 5 million nuyen for continued research into the relationship between mind and machine.

To Ms. Leslie Lockhart, I leave 800,000 nuyen to be used for her care and schooling, plus copies of all of her mother's sims.

To Phoenix Biotechnologies, 20 million nuyen for use in your research into the behavioral differences between males and females.

To Muirico, I leave free reign to the area of astral and physical space within one kilometer of the copse of stunted evergreens on my Prince Edward Island estate.

To Abraxas Industries, I leave the sum of 100 million nuyen for their continued investment and growth.

To Nine Lives, whom I last saw in the Lucky Strike Tavern on the outskirts of Tacoma, I leave 10,000 nuyen. Here's hoping you'll put this gift to better use than my last one. (You simply *must* learn not to be so careless.)

To Londa Cannon of Ohio, I leave my personally autographed picture of Elvis onboard the mothership. I hope she draws the same inspiration (and conclusions) as I.

To the first party to develop successful communication between metahumanity and dolphins, elephants and/or satyrs, I leave 40 million nuyen and his/her/their choice of any of the Cayman Islands.

To Richard Villiers of Fuchi Corporation, I leave my shares in Fuchi Corp for him to do with as he pleases.

To Perianwyr, I leave the remainder of my

music collection. I have a great deal of appreciation for anyone who prefers to hoard beauty and art, for they are the greatest treasures we have.

To Mina Graff-Beloit or her oldest living descendant, I leave the promissory notes for sums owed to VisionQuest by various wholly-owned subsidiaries of Saeder-Krupp.

To Richard Edmond "Red" Thompson, I leave the title to the customized GMC Riverine Delta Devil; the craft is already in his possession.

To Bradley Beavers, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To the first party to create a cure for any of the current strains of flu, especially the rare and deadly Dragon flu, I leave half my stock in the Fort Howard Bristol-Meyers Squibb Corporation.

To Reliable Imaging, I bequeath 300,000 nuyen to resume funding of the multi-phased simrig project.

To Lucien Cross of Cross Applied Technologies, I leave the undiscovered da Vinci entitled "Seraphim."

To Seattle-based trideo station KSAF, 4 million nuyen to be used expressly for the purpose of hiring freelancers, 12 million nuyen to be used for the purpose of increasing security, and 10 million nuyen to be used as a slush fund. These monies must be used before New Year's Eve, 2059 or the remainder shall revert to my estate. Also, the contents of the bookshelves in my bedroom at my home in Maine, along with instructions on the order in which they should be read.

To the first party to successfully invent an artificial mechanism capable of producing and sustaining a magical effect with no assistance from a living magician or spir-

it, I leave 8 million nuyen for additional research into the fusion of magic and technology.

To Sharon Chiang-Wu, I leave the Third Coin of Luck.

If the owners of the bas relief sculptures commonly known as "Pre-Bronze Age Cave Reliefs 1-12" will bring these pieces to the Museum of Modern Art, the current assistant curator of the sculpture collection will prove that these twelve pieces can be assembled into a single work. In return, the owners will receive an equal share of all proceeds from the sale of my first and only attempt at free-form sculpture. (I must admit I was very disappointed in the result of this foray into an unfamiliar art form, and I'm afraid I lost my temper and smashed it. Imagine my surprise at finding the pieces being regarded as art!)

To Rhonabwy, I leave the Silver Songbird. A poor reflection of that most beautiful of voices, but still a feast for the appreciative ear.

To Sierra Incorporated, I bequeath my 17,300 acres of land in Northern California, to be used as a reserve for indigenous wildlife. No development may take place on these lands, and no creatures may be removed from them under any circumstances without their express permission.

To Tamara Gordon, I leave my collection of Gothic romances. May she find them inspirational.

To the government of Amazonia, I leave the Pale Orchid and the Ashes of the Great Tree. Use them to help protect the world from itself, but do not forget the lessons of the past or assume that your wisdom is greater than Nature's.

To Sophie Yarborough, I leave the Hope diamond. Please forgive me for never



giving you the ring I promised, but circumstances conspired against us. Do not fear the supposed curse this stone carries, for what we shared is strong enough to overcome the accumulated years of fear and greed impressed upon this precious bauble. You were often in my thoughts and dreams.

To the first party to fully explain the basis for magical ability in *homo sapiens* and provide documented research of their discoveries, I leave 10 million nuyen, to further the world's understanding and advancement of humanity's magical capabilities in general.

To Sierra Incorporated, I leave 2 million nuyen to aid them in protecting the environment from exploitation.

To the first party to spend 24 hours in Glamis Castle during a full moon, I leave the castle, its furnishings and the grounds historically associated with it. "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse/while night's black agents to their preys do rouse."

To Theodore Winslow of Lone Star Security Services, I leave an antique sheriff's badge worn by Wyatt Earp, a reminder that this is *not* the shoot-out at the OK Corral.

To the Atlantean Foundation, I leave 5 million nuyen to further their search for the truth. I also leave the fingerbone of St. Dunstan (the real one), as a reminder that truth is not always easy to separate from fiction.

To the first party to capture and successfully breed Ecuadorean honey ants, I leave 8 million nuyen for the expansion of the breeding program.

To SilveryK, I leave my private can opener program. You know where to find it on the Matrix, and the IC has been programmed to accept your ID in the event of my death.

Have fun. I am so very glad I won't be here to see what you do with it.

To the Aztechnology corporation, I leave the Sexton of Worlds, with the provision that the corporation and the government of Aztlan ban the practice of blood magic in territories under their jurisdiction within a year of my death and submit to an outside investigation to verify this ban, the investigator to be designated by and answerable to the Draco Foundation.

To the bearer of SIN 5T2G-8U6V-PK02: present yourself to the Draco Foundation on any Wednesday between 10:00 and 10:15 a.m., and the Foundation will grant you one wish. This offer stands good for one year from the day of my death. I believe the saying is, be careful what you wish for—you may well get it.

To Lugh Surehand, I leave the Torc of Rhiannon. May you wear it in good health and your land prosper thereby.

To the first party to find my lair in the Caucasus Mountains, I leave its contents, including clues to the location of two other lairs. In the third lair, you will find a plain brown scroll case. Return the case to the Draco Foundation unopened, and you will receive my lucky preces foot. May it bring you all the good fortune it brought me.

To the current head hounigan of the Caribbean League, I leave one year's worth of talon clippings.

To the Daughters of the Circle, I leave the Onyx Unicorn in the hope that they will find its true owner. If they fail to do so within a year of my death, ownership reverts to the Draco Foundation.

To Holly Brighton, my dear friend and one of the most exceptional humans it has been my pleasure to know, I leave ownership of Lake Louise and the VisionQuest Virtual Theme Park and its

subsidiary companies and support services. It is my wish that she continue to reside there as she has done these past years.

To David Dollinger, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To the elusive TX, whom I know exists, I leave 10 million nuyen on the condition that she come in from the shadows and report to the UCAS government for testing and training. I give her full assurances that she will not be harmed. I further authorize my executor to grant this same sum to any person or group of people who find TX and bring her, alive and undamaged, to any UCAS military installation. I authorize an additional 10 million nuyen for the hiring of qualified individuals to escort her safely home and, if necessary, to avenge any mistreatment of her with extreme prejudice.

To the first company to create edible synthetic flesh for ghouls, I leave 2 million nuyen with which to develop a complete and diverse product line.

To Melody Tyger, I leave the sum of 10 million nuyen to complete and fund the performance of her "Fearful Symmetry" world tour. Your words ring true, making them most worthy to be heard. Let no one silence you.

To the first party to determine what lies behind the door of room 1835 in the Renraku Arcology in Seattle and report their findings to the Draco Foundation, I leave 5 million nuyen.

To Jawwad Nakhan, I leave 3 million nuyen for the express purpose of continuing his research on the effects of mana on latent autosomes, on the condition that he publicly release his findings.



To the first party to develop a magic item that can be used by a mundane, I leave the medium-sized chunk of orichalcum I keep in my sock drawer at Lake Louise.

To Carras Communications I bequeath 1 million nuyen for marketing its products.

To Robert Page, I leave my copy of an ancient text that proves elves are not the only race to possess a unique language. Take pride in your heritage and continue to promote the rights of your people, for the orks have always fought to rise above the position in which others would keep them. May this document aid your struggle up from below.

To the first party to establish a self-sustaining community of no fewer than 100 persons on the ocean floor, I leave 5 million nuyen.

To Jenna Ni'Fairra, I leave the Book of Leaves. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, according to humans. If that is true, and it seems likely, then perhaps it is time we all learned.

To the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Thaumaturgy, I leave all books copyrighted before 1960 from my New York library.

To the first party to revitalize any three species of flora or fauna currently near extinction and successfully return them to their native environment, or successfully adapt those species to a new environment, I leave 30 million nuyen and funds for further research to be provided by the Draco Foundation.

To Maria Mercurial, I leave my collection of vintage jazz and blues albums. May they bring you as much enjoyment as your music has always brought me.

To Wu Lung-Wei, I leave the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire.

To the first party who successfully cultivates the Brazilian kiwi outside its native environment, I leave 10 million nuyen and funds for further research to be provided by the Draco Foundation.

To the government of the United Canadian and American States, I leave the Tapestry of Fate, to hang in the home of the President as a reminder of Fate's power to change our lives.

To the Gunderson Corporation of Miami, I leave to the present CEO all of my preferred stock in the company to be disposed of as he or she wishes, with the condition that the work continues without pause per our verbal agreement of 17 July 2056. And I add my personal wish of good luck.

To the first party to discover what lies behind the door of room 429 of the Saeder-Krupp offices in Berlin and report their findings to Lofwyr, I leave the Arrow of Red Dragon Slaying.

To Craig Sanchez, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

For a period of ten days beginning on 14 February 2057, Lars J. Matthews will cease to possess any legal status. He will be stripped of all evidence of legal existence, including SIN, credsticks, DocWagon contract, bank accounts and so on. To the individual or group who ends Lars J. Matthews' physical existence during those ten days, I leave all of Matthews' assets and 1 million nuyen for a job well done. If Mr. Matthews survives and can prove his identity, his legal status and all possessions will be restored to him. Haven't you heard? Never deal with a dragon, Lars.

To the Joseph Campbell Mythology Society I leave 500,000 nuyen to continue keeping the work and dreams of Professor Campbell alive.

To the most direct descendent of either Howard Carter or George Herbert, Fifth Earl of Carnarvon, whichever shows up first, I leave the nose of the Great Sphinx of Giza.

To the Mountain Dragons Urban Brawl team, I leave ownership of the franchise to the team members and their manager, to be divided equally among them. You have consistently amazed me with your spirit and tenacity.

To the first party to successfully grow cactus on the ocean floor and produce an acre of wheat in low orbit, I leave 20 million nuyen.

To Terri Ann Riberio, I leave ownership of vid-station KZHN in Los Angeles, CFS and all of my stock in MegaMedia, Brilliant Genesis Studios and Amalgamated Studios. I further leave an additional 30 million nuyen to Ms. Riberio for the production of a film biography of my modern life and times. Terri, you have always been a speaker of the truth as well as a crafter of dreams and I hope that you will continue to do both in the future.

To the New Wine Fellowship, I leave the lands and buildings of Crusader Church.

To the owner of the sky-blue Chrysler-Nissan Jackrabbit that was crushed by a falling chunk of plascrete on October 26, 2045, I leave my 1964-1/2 candy-apple red Ford Mustang convertible. Sorry for the inconvenience—I had an itch that I couldn't reach and caught the corner of the building with my claw.

To the MetaErgonomic Division of Yamatetsu, I leave Mountain King Engineering, that both may benefit from the effects of serendipity.

To the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, I leave the gold-filigree-and-enamel box containing Rasputin's heart.



To the people of the UCAS, I leave Prince Edward Island and my estate thereon, including the necessary monies to maintain my estate in perpetuity as a public park. Ownership of the island will revert to its residents.

To Zor Entertainment, I leave 3 million nuyen for expansion of its recording studios and marketing of its labels.

To the Provisional Government of the Yucatan, I leave 3 million nuyen and the hope that they will succeed in their struggle for freedom.

To Xerxes Positive Research Tank, specifically its Mendocino Laboratory, I leave Neptune's Net.

To Keilha of the Lake Louise centaurs, I leave the meadows and forests in which your people live. Take care of them, old friend.

To the Shadowland Nexus, I leave ownership and control of certain Matrix LTG sites, the locations and passcodes and titles of which have already been transmitted to you under my electronic signature. You have indeed "taken all knowledge to be your province," and the world has profited greatly thereby. Use these resources wisely, that it may continue to do so.

To the Sisterhood of Ariadne, I leave one year's worth of talon clippings.

To Arleesh, who I know has no use for things of this world, I leave the hope that your efforts will be successful. You will have the complete cooperation of the Draco Foundation when it is needed for your work.

To the University of Cheyenne, I leave 100,000 nuyen and a detailed map of the archaeological site near the town of Oraibi. Excavate with care.

To Thomas Nolan, I leave my home outside of Vancouver and the land surrounding it. I believe you will find the library well-stocked and the security adequate.

To Aina, my dear friend who has suffered so, I leave the most important thing that I have to offer: hope. Hope for change, hope for life and hope for beauty. It is a rare quality in this day and age and perhaps the most valuable thing that I have to offer. I urge you to join the Draco Foundation and so take a small step toward re-joining the world. Hope need no longer be an endangered species.

To Jan Petersen of Saeder-Krupp Aerospace, I leave promissory notes for sums owed to me personally by the Vice President of Ressha Corporation, a Shiawase subsidiary.

To Oliver McClure of Québec City, I leave my voting stock in Aztechnology and the board seat to which that entitles you. It was refreshing to find such a thoroughly honest man making an adequate living in these times that make such a thing so difficult. I hope that you will prove to be a good influence on the board, and perhaps remind them of the surpassing brightness of the metahuman soul.

To Sirrurg, the Destroyer: though we have never understood one another, I respect your conviction. Because I know you value nothing else of mine, I leave you with my respect and that alone.

I leave Gavilan Ventures to Nadja Daviar and appoint her acting head of that corporation. I also leave to my dear friend a sealed envelope containing the details of my seven-year plan for this asset.

To Arthur Vogel, I leave my seat on the board of Ares Macrotechnology. Read every report to which you are entitled, and judge the effects of the corporation's actions with an open mind. I believe you will see the fundamental error of the toxic

way. Carry on the good fight—this time in earnest.

To Glenn Dudley, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To Lady Brane Deigh, I leave a set of antique path cards. May they help to illuminate your wisdom in the days ahead and place you in touch with the past you hold so dear.

To Toshiro Mistuhama of Mistuhama Computer Technologies, I leave an ancestral katana forged by the master swordsmith Masamune. May its quality remind you of the value of art and beauty coupled with the qualities of honor, courage and loyalty.

To the Upper Sandusky Magicians Society, I leave 25 million nuyen to fulfill the following request according to the instructions provided here. The Draco Foundation will provide to USMS a list of my five favorite ally spirits, one at a time, and a list of five individuals. The Society must summon each of these spirits and command it to perform a specific task, as defined below. To protect the rights of the spirits, the summoning magician must agree to submit to a dose of laés, to be administered by a representative from the Draco Foundation immediately following the summoning. At the end of its service, the ally spirit will be allowed to go free.

An ally spirit will inhabit the cat owned by Maude Greider for one year, a period of time that represents Ms. Greider's current life expectancy. The spirit will provide companionship to Ms. Greider, who already believes the cat talks to her. This arrangement will simply make her belief come true. May your final days be peaceful, Maude—you deserve a little peace.

An ally spirit will use its accident power against Tara Bills three times a week for a period of one year. If she sur-



vives, perhaps she will learn compassion for those in the ambulances she is so fond of chasing. And don't worry, you'll make new friends after a few years have passed.

An ally spirit will use its binding power to prevent Howard Folkner from walking away from his wife, his mother-in-law, his employees and all others whose opinions and advice he has been ignoring for years. Learn humility, Howie—your track record for making effective decisions on your own isn't so great. There are certain things you need to accomplish in this life, and you're obviously not going to do them on your own. Learn to take advantage of your assets.

An ally spirit will use its alienation power on Sir David Meyerhoff for a period of seven weeks.

An ally spirit will maintain a constant telepathic link with Stefan Rubloff for a year and a day. The spirit will provide any and all assistance allowed by this power and required by Mr. Rubloff during this time; in addition, the spirit will provide an update every 20 minutes of its current position and the events and people under its observation. "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

To Enrico Hernandez, I leave the pictures in my safe deposit box at the Glendale branch of Angeles Fidelity Bank.

To the first party to track down the Russian crown jewels, I leave that treasure except for the scepter and crown, which the Draco Foundation will return to the descendants of its original owners. According to my research, the jewels were smuggled from the country inside a spinet piano, one of nine belonging to the royal palace. The jewels were not in the four spinets that I have acquired. There are three more that I have been unable to track down, and two currently in the possession of private collectors.

To the gypsies of northern California, I ask that they appear at Shasta Dam on 21 June 2058, at which time Hestaby will distribute ownership rights to land from my California holdings on which they may permanently settle.

To Abigail Ceccion, I bequeath one dozen red roses from the New Zealand horticultural complex to be hand delivered to her residence each week for the rest of her natural life. Maybe now, you damn shaman, you will believe that I never forget a promise. Or a debt. Though how you produced that fourth ace without the aid of major magic is completely beyond my understanding of the game.

To the People's University of the California Free State, I leave the access code to a Matrix location I think you will find quite useful. My sincere best wishes for your continued existence and success.

To Lawrence Edward Grafton, I leave a stipend of 50,000 nuyen annually for as long as he stays chaste. (Good luck.)

To the parties the Draco Foundation agrees have achieved breakthroughs in the inventions necessary to successful deep-space living and travel, I leave 50 million nuyen each for continuing research.

To Art Dankwalther, I leave the sum of 34,586,224,739.58 in UCAS dollars. According to my calculations and accounting for conversion of the original currency, inflation, and 1 percent interest per annum, this settles my debt to your ancestor for the gold piece he kindly lent me for the last meal we shared.

To Josey Anne Miller, I leave the antidote labeled DDE2, currently stored in my office refrigerator at Gavilan Ventures. You'll know when to use it.

Beginning in February of 2058, the Draco Foundation will sponsor two annual competitions for the purpose of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, with an emphasis on practical applications. These competitions will be open to the public, with no entrance fee and no formal qualifications required. Winners will receive a patent established in their name by the Draco Foundation, and additional resources for development if applicable.

The first competition (time and date to be announced) will judge magical innovations, including but not limited to such categories as Spell Design, Magical Theory, Magical Objects and Astral Exploration. The second competition will judge technological innovations, including but not limited to such categories as Rigger Technology, Space Technology, Matrix Technology, Medical Technology and Cybernetics. This competition will take place roughly six months after the first competition.

To Bradley Smith, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.

To Vlad Curcio, I leave my open-ended pass to Virtual World Disney. I'm glad we bumped into each other there last fall, and I hope you've recovered from the broken collar bone. "It's a small world, after all."

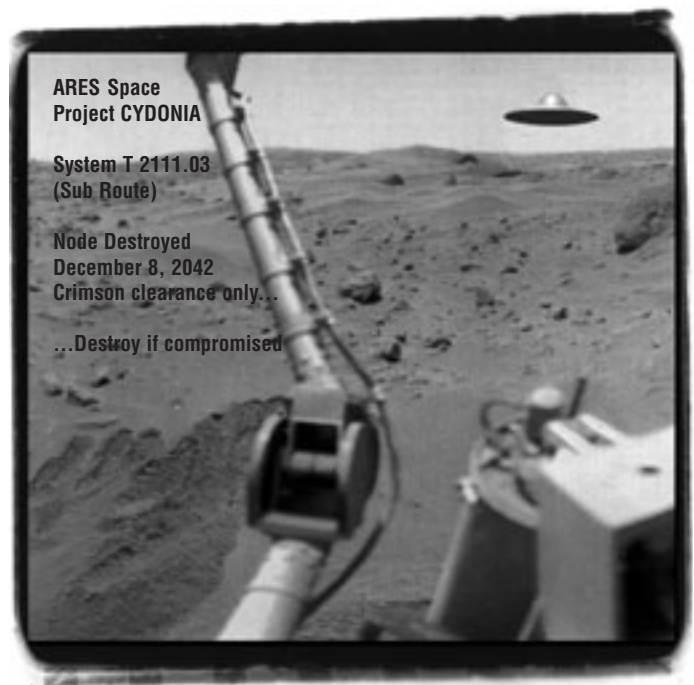
To Ryanthusar I leave my heart, which you will find at my Lake Louise residence.

To the last Knight of the Crying Spire, I leave the suit of armor worn by Richard the Lion-hearted on his Crusade, because it's up to You to lead the next one. I also leave you the sword Excalibur—unfortunately, I can't seem to find it at the moment. To whomever finds Excalibur, deliver it to the Draco Foundation for a reward and title. The Draco Foundation will promptly turn the sword over to you, my knight.

- These are the photos referred to in the will. The text that appears on the Mars photos is a bit murky, so it's reproduced beneath each photo for your edification.
- Captain Chaos



NASA Security Probe • Zeta Test • October 27, 2001 • Alpha Blue Priority... • Top Secret Clearance... • ...Destroy if compromised



ARES Space • Project CYDONIA • System T 2111.03 (Sub Route)
Node Destroyed • December 8, 2042 • Crimson clearance only...
...Destroy if compromised



NASA Sentry Probe • Alpha Test • August 8, 2001 • Alpha Blue Priority • Top Secret Clearance... • ...Destroy if compromised



"To the first party to identify the victim in the accompanying photo and bring his five perpetrators to justice, I leave the access codes to my property in Paris..."

FALLOUT



Okay, chummers, this is the place for you to post all your speculation, inside dirt and assorted babble about the will and whatever dust seems to be settling from the assassination. Dunkelzahn's been dead about two weeks now, and as far as we're concerned, interest still hasn't peaked. We'll be following anything and everything connected with Dunkelzahn's death, the will, the Draco Foundation, and even Haeffner and the UCAS government for some time to come, so check in at this BBS before you head out into the shadows, and report back here with your findings. Don't think of it as giving away something for nothing, think of it as a shared plan for survival. Hey, if we don't help each other out, who will? To start things off, I've posted some information that a few insiders and experts sent my way. If anyone has anything more, send it on over—we'll put it in if it looks good.

☛ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 22 August 2057 at 19:44:39 (EST)



WHO KILLED DUNKELZAHN?

BY DC INSIDER

The murder of President Dunkelzahn is one of the most shocking political assassinations since the deaths of four major world leaders in the space of a few weeks back in 2016. The suddenness of the dragon's demise shocked the entire UCAS. All the tensions that had been building in the nation since the failed election in 2056, tensions that might have been eased by the election of a new president, exploded in violence. Minor riots broke out all across the UCAS and almost led the UCAS government to declare martial law. Fortunately, local authorities managed to get the situation under control ... for the moment. But the big question on everyone's mind remains: "Who did it?"

- ❖ Come on, DC, call a spade a spade. Ares and Knight Errant suppressed most of the riots all on their own. Sure, local authorities helped stop some minor flare-ups in small towns and such, but Ares and the military handled things in the largest cities. I saw it all, cuz I was in Milwaukee when the Ares hovercraft and helicopters came flyin' in over Lake Michigan like they were invading Normandy back in WW2.
- ❖ Cheezhead

The circumstances surrounding Dunkelzahn's death are not entirely clear at this point. We do know that the President was attending one of many Inauguration parties thrown that night in DeeCee. Aside from that, though, the "experts" differ on what happened. Some say he received a phone call, others say the Secret Service called him out, a few eyewitnesses say he looked tired and ill. Whatever the circumstances, we know for a fact that he excused himself, left the Grand Ballroom and made his way to his waiting limousine. The limo drove off, but only got maybe fifty yards away from the hotel before some kind of explosion tore it

apart. The blast disintegrated the limousine and left a gaping crater in the street where it happened. Trees and other nearby obstructions were flattened or blown to bits.

UCAS Federal authorities cordoned off the site immediately and called in the finest forensic experts and investigative teams. There was so little debris remaining at the blast site that analysis was difficult. According to all the information I have, no bodies were removed from the rubble of the blast site, though the entire security team escorting the president bought it in various grisly ways. Also, a strange mass of scintillating light in all the colors of the rainbow has been hanging some twenty meters in the air directly over the center of the crater ever since the tragedy. UCAS magical specialists suspect it's some kind of astral/magical manifestation, but they can't say exactly what. Matter of fact, they can't hazard an intelligent guess.

The UCAS government has officially turned the investigation over to the FBI. The list of potential suspects is extensive, to say the least. Among the major suspects are: VP-turned-President Kyle Haeffner (he was sworn in immediately), Vice-President-in-waiting Nadja Daviar, all of Dunkelzahn's political rivals, unspecified "hostile foreign powers," and radical terrorist organizations such as Alamos 20,000 or Human Nation.

- ❖ In other words, nobody has a clue who did it and it could have been fraggin' anyone. So what else is new?
- ❖ Cynic

Kyle Haeffner certainly had motive. Dunkelzahn's death made him President of the UCAS. Haeffner was attending another Inaugural party across town when the explosion occurred, and his whereabouts are well documented for several days before the dragon's death. So it's possible, but unlikely, that Haeffner arranged for the assassination. Immediately after it happened, Haeffner called Chief Justice Richard Scott and asked him to form a commission to investigate the death of the President. The Scott Commission will be modeled on the Warren Commission that investigated the death of President Kennedy back in 1964. My guess is their first witness will be Haeffner; he can't effectively lead the government unless they give him the once-over and formally clear him of wrongdoing.

- ❖ Being somewhere else at the time isn't an alibi. Haeffner didn't have to do the deed himself—he would have hired someone else to off the dragon, if he had any brains.
- ❖ DragonIX

Nadja Daviar, Dunkelzahn's translator and personal assistant for the past eighteen years, is Suspect Number Two in most people's minds. Daviar probably knew the dragon's mind as well as anyone, and she got major bennies from his death—Haeffner has nominated her as his Vice President, plus she's the executor of Dunkelzahn's considerable estate. On the other hand, we're talking about somebody being cold-blooded enough to murder a close personal friend of nearly two decades' standing ... and devious enough to keep a smart being like Dunkelzahn from sniffing it out. So Daviar's certainly possible—but likely? The jury's still out,

in my opinion. I'd guess she's second on the list to be interviewed by the Scott Commission. Congress will definitely not approve her for the VP slot unless the Commission gives her a clean bill of health. If they do, she's a shoo-in.

❖ My money's on Daviar having offed him. Look at what she gained out of it! She went from being a minor-league celebrity riding on the dragon's coattails to one of the most powerful women in the world: VP of the UCAS and director of the multi-billion nuyen Draco Foundation. She and Haeffner were probably in it together—he gets the top spot, makes her VP and they split the money. Oldest motive in the book.

❖ Hangfire

❖ I dunno. That just doesn't strike me as Daviar's style. I don't have anything to back it up other than a gut feeling, but I don't think she did it. I get the impression that Daviar was completely loyal to the old wyrm and genuinely shocked over his death. In fact, I suspect she might be in a little over her head dealing with all of her new responsibilities.

❖ Pentecost

One of Dunkelzahn's political rivals might have engineered his assassination, though killing him wouldn't net them any political gain. The UCAS Constitution states exactly who will replace an incapacitated or dead President, and it isn't anyone else running for office. If any of Dunkelzahn's rivals had wanted to kill him for gain, they would have done it on the campaign trail like somebody did to General Yeats. However, one of the rival candidates might have killed him out of spite or in a desperate effort to affect the political climate of the UCAS. (Can't win with the ballot, then try the bullet ... tactics beloved of political extremists everywhere.)

❖ Brackhaven's the one. He's fraggin' HUMANIS, and everyone knows the Humanis Policlub was foaming at the mouth about a non-human becoming President. Alamos 20K, Human Nation, the Order or one of those kinda groups could have pulled it off.

❖ Pablo

❖ I agree. Everyone knows that Humanis had a collective seizure when the dragon won. They probably had some kind of contingency plan in operation for just such an eventuality. Even if their boy didn't get the top spot, they might have figured that having Haeffner as Prez was the lesser of two evils. At least he's human.

❖ Street Knight

❖ I don't think Humanis did it, chummers. Check out the descriptions of the explosion that destroyed the Big D's limo. What conventional explosive produces a totally silent detonation? Smells like serious magic to me, and Humanis hates magic almost as much as they hate metahumans. Big juju points right to Roz Hernandez and her mage cronies. Some big-time ritual magic could have been what killed the dragon.

❖ Switchback

❖ BZZZZTT! I'm so sorry, that was the wrong answer. But thank you for playing. First off, Humanis has magic and uses it. (Why let principle stand in the way of an effective weapon against the "inhuman hordes"?) Alamos 20K has also used magic in the past, so don't count them out on that score. The Awakened are no more free of racial prejudice than anyone else—who says magicians can't hate metahumans? Second, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A GREAT DRAGON HERE! Do you *really* think that even the Illuminates of the New Dawn could whip up a ritual that Dunkelzahn couldn't have seen coming a mile away and countered?

❖ MissTick

❖ I think you may be overestimating Dunkelzahn's power, MT. The Inner Circle of the IOND is supposedly a few *hundred* initiates. They could be using Ghost Dance-level magic for all we know. Imagine the kind of power that could bury Los Alamos directed against one being. No matter how tough he or she might be, *nobody* is going to shrug that off. Anyway, the Illuminates were probably working with the Tir Tairngire elves. Everybody knows they're tight.

❖ Dvorak

❖ Besides, if a group like IOND doesn't have enough mojo to do the deed, who does?

❖ DeeCeelOT

❖ Other great dragons. What about Lofwyr, Hestaby, Ryumyo, Lung, Sirrurg and Rhonabwy for starters? They have magical power we can barely comprehend. Maybe it was some kind of freaky dragon thing. Maybe one (or more) of the big wyrms didn't like the idea of Dunkelzahn being Prez.

❖ Dragonslayer

The possibility that agents of a foreign power were behind the assassination is one of the graver considerations under investigation. It is possible, though unlikely, that foreign agents could have planted some kind of bomb to kill Dunkelzahn in an effort to weaken and destabilize the UCAS. Ironically, Dunkelzahn was one of the less controversial candidates in the eyes of many foreign powers—but that certainly doesn't rule them out.

❖ Could it have been the NAN? Maybe they fired up the ol' Ghost Dance again to make sure the UCAS stayed down for the count.

❖ Rapid Fire

❖ Don't think so, Fire. I've got too many friends in NAN territory not to have heard at least something if the Tribal Council was starting up the Dance again. It wasn't them. Or if it was, they were operating under some incredibly tight security. It's possible, but I doubt it. Actually, the NAN were intrigued by the Big D becoming Prez. He had no stake in the old US of A and was used to their independence. Of all the candidates, he was probably the friendliest toward the Native American Nations.

❖ Walks-In-Shadow

❖ OK, what about the Tir? They've got the mojo and the technology to pull off something like this. The explosion could have been magic combined with conventional stuff for extra punch. They've also got those spooky elven commandos—the Ghosts, I think they're called—to do the deed. Nobody knows what kind of power they can call on. Plus, everyone knows that elves and dragons don't get along. Maybe they didn't want Dunkelzahn as their neighbor?

❖ Slater

❖ Maybe, Slater, but all elves don't hate all dragons (or vice versa). *Some* elves don't get along with *some* dragons for a variety of reasons, some of which remain unknown. Ebran and several other Tir Princes fought like hell to keep Lugh Surehand from appointing Lofwyr to the high council, but nobody tried to assassinate that dragon (at least, not that anyone knows of). I'm not saying the Tir (either one) couldn't have done it—but if they did, it was entirely for political reasons and not because of some nonexistent elf-dragon feud.

❖ Findler-Man

❖ Could have been Tír na nÓg as well, but their relations with the UCAS have been stable lately. Their interests just don't cross ours very often. Maybe they didn't like the possibilities implicit in a dragon becoming President?

❖ Liam

"Hostile foreign powers" just about has to include the possibility of megacorporate interests at work. Any of the megacorporations certainly has the resources for an operation of this magnitude, and none of them have shown any qualms so far about messing with the politics of other nations as it suits their own needs. No megacorporation has shown any special animosity toward the dragon, but then, a good card player never gives away what he's thinking.

❖ It's got to be Saeder-Krupp. Lofwyr couldn't stand the idea of another dragon getting as powerful or more powerful than him, so he arranged for the hit. S-K has some of the best kick artists around working for them, and Lofwyr would know all the Big D's weaknesses inside and out. He knows how a dragon thinks because he *is* a dragon. That gives him the edge.

❖ Trevor

❖ Hold on a second, chummer—what about Aztechnology? Remember that drek from the Aztlan upload? Dunkelzahn was behind that, and he made it pretty clear he was none too fond of the Big A. I'd bet the feeling is mutual. I'd also bet Aztech didn't want a dragon to be in charge of the UCAS—too much competition. So they take the wyrm out, and send a clear message to all those other mystery guests who were looking too closely into Aztlan's skeleton-filled closets to back off or expect a taste of the same.

❖ Pablo@nyc.mv.com

❖ Chummers, corps don't do drek like this for personal reasons. A megacorp has one motivation for its actions—the almighty bottom line. Why would a corp want to kill Dunkelzahn when all the dragon ever talked about in his campaign was "growing the business sector" and more government investment in technological development and education? That's just the kind of drek that the corporations live for!

❖ The Keynesian Kid

"Greed IS Good"

❖ Dunkelzahn wasn't necessarily talking about growth for *them*, kid. Face it, the megacorporations have a certain point of diminishing returns. Most of them are busy running the Red Queen's Race, "running and running just to stay in place." A lot of the innovation Dunkelzahn was talking about meant supporting the growth of smaller companies that are up-and-coming in their various fields. The megacorporate dinosaurs don't like the idea of someone trying to give all the little mammals scurrying at their feet an evolutionary leg-up. That might allow one or more of those corps to get a big enough hunk of the market to actually threaten one of the megas, and that's a major no-no. There's where your bottom line comes in.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense"

Finally, let's look at the possibility that a terrorist organization might have been behind the explosion. So far, more than 500 terrorist groups have come forward to claim responsibility for the assassination. The government thinks most or all of them are insane idiots, but they've got to check them out. Maybe a handful of groups—no more—have sufficient resources to have done it, and pretty much all of them were opposed to Dunkelzahn's becoming President of the UCAS. Oddly, none of those few groups have claimed responsibility.

❖ The big suspect has got to be Alamos 20,000. They had enough resources almost twenty years ago to pull off the destruction of the Sears Tower and the Night of Rage ... just imagine what they can do nowadays. I wouldn't put it past them to have pulled this one off.

❖ Bung

❖ And, of course, most so-called "terrorist organizations" that have the kind of resources to manage something like this are puppets of foreign governments or corporations anyway.

❖ Lone Gunman

❖ Let's face it, this ain't killing off a President in the normal sense. This isn't a petty, "I'm right, you're a heathen" kind of assassination. You don't just piss off the UCAS by killing Dunkelzahn—you piss off metahumans all over the world, a whole mess of dragons, S-K and possibly other megas, mages, shamen ... drek, even most of the spirit world for all I know. Whoever did this will never be found because if one side doesn't get him, her, it or them, some else surely will.

❖ Reality Czech



TREASURE HUNT

BY MOLEMAN

Dunkelzahn's will poured millions upon millions of nuyen into the hands of people all over the place. Though it sounds cold, for a lot of people the dragon's death has been like winning the lottery several times over. But the truth is—and it's pretty scary when you think about it—all the stuff listed in Dunkelzahn's will may only be the tip of the iceberg. I've been doing a lot of digging, and I've still only scratched the surface of the dragon's holdings. Dunkelzahn was rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and I haven't been able to find a complete accounting of all his assets *anywhere*. I doubt the UCAS government or even Daviar knew about everything the dragon had squirreled away.

❖ I don't know about that. I'd bet the UCAS government and Daviar have a good idea of the dragon's assets. They're not going to let anything slip through their fingers.

❖ Bean Counter

❖ Maybe so, but there's no guarantee Dunkelzahn told them where everything is. The wyrm had money stashed all over the world and owned stuff that *nobody* knew about until the will was read, so who's to say there isn't plenty more out there?

❖ Orgchart

❖ Why didn't the fraggin' dragon just pay off the UCAS national debt and be done with it? If he wanted to do the country some good, that's where he should have started.

❖ Patriot@nr.nj.com

❖ Chummer, even Dunkelzahn didn't have *that* much money. Though for what it's worth, the UCAS probably did get millions in taxes from this sudden redistribution of income (except for those who were smart enough to shelter their inheritance money right away, natch).

❖ The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense"

The bulk of the money not specifically willed by Dunkelzahn to another party is held in trust by Nadja Daviar and the Draco Foundation, along with all the provisional money the dragon set aside for whoever carries out certain goals mentioned in the will. The Foundation's holdings are easily in the billions of nuyen, and even *that* may be a conservative estimate.

Dunkelzahn's will indicates that he left plenty of stuff out there, and it's first-come-first-served to whoever finds it. My guess is that in addition to the things he's admitted to, he also has "secret hoards" hidden in various places all over the world. Rumors about just that are turning an amazing number of people into obsessive "treasure hunters." They believe they can piece together the trail to one or more of the dragon's "hidden treasure troves" and make themselves fabulously wealthy when they discover what they're looking for. Smart entrepreneurs and con-men are making a fortune selling gullible drekheads bogus "treasure maps" and clues to the dragon's hidden stores of wealth, usually with some lame story about how they would have gone after it themselves "in their younger days," but now they're too old and must pass things on to "younger and more capable" hands.

❖ You mean ... ? Frag! And that old guy seemed so sincere ...

❖ Barnaby

❖ I agree with Mole. Rumors are running rampant about the dragon having secret stashes of stuff all over the place, and they get bigger with every telling. Lots of people are chasing those rumors out into the wilderness after some cave or other where Dunkelzahn supposedly kept his pile of gold (or whatever). I've seen mailing lists and newsletters based on this drek making the rounds.

❖ Tin Lizzie

❖ Which is pretty stupid when you think about it. Dragons don't have big piles of gold except in the sims. They deal in cred like everyone else. Most of the dragon's money is probably stashed in secret accounts in places like Zurich-Orbital and the Cayman Islands. You want to go hunting for dragon-treasure, start looking in the Matrix.

❖ Whiz Kid

❖ Not entirely true, Kid. Sure, most of Dunkelzahn's money is probably sitting in a bunch of banks and numbered accounts, but there's a lot more stuff than just cred. Just look at some of the things the dragon gave away in his will. A lot of that stuff—art, hardware, real estate and magical drek—is probably just a fraction of what Dunkelzahn owned. What happens to the rest of it? Do Daviar and the Draco Foundation have it all? Does she even know where all of it is? Those are the kind of questions that are sending people out looking for stuff the dragon might have left behind.

❖ Jumpin' Jack

❖ Listen up, people! I have to admit I never thought Dunkelzahn would affect me in the least. I mean, I specialize in smuggling and extraction. When you live in a place like Denver where there's a

national border every five feet, plus the never-well-protected border of the CFS close by, you can get that kind of work as easy as picking litter off the streets. So the Big D dies just after becoming President of a country I don't even belong to. So what? Well, I found out what. The will hit the news services and my comm started ringing off the hook ... rich skags wanting to get richer, poor skags wanting a piece of the Holy-Fraggin-Dragon-Grail, corps wanting to know why they got left out and someone else hit the jackpot, and a huge number of newbies who need shadow talent for everything from protection to spies to escorts. The Big D didn't put me in his will, but boy am I going to get rich off it anyway! Pay attention—this may be the biggest influx of nuyen into the shadows since the creation of the first megacorp.

◆ Prime Runner

THE DRAGON'S HOARD

BY TALON

The death of Dunkelzahn has put an interesting new spin on the tired old saw about a hero acquiring some fantastically powerful magical item or secret from a dragon's hoard. In his will, the dragon has already given out a number of goodies that seem to have unspecified magical capabilities, and rumors are flying of plenty more where those came from. The Draco Foundation is said to be sitting on a literal treasure trove of magical drek collected by Dunkelzahn over the years, an enchanted arsenal that would make any magician sit up and take notice.

What is all this stuff, where is it coming from, who's getting it and what are they doing with it—those are the big questions on everyone's mind. But here's the kicker—from what I've learned (and please don't ask me how I got this info), dragons don't usually just give their stuff away. Traditionally, other dragons fight over a dead dragon's hoard. So Dunkelzahn's handout-fest may have really messed up the status quo among the dragons ... more than a few in the dragon community certainly don't seem too pleased about it.

◆ I also hear that some of the big and powerful elves ruling the Tirs (you know, the ones in the Seelie Court and Council of Princes) are pretty ticked off, too. The wyrm upstaged them, and they're afraid their secrets will be the hot topic on the next "Behind the Green Curtain" exposé. The dragon made as many enemies as friends when he died.

◆ Elven Politico

Of the items named in Dunkelzahn's will, no two are alike. The people I've talked with all agree on one thing, though: many of the items are very old, all of them are potent, and up until the reading of the will most of them were totally unknown to anyone but Dunkelzahn (and whoever was in the dragon's confidence). Unfortunately, none of the trinkets seem to have come with an instruction manual and there doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason to how Dunkelzahn chose to distribute them. (Anybody want to try psyching out a dragon? Good luck.)

Most of the "art objects" from the will are going to various individuals, with a few exceptions. Not all of the items have been claimed so far, and the Draco Foundation is in charge of them until



then. Some of the items can't be claimed unless the beneficiaries come forward or meet the conditions set out by the will (which may or may not ever happen). The UCAS government is carefully registering all the items handed out from the will and also assessing taxes based on each item's estimated value (which is usually way off).

◆ Of course it is. How do you estimate the value of an item that might well be priceless? The UCAS government's so-called "art experts" wouldn't know a powerful focus if it bit them, and one or two of these items just might.

◆ Magister

◆ Not just that, Magister. It's fragging hard to tell if a lot of this junk really is magical or not. Some of the best psychometrists working

for the UCAS have examined a few pieces and gotten mixed or confusing impressions. Some of the stuff seems totally mundane, but who knows what kind of enchantments the dragon might have put on some statue or other to hide any traces of magic? Who knows what kind of unknown magic might be involved with some of this stuff? We hardly even know what we're looking for in the first place, much less what it's worth when we find something.

❖ Spook-Squad

❖ Does anyone have any paydata on any of the goodies named in the will?

❖ Gopher@cas.atl.com

❖ An item that the dragon left to the UCAS, the so-called "Tapestry of Fate," now hangs in a gallery in the White House. It's this big thing covered with abstract geometric designs, kind of Arabian- or maybe Celtic-looking, that make your eyes hurt if you look at it for too long. It reminds me of those 3D fractals and "pop out" pictures that show up when you stare at something else. Word has it that President Haeffner likes to sit and stare at the tapestry when he needs to be alone and think. Makes you wonder what he sees in there.

❖ DC Insider

❖ The dagger that Carla Brooks got is carved from ivory and set with gemstones. I'd guess it's some kind of ceremonial object, since it would blunt too quickly if you used it for real fighting.

❖ Whisper

❖ Unless, of course, it was really carved from the tooth of a dragon like the name implies.

❖ Reedy

❖ How about some of the stuff the dragons and the elves got? What's this Jewel of Memory that went to Lofwyr?

❖ Mistick

❖ It's a big crystal, reddish-colored, about a meter tall. It looks natural, not cut, but it's very well polished. And it's absolutely crawling with barely constrained mojo. A friend of mine says he saw shapes moving around inside it when he gave it an astral look-see. Lofwyr was quick to snap it up—had a team of Saeder-Krupp people on the spot to claim it just minutes after the Draco Foundation opened its doors. I heard he was pretty peeved at having to wait even that long—if he could've gotten his talons on it the minute the will was read, he would have. Anyway, his people loaded it onto an S-K chopper and flew it to the corporate compound in Pennsylvania, then loaded it on the first plane to Europe. Whatever it was, the dragon took no chances of it going astray.

❖ FedSpook

❖ What the frag is the Tradeus Manual?

❖ Mercy Lucy

❖ Hell, he's giving it to me and I don't even know what it is.

❖ Taylor

❖ Knowing you Taylor, it's gotta be magical.

❖ Rabid

Interestingly enough, since Dunkelzahn's death there has been a whopping increase in rare art objects and talismans offered for sale on the black market. The sellers have been exceptionally close-mouthed about the origin of the items up for sale, and most of the buyers have been people with a lot of cred who don't ask a lot of questions. Could some of this stuff be coming from Dunkelzahn's estate? If so, why wasn't it listed in the will in the first place?

❖ As I stated earlier, this is where we can all get our share of the dragon's nuyen. People are crawling through the shadows looking for talent to help them "expand" their art collections ... so climb aboard the gravy train for a long ride. As long as somebody wants what somebody else has, the dragon's will is our gold mine. Read it, use it, and get yourself a warehouse to store all the cred you'll earn.

❖ Prime Runner

This behind-the-scenes activity suggests that the Draco Foundation or Nadja Daviar, or both, have some kind of secret agenda for pieces of the dragon's estate, which they are carrying out in addition to handling the bequests in the will. If so, the Draco Foundation and possibly Daviar have become one of the biggest power players on the planet.

❖ I think the DF is selling off a lot of the wrym's drek in some kind of big underground garage-sale to raise more capital. They're pouring all the money they make into a big slush fund that they can use to pump up their existing investments and purchase new ones. Before you know it, the Foundation will be another fragging megacorporation.

❖ E-Lite

❖ That may be sort of a bonus side-effect, but I don't think it's the Foundation's main motive. The dragon must have given them instructions for disposing of the remainder of his stuff. Maybe the will is just a blind; maybe most of the stuff in it is a smoke screen to cover up the real booty that the Draco Foundation is dishing out, the stuff nobody's supposed to know about. I know lots of people who are real interested in finding out what some of the secret stuff is and why the dragon wanted it passed out on the sly.

❖ Reid

So far, no one's seen or heard about any demonstrations of the magical capabilities (if any) of the stuff given out in Dunkelzahn's will. Lots of the items may be nothing more than a hoax—the dragon's last laugh on all the silly people running around trying to get their hands on a bunch of useless trinkets. Or plenty of them might be brimming over with powerful magic like we've never seen before. We just don't have enough information either way. So track this stuff down and tell us what you find out, chummers. Let Captain Chaos know and he'll post it up here. (He tells me he already has some stuff in the oven.)

Also, lots of this stuff is older than written records, which means one thing to us magical scholars—time to study legends, myths, fairy tales and oral histories, because they may be the only clues we have. Just because something is called one thing in 2057 doesn't mean ancient civilizations called it by the same name. Those of us who've studied magic understand that many of the changes we've seen in the Sixth World have legendary and mythological roots (or so it seems, since we really can't prove it). So it makes sense that a dragon who lived for thousands of years would have items that other people knew by name and believed were powerful. Keep your eyes and ears open, because the only way we can hope to figure out this stuff is to understand where it might have come from—especially the items that don't seem to work right away.

❖ I just thought of another question. Great dragons are known to be big-time sorcerers in addition to all their other abilities, right? Are there any indications that Dunkelzahn had a grimoire, book of shadows or some other place where he recorded all of his spells? Just imagine how much that data would be worth! If the Big D was anything like the other greats in terms of magical lore, his grimoire could contain spells we haven't even thought of yet, not to mention complex and powerful versions of standard spells. Any pay-data out there?

❖ MagiManic

❖ Interesting question. We don't know if dragons bother with spell formulae like we do, so Dunkelzahn's magical knowledge may have been entirely in his head (which would be a tragic loss). If he did bother to write it any of it down, I'm not sure it would be in any form we would find meaningful, but the possibility of finding and translating it is tantalizing. With his fondness for modern technology, Dunkelzahn strikes me as the type who might have kept an electronic grimoire like many modern magicians do. If so, we're talking about a huge datafile that might be virtually anywhere (no pun intended). Maybe there's something else to poke around the Draco Foundation for (if they have it, that is).

❖ Silicon Mage

The other big magical mystery left by Dunkelzahn's death is hovering some twenty meters above the pavement where the Big D bought the farm. Dubbed the "manastorm" by the press, the glowing mass of swirling light and energy appeared (as near as we can tell) at the same time as the explosion that smoked the dragon's limo. The UCAS authorities handled the site around the manastorm with kid gloves and secret precautions until they decided that the whatever-it-is appears stable and isn't growing (not perceptibly, anyway).

The manastorm is roughly oval-shaped and about eight meters across at its widest point. It throws off enough light to clearly light up the area around the blast site at night. It also appears to be very dangerous. According to a friend of mine inside the FBI's Thaumaturgy branch, the Bureau and the UCAS Army each lost a mage to the storm when the poor slots astrally came in contact with the outer edge. As near as anyone can tell, their astral bodies were destroyed, leaving their meat bodies

mindless and comatose. Apparently, there's not much hope that either victim will recover. The danger makes the storm difficult to investigate, to say the least. The Army Corps of Thaumaturgists has posted warning signs in astral space around the manastorm—magical markers to warn away the curious and the foolish.

❖ Talon's data is right on. The UCAS has no fragging clue what the manastorm is. Last I heard, the government was calling in experts from a couple different corps, IOND, the Atlantean Foundation and the Tir Tairngire embassy to look the thing over. Don't know yet what they think, or if they'll turn up anything more.

❖ DC Insider

❖ I suspect the manastorm is some kind of astral disturbance, like the foveae in Aztlan. The foveae appear to be pockets of astral "dead space" that can destroy active astral forms that pass through them. No visual phenomena are associated with the foveae, but their effects seem similar to the manastorm's.

❖ JujJuan

❖ Maybe the manastorm is like those magical storms in Tír na nÓg, the *doineann draoidheil*. (Thank the gods for a good Gaelic spell checker.) Those storms discharge a lot of mana and are supposed to be very dangerous.

❖ Druid Lass

❖ I've heard some people say that the foveae are the result of all the blood magic going on south of the border. If the manastorm is similar to them, maybe that means somebody used blood magic as part of the assassination. If so, it would certainly make Aztechnology a prime suspect. After all, how many people out there know enough about that drek to use it effectively?

❖ Terrance

❖ If the manastorm is some kind of disruption in astral space, it might also be a considerable source of magical power for someone who learned to harness it safely. How much power? Who fragging knows? Maybe a lot.

❖ Sedgewick

❖ What if the manastorm is more than a disturbance? It might be some kind of astral/physical rift that could potentially upset the balance of astral energies. It's like a hole in our ozone layer, allowing astral energies to pour unfiltered into the physical world. If the rift should start widening, the results could be disastrous.

❖ Prof M.

❖ Alarmist jetwash. For such a powerful astral disturbance, and considering it's the place where a great dragon died, the blast site has a surprisingly low background count. Astral space around it is normal, except for the manastorm. It's as if all the disruption from the dragon's death got concentrated in one spot instead of spreading out over the area. So it's probably not going to get any bigger.

❖ FedSpook



THE CORPORATE CONNECTION BY THE CHROMED ACCOUNTANT

Welcome to boom-time in the shadows, chummers. Doing the corps' dirty work just got a whole lot more complicated, with the Big D shuffling off this mortal coil and leaving all his assorted stuff behind. Dunkelzahn's net worth is nigh-impossible to calculate for certain, but reasonable estimates I've seen place it around the 100 trillion nuyen mark. The dragon was practically a megacorp in and of himself, capable of competing financially with some of the Big Eight. Now that he's dead, all that money has to go somewhere, and a lot of it is going to go right into the shadows. Let me tell you why.

- ❶ Listen up, chumlies ... CA hits it right on the head.
- ❷ Prime Runner

Dunkelzahn's will gives a lot of money to corporations and individuals with corporate affiliations and business interests. That money is going to go straight into capital investment to make those corporations and business interests stronger and more viable. The big influx of cash to the business world has already been called "Dunkelzahn's Economic Legacy" by a lot of newsies, many of whom see it as a noble final effort on the dragon's part to fulfill his campaign promise to bring greater prosperity to the UCAS.

Certainly the money is going to make the difference for a lot of small operations between taking off or going under. A few million nuyen is chump change if you're a megacorporation, but it can be the difference between success and bankruptcy when you run a small start-up company or a Mom-and-Pop operation—which, by the way, the media have taken to calling "Dunkelzahn's Babies." The "manna from heaven" bestowed by the will increases the chances of these little operations staying afloat long enough to become successful, and may even help them escape being gobbled up by the megacorps at bargain-basement prices.

- ❸ Note that Dunkelzahn isn't handing out money—the Draco Foundation is. And the Draco Foundation is run by Nadja Daviar, who is also the executor of Dunkelzahn's will. For a lot of the conditional bequests (the ones that go something like, "whoever does thus-and-so gets so much cred"), Daviar gets to decide who's worthy of the prize ... which makes her one of the most influential people in the entire fraggin' world right now.
- ❹ Spook

❺ That's true, though the decision isn't entirely up to her. The Foundation has a Board of Trustees who must operate according to the specifications Dunkelzahn laid out in the will. They're building an army of legal experts to go over every precedent involving the will on an individual basis and provide advice on what the Foundation is allowed to do with the money in each particular case. Daviar has a lot of say in what happens, but she's as bound by the dictates of the will as anyone.

- ❻ MesoStim

❶ I guess the ultimate question is whether the dragon left instructions, guidelines or just plain ol' good intentions. I guess we'll have to take a wait an' see approach to dealing with them.

- ❷ Chaz

The second part of Dunkelzahn's legacy is the list of contingent bequests—all the cred left to whomever accomplishes the conditions set out in the will to claim it. For example, there's a nice slush fund set aside for the first party to discover a way of communicating with dolphins. Take note of that word, party—that means small or mid-sized companies like Aqua Arcana, bigger-than-God corps like S-K, or anyone else on the planet who wants to try to get their ideas across. You never know, chummers—your crazy old neighbor who talks to his little fishies might end up becoming the new Damien Knight or Richard Villiers.

Dunkelzahn's will seems to be setting up competition, dangling fat whacks of money like carrots to send companies scrambling to discover what the Big D wants done. Whoever manages this or that particular feat is guaranteed a certain level of reward for it, in addition to whatever they might get for patenting and marketing their development. Now *there's* incentive ... but to what end? Did the Big D just want to stir the economic pot a little, or does he have some more definite goal in mind? We may never know.

Whatever the reason behind it all, these funds are a big spur for corporate R&D of all kinds, plus they allow lowly inventors with ideas for building a better mousetrap to get their work out without selling it to one of the megas. Thanks to Dunkelzahn, the inventor who develops a wiz way to talk to dolphins need only apply to the Draco Foundation and show them his research material. If he's got the right stuff, they may give him enough money to start his own biotech company, which means Joe Inventor can develop and sell his invention and get filthy rich instead of selling it *and* all the accompanying rights to an existing biotech company. That means one really good thing for all of us: more competition for existing companies.

❸ CA, let me get this straight. You really think S-K, let's say, is going to let some R&D weasel stroll casually out the door, go to the Draco Foundation and get millions of nuyen, then set up his own lab? No way, omae. Face reality—those big-brained science dudes will come running to the shadows first. Don't be surprised if self-extractions become the norm. Plus, the corps will be going after each other's top dogs with more than just nuyen and a taste for payback. Now they have a chance to skim big chunks of the dragon's nuyen and freeze their competitors out of the mother lode. If we thought the shadows were busy and deadly before, we ain't seen nothing yet. We are the wild card—we decide who to protect, who to extract, what lab to hit. We get to change the playing field, chumboys and -girls. For once, the dragon has found a way to beat the megas. We in the shadows have the power.

- ❹ Prime Runner

❺ PR, does your head fit through the door frame? Lighten up, man ... you're scaring me. The guy with the biggest wallet controls the

shadows, just like always. That may be the Draco Foundation right now, but it doesn't mean that S-K or Fuchi or even some mid-level corp we ain't ever heard of is going to say the war is lost and the runners win because we can pick and choose jobs. Frag, man, nuyen always wins. Somebody'll always take a job for enough cred. I agree that the shadows are going to get awfully busy real soon, but don't blow a fragging gasket about runners getting Ultimate Power.

❖ Merc

❖ Interesting how Dunkelzahn made a lot of his bequests to "whoever meets goal X." That way, the dragon influences research and development and investment in a lot of different corps from beyond the grave (or wherever dead dragons go to). A company that might have worked on developing, say, new soy-food additives might decide to re-direct that R&D money into genetics or biotechnology instead. In the same way, a lot of developers and inventors are going to start concentrating on the stuff that can earn them meganuyen from the Draco Foundation—which means that consciously or not, they're dancing to the dragon's tune.

❖ Bean Counter

❖ Not just Dunkelzahn's tune, Bean. Like I said, Daviar and the Draco Foundation are pulling a lot of the strings here. Administration of Dunkelzahn's vast estate gives them a LOT of clout.

❖ Spook

❖ Even more interesting is how the dragon set up some bequests that he must have known would never be claimed. Like Aztechnology's ever going to ban blood magic, or the Council of Princes reveal all on world-wide trid! He knew it would never happen. You ask me, those "bequests" are his way of saying "frag you!" from the grave to certain parties.

❖ Forbrush

❖ Frag, even dead, Dunkelzahn is still running things.

❖ Winger

❖ That's dragons for you, chummer—scheming to the very end.

❖ Tin Lizzie

❖ That reminds me. What the hell is that drek at the end of the Tir bequest? Some kind of dragonspeak?

❖ Barnfather@NA/ATH.tundranet

❖ It's Sperethiel. Does anybody know what it means?

❖ Bowers

❖ Yes.

❖ Spes

❖ So are you going to share with us? C'mon!

❖ Bowers

❖ Roughly, it means "Communication is for all to have. Share the language."

❖ Spes

In the past ten or twenty years, the megacorporations have gotten a bit soft. They've been slowly dividing up the world's economic resources between them, with an occasional squabble over a prize here and there, but for the most part their progress has been slow and steady. The megacorps are all chummy with one another, protecting their interests through mechanisms like the Corporate Court and pretty much stifling competition.

Dunkelzahn's bequests are all set to blow that comfy little megacorporate scene wide open. The dragon's last gift is the potential for all kinds of newcomers to appear on the scene with the money to back their grandiose dreams. Are the megacorporations worried? You bet they are. Not because some street inventor with an overcrowded garage can hope to get millions of nuyen, start his own company and put them out of business—that kind of thing's just not going to happen. The megas are worried because the hold they thought they had on the rest of the world is going to loosen a bit and the increasing competition is going to create a more level playing field for other up-and-coming corporations. Sooner or later, some newbies might even unseat one or more of the Big Eight. Plenty of second-tier corps are looking to get into the top spot, inspired by Yamatetsu's success at clawing its way up there years ago. Dunkelzahn's money may just allow some of them to do that.

❖ Lots of lower-tier corps like Cross Technologies and Wuxing would like to bring one of the megas down or boost themselves up into that exalted company (or both). They've always been conservative in taking action, but the bigger the potential gain, the more willing most people are to take bigger risks. The chance of getting some of the money from the Draco Foundation is enough to make some of these corps try stunts they never would have pulled before against their competitors and the Big Eight. I hate to agree with Prime Runner, but the work is going to be there. Corps will want runners for all the typical stuff, but the results will matter even more than in the past. Real soon now, runners will be able to make or break a corp for real. It's no longer "take the nuyen and run." Because our actions can have big-time consequences, runners will need to justify their actions. Keep that in mind when you starting thinking about all the offers that come in—the nuyen will be higher, but so will the risks. And the chance of surviving will be that much smaller.

❖ Argent

❖ Just think of how many lower-tier corps are out there. A couple dozen at least have the potential to become AAA megacorps. Nothing is eternal and no corporation can stay on top forever. The corporate world is a shark tank, and there are plenty of hungry fishies looking to start a feeding frenzy over all the capital tied up with the Draco Foundation. The only real major advantage the Big Eight have over all the other corps is their control of the Corporate Court and their global position.

❖ Orgchart

❖ That control is no small advantage, though. The Corporate Court, the Zurich-Orbital Bank and whatever resources it might hold are probably enough to keep the Big Eight secure from the little fish. All it takes is one Omega Order from the Court to cripple another corporation, and you can bet the triple-As will pull together to keep their club exclusive.

❖ Raiko

❖ Don't count on it, Raiko. It's not that simple (what is?). Plenty of infighting goes on between the Big Eight, and any up-and-comer is going to take advantage of that. Think about it. If you're Mitsuhama or Renraku, don't you want more happy Japanacorps on the Court? Well, maybe you'll be willing to support a lower-tier Japanese-based corp (covertly, of course) when they make a bid for the top, especially if they can hurt one of your competitors in the process. Your new megacorp ally will really owe you one. Remember when Yamatetsu fought its way onto the Corporate Court a few years back? It can be done. And never count out internal strife. Every time a giant world-spanning corporation toppled, it fell victim to internal politics. The megas have been pretty clean so far, but that can change in an eyeblink.

❖ Keynesian Kid

"Greed IS Good"

What does all this mean for shadowrunners? Boom time. All the cred just waiting to be won by the company or individual who first develops "Project X" means that inter-corporate espionage, datasteals and shadowrunning are going to shoot through the roof. Everyone is going to be setting up runs on everyone else and working at the same time to protect their own precious R&D from runners working for their rivals. A single shadowrun could make the difference between some of these lower-tier corps hitting the big time or hitting rock bottom. The stakes are higher than ever, which is sure to make shadowruns ... interesting.

❖ Everyone here agrees that the shadows are going to be hot. I figure you can divide the whole biz scene into the types of work available, as follows:

Protection of: a facility; person doing research; person transporting an item to the DF; small corp

Raids against: a facility; person transporting an item to the DF; small corp; megacorp

Extraction of: a person doing research; person transporting an item to the DF; small corp

Removal of: an item from someone who received something from Dunkelzahn; an item someone wants that someone already has

Research on: an item; corp; person

Search for: people, places and/or as-yet unclaimed things mentioned in the will.

So get out there and take your share.

❖ Prime Runner

❖ Thanks to PR for the basic lesson in running the shadows the Prime Runner way. But you left out the other jobs: wetwork, theft, extortion, political power plays, corporate experimentation, being used and then left twisting in the wind ... This is the shadows, boyo. It's life or death, not a carnival ride. Just because the shadows are getting busier doesn't mean the rules have changed. In fact, as far as I can tell they've only gotten worse. Now more than ever, runners are expendable.

❖ Argent



THE DRACO FOUNDATION

BY PROF

The first provision in Dunkelzahn's will establishes the Draco Foundation, a holding company to administer the wyrm's estate and all of the will's other provisions.

Even though Dunkelzahn gave away a packet of cred and other stuff, the remaining assets give the Draco Foundation resources rivaling those of a megacorporation—billions of nuyen at best estimate, if not more. All those resources are at the command of the seven-member Board of

Trustees, appointed by will executor Nadja Daviar, who is also Chairman of the Board.

❖ Not entirely true. I believe Dunkelzahn chose several board members in advance and privately passed a list of them on to Daviar as part of his estate. Rumor has it that Daviar is less than fond of some of the board members, which adds credence to the idea that they are the dragon's people, not hers.

❖ DC Insider

❖ I tend to agree. The Vice-Chair of the Board, Aina Dupree, is a real hardcase. It's funny that her name was mentioned at the same time as Daviar's. She may have it in for Daviar, especially if she thinks Daviar had anything to do with the Big D's death. Apparently, she's an independently wealthy recluse—not much background on her is available. She's a Negroid elf with white hair, kind of a strange combination.

❖ DV8R

❖ So far the Draco board seems to share one point of view: they all think Dunkelzahn was some kind of fragging saint and they want to "keep his dream of a better world alive." Daviar's press release oozed so much sweetness and light that I needed a shot of insulin after reading it.

❖ Snoop

❖ Don't let that fool you. The Foundation will have to be as ruthless as any megacorporation when it comes down to getting what they want done. They have a lot of money and influence, and they're willing to throw their weight around when they need to.

They also have a serious in with the UCAS government, being that their director is going to be the fragging Vice President any old day now. So far, it looks like the UCAS backs the Foundation all the way—you mess with one, you mess with the other.

❖ Bitter Lemon

The Foundation's main purpose is to administer to the provisions of Dunkelzahn's will. They hold on to all the "conditional" bequests the dragon made, and judge how well the applicants for any of them fit the requirements that Dunkelzahn set down. The lucky applicant who wins the Foundation's blessing gets a big chunk of change. For the rest, better luck next time. Who wins what depends largely on the judgment of the trustees, based on the advice of various hired consultants and experts.

The Draco Foundation also handles the distribution of the named bequests in the will. Not everyone Dunkelzahn named in his will was there for the reading, and some of the people named have been difficult to locate and positively identify. The Foundation has to deal with the many applicants claiming that Dunkelzahn left them something-or-other in the will and determine the validity of such claims.

❖ That alone gives the Foundation a lot of influence. I heard they even made Lofwyr wait to get his bequest until they officially opened the Foundation's doors. Think of them as Santa Claus with a private army. They decide who gets what, and their word is most likely final. You can try to fight it out in court if they decide against you, but good luck at ever seeing a plugged nuyen. They also decide on how best to pass out some of the other goodies the dragon specified, especially when the named beneficiary isn't immediately forthcoming.

❖ Legal Eagle

The Foundation has an army of lawyers to handle the lawsuits that are already starting to spring up over the will's many provisions. All kinds of people are claiming to be a "close friend" of Dunkelzahn and saying he just so happened to promise them a million nuyen (or more) before he died—only gosh darn it, he never got around to changing his will. Such cases are incredibly hard to prove, but there's enough money at stake to get some people to try it.

In addition to handling day-to-day matters connected with the will, the Draco Foundation is administering the huge pile of cred that the dragon managed to accumulate. They're not sitting idly on all that money—they're doing whatever they can to make the pile bigger. The Board of Trustees is empowered to oversee the affairs of Dunkelzahn's estate, which means bank accounts and investments from all over the globe that are still earning enough interest to support a small country. Add to this the liquid capital that Nadja Daviar brings to the Foundation and you have an investment company rich enough to rival financial giants like Hildebrant-Kleinfort-Bernal and the Pacific Rim Bank.

❖ Lately, lots of people have been trying to follow "bread-crumb trails" in the Matrix—clues that might point to some of Dunkelzahn's hidden assets changing hands quietly behind the scenes as Daviar and the Draco Foundation take control of them.

Look at Ares, just as one example—Nadja Daviar is now the proud owner of 12 percent of that megacorp.

❖ Red Wraith

❖ A lot of stuff has changed hands over the past few weeks, and the aftermath of the will reading has sent the stock markets fraggin' berserk. All the noise makes it hard to say what's really going on—but more important is what Dunkelzahn did with what he owned. I mean, look at the Renraku/Fuchi deal. What is that all about?! Dunkelzahn puts the head of Fuchi's internal security on the board of Renraku, effectively killing the man's career (though his net worth just vaulted into the millions) by forcing two megacorps to decide where his real loyalties lie. Fuchi worries that their boy Lanier will take his secrets to the board room in Chiba, while Renraku is fraggin' going nuts trying to figure out if they can ever have a board meeting again without all *their* secrets going right to Fuchi Tokyo. Meanwhile, the Draco Foundation made Miles Lanier richer than he ever dreamed. So who does he give his loyalty to now ... Daviar and the Foundation, maybe? Food for thought. And that's just the wildest example. We have to assume that Dunkelzahn owned stock in as many corps as an independent operator possibly could. Where are all those documents, all the pieces of those pies? Watch the nets, kiddies, and follow the electronic cred as it flashes and blinks its way to the truth.

❖ FastJack

The Foundation is already making investments and cutting deals. Even before opening shop, they've become a significant player in the corporate world. All the major megacorps are currying favor with the Foundation, as are hordes of smaller companies and charitable causes looking for sponsorship by the foundation's deep pockets. Numerous start-up companies are looking to the Draco Foundation as a "white knight" to protect them from the ravages of corporate takeovers, especially since the Board of Trustees apparently intends to carry out many of the Foundation's investments based upon the last wishes of their founder as described in his will and his campaign promises.

❖ The Foundation could end up in charge of a lot of the corporations they bail out of hostile takeovers and whatnot. They could build their own megacorporate empire without half trying, a prospect that keeps a lot of corporate VIPs up at night.

❖ Alonso@xnet.la.com

So what does the establishment of the Draco Foundation mean for those of us operating in the shadows? The simple answer—a major new player has turned up in the megacorporate game whose presence will have quite an impact. The Foundation is going to need as much or more shadow talent as the average megacorp to take care of its "interests" that may be less than legal, as well as handling certain "sensitive" matters the Foundation doesn't want revealed to the public. On the other side of the coin, the megacorporations will pay handsomely for inside information on the Foundation's operations and assets, and will play things all-hell careful in dealing with this new wild card.

❖ For fear of starting a war of words with Prime Runner, I've gotta tell you I don't see the Draco Foundation running the shadows. Why start doing that now? Dunkelzahn never had any contacts in the shadow world, so why take the risk that people will see you as the Bad Guy instead of the Good Guy? We're "the criminal element," after all ... or have we suddenly become heroes and I just never noticed?

❖ Merc

❖ Sorry, Merc, but the Prof calls it true. Johnsons with ties to the Foundation have been hiring runners all over the place to carry out mysterious runs involving a lot of data acquisition, surveillance and courier work. It seems the folks who've been telling us that the Foundation has a secret agenda may very well be right.

❖ Findler Man

❖ To set the record straight (or at least give it a shot), we all kind of backed into the answer to this question via a series of posts—including my own. Check the Watchers section further on in this file. We may all be in for a surprise.

❖ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 3 October 2057 at 21:05:59 (EST)

NADJA DAVIAR—LADY OF MYSTERY BY COBALT BLUE

There's been a lot of talk about Nadja Daviar throughout this document, but plenty of questions still remain. This woman, likely to become the first metahuman Vice President of the UCAS and definitely one of the most powerful individuals in the world in the wake of Dunkelzahn's death, is one big question mark. Who is she? Where did she come from? What does she want and what is she planning? Where do her loyalties lie? I've done some digging; what little I turned up, I've posted here. Anyone who's got more, post away.

Daviar hails from Eastern Europe—Estonia, to be precise. Record-keeping in that part of the world is spotty, to say the least, and anyone who knows their modern history can understand why. With the Euro-Wars following right on the heels of the Crash of '29, most useful records from the past twenty to fifty years got blown to cyber-oblivion. So I couldn't find much in the way of definitive, independent sources to cross-check; I wish my fellow datasnoops better luck, that's all I can say. According to the information in Dunkelzahn's various press kits and public information servers, Ms. Daviar was born in 2014 during one of the first waves of UGE in Europe. Her parents got killed in a riot when she was only eight years old, and she was taken into an orphanage along with hundreds of other poor orphans of the time. She lived there until she was a teenager, at which point the info trail gets muddy.

The next five years of Daviar's life are almost a complete blank, from the time she left the orphanage at sixteen to when she resurfaced in Prague in 2035 at age 21. By that time she had apparently come far in the world—she had her own plush apartment and a fair amount of money at her disposal. The source of that money remains unknown. All my efforts to track it down led to dead ends, which suggests that the cred was well-laundered



through a series of financial changes and Matrix-juggling that would require the skills of a capable decker.

❖ What this really means is that the only information we have about Daviar before the age of 21 comes from Dunkelzahn's press releases about her, most of which she probably wrote herself. The convenience of the Crash of '29 destroying a lot of computer records means that Daviar could literally be from anywhere. She speaks English with no discernible accent, along with French, Spanish, Russian and a few other languages (all without lingua chips). She looks like she could spring from pale-skinned, dark-haired Slavic elven stock, but even that could be a good biosculpt job. The bottom line is, take everything you hear about Daviar with a lot of sodium. Any or all of it could be fake.

❖ Media Watcher

❖ Rumors have circulated over the years that Daviar is in fact from Eastern Europe, recruited by the Polish intelligence community and intensively trained as a deep cover operative. Her “socializing” throughout Europe was just a means for her to get close to people in power and ferret out their secrets to pass on to her superiors in Krakow. If it’s true, her training and preparation would probably have included some headware and concealed chipware to give her the necessary skills to move freely in high society.

❖ Molniya

❖ Drek. Daviar is one of *them*. She’s one of those elves that lived before the Awakening, like some of the High Princes of Tir Tairngire and the Shidhe of Tír na nÓg. Her background has been covered up to hide the fact that she’s really a lot older than she looks. She and Dunkelzahn probably knew each other for a long time and their first “meeting” in Paris awhile back was arranged for the benefit of the media. She may even be an agent for the Council of Princes sent to get cozy with the dragon. It’s all just part of their plan.

❖ Lone Gunman

❖ I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: *there is no evidence that elves are immortal*. None. Just theories. What’s more, the Lone Gunman thinks every single fragging event in the world is part of some monolithic conspiracy.

❖ Magister

❖ A-HA! So you admit it!

❖ Lone Gunman

Daviar developed a reputation as a socialite and patron of the arts throughout Europe, especially in Budapest, Paris and Barcelona, which became her favorite haunts. She was charming, witty, well-versed in modern art and culture, but above all a true woman of mystery. Several smitten suitors attempted to win her affections, but she never became deeply involved with anyone despite acquiring a number of very expensive gifts from would-be paramours.

❖ Among those paramours were such important men as French Finance Minister Gerard Toulouse and Saeder-Krupp VP Hans Brinkhoff. Not long after he gave up pursuing Daviar, Hans Brinkhoff was found floating face down in the Rhine as the result of a tragic “boating accident.” Monsieur Toulouse still lives happily with his wife.

❖ Eisen

❖ That’s because even Lofwyr wouldn’t want to tangle with Madame Toulouse. The woman is a holy terror.

❖ Gendarme

The first publicly known meeting between Nadja Daviar and Dunkelzahn took place in Paris in 2039, where the dragon was attending an exhibit devoted to the renowned French artist Adam Aloné. Dunkelzahn had financed much of the artist’s early work, and Aloné considered the wyrm a friend and “true patron of the

arts.” Dunkelzahn attended the soiree in human form and apparently was quite taken with Daviar. The French fax-rags had a field day with the possibility of the dragon becoming romantically involved with “Mademoiselle Mysterie,” and photos of the two of them talking at the reception in front of Aloné’s massive “Reign of Terror” painting were plastered across screens from Europe to California.

❖ Some sort of attraction between Daviar and Dunkelzahn was clearly apparent during that evening. Whether it was romantic or not, or whether they put it on for the benefit of the media hounds, is unknown to anyone but Daviar now.

❖ Snoop

According to some gap-filled records I managed to pry out of the Paris RTG, Daviar and Dunkelzahn communicated at least five times in the following ten days. Just two weeks after their first meeting, Dunkelzahn’s media agent issued a press release saying that Daviar would be the dragon’s new translator as well as the “voice” for his semi-annual trideo show “Wyrms Talk.” Daviar moved to Dunkelzahn’s Lake Louise compound and made herself right at home. According to several former staff members at the resort, in no time at all it seemed like Daviar had been at the dragon’s side for years.

In addition to operating as Dunkelzahn’s translator for the trideo cameras and other electronic recording devices, Daviar was the dragon’s personal assistant and confidential secretary, a sort of Girl Friday who handled all of Dunkelzahn’s numerous media appearances and other business activities. That made her second only to the “Big D” himself in the dragon’s person fiefdom, and allegedly earned Daviar no love from Dunkelzahn’s previous translator or his friend and media rep, Holly Brighton.

❖ That’s an understatement. Daviar and Brighton hate each other. They didn’t get along from the moment the elf biff moved into the dragon’s castle-like lair near Lake Louise. Brighton ruled that place like a queen, and Daviar trying to move into her turf set off a real alpha-female struggle to the death. I get the impression that the dragon had to smooth over a lot of ruffled feathers to keep things peaceful around there.

❖ X-VP

❖ One or two accusations surfaced in the press that the dragon acquired a metahuman translator pretty quickly once all the little elf and dwarf kids got old enough for him to hire one. He also hired a lot of metahuman crew members at his theme park and for his trideo show. Some people suggested that the dragon had been “making do” with humans up until that point.

❖ Waldo

❖ Not true. Dunkelzahn saw us all as equals, human or metahuman. To him, what you were like inside mattered, not how you looked. He hired a lot of us for his company because not many other employers were willing to give an ork a break back then. Most still aren’t.

❖ Best Boy

In the eighteen years that she worked for Dunkelzahn, Daviar made herself indispensable. She was the dragon's almost constant companion for every public appearance, interview, trideo program and day-to-day business meeting. All the dragon's other employees learned to treat Daviar's word like it came from the wyrm himself. She ran Dunkelzahn's affairs with a crisp efficiency that could have gotten her hired as personal assistant to any megacorporate executive in the world.

❖ Dunkelzahn was fond of conducting business meetings via teleconferencing, which meant that Daviar had to be there to translate the dragon's thought-voice for the telecomm. Lots of times it was quite an advantage for the dragon to have his attractive elven assistant spelling out the hardest-edged business deals in her sweet, pleasant voice. The sheer incongruity of it must have thrown a lot of negotiators off balance.

❖ CC Raider

❖ I remember hearing speculation that Daviar was really running the show sometimes. I mean, over the trid you have no way of know what the dragon really said, so how do you know that Daviar translated what the wyrm meant? It's pretty unlikely, I know, but a lot of people spoke directly to Daviar at times as if it was her deal to negotiate.

❖ Hammer

❖ Right—and Dunkelzahn stood there and let Daviar say stuff he didn't want said. The dragon had ears; if he didn't like what was being said in his name, he could have shifted into human form and spoken out loud for himself all day. I think just the opposite—Daviar knew him so well that she could anticipate everything from the dragon, including emotion, subtext and inflection. If I hadn't seen them together, I wouldn't have been surprised to find out that she was really the Big D in human form.

❖ Lemon Juice

Not surprisingly, Dunkelzahn appointed Daviar as his campaign manager for the '57 election and she played a big part in winning her boss the Big Prize. She managed the presidential campaign with the same efficiency and zeal she brought to every other part of Dunkelzahn's business. The campaign's insightful, brilliantly targeted media ads and trideo programs really struck at the heart of the cynicism peddled by the other candidates. Daviar sold the people of the UCAS on the idea that the dragon's election would bring about an age of growth and prosperity, and strength for the entire country ... something that folks sick and tired of seeing their country get pushed around just couldn't resist.

In the wake of her mentor's assassination, Nadja Daviar finds herself the Vice President-apparent of the UCAS and heir to one of the largest fortunes in the world. It will be interesting to see what this insightful, capable lady of mystery will do next.

AND TROUBLE FOR ALL BY SOCIOPAT

We have a problem: Dunkelzahn was an idealist. His political platform during the presidential race demonstrated this, as do the provisions of his will. Idealism is all well and good—it got the dragon elected by a country full of people desperately in need of a big dose of hope. Idealism is also dangerous, and may just get us all in very deep trouble. I'm talking about the provisions in Dunkelzahn's will that give money to different metahuman rights and "social justice" causes, and the social currents to which they are linked.

Now before you all start flaming me, I'm the first person to support more social justice in this big, bad world of ours. I'm not opposed to metahuman rights and I'm certainly no Humanis apologist (and yes, before you ask, I'm human). I am a keen observer and student of metahuman behavior, and I can tell you right now that this change in the balance of power means trouble.

For as long as humanity has recorded its history, racism and discrimination have existed in human society. Every culture in the world has hated or looked down on someone because of race, religion, culture, gender or whatever. Human cultures need to define some group as "other," and these "other" groups become scapegoats for all sorts of things that the majority culture needs to blame on someone else. People often define the scapegoat groups as "less than human" to justify killing or enslaving them with impunity. Even Dunkelzahn realized this ugly truth about us.

Over time, cultures change. Minority groups get absorbed into the majority. Cultural revolutions and changes transform the nature of the majority group, and a new "scapegoat" minority springs up to take the place of the old one until that minority wins acceptance, and so forth. But no matter what, some segment of the population is considered separate from the "mainstream."

❖ Hold on a minute, Pat. Are you saying that racism and prejudice are *natural* traits? That bigots are just following normal human needs? What kind of drek is that?

❖ Bung

❖ I'm not saying prejudice is inevitable, only that it's an easy out. History and experience shows that when there is trouble, people need to blame someone, and we all tend to pick those different from us to place blame on. If everyone really were happy and equal it wouldn't be a problem, but prejudice happens and has happened throughout history. As much as I would like to see that change, as a student of human behavior I don't honestly think it will any time soon.

❖ SocioPat

The presidential election showed us just how much racial tension exists in the UCAS and elsewhere in North America. The issues of the campaign brought every conceivable radical group out of the woodwork and onto the streets. Racial violence and hate crimes shot up, motivated by different political factions and policlubs across the continent. Tempers flared; everyone seemed ready to drag out their petty grievances at a moment's notice and take out on their anger and frustration on the first person of the "wrong kind" to come down the street.



❶ Racially motivated hate crimes in the UCAS have increased *two hundred percent* in the past eight months. That's not just humans going out to bash ork skulls—that includes metahuman gangs and groups who hate the norms and each other as well. Groups like the Humanis Policlub stir up trouble, and then meta groups like the Ancients and the Sons of Sauron give trouble right back, which starts a new cycle of violence and reprisals.

❷ StatsMan

Making things worse, the election showed people just how powerful the human majority of the UCAS is. When Kenneth Brackhaven first started spouting the Humanis party line as part of his presidential campaign, I knew a lot of people who laughed at what they thought was some absurd political joke. Well, they stopped laughing when a big chunk of the country started nodding their heads in time with Brackhaven's speeches and agreeing that "something needed to be done" about the "metahuman problem." All kinds of people who ought to have known better started to agree that maybe, just maybe, all those "idle goblins" living in the slums of their cities really were solely responsible for all the crime and everything else bringing down the rest of society.

The truth is that metahumans are still a tiny minority in the UCAS. Humans make up more than 60 percent of the UCAS population and about 80 percent of the registered voters. That is a fact, even though some people didn't want to think about it until they had no choice. Brackhaven came much closer to winning than anyone thought he would, and that sad truth has had a real impact on race relations in North America.

The Humanis Policlub almost gained respectability from this election. They've been flooded with new recruits, from otherwise honest citizens who mistakenly think the HP represents their interests to rabid racists who want to see all metahumans put in camps or shipped off to Yomi like they do in Japan. We may joke and bad-mouth the Humanis Policlub and all of its related splinter groups here on Shadowland, but that tends to blind us to the danger they represent. By marginalizing them here, we forget that they are a serious power out there, and they are growing every day.

❸ A good point, Pat. We're taking steps to correct that situation.

❹ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 23 August 2057 at 09:26:40 (EST)

❺ I agree with Pat. One of the biggest advantages the Humanis Policlub has is the fact that very few people take them seriously as a threat. The media marginalizes them, and a lot of people who should be taking them very seriously treat them as a joke. Humanis and hate groups like them have been gathering strength behind the scenes for a long time now. Just look at how influential they've become in cities like Seattle, New York and DeeCee. Take a look at how much support a presidential candidate running on an anti-metahuman platform could generate and tell me that the racists are marginal.

❻ T-Bone

The election of a dragon to the highest office in the UCAS looked like a victory for metahumans everywhere and a blow to the power of Humanis-type bigots. All the Awakened-rights groups

were dancing in the streets because someone as liberal and fair-minded as Dunkelzahn was going to be occupying the Big Chair. Meanwhile, most of the disgruntled humans who never liked the idea of a dragon running their country shuffled off and sided with the Humanis platform after watching Dunkelzahn get elected—even if they voted for somebody other than Brackhaven on Election Day.

Dunkelzahn's assassination set off just a sample of what we can expect in the foreseeable future. Accusations and counter-accusations flew back and forth like bullets. Blame fell on the Humanis Policlub, the Brackhaven campaign, shadowy organizations like Alamos 20,000, or any other plausible anti-Awakened villain. Chaos erupted in the cities, and the national guard plus all the security corporations put together—Lone Star, Eagle Security and Knight Errant—could barely keep control of the situation. The shock of the assassination dashed a lot of high hopes, and people had to turn their anger somewhere. People's need to scapegoat "the other" took a quantum leap forward, and so did the violence that comes with it.

❶ I remember how I heard about Dunkelzahn's assassination. I was enjoying some refreshment at my favorite tavern in Ottawa when suddenly there's a riot going on outside. Seemed to blow up out of a clear blue sky. I picked up one of the troublemakers and asked him what the frag was going on. All he said was, "They killed him, the fraggin' bastards. They killed the President." I'm not sure he knew who "they" were, or if it mattered to him.

❷ North

❸ A lot of the rioting by pro-Dunkelzahners against "the man" is just what Humanis wanted. It let them point the finger at "dangerous non-human radicals" causing civil unrest. From the sound of it, the HP touched off some of the riots on purpose just so they could do that.

❹ Poly Chromatique

In the aftermath of Dunkelzahn's death, the UCAS government says it wants to follow the dragon's ideals and keep his dream alive. Dunkelzahn's will has poured millions of nuyen into the coffers of groups devoted to metahuman advancement and equal rights for all citizens. The government proposes nationwide free SIN registration and amnesty for all SINless in the country. In response, the Humanis Policlub is swelling with new members, and radical anti- and pro-Awakened splinter groups and terrorist organizations are springing up like weeds. The simmering racial unrest in the UCAS is coming to a boil, and when it finally explodes it could make the Night of Rage look like a day at the beach.

Like I said, we have a problem. It is not going away, nor will it be settled easily. It will be a force to be reckoned with in the cities and in the shadows for some time to come. Don't forget about it, because you might just get a chance—no matter how slight—to do something about it some day.

❶ Alarmism. Fraggin' chicken-little thinking. It's back to business as usual, with everyone fragging everyone else over. It's not going to come down to a race war—who profits from that?

❷ Truth in Advertising

DUNKELZAHN THE MARTYR

BY PEOPLE WATCHER

mar'tyr (mär'ter), *n.* One who sacrifices his life, station, or something of great value to him for the sake of principle, or to sustain a cause. (from World-Wide Word Watch)

Everyone is making Dunkelzahn out to be a martyr, "a noble creature who sacrificed himself to lead the UCAS into a new golden age and was brutally struck down by the forces of darkness arrayed against him on the eve of his victory." It sounds like a complete load of drek (to me, anyway), but that's what people are saying about the dragon now. The quote comes from a speech given in DeeCee recently by a man named David Emerson, near the site where Dunkelzahn's limo became one with the pavement. Emerson had a decent audience, too, given the number of gawkers and sightseers who show up or camp out at the site almost daily.

❶ Emerson is one scary guy. He has "potential cult leader" written all over him. He was a junior campaign gofer, a cog in the huge Dunkelzahn election machine, and word has it he thought the dragon was a saint. When news of the assassination hit, he took up a vigil at the blast site and has kept it ever since, except for the three times the DeeCee police arrested him and hauled him away. Each time he's gotten out and gone right back. He speaks about Dunkelzahn's "divine greatness" to just about anyone who'll listen, and it looks like he's picking up a following among the dragon-groupies who come to eyeball the blast site and the manastorm.

❷ DCPD

❸ Emerson and a few other people claim to have had visions while meditating near the blast site. The Feds were worried at first that the "visions" were some kind of magical spillage from the manastorm, but no one's been able to verify that these people were affected by anything other than fatigue, lack of food and (in a couple of cases) one too many BTLs.

❹ Spook

❶ Some of the dragon-groupies around the blast site like to sit and stare into the manastorm for hours on end. They claim it's "the great dragon's divine light" and that they receive visions by looking into the depths of the storm. I suppose if you stare at anything long enough you'll start to see things, and maybe the magical emanations of the storm can cause hallucinations with enough exposure.

❷ Leery

Since the election and the assassination, the media has romanticized Dunkelzahn to an incredible extent. Trideo-special "retrospectives" about the dragon's life show up on the major networks daily. Most of them are pastiches of the same trideo footage and vid bites we've seen a million times, cut together with new voice-over commentary by some expert or "close friend of the President." All these programs, eulogies and tributes to the great dragon make Dunkelzahn out to be the savior of the UCAS, struck down in his moment of victory by foul treachery.



❖ Hell, I've heard ABS is thinking about starting up "the Dragon Channel," where you can get 24-fragging-hours of endless reruns of every news program and talk show that Dunkelzahn (or any other dragon) ever appeared on, not to mention constant repeats of the dozen or so episodes of "Wyrms Talk" that were produced. Sad. The dragon-groupies will probably eat it up, too.

❖ Media Watcher

❖ Syndicated sales of those old "Wyrms Talk" episodes have gone through the roof. Yet more cred wends its way to the dragon's estate and into the coffers of the Draco Foundation.

❖ Monty Haul

❖ Terri-Ann Riberio's little media empire also has millions of nuyen to make the dragon's fraggin' life story into a major movie. Any bets on who's going to play Dunkelzahn? Maybe Lofwyr with a lot of make-up? Are there any dragons in the Screen Actor's Guild?

❖ SilverScreen

❖ They'll probably do the dragon with computer modeling and sampling, the same way they've done for years with other dead celebrities. There's certainly enough trideo footage of Dunkelzahn out there to construct a nigh-perfect holo-model of him—and how many people know what the dragon's real "voice" sounds like, anyway?

❖ Best Boy

❖ Riberio may end up with competition, too. NewsNet got millions from the dragon to do a documentary on his death (almost like he knew there was going to be a story there). Both sides are likely to cross the fine line between "dramatization" and "documentary," and they'll be scrambling to be the first to release their production—not to mention get the juiciest bits and the best material, and maybe sabotage their rival's production with a few well-placed shadowruns.

❖ Holly, Wood & Vine

❖ One chunk of footage the trids didn't get was the flight of dragons that appeared over the blast site a couple of days after the assassination. Must have been a dozen or so of them, including what looked like Lofwyr and maybe even a couple of other greats. They flew in a complicated kind of dance over the site and over and around the mana storm for almost half an hour before breaking up and flying off. It was a tense thirty minutes, with the UCAS government wondering if they should mobilize some jets to fight off a possible dragon attack. The newsnets went nuts to be the first to get a vid of it on the air, but all of them discovered that their recordings of the spectacle were totally blank. No dragons, no dance, nothing—just a recording of the blast site with nothing happening. A few went with "artist's recreations," but most of the networks didn't even bother. It was quite a show to see in person.

❖ FedSpook

❖ Always willing to capitalize on a truly spectacular death, the market has been disgorging Dunkelzahn memorabilia like there's no tomorrow. People are hawking T-shirts, bumper stickers, souvenir chunks of pavement from the blast site, Dunkelzahn dolls and tons of other drek all over the place. Not to be outdone, all the anti-dragon types are holding their own marketing blitz with "dragon slayer" logos and "I voted for a human" bumper stickers. The people named in the will aren't the only ones raking in the cash after the wyrms kicked it. The folks behind these marketing schemes are making cred hand over fist. Naturally, a fee for all the licensed products (which is less than half of what's out there) goes right into the Draco Foundation's coffers. Greed. You gotta love it.

❖ Gecko

To say that the world is over-romanticizing Dunkelzahn's life is possibly the understatement of the decade. Not unlike many assassinated leaders in history, Dunkelzahn is starting to take on mythic qualities. His achievements are glorified, his shortcomings downplayed or outright ignored. The dragon joins the ranks of the human celebrities throughout history who became martyrs, saints or mythic heroes following their untimely deaths. My prediction: we're going to see a lot of bunco "history" making the dragon out as a hero who sacrificed himself for the greater good of the people of the UCAS, just like the Emerson quote suggests. We'll also see a lot of distortions of the dragon's life and times to suit someone's particular vision of Dunkelzahn as a saint.

☛ That's for sure. Has anyone else seen those little printed booklets of Dunkelzahn's Last Testament that have started circulating? The dragon groupies in DeeCee are selling them as keepsakes, souvenirs and "reminders of the great dragon's last message to us." People keep them in their pockets and treat them like little Bibles or something. The groupies love to quote from "Dunkelzahn's wisdom" to just about anyone who'll listen while offering them a booklet. It's really spooky.

☛ Weezer

☛ Great, I can't wait until they move into the airports and start fighting for space with all the other psychos.

☛ Leery

On the other side of the coin are the people who are making the dragon out to be a hell-spawned creature that very nearly seized control of Our Great Nation. They see the dragon's death as a sign that a non-human was never meant to lead the UCAS. Some go so far as to suggest that the Wrath of God destroyed the presumptuous wyrm on the eve of his supposed victory. Less apocalyptic-minded opponents of the dragon point to "patriots" and "resistance groups" as the heroes who prevented a monster of myth from tyrannizing the good people of the UCAS.

I don't think Dunkelzahn was a saint or a creature of evil. I think he was far more *human*, in the sense of having both strengths and flaws, than most anyone is likely to ever give him credit for. Dunkelzahn seemed a lot like us in all the ways that matter, more than we will ever admit. And that's how I'm going to remember him.

☛ Notice to all who may have received, plan on receiving, or think they should receive anything from Dunkelzahn's hoard. You are not the rightful owners. The rightful owners will claim their birthright and you will only get hurt if you maintain your ignorant, foolish insistence on your "rights" of inheritance. Dunkelzahn's confused sense of propriety and his overweening pride made him turn his back on his own traditions. Those traditions are important, and will be maintained whether Dunkelzahn wished it or not. I survived and triumphed in this type of war before, and I will again. Consider this a warning.

☛ Loremaster

☛ I've lurked here for years watching only one speak for us. It is good to see an ancient like yourself realize that there is more to be done in this so-called Awakened world than sulking in a dank cave feeling all-powerful and wondering why no one else ever notices. Too bad it took such a death to wake up the beast ... or did you know about these events before they happened?

☛ Orange Queen

☛ Orange Queen? That can only be one of us. I am surprised. Your relationship with Dunkelzahn should "award" you more than a token item. You should be fighting your brothers and sisters. As we have learned though the ages, only the strong will prevail. As for your less-than-subtle insinuations—no, I had nothing to do with his death. I will admit that Dunkelzahn has been a thorn in our side. He has mocked the greatness of dragons since long before this time, meddling in matters that should not concern him. Does his death sadden me? No. We lost a clown, nothing more.

☛ Loremaster

☛ A clown who could mobilize a world to action. May the gods provide more clowns.

☛ Orange Queen

☛ Dunkelzahn seems to have touched your heart. I suppose it should not surprise me that an innocent like yourself should be swayed by his speeches. You will soon learn that the rabble are as willing to follow evil as good, and on that day you will beg for help.

☛ Loremaster

☛ LOL! You are much funnier than Dunkelzahn ever was.

☛ Orange Queen

☛ Then heed this warning, child. Do not get in my way. Do not try to thwart my plans. Do not stand against me. I will crush you.

☛ Loremaster

☛ Enough, both of you. You have revealed more in a scant few seconds on Shadowland than Dunkelzahn said in all of his inane broadcasts. Once again, Dunkelzahn has proved that for all his breaking of traditions and his fascination with metahumanity, he possessed a mind superior to most others. In the long run, he may have played the game better than any of us.

☛ S-K HQ10596@saederkrupp.com

☛ After that last post, the Shadowland node shut down for 6 seconds. In that time, S-K HQ10596 was deleted from the Matrix—no mail gets through to it. Orange Queen and Loremaster still seem to exist, but all attempts to trace the incoming messages have turned up nothing. Why does that scare me?

☛ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 25 August 2057 at 03:57:44 (EST)

THE PLAYERS



Get your scorecards! Get your scorecards! Can't tell the players without a scorecard! Or so I've been told, so I took it upon myself to compile some of the "players" mentioned in Dunkelzahn's will—plus some folks who've made news in the past few months. The amazing amount of biz on the Shadowland pages lately has been making our CPUs smoke, so this list does not include every Joe Chummer mentioned in the will—just the ones I had time to get some dirt on, or who seem most important at the moment. Heck, next week three more corps could come out with big products and bump some of these to the Where Are They Now file. Other names on this list come right out of the past few days' headlines and don't have much to do with the dragon's will (hey—we *are* your full-service black information store). You want info on everybody else, get out there and dig it up (and post it to the SIG if you're feeling inclined toward charitable behavior). A few friends of mine have promised to investigate some of the corps and people named in the will, but they won't have all their stuff ready for a few weeks, so all we got right now is what you're about to read. Most of this stuff is public domain. I leave it to you experts to figure out where all the lies are hidden. For stuff done up in other files on Shadowland, I included only significant changes or updates from the existing drek. No point in repeating for the billionth time who owns Ares, right? Players affiliated with a larger group (like a corp) are discussed under that group's heading, just to keep everything nice and neat. Let's keep it that way, so *ka*?

◆ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 31 August 2057 at 02:55:23 (EST)

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

President/CEO: Damien Knight

Chairman of the Board: Leonard Aurelius

Headquarters: Detroit, Michigan, UCAS

OK, so I lied—we may not know exactly who owns Ares. I'm not going into who does what and how much they make in pork bellies, but I am going to address a subtle and potentially huge megacorporate power change. It's a well-documented fact that Damien Knight and Leonard Aurelius both own 22 percent of the UCAS giant ... or so we've always thought. One dragon's death later, the balance of power has radically altered. It seems the Big D was the big cheese behind Gavilan Industries (through a couple million blind alleys, shell and holding companies, and at least three different Zurich-Orbital accounts). Well, the Big D decided to give this "little side company" to his very attractive assistant (who is now also the VP-in-waiting).

Yeah, Cap, you're thinking, we read all that in the will. So get on with it already.

But wait—there's more. Those who enjoy watching the cigar-smoke-choked meetings in back rooms (hey, it's your life) say that Daviar has signed over *all her proxy rights* to Mr. Knight. Which means Knight now controls 34 percent of Ares to Aurelius's 22 percent. Plus, two seats on the Board of Directors went with the Gavilan Industries stock. Daviar will most likely keep hers, but guess who picks the other seat: Mr. Knight or Ms. Daviar? See why doings at Ares are getting to be everyone's favorite spectator sport?

As you all know, Ares and Mr. Knight have been my hobby for years. Dunkelzahn's will holds a lot of clues as to how Knight made his mark on the world—the wyrm was there to help. The question is, without the wyrm, can Mr. Knight steer the monstrous ship he runs? Things at Ares promise to get *reeeal* interesting real soon, especially since Leonard Aurelius isn't about to take this lying down.

Squire

Here's an interesting factoid. Some bigwigs in the UCAS gum-mint said that Daviar absolutely hates Knight. Unlike her dear departed boss, she can't stand the sight of him. Word is, she may have signed over the proxy vote just to keep him away from her.

PoliSci

You got it wrong, PS. She hates him, all right (who wouldn't hate a rich, arrogant puppet-master like Knight?), but I've heard that Ares refused to help put down the rioting in the UCAS after the Big D's death unless Daviar showed a little "appreciation" for all the work he planned to do for her. Daviar had no choice but to give him the proxy votes. Even my contacts can't find out how long the proxy is for, but my guess is it's long- rather than short-term.

DC Insider

I hear Knight really wanted a position on the Draco Foundation board, but Daviar didn't want to deal with him any more and outconned him by giving him the Gavilan proxy vote. She handed Knight a choice—controlling a third of his baby up in Detroit, or sit-

ting on a Board of Directors doing nothing but verifying will claims and fighting off lawsuits. Predictably, he couldn't resist the lure of a bigger share of Ares.

Toady

If that's true, then Daviar learned a lot from Dunkelzahn. She played hardball with the original hardball player and came out with a bit of a victory. Maybe I should switch to watching Daviar.

Squire

I'm all over Daviar like a blanket.

Toady

THE ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

President: Sheila Blatavska

Headquarters: Atlanta, CAS

Profile:

Founded in 2012 with the stated purpose of "restoring the glory of ancient Atlantis," the Atlantean Foundation has grown into an international organization with millions of members worldwide. They continue to sponsor numerous archaeological expeditions around the world to uncover artifacts and other evidence that the mythological civilization of Atlantis, a lost land supposedly blessed with advanced technology and magic, really existed. They're also involved with a lot of related activities, especially the production of popular trideo programming through cooperation with Hisato-Turner Broadcasting Corporation in Atlanta. The organization publishes a monthly electronic magazine for its members, *The Atlantean*, which contains various scholarly articles and the latest information on the Foundation's discoveries.

Recently, this organization seems to have been getting less interested in Atlantis specifically and more interested in anything magical or potentially magical. They've been funding digs along ley lines, at powerful mana sites, and even at "traditional" magical or legendary sites in South America, Africa, Australia, the various NAN nations, Eastern Europe, Western Asia and the Middle East. (Kinda makes you wonder, don't it?)

Most of the people who belong to the Atlantean Foundation are harmless flakes who like to read stories in the newsletter and watch *Tales of Atlantis* on the Ancient Wisdom channel every Thursday night. They like the idea of an ancient civilization of noble magicians and elves, but it's just a fantasy.

AnimaTed

Williams, Casey. Sits on the board of the Atlantean Foundation. Left 4 million nuyen in the will. Coincidence? I don't think so.

Golddigger@mainenet.com

Check out Lone Gunman's upload in the Threats file for more information on the Atlantean Foundation from his ... *unique* perspective. I don't know how much of the Gunman's information is accurate, but the fact that Dunkelzahn left them a lot of money lends some support to his argument that they're involved in some kind of "Atlantean conspiracy."

Sten

❖ Not necessarily. Maybe the dragon just liked the work they did. Maybe the AF is way off the beam, and Dunkelzahn hoped that his money would get them on the right track—or keep them off it. Who can say? There's not enough evidence to start jumping to conclusions.

❖ D. Bunker

❖ One thing's for sure—the Foundation's personnel, especially those Mystic Crusader guys, will get themselves some early Christmas presents out of that money. Expect the Foundation's equipment and methods to get more sophisticated in the near future. They might even step up some of their operations and archaeological digs.

❖ Q-Bert

❖ Late breaking news! Representatives of the Atlantean Foundation have been negotiating with the governments of Bermuda and the Caribbean League to set up some kind of expedition in the area, maybe a permanent branch office in Bermuda or beefing up the one they have in Miami. Word has it that they're looking for something in the Bermuda Triangle.

❖ Islander

❖ Rumor has it that Blatavska met with high-ranking Aztlan (read: Aztechnology) officials to discuss the possibility of joining them in that dig they've got going a few clicks south of San Antonio. She got the heavy heave-ho, and is none too pleased. I have a feeling the Mystic Crusaders will be busy boys and girls in the next few months down Texas way.

❖ Alamo

BRACKHAVEN INVESTMENTS

President: Kenneth Brackhaven

Headquarters: Seattle, UCAS

Business Profile:

Brackhaven Investments is the name of an umbrella organization that handles all of Kenneth Brackhaven's many business interests. Kenny-boy is quite the riches-to-riches story; he invested his family fortune in a wide range of business ventures, and his talent for predicting success paid off in a big way. In not very many years, Brackhaven turned his modest (by some standards) inheritance into a multi-billion-nuyen business empire.

When he decided to run for president, Brackhaven seemed to have it all: a successful, conservative business executive and devoted family man, a self-made joe in the pioneer-American tradition (or so said the spin docs at the Brackhaven campaign HQ). Eventually, though, some interesting details came out in the wash. Brackhaven wasn't everything he appeared to be (surprise, surprise). Not only did Kenny-boy have ties to the Humanis Policlub, but it turns out he isn't even the real Kenneth Brackhaven. The real Kenny Brackhaven goblinized into an ork in 2032, and his loving Daddy promptly replaced him with another kid to hide the "shame" of having a metahuman child.

That revelation hurt Brackhaven's campaign ... for about five minutes. His supporters, though momentarily startled, apparently

figured that a human Brackhaven was lots better than an ork Brackhaven, and ended up even more loyal to their man than before. Despite the anti-metahuman vile he spewed, Brackhaven came frighteningly close to winning the election. After losing out to Dunkelzahn, Brackhaven went back to his business interests in Seattle (read: circled the wagons with his HP friends and decided on the next strategy), but not before swearing in his closing speech that he would "continue to fight for the rights of the real citizens of our nation and carry the banner of our cause until this fight is won."

❖ Brackhaven is a bigot, pure and simple. By "real citizens," he means humans—mundane humans, to be precise. He and his Humanis buddies won't be happy until they've shipped all the metahumans and magicians out of "their" country. Then they'll go conquer their neighbors and push the "freaks" out of there, too. Pretty soon there'll be nowhere left for the metahumans to go but straight to hell, which will suit Brackhaven just fine.

❖ PoliSci

❖ Brackhaven's not just a racist, he's a *powerful* racist. Brackhaven Investments has fingers in a lot of pies, including major corporations all over the world. Brackhaven sits on the boards of a lot of those companies and influences their policies with his money and connections. And those companies influence their subsidiaries, and so on down the line. That means Brackhaven is in a position to affect a lot of people's lives.

❖ MoleMan

❖ My guess is he tried to get some action out of HP, but face it—Humanis is still a talk-is-easy-cuz-here-we-are-with-our-good-buddies social club. They're not out to take over the world, no matter what your conspiracy-theorists say. So then Brackhaven went political—he thought, I'll get the "norms" to vote for me, then legally enact my twisted world view. But he ran into a charismatic dragon richer and more powerful than he is, who forced him to stand squarely in the shadows. Now, I figure he plans on taking his "social agenda" to the business community.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense"

❖ If he's so powerful, why hasn't he implemented his Final Solution? Brackhaven was sitting on those corporate boards for years before he went public with any of his political agenda. Why hasn't he started a race war already?

❖ Goblin Boy

❖ Read the newsfaxes, kid. You think we ain't got a nice little low-intensity war goin' on now?

❖ City Slicker

❖ I'd guess he was trying to be subtle. Even now, Brackhaven doesn't quite dare call for the outright extermination of metahumans (though he's done about everything short of that). And like City says, how do we know he *hasn't* been starting a race war in his own nasty little way? Racial violence is on the rise and Humanis

Policlub chapters are springing up all over the place like weeds. I'd be willing to bet there's at least some of Brackhaven's money behind it.

❖ Bung

❖ Interesting to note that with the creation of the Draco Foundation, Brackhaven has a major business rival that represents Dunkelzahn's political and social ideals. While Brackhaven's money talks to companies about protecting "normal" workers and instituting programs to limit the size of the metahuman work force, Draco invests in social progress and gives money to groups like MOM. Even from the grave, the dragon is working to thwart the efforts of people like Brackhaven. I'll bet that just frustrates him no end (the drekhead).

❖ Tanner

❖ Biz is in biz to make money, not social utopias. No right-minded corp that wants to make nuyen hand over fist is ever gonna ignore the metas. There's too many of 'em and chummer, it don't matter squat to a corp who's putting the money into their vaults. As long as the corps can make money on metas, they will. Brackhaven's days are numbered.

❖ Gecko

❖ Interesting thought, but Brackhaven can still cause trouble. He's bitter, vengeful and well-connected—and enough people believed in him to give him hope that through economic means he can and will call the shots someplace. Plus, he's young. He's got time on his side. If Haeffner and Daviar can't make the UCAS one big happy place like Dunkelzahn promised, Brackhaven'll be there running again in 2060.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense"

CARRAS COMMUNICATIONS

The first entry in the "go figure" department ... These guys are a small-time firm based out of Minot, North Dakota, UCAS. Seems they specialize in highly charged low-frequency communications. Awhile back they put out a small headset unit that barely worked. That's about it. Owned by a husband-and-wife team, Joan and Nelson Tessman, with six employees at last count. They converted their farmhouse into a corporate HQ (if you can call it that) and a barn into their R&D "lab."

❖ Okay, so giving them a pile of cred makes no sense whatsoever. Why?

❖ Remy Martin

❖ Low-frequency communications aren't used much anymore, thus making them very useful to our kind.

❖ Skipdangle

❖ Carras Comm does put out other well-made and reliable comm gear. Unfortunately, it's gone totally unnoticed. By everybody except Dunkelzahn, apparently.

❖ Asteric

❖ Yeah, but what did he notice? I got three offers in the past week to go up to Minot and hit their R&D division, so I checked it out. The R&D "division" is a guy named Deuce Morton. THAT'S IT! One guy. I turned down the jobs. I'm as cold as the Arctic: give me the cred and stay out of my way. I don't usually ask for the whys and the whos, but taking out the life's work of one guy who was working in a lab the size of my flophouse in the Barrrens until the Big D died just seems unnecessary. Cruel, even.

❖ Blackheart

❖ Hey Blacky, if you don't have the cojones to do the job, pass the cred and the info on to some of us who do. The wyrm gave these guys wads of nuyen, and I plan on cashing in.

❖ Turk

CROSS APPLIED TECHNOLOGIES

President/CEO: Dr. Lucien Cross

Headquarters: Montreal, Republic of Quebec

Business Profile:

Cross Applied Tech Corporation (CATCo for short) started up in the wake of Damien Knight's nanosecond buyout of Ares Macrotechnology. Lucien Cross made himself a considerable fortune around that same time in 2033 and acquired controlling stock in several small high-technology companies. Cross brought all of these companies together under the umbrella of the CAT holding company in Montreal, and has been slowly building his business empire ever since.

Cross Corp mostly deals in high-tech consumer goods like electronics and medicine, as well as corporate services like Matrix technology and cybernetics. The company has a reputation for cutting-edge developments in tech, plus the marketing savvy to sell them to the highest bidder.

Principal Divisions:

Division Name: Cross Matrix Technologies

Location: Montreal, Quebec

Division Head: Lucien Cross

Chief Products/Services: Software utility suites, computer hardware (such as the CMT Babel series cyberdeck) and peripherals. This division is housed in the corporation's main headquarters, where Lucien Cross personally oversees its operations.

Division Name: Cross Biomedical

Location: Boston, UCAS

Division Head: Sandra Wright

Chief Products/Services: The biomed division puts out products for the medical/HMO industry, including artificial blood substitutes, cyberware and organ-replacement equipment.

Division Name: Cross Advanced Electronics

Location: Seattle, UCAS

Division Head: Bernard Cross

Chief Products/Services: This division handles household consumer products like trideo sets, sim game players, music chip players and all the assorted electronic junk you usually find in the average household. It works closely with the E&M division.

Division Name: Cross Entertainment and Multimedia

Location: Atlanta, CAS

Division Head: Alexandria Hunter

Chief Products/Services: This division cranks out all the sims, vids and sounds that go into the gear produced by the Electronics branch. A lot of it is low-grade factory stuff done entirely by computer, but the division has several artists under contract to produce the good stuff (all carefully packaged and marketed to folks with a lot of disposable income, of course).

- ❖ You left out the most important one, Cap.
- ❖ Silk

Division Name: Seraphim

Location: Mostly Montreal, with activities worldwide

Division Head: "Gabriel"

Chief Products/Services: The Seraphim are Cross Corp's best asset—shadow ops. Lucien Cross knows plenty about making use of information snatched from someone else, and CAT is masterful at finishing other companies' projects for them. Cross was in the industrial espionage business before he went legit, and Seraphim personnel act as his personal praetorian guard as well as the corp's shadow operatives. Seraphim handles internal security matters for the corporation, ruthlessly rooting out disloyalty with the aid of magical mind probes and sophisticated interrogation techniques. They also spy on other companies and secure new developments for CAT. The members of the division all have Biblical-style code names and are skilled professional intelligence operatives on a par with the best in the AAA corps. Cross trains his agents well. I ought to know.

❖ Echo that. Word has it that Cross was one of the people who helped Damien Knight set up the Matrix acrobatics for his nanosecond buyout. He certainly has the credentials for it, with a Ph.D. in Computer Science from MIT&T. Interestingly enough, Cross and Knight seem to steer well clear of each other. If they did work together once upon a time, it must have been just a business relationship. There's no love lost between them.

- ❖ Bishop
- ❖ This guy got an "unknown da Vinci"? Is that possible? Does anyone have any idea how much it's worth?
- ❖ Curious George
- ❖ Yes. Yes. And virtually priceless, if it's real. I hear Mr. Cross is already swamped with calls from museums and private collectors. No doubt he'll soon become the target of art thieves galore.
- ❖ Remmy

❖ Cross doesn't like Damien Knight one bit. Rumor has it that he takes special delight in stealing technology and research from Ares-owned companies. He's taken advantage of the placement that Quebec's tariff structure affords his company in terms of marketing and producing software and computer hardware to build up a steady business, especially with the government. Why Ares hasn't squashed him yet, I have no idea.

❖ Hopalong

❖ Old Lucien must have something on Knight. Maybe something connected with the nanosec buyout? Either that or the fact that Dunkelzahn apparently liked the old bandit (or so his will suggests).

❖ DeeluvLee

❖ Lucien's nephew Bernard is an idiot. Some trouble last year at Cross Electronics in Seattle involving MCT almost cost him his hide, and the smart money says the old man will boot him out of the VP spot within six months or the next screw-up, whichever comes first.

❖ Silk

❖ Cross and Daviar have had several meetings while he's been in DC waiting for the Foundation to give him his painting. My guess is, their equal hatred for Knight is making them friends. Watch for Cross Technologies to have mucho dinero to spend on some new products. Almost everyone admits that the Big D had more money squirreled away than the will suggests, and I wouldn't be surprised if Cross gets some of that secret stash.

❖ Toady



THE DRACO FOUNDATION

Director: Nadja Daviar

Headquarters: Federal District of Columbia

Profile:

Almost overnight, Nadja Daviar transformed from Dunkelzahn's attractive spokes-model and mouthpiece to one of the most powerful and influential people in the world. In addition to being appointed Vice President of the UCAS by President Kyle Haeffner, Daviar was also made executor of Dunkelzahn's considerable estate. This position placed untold billions of nuyen in her care as Chairperson and Head of the Draco Foundation.

The Foundation's purpose is to carry out the instructions and intent of Dunkelzahn's last will and testament. Accordingly, the Foundation's Board of Trustees has sole power to dispense the meganuyen from the dragon's estate according to the requirements set forth in the will. Who decides if someone meets the requirements? The Draco Foundation, that's who—specifically, the board and the executor, advised by an army of legal experts.

The Draco Foundation also handles Dunkelzahn's estate and the money he willed to Nadja Daviar, which gives them considerable resources to invest in companies, causes and projects that "further the work of our noble founder," as Daviar recently put it. The board votes on all such matters, and in that respect works like any other megacorp.

❖ According to all the information available, Daviar has already appointed the six board members, all between August 21 and August 31, 2057. The word is, the Big D left her a list of folks to

choose from, but no one knows how many people she asked or how big the list is. (The Big D seems to have left nothing to chance.) Sorry I couldn't come up with more info than the names, but I'm sure we'll hear more about all these folks in the near future.

☛ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: September 1, 2057 at 16:21:26 EST

Chairperson and Head of the Draco Foundation: Nadja Daviar

Vice-Chairperson: Aina Dupree

Board Member: Frank Hardy

Board Member: Milo Czerda

Board Member: Midori Kanematsu

Board Member: Manuel Torres

Board Member: Grace Friel

The first meeting of the Draco Foundation, convened to go over the rules and the will with a herd of lawyers, is set for September 3rd to November 10. Beginning in December, the Foundation board will convene for one week beginning on the 3rd of every month. If you need to talk to the Foundation, make your appointment now. Time slots will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis or in order of importance (to be determined by the Foundation, natch).

☛ Who the fragging drek *are* these people? How do they rate the power they've been handed? I've never heard of any of them!

☛ Solomon Grundy

☛ You will, chumboy. Sooner or later, you will.

☛ La Marquise

THE GUNDERSON CORPORATION

President/CEO: James Johan Harvin Jr.

Headquarters: Miami, Caribbean League

Business Profile:

Well diversified and solidly financed, this baby megacorp is a risk-taker, going for the cred where no other company would. Most of their wild gambles pay off, which allows them to buy more resources and try yet another crazy scheme. CEO Harvin is a gambler in a suit, which is probably why Dunkelzahn liked him.

Principal Divisions:

Division Name: Montclair Industries

Division Head: Dr. Albert Church

Chief Products/Services: Montclair specializes in the manufacture of precision machine parts, tool and die work for one-of-a-kind items, experimental prototypes, and so on.

Division Name: TransSea

Division Head: Barbara Powers

Chief Products/Services: This division handles cross-ocean shipping and importing, long-term storage and other such stuff, much of it for TGC's other subsidiaries.

Division Name: Atlantic Security

Division Head: James J. Harvin Jr.

Chief Products/Services: Atlantic's people are the security guys. In addition to working with TGC's other divisions, they provide armed protection for ships, dockyards, and such in the Carib/Gulf area (a thankless job, given all the piracy and smuggling going on down there).

☛ Has anybody else noticed that the freaking CEO is personally in charge of the guys with the guns?

☛ May Daze

☛ And how do they get away with all that black ice?

☛ Surfin' Babe

☛ Wise up, gleebs, they fragging OWN Miami. What isn't in their pocket is in the pocket of somebody else who's in their pocket, et cetera et fraggin' cetera. You wanna suck air in Miami? TGC will make a profit off it. No drek.

☛ Parrothead

☛ That's why serious street crime is so low—for the benefit of the tourists. Happy tourists make Miami look good, and that makes TGC look good. The locals can occasionally get away with robbing a tourist who's dumb enough to stray into a zipzone or the overtown sprawl. But hurt one bad, or kill one? A few days later Atlantic Security has an "accident" in which a plane full of napalm crashes smack on top of the home of the chummer who runs the gang that aced the poor out-of-towners. Blam! A whole block goes up in flames, and no fire engines or Doc Wagon-mobiles arrive until it's ashes-to-ashes time. Atlantic only needed to do that one or twice before the locals started geeking each other to stop their neighbors from molestin' lost out-o-town sheep. My hoop or yours is a very simple equation, easily solved by most lifeforms more advanced than a salaryman's bundlehoney. Used to be awhile back that you carried a map in Miami or you got geeked. Nowadays, in some sections of the city only a tourist can get out alive and relatively whole.

☛ Coral Reefer

HUMANIS POLICLUB

Leader: Unknown

Headquarters: Unknown

Profile:

I know I said in the California Free State post that I didn't want to promote these skags, but for the sake of raising awareness I'm giving them a slot. The Humanis Policlub (and all of its related spawn) has become a force to be reckoned with following the presidential election, and forewarned is forearmed. So please—post what you know.

☛ Humanis is a real mixed bag. Some of the policlub's branches in the UCAS and elsewhere are no more dangerous than the Masons or the Rotarians. They're just places for good old boys to hang out, drink beer and play darts. Then there's the ones that are political-

ly active and aware. They organize protests, lobby local governments to “protect human rights” and fight the metahuman “special interest groups.” Their membership tends to be a lot more knowledgeable and usually better-off financially, which brings them some decent donations to pass on to approved candidates and causes.

Lastly, there are the real fanatics, the crazy splinter groups: Alamos 20K, Human Nation, the Order and similar nutcases. These are the hard-core militants and bigots, the types who organize lynch mobs and plant bombs in places known to cater to metahumans. Unlike the public face of Humanis, these groups are totally illegal and banned in most civilized nations. Their leadership and organization is largely unknown, but the Threats file has some interesting dirt on Alamos.

◆ Windtree

◆ The Humanis Policlub has no association with terrorists of any kind. We are a peaceful organization devoted to political change and the protection of the rights and values of ordinary humans. We look out for our own because no one else, the UCAS government and the major corporations included, seems willing to do so.

◆ Brother John

◆ Fragging drek-eating apologist, who let this guy on the board?!

◆ Raze

◆ I did, chummer. I may not like what he has to say, but he’s a legit user just like anyone else. Shadowland is supposed to be a place where information is free. That includes information we don’t like. Try to confine yourselves to the facts, everyone, and keep the name-calling off the board or I might just revoke your access privileges.

◆ Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 2 September 2057 at 10:34:52 (EST)

◆ Humanis has no real organized leadership at the moment. Each chapter of the organization is technically a separate entity. The policlub adopted this tactic in Europe to keep national governments from shutting them down entirely. Local governments can ban the organization from their doorsteps, but that doesn’t affect the other independent groups elsewhere. So the independent-cell structure keeps the HP around, but has also kept it scattered and unfocused. With the emergence of demagogues like Brackhaven who can mobilize a lot of support across group lines, that last part may be starting to change. Brace yourselves for more organized activity from the HP in the future.

◆ Marionette

◆ Humanis membership took a huge leap with the election. Membership in Seattle alone is up something like 60 percent. The policlub did a lot of advertising and lobbying along with Brackhaven’s campaign. To everyone’s amazement, Kenny-boy’s Humanis ties didn’t cripple his campaign when the word got out—frag, they hardly gave him so much as a stubbed toe. Most metahumans didn’t like him much in the first place, and a lot of humans were willing to overlook a little excess harshness toward



“metahuman scum” in exchange for what they saw as someone who supported their “down-home” values. Brackhaven came pretty fragging close to winning, much too close for my comfort.

◆ DV8R

◆ It isn’t over yet. Brackhaven still has a powerful political machine backing him, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he takes another shot at the top slot in 2060. He might just make it, too, if Haeffner turns out to be a disappointment to all the dragon-fans who voted for Dunkelzahn just because he was way different from the status quo.

◆ Raiko

ILLUMINATES OF THE NEW DAWN

High Magus: Rozilyn Hernandez

Headquarters: Federal District of Columbia

Profile:

Based in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood that is also home to Georgetown University in the UCAS capitol, the Illuminates are a hermetic magical order with considerable influence and—allegedly—magical power at their command. Their most illustrious member is their own High Magus, former presidential candidate Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez. The members of the order include the cream of academic and corporate mages from the surrounding area and across the major cities of the UCAS. The group is set up like a private club and maintains quite the “old boys (and girls) network” for its members and their friends.

The Illuminates are devoted to utopian ideals of technological and magical progress working hand-in-hand to improve the lot of humanity. They support aggressive research and development programs, corporate incentives, progressive social programs and equal rights for the Awakened.

Membership is organized into two groups. The Outer Order is made up largely of mundanes, mostly political supporters and various social-climbers looking for the thrill of belonging to a “real” magical organization, along with some real mages waiting to be admitted into the Inner Order. The Inner Order is entirely

made up of mages who have been initiated into the greater mysteries. Rough estimates place the membership of the Outer Order at around 3,000; the Inner Order is a few hundred at most, according to the best available guesses. (Like any good secret organization, the Inner Circle keeps its records private.)

The Grand Lodge in Foggy Bottom is only a few miles from the university campus and is supposed to house one of the finest hermetic libraries in North America along with all the amenities needed for high-level ritual workings.

❖ That's an understatement. Rumor has it that the basement and sub-basement levels of the IOND's Grand Lodge have space for conducting ritual magic on a massive scale: elaborate hermetic circles more than twelve meters in diameter, alchemical laboratories for cranking out radicals, fetishes and all sorts of ritual material, and a fully equipped enchanting shop or two.

❖ Harker

❖ I've also heard that the IOND has some spirits bound inside conjuring circles in the deepest levels of the Lodge. *Powerful* spirits, which are allegedly held there by the collective magical might of the order to carry out the bidding of the High Magus and her underlings. It's been said that the Illuminates will pay handsomely for information about free spirits and their true names so they can try to bind and control them.

❖ DeeCeelOT

❖ What would they want all those spirits for? Sounds to me like the IOND is starting up a spirit army.

❖ Callistra

❖ The Illuminates might look like a stuffy academic social club on paper, but they are a magical order of the first rank and a force to be reckoned with. They keep their activities quiet, but there's been talk about several incidences of "magical war" being declared between the Illuminates and other magical orders around the world. It seems not all the kids play well together in the magical sandbox. The IOND have clashed with groups like the Ordo Maximus and the Black Lodge in the past, and probably will again. They also had some kind of blowout with some magical order from Tir na nÓg awhile back, not long before the election.

❖ Miss Tick

❖ The Black Lodge is a bogeyman story. They're about as real as the monsters under my bed. I'm amazed that some of you people believe everything that gets posted here!

❖ ShowMe

❖ How do you know there *aren't* monsters under your bed (heh-heh-heh)?

❖ Fangs

❖ A couple of the more interesting bits of election fallout ... Hernandez's new World Magical Order really piqued the curiosity of some the mages and shamen in Tir Tairngire. In fact, the Council of Princes will be deciding real soon whether to allow the IOND to

actively operate within their borders (which makes an even bigger division between the Tir and their elven kindred in Europe). Let me just say, though, that I'm not sure the IOND is nearly as powerful as you all suggest. I don't see any evidence to support that.

❖ Mage-o-matic

❖ The Illuminates have a secret agenda—they want to collect as much mojo as they can. They hire runners to "recover" magical artifacts and foci from competitors (read: other magical groups). They stole one of the Atlantean Foundation's latest finds from the Foundation's dig site in Sumatra. Everything they get their hands on disappears into the vaults of the Grand Lodge, never to be seen again. What they're doing with all of it I have no idea, but you can bet it's nothing good.

❖ Magister

❖ The IOND is also *very* interested in the mother lode of magical items in Dunkelzahn's will. They've probably already got agents out there looking to track down everything mentioned in the will, as well as sniffing out all rumors of other items *not* mentioned that now most likely belong to the Draco Foundation (which is practically next door to them in downtown DeeCee).

❖ Talon

❖ I hear that the Feds called in some of the Illuminates to help investigate the manastorm over Dunkelzahn's death site. They still haven't figured out what it is, but if there's some way the IOND can benefit from it, they'll find it.

❖ Jewelee

❖ The New Century Party (a wholly-owned subsidiary of the IOND, for those who hadn't figured that out already) plans on turning its more successful campaign offices (the ones near colleges) into full-blown regional headquarters. On the big hit parade: Boston near MIT&T, University of Chicago, and Seattle. I also hear they'd love to be considered a legal political party in the CAS, and to open up an office in Atlanta.

❖ DC Insider

❖ Yeah, probably right next to the Atlantean Foundation.

❖ Talon

❖ Good fragging luck. The New Century's got legal troubles—some of their already-established "regional headquarters" are becoming nasty pains in the butt for the party founders. Some chapter's filed a lawsuit against the founding organization, alleging everything from misuse of collective funds to not saying "Please" before making them jump through hoops.

❖ PoliSci

❖ Which is why the IOND has been taking pains lately to point out that it's a separate organization from the New Century Party. The fact that lots of Illuminates are also NCP members boils down to "coincidence." I'd guess the IOND is taking no chances of getting hit by flying shrapnel if the New Century implodes.

❖ MotorVoter

- Look for Rozilyn to try for an appointment to the board of the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research. I'd say she'll have to go some ways to prove to Daviar that she isn't a megalomaniac.
- Silicon Mage

THE JOHN TIMMONS MEMORIAL FUND

Director: Anne Penchyk

Headquarters: Federal District of Columbia

Profile:

A provision of Dunkelzahn's will established this fund, designed to further the cause of metahuman rights, racial harmony and all that drek. In a surprise move, Dunkelzahn apparently specified Anne Penchyk to head up the Fund. She recently accepted the offer and is already working on making the Timmons Fund a major force for metahuman and awakened rights in DeeCee. Her other pet project, the pro-women's rights Empowerment Coalition, is officially operating under the auspices of the Timmons Fund as of a week or so ago. (Interestingly enough, Ms. Penchyk's fellow Coalition founders allowed her to fold their baby organization into the Timmons Fund without so much as a polite discussion. They must all be *really* good friends)

- Penchyk fought the good fight after her running mate, Gen. Franklin Yeats, was assassinated during the presidential campaign by "unidentified terrorist agents." She took up Yeats' mantle as presidential candidate and made a good showing of it despite a lot of bad press and death threats from hate groups like Humanis.
- Goblin Boy

● Bulldrek. Dunkelzahn was behind the hit on Yeats, and this Memorial Fund is some kind of posthumous payoff to Penchyk. Yeats was the only candidate with the credentials and the support to beat the dragon, so Dunkelzahn had him cacked. Naming the fund after John Timmons is just the dragon's idea of a joke, considering he probably had Timmons offered too. Those who live by the sword ...

- Gossip Hound

● Sorry, Hound, but there's no evidence that the dragon was behind the hit on Yeats. In fact, there's no evidence at all that I know of. Whatever there is, the UCAS government has got it buried real good. You can bet it wasn't "terrorist agents," but beyond that nobody knows nuthin'.

- DC Insider

● It's far more likely that whoever hit Yeats also took out Dunkelzahn and rigged the whole '56 election in the first place. The puppet-masters are getting sloppy and too much of their work is showing, but the truth will out.

- Lone Gunman

● Anne Penchyk is one competent politico, and she's said outright that she intends to make the Timmons Fund a kind of umbrella organization for all the various metahuman/Awakened rights groups out there like MOM, the AAAT and the NAAAP. The

Empowerment Coalition is just the start. She's got the marketing plan and the business sense—it only remains to be seen if she can get all the other groups to fall into line.

- Bitter Lemon

● Smart move, making the Empowerment Coalition part of the Timmons Memorial Fund. That way, she gets to funnel the dragon's cash to her women's-rights group—and her fellow founders are savvy enough to know that.

- Camille

● She's also received a couple dozen death threats from various anti-meta, anti-Awakened groups since she took over as director of the fund. (OK, so I need a better hobby than reading other people's mail.) Seems some people just aren't comfortable with the idea of an ork woman having all that power.

- Black-Eyed Suzan

● I sense a shadow-war looming between the Humanis Policlub on one side and the Timmons Fund and all the little meta-rights groups it represents on the other. Now more than ever, it's important to know who your Johnson is answering to.

- DC Insider

● Who cares, as long as the cred is good? If it comes down to a fight between the HP and the meta-rights types in DeeCee, Humanis will slaughter them. Penchyk had better have an extra couple of aces up her sleeve if she plans to survive in her new job for long.

- Fenris

● Don't worry—she does.

- Vixen

MANADYNE CORPORATION

President: Dr. Carolyn Winters

Headquarters: Boston, UCAS

Business Profile:

A major up-and-comer in the field of theoretical and applied magic and magic-related services, Manadyne draws much of its talent from the campuses of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Thaumaturgy, Harvard, Northeastern University, Boston University and numerous other colleges in the area of the Boston Metroplex. The company has patented tons of spell designs and different magical techniques over the past few years. Its most recent business coup: picking up several UCAS and CAS government contracts following the disastrous outbreak of insect spirits in Chicago. Manadyne has been working on anti-bug magical countermeasures, advanced warding techniques and sophisticated metaplanar explorations.

Company CEO Carolyn Winters is a talented magician and graduate of MIT&T's doctoral program in thaumaturgy, in addition to holding an MBA from Brown University. Of course, Dr. Winters can rarely take time from her administrative duties to venture into the lab these days.

❖ In addition to the money Dunkelzahn already invested in them, Manadyne is a likely candidate to pick up some of the other magical goodies in the dragon's will. They've got a magical R&D department that rivals some of the best at the megacorps. I'd say only Aztechnology or maybe Mitsuhama can equal them. They're sure to come up with some of the patents that the will calls for, and that'll boost them right out of sight.

❖ Arioch

❖ Don't be too sure of that, chummer. I know for a fact that Lone Star's Paranormal Branch (the DIPs) are salivating at the idea of getting their hands on all that money. They'll be working double-time to try to pull off some of those magic tricks first.

❖ X-Star

❖ Yeah, and the DIPs also have the advantage of being the ones who police everyone else's magical activity. Anyone want to bet Lone Star's gonna make a big push for more magical regulation throughout their many jurisdictions? More licensing, more testing, more bureaucratic red tape to tie up all the magicians except the ones who work for Lone Star to let them get a head start on any project where they think they have a chance.

❖ BlackStone

❖ Manadyne is something of a one-note company. They don't do much that isn't magical in one way or another. That involves a serious specialization of talent that tends to limit them in a lot of ways.

❖ Orgchart

❖ True, but their magical talent is just the core of their operation. Manadyne also employs a huge support staff for clerical, security, administration, accounting and so on, just like any other corp. They also have a fair number of mundane magical theorists and adepts to back up their high-level magical staffers. They don't have the breadth of a megacorp, but they're very good at what they do.

❖ Reid

❖ Carolyn Winters is one capable mage and a very sharp lady. She built the company up herself from a piddly-drek magical consulting business. A lot of people say power and success have made her distant, but she still gets down in the trenches from time to time to personally supervise some of the company's projects and get to know her employees. She carries a lot of responsibility on her shoulders, but she bears it well.

❖ ManaDiane@manadyne.ucas.bos

❖ Sorry, Diane, but I hear that Winters has been acting distant the past couple of years because she's not herself ... literally. Rumor has it that Dr. Winters had a fatal summoning accident, in which she was replaced by an anima spirit that assumed her form. The spirit is studying people, but it doesn't have the act down perfectly and there are still gaps in its knowledge. The board of Manadyne knows about the switch but doesn't want to endanger the company by revealing the truth.

❖ Walker

❖ I've heard the same story, Walker, but I don't think I buy it. After Dunkelzahn's investments in Manadyne were revealed, plenty of people started claiming that Winter was a disguised western dragon and one of the Big D's minions. Just because someone changes a little after becoming president of a hugely successful business doesn't mean they're possessed.

❖ D. Bunker

❖ Winters is an insect spirit. Think about it—it makes perfect sense. She started acting different something like six months before the whole Bug City thing went down, and now her corp is handling all kinds of magical stuff for the government involving Chicago. What better place for the bugs to start taking over?

❖ Tiger Faux

❖ Get a grip, Tiger. After Chicago, people are seeing bugs everywhere. Don't you think the UCAS fraggin' government would check out something like that?

❖ D. Bunker

❖ Who says they're smart enough to spot a bug? The Threats file says the bugs are getting better at hiding themselves. How can we know for sure? Take my advice, trust no one.

❖ Tiger Faux

MEGAMEDIA

President/CEO: William Welsh

Home Office Location: Seattle, UCAS

Business Profile:

One of the major players on the simsense scene, MegaMedia does a bit less in trideo and print despite the all-encompassing name. Hit hard recently by the California simsense corps, they've moved into research on other uses of simsense, especially as a therapy tool—biofeedback and the like.

❖ MegaMedia's best known for putting out all the Euphoria sims. They've gone downhill since *Against the Hive Masters*.

❖ Reid

❖ Wasn't Euphoria's real name something-Lockhart?

❖ Studiotech

❖ Just what we need. Another amateur running a conglomerate that has influence.

❖ Otus

MEYNT-ZAI INDUSTRIES

President/CEO: Victoria Meynt-Zai

Home Office Location: Omaha, Nebraska, UCAS

Business Profile:

Meynt-Zai Industries is the brainchild of Richard Zai, the man who brought to fruition the terrhodopsin memory system upon which all computers have been based since the mid-'20s. He was

one of the pioneers who helped make the Internet-to-Matrix transition thirty years ago, and continued to uncover breakthroughs in computer architecture until his death in late 2041. His wife Victoria, the other half of MZI, carried on where her husband had left off, though not as solidly on the blade of technology as the company was with Zai at the helm.

❖ Rho-what-sin?

❖ Newbie9103336163215@UCASOL.COM

❖ The protein memory in your deck (or turtle, whatever you've got). Terrhodopsin replaced silicon as the storage device of choice. Light-harvesting protein molecules called /bacteriote-rhodopsin/ act as the traditional binary "0" and "1" indicators. If a particular spectra of green laser light is "fired" through fiber-optic cable to shine on one of the molecules, it is forced into the binary "0" position; red laser light forces it into the binary "1" position. This drastically cut down the system lag typically generated by silicon chips, which had to convert light signals sent through optical cable into pulses of electricity that would affect their own version of the binary 0/1 switch.

❖ The Smiling Bandit

Striking Again!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

❖ So, Mr. Bandit, you're saying that our computer chips are like, protein now or something? If it's living matter, wouldn't it rot or decay?

❖ Newbie9103336163215@UCASOL.COM

❖ Actually, that used to be a problem until we made significant advances in genetech. Terrhodopsin is actually a "super- protein," a drastic manipulation of naturally occurring rhodopsin. It was designed with shelf-life in mind, and is expected to last for approximately forty years before it deteriorates. So yes, forty years down the line you'll want to copy all your pertinent files onto a brand-spanking-new storage memory unit.

❖ The Smiling Bandit

Striking Again!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

❖ Supposedly, Zai isn't dead. The word is that he goblinized in the late '30's and that his death was faked, most likely because people couldn't handle the fact that everything they used on a daily basis came from the depths of some poor trog's mind.

❖ Conspir-I-See

❖ How do you fake a brain embolism in front of your own shareholders?!?

❖ Marabellum@pip.cc.brandeis.edu

❖ Very carefully?

❖ Conspir-I-See

PHOENIX BIOTECHNOLOGIES

President/CEO: Jeremy Newburg-Rinn

Home Office Location: Phoenix, Pueblo Corporate Council

Business Profile:

Phoenix is Pueblo's biggest non-computer-based corp. They do a lot of work in genetic engineering, infertility treatments, psychopharmacology and magical medical techniques, and are just starting to look into bioware. They also do a fair amount of "pure" research, all government funded and most of it kept confidential until Pueblo can profit from it. The company is technically a subsidiary of the PCC and the Pueblo government is the only major shareholder, but by a narrow margin. Newburg-Rinn is a puppet, but he's got a hefty entourage of bodyguards—all physads, most of them female.

❖ If Newburg-Rinn is a puppet, how does he rate protection like that? Physads don't exactly grow on trees, so they cost. If they're any good, that is.

❖ Camille

❖ The fact that Dunkelzahn left Phoenix stuff in his will suggests there may be something more to Newburg-Rinn than meets the eye. Time to go hunting again!

❖ Rikki-Tikki-Tavi

PROTEUS SUBSYSTEMS

President/CEO: Adam Goines

Home Office Location: Des Moines, Iowa, UCAS

Business Profile:

Adam Goines was a young but eccentric owner of a little microtronics company in 2014 when he Awakened as a troll. After his change he acquired a reputation for putting immense emphasis upon names, adding the surname "sub" to the then-Proteus Systems and coming out with such products as the "Adam Smasher 3000" amongst other things. Proteus Subsystems continues to push the envelope of microtronics technologies, selling their products to research facilities and educational institutions.

❖ Microtronics?

❖ Newbie9103336163215@UCASOL.COM

❖ Manipulation of particles at atomic and sub-atomic scales.

❖ The Smiling Bandit

Striking Again!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

RELIABLE IMAGING

President: Elvis Presley (no, I'm not kidding—presumably, this skag is)

Headquarters: Atlanta (actually, it's the only space they own)

THE PLAYERS

These guys are working on development of a multi-phased simrig. This company—just barely big enough to be called that—has seven employees. The owner either has a sense of humor or is a real paranoid, because every search I've tried of their board of directors lists Elvis Presley (a musician some claim is still alive), Jimmy Carter (a president in the old USA), Errol Flynn (a movie actor back in the black-and-white days), and Robert E. Lee (a USA Civil War general). All records that I've come up with are privately owned. According to the teasesheets, the simrig they're working on is supposed to offer the most realistic simsense experience yet. Supposedly, it lets you program experiences and sensations that are either impossible or that no one's actually undergone.

❖ How the hell can you do that? You need an AI to pull that off.
❖ Sutfon

❖ Maybe that's what the funding is really for.
❖ Beany@NA/NE.beannet

❖ Good work, CC. You have more info than I do (and you cracked some A-1 ice to get that much). All I know—from physical observation—is that the seven employees at Reliable are two human males (one black and one white), one very attractive elven female, one human female, one troll named Eddie, one black elven male named Conway, and one dwarf. I have no idea if they've ever actually met Dunkelzahn, but I know none of them were in DeeCee for the reading of the will.
❖ Dixie Cousin

SIERRA, INCORPORATED

President: Arthur Vogel

Headquarters: Sacramento

How things change in a year. Arthur Vogel, presidential candidate and rumored head of every eco-terrorist group in the world, recently agreed to head up Sierra, Inc. When the announcement was made, Sierra's membership jumped by 8 percent overnight! Looks like Sierra, Incorporated is trying to break out of their image as a mainstream environmental organization. Many activists are confused, some claiming that Vogel sold them out and others insinuating that Sierra, Inc. is really a corporate front meant to draw off members and momentum from more radical enviro-groups. Vogel claims that Sierra's main goals are just what they've always said they are: preventing environmental degradation and ensuring that people have free access to wilderness areas. Vogel's hardball tactics throughout his years as an aggressive lawyer, however, have some people wondering how long Sierra, Inc. can enjoy the moral high ground it often claims.

❖ I still say SI is a front. Vogel sold out to the man.
❖ GreenMan

❖ I'm gonna have to change my tune on these guys. I've ridden them for being wimpy and corrupt, but now I want to see what Vogel does with them. Hopefully, he'll give them a much-needed influx of attitude. And I *really* can't wait to watch Arthur Vogel

walking down the streets of Sacramento. I want to be there while Mr. Famous Dwarf strolls down the street ignoring all the "No Metahumans" signs. That'll be worth more than nuyen.

❖ Landlubber

❖ I told you they were a front for Save our Seas and TerraFirst. No one believed me and now I AM VINDICATED. I KNEW THE TRUTH.

❖ Snoop

❖ STOP SHOUTING! This proves nothing, except that SI wanted a little spice in their white bread.

❖ GreenMan

TAN TIEN INCORPORATED

President/CEO: Sau-kok Chu

Home Office Location: Beijing, Republic of China

Business Profile:

One of the few Chinese corporations to actually make it big enough for anyone to take it seriously in the West, this outfit is a surprisingly slick little set-up that combines biological and computer-based technologies. It's got a small staff, all competent and well-trained professionals. Funny, though—I can't find a magical division anywhere, not even security.

❖ That's because they're backed by tongs, which are vociferously anti-magical/anti-Awakened.

❖ Rathceet

❖ Strange behavior, if that's true. The tongs tend to be magic-heavy.

❖ China Doll

TELESTRIAN INDUSTRIES

President: James Telestrian III

Headquarters: Portland, Tir Tairngire

Business Profile:

Telestrian is the golden child of Tir Tairngire corporations and the most aggressive among them, with interests in just about every cutting-edge industry. The corporation is tightly controlled by the Telestrian family, who hold virtually all of the corporation's stock as well as its most important offices. With their reputation for ruthlessness, technological innovation and interest in cutting-edge advances, watch for Telestrian to become a player in the efforts to snag some extra cred from Dunkelzahn's will.

❖ They're going to have a hard time of it. There seems to be no love lost between Tir Tairngire and the Draco Foundation—in fact, the Foundation already seems to be going out of its way to hack off the Tir government. After the reading of the will, one of the first things Daviar did was send an official memo to the Council of Princes asking them if they wanted to claim the bequest Dunkelzahn left them—and saying she'd be happy to arrange an appearance on "Wyrms Talk" for them to tell all about their personal histories. Needless to say, the Council answered with a typi-

cally high-toned, fancy-words version of “Go frag yourself.”

❖ Darkholme

❖ Telestrian isn’t just in it for the money. He and his kinfolk are more interested in digging up information on some of the dragon’s magical goodies, like the ones mentioned in the will, as well as any other trinkets Dunkelzahn might have had stashed away somewhere. Naturally, anything they learn is immediately passed on to the Council of Princes.

❖ Byrne

❖ Telestrian’s cred is as good as anyone else’s, chummers, and they’re hiring in the shadows big time. There just isn’t enough talent in the Portland shadows to accommodate them, so be on the lookout for the flower-eaters to go sniffing for outside talent—probably starting with Seattle.

❖ Lucas

UCAS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Here’s a list of all the bigwigs in the FedGov following the election, in order of their succession to the presidency (just because you never know who’ll get bumped off next). All the officials appointed by the Haeffner/Daviar ticket are not yet sworn in; their appointments are pending approval by Congress. I’ve also gotten the names of the lucky people (hah!) chosen for the Scott Commission, recently formed to investigate Dunkelzahn’s death.

President: Kyle Haeffner (Dunkelzahn Independent)

Vice President (Not sworn in): Nadja Daviar (Dunkelzahn Independent)

Ms. Daviar’s appointment is awaiting final House and Senate approval, but Haeffner is treating her as the VP on the (probably accurate) assumption that Congress will approve her. (She may be an unofficial suspect in Dunkelzahn’s death, but so are a lot of other people; to Dunkelzahn’s partisans, Daviar is the only possible choice to help run the country. Besides, keeping the Veep slot open will only make things even less stable than they already are, and the last thing Congress wants is more riots.) The Justice Department is holding off on taking any action until they’ve checked out her activities on the night of the assassination. It looks like Haeffner and Daviar will be the first witnesses to testify before the Scott Commission.

Speaker of the House: Betty-Jo Pritchard (Dem.)

President Pro-Tem of the Senate: Arnold Humphries (Rep.)

Secretary of State: Neil Hamblin

Secretary of the Treasury: Roger Tanaka

Secretary of Defense: Andrew Maykrantz

Attorney General: Mina Pantorelli

Secretary of Agriculture: Robert Cermont

Secretary of Business: Anna Laws

Secretary of Resources: Nolan Pulver

Secretary of Human Services: Annette Sanchez

Surgeon General: Dr. Ignaz Yablonski

Secretary of Information: Richard Chen

The Scott Commission on the Assassination

of President Dunkelzahn Head: Richard Scott, Chief Justice of the UCAS Supreme Court

Appointees:

Sen. David Ralph (Dem., Illinois)

Sen. Melissa Washington (Rep., Maine)

Representative Jess Rummens (Tech., Iowa)

Representative Sarah Lynn (Independent, Vermont)

Carla Brooks, advisor to former President Dunkelzahn and President Haeffner

Dr. Frazer Williams, Director of Magic and Occult Studies, Georgetown University

General Steven Coe Bowling, former director of the CIA

Profile:

Now that the dust has begun to settle from Dunkelzahn’s death—and all the other craziness of the past two elections—the UCAS Federal Government is finally starting to pull together. Kyle Haeffner is the top dog of the UCAS, even though plenty of people think that he might have been behind the assassination. The big problem with this theory, of course, is the fact that Haeffner—and most of the other major suspects—has an airtight alibi. The politicians in DeeCee seem to approve of him, mostly out of a desire to put the election and the assassination comfortably behind them.

The Scott Commission is based on the Warren Commission, the body that met to determine the final government say in the death of President Kennedy in the 1960s. It’s got pretty much the same make-up, except for the addition of a magical “expert”, Dr. Frazer Williams. The first order of business for the Scott Commission is to interview Haeffner and Daviar sometime in the next week, so that she can get sworn in ASAP. Look for the swearing-in to happen in mid- to late November.

❖ Haeffner’s alibi means drek. He wouldn’t have done the deed himself. He would have hired some shadowrunners and set up an airtight alibi, like any good Mr. Johnson.

❖ DragonIX

❖ Yeah, but the same could be said of every single bigwig and VIP who was at any of those inauguration parties that night. It could have been anyone or even fraggin’ everyone who did in the dragon.

❖ Cynic

❖ Everyone knows who’s president now, and one thing I can say is, I sure didn’t vote for her.

❖ Remy Martin

❖ You can’t vote period, Remy.

❖ Bung

❖ Hey, what else are fake SINS for?

❖ Remy Martin

❖ Word has it that most of Haeffner's Cabinet appointments are the ones Dunkelzahn was planning to make. Some of them are very ... interesting.

❖ DC Insider

❖ I'll say. Not only is Daviar the first metahuman Vice President, but the Haeffner Cabinet has some of the first metahumans and magicians in those offices as well. A good thing, because the UCAS government is going to need some good people to balance out the increasing influence of racist policlubs. The sharp rise in hate crimes recently ought to make everybody sweat.

❖ Mom-on-the-Run

❖ For the record, Bob Cermont is an elf (natch) and Nolan Pulver is a dwarf. Yablonski is a mage and former Chief Forensic Magician of Seattle, in addition to being a medical doctor. Everyone else is human. Note: no orks or trolls in the Cabinet. Can't have us ugly folks messing up those photo ops, right?

❖ Tuskadero

❖ That's true as far as it goes, Tusky, but 15 Undersecretaries and nearly half the Secret Service agents protecting the Prez and soon-to-be VP are orks and trolls. I'd say that's a major improvement over the zero that were there six months ago.

❖ MOMmy

❖ Interesting to note that, for about eight months or so, Betty-Jo Pritchard was the de facto President of the UCAS, filling in and keeping things together while the election campaign was going on. That not only makes Pritchard the first female President of the UCAS (by default), but probably one of the most effective. Shame she didn't bother to run herself.

❖ Sam Eagle@star.nova.com

❖ Between last year and this year's elections, the UCAS government is just as fragmented as ever, with the House and Senate divided among six or so parties—and that's not including the real fringe groups. They've been cooperating with President Haeffner so far, but the honeymoon will soon be over and everyone will go back to business as usual. Endless gridlock, anyone?

❖ Paige

❖ Rumor on the streets of DeeCee is that Daviar'll pay big cash for any info on who killed Dunkelzahn. This isn't connected to the Draco Foundation, either. Supposedly, the point person is Carla Brooks, Big D's Head of Security and Scott Commission expert. So runners, start lining up at the back door to the White House—there's cred to be made.

❖ Tora-chan

❖ And which of the 671 organizations, cults and fanatics who've claimed responsibility are you going to start with? You'll never get enough information to figure it out or get any cred. Let the dragon lie dead and go after the good stuff—the big list of toys he left people.

❖ Gradgrind

❖ On the international front, Aztlan has doubled the guard at its DeeCee embassy and recalled its ambassador (if you can call some mid-level Aztechnology manager an ambassador). The NAN councils have a standing appointment with Haeffner and Daviar, but the Prez and acting VP have refused to meet them until she's been sworn in. Atlanta seems to be waiting until things cool down (my guess is they want help with their little Aztechnology/San Antonio problem, but they don't want to look too pushy). Tir Tairngire has asked to speak with Haeffner about "mutual problems affecting both nations," but they refuse to meet if Daviar is there. Haeffner says that's not an option. The CFS has no idea what's going on (as usual), and Quebec is so relieved that they don't have to deal with a dragon that they've relaxed their super-tight border patrols. Other nations have sent their regards and will probably meet with the Prez when things settle down. Tir na nÓg has shown no interest in UCAS affairs (though I think they'd have had a lot of interest in playing getting-to-know-you if the Big D was still in the White House).

❖ DC Insider

❖ On the corporate front, other than the personal meetings with Damien Knight and Lucien Cross, Daviar has kept all the business meetings within the purview of the Draco Foundation—though I hear she'll be meeting personally with Wu Lung-Wei of Wuxing, Inc. Lofwyr has been conspicuous by his absence, though my guess is he makes his presence felt regardless. Haeffner has personally assured Richard Villiers that they will meet to discuss overall economic plans for the UCAS once things settle down. Villiers appears very upset that Dunkelzahn played the ultimate joke on him by making Miles Lanier a Renraku board member, but on the other hand he's happy to have gotten a bigger piece of the Fuchi pie. My guess is he's faking the anger to appease his Japanese partners. MCT has yet to acknowledge the new Prez—ten to one they're waiting to see how deep in with Ares he is before making any statement. It's no secret that they wanted Brackhaven to win so that they could push for major expansion of industry in Seattle and the rest of the UCAS. Yamatetsu embraced the whole dragon-as-Prez thing in a big way, and has already put out a press release stating that it will help the new Prez and the UCAS government in any way possible. Of course, anyone with a single functioning brain cell knows this is a lie, but it plays well in public. Renraku and Shiawase are in holding patterns, waiting to see what the rest do before they decide which way to jump. Renraku is hurting the most because of the Miles Lanier deal.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

"It's all about dollars and sense"

UNIVERSAL OMNITECH

President: Hamilton Grimes

Headquarters: Vancouver, Salish Shidhe Council

Business Profile:

These are the people who brought you a revolution in biotechnology. Universal Omnitech was one of the first corporations to perfect some of the artificial biological implants—that's "bioware" to most of you—that have become so popular today. They pioneered research into genetic modification and development of new-and-improved replacement parts that work better than the originals. Under the guidance of such luminaries in biotechnology as Dr. Karen Martin, Universal pushed itself to become a major second-tier corporation and one of the best in its field.

❖ Universal has far too many divisions around the world to go into them all here. They recently acquired the failing Ingersol Aquaculture in the Pacific Northwest, and have plans to refurbish the corp and pour some money into aquaculture food production. Several of the major aquaculture and agribusiness interests in California are none too pleased with that idea.

❖ CC Raider

❖ I hear Universal is hard at work on some kind of forced-cloning project to produce viable, complete clones. Looks like they're going for some more of that dragon bounty. Plan on Biogene or another biotech corp hitting them sometime soon.

❖ Chimera

❖ And let's not forget the infamous Project Infinity ...

❖ The Smiling Bandit
Striking Again!
Ha! Ha! Ha!

❖ Mr. Bandit, I thought we agreed not to discuss this in public.

❖ KAM@uniomni.ssc.com

VISIONQUEST ENTERTAINMENT

President/CEO: Holly Brighton

Headquarters: Lake Louise, NAN

Business Profile:

VisionQuest Entertainment is made up of most of Dunkelzahn's former "toys"—various companies and establishments that the dragon used largely for his own entertainment and as a means of furthering his obsessive interest in metahumans.

Division Name: VisionQuest Theme Park

The company is centered around the VisionQuest Theme Park in Lake Louise, which served as Dunkelzahn's "lair" for several decades before the beginning of his Presidential campaign. The park is a combination of real-life and virtual-reality environments that allow visitors to play in a pseudo-medieval fantasy land full of knights, wizards and princesses. Be warned, however, that a dragon—or indeed, any existing paranormal species—is never the bad guy (talk about political correctness!). The park is one of the most popular tourist spots in North America, rivaling Fun City in California.

Division Name: VisionQuest Studios

VisionQuest Studios, the company's other main branch, produces the sophisticated virtual-reality technology used in the theme park. VisionQuest's labs turn out some of the finest sim-sense hardware and software on the market, and what began as little more than a hobby for Dunkelzahn turned into a significant source of income in the years before his death.

VisionQuest is largely owned by Holly Brighton, the reporter who interviewed Dunkelzahn when he first appeared in Denver in 2012. Since then, Brighton has been a friend and professional colleague of the dragon.

❖ Park attendance at VisionQuest has boomed since the wyrm's death; I've heard of at least a couple of "Dunkelzahn sightings" there already.

❖ Dancin' Bear

❖ In the park, at the death site, all over DeeCee and in every fraggin' Stuffer Shack from Lake Louise to Hawai'i, chummer.

❖ st-st-stutter

❖ Word has it that Brighton hates Daviar's guts with the passion of a woman scorned. After devoting her entire career to Dunkelzahn for more than forty years and ending up with nothing more than a glorified theme park to show for it, seeing Daviar get to be vice president and director of a multi-billion nuyen foundation must really feel like a slap in the face.

❖ Auntie Social

❖ "Woman scorned" indeed, my dear. I hear that Brighton had more going on with the dragon than a "professional" relationship.

❖ Mimosa Boy

❖ You think she ... with the *dragon*? That's sick!

❖ Brother John

❖ Funny image, though.

❖ DV8R

❖ Seriously, I don't think Brighton's relationship with the dragon was anything more than professional, but she's definitely hacked off about something. Word has it that VisionQuest is hiring a fair amount of shadow-talent for some definitely interesting jobs. Some of it may have something to do with that Human Nation terrorist attack on one of VisionQuest's research facilities.

❖ DataBear

❖ On the flip side of Brighton's relationship with Daviar is her relationship with Terri Ann Riberio, the Big D's other ex-translator. Seems relations between Riberio and Brighton are quite cordial. Expect some kind of collaboration between VisionQuest and Riberio's newfound entertainment empire some time in the near future.

❖ Holly, Wood & Vine

❖ I wouldn't be surprised if the Big D put something in the contract that if Brighton tried to sell any of VQ, Daviar or the Draco Foundation

gets first grab. That way it remains in the “family.” The dragon ain’t no fool—if he wanted to give his empire away, he would have. I have a feeling that’s what torqued Brighton off—his assumption that she’d sell everything he worked for to the highest bidder.

❖ Common Law

❖ Women—can’t live with ‘em, can’t trust ‘em after you’re dead.

❖ Streeter

❖ Nice sentiment. Let me introduce your groin to my foot, you sexist little wimp. I’m going to hunt you down and show you how a woman deals with drek like you.

❖ Angel

WARPDIVE SYSTEMS

President: Steven Z. Ridgemont

Headquarters: Denver Front Range Free Zone

Business Profile:

Nearly everyone in the software industry knows Steve Ridgemont. At the age of 15, he developed and sold *Factor One*—his homemade encryption/decryption software—to Fuchi for enough money to put him through the best colleges around and start his own company.

Ridgemont founded FTL Technologies in 2038 with the help of several friends from Texas A&M’s computer science program. Even though he and his co-workers were fresh out of college, Ridgemont’s company turned out some killer resource and utility code that sent the company’s value steadily climbing. FTL maintained good relations with Fuchi as well. FTL created the Warpdrive programming language, and the FTL persona code used by most of Fuchi’s cyberdecks produced in 2041 or later netted FTL a tidy royalty.

Five years ago, Fuchi decided they wanted a more “intimate” relationship with FTL. The company was growing so fast that many market-watchers figured it was about to break out of the Sioux Nation (where it was founded) and go multinational. Before that could happen, Fuchi made a bid to buy the company. To their surprise, Ridgemont rejected their offer—Fuchi’s onetime programming lapdog wasn’t interested in doing things their way any more.

The rejection led to a legal battle and numerous takeover attempts that lasted almost two years. Worsening relations with Fuchi caused problems for FTL; among other things, the megacorp’s legal department saw to it that most of FTL’s best-selling products got so tied up in legal red tape that it was impossible for them to sell to anyone else. No other companies were willing to get involved in the mess, despite Ridgemont’s efforts to find himself a white knight. In 2055, Fuchi bought up what was left of FTL and made it a subsidiary of Fuchi America. Ridgemont was even offered the opportunity to stay on with the company, but resigned instead.

Instead, Ridgemont moved to Denver and started all over again. He made use of all his contacts in the computer industry and began doing what he did best: writing code. Eventually he attracted investors and released his new company’s first product, the *TransWarp* telecommunications suite, which was an overnight

success. Ridgemont appears to be making a comeback with Warpdrive Systems, and you can be sure Fuchi’s keeping a watchful eye on him.

❖ With the extra capital from Dunkelzahn’s will, Ridgemont has managed to really jump-start his operation. He’s hiring a lot of hot programmers out of major schools and places like Silicon Valley. Word has it he’s even recruiting some “freelance” deckers. Looks like Ridgemont is charging straight ahead—Fuchi’s top execs are probably buying up antacids wholesale.

❖ The Dead Deckers Society

❖ Ridgemont is a dwarf, by the way. And no cracks about how “they make the best techies.”

❖ Half-Life

❖ No problem halfie, everyone knows us orks make better deckers anyways.

❖ Chuck Chuck Razool

❖ Ridgemont is also getting some help from our side of the street. Stevie has been working the Matrix since he was a tender youth under the handle “Scotty.” He’s built up a decent rep in the shadows as a codebreaker and he’s been using his connections to get a leg up from some of the best in the business. I think Fuchi should start watching their collective backs. Anyone interested in some side-work, check out the maildrop scotty@nexus.frz.den for more info.

❖ Dr. Bones

❖ Actually, Mr. Ridgemont has several Matrix aliases, one of which is ... Dr. Bones. Isn’t it a little strange to talk about yourself in the third person, Steve?

❖ FastJack

❖ Sometimes, Jack, but you get used to it (you ought to know). By the way, interested in a job? ; - D

❖ Scotty

WUXING, INCORPORATED

President/CEO: Wu Lung-Wei

Headquarters: Hong Kong Free Enterprise Enclave

Wuxing has a lot of clout in the Free Enterprise Zone. They started out as an import/export business and expanded over the years, so now they have their fingers in a lot of different pies. For some reason, Dunkelzahn decided to give the corp a good whack of cash in his will, along with some other goodies that may send Wuxing climbing up the megacorporate ladder. I have some friends checking out this little corp, and as soon as I get the info I’ll post it. Watch this space.

YAKASHIMA TECHNOLOGIES

President/CEO: Hiroshi Yakashima

Headquarters: Yokohama, Japan

Business Profile:

Another corporation to watch out for, Yakashima Technologies is the hostile-takeover king of the Japanacorps. The company has grown by leaps and bounds over the past several years by taking over and buying out smaller companies. Hiroshi Yakashima seems to have an uncanny knack for picking smaller companies that have the potential to be valuable assets, but at the same time aren't prosperous enough to make tempting targets for other corporations. Once the new acquisitions are under the Yakashima umbrella, restructuring and new management makes them hot property. Yakashima's acquisitions seem to be highly market-driven; whatever technology or product is hot at any given time, Yakashima is most likely working to acquire a company that specializes in it.

This scheme has made Yakashima a diverse and successful "second-tier" megacorporation. Dunkelzahn's gift to Yakashima may have come just in time; recently, Yakashima has been competing with some other major second-tier corps and even some of the Big Eight for choice microcorps that it wants to swallow into its "happy family." To win in a fight with the big boys, Yakashima'll need all the cred it can get.

❶ A lot of Yakashima's "uncanny" insights come from liberally employing shadowrunners to spy on the competition and get all the dirt, as well as engineering the occasional "accident" that devalues the target company and makes it easier for Yakashima to snap it up at bargain-basement prices.

❷ CC Raider

❸ "Restructuring" for Yakashima often means gutting the occasional acquisition for capital and laying off all the employees, then claiming a tax loss on the whole deal. Yakashima's buy-outs may end up making some of his companies more successful, but it doesn't do much for the people who lose their jobs because of it.

❹ Blue Collar

❺ Yakashima's layoff patterns suggest that the corp has a preference for human workers of Japanese descent (surprise, surprise). They lay off a far greater proportion of metahumans than the worker populations of their acquired companies would suggest. So far, no one has successfully brought any kind of discrimination suit against them.

❻ StatsMan

❼ Awhile back, Yakashima got into a vicious proxy fight with Ares over control of Osprey Technical Publications in Los Gatos. Seems they wanted to get one up on Ares in the Valley.

❽ DeWinter

Principal Divisions:

Yakashima, like any corp its size, has numerous divisions. I've listed a couple of choice recent acquisitions below.

Division Name: Biogene Technologies

Location: San Diego, CFS

Division Head: Dr. Jared Leiji

Biogene is known for developing numerous biotechnology innovations, the latest of which is an oil-leeching bacteria for the extraction of substrate oil from shale deposits and other difficult spots. The rumor mill says Biogene got Yakashima to come in as a white knight to save them from a takeover attempt by Aztechnology.

❶ Honto. And the Big A is none too pleased. Expect shadow-activity against Biogene and its associated companies to increase. Aztechnology still treads softly in San Diego, however, so there shouldn't be too many fireworks.

❷ Pyramid Watcher

❸ One of the first things Yakashima did as part of its "restructuring" was to move Biogene's security contract from Knight Errant to Sakura Security, one of Yakashima's own subsidiaries. Nothing like keeping it all in the family, especially since relations between Yakashima and Ares aren't the most cordial right now.

❹ Tetsuronin

Division Name: Farm-the-Sea, Inc.

Location: Anchorage, Athabaskan Council

Division Head: Hollis Baynes

This company raises "herds" of whales in the cold coastal waters of the Athabaskan Council and uses them for consumable proteins and other products, especially synthetics. A lot of Farm-the-Sea's raw material gets funneled through Yakashima's other companies.

❶ FTS is also a favorite target for eco-terrorists because they're enslaving and slaughtering all those cute, ever-so-intelligent whales. Greenies and whale-huggers all over North America are hopping mad about it, but the Athabaskan Council desperately needs the tax income and jobs that the company provides, so they ignore the protests.

❷ Yukon Cornelius

ZOR ENTERTAINMENT

President: DeMille Jones

Headquarters: Seattle

A record label and studio, Zor Entertainment is a mid-level company with a taste for indy, alternative music. "Avante garde" is a kind way of putting it (guess there's no accounting for taste).

❶ Zor Entertainment? Why the frag would Dunk leave anything to them? Their artists suck.

❷ Grinder

❸ Not all of them. Sure, Zor is kinda out there, but they used to handle the Dark Angel account after he was brought back from the dead and before he disappeared again.

❹ Diamond Dave@irule.really

❺ Gone, but not forgotten (apparently).

❻ Icelady

SHADOWLAND

ON PARADE



❖ If you're here now, then you already know that Shadowland serves, among its other endeavors, as an information clearing-house. We collect, sort, index, manipulate, reformat, bury and otherwise find a way to store (and retrieve when necessary) all types of information of interest to our most loyal users and others with the cojones, deck and IC picks required to find and access us. Our policy always has been and will continue to be, "If you can't find us, you don't deserve to know."

Here at Shadowland, we fervently believe in the old saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." All information will be useful to someone, somewhere, at some time—and we want to be the ones to provide that information. Our secret is that we never throw anything away. I mean it—our holographic storage systems allow us to store virtually unlimited (pun intended) gigapulses of information, all carefully labeled, filed and cross-indexed.

We designed this system with our users in mind. The very nature of the Nexus allows Shadowland to offer our consumers both a product and an opportunity. Our product is information. The opportunity we provide is a safe forum for selling information. Here's how it works. Every single day, we receive a substantial number of datafiles and other types of downloads from shadowrunners across the globe who keep their eyes peeled for data that might prove useful to someone else at some point. They post what they find to us, we tag it with an encrypted contributor code and subject iden-

tifier, then file it. When someone like you comes looking for that vital piece of data for the run you're on, you can get it from us for a fee, part of which goes to the person who uploaded the data.

The days and weeks following Dunkelzahn's death have produced a record number of posts on the subject of the dragon (and his death, life, will, plans, his friends and enemies and so on), ranging from the amazingly lame to the startlingly insightful. I've posted three of the most illuminating—consider it free advertising, a complementary gift, whatever. These three and many more reveal a Dunkelzahn who was far more than just a media-figure-turned-president or everyone's favorite, jolly ol' wyrm. There was more to the Big D than any of us could have guessed, and the fallout from his death surely means that life in the shadows will never be the same.

The rules have changed dramatically, and the better prepared you are, the better your chances of survival. If you have anything to add to these accounts, post your data. If it's good, you can earn some extra cred, along with the warm admiration of your fellow social outcasts. What more could you ask? And hey, don't be afraid to learn something from these investigations. Everyone has his own way of conducting biz, but those of us who stay alive keep kicking because we benefit from the lessons of our own mistakes and others'. Read closely, consider the circumstances, and work just a little bit smarter next time. Be careful out there.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 2 October 2057 at 14:56:31 (EST)

THE SLEEPING DRAGON



BY LEI HUNG

From a friend of mine in Hong Kong comes this profile on Wuxing Inc., a corporation mentioned in Dunkelzahn's will as the beneficiary of umpty-million nuyen and maybe a lot more. Who runs this corporation, and why did Dunkelzahn give them what he did? My friend Lei found some answers—read on and you may find your own.

◆ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 5 October 2057 at 09:23:19 (EST)

Sometimes a shadowrun just doesn't pan out. It happens. There are no guarantees in this biz, nobody to complain to if things don't go your way. I know that as well as anybody—hell, that's the only reason I've survived in the shadows as long as I have.

But all the wisdom in the world doesn't make a bad situation any easier to take. Or to get out of.

This all started when a fixer buddy of mine happened to mention that a Johnson was looking for someone to track one of Dunkelzahn's bequests—to a mom-and-pop-sized corp called Wuxing Inc., based in the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Zone. Seems the Johnson wanted to know why this little corp got a fat whack of cred from the dragon, and what the CEO or whoever might be planning to do with it.



My fixer friend knew I'd spent several years as a legit private investigator before circumstances pushed me to the other side of the shadow line, so she tapped me for this job. Unlike your average smash-and-grab or datasnatch, real investigative work takes specialized skills. And I told a friend, and he told a friend, and she told a friend, and we built ourselves a team.

❶ Since Lei is too modest to mention it, I'll fill in a little background. Lei and his usual "associates" are commonly known as the Sons of Thunder in Hong Kong, and have quite a rep for competence. I had the pleasure of working with them on a job that took me to Kowloon, and I found their assistance invaluable. Thanks again, terms.

❷ Skater

The Johnson wanted to meet at the Magic Matrix in Hong Kong ... not exactly tops on my personal list of meeting places. Virtual space makes me itchy—I like my reality real when I can get it. There's just something weird about doing real stuff in an imaginary environment, y'know? But a job is a job, so I had my chum Snow Tiger rig me up with some trodes and we jaunted off into virtuality.

For those of you who don't make the virtual trip to Hong Kong very often, the Magic Matrix is a virtual club—a private sculpted space in the Matrix where people can hold excessively secret meetings. We met our would-be employer in a system "conference room." One look at his icon told us just how secret he wanted to be—he was using the basic iconography provided by the Magic's own system, nothing individual or distinctive about it at all. Just a garden-variety humanoid form in monochrome—head, body, two arms and two legs, features sketched in just enough to keep from weirding out people who don't like talking to a blank oval. Clearly, this guy was taking no chances that somebody somewhere might remember a telling detail at an inconvenient time. That's one advantage of virtual meetings, I have to admit. You may have no idea what the guy you're talking to looks like in realspace, but he doesn't see your face, either. Anonymity doesn't get any better than this.

So the Johnson says he wants to know all about Wuxing's recent windfall from Dunkelzahn's will. Rumors of it had been circulating all around the Matrix for the past month: 200 million nuyen in cold, hard credsticks, to be used "at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer and principal shareholders." The Johnson wanted to know how Wuxing might be planning to spend the dragon's bounty, and how this little third-tier operation got into a powerful dragon's good graces. Normally I shy away from anything involving dragons, but with Dunkelzahn blown to microscopic fragments, I figured for once there wasn't much to worry about. So we settled on terms and shook virtual hands, and my buds and I went to work.

❸ Dunkelzahn isn't dead. He faked his death so he could keep working to save the world from behind the scenes. I mean, come on—don't we all know it's impossible to kill a great dragon?

❹ Believer

❶ Sure thing, pal. I bet Dunkelzahn and Elvis are yucking it up together at a little Stuffer Shack somewhere out on what used to be Route 66. Did I mention that the UCAS government implanted a mini-datajack in one of my molars? Every day they tell me what color socks to wear ...

❷ D. Bunker

The first part of the job was simple: gather up everything we could get about Wuxing, the will, or anything else related to them off the public datanets and other easily accessible sources. Snow Tiger sent out scads of knowbots and search daemons to scour the datanets, finding and organizing all public information on the corp and on the will with an emphasis on bequests that involved Wuxing Inc. The search programs collected a small mountain of news articles and public datafiles, all of which were waiting for us the next morning.

While Tiger sent out her Matrix grunts, I got on the horn to a friend of mine whose specific talents I knew would put us way ahead of the game. He goes by the name of Lo-Wang, and up until a few years back was a company man for Wuxing. Lo-Wang is the one thing the corps find most dangerous—a smart ex-wageslave with a grudge. He knows the corp and its top people better than a lot of them probably know themselves, so I knew he could give us some useful insights on whatever we turned up. And I knew he'd leap at any chance to do them dirt, especially long-term dirt with little chance of it ever getting traced back to him.

❸ Would this be Yen Lo-Wang, the "King of the Dead" himself?

❹ Hi-Lo

❺ The very same.

❻ China Doll

GRUNTWORK

Once we'd gotten all the public drek, we sifted through it for anything that might lead us in promising new directions. Snow Tiger'd turned up a fair number of haystacks, which had more than a few needles in them (they always do). That's the beauty of this kind of work—every step on the datatrail leads to something else, and sometimes the things you least expect to lead anywhere take you to some *real* interesting places.

From the copy of the corp's annual report (those things are always good for a laugh), we found out that Wuxing means "the Five Elements," and that Wuxing Inc.'s diverse interests lived up to its name. For an itty-bitty corp, Wuxing had an amazing number of divisions—though I suspect a lot of them were just a couple of guys doing the work of ten people and getting paid drek-all for it. In the "odd stuff you never think about" department, we found out that one of the corp's top four moneymakers is the division that sells those little packets of salted dried plums you find in Chinese markets. The other three cred-pullers are those little pin-head-sized doohickeys that go into datajacks, some kind of biochemical compound used in skillwires, and (this one was really bizarre) personal flotation tanks. (They're hot drek in the Free Enterprise Zone, where an awful lot of people have too much cred

and not enough to spend it on. Go figure.) The corp report also briefly mentioned a magical research department, but didn't give much beyond its existence and some vague promises of eventual profits.

We also turned up a little history of Wuxing Inc., and its role in the development of the Free Enterprise Zone. Seems this little mom-and-pop corplet had influence out of all proportion to its size ... which might explain why a powerful great dragon like Dunkelzahn would have cared drek about it, or even known it existed.

Wuxing Incorporated started out in the 1990s as an import/export business in Hong Kong, funneling goods to the Chinese mainland and elsewhere in the Pacific Rim. It also arranged cheap Chinese labor for companies moving into the area. The corp's founder, Wu Kuan-Lai, hailed from Kowloon in the New Territories. An astute businessman, he had a gift for sensing where the wind was going to blow next and the smarts to take advantage of it. He foresaw the eventual failure of China's efforts to control Hong Kong, and made sure his corp was Johnny-on-the-spot when the walls came tumbling down.

Even before the Chinese took Hong Kong back from the Brits in 1997, people had been saying that the rough-and-tumble freedom of Hong Kong would never mesh with Communist China's insistence on centralized control of everything. The prospect of Communist China imposing its iron-fisted rule over Hong Kong made the city's wealthiest inhabitants nervous as cats in a canoe. Most of them didn't believe China's promises to leave Hong Kong alone, and they made arrangements to run like bandits for Europe or the Americas if the worst happened.

For a few years after the turnover China played things hands-off, using Hong Kong as an "economic outreach center" to generate business that flowed into the People's Republic. By the turn of the millennium, though, the Chinese government was starting to feel the strain. Hong Kong, the New Territories and Taiwan all had a much higher standard of living as well as a lot more freedom than the rest of the mainland, and the average mainland Chinese resented it like hell. When masses of Chinese started pouring into the streets demanding liberty and decent wages, the old men in Beijing knew they had a problem on their hands. With the usual stupidity of dictators, they responded by oppressing the free instead of freeing the oppressed. Crackdowns on Hong Kong's freewheeling ways brought angry protests from citizens and from corporations with interests in the region. In 2015, the whole thing blew up in China's face—Hong Kong declared independence, with plenty of corporate encouragement. One of the loudest voices calling for independence was Wu Kuan-Lai's.

As the Chinese government began mobilizing its military, Wu and his company helped put together a pro-independence corporate council. The council members screamed for help to Hong Kong's old friend Britain, which sent scads of diplomats to keep the Chinese talking instead of moving troops. While the Chinese and the Brits argued over legal and diplomatic niceties, the corps secured their own power. By the time the diplomats got done talking, the corporate alliance controlled Hong Kong and Wuxing had made itself a pretty big fish in the Hong Kong pond. By mega-corporate standards, it was still pretty small—but it had money and land to build a spanking new headquarters, plus the free cred

to diversify its business interests. Over the next forty years, Wuxing Inc. became the mouthpiece for several smaller PacRim companies, as well as expanding its own markets.

● Wu Kuan-Lai's legendary foresight isn't entirely personal genius. Rumor has it that much of Wuxing's early business success came from Wu's close ties to the Triads. His "import/export" business gave cover to more than one Triad smuggling operation; nowadays, they launder their money through it.

● Golden Boy

● Skilled management wasn't the only thing driving Wuxing back then. The corp used the chaos created by the secession and the establishment of the Free Enterprise Zone to snap up a lot of smaller companies whose owners were looking to get out of Hong Kong. Wuxing bought up their property at pennies on the dollar, knowing full well that the situation would stabilize before long.

● HK Kid

● Wuxing also has a lot of influence with the "mini-dragons" of the Pacific Rim—Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. Kuan-Lai spent his whole life talking up a "Pacific Prosperity Group" strong enough to squeeze out the Japanese and guarantee success for other PacRim nations. Wuxing's current CEO is pushing the idea even harder, which makes him a favorite target for hangings-in-effigy among some of the Japanacorps.

● Fox-E

According to a 2017 newsfax article about the building of Wuxing's new HQ—whose true significance we didn't recognize at the time—Wu Kuan-Lai had personally inspected several potential sites and made the final choice. Info we turned up later told us that Wu didn't pick the site for its high property values. He had something else in mind—but I'll get to that.

The data search turned up one other interesting thing, though we didn't know what to make of it at first. In addition to the 200 million nuyen handed to Wuxing Inc., the company's chief monkey—Kuan-Lai's son, Wu Lung-Wai—got a statue grandiosely named "the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire." Tiger sent her electronic minions scampering off to search for references to the statue while we dissected the info we already had and figured out where to go sniffing next.

● For what it's worth, Lung-Wai went to school in Europe and the UCAS (he's a Harvard MBA). He's well-traveled, speaks five languages fluently without any help from lingua-chips, and has a rep for being all-around brilliant.

● Prof

● I've heard rumors that Wu Junior owes his smarts to a secret genetic program the Chinese were conducting in the early part of this century. Could he be some kind of genetic superman?

● Chimera

● Smoke and mirrors. Urban legend. Those genetics programs never produced anything, except possibly VITAS-1 if you believe the rumors. Besides, Wu Kuan-Lai didn't have enough pull with the

Beijing government to have gotten anything out of a program like that even if it existed. All those old dictators figured him for a dirty rotten capitalist.

❖ Doc

❖ Who says the old men in Beijing had any say in the matter? Money talks. And old Wu seems to have had pull with *somebody*.

❖ Nuyen Nick

THE DRAGON'S GIFTS

According to bank records, Dunkelzahn's 200 million nuyen showed up in the corporation's accounts on September 12th, more than two weeks after the reading of the will. The time lag struck me as odd, so I decided to check out the corp's top people, starting with Wu-Lung-Wai. Lucky me, I hit pay dirt right away. On September 9th he'd purchased a round trip suborbital ticket from Hong Kong to DeeCee and back. Hotel reservations confirmed his arrival, and his name was on the visitor's log in the lobby of the building occupied by the newly founded Draco Foundation. A few questions and a little cred dropped in the right laps in DeeCee confirmed that Wu Lung-Wai had indeed paid a visit to the Foundation and spent the better part of an afternoon talking to Nadja Daviar. During that visit, he also apparently picked up the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. He carried the statue with him on the ride back to Hong Kong, in blatant violation of suborbital flight regs concerning the size of carry-on luggage. No one seems to have made an issue of it.

❖ A lot of people would pay mucho dinero for a transcript of those closed-door conversations with Daviar. Wu wasn't the only one she saw in private. Did Daviar give the chosen few secret instructions from their scaly benefactor? Did she ask for future favors for the UCAS and/or the Draco Foundation? Does anyone know what might be going on here?

❖ Sims

❖ It's all part of a plot to take over the world. The dragons and the metahumans and the magicians are all in it together. Get ready for the war, 'cause it's coming!

❖ Minuteman

❖ The only "plot" is in your tiny excuse for a brain, Minuteman. Maybe Daviar knew these people personally. I mean, how long has she been Dunkelzahn's voice? Anybody he knew, she did. Maybe she just wanted to say a few personal words, away from the glare of trideocams.

❖ Elinor

❖ Looks like nobody knows nuthin'. As usual.

❖ Diablo

While I was busy with Wu Lung-Wai, Tiger tracked down the distribution of the 200 million. She discovered that the bulk of the money disappeared into a hidden account that, on paper, belonged to a dry-cleaning supplies business. (Tiger's real good at sniffing out stuff like that.) She also found evidence of several

other deposits to that account within the same three-day period. Tracing some of those deposits back, she started running into walls—and walls don't tend to stop Snow Tiger unless they're really thick and strong. Meanwhile, Lo-Wang had been fishing for useful rumors that might be circulating in Wuxing's corporate hallways, and had come up bone-dry. That was also real unusual. His usual contacts in the corp either didn't know much or weren't telling. Clearly, we'd stumbled on something major—the sheer level of stonewalling told us that. What it might be, though, we still hadn't a clue.

We'd gone about as far as we could down the money road, at least until Snow Tiger pulled a few more electronic rabbits out of her hat. So I started sifting through the data her search daemons had turned up on Wu Lung-Wai's new objet d'art.

THE JADE DRAGON OF WIND AND FIRE

Finding info on the Jade Dragon took some serious digging. Starting with Tiger's leads, I resorted to more conventional methods for finding out the rest, poring through reference material and calling in favors from friends in the antiquities biz.

The "Jade Dragon" isn't a dragon, but a carving of three fish leaping out of the water. The statue weighs a good 25 kilos and has a value somewhere in the seven-figure range according to the will. From what I eventually dug up, I'd say its actual value is impossible to estimate ... and I'm talking more than just money. I swiped a picture of it from the company that assessed various valuables given in the will; the sheer beauty of the thing is enough to make an art collector sell his soul for it three times over. And when you consider its potential for—but I'm getting ahead of myself.

❖ Fine. Tease me and leave me hanging. See if I care.

❖ Cosmo

❖ The instant-gratification crowd has now given up on this post in sheer disgust. Those of us with functioning brains will keep reading.

❖ Tin Lizzie

The statue has a story that goes something like this. In ancient China, during the reign of the First Emperor, lived a sculptor named Chan Lo. The Emperor had recently acquired a sizable piece of fine green jade, and wanted a statue carved from it fit to decorate the Imperial Palace. He summoned Chan Lo and ordered him to carve the jade into a dragon of Wind and Fire.

Chan Lo carefully considered how to sculpt the dragon. He considered everything about dragons: their shape, texture, appearance, sound. Then he considered the texture and nature of the piece of jade. He tapped and stroked the stone, and listened carefully to the sounds it made. The sounds he heard were *pah-tah*, *pah-tah* and *shooosh*, which didn't seem like the sounds a dragon would make.

❖ What is the point of this bedtime story?

❖ Jaxon

❖ Read to the end of the paragraph, drekhead.

❖ Shadow Dancer

❖ Chan Lo's story reminds me of that quote from Michelangelo about how he carved an elephant by taking a block of marble and chipping away everything that didn't look like an elephant. Or maybe that was Leonardo? Anyway, a lot of sculptors think of their work as freeing an image from within the stone.

❖ Pygmalion

❖ All truly great artists have the gift of Sight.

❖ Starfall

❖ The ideas of jade and sound are strongly connected in Chinese culture. Their words for "jade" and "sound" are practically identical.

❖ Webster

As much as Chan Lo tried to see a dragon within the fine block of jade, he could not escape the sounds of the jade calling to him, suggesting another shape to his mind's eye. He sat for days, looking at the jade and considering its form. Finally he summoned his apprentice and set to work. He worked tirelessly for weeks, resting and eating little. When the statue was finished he brought it to the Emperor's court, all of whom were gathered to see the masterpiece unveiled. Chan Lo removed the covering cloth to reveal not a dragon of wind and fire, but three carp dancing in the waves.

The Emperor was outraged. "Where is my dragon of Wind and Fire?" he demanded.

Chan Lo prostrated himself before the mighty Emperor of all China, saying, "Forgive me, O Emperor, but I did not see or hear a dragon within the jade. I saw and heard only these three fish from the gardens of the Celestial Palace."

The angry Emperor ordered Chan Lo imprisoned for disobedience while he considered his ultimate punishment. So furious was he that he decided to sleep on the matter and let his dreams show him the sculptor's fate. That night the Emperor dreamed of carp dancing in the clear waters of the garden in the Celestial Palace, and heard them playing: *pah-tah, pah-*

tah, shooosh. He awoke the next morning unsure of the meaning of his dream. He considered long and hard into the day, and finally went to meditate in the palace gardens.

As he rested by the reflecting pool, the Emperor heard a sound: *pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh.* He looked around and saw Chan Lo's apprentice, gently polishing the sculpture of the three fish that had been set near the entrance of the garden. Seeing this, the Emperor made his decision and summoned Chan Lo before him.

The Emperor offered Chan Lo his humble apologies. "You were wise," he said, "to see and hear the true form of the jade. In my arrogance, I tried to impose my will upon the stone. But you saw the stone's destiny. I will keep this fine statue as a reminder that we must sculpt the stone where it must go, and not where we might wish it to." And he gave Chan Lo a generous payment and sent him back to his work. And the statue known as the Dragon of Wind and Fire reminded the Emperor of all China that things are not always as they seem, or as we might wish them to be.

I got that story from a bunch of different sources, including a friend of mine at Hong Kong University. Minor details differ from version to version, but the basic events—and the moral—remain the same. No one who knew the story believed that statue really existed; they all thought it was just some Chinese folk tale. A couple of antiquities experts I know tell me that if Wu Lung-Wai's statue is the genuine article, it's priceless. Anything that old, made of that much top-quality jade, can pretty much command its own price.

Its greatest value, though, may lie in something else: magic. Our search for data about the statue turned up some interesting documentation from Wuxing Inc.'s own internal files, which Snow Tiger said were heavily encrypted with cascading party ice. That seemed like an awful lot of protection to be putting around memos that, when it comes right down to it, don't say a whole fragging lot. It seems certain folks at Wuxing, Inc. don't want any word about the statue's possible magical properties getting out—even if the word is incomprehensible.



From: tsaitao@research.wuxing

To: president@wuxing

Re: Chan Lo research

Sir: Our investigations of the subject have proved inconclusive. It has an undeniably strong spirit-pattern, but the pattern is unlike anything any of us have ever encountered. I respectfully resubmit my request for additional consultants.

—Dr. Tsai Tao

From: president@wuxing

To: tsaitao@research.wuxing

Re: Chan Lo research

Request denied. Research will continue as scheduled.

—Wu

❖ That's it?! Just "request denied"? Not even a hint about why ... and in an encrypted internal document, yet! Whatever they're looking for, they really don't want anybody else getting a clue.

❖ Bingo

❖ You know who Tsai Tao is, don't you? He's a top-flight magical scholar; used to teach at Hong Kong University until a couple of years ago. The story he gave out then was, he was retiring to write a book on the ancient art of feng shui—geomancy—in the age of the Awakening. Nobody's seen or heard anything about him since.

❖ Masterson

❖ Until now.

❖ Tin Lizzie

❖ You've got the wrong guy, Masterson. The retired scholar's name is Tso-yu Tao, and his feng shui manuscript has just been accepted by White Eagle publishing in New York. The Dr. Tsai Tao of the memos could be anything from a wageslave with a little whammy to a complete quack.

❖ La Marquise

As with the money trail, information about the statue pretty much dead-ended right there. We did learn one other thing, though, that shows how important the statue is. Wu Lung-Wai has refused numerous offers to buy it, including an offer from Lofwyr. That's right, Lofwyr. Lo-Wang heard that the honorable president of Wuxing Inc. politely refused Lofwyr's offer of a billion nuyen. Lo-Wang also heard that Wu refused requests by museums and universities all over the fragging planet to examine the statue and learn more about its origins. Whatever its secrets, Wu Lung-Wai wants them for himself.

❖ Is this Wu guy cracked?! Who turns down a *billion* nuyen—and from Lofwyr, who doesn't take kindly to anyone telling him "no"?

Wu's either crazy, or he's sitting on something powerful enough to make a dragon blink.

❖ Brother P-Touch

❖ I suspect the asking price grew in the telling, but if this thing has some kind of big mojo then even five billion isn't enough to buy it. Turning down a dragon isn't something you do lightly, so I'd bet Wu isn't keeping it just because it goes well with his decor.

❖ Winger

In the past few weeks Wu Lung-Wai has made personal visits by helicopter to the research site. Snow Tiger also found fragmentary records of several secure phone calls to the site—she tried to tap into one and nearly got brain-fried. Then she

tried to get transcripts, but ran into walls so solid that none of her usual tricks could punch through them. About a week ago, Lo-Wang heard that the statue was being moved to the president's office in the main HQ in downtown Hong Kong. Security around that building and that office is as tight as it gets.

❖ So is this thing some kind of magical focus?

❖ Lee

❖ Looks that way. From Dr. Tsai's comments, it's pretty unusual but definitely enchanted. I'd love to get a look at it.

❖ MissTick

❖ Good luck getting through Wuxing's security.

❖ Talon

❖ How can this thing be magical if it was made thousands of years before the Awakening? There was no magic back then. Or was there?

❖ Moxie

❖ It's like this, Moxie old thing—we don't fraggin' know. Everybody's got a theory, but we've got no facts. The problem with magical archeology (an infant science at best) is that there's no clear physical evidence—and astral evidence is inconclusive. Right now, we can pretty much figure magic worked *to a limited degree* before December 2011, assuming that the bona fide cases of "paranormal phenomena" in the twentieth century were actually pre-Awakening uses of magic. And before all you professional skeptics say anything, I'm talking only about those documented cases that *could not* be ascribed to any known phenomenon no matter how hard people tried—so don't give me drek about falling for urban legends and fantasy stories, 'kay? The way I figure, back then magic was much harder to do because there wasn't nearly so much of it as there is now. The ambient magic level was a lot lower, so you needed lots more talent, concentration and effort to sling mojo.

The question is, how far back does this effect go? Was it possible—albeit difficult—to perform magic in 1600 BCE? If so, was it easier or harder than in the late twentieth century? We don't know. Bits and pieces of historical and archeological evidence suggest that the utility of magic fluctuated several times in different places around the world, which might account for certain mythological and legendary events. Magic became more powerful in a certain place and time, allowing latent magicians and adepts to perform legendary feats that we recall as the acts of mythic heroes. As to what might have caused these changes in the magic level, we have no clue (frag, we still don't have a clue about what caused the Awakening).

So maybe there could have been enough magic back in ancient China to enchant a jade statue. Would the enchantment be anything like what we're familiar with now? Maybe. Would it still work after all this time? Maybe. Or maybe not. Too fragging many maybes and not enough answers.

❖ Silicon Mage

❖ I want to know what this thing's supposed to be able to do. According to the story, it doesn't *do* anything. So what's the big fragging deal?

❖ Pokerface

❖ Don't you get it? The whole story is about being true to one's nature. Chan Lo couldn't carve a dragon in the jade because a dragon wasn't there. Obviously, this statue has some powerful magic that lets gifted people use it to see through illusions to Truth.

❖ Starfall

❖ Oh, obviously. Why didn't I think of that? Silly me, thinking it was just a pretty piece of artwork.

❖ D. Bunker

❖ No, no, no. The story is just a story, made up to disguise the statue's true nature. "Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire"—get it? The statue lets magicians raise super-powerful fire and air elementals.

❖ Ariel

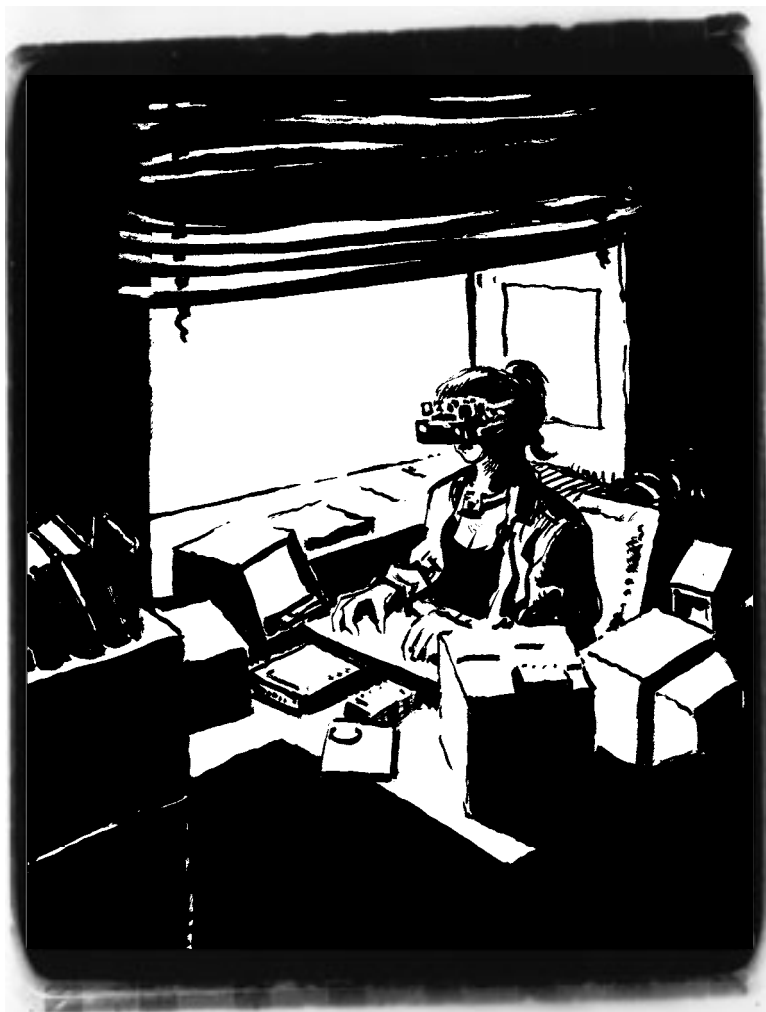
❖ Dear, oh dear. What *have* they been putting in the water?

❖ La Marquise

THE SECRET WILL

About the same time I was running out of info on the Jade Dragon, Snow Tiger managed to climb over a wall or two and got us back on the money trail. The hidden dry cleaners' account wasn't the only one of Wuxing Inc.'s secret nest eggs to see some activity during the three days after Wu Lung-Wai's visit to DeeCee. Several other accounts saw major action, mostly investors putting cash into new ventures that the corporation was touting to its stockholders.

Several major shareholders and investors, including Mr. Wu, received more than 70 million nuyen from unknown sources. A



little deeper digging gave us some names, which I'm still trying to figure out. House Beautiful home-cleaning service; Lysis, Inc., makers of synthetic liners for shock gloves; the Cinnamon Swirl Gourmet Baked Goods Company; NachtMusik, a little simchip label specializing in virtual re-creations of jam sessions with famous jazz musicians; and Webster-Gannet, a factory that processes paint sludge. A few more transactions led to anonymous numbered accounts in the Caribbean League, Europe and Zurich-Orbital. And those were just the ones Tiger managed to crack. Plenty of others eluded her search programs—the programs mysteriously crashed, or failed to report anything. She told me she suspects a complex virus or even a semi-autonomous knowbot might be acting as a kind of "Matrix watchdog" to prevent anyone from digging where they shouldn't.

❖ Hunter-killer knowbots? Is that possible?

❖ Donner

❖ Very. You'd really have to know what you were doing to program them, but a smart decker could create a kind of "spore"—a structured, self-replicating program that seeks out certain kinds

of activities in the Matrix and interrupts them. The bots could exist on spare processing cycles “scavenged” from various host systems, almost like a parasite. If they were good enough, SKs like that would be more than a match even for most smart frames.

❖ Jerusalem

❖ They’re real, all right. I met one of them while doing a little digging into the First Wyrn’s estate. I was handling a tricky intrusion and got jumped by ... something. It’s difficult to describe. It was fast and adaptive—reminded me of cascading ice. I held it off, but I didn’t want it to give us both away by setting the system on alert—I don’t think it belonged there any more than I did—so I got out of there pronto. I haven’t seen another one since, but I’ve also had other matters to attend to.

❖ Red Wraith

❖ Doesn’t take a Matrix genius to figure out where those things came from. The dragon set them up to cover his tracks.

❖ G-Force

❖ Maybe, but did Dunkelzahn have deckers that good working for him? I’ve heard the wyrn was fascinated by the ‘trix, but a trick like this requires the capabilities of a top computer corps or one of the megas. These “watch-bots” might have been whipped up by someone else with an interest in keeping secret some of the doings involving the dragon’s cred. The Draco Foundation springs to mind ... also the UCAS government, which might have been looking to hide the President-elect’s dirty laundry. Time to go out fishing and catch one of these things so I can figure out where it came from. More anon.

❖ FastJack

In addition to the transfer of funds, Tiger traced a redistribution of 12 percent of Wuxing’s stock that went to different owners from a blind holding company. All of the transfers took place after the Dunkelzahn’s death, the vast majority of them after the reading of his will. The stock redistribution fortified Wu Lung-Wai’s hold over the board of directors and the corporation, while maintaining a balance of power among the other major shareholders. I couldn’t help but recall the precise wording of Dunkelzahn’s bequest—that the 200 million nuyen be used “at the sole discretion of the Chief Executive Officer and the principal shareholders.” With his hold on the corp tightened by a stock reshuffle and the other principal shareholders canceling each other out in voting power, Wu Lung-Wai is now in a position of virtually unlimited control over Wuxing Inc.’s new cash flow. Coincidence? I don’t think so.

❖ So Wu gets effective control within days after meeting Daviar ... who presumably passed on to him some kind of Famous Last Words from dear departed Dunkelzahn. So whatever Wuxing Inc. does with the 200 million, it’s a sure bet that Dunkelzahn wanted it done. Which leaves us with one question: WHAT THE FRAG DID DUNKELZAHN WANT?????

❖ Dazed&Confused

During this same time period—three days after his return from the meeting with Nadja Daviar—Wu Lung-Wai unveiled a dynamic new business plan to Wuxing’s board of directors. The nitty-gritty details of the business plan are locked up tighter than Tibet, but we got our mitts on a few scraps. First, Wuxing needs a huge influx of venture capital (which they seem to have gotten, judging from the bank-account datatrail). Second, a big chunk of money is going into a whole new area—plant breeding. Not Big Agriculture, nothing to do with edibles—we’re talking hybrid flowers, trees, that kind of thing. Hardier strains of cottonwood, according to one rumor Lo-Wang picked up. Third, another big chunk of money is going into the existing biochem division, to “diversify the product spread in this market area” (to quote it in corpspeak). No details about what kind of new biochem products they’re after—just a general beefing-up. And not a fragging cent—apparently—is going into the magical-research division, despite the acquisition of the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire.

❖ Someone as powerful as Dunkelzahn must have had some kind of contingency plan in the event of his death, and some parts of his master plan have got to be less than legal. That means handling things quietly, behind the scenes. So the dragon puts some stuff in his will for show, then leaves everything else to Daviar and the Draco Foundation along with explicit instructions about what to do with it. Money starts changing hands behind the electron curtain and no one is the wiser about where it came from.

❖ Ariocho

❖ How do we know it’s Dunkelzahn’s plan? The Draco Foundation or Daviar could be operating on their own. Even if the dragon left instructions with Daviar, how do we know she’s following them? Maybe she’s carrying out the Big D’s last wishes, or maybe she’s running some game on her own. We’ve no way to tell which.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

“It’s all about dollars and sense”

❖ You’re missing the point, people. Everyone’s asking “who?” when we should be asking “why?” Why distribute money (overtly or otherwise) to these particular corps? Why offer money for certain goals? Why these items to these people? Answer some of those questions and you’re well on your way to figuring out the “who” of it.

❖ Cobalt Blue

❖ I can’t speak to motives, but the cred pouring into these lower-tier corporations as well as the conditional awards and other “carrots” held out by the Draco Foundation will have a profound influence on corporate policy, research & development, marketing and all aspects of what these companies do. Bottom line, Dunkelzahn ends up posthumously shaping the world’s economic and technological future. But why? For what? We don’t know, and that’s the real problem.

❖ The Chromed Accountant

“It’s all about dollars and sense”

THE DRAGON LINES

So after a few weeks' investigation, we had a picture of a little corp with a big cash influx and a priceless work of art worth scads of money—and maybe a lot more, magic-wise. We had a corp exec spending quality time with the public voice of a deceased great dragon, and coming out days later with the most ambitious expansion plan his little operation had ever seen ... and the power to get things done his way without question. And we had a guy so concerned about his pretty new statue that he rode shotgun on it all the way from DeeCee to Hong Kong, had some in-house talent analyze it for magical capability, and then moved it to the highest-security spot in his personal empire—his own office. We definitely had a picture of something—but it was like one of those huge jigsaws with big enough holes left in it that we couldn't see what the whole picture was. We needed to find a few more pieces.

On a wild hunch, I dropped a word in the ear of a mage buddy of mine and asked her if there might be anything special—magically speaking—about Wuxing Inc.'s HQ site. That article about old Wu Kuan-Lai personally selecting the HQ site and being ungodly picky about it was stuck in the back of my head ... and I wondered if it was just a desire to look at his pretty statue every day that had prompted Wu the Younger to decorate his office with it. In this business you learn to pay attention to hunches about nagging details, because they tend to pay off in spades. This one sure did.

The mage, Meimei, gave me some fascinating lowdown on Wuxing's HQ. It seems the site is smack dab on top of a major crossing point for what the locals call feng lung, or "dragon lines"—that's mana lines, for all you non-Chinese. The dragon lines are ribbons of pure mana—what the Chinese call chi, or "life energy"—that flow in specific pathways depending on things like the contours of the ground and other aspects of the landscape. When dragon lines cross, powerful chi collects at the juncture—power that a magician who knows what he's doing can tap like water from a well. The exact nature of the chi that collects at any given juncture is shaped by the overall qualities of the place.

❖ Lei Kung is wrong about one thing: chi and mana are not the same force. Chi is made of the polarities of Yin and Yang, and the tension between them provides the life force. Chi flows through the Earth just as it flows through our bodies. It has nothing to do with astral space or any such thing.

❖ Deng-Xiao

❖ Sure it does. When are people going to get it through their heads that the astral isn't some mythical "elsewhere"? It's right where the "real world" is—just a step or two sideways, that's all. Mana, chi, whatever flows through the astral, *and* the Earth, *and* our bodies, and every other fragging thing in Creation.

❖ Hornblower

❖ A rose by any other name, chum. Mana, chi, ka ... it all works the same, doesn't it?

❖ BeWitched

❖ The fine art of judging the flow and pooling of chi is known as feng shui, meaning "wind and water." Some people also call it geomancy. Geomancers look at different aspects of the landscape: how the geographic features are positioned, what direction hills, rivers and other features face, how man-made objects and natural obstacles relate to each other and so forth to determine how all those conditions channel and affect the flow of chi. A site that allows chi to flow unhampered is considered to have "good feng shui"—a place like that is what we'd call a power site. A place that chokes off the flow of chi can cause it to settle and spoil, like a blocked artery or vein in the body. This means bad feng shui—a polluted reservoir of magical power that can cause sickness and bad luck.

People pay professional geomancers large consulting fees to study building sites and plans to make sure that they fit into the natural chi flow and don't cause bad feng shui. Some even adjust the construction and landscaping to take maximum advantage of the feng lung and strengthen the chi flow. I wonder if old Wu Kuan-Lai did something like that?

❖ Lilibet

❖ Skilled geomancers are in high demand in Hong Kong and the Chinese Kingdoms. Almost nobody bothers to put up a building without first making sure that the entrance is facing in the right direction and the arrangement of the walls is pleasing to the natural flow of mana. Some people even rearrange the furniture to make sure nothing's out of whack.

❖ NeonRose

❖ Feng shui and other similar geomantic arts do affect the flow of manalines and can influence an area's background count, which can have positive or negative effects on the practice of magic in that spot. Nobody has proved that too much collected mana brings "good luck" or "bad luck" of any kind, but I'm the type who doesn't like to take chances. Considering how much we still don't know about magic, I'd say it pays to listen to your local geomancer.

❖ Talon

Wuxing's HQ was designed and built to take maximum advantage of the local chi flow. Not only is it sitting on the crossing point for several mondo huge dragon lines, but everything about it—the size and shape of the building, the materials used in its construction, the design of its exterior, the landscaping, even the lobby decor—all were chosen to enhance the chi flow and turn the corp HQ into a major power site. Interestingly enough, local stories about old Wu claim he at least believed in, and may have practiced, the art of feng shui. No one can confirm whether old Wu or Wu Lung-Wai have any magical talent, but if Wu Lung-Wai is magically gifted it would explain why Dunkelzahn left him a magical item of unknown power and origin. Of course, it made us wonder what Young Wu might be planning to do with all the magical energy at his disposal ...

❖ It also makes you wonder how old Wu knew that his son would be getting a powerful magical object that would let him tap into the power in all those crisscrossing mana lines. He picked the site in, what, 2017? And Dunkelzahn's gift turns up forty years later ...

❖ Stoneboy

❖ Honest to god, some people would see Deep Significance in carpet lint. Old Wu might perfectly well have wanted his corp HQ to be on a power site without it having anything to do with the Jade Dragon. To suggest that he picked a magically powerful location simply and solely because he somehow "knew" that forty years later a dragon would leave his son a giant talisman is just silly.

❖ Skeptic

❖ How much power are we talking about here? A real BIG fireball? Another Ghost Dance? What?

❖ Hexen

❖ That's difficult to say. The manalines and nexus points amplify the amount of mana that can be tapped, but the real "choke point" for channeling magical energy is the magician himself. Try to grab too much power and it will overload your body just like too much current overloads a circuit. A lot of magical techniques and equipment are designed to "insulate" the magician from energy overload and let him channel more power safely. Theoretically, an almost limitless supply of magical power exists to be tapped—but how much of it can you handle at once?

❖ Silicon Mage

❖ We have no idea what (if anything) the Jade Dragon does, so it's a moot point. We'll just have to wait until the corp decides to play that particular trump card, and hope they aren't aiming for us at the time.

❖ Magister

THE FOUR COINS OF LUCK

So now we knew something else about Wuxing, Inc. Not only did it have a ton of new money, it also had magical power to burn ... potentially, at least. Thanks to Dunkelzahn's bequests, the mom-and-pop Hong Kong corplet seemed poised to hit the big time in more ways than one. We could have stopped at this point—we were still quite some ways from knowing everything there was to know about Wuxing Inc.'s future plans, but we'd scammed enough to make our Johnson happy. We knew they were diversifying into biogenetics, beefing up biochem research, and probably doing a lot of other drek that the Johnson could sniff out in time. We knew that they had more tentacles than an octopus, most of it camouflaged in apparently unrelated businesses, which meant that this little corp was a lot bigger than it looked. We also knew what they weren't doing—pouring any of their newfound assets into magical research, in spite of the fact that they had a hot magical item on their hands. Like the classic dog that didn't bark, that omission pointed to something—namely, that whatever resources had to be going to magical research were

doing so waaay off the books. (They *had* to be doing something in the magic field—only idiots would look a gift horse like the Jade Dragon in the mouth, and Wu Lung-Wai is anything but an idiot. The level of the pretense that nothing was going on in that department argued for either incredible paranoia or expectations of hitting the jackpot—or both.)

But I still wasn't satisfied. I wanted to see the connections, and I couldn't yet. My mother used to tell me that curiosity would be the death of me someday, and she may yet be right. Sheer curiosity kept me digging for more when I should have been reporting to the Johnson and collecting a fat credstick. I still haven't found the answers I wanted ... instead, I found a lot more trouble than any of us had bargained for.

Someday I'll learn. If I survive.

Snow Tiger and I went back to the datatrail, looking for any little side streets we might have blown by the first time around. We started with the first of Wuxing's hidden accounts, the dry-cleaning supply business. We checked the names of the owner, the VP, anybody who looked like they might be management (which wasn't much in a business this small) and came up with nothing. Then, as a last stab in the dark, Snow Tiger went crawling through the owner's personal correspondence and found a trash file from mid-2056. She managed to reconstruct most of it, and found a brief note of thanks to one Sharon Chiang-Wu for the hosting of a 60th birthday party for a Mr. Chun Do Kim. Mr. Kim's name rang an immediate bell; Chun Do Kim just happens to be the Senior Executive Vice President in charge of Wuxing Inc.'s biochem division. Among other things, the letter mentioned that Ms. Chiang-Wu's "kind efforts on our behalf have all but assured Mr. Kim's continued generosity toward our enterprises. We therefore confidently expect to expand our business to an even greater extent than previously planned."

To translate polite business-speak into layman's terms, Mr. Kim was so pleased by his birthday party that he decided to keep funneling money into the dry-cleaning biz whose owner had thrown him the bash, with a lot of help from Ms. Sharon Chiang-Wu. So here we had a lady none of us had heard of before, who was in a position to hold an important social event for a bigwig at Wuxing Inc.—which, on paper, had nothing to do with the little dry cleaning business. And I mean important; Koreans regard the 60th birthday as a special milestone, so to help throw a Korean exec's Happy 60th is quite the responsibility. I definitely wanted to know who Ms. Chiang-Wu was, so I went looking ... and found out that she's married to Wu Lung-Wai, chief exec of Wuxing.

Snow Tiger had set up her original search of documentation connected with Dunkelzahn's will to flag the name "Wu," and we'd gotten the mountain of extra drek that you usually get when you run a search with parameters that broad. After a quick scan we'd set aside everything about people named Wu outside of Hong Kong, figuring there wasn't anything useful in it. Luckily, Snow Tiger and I are both pack rats by instinct; we hate to throw anything away, in case it comes in handy at an unexpected moment. This was one of those moments. I went back through the drek, looking for Sharon Chiang-Wu, and I found her. Or rather, I found what Dunkelzahn left her—a little something called the Third Coin of Luck.

❖ Rumor has it that Ms. Chiang-Wu is not popular with the upper echelons of Wuxing, partly because she's a woman with considerable power and authority, something many traditional-minded Chinese aren't too comfortable with. Also partly because she's ABC.

❖ China Doll

❖ ABC?

❖ Zippy

❖ American-Born Chinese. As far as non-American Chinese are concerned, being American-born makes you just as much a "decadent Westerner" as any other skag from the other side of the planet, even if you were raised by very traditional Chinese parents and speak the language as well as anyone. Trust me, I know.

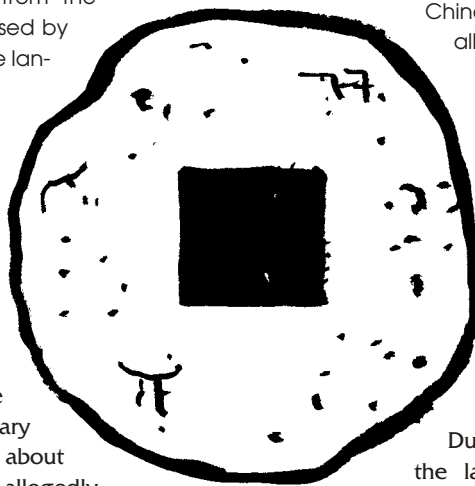
❖ China Doll

According to the will, the Third Coin of Luck is a valuable antique worth nearly a million nuyen for its age alone. It's a Chinese bronze coin, at least two thousand years old, with a square hole drilled in the center and faint Chinese characters on the surface.

Interested to know if the coin, like the Jade Dragon, might have more than monetary value, I went back to Meimei and asked her about it. She collects stories and folk tales about allegedly magical objects, on the theory that at least ten percent of the old stories are actually true. (Meimei picks up some interesting stuff that way.) The story that goes with the coin—coins, I should say—is pretty interesting in itself.

According to the folk tale, the Dragon Kings (lung-wang) gave the Four Coins of Luck to humanity "long ago in the distant mists of time." Each coin represents a different type of good luck: the first, wealth; the second, longevity; the third, fertility; and the fourth, general good fortune. The Dragon Kings were agents of the Celestial Emperor and the rulers of the four seas that surrounded the known world of China. They were also the masters of the rain on which the land depended. Each Dragon King lived in a crystal palace at the bottom of his respective sea.

The coins grant their bearers the gifts of wealth, long life, etcetera and together can make even the humblest man an emperor. Depending on which version of the story you hear, the Four Coins are either outright gifts from the Celestial Court to humankind, or they're a test of some sort—you know, to see what people will do to get unlimited luck by "unfair" magical means. Sharon Chiang-Wu had become the proud owner of the Third Coin of Luck, the coin of fertility. So, assuming that it was the genuine article and that the coins actually possessed the magical properties attributed to them by legend, Wu Lung-Wai had connections to two powerful magical items. What could Dunkelzahn have intended the Wus to do with them ... and did Lung-Wai and his wife intend to carry out the dragon's plans?



These were the Big Questions for fragging sure. I wasn't certain I really wanted them answered anymore ... and anyway, I had no idea where to start or what kind of hornet's nest I'd stir up if I went poking in the wrong place. So I decided to try a simpler question (or so I thought): did the other three coins still exist, and if so, who had them?

❖ Lady Chiang got the fertility coin, eh? Wonder what message the old wyrm was trying to send ...

❖ DV8R

❖ Fertility means more than what you're thinking in Chinese cosmology, chummer. It's life and growth of all kinds, similar to the kind of magic used in healing spells. Hey, that's an idea. Could these coins be spell foci?

❖ WindDragon

❖ Maybe. Maybe not. We have no evidence either way.

❖ Wayland

We got no joy on the Fourth Coin of Luck, but the First and Second Coins also turned up in Dunkelzahn's will. The Second Coin of Luck went to the dragon Lung. Dunkelzahn bequeathed the First Coin of Luck to the last person anybody'd suspect—a fisherman named Sun Yat-sun who lived in Hong Kong's harbor district. According to one of Mr. Sun's nosier and more talkative neighbors, Sun Yat-sun had recently gotten a hand-delivered package from someone unknown to anyone else in the neighborhood—a little package, well-wrapped, that just might have been the right size to contain a coin. So Lo-Wang and I went to check it out.

The Hong Kong harbor district has only gotten more and more crowded since the troubles on the mainland started. A lot of boat people, refugees from the fighting between various Chinese warlords, come here to find shelter. The harbor is jammed full of junks, houseboats and other mismatched craft. Except for the occasional modern boat or tug, it looks almost the same as it must have more than a hundred years ago.

To get to Sun Yat-sun's boat, an old junk farther out in the harbor, we had to climb over the network of boats, gangways and ladders that make this part of the harbor a kind of floating village. Strangers are an uncommon sight in places like that, and we drew our fair share of curious stares. Sun Yat-sun reminded me a bit of my grandfather—small and shrunken, but spry for his age. He took care of the boat with the help of his daughter and her younger children. He greeted us and asked us in for tea, which we accepted. After the first cup (proper etiquette is super-important when dealing with Chinese, especially elderly Chinese), we got down to business.

To my surprise, Mr. Sun cheerfully admitted having received the coin. He had no idea it had come from Dunkelzahn—the accompanying note said only that it was the First Coin of Luck.

According to the delivery receipt, the package had been sent from Prince Edward Island in the UCAS.

- ❖ PEI ... that's where Dunkelzahn's old estate is. Maybe he stashed a lot of stuff out there. Anyone interested in a treasure hunt?
- ❖ Pengu
- ❖ Forget it, omae. By now the UCAS feds have gone over every square inch of that place. If there was anything there to find, they already found it.
- ❖ Winger

Mr. Sun knew the legend of the coin, and clearly hoped it would bring him some much-needed wealth. He told us it was supposed to be bad luck to spend the coin or sell it—it could only be given away, otherwise the Dragon Kings would be angry. I asked if I could see it, and after a second's hesitation he said yes. As the old man took the coin out of an inside coat pocket, the door of the boat's small cabin burst open and gunfire sprayed the room.

I don't know how he did it, but Lo-Wang grabbed me just as the door caved in and threw me to the floor out of harm's way. The spray of bullets cut Sun Yat-sun down in a shower of blood. While I caught my breath, Yen Lo-Wang popped up from a crouch just long enough to fire two shots into one of the gunmen in the doorway. The gunman jerked and staggered back, falling out of sight. His buddy tracked Lo-Wang with his machine pistol, but before he could fire I toasted him with a flame spell.

Lo-Wang stepped over to examine the bodies while I went to Mr. Sun. He was beyond the reach of any healing spell I knew. I spotted the coin between his fingers and picked it up just as Lo-Wang turned toward me, holding up a small paper charm.

"Hatchet men," he said without emotion. I tried not to gulp. Hatchet men are traditional Triad assassins, which meant the Triads were after the coin. They hadn't been expecting anyone to be here but old Mr. Sun and his family, or we'd have had a lot tougher time taking them out. Those guys are no joke to tangle with. We cleared out before anyone else showed up to investigate the gunfire. A few frightened faces peered out from behind closed curtains as we left.

- ❖ What's Lei Kung covering up here? The Hong Kong police found no bodies on the boat except for the old man and his family. Maybe the Sons of Thunder greased them and made up this "assassins" story to cover their tracks.
- ❖ Doubting Thomas
- ❖ I know Lei Kung. He's not the type of slag who kills helpless old men and women. Besides, everyone knows that Triad activity often gets "accidentally" left out of reports filed by the Hong Kong police.
- ❖ China Doll
- ❖ So why did Dunkelzahn give this old geezer such a valuable item? He must have known somebody would smoke the old man

for it, which means the wyrm all but killed the poor skag himself. Why? And what about the last coin? Who has that? The Draco Foundation? Daviar?

❖ MesoStim

When we got back from the harbor, we found Snow Tiger waiting with a look that said trouble. Without a word, she punched up a newsfeed on the trideo screen and let us read.

HONG KONG •

Mr. Daniel Kwan, an executive with Minh-Pao Imports, died late last night in an apparent industrial accident. Mr. Kwan was working late in one of the company's dockside warehouses when some of the volatile chemicals stored at the site exploded. The resulting fire gutted the warehouse, but firefighters were able to contain damage to the surrounding buildings. Mr. Kwan's remains were identified by the Coroner's Department through forensic magic. The police are continuing to investigate the possibility of arson.

We looked at her, not understanding. "I'm not sure," she said in a small voice, "but I think that's our Johnson."

Good old Snow Tiger. Her obsession with knowing who she's working for had given us a little warning—maybe enough to save our necks. If Kwan was our Johnson and the Triads—or someone else—had geeked him, then we'd gotten into something a lot deeper than any of us had expected. And it was time to get out.

I put in a call to a friend of mine who knows a lot about local Triad operations. I told him to put the word out that I had a certain item for sale that I'd picked up in the harbor district. A few hours later, a little bird told me some buyers were interested, so we set a place and time to meet.

I've got an hour and twenty minutes before I have to be there. Maybe an hour and twenty minutes to live, I don't know. We'll see how it goes. Hopefully the coin will bring me better luck than it brought to Sun Yat-sun. Funny, I kind of wish it was the Second Coin and not the First ... what good is wealth without longevity in which to spend it?

You know what really bugs me, though? I *still* don't understand what the frag is going on.

Fragging dragons. Even dead, they're nothing but trouble.

❖ That's all there is. As near as we can tell, somebody uploaded it to Shadowland a couple days after Lei Kung's meeting with the "little bird"—presumably the Triads. I don't know for sure who sent it, and no one's been able to reach Lei Kung. If anybody runs into the Sons of Thunder, pass on the message that I want to know how things went down.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 5 October 2057 at 13:58:01 (EST)

❖ You know who Daniel Kwan really is, don't you? He's a big Triad boss. Minh-Pao Imports is a money-laundering front.

❖ Digger

❖ Why is every poor sap who gets killed on the job automatically a secret mob boss?

❖ La Marquise

❖ Daniel Kwan doesn't exist, except as a cover ID for the good folks at Minh-Pao ... which isn't a Triad shop at all. It's yakuza-connected. They've been trying to get their greedy hands into Hong Kong for years, and Minh-Pao imports is one of their front-line operations. So if Lei Kung & Co. were working for someone calling himself Kwan, they'd best find out why "Kwan" faked his death. After all, false identities are expensive.

❖ Marco Polo

❖ Man, this board gets wilder every time I read it.

❖ FerLaffs

❖ Anyone have a guess why one (or more) of the Triads is after these coins?

❖ Go

❖ The great eastern dragon Lung received the Second Coin of Luck. Supposedly, Lung runs the Red Dragon Tong. Maybe his boys were trying to get the full set for their master's collection. Or maybe it's got something to do with Wuxing's Triad connections.

❖ China Doll

❖ What Triad connections? Where's the proof?

❖ D. Bunker

❖ I can't believe you're all missing the obvious. Wu Lung-Wai ... Lung ... get it? The president of Wuxing is the great dragon Lung in human form. Lofwyr's not the only dragon running a corp—he's just more up-front about it. The Triad connection clinches it. It's the only answer that makes sense.

❖ Dragonsbane

❖ Sorry, chummer, but you've got no case. Lung is a common Chinese name meaning "dragon" (which means it probably isn't Lung the dragon's real name). Wu Lung-Wai's background is too well documented for him to be a dragon. I wouldn't be surprised if Wuxing and Lung had some kind of deal going behind the scenes (in fact, I'd be real surprised if they *didn't*), but that does nothing to back your theory.

❖ China Doll

❖ Maybe the dragon replaced the real Wu Lung-Wai. Or maybe I've just been watching too much trid. Never mind.

❖ Whodunnit

❖ If the Four Coins were gifts from the Dragon Kings in ancient times, maybe Lung just wants his property back.

❖ RainMaker



WHO WATCHES THE WATCHERS?



C hummers, I think a lot of us may have been had in a very big way. Now, I know this isn't a new feeling to most of you out there—who hasn't been screwed over by a Johnson before? But we're talking a whole other level of manipulation here, a scam that would make Machiavelli green with envy.

Everyone knows the old street saying: "Never deal with a dragon." It's quite simple. But how do you know when you're dealing with a dragon? Think about it. A dragon that's looking to hire some shadowrunners isn't going to walk into a meet two stories tall and scaly. If a wyrm can be bothered to do something as lowly as hire shadowrunners personally, it will at least take the trouble to assume a human form. More likely, the dragon will operate through intermediaries, just like any other big-time Johnson. It will contact a fixer (or have an underling do it) and give the fixer the specifics of the job. From there, it works like any other job. The fixer will go about hiring people for the run; those people, in turn, will hire anyone they need, and so on. The chain of command can become so long and convoluted that most of the runners on the job won't have any idea who they're really working for. Corporations have done it for years to keep runners in the dark about who's calling the tune. Well, now it looks like corps aren't the only ones.

When you think of a dragon that's likely to hire shadowrunners you tend to think of corporate wyrms like Lofwyr. Saeder-Krupp is just another corp, after all, and it uses shadowrunners all the time. Likewise, you might not be too surprised learn that one of the mysterious dragons like Hestaby or Lung,



who involve themselves in local politics, hire runners to do their dirty work. Some dracoforms, such as the feathered serpent Pobre in the Yucatán or the feathered serpent reportedly leading ALOHA in Hawai'i, even get involved with political uprisings. But how many of you would think of Dunkelzahn?

That's right—good old Dunkelzahn, the "Big D" himself. Now, I know many of you are probably thinking that all that Matrix surfin' is finally starting to fry old Capt. Chaos's brain. Dunkelzahn, you say? The trideo star, the dragon that million of people around the world invite into their living rooms? The dragon so trusted that he could win the presidency of the UCAS? That same old lovable Dunkelzahn?

But think about it. If you're a dragon, what better way is there to make people forget how dangerous you are than to make yourself out to be an honest, upstanding, peace-loving lizard? The fact is, there is no better way, and Dunkelzahn pulled it off so well that hundreds and hundreds of people—runners included—ended up working for the dragon in one way or another. Of course, now that he's gone, it's easy to see what a giant shadow he cast, as the following accounts show.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 2 October 2057 at 11:58:03 (EST)

NOTHING BUSINESS, JUST PERSONAL

by Hawke

❖ Hawke is a shadowrunner who operates mostly out of the Boston/New York Sprawl region. He's been in the business long enough to know what's what and I trust his judgment. He also needs a little help, and he's posted here looking for some answers. If anyone has any of the paydata he's looking for, post here and I will consider it a personal favor.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 2 October 2057 at 12:03:27 (EST)

I'd just finished one of those rare strings of shadowruns that actually go the way you expect them to, which had given me a bit of a head start on the money situation and the chance to enjoy some well-earned time off. Late spring in Boston is a good season to have a little unstructured free time on your hands, and I took full advantage of it. I was beginning my days with workouts along the Esplanade and spending my afternoons and evenings reacquainting myself with the shops and eateries of the Back Bay and North End, respectively.

Then one evening I was partaking of a particularly fine meal at Artie's when I got a call. (I always carry my phone with me, even when I'm on "vacation," because you never know what will turn up.) I put aside some of the finest antipasto this side of Rome to take the call.

"Hawke, it's Brand. I've got a situation that I could use your help with."

It was Xander Brand, a local fixer I had worked with many times before. Brand was a gentleman's gentleman and had never steered me wrong in any of our business dealings during the ten

years I'd known him. Contacts like Brand are worth their weight in gold in my business, so I made it a point to be as good to him as he was to me. In fact, I considered him a friend, and whatever his problem was I was willing to lend a hand.

The matter sounded urgent, so I told Brand that I would meet him in an hour at his place on Beacon Hill. That gave me time to at least finish the next course of my meal before excusing myself and keep from hurting Artie's feelings too seriously. I went out to my car and slipped my extra sidearm under my jacket before heading off to the Hill to meet with Brand. Like I said, it pays to be ready.

Good thing, too, because when I reached Brand's townhouse I got the distinct impression that something was wrong. I get those feelings sometimes and I've learned to trust them. I rang the buzzer and waited. Nothing. Rang it again. Still nothing. I knew that Brand had a contract with one of the local security providers—Minuteman, I think—which was providing periodic overwatch on his house alarms. Fortunately, he had hired me in the past to sneak by better systems than this. I just had to make sure I was quick, because loitering in front of a ritzy Beacon Hill place in the dead of night was enough to make any of the local patrols curious.

The lock yielded to my gentle charms, and within seconds I was gently pushing the door open, Glock in hand. The empty foyer was dimly lit by the glow from the study as I stepped inside and silently closed the door behind me. I made my way along the wall to the door of the study, every nerve in my body tuned for the slightest sound or briefest flicker of movement. There was nothing. I pressed myself flat against the wall beside the open doorway, stilled my breathing and listened for a moment. Still nothing. I spun into the doorway, the white dot of my Smartlink tracking into the room. I checked right, left and above before I took stock of what lay before me.

Brand was slumped over his desk, and I didn't need to get any closer to see that he was dead. A small pool of blood had collected on the edge of the desk and dripped onto the fine Persian rug covering the floor. From the look of it, he'd been shot twice at close range with a light pistol of some kind—weapons as heavy as most street-types carry would have left exit wounds you could drive a truck through. That meant someone who preferred stealth over stopping power; probably a professional hit man.

As I checked Brand's body, I realized that the phone call could have been part of a plan to lure me to the townhouse and frame me for the hit. Brand's blood was still mostly liquid, and his body was slightly warm to the touch. That meant the hit probably happened only a few minutes before I arrived. I chose to assume that it really had been Brand on the phone earlier, and that his death had something to do with the trouble he wanted my help with. Unfortunately, a bodyguard wouldn't have done him much good at that point.

It didn't seem like the killer had disturbed anything in the townhouse, which suggested that whoever was here was only interested in geeking Brand. Either that, or the intruder knew exactly where to find what he was looking for and didn't want anyone else to know that it was missing. A quick check of the study didn't

turn up anything unusual. I was considering checking Brand's small desktop computer for possible clues when a sound caught my attention—and probably saved my life.

Brand's house is something like three hundred years old and I'd guess that parts of it are still original equipment. The stairs creaked slightly when anyone walked on them, and Brand often compared them to the "nightingale floors" of the old samurai manors—surfaces constructed to make a sound whenever someone moved across them. So when I heard a faint creak from the stairwell I quietly made my way to the doorway of the study and listened. The creaks came fairly regular and slow, so whoever was coming down was taking his time and being careful. When I counted enough steps to indicate that the intruder was at least past the landing and heading down to the foyer, I spun out of the doorway in a crouch and aimed up along the banister.

For a split second the figure halfway up the stairwell was no more than a blur. Then my skill-wires kicked in and time seemed to stand still, allowing me to pick out the details of the man's face and the slim semi-automatic he raised toward me in surprise. He seemed to be moving in slow motion as I leisurely put two shots into his chest.

Time sped up again as he dropped to the stairs, and his gun clattered down the steps. I stalked closer, keeping my Glock trained on him, then reached down with one hand to roll him over. I knew from the look in his eyes and the wounds that he was either dead or would be in a few minutes. I also knew that I had to be getting the frag out of Brand's place because Minuteman or Knight Errant might show up on the doorstep at any minute, and I doubted that they would bother to knock to let me know they were coming in. A quick check through Mr. Hitman's pockets yielded a credstick and a slim pocket secretary I recognized as Brand's. The pocket comp, Mr. Hitman's semi-automatic and the credstick disappeared into the inner pockets of my jacket as I took one last look at the assassin's face and bolted.

❖ Sorry to burst anyone's bubble about this amusing little detective story, but it should be mentioned that Hawke is currently wanted by the Boston authorities on suspicion of murdering Xander Brand. Hawke's infamous for some of the hits he's carried

out and Brand is just one more in a long line. Minuteman Security found no evidence of the events that Hawke describes in his narrative. Hawke contrived this whole story to convince others of his innocence.

❖ NoMan

❖ Listen, omae, I know Hawke and he's a man of honor. He doesn't do wetwork any more. That was a long time ago, before he met up with people like Brand and me who were willing to play it straight with him. He did what he had to then and I'm willing to

take him at his word. Everyone fragging knows that Minuteman is on the take from at least four different big shots in the Hub and would fraggin' cover up even Dunkelzahn's death if someone paid them enough to do it. Rent-a-cops can be bought, that's what they're for.

❖ Six

❖ The same could be said of shadowrunners.

❖ NoMan

When I was a little kid I used to dream about being an artist. I loved to draw and my mother would always proudly hang my pictures up in the kitchen. Unfortunately, being born in Southie didn't give me much opportunity to go to art school, so I ended up using my talent with my hands and my eye for detail for something other than portraits and watercolors. I still like to draw to relax, but I also see the irony in my ability to create something beautiful even after all that I have seen and done in my life.

Being able to draw also comes in handy when you're re-creating the face of a killer that you've seen only once. Like I said, I've got an eye for details and

faces. Anyway, I took the time to put together what I considered a good sketch of Mr. Hitman and scanned it into a file so I could send it out on the Matrix if I needed to. (Yes, I still draw with paper and pencil rather than a graphics tablet. Never could get used to the nuances of electronic drawing and—as anyone who knows me will tell you—I don't mind getting my hands dirty.)

The credstick was certified and held five thousand nuyen. No user ID, no SIN number, nothing to connect it to the shooter, but I didn't really expect the assassin to be stupid enough to carry identification. I decided to hold on to the cred. Trying to cash in



on some quick nuyen might tip off the wrong people, and I wanted to hold that card in reserve in case I needed it later.

The semi-automatic was a nice piece of work—a Walter PB-120 in good shape. The serial numbers had been lasered off by the look of it, which meant a professional job. I might have had a shot at tracking down where the hitter had acquired the gun, but only if his connection was local, and there was no way of knowing that. The clip was short three rounds, which would have been the ones that took out Brand.

The pocket secretary was Brand's all right. A nice Renraku model, this year's. Brand lived according to the "latest-and-greatest" principle and had to have all of the new techno-toys, even if this year's model was simply last year's model with a new paint job. The comp was passcode protected, of course. Fortunately, a friend over at Renraku North America once showed me how to pop a comp's access panel and convince it that it's in for repairs at an "authorized Renraku repair location." That gave me access to the primary functions "behind" the main opsys. From there, disabling the password protection and scrambling the security protocols was easy. It was a shame to trash the little critter's system like that, but I didn't have time to be polite. I backed up the files on my own system in case I'd missed some other security protocols and started searching.

One thing about Brand was that he was a completely compulsive organizer. That's a good quality in a fixer as well as a friend, and it showed in the contents of his computer. The files were all very carefully arranged and catalogued. He kept this secretary with him all of the time, and it had names, dates, LTG codes and other useful pieces of data that allowed him to maintain his complex network of contacts and operations with the touch of a button. Just out of curiosity I looked to see what kind of files Brand had on me. I was pretty impressed at the volume and detail of the material—rather flattered, in fact. I was also surprised at some of the things that Brand had known about me but never mentioned. Funny, the things we keep from each other.

I immediately noticed that several of the files were flagged with priority tags. I had the comp arrange the files in order of the most recently used ones and saw that a small cluster of them had been tagged and accessed on the night that Brand was killed. I opened up those files and started reading. After the third file I notices they all contained a field labeled Inheritance—each file described an individual who was named in Dunkelzahn's will. Now, that could be some weird coincidence, but I don't think so. I think the people named in these files had something to do with Brand's death. How or why I don't know, but I'd appreciate any data anyone out there can give me about these individuals. And any thoughts on what the frag is going on here.

TOSHI AKIMURA

Physical Description: Caucasian/Japanese human, slight build, mid-30s, hair graying at the temples. Has been known to change his appearance through cosmetic surgery. Very slick and businesslike. Angel tattoo on right arm hidden under clothing. **Area of Interest:** New Orleans, CAS

Inheritance: Property in the French Quarter and ¥

Contact Code: "Cannonball" Adderly



Alpha Code: Somethin' Else

Notes: Former street-runner known as "Silk" and "Archangel." Operated out of Seattle and New Orleans. Has lived in and worked exclusively out of New Orleans for the past four years. Known to frequent the Dragon's Lair casino, which he is also rumored to own.

☛ I have run the shadows with Silk and he is a good man. I don't see

him having anything to do with any wrongdoing.

☛ Daikoku

☛ If he was a shadowrunner, he did plenty of wrong. All runners do—it comes with the turf.

☛ Stomper

☛ It is possible to be a shadowrunner and still have some sense of honor, friend.

☛ Daikoku

☛ Silk used to work for Cross Applied Technologies in—you guessed it—the Seraphim. He was a company man and black-ops agent for several years until he and the corp called it quits. From what I hear, he still carries a grudge against Cross for one reason or another.

☛ Q-bert

☛ I've heard that Silk is a capable decker—not high-class, but not bad. His specialty is B&E and infiltration, going where he's not supposed to and taking things that don't belong to him.

☛ Raze

☛ What's the contact code deal—anybody?

☛ Nosey

☛ Not enough info on it yet, Nosey.

☛ Daikoku

SMEDLEY PEMBRENTON III



Physical Description: Caucasian troll, broad build, one horn on left side. Smokes expensive cigars and has a slight British accent.

Area of Interest: Boston, UCAS

Inheritance: The Avalon nightclub in Boston

Contact Code: Dave Brubeck

Alpha Code: Time Out

Notes: Former member of the rock band "The Nuclear Elves" under the stage name "Boom." After the

band broke up following the release of their first hit album, *Write It Down*, he disappeared into obscurity. Has worked as a shad-

owrunner on previous occasions. Personally books acts for his nightclub and can usually be found there.

❖ You've got to be kidding me! This guy is the same Boom who thrashed drums and downed beers on stage all night with the Nuclear Elves? And he's some kind of night club owner? Boom has gone corporate! Lordy help us all!

❖ RumRunner

❖ Once, while in his cups, Boom said something about his family coming from money in the UK. I always thought it was funny that his Cockney accent tended to give way to much more upper-class Brit-speak when he was really trashed or tired.

❖ Inoshiro

❖ Pembrenton is a big-time information junkie. He has some mega data-feed in his office at the Avalon, enough bandwidth for a small corporation. He must be downloading stuff from news-nets and vid-channels all over the world with equipment like that. With some decent filter programs, he could be gathering a lot of data. For what reason, I have no idea.

❖ CC Raider



HENRY HIGGINS

Physical Description: Caucasian troll, older and overweight, fond of fine suits, fine food and wine.

Area of Interest: Atlanta, CAS

Inheritance: Bottle of wine, possibly ¥

Contact Code: Oscar Peterson

Alpha Code: Nigerian Marketplace

Notes: Frequents the opera and ballet as well as many fine restaurants. A known philanthropist and connoisseur.

❖ Higgy's a connoisseur all right, and a fixer of some repute. He once hired me to pick up a fragging crate of wine. Said that it was old vintage stuff and that I wouldn't get paid if a single bottle was broken. Pay was good, but what a weirdo.

❖ Zorch

❖ Higgins's appreciation of the finer things makes him a real gentleman in his dealings with others. He considers himself a man of honor and expects to be treated in kind. He won't frag you over

for a run, but cross him once and you'll be on his drek-list forever.

❖ Greensleeves



AKIRA KAGEYAMA

Physical Description: Japanese human, late 30s, conservative dress and appearance. Notable for his ability to blend into a crowd.

Area of Interest: Vancouver, SSC

Inheritance: Vancouver condoplex and ¥

Contact Code: Miles Davis

Alpha Code: Sketches of Spain

Notes: "Financial advisor" to many corporations in the Northwest and Pacific Rim, notably Yamatetsu, Renraku, VisionCrafters, Universal Omnitech, PacRim Bank and Tokugawa Technologies.



BEATRICE WILDER

Physical Description: Mulatto human, above-average height, dark brown hair and green eyes (artificial), no visible cyberware other than a datajack, but additional enhancements have been reported.

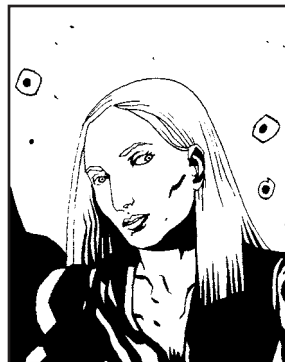
Area of Interest: Western Europe

Inheritance: Mountain retreat located at Rikon, near Zurich

Contact Code: Billy Holiday

Alpha Code: The Legacy

Notes: Formerly a shadowrunner under the name "La Belle Dame." Operated primarily in Paris. Strong ties with the international jet-setting crowd.



KIMBERLY ROBINSON

Physical Description: Albino human, slight build, silvery white hair, mid 20s, datajack behind right ear.

Area of Interest: Matrix

Inheritance: Can-opener program

Contact Code: Sarah Vaughan

Alpha Code: In the Land of Hi-Fi

Notes: Decker who uses the street-name "SilveryK." Has previously worked for la Familia.

❖ SilveryK lives in the UCAS—Indiana or Illinois, I think—one of those big flat states with no trees. Other than that, beats me. The files have been smoked.

❖ Sullivan

❖ Chummers, beware. Silvery is a stellar decker who designs and builds her own equipment from scratch. Lots of norms and metas consider her a freak because she's albino, and she's got a permanent mad on because of it. She's got no regular Johnson, or even steady chummers, despite the fact that she's got a figure to rival that of Lotte Lovin', the BTL star. Silvery's a total loner—as soon as the run's over, whoosh, she's gone. Used to deck for Little Nell, and then the old Mafia families in Brooklyn 'til she managed to swipe a Firelight from somewhere and went solo. I reckon that inheritance from Dunkelzahn's gonna make her extra-bad, so any Matrix-jockeys out there better think twice before crossing her.

❖ Wild Bill Williams

- ❖ If she's that good, I'm surprised there's any info on her at all.
- ❖ Omni
- ❖ If she still runs the shadows, then she has to boost a rep some. If everybody thinks you're dead, who's gonna hire ya?
- ❖ Ann-nihilator

❖ Usually we let the chips fall where they may here at Shadowland. But I've known SilveryK for years. (We've got a real, in-the-flesh relationship, not just some 'trix connection.) We go back a long way—longer than she or I would like to admit, in fact. That's why I'm breaking with tradition here. When I saw her name in Dunkelzahn's will, I assumed she simply did the wyrm a favor. But after I saw Hawke's post, I grew a little concerned that my good friend might be mixed up in something big, so I sent her the post and asked her if she would like to comment on it. Her response follows. I leave it up to you to decide where she stands in all this.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 4 October 2057 at 16:22:09 (EST)

MY DEFENSE

by SilveryK

Thanks for the file, CC. It seems that I've suddenly become some kind of double winner—a gift from the late Dunkelzahn, president and wyrm-about-town, and honorable mention in the database of a dead fixer. While I can't say this is the first time my name has been mentioned in the personal files of a fixer, living or dead, this may be the first time such a mention has made me a suspect in the fixer's death. But I will allow others to search for the truth—if such a thing can be found in the Matrix.

I knew Xander Brand—he was a friend and a contact. We all have friends that we trust, friends that we will go to the mat for, and some friendships that are even deeper than that. My relationship with Brand was both professional and social. But friendship is a two-way street, and when an individual's lust for nuyen and his own inflated pride lead him to betray and expose people who once trusted him, those people have to defend themselves. I'm not saying I killed him, because I didn't. I'm not even saying I know who did—because I don't.

The truth may exist in this electronic world, and so I say good hunting. But keep in mind that nothing's black and white in this day and age—if it ever really was. We live in a world where shades of gray are the norm. Just judge what you find by the standards of the Awakened world and not by Hawke's desire for revenge. Each of us can only deal with the world by our own standards—and while those standards are different for each of us, one criterion **MUST** remain absolute, as it has since the beginning of time. That criterion is justice. Without justice, truth is subjective. And consider yourself fairly warned: I will protect myself and my chummers.

Hawke, I hope you are willing to recognize that sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction—and that sometimes the last thing you want to learn is that the people you think are your enemies are really your friends.

❖ I'm willing to take a look at this stuff with an open mind, lady, but I haven't given up the possibility that you're involved in all of this up to your pasty white eyebrows. I think everyone else should keep that possibility in mind, too. My life is on the line and I ain't going to be hung out to dry to cover up someone else's dirty work.

❖ Hawke

❖ That being said, here is a document from a very busy decker named Diabolique. Read carefully, everyone: she has some very interesting things to say.

❖ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 4 October 2057 at 16:48:59 (EST)

ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS

by Diabolique

Three calls within three days from three different people, all of whom you've only had peripheral dealings with, generally means something's up. So when I received a call from Hawke, followed by a call from SilveryK and then one from the esteemed Captain Chaos, I knew that whatever they wanted was important. So I did a little digging in the Matrix, had a few heart-to-hearts with my contacts, and I came up with some very interesting data. From the looks of it, I'd say something big is happening in the shadows. Or more precisely, something big has been happening for awhile. Once I realized the scope of it, I figured the best way to ensure my safety was to put what I know—actually, what I suspect, to be more precise—out in the open.

As was stated earlier in this compiled post, every individual mentioned in Brand's files received something in Dunkelzahn's will. I noticed it a while ago and so conducted a little research on the activities of the known fixers on Brand's list and a lot of other people mentioned in the Big D's will. Taken separately, it all looks like nothing more than a lot of unrelated shadow activity, the kind of day-to-day drek that goes on in the shadows. But when you put all the pieces together, the resulting picture begins to suggest a vast organization conducting its biz just below the surface of the shadows—an organization headed by the late, great dragon. I think Brand knew about this organization, and it got him killed.

❖ Someone in this organization killed Brand?!

❖ Hawke

❖ Well, I think someone in the organization—or a few someones—had something to do with it. But I don't know who. In fact, I don't have concrete proof of this organization or anything I'm telling you—I'm just saying that everything I've uncovered suggests that it exists.

❖ Diabolique

❖ Whoa there just a minute, Diabolique. You're saying that the Big D was running some vast shadow enterprise? That's quite a stretch. I mean, lots of people got stuff in his will. That doesn't mean they were all in his employ. And how come no one noticed this before?

❖ Skeptik

Listen, I don't expect everyone to believe what I'm saying

without hearing the whole story. I'm still not sure I believe it all myself. But it all seems to fit. Let me start at the beginning. I'll run through what I think, how I arrived at this theory—and then everyone can decide for himself whether or not to believe it.

THE DRAGON'S WEB

As we all know, Dunkelzahn was the first dragon to show an interest in humanity as anything other than a source of nutrition. His initial appearance in Denver and his subsequent trideo interviews made him the voice of the Awakened world to millions of viewers around the world. He became an instant, "approachable" media darling—something that no other dracoform had ever pulled off. Next, Dunkelzahn took the millions of nuyen that he made from sales of his interviews (tax free, no less) and invested them in the purchase of his Lake Louise "lair," which he converted into the VisionQuest Theme Park. Suddenly, Dunkelzahn had a—well, "cuddly" image is the only way I can think to put it.

❖ Hard to think of something that was the size of a building and covered in armored scales as "cuddly."

❖ White Tiger

❖ Maybe so, but is there any other dragon that had its own plush doll?

❖ The Marketeer

Pretty soon, people thought Dunkelzahn was nothing more than the reptilian equivalent of an air-headed trideo bimbo. And I think that's just the way he wanted it, because his public image provided such a compelling picture of the dragon that no one ever did any serious digging into his private affairs, into the things he did while he was away from the lights and cameras.

I won't go into everything I know or suspect about Dunkelzahn's private activities over the years. They are simply too extensive to get into here—and I've probably only managed to nick the surface, anyway. Suffice it to say that in one way or another, the Big D had his talons in governments, universities, social organizations, political groups and even megacorps all over the world. Dunkelzahn had a massive political and economic empire, all run with shadow-resources and an extensive network of agents that answered to him directly or indirectly.

❖ You think this stuff was all a build-up to the presidential bid?

❖ Smoky

❖ You think it wasn't? Of course it was. With this many shadow connections it's also looking pretty obvious who rigged the '56 elections.

❖ Chaosmosis

❖ Obvious nothing. Dig up some evidence and then we'll talk, chummer.

❖ FastJack

❖ I agree with FastJack. Building an organization like that would take some major time and resources—time and resources the Big D wouldn't spend on a mere presidential bid. No, I think the moti-

vation behind this kinda thing would have to be something much bigger than the UCAS presidency, something much more than the simple desire for power. I mean, from the sound of it the Big D was preparing to go to fraggin' war or something. I think the election timing would have been a mere coincidence. And besides, if the dragon had that kind of power, being the president would have been a step down for him, neh?

❖ Reality Czech

❖ Hang on a second, here. You people seem ready to accept this whole secret organization thing way too easily. Granted, this conspiracy stuff sounds just fantastic enough to be true, but why would Dunkelzahn bother with all this cloak-and-dagger drek when he had the cleanest reputation of any great dragon and could have operated any number of businesses as openly as he did his theme park and media interests?

❖ Gillian

Well, working behind the scenes usually means that you want to hide your activities from someone, right? Who would Dunkelzahn want to hide his activities from? The only folks I can think of are his fellow great dragons. Perhaps someone like Lofwyr would have seen Dunkelzahn's accumulation of power as a threat to his own position. That could have started a nasty power-struggle that the Big D would undoubtedly want to avoid.

❖ I find it hard to believe that someone like Lofwyr wouldn't have known what Dunkelzahn was up to.

❖ Nacht@berlin.inne

❖ Who knows? Sounds like Dunkelzahn did a good job covering his tracks. Lofwyr's got the daily business of running a megacorp to deal with. Maybe he just didn't notice.

❖ Black-Eyed Suzan

❖ Wait a minute, the Nachtman has a good point. And what about everyone in the shadows? If this organization was so big and powerful, how come no one ever suspected its existence?

❖ Umney

❖ I agree with Umney. I don't buy it. Maybe the dragon had a lot of pull, but there is just no fragging way that he could have hidden so much from everyone.

❖ Bitter Lemon

❖ Why not? Look at Lofwyr's buy-out of Saeder-Krupp. One of the subtlest pieces of stock manipulation ever, and no one saw it coming until it was too late. Lofwyr's influence on S-K became public knowledge only because the dragon decided to consolidate and take it over. If he had kept quietly in the background, he could have retained control of the corp by proxy with no one the wiser.

❖ CC Raider

Probably the biggest factor in Big D's success at keeping his organization secret was his use of a simple, age-old stage-magician's trick: misdirection. Keep the audience watching the show

and it will never notice what you're doing behind your back. As I mentioned before, the dragon's trideo personality provided the perfect cover—no one suspected “good old Dunkelzahn” of having any ambitions greater than being the king of late-night television.

And what's more, Dunkelzahn took care to protect his secret persona at all times. Everyone knows that Lofwyr is the original big, bad corporate dragon and that's just the way Lofwyr likes it—drek, Loffy's people put out a newsvid release damn near every time their boss so much as picks his nose. Well, the Big D didn't work that way. He didn't get involved with any high-profile mergers or publicity-hungry megacorps. Instead of buying out major megacorps, he invested in the up-and-comers—hundreds of them.

- ❖ Makes perfect sense. Slipping in the back door is often more effective than breaking down the front.
- ❖ Whistler@na.cas.tx

The wyrm's corporate influence was generally confined to second- and third-tier corporations, but he also invested in a lot of small start-ups and new businesses. He always seemed to be looking out for interesting new investment opportunities for his considerable wealth. The dragon would find a company that was in trouble or just getting started and in need of financial support. If the firm struck his fancy, it would receive funding from a third party—usually a fixer or shell company that the dragon controlled indirectly. That way, the company got going and Dunkelzahn effectively owned them, even though nothing could be traced back to him. All in all, the Dragon's business empire probably rivaled that of several major megacorps.

- ❖ And at the same time the dragon didn't develop the bad-hoop rep of corporate wyrms like Lofwyr.
- ❖ Arioeh
- ❖ Why wouldn't he want a rep? Good rep means respect.
- ❖ Jaxon
- ❖ Simple. Not having a reputation means that your enemies tend to underestimate you. When you're working behind the scenes, the last thing you want is to get a rep for being the baddest kid on the block.
- ❖ Argent
- ❖ So what was the dragon investing in? That could provide a clue about what he was up to.
- ❖ Woodward

From what I can tell, he concentrated a large share of his investments in high-tech research, especially during the past few years. The dragon started off by buying Matrix and ASIST research firms in the 2030s, then moved on to more sophisticated stuff in more recent years—AI, nanotechnology, robotics and cybernetics.

- ❖ Makes sense. Dunkelzahn was really the only dragon who was known to have an interest in the Matrix and its inner workings. He was certainly the most computer-literate dragon anyone knew of.

That kind of Matrix savvy would have been invaluable toward operating in the modern world without being noticed. Dunk seemed to have a real handle on the way that the media worked, and played it like a maestro.

- ❖ Media Watcher

❖ Chummers, I used to work freelance for Dunkelzahn and let me tell you, the dragon was one big techno-weenie. He had some of the sweetest hardware and software you would ever want to interface with. Made you feel like a real god in the 'trix, like nothing could stop you. If that can-opener program SilveryK got from him is like that drek, she's gonna have some real fun with it.

- ❖ Neon Dragon

- ❖ Hmm. Wonder what happened to the rest of that computer gear? Anyone know who's got it?
- ❖ Core Warrior

- ❖ Daviar, probably. That slitch is like fraggin' Malibu Staci, she's got every play-set in the world.
- ❖ HeadCrash

- ❖ Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if Brighton ended up with it as part of the VisionQuest package.
- ❖ The Dead Deckers Society@na.ucas.sea.org

- ❖ Excuse me for interrupting, folks, but it seems like we're getting a bit off track. I'm convinced about the D's motivation for secrecy here, but I still don't understand how he could operate this vast organization without exposing himself.
- ❖ Gillian

ORGANIZATION

Obviously, Dunkelzahn didn't oversee much of his shadow-work personally. He made the major decisions and called the shots, but a lot of different people got things done for him. Shadowrunners formed the lowest tier of operations. They'd get their orders from a fixer or an agent from one of the Big D's shell companies. Most likely the runners—nor the fixers and agents who hired them, for that matter—ever knew who they were really working for. They simply got their orders from someone on the tier of operations above them. And those people got their orders from someone above them, and so on. It was like a giant onion—you could peel away layer after layer and still not get to the middle of it all. Only the most trusted operatives were brought into the dragon's confidence, and none of them really knew the big picture, or even a significant part of that picture. All in all, he probably had thousands of people working for him, if you count all of the shadowruns that he influenced indirectly.

- ❖ Not all of Dunkelzahn's agents were metahuman, either. There is evidence that the dragon had a lot of paranormals working for him: free spirits, sasquatch, shapeshifters and maybe other races. He seemed to have a lot of pull in Awakened lands like Amazonia and Siberia.
- ❖ Red Wraith

❖ I mentioned the death of Dunkelzahn to a free spirit I'm familiar with. It reacted with shock and sadness—honest, it did. It said, "We have lost a friend." I thought that maybe the spirit knew the Big D personally, so I said the same thing to a watcher spirit I had conjured and it reacted the same way. I mean, the watcher spirit has about as much sense as a doorknob and yet it reacted to this news as if it had lost its best friend. I'm not sure what it all means, but I got to tell you, if the Big D had that much influence among the denizens of astral space, then dragons may be more powerful than we ever imagined.

❖ Mage-o-matic

And Dunkelzahn's organization worked like an intelligence-gathering network, too. Dunkelzahn's agents would seek out useful information and pass it on to their fixers or company managers. The fixers and managers would then pass useful info to the next tier of operatives, and so on. Finally, these people would send their data to Dunkelzahn and his closest advisers. My research shows that Dunkelzahn's lairs (both in Lake Louise and the one on Prince Edward Island) had some serious data traffic flowing in and out of them from all over the world. He also set up lines and nodes in some unexpected places—Mason City, Iowa; Enid, Oklahoma; the Aleutians.

In fact, information-gathering was probably one of the most important functions of the network. And some of the most important members of the network were the watchers.

❖ What are "watchers?"

❖ Tyro

I figured someone would ask that question. Let me explain by first saying that everyone would agree that shadowrunning is big business in this day and age. As one shadowrunner once said, "we are essential to the modern world." Without us, the megacorps, the governments and the bigwigs wouldn't have the "deniable assets" they need to perform their dirty work. The system has become so sophisticated, so involved and so interconnected that the only ones who can get away with the things the corps need done are the ones who are outside of the system altogether, invisible and unknown, blank ciphers that the all-seeing eyes of the Matrix can't track. We live in the shadows cast by the corporate giants and we're part of the machine that makes it all work. I think that Dunkelzahn understood that better than most people.

Considering that shadowrunning is such big business, it makes sense that employers would want to keep tabs on the shadows. After all, any corp knows that it needs to carefully study the business environment and continually take stock of its assets to work as efficiently as possible. Well, nowadays, what happens in the shadows affects everybody, and shadow-resources and black ops are just two different kinds of assets. But shadowrunners, and the shadow world in which they operate, are outside the system. Runners can't be organized, tabulated and tracked like other corporate assets or they lose the very qualities for which the corps value them most—namely, their anonymity and deniability. Similarly, important events in the shadow world can't be tracked

in the usual ways. Big-time employers—like Dunkelzahn—need some other way to manage their shadowrunning assets and keep tabs on the shadow world. That's where the watchers come in.

WATCHERS

Information has been called the only real commodity of value in this day and age, and that might well be true. Data is the primary product of many corporations, and some turn out nothing but. And the market is growing every day—observers estimate that the amount of data on the Matrix has been increasing exponentially for the past several decades and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. While the increasing value and volume of information has led to the development of hangouts such as Shadowland and pastimes such as Matrix surfing, it has also led to the development of a unique institution among corporations: the watcher.

Watchers are corporate agents who are paid by a company to keep an eye on things. That's it—they just watch for data that might be of interest in one way or another to their corporate bosses. Sounds like a real cushy job, neh? Well, I know plenty of deckers who thought so, too, and ended up disappointed, because watching is hard work. Watchers basically function as one-man data-collection teams. Some like to do things for themselves, some employ armies of deckers to do their legwork, but each must sift through gigapulses of data from the Matrix, video broadcasts, newsnets, corporate reports, on-line services—the never-ending deluge of information that most of us tune out. And sometimes a watcher has to sift through tons of babble to find a shiny little of nugget of data.

❖ You can bet that more than a few watchers access Shadowland, too. This is one of the best places to keep up to date on the state of human knowledge and to monitor the effects of your boss's disinformation efforts.

❖ LiveWire

In the course of their work, most watchers dig up lots of secrets, secrets that give some watchers major power within their organizations. In fact, many watchers are the real powers behind the thrones of their corporate divisions.

Watchers also employ huge numbers of shadowrunners. When there is a piece of information that can't be obtained by conventional means, they are more than willing to hire outside talent to acquire it. Generally, watchers only go after information they think will be valuable to their employer, but some are more willing to gamble.

❖ There's a watcher down in Los Angeles named Nils Hammarand who works for Angelic Entertainment. He's the eyes and ears of Lofwyr in CalFree, and seems really hungry to dig up some drek on the other corps in the area to turn over to his boss and so increase Saeder-Krupp's influence in the Free State. Worked for him once before, and the pay was good.

❖ Mr. Clean

Most watchers are agents of various corporations or governments, but some operate as freelancers, selling their services and information to the highest bidder. Few ex-corporate watchers

exist, however, because most companies aren't willing to let their valuable "assets" wander away—especially when those assets always know too much. All of which makes the freelance watcher a rare breed indeed.

FIXERS

The other important members of Dunkelzahn's network were his fixers. That might strike some of you shadowrunners as a bit strange, but think about it for a minute. Fixers are paid to know the right people for the right job at the right time. A fixer's professional reputation is measured entirely by who he knows, what he knows about them, and how many favors people owe him. Fixers make their livings by earning more favors than they have to give out in return. They deal in the biggest commodity there is: information. Not the kind of information you can get from the Matrix and media outlets, because you can hire a competent watcher to get that for you. Fixers deal in information gathered the old-fashioned way: through connections, contacts and working the streets. They spend most of their time building up, maintaining, and ensuring the continued growth of their "stables" of connections. That's why the best fixers seem to know everyone, or at least they always seem to know just the right person for the job you're looking to get done.

❖ Works both ways. You want to be successful in the shadows? Develop a good relationship with a couple of fixers that you can at least trust to be straight with you about a run. The recommendation of a good fixer is the best advertising you can do for yourself. Fixers are like Hollywood agents: they field the best offers and find one of their clients to do the job. Hanging out in a "meat market" trolling for a Mr. Johnson is just asking for trouble because Johnsons go to places like that to find cheap, expendable shadow-talent. A good fixer will try to keep you away from jobs like that because it's in his best interest to maintain a full stable of good runners.

❖ Argent

Naturally, fixing is a very competitive business. There is only so much shadow-work to go around, and quite often one fixer's gain is another fixer's loss. The employers of the shadows like it that way. It keeps fixers hungry and it keeps them sharp. It's like street-level Darwinism: only the best and the fittest survive.

That's why many fixers maintain relationships with the big organized crime syndicates like the Mafia and the yakuza. In return for the fixer's services, the organization backs him with capital, protection, and resources—resources that let the fixer take chances that other fixers can't afford to take. Megacorps and governments sponsor their own fixers as well—in fact, heading up a corporate black ops division or a government spook squad are akin to the Holy Grail for most fixers. Those kinds of positions provide the level and quality of influence that makes most fixers go weak at the knees just thinking about it. Of course, the competition for such positions is quite fierce.

Naturally, these "established" organizations are quick to squash any new groups of fixers that seem to be establishing a toe-hold, because any unified group in the shadow community

will almost certainly interfere with the established organizations' ability to take their pick of the best and brightest. That's why starting up your own network of fellow fixers is incredibly difficult unless you are very, very subtle—or unless you've got the help of some very powerful individual—a great dragon, for example.

❖ Given the choice, I prefer to work with a fixer who's independent, even if that means he's not as "big time" as some of the "made men" of the Mafia or the yakuza. Indies are more likely to deal straight with you and less likely to be pushing someone else's agenda. If they're good, they'll develop a support organization of their own. If not, they're probably not worth working with.

❖ Amazing Grace

❖ Watch out for government fixers, especially anyone working for the UCAS Feds. They'll hang you out to dry in a nanosecond if it suits them—and most of the jobs they hire shadowrunners for are suicide missions in disguise. And if you're captured, they'll disavow all knowledge of you, the tape will self-destruct in ten seconds and all of that cloak-and-dagger drek.

❖ DC Insider

KINDA FAR-FETCHED, ISN'T IT?

❖ So let me get this straight. Dunkelzahn ruled a secret political/economic empire, which he administered via a shadow network of assorted agents, runners, watchers and fixers. I still find it hard to believe that none of the runners who worked for him caught on to the big secret.

❖ Skeptik

❖ WOW! It all make sense to me now. I think I've working for Dunkelzahn for years without knowing it. You see, I've been running the shadows since I was old enough to snatch fries from the local Stuffer Shack. About seven years ago, a fixer calls me out of the blue, arranges a meet and invites me to join in on a run on a CFS installation in the middle of nowhere to grab some electronic doo-dad. I'm not sure what it was—my job was to run silent and temporarily disable the guards, and to cover the hoops of a couple of deckers and an electrician/rigger. The run went smooth, I didn't kill the guards, and when I got back to Denver I got paid good cred.

The next day I'm hanging in a little bar in the UCAS sector, when who walks up to me but the same fixer (I'll call him "Slim"). Asks me if I want another job. I'm shocked, cuz usually I end up looking for my next biz two weeks after I've run out of cred, and here he is asking me if I have any interest in working right away again. This time, Slim says, he'll pay me the same amount as for the last job, or a month's rent on a nice little pad in a pretty wealthy section of the CAS sector. Hell, I'm game. It was another smooth run, another caution against cacking anyone, and I'm frosty.

During the next two years, I went on about seventy-five runs for Slim—all simple, in-and-out jobs, no wetwork. In return, I got a steady supply of material for enchanting and such, magic teachers seemed to show up just when I was ready to learn something new, I studied nearly every form of hand-to-hand combat with the best in Denver's Chinatown, took free vacations, and once or

twice when I got beat up pretty bad Slim was there paying all the bills at the DocWagon clinic.

After I'd been there about five years working exclusively for Slim, he says he'll be out of town for about six months, says he's going on vacation to Lake Louise. He wants me to do him a few favors while he's out of town. Says that he left my name and number with a guy who will set up some runs, and I'll even get extra cred if I want to do the fixer's job on these runs, too. Now, the shadows can get pretty dangerous and I never thought about being a fixer, but I figure what the heck, it's only for a few months. So I organized five jobs during this time. They all went off pretty smoothly and the guy on the other end of the comm—I called him Mr. Cajun because he had a super-strong New Orleans accent—seems really pleased. He asked me if I wanted to work as a fixer and runner full time. Well, I said that he'd have to wait for my answer until my friend Slim came back from his vacation. Mr. Cajun replies, "Loyalty can never be bought, only earned. You have passed." Two days later Slim came back.

Slim seemed to be really happy with the runs I did, and he passed along Mr. Cajun's compliments, too. I'm figuring I've been caught up in some kind of corporate maze and that they had hooked and reeled me in. I was actually pretty concerned, but these guys were nice, real nice, so I thought maybe I didn't mind so much after all. I figured they might be Ares, but I talked with other runners who worked mostly for Ares and they never had it as good as me.

About a year later, Slim called me and said he had a big one. When I get to the safehouse for the meet, there's twenty-five runners sitting around. I knew about half of them from working in Denver over the years, and most of the rest I knew by their reputations. Slim explained that we were taking on Aztechnology—in its own sector. Our goal was a high priest, a mage who had arrived that morning. We could kill anyone who got in the way, but not the mage. Slim informed us that he would be coming along as a rigger (who knew!). Well, only eight of us returned that night—and Slim wasn't one of those eight. The Azzies hit his van with a missile just before it reached the CAS border. The mage was barely alive when we reached our safehouse. He'd used two of our own team to fuel what I now know is blood magic, and we had to pummel him until he was barely alive to subdue him.

I called the only person I could think of—Mr. Cajun. He told us to take the mage to the local DocWagon clinic and wait there until he arrived to "take care of business." He arrived about half an hour later, with what looked like a paramilitary team. They took the mage, climbed into their black Hughes Airstar and took off. An hour later, I received a call from Mr. Cajun, who matter-of-factly tells me that I now have two million nuyen in an account in the Zurich-Orbital and that I own an island off the coast of Florida someplace—and that I should go there immediately and check it out for about a year. The next day, my house in Denver was blown to bits while I was out on an errand. I hopped on a plane that afternoon.

So, about six months ago, I get a call from Mr. Cajun, who says he would like to meet me in Miami and discuss my future with the organization. A day before the meet, he calls and cancels. He

says a new development has occurred and he would like to meet later once the situation is normal. The next day Dunkelzahn declares himself a candidate for president of the UCAS. I haven't heard from Mr. Cajun since, but I hope I do because if I was working for the Big D, I'd love to do it again. He treated me fair and square and not like a piece of meat. I may have been one of his unwitting operatives, but I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

❶ The ex-Denver Kid

❷ Nice story—I suggest you send it over to the Fiction Writer's Forum. I've never heard of you, and others I've talked to (especially those in Denver) can't recall you, either. No fixer or Johnson I've ever met has ever done any of the buddy-buddy things you describe, and I doubt that any fixer would get that tight with a runner—there's no profit in it. Finally, I would think that Dunkelzahn—if he was God's gift to the runner community (which I don't think he was)—would have had his operatives be a little more quiet about his being the Robin Hood of the shadows. Slags like you slinging buldrek like this is a serious matter, and I wish that the Captain would watch these boards a little more closely.

❸ Cold Heart

❹ Whoa, keep it civil. The ex-Denver Kid's story may be hard to believe, but that doesn't mean it's not true. Let's look at the facts. There was a big hit on Aztlan turf approximately around the time the Kid says—a blood bath according to witnesses in the area—and a high priest was, in fact, extracted. A van was hit by a missile just before the CAS border. The CAS tossed some kind of diplomatic fit over it, but Aztlan ignored it. Also, twelve houses in the CAS were fire-bombed during the weeks that followed the raid. It's possible that Mr. Cajun is Toshi Akimura, though I'd guess that Dunkelzahn would have a bigger player in Denver—but maybe "Slim" worked for the entire council and it was Mr. Cajun who took an interest in the Kid. The Kid's story may sound unlikely, but I wouldn't rule it out. Dunkelzahn played by his own rules, after all, that much is certain.

❺ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 12 October 2057 at 20:05:11 (EST)

❻ Funny, the relationship the Kid describes sounds a lot like the relationship Hawke had with Brand. Maybe Brand worked for Dunkelzahn, too.

❼ Argent

❽ All I know is that life seemed easier for the Kid than for the rest of us. But I'm not sure if I'd want shadowrunning to be my "job." It almost sounds like going corp.

❾ Jaxon

❿ I don't know, it sounds cool to me. Better than the life I lead now. Wonder where you sign up.

⓫ Waverly

⓬ Heck, you probably worked for them already, Waverly, but you ain't been deemed worthy to join the club.

⓭ Toothless

❖ Well, I'm not positive, but if the Kid is right, he probably blabbed a little too much and may soon be the ex-living, ex-Denver Kid—if Brand is any indication of what happens to those who expose too many of the wyrm's secrets.

❖ Cynic

CONCLUSIONS

❖ So if I'm following all this correctly, then those individuals listed in Brand's datapad—including SilveryK—must be some important skags. I can understand the Big D leaving them stuff in his will, but I don't understand why we're reading all about them on Shadowland. It seems to me that the Dunkelzahn Corporation or the Draco Foundation or whoever's running this big organization now would not want such information leaking out. But Dunkelzahn himself pretty much guaranteed that this would happen when he named all those people in his will, neh? So why'd he do it? Why expose his shadow network now?

❖ Brother Data

❖ I suspect that Dunkelzahn didn't like the idea of all of the cloak-and-dagger stuff. He seemed like someone who valued the truth. Maybe he wanted it all out in the open after he died. Kind of a final confession.

❖ Deacon

❖ I don't think you can attribute human values and motives to a creature like Dunkelzahn. More likely the exposure of his network is just part of some bigger master plan. Maybe he wanted people to start offing each other, maybe by doing so they're unwittingly carrying out his final plan. I mean, we're talking a dragon, here, and we all know how much dragons love their intricate plans—multiple redundant fail-safes, backup plans, boxes within boxes—it's simply the way dragons think.

❖ Dragonslayer

❖ I think you been slottin the wrong chips, priyatel.

❖ Soder@netro.org

❖ Let's take another tack. SilveryK made some not-so-veiled references to a traitor. Maybe that traitor belonged to the dragon's organization. It's not hard to imagine. Maybe he, or she, worked simply for the cash. Then one day this someone decided it was time to cash out, to go solo and sell his or her knowledge to the highest bidder. Of course, doing so probably would not be very easy. We all know that dragons don't take backstabbing lightly, and given the time and resources Dunkelzahn's people seemed to spend developing new members, they probably didn't take too kindly to members leaving. In fact, I'd think that anyone who reached any position of authority in the organization would be expected to remain with the dragon for the rest of his life. So this someone who wants out would have to bide his time, waiting for an opportunity.

Then one day it happens, fate turns its big ol' wheel and the big wyrm Dunkelzahn, the president of the UCAS and your secret boss, goes up in a ball of flame in downtown DC. Suddenly, the organization's been decapitated. For a short time, it's like a body

without a brain—no one's taken charge yet, no one's controlling the parts of the body, no one's monitoring the information that its eyes and ears are providing. You realize that this is your big opportunity, the one that may never come again. You decide it's time to sell your secrets and live high on the hog. Nothing to be afraid of, just you and the rest of your life as the richest ex-watcher in the biz.

For a few days it seems like you've gotten away with it. But then some of the other people in the organization hear about your little enterprise and decide that you have crossed the line. Maybe they've decided to remain loyal to Daviar, the dragon's anointed successor, and they want to preserve the organization. Maybe they simply don't like the fact that you're selling information that could endanger their lives. Maybe the dragon himself was behind it.

❖ Watson@BTG.52893-221B

❖ I don't know who you are, buddy, and you better hope I don't ever meet you, because if I do, fraggin' crazy conspiracy theories are going to be the last thing on your mind. Xander Brand never belonged to any secret organization working for Dunkelzahn or any other fraggin' dragon. And if he did, he never would have betrayed anyone he was working with. He was a straight player who worked hard to protect his runners. But if these individuals offed him, I'll make sure they pay—everyone from SilveryK to Daviar herself.

❖ Hawke

❖ Hawke, Hawke, settle down. Watson makes some good points. How do you know Brand wasn't part of D's organization? To be honest, I've worked for Brand myself and Watson's theory makes sense to me. Brand didn't get anything in Dunkelzahn's will, but he has been ultra-paranoid lately and seemed to be ready to go into hiding.

❖ Cheezcake

❖ The lack of evidence in the will does seem to me to be the biggest hole in my deductions.

❖ Watson@BTG.52893-221B

Actually, Watson's theory pretty much matches what I think is going on. I'm not sure who exactly killed Brand, and I wouldn't even hazard a guess at this point. But I think Watson was right on the money when he talked about Dunkelzahn's death leaving the organization without a head. Dunkelzahn put together this big "kingdom," if you will. But none of his "princes" have enough power or influence to hold it all together like he did. Dunkelzahn undoubtedly recruited some very intelligent and ruthless employees, after all, and it seems likely that at least a few of them are very ambitious as well.

Assuming that what we've pieced together holds water, then I've already heard rumors of a few of those people we've tagged as former Dunkelzahn agents breaking away from the organization and trying to go it on their own. A lot of the organization's fixers seem to be gathering information on each other and trying to keep the heat off themselves by exposing the rest. And apparently, all of these folks are working hard on the streets to set up

their own little networks of informants and contacts. Plus, many of them have been getting influxes of nuyen from somewhere—maybe enough to start up as independent operators.

On the other hand, many of the Big D's former connections and contacts appear to be sticking together and trying to maintain as much of the network as they can. I know for a fact that several fixers, like Kageyama and Akimura, have been in contact with Nadja Daviar since Dunkelzahn bought it. I'd lay odds that these people are now simply working for the Draco Foundation and Daviar, rather than Dunkelzahn.

So far, it's not clear how Daviar plans to deal with all the people who are leaving the fold. She might decide to look the other way—or she might come down hard on anyone trying to break ranks. Either way, information on what everyone else is doing at any given time has become highly valuable, and it seems that different factions are already staging shadowruns against one another.

All in all, these developments have drastically heated things up in the shadows and are providing plenty of new opportunities for freelance runners to make nuyen—and to die, as well.

So how does the data from Hawke's download and Brand's notepad fit into all this? Well, I can confirm that Toshi Akimura and Akira Kageyama are standing by Daviar. According to all indications, both have pledged their loyalty to her and the Foundation, if pledging loyalty is the right term. Kimberly Robinson (a.k.a. SilveryK) also seems to be in the Daviar camp right now, from the looks of her posts to Shadowland. Smedley Pembrenton III, Henry Higgins and Beatrice Wilder are not talking, but I would guess that silence implies consent and that they'll soon be talking to Daviar to learn if their roles in the organization have changed.

My guess is that Brand had information on these individuals only because he knew them personally. I suspect this because two days after I started my investigations, Hawke sent me a copy of the chip from Brand's notepad. Brand's private phone book had the contact names for all these people—which are simply the names of jazz musicians from the 1900s. The alpha codes are the titles of recordings each artist made. I think the artist names were some kind of password and the recording name some sort of Matrix code, but I could be wrong.

Brand's notepad also indicates that he flew to Washington DC for the reading of Dunkelzahn's will. He told his friends he was looking for work for his runners. Later that night, after the reading of the will, Brand went to dinner at the Kingdom Seven. Apparently, he was pretty upset about something—he threw his food at his dining companion. No ID on who that was, witnesses simply describe her as a very exotic woman, dressed in the latest fashions. My guess is Beatrice Wilder, but it's only a guess. Patrons overheard him saying he didn't get his due and that he got stiffed.

❖ It all makes sense now. Dunkelzahn suspected a traitor or double agent in his little group, and he probably suspected it was Brand. Obviously, Dunkelzahn couldn't just let him go on leaking secrets, but at the same time the dragon probably didn't want to off one of his own. So he simply omits Brand from the will—which angers Brand and prompts him to show his cards. As a result, Daviar, the Draco Foundation and Brand's former peers know he

is going to spill his guts, as do Brand's "new" employers. So now, who wants Brand dead—the Dunkelzahn camp, which is probably hoping that Brand will lead them to his "new" employers—or Brand's new employers, who undoubtedly don't want the Draco Foundation to discover their mole? It would seem that our late dragon friend may have engineered a traitor's death at the hands of the traitor's masters. It's elegant, simple and a stroke of genius. I wish I'd had the opportunity to meet this Dunkelzahn while he lived.

❖ Watson@BTG.52893-221B

❖ Yipes, even from the grave Dunkelzahn is pulling the strings.

❖ Black-Eyed Suzan

Finally, it would seem that Brand's final act, calling in Hawke to protect him, was just plain old luck. Hawke gets framed for the murder and now must prove himself innocent. By doing so, he potentially exposes a slice of Dunkelzahn's organization, allowing Brand some satisfaction for his grievance against the dragon even in death—though this may all have been set up by the dragon, too. After all, there is no actual proof that any of these people are anything more than what they appear—contacts and fixers who work for whomever hires them. Dunkelzahn, like any good consumer, may have just stuck with known quantities that he trusted.

Personally, I think the dragon did maintain a vast shadow network, and that the people mentioned in Brand's notepad represent only a minuscule portion of the organization's personnel. I'd guess that the organization still has hundreds of watchers, agents and fixers scattered throughout the megacorps, governments and shadows of the world. And I think their operations may never be exposed.

So why did the dragon maintain this network? I have no idea. Is it a good thing? I have no idea. Were we being conned? Probably. Will the system continue? Yep. Is that a bad thing? Depends—if you like the Draco Foundation and don't mind taking orders, cool. If absolute power in anyone's hands scares the drek out of you and you hate having your orders generated by a committee, then it's bad.

Finally, will any runner on any given day know if he or she is working for the Draco Foundation or Daviar? Probably not. Whether you like it or not, it seems that Dunkelzahn's legacy will live on in the shadows for better or worse.

❖ That said, we'll let everyone decide the truth of the matter for himself. Runners always ran the shadows for someone—megacorps, the rich and powerful, politicians looking for the piece of paydirt that will get them elected. Now it seems that many may have been working for a dragon. How the future will play out is anyone's guess. But I can't help thinking of an old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times."

❖ Captain Chaos

Transmitted 5 October 2057 at 03:09:00 (EST)

IN THE CARDS



This story comes to us from the street mage known as Talon. Magically inclined readers may recognize the name Miles Swinburne—yes, it's the same Swinburne once known as the "father of hermetic magic." But before any of you non-magical types decide to skip this file on principle, I strongly suggest you read this cautionary tale. I don't think any of us will have to try very hard to understand the moral of the story, and the message is an important one.

♦ Capt. Chaos

Transmitted: 12 October 2057 at 08:33:52 (EST)

DEATH COMES KNOCKING

The golden candlelight cast a warm glow on the worn and well-thumbed cards laid out on the faded cloth in front of me. The significator at the center—the card that represented me—was the Magician, symbol of arcane power, questor after secrets, walker between the worlds, seeker of truth. Across the significator lay the representation of my current problem—the Hermit, symbol of solitude and spiritual advancement. I focused my thoughts on the images on the cards and reflected on the events of the past few days, letting myself drift into a meditative state that might enable me to see some new angle or connection that my everyday mind hadn't recognized. Nothing. I was missing something, and I couldn't figure out what.

I took the next card and laid it in the part of the pattern representing the near past. The card's image stared back at me as I contemplated the meaning of ...



"Death!" Professor Swinburne said as he flung a card down in front of me. I glanced at the card and looked back up at the old man, who was doing a pretty good imitation of the Grim Reaper himself right then. Professor Swinburne was pale and trembling—whether with fear or rage, I couldn't say. His fists were clenched, and a film of sweat on his high forehead glistened in the dim yellow light of my office. I slowly picked up the card, doing my best to look undisturbed by my client's rather melodramatic entrance.

The unassuming pasteboard was indeed Death, one of the twenty-two trumps of the Major Arcana of the Tarot. This particular rendition was an antique design, a scythe-wielding black-robed skeleton mowing down a field littered with human limbs and bodies. I looked at it for a moment, then leaned back in my chair and put my booted feet up on my desk.

"Death," I said slowly and with deliberate care, "card thirteen of the Major Arcana, symbol of great change, transformation or rebirth. What else would you like to know?" My display of tarot lore did nothing to calm my agitated client.

"Spare me the Tarot 101 lesson, Talon," Professor Swinburne said. "I was reading the cards before you were born. I know what the fragging thing means. I want to know what you've been doing. Things are only getting worse, and that card came up during a reading I did this morning. Ever since I got this damn deck I've been getting these impressions. I can't take any more of this!"

I glanced at the card one more time and dropped it on my stained desk blotter.

"Professor Swinburne, I don't think this is a matter for you to worry about. You know as well as—hell, better than—anyone that tarot readings, or any other divination method, don't give exact predictions of the future, only possibilities for contemplation. The change signified by the Death card could be anything—including the end of these attempts on your life."

Professor Swinburne gave a shuddering sigh and collapsed into the patched chair behind him, prompting a soft whine of protest from his cyberleg. The energy that had animated him so fiercely a moment ago seemed to drain away, and he suddenly looked much older than his sixty years. He looked tired and defeated and nearly overcome by frustration.

Miles Swinburne had been born decades too early, according to most people who knew him. When the Awakening brought magic back to the world in 2011, Professor Swinburne was an expatriate Brit teaching history in Paris. An expert on hermetic magical traditions dating back to the Middle Ages, he seized the opportunity to start field-testing his archaic knowledge, and within months he was recognized as one of the best hermetic magicians in Europe. In fact, his *Fundamentals of Hermetic Magic* was long considered the definitive textbook on theoretical hermetic practices.

When the Euro-Wars broke out, Swinburne became a valuable commodity, along with all the other magicians at the time. Magic was a new power that all sides in the conflict were eager to harness for their own benefit. Swinburne became a military combat mage, lobbing fireballs into enemy emplacements and casting debilitating spells on opposing commanders. He was a great success until the day a surprise counterattack hit Swinburne's circle in the midst of performing a ritual. All of the

circle members died except for Swinburne, who was critically injured and not expected to survive.

The medical technicians pulled out all the stops to save his life, but they didn't have time to take the extra-special care needed to ensure that their procedures didn't upset the delicate balance of the magician's body and destroy his ability to channel magical energy. In the end, the doctors successfully patched Swinburne together with various drugs, cyberware and implants, but those life-saving measures permanently crippled his magical abilities. Too proud, stubborn and filled with self-pity to accept limits on his once nearly limitless power, Swinburne let his abilities slowly slip away during his recovery until they could no longer be reclaimed. He rejected all the efforts of his friends and colleagues to help him learn to deal with his altered condition, and he became a magical burnout.

After the wars ended, one of his former commanders set him up in a string of corporate wagemage jobs, mostly theoretical stuff, but he seemed unable or unwilling to keep up with the leading edge in the Art. Younger, more innovative and more capable magicians kept pushing him further toward the fringe, and eventually Swinburne was out. He ended up as an associate professor of magical theory at the University of Seattle, by all accounts a bitter and frustrated old man known around the campus as a real academic hard case whom students avoided whenever possible.

Looking at the frail wreck of a man sitting across from me, I could hardly believe that Professor Swinburne was the same man I had read about in books on the modern history of magic. He seemed very frail and vulnerable, and as he spoke I began suspecting that his mental faculties were beginning to go the way of his magical abilities.

He told me that Dunkelzahn had left him an old tarot deck. He had no idea why; said he'd never even met the dragon. Naturally curious, Professor Swinburne couldn't resist doing a few layouts with the cards. What he had seen in those divinations had disturbed him profoundly, and he was convinced that the cards were foretelling his death. I wasn't so sure yet, but I knew that anything that came from the claws of a dragon was suspect, to say the least. The deck wasn't enchanted, at least not so far as I or anyone I knew could tell, but with a dragon involved you couldn't really be sure of anything. Right then, though, my immediate concern was calming Professor Swinburne and getting him back to his own place.

"I'll take you back home, Professor Swinburne," I said. He looked up at me and wearily nodded. I helped him out of the chair and the aging circuitry in his cyberleg protested as he steadied himself.

Grabbing my hat and duster on the way out, I led the professor down the three creaking flights of stairs to the street. The building's old freight elevator was on the blink again, and I made a mental note to yell at my landlord, Mahoney—right after Professor Swinburne paid me and I regained my yelling rights by paying off the rent I owed, of course. The few working street lamps scattered pools of fluorescent light on the street outside, which was surprisingly quiet for this part of Seattle. We skirted a rainbow-streaked puddle on the sidewalk as I led the way to the alley where my car was parked.

As we rounded the corner I heard a creaking sound and felt Professor Swinburne's fingers tighten on my arm in a vise-like grip. I was just about to kid him for being so nervous about every little sound when I noticed the skeleton standing just down the alley, between us and my car. The night breeze stirred the ragged black robe wrapped around the figure, whose bony claw clutched a tall scythe with a blade as long as my arm. Its razor edge gleamed in the fluorescent street-light. I immediately recognized it from the old tarot card I had left on my desk—it was Death!

The thing lunged at us with a terrible, silent swiftness broken only by a faint creaking that I absently identified as the stretching of dry, ancient tendons. Professor Swinburne cried out as it raised its scythe in a two-handed grip, towering over us. I pointed at the reaper's rib cage, quickly whispered a spell, and an invisible bolt of force struck the thing like a runaway truck. The bolt sent the skeleton flying back just as the scythe came flashing down, tearing into my duster and ripping through the armored lining. I felt a warm wetness spread across my side.

Amazingly, the thing seemed to be recovering from my spell as soon as it hit the ground. I used the few seconds I had bought to focus my magical senses on the robed figure, probing for some clue to how I could defeat it. The apparition moved more cautiously this time, circling off to the side a bit and looking for an opening. I began running half a dozen possible magical attacks through my mind, but I wasn't too certain of any of them after seeing the thing shake off my power bolt. Then, just as the reaper began moving toward us, scythe held low, I hit upon what I hoped was the answer.

Bracing myself, I shouted the words of banishment. The creature froze and I could feel the astral energy pour off the thing and surround me like a wave of heat. The wound in my side began to throb and sting, but I gritted my teeth, held my hands out in front of me and concentrated the full force of my will on the banishing.

"By the power of my will I command you to dissolve, vanish, depart, disappear," I screamed. "You are banished and may not return. So mote it be!"

The skull's empty eye sockets fixed me with a glare that sent a chill up my spine and for a moment I was certain the banishment had failed. Then the reaper's robe began dissolving into a black mist. The material form of the spirit began to boil away, reducing it to its essential astral pattern. I could feel it struggling against me as I continued to focus my will and attention on unraveling the spirit's form. The astral traces of the spirit began to fragment and fade and then the thing was gone with an almost audible pop, vanishing like a burst bubble.

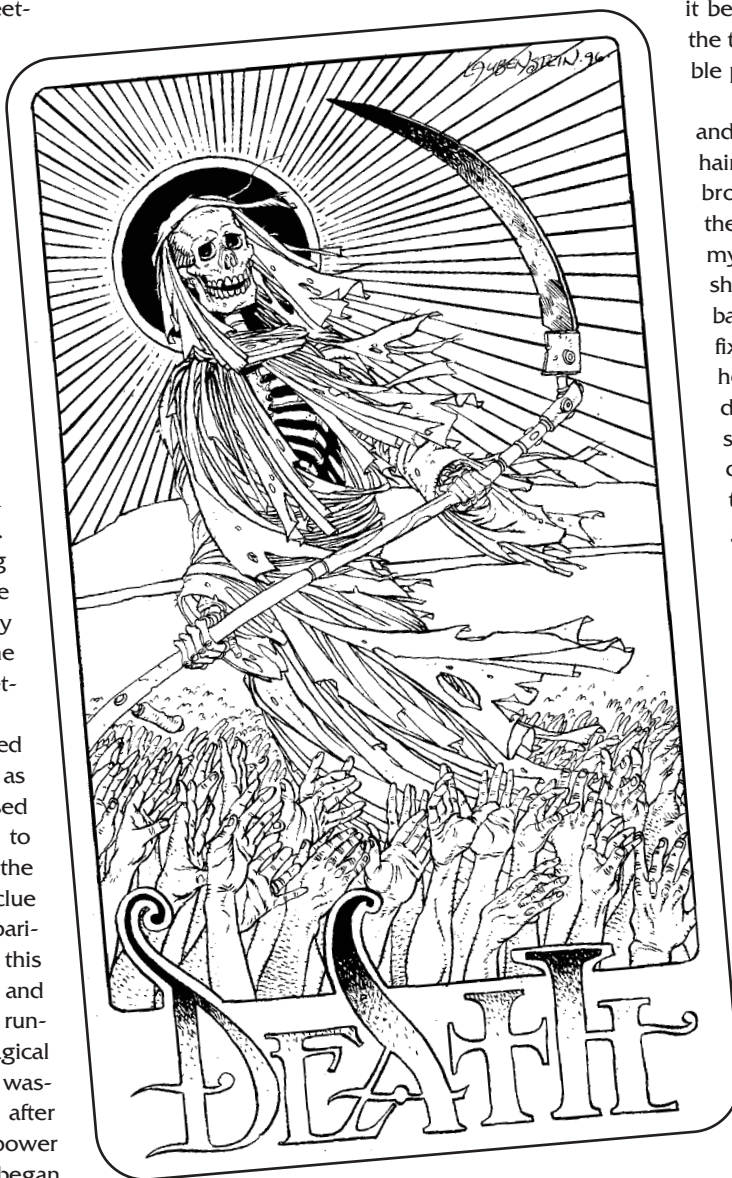
I slumped against the alley wall and brushed sweat-soaked strands of hair out of my eyes. The pain in my side brought my attention sharply back to the material world and I pulled aside my torn jacket and shirt. The cut was shallow and nasty-looking but not too bad. Nothing a healing spell couldn't fix—once the throbbing ache in my head subsided, of course. I heard a dull moan and turned just in time to see Professor Swinburne faint and drop to the ground nearby. Only then did I start to wonder what I had gotten myself into.

FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

I was still wondering if things could get any worse when I pulled up in front of the small Puyallup storefront late the next morning. I had spent the remainder of the previous night returning Professor Swinburne to his apartment and setting up a ward that was strong enough to make me comfortable about leaving him alone for a little while. As soon as I'd finished the wards, I rang up my old friend and fixer Spanner to see if he could help me figure out what was going on. No answer, so I left a message and crawled onto a sofa for some much needed rest.

I'd gotten about three hours of fitful sleep when the telecom woke me up and Spanner told me to get my hoop over to the Thrash and Slash. Now, Spanner definitely liked to hang out in some interesting places, and when those places happened to be in Seattle's nastier neighborhoods, finding Spanner could turn into a dangerous version of hide-and-seek. Fortunately, the clientele in most of these hangouts knew me as Spanner's friend, so they rarely hassled me.

I've never been able to figure out exactly why it is that Spanner and I are friends. In fact, friendship isn't exactly the right



word for our relationship. More like mutual curiosity, I guess. We'd worked together on one or two shadowruns when I first came to Seattle, and ever since we've stayed in touch, keeping each other up to date on things, passing along information, that kinda thing. But we don't really socialize much—mainly because Spanner's lifestyle would tend to put me in the hospital a bit too often for my taste.

The Thrash and Slash—or “Thrash and Ash,” as the local wags called it—was Spanner's latest discovery. The bar occupies a storefront in an old, nondescript red-brick three-flat. At least I think it's red brick—I couldn't really tell for sure. Clouds of gray volcanic ash from the nearby Cascade volcanoes seem to wrap Puyallup in a perpetual haze, and it looked like no one ever bothered to dust the gray grit from the building.

The gloomy interior made it clear that the air inside wasn't much of an improvement over the haze hanging over the ash-choked streets, so I stood in the doorway for a moment and allowed my eyes to adjust to the darkness. A motley collection of orks, trolls and human street scum looked up at me from their various amusements like a pack of rats suddenly caught in the open. I spotted Spanner and started toward him.

“Nice to see you too, Tommy T,” the elf said as he pushed back a long black dreadlock from his face. “Whatsamatta, don't you like the place?”

“Oh, yeah, it's real nice,” I muttered as I flicked a six-legged piece of the ambiance off the table.

“Gotta keep my edge, chummer,” he said as if that explained everything. I wondered how many fights he'd had with the patrons before they decided to just leave him alone. I decided not even to bother asking.

“Since you came out here, I assume that this isn't just a social call,” Spanner said. “What's up?”

“I'm looking to see if a client of mine has any enemies.”

“Everybody's got enemies, Tommy.”

“Yeah, well these would have to be pretty *unique* enemies.”

I then proceeded to tell Spanner about Professor Swinburne, the attempts on his life and the encounter with the Death spirit. He listened without comment and asked no questions until I finished the story. Then he leaned back and thought for a moment, his face a mask and his eyes unreadable behind the wrap-around mirror-shades.

“Could be an enemy mage from the Euro-Wars,” he speculated, “or some corp wagemage who's got a beef against this guy. Or it could be a pro.”

“That's about what I figured. If it *is* a hit mage, I've sure as hell never heard of him. Think you could check around? Tarot spirits are a pretty unique trademark.”

“I'll talk to a few people.”

“Wiz. Call me if you find out anything.”

Spanner grinned again.

“Why don't we just meet somewhere?” he asked. I winced at the thought and gave him a dirty look that just made him laugh as I got up and made my way to the door.

When I got back to Professor Swinburne's flat near the university, I assented the wards before going in and found them all

intact. Professor Swinburne was snoring on a ratty old couch when I came in. On the floor next to him lay the old tarot deck, with the Devil card on top. Great, I thought. Now he's going to think that he's going to burn in hell as well as die.

Professor Swinburne grunted awake at the slight tremor in the astral energies as I began preparations to strengthen the wards. His magical powers may be weak, I thought, but his senses and skills seem as sharp as ever.

“Anything?” he asked, with a note of helplessness in his voice.

“I have a friend checking on a few leads,” I said as I continued laying out my materials. “In the meantime, I'm going to strengthen the wards.”

“You might also try tracing the astral signature of that spirit,” Professor Swinburne began, but I shook my head.

“I didn't get a good look at it in astral space and the astral traces it left behind are too faint,” I told him. “It was a pretty good banishment, if I do say so myself.”

Professor Swinburne looked for a moment like he was about to lecture me on my assensing technique, but instead he moved over to the end of the couch and just watched me quietly as I went about my preparations. I lit a small brazier for the incense and started sketching out a circle for the ward casting.

I was getting the incense out of the shopping bag when I felt it. There was no tremor in the wards, no warning other than an astral whisper of power and a small gasp of terror from Professor Swinburne as the horned, cloven-hoofed beast appeared. It was so big that it had to bend over to fit in the confines of the squat, and it gave off a powerful, rank stench of sulfur and brimstone that choked my sinuses. A wave of heat poured off the flames that danced around the creature and raised bubbling blisters on its reddish skin. Rattling a heavy iron chain with one of its clawed hands, the Devil spirit turned its black, merciless eyes upon us, let out a deep, booming laugh like the roar of a furnace, and took a step toward us.

I shook off my initial surprise and shifted to my astral senses. The demon's shimmering aura surrounded it like the yellow flames that outlined its physical body. This spirit was more powerful than the last one. Banishing it would be difficult, and if I blew it both the professor and I would be toast—literally. Astral combat was right out. Even if I could take the thing, I'd have to leave my physical body helpless while I tried. And no way I was going to go toe-to-toe with the thing physically.

The flaming chain lashed out and I hit the floor. The chain whooshed through the space where I had been standing and smashed the wall behind me, sending chunks of burning sheet-rock and wooden studs flying like a pile of children's blocks. Fortunately, I hadn't removed my armored jacket before I started the casting for the wards, so I simply tucked my head and let the charred debris bounce off me. As someone in the next apartment began screaming, I focused my will into a bolt of magical power that leapt through the astral like an electrical arc to strike the spirit. The horned creature batted at the spell as if it were trying to swat an annoying insect buzzing around its head, and I grabbed Professor Swinburne and began to haul hoop out of there.

The spirit was too fast, however, and it suddenly loomed ahead of us, blocking the exit from the small apartment. Choking waves of heat and sulfurous smoke continued to rise off the creature, while flames were quickly spreading to the rest of the room. The beast gave a fanged smile and raised its fist for a blow that might have easily crushed us both. As the flaming fist fell, I lashed out with the force of my will. The floor beneath us groaned and collapsed, and Professor Swinburne and I fell down into the apartment below.

I went limp and managed to cushion Professor Swinburne from the full impact of the fall. My body armor gave me some protection, but I was going to be bruised and sore for the next couple of days. Luckily, the confusion and smoke from upstairs had apparently sent the residents running for help, so the apartment was empty.

I managed to get up and help Professor Swinburne to his feet. The fire was spreading rapidly through the dry old building, so we limped to the door and out to the alley. I helped Professor Swinburne into the car and stood for a moment, watching the building burn. There was no sign of the spirit. I wondered why it hadn't come after us yet, but I wasn't going to question our good luck.

Sirens in the distance announced the approach of Franklin Associates Fire Services to put out the blaze. Rather than trying to explain the mysterious fire to the Lone Star patrol that would inevitably arrive shortly after the firefighters, I got into the car and we drove toward the Barrens.

SANCTUARY

Most people don't exactly consider the Puyallup Barrens a place of refuge, but right then it was the best that I could come up with. You see, the Barrens feel like home to me, and under the present circumstances I felt the need to be on familiar ground while I regrouped my thoughts and tried to make sense of the mysterious spirit attacks. And no place in the Barrens feels more like home to me than St. Martin's Church.

Like most of the Barrens, St. Martin's has seen much better days. The old church had once been the heart of a pleasant little suburban town—or so I've been told—but now it stands in a small

plot of scorched land like a battle-scarred warrior on a park bench retelling old war stories and recalling past glories. But anyone can see that the building had been quite nice at one time. And its heavy, Gothic-style construction has enabled the church to survive the turbulent changes in the world around it. Of course, all of St.

Martin's original stained glass windows have been replaced with sheets of construction plastic, barred over or covered with heavy shutters. And the sides of the building bear scars and layers of graffiti that date back to the Year of Chaos, maybe even earlier. But the church is still solid, and it had weathered all that the world had thrown at it up to that point. It was that kind of a haven that Professor Swinburne and I needed right about then.

Professor Swinburne had collapsed a few moments after we'd left the scene of his burning apartment, slumping down in the car seat. He had a few bruises and scrapes from our somewhat unorthodox exit but appeared to be uninjured otherwise. When I pulled into the small, weed-choked lot behind St. Martin's he opened his eyes with a groan and looked around, trying to get his bearings.

I went around to the passenger side and helped the professor to his feet. With all of his cyberware, the old guy was a lot heavier than he looked. Obviously, whoever wanted Professor Swinburne dead wasn't fooling around here, I thought to myself. This mysterious individual also had some very serious magical firepower of an unknown type at his command.

It still nagged at me that the Devil spirit hadn't come after us when we dropped out of the professor's apartment. If the

thing had been a common type of spirit, the wards would have stopped it. Professor Swinburne and I, as physical beings, could pass through the wards without any difficulty, of course, but astral spirits wouldn't be able to. But the wards hadn't stopped the thing from getting *in*, so why would they stop it from getting out?

In fact, I didn't even know how it had gotten inside the apartment in the first place. A spirit of its obvious strength could have broken the wards, given time, but the wards weren't even touched. There was no disturbance, the spirit was just suddenly there. I didn't know of any spirit that could do that, and that real-



ly bothered me because it meant that normal magical protections were next to useless against this enemy. I needed time to regroup and plan some other kind of defense, and to do that I needed to find out more about the nature of our mystery assassin.

Moments after I knocked at the church's back door I could hear footsteps inside. There was a brief pause as we were examined through the door's peephole, followed by the sound of locks and security devices being disengaged. Then door swung open and we were quickly ushered inside.

"Any shelter for a couple of heathen magicians?" I asked.

Father Michael O'Neil returned my smile with a grin that was full of sparkling good will. The padre was the main reason for St. Martin's continued good health in the depressed area of the Barrens. Like me, Father Mike had reached Seattle by way of Boston, which gave us something in common. Father Mike, however, had come to the Hub after leaving his native Ireland when the Shidhe had "reclaimed" their lands from the humans who lived there. The new elven rulers of Tír na nÓg (as they had named their Dominion) were not favorably disposed to the influential Irish Catholic Church, and they had expelled Father Mike along with thousands of other clergymen. I'd heard that Father Mike had worked with several resistance groups that had tried to overthrow the Shidhe before he came to North America.

The padre had literally worked miracles in keeping St. Martin's running. It was a continual wonder to me how the man managed not to go deaf from the sound of all of the Commandments breaking around him. Yet he handled it all in stride. In addition to working with his flock and the local residents, Father Mike also maintained a network of shadow contacts that had served the small church well on several occasions (I even knew one or two runners who regularly visited St. Martin's for what must have been some very interesting confessions). Whenever anyone asked him why he sometimes offered help to shadowrunners and other such "undesirables," Father Mike simply smiled a mysterious little smile and said, "the Lord moves in mysterious ways."

"All are welcome in the House of the Lord," he replied without missing a beat, "even such unrepentant neo-pagans as yourself, Talon."

Concern replaced his good humor as he closed the door and reactivated the security system. He helped me carry Professor Swinburne into a spare room on the second floor and waited until I had satisfied myself that the room was secure before he asked me what was going on.

"I need—we need sanctuary, Father. Someone or something has twice magically attacked and tried to kill my client. I need a safe place to hide him and I couldn't go anywhere I was known to frequent."

"Well, then, this will be the last place they'll think to look, eh?" Father Mike said with a smile. "You may not be a churchgoer, Talon, nor even a Christian, but each of us serves God in our own way. You are quite welcome to stay."

I nodded gratefully.

"I want to be up front with you, padre. Professor Swinburne's place got trashed earlier this evening by a spirit that I haven't been able to identify." I decided to leave out the details

of the Devil spirit. Father Michael was a firm believer in the papal encyclical that stated that magic was not a tool of Satan, but strange spirits—especially ones that looked like something out of a medieval rendition of Hell—tended to make even the most liberal clergyman nervous.

"It or something like it might come after him here. If you feel it's too dangerous, then we'll leave as soon as the professor recovers a bit."

"Nonsense," he said, "you and your friend may stay as long as you need to. So long as you feel that there's no great danger to my flock."

"I don't think anyone else will be in danger. So far the spirits I've seen have only gone after Professor Swinburne. They attacked me only when I got in their way. I don't think they'd attack any innocent bystanders."

I was also gambling that the spirits wouldn't even show up here. I don't put much stock in the power of religious icons or the like to keep away evil spirits, but the strong faith and the rituals conducted in St. Martin's over the years had built up a mild astral background count, a sort of magical "static" that would make any magical assault a bit more difficult. And I was also hoping that the background count would make tracking us by magical means more difficult and buy me a little more time.

"Well, I don't get many visitors at this time of the week, anyway" the priest replied, "but I'm glad you gave it to me straight."

Apparently satisfied with my explanations, Father Mike excused himself and left me alone with Professor Swinburne.

My phone beeped and I pulled it out of my jacket pocket and flipped it open.

"Tommy T," the voice said before I could speak, "I've got somebody who'd like to talk to you."

"So ka." I frowned at no one in particular. "Where do I have to meet you?" Spanner just laughed.

DIGGING IN THE DIRT

I stood for a moment and looked over the ruins of Tokyo circa 1967, listening to the monster's bellowing roar before I moved in. The detail in the devastated miniature cityscape was impressive—almost as impressive as the size of the crowd sipping cocktails and dancing among the crumbling skyscrapers and debris-filled streets. It was like Armageddon had come and everyone decided to go out with a party.

I saw Spanner sitting on the end of a stomped-on warehouse and wove my way through the crowd to join him. The miniature-scale city took up almost the whole first floor of the Tokyo Shoe. A bar ran along one wall. The other three walls were covered by huge tridscreens showing loops of holovized late-twentieth-century Godjira films cut with clips from simporn-queen Sushi Dawn's latest release.

The place was packed, mostly with slumming young sararimen and other corp types. But the Tokyo Shoe also contained a smattering of college students, simsense people, runners and other assorted odds and ends—just enough to keep me from feeling *too* out of place but not enough to make me comfortable.

As I sat down on the model warehouse next to Spanner, I raised an eyebrow and glanced at the elven samurai. He caught

my meaning at once. Even with the buzz of the crowd and the occasional 100-decibel Godjira roar, the Tokyo Shoe was by far the nicest place he'd ever selected for a meet. He shrugged and gave me a tight smile in return.

"What can I say?" he replied to my unspoken comment. "She wanted to meet here. Her turf, her rules."

So ka. The contact wanted someplace where she was comfortable and known, where strangers would be reluctant to start trouble. I'd have done the same thing in her place. In fact, it occurred to me that Spanner had always done the same thing when he picked places for our meets. Trust is a commodity that only goes so far in the shadows, and sometimes knowing who your friends are can be tough. Like the old saying says—just cuz you're paranoid doesn't mean that there ain't people out to get you. Professor Swinburne was living proof of that.

I glanced up as a woman approached. She moved through the crowd with a smooth, practiced, predatory grace. From the way people parted in front of her, I guessed that she was well known and respected here—perhaps feared, even. With her blinding bright blond hair, blue eyes that would suit a first-class gander-girl and an outfit so sharp you could shave with it, she didn't look particularly tough. But her bearing and movements seemed like the bright markings and slow undulations of a venomous snake that's ready to strike—they unmistakably said that this was a woman you didn't want to mess with.

I glanced over at Spanner. He saw the woman but remained impassive, his sharp features betraying no emotion. If he knew her, he was keeping it to himself for now. She couldn't be a real problem or Spanner would have given me some sign—I hoped.

"Spanner," she said with a nod, like royalty acknowledging an audience.

"Drusella, how's biz?" Spanner asked in way of reply.

"Pretty good. How 'bout yourself? Haven't seen you around lately—professionally or otherwise."

"Been busy, you know how it is," the elf said.

The woman nodded sagely and turned to me with a 100-watt smile.

"You must be Talon." I nodded with a tip of my hat.

"Guilty as charged."

"You didn't tell me that he was cute as well as talented, Spanner. We could have worked out some—alternative method of payment."

"You're not his type, Dru."

"Pity." She gave a mock sigh as she sat down on a partially flattened office building nearby. "I suppose we'll stick to the original plan, then." She turned her attention back toward me.

"Spanner tells me that you're looking for information on one Miles Swinburne. I may be able to help you out."

"In return for—?"

"Since you're Spanner's friend, I'll put it on a tab. You can owe me one. Every now and then I need the skills of a good mage."

I didn't like owing nebulous debts to fixers, even ones that looked like Drusella, but she appeared to have information I needed. I nodded.

From the inside pocket of her stylish jacket, Drusella withdrew a pocket secretary. She manipulated the keys for a moment, then handed the device to me.

I scrolled through the file displayed on the small vidscreen. Records of Professor Swinburne's service in the Euro-Wars made up most of the file. The professor's military records contained a medical report on the injuries he had suffered and the repairs that had been done to put him back together. It was some pretty sophisticated drek for its time. The military psychologists said that Professor

Swinburne had showed only minimal trauma over his power loss and that he had thrown himself back into his theoretical work as soon as he had been able.

The file also contained a list of Swinburne's potential enemies, but it was very short. Apparently, Professor Swinburne was quite the harsh taskmaster, especially with students who normally skated through their magic courses on their talent alone—which left him pretty unpopular with a lot of his pupils. That might be enough to earn him some nasty pranks or maybe some static from a rich kid's family, but I couldn't really see anyone hiring a hit mage over it.



Potential enemies from the Euro-Wars were almost impossible to track, because the aftermath of the war and the Computer Crash of '29 virtually ensured that any records from that time would be incomplete. The file showed that a few of Professor Swinburne's junior magicians complained that he was a hard case, but again, nothing that would make anyone want to kill him twenty years later. I sighed and handed the computer back to Drusella.

"What about the tarot spirits?" I asked. "Any leads on them?"

Drusella shook her head and punched a key. The comp beeped as it copied the file onto a chip for me.

"Not my area," she replied, "but as part of the deal I can give you a referral."

Kazuo wasn't very hard to find. He sat alone in a corner on a model of that power plant that Godjira always seemed to go out of his way to rampage through. A holo generator produced the flames that flickered in the plant's tiny windows as well as the occasional burst of blue sparks from the broken cables that lay strewn about. The street shaman wore a dark kimono over his black Jeddi Kal jeans and silk shirt. His hair was cut in a shag in front, with a long braid trailing down the back. A bit shorter than the average human male, Kazuo still seemed to tower above the people around him, like a guru seated upon his mountain top awaiting seekers of wisdom.

As Spanner and I sat down on one of the damaged oil tanks nearby, I noticed that the tridscreen behind Kazuo looked defective. The image was hazy and distorted, like a bad signal or something, but then I realized what was causing it. I'd heard a rumor that the Tokyo Shoe's hearth spirit favored Kazuo and often stayed close to keep an eye on its pal. Three guesses as to what the spirit manifests as in the physical world. That's right—the last guy who hassled the street shaman in here had a bad case of radioactive breath-burn when the bouncers tossed him out on the pavement.

Kazuo sedately looked us both over and I knew that he saw with more than his physical eyes. His gaze flitted quickly over Spanner and came to rest on me. He blinked a couple of times and his eyes focused. He favored me with a slight smile and I got the feeling that my masking had held up under his scrutiny. Point one to me.

"Konichi-wa, Talon-san," the shaman said. "Drusella told me that you might want to talk to me. What may I do for you?"

"I need some information about some rather unusual magic manifestations," I said, then described to the street shaman the appearance of the tarot spirits and their apparent defiance of known magical defenses. He listened without interrupting.

"Well," I said, "what do you think?"

He paused, carefully weighing his answer.

"I may be able to offer some small advice, but knowledge is power," he replied. "What would I receive in exchange?"

"A professional courtesy," I said. "When I discover the truth about these spirits, I will inform you of it. As you say, knowledge is the only coin of real value."

Kazuo kept a perfect poker face, but I could see the gleam in his eyes. Very few magicians could resist the chance to acquire some new bit of arcane information that no one else knows. I figured that Kazuo would be willing to gamble that I really would find out what was going on.

"I have never heard of such spirits myself," he said slowly, "but I know well that spirits may take whatever form their nature dictates to them." I understood his subtle reference to the Shoe's rather unusual hearth spirit. "If these spirits appear as images from the tarot, then there is a reason for it. Such things always have meaning if we can only learn what it is that the spirits are trying to say."

"Well, Professor Swinburne is a tarot expert," I said. "Maybe somebody thinks these attacks are some kind of poetic justice."

Kazuo gave an expressive shrug. "Perhaps, but I suspect that there is more to this than meets the eye. From your description of these spirits, I am surprised that Professor Swinburne has managed to survive these attacks for as long as he has."

I had begun to wonder about that myself.

"Perhaps you should go to the source of the problem."

"How do you mean?"

"If the problem lies with the tarot, perhaps you should consult the cards."

Spoken like a true shaman, I thought. Whenever things get tricky, run off into the woods and toss bones on the ground until you get the answer you want.

"What, am I just supposed to say, 'gee, guys, how come you're so hacked off at Professor Swinburne?'"

Kazuo didn't seem impressed by my sarcasm. He just shrugged again.

"There is an old magicians' saying that I believe may apply here," he said.

"What's that?"

"It's so crazy that it just might work."

BATTLING THE DEMON

Drusella's info about Professor Swinburne pushing his students was right on the money. Even the ones who showed real talent and worked hard didn't seem to be good enough. Not a word of praise to anyone. I was glad I was only working for the good professor, because he sounded like a bitter old man when his life wasn't being threatened. Still, none of the students had displayed enough talent or skill to muster the spirits that had attacked Swinburne. Of course, no one I'd talked to had any experience with anything like the tarot spirits, so I really didn't have any way to tell for sure.

The bottom line was, after two full days of checking, talking and scrounging, I was no closer to finding the mystery hit mage than when I had started. Thankfully, Father Mike had been talking with Professor Swinburne and was doing a much better job of keeping the man's spirits up than I had been able to. The two of them often spent time in the evening talking, usually about their experiences in the former United Kingdom.

On the third day, Father Mike showed me a newsfax about several tenements that had burned down in the neighborhood the night before. That wasn't all that unusual in this area of crumbling fire-traps whose owners couldn't or wouldn't pay for fire protection services, but I still got a chill feeling that told me I didn't have much time.

Finally, in desperation, I resorted to Kazuo's suggestion. I laid out my own tarot cards once again in hopes of seeing something

about the situation that I had missed before. I sat back and looked at the pattern before me. The Magician was me, but it also represented the heart of my situation—a problem with magic. The Hermit was certainly Professor Swinburne, but it also represented solitude and wisdom, spiritual advancement through solitary contemplation. Not exactly an apt description of the man, judging from what I'd heard so far. The Death card, as I'd reassured Professor Swinburne, was a symbol of transformation, of change or rebirth. And it also referred to the symbolic death of initiation. The Devil wasn't necessarily a bad card either, despite what had happened at the doctor's place. In the upright position—as the card before me lay—the Devil spoke of a change or sacrifice that would ultimately be for the greater good. The Empress suggested that there was much to be gained from nurturing, and the Knight of Swords called for clear and decisive thought. The Hierophant showed a need for spiritual guidance and advancement, the Queen of Pentacles represented profit, and the Sun was the goal: renewed life, the source of light.

Change, advancement, mind and spirit. Everything seemed to point toward some kind of ... *holy fraggin' hellfire! That was it!*

A crash shook the church and a scream of terror came from the chapel. I jumped up, ran out the door and tore down the corridor. I flung open the door from the vestibule into the chapel and a blast of heat forced me back. As I shielded my face and surveyed the room, I saw that the pew that Professor Swinburne and Father Mike had been sitting on had been overturned and snapped neatly in half. The professor was slumped against the broken pew, bleeding from his natural arm, while Father Mike edged over to the altar, staring in horror at their attacker. The Devil spirit loomed over Professor Swinburne, as large and menacing as ever. It seemed a bit slower than I remembered. Hopefully that might give my plan a small hope of succeeding.

Professor Swinburne, who was facing the door, saw me first. He raised his blood-streaked face toward me, keeping an eye fixed on the spirit.

"Talon, you've got to stop it! Help me!"

Father Mike turned to face me when the old mage called out my name. I carefully moved over to Father Mike so I could stop him from interfering, if necessary, and I said one word.

"No."

Both men couldn't have been more shocked if I had stabbed Professor Swinburne in the back.

"Talon, what in God's name are you talking about?" Father Mike whispered frantically.

"You'll just have to trust that I know what I'm doing, Father. Please." The priest looked at me and glanced over at the Devil spirit as it took another step closer to Professor Swinburne and bared its yellow fangs, eager for the kill.

"I just hope that you do."

So do I, I thought as I called out to Swinburne. "I can't help you, professor. You're going to have to stop this spirit by yourself."

"Have you gone mad?" He screamed. "You know I can't do that!"

I shook my head sadly. "If you don't try, you're a dead man."

Professor Swinburne looked up at the spirit with stark terror in his eyes, but I could see that his fear was tempered with a kind of longing. He shuddered and looked away.

"I can't," he whispered, almost to himself.

"Do you really think death is better? Would you rather die and never know what might have been, never having tried—or are you going to go out fighting? Dammit, is your life worth that little?"

"You must have faith, Miles," Father Mike joined in.

"Faith in yourself as well as in God."

Fear and hope warred openly on the old man's face as he raised his hands toward the towering spirit. The thing had stopped and seemed to be waiting.

"By the power of my will," Professor Swinburne began in a shaky voice that grew stronger with each familiar word, "I command you to dissolve, vanish, depart, disappear." The glow of the flame around the spirit grew brighter as a fraction of the raging astral energies spilled over into physical manifestation. Professor Swinburne, now on his feet, held out his arms in front of him. "You are banished, never to return."



The form of the spirit began to burn brighter and brighter until I had to look away, but Professor Swinburne's voice rang out, filled with new authority and confidence.

"By my will, so mote it be!" he cried, and a noise like a thunderclap echoed through the church. A hot, dry wind rushed by, blowing my hat off. When I opened my eyes, I saw Professor Swinburne standing on the ruined pew like a warrior, battered and bloody—but victorious.

The spirit was nowhere to be seen.

EPILOGUE

Inoshiro slid me a beer and I slapped down a five-nuyen note on the counter next to it. Kazuo set down his sake cup as I took a long pull from my drink.

"So Professor Swinburne was actually conjuring those spirits himself, subconsciously?" he asked. I nodded. True to my word, I was giving him his money's worth.

"Looks that way. He was so traumatized by the damage to his magical abilities during the war that he had convinced himself that they were gone for good rather than accept what had happened," I explained. "But part of him couldn't accept living without magic, and the longer he kept it suppressed the more it festered until—"

"Until he tried magical suicide?"

"Not exactly. I think the tarot spirits were an attempt by his subconscious self to shock him out of his complacency and force him to use the magical ability he still had. And the specific images of the spirits represented his subconscious mind's attempt to tell him that he needed to put aside his ego and start over again—even if it meant relearning some of the basics.

"An initiatory experience," the street shaman said. I nodded.

"But the stubborn old goat ignored the symbolism and came to me for help instead. The more I 'helped' him deal with his 'attacker,' the more dependent Professor Swinburne became and the less able he was to handle things himself. If I hadn't finally taken your suggestion and looked at the tarot symbolism, I might have gone on 'helping' him until he really did manage to kill himself." I stopped and took another swig from my beer.

"And the Devil spirit was able to get past the wards—"

"Because Professor Swinburne summoned it himself," I finished. "The circuit between him and the metaplanes simply bypassed the wards altogether, but when we ran, the Devil spirit got trapped *inside* the wards and had to break them to get out."

"Do you think the dragon knew this was going to happen?" Kazuo asked.

"I think he had a pretty good idea. He didn't know Swinburne personally, but he undoubtedly knew of Swinburne's work—and the professor's decline following the Euro-Wars."

"Dunkelzahn must have had some reason to take an interest in Swinburne regaining the use of his magical abilities," Kazuo said. "If it was because of personal regard for the man, then perhaps the professor is destined to make some important magical breakthrough."

"Maybe. Professor Swinburne has convinced the university to give him a research grant to study the phenomenon of the tarot spirits, and the UCAS Journal of Thaumaturgy wants him to write a series of articles about his experiences. That line of study might lead to something, but I've got a different theory. Because of who he was, I figure Dunkelzahn must have had something much more important in mind."

"Such as?" Kazuo asked.

"Think of it this way. What if Dunkelzahn intended Professor Swinburne's experiences to send a message to metahumanity, to serve as a parable? The professor had the power to perform magic in him all along—the only reason he couldn't was because he *believed* that he had lost the power, because he believed it was simply outside the realm of possibility. And only he could remove that mental block. The tarot deck was simply a catalyst—it prodded him into action, but Professor Swinburne alone rediscovered and regained his abilities. I assume you're familiar with Dunkelzahn's testament and his plea to metahumanity to restore the balance of the world, to turn things around? Well, both us know that most people simply believe it's not possible. They believe metahumanity lacks the power to do so. I think Professor Swinburne and his tarot deck are Dunkelzahn's way of telling us that we *do* have the power, and that our disbelief and lack of faith are the only things preventing us from using it."

"To look at it that way, you must believe that the glass is half-full," Kazuo said with wry admiration. "Of course, we are dealing with a wyrm in this, a powerful wyrm, one whose motives we can never really understand. For all we know, many of the items he gave away are curses rather than benefits; many may cause even more trouble for their recipients than the tarot deck you became involved with."

"I'd rather believe that the dragon had a plan, and that Swinburne is a part of it. Drek—maybe I'm a part of it, too. I think you're right, though—we'll never understand the wyrm's motives."

For a moment, Kazuo and I sat in silence and contemplated the implications of our words. Then the street shaman refilled his sake glass and slowly raised it in a toast.

"If your theory is true, then things seem to have worked out well. Good karma for the professor, for you—for all of us."

"Yeah," I smiled. "I guess you could say it was all in the cards."

First time I ever saw anyone choke like that on sake.



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