



BLACKOUT

“I would like to say once again to assure your viewers, Sam, that the situation in Detroit is under control. We have already mobilized a relief force to deal with the unfortunate failure of public services and provide for the basic needs of all UCAS citizens.”

Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI) smiled into the lenses of the small camera drone hovering a mere meter from his face, hoping to project the stalwart confidence he most certainly did not feel as he addressed reporter Sam Bluestone of the trid news show *DeeCee Now!* In fact, Kittering could feel the bile inching up the back of his throat as his stomach lurched yet again.

But the one skill Kittering knew he could count on was his ability to lie and look good while doing it.

“I see, Senator. But what about the vast number of corporate citizens in Detroit. Will they be receiving aid as well?”

Kittering nodded and pressed his lips together slightly, trying to look like he was seriously pondering the question. In reality, it was nothing more

than a stall tactic while he tried to compile an answer. So far, Bluestone had kept to the script, giving softball questions designed to help Kittering sell the idea to the average UCAS citizen that the situation in Detroit was nothing more than a power outage, an outage that might be a massive inconvenience but would be addressed and eventually solved in due time.

But that damn dandelion-eater of a reporter just blindsided him with a question that put him in a very awkward position, given his current ties to Ares Macro-technology. The question might as well have been “Are you a loyal UCAS citizen or a corporate sell-out?”

Behind the camera-drone, Kittering saw Maggie Henderson, his chief of staff, already texting away, a furious look on her face. Kittering loved that look—it usually meant someone was going to get their hoop reamed, which is one of the reasons he hired her.

“First, Sam, I want to say that any metahuman suffering of any kind within our borders is purely unacceptable. However, as you may well know,

the current law can make things tricky with regards to corporate extraterritoriality. We would never knowingly turn a blind eye, but we cannot simply ignore Ares' sovereignty over their private property. They have rights that must be respected. Now, if Ares would advance a formal request for assistance, I would be the first one to spearhead such a measure through the proper governmental channels. We are not heartless here in the United Canadian and American States, but we are a nation of laws."

Bluestone looked for a few seconds like he was about to reply, but then he cocked his head a bit to the right, as if listening to something carefully. With practiced ease, he didn't break stride as he said "Well, thank you, Senator Kittering, for your time. We will return in a few moments with Artie Jones and his editorial on ..."

Kittering didn't bother to listen to the rest, disconnecting the link. The small camera drone slowly drifted down to its recharging cradle. The senator then swallowed hard, forcing the chicken marsala he'd had for dinner back where it belonged.

"My apologies for that, sir. I was assured Bluestone was reliable."

Kittering waved Henderson's concerns away. "It's not your fault, people are fallible. But I would like some assurances that this will not become some kind of impediment."

"Already taken care of, sir. The Firm has been contacted, and appropriate actions will be enacted."

Kittering nodded, enjoying for a moment the knowledge of the power he wielded with just a commcall. It was a delicate time right now. If he were to survive it, he needed to stay ahead of anything that could potentially cause him any problems. That was what politics was all about, after all. Kittering was about to offer Henderson a token platitude of praise when an ARO window opened in the corner of his vision. The words froze in his throat as he recognized the incoming commcode.

"Ah, good work, Margret. That will be all for now. Get some rest—we have the subcommittee hearings tomorrow and I'll, ah, need you rested."

Henderson stood there for a moment, a slight confused look on her face, but she accepted her bosses' orders without question, just like she always did. With a nod, she backed out of the office.

Rubbing his face, Kittering mentally accepted the incoming call. A familiar female silhouette greeted him.

"Your answer to Bluestone's question was ... satisfactory. But it never should have come to that. Should I worry about you, Senator? You have been making a lot of statements of late, not all of them conducive to current needs." The voice delivering the message was slightly modulated.

"N-no, not at all. It's being handled as we speak. And I have no plans to speak publicly in the near future, but I needed to give certain reassurances to others in order to keep things moving."

"Very well, because we'll be in need of your services very soon. We'll send more detailed instructions. Be sure that all objectives contained within are completed—they must be in place by the specified times."

"You realize that I'm already under a lot of scrutiny? I can't maneuver the way I used to."

"Are you backing out?"

"What? No, *no!* I just need, need to let things settle a bit."

"Not an option. You knew what you might have to do. Oh, and if you think too much more on this and contemplate ending our friendship, know that I've just placed 1.5 million nuyen in a Carib League account and set up a data trail leading back to you. Cause me any concern again, and those trails will be exposed. Am I clear?"

"Yes. Crystal."

"Good. Enjoy the nuyen."

And with that, the commcall terminated. Kittering calmly walked into his bathroom and relieved himself of the night's dinner.

///REQUESTING ACCESS: SECURE
NODE 78-22-54/4(C) 'WAR ROOM/BLACKOUT///

<<USER NAME/PASSWORD ACCEPTED/
ACCESS GRANTED>>

///DATE/TIME: 08-05-80/1138.34 ZULU///

- > Things are not looking good for the UCAS right now, with the fighting in Detroit still going on and the UCAS suddenly losing a third of their army. Screamsheets and news outlets are doing their best to quell panic and chaos, but methinks we're a little past that now. Still, I asked Kay St. Irregular in DeeCee to give us the paydata on what's going on in the Federal District of Columbia and keep an eye on things as they progress.
- > Glitch

PANIC ON THE POTOMAC

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

<UPLOADED 8-15-80/1245.00>

The headline about sums it up.

When the Matrix went dark in Detroit, the UCAS government initially took it as nothing more than a massive failure of services rather than a full-blown crisis. In the first few hours, there was even talk in certain government circles about whether the UCAS could sue Ares for all the damage the Matrix blackout caused.

It didn't take long for reports and images of the open fighting in the Motor City to make it back to the FDC. For their parts, the Pentagon, FBI, CIA, NSA, and every other alphabet agency were completely blindsided and not sure what to make of things. But it didn't take President Colloton long

to fire a great number of high-ranking officers and intelligence department heads. Then I'm guessing about thirty seconds later she ordered the mobilization of III Corps. I even have it on good authority that before she gave that order, Colloton actually banged her fists on her desk—not in frustration but in joy at being able to, and this is a direct quote, “Stick it to Ares for once.” And let's not forget her infamous orders to III Corps CO, General LaShonda Hobbs, about bringing Detroit under control “at all costs and by any means necessary.” But it wasn't until III Corps, a.k.a. Task Force Peacemaker, went missing that things went truly sideways.

- ▶ The loss of III Corps is going to be remembered by history as a massive military blunder. You don't send an entire corps in, even on a “recon in force” mission; that's what drones, Special Forces, and dedicated recon companies are for. Nope, this was Colloton trying to show that the UCAS was still a power to be reckoned with and settle a twenty-plus-year-old grudge. Of all people, she should have known better than to let her ego get in the way.
- ▶ Colonel Cobra

Concerned this could be the first wave of an attack similar to the New Revolution's attempted coup almost twenty years earlier, Colloton placed the rest of the UCAS military, all federal agencies, and even local law enforcement contract providers on alert and deployed them in defensive positions throughout the country to “shore up key strategic positions.” I'm no military man, but I know what that means: that the military was being positioned to protect some areas (like DeeCee) while leaving the rest basically unprotected—sacrificed, if needed. When asked about the fighting still continuing in Detroit, Colloton reportedly looked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directly in the eye and said, “Let Ares deal with it.”

- ▶ Don't get so uptight about it. It's basic military doctrine. For those of you not familiar with that, think of it as triage. Sacrifice a limb to save the body, or at least the head.
- ▶ Scattershot
- ▶ I'll bet that's a great comfort to those chosen to be sacrificed.
- ▶ Old Crow
- ▶ And that's funny coming from a confederate. Wonder how you'd feel about it if Atlanta was under attack?
- ▶ Ecotope
- ▶ Nice try, but it takes a lot more and better bait to hook me. And for the record, I'll care as much about something as someone pays me to, no more or less.
- ▶ Scattershot

But regardless where you were in the UCAS, there was the panic that one would expect when

the populace thinks they are under threat of attack. But to their credit, the UCAS authorities showed (mostly) a great deal of restraint when dealing with the panic; the damage across the country was described as “mostly minor.” There were also reports of various political and neo-A groups using the opportunity to strike at opponents or targets of opportunity.

- ▶ One of the biggest of those incidents came from Cincinnati where some Humanis-affiliated gangers torched a Mothers of Metahumans free clinic. The attack left ten dead and fourteen injured. Needless to say, the response from the shadows was swift and ... efficient.
- ▶ Pistons

Globally, all UCAS government officials, their family, and staff abroad on official duties or vacation were given instructions to immediately report to their designated safe locations and await further instructions. However, some of them elected to simply return to the continental UCAS. Despite this order, approximately only eighty percent of all those recalled have been accounted for. And to be brutally honest, the UCAS is considering them to be write-offs.

MISSING PERSONS

◀POSTED 08-13-80/2316:II▶

I represent several prominent individuals and influential families from the United Canadian and American States who have had members abroad whose whereabouts cannot be confirmed. These individuals and families are offering considerable compensation to suitable professionals for the return of, or at least information leading to the return of, those missing. Last known locations of subjects range from Aztlan/Central America, Asia, Europe, The Middle East, the Trans-Siberian Regions, and Southeast Asia. Contact LTG# NA/UCAS/FDC 222 (19-5501-9311) for more information.

But as quickly as the “Detroit Problem” got everyone all riled up, the sense of imminent threat and danger has seemed to fade for the regular populace. Within a week, the alert issued by the White House was still in effect, but the UCAS has settled into a sort of new normal of waiting for the other shoe to drop or for the all clear to be given. People will only stay freaked out for so long when there is nothing to apparently be freaked out about.

The federal government, on the other hand, (specifically the White House) is still riding that horse hard. Sources indicate that Colloton calls for hourly updates on the Detroit situation. Additionally, numerous attempts to contact Ares via regular channels and reportedly various irregular



ones have met with nothing but consistent failure, rebuttal, or outright apathy. This has caused not only increased ill-will (if such a thing was possible) between the White House and Ares, but I've heard rumors that certain elected officials with ties to the megacorp have been unofficially told to find a way to make some traction with them or face serious repercussions.

- > Quick addendum: I'm still working on that angle, but given the climate here in DeeCee, I have to tread *extremely* carefully. Three of my personal sources have been found dead, and two more have gone dark. So if anyone wants to help, you know how to get a hold of me. I have enough of a slush fund to make it worth your time and effort.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > I've also heard a rumor that anyone from Ares isn't speaking to the UCAS—not because they don't want to, but they literally have nothing they are allowed to tell them. If this is true, then Knight must have kept the Latvian Gambit close to the vest.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Couple of sections ago I talked about Ares employees dropping like flies because of various causes. As it turns out, there may be more truth to that statement than I anticipated. I finally got some word from my partner who got a hold of an unofficial and later amended autopsy report that indicated that one of the murdered was in fact one of those high-grade bug merges. Maybe a part of the Latvian Gambit was to clean house internally.
- > Det. Gumshoe

And according to one of my still-available personal sources close to White House staff, Colloton has ordered the Joint Chiefs to start drafting plans to send UCAS spec-ops or “trusted assets” into Detroit to determine what the frag is going on. So for now, the UCAS is in sort of a crisis holding-pattern. Fingers aren't exactly on any triggers, but a lot of those fingers are still rather itchy.

- > Colloton and the Pentagon are getting tunnel vision and need to keep an eye on their borders, especially their western ones. Over the last couple of weeks, the NAN has quietly been shuffling troops in that direction. Nothing overt so far—a few units here, an extra patrol/maneuver there. But they and other governments are probing and gathering intelligence.
- > Colonel Cobra

BACK FROM THE DEAD

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

UPLOADED 9-10-80/1245:00

- > I knew things had gotten a bit quiet around here, but looks like that's over now and whooo-boy! Still, all things told, I'm personally glad Vogel is back. First, the official word from the man himself, then I'll toss in my two yen.
- > Kay St. Irregular

- > Ho-le-frag. Did anyone else hear the bombshells that just went off?
- > Slamm-O!
- > This is going to be a gold mine for the shadows. I need to find me an Ares Johnson *today!*
- > Wiz-Bang
- > Not just Ares—a lot of other Johnsons are going to be salivating over this.
- > X-Prime
- > In other news, the Pentagon has issued “stand-down” orders to all military forces. Most of them are going to remain on station for the time being, but they're no longer on high alert.
- > Colonel Cobra

ARTHUR VOGEL MAKES FIRST STATEMENT POST-DETROIT CRISIS

DETROIT FREE PRESS (AN ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY AFFILIATE)

<Begin Transcript>

Vogel: Hello and greetings. This will be what I hope is as brief a statement as possible concerning the recent events surrounding not only Ares Macrotechnology, but the events that transpired in the city of Detroit and announcements concerning the future of the corporation. Again, this is a statement only. I will not be answering any questions at this time. Any inquiries can be directed to the public relations department.

First and foremost, people may be wondering why I am making this statement and not CEO Damien Knight. It is my sad duty to inform the world that Mr. Knight is dead, having been killed during the recent fighting at Ares Tower just hours before the overall fighting in Detroit came to an end. As per Corporate Court law, specially certified medical examiners have performed the required DNA identification and certified Mr. Knight's death. As Mr. Knight has previously directed, as the sole surviving member of the Ares Board of Directors, I am taking control of the corporation as CEO. However, unlike Mr. Knight, I will be assembling a new board post-haste. Also, we are working to re-establish Matrix access within Detroit, but we have found out that the local grids were more damaged than originally anticipated.

Second, I wish to move forward with rebuilding this company after horrific recent events. But I know that there will be serious questions regarding my apparent death that will distract from those efforts. So let me set the record straight on what transpired and why. On December 10, 2079, a bomb planted by a dangerous anti-corporate, neo-anarchist terrorist group exploded in the board room of the Ares Tower in Detroit, killing all of the board members except myself and Mr. Knight; he was in his office two floor above and was shielded from the blast, while I was in the executive elevator. The fact that we were both running late saved our lives. I sustained significant injuries and was taken to a secret, Ares-affiliated medical facility, where I was placed into a medically induced coma in order to recover. For my protection, Mr. Knight used my apparent death as a cover story. Twenty-nine days ago, I was deemed well enough to be revived, but I stayed hidden for medical as well as security reasons, considering the attacks that began on July 30, 2080.

Third, the attacks that began on July 30 were perpetrated by the same anti-corporate forces that attempted to decapitate Ares' leadership weeks earlier. Their goal was nothing short of the complete destruction of Ares as a corporate entity. When their bombing attempt failed, they bolstered their numbers and resorted to targeting our corporate military forces while they were in a vulnerable state as they were undergoing a lengthy refit and modernization program. What we did not know—what we had not been warned about from the UCAS government—was the scope and scale of this terrorist organization, the lengths they were willing to go to in order to accomplish their goals, and the weapons of mass destruction they had managed to obtain. Ares corporate forces were initially surprised by these terrorist's attacks that unfortunately took the fighting into the streets of Detroit; fighting that I will remind everyone lasted for over two months. Eventually, Ares forces—without the aid of the UCAS military—were able to mount a successful counter-offensive that culminated in the destruction of the terrorist threat in Detroit; although I have been informed that this still unnamed organization still exists, albeit in a diminished form. I also have information that UCAS intelligence agencies had prior knowledge of this terrorist group and the threat level they posed. Yet, for reasons unknown and despite being properly informed of the situation, the UCAS leadership chose not to disclose this information to Ares or anyone on the Corporate Court, which could have saved countless lives and prevented so much loss in Detroit.

And finally, because of the damage inflicted on Ares' assets in the city of Detroit and because the UCAS government's willful and blatant failure to act to protect an economic partner and protect its citizenry, I am announcing that Ares Macrotechnology will be moving its corporate headquarters to our new permanent home in Atlanta, Georgia of the Confederation of American States. I have already spoken with the CAS government and arrangements have been made for the new Ares board to relocate within one week. A program for the complete withdrawal of all Ares corporate assets from the UCAS has already begun and will continue until said move is complete.

That is all for now. As I said earlier, any questions, inquires, or additional details should be directed to Ares' Public Relations division.

<End Transcript>

Yeah, Vogel's statements are a bit of a surprise. And I'll admit, I was just as stunned by his return and subsequent announcements as anyone else. But with all that aside, his announcements and proclamations has unleashed a political firestorm in DeeCee and raised a drek-ton of questions, and very few satisfactory answers have been given. Of course, the White House was quick to fire back.

UCAS RESPONSES

To say that the response to Vogel's announcements garnered a swift and savage response from the White House is an understatement. I could post mega-pulses of analysis, comments, rebuttals, and talking points that have been put out over the last several days until your brain melts. But it boils down to a few key points. **Note:** This is the narrative that Ares, the White House, and UCAS government are pushing, so set your bulldrek detectors accordingly.

First, the White House vehemently and categorically denies that UCAS intelligence agencies knew about the "terrorist attacks" Vogel described. They also deny that any such group exists. Of course, in the realm of spin this has actually helped Ares, who're painting themselves as victims. And more the UCAS protests, the guiltier they look in the court of public opinion.

- > Colloton's quote of "Let Ares deal with it" with regards to Detroit made a great headline for all the screamsheets, not to mention her fist-banging moment. Those make her look like she abandoned Detroit to settle her beef with Ares/Damien Knight. Both became rallying cries for the pro-Ares factions. And according to the latest polls, almost half of the UCAS citizenry are siding with Ares.
- > Sunshine
- > Doesn't hurt when you've also got Horizon spearheading your PR and information initiative. News stories, e-articles, and social media are blitzing the masses with pro-Ares messages.
- > Doc Spin
- > What about actual battle footage from Detroit that clearly shows all of the bugs?
- > Treadle
- > Some of it has been leaked, but "experts" are quickly debunking it, calling it doctored and an attempt to smear Ares by "taking advantage of the tragedy in Chicago" and creating a false narrative to "distract from the truth." This slots me off on so many levels. After all these years, no one learned a damn thing.
- > Bull
- > We could show a bug carcass on live trid and no one would believe it unless some so-called authority told them to.
- > Old Crow

- > Yeah, funny thing that. A lot of us here in Detroit are kind of slotted that **our** tragedy, **our** homes, **our** loved ones are being used as a pawn or talking point in this farce. Frag them all.
- > Johnny Redline

Second, all of this is undermining the UCAS' legitimate efforts to get any real information out of Ares regarding what happened in Detroit, as there were numerous UCAS citizens involved, not just corporate ones. Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI) has been appointed head of a special investigative commission, but so far, Kittering has described the Ares reps as being "less than enthusiastic" to share information. So far, at least two hearings have been convened, but no official Ares employees or representatives have shown. And those who *have* testified, their testimony has been little more than "I can't confirm, but this is what I've heard." As of this posting, the UCAS has formally petitioned the Corporate Court in an effort to force Ares execs, including Arthur Vogel, to testify.

One can guess how well that's going.

- > Many more credible witnesses have also refused to testify, risking contempt charges. It may have something to do with John Harriman and Lucy Blackridge, two Ares contractors set to testify on what they were contracted to do with regards to the blackout in Detroit. Blackridge was found doing the permanent backstroke in the Potomac—the autopsy said he had a blood alcohol level of .556. Meanwhile, shredded remains found in Baltimore were DNA matched to Harrison.
- > Det. Gumshoe

And third, everything is at a standstill at this point. As of this posting, Ares is continuing with their move as the new board is in Atlanta, settling into their new digs while simultaneously stonewalling any attempt to answer any serious questions about Detroit. Only thing I have left to talk about is that I've learned through the FDC grapevine that an emergency session of Congress is set to be called in three days, the purpose of which I have no idea. But as soon as I know, I'll share.

UCAS DROPS A NUKE (METAPHORICALLY)

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR
<UPLOADED 8-12-80/1341:55>

If you haven't seen any of the headlines, go look, then come back and read this, because I'm on the move and only have time to make a quick post.

Frag, I've never seen a government move so fast before.

Earlier today in a closed session of congress, the UCAS government put forth and passed a resolution that terminated the UCAS' involvement with the

Business Recognition Accords, claiming that the actions of Ares Macrotechnology in particular and the Corporate Court in general violated multiple articles contained within said accords. Therefore, the UCAS is declaring the accords null and void within all UCAS territories and protectorates. For those of you who don't know what that means, the UCAS just basically told the corps to go frag themselves by revoking their extraterritoriality within the UCAS.

And I just found out that Colloton has officially signed it into law. Total time to make this happen: six hours and forty-three seconds.

This is ... frag, I don't know what this is. On one hand this is one of the gutsiest moves I've ever seen a country take against a corporation and the CC to exercise their sovereignty. On the other hand, I'm firmly entrenched in reality and know ... who am I kidding, I know frag-all what this means or where this will take us. But I do know that in some ways, this is going to be painful.

I'm also going to sign off for the foreseeable future; I need to cover my own six. This isn't like Denver where I had an out, a place to bolt to. No, this is on a whole other level. As greedy as this may sound, I need to keep my own skin intact first and foremost.

Only thing I can say at this point is ... good luck and ghost-speed.

- > Holy frag on a pogo stick.
- > Stone
- > Kay isn't the only one going dark. A lot of my DeeCee sources have also bailed. I'm even canceling plans to head to the FDC myself and staying where I am. Guess I better get comfortable.
- > Sunshine
- > Who says governments can't get anything done? Do we know how the vote count went? Was this a landslide, an overwhelming majority, or a down-to-the wire vote?
- > Peri
- > The newsfeeds are giving conflicting stories. Some are saying it was a massive majority in favor, while others are saying it came down to a mere handful of votes in the Senate. But the government isn't releasing any numbers, which is also kind of scary. There are groups and pundits already calling for transparency, saying that voting in such a way violates jurisprudence and due process; but technically, under UCAS law, it doesn't. *shrug*
- > Legal Eagle
- > Not sure how to feel about this. UCAS stands up to the corps but still keeps its dealings in the dark. Frag it; I'm going to get some popcorn and see how this shakes out. I can't wait to see how the Corporate Court deals with this!
- > Old Crow
- > Granted, I'm not in North America, but from what I'm hearing over the past few days since the UCAS' announcement, people in the FDC and across the country are (generally) falling into two camps. First are the ones cheering the decision, making statements like "taking our country back" and all that. The second I'm calling the Doomsayers—they're the ones on edge, like Kay. Can't really say I blame them. The third group is saying that Colloton et al have made a huge mistake, but those folks are usually shouted down as being corporate-bootlickers. Speaking of, the CC and other corps have been relatively quiet about all of this—anyone hear any word?
- > Fianchetto
- > Those with interests in North America have condemned the new law. S-K, Renraku, and now Spinrad Global specifically have issued statements calling the UCAS' decisions rash and uninformed, among other adjectives. They have also warned all UCAS law enforcement and military that they still consider the BRA to be in effect, and any intrusion onto their territory will be met in kind by necessary force.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Both DocWagon and Lone Star are particularly slotted about this. They may only be AA, but both have declared themselves "on strike" in all UCAS cities where they have contracts.
- > Hard Exit
- > And here I just upped my DocWagon contract to platinum. Fan-fragging-tastic!
- > Cayman
- > Better stock up on med supplies. I'm about to see an uptick in business.
- > Butch
- > Anyone seen the attached CC release? Looks like the CC is finally voicing its opinion on the matter. Took them long enough.
- > Operator Bastard
- > I'm surprised how relatively quiet things have been the past two weeks. I've only had to shoot two people breaking into my house, and only one mugger!
- > Danger Sensei
- > I think people are too scared to do anything at this point. And not knowing who is hiding the heavy hardware helps, too—no one want their home to become another Detroit.
- > Pistons
- > I'm honestly amazed that Seattle hasn't exploded by now.
- > Bull

OFFICIAL CORPORATE COURT PRESS RELEASE

◁POSTED 10-28-80/15:00:01▷

To be distributed to all news outlets

Over the past sixteen days, the Corporate Court, in conjunction with the United Nations, has been reviewing the situation regarding the decision by the United Canadian and American States to unilaterally and abruptly declare the Business Recognition Accords null and void within their territories. While we are reviewing the legality of this decision in accordance with international law, the Court and UN have decided to provisionally recognize the UCAS' resolution. Our response will depend on the results of that review.

All corporations of AA-rating or higher that are providing necessary services such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and vital infrastructure services have also pledged to the Court to uphold their contracts until this matter is resolved. This is being done to maintain law and order as well as prevent unnecessary loss of life and property. In return, we ask that the UCAS allow said corporations to continue unabated with their business dealings.

We recognize that the UCAS may have legitimate grievances with Ares Macrotechnology in particular and the Court in general, but we are disappointed that proper channels and procedures were not followed. The Court is still willing to address any issues the UCAS may have and work towards a mutually beneficial agreement.

We await the official response from the UCAS government.

◀◀◀30.66 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:
ADMIN-03 ◁10-29-80/2300:13▷▷▷

- > No one freak out—I've archived the following mega-pulses of speculation and bull-drekking.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Anyone know anything about Philly? I've just gotten word that there was some kind of weapon detonation over the city! I've heard that there was some kind of flash over the city, then lights out!
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Matrix check, Philadelphia grids are offline.
- > Glitch
- > Confirmed, just got a bird over Philly—the entire city is dark. Anyone else getting a sick sense of déjà vu?
- > Orbital DK
- > I don't know, but we're now twenty-four hours in, and Baltimore is now dark.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Updates: Newark, Halifax, and Bangor have also gone dark. Reports from surrounding areas indicate a massive flash seen over each of those cities before everything technological in the area went dead, same as Baltimore and Philly.
- > Slamm-O!

- > It's Detroit all over again!
- > Wiz-Bang
- > It's ... close, but definitely on a bigger scale.
- > Peri
- > Not only that, but now at least forty percent of our user lists here are now listed by the system as "inactive" after I sent out emergency update messages. Anything I send is either sent back, or I get a non-delivery error message.
- > Glitch.

CITIES GOING DARK!

POSTED BY: ORBITAL DK

◁UPLOADED 11-06-80/0013:55▷

Just when you thought that the insanity may have ended once the fighting stopped in Detroit and things seemed to calm down between the UCAS and the Corporate Court, a brand-new cluster-frag has landed on our doorstep! For those of you not paying attention, approximately five days ago there was a mysterious flash over the city of Philadelphia, then twenty-four hours later, same thing and result over Baltimore followed in kind with Bangor, Halifax, Newark, and now Providence and St. John. In response, the UCAS is staying true to form. Don't need to get too detailed with it, but suffice it to say chaos and rioting have already begun. Martial law was declared across the country three hours after Baltimore went dark.

All we know for certain is at this time are that those cities have been hit with something that I can only describe as being similar to an electromagnetic pulse, even though EMPs stopped being a threat to modern tech at least a decade ago. As far as we can tell, all tech of any kind has been knocked out, along with the Matrix grids servicing those cities.

And before anyone asks, yes, there are some similarities with what went down in Detroit, but there are also some differences. For instance, the flash that precipitated these blackouts was not seen in Detroit. Secondly, there were a lot of people trying to get information into and out of Detroit, but with the Matrix down and sats being overwhelmed (or destroyed), it was like a massive information bottleneck. This time, we don't have that problem, and there's almost too much data coming out through scores of sat-links across the country. We're trying to bring order to the chaos here, but it's like trying to fight a fire with a squirt gun—in other words, not gonna happen. So we're going to open the floodgates and post whatever comes in as it comes in (post sec-scan, of course).

- > Even sat-links needs batteries. How long before they, too, go dark?
- > dev/grrl
- > I'm just here to pile on the drek because Bismarck, Lexington, and St. Louis went dark within three hours of each other, with the same flash over each city. The UCAS military is once again scrambling, but there's no way they're going to be able to handle all of this.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Drek, add Toronto to that list as of two hours ago.
- > Operator Bastard
- > As if it hadn't already been through enough, Chicago has gone dark, sort of. The entire city went down just like the others, but within five hours, huge sections of the city at least regained power. I'm sure the fact that those are many of the corp reclamation areas means nothing at all, nor do the barriers that are going up between the "corp zone" and the rest of the city along with a near army of corp security going active.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > Corps protecting their own interests and leaving others to suffer. I'm shocked.
- > Old Crow
- > Speaking of adding insult to injury, I've just learned that at Ares has ordered all KE departments to activate what is known as an "ejection clause" in their contracts. At midnight today (11-07-80), they're under orders to cease all law enforcement activity and proceed to designated areas to—damn, this is a dick move—"facilitate the movement of and secure key Ares property and personnel from areas in and around Detroit and the surrounding area to the CAS borders." Holy frag, that's stepping on the UCAS' throat!
- > Hard Exit
- > Got word from Kay—who says "hi" but is still laying extra-low—that he's still got feelers out and that he's got word that President Colloton has officially requested UN aid in light of the recent events taking place across the UCAS.
- > Sunshine
- > I've heard something similar, but I've also heard that the UN isn't exactly rushing to mobilize a relief force. In fact, instead they're forming several action committees to evaluate the "best way to mobilize and render aid." News like this makes me honestly weep for the unfortunate in the UCAS.
- > Fianchetto
- > Okay crew, we're all trying to figure out what the frag happened last week. Blackouts, dead Matrix connections, people collapsing in the middle of the street ... it's been utter chaos out there and the rumors have been flying fast and furious. Getting the truth hasn't come easy. Or cheaply. Take a look at some data.
- > Glitch

<<< FILE GLITCH#593 UPLOADED
FROM LIBERTYNET 11-19-80/0745:13 >>>

- > Are we on? Anybody know what happened?
- > Hotstuff

...ECTIO ... PROCE... .. LOGIN V...

- > Hello? Anybody?
- > Hotstuff

<<<LIBERTYBELLE <ADMIN> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > Sweet jumpin' Jesus, what was that?
- > LibertyBelle
- > That's what I want to know! The night lit up and the city went dark!
- > Hotstuff
- > Getting multiple logins now. Looks like it went off square downtown.
- > LibertyBelle
- > "Went off"? Like a bomb?
- > Hotstuff
- > Maybe, too early to know yet. Lone Star's going ape right now.
- > LibertyBelle

<<<TATERTOT <USER> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > <Error: Renraku Babylon is offline>
- > TaterTot
- > Hey Tot! No Mandarin right now. Looks like Babylon's down.
- > Hotstuff
- > Screw that! My *arm* shut down!
- > TaterTot
- > Wait, your arm? Did you get caught in the explosion?
- > LibertyBelle
- > What explosion? You mean the fireworks? All sizzle, no boom boom. And, trust me, I know from fireworks.
- > TaterTot
- > We don't know! There's a whole section of the city that just went dark!
- > LibertyBelle
- > Yeah, I was there. I saw the sparks up in the sky in the mirror, right? Then the booms? That's when everything started dying ... lights, street signs, billboards, cars ... Charlie's sitting in the street right now. I can't get a signal from him... I can't get a signal from myself right now. This isn't even my commlink, I had to snag one from a vending machine. Arm might be dead, but it's still metal, right?
- > TaterTot
- > Hang on. It blew up your arm?!
- > Hotstuff

- > Negative. Arm's still there, just limp. No feeling at all. Doesn't respond to anything, but the manual release is still good, so instant metal bat. When I get home, I'll slap another on and start diagnostics. Everything else? Commlink, glasses, you name it ... just done.
- > TaterTot
- > I'll shift astral in a bit, see what I can see.
- > Hotstuff
- > Be careful kid. We don't know what this is yet.
- > LibertyBelle
- > Oh, come on. It's only Devil's Night. What could go wrong?
- > Hotstuff
- > Hey, just had an emergency transmit hit the com. Something about ... Oh *****Translation failed*****
- > TaterTot
- > Sorry, still no Babylon. Say again?
- > LibertyBelle
- > The Zero! The Zero went dark! They're breaking out!
- > TaterTot
- > Jesus! Tot, you gotta ...
- > LibertyBelle
- > SE sector blacked out. I'm NW. Still, I'm gonna shut down so I can focus on moving.
- > TaterTot
- > Stay safe out there.
- > LibertyBelle
- <<<15.56 MP DELETED/AUTHORIZATION: ADMIN-01 <11-27-80/0500:13>>>>
- > Okay, ow.
- > Hotstuff
- > Kid! You okay? What happened?
- > LibertyBelle
- > The astral is a mess down there. I didn't see anything I could recognize, but the raw emotion is unreal. People are panicking, and the whole area is a giant feeding frenzy for spirits. All that energy is like a buffet for certain spirits, and even if it wasn't, the instant background count's like diving headfirst into a hurricane. The fireworks might have been magical, might not ... I can't get in close enough to find out. Nearly got ripped in half when I got too close.
- > Hotstuff
- > You remind me of why I'm glad I'm normal instead of Awakened. Meanwhile, Ares is mobilizing to the area. Bishop's calling up every Pawn in the area to go back the Star on this one. The Zero breaking open has everybody worried.
- > LibertyBelle
- > Yeah, understandable. Those guys are nuts. Of course, if it works, Bishop looks like the city's savior. That's a big PR win.
- > Hotstuff

<<<FILE CLOSED>>>

- > I'll drop some more in later but this is our first eyewitness account. Thoughts?
- > Glitch
- > What's the Zero?
- > Kia
- > The Zero Zone, the first barrens in UCAS. A whole section of the city walled off and used as a dumping ground for criminals, the SINless, and so on. It's where LA got the idea from and possibly where MCT did as well. Whatever goes on inside, nobody cares about. Supplies are dropped in daily, first come, first serve. It's hell on Earth.
- > Butch
- > Not as secure as they think. Tons of smuggling in and some, much more expensive, to get out. Ghouls handle most of that part. If you double-cross them, well ...
- > 2XL
- > The dead tech is interesting. I heard that there were several casualties in each city from cyber going idle. Heart stoppage, legs collapsing and people getting trampled, that kind of thing, but it sounds like it stayed dead even when they left the area.
- > Netcat
- > I can confirm that. Want to know the weird part? Half an hour later, my crew was riding in alongside Ares, but we didn't have any problems. I was ready to walk the boys through silent comm signals, but the trucks just pushed through the idled cars and never slowed down. Our commlinks stayed active, and Jake's cyber stayed on the whole time. I thought it was some kind of EM pulse but, nope—not a bit of residual radiation. The damndest thing I've seen in at least three weeks.
- > Stone
- > So it fried everything in the area but didn't stick around. Sounds like magic to me.
- > Riot
- > Maybe, maybe not. Is there some kind of recharge to the attack vector? But these all happened on the same night, an hour or so apart. Nothing happened in the daylight. Connected?
- > Glitch
- > Could be vampires.
- > Plan 9
- > Oh, here we go.
- > Snopes
- > I've got a list of suspects, but the fact that these attacks all hit at night moves the vampires up in my book. All that emotion being stirred up makes their meals taste better, they don't really care if all the cyberware in a city dies, and they work best in the dark. The evidence stacks up nicely.
- > Plan 9

- > Keep in mind, this isn't our only suspect. We're still gathering data.
- > Plan 10

- > Whatever it is, DeeCee is taking it seriously. They have a complete lockdown on communications in or out of the city, reserving all channels for emergency transmissions and the military.
- > Netcat

<<KANE <USER> HAS LOGGED IN

- > They got Baltimore!
- > Kane
- > What? Who did? When?
- > Glitch
- > The fragging mimes, man! I told you there were up to no good! They just blew up Baltimore!
- > Kane
- > ... Mimes?
- > Glitch
- > I'll fill you in later. Kane? Blew up Baltimore? Are you sure?
- > /dev/grrl
- > The whole city just vanished! I'm anchored in the river and boom! No more city!
- > Kane
- > Did it vanish, or just go dark?
- > Kane
- > I didn't stick around to find out! The mimes ain't playing around!
- > Kane
- > Getting called up. Seems like it went dark but it's still there. Looks like my crew's gonna get another payday. Time to roll out!
- > Stone
- > All right, spread out, start getting some more data. We'll meet back here in twelve hours.
- > Glitch
- > So /dev/ is taking care of Kane (somebody's been hitting the rum hard this week), so they're out for now. What else do we have?
- > Glitch
- > Bismarck and Lexington. I heard Kansas City, but I've not found any confirmation on that one.
- > Plan 9
- > Can confirm KC wasn't hit. Anyone heard from Vegas?
- > Snopes
- > No problems in Vegas. Well, not beyond the normal weirdness.
- > Plan 10

- > Still no word out of Detroit, other than Ares in full retreat.
- > Riot

- > Ares is retreating from everywhere. Official word was something about not wanting to be held responsible under UCAS law should extreme measures be called for, so they're choosing not to engage.
- > Butch

- > Cowards.
- > Riot

- > Hey, take it from an old soldier—sometimes retreat is the right option.
- > Butch

- > Colloton's worried enough that she's called up the UN for aid. They're moving with all the speed of bureaucracy.
- > Bull

- > Ares assets across UCAS are getting bugout orders (no pun intended). They're transferring a small nation's worth of material from Michigan to Atlanta, and they need all hands on deck for it. Several regional offices are being closed down and given immediate redeployment orders as well. Ares is pulling out from the UCAS.

- > Icarus

- > More than just the Army. Ares is reallocating satellite resources as well. GPS is working for now, but the Air Force is going blind as all their spy sats switch from UCAS to ARES. Air traffic, NOLA, the works.
- > Hard Exit

TALES FROM THE BLACK

- > Still trying to gather facts, so here are some first-person anecdotes from people on the ground when the power went out. Glean from them what you can.
- > Glitch

THE JANITOR

(PHILADELPHIA)

I saw the flash, and that was the last thing I saw with those eyes. They weren't originals, natch. If they were, they'd have been fine. It happened because they were cyber. All around, people are flipping out because their commlinks don't work, and here I am with dead eyes! Could be worse. I used to run with this chica who had all her limbs replaced. Frag, I hope she was nowhere near the towns they hit. Do I still have her number? Don't matter, all my commlinks were bricked, too, and I don't backup my files on the Matrix like dumbass

SINners. She was a real badass, but if she was near one of those flashes, she's probably dead. Anybody know a street sam named Katydid? Anyway, yeah, cyber got wrecked. Like everybody's. I'd've been hosed, except I got the connection. I opened my other eyes, and I could still see with those. You can't brick my connection to mana. Know what's weird? I seen a few bombs go off, just for fun you know? Biz, too. Not many mundies know this, but a bomb leaves an astral haze. Ivory-tower types call it a "background count." This happens even when you don't blow people up. I saw a lotta bad drek in the astral that day. People freaking out, death and destruction, nasty-ass spirits of every kind, people going all post-apoc, you know? It gummed up the local mana real bad, but at least I could see where I was going. That flasher, though? The big bomb thing that set it off? I got a real good look at it while I was trying to figure out what the frag I was going to do, and I didn't see no background count. That's how I know it wasn't a nuke.

- > I've had the opportunity to observe a number of specialized blasts from astral space—not recently and certainly unrelated to current events—and they indeed leave behind a background count, not unlike the results from a kinetic blast. They were relatively weak and faded more quickly, but they're impossible to miss. Are you certain you were looking in the right location? You may have been disoriented.
- > Black Andy

- > I know what I saw and where; plenty of landmarks to go by. And it wasn't weak background count. There was none!
- > The Janitor
- > Hey, Big J! Good to hear you're still kicking. Sorry about your eyes. Alpha-grade, am I right? I was safe and sound out of town, so I made it okay. BTW, your commlink backs itself up on the Matrix without bugging you about it, so you probably still have my number. Shoot me a message!
- > Katydid

NICODAEMUS

(LOCATION REDACTED)

I lived in one of the places that became a black-out zone, though I won't say which. I was in a local bar I sometimes frequent. I like the place because no one makes eye contact or attempts conversation. Suddenly, the power went out. Everything was dark and silent for a moment. We saw no flash or heard no explosion, but there're no windows, and we were outside the blast radius. Most of us left the building peacefully and went on our ways. As I returned home on foot, the effects of panic began to manifest. I saw the vehicular accidents and aerial drones littering the city with their corpses, reminiscent of dead insects. Many people were leaving their homes to find out what to do next. It didn't take long for violence to erupt, which added

to the hysteria. Most of the survivors were people who kept to the shadows and found a good place to hole up. I'm unashamed to admit that I found the circumstances more terrifying than I've ever experienced. There was no gunfire, but I heard distant cries in almost every direction, and the immediate area filled with the sound of desperately rushing feet. Sometimes individual voices would stand out, while others erupted into screams. Have you ever listened to the sound of thousands of terrified people suddenly screaming for their lives as they flee from a danger they're not prepared for?

Sometimes they were the result of a blind panic, but there were also real dangers. A lack of functional firearms or tasers made devil rats more than a nuisance. Metahumanity posed a more ubiquitous danger. Panicking masses of people are incredibly hazardous. People who tripped or were knocked to the ground rarely survived the experience. The mob kept running, swept along too quickly to be able to stop and help without also being trampled. It was madness. I've since heard stories of communities pulling together to help each other through the hardship, but I don't believe them. They seem like fantasies spun by Horizon's storytellers and completely inconsistent with my experience. It took me a very long time to carefully sneak my way to the city's outskirts, where I intend to stay —no more diving into inner-sprawl dangers for me.

- ▶ I was in a blackout zone. It was damned boring. Sure, the sounds were unsettling, but nobody tried to break in. Why would you go out in that mess instead of just hunkering down?
- ▶ Sai
- ▶ My guns worked just fine, but I carry an array of nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolvers. I made so much nuyen!
- ▶ Wolfsbane
- ▶ That was my plan A, but some people set my apartment building on fire with Molotov cocktails. Good call on the throwback firearms, Wolfsbane. Glad I specialize in archery. Many of my accessories were destroyed, but a bow is a bow. Same for crossbows.
- ▶ Nicodaemus

JAYRICKY

(LEXINGTON)

When the blackout struck, my team and I were working a long con at a hospital, which shall remain nameless to protect the innocent. It was inside the affected area, and all technology died at once, like everywhere else hit. I was surprised by the nursing and administrative staff's professionalism. They took charge of the situation and avoided immediate panic in a manner I found impressive. I won't underestimate anyone in their line of work again. For many patients, there was nothing they could do. I

was preoccupied with establishing contact with my team, whom I imagined might roll in weapons-hot to find me at any moment and cause unwarranted loss of life. I appreciate my compatriots, but I recognize their tendency to react with violence when presented with unpleasant surprises. I needn't have worried, though, as they rely heavily on tech and were as helpless as I. My cover was intact, but my skillwires, skillsofts, and headware that contained profiles of the hospital and staff were lost to me. I barely avoided having to explain my sudden lack of skill in surgery. The woman died on the table before I could concoct a plausible escape. We didn't realize this at first because she sat up, screamed, and turned one of the nurses before we could react. If I hadn't been eager to leave, I'm certain we'd all have been killed. We did not impede her escape, and I used the opportunity to make my exit. As I left, I saw scores of people coming to the hospital, arriving on foot or on makeshift stretchers. There were more than the hospital could possibly help. If I remained, I would have been a liability. So I left with a heavy heart. I wonder how many of those nurses survived and how many people owe them their lives?

Thanks for letting me post this, Bull. I know a lot of people might consider heading into one of the blacked-out areas. If you're going in with ground vehicles, you need to be prepared. GridGuide will not function, and you'll also need to bring your own fuel and spare batteries. Even then, getting around is extremely difficult because of all the crashed vehicles. When the blackout struck, it destroyed pretty much every vehicle in the affected area. Vehicles in motion crashed, leaving roadways blocked or jammed — often still occupied with corpses. There's been no concerted effort to clear these, so you'll need to scout ahead. With no active Matrix, the range of most drones isn't likely to exceed 100 meters, even if you bring your own sat-link. The most effective solution I have seen is to employ outriders on motorcycles equipped with throwback radio transceivers and flare guns. If you have a t-bird, be aware that unauthorized aircraft are shot down immediately.

- ▶ You're not kidding about the crashes. I couldn't believe how long they carried on for. I had just got off the bus, and I lost count of how many times I was nearly killed before I could get indoors. Ironically, I was able to get into a place for shelter because a truck that almost killed me put a hole in the wall that was in my way.
- ▶ Calvin Moon
- ▶ You're lucky. I was in a t-bird on biz. We were flying nap-of-the-earth to avoid detection. I had almost no time to react before it crashed. If I hadn't had a few choice spells already active, we would all have died, though I saved three of us. I swear to never ride in a vehicle again without casting the appropriate spells and sitting within arm's reach of an exit with manual controls.
- ▶ Kass

- > Why would you want to go into one of those cities? They're a mess! No Matrix connection, dead bodies all over the place, and all the stuff you'd want to steal is worse than bricked!
- > Asino
- > I believe that's where our next runner comes in. August, go ahead and post your thing.
- > Bull

AUGUST

(ST. LOUIS)

When it happened in St. Louis, I was outside of the blast radius, but the flash was impossible to miss. It seems to me that the people who were harmed the most are those relying too heavily on megacorp products and luxuries. If people stayed calm instead of acting like rabid lemmings, the death toll would likely been in the hundreds instead of thousands or more. For people like us—the SINless who don't worship at the megas' altars—it was less disruptive. We don't seek guidance from the rich and powerful as if they possessed actual wisdom. The rioting masses were full of people who couldn't think for themselves and were desperate for an authority to tell them what to do next. When they received no such guidance, they became beasts.

When I saw the flash and the darkness that followed, I didn't know what had happened. I knew that I must use my power to help, and so I did. I summoned spirits, gathered reagents and what supplies I could carry, and entered the city. I saw many tragic sights and was in no small danger, but I also saw something I hoped for: people helping each other. Where I expected to find a looted Stuffer Shack, I saw a community gathering to distribute goods to whoever needed them. The clerks had made arrangements with a local gang to make the area around the shop safe and help people get what they needed, and no one was murdering each other over what might be the last microwave burrito. They were sharing things, providing medical care, asking around about people in the neighborhood who might need help. No one waited for corporate approval to release the food that would undoubtedly spoil without refrigeration. No one got stabbed over a bottle of water. The tension was there, people were still afraid and angry, but they helped one another instead of taking it out on each other. I'm not so naive to assume there were no unpleasant altercations over the duration, but it was much better than what I saw closer to downtown.

Many headed to the bright beacon of light in St. Louis: the ARCHology. Unlike everywhere else in the city, it appeared to have been shielded from the effects of the blackout. And so, like moths to a flame, the dispossessed gathered there and formed a refugee camp. The ARCHology's mas-

ters responded to the crisis exactly how you would expect those with wealth and power to react to the needy: They kept their doors locked. Never place your hopes in the hands of people who value wealth over all else. I don't believe it helped, either, as there were unmistakable signs of chaos inside the ARCHology.

I've spent the last few weeks moving about, in and out of the city. It hasn't been easy—the UCAS military seems to prefer interfering with relief efforts rather than assisting them—but I've found others with the means and inclination to help. When runners work together to provide aid, we will be remembered differently. When the politicians, soldiers, police, and corporate management abandon the people in need, we must be the ones who provide it. The world needs us, and we have precious few opportunities to prove it. If you are a magician, your skills are extremely valuable, because magic doesn't rely on the Matrix to function. Street samurais need to know that the blast seems to have been a brief event. Your augmentations are safe, and your weapons will be some of the only functional firearms in the area. Hackers, there is a great need for people to establish communication. The UCAS government isn't making any visible effort to restore Matrix connections, and neither are the megas. Your expertise is needed to set up satellite uplink points or establish daisy chains of re-trans units. Riggers! There are so many goods that need to be brought in to help people and avoid the authorities that interfere with our efforts. Faces are greatly in demand as well. You can make deals and coordinate people with potentially conflicting personality traits. Every kind of shadowrunner can chip in. To those of you who resist working for no immediate pay, I ask you to widen your definition of compensation. Forming a deep network of highly capable and connected people and hundreds of grateful souls knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that they owe you their lives may not buy you a soykaf, but it's extremely useful and enriching nonetheless. There are many lucrative looting opportunities as well if you know where to find them. Most of my best tips for good looting spots were provided to me by grateful locals.

- > Or if you have a decent fixer, you can make a lot of nuyen hunting down and taking out Matrix hotspots. They pay extra if you take out the techs that set them up as well. Frag me if I know why, but I have as much work as I can handle taking contracts that seem designed to prevent any relief efforts from being successful. I think I can afford to buy myself something really nice after this mess!
- > Clockwork
- > Piece ... of ... drek!
- > Think Tank

OPPORTUNITIES IN A BLACKOUT ZONE

POSTED BY: CLOCKWORK

◀POSTED 11-22-80/2134:11▶

Since I'm in a good mood, I'll share some paydata. Some Johnsons in a Blackout Zone are likely to be offering these kinds of contracts. I'll even share how much they pay so you don't get ripped off by someone trying to low-ball you.

Matrix hotspot hits: These hotspots are usually satellite uplinks that have been set up to allow limited Matrix connections to an area roughly 200 meters in diameter. They're usually running silent and hard to spot, and the ones that restrict data flow to text-only are the hardest to detect. Still, they have to be exposed to the sky somehow. If you're really good at spotting hidden icons, you do something like this: Head to the general area Mr. Johnson sent you to (or just bum around looking for likely spots if you've got a bounty-style gig) and slowly sweep the area. I like to jump cold-sim into a small flying drone to be safe. If you aren't good at spotting hidden icons, look for high points with convenient spots to hide a satellite dish. Your target is likely to be guarded by at least one asshole of a decker. An even more serious threat is the likelihood that technomancers will be infesting the area looking for a fix, so don't forget to run silent yourself. You're likely to find a mage and/or some muscle guarding the place, but they're usually just local gangers. If you're smart, you won't need to engage them directly. The real trick is finding the satlink without getting spotted. Once you've done that, it's just a matter of briefly applied firepower. These jobs typically pay 10,000 nuyen, but you can usually get double this figure by offering to take out nearby tech support. You've got to weigh the pros and cons of this, because if you don't off the techs, they'll set up another target that you can get paid to take out. I've found there's plenty of work to go around.

Convoy intercepts: You can make some good money intercepting trucks carrying food and medical supplies. Most of the drivers are smart enough to turn off their vehicle's Matrix signal since GridGuide is gone. They often travel in small caravans, with a couple of bikers or a pickup truck scouting ahead for them and support drones. Roto-drones mounting assault rifles with underbarrel grenade launchers seem to be in fashion—a design choice I approve of, but you can't beat the MGL-12 for firing rate if you don't have to be

selective about your targets. If it's a pro team, there are going to be a couple of spirits escorts in astral space. Their summoner is probably riding in the most heavily armored vehicle, usually a Bulldog or a Roadmaster. I don't take these contracts often, because you really need a team to pull them off without losing too many drones. You can usually expect to be paid 10 to 15,000 nuyen total, with an option to sell the goods and vehicles you can recover back to your Johnson—getting twenty-five percent of retail seems about the standard, but if you've got a good face on your team (or dirt on Mr. Johnson), you might get as high as forty percent. I did the math: a single Bulldog or Eurovan moderately loaded with non-perishables and basic medical supplies should net you about 20k, counting the vehicle itself at the twenty percent rate. A Roadmaster and its cargo is probably double. The loot money has to be split, of course, so casualties on your team work in your favor.

Missing persons: The good news about this work is that there's a ton of it. Non-functional vehicles and no Matrix combine to keep people away from home and unable to call back. Throw on top of that the violence and destruction of the blackouts, and there are many who aren't where they're supposed to be, and others who are worried about them. The work is there, but the downside is that the pay often isn't. Not everyone who wants to find someone has extra cash lying around, especially with bank access becoming tricky. You may end up working for food, secrets, favors, or other things of value rather than hard cash. If you take on one of these jobs, try to eke 500 nuyen worth of value for a straightforward job, 1,000 or more as complications mount.

Item retrieval: This is a lot like the above task, though generally without the complication of the item in question wandering around on its own. Though sometimes other people take the thing you're looking for. Anyway, whether it's a device prototype, a special sword, a child's toy, a really good bottle of scotch, or anything else, people have a way of coming up with an item they really need to get them through the trials of the blackout. As with missing persons, a simple retrieval should bring in 500 nuyen, a little more complexity bumps that to 1,000, and if you need to get by serious security, make sure you charge at least 5,000.

- ▶ What I like the most about these jobs is that there doesn't seem to be any interference from security forces. No sirens in the distance. No high-threat-response teams. No looking over your shoulder for trailing police drones. It's good clean work, as far as I'm concerned.
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ With those last two, it can depend on who or what you're retrieving.
- ▶ BlueShoes
- ▶ I shall not hold back against anyone I encounter undertaking such contracts. I would never work with a person who would do such a thing, either. You had best hope you don't take any that cross my path, murderer.
- ▶ August
- ▶ There are more runners on my side of the aisle than yours.
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ I shall be on the lookout for opportunities to cull some of you, then.
- ▶ August
- ▶ So to get more on topic, I'm going to share what happened when I ran into a pack of ghouls during the blackout! Bear with me, this is heartwarming. I was skulking along the sidewalk when I came 'round the corner and right into a group of seven of them. They'd been skulking along the same wall coming the other way, and we'd all been real quiet. I thought I was about to be ghoulish, seeing how my shotgun didn't work at all. But they just froze, too. They looked at me, I looked at them. I was about to run for my life when the one in front waved at me and

said “Hello.” We got to talking, and they turned out to be nice people. They were out watching for signs of trouble—they had spirits that make the zombies and such—and running errands for some folk who needed help. I assume they were also cleaning up the corpses from the streets, because I noticed an absence of those in the vicinity, but I thought it unwise to bring that up in conversation. They were all wearing a purple sash or bandana. I asked what it meant, and they told me they were vegans. They said it wasn’t in a literal sense, but they use term as a shorthand for ghouls who only eat food that wasn’t killed for the purpose of being food. I guess it’s a movement or something. Ghouls with a code of ethics about who they’ll eat or not. Any of you hear of that?

- > Ratchet
- > I have. There’s a ghoul in NOLA who helped out with feeding the local homeless. He’s said, “Don’t be afraid of me. I’m a vegan.” Now that I think of it, he was wearing a purple bandana. Everybody loved that guy. I think they called him Noodles, because he’d always pass out sealed ramen packets. I hope he’s doing well.
- > Matthias
- > I just got in a more detailed piece, from someone with some unfortunate experience with disasters. Hell of a thing to become an expert in. Anyway, here’s AJ to give you a deeper look at how this is affecting St. Louis.
- > Bull

STILL FRAMES IN THE ACTION

POSTED BY: AJ <UPLOADED 11-25-80/2323:23>

So you think you have drek luck, eh? How’s this catch ya? I took a little job a few years back. It wasn’t in my hometown, but it was a quick in and out, easy gig; the job went smooth. Luck went south because the job was in Boston, and I got stuck behind the lockdown. Move ahead to now—I’ve been clear of Boston about a year now. I’m doing my best to generate a new report on the blackout in St. Louis, much like I did for Boston, but at least I can get out of here if I want. I’ve just got too much gold in my heart to bail.

Yeah, I should’ve known better. I’d seen the news with the blackouts up the eastern seaboard, but A) that’s the other side of the UCAS, and B) I wasn’t even in the UCAS side of St. Louis, I was on the CAS side. Didn’t matter, I’m still stuck in the dark with several systems that won’t reboot, but I’m not giving up, as you can tell.

I’m not journaling my own explorations this time, but I’ll give you the geographical highlights of whatever the drek this is, along with dropping the forum chatter that I snagged from some of the pop-up boosters that hosted Matrix activity. I’ve

snagged briefs from a few other locals who I trust to offer some more in-depth insights, and I found a few random bits of stuff that I’ll slap on here just to make it easier for the Triumvirate. All in all, the situation in St. Louis means someone is up to something shady in the darkness, and while I don’t have all the pieces, I think I can speculate with some accuracy.

As for those boosters, folks leaped on the chance to blabber at each other again. To save bandwidth, the operators often ran everything as text only. It wasn’t the Matrix, really, but it was better than nothing, and when you were alone in the dark it was something to connect to.

So, in memory of my favorite reporter, here I go again.

VOICES IN THE DARKNESS

Here’s the data dump broken down by booster node, with titles I made up for them. I cleaned out bits here and there to save space and avoid the garbage, but it isn’t *all* gone. If the rantings seemed to hold some hint of interesting truth, I dropped it in near the end for the conspiracy nuts to sift through.

SHINING STAR?

- > Anyone know anything about that OmniStar office building over on Pine that was being renovated? Three of my crew headed there yesterday to check out a rumor about a well-stocked DocWagon food pantry. They didn’t come back, and I’m just curious if it was the site or something along the way that might be delaying them.
- > Philter
- > That’s in the heart of the dark zone. Not sure why anyone would head there for anything.
- > JamesGull
- > The flash trashed everything electronic, including door locks. Access to whatever you want, wherever you want, is just a crowbar away. Plenty of scavengers headed into the darkness.
- > NoFearoftheDark
- > If you’re talking about Serra Park, I’d keep your distance. You never know what D-Wag had stored in their labs that may be thawing and ready to unleash a plague on the city if someone opens the wrong thing.
- > SaintLouisSingle
- > If anyone goes, can you look for my wife? She hasn’t come home since the blackout, and she works on the eighteenth floor. Her name is Kayla West, and she’s short, with black hair, green eyes, and glasses. Not sure what good it will do anyone, but I’ve got a pair of thousand-nuyen certified sticks for definitive info on her. I just need to know.
- > WestJimWest

>>>>INSERT ? PAGE
HORIZONTAL ILLU, #9
HUNTERS AND PREY

- > Everyone should stay away from that building. When the flash went off, the fire-protection system went haywire. I saw people slamming into the front doors of the lobby to try to get out. Passed it the next morning, and there were no bodies. Just blood spatters on the glass and smears on the marble floor.
- > TaretheScales
- > What are you talking about? I went there this morning for medical treatment. They had offline generators that didn't get zapped. They aren't at full power, but the office has plenty staff on site including DocWagon, Lone Star, and Manadyne. Protection, medicine, and arcane assistance all in one. Definitely not where this guy lost his crew.
- > DowntownBrown
- > And they're just helping people out of pure kindness? If my olfactory booster hadn't been fried by the flash, I'd be smelling bulldrek.
- > Archon
- > Actually, everything there is fine. They're helping because they're good people and want to help others. The generator power is reserved for the medical center on the tenth floor, so be careful and bring lights to get through the lower floors. Obviously the elevators don't work, so use the main stairwell. If you have injured with you, you can leave them on the ground floor, we've rigged a pulley system in the elevator shafts for emergencies.
- > Omni Operations
- > Good humans? "Ignore the nine floors of darkness, we promise we're up here." What is this drek?
- > Archon
- > Pretty much a standard in a lot of these disaster zones. I did relief efforts in Chicago and Boston. Both times we found populations had moved up at least four floors when possible. Even small structures with less than four floors never had residents on the first floor, and rarely the second. The move up gives a buffer zone to spot and handle trouble. Of course, this led to a large number of deaths during fires or structural failures.
- > EngineNineOnStandby
- > Whether you head there or not, the lower nine floors have a lot of salvageable material. Violence and death across the downtown caused by system failures left most of this region with salvageable goods. Heading into corp-controlled ares could be risky. Better to hit spots not under someone's watchful eye.
- > EasyPickings

MARKET MESSAGE

- > Help available at 800 Market Street. We have supplies and a safe space inside the dark zone. All are welcome! We can't check SINS right now, anyway!
- > Cooper
- > Oh, thank you! Do you have anyone who can or is willing to help us over?
- > EliseReynolds

- > I'm in, got a few spare Predators too for anyone who needs one and knows how to use it. I say the sooner, the better. My building is having issues with looters, and they're working their way up. I'm high enough that I probably have a day or two, but there are people under me I'd like to bring along, and they'll probably have issues before nightfall today. I can see the emitter truck, corner of 9th and Pine. Meet near there?
- > Courtside
- > I have four people here who are willing to go. The other dozen with us aren't sure about this. Anyone out there able to verify this is on the up and up?
- > DarkVision
- > Don't go there. They're ...
- > (Null ID—Transmitter signal damaged)
- > Sad to say, but Cahokia over in the barrens is doing better than we are. Probably because they're used to these conditions.
- > AngelaLofton
- > Stay away from Cahokia. Mana is spiking in the area, and spirits are saying the area is dangerous, even for them.
- > SpellcasterforHire
- > We lost a few blocks. When the water drops, if it drops, we'll see how folks fared. The river ended up moving a barge that had plugged a cracked embankment and protected it from complete failure. Minute it pulled it free, the flow quickly crumbled fifty meters of earthworks. The barge got dragged through, along with two tugs. Buildings near the break crumbled fast and slowed the flow, but the high river flooded.
- > LarryLongshoreman

PROPAGANDA

- > Citizens of St. Louis, don't fear. Every effort is being made to return power to affected areas. Your city stands by you. For the safety and welfare of everyone, the City of St. Louis, along with the support of the United Canadian and American States and Confederation of American States, has placed the affected region, along with an operations corridor of approximately one half-kilometer, under the conditions of martial law. Citizens within the affected region are asked to follow the curfew and stay within their domiciles from thirty minutes prior to sundown until thirty minutes after sunrise. This allows setup and breakdown of support facilities and allows violations to be handled during daylight.
 - Support stations will be available during the daylight hours to distribute supplies and handle medical care. Permanent stations are located at the edge of the affected zone, and mobile stations will operate across various sections of the affected area throughout the day.
 - Citizens are reminded that interference or disruption of any support station or enforcement personnel is a federal felony and punishable by immediate and extended incarceration. Criminal activity will be investigated by both local and federal authorities, with detainment maintained indefinitely. Judicial proceedings will not reconvene until after martial law has been lifted. Information pertaining to the source of the attack or criminal activity can be directed to the appropriate node on the peripheral Matrix hosts. Intentional false reporting is a federal offense under martial law. As efforts progress, updates will be provided when available.
- > CityofStLouis
- > Big hit there. If you're in the area and need help, drop a line. We have boats heading out each day, but it's slow because of treacherous waters and current.
- > MississippiQueen
- > The fallout could have been worse. I don't know if anyone else saw it, but those buildings didn't fall from the water. I saw a dragon in the water. It was dark and had a scar on its snout, and the head was bigger than a Citymaster. It swam through the raging water like it owned it and barreled through buildings like a bulldozer!
- > Meeper420
- > So a dragon bothered to help out. Not likely. Stop spreading lies and rumors on here. We have enough fear and worry about.
- > SysAdmin
- > I've studied dragons. Leviathans are of particular interest since they are so rare. The only great leviathan, known as the Sea Dragon, is captured in only a handful of reliable images on the Matrix. What's especially relevant is the scar and her size. No other leviathan comes close, and that scar isn't well-known. She got it a month ago after giving a hard lesson to Terasca in New Orleans when their altercation became a physical one. I'd lean toward believing him about those buildings and shift worry over to why she's here.
- > Dragonologist9653
- > What??? You're full of it.
- > SysAdmin

RIVER STATION SOUTH REPORTING

- > Hey! Glad to drop the first message. We're here in the glow of the ARCH and living better than expected. Several barges have been pulled clear from groundings.
- > RiverMudMatt
- > People! I'm looking for folks to doss with. My place got hit by gangers. I was gathering goodies at a Stuffer Shack, so I have supplies to share. Just need a roof over my head.
- > Soulfire
- > Dragonologist9653 stopped by and uploaded a pic. It's a stupid selfie, but the leviathans in the background are unmistakable. Could be faked, but *shrug*. Also, we'd like to note SysAdmin is not actually a system administrator—we just don't have good name-blocking protocols on here.
- > Admin
- > The river's seen a lot of traffic since they cleared a path. Barges of supplies are coming into the ARCHology, and a few are moored out together in the river, waiting to bring more in.
- > ARCHEologist

- > River Rats need help. They're getting the short end of the stick out there. They're a target for the patrols when doing anything except ferrying people to safer turf.
- > MudinmyVeins
- > It's not just the corps; the gangs have been pointed at them. Even though gangs in the blackout are partying and frying resources left and right, they're still stocked to the gills. Enough to trade with. Someone is backing them, and not for benevolent reasons.
- > NoRestfortheWicked
- > Today marks three weeks. Three goddamn weeks. We've had these boards for the bulk of that. Why can't the goddamn megacorps do better? The CAS still accepts the BRA, and last I checked, the dirt I live on is in the CAS! This is some petty, murderous bulldrek. People are still dropping daily from malnutrition, diseases, violence, and other causes! I'm a damn MCT citizen, and I can't even boost a regular Matrix from my own corp. Drop some satellites! Send in some sat trucks! I know they exist, because we dumped them in the desert to rot years ago! No reason they can't come off the scrap heap. We don't deserve this, we deserve better! When the power comes back and we get clear of this, I'm going find a way to make a difference.
- > MCTEngineerSamWatts
- > Funny you mention satellites and sat-trucks. I saw the latter get turned back near the martial border. I've also seen drones signal-blocking satellites, with either broad-spectrum jammers or laser reflectors for those making a direct laser link. Someone is trying to keep us isolated. Anyone able to take down a drone, bring it to me. I can check the circuitry and get owner data. Not a perfect data trail, but it can point us in the right direction.
- > ItsNotHacking

FOUND THIS ... JUST NEEDED TO POST IT

- > Yesterday, I was the pinnacle of the street, an apex predator. Today, I'm practically a cripple, barely able to dictate this into a junk 'link I found. Tomorrow is a question. Let's talk about yesterday first, and then I might get to my tomorrow story.
It started out like every other morning: I checked the news feeds for updates on the East Coast attacks and heard the same garbage. Terrorists with zero capability of orchestrating such a thing taking credit, corporate pundits claiming the UCAS just needs to throw support back into the BRA, government officials claiming everything was fine, support was on the way, aid was being dropped, and efforts were well underway to restore normality. The death toll scrolled across the bottom of my screen and made me laugh. They weren't counting the SINless, and the number was already outside my ability to fathom.
I chuckled to myself that the ghouls were going to have a field day. I know that's sick, but that's my kind of funny. The feeds led me to my messages, nothing exciting unless I needed a new sex pill or wanted to "connect" with some cheap skank. No new work options, so it was off to the gym to keep my muscles up to

par with my metal. I was back home and chilling, catching up on Chase: Errant Knight when everything went black.

Now, not just dark with emergency lighting, but black because I have—well, had—cybereyes. But the dark wasn't the worst. Right after the darkness came the pain. The pain in my head from the circuits in my eyes frying, pain in my shoulders from my arms going limp, and pain over my whole body as the booster nodes for my wired reflexes all popped and fizzled out in the same instant as the darkness.

I'm glad I was already lying down.

The pain didn't last long, so that was nice, but when it was gone, I was left with the nothing. I couldn't see, couldn't feel my arms, my legs barely worked with the fried wires. But I could hear. I heard crashes, screams, and the early explosions. While I lay there helpless, I heard gunfire erupting throughout the neighborhood. I used to live in a nice 'hood right in the heart of the city. But whatever happened ended that.

When I got over my initial shock, after less than an hour (which felt like an eternity), I stumbled through shoving furniture in front of my door and did my best to pull curtains closed with my feet and my teeth, all the while hearing everything going on outside. I couldn't see a thing, but what I heard made it easy to draw a mental picture.

That was my whole night, sitting in the darkness and imagining the world. I wanted to see, to do something. But all I could—can—do is lay here. I managed to find this 'link. Got the recorder on with voice commands, and now I hope it's recording and transcribing properly. If not, who cares, because we're going to talk about what tomorrow brings.

I'm opening the door and walking out. I'm letting the world out there take care of what I can't manage in here because nothing works and I have no hands to manipulate things. I may meet someone who can help. I may meet someone who takes me out. Point is, I'll leave this 'link here to broadcast. If it works out, I'll come back and get it someday. If it doesn't, thanks for reading and please find out what the frag happened and put a bullet in the brainpan of the fragger that started all this.

Signing off, Collin James Kershaw. C.J. on the streets.

> CJ

SCRUBBED (A.K.A. HAVE FUN PLANS!)

Here's a small collection of the scrubbed stuff. I don't know what in this is true, but if any of it is, we're in some deep drek. Figured it was better to leave some of this out here for curious folks to check out, rather than let it sit somewhere offline and eventually catch wind of a disaster foretold in this madness.

- > We are the rightful owners of this city and this land. We have stripped it of the spider's taint and now shall reclaim it as our own. Members of the ancient tribes, come together, rise up, and wipe the land-stealers from this, our sacred home. The Ancient Nations claim the power behind the blackout. Those in so-called

“St. Louis” should leave now before we are forced to unleash the spirits of the darkness to cleanse this place!

- > ChiefSahuatik
- > How wrong can someone be? Or how crazy? The portals under Gateway Park aren't spacetunnels or whatever; they're metaplanar gateways built by the Black Lodge, and they've been there for over a decade. They were one of the big reasons the ARCHology got built so fast and for so cheap, as they brought in materials from other metaplanes. There's plenty of extra stuff stored down there and in the big arch that didn't come through in the same form as they expected. Check out all the warded space in the ARCHology. It's easily beyond any other megacorp arcology for ward space, and Novatech is not a major magic player.
- > DefenderoftheLight
- > They did it. Even though we let them leave, they still came after us. We spend billions to find a cure for CFD, spend more to build them a ship, and the fragging Monads still retaliate! How could we have been so foolish? Why'd we believe them? What fools they have made of us?
- > CainJames
- > It's not retaliation, its revitalization. The Monads who stayed back needed more numbers. The blackout cities are no different than Boston. They're infecting everyone they can and cleaning out every database of the cures! We need to stop them. Band together brothers and sisters, for the war for our minds is upon us in the darkness. Spread the word! Spread our salvation!
- > SavetheMinds
- > I've long known this day would come. When they sent the devil dogs to silence me, I should have come forward, but I thought I was safe in my feigned death. I should have known Ellison would strike at me with his master plan. St. Louis is black, but when the lights come on it will be Black. The Black Lodge will control the city.

Crazy?! Black Lodge?! You don't know, because they're hidden and in control. They lead world leaders. They guide the megas without needing to be a face on the trid. They're everywhere. Why else was a city so firmly a part of the CAS hit, while all the other cities blacked out were in the UCAS. You're fools! They are taking over. They must be stopped. Come together as a force of light and white against the Black Lodge!

- > HumanitiesLastHope
- > I saw them creeping in the darkness. They're here. I thought I'd seen the last of them in Chicago, but the blackout has allowed them to scurry freely in the night. We will be taken again.
Damn Ares!!! Why did you strike so poorly in Detroit? We know it was the bugs! You struck the hive, but not all the hives, and you gave the others courage to strike. We will be overrun. We will be turned and used. We will never win now. Ares and their warmongering have started a war they could not win alone, and their ego was too great to ask for help from true powers in

this world. We can only hope MCT and Saeder-Krupp can save us. The bugs are coming! Trust no one!!!

- > CermakWorked
- > Freedom isn't free. We all know that. Those of us who understand those words know how this happened. They also know it means we just keep fighting because they're afraid! What do Philadelphia, Baltimore, Toronto, Bangor, Newark, Halifax, and Bismarck have in common? They're UCAS cities. What is St. Louis? Especially downtown, where they hit? CAS! Why did we get hit? Because while the UCAS was being beaten down by someone else (probably the Corpse Court for the BRA debacle), they decided to use the cover to hit us and slow the loss. We will be free. Be free of the UCAS! Be free of the CAS!
They tried this to stop us! But they don't know the mistake they've made. The lights protect the masses, not the resistance. We work from the shadows. We have long lived in the darkness. The power will return, and they will find a different St. Louis. A free St. Louis. An INDEPENDENT ST. LOUIS!!!
- > MississippiFreedomFighter
- > Nooooo!!! The White Wyrms has done it. His mountain village wasn't enough, now he wants more. He wants from the mountains to the Mississippi. He is not alone. This tech stinks of the Wired Wyrms. He feigned distaste for St. Louis, but he protects that river-spanning abomination. The River Dragon will be our slavemaster, serving the dragon king. This isn't the end. The other dark cities will fall. They will rule this continent. We are but a foothold. They will take us, then seek revenge on Aztechnology for the murder of their kin. Boston broke for Eliohann. The UCAS will crumble for Dzitbalchen. We must rise up and fight now when we have a chance. They have taken our tech, our tool to destroy them, but what remains is enough. Raid the armories! Rob the airfields! Show the soldiers the truth. They cannot stand aside and protect the oppressive efforts of the dragons! They must fight at our side.
- > Archangel

LOOKING AROUND IN THE DARK

Let me avoid sucking up tons of bandwidth with this and get to the point of my efforts. The lowest rung here, and the first drekheads to jump at this fragged up situation, were the gangs.

The streets of St. Louis went wild in the early nights. As the core of the city blacked out, gangs from the East (a.k.a. the East St. Louis Barrrens), Castle Rock, and the Blight came pouring in like piranhas smelling blood. Maybe they were waiting and ready because of all the other cities that have been hit, or maybe they're just opportunistic and can mobilize quickly, but whatever the reason, the dark zone and the zap-zone (as I call it) were swarming with them throughout the night. As the morning came, some of them settled into new spots to rest, while others headed back to where they'd come from. All of them left death and destruction in their wake.

I'd love to say it was just the first night, but the gangs coming in became a nightly occurrence, with more and more of them settling into the dark zone. Very few settled into the zap-zone. The place felt like a void most of the time. Tech is a part of our lives we rarely notice, including the hum it creates that we just don't hear anymore, but as soon as that's gone—oh, you notice. It's eerie. The dark zone was bad, but it had a few generators here and there, or rebooted old tech that managed to not go dark, but nothing big could run for long. The zap-zone was devoid of anything. The saving grace of most folks there was the ARCHology and the fact that, after forty-eight hours of darkness, it somehow powered up again and stayed that way. The external lighting of that ever-glowing behemoth cast long shadows.

Back to the gangs. They came in, they looted, they killed, they wrought havoc by night. But the daytime sent them scurrying to their lairs. It gave locals time to recover, and in far more cases than I'd like to admit, retaliate. Several local groups started calling themselves Van Helsings, after the famous vampire hunter, because they'd go in and kill the gangers who dosed down in the dark zone in their sleep, like resting vampires. It wasn't always some close-up kill, either. There're plenty of burned-out husks of buildings (and blocks when things got out of hand) that are a result of efforts to burn them all in their sleep.

As you can expect, most gangs now post look-outs or hire guards (often runners) to protect their squats while they sleep. I took one of these jobs and then decided "never again" when I had to put a few rounds into a crowd of angry sheeple who wouldn't listen to reason. I shot to wound, not kill, but people who are that far gone don't care until someone is dead. Luckily it only took two very neat headshots and the rest realized this wasn't worth the risk. It isn't always like that, but I didn't want that again. The citizens have become as bad as the gangs; they just don't all wear the same colors. The dark zone was a free-for-all in those early days and has only settled into a more controlled free-for-all over time. It's still like the Wild West in there, or an all-hours urban brawl match.

Let's move up to the mob. A lot changed for them in that first night. The previous Don was in transit when the blackout fried his limo and sent it right off the Eads Bridge. The power struggle that set off still hasn't fully settled, but their efforts have flooded the shadows with business and nuyen. Some of the challengers think of it as a conquest, while others are taking the hearts-and-minds route and helping those in the blackout, and all are trying to expand their powerbases and businesses while there's no top capo to rein them in. Try to pay attention to who you're working for, if only to dump reports on the Matrix pop-ups so someone can get an idea of who's winning, because frag-all if I can tell.

With the Mafia headless, the Yakuza and Vory are protecting their assets from rabid capos while also pushing back because they know the capos can't ask each other for help at the moment. The Yakuza are actually doing less expansion and more outreach than one would expect, taking care of anyone whose ancestry fits their world view. Hooding Yaks seems like an odd concept, but it's a regular thing, even if it's just Yaks paying runners to do good when they don't have the manpower to stretch or don't want the exposure.

The Vory are pretty much the exact opposite. They're operating in hardcore mode and dumping massive numbers of bodies in the river (which is a problem, but one runners can't address by anything other than not using the river as a body dump like so many others are). They're locking up territory, especially after the dumb-hoop gangers come through and soften it and then get hardboiled by the Vory. Plenty of locales that once were Mafia or Yak territory are now controlled by the Vory. Most of them still don't have power, but booze and physical gambling are back to the norm inside the blackout, so the Vory are still bringing in cash even if the juice is not flowing.

The other syndicates are generally stagnant. They're focused on holding turf and fighting off random gangers and citizens' brigades that are real uppity and super bored, especially with the Van Helsings bolstering their attitude. Remember, though, that what I'm describing doesn't cover all parts of the sprawl. The syndicates don't control that much dirt, leaving plenty of places as silent hollows with regular folks trying to figure out how to survive or how to get out without running into roving trouble.

Let's talk government next. In the early days of the blackout, a lot of government officials residing outside the blackout zone tried to calm the people and tell them everything was going to be okay. They attempted to send in law enforcement and security to help those in the dark and zap-zones, but they only managed to get a lot of folks killed before they realized the magnitude of this disaster. They declared martial law on both sides, not just the UCAS zone (which was already in effect) and told people to stay out of the dark zone while sending in relief piecemeal via air because nothing ever made it far on the ground. Plenty of runners were tapped to recover devices, people, valuables, and the like, but amazingly none of that work involved helping any regular citizens.

Now, for the hinky stuff. First, I tracked plenty of government aircraft making stops at the ARCHology, which means they were connecting with the corps. Maybe it was about getting aid, or maybe they were stopping by to scream at them and blame them for letting this happen. But more than likely, they're working some other angle. Maybe it's long-term restructuring or increased freedom

and support, or ignoring the whole “UCAS tore up the BRA” for the UCAS side of town, but they flew right past the heart of blackness and landed on the gleaming corporate monolith scores of times in the first few weeks.

Second, I got plenty of word-of-mouth reports about runners outside of the dark zone taking protection gigs that involved St. Louis government officials and various political figures from both the UCAS and the CAS. Again, aid, support, anger venting ... there are all sorts of options for why, but word of mouth (the flow of which is sometimes abetted by alcohol) pointed to some kind of arrangement being made. Maybe they need permission for a wall around the dark zone or they’re petitioning a full move to the CAS in hopes of avoiding future issues related to the UCAS. Whatever the case may be, a lot of work revolves around something that doesn’t help those suffering in the city.

Which brings me to my own personal strange experience as point 2.5. I took a protection gig to pick up some cargo being smuggled into the city from the Blight and transport it via a fairly specific path to the drop-off down near Arnold. I had a little leeway to avoid trouble, but they had some very specific spots they wanted this cargo to pass through. Details were sketchy, but they offered an upfront payment of some seriously needed medical supplies and food, which was enough to get me to go in blind. I survived Boston, and the early days of this still haven’t been as horrifying as that pit. Anyway, it turned out that the pickup was a person. A person who I was awfully familiar with, thanks to her campaign ads that were still all over Seattle and the fact that I’d seen her on the trids almost daily back in the home sprawl. I drove none other than Corinne Potter, governor of Seattle, all throughout the dark and zap-zone and then dumped her off in Arnold without her ever sharing a single word. No hello, no small talk, no questions about what was going on. I drove her, dropped her with the same t-bird smuggler on the other end, and then went about my day wondering what the frag the governor of Seattle was doing here. Best I could guess was she was getting a look at what might hit them next, since they were pretty much the last major UCAS sprawl, other than DeeCee and New York, that hadn’t been blanked.

Let’s talk of rumor and reason four. All sorts of crazy stories are told in the dark. You talk to enough people, and eventually they claim to have seen some wild thing themselves, or they directly know the person who saw it. Ask a few questions, get a few details, and you discover that everyone who tells the same tale has some vastly different details. That’s why I’m willing to mention this rumor. Stories have already been spread about a river leviathan. But when you keep seeing a series of rumors about that dragon posting up in a flooded

zone and holding meetings with city officials on an abandoned rooftop, you start to ask around, and you hear some awfully similar details. These stories are going to add up to something, so it’s best if we figure out what that is soon.

So, those are my points. The city is putting a lot of effort into conversations with the corps, two governments, a distant governor, and a dragon, all while their citizens suffer in a place without power, and the days and nights slowly get colder.

That’s enough conspiracy talk. Let’s focus on reality. For those who don’t know, the zap-zone, that space where everything got fried to the point of no repair, is located in the heart of downtown St. Louis. From the river (well, really Gateway Park) out to Grand, and I-55 up to Madison was hit with whatever device the terrorists used. About a two-kilometer-wide stretch. I had street sam and decker buddies who died instantly from their ’ware frying, and the hospitals down there quickly filled their morgues due to failed equipment, accidents, life support failures, and so on. The dark zone is bigger, about twenty kilometers across. From what I’ve heard, that might be the biggest radius of any afflicted city, but St. Louis was also one of the biggest sprawls hit. It’s about an even split of UCAS and CAS territory centered on the same point as the zap zone. It tagged most of Downtown, a chunk of Crestwood, Kirkwood, Mehlville, and Ferguson on the CAS side, as well as parts of Granite City, Belleville, and East St. Louis (though I doubt the barrens’ denizens even noticed) on the UCAS side. The only thing that recovered quickly was the ARCHology, which stands as a beacon of light, casting long shadows into the darkness every night over the river. The base parks on both sides are squatter-ridden, but the building itself lets no one in from the ground. All access comes from the air. Everything else in that radius got blacked out. Devices didn’t fully fry but anything that was on was corrupted to the point of uselessness. Things that were offline seemed to survive, but when they came back, there wasn’t enough bandwidth or infrastructure for a functional Matrix. It was just gone. Power junctions were bricked, and it doesn’t look like the power is coming on anytime soon. There’s a lot of stuff that’s going to need fixing before the lights come back on a large scale.

Small scale has been hard to maintain. Every time somewhere gets power, it draws trouble like a sprite to open data. Everyone comes to either rain on the parade, steal whatever’s providing the juice, or steal the territory and have the lights for themselves. Plenty of runners I know have settled into a decent living by siding with a “spark”—that’s what locals call these lit-up sites—and protecting it for food, shelter, booze, and boosted gear and goods that most of them are squirreling away for later, shipping out of the dark zone, or selling in the dark zone and putting the nuyen somewhere

>>>>INSERT ? PAGE
 HORIZONTAL ILLO, #10
 GETTING THE WORD
 OUT

safe while they don't have to use it for rent and electric bills.

Did I mention rent? This is one of the bright spots in the darkness—no one is collecting rent, because they can't. Some rule about providing a "livable" residence, which they can't, because they can't fix drek. I'm sure once all this passes, the courts are going to be filled with lawsuits ("Your honor, just because tenants cannot safely sleep in a unit does not, on its face, render it not livable"), but since most runners use a fake for their doss, it's just going to be a lot of burned SINS and/or landlords that know full well who they have living there and they never bother to sue. Instead, they'll use the streets to collect. That's all down the road, and honestly, I'm not sure how well this place will manage down the road. I don't think it's going to go the Chicago or Boston route, but regrowth is going to be tough.

That's enough from me. I may add a comment or two later in the posts, but this is plenty of explanation for what we're looking at right now. Let me turn over a couple of bits from some guys I found here and trust.

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

Name's James. Nope, not real, it's a street name, but I always thought names like Robin, Locksley,

Hood, Hooder, or White Knight were a bit on the nose. I do good work in the shadows. I rob from the rich and give to the poor, and those I work with and connect with do the same. Everyone in the community knows James. Maybe it's the silly street name, but I like to think that I do a vast amount of good. I, like AJ, have experienced being trapped in a bad situation, but mine was Chicago when it became Bug City, so I know something about this game.

Introduction over—let's talk about St. Louis after dark.

First thing we have to do is get communications up. Hard to get data moving around right now. Really does feel like Chicago, minus the fragging bugs. Worst part is—well, maybe not the *worst*—I think the people here are tougher to deal with. You can't band together against darkness like you can against something physical like the bug spirits. You can't fight the depression of Matrix withdrawal, the fear of living without social media or doing things without your virtual assistant. You can't punch loneliness and isolation, and you can't shoot the frustration you feel when you realize how ill-equipped you are to survive unassisted by tech. People here can't fragging make themselves food. Even things others would consider simple, like opening a can of creamed soy, is beyond the teach-

ings of someone who grew up with a Nature-Taste KitchenHelper™. I run with Stitch, a snake shaman, all the time because I need him to patch up people's hands after they try to open those cans the wrong way.

Digression: communications. First people I approached won't surprise anyone. I hit up every rigger and hacker I knew to help me solve the problem created by zero Matrix. Hopefully all of you appreciate the difficulty of that. I couldn't call and arrange a meet. I had to go places and look for them. AJ was very helpful talking to people and getting pointed in the right direction, as well as helping me out of scrapes when I got pointed the wrong way. It took days just to get a dozen chummers on the case. Picked up a few more over the first week, and we had our first "Connectivity Car" up and running just shy of a week in. It was pretty much ready by day four, but the gangs were too rampant and wild for us to risk all the work we'd done. With nothing to distract them but this project, the team was focused hardcore. The test run was a bit overwhelming, and we trimmed back the plan because voice and video took more bandwidth than we could handle. Ten "Text Trucks" rolled out across the dark zone by day ten (poetic, I know), with two more Connectivity Cars sent to the zap zone. The riggers had a field day kitting up those rigs like it was some barrens death race, but it was a good idea. Only one of the cars made it out. The other got a collection of messages transmitted back before it went offline. The last message was a text from the driver about getting swarmed by rats. That rig is still out there with a load of messages that didn't get out, but we haven't risked anyone in an effort to download it yet. Several TMs we know (more on their part later, it's great) think they were emergent critters and the Matrix signal was like a dinner bell to the starving masses.

We've had the trucks and cars running ever since, and AJ has us sending him the conversations. Most of it is just people reaching out in the darkness, and that's why we keep taking the risk to put them out there. The gangs hit them, the corps seem to be after us as well, and the syndicates are trying to take over but use it for their purposes. We've lost several, and quite a few other groups are suddenly popping up their own, often with nefarious purpose, but what else would you expect from metahumanity in a blacked-out sprawl?

It also seems like we're not the only ones with this approach—some unmarked vans have been seen drifting around the city, being suspiciously functional and all. A handful of technomancers, along with a few deckers who managed to get some functional gear, have reported a wireless signal from the vans. Who owns them, who drives them, and what they're up to is anyone's guess.

Now, let's talk about those technomancers and something I think only we've come up with. The

moment the Matrix went blank, the TMs in St. Louis started freaking. The sudden silence was like losing a major sense to them. Imagine going blind or deaf in an instant. Many made the panicked run for the rest of the city where the Matrix still hums. A few made it, but most didn't. The streets swallowed some, others ducked into the safety of a new crew, but most turned back. They saw the terrors in the streets and while the "silence" was scary, death was scarier. In this exodus run, a few discovered something. In the emptiness and void of no Matrix, they could sense each other easily and talk across the void. The experience is strange—it's no longer a conversation in the construction of the Matrix, but a call across the blackness. More and more devices have come online, and they can sense and touch them, but it's not the massive clutter and vast variety of the Matrix with its billions of devices. This lack of clutter has given them a little more reach than they used to have, and most of them can reach out and talk directly to another technomancer about a half kilometer away. A group of them have gotten together and created the Network. They operate like a message service across the dark zone and the zap zone (still a stupid name, AJ, but I'll use it for consistency), often in a direct way with two people talking through the pair of technomancers. Initially, they joined forces with our little hooder network, but recently they've started transforming into a more universal communication system, as other groups have started offering larger paydays to send their messages. We still do a lot of protection gigs for them—they're big targets due to the amount of information they send and know—but their income makes it easier to distance themselves from our movement and contract other muscle.

Those are the highlights of our hooding crew. We do the normal runs for supplies and equipment to keep the people safe and fed, and we try our best to hinder the growing forces of metahuman darkness that succumb to their base desires in the darkness.

ARCH-NEMESIS

AJ thought it was important to talk about this, though what I have isn't going to fill much space once he deletes all the expletives. I'm Cajun Kate, a regular river runner and frequent "cargo redirection specialist." I live on the Mississippi and Missouri, and I spent many an hour staring at that monstrosity as it got built. I keep my sonar up and try to stay on top of all things ARCHology. Now, that's a bigger deal than before because of the fragging weirdness. I'm as out of the loop as anyone else who isn't allowed inside, but I've got connections, so let's talk corporate dreckheadedness.

If you ask anyone who's made it in blacked out St. Louis this long and mention the ARCHology,

back up, because there's a chance they might hit you out of reflex. This has been the *most* talked about thing during the blackout. Why? Because it barely got blacked out. Somehow, despite being on the edge of the zap-zone and in the heart of the dark zone, the ARCHology has been shining most of the time. When the blackout rolled out from downtown, the ARCHology went down with everything else, but on night three it lit up like a birthday candle. I should know, I watched it all happen from on the water. I saw the flash, then Downtown go black, and then the blackness rolled out down the river. Because I was working, I was actually spared the worst of it as I sat in the darkness with all my tech shut down, but I watched plenty of boats and drones go dark, all while the ARCHology kept the lights on.

As one would expect, the light drew the desperate, but that's the extent of aid they got from that ghost-forsaken drekstain of a building. Light. They locked down their ground floor entrances and got all their supplies and visitors through the air once flights started heading in again. The air was empty for a short while after the lights went out, as no one wanted to risk losing their tech if whatever had hit them was still operating. The parks and parking lots on both sides of the river have become shantytowns full of tents, makeshift houses, and community fires in two-hundred-liter drums (when they aren't just burning a car). The masses are angry, but they aren't violent—most of the time—because they know full well if those inside want them gone, they have the capability to take them out.

Let's talk inside. First off, who's there? NeoNET collapsed. Ownership of the ARCHology went to Novatech before the CC shredded NeoNET's assets, but ownership of the structure was far more debt than a broken-off Novatech could really handle. Samantha Villiers sought a buyer in Ares and Spin Global, but Ares never bit, and Spin is looking at Monaco rather than the split city of St. Louis. Thus far, no one has come in with an offer to buy the place outright, so the ARCHology is officially Novatech property, with office space rented to several dozen corps, including Erika, Transys-Neuronet, and OmniStar, as well as the St. Louis government and the Corporate Court. There are plenty of political issues going on around the ownership, but that's got nothing to do with the blackout, other than the rumor that it wasn't hit because the owners made a deal with whoever did this. But since no one has a clue who really did it and every terrorist organization is claiming the attacks as their own, it's a moot point.

I will say the efforts to try to fix things are spearheaded inside here, with government officials talking to the CC officials and the corps that are here. Problem is, no one knows what happened, so knowing how to fix it is tough.

They've sent out researchers. These guys get protection from runners and join that glorious category of deniable assets. Thing is, the researchers don't talk much about what they're looking for, and they usually hire the same runners for the same researcher. Meaning we in the shadows will need to communicate, and that's a hard sell.

They're a well-protected, active Matrix hub. This is huge. Hackers try to break in daily, but this rock stands unbroken (according to the hacker community). Technos dig it, just to have the feel or the Matrix nearby, but even they can't seem to scratch past the brutal defenses arrayed against them.

They're mostly empty. The capacity as compared to the actual number of inhabitants means it's mostly unused floor space. Between not being totally sold or leased and the number who just weren't in residence or at work at the time, the place would feel like a ghost town. That hasn't stopped several slick squatters from slipping inside, most thanks to yours truly, but it's a dangerous game to play. If you get caught inside, you can't just run out. No surprise that I slide them in through a water access.

This place is a pain to everyone outside and one of those corporate eyesores that just make everyone angry. It already made a mockery of the city's skyline and is just the start of more massive sky-rakers. Maybe that's why they blacked us out. To drop values so they can build new towers to their power.

Thanks for letting me rant, AJ. The next drink is on me!

- > No mention of the body tossed out a window of the place on night two?
- > Plan 9
- > Never saw it. Unsubstantiated rumor, as far as I can tell.
- > Cajun Kate
- > But I have pictures. Can't send them through the Matrix, though. I'll find some way to get you a look.
- > Plan 9

EXODUS TO NOWHERE

My grandfather used to talk about the old days. He had a nice house in a nice little neighborhood, with a big yard and nice neighbors. Then, VITAS and the first Crash came. Most people don't realize how bad it hit the US. Behind these events, the megacorps rose up, and much of the first world saw a massive urbanization shift. And it wasn't just the switch from rural to urban, but suburban to deep urban as arcologies and skyrise living got people close (but not too close) and out of suburbia. The suburbs turned into barrens.

But enough about history and the good old days. The point is, those suburbs are about to get

some new residents, as those affected by the blackout are moving out en masse.

Vast caravans of people are leaving the affected regions of the cities to squat and reside in some of the abandoned neighborhoods left behind. It's not isolated to a single sprawl, either. The idea is universal. All the blackout cities are seeing average folk, not just barrens rats and gutter trash, moving out to the empty suburban neighborhoods. The groups are usually on foot, but a few have gotten creative, stringing lines of dead cars together like a train and pulling them all together. Cops have had a hard time dealing, and most let them just roll on.

It's a dangerous effort, and I tried to warn them, but desperate people rarely listen. Maybe a plea here will save a few, but there are plenty of runners who do anything for money. Point is, the corps that hold deeds on the property they're squatting in aren't going to be nice. If it's a mega, which most of them are as they absorbed banks and employee property over the years, the dirt is extraterritorial. As such, deaths on it can be investigated or ignored as their security forces see fit, and the property can be protected the same way. With no one technically living there, they'll be free with the wetwork and frequently skimping on the investigations.

Hopefully more runners work to help these troubled folks than to harm or hinder them. Fingers crossed.

SMUGGLERS FOR THE WIN

I dig hooders and white knight runners. They're definitely some of my favorites. Better than runners with a golden heart are riggers, in particular smugglers with the same gilded pumper. The run from the West Coast was already hot, especially with the smuggling action in Denver, but the ramp up in riggers making what they call the Blackout Blitz is unheard of. I'm guessing several cities are short on skilled riggers right now, because so many are making cash and connections getting supplies to Bismarck, Lexington, and St. Louis. The East Coast isn't getting the same support from the West Coast, but there are plenty of riggers running the eastern seaboard up from CAS and Carib League spots.

These runs are bringing food, water, medicine, and, most valuable of all, drugs into the regions to help the people survive and cope with the darkness. I'm not a huge fan of the last, but it also keeps a lot of people who shouldn't be on the street off it as well as calming down and defocusing the gangers.

Runners have gotten security gigs and plenty of blackout victims with nuyen to spare are paying good money to take up the space on those rigged rides after they dump cargo. Some rig jockeys won't take those jobs, but plenty of them do. The ones who refuse usually fill up with a few critical patients from local docs to move out of the blackout or over to another city altogether. If you can

get a ride or a job helping these crews, you may get a lift out of hell for yourself.

NEW YORK HITS

The news mentioned Newark, and I've been wondering why the focus went there when I lost contact with chummers in Newark, Brooklyn, Queens, Jersey City, and the Bronx. Even Manhattan took a hit (I'll bitch about that later), and it's getting coverage like only Newark went dark. Sure, Newark got the fireworks with the big flash in the sky, but areas all over New York and New Jersey went dark. It wasn't as clean as some other places and that might be a clue, but right now I don't care about clues—I care about truth and letting the people know what's going on.

And what's going on is bulldrek!

I live in Perth Amboy—well, technically I doss in a houseboat on Raritan Bay. So ka, it's a refit barge, but it means I'm outside any of the East Coast blackouts. Thing is, I have hundreds of friends across this sprawl (I need more in Manhattan, but I don't have that kind of corp clearance), and minutes after the blackout I was all over the Matrix checking in. The black zones were weird. Strange to have voids that big. The grids were still there, but they were patchy before they flaked out completely. I made touches, found some friends safe, but had nothing on most of them. Well, except for my handful of Manhattan friends.

The grid across Manhattan had issues for all of about two seconds. Corps in the rotten apple had things back up in a jiffy, almost like they had back-ups ready to roll. Sure, I sound like a conspiracy nut, but here go the details, without cute anecdotes.

Newark was reported hit just like Baltimore and Philly. The flash popped over Jersey, but blackouts hit several New York boroughs as well. In every other city, the flash and the blackouts had a link of some kind. Here, Newark got the flash and a blackout alongside several over separate regions that saw no flash but still blacked out.

Nowhere besides Manhattan has regained power. Nowhere else. But somehow this corp-controlled glitz-dump got juice back.

It was easy to find plenty of other circumstantial stuff and rumors, but can we have any doubt when a corp-controlled stronghold somehow comes on in under a day while other places are going on weeks of blackness?

Well, I didn't. So I dug.

I know when this hits the streets and shadows, I'm a marked man, but I'm willing to offer what I have because this has gone too far.

Serve the corps. Doable as long as we have entertainment and life.

Barely subsist on what we make. Okay, as long as the entertainment is good, some recreational goods are available, and we have our lives.

Ignore the heavy boot of oppression and instead see it as a safe and secure hand protecting us from the darkness always trying to destroy us. Sure, as long as those drugs are good, we have the illusion of freedom, and we're alive.

Black out city after city, murdering thousands with each act, in some charade intended to badger the UCAS back under your BRA boot, and in the process kill us by the thousands and take our lives.

Well, you see, with that, there is a problem. We take the oppression as long as we live, but kill us, take our lives, and we do not sit so idly by.

Get the datafile I'm attaching and this message to Old Crow. He has the connections. Let him spread the word and rile the masses. They were willing to sacrifice us in this. They were willing to sacrifice us in Chicago. They were willing to sacrifice us in the AMC. They were willing to sacrifice us in Boston. They have been willing to sacrifice us too often. We can't accept this any longer.

- > Time to add a little more to this file. With a little bit of time, people are trying to look into the why and the who of what happened, instead of being consumed by the what. There may not be a lot of answers ahead, but it will help us ask the right questions, which is important.
- > Bull

DEFENDE NOS IN PROELIO

BY FREYA

POSTED BY: LYRAN

UPLOADED 12-04-80/14:15:22

- > This was originally posted on ShadowSEA's fancy-pants private data haven for all things magical, the Emerald Palace. Someone on the inside forwarded me a file dump, and when I saw Freya's name, I figured I'd cross-post it here. You know things are getting bad when someone with an ego like hers is asking for help.
- > Lyran

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil ...

You've all heard about the blackouts by now. You've heard the conspiracy theories about who's behind it. Most people blame the corps—the “evil” corps, as though amoral corporate greed were any match for the real evils lurking in these blackouts. Blood mages, toxic shamans, shadow spirits, shedim ... the list goes on, and their numbers are growing by the night. There are a few of us out here, an informal network of magicians and adepts calling ourselves the Archangels, protecting people against

the wickedness and snares of these blackouts. We can't be everywhere at once, though, and things are getting worse by the day.

This document lists of some of the most dangerous threats the Archangels have discovered but don't have the manpower to deal with ourselves, along with general information for those who would join the cause. This isn't all of them, not by far—it would take an elven lifetime to list all of the magical threats the blackouts have to offer. The targets here are the ones that are too big for the Archangels to handle alone but small enough that competent runners could get the job done.

One little note regarding payment before we get started. I know a fair number of you reading this don't, in fact, believe in altruism. If you fall into that category, don't fret: The Draco Foundation still offers bounties for live captures of blood and toxic magicians, and the rest of the targets included in this file are dangerous enough that other people will pay to have them dealt with. When I have info on those contracts, including their likely KWE rating, I'll post it.

- > What the frag is a “KWE rating”?
- > Nanabozho
- > The Kano-White Eagle Scale of Metaphysical Force. It started off as shorthand for researchers that wanted to describe the power level of astrally active beings and objects, and eventually made its way into the shadows as a convenient scale of reference. Any time you hear someone talking about “Force something,” they're using the KWE Scale.
- > Trismegistus
- > So, more overly-rigid hermetic bulldrek. Got it.
- > Nanabozho

Be careful when dealing with the Draco Foundation and their “we only pay bounties to people with SINS” policy. It's possible to find “bounty brokers” who'll arrange a deal, but you usually give up fifteen percent of the bounty as a transaction fee—and getting a hold of one during the blackouts is probably a job in itself, not to mention hanging on to your bounty long enough to meet them.

All right, enough housekeeping. Let's get on with the hit list.

MAJOR THREATS SHADOW SPIRITS

You couldn't ask for a situation more tailor-made for shadow spirits than these blackouts: millions of terrified, despairing, angry people packed into small places. To shadow spirits, that miasma of metahuman emotion is an all-you-can-eat buffet. Imagine how much energy a nightmare

can drain from a group of people who jump at every unfamiliar noise after dark, or how a shade might gorge itself on those who have given up hope that the blackouts will ever end. Wraiths cackle with glee as desperate people fight and even kill each other over a scrap of food, a mouthful of water, or a spot in an alley just wide enough to shield them from winter winds. Succubi gladly drain anyone who wants to be distracted from the misery with mindless lust, while muses make a feast out of creative-minded people who use their talents to inspire others. The longer these blackouts go on, the more numerous and powerful the shadow spirits will get, until the UCAS' major cities are as infested by them as Bogotá was during the Az-Am War.

BAD VIBES

The most common, and potentially most dangerous (or at least irritating), foe for the Awakened in the blackout zones is background count. Distilled metahuman misery started leaking into the astral since a few days after the power went out, and it's been making our lives difficult ever since. Foci shut off and can't be reactivated, quickened spells fizzle, spirits balk at being dragged through the metaphysical muck ... I've even seen adepts have their abilities dampened so much that their Talent becomes a burden instead of a boon.

If you're planning to visit the blackout zone, come prepared. Upgrade your foci so they can withstand the astral interference. Try to limit how often you use spirits, and bring plenty of reagents to use in atonement rituals, especially if you want them untainted. If you have the opportunity to learn cleansing metamagic and the rituals that come with it, or the adept metamagic that lets you ignore some of those side effects, do so. If you meet a magician who knows cleansing, find a way to be their new best friend until they agree to teach you, or at least let you hang out in the areas they've purified.

- Unless the magician you run into is Freya and you can't stand self-centered elven princesses, in which case dealing with background count might be the preferred option.
- Martinet

Speaking of which, for those of you who remember the wraiths called Maelstrom and Oblivion, I have bad news: they have a northerly cousin. When the UCAS government started deploying troops to keep the peace, it brought up a lot of bad memories in Philadelphia—particularly North Philadelphia, with its history of police brutality and racially and meta-racially motivated violence. Tensions skyrocketed, and fights started breaking out as the stress of the blackouts grated on everyone's nerves. During one particularly large brawl, the soldiers tried to crack down on the people involved to keep the incident from becoming a full-

scale riot. It went about as well as you'd expect, but something was different: Instead of agitated crowds clashing with police trying to restore order, the brawlers threw themselves at the soldiers with bloodlust in their eyes.

The soldiers started shooting after several of their number fell under the assault, and over a hundred citizens of North Philadelphia died before the slaughter ended. Afterward, people claimed to have seen a black-cloaked figure on the edge of the crowd, delighting in the carnage. A local Awakened Baptist minister investigated and found that the culprit was a powerful wraith he tentatively named Strife. I don't know what happened after that, just that the clashes between the local citizens and the soldiers haven't stopped.

- Reverend Leon tried to banish that wraith two or three different times. The last time he tried, the wraith took over one of reverend's escorts who then shot Reverend Leon in the back. There're a couple other mages around, but we aren't powerful enough to take on a spirit like that without help.
- Lincoln Lion

BOUNTY: STRIFE

Type: Wraith

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 13

Active Bounties: UCAS (210,000¥, payable when spirit is destroyed in its home metaplane)

Description: Strife, like all wraiths, appears as a black-cloaked humanoid figure with glowing red eyes.

Last Known Location: Philadelphia, PA, UCAS

- Wait, how are you supposed to prove you destroyed a spirit?
- Bits

Besides their direct influence, shadow spirits are masters of manipulating others via spirit pacts. Mistress Mystique is the madam at a low-rent brothel and BDSM club in Halifax. She started off as a joygirl and made a name for herself by being an outstanding earner, amazing both the madam and the other employees with her earning power—every single one of Mystique's customers had the sex drive of a rabbit on novacoke, and they were happy to pay for every lewd act they could manage before they collapsed from exhaustion.

What Mistress Mystique's colleagues didn't know—what Mystique herself didn't know, at first—was that she's an adept. Mystique only discovered her talent when she was approached by a mysterious woman who offered her more. Naturally, the "mysterious woman" was a succubus named Luxuria, and the "more" came in the form of a spirit pact that let Mystique use her new patron's

mind-altering powers to send her customers into a frenzied lust. The symbiotic relationship continued for years: Mystique pocketed huge amounts of cash from her customers, and in return, Luxuria grew powerful from the life energy it drained.

Then the blackouts started, and customers stopped coming to the brothel—but Luxuria still wanted the life energies it drained from Mystique's lovers, and Mystique still wanted the power the spirit gave her. Now, the duo lure innocent bystanders in with promises of shelter from the blackouts, then take what they want by force.

- ▶ My team and I took a run at Mystique and Luxuria not long after the blackouts started. Mystique isn't that powerful an adept, but the Talent she has is enough to deal with your average person on the street. I also got the feeling that Mystique is a reluctant participant, not a willing one. Give her an alternative, and she might be willing to turn on the spirit.
- ▶ Brimstone
- ▶ Or she might be a master manipulator backed up by a spirit who gets what it wants by telling people what they want to hear. Just saying.
- ▶ Rune

BOUNTY: MYSTIQUE AND LUXURIA

Type: Adept (Mystique), Succubus (Luxuria)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 4 (Mystique), 11 (Luxuria)

Active Bounties (Mystique): None

Active Bounties (Luxuria): UCAS (210,000€, payable when spirit is destroyed in its home metaplane)

Description: Mystique is an attractive white elf, though the perpetual youth of her metatype has been tarnished by years or decades of hard living. Her clothing tends to show off her body to help lure her prey. Luxuria's spirit powers allow it to appear in whatever form its victim will find most attractive.

Last Known Location: Halifax, NS, UCAS

SHEDIM

Obviously, metahuman-made disasters like these blackouts are going to result in a lot of people dying—or as shedim would call it, “growth in the housing market.” The Watergate Rift might be closed, but there's no shortage of shedim hanging around DeeCee, especially if one JackPoint download I've read about master shedim experimenting with new rituals is true. What I can say for sure is that an entire shedim horde seems to be spreading up the East Coast from the DeeCee/Baltimore area,

coordinated until recently by one Evan Corcoran, a bank CEO and close confidante of Colloton's Director of Magical Security Policy (which would explain why he was never caught).

Corcoran's now dead—well, more dead—but some of his lieutenants are still at large, including former Fredericton Mayor Cole Bright, who was outed as a shedim and jailed back in 2074. Apparently, Bright got tired of waiting for the city cops to decide what to do with him and broke out of prison. He's been seen in DeeCee a few times in the years since, most notably last July, when he and Corcoran were spotted at a popular DeeCee restaurant.

- ▶ Bright's legacy lives on (pun intended) in Fredericton. A group there is suing the city for banning Bright from running for re-election, on the grounds that they're discriminating against him for being a stupid evil zombie.
- ▶ Pest
- ▶ I've been in and out of Saint John a few times, and the shedim are definitely more organized there than in other cities around here. I bet Bright pitched up there when the blackouts started.
- ▶ Wolastoq

BOUNTY: COLE BRIGHT

Type: Shedim (Master)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 12

Active Bounties: UCAS (165,000€, payable upon proof of disruption)

Description: Bright's true appearance is that of an animated corpse, but he normally uses spells to conceal himself as a late-middle-aged human man and masks his aura to appear mundane. The most visible signs of his true nature are the chill in the air around him and the way plants and small animals die in his continued presence.

Last Confirmed Location: Fredericton, NB, UCAS (possibly located in Saint John, NB, UCAS)

Walton's story, on the other hand, is more tragic. Some of you reading this probably know her as Misthios—yes, the street samurai who used to work out of Baltimore. The way the locals tell it, Misthios got geeked when she and her team tried to take Evan Corcoran out a couple years ago. Corcoran hung on to her body to use as a vessel, and when a master shedim took it over, it started using Misthios' real name as an alias. If you go up against her, you'd best hope she doesn't decide to carry on the tradition.

BOUNTY: MARJORIE WALTON

Type: Shedim (Master)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 14

Active Bounties: UCAS (255,000¥, payable upon proof of disruption)

Appearance: Walton appears as the early-middle-aged female troll her host was in life. Like Bright, she normally uses spells to conceal herself (though her body is better-preserved than Bright's is) and masks her aura to appear mundane. She also exhibits the same chilling, life-sapping aura as Bright does.

Last Known Location: Washington, FDC, UCAS

TOXIC MAGIC

Everyone knows that toxic magicians and spirits love to hang around wholesome places like chemical spills and nuclear-waste-disposal sites, but these blackouts have resulted in a couple of lesser-known opportunities for toxic magic to fester. The first one, besides being metaphysically corrupt, is just plain gross. Widespread power outages cause a lot of problems, but one that people don't think about too often is that no power over a prolonged period causes plumbing problems. Shitty jokes about "shitty jokes" aside, I'm sure you can all see where I'm going with that.

- > Eww.
- > Viking Cowgirl

I know this sounds like something you'd find on a particularly juvenile comedy show, but the "metahuman waste" variety of toxic magician has already found some purchase. There's a Lenape street shaman running around Newark who used to be a member of Warpath, a Native American group bent on kicking non-natives out of North America by force. When the blackouts lasted long enough that the sewage plants stopped working and started overflowing, the added stress on the environment made him snap and turn toxic. He abandoned his old totem to follow Pollution and started calling himself T. Crapper. He now runs around wreaking destruction on anyone who isn't Native American, preferably by exposing them to raw sewage (including Pollutant spells and toxic spirits) to destroy them and their homes the way their ancestors did to his.

The other variety of toxic magic I've seen in these blackouts is more subtle, and less nauseating, but no less dangerous—because why would it be? This other variety focuses on the corruption of metahumanity itself, rather than the environment in which we live. Back in Seattle, I had the displeasure of fighting a group of toxic magicians called the Temple of the Nine Gates, who turned out to

BOUNTY: T. CRAPPER

Type: Toxic Magician

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 10

Active Bounties: DIMR (75,000¥, payable upon capture)

Description: Crapper is a middle-aged Native American dwarf male.

Last Known Location: Newark, UCAS

be Elder God cultists in the guise of an extremely warped vision of Gnosticism. Imagine my surprise and annoyance when I found out that another Nine-Gater group had taken up residence in Manhattan on some kind of twisted crusade against the megacorps. They're led by a priestess calling herself Aletheia, and their hobbies include making Faustian pacts with evil deities and trying to convince mundanes that it's possible to Awaken by committing enough blood sacrifices. Who knows, maybe Dunkie's House of Shady Deals will give whoever gets her a two-for-one deal, since she's both a blood mage *and* a toxic.

BOUNTY: ALETHEIA

Type: Toxic Magician (Elder God cultist)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 9

Active Bounties: DIMR (30,000¥, payable upon capture)

Description: Aletheia is an elven female of Middle Eastern descent. She typically dresses in priestly looking white robes.

Last Known Location: Manhattan, NY, UCAS

LESS-MAJOR-BUT-STILL-BAD THREATS

BLOOD MAGIC

Don't get me wrong: I still have a special disdain for those who practice blood magic, including thinking they'll ultimately destroy the world. The reason I call it a "less major" threat is because most of the blood magic I've seen used since the blackouts started is at least partly benevolent. One stranded Aztechnology wage mage I met opened a vein to empower a warming spell and keep a group of people from freezing to death, and I was teaching a younger, newly Awakened street magician to do the same thing. I worry that they'll be less

likely to restrain themselves to willing donors as time goes on (or that they'll need so much power that they have to choose between using more willing donors or fewer unwilling ones), but for now, we've got bigger problems to deal with.

Li Wei is a former Ares Firewatch sec-mage, one of the few who didn't get turned into an insect spirit host. Apparently, he was part of some super-secret Ares initiative to fight the bugs using blood magic (because that's *never* caused problems), because I ran into him briefly in Detroit when he was part of Anne Ravenheart's merry band of reprobates. Li and the Firewatch troops he worked with had a better-than-average success rate against the bugs, but they took a lot of casualties, and a few of us wondered whether it was the bugs killing them or Li going Blue Falcon on his teammates to power his magic. Whatever the case, it looks like Li got himself neck-deep in blood magic addiction before the Detroit op ended. He fled when the Ares MPs tried to take him in and later popped up in various places around Toronto.

- ▶ Several of my fellow Akali have run into Li since I first arrived in Toronto. For some reason, he likes to attack the gurdwaras we protect. I don't know whether it's because he sees us as a convenient supply of victims, or if he thinks we're all bug spirit fronts, or if he just doesn't like guys with beards and turbans.
- ▶ Sikh Burn

BOUNTY: LI WEI

Type: Talismonger

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): Unknown

Active Bounties: Atlantean Foundation (75,000€, payable upon capture)

Description: Li appears as an elderly Chinese man. His left eye has been replaced with a faceted emerald.

Last Known Location: Greater Toronto, ON, UCAS

THE INFECTED

Obligatory disclaimer: Not all Infected are evil. Many of them, possibly even most of them, aren't. Yes, they eat people, drink our blood, drain our souls, whatever. If you think it's unnerving for *you*, ask a bovine shifter how they feel around meat-eating metahumans sometime, and remember that they don't have the advantage of numbers.

Okay, disclaimer (and vegetarian elfy-rant) over. The fact is, some Infected actually *are* horrifying monsters, whether because they're intelligent hunters who are more capable of attacking us than we are of defending ourselves, or

through sheer bestial ferocity. The worst of these are probably the **wendigo**, which is what you get when you infect an ork with Strain I HMHVV. They're cannibals who create cannibal cults with mind-bending powers similar the ones used by spirits of metahumanity, and every single one of them is a toxic spellcaster, a magician, or a mystic adept. Talia Poroshenko is one example. She's reported to have showed up in Rhode Island after the blackouts started. As food supplies got scarce, she had no trouble recruiting people into her cult. According to the data the Archangels dug up, she's displayed both spellcasting and adept powers, in addition to her Infected abilities and the power she gets from her brainwashed minions. Honestly, it might be easiest to just drop a MOAB on the place and collect her ashes afterward.

BOUNTY: TALIA POROSHENKO

Type: Wendigo (Toxic Mystic Adept)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 12

Active Bounties: DIMR (165,000€, payable upon capture), UCAS (87,500€, payable upon proof of death)

Description: In her natural form, Poroshenko appears as a taller-than-average, well-muscled ork female covered in white fur, with elongated nails and tusks. She frequently uses magic to change her appearance, most often into that of a strikingly attractive ork.

Last Known Location: Providence, RI, UCAS

INSECT SPIRITS

You know, after Detroit, I'd really hoped that the bugs were all dead. I mean, I never actually *believed* they were, but a girl can dream, right? But no, they're still out there, trying to assimilate all of metahumanity into their gestalt consciousness like they did in the days of the Universal Brotherhood. Worse yet, they seem to have accelerated their efforts to turn magicians to the insect spirit tradition. When I was in Detroit helping Bravo Company/61st IR assist Ares with their bug problem, we ran into an insect shaman who used to be a shadowrunner who'd gotten booted out of his hive because the queen saw him as a threat and took it personally enough that he decided to sell them out.

When they brought me in to help interrogate him, the self-righteous prick started lecturing me about how helping Ares destroy poor, defenseless bug spirits that were victims of cruel experiments proved that everything I'd written for JackPoint's hooding download was a crock of shit. It's the only time I've ever seen McCord leave the room so he wouldn't burst out laughing.

- Yep, that happened just as Highness stated. And at the time, it was as funny as it sounded. But I later learned that life has an odd way of showing you the truth.
- Rifleman

A couple months later, I'm taking a well-earned vacation when the blackouts hit and Dragonslayer informs me I'll be going east. A few chummers and I form this impromptu network of Awakened and start discussing bounty targets. One of them mentions an insect shaman who escaped from Detroit—and wouldn't you know it, it's the same one who lectured me about my hypocritical attacks on (most) bug spirits. KE is willing to pay anyone who brings him in (although I have no idea how to do that now that they've left the UCAS), and I'll personally throw in a bonus if you beat the little shit senseless before you hand him over.

Well, there you have it: the Archangels' Greatest Hits. Don't think for a second these are the only problems that need fixing, though—they're just

BOUNTY: QUEENSGUARD

Type: Insect Shaman

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 8

Active Bounties: Knight Errant (15,000€, payable upon capture), Freya (10,000€, payable upon proof of beating the little shit senseless, redeemable up to three times)

Description: Queensguard is a human male in his late twenties or early thirties.

Last Known Location: Detroit, MI, UCAS

the ones we could fit into this document with the shitty Matrix access we have. Hell, several more have probably popped up since I started this file. And it's only going to get worse as the blackouts continue. The Archangels will hold the line as long as we can, but if any of us are going to survive this, we'll need all the help we can get.