

damage control

The Fanzine for
SLA Industries



- Including "The Mort Gauge" In Character SLA Industries Magazine
- Exclusive Fiction
- GM Material & resources

Published by Team8



PARENTAL
ADVISORY
CONTENT

Damage Control

So what are you looking at?

Damage control/ Mort Gauge is an unofficial fanzine dedicated to The SLA Industries RPG from Nightfall games.

DISCLAIMER : SLA Industries and all characters, settings, images and other intellectual properties pertaining thereto are Copyright 1993-2002 Nightfall Games Limited, and are used without permission. No challenge to those copyrights is intended or implied. All other Non-Nightfall logos and trademarks in this publication are property of their respective owners. All the rest not covered by the above Copyright 2003 by Team8

There are 2 parts to the 'zine:

- 1) **Mort Gauge** – The 'players sections' which is designed to be completely in character. After reading it yourself, and editing as need be for your version of Mort, you just hand this to your players at the next game and let them read it in character (if the character can read). We have plotlines and ongoing story lines that will be revealed as issues of the 'zine progress.
- 2) **Damage control** - Ref's section of the Fanzine. This contains:
 - The Game mechanic info which would spoil the in-character feel of MG.
 - Ideas on how to use MG articles and weave them into BPN's, NPC's and similar events in your games.
 - Cute concepts that would be spoilt if your players knew about them in advance.
 - Occasionally (when we are organised enough) we will include teasers in this section so bits in the next Mort gauge don't surprise you as much as they will your players.
 - Extra goodies to use in your games.

Who are Team8?



Team 8 are a group of people more interested in promoting the game they love than themselves.

As such this Team 8 group 'photo' by Dave Allsop is the best you are going to get.

Ref Support Notes for MortGauge Articles.

15 Mins on Iona King.

The exact stats of the character that is something you should decided on to blend into your wop, but the following should provide you with a few pointers:

Firstly she is that arrogant because she _is_ that good. Like many bright people she assumes that every one else should be that good to, and it is just that they do not apply themselves properly. Thus she can be infuriating to be around as instead of merely answering the question she will dangle clues and expect the PC to figure it out. Please note: This will not apply if the PC is a paying client. They have already admitted they are 'stupid' and need her assistance by hiring her rather than doing the job themselves.

Its not a question of if she can solve the mystery, just how long it will take her to put the pieces together. Diagnosis and concentration (and thus Know) are at human maximum, and she will use streak to give here an extra kick if the problem needs it- though she is very careful to detox with flush as she is well aware of the long term effects. Assume all skills which could relate to investigation, research, data collation and analysis are also maxed out. That includes all the persuasion and streetwise side of things, although you probably wouldn't know it from her attitude.

On the flip side she has little in the way of combat abilities, (although she has a high evaluate opponent, it is purely theoretical). However she has a number of contacts and friends who do, and in who's best interest it is to keep her alive. Over here career she has amassed a large amount of 'dirt' on some very important people, and there is always the possibility that if something were to happen to her these 'private' files could find their way into the public domain. "Black mail is such an unfortunate word, lets call it collateral insurance." Needless to say she has a sizable LAD account and rarely finds herself in a location where it would take longer than 4 minutes to get to her. Even if she does, high status Ebon with Reality fold are a viable option.

Using her:

The PC could encounter her via a number of routes:

- 1) An investigation she is on overlaps with a BPN they are doing, or even worse if she has been called in by the issuing office because they are worried the squad are not making the progress needed. (remember the 25% fee)
- 2) They attend one of the lectures or courses she mentions in her interview.
- 3) Possibly they are chasing up the same hunter sheet- or a BPN the are on leads to the same individual as a hunter sheet she is researching. [Remember knowledge fines]
- 4) Whilst it is unlikely they would simply run into her in some social situation- she is a driven individual who takes little time off- but they could encounter her in any location where data is stored, for example the Central Library, museums, archives or even virtual over SLA-net.

However they meet here, as long as it does not interfere with her own investigations, and the squad are polite and interested in her 'lessons', she may well help them out with a few hints and pointers. If the squad are not polite then it is even more likely she will help them out, but be considerably more patronizing and irritating about it. If they are rude, wind them up. If they pull a gun, then have a friend show up and put them in their place, etc.

Its possible that you could use her to give the PC's a prod in the right direction if they are being particularly dense with an investigative BPN - this would be more than in keeping with the character, she likes opportunities to show how good she is. If they come away cursing her but having to admit they should have been able to work it out for themselves, all the better. If the PC's start relying on her rather than thinking for themselves, have her suddenly become unreachable on an under cover assignment.

Oh And just to make life really interesting..
Yes she is chipped.

:)
Have fun.

What's the worst that can happen... A guide for Refs

(WT)2CH is written as an account of a badly screwed up BPN. This is an attempt to give you a good idea of the various problems you can throw in the way of your players. They are not really designed as BPN you would immediately take your players on, especially if they have just read the issue of Mort Gauge themselves, however I hope that you will take some of the ideas in the write up and use them in your own BPN's.

To give you a head start in this the following is a break down of the components of the BPN in this issue.

- 1) **The BPN card.** This is probably one of those "standing BPN's" i.e. BPN's that are always floating round the system somewhere. In a Bureaucracy as extensive as SLA Industries it is a fairly safe bet that paperwork gets confused and things go missing on regular bases and thus can be used as a back up plan when the squad sensibly say no to the messy black you had planed. Just fiddle with the wording and change the destination [pick a department at random from the table on pg42 of the MRB- that's all I did.] and your players will be non the wiser.
- 2) **Employee incompetence.** "Employee incompetence" is a good catch all for SLA Industries. Failings in a system can be blamed on one person and thus the problem never has to be acknowledged or addressed. Additionally 'Employee incompetence' is a useful euphemism if some one unexpected turns to some soft company, and SLA do not want to admit that they missed the security risk. And of course there is always the vague chance that in fact the employee was actually incompetent. The death of the employee 'under questioning' could be indicative of one of these alternatives and SLA covering up. Or it could just be that the squad was a little heavy handed in the interrogation. All of these points could feed into a Grey or White BPN to investigate the background to such events.
- 3) **Storage facility:** In this case it is a Monarch franchise, but others would exist. Fundamentally they are large warehouses, with varying degrees of security, compartmentalised to allow

"easy" finding of the stored items IF you have access to the paperwork/ database. Of course without this information finding materials stored here is going to be a lot of leg work and desperate opening of boxes. Inside of these building could be anything from high tech (with complex machinery to store and retrieve the items) to primitive (couple of guys with trucks manhandling the boxes) or even a Dark Lament storage (where the items are folded to some distant location, and the squad find them selves surrounded by strange Science Frictions creations).

Such facilities would be found all over Mort – the further away from Central, the more likely they are to be storing some nasty dangerous materials. Lots of things can go bang when they are shot. If your squad is getting a little gun happy this might be a way of thinking before they shoot. Important people store things too.

Any number of BPN's could lead the players to a storage facility, may be some crucial evidence for a white has been hidden here by some informant; They could be responding to a red called in when the facility is attacked by a gang; May be some soft company or kult are using the facility as a cover.

- 4) **Armed and armoured in downtown.** In this case the squads chosen apparel attracted unwanted attention, but being obviously "tooled for bear" in downtown maybe a mistake for other reasons. Not only does it scream "Operative", but the state of decay of walk ways and stairs in downtown means moving round in heavy armour and carrying heavy equipment can lead to a long drop and painful stop.
- 5) **Standard Protocol.** SLA is a minefield of bureaucracy and many of these protocols will have been forgotten except by the most extreme of jobsworths, (Internal affairs then).

Any of these ideas could be woven into your WOP. Just let the inspiration feed your imagination, and run with it.

Notes on the BPN's

White

SCL: 10

Contact: Department of Shivers.

Training package: I&I / Any

Summary:

Investigation required of recent rash of disappearances amongst civilian population of Suburbia sector 87.

C.B.S.: 200c per op

Coverage:

code 456-23564-0907902-4/H-W

BPN 456-23564-0907902-4/H-W

Possible reasons for the 'missing' civis:

- 1) Serial killer is killing these people and removing the corpses for.. well what ever mad reason they may have for doing these things. May be they think it will bring them immense powers, may be they are trying to kill the next saviour of Mort, may be they are all the people who teased them when they were at school. Who knows. Killers are mad aren't they.
- 2) Skin trade agent is operating in the area. A number of large and unusual vans have been spotted locally and people are getting scared to walk the streets at night.
- 3) The people never existed. They were all part of a welfare scam, or may be part of an attempt to distort local civilian elections for the sector mayor, point it there were no such people. Locals will get confused if the squad keeps asking about people who never existed and they never heard of.

Grey

SCL: 10

Contact: Dept Data retrieval.

Training package: Any

Summary:

Squad required to investigate and put an end to a significant increase in civilian deaths in Downtown sector. Subversive/ Soft company involvement expected.

C.B.S.: 200c per op

Coverage:

code 456-23564-0907902-4/H-W

Thanks to protracted 'gang wars' in nearby sectors, Sector 521 has grown rich supplying to props, Shivers on sleeper duty, operatives any one else who need what they sell.

The deaths reported above are the result of 'scuffles' between the gangs and factions in the sector to get the most out of this financial opportunity. Normally this would not be an issue, but double agents in Dark night have warned SLA that dark night are planning to using this sector as a "SLA doesn't care" example in their propaganda pieces. SLA would like things taken care of to take the wind out of their sails before the piece airs. By the time the squad arrives the sector is split between 2 factions – 1 specialising in drugs and one in ammo. Both factions are too powerful and dug in for the Squad to take them on their own.

To have any success in 'cleaning up the sector' they will have to make a pact, at least briefly with one or the other, or at least come up with some way of breaking the stalemate that exists and pitting the factions against each other.

And they have to find some way of doing this with out the civilians in the area getting caught in the cross fire, and thus raising the deaths statistic they are meant to be reducing.

Of course seeing as the 2 factions are now balanced they could just go home and declare job done.

The BPN was inspired by the Sergeo Leone film "Fist full of dollars". Refs with cerebral players may like to watch Yojimbo by Kurasawa for inspiration instead.

Feel the width notes.**Rogar's training grounds.**

For every 2,000-3,500 credits, an Op would be looking at 1 level in a skill particular to their training package, or in Hide, Sneak, Pistol, Autofire or Unarmed Combat. Make sure they do the time though, the Rogar Grounds

are best experienced In Character if you think you can draw it out right.

Please note all the stats needed for the **vehicles** are hidden in the article. AAR Scale is the PV and ID of the vehicle.

Stats on the small calibre pistols.

OWD NG-77

Size : P Clip : 12 Cal : 10mm Rof : 1 Recoil : 3 Range : 15m weight : 0.35kg Cost : 250c

Laser painter included. Can fit silencer and flash suppressor.

BLA 354 'equaliser'

Size : P Clip : 50 Cal : 9mm Rof : 1/5 Recoil : 2/5 Range : 10m weight : 0.55kg Cost : 180c

Can fit laser painter, silencer, flash suppressor or recoil baffling.

Full std magazine cost 85c, 125c for AP or HP magazine, 365c for HEAP magazine. Empty helicoidal magazine cost 2c

KPS 'shotpistol'

Size : P Clip : 2 Cal : 10g Rof : 1 Recoil : 2/5 Range : 7m weight : 0.8kg Cost : 100c

Can fit laser painter or recoil baffling.

GA DP-1

Size : P Clip : 20 Cal : 10mm Rof : 1 Recoil : 3 Range : 12m weight : 0.3kg Cost : varies

Can't fit any equipment. Std DP-1 : 25c, AP DP-1 : 45c, HP DP-1: 65c, HEAP DP-1 : 45c

FEN 605 Xtralarge

Size : P Clip : 20 Cal : 12mm Rof : 1/3 Recoil : 4/6 Range : 10m weight : 1kg Cost : 165c

Can fit laser painter, silencer, flash suppressor or recoil baffling.

AAA Funboy

Size : P Clip : 18 Cal : 10mm Rof : 3 Recoil : 5 Range : 10m weight : 0.5kg Cost : 175c

Can fit laser painter, silencer, flash suppressor or recoil baffling.

SW Stiletto

Size : P Clip : 15 Cal : 10mm Rof : 1/3 Recoil : 3/5 Range : 12m weight : 0.6kg Cost : 150c

Can fit laser painter, silencer, flash suppressor.

FEN 601

Size : P Clip : 18 Cal : 10mm Rof : 1 Recoil : 3 Range : 10m weight : 0.5kg Cost : 60c

Can fit laser painter, silencer, flash suppressor or recoil baffling.

Advanced warning...

We have plans for Squad Mylar and Dr Argent's pets.!

Contract circuit Divisions.

After discussions on referring to reputation in Character I came up with this idea. It's simply a division ranking system based on directly mapping rep level to a division.

Reputation level 1

Probationer Division - no restriction on weapons/armour (if you can afford it) this helps separate the wheat from the chaff in the early stages of a career, although fatalities are kept to a minimum.

Reputation levels 2,3 & 4

Ripper - no restriction on weapons/armour, although sponsors are less likely to smile upon long ranged sure-kill weapons, so by this stage up-and-coming killers are recommended to begin to hone their close combat skills.

Reputation levels 5 & 6

Survivor - again, no restrictions. This is essentially the mid division where quite a lot of killers will end up staying, or at least hovering in for a long time, where up and comers find their limits, and the higher ranks might drop to occasionally. This is the division with the most killers, and which gets your general run-of-the-mill grandstand, filler type coverage, ie. summaries between the higher div fights, a bit less camera time, but more often, and more regular. The sponsors use this division to pick and choose the more photogenic killers.

Reputation levels 7 & 8

Rapier - restrictions on long ranged weapons in effect, no armour above PV 9. Encouraging close combat is the aim of this division, although armour and ranged weapons are still available, this is simply to avoid sniping by armed killers, and to keep the action to smaller areas to enhance media coverage.

Reputation levels 9 & 10

Blade - the top players only, this division gets the longest contiguous segments of airtime, and has the top sponsors. Same restrictions as Rapier, but the higher sponsors like (of course) the closer, nastier, more drawn out combat, all the better for showing their logos.

Reputation levels 10+

Claw - no restrictions. once into this area, we're beyond normal sponsorship & coverage, this division has less than 15 killers in it, but it includes people like the Spinner & Sour Blood

Specialist divisions.

One can be a killer in these divisions **as well** as playing in the normal divisions. It is quite possible there will be “unofficial” divisions **within** these specialist groups as well.

Wheels - vehicular combat, finds a different kind of killer than normal, with possibly faster reactions and completely different style of combat, while being allowed to fight in the standard divisions is possible when in this, apart from specialist matches, you won't find too many killers in this division who still play in the standard.

Friction - Ebb division, exclusively for Ebons, BrainWasters and Necanthropes. No restrictions unless fighting in a mixed game against non-ebons.

Flesh - Karma division, for any killer sporting more than 2 Karma enhancements. Again, no restrictions unless fighting in a mixed game.

Card Quick Gen system.

This is a quick character generation system designed for use for demos and similar one off games. This system takes a little advance work on the part of the ref, but no more than that in creating Pre generated characters for such games, and once created they can be used again and again. The advantage is that it gives the players some choice over the characters they play (the more cards available, the more choice) but is considerably quicker than the full generation system. However is it not intended as a replacement for the system that appears in the MRB as the characters produced are limited.

A number of cards to give a feel for the system are included in this issue, and we plan to include a few more in each subsequent issue of the 'zine. Feel free to send to us any interesting cards you create yourself to share them with other refs.

How to make the cards

Race cards are built on 200pts.

They should include the stats, racial and background advantages and disadvantages and skills. They also include equipment values at about 750C. Generally it includes one suit of “armour” (Death suit, blocker or Velkra) and one weapon. Extra equipment should be ‘bought’ with the financial advantage. The card is finished off with a brief hint on the background of the character.

Package cards are built on 100pts.

Mostly they are derived for the skills taught at Meny as part of that package But could include other skills, advantages and disadvantages that might be applicable.

They also include equipment of about 250C, with extra equipment being ‘bought’ with the financial advantage. In some cases it may be necessary to give 2 versions – one for Ebb users and one for Non Ebb users, especially for equipment.

The card is finished off with a quote that reveals the personality of the character.

How to use this system.

- 1) Players choose one ‘Race’ card and one ‘Package’ card.
- 2) Some skills may appear on both cards. Where this is the case the highest value skill is kept. The lower value is assigned to a new skill not on either card. This allows some limited personalisation of the cards.
- 3) This results in characters of approximately 300 points and 1000 Credits. Play can then begin.

2 Example Race Cards

Name: Race: Human: Downtown born HP: 15. (5,15,7.8) Dam bonus 2 Phases 1,3,5	Stats: STR 7 DEX 9 PHYS 8 DIA 9 CONC 9 KNOW 9 COOL 9 CHA 7 FLUX 0		
Advantages Minor friends RK5 - Downtown contacts Hearing RK 5 - +5 to detect based on hearing Luck RK 4 - Disadvantages Income RK3 - Cut of earnings to talent scout	Skills	Rank	Stat
	Blade 1H	4	STR
	Unarmed combat	4	STR
	Gymnastics	4	DEX
	Hide	4	DEX
<u>Character Notes:</u> You grew up in downtown in the dark, surviving as best you could on your own. Getting into Meny was a major break and a chance to escape and aim for something better.	Detect	4	CONC
	Evaluate Opponent	4	KNOW
	Rival company	3	KNOW
	SLA info	3	KNOW
<u>Equipment:</u> Blocker, PV5, ID 8,14,10,12 Fen 603, 40 Standard Ammo Mac Knife, 5/1/1	Street wise	4	KNOW
	Literacy	1	KNOW
	Persuasion	4	CHA
	Pistol	2	DEX

Name: Race: ebon HP 15 (5,15,7,8) DAM bonus 2 Phases:1,3,5	Stats: STR 7 DEX 8 PHYS 8 DIA 8 CONC 11 KNOW 10 COOL 7 CHA 9 FLUX 10		
Advantages Speech +1 to CHA skills Disadvantages Vacillation: RK1 - fear of being alone -3 to skills	Skills	Rank	Stat
	Martial Arts	4	DEX
	Diplomacy	4	CHA
	Communique	4	CHA
	Persuasion	4	CHA
<u>Character Notes:</u> One of the beautiful and aloof whelders of the power of the ebb. You have come to SLA industries because it is what Preceptor Teeth, leader of your race, expects	Computer use	4	DIA
	Literacy	1	KNOW
	SLA info	2	KNOW
<u>Equipment:</u> Death suit (PV6, ID 10,15,12,14) Distracter (-2 to targets conc rolls) Pathfinder (bonus to ebb detect) 2 flux burn gem. Fen 603, 40 Standard Ammo	Detect	1	KNOW
	Communication	5	FLUX
	Ebb Detect	5	FLUX
	Protect	4	FLUX
	Illumination	4	FLUX
	ebon (language)	3	Know
	Rival company	1	KNOW

2 Example Package Cards.

Package: Kick Murder Assassination and espionage experts “More ground can be gained and held with weapons and intelligence than can be gained with weapons alone.”	<u>Skills</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>Stat</u>
	Blade 1H	6	STR
	Hide	6	DEX
Advantages Natural Aptitude: Sneaking rk3	Sneaking	6	DEX
	Martial Arts	6	DEX
<u>Disadvantages</u> Paranoia RK2, -1 to skills in crowds. CHA skills capped at -2	Climb	6	PHYS
	Acrobatics	6	PHYS
	Slight of hand.	4	
<u>Equipment:</u> MAC Knife (4,1,1) ECM body suit Climbing kit 4 dose KS solo			
<u>Non Ebb users:</u> Upgrade to exo heavy PV 8, 15,35,25,28	Ebb users – Protect to Rank 6, Medium death suit: PV7 ID 10,20,15,17 & +2 Phys.		

Package: Mechanics Techy. “So that’s what the inside of a fusion generator looks like...”	<u>Skills</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>Stat</u>
	Mechanics repair	6	KNOW
Advantages Hobby: inventing rk6 Minor friends rk6	Mechanics industrial	6	DIA
	Electrical repair	6	KNOW
<u>Disadvantages</u> Technical Curiosity rk 3 – Over whelming desire to see how things work	Electrical industrial	6	DIA
	Computer use	6	DIA
	Computer subterfuge	6	KNOW
<u>Equipment:</u> Maintenance kit. Oyster & expert programs Slug decks, chippy leads, bits of tac coms, semi dismantled mobile phones and other assorted junk in “tool bag of holding” Flash light – shoulder mounted			

False Profits

Inspired by the picture on page 5 of the Contract Directory

He sits on the bed, undoing the straps on his boots, with a weariness that speaks of muscles pushed to their extremes too many times in one day.

I rest back, holding the glass of wine, waiting for him to flop against me as he always does after days like these.

Our weapons are scattered around the floor, his armour in pieces over the sofa and dinning table. Deep cuts in the chest plate that will need repairing before the suit goes out again. But the second set already waits by the door for whenever it comes time to leave.

It takes a sizeable proportion of our combined income to pay for the upkeep of this flat. A fair amount of that goes on making sure the Scream Sheets never find out about it. It would be bad for both of us if this ever got out.

Eventually his boots hit the floor with a resounding thud and I pass him the wine.

"Good day at the office?" It's an in-joke grown stale from long use. I should think of something better but it's an easy habit to slip into.

He smiles at me wearily. "Profitable."

"I caught your fight with Tachi."

He shrugs. Obviously not wanting to acknowledge the world outside these walls. His arms slip round me, his head on my breast.

I catch the glass before the wine spills on the sheet as his snores gently fill our room.

I reach for the remote and start skipping the channels...

...And reflect that such is the price of fame.

+++

Her soft snores fill the room as I awake. It's a good noise, one of the few times she sounds relaxed. I feel a little guilty about passing out on her earlier, but there is only so long I can keep going for when the adrenaline drops.

But now I am awake and there is a back-pressure on my kidneys I can't ignore. Careful not to wake her, I slide out from her grip.

The vid screen is on mute so I drop into the seat and flick channels. It must be a slow day - They are still showing clips of the Tachi fight.

The guy is a complete asshole. Most people like to kid themselves that the insanity Killers portray is put on for the cameras. No. The Reaver is that weird. The phrase obsessed doesn't even come close. He puts the white spiked heel of his boot through the interceptor's face and twists. I wince as the strand of ichor stretches out of the eye socket. The audience reaction bar suggests the punters appreciated it, so who am I to judge.

I distract myself by dispassionately reviewing my performance; noting where I could have put an opponent down quicker, or with more style. I hate to watch my own fights, too often I spot what could have been a fatal mistake, but this way I can compare my notes with Maxwell's at our next 'debrief' and I might have some idea what he is talking about for a change.

He won't like the shot I put in. It's an inspired shot, right through the ears leaving a spray of grey and red on the concrete. The ratings response is good, but he will still complain. "The money is in the hand to hand. Shots too quick." He should make a data slug and save himself the breath. At the time, I judged that the Guy was just too far to risk closing the distance, especially with the 12.7mm cannon he was packing. It's my life and my call, he knows that, but he will have to comment. He considers it part of his job.

That finished I flick to the channel carrying the Hunter Sheet stream and make mental notes of the names and faces in case I get lucky.

The fax hums softly and spits out the next call to arms. A special job for my current sponsors, one of those "faces on show" pointless exercises.

I'd like to say goodbye, but her snores are still deep and relaxed, and I can't bring myself to wake her.

Instead I suit up, take one last look at the false perfection we have built here, and go out to kill again to keep it going.

+++

By the time I awake he, and the both suits of armour, have gone. The bed is only faintly warm and the saliva from his parting kiss is dry on my forehead. I am acutely aware that it will probably be days before we get chance to meet again, and that we wasted last night's opportunity on sleep. Still it was time together and that is worth something at least.

The TV in the main room is tuned to "Premonition". His preferred channel

because it carries the Hunter sheet stream in the top right corner and the info-mercials are actually presented by people who know what they are talking about. There is the top sheet lying next to the fax but I make a point of not looking at it. I decided some time ago there are some aspects of his life I prefer not to know, and who is next target is one of them. I worry too much when it's a big name. But, as he is all too fond of pointing out, with the life style we are living it needs to be big names to make the books balance. Instead I busy myself tidying the flat and getting some breakfast before heading out into the rain and back to my own life.

+++

Sure enough Maxwell's first words are

"You fired the gun."

I introduce him to the business end of the Blitzzer and remind him which of us has the exemption form and he has the good sense to drop it.

Maybe he knows he dragged me away from her but chances are even if he did he wouldn't care. A long term relationship for him is when she is still there for breakfast.

We drop the damaged suit of at Power Projects, warning them it's a rush job as usual. Then head to the quiet unassuming building in central that BLA use for their more private conversations.

It's one of my favourite places, sumptuous without being over the top. The waiting areas well provisioned with whatever distraction delights you. The coffee they serve is direct import from Bogata. The seats real dead cow cover, deep and comfortable. And they insist all camera's go off at the door. Maxwell hates it.

I enjoy every second of the 45 min wait we have before we are shown into her office.

As I settle into my seat my eyes are drawn to the looped footage of my shot from yesterday. To be honest with the wall screen you would have to be blind to miss it. Esprit gives a brief but appreciative gesture to it as she takes her seat. It's unprofessional but I can't help but grin at Maxwell and watch him squirm. You might almost think she too was rubbing it in as she adds. "Nice use of HEAP." As once again the Interceptors head expands then fractures under the sudden internal pressure. Then the screen goes blank grey.

"But that is not why we are here, at least not directly." She turns and looks at me with her smooth pastel blue eyes. BLA have been my sponsor, and Esprit my handler, for long enough for Maxwell to become a minor partner in our relationship. She talks to me and treats him with as much interest as the pot plant in the corner. "There is a task we need you to carry out."

I nod.

"There is a slaughter house special on New Paris in two days."

I nod.

"We want you to enter it."

I nod. So far - so normal.

"Also entering is Domina, a New Parisian based Contract killer. We want him dead. Dead dead. No coming back dead. Not LADable Dead, Clear?"

I nod. The briefing doesn't leave much room for misunderstandings.

She gestures back up to screen where the still of the dark nights face fractions before the bang is hanging. By the expression on his face, he had every idea how dead he really was. There is a terror in his eyes, already bulging with the pressure. His mouth just opening to emit a scream that never made it out of his throat.

"Like that would be appropriate."

I stand up. "I'll see what I can do."

+++

The squad are waiting for me by the time I reach the office. Aleister stares at me with a knowing look. He guessed some time ago that there was some new 'love interest' in my life, but, thank Intruder, values his own privacy as much as I value mine. A simple smile is enough to answer all his unasked questions.

Creed has the BPN ready for us, direct from our squad sponsors and a grey as usual.

It may sound strange to those operatives just out of Meny, but there are days I would KILL for a blue. Something simple and straightforward that would not lead us into more things we really did not want to know.

This one all ready stinks of D-notices and owed favours.

A technician from Dark Lament has gone walk-a-bout with some experimental gear. The only reason

this is not a jade is that the Tech is human. Thus it fell into Internal Affairs lap and from there into ours. Creed seems happy about it, personally I am not so sure, but, as he is all too keen to point out, it is too late now, I should have been there an hour ago. Not that my presence has ever made any difference in the past.

Going by the letter of the BPN our task is to find out why he took the prototype where he took it, and who is after it. The key phrase is "Identify interested parties and detain." To me it looks like it could prove to be one hell of a paper chase. In the end it will all come down to when our cloak handler is happy the data is complete.

I am guessing Creed has missed that aspect in his eagerness to impress cloak.

Brador informs me that he has also identified a Yellow BPN, issued by Dark Lament, and a Hunter Sheet, funded by a Dark Lament holding account, related to the job.

"Some one is obviously covering all their options on this one."

"Or DL don't want people to know how badly they screwed up." Aleister comments wryly.

A five person SCL9b squad with the unlikely name of "Intimation" has taken the yellow. A quick check on the who's who reveals them to be inexperienced but efficient.

Who is working on the hunter sheet is anyone guess.

+++

Maxwell's dark expression as we leave the building says everything. Everything being "The sooner we get you out of that contract the better." My returning grin just irks him more. "BLA pays well." I justify as I open the door for him.

"Not that well." He responds, dropping into the back of the limo. I use the brief walk round the car to check the guys in the van are awake and ready to follow us, but I needn't have bothered. By the time I sit next to him Maxwell is already on the phone to them.

I sit back in the seat and stare out at the patterns made by the rain.

I've been to New Paris a few of times before, all on contract related business, although two appear as 'holidays' if you check the official records. It's a strange place for a Mort bred boy like me. First time it took me 3 days to get used to the lack of rain.

I've never been in the arena Slaughterhouse are using, but the insider data states it is virtually identical to the Sector 6 Showcase and I am more than familiar with that. I'll just have to hope that the gossip is correct.

2 days is not long to prepare for a fight, and I will never get sight of the arena set up this close to show time.

Instead I get Maxwell to do something useful for once and get his contacts with 3rd eye to call up fight footage of my opponents.

It's not much but it will have to do.

+++

I loose my self in the work.

We start at Dark lament with the scene of the crime and it becomes very obvious very quickly that our target has been unhappy for some time. His ebon work mates had excused it as "him just being human." Given he was unable to use the equipment they had

been lax with his security access to it. As a result it was all too easy for him to pick it up and walk off with it.

They are very reluctant to tell us anything about that the prototype at all. Best we get is a photo of some spherical device covered in what I assume are glyphs and a vague reference to "Some whole new area of flux use." They are adamant that everything else is above SCL 4.

So the task at hand quickly becomes where did he go next. Brador and his beloved oyster quickly collects the data we need. As usual, the squad look at me expectantly as I finishes reading the mass of print outs.

"He got a text to his phone from a disposaphone at 18:17. He picked up the item and walked straight out of the building and into a waiting taxi. That took him to the gauss station, where he entered the main concourse at 18:29, which is where we loose him. There is no record of him buying a ticket, nor does he appear on any of the exit cameras.

"But when the shivers hit the place at 19:03 he was not on the station, nor were their any unauthorised train entries reported in that time."

"Which means?" Creed prompts, unwilling to do any thinking for himself.

"Either he bought a ticket in advance, a ticket was waiting in the taxi or he was meeting some one. My bet is the latter. There is no transaction from any accounts we have for him that ties into a ticket purchase. Also some one ordered that taxi via SLA-NET and it wasn't him." I explain.

"Can you trace the SLA-NET connection?"

"Not to anything useful." Brador admits painfully. "Came in via Ex-Net. However the channel is one we've seen Dark night use before. But that could be a red herring."

"The disposaphone?"

"Only time it was ever used. I've set a trace on it but I seriously doubt they would be amateur enough to use it again."

"The train?" Creed starts.

"We only have 4 departures in the window of opportunity, including one to Guidance, which was the first one to depart after his arrival." I summarise the bad news. "Given the preciseness of his actions... I'd guess he and his partner were on that one"

"And from there?"

"Anywhere. "

"Ok lets turn this one on its head."

Aleister starts. "If you were a human being with a prototype Dark lament device, being hunted by SLA and every contract Killer on the planet. Where would you go?"

"Personally, off it." I respond.

He nods.

We head to Guidance.

+++

I watch a montage of my next victims most recent fights in the car on the way to guidance.

Maxwell makes a number of knowing noises which suggests, as usual, he has been reading around the subject. But I am all too aware that if I want to make next months rent payments it's probably something I do not want to know. I just wish he would shut up.

I focus on the combat footage. Domina's fighting style is typical of New Parisian killers. Lot's of show and style, however he has and underlying killing conviction, which is probably why he has been so successful so far.

Not much longer though. If BLA want him dead dead then he must have done something really bad, or really stupid, not that there is much difference. I muse briefly that Maxwell from his 'ahhhs' and 'umms' probably knows what it is. Best to put that out of my mind.

Maxwell leans across. "That high blow finisher he is fond of leaves him open to a low attack."

"I know." Despite my self there is an edge in my response. "And so does he..." I flip the slug to some appropriate moment to illustrate.

Domina takes up his classic stances, swinging his vibro sabre.

The incoming Prop drops low to one knee beneath the finishers usual path, swinging his flail at Domina's knees.

Domina jumps and twists, bringing one hand down on the props head and using weight and momentum to force the sabre through the props armour and chest. Arterial blood spurts out of both sides of the chest plate.

"...and he's practice it." I finish.

"Oh." Maxwell sits back and swallows. "The girls and camera guys will meet us at the departure lounge." He states, desperate to chance the subject on to one where he actually knows what he is talking about.

"Fine." I stare out of the window at the bad news about the entourage and wish I was already on the flight.

+++

We use the gauss train to follow in our quarry's footsteps, using a private booth area so we can continue our discussions.

"Off it yes, but not on a fold ship – too much of a danger that the crew would detect the device. Given his areas of research he knows that." Brador points out. "Which really narrows down his options." He turns to the Oyster and taps frantically, cursing the way his remote connection drops in and out with the rapid movement of the train.

In the pause whilst we wait for him to perform his technomagic Aleister speaks. "So who is the other party?"

"This guy is buying his freedom from SLA and Dark Lament with this prototype. Could be any of the soft companies." Creed responses.

I shake my head. "No. Only ones with access to an Ion drive vessel that can get clearance to land at Guidance. Which means its not Thresher or Tek Trex, not either of their styles. The EX-net was a Dark Night Channel."

"But?" Al voices my unspoken concern.

I shrug. "Too obvious." I shake my head. "I don't know. Doesn't feel right." Brador sits back, a smug expression on his face. "Got it. Independent trader ion drive vessel departed 20 minutes after our guys train arrives. Flight reports records 2 passengers added to its cargo manifesto at the last minute. They were heading for the Cyrus III."

"Another Dark night connection." Aleister whispers.

"Almost as if they don't want us to have to think for ourselves." I whisper back.

+++

We arrive at the main New Paris VIP departure lounge for Guidance only to discover Deity has beaten up too it. Maxwell grumbles loudly to the concierges but there is nothing for it. With his presence no one will be interested in us. Instead we make use of a lounge going to some arm-pit world where we can at least pretend to camera that we are the most important people here.

Sure enough, and as they are paid to, the flunkies and hangers on swarm round us. Helped by their presence and the fact that Maxwell is busy I drop into my slightly unhinged Killer act; Snarling at the waiter for bringing me a drink without the requested ice whilst flirting shamelessly with his barmaid.

Some one, at a guess Maxwell, puts up the Tachi footage and soon I am re-enacting parts of the fight using Brig the soundman as punching bag.

Credit where its due the guy lets out a very realistic scream as I lift him over my head to display how I pulled off the back breaker manoeuvre. I hope it was put on and that he trusted me more than that. But in this line of work you can never be sure. I give him a good shake for show before making sure he lands 'by accident' on the sofa next to the door.

As I step back to take the bow the door opens into me and turn to defend my self. The face I almost hit makes my heart stop.

+++

I hate it when it happens.

As squad arrives in the departure lounge, I almost walk straight into him. Ever the professional, he apologies for his thoughtlessness before moving his financier and entourage out of the way of the door.

It takes a lot not to look over there, especially when one of the hangers on throws her arms round his neck and snogs him.

The shuttle he is waiting for is going to New Paris, which is kind of a relief. Whenever we are on a BPN with an associated hunter sheet I am always half afraid he will take it. Still the sheet on this guy is not enough to maintain our lifestyle.

After a quizzical look from Aleister, I loose my self in reviewing the data on Cyrus III.

It's not a fun place, just shy of being a war world. Lots of contract games are held there because it's considered a 'challenging environment'.

I can't imagine for one second that it is our targets final destination. There is nothing there for a run away Dark Lament technician.

However we have a major advantage. The fold ship will get there all but instantaneously. Which means we will arrive a few hours before the lon vessel. If we get this right, and cloak handler being willing, we could be home by this evening.

Despite myself I glance over to the disorderly swarm in the corner. It only reminds me that no matter how quickly I get home, he won't be there. No rush.

+++

I wish she hadn't seen that.

Its hard enough having to ignore each other in public, but that idiot girl throwing herself at me can't have helped her focus on what ever job she is on. I resolve to make it up to her with something really special when I get back. May be something nice from one of the New Paris designers. In black lace. May be not. As soon as we get on the ship I make my excuses at having to prepare and retreat to the sleep module. Of course I have to throw said idiot girl out as the word "No" was not something she was taught in flunky school.

The corridor security drone pans nicely to catch her flight through the air, the crunch of her arm bending around the support strut and her scream, as ear piercing as her laugh. And of course pans back to take a shot of my grin at her pain and confusion.

I can be sure "Killer breaks sex-toy" will be all over the scream sheets by the morning. May be she will see it and it will make her smile. Actually probably not, one of the elements that drew me to her in the first place was her compassion.

+++

The shuttle drags itself out of atmosphere and docks. The flux vessel we are heading for is small, just a crew of 20. It hangs as a dark hole in space against the multitude of pinpricks of distant worlds. As we get closer the running lights of our shuttle start to reveal the details and I make a point of looking away.

There is something about the vessels that have always made me very nervous.

It could be the fact that I do not like 'folding'. That brief moment of un-remembered 'non-existence' frankly scares me. Fortunately I rarely have to tolerate it.

But there is more to it than that. Someone, long dead now, once told me that Fold ships were living beings, subjugated many centuries ago by the ebons. I never found any real proof for the theory but it is all too easy to believe.

The purser greets us at the hatch with a false smile and blank eyes. With a stream of meaningless small talk about the journey ahead and our destination, he guides us through corridors lined with tubes of pulsating black and purple.

It is something of a relief when he leaves us at the passengers quarters, partially for the silence he leaves behind, but mostly for the more human friendly décor in here.

Aleister shudders. "The flux is building, we will be folding soon." He explains.

"Warn me." I request

"No. You'd be better not knowing."

+++

I slide into the module and drop the data slug into the screen system. For appearance sake I pull the privacy curtain, but the security camera is happily watching every thing I do in the narrow tube, so its an illusion of privacy at best.

I call up the fight reviews of my potential opponents in the New Paris match. I am the only "foreigner" in the line up and most of the others are low ranking fillers at best.

Conscious of the security observing me I try not to focus too much of my time on Domina. It would be all too easy for some one to pick up my interest and warn him to watch out for me. Chances are that will happen anyway, but I'd rather it could not be traced back to some mistake I made. I'd like to come up with some well thought out and pretty plan. Something cunning and clever to take him down and make an example of him in the way Esprit would appreciate. But the more and more I watch his style, the more I am convinced that pure brutality is my best bet. It hurts. I'd like to beat the New Paris ponces at their own stylish game and not pander to stereotypes. But I have a job to do and I can't risk a failure just to look good. I'll have to satisfy my craving for "cute stuff" on the fillers and get down to business when I face him. Besides, off world fights only make edited high lights on Mort and a win for a mort killer such as myself is unlikely to get good coverage on New Paris itself. Anything I do in the next few days is not going to make me famous. Decision made I settle back and, for once, use the module for what it was actually designed for. Sleep.

+++

Despite Aleister's attempts I do know. There is a moment of waking without sleep and a distant memory of a dream I could not have had.

Despite myself I glare at him for not warning me.
He just shrugs and heads for the door.

+++

I'm awakened upon our arrival by a sour faced customs official. In deference to my official status as guest of the New Paris Circuit he lets me freshen up whilst he checks out the paper work. As he leaves Maxwell arrives and drops the scream sheet on the toilet seat next to me. The Girls tear streaked face juxtaposed with my own animal grin stares out of the page surrounded by illegible New Parisian. "I suppose you think that was clever!" "Just pandering to the expectations of the audience." I respond - returning the scraping the nights accumulation of hair from my chin, I don't want to take this "Beast of Mort" thing that far. "Yeah well that broken arm cost us extra." He complains. Suddenly it all be comes clear - its not the hurt to the girl or the stain on the reputation of his fighter that bothers him, it's the cold hard cash. Any need I felt to justify my actions are removed by his. I shrug. "Next time you clear stunts like that with me. Understand?" "Next time employ a professional who knows what 'NO' means. Understands?" I retort. "What professionals like Clare?" He sneers back.

It's a low blow. An allusion to an event way back in our working relationship where an after contest party got out of hand and a lot of covering up had to be done to keep the rape and death of a groupie out of the scream sheets. I wasn't much more than a kid at the time myself and, perhaps mercifully, I have very little memory of the night myself. Still it is not something I'm proud of and he knows it.

He should know better. The gun is at his head before I have time to think. "I could shoot you now and solve that problem." I remind him.

"Oh No." He grins back. "That contract you signed with me makes it very clear. You kill me and you will NEVER work again."

"Who says I want to work again?" I deliver the line with enough conviction that the smile fades from his face.

But I lift the gun from between his eyes.

"Get out I need to take a dump."

He leaves and I close my eyes. Driving the bad taste of Clare out of my mind by thinking of her asleep in the flat.

+++

Cyrus III is the pit I expected it to be. There is a strong wind blowing outside which made landing the shuttle a challenge. At one point I was sure we were going to land half on the terminal buildings. The squad run across the shattered tarmac to buildings that have been forced back into some semblance of shape after the war that destroyed this planet.

Inside is not much better. Half the walls show signs of desperate

patching to force them to support the weight of the roof. The plexi-glass windows looking out onto the landing bay is creaking under the joint strain of the weather and decay.

We head of the arrivals lounge. "If we are lucky they won't be expecting us and this will be a breeze." Creed states confidently.

Aleister and I exchange looks which pretty much mean we both think that is a long shot.

Baldor turns to the ever present oyster and logs into the local net work. We tolerate the normal minor cursing as he tries to negotiate with a non Mort data system.

"It's coming in at terminal 81." He declares with a smile. "Or at least it was. I just changed his docking permit to terminal 5." He points to the door opposite us and grins smugly. "According to their ETA we have twenty minutes, any one want coffee?" Aleister shakes his head and heads for the booth near the door.

"Why don't you two got and get something to eat and we will take first watch." I offer and follow him.

Aleister sits toying with some strange Dark lament trinket, making a point of not making eye contact with me until the other two are well out of earshot.

"You have a theory?" He prompts.

"There are lots of clues pointing at dark night. Too many clues. I seriously doubt any dark night cell good enough to set this up would make such basic mistakes."

"So you think?"

"May be some internal job. Some one in SLA who wants the prototype to vanish. Possibly even some one in Dark lament."

He looks at me quizzically.

"If you had spent a lot of credits on a project that didn't work, wouldn't it be nice if you never had to admit to the failure because some one nicked the prototype."

"I don't see any evidence for that."

Aleister states.

"I know. It was just something about the way they were behaving at Dark Lament. Our BPN is just to get him

and who ever he is with. The retrieval has been given to some no-hoppers who probably don't even know it's not on mort anymore. And then there is he hunter sheet." I shake my head. "If they wanted the job doing properly they wouldn't mix and match like that. It smells."

"So your conclusion is?"

"Expect trouble."

+++

I settle into the briefing room for the contest and glance round at my opposition. In some ways it's a mercy that I have no idea what these guys are talking about. Their strange warblings just flow over me like some surreal sound track.

The Slaughterhouse Six rep comes in. A tall leggy blond that may be in my earlier days I would have been attracted to. But I've learnt to keep clear of women like that now.

It is obvious from the reactions of the other contestants that something is up. I look over confused and one of them in a desperately accented attempt at Killian fills me in.

"Arena problems. Contest being moved."

"Where?"

He shrugs, obviously not sure of the words. "off world?" He guesses

I sit back and let them argue it out amongst themselves. If anything this is better for me. A late change of venue is a common stunt to play for this level of fight and it means we are all in the same boat of unfamiliar territory now.

I just let them usher me on to the shuttle with the rest of the killers and settle down to get a brief nap.

+++

The ETA is wrong. Terminal 5 flashes up a docking warning.

"Shite." I kick in the tac- com but the local relays must be down. All I get it static.

Aleister winces. "I hate communicating with Creed, His mind is so..."

"We might need them if it turns nasty." I stand up and move over to the door.

Aleister opens his eyes again. "They will be here in 10."

"Too late."

The door to Terminal 5 opens.

First guy off is a hulking great shaktar. Fortunately he makes a be-line for the Port masters office. I spot our target wandering down the ramp with out a care in the world, a hold-all on his shoulder.

There is no sign of anyone else in the tunnel. Who ever his companion was they are not about now. This may well be our best chance.

I step forward. "Mr King?"

The colour drains from his face as I address him by his real name. Its all the answer I need.

Aleister appears at my shoulder, flintlock in hand. "Don't even think about it."

"We need to ask you a few questions." I smile and gesture to the booth we were using earlier.

He has more sense than to try to run. We guide him into the corner of the booth and wait for back up to arrive.

+++

As I come off the shuttle my eyes scan across the lounge trying to work out where the hell they have taken us.

Rather than any useful location information they fall upon the face of a nervous looking human sat at the back of a booth. There is something familiar about his face. It takes a few steps for me to place it.

I've got lucky. He was one of the faces on the scream sheet stream from the night before. Not a massive amount, but this is money for nothing - and this fat out chances are no one else will know about it. A few subtle hand signals to Josh and I know the camera is ready to get the kill conformation I will need back home. The gun swings into my hand and I see the fear enter his eyes.

His gaze must warn the guy with his back to me as he starts to move. He is another familiar face, but an ebon this time. No problem may be he is worth a little more. I drop the HESH round between the eyes of my target to ensure the first payment and then switch aim to claim the second.

Ebons can be tricky, and I have no idea what this guy can do. I'm certainly not going to risk giving him the time to do any calculating. I let a snap off at him, taking him in the neck, spinning him round and impacting him into the wall.

That's when the other figure in the booth moves. As she turns it is a face I know all too well and suddenly I realise why the ebon looked familiar.

He was not a hunter sheet. He was with her in the lounge on Mort. A similar look of recognition in her eyes stops us both pulling the trigger, despite the aim we have on each other. And then I hear the shot go off next to me.

I've seen enough people die in my time to know the look in the eyes of the woman who my world revolves around. I don't need to see any more. The impact sends her sprawling across the table as her light dies. Despite myself I step forward towards her, then stop as all that long practised 'give nothing away' kicks in. Then consciousness over rides it and I realise there is no point in pretending now. As I reach her my brain tells me there is a noise behind me. I turn to see the source of the shot. Maxwell stands celebrating loudly about the easy profit we just made and the fact he saved my butt. I can hardly hear him. All I can hear it the blood squirting out of her dying heart.

All I can see is the smoking barrel in his hand. There is a gun in my hand as well. I don't have any conscious control over it as it raises to point at his face. He barely responds to the threat: it is an act we have played out far to many times before.

I look at him and his dancing celebrations. His words "You'll never work again" echo in my head.

I look down at the blood soaked hair framing her face and dead eyes.

"Who says I want to work again?" whispers out of my lips.

The swing of the barrel to his face my have been the guns, but the pressure on the trigger is all my own.

"Well just one last time for Esprit."

+++

"And finally Chelsea, the Slaughter house special kicked off early today with a shoot out in the arrivals lounge on Cyrus III. "

"Yes Steve. Thanks to the sharp eyes and good memory of Mort's own Contract Killer Terminus, Dark night agents were prevented from disrupting the contest. It seems our hero recognised one of the terrorists from a Hunter Sheet, and of course too the appropriate action. End result 7 terrorists dead."

"Including a bit of a shock I believe?"

"You'd be referring to the New Parisian Contract Killer Domina. It seems he had been smuggling weapons to the terrorists and so tried to defend them when Terminus opened fire. Fortunately Mort expertise won that one and Domina days on the circuit are well and truly over."

"However there is a sad side to this isn't there Chelsea."

"Yes, Terminus financier Maxwell Smart was caught in the crossfire. They've been working together for 6 years so Terminus has taken it pretty hard. We are hoping he'll have recovered enough to take part in the Special but last night he was said to be too distraught to comment."

"Well lets hope he is there, regardless any contest that kicks off with something like that has got to be worth seeing. The slaughter house special will air live at 11 on SH6 Pay Per view channel. Order now and get a 50% discount in celebration of this victory against Dark Night. "

END

Runner

1

The flashing images on the monitor lit up the room, making the small booth seem much larger than it was. Small people went about their lives in black and white, carousing and dealing, completely unaware that they were being watched by SLA.

“So what is this?” the voice behind his ear growled. Ignoring it, he took another sip of his drink to calm the nerves and put his hand on the keyboard to keep it from shaking. The timeline for a resolution was originally ninety-six hours but it had taken seventy-two of them and a literal mountain of paperwork to get the video record. You’d think that if the company really wanted this thing fixed, they could have been a little more flexible but it just wasn’t in their nature. That stood about as much of a chance as the rain stopping.

“Look, I ain’t got all night,” the Waster continued. His name was Horace and he was a pain in the neck on the best of days. “B’sides, if we’re gonna watch movies, it’s gotta be porn.”

Patience wasn’t something that they necessarily had time for, but the little he had left was all that had kept him from doing something unpleasant to the Waster. If that charred-eyed freak said one more thing...

“Come on, can’t we hurry this up? I’ve got a date and it’s gonna be a hot-”

“Stifle yourself,” came a bass rumble from the 313. The Stormer medic had somehow fit into the booth without squashing everyone and was playing referee again. On the good side, Padre was wide enough to block the views of passersby. Since this was a public terminal, he was the only security they had and it wouldn’t pay for everyone to know what they were up to.

“Come on Mackie,” the Waster continued. “Can’t you call me when you get to the right spot? I ain’t got all night!”

Bruce MacReady (or Mackie to his friends) punched the fast-forward again. Killing the Waster wasn’t a realistic option, regardless of how enjoyable it would be. They’d need everyone if they were going to make it through this. Suddenly an image came onto the screen that he recognized and he snapped the feed back into real time.

“Okay, here it is. At oh-one-twenty hours, about seventy-five hours ago.”

The view was of a bar and a group of men were sitting around a table in the lower left of the screen. The table was covered with glasses and party favors of all sorts and each guy had at least one hooker in his lap or on his arm. They seemed to be having a pretty good time.

“Looks like some sort of private party,” Magdalene commented. Mackie could feel the heat from her breath on his neck as she leaned in to look and glanced at the smooth angle of her jaw. “Where is it?”

“A dump called Nightside. It’s in DT sector three, sublevel two.”

“Looks pretty high class for that area,” she commented. “Now who are we watching and why? Uh...hello.”

Even with the grainy video, Mackie could see a subtle shift in the demeanor of the three men. That was when the girls scattered and a man in a pristine white suit and coat walked up to the table with his palms up. The audio was so garbled that he couldn’t make out a single word and the Waster was the first to complain

“Can you turn that up? I can’t understand-“

“Shut up,” Magdalene snapped, leaning in closer to listen. Her hand was on his shoulder and the grip was like a steel press.

If it was some sort of negotiation, whatever had happened wasn’t to the man in white’s liking. He slapped something down on the table, spoke, and then left with a dramatic flourish. The remaining men sat back down as if nothing had happened and began enjoying the drugs and women again.

“Some kind of deal went tits up I guess,” Mackie commented but Magdalene waved him to silence.

A moment later, men rushed into the camera’s field of vision and everything hit the fan. The table exploded into shards of paper and glass and stuffing spat from the booth. The three men pulled weapons and fired back, temporarily blotting the video with the flash of weapons fire. Figures dove over tables and rolled behind cover, looking more like something out of a television show than an actual gun battle. The sounds of bullets shredding flesh and people dying proved that it was real.

“HOLY SHIT!” Horace whooped, finally interested in what was happening.

It was over in seconds and the room was littered with bodies and debris. Pockmarks covered the walls and Unis floated in the air like falling ash. Not a piece of glass was intact in the room and MacReady stared slack jawed, never having seen anything quite like this. That was when the man in white entered the screen again and walked over to look at the bodies. Taking a pistol from one of the shooters, he calmly shot each of the three men in the head and then handed it back. Looking right into the camera, he waved and smiled before walking out.

“Cheeky bastard,” Padre said. “Now what does this have to do with us?”

MacReady was still staring at the screen as he fished out the BPN and passed it backwards. His throat was dry, but he still managed to force the words out.

“We’ve been given a chance to wipe that last fiasco wiped off our records,” he mumbled. “That’s the good part.”

“Fine with me,” Horace said. “What’s the bad news?”

“It’s a Grey,” he answered. He drained his drink in order to wet his throat, but his voice still came out as a tight rasp. “We’ve got twenty-four hours to take that guy down. Or else.”

There were a few whispered curses from the squad, but Magdalene’s silence caught everyone’s attention. With a start, Mackie realized that the olive skin of her face had been drawn and pale even before he told them about the BPN. In his year and a half with the squad, this was the first time he had ever seen her scared and his throat tightened even further.

“It gets worse,” she said. “That guy is Trang.”

“The Trang?” Horace asked. “What the hell is the Orientan mob doing in upper downtown? Are you sure that-“

“Yes I’m sure,” she snapped, her voice squeaking from the tension. It had an odd sound that was positively unnerving. “I grew up in Changtown. I know the language and that guy is Trang. No one *alive* can or would identify him. He might as well be a ghost.”

The silence in the booth was nearly absolute and the echoes of the passers by seemed as loud as Shiver APCs. Looking at each of his friends’ faces, the young Frother forced himself to speak. Even he had heard of the Trang’s reputation with its impenetrable ranks of enforcers that were so violent as to be nearly legendary. Magdalene was the first Chang he had ever met and if she thought they couldn’t do this, then that meant it was all over. Regardless, he knew that he was far more afraid of Cloak than anyone else in the World of Progress and spoke up.

“Okay, then we have to find this guy and take him down,” he said. His voice sounded weak and small, but it seemed to motivate his friends. “So how do we find a guy who’s a ghost?”

Magdalene still hadn't taken her eyes off the screen and her sudden lunge towards it startled everyone. The color had returned to her face and the voice was excited as she poked the monitor with her finger. A lone woman – one of the hookers- crawled out from the wreckage and stared at the carnage. She collected something from the debris and ran off screen and into the rain. Somehow, one witness had survived the massacre...

"Her. We find *her*."

2

The black tile floor was frosted with broken glass and every step sounded like a New Year's firecracker to her ears. Fist-sized holes lined the expensive bar and mirrors and blood and liquor covered the tables. The crime scene was a jigsaw puzzle of clues but too many were missing to put it completely together. There was always a message left and she knew that she could find it if only she were given a chance to concentrate.

"So, what? Was one of these stiff's boffing the ghost's woman?"

The screeching voice cut through her concentration and she circled the table where the three primary targets had been seated. Most of the squad had never seen this kind of carnage before and the air was remarkably still as they looked around. The sole exception was the Stormer whose eyes showed that he had seen far more than this and lived through it. Of all her teammates, she would have never expected to find kinship with a 313 but they often saw things the same way.

"Well, were they?" the Waster demanded. It was always obvious when he was nervous because he insisted on speaking louder like a small child. The stillness of the room just made it more significant and she gritted her teeth. "This is personal, right?"

"No," Magdalene answered. "No it wasn't."

"W-why...how do you know that?" Mackie asked in a whisper. He was the youngest in the squad and his inexperience showed too much sometimes. His face was still pale and spattered so she dabbed his face with a napkin as she passed him and sent him over to the Stormer.

"Because this would have been *much* worse."

"How could this be any worse?" Horace gagged. "I mean, good Gahd! This guy doesn't have a head or hands or feet or...or... They friggin' chopped him...frigging chopped him up..."

Magdalene had decided to start with the booths shown in the videotape and work backwards but the Waster had taken the office. When she got to the door and looked in, she changed her mind - there was no doubt that the hit had been personal. Horace had tripped over a particularly ugly piece of the puzzle and she pushed him out of the doorway before he threw up on it.

"What happened here?" Padre's voice rumbled. The big 313 had moved up to block the view from the others but stayed well out of the way. The desk, the blotter, the walls, even the ceiling was splattered with crimson. What was left next to the chair was barely human and completely unidentifiable.

"Horace was right," she whispered as she pushed past him. "They did chop him up and they did it here."

"Is there some significance to killing someone with a knife?"

She shook her head as she got back into the fresher air of the bar. The smell of alcohol and smoke was almost strong enough to blot out the scent in the office. It wasn't worth picking through the gore for clues so she waved the Shivers with body bags past.

"It wasn't a knife. It was a Liu Kwai," she answered but the look on the 313's face told her she needed to explain. "A short ceremonial axe with a wide crescent blade – about eighteen inches wide. This would take two strong men to do it properly– one to hold him and one to do the work."

Padre's brow furrowed as he shrugged, not getting the significance of the whole thing. Letting out her breath, she closed her eyes and gathered her strength. Behind her, she heard the Brain Waster and Mackie losing their lunches and the crackle of glass under the Shivers' boots as they dragged the mangled torso into a bag.

With only twenty-two hours of life left, there was no time to teach so she'd have to guide. It was the only chance they'd have.

"It's a war and we're about to intervene."

3

The rain wasn't about to simply stick in his hair like the proper stuff. No, it was the sort of day that it would go right down his back and under the damn deathsuit. God, he hated rain. He also hated the job, especially when it was about to get his ticket royally punched. How in the hell had they gotten into this mess in the first place?

Oh yeah. It was the Frother.

It's always the damn Frother, the weak-kneed, wide-eyed, sword-swinging child that he is. Obviously you can't have balls and still wear a skirt. He'd tell him that as soon as the boy stopped puking on his feet.

"Get up Bruce," he said quietly as he helped hold the Frother's braids out of the puddle he was creating. "You'll catch something in the water."

"Whassis matter?" the voice said from under the mop of hair. "We're all DEAD anyway! Didn't you hear Magdalene? We're gonna die!"

The sound in his voice was so unusual that it caught Horace off guard. Was the boy drunk? How did the kid manage to tie one on without him noticing and tagging along? He pawed the kid's hair out of the way to see his face and cursed.

"I can't believe you're crying," he mumbled under his breath but it was so low that Bruce didn't hear him. Little kids cry and women cry when he leaves them, but operatives don't cry. *Especially* when they're under the gun...

"Stop crying," he said gently and the man's shoulders trembled harder. Letting out his breath he tried to look up at the sky dramatically but cursed when he got a face full of dirty water and spat it out. God he hated rain and this was really starting to piss him off...

"I said stop crying," he repeated, but the man only broke down farther. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Horace imagined a tiny spark working its way down a fuse to a big barrel and his voice rose from a growl to a snarl. "NOW!"

It didn't take long for that little spark to run its course and the snarl became a roar in his ears. With a jerk, he yanked the Frother fully upright and threw him forward but the man just flopped into a puddle at his feet. With a shock of guilt, Horace realized that he still had hold of his friend's hair and he had just bounced him off the side of a steel dumpster.

"Ohshitohshitohshit!" he mumbled aloud, gingerly letting go of Bruce's hair and trying to get him upright again. He wasn't sure if the Frother was unconscious or dead and was shaking as he dragged him under cover.

"You really shouldn't have done that," he said to himself as he rifled through the Frother's drug kit to find Kickstart. Vials and boopas fell out into the puddle as he fumbled and soon the entire pack contents were out as he fought panic. Somehow he managed to keep his voice low and Magdalene and Padre didn't choose right now to step outside to check on them. "You KNOW you shouldn't push me like that. This is ALL YOUR fault! You know my temper! You shouldn't push me! This is your fault!"

Horace thanked the powers that be as the Kickstart or one of the other drugs he had given him took effect. With a twitch, the Frother muttered something and started to come around. Absently, Bruce patted at the bloody spot on his scalp and looked up at him.

“Wha-what? What happened?” he asked. Horace took consciousness as a good sign and helped him to his feet with more care.

“You, uh...slipped and fell into that dumpster,” he answered, feeling heat rush to his face. He wasn’t sure if it was guilt or fear, but decided that fear was the most likely. The others just wouldn’t understand and he’d be blamed for something else. “I’m good, but not good enough to nursemaid you all the time.”

“Thanks Horace. I owe you another one,” the Frother answered and smiled up at him.

“Yeah you do and don’t forget it,” he answered as he looked around without seeing anything important. “Now let’s get inside. I’m getting soaked because of you.”

“Sorry,” Bruce said as he crouched down to collect the contents of his kit. The Waster felt a little guilty about the mess he had made of it, but it would do the boy some good to have to work for once.

“Yeah, just remember that it was one of your sorrys is what got us into this in the first place so I don’t want to hear it.”

He hoped his voice sounded more sure than he felt about that, especially considering the nature of the “collateral damage” that Cloak had taken issue with. That was water down a drain at this point and he tried to push it out of his mind but it kept coming back at him like a rabid DAC. He felt the fuse to his temper lighting again and it showed in his voice. “Hurry up!”

Horace saw something moving on the other side of the street and ignored the Frother’s response. It might have just been someone passing by, but his instincts told him it was more than that. Leaving the kid, he walked out of the alley and met the others in front of the former bar.

“I think that guy’s watch-,” he said aloud but Magdalene talked over him like she always did. The words “arrogant, pushy bitch” sprang to mind but he knew enough to not let them past his lips. How the hell did a Chang chick get the name Magdalene anyway?

“He’s been on us ever since we left the subway,” she answered, looking around at the relatively scant foot traffic. Horace thought about how irritating she was and how he alternated wanting to bed her and shoot her. “He’s probably working for one of the big players.”

“Probably, but why are you sure?” The vat goon asked. As far as Horace was concerned, Stormers weren’t good for much and a supposed combat machine that was a friggin pacifist was a complete joke. They oughta shoot the guy who came up with that dumb idea.

With a glance at the rain dribbling out of his hair and the soaked Frother bounding up behind him, Magdalene’s voice took on that same tone that he found both incredibly inviting and aggravating at the same time.

“Because you’d either have to be very disciplined or a complete idiot to stand out in this rain for long.”

The sidelong glance underlined her meaning and Magdalene stepped from under the eave and out into the curtain of rain. With the dull roar of the downpour washing into the drains, it sounded like she said “I want to talk to him” and he found himself once again trailing behind the others in a cold shower. God, he hated this crap but at least he wasn’t shivering anymore. It was amazing how one little spark working its way down a fuse was enough to keep him entirely warm.

Mackie's head was pounding again even in spite of the Kickstart but he was so caught up in the action that he barely noticed. The impacts of his boots were like gunshots as he ran through the puddles after their quarry, trying to keep his balance and not drop his Claymore. With a self-conscious giggle, he realized that he was indeed completely stoned out of his skull and enjoying the hell out of this. There must be something new in the latest batch of Kickstart he picked up – not that he was going to complain because all the fun was probably going to be over by nightfall tomorrow.

The guy that Magdalene had wanted to speak with had ducked into an alley instead of standing to talk so it was another chase in the rain. It would have been fun if he was partnered with someone who had a sense of humor, but it was the Waster again. The charred-eyed freak was on his heels, grumbling and cursing all the way as he tried to catch his breath. Some part of him wished the unpleasant, womanising bastard would catch a slug between the eyes but no one was shooting.

The man in the light colored rain slicker was running at a breakneck speed, ducking and weaving past junk and debris like a man possessed. At times he was only a brief flash of color and at others, the young Frother was nearly within chopping distance. Each time though, the man managed to pull away and nearly vanish in the mist. It was like grasping at a wisp of smoke and it would have been aggravating if Mackie hadn't been in such a great mood. He made a note to pick up more Kickstart the moment this was finished because he hadn't had this much fun in weeks.

Unconsciously, Mackie thanked his long deceased mother for giving him the quick feet because it was a miracle he had managed to keep pace this long. Realizing that it was probably more of a miracle that ole Dad had caught up with his fleet-footed mom in the first place, he found himself giggling just in time to duck a falling stack of boxes. No wonder he had gone this way – there was a lot of things to drop on him.

The guy did it again with a stack of skids and Mackie bounded over a dumpster to keep pursuit. Somewhere behind him, he heard the Waster wheezing and knew that it was soon going to be only the two of him. The others were trying to circle around and cut him off, but he couldn't tell them where he was because he had somehow managed to lose his mike in the alley next to the bar. Some days are definitely worse than others.

The alley looked like a dead end ahead and Mackie would have laughed aloud if a dumpster hadn't abruptly lunged at him. Diving onto it, he rolled across the closed panel and dropped to the ground but the world spun suddenly around him. The man had been waiting on the other side and hit him as he landed.

The impact wasn't nearly as bad as he would have expected and he came up with blade in hand and the proverbial blood in his eyes. He had to give the guy credit –he was certainly quick and still had enough endurance to put up a fight even after the long run. On some level it worried him that the guy wasn't winded, but he didn't have much of a choice but to deal with it.

"We just want to talk to you," Mackie said as he weighed the sword in his hand. Realizing that this was probably a mixed signal, he shut the Claymore's oscillation off and held it to the side. "Let's just wait for the others and we'll settle this peacefully--"

The man started down one of the side alleys but came up short when he saw that it was blocked by a few hundred refrigeration units. Spitting something in another language (Chang?) that sounded like a curse, he almost seemed to get upset but then regained his self-control. Calmly straightening his slicker, he smoothed back his hair and took a fighting stance before waving Mackie on. The fact that he seemed completely unconcerned that his opponent was armed with a three-foot long blade made the young Frother a little more willing to wait for backup.

"We can talk about this," he said and the man said something else that sounded like a taunt. Even without being able to translate the words, his body language was perfectly clear and the Frother felt his temper rise again. "Screw the backup," Mackie said as he switched the blade back on and stepped forward to meet him.

The man moved forward, circling just out of range and weaving his head like an animal. It was one of the weirdest things Mackie had ever seen but the guy's other hand was what soon had his attention. Holding it near the solar plexus, its palm continually flipped and moved like a beached fish. It would be a few minutes later before he'd be able to realize the guy had been taken him like a complete amateur.

His eyes opened to the stinging rain and the feeling of wet concrete on his back. Sitting up and spitting the water out of his mouth, he tried to shake off the fog. His Claymore lay beside him, chattering on the concrete and he rubbed his eyes.

"What a stupid..." he started to say but there was no one around to confess to. The realization that he had royally screwed up and was lucky to be alive sapped his earlier enthusiasm and he rubbed the new sore spot on his head. "Of all the stupid things to fall for."

Nearby movement brought him to his feet and he wobbled back past the dumpster to see the man trading shots with Horace. Something exploded between Mackie and the target and he ducked reflexively - the damn Waster was using Ebb grenades again, which was exactly the thing that had gotten them in trouble in the first place. When the young Frother raised his head, he saw the man smiling at him and any irritation he had vanished like blood through a sieve. Suddenly, everything started moving much slower for him and an Ebb blast snaked past like a streamer from a party.

"What the hell?" he said aloud and quickly reached for his FEN. The man's chrome-plated hand cannon swung around in slow motion and Mackie knew that he wasn't going to make it to tomorrow.

That was when Magdalene appeared from nowhere, sliding in and twisting the man's pistol up and away. The weapon went off twice in the rain, sounding weird in the tight quarters and the man tumbled forward to land on his feet. With a movement faster than Mackie thought possible, the guy's leg snapped upward at her face and she spun low beneath it. The man flipped through the air again, but this time he landed on his face and stayed down.

"Good grief," Mackie mumbled in spite of himself.

By the time the man started to stir, everyone was there to watch him. He was cuffed behind his back and slowly lifted his eyes to look around. It took a few moments for him to get his bearings but Mackie could feel it when the guy became cognizant again.

"Who are you working for?" Magdalene asked and the guy just stared blankly.

"I bet I can make him talk," Horace volunteered and started forward, but Padre stepped in and forced him back. The Waster loved to inflict pain and a handcuffed prisoner translated to piñata if you gave him even half a chance. It was a good sign that the prisoner flinched because that meant he had to understand Killian.

Magdalene repeated the question but the guy was intent upon not cooperating and said something in another tongue that sounded like an obscenity. Even with being a little intimidated by Horace's enthusiasm, he was still pretty proud of himself right up to the point that Magdalene started on him in the same dialect. That little surprise seemed to really shake him up and the man suddenly became much more cooperative. The young Frother really wished he could understand what they were saying but a wave of fatigue washed over him and pushed everything else aside. He was coming down like a falling brick and there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Mackie put his hip into a wall and rubbed at his eyes to keep alert but it was barely slowing the fall. The alley was closing in on him and the sounds of the interrogation were now lost in the muffled roar filling his ears. It was like being covered in a ton of cotton and he was getting sleepy.

"What in the hell...? *What* had he taken?" he tried to ask.

Someone was there with him trying to keep him upright, but his eyelids were armored shutters and he couldn't keep them up. The legs weren't working either and he felt the wall scrape his back as he slid down to rest. Something tapped on his head but it didn't bother him that he couldn't tell what it was. "Rest is good," something told him and he gave in to the darkness.

In the close quarters of the alley, his voice felt bigger and more powerful than it normally did. It wasn't like he suffered from any feelings of inadequacy, but you had to enjoy the little pleasures when you could. He gently shifted the Frother out from under the leaking gutter and stood up.

"MacReady is out," he said aloud as he stood up. Padre knew his voice would carry just fine without being raised, but the Brain Waster's tantrum was nearly loud enough to blot it out. The little one had never liked taking orders from Mag but the current situation only made it worse.

"I can't believe you fucking want to LET HIM GO!" Horace yelled. "HE'S OUR LEAD! YOU GOTTA BE CRAZY!"

Mag had briefly tried to ignore him but that had only made things worse and now he was agitated enough to get between her and the prisoner. Padre could see the edges of her composure starting to crack and would have intervened if she hadn't waved him off. The Waster was as unstable as all of his kind and would probably do something typically stupid if he had half a chance.

"You don't know anything about the Chang world, so -"

This time the Brain Waster managed to interrupt Mag and it only made him bolder. His voice rose to a full octave higher than hers and he had stepped close enough to spit in her hair.

"Bullshit! This is the *World of Progress* –MY World – not a playground for some spoiled corporate brat who's never worked a day in her damn life!" he shrieked. Even from here, Padre could see that he was foaming at the mouth like a rabid DAC and close to losing it completely. The big 313 shifted forward slightly to put himself in front of the unconscious Frother.

"You don't know shit about anything real life and I don't want to hear how this is some different world we're dealing with! That's bullshit!"

Her voice was as steady as her stare but her frame trembled as she shouldered past to take the cuffs off the prisoner. At times like this, Padre wished he had been given a much more violent nature...

"YOU BETTER NOT LET HIM GO!" Horace continued without stopping her. "I'M WARNING YOU!"

Mag glanced back before helping the prisoner to his feet and there seemed to be a modicum of respect between them. He was no longer a threat and it showed in his mannerisms as he smoothed out his coat and hair and spoke further. The cocky smile returned briefly as he said something to the Horace and then turned down the alley out of sight. It was probably the mocking laughter trailing after him that set the Brain Waster off. Horace's frame visibly stiffened as he wrestled with his temper.

As Magdalene turned to him to talk, he heard the Brain Waster mumbling something behind her and the air temperature suddenly jumped a good twenty degrees. The falling rain sizzled and the air was filled with steam and the smell of burning flesh. Screams mixed with laughter as Padre found himself snarling and trying to pull his squad leader into cover.

It was times like this that he regretted not having what humans take for instinct. In hindsight, it would probably have prevented a lot of problems.

For some reason, everyone was screaming at him and making no sense at all. It looks like the persecution was going to continue regardless of how good of a team player he was. Pushing past them to check the hostile, he shrugged off the barrage of "whys?" and "how could yous?" like they were part of the rain. Gently kicking the man in the kidney, he felt rather pride welling up to replace the anger. This was a solid kill and would look good on his record.

“Scratch one more soft company thug!” Horace laughed to himself. “How does that feel jackass? Nice job if I do say so mys-“

His litany was interrupted by a sudden spin, an impact on the jaw, and field of stars that flooded in behind his eyes. He would have fought back if he could have, but another shot to the nose and a third one somewhere a lot lower made breathing his priority. As he went from kneeling to curling up in a ball on the wet concrete, he saw the 313 hauling Magdalene into the air and away.

“Must be that time of the month,” he told muttered but it was loud enough that she heard and went off again. She struggled in the Stormer’s arms like a little kid and it would have been funny if he wasn’t hurting so much. Someone really ought to tell her that she’ll live longer if she controlled her temper.

“YOU SON OF A BITCH!” she screamed. “HOW COULD YOU DO THAT?”

Some part of him wanted to explain how Ebb actually worked but it would have gone right over her head and wouldn’t have mattered anyway. Why she was actually concerned- didn’t this guy just try to kill Mackie? She was probably just ticked off because he had the balls to do what she didn’t. She’d just have to get over it. You don’t let a soft company goon walk and he just fixed her mistake.

“Don’t see what the problem is,” he said once his breath had returned. She hadn’t gotten a solid hit in and the pain was subsiding pretty quickly. Thanks to the beefed-up deathsuit, he wouldn’t be a soprano anytime soon and that was a good thing.

“You killed him after I told him he could go!” she yelled. Magdalene was so intent on coming at him that the 313 had to strain to hold her back.

Horace was getting more irritated by the way she was reacting. After all, a little communication would have prevented any misunderstanding. He never could understand why some people couldn’t take responsibility for their mistakes.

“Maybe you should have let me in on that,” he said. His voice was far calmer than hers and he got back on his feet. “Then this might not have happened.”

“MIGHT NOT HAVE HAPPENED?” she continued. The woman pushed away from the stormer and then came right back. “Wasn’t uncuffing him a good enough hint?”

Looking over at the smoking body, Horace tried not to laugh when he answered.

“From the looks of things, I guess it wasn’t.”

Instead of lunging at him again, the short Chang woman did the unexpected and simply turned away. It was a little overdramatic for the Waster’s taste, but then he was the weird one in the squad because he lived in the real world. Magdalene crouched next to the body to check for a pulse, but gave up and sat down next to it.

“He’s dead, Tim,” Horace laughed to himself but the 313 heard him and growled. It sounded remarkably like a cat caught in a garbage disposal and the Waster snickered in spite of himself. Apparently, tall, vat grown, and slobbering wasn’t used to trying to be intimidating.

“What?” he asked with an innocent shrug. “I hit the guy hard enough to char his whole friggin family! I coulda told her that he was dead and saved her the trouble! Hell, they all look alike anyway.”

Padre shook his head and got a thoughtful look on his face that turned surprisingly dark. It caught Horace completely off guard when the 313 picked him up by his neck and held him a good two feet in the air. He kicked and tried to get a foothold but the Stormer just shook him like a rag doll in response. Fighting for air, the Waster wrapped his arms around the one holding him and tried to stay conscious.

“What you’ve done is kill us all!” the Stormer growled. In between gasps for air, the Waster could see that the vat-trash actually did have that intimidation thing down.

Just as the darkness began was creeping across the corners of his vision, the 313 let go and he crashed down onto his knees. Air came back into his lungs in long draughts and his head pounded like a drum. For some reason, the Stormer was deliberately looking away from him and revulsion swept over him when he realized why. The 313 was actually embarrassed by what he had done! Horace spat at his feet and cursed. Not only was the creature big and stupid, it was also weak. So much for that lingering bit of respect he might have had for it...

"Now it doesn't matter if we solve the BPN," the Stormer said once Horace's wheezing had ended. His voice came across more serious than usual with each word clipped like he had just learned them. "Even if Cloak doesn't kill us, they will. You don't kill one of theirs and live."

The only thing that kept Horace from busting out with laughter at the Stormer's melodrama was the realization that he was right. All the arrogance and pride that normally held the Waster up to what life threw at him faded along with his temper.

"Good job, dumbass," Padre said as he went over to check on the Frother. No one spoke for a few moments and the sound of the rain slapping the pavement was the only real sound. Magdalene stood up like someone had shocked her, pulling her pistol and walking over. He couldn't help but think how silly she looked. Was she actually going to shoot him? Not a chance. The chip on her shoulder was pretty big but she didn't have it in her.

"What?" he asked with a stupid grin. The new hardness in her eyes was a little unnerving and it was the smooth cocking of the weapon and her taking aim that silenced him. Was she going to shoot? Had she lost it?

The Stormer wasn't looking at him, Mackie was dead or something, and that left just her, him and the gun. He never saw what was coming as she ripped his ID tag off his jacket and shoved him backwards.

"You're out of MY squad. Get lost."

7

If she had just taken care of him a long time ago, none of them would have been in this position. The stupid bastard gotten them into hot water with Cloak, got them onto this BPN, but he had managed to top himself by signing their termination warrants. It took a lot of control not to squeeze the trigger but knowing that it would have been kinder that what was coming was all the motivation she needed.

"Y-you aren't serious," Horace stammered. His face was even paler than usual and his cockiness was gone. "Look Mag, this isn't very funny."

"Get out of here," she continued. "You're out of the squad so get the hell away from us NOW!"

He mumbled something but Magdalene ignored it and dragged him to his feet. With a good shove, he was stumbling past the man he had killed and at the alley's mouth. She would have thrown something at him but there wasn't anything nearby.

"SCREW YOU!" he yelled back, waving his arms. "I DON'T NEED YOU! TIRED OF FIXING ALL YOUR PROBLEMS ANYWAY!"

Magdalene sighted in on his face and his laughter sounded like a bark.

"What? You're going to shoot me?" he mocked. "YEAH RIGHT! Go ahead! YOU DON'T HAVE THE BALLS FOR IT!"

When she didn't move, he used hand signals to tell her how happy he was with the situation. Magdalene squeezed the trigger and the Waster yelped and ran away into the rain.

"I thought you were actually going to do it," Padre said and she shook her head.

"I wanted to, God knows he deserves it," she answered. "But they'll do a lot worse to him than I ever could."

"You think they know yet?"

She shook her head and holstered the pistol before answering. The rain dripping off an old fire escape formed crimson puddles at her feet and she wiped it out of her eyes and hair.

"How fitting," she thought to herself. "The sky's bleeding like a gutted pig. Absolute poetry in the World of Progress!"

"Not yet," she grumbled aloud in response. "If they did, we'd be dead by now. They'll figure it out soon enough when he turns up missing."

"Is there any way to repair this?" the 313 asked.

"Maybe, if we're lucky AND quick," she said as she checked Mackie's pulse. It was strong and he'd probably live if they got him somewhere safe to sleep it off. "Let's get him up and get out of here."

"What about the body?" he asked but she had already moved past it without a second thought. There was a cab stand around the next corner and she started trotting towards it, hoping that they'd get one quickly. Mackie's Claymore slipped off his magplate with a rattle and she tucked it under her arm as the Stormer picked him up. The young Frother was mumbling and she took that as another good sign.

"Call the Shivers," she answered. "We don't have time for anything proper."

"Okay," he asked as he strained to keep up. "Then what do we do?"

"First we're going to get Bruce a hotel," she said as she waved a cab over. "Somewhere they wouldn't think of. Then comes the hard part."

"What's that?" he asked. The Stormer's voice was very expressive of his feelings and if its tone was any indicator, he was absolutely scared out of his wits. Her mouth was dry with tension and it took effort to say what she had to.

"We tell his uncle that he's dead. And how."

8

Padre kept quiet and let Mag do the talking. When you were in lower Downtown, especially the Barrows section, you didn't push the fact that you were an operative and she had known right where to go. Within a few minutes, cash had changed hands and they were on their way up the single flight of broken stairs.

"Will this be enough?" he asked her as he carried the limp Frother down the hall. It stank of old blood, vomit, and mildew and his nose twitched involuntarily. "Will he be safe from them here?" he added as a rat rustled past through a pile of trash and spent needles.

"Maybe. At least for a while," she answered as she stopped at the door that would have been marked 24. The plaque that identified it had fallen off or been stolen years ago but some tagger had made up for it by painting the numbers on every door in a different color. From the looks of it, someone had stopped him before he finished the entire hall, but someone had taken up the work afterwards and improvised. The faint numerals wiped in blood probably meant he still managed to contribute.

The door swung open awkwardly like so many in downtown did and reminded the 313 of the door of an APC. It was at least twice as thick as he would have expected and had seen its share of damage and makeshift patching. Mag walked in and beat on the mattress and then waved him over when nothing crawled out. Once she was finished, he carefully put the Frother down. It wouldn't have been tragic to have Mackie eaten by rats while they were gone and it was a good thing that she had thought of it.

Out of reflex, he checked the small window and the hinges on the door but it wasn't encouraging. Neither would hold up to abuse, so they'd just have to hope that they could take care of the problems before someone came looking for him. Who could have imagined that today would end with them being caught between Cloak and the Trang? He wiped the rain out of his hair and looked in the mirror to see the dark bags under his eyes. Horse faced or not, he was wearing his fear like a mask and it made him uncomfortable.

At times like this, he couldn't help but laugh at the irony of his name. He had no idea how to pray and being a Karma product, didn't have the faith to even try. Maybe the technicians would start putting more thought into the names they gave their Stormers someday but that was about as likely as him seeing another day past tomorrow. Rain spattered the side of the outer wall and he heard the bed creak as Magdalene tucked the Frother in.

"Are you read-" he said as he turned, but froze in mid syllable. With more gentleness than he imagined she was capable of, Magdalene leaned over and gently kissed the young man on the forehead. With a start, she realized he was watching and abruptly got up and opened the door. When she spoke, her voice had an odd tone to it that he couldn't place and he studied her more closely. Was she shaking? He couldn't tell and tried not to be obvious about watching.

"Let's go," she said as she went out.

With that, the door was locked and they were on their way down the stairs and into the street. Still watching, Padre caught a glimpse of something in her eye but she quickly wiped it away.

"It had to be rain," he thought to himself and followed along. "It gets into everything."

As they rode in the cab, he found himself staring out the side window at the change of scenery. The blasted tenements and low water gradually gave way to cleaner streets lined with vehicles and kiosks, so he knew they were in upper downtown. With a shock, he realized that she was watching him now and he tilted his head curiously.

"Sorry I was staring," she said quietly, apparently thinking something over. "I guess that you're still a mystery to me. How do you do it?"

"How do I do what?" he asked. Padre couldn't imagine what she could be talking about since she was a human and a highly skilled one at that. Even on a good day, he'd never be able to equal her on any level and the question confused him. It wasn't possible to understand without more information.

"How have you managed to do this job without killing anyone? You know you'll have to eventually," she continued. Magdalene looked small and almost childlike since she had curled up in the corner opposite of him, but there was something unpleasant about her. While her face was calm, she seemed to almost be coiled and ready to strike.

The question was weird enough that he couldn't answer it easily. As far as he knew, he had to be the only non-violent 313 in existence. For some reason, SLA had allowed him to live and put him to good use. Maybe it was just cheaper to make him a medic instead of killing him outright.

"I don't know," he said after a few moments. "There are always alternatives to killing. I just don't see a point to it."

Her laugh startled him. It was harsh and cold like a gunshot and her eyes were as hard as steel. With the hair standing up on the back of his neck, he began wishing that he were anywhere but here.

"Is there really a point to anything?" she laughed. At that, she shifted her back to him and watched the world pass by in the rain.

The many years that had passed since she had last walked these streets faded away like mud in the rain. The same ageless shops, the same rich smells, and the same groups of faceless people moved about their daily routines. Magdalene found herself smiling despite the circumstances.

She was home.

On a whim, she veered off the main walkway and pushed her way to a food kiosk. The tickling aroma of ginger, garlic, and curry had just been too much to resist and she bought a small bowl of stir-fry and left the change. Time might not have been something they had a lot of, but what good was life if you didn't enjoy the little things? Besides, they'd probably be dead inside ten minutes and it was bad fortune to die with an empty stomach.

"What is that?" Padre asked, leaning over her shoulder and sniffing. The smell obviously had the same alluring effect upon biogenetics and he slobbered on her arm. If her mouth hadn't been stuffed, she would have told him that Changtown was the only place to get cooking this great. God knows that the pseudo-Chang restaurants in upper downtown were complete crap to someone who cooked her own.

"Gai Pad Nam Tau," she mumbled as she wove her way past lost tourists and a trio of men carrying baskets. "Want some?"

If it had been anyone else, she would have just told him to get his own damn bowl but the Stormer was special. From the look on his face as he took a taste, the dish was probably more than he had expected.

"Ha-ha-hot," he muttered, waving his hand in front of his mouth.

A lot of outsiders find out that the local cooking is far too spicy and his sudden sweat and bugging eyes proved that he wasn't any different. As tears welled up and he started snorting and sneezing, she found herself laughing out loud through a mouthful of food. It had been a long time since she had seen a *gwailo* choking on a local dish and it did her heart good. Motioning him towards a kiosk, she bought him a drink, a cup of rice, and a sweetened dough roll to lessen the burn.

"Death pepper," she laughed, picking out one of the dried red peppers that had probably been the culprit and swallowing it whole. "It's an acquired taste."

"More like a weapon! Is all of the food here that hot?" he asked as he drained his second cup of soda. Despite the touch of guilt she felt, Magdalene wasn't about to tell him that a sugary carbonated beverage would only make things worse. Despite the blank face of the boy behind the counter, she knew that he had to be thinking the same thing. Having been in the young man's position as a little girl, she had learned that there was an art to keeping one's face a mask while laughing on the inside. It was basic survival in this world.

"No, just what we give the *gwailo*- I mean, the tourists," she answered. "We need to go so suck it up."

With the 313 still wheezing and snorting, Magdalene grabbed his arm and pushed her way into the bustling crowd. The walkway flexed and moved like a snake (or a dragon she thought) and they were soon part of it, being buoyed along within the current of the foot traffic. Around them, the bright colors and rich smells blended together and she felt almost like a child at a carnival. The language of her people was an unexpected comfort as it came at her from every angle, mixed with snips of Killian and other dialects. For the first time in years, she felt like she belonged somewhere and then a pang of guilt hit. She really should go to visit her grandmother, but now wasn't the best time. If she lived through tomorrow, she swore to herself to come back and do that. Smiling, she told herself that she might even stay.

They passed stalls filled with every imaginable type of ware and each time, she had to pull Padre along like a lost child. It was the typical reaction that she saw in outsiders who come here. The *gwailo* are always distracted –no, hypnotized is a better word –by the colors and sounds of each of the dark booths with their smiling merchants and otherworldly wares. This strip and the hundreds like it are a great way to lose track of time and your wallets and if the Trang is about to go looking for you, your life. With a

tug, she yanked the Stormer along by the arm again and wrenched him away from the stands towards their next stop.

“You’re too easily distracted,” she said as she turned down a narrow alley. “That will get you killed more quickly than you can imagine.”

Magdalene almost remarked about how clean it was for an alley but kept silent, reminding herself where she was again. There wasn’t any trash to be found in the alleys or streets of Changtown because the powers wouldn’t allow it. The two operatives weren’t in Slayer’s world any more and she knew she would have to keep that in mind as they crossed beneath the ornate wood edifice of a deserted restaurant. Ahead was a red door with a broadly carved crest that was nothing more than decoration to non-Chang eyes.

“Remember, keep silent and keep still,” she whispered. “Anything else and we’re both dead.”

It was time to lose the training and the indoctrination, time to remember the way she used to be.

Taking a breath, she opened the door and they went in.

10

Padre was doing exactly as he had been told, but it was more out of amazement than any inner discipline. He had never seen a room that was so ornately decorated and stared wide-eyed at the broad bands of gold and red. Magdalene had told him not to move or speak and so far he had done exactly that. Regardless of whether she would agree, he knew that she was entirely within her element and she was still part of this world.

Seated before them was a small gray man, dressed in what looked like lounging clothes with slippers and a comfortable robe. He fit what the 313 would have thought of as a grandfather and had spoken in a polite, unassuming voice to everything Mag said. They seemed to know each other and they spoke with quick, complicated phrases of some other tongue. It was musical in some ways and he resisted the urge to cock his head and stare like he usually did when he was curious. There hadn’t been a word of Killian from anyone but her since they arrived and that only made everything seem even more unusual. The conversation’s tone changed slightly when looked at the photos from the surveillance tape and they were quickly put away. She also handed him something like an ID badge, but he wasn’t sure what it was.

The old man was unreadable and completely relaxed as a servant brought him tea and dinner but the same couldn’t be said about the score of young men that continually circulated around. The oldest could have been no more than fifteen or so and each one was tense and watchful. Following Mag’s orders, Padre became a statue, watching everything and so far, that had been enough to not provoke anyone. One in particular seemed anxious to do something and he had what Mackie would have called an angry mouth, which meant that his scowl was probably permanent. The Stormer thought briefly about his friend and hoped that he was still breathing.

The conversation with the old man seemed pleasant and measured like a tapestry and the Stormer never realized that something changed until every young man in the room pulled weapons and aimed them. Blinking, he stayed still and looked to Mag for direction. The one with the chip on his shoulder shoved his pistol to the side of the Stormer’s head and said something that sounded rude, but a word from the old man stopped him from pulling the trigger. It took another harsher statement before the angry one put his weapon away, but something about his eyes assured Padre that he was going to see the little man again.

“If you hurt me,” he thought to himself. “Magdalene will eat you for breakfast.”

He wasn’t sure how long they stood there like that but the conversation resumed and the old man waved his hands downward. The men gradually filtered out of the room and the Stormer was left staring at his friend and the old man. Something else passed between the two and Mag hugged him as she got up and walked past. After a few seconds, the old man began staring at him with a quizzical look. Magdalene appeared to his side and patted on his arm.

"It's okay. You can move now," she said and he followed her back out into the rain. It was a few minutes before she seemed willing to talk but he couldn't keep his curiosity in check any longer.

"And who was he? Are we dead? What did he say?" he blurted as all the questions burst out at once.

Magdalene slowed down and took a few moments to wipe her eyes before she spoke. Her voice was measured and quiet and he thought he picked up a slight accent as she spoke.

"He's my grandfather, my *actual* grandfather if you can believe that," she said, taking a breath. Her words came out clipped and mechanical like she was reading from a script. "The man that Horace murdered was my fifth cousin. The man we're after is Johnny Tsang. He's just taken over the *Chin Ch'uan* tong by force and is trying to take territory from the *Wah Chang*. That's means a city-wide war is probably coming."

"Oh..." he mumbled, ignoring the mission specific information and concentrating on what she had actually said. Any choice of words felt inadequate but he had to say something. "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

She looked up at him and nodded. At times like this, she looked deceptively small and weak but he knew the woman was stronger-willed and tougher than any 714 he had ever met.

"What now?" he prodded. "What do we do now?"

"If we want to make this right," she started as she straightened up. "Three debts have to be paid."

He nodded excitedly, trying to encourage her to go on. He nearly lost her voice in the background din as he struggled to keep up.

"The first is by finding and killing Tsang before the *Wah Chang* hits back," she answered as she pushed back into the crowded walkway. "I've found out where he'll be tonight."

She didn't say anything else, so he prodded. He seemed to be doing a lot of that today and it made him uncomfortable.

"And what are the others?" he asked and she answered him without looking.

"Don't worry about them. They've been a long time coming and will be taken care of soon."

11

The stupid bitch had no right to throw him out of the squad – NO RIGHT AT ALL! Who put her in charge anyway? Who said she was even capable of leading?

A flood of angry questions went through his head as he stomped through the rain, waving his hands and kicking trash. It had started off as a bad day, gotten worse, and now finally finished its nosedive into the toilet with that stupid broad kicking him out of HIS squad. That was just fine because he was leaving them anyway- it was only a matter of time. After four months of them holding him back, now he was finally going to find some real professionals to work with, some hard ops with a real edge. No more stupid humans and Karma misfits, he cursed. Hell, the druggie was the only one worth keeping and he OD'd!

As it played back in his mind, he angrily shouldered another passerby into the street. You'd think that the stupid humans would learn to stay out of a Waster's way sooner or later, but they kept walking too close and bringing it on themselves. The next one was some sort of transient and was too stupid to get out of the way without encouragement, so Horace decided to fix it. With a growl, Horace tossed him to the side and there a rewarding "bong" as the man bounced off the side of the APC to land in a storm sewer. He would have laughed if he hadn't heard the telltale sounds of armor and the hum of GASH batons coming around the side. It looked like things were still going from completely shitty to something worse...

“Hold it right there, Sloperative,” a voice said and the men in green armor clicked on their helmet lamps. They liked to blind people with them but it only made hard Ops like him irritable. You’d think that they’d know better, but then they were only Shivers...

“Any primate that wants a piece, step right up,” he growled under his breath as he stepped forward to meet the Shiver more than half way. He had at least half a head on the man and a good twenty pounds even with the guy in full armor. The confrontation lasted maybe five seconds before the human’s survival instincts kicked in and he backed off to wet himself.

“G-go about your business, sir,” the Shiver stammered as he back-pedalled to get out of Horace’s way. He wasn’t fast enough and the Waster shouldered him aside as he started walking.

Two streets over, he found the address and went in. It was a renovated brownstone owned by a soft company called Silk Lady, the same group that supplied the working girls to the Nightside. It had taken his sources only an hour and a half to find that info and now he was at their headquarters. It would have taken the others a week to find this out, but then he was good. He expected that it would only take a few minutes to get the girl under wraps and then the rest of the squad would come begging to him to save them from big bad Cloak Division. In the meantime, he could probably do something to take the edge off his anger and mellow out. Shaking with anticipation, he swung the doors open and went in.

Instead of a plush “comfort room” filled with lounging female merchandise, he found an empty room full of couches and chairs. This had to be the first bordello he’d ever seen where they didn’t have any samples on show and he walked in, turning to look around. Something tickled his curiosity and he quietly pulled his Flintlock. This just wasn’t right...

As he started to step through a curtain to another room, a short Chang man in a tan suit stepped through and met him half way. The little guy was all smiles and Horace backed up into the lobby.

“Good evening operative sir!” the man said in heavily accented Killian. “How can I help you tonight?”

The Waster didn’t doubt that the Silk Lady was probably Chang-owned, but he hadn’t expected a male to greet him - it just wasn’t *normal*. For the time being, he kept his Flintlock out and maintained the distance he thought he’d need if he decided to blast him.

“Yeah, I want a girl for an hour,” he answered, keeping his eyes on the man while watching the peripheral. A voice in his head told him to start calculating but he decided to hold off until he was sure. “A blonde would be nice. Make that two of ‘em.”

“I’m very sorry,” the man said with the same smile. His face was an absolute mask, but something had changed about his demeanour and he started forward again. “All our girls out for night. Maybe I offer you something else?”

“Yeah,” Horace said, smiling back. “You do that.”

In the past when he had the choice between sex and violence, it was always a toss up between which one he preferred. At times like this though, not having a choice didn’t matter much. He liked to think of “fucking people up” as a good fusion of the two.

Numbers streamed through his mind like quicksilver as the Deathsuit pushed the equations and he felt the air sizzle around him. Flux bubbled and rushed out of the suit to pour down his arm into the weapon but the man was on him before he could release. The dancing numbers vanished in a flash of pain as the man kicked him in the head.

The impact tossed Horace into a couch and he arched his back to somersault to his feet. A familiar sound sent him sliding behind an end table just as someone opened up. Stuffing popped out of the couch and chairs near him, spraying foam and feathers across the elaborate carpet in rows.

His Deathsuit screamed in rage, encouraging him to fight back, and he happily gave in. With the numbers sizzling past his eyes like glowing ribbons, his arm pulsed with Flux again and he felt the

ecstasy of the release. He had visualized the small man's chest exploding during the calculation but the reality of it was much sweeter. The air was crisp and raw with the smell of flux and burning flesh and he howled with glee:

"I AM THE MAN!"

Voices cried out in another language from the other side of the room and he ducked down to calculate again. Who needed the squad of losers anyway? This is what he lived for and he was damned good at it.

The lamp and end table in front of him exploded and pain wracked his arm and leg. Cursing, he saw that he had taken a hit and the Deathsuit had been punctured. It wasn't serious enough to stop him and his anger grew deeper.

"You come out we let you live!" a voice called out, running the sentences together.

Numbers flowed again, looping through his mind through the deepening clouds of red darkness. He bit his lip, growing angrier by the moment and feeling *it* push forward. Horace gave in and went with the flow.

"You okay, mister operative? Still alive?"

It was happening.

The pain had faded to a dull throb and the room's colors grew richer.

It was happening and *It* was glorious.

"We gonna count to five! You come out or we shoot!"

His laughter came out as a roar and the scent of their sudden fear was as sweet as wine. As he stood up, the looks on their faces told him that they weren't going to be able to count, so he decided to help them.

They had never seen *IT* before.

"ONE!" he yelled, tossing the couch aside like it was made of paper. The first man lost control of his bowels as the beast grabbed his head and squeezed. Someone fired at him from the side and *It* took his head as a trophy.

"TWO!" It roared, leaping forward into the three men with guns. His chest pounded as their weapons went off but his rage seared away the pain. They died screaming and he was particularly happy that he made one of them shoot the other. There were more of them and they swarmed across the other room, diving behind cover as if that would help. *Its* power was overwhelming and he knew that nothing, not even Slayer himself could stop him now...

"THREE!" It bellowed, enjoying the game. Hot, sweet blood splashed the wall and *Its* face as he ripped the head off another. It loved that taste and he clawed another closer, tearing the man's throat out with his teeth. A sudden flash of white light distracted him and he dropped the body, pain stabbing deep enough to make him falter. He couldn't see from one eye, but the other was working well enough for him to claw open the stomach of the one who had shot him and pull out the sweetness. His back was on fire and he spun around to kill another, coughing up as much blood now as the victim.

"F-FOUR" It stammered. The colors in the room were dimming and his breath came in wet rasps. The walls and floor near him danced with splinters and flying glass, but there was no pain at all or any sensation. His anger was fading and with it, his power. He clung to the rage, but was going under in a wave of panic.

The room tilted again and he spun to keep his balance but tripped over a girl's body and crashed through a glass table. The warmth of flux was replaced with ice water and he suddenly realized that he

couldn't feel his legs or his arms. Another impact and he couldn't feel anything at all. The room was fading to black and the sound of gunfire was distant as a dream.

Without any fear, he tried to laugh at the men that carefully surrounded him but it came out as a moist cough and a splash of blood. These mooks were terrified and he smiled even as he recognized the guy from the photo staring down. The guy didn't look nearly as cocky as he had in the surveillance tape.

"Almost...got...you," Horace choked out but it came out as a weak gurgle.

As he looked up at their rising weapons, the humor of it all hit him and his body was wracked with spasms of dying laughter. Who would have thought that he'd find the target by going after the only person that could identify him?

12

Magdalene knew that it wasn't wise to wax philosophical at a time like this, but returning to Changtown and the conversation with her grandfather had that effect. Concepts like how every action has a consequence and a cost stayed centered in her thoughts, regardless of what she tried to think about. The details looped in her mind like the proverbial dragon made of smoke - the harder she pushed, the more it surrounded and enveloped her. She was part of this whether or not she wanted to be and there was nothing to be done about it. As she squeezed past another passerby, it occurred how a lot of old ghosts and duties had been awakened by the return. Unfortunately the value of family ties was barely equal to the cost of the obligation itself.

With a final shrug, she managed to clear her head long enough to dodge a group of people intent on going the right way. Courtesy was expected on the narrow elevated walkways and until now, Magdalene had ignored it in favor of expediency. She chalked it up to too many years of living in Slayer's world where you had to push to get anywhere and reigned in her anxiety. Falling in line on the correct side, it took discipline to simply bide her time. Everything happens at its own pace and that law applied equally to the walkway as much as her own fate. Thirty feet below, throngs of people moved and ebbed like a living tide and she smiled. Despite the circumstances, it was still good to be home again even if it might not last.

"I didn't know you had living relatives."

The comment came so suddenly over her shoulder that she flinched. Having been so wrapped up in her own thoughts, she had completely forgotten about the Stormer and nodded. Deciding to sacrifice courtesy again, Magdalene pushed forward at the risk of offending a few more faceless people.

"Yeah," she answered. "I've got a lot of relatives."

"I didn't know that."

Magdalene smiled to herself. Of course he wouldn't know that - none of her friends did. Telling people about her family always led to more questions and inevitably bad outcomes. The sad fact was most people would readily befriend a Deathsquad operative (especially an attractive one), but even the bravest operatives got cold feet when they found out that she was the granddaughter of a *dai lo*. Apparently becoming known to the head of the *Wah Chang* entailed too much risk even for those that claimed to live on the edge.

"No one does," she said as she left the walkway and crossed a second catwalk that arched over the reservoir. The metal creaked beneath her and flakes of rust and metal floated down to the dark water as they reached solid land again.

"What did you mean about things were a long time coming?" The Stormer asked and she shook her head.

"It's like a dragon chasing its tail, everything catches up in the end. Everything's eventual."

Ahead, the streets were unnaturally bright, with every shadow blotted out by the glare of glowing neon or reflections of it. The sign for the *Pai Lung* Club stood out with its flickering white dragon namesake coiling around the marquee. Somewhere inside, they'd find Tsang and finish this. With a breath and a prayer, she swung the door open and stepped out of the rain.

The smells and sounds of a party in progress hit her like a moving wall as she passed the bouncers and stepped into the main club. Strobes and spotlights swept through clouds of smoke and the crowd ebbed and flowed along to the pounding music. Pushing her way in further, Magdalene strained to look for Tsang but couldn't see anything but rippling silhouettes. It was a good time to have the tall 313 along her because the medic had the advantage of both height and mass. While he was a great anchor, he was even better as a spotter.

"I think I see him," he said, leaning down to her level to talk. "Next level up, at ten o'clock."

Following his lead, she worked her way around the edge of the dance floor and up the three stairs to the area with the booths and tables. Without throngs of dancers to get in the way, the booth was easy to see and she made her way closer. Old memories and faces came back to her in a blur and the background noise became a hushed rumble. It had been seven years since she had been here and that had ended in a lot of death also.

There were five or six guys her age in the booth, each wearing a suit that would have taken three BPNs to pay for. That type had been here all her life and was probably the main reason she became an operative. As a young couple passed, Magdalene slipped the pistol out of its holster and held it behind her leg. It was going to be over soon, one way or the other ...

A spotlight flashed into her eyes and tracked across the line of booths, highlighting features and she saw Jimmy Tsang amongst them. He had seen her too because his mouth twisted into a wicked smile. With a silent signal, everybody in his booth started to move.

Magdalene jerked the pistol up and started firing, diving towards the cover of one of the high tops and sending patrons flying. She kept firing as she went, seeing the seat near Tsang pop apart and one of his bodyguards go down in a spray of blood and glass. The men scattered, rolling and tumbling out of the booth and she saw Tsang pull a pair of gold-plated pistols from the front of his jacket. Another man raised a submachine gun and the flash lit up the walkway as he squeezed the trigger.

Wide cracks clove the table into shards and its top exploded as she somersaulted away, kicking a chair to the side and taking a guard off his feet. Sparks danced off the metal railing near behind her and she fired back repeatedly, turning the knees of the man with the SMG into pulp. He tumbled backwards over the rail still firing, bullets tracking into the darkness above and sparks rained down from the ceiling. The crowd was screaming and people ran through her periphery trying to get to safety of the exit.

The pistol bucked in her hand again as she rolled forward into a booth, ducking her head and reaching for a spare magazine. Plumes of liquid sprayed the air as the bottles on the table disintegrated and Magdalene felt her hair mat to her face. Dropping the spent magazine, she slammed another home and jerked back the slide. There were more pops and the table exploded into splinters. Meanwhile, Padre seemed to have taken cover two booths over and she wished more than ever that he knew how to use a gun.

With a yell, she leapt upwards while firing and dove over the top into the next booth. One of the shooters had the same idea and passed her in the air firing, bullets grazing her jacket and leg. They landed opposite of each other and she kicked hard, slamming the table into his gut hard enough to send his pistol spinning across. He looked up just in time to see her scoop it up and use it to shoot him in the face. With another hard twist, Magdalene nearly cart wheeled to the side and into the floor, bullets tearing up the booth where she had just been. Her pistols were firing of their own accord now and she was riding the going. Some of the men scrambled towards a door and she swore that none of them were going to make it.

"Screw the bullet tax," a voice said in her mind and she agreed. The rumble of the twin recoils was better than the best sex and it wasn't ever going to end.

Kicking backwards, she felt the crunch of broken glass more than pain and fired again and again. One fell, and then another but then the slides snapped back on her pistols with loud clicks. Dropping them, Magdalene rolled forward across a body, snatching replacements and emptied both into the guts of the last two bodyguards at close range. They jerked and twisted as they fell backwards and she rolled behind cover again.

The sudden absolute silence was deafening and she carefully rose up to peek around, seeing the spotlights sweep through the smoke. The area was covered with bodies but none of the dead men was Tsang. Picking up a weapon from a tabletop, she blinked when she saw it was a gold plated hand cannon like the one Tsang had pulled. Without a body though, this was all for nothing. The bastard had managed to get away...

That was when she heard the roar and screams from beyond the doorway. Without thinking, Magdalene ran towards it, hearing the sounds of ripping and snarling echo back. She ran faster, coming around the corner so quickly that she nearly tripped over the Stormer. Padre was sitting next to what was left of the gangster, dripping in gore and staring up at her. With a sigh, Magdalene sat down next to him and draped her arm around his trembling shoulders. The 313 had been the only thing between Tsang and freedom and this had been the only way to stop him. It wouldn't have done any good to tell him that sometimes there isn't an alternative to violence. Sometimes you just have to pay the price and innocence is always a good currency.

Instead, she kept quiet and let him lean into her shoulder until the Shivers came to clean up the mess.

13

Mackie's eyes snapped open to a painfully bright room and he would have draped his arm across them if he had been able to move it. It felt like it was weighted down with lead and he was immediately tired from the effort.

"He's awake," someone said and he forced himself to open his eyes again. The best he could do was squint and it took a few moments to bring the world into focus. Padre smiled down at him from one side and Magdalene from the other.

"Whuh-" he tried to say, but his mouth was filled with proverbial cotton. The Stormer must have realized it and gave him a small sip of water. That helped, but his voice still sounded like an old man's and he kept the cup. "Where? Are we dead?"

Laughter from the left drew his attention and Magdalene sat on his bed to push the hair out of his eyes. She looked different, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"No, not hardly," she said with a smile. "The BPN's finished. We're in the green."

He looked around again and realized that something was missing. It occurred to him what it was and he cleared his throat.

"Horace?" he asked. "Where is-"

"Didn't make it," Padre answered. "Terminated by the target."

Despite the fatigue, he felt sadness welling up. It was always a tragedy when someone you knew died, even if he was an arrogant bastard. The Frother wanted to ask what had happened but Magdalene pushed him back down and it winded him.

"You need to rest, Bruce," she said and he found himself staring because she never called him by his given name. Something wasn't right here, but he was too sluggish to figure it out on his own.

"What's going on here?" he asked finally. "Aye? W-what's happening?"

“Think of it as an end and a beginning, of sorts,” she answered, smiling warmly. “You’ll recover and go on with your life. Padre will see to that.”

“What about you? The squad?” he blurted. He might have been groggy, but it didn’t do anything to stop his reaction. One of them was dead and now the squad was disbanding? It didn’t make sense...

“Everything has a costs,” she said quietly. “I’ve got one to pay.”

“What? What are you-“ he started, but the warm press of her lips shut him up. Gently, she pulled back and stood up, smiling at his stunned expression. She was wearing a dress instead of typical street clothes and that in itself was as shocking as the kiss. A well-dressed Chang man leaned in and said something in another tongue and she nodded before hugging the Stormer.

“Goodbye,” she added as the door closed behind her.

Mackie pushed himself onto his elbows and stared at the big Stormer who sat down heavily in a nearby chair. As he took another sip, he wondered what kind of hell they had been through and why everything was different now. Padre must have known what he was thinking and when he spoke, the experience of the past day was tangible. While the Frother may have been unconscious, whatever had gone down had changed them forever.

“Everything has a cost and sometimes there just aren’t alternatives.”

When Mackie arched an eyebrow, the Stormer simply closed his eyes and curled up in the chair. Before he dropped off, the 313 added one more thing.

“I guess that everything’s eventual after all.”

End

Coming Soon:

Next month’s release by Team 8 will include a developed Runner *BPN* with source material for using the Trang and Changtown in your ongoing campaigns. Stay tuned.

MortGauge



This Issue:
Profile on Squad Mylar
Plus Exclusive interviews, news and gossip

Product reviews
Your letters and questions answered

Regular columns
What's the worst that can happen
More to life.

Profile on

Squad Mylar...

The BPN Halls and Mort in general are full of artificially crafted squads, groups of operatives banded together by the clerks and instructors.

Not so for Squad Mylar...

This experienced team of operatives began as a group of friends living in the slums of Ultima sector in Downtown. Orion, Andre, Eldor and Helman started life running with the local gangs and fighting in the Frother clan wars. The talent, loyalty and ambition of these close knit friends gave them a lifelong bond, astounding combat experience and a desire to make a difference in the world.



They breezed through Meny, earning top ranks in their respective fields, before forming an abortive squad - Type X - with two other rookies from their graduating year at college.

After three failed BPN's, the five friends split from Type X and formed their own squad - Squad Mylar, which they named after the leader's mother - Mylar Demetry. From their experiences with Type X they decided more upper range assault grunt was required and Matrix joined the crew.

Squad Mylar have achieved a lot of success in a short time, thanks to careful juggling of missions and a wide selection of BPN styles. Not content to take the standard Blue's open to new squads, Mylar have pushed and argued their position until they are now rated in the top 100 squads for completing Greens, Reds and Yellows.

Many have asked what the key to their success is... And as many different answers have been forthcoming...

The main feeling is that the squads balanced composition. Orion as their sneaky Wraith urban killer, Andre Alexikov, their muscle bound support and leader, Eldor, the hardbody sexy Ebon medic, Helman Darsk, the bald I&I agent and Matrix the unfragable Stormer.

Since their recent success catching the so called 'Black Cloud Killer' they have been approached for sponsorship by Beatman Books and have already had several graphic novels released of their exploits, the first of course being based on the Black BPN to take down the Black Cloud Killer.

Darkening of the Day, now a cult classic, stressed the use of insight and investigation in tandem with raw killing power and street style as key to beating the Black Cloud Killer. Taking down a Thresher Sarge is no easy task and if not for the team's clever interpretations of local children's nursery rhymes they would never have predicted the Black Cloud Killers tactics so perfectly. Considering the fact that the Thresher suit was retrieved intact for the Department of War speaks even more highly for the skill of Squad Mylar. Be sure to check out the book for the excellent APC roller manoeuvre scene and Orion's snappy one liners!

Dark Day and all other Squad Mylar graphic novels are available at all good news stands through Beatman Books, a wholly owned subsidiary of Third Eye News, a SLA Industries company.

Karma hotline crushed by prank mails.

At 10:35am yesterday the Karma enquiries automated hotline system collapsed after an estimated 15,000 calls simultaneously hit the system. The calls were in response to a prank mailing [see below] which claimed that an L.A.D. account had been taken out by a serial killer in the name of the recipient. Understandably this caused a great deal of panic amongst the victims of the prank, who assumed they were now being targeted by a killer. The panic was further flamed by a Karma's unwillingness to confirm the name on the account, leading every victim to assume they are the target.

At a press conference held at Karma Head office today, a spokesman said "I can confirm that the account reference number does relate to a genuine LAD account and that it currently contains 2005c. However due to our confidentiality agreements with our clients I can not reveal the name on the account or who the account was opened by. Although Karma accepts no responsibility for this incident, we do recognise the stress it will have caused in the victims of this prank. As a result, and as an expression of good will to our consumers, Karma has agreed to give a six month complementary 1c LAD account to all the people who received the prank mailing."

Individuals wishing to take advantage of this offer should take the mail they received to their nearest Karma outlet.

Notification of third party LAD Account.

Account reference number: **298/9834/1111902/67829/A**

Name: **Lisa Ronan**

Occupation: **Reporter**

Registered Address: **c/o Mort Guage HQ,
28 Freeman Drive,
Sector 16,
Mort.**

I am writing to you to inform you that a Life After Death account with the amount of **2005c** has been opened with you listed as the beneficiary. This entitles you to the benefits indicated below upon your death.

The account was opened by

Name: **Brian J. Lazerouson**

Occupation: **Serial Killer**

Registered Address: **Not Recorded**

who signed for the account on your behalf. You should contact them for any further information concerning the opening of this account.

Please contact your nearest LAD office to collect the emergency callout system as soon as possible as LAD will not be held accountable for delays in retrieval of your body.

Yours

Michael Grook
Third party accounts manager.

Benefits of your account

Account reference number: 298/9834/1111902/67829/A.

Please note these benefits are dependent on the minimum payment being present in your LAD account at the time of death.

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1-999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Basic 'patch-up' account |
| 1000-2000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Replacement organs and limbs |
| 2000-2999 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | As above but with new skin |
| 3000-3999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Full body augmentation implants |
| 4000-4999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Full body conversion |
| 5000+ | <input type="checkbox"/> | Personal touch |

Should you wish to increase your level of cover please contact your nearest Karma Shop quoting the Account reference number above.

Mort Gauge exclusive!!

Earlier this week we had the rare opportunity to speak with a member of the newly formed Karma Interfector Team, Dr Jennifer Argent, one of the team responsible for the creation of the new animals in the contract circuit. We caught up with her at a break in her research earlier this week.

Mort Gauge: Dr Argent, it is an honour for us to be here speaking with you today, and we'd like to thank you for taking the time to talk with us.

Doctor Argent: It's no problem at all, here at Karma we always like to keep our public informed

MG: Can you tell us what you're working on at the moment?

DA: Not in its entirety, there are a lot of things that we're doing at the moment that I can't share with you for reasons of contractual security.

MG: Can you at least give us a teaser?

DA: Well, I can tell you that the latest creatures to be put in the circuit won't be very big, to say the least.

MG: Really? Surely that will make them an easy target for any experienced killer?

At this point, Doctor Argent scowled, as if she'd heard the same argument before.

DA: I don't think you appreciate the effort that's gone into the work that we've been doing here.

MG: Well, surely any normal small creature, one bullet and it's gone, you can't get around that.

DA: No, we can't get around the size, but if size was all that mattered, The Bad Thing would be the King of the Circuit surely?

MG: I would think that anyone with half a brain could run rings around that thing

Doctor Argent leans forwards with a bit of a gleam in her eyes at this point

DA: Exactly, Exactly. The fighter with the intelligence and the ability always wins the fight, no matter how strong the other is, we've been working with strains of DNA from the Helion race, particularly from their frontal lobes, and combined them with other smaller creatures to create a faster and more intelligent species.

MG: Do you have any examples?

DA: Well, we've been working with the common mort rat recently, there's no point in adding armour and enhancements to these creatures, so we've been working on enhancing their brains. We took the Karvin node from the brain of a Helion and produced a synthetic version of it that we implanted into several of the rats, the result was a creature that was capable of learning and adapting whilst in a new environment.

MG: But still, the problem with the size of the creature must still be an issue?

DA: No, we worked with putting in a strain of the 313 DNA into the same creature, not for the regenerative abilities, but for the enhanced musculature and bone strength. A normal rat can bite through wood and soft metal, these can cause damage to ceramics and steel given time.

MG: Surely most armour will be able to resist them for long enough that anyone with weapons will be able to take them down.

At this point, Doctor Argent took out a small piece of white material from her pocket and placed it on the table in front of her with a smile.

MG: And this is?

DA (smiling) 714

MG: A Chagrin?

DA: And, by coincidence, the number of seconds it lasted against our new creatures.

MG: Impressive, so I would presume that with the danger these creatures would present, you're keeping them under wraps until they're ready to release into the arena.

DA: Well, for the most part, but we released a few into the lower downtown area a while ago to see how well they would adapt to the lifestyle.

MG: You released a creature like this into the wild? Did you think of the possibility of them breeding in such an environment.

DA: We didn't consider it to be an issue, after all, they're super-predatory, they wouldn't be breeding with other rats, they'd be killing them.

MG: Well, what if they did?

DA: They Wouldn't.....

MG: And how can you be sure, did you make them all female or something like that?

DA: No, but we're fairly sure that they wouldn't cause any problem, a few operative squads should be able to take care of them.

MG: But let's say that they did breed, what could we expect?

DA: Well, we wouldn't have a problem with the overcrowding in downtown anymore, that's for sure.

MG: Isn't that a bit of a cold hearted attitude to take?

DA: No, after all, these people are not important, they don't have any

training or relevance to what goes on in the world.

MG: And is that the company line?

DA: Yes.

MG: Are you saying that Karma endorses the use of civilians to test out its new projects?

There is a pause here, Doctor Argent now looks somewhat doubtful.

DA: No, not at all, merely that some of these creatures were released by accident.

MG: That's not what you said a moment ago.

DA: You must have misheard me, and now, unfortunately, the time I've been allocated for this interview has run out, please feel free to contact me for another interview if you would like to know more.

MG: Indeed we will.

While it is not the policy of Mort Gauge to print anything that would appear libellous to any of the good and loyal SLA companies in the world of progress. This said, we do feel that any operatives in the downtown areas should be aware of the sorts of creature that are roaming about there. We think that Doctor Argent's comments will prove useful to any operative who encounters them and it is this reason that we print the interview as it was taken, our recordings are available for anyone to listen to if they need verification.



File photo of Dr Argent

More-2-Life

Ever get the feeling that the life of a SLA operative is little more than BPN-Pit-sleep?

Do you get bored with the endless cycle and long for something a little more varied?

Well we at More-2-life agree with you, which is why we hope to provide you with the occasional light relief event to drag you out of that old predictable drudgery.

Social Events Number One: The film premier.

Ok officially tickets to these things are hard to come by, but in truth there are always floating around. Could be your squad could get lucky and win them in a contest - you'd be amazed what you can find on a Slosh ring-pull these days. May be sponsorship deal requires your presence if some one in the company got a good deal on the product placement. Its not unknown for tickets to come as back hand 'payments' for services rendered. Careful cultivation of friends, especially on the contract circuit, and you might get lucky and have the tickets passed on to you by some one who wants an early night for a change. How you get them is less important than the fact that there they are lying in your sweaty hand.

So how do you maximise this opportunity.

First things first. Make an entrance. It's expected. No one arrives at one of these things quietly. Ok chances are you are not going to be one of those people every one has come to see, but neither do you want to appear on "Morts Greatest Misfits".

Now this might be a bit of a strain on the Credit account but turning up in your body-blocker is not going to impress any one. So get yourself a new outfit. If you know NOTHING about fashion find yourself a good tailor/ dress designer who does stuff you like and put yourself in completely their hands. This takes a certain amount of trust but if you mention why you need the suit and promise to mention them to the press then its in their interest to make you look good.

Same goes for the vehicle you are going to arrive in- and no Gauss train and walk is not a viable option. Turning up in a flaming Augustus, mounting the pavement killing

By Lisa Ronan

hangers on and being put out by Fire SHIVERS will get you noticed but not in a good way - Unless you are a brainwaster with that sort of 'onscreen' persona- so make sure you hire a good chauffeur as well.

Once inside try not to give your true status away by gawking at the VIP's and asking for autographs. For a start it's going to mark you out as a geek. Also you could annoy some one important, which given a good percentage of the people present with be contract Killers could be detrimental to your long-term health.

Lets make this clear, there will be plenty of people drifting around doing the fawning autograph hunting routine but that is NOT your role here. Truth be known many of those people will be Civilians deliberately let in to do such things and make the VIP's look popular in front of the cameras. Some of them may even have been paid by the VIP's publicist to gather round at crucial moments.

Forget what the film is -well try to recall the title so you don't look totally stupid but at events such as these you are missing a valuable opportunity to sort out who are the real leaders and players in The Society if you are focused on the screen. Keep your eyes open and looks at who is talking to who - and just as importantly who isn't.

Look out for groups of inconspicuous young operatives in suits professionally observing the crowd. Chances are the person they gathered around is one of those nameless VIP's who actually keep the World of Progress progressing. One of the big give-aways is that the groupies will not be going near these people - and if any of them do, they will be carefully distracted by said suits. Note these people, if you get a chance to talk to them later in the bar take it, but don't push it. Be polite but not sycophantic - you never know when it may be helpful to have your name and face recognised by such individuals.

When the media types home in on you smile politely. Be sensible. Don't get drawn into a detailed discussion on things you know nothing about. Don't voice opinions on the movie until AFTER you have seen it - that may sound obvious but its a mistake its all too easy to make. Its much better to

be boring and end up on the cutting room floor than to shoot your mouth off and be famous for all the wrong reasons. For all the same reasons -be careful what you eat and, especially, drink.

There are a few things you have to be aware of at such events. It's unlikely that they will happen but it pays to be prepared:

1) Civilians getting out of control. There is no accounting for what the proles will think is a good idea and emotions can get rouse easily. It can take a very little to set them off, as the premiere of "Seven moon honour master" showed. A Brainwaster by the name of Burnout though it would be sensible to insult the crowd by doubting the sexual orientation of the films star, BR'SS'L, and imply they 'lent the same way'. The crowd, which had a number of Shaktar fans in it, erupted and the resulting riot lead to seven hundred and twenty million credits worth of damage. Ok if there is a riot outside (or even inside) the building technically its not your problem and you should leave it to the SHIVERS. However if you get a chance to be brave either on camera or in front of one of those nameless VIP's then take it. Publicity like that is priceless. However be careful as if you misplay it the notoriety can be hard to live down.

2) Contract Game or hunter sheet. When contract Killers are involved in a circuit game some times the best place to catch up with them is at an event such as this. Chances are you have seen plenty of footage of these instances. If not tune into "Hunters and Killers" on SIC, they have at least one a program. Advice: Unless you have a good deal with LAD [and an agreed cut on the hunter sheet] - stay out of the way. Neither Killer will be impressed if you try to steal their screen time. If the attack is a Hunter sheet rather than a game - it maybe worth getting your techy or business dude to check the value of the hunter sheet. If you can intercept the attack then you could earn yourself a bit of cash on the side. However it better be REALLY worth it as such behaviour means you are unlikely to get tickets for an event like this again if the guy you poached the kill off has any influence.

3) Major Incident: Mr Slayer help you if you end up in the middle of some Dark night terrorist attack, large fire, or even some thing nasty swarming out of the

sewers, such as happened at the recent opening of "Five Go Free", where 783 civilian crowd members were hospitalised. In this case, unless opportunities for stardom really present themselves, cover your back and get out. The "famous ones" will be hogging all the lime light for themselves, and the chances of the six o'clock news using footage of a nobody like you is slim. Keep an eye out for those suits, just in case you can help someone important.

After the film is over...

There is usually a number of parties, which one you get into depends on how well you played the social game.

1) There is the **public media party**, usually attended by the minor stars of the film and which ever producer and major star lost the drawing of straws. The film crews will be here collecting the dirt and spreading the joy. Be seen then leave before you find yourself on some scream sheet being snogged by some has-been.

2) There is the **stars party**. This is where the top contract killers, high fame operatives and such like will end up. There will be a few very select media types here, those that can be trusted to print only the acceptable side of fame. Count your blessings you have been very very lucky. So: Don't get drunk. Don't challenge anyone to a fight. Don't let your mouth runaway with you and you will be fine. The people here are professionals, treat them that way and you could make some very useful contacts.

3) Finally there's the **Movers and shakers** party. Sit in a corner and keep your mouth shut before someone realises you shouldn't be there. Once its polite to do so make excuses and leave. Instantly forget everything you may have seen or heard, and pray no one remembers you were there. That way you might just survive.

The important thing to remember about such events is that you are either there to have fun or to progress your career. It's highly unlikely you will do both. Decide in advance where you and your squads priorities lie. If they are not in the same place sort out who is going and who isn't. Squad in camera bust ups might make good press, but not good publicity.

If in doubt - remember the golden rule: The media can make or break you.

What's the worst that can happen...

Your worst nightmare?

TRANSCRIPT STARTS

CA: "Operative Sharman"

I: "Yes Sir."

CA: "BPN code 137-41296-1906953-3/A-Y"

I: "We failed it sir."

CA: "Yes son, I am aware of that. Now would you mind explaining to me how your squad took a very basic very straight forward yellow and turned it into an unmitigated blood bath?"

I: "I... I don't know sir."

CA: "Give me your best guess, son... We've got... All... Day."

###TRANSCRIPT ENDS ###

We at (W.T)².C.H. are all too well aware that even the best laid plans by the most efficient of squads can go awry. But what about when even the most basic concepts are ignored. Recently, under the 50 year rule, (W.T)².C.H. were given access to some of the more interesting debrief transcripts and reports from that most secretive of departments: Cloak Division.

We hope that in presenting extracts of these documents we can point out some of the more common pit falls that inexperienced squads can make.

Take for example BPN code 137-41296-1906953-3/A-Y and squad Kakorate. Only four weeks out of many this raw squad took what they assumed would be a straight forwards yellow BPN:

SCL: 10

Contact: Department of Retrieval.

Training package: Any

Summary:

Vital package for department of Archaeology failed to arrive at destination.

Nature of package suggests subversive agent involvement possible in its disappearance. Package recovery intact and unopened essential for BPN payment.

C.B.S.: 200 per op.

Coverage: Third eye
code 137-41296-1906953-3/A-Y

Report conclusion.

The arrogance and a failure in standard protocol, turned a straight forward paper trail and package pick up into a 4 way battle shoot out between the squad, Monarch security, local gang members and responding shiver sleeper unit. Employee incompetence at the Mount Pleasant sorting office in sector 121 resulted in the target package being mixed up with a routine delivery to a downtown storage facility for ex/deceased operatives personal effects.

After a data search of the Sla-industries postal Intra-net and interrogating the responsible employee at the sorting office, the squad quickly ascertained this mix up. During interrogation the employee implied he was acting under the orders of some higher authority, but died before this authority could be identified. There is no evidence to support this claim and its is believed he was trying to cover his mistake, however the comment may well have resulted in the squads 'strong arm' approach at the storage facility.

The squad arrived very obviously armed and armoured. This attracted the attention of local gang members, who were using rooms in the same building.

They failed to announce their identity and BPN code to the sub-contractors (Monarch security) leading to a facility lockdown.

The squad also failed to identify their presence to the relevant shiver sector house. Thus a shiver unit responded to the lockdown and, on seeing forcing entry to the facility, took appropriate action.

85% of the combatants (including all local security, 3 Shiver and 2 ops) sustained mortal wounds in the ensuing firefight.

57% of the facility's contents were permanently destroyed. Most of the damage occurred when 250 litres of a freeze distilled wraith liqueur exploded, after it's storage drum was penetrated by a 12.7mm HEAP round.

In addition a slug from a 20-20 owned by squad member Demon destroyed the package thus concluding the BPN.

Final analysis: Operative error.

Operative status removed from the surviving squad members. They are currently working off their fines on the Con-ed Mining facility. Additionally wraith liqueur's owner fined for incorrect storage of volatile material.



A look into the positive side of having Shivers on the beat.

Last year, in response to open dealings of the skin trade, notably the ruthless Blue Hand Brigade the Department of Shivers decided to target the Downtown hideout.

They found that many of the BHB members were from outside the area. They came into the Downtown because they saw a ready market for their wares, and thought that in the maze of alleyways and decaying buildings they would not be noticed.

But they were spotted by an Operative squad following up links on a Jade they were currently on, these diligent individuals passed the information on to their local sector house. And using undercover officers – operating at some risk to themselves - Shiver units gathered evidence and made arrests. "We sent in officers dressed as clients, general locals who got to know them, got their confidence, says Captain Simon MacAndrew.

"Once we had enough evidence we mounted raids on various addresses and picked up people on the estate after they had just sold to our officers."

As a result, a dozen people were convicted and jailed for between 18 months and six years.

The atmosphere on the estate now is very different, according to Captain MacAndrew.

"Open dealing on the estate has virtually disappeared," he says.

"It has made a difference to the quality of life of people on the estate, because last year it was very intimidating. Local people were getting harassed, and people were going missing.

"So the quality of life has improved vastly for the people of the estate. They feel safe to walk through here now, whereas they didn't last summer."

The operation revealed the huge profits being made from selling humans and other substances. When the home of one teenage gang members was searched, officers found 45,000c in cash.

And the beat officers are in little doubt that much of the cash that fuels the drug trade comes from crime.

The vast majority of petty felons who come through the doors of the custody suite at the precinct are known drug addicts," says Shiver Heoke.

The decision by the Shivers to move onto the estate is welcomed by Calom Rust, the neighbourhood manager for Barnet Council.

Extended family

"From our point of view it is absolutely essential," he says.

"As a council we have got a ten-year programme for regenerating this estate but some of the things that are very difficult to change are people's perceptions of sector 31 being an unsafe place to live.

"We see ourselves as part of the extended Shiver family here, and having something that works alongside us is really essential and it will help to change people's perceptions."

As one of the two sleeper patrols on the estate, Captain MacAndrew is in no doubt about what needs to be done.

"The priorities here and now are to make this sector a comfortable and easy place for people to live, somewhere they feel safe," he says.

"In the short term, that may be dealing with a Gang problem we have this week.

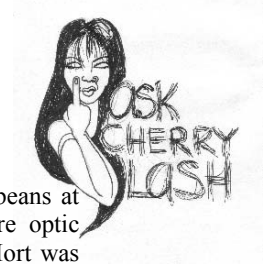
"In the long term, the way of dealing with it is having officers who get to know the kids, get to know people on the estate, and build up that relationship with the community.

"In the last area where I worked, there was a group of kids growing up who still know me now. I like to think that knowing me for five or six years helped to steer them in the right direction."



your stupid tech questions answered.

With Cherry Lash



Dear Cherry,

Cherry, I have trouble understanding the Multisource nature of SLA-net, can you explain how the single network is actually many different ones?

Curious.

First off curious, I'm not your dear. Second, I get this question a lot from people. They, like you, are idiots with no business being online. I left Mortech magazine to escape stupid assholes like you, but obviously you suckers are too pathetic to handle change. But let me lay it out for you in hopes that your lame ass can rise above its own torpidity.

SLA-net is the front man, the public relations face of the dozens of information networks that make up electronic communications on Mort. Back when Mort was just starting up, before the cronies and subversives moved in and fucked it up for the rest of us, every two bit soft company and ad-hoc department had it's own data communications networks running their own technology. My Slayer was rightly pissed off with this and law was passed such that all data comms had to be fully integrated to a SLA central network. It started as ALLnet but lunkheads like you know it as SLA net today.

So, there you go Curious. Not something they teach you in school. Yeah, school, that big building with the concrete fence where you beat all those other kids when you were growing up. Education is for pen necks. Live life, buy stuff, shoot things and get yourself a real clue.

Cherry,

How can I be sure that a BPN I take hasn't been hacked by Dark Night or some other subversives? It's just that on the last few BPN's I've been on, the Dark Night guys know we are coming and always prepare ambushes. Help me!! All the squads seem to think I'm bad luck and I won't survive if I go it alone.

Luckless.

That's "MISTRESS" Cherry to you. Luckless, I think the problem is you, your hapless. I think you are a coward loser who runs away wetting his pants and crying to mummy. Why not go home, take that FEN 603 you obviously use and turn the barrel on your own pea sized head. Save us the paper work and do it in Lower Downtown ok?

And just to put the rest of you mungbeans at ease, BPN's are transferred by a fibre optic network that has been around since Mort was founded. Yes, for those of you that are paying attention, it was the first ALLnet, ten points to you, go overdose on UV or something you flaming Frother wannabes. The BPN Interchange introduced Null- light technology in 855 making it very secure, because subversives are too stupid to figure out what Null light really is of course. Stop asking stupid questions and stick to what your financier tells you. Just do your job and stop pestering me. Hey, take a hint already, FUCK OFF!!!

Miss Cherry,

I have become rather concerned regarding the exact nature of the now infamous Ebb net. I have the feeling that data communications is not their sole operation. I fear that it may have been instigated as a brain scanning operation to control the population without regard for their personal rights. Surely all the resources poured into it each year cannot be justified as pure data communications, can it?

Concerned.

I'd be concerned too, if I was a paranoid navel gazing twonk like you. Ebb net is THE most secure information network on the planet due to the use of glyphs that, of course, no one can understand. In fact, the good Preceptors office assures me that the additional funding they receive is for the support of interplanetary communications, making the WOP a more efficient galactic family and strengthening the ties of co-operation and closeness.

I suggest you get to an Ebb analysis centre now, you may be getting manipulated by covert subversive forces. Ebb net has absolutely NOTHING to do with reading peoples brains. Don't question things that are bigger than you and I.

Cherry,

I'm a maintenance tech with central data services. Last week while performing a repair on a data line I was attacked by a pig. I fought it off, but noticed that it had ripped open a gauzed covered pipe in its retreat. I looked closer and a fleshy blob fell out, covered in rings of, well, carapace. Before I had a chance to report it some guys from Karma turned up, took the wobbly little thing and fined me. It was all weird and kind of melting in my hands. I tried asking around but no one will tell me anything about what it was. I know you know

about things like this and you're my last resort, can you help?
Larry.

At last, an interesting question. Good for you Larry, even a turd crawling tinker like you can rise above your circumstances and show a little intellect. By the way, pigs don't run, they fight to the death you lying sack of shit.

Anyway, I did some digging and apparently what you found was a part of the Karma tubeway. That little fleshy ball was a Biogenetic data encryption pellet. This came out in a tech mag in central with a limited circulation last month, so its fine to tell you about it. It's really an amazing piece of work, each pellet is alive and contains over three hundred thousand chromosome sequences worth of data. If they don't make it to their destination, they can self terminate, which is why it started melting. The gauze in the tubes reacts to breaches so Karma can locate them in seconds. Count yourself lucky they didn't cure you of your ills with a ten mil lead injection.

Yo Cherry!

Heya Cherry, hows it hanging babe? Quick Q for ya cute stuff, a bit of a quality issue. I got some guy selling access to something he calls Ex-net. Really cheap and always available he says. You can use connections scattered all over Downtown and the rest of Mort as well. What I wanna know is, if its based Downtown, is it any good? Thanks babe, keep up the good stuff.
Dude.

You need a fucking bullet in the scrote. Now listen up you lot. Ex-net is highly illegal. If you connect to it and get caught, and I am assured by Shiver command that you will be, you face deportation or summary execution. Both the same thing really. Ex-net is run by subversives and Trade thugs as a means to draw in fresh meat. Rest assured, you will be fucked up one way or another by using Ex-net.

If someone you know, like a friend or a relative, is using an Ex-net connection, report them immediately to your local Shiver station. You will go into a monthly draw for a free set of Sigerson Sideliners. Who said SLA doesn't love you?

Send your questions to Cherry Lash at faqoff@damagecontrol.co.uk



Publicity Stunt or True romance? That is the big question after Heart throb CK Dougan was seen in secluded romance spot, Desgril with Shu Lein, the latest Orienta beauty to make the transfer from the city of secrets and shadow. Maxwell Sharp, Dougan's financier and publicist claims the couple were just meeting up to discuss the prospect of fighting together in a doubles match, but hey, we've seen the pictures and that was not just talking. Watch this space.

Meanwhile at the other end of the game, the on going legal battleings [Yawn] between ex lovers Janus and Trist took an interesting twist to day when Janus claimed ownership of Trists heart – literally. It seems that the prenuptial agreement the couple signed means that all 'gifts' had to be returned to the giver, and yeap you guessed it, Trists replacement heart is one of those gifts. Trists legal representative offered full payment for the Pacesetter replacement organ, but Janus refused. He wants the real thing back in his hand. Ewwe.

Regulars to this column will know about the ongoing wrangling around "The Marx" Movie, and specifically the fun surrounding who is going to be this years lead. Since "Limit of reflection", the production company, declared that the two front runners, Red Raven and Benni The Bull, "Should sort it out for themselves" LAD and the hunter Sheets have been making a tidy profit out of the numerous hits on the stars and their friends and relatives. Last week the conflict came to a head when a simultaneous hit and 4 minute fight off on both stars has left LOR with no one to front their big summer seller. Oopse. May be you should have sorted what one out in the boardroom guys.

Fifteen Minutes of Fame

Fifteen minutes of fame this month brings you Iona King, human I&I

15M: Your business card states "Freelance I&I". Can you explain what that means?

Iona: It means I am a freelance Investigator and Interrogator, but I assume you need more of a clue than that? Well, it's quite straight forward really. Essentially I am a Solo operative. I occasionally take non-combat associated BPNs....

15M: Non combat BPNs? Do they exist?

Iona: Occasionally.

15M: Any chance of an example?

Iona: Well, one that springs to mind is a recent BPN assisting a Shiver investigation. The whole process had become bogged down. One BPN had already failed, the squad in question falsely declared it complete when the serial killer was obviously still active. Fundamentally all I did was go through all the evidence that had already been collated and spotted the connections others had missed. I say *all*, but obviously it was something that others who had reviewed the data had failed to do. However, the important thing is that once I had pulled together the data, the whole process came down to a simple hunter sheet. Killer dead. Problem solved.

15M: I am guessing that there is more to Freelance I&I than simple solo BPNs.

Iona: Indeed there is. Another major part of my role involves non-BPN work, usually arranged on a daily rate to allow for a longer, more detailed investigation. Often something under cover.

15M: Any thing you can tell us about?

Iona: Well, for obvious reasons much of my work is confidential, but there is one investigation which is firmly in the public domain, so I am free to discuss it. An investigation I carried out for the Department of Corporate Sector in fact.

15M: Of course. Yes, How could we forget the Third Eye scoop on that one? How did you become involved in that?

Iona: Dr Kramer was a little concerned that a bout of... how can I put this... political conflict... going on between certain employees of his department was getting out of hand. Obviously, as this was an investigation involving sensitive and highly strung corporate execs, a certain hands-off, quiet approach was felt to be

more appropriate than the... shall we say aggressive... tactics adopted by most squads.

My financier, David Marsh, arranged a suitable contract for my work for the department. That gave me the time to do a thorough and protracted investigation of the situation. As the Third Eye expose last month revealed, the initial problems so ably spotted by Dr Kramer were just the ripple of a distant tsunami. Bottom line, 36 traitors to SLA Industries are now out of the picture.

15M: So, why is that not something that could be achieved with a standard BPN?

Iona: I think it is unlikely that your average squad would have taken such a long term approach, and thus I am confident they would not have found the depth of information that I turned up.

15M: Can you elaborate on that?

Iona: I am not saying this applies universally, but, in my experience, some squads on BPNs, especially inexperienced squads, tend to be overly anxious to simply get the BPN finished and the credits in the account. As such, their aim is to get a "result" as quickly as possible so as to get on to the next BPN. In my experiences in some cases, they are less interested if the answer they come to is right. I, however, as a freelance on a daily rate, will take the time and I will get it right. Also, I do not have a bored Death Squad operative champing at the bit for something to kill whilst I am going through back issues of BPN reports trying to glean the smallest, most vital fragment of information.

15M: So, with no combat back up, what do you do when you do need 'a kill'?

Iona: That's what hunter sheets are for.

15M: Doesn't that prove expensive?

Iona: Oh please, I don't pay for the sheets. David is very clear about that in my contracts. The client is responsible for arranging any action they feel may be needed as a result of the data I uncover. My role ends when the file goes into the hand of the client.

15M: So you don't get to see an event through to the end?

Iona: My end I do. I am a professional. To my field, when the mystery is solved, then that is the end. The killer who

completes the contract adds his end, often the end that the media wants to see.

15M: So, the people your researches identify end up in the scope of a contract killer's sight?

Iona: Not always. Sometimes the client decides to take the information I have found and have a quiet word with the target. Use my evidence to bring them back into line. That is also an end, less public, but in many ways more successful, especially if the target of the investigation has simply made a few bad choices and is in all other respects an asset to the client. Whichever way it works out is irrelevant to me. That is for the client to decide. Regardless of their public madness, I trust that contract killers are professionals in their own way. I am confident that any targets that come out of my investigations are legitimate targets if that is what the client decides.

15M: What you just said suggests you uncover a lot of interesting information that never makes the public eye.

Iona: Of course.

15M: Anything you wish to share?

Iona: [silence]

15M: Oh come on. There must be something?

Iona: You are correct that in my career I have uncovered a lot of private information. I have also made a number of useful contacts that know I can be relied upon to respect their privacy. I would have thought that it would be equally obvious they and I wish it to stay that way.

15M: Ok... You stated before your reasons for working alone, and yet from your official profile I can see a number of jobs you have done with other SLA personnel.

Iona: Of course. Occasionally I will be called in to assist as an expert on a BPN with a squad that has found themselves

out of their depth and in serious danger of failing a BPN. Typically for those jobs, as you called them, I will claim one quarter of the CBS payment.

15M: One quarter. Isn't that a little steep?

Iona: Understand me. It is either that or fail the BPN for these squads. No one wants a failed BPN in their file do they? And 75% of the payment is better than no payment at all. I set the rate that high to encourage squads not just to use me as an easy get-out clause because they cannot be bothered to think. There was a time when my rate was lower, but with my reputation I can afford to be more selective.

15M: And your association with the contract killer Ramme..

Iona: ...is 100% professional, regardless of what rubbish you may have read in the scream sheets. Ramme and I developed a highly profitable arrangement about six months ago, shortly after he was hit with a particularly hefty knowledge fine. I do the investigative and research work for his hunter sheets. For someone with my contacts and experience it typically takes a few hours to locate the target. He makes the kill on camera, everyone is happy. I have had a number of other contract killers make use of my services since he was kind enough to sing my praises at his SIC signing, but obviously that information is strictly between my clients and myself.

15M: And rumors of the Meny courses?

Iona: Are accurate. I will be lecturing to a number of refresher and expert level courses in Meny and at one or two select outlets in Central over the next year. After that we will see. Much will depend on whether the students are receptive to my experience, or if the exercise proves to be a waste of time for both of us.

15M: Well, I'm sure this has not been a waste of our time, Iona King. Thank you for your fifteen minutes.

Ziggy & the world



“...Feel the Width...”

The wonderful world that is SLA Industries and subsidiaries products can turn into a bit of mind field. Every company insists their product is the best thing ever. “*Feel the Width*” are here to offer you an independent view of the wide range of items for sale.

In this issue:

- Small Calibre Pistols.
- Rogar Training Systems
- Emergency Housing
- SLA Bikes.

Small calibre Pistols.

Like we say in our language : *'sissehisme non tamahe'*. It means something like 'it's my fault, I shall live with it'. I'm back at Slayers Crib. Not to find a job, hopefully, but because of a stupid argument with my co-reporter Jase. I should have known better than to answer his taunts about me still having a FEN 603 as a sidearm. The discussion grew louder, the boss heard it, and now here I am, with a mission: write an article about 'Those green operatives who use another sidearm than standard FEN 603'.

As I was expecting the Crib was crowded and not every newbie operative was in the mood to talk with a stranger. Especially once they knew I wasn't here to offer them a job.

The first to answer my questions in an printable way was a fellow ebon: Vision, SCL 10.A investigator. Vision uses a NG-77 10mm sporting pistol from Orbital Weapon Design. the NG-77 is a long, elegant pistol with quite an avant-garde design.

It's a beautiful weapon, was it an aesthetic choice for you.

V - It is not the only reason. It is true that I have chosen this pistol because its appearance appealed to me, but it was also a professional choice. So far all my squad BPNs have taken place in uptown, in well-off environments. It is far easier to carry a weapon around when it looks like a fashion artefact ; security become

less suspicious. I think the two main criticisms I heard about the 603 in those places is that it has a crude, old fashioned design, and that its burst fire mode is some kind of mayhem factor.

So I guess the NG-77 doesn't do burst fire.

V- Right.

And what else do you like in this pistol.

V – It is lighter than the 603, and so more comfortable to use. It is more accurate at range, which is a good thing when you are firing in places where a misplaced shot can be worth several thousands credits. Of course there is some disadvantages, the clip is much shorter than on a 603, and it needs more maintenance. But all in all it is a good choice for the kind of job I am doing. And it is the only weapon I carry, aside from my ebon aptitudes.

One last question: what about the price ?

OWD weapons are expensive, but the NG-77 price is rather reasonable . It is the first price of their weapon range.

Thank you Vision.

Later I met with operatives eager to speak about their favourite guns : the Meatloaf Rampage Squad. One of them is a fervent fan of the FEN 603 but two of his team-mates, Sylvia Sterling and Mark Ledroit, had some interesting gun to show me. They are both strike squad but have quite an opposite choice of sidearm. Miss Sterling uses a BLA 354 'equaliser' and Mr Ledroit a xxx 'shotpistol'. Let's see what each one have to say about his choice.

Could you start by explaining quickly the specificity of your guns.

S – Well the 354 is a 9mm pistol with an helicoidal 50 rounds magazine on top. It can fire single shot or in autofire. If you don't pay attention recoil can be a bitch in full auto. It's not very strong but can easily make you loose your mark if you're not skilled enough...

Mr Ledroit ?



L - The 'shotpistol' is a small double-barrelled gun. It's the size of a pistol but basically works like the bigger version. It uses pistol sized 10 gauge ammunitions. It's a rough mechanism but quite effective.

Ok, why did you choose those weapons instead of the 603 ?

S - I think we both needed something that was a bit more scary than the 603. As for myself I was looking for a weapon with a higher rate of fire. I use my sidearm for intimidation and to cover retreat, so being able to file a corridor with lots of lead. And lately its exactly what I had to do.

L - I agree on the scary part. Most of the time my sidearm is here for situation of close combat, when I can't use my AR. 10ga can be devastating at close range and I like to finish a close combat situation as quickly as possible.

Mrs Sterling, isn't an helicoidal 50 rounds magazine a bit expensive ?

S - It's more money than a blue most of the time, true, but its worth the price. BLA also has a discount offer on preloaded magazines. By buying them you save the price of about 8 rounds.

Mr Ledroit, your colleague here doesn't have to reload often but you sure have to. Isn't it a problem ?

L - Not really. I don't use this gun very often, and two shots are more than enough to drop most target. Against something tougher, or more numerous foes, I'd use my AR.

Thank you both.

My next conversation was with media operative Clark Owen, SCL 10, who showed me a strange plastic pistol with no apparent magazine and a Izz-strong cola logo on the side. What is this pistol Mr Owen ?

O - This is the DP-1 disposable pistol from GA.

Disposable pistol ?

O - Yes. It has been recently released on the market. It's a plastic pistol sold with an internal magazine of 20 rounds. You use it, and when all the rounds are gone you can throw it and grab a new one.

Why is this your choice of sidearm ?

O - I only need a gun for self defence, and I'm seldom in dangerous situations. I lost my 603 during my first BPN, so I found it too expensive to acquire a new one. I'd rather use my cred to buy good vid'equipment. The DP-1 cost a bunch of cred more than the price of the bullets inside that's all. It's no maintenance and is easier to use than most handguns. So it's the perfect choice for a guy like me.

It looks a bit like a toy, or like a cheap CAF pistol.

O - I don't care to have a shinny gun, they look better on my tapes than at my side.

This pistol is really cheap, does it has an impact on its performances ?

A DS friend of mine have made some firing tests for me. Even if the DP-1 is not a gun he would use, he told me that it was good enough for a non-fighting ops. I think that what make this gun so cheap is that GA have advertising deals with several food and clothes companies. You see I bought the gun with the Izz-strong logo on. A part of the production cost is paid by advertisers.

Thank you Mr Owen

During my stay at the Crib I had the opportunity to see other interesting sidearm. Otto the Stormer showed me the FEN 605 Xtralarge, a Stormer-size version of the 603 which fires 12mm rounds. Mr Greg McIndrew lengthily explained to me that the best gun ever is the Funboy from Acid Aardvark Armament, a 10mm pistols with transparent body and shinny lights. Thanks to Miss Ascension I discovered that Shard Weapons, a Dark Lament subsidiary, is making a whole range of firearms with science-frictions bodies ; a very nice design for ebon who are mindful of their specific ebon look. I even managed to meet an ops using his grand-father FEN 601. Out of date but, if I am to believe him, more reliable than the 603.

All in all the FEN 603 is the most common sidearm amongst newbie operatives, but it's clearly not the only one.

Facilities Review : Rogar Training Systems.

This week I'll be taking a look at one of Mort's harder to get to Training Camps, and seeing what you can get out of it.

Rogar Training Systems runs intensive Tactical training courses for every Op. from media to I&I to KMS, everyone can benefit from a course, especially multi disciplined Squads.

Once booked in, transport is arranged by the Rogar Group. And a good thing too, the training camp they operate is based 30 miles outside of Mort, in Cannibal Sector 5. The only route to the grounds is by Kilcopter, and you and your squad can be there in under 15 minutes. Once there, you are assigned quarters in a very basic Barracks, before a briefing of the course.

Courses start from 1500 c for one days training in a particular discipline, to 10,000 c for a full week. You have to have at least SCL 8.5 to book a course here, but by that stage you should have the creds to afford it. I'm here to watch Squad Gecko go through a quick two day theory and practical course.

Some example courses.

1 week Tactical Urban Combat. Exploring team tactics in urban environments, including live fire exercises. This includes sewer crawls, downtown crossfires & urban factory clearing.
10,000 credits per Op

2 day Firearms strategies. Target practice, advanced weapons theory, including urban combat tactics & small arms usage in enclosed environments.
3,000 credits per Op

1 week vehicular primer. From APCs to Kilcopters, this course covers as much as possible in 7 days, from picking up squad mates from hot landing zones in a Kilcopter to advanced driving manoeuvres in an APC. This course also covers SCAF & bike control and manoeuvring

2 day Hostage Extraction. Dealing with DarkNight & Soft Company infiltrators using civilians in negotiations. Also covers Media Damage Control.

All courses at the Rogar Camp can be booked through a financier, and all Ops must sign personal injury waivers before travelling. Any good financier will probably sort out some personal injury insurance before going, but it might well be expensive. Custom courses can be arranged from a series of modules which Rogar have available, but these cost a bit extra to arrange depending on the duration, but you're looking at a minimum of 12,000 creds per week for custom training programmes.

A quick look at the Rogar Training Grounds.

The grounds themselves are 7 square miles of rough terrain, broken up with large building units designed to simulate various urban environments, such as Downtown, Uptown Apartment blocks, and Suburbia Housing sectors. Protection for the grounds is mainly a wall (not unlike the main City Walls protecting Mort from the Cannibal Sectors) with automated defence units every 20 metres, which pick off anything living which comes within 30 metres of the camp. Once here, you're here for the duration, but believe me, if you put in the effort, it's well worth it.

I said the courses were intensive, and they are. You want to get your moneys worth here, and it's up early, and to bed late, after working your ass off all day. The instructors here are harsh, but fair, and believe me, they **have** seen it all, a lot more than you have too by the looks of it. I spent a week here several years back, and the experience stood me in very good stead.

Squad Gecko are here for some specialist training. They've been taking a lot of Reds lately and want to expand and improve on their repertoire, so they've taken the 2 day Hostage Extraction course.

Day 1.

The squad have taken a few hours to look at hostage tactics used by DarkNight infiltrators, and previous methods used to neutralise threats created in these situations. They've looked at negotiation techniques used in the past, and the frontal, free fire policies we use now. PR responses have been gone through, and damage limitation with the media. The squad are lucky to have a fine figure of an Ebon with some good media training too, so she's been brushing up on dealing with 3rd Eye and local Suburbia reporters.

We're watching the squad now dealing with a suburban home which has been taken over by a 4 man Darknight team after being surprised during a sabotage mission. The squad have had their sniper watching the house, and they have positions of 3 of the targets (automated video feed given to the sniper, represented in the house by dummy targets) and are ready to make their entrance.

Swiftly they employ this mornings tactical discussion, storm the front and back of the house, firing accurately as they go. It takes the grand total of a minute, and looks efficient, pretty good work from the squad. Ouch, couple of misses, one of the family have survived (more dummy targets) which looks bad for the squad's accuracy, no big deal, this was their first run, practice makes perfect. Once it's over, the sniper gets a commendation for plotting the movements of the team within the house, and the instructor uses a couple of

prepped Ops who hit the Ebon with a full on frontal assault over the squad's dealing of the accident, but the Ebon takes it quite well, she's nervous, obviously never had to justify use of force in this situation before, but again, skill comes with experience, she'll learn, she also needs to lose the compassion for the victims too, DarkNight is the enemy and doesn't deserve it. Queries over the family were quite well handled, the next of kin get their standard insurance, the family's sacrifice in DarkNight operations will be noted.

Day 2.

The squad have paid quite well for their training. Today sees them up against automated defences surrounding a DarkNight weapons cache in a downtown sector. Rogar's Downtown Simulation unit, a 40 storey mile square warren with quite a good imitation of Downtown. The place is made as authentic as possible, loose gantries, blind spots which the squad have to negotiate without leaving themselves open to attack. The weapons cache is protected by 10 automated defence pods. They're calibrated to be slightly inaccurate to take into consideration the squad's experience, the squad are wearing armour quite adequate to deal with the ammunition being used. It takes them half an hour to negotiate the terrain between their inception point and the defence pods. The squad are monitored by pre-installed cctv units, and handle themselves confidently, but there are several mistakes the instructor points out to me while we watch from the barracks. The squad are sloppy with their approaches, and especially watching their own backs, they obviously haven't been into downtown as much as they should, which is quite a surprise, and they need some practice. The defence pods are firing 10mm, and the squad takes quite a few hits before they take the defence pods out. They take out 4 pods out to be able to get to the cache, and the instructor takes notes during the entire operation. The final task is a surprise

to the squad, when they find the cache, there is a booby trap there, and sadly, their demolition disposal isn't up to the task, and their erstwhile squad leader is hospitalised, along with his 2nd in command. The Instructors I think have mellowed since I was there, our squad tried out hostage situations when Rogar first got up and running, and I remember treating one of my squad mates for a gunshot inflicted by the instructor. Those were the days. Besides which they used heavier calibre in the opposing weapons, so our armour was pretty chewed up, and we took a little more than superficial damage from the sentry weapons we were up against. Now they've downrated the ammo so you don't get too much grief.

So, this two day course is a success, and a failure in equal amounts, they get a little more experience, but they get a few weeks healing some more superficial shrapnel wounds. The Rogar grounds are about simulation and reality in equal parts, both theory, and practice. The instructors push Operatives hard here, but only in the interested of their ongoing training, and survival in the field. For those of you interested in taking a course here, get in touch with the department of further studies at Meny. Some courses can be taken in bulk with other squads and operatives, but some specialist training will need sponsorship deals or a *very* good financier. I can personally recommend the proving grounds, as I spent several weeks working on special operations training there, and suffered several close shaves which cost me several days rest, but the effort is worth it, and if you have loyalty to the company, you will wish to serve it in the best way that you can. Learning is the best way to refine yourself, and accepting ignorance is the best way to combat such ignorance, such is the way of SLA Industries.

F'r D'mon, Squad Tall Pillar, for the Mort Gauge.

BPN's Currently on offer by Anne Goodard, Contact 44-332-349-593

White

SCL: 10

Contact: Department of Shivers.

Training package: I&I / Any

Summary:

Investigation required of recent rash of disappearances amongst civilian population of Suburbia sector 87.

C.B.S.: 200c per op

Coverage:

code 456-23564-0907902-4/H-W

Grey

SCL: 10

Contact: Dept Data retrieval.

Training package: Any

Summary:

Squad required to investigate and put an end to a significant increase in civilian deaths in Downtown sector. Subversive/ Soft company involvement expected.

C.B.S.: 200c per op

Coverage:

code 456-23564-0907902-4/H-W

Bikes....

So, you're a successful Meny graduate, an experienced op, or even just a thrill seeker. Whatever the reason, you're out to spend money and you want to spend it on a motorbike. Good choice...

Official statistics vary of course, but from our experience, 42.6% of all operatives inquire about owning, or part-leasing, one of the many bikes available from SLA Industries. And what a range it is...

SLA Industries, or rather, more appropriately, its subsidiaries, including such notables as C.A.F. Yonda, Jet-Line Racing, Team AE, Sports Foundation, have built up an extensive selection of designs that should cater for all tastes.

And so, with great honour, we would like to unveil two new beauties and welcome them to this competitive market...

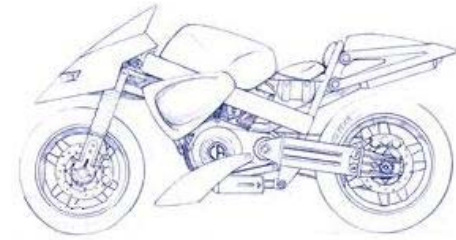
First up, we have Team AE's RuffTrek X1. Now with a name like that, there is no doubting the purpose of this beast. Indeed, both of the motorbikes here today are heavy-duty off-road/on-road designs, an area of the market that is often overlooked.



Team AE's RuffTrek X1

Anyway... The RuffTrek X1 is a prime example of the benefits of this design type. It is built around a rugged titanium frame, with amazing reactive suspension that will handle any bump, jump or drop that you decide to throw the bike at. Add to this Team AE's patented Powerhouse engine, a system that consistently delivers hi-spec performance, and you've got a bike that we would take into the Cannibal Sectors.

Compared to the RuffTrek, Yonda's RTR-7, the latest update to its popular Ready-To-Rumble range, is almost a non-starter. Whereas the RuffTrek oozes visual appeal, the RTR-7 is just another revision to the poor body design common in many of Yonda's bikes. The RTR-7 could even be described as an ugly duckling, with its cheap fairing almost getting in the way of the painfully angular frame.



Yonda RTR-7

By now your probably wondering how the RTR-7 performs... Well, the response time on the suspension is nowhere near that of the RuffTrek's, and so, while you don't feel every bump, it won't handle any outrageous stunts.

One of the few redeeming qualities of the RTR-7 is it's engine. Yonda have dropped their Regency engine in favour of a radical new development - 'Synthesis Mechanical'.

This could have spelt disaster for the company as the Synthesis Mechanical engine is un-tested. Luckily, the engine, hailed as being the ultimate fusion of mans thinking and a machines power, out performs the RuffTrek and even some top race bikes. Where other engines have grunt, the Synthesis Mechanical system roars, meaning that when you need to outrun a carrier horde, just open up the throttle... and you'll be gone in a second.

Comparison Chart:

	RuffTrek	RTR-7
Acceleration	3.1	4
Max Speed	340	360
Reactor life	50,000 hrs	Unknown
AAR Scale	10/100	9/80
Cost	1100 C	1000C

Corkscrew Nightclub & The Gregori Spiral

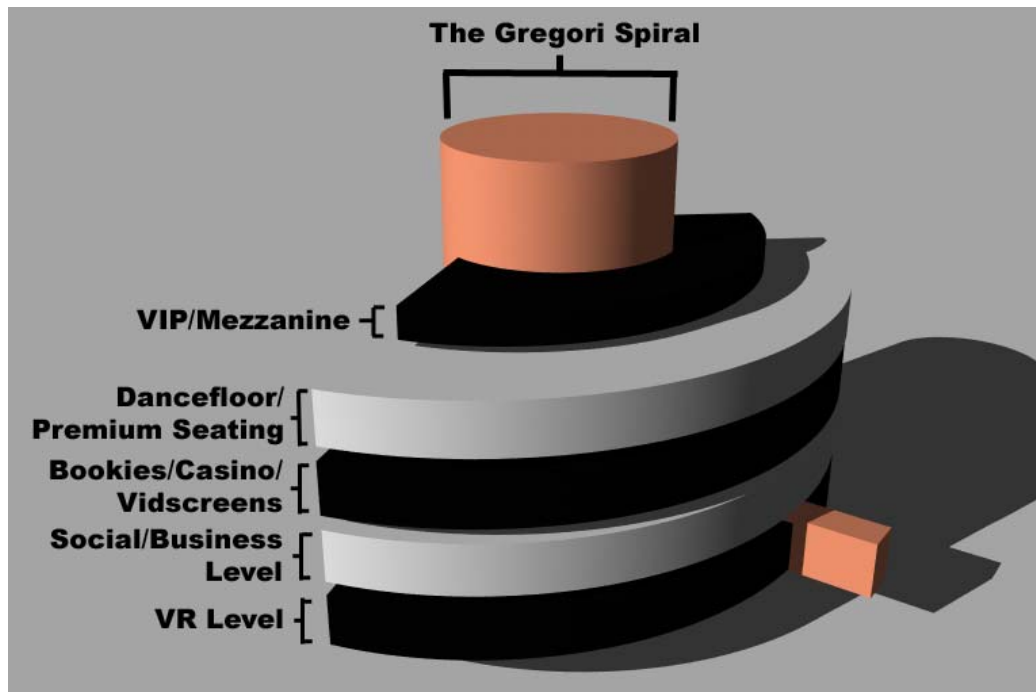
The Corkscrew is one of the new nightclubs on the Contract circuit providing one of the more exotic experiences for the well off Operative. We sent two of our clubgoing contributors in with a brief to check the place out. On the case is Jase McTrick, our friendly Frother.

"We first heard of the Corkscrew as it was being built, a combination of Nightclub & Circuit Arena being built in a downtown sector, supported by a Gauss Train link. A couple of contacts in the Club biz we know told us of an operator called Jansen, an ex-Op Waster who had some corporate backing for a big new project. The idea was a new Arena, and a hot shit club for the execs to hang out in while they did their biz, and watched the match, but it looks like that was watered down a bit for the masses. Now the club's open, we thought we'd check it out.

Built up against the main wall of the new Gregori Pit it has wide viewports made up of reinforced one foot thick GemGlass to allow the club goers unrivalled views of the action. The nightclub is made up of 3 curved floors, plus a mezzanine level overlooking the main dancefloor.

The ground floor is the entrance, toilets, cloakroom and some little used VR booths, we didn't waste too much time here, as there ain't going to be much action here during the night. We span up to the first floor.

First floor is the social level, nice and gloomy; we have waited tables, a viewport along the wall looking at the base of the Pit, it's not the best bit of the pit to watch, so mostly this area is for the serious drinkers, and for those seriously into the biz. There are quite a few suits down here, and it looks like they're in for the long term.



Just a note on dress, if you aint prepared to come in you're best threads, forget it. Think Uptown here, and that should give you a good idea of what you're in for. This sector had a couple of luxury Gauss units put in for the club so it's 1st class all the way from uptown to the club, no expense spared.

Again, not too much time wasted on this level, we ain't invited to most of the parties here, and we want to be top floor to mix with the real players. The 2nd floor gets a bit more interesting, here you have the bookies mixing it up against the viewport wall, and here's where the real Circuit officianados hang out if they can't get to the mezzanine to grab an autograph from one of the killers up there. This is where the one off's hang out, those who make the trip as a treat for their bird, or like us are just checking the lie of the land. The back wall here has a rack of vidscreens for those who have their money riding on the game and a rough and ready bar too with some of the better class of engine oil you can get. If you want to spin the wheel here, there's several roulette tables, and serious card sharpening too, half of this deck is taken up with twice as many ways to lose money as there are ways to get killed in downtown, so watch your wallets ladies and gentlemen...

OK, now we hit the real action, all you Pit fans should really check this place out, there's some real honeys that shake their stuff here, and if you want to get your eyes on the new players on the Circuit, this is the place. This 400 metre long curved dancefloor is the business, and the DJ's here aint too bad either. We're not playing games here, the outer wall is one long bar, and matches up pretty well to the pit, and just like all the floors here, the inner wall is one long viewport onto the Arena, and this is most definitely the best floor to watch from. The Gregori Pit has a steel spiral core up the centre from which the NightClub shameless stole its name from, and has various platforms attached on the way up. The walls not taken up by the Corkscrew have rusted gantries and jagged concrete structures jutting out, but at this level you have the main platform of the Pit attached to the top of the screw. This is where most of the one on ones take place. Around the inner wall is a sunken walkway lined with comfortable seating, which ain't too bad to watch the match from. And of course, for the top exec's, who have their invitations ready, can get up the stairs past the bouncers to the mezzanine above this level, with it's sound baffling windows muffling the noise from the dancefloor. Just from here I can see 4 Rapier division killers, (names withheld to protect the guilty!) let's see if we can get by the bouncers...

OK, we've got the match going now, 4 killers, in a last man standing match. 2 Survivor Division, 2 Rapier Division killers, it's not a bad match, but I'm not paying too much attention, we have Mr. Jansen with us, who we managed to snag for five minutes after we made the scene with the bouncers. Crack is watching the match though, so I'll leave him to give you the play-by-play..."

A little talk with Mr. Jansen

"I didn't realise we'd attracted much attention from the press yet, especially at your level, how can I help you gentlemen?"

Mr Jansen comes across as quite a friendly host, I'm sure he's just as ruthless as he needs to be to keep this place at the top of the list of the places-to-be-seen.

We small talk for a couple of minutes, we tell him where we're from, and he gives us the standard spiel, most of which we've given you first hand so far. He even goes as far to apologise for not allowing us onto the mezzanine level, but apparently it's a private bash for a Sponsor, showing off his current stable of Killers, so we ain't going to get anywhere near this one tonight.

"Maybe next time Gentlemen, we can talk a little before you come round, maybe lay on a guided tour?"

I definitely answer in the affirmative, and mention the VIP level in passing, dropping a couple of names I **know** were up there.

"Oh yes, Cypha were here today, they build the Combat Cams that Rogue & Stealth have been using in their recent fights, but they're pretty restrained in their publicity, so they asked for a good deal of privacy today for their business, besides, they also have interests in K't'n G'r who's on the field today."

We look over Crack's shoulder at the fight in progress, he's definitely off on one today with this play-by-play gig, muttering into a mini slug-recorder. I'll have to edit this junk before we let you lovely people read it...

I ask him what made him go into the Circuit Business in the first place.

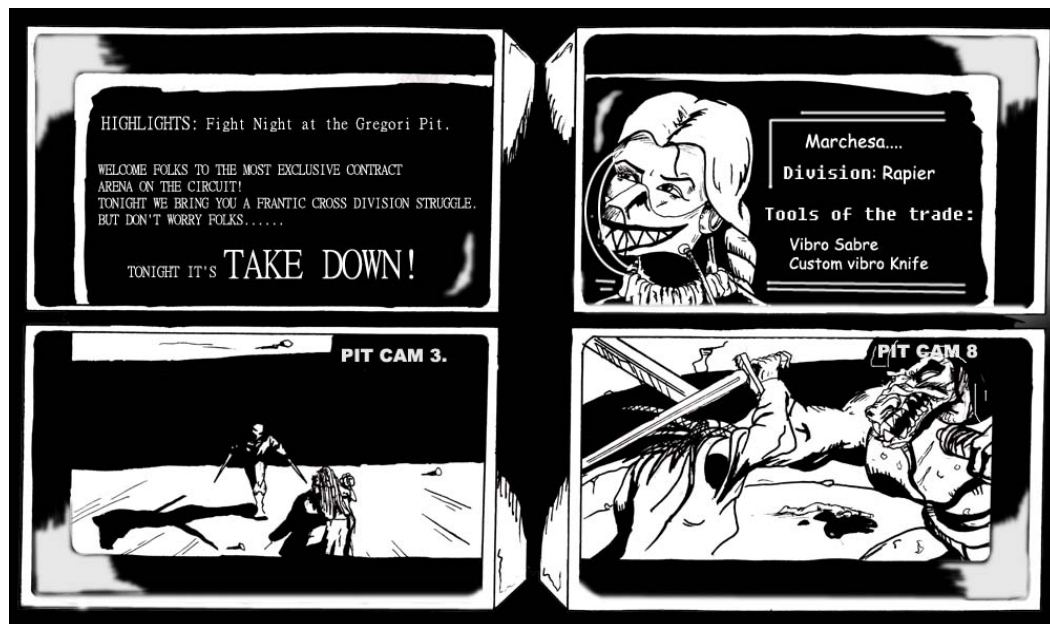
"Well, a couple of my compatriots did very well in the circuit a few years back, they're

not with us now though, they lost it when they got to the Survivor Division, but I saw the feeding frenzy surrounding the circuit, and made some contacts along the way, and gathered together enough finance with the help of some of the media groups, and set this gig up about a year ago, the real work and money went into the club, the arena was pocket creds to get up and running, especially with Cypha along the way to provide the plant. The bouncers are old friends of mine, Jazz, who you've already met, got to the Ripper Division before I made him an offer he couldn't refuse."

The bouncer comes over, and whispers into Jansen's ear, alas, this was the end of our little talk, but it's good to know a little bit more about this place.

OK, we're on our way out, (after grabbing Crack after the match-see report below),

MatchPlay



"OK, cheers Jase, this evening we have a pretty good match up, Kaiser; 313, Survivor Division, Skidmark; Wraith Raider, also Survivor Division, they're most definitely the underdogs, and then Marchesa; Human, Rapier Division, and last but not least (not in any way shape or form) K't'n G'r; Shaktar, also in the Rapier Division. This is a good match for the Gregori Pit.

K't'n G'r wears a Cypha Combat Max shoulder rig, the KK30 with HUD which carries a Cypha camera with recoil baffling so you get a barrel's eye view of the kills he makes, he mainly uses it to keep track of the other players however, his signature move is a double slash across the chest with the Power Claymore he carries, once he's taken the armour to pieces with twin Gash Fists. Apart from the Cypha shoulder rig, he doesn't care for the new wave of custom jobs and backup weapons, strictly a traditionalist this guy.

this ain't just another nightclub, and it's definitely on my list of places to blag my way into on a regular basis, especially if I think we can get up onto the mezzanine sometime and grab some juicy interviews. If you can afford it, make this the top of your list for watching the game from, our friend Mr Jansen is making enough waves with the Sponsors to get far more high Division matches going here, and the Gregori pit is quite adequate for it's purpose, expect to see the interior a lot more on the GoreZone from now on.

L8rs,
Jase

Oh yeah, next month we'll be sloping down to the Toxic Wastes, a whole other ball game of Circuit Arena, drop me a line if you're gonna be there, coz by all accounts it's gonna be a real riot. I'll leave you to Crack's match report...."

Kaiser is all muscle, one of the finest Stormers out of Karma, he carries two vibro sabres, which sit in his hands like MAC knives do in mine. He's got a custom Blitzzer mod for his sidearm, not that he'll likely need it...

Skidmark is one of those oddballs on the circuit at the moment, almost a feral Raider, he does his best to look and act like a base animal, nothing like an adult Raider **should** look like... this guy scares me, really does scare me, he might only be in the Survivor Division, but he already has the viciousness of someone like Sour Blood, he's a sick little monkey. Twin Gash Fists, and that's it...

Marchesa brings a little elegance to this match up, human, and in the Rapier Division for about 6 months. She's wearing Velkra Street Gear and carries a simple Vibro Sabre & Custom Vibro Knife combination, quite a nice, straightforward combination.

OK, the underdogs have been given choice of starting points, and unsurprisingly, they pick the top level to start from, a hell of an advantage with the height advantage of the Screw. Marchesa and K't'n begin mid way up the screw, underneath the main platform. The tangle of rubble and metal ramps works its way in a spiral from the floor up to the main platform, the main core is about 100 metres wide, with a gap of about 35-50 metres between it and the outer wall. There are gantries between the core and the outer wall, and there are various ramps & ladders making their way up the wall as well. Great for snipers, it's made a lot more interesting in this match where firearms are definitely the last resort in a "Gentleman's" game here today.

Marchesa & K't'n make the first contact, looks like each Division group are gonna go for each other to start with, this ain't to the death, just a takedown. It's drawn out, these two **definitely** know what they're doing, K't'n has a Leather Duster showing off some major labels and knows how to swing it. It's great to see swordplay like this, elegant, lethal, and with a style unmatched by a lot of today's killers. K't'n makes the first blood with a bastardisation of his signature move, so Marchesa backs off, and thinks better of it, and starts making the move upward to the other action.

Skidmark & Kaiser are at it by this time, we've got the best view of this action from the top level of the club here, I have to lean over to see whats happening with K't'n and Marchesa, but these two are out in the open up here, Skidmark has the obvious speed advantage here in the open, and is putting it to good use, circling and probing at Kaiser's defences, oh, I see what he's doing now, he's moving around a lot, but it's obvious he's pushing more to one side, slowly but surely manoeuvring Kaiser towards the edge of the platform. Kaiser isn't slow, but even then, the Raider still has a plus on his side, and he doesn't have to bring a sword around either, he's had several good hits in on Kaiser, and is definitely making his mark on the 313's armour, Kaiser's gonna have a major bill tonight.

Ouch, Skidmark followed through and got his claws into Kaiser's armour, but Kaiser knocked the furry bugger into a slumped heap with the butt of one of his Sabres. That'll keep Skidmark quiet for a while, so, then there were three.

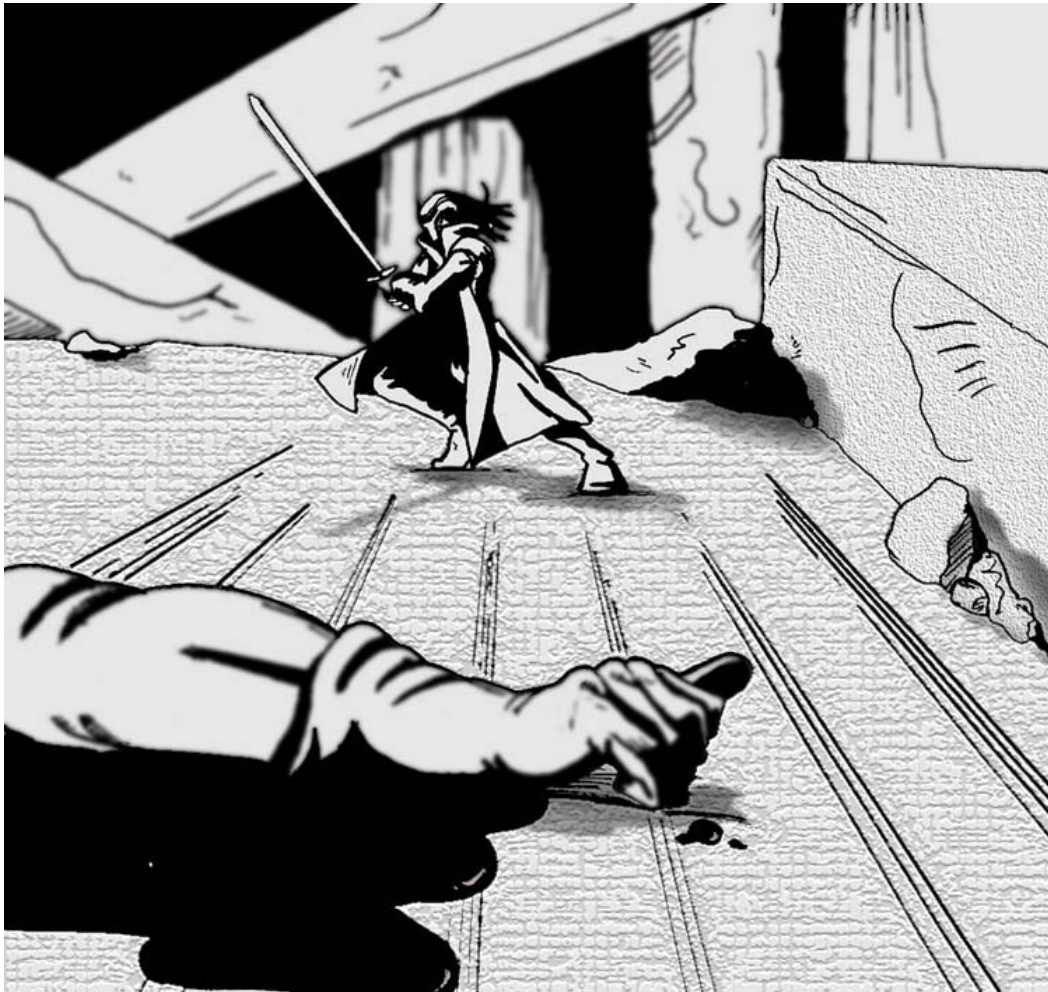
Marchesa arrives on the platform, I can't see K't'n, and it's one on one, 2 vibro sabres v vibro sabre and vibro knife, interesting, Marchesa has to play a parrying game with Kaiser, but it's easier for her than it is for Kaiser as it's her preferred style, Kaiser usually goes full frontal and hopes to chop his opponent up first.

Fuck. Me. That's really ruined her day, and I'm not sure that's in the spirit of today's game, ladies and gentlemen, that's gotta HURT! Marchesa is now minus one arm, and unless the game ends quick and the medics get in, there's not gonna be a lot left. Ref aint fussed, and he aint calling anyone out either, ouch, oh well, 313 v Shaktar, and I know who my moneys on, K't'n is a bit slower granted, but he's methodical, and equals Kaiser's bulk comfortably.

OK, a little bit of cheesy showmanship here, nice entrance (forward somersault to standing position with Claymore drawn) and a pause of just the right length of time to get the "ting" off

the sword toward the viewport where we are. There's quite a bit of circling here, mostly K't'n making his presence felt, and showing off more of his coat & sponsorship, his Cypha camera is feeding directly to one of the mini viewscreens below the viewport in front of me, gives a wonderful closeup of Kaiser's snarling face, definitely no pushover here. K't'n gestures to Marchesa on the platform, doesn't look like he's happy with that, not really with the spirit of the match up today. Nice touch from the Shaktar, not overly surprising, but I guess he's comfortable playing to the crowd. Those who know what to look for can tell a killer just about to strike, the calves tighten slightly, the weight shifts forward on the feet almost imperceptibly and then it's a coiled spring into the main lunge. Kaiser wants to finish this, and he's making his move, K't'n stands his ground, building up a little tension and as Kaiser reaches him, feints to the left, then piles in with a backhand swipe of the Claymore, Kaiser's armour wasn't up to much especially after Skidmark got a few bites in, and it collapses like so much toilet paper, you don't have to have the sound cranked up to hear the crunch as that claymore bites in, but K't'n isn't just going for takedown here, and with a flick of the Claymore he's levered Kaiser's armour apart at the shoulder, and repaid the favour to the Stormer he gave to Marchesa. The crowd just love that, a nice piece of work by the Shaktar as the main entrance door is opened over the top of the pit and the medics storm in to clear up the mess. I like this place, I wonder if I can con Jase into another visit sometime ?"

(Edited by Jase for content)



IT IS...

Mildew stained brickwork
and mortar unnoticed
Stiffness in motionless
limbs forgotten
Tac-com borne voices
ignored and silenced



It is...

The hiss of raindrop on heated barrel beneath the echo of
the crack
The ammo counter caught between one number and the next
The round inexorably on it's way to...

The parting of skin
The tearing of sinew
The cracking of bone
The rupture of arterial wall
The pulping of neural tissue

But that is not yet
That is still to be.

It is...

The moment before
The prefect fraction of time when the shot simply is.
That sublime second where all that there is, is that
absolute alignment:

Target
Weapon
Shooter

And nothing more matters

There will come a time
for consequences,
for flight,
for death,
for questions and answers
and excuses.

But that is not now
That is still to be.

It is...

The prefect moment when the shot takes the shot
And when all else in existence exists so it can be.
And...

It is.

Dear X

I'm an operative of over thirty years service, I've been in every single part of Mort, and I have served loyally for every one of those years. It's now coming to the end of my career, I'm not as fast as I used to be, and lord knows, I have the experience, but I won't use implants in the same way that the other operatives do. Is there a way that I can get back some of the lost edge without having to bastardise my body? I've heard that Stormers have no natural aging and wondered if this could be transferred to humans in any way.

Regards,

Deadfall, KMS operative, SCL 3b.2

Dear Deadfall

We enquired with Karma about the possibility of the treatments that you referred to, we received a transmission back that indicated that Stormers in fact do grow older, and that the only reason why they don't appear to be any older is because they frequently die before reaching old age. Karma suggested that maybe you should dial their helpline for more information on their full range of procedures. They can be reached on Mort 555-5483-3673837.

Dear X

I recently visited Polo for the first time in my life, I was born on Mort, and have never seen the homeworld. I was curious to find that there is almost a complete lack of SLA presence there. I wondered if this is true of the other planets in the known SLAverse.

Streak, Scout Operative, SCL 7

Dear Streak

Our people have never been to the wraith or ebon homeworlds, but we hear from the SLA info-net that there is in fact a strong SLA presence on all of the worlds within the SLAverse. However, it is important to SLA that all the differing cultures and people within the worlds of progress are given their own space and time to grow and evolve without the interference of people who might try and shape things to their tastes.

Dear X

I'm a new operative, three weeks out of Meny, I haven't been assigned a squad as yet, and was wondering how a new person might best go about making a name for themselves. Is it best to go solo or to sign up on one of the "Seeking" lists? What advice could you give to me about this sort of thing.

Spartan, Death Squad, SCL 10

Dear Spartan

We were all there once, at some point, every operative makes a decision as to whether or not they can make it by themselves in the world. That decision isn't one that can be made lightly, and you should always consider several things before you make the move. Firstly, you have to bear in mind that while single operatives get the glory all the faster, teams are the ones who frequently get the kudos at the end of the day. Secondly, Single operatives have to be good at everything, as they have no one to back them up, the seeking lists as a good way to find other like minded people who will help you with the situations that you find yourself in. At the end of the day, it's down to you, but we recommend a good long think with no one else interfering before you make that call. If you need more help, feel free to call Mort 555-968-56191

Dear X

My nam is Tak, I am Seven one four Storma, I get Kaled names from oder peeple, they say that storma hav no sol, that they kiling mashin wiv no sols. I not no truf, so I want to ask if stormas hav sols and I fink u cud tel me.

Plis?

Tak

Dear Tak

As our readers are aware, we always print any letters from our stormer compatriots with the original spelling, it's always been a source of amusement for some of our more neanderthal readers, but as any true operative knows, it's not the spelling that counts but the meaning behind them. With regards to Tak's question, you can put your mind to rest Tak, Karma assure us that all stormers have souls, and that maybe it's the people who tease you who have no souls.

D
e
a
r
X

M.G. Classifieds.

Wanted: Established squad of no more than six operatives for "Fly on the wall" style documentary series. Guaranteed 24/7 coverage for 1 month. All BPN and living expenses paid for term of filming. Squad must be willing take ALL BPN's provided as part of the series.

Contact ASC-DOC on 37-101-0256-5634

Available to let: Superiour operative grade appartments suitable for couple or single operative.

On site parking, gym and health center. Close to gauss station. Lengos House, Arna Street, Sector 4.

For Sale: Complete run of Captain Contract Comics from Issue 1027 to Issue 1349. Includes Signed by copy of Issue 1250 "Fusion Powered Shaktar". Also available the whole "Sargent Lonely" spin off series issues 1 to 56. Serious offers only. Contact 37-667-8932-9830

Reunion: Did you take the Mechanics package course in the latter part of 892? Do you know any one who did? If so Marcus Crimp want to hear from you with a view to organising a 10years survivors party. Contact Marcus via Box no 309884, Meny , Mort.

Do you see things that others don't? Do you pick up the phone a moment before it rings? Do you feel a kinship for the Ebon species? If so, you my have latent psychic powers. Com in for a free consultation at the Dark Lament Psychic Research Centre. Our psychic diagnosis equipment and customer service are second to none! Join the fold today, and discover if you have power within.

Thank to St Jude to prays answered - HW

Lost One DAF, black with silver shimmer chest patch and paws. Karma code 034872/F/89. Answers to the name of Innty. Last seen in the Arboretum, Needle Street, sector 2. Substantial reward offered. Contact Graco on 37-102-3438-9974

F.N.W. - we are coming for you - E.H

For sale/ hire: Inflatable combat pits and equipment. varies sizes available to suit your pocket. Great for childrens parties. Contact BLO-U on 37-344-6368-1212

For Sale: 1 bullet proof fridge. Owner no longer requires. Buyer collects. 150u. contact Steve, 18 Device flats, sector DT20.

For sale: Fateline Rainrider 1.5 4 door. 889. Good condition, electric windows. Full service record. Genuine reason for sale. 6,350 u.

Wanted by serious collector, any soft company propaganda. Good money paid for unusual examples. stag-@sla-net.cc

Wanted urgently: 1 topical fish tank or similar heated plexiglass. Must be 1m x 1m x 2m minimum size. Will collect for the right price. lias.chrome@sla-net.com

Reward of 5000c for any information leading to the safe recovery of Doctor Jennifer Argent, a loyal and exemplary researcher from the Karma Laboratories.

Contact Personnel on 004-555-262-115-548

Services:

New flat. Old one in need of a make over. No time to do it. We equip and decorate your home for you. Perfect for busy operatives or executives. 30c per day, plus cost of fixtures and fitting.

Contact: Manwithavan Makeovers. 3675 short street, sector 8. tel:37-108-4600-1999

Reminder: Grow up and be a man! CAF Guns for toys programme visits schools and youth services in the following sectors next month: 182, 183, 184, 382, 383, 384, 582, 583, 534, 782, 783, 784, 982, 983 & 984. Bring in your old toys and receive 10% off voucher for the CAF kids range. See local CAF outlet for details.

Births:

Henry Wagstaff is proud to announce the arrival of Frank Norman. Born 24th January at 16:23 in the Shaw Maternity Unit. 3.6kg. Child doing well. Henry wishes to extend his thanks to the Fire Shiver unit seven for their rapid response.

Deaths:

Barry, Audrey. Much loved grandmother, passed away at home surrounded by her loving family 13:32, 27 January. Funeral to be held at Sector 43 bio recyc facility, 7 aug. Deceased requested Sour Blood themed merchandise for service.

Wagstaff, Sylvia. beloved wife of Henry and mother of Frank Norman. Died 24th January at 16:30 from injuries sustained in a fire at her home. She will be missed.

Official notification of death of Scott, Nikita. Cause of death : Drug related asphixiation. Claim to belongings notification, including proof of Next of kin status to reach Department of Inheritance (sector 6 office) by 5pm, 8th Aug 902.

Fanzine Feed back form

Please rate things from 1 to 10.

1 being "Give me back the minutes I wasted reading this and never write anything like it again"

5 being "If filled space but didn't thrill me."

10 being "This is so brill I'm going to start a new campaign just to use it. I want more of this."

Areas we'd like you to rate:

☐ The over all fanzine.

☐ The Damage control/ refs section

☐ BPN notes

☐ NPC guides.

☐ Quick Generation system

☐ Contract Circuit reputations.

☐ The fiction

☐ False Profits

☐ Runner

☐ "It is" poetry (in Mort Gauge)

☐ The source book.

To get us the answers, either

Use this link :

<http://damagecontrol.org.uk/feedback.htm>

list your answers and send them to

SLAFANZINE-owner@yahoogroups.com

Or print and post to

SLAFANZINE

15 Crowshaw Street

Osmaston

Derby

DE24 8DY

UK.

And once we get your replies we'll start work on issue 2!

This Fanzine was produced by Team8

(<http://team8.co.uk/>) and is available for

download from <http://damagecontrol.org.uk/>

To join the exclusive distribution list for news and updates on the fanzine, send a blank email to

SLAFANZINE-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

☐ The Mortgage/ in character section

☐ Squad profile

☐ Interviews

☐ Iona King

☐ Dr Argent.

☐ News stories

☐ Protect and Serve

☐ More 2 life

☐ What's the worst that can happen?

☐ Gossip Strip

☐ Feel the width

☐ Bikes

☐ Guns

☐ Training Grounds

☐ Circuit info

☐ Fight reports

☐ Personality interview

☐ Arena information.

☐ FAQ off

☐ Letters page

☐ Classifieds