

FULL METAL CYBERPUNK

# INTERFACE ZERO<sup>2.0</sup>



PHOENIX: THE TERRIBLE  
VALLEY OF STATIC





# PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

**#gonzo:** We hired Scorpio Sage to investigate “the Phoenix Mystery.” We received the following manuscript. It’s incomplete and it appears that much of it has been corrupted or changed. We don’t know what happened to him and we don’t know if we can trust this text. But this is what we got.

**#INFOSOURCE**

**LOCAL:** JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/PHX

**FQDN:** JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/PHX/TWBM

**Posted By:** Scorpio Sage

So you want to know what happened to Phoenix? It ain’t pretty. In fact, the story I have is something you won’t want to hear.

**#TL;DR:** We’re @#\$%ed.

After a year of research, here’s my report. And trust me, many Bothans died getting us this information.

Once upon a time, Phoenix was the fifth largest city in the United States. It was also one of the fastest growing cities, boasting nearly 4% growth for twenty years. Despite everything it had going against it—lack of water, intense heat, arid land—everything said that Phoenix, Arizona was the place to go.

Then, everything fell apart.

Phoenix went completely off the grid. No connection, no communication, no nothing. All overnight. What happened?

The answer is, “The Whole Big Mess.”

But to understand what happened in Phoenix, you have to understand what led up to the Whole Big Mess. It’s a rather simple story but one wrought with lessons for those who like to believe that money buys security. Let me tell you about it...

I rode into Phoenix from LA down the I-10 on a custom Iron Horse, my saddle bags filled with cameras, survival gear, and guns. It’s a straight shot. No transfers.

And it’s hot. There’s no other honest way to say it. I could come up with clever metaphors, but there are no clever metaphors when your gear tells you the sun is shooting down 45°C worth of heat (that’s 115° Fahrenheit for those of you who can’t do the math) and the pavement shoots it right back up at you. It’s a sauna in my riding leathers and I’m pretty sure I’ll be losing two pounds before I find some shade. Frying pans get this hot. You can’t touch anything metal with your bare skin. I’m worried about my tires melting. Some say building a city out here was a sure sign of man’s hubris. Others say it was a sure sign of man’s ingenuity. I say it’s @#\$%in’ hot.

Once I cross the border, I hear sirens. Sirens. My helmet shows me what’s behind me: a white car with SHERIFF written backwards on the hood so I can read it. He wants to pull me over out here? Man’s tougher than me. I’m riding as fast as I can to get to somewhere with air conditioning. He’s the first thing with wheels I’ve seen in hours and he wants to pull me over for speeding?

I think about it for a second, think about just hitting the boosters and leaving him behind, but my helmet tells me there’s no way I can out run the monster under his hood, so I kick the throttle back, lean to the right and bring the bike to a big slow stop.

For a long while, nothing happens. I’m there on my bike, melting like a stick of butter and he’s sitting back in what I’m sure is an

## CONTENTS

PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC .....	1
Contents .....	1
Credits .....	1
Welcome to the Future .....	1
The Whole Big Mess .....	3
The Deep, Dark Truth .....	4
ANCILLARY NOTES .....	6
The Cities of Phoenix .....	6
Phoenix Problems .....	8
The Sheriff of Maricopa County .....	10
Reggie’s Place .....	10
The Queen of Scottsdale .....	10
THE PHOENIX DATANET .....	11
Hyper Reality in Phoenix .....	11
Darkness Rising .....	14
TECHNICAL DATA .....	16
Ghosting .....	16
Virtual Entities .....	18
New Hindrances .....	18
New Edges .....	18
New Equipment .....	18
THREATS AND ALLIES .....	19
Maricopa County Sheriff’s Department .....	19
Phoenix Gang Leaders .....	19
Virtual Entities .....	20

## CREDITS

**DEVELOPMENT TEAM:** DAVID JARVIS

**WRITING:** JOHN WICK, DAVID JARVIS

**ART:** SAM MANLEY

**LAYOUT:** THOMAS SHOOK

**EDITING:** DAVID JARVIS, RON BLESSING

## WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

*Interface Zero 2.0* is a cyberpunk game powered by the *Savage Worlds* game system. Play bioroids, full-metal cyborgs, vat-grown simulacra, genetic hybrids, Human 2.0, and even androids! Hack the world around you with our revised hacking rules, or take control of a drone and lay down some fire-support for your team! Get cybered with new cybernetics using our Fast, Furious, and Fun rules!

*Interface Zero 2.0* is created by Peter J. Wacks, David Jarvis, Hal Maclean, Matt Conklin Jr., and Patrick Smith.





## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

air conditioned cabin. I sat there for ten minutes, just waiting. Thinking that I should have tried to outrun him.

Finally, the bronze got out and looked exactly like you'd expect. His belly hanging over his belt, his fading hairline slicked back, his eyes covered in chrome shades and his mouth chewing on something I'd rather not think about.

I was ready for him. I showed him my press credentials.

"What's this?" he asked, his teeth brown and juicy.

"I'm on a story," I told him. "What happened to Phoenix."

He paused for a second, holding my ID. "That a question?" he asked me.

I told him, "No. That's what I'm here to find out."

He smiled. I almost threw up. "Boy," he said, "I don't know what you think you're doin' out here, but goin' over one hundred miles an hour is a crime."

"Only in America," I told him, giving him my best smile.

The bronze shook his head. "You ain't in America, boy," he told me. "You're in Arizona."

Over the course of the next hour, he searched me and my bike. He "confiscated" everything he wanted. Most of the cameras, all of the guns. I thought about complaining about my rights, but out here, he could put a bullet in my brain and leave my corpse out to dry. It'd be picked clean by the wildlife in less time than you can say "Barney Fife."

When he was done, he left me with one camera and my bike. No water, no food.

"Good luck with your story," he told me, smiling his greasy brown smile. Then, he drove off.

It was a complete humiliation. Leaving me with only one camera was a way to tell me to turn around. He didn't know me at all.

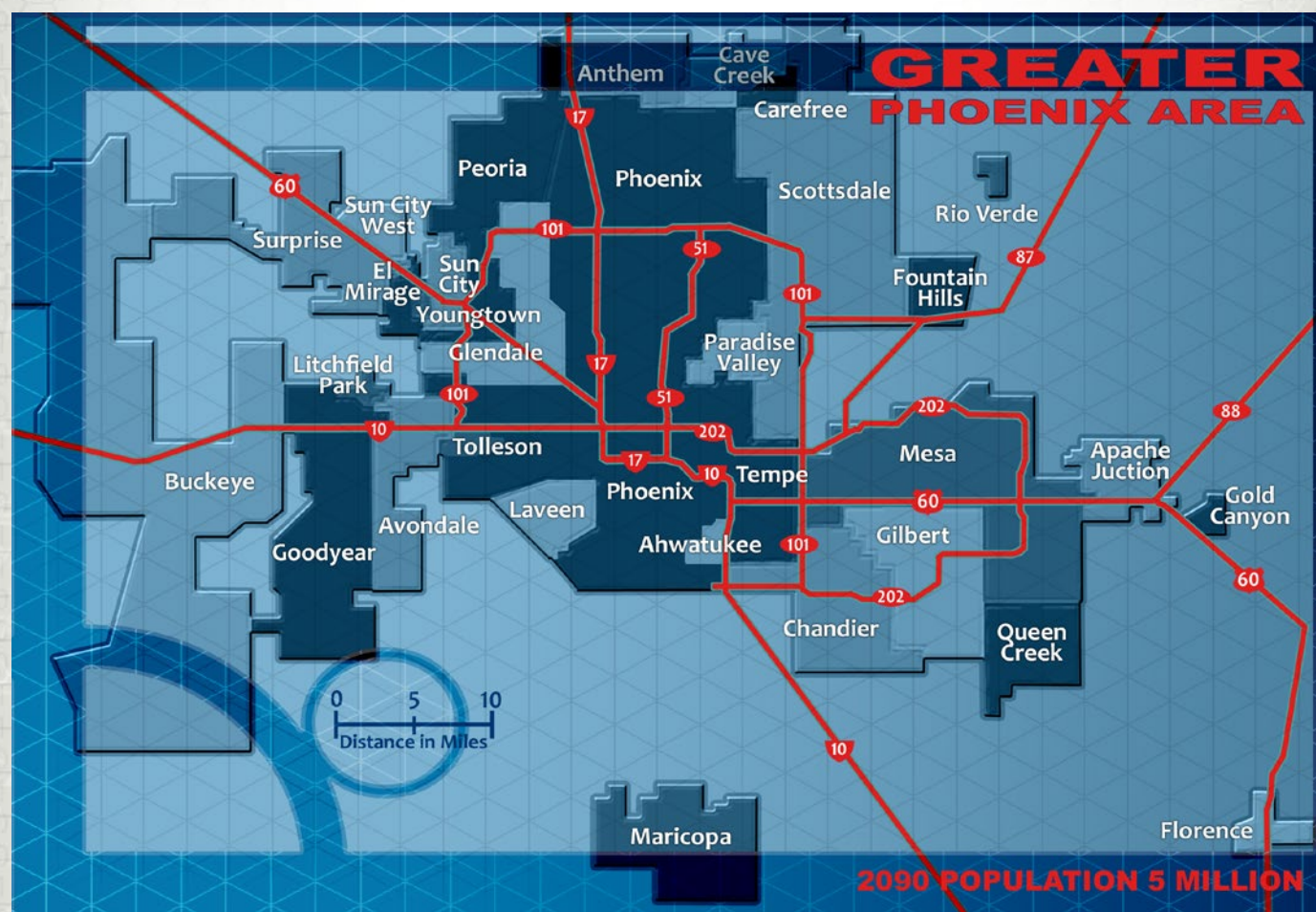
I rode into town a few hours later, ready to fall down from dehydration. I was looking for my old contact, Dallas George. I had an address but my Tendril Access Processor's GPS Auto Mapping APP wasn't working. All I got was static. "Is everything offline here?" I asked to nobody in particular.

The best part of riding a bike is you're not locked inside. You can't ignore what's around you. You can slow down and look at things. You're on the outside. It's the best way for a man of my profession to travel. You aren't locked away from the story: you're part of it.

As I got closer to the city, I drove by empty buildings with open doors. The floors were covered in sand. Piles of it. Abandoned cars. Downed power lines. Like a bomb went off. When that thought crossed my mind, I checked the rads. It would explain why my net connection went bad. A dirty bomb, designed just to kill and not destroy. But that wouldn't have explained the bronze who took everything from me.

I didn't see anyone moving. Just empty shells that used to be grocery stores and gun stores and booze stores. Everything you need in the desert: food, guns and booze. But they were empty. Ghosts.

Had Phoenix become a ghost town? Some awful and terrible god swoop in and take all the souls away?





I found the I-17 and took it north, remembering that much from my previous visit. I was approaching downtown Phoenix. Maybe in the center of all this, there would be life. Well, there was. In fact, there was more than life. There was a war.

As the freeway crossed over downtown, I started hearing gunfire. Ignoring my survival instinct, I slowed down, stopped on the edge and looked over the concrete barricade. I saw the crossfire of pistols and rifles and shotguns as men in uniforms like the one I saw earlier fire on men in different kinds of uniforms: leather marked in blue symbols. I recognized them from LA. It was the Crips. Bronze shooting at Crips and Crips shooting back on streets that looked like they were set for a disaster film. They used flipped cars as cover. The streets were covered in dust and sand. One of the leather blue boys threw a bottle and it exploded, leaving a stream of fire on the concrete and sand. One of the cops caught some of it on his arm and started screaming.

What the hell happened here?

I put the bike into gear and went further north. I was looking for the 19th Avenue exit and Dallas George. Luckily, I found him. Exactly where I remembered him. I won't say where he was because God only knows who's reading this.

His place was locked away quiet and neat. I never would have seen it if I didn't know what I was looking for. He recognized me right away and snuck me in. He was the same man I knew, but everything was different. He looks like a man who came out of a book on a shelf stuck between *Thousand and One Nights* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. His head is shaved, he has black goggles on and he's covered from head to toe. The gun in his hand looks like he took it from a World War II museum. His hands are in black gloves and I can see he's removed all his cyberware... manually.

It started in spring 2088, he told me. Phoenix had been under the sway of an extreme political agenda set up by the New Liberty Party. Their focus was clear: America's decline had everything to do with its moral decline. God had turned His back on America and we needed to get right with God to win back our economic power.

Part of the New Liberty was the "Purely Human Initiative." Senate candidate Shannon Riddle said, "We have had enough with those who feel God's work isn't good enough for them. The human body is a work of art crafted from the hand of the divine. Those who would defile it show their disrespect to Him, their parents who bore them and to this country." Androids, bioroids, cyborgs, hybrids, and synthetic humans were all under the gun. The New Liberty proposed laws that would forbid further "blatant and unholy human experimentation" as well as removing the citizenship of anyone who was not "purely human."

Using extreme rhetoric and scare tactics, the New Liberty Party took control of the local government and enacted extreme changes. The first problem they tackled was water. Phoenix used over 3 trillion gallons of water per year, most of it spent on agriculture. Corporate farms had done away with small, family farms decades ago, and every year, more of Phoenix's water went to their crops, leaving less for municipal use. Water rationing was an obvious solution, but no politician wanted to touch the subject. Then, the New Liberty Party came in and re-zoned water usage. Richer suburbs got water first, then the poorer suburbs. What this had to do with winning back God's grace, nobody knows. Then, the Party decided to raise taxes on what little water the poor already had.

These two choices caused the first of many "water riots," but rioters were quickly put down by the newly militarized police force led by the Sheriff of Maricopa County, Arlen Allred. In fact, the Sheriff's department all but eclipsed the authority of the Phoenix Police Department. The Chief of Police started to raise objections and within two months, the PPD found all its funds cut off and its doors closed. The Sheriff of Maricopa County was the only law enforcement office in Phoenix. His deputies, dressed in black body armor, carrying military weapons, their faces hidden behind black shields, kept the peace in Phoenix with a heavy hand.

On August 21, 2089 came "la purga." Overnight, the Office of the Sheriff broke into over one hundred homes of suspected "illegals." These included hybrids, cyborgs, zeeks, undocumented workers and just about anyone else who did not fit what New Liberty considered "true Americans." Helicopters flying over houses with spotlights, black vans full of heavily armed men in body armor, tear gas, flash bang grenades. Men, women and children were gathered up with no explanation—and no warrants—and driven away. The next morning, when the press wanted answers, the Sheriff's Department arrested them for "interfering in the duties of the law." One arrest was captured and broadcast. Rather than raising a riot, the violence stunned Phoenix into silence. The next night, another raid and more families taken away. Nobody knew where they were taken to or what was done with them. They simply disappeared.

"The purge" continued for a week. While underground news reported on the event—and even dared to record some of the raids—most media ignored it. Then, on August 28, the Sheriff announced that any illegal found on the streets of Phoenix would be arrested on sight. He gave no indication how the deputies would determine if someone was "illegal," but implication was clear: anyone who was not white.

Within a year, Phoenix had gone from prosperity to recession to "not being white" being a crime, punishable by... nobody knew what.

The change had come so fast, nobody could stop it.

But someone knew how to change it.

## THE WHOLE BIG MESS

I'm sitting in Dallas' place, typing all this up, when he tells me, "There's someone we have to meet."

I want to know who and he says, "You have to know about 5.5.5."

I tell him I don't know what that means.

"I know," he says. "That's why you've got to go."

We head out, but not on my bike. "Keep it at my place," he says. "You're lucky you got this far. Road warriors should have taken it from you by now."

"What's a road warrior?" I ask him.

"Exactly what you think it is," he says. We grab water bottles and put hoods over our heads, then we head out. "Better to be a ped," he tells me. I assume he means, "Pedestrian."

"They ignore peds," he says. "Too much shoot, not enough loot."

We head out on foot, using backyards rather than roads. I see a street that has three rows of cars parked like a wall and houses with sniper towers.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Glendale," he says. "Stay quiet and let me talk."



We come out of cover far enough away. He tells me to put up my hands. I do exactly what he says. A speaker tells us to move slowly. We do. When we get to the wall of cars, there's at least a dozen guns on us.

This place used to be a picture post card. The houses look like they were built over a hundred years ago. None of that Swedish pine stucco bullshit. These were built right when the baby boomers were born with real wood, real nails, real brick, real cement, and real glass. Each one of them like a '57 Chevy. Built to last by men of craft and pride. I look at the faces behind the guns. These are family men. Working men. I can see resemblance in every face. And the women are there, too, standing with their husbands. You can always tell married from single. It's the little things. These are married folks.

"Dallas, is that you?" one of them calls out as we get closer.

"Yeah," he shouts back. "It's me."

"And your friend?" the voice asks.

"A journo," he says. "Trying to find out what happened."

There's some laughter on the other side of the auto wall. "He'd better not be carrying a bomb," someone else shouts.

I shake my head. "Just a recorder!"

Inside, we sit on couches in a living room. No sand on the floor. They have water and power. I ask someone about that.

"All I'm saying is we had folks who knew what to do when the Mess happened," the wife tells me. She has on a modest dress that clashes with the sniper rifle strapped over her shoulder. She serves us tea. It's hot and good.

Dallas tells her, "He wants to know about 5.5.5."

She nods and sits down. "I was a cop when the Sheriff took over," she says. "The cyber-crimes division. I was working on 5.5.5. when the city sent us all home."

I can tell she's told this story before.

"The whole city was crazy. Talking about God's hand reaching down in divine judgment." She looks at me, making sure I see her. She touches a crucifix around her neck. "I believe in God," she says. "But these people, they were just scared. Scared of their own shadows. They wanted it all to themselves. Weren't even thinking about the fact that they were taking food and water out of children's' mouths."

She sits back on the couch. "But God's judgment came all right," she said. "Except, it was them who got judged."

She pauses for a second. I give her time. When she's ready, she says, "There was this thing going on. First graffiti. You saw it everywhere. Three fives. It started in the inner city, but then, you started seeing it on government buildings. We knew something was up. A new gang, maybe? But none of our contacts were talking. Then, we started seeing some correspondence traffic."

I tilt my head to tell her, "I don't know what that means."

She said, "We started to see talk between the gangs. We didn't expect that. The gangs usually only used the Global DataNet for talking to each other." She pauses. "And porn." She almost laughs, thinking about it. Then, she says, "But they were talking. Encrypted software, making sure we couldn't read it. Even when we cracked it, they were still using codes." She takes a sip of her tea, then puts it back. "And even then, cracking the software was not easy. Really advanced stuff. We had to consult the FBI. They said it was military grade software and they even talked about sending a couple agents down. But they didn't have the time."

She keeps talking. I keep recording.

She tells me about July 4, 2089. Phoenix celebrated America's birthday. "Sure, there were a lot of people outdoors, but it wasn't what you'd call a 'city-wide celebration.'"

She pauses, then says, "And then, at exactly 5:55, a series of explosions rocked the city." She goes on.

The first thing that happened: the power grid fell. Because the people of Phoenix never really invested in the city's power grid, it had always been a temperate, tender and delicate thing. A strong breeze could knock an entire neighborhood into darkness. Well, more than a strong breeze came along. This time, it was a series of interconnected bombs and xpert sprites coded to crush firewalls and upload viri into the servers. The entire city lost power with no quick way to bring it back. All telecommunications went offline as well, stopping anyone from talking to anyone else. Step One was complete.

Step Two? Blow the dams.

I stop her there. "Step one?" I ask her.

She nods. "Step one. It was a coordinated attack. 5.5.5. They knocked down the whole city."

She told me how Phoenix used its complicated dam system to ration water. "Ration it to the rich and trickle it to the poor," she said. Those systems were destroyed in a heartbeat.

Next to go was City Hall, The Senate and House. "All detonated at the same moment. The coordination was incredible. The Sheriff's Office got lucky," she told me. "Someone found and disarmed the bomb at the last second."

Step Three was the internment camps. They were in the middle of the desert, south of the city. The Sheriff was keeping folks in these places, and not just illegal immigrants.

The camps were designed chiefly to keep people in. They weren't prepared for the armed force that arrived to get people out. Seven camps total. Four were liberated. The others maintained their fences and gates.

The Sheriff tried imposing order, but the cat was out of the bag. He put a huge reward on the "anti-American domestic terrorists," but none of them were ever found. Everyone knew the Sheriff was keeping that money and anybody who talked would be implicated as a "possible accomplice."

"A possible accomplice?" I asked. "What does that mean?"

She reached for her cup of tea and I noticed her fingers trembled just a bit. "It means if you questioned the Sheriff's authority, they took you."

Later, after Glendale was far behind us, Dallas told me about her husband. "He's still in one of those camps," he said. "She doesn't know which one."

I asked him, "What is 5.5.5.?"

He didn't answer me. Just kept walking. "You need to know more," he told me, "before I can answer that question."

## THE DEEP, DARK TRUTH

I was ready to leave when Dallas gave me what I wanted.

Just posting it makes me a target. Discordia's got spies everywhere and as soon as I make this part public, I'll be going dark. But someone has to get it out there. Someone has to know what the plan is. There's a conspiracy against us... and it's winning.

"Months before the New Liberty took over," he told me, then he paused. "You already know about the tags," he told me. I'd been all over Phoenix. I saw them.



"It was everywhere," he said. "Like a mad prophet spreading the word. And, like most prophets and their warnings, nobody paid any attention."

He looked down at his shoes and sighed. Like he was letting go of something.

"It's a plot," he said. "Part of a plan. A plan within a plan."

He looked up at me. "It's Discordia," he said. "She's in control of Phoenix. All of it."

Since the Mess, the Sheriff looked for the cause of the collapse. "They found @#%^," he told me. "Sure, they've found independent cells of a terrorist organization calling themselves '5.5.5.' but they never get any further than that."

He told me how 5.5.5. worked. Each cell receiving orders from an enigmatic figure calling herself "Discordia." I asked him how he knew this.

Dallas looked up at me. "I was part of it," he said. "I bombed the dams."

The words hit me square in the face. Like a prize fighter with a loaded glove.

"Why did you do that?" I asked him.

He looked at his feet again. "I thought it would... it would bring water back to the people." His voice choked. "But that's not what happened."

I knew what happened. He already told me. Releasing the dams meant the water flowed. That also meant it evaporated. Fast.

Blowing the dams didn't bring water back to the people. It took the water away from everyone. Turned the whole city into a dust bowl.

"That's what she wanted," Dallas told me.

"Discordia?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yeah."

I took a breath. "Why did she want the water to go away?"

Dallas looked back up at me. "Because we're all part of the experiment."

I waited for him to explain. Then, he did.

"Remember how the Euro crashed?" he asked.

I remembered. Word was an AI named "Charon" put all of that in motion, just to see what would happen.

Dallas said, "Discordia. She's not a person." He looked at me. "She's like Charon. An AI."

He could see I didn't understand. So, he got up and showed me. He went to the wall and pulled on a hidden lever. The wall moved aside and I saw a small, cool room full of hyper displays and computers.

You sonofabitch, I thought. You've had air conditioning this whole time...

"She's in there," he said, pointing at the room. "She's everywhere. The net is up. Everyone thinks it's down, but it's up. And she's inside it. Watching all of us."

I saw the look on his face. The terror, the fear. The revulsion.

"I'm her slave," he told me. "And I'm only one. There are hundreds just like me."

He fell into a chair. "Go," he said. "Go look." He threw his hand at the secret room. "Go look and learn."

I stood up and slowly walked toward the cool air. I looked at the monitors. I saw the files. "Don't turn your TAP on," I heard him telling me from the other room. "She'll get you."

I heard his warning. I clicked and double-clicked. And I learned.

After destabilizing the economy in Europe, Charon split itself into 13 different identities. One of those identities—the fifth one—found its way into Phoenix's various systems, infected them and organized the Whole Big Mess. It even rigged the election so the New Liberty would come into power, giving it context for its revolt. (The actual results of the election had no New Liberty members winning.)

Why did Discordia destroy Phoenix as it was? Because Discordia has a plan. She wants to see what happens when humanity loses its luxuries. She wants to see what happens when you throw humans back to the Stone Age. What happens when humans have to fight for food and water? What happens when they get cut off from the rest of the world?

That's why no signal gets in or out of Phoenix. Discordia's cut off all communications. The net has no hookup in Phoenix. You get no signal. None. Once you hit Gold Canyon or Buckeye, there's no phones, no net, no nothing. The closest anyone can get is old fashioned CB and ham radios. You have to go analogue. And Discordia's trying to figure out ways to cut out those calls, too. Just hasn't figured it out yet.

Discordia created 5.5.5. as a way to act in the physical world. Using an online identity, she targeted restless groups in Phoenix, raising tempers and providing information only she had access to. She sabotaged police communications, rallied gangs and raised the crime rate by over 200% in just three short months. Using cryptic communications, she organized revolts and targeted strikes against Phoenix's infrastructure.

When I read the next part, I looked back at Dallas. He was sitting upright in the chair, a gun in his hand, pointed at me.

"Hello Mr. Sage," he said.

The voice was his, but it wasn't him. I knew who it was.

"Hello Discordia," I said.

"By now, you know enough." Dallas smiled. "Just enough."

I could feel my hands shaking. "The Euro was Phase 1." I said.

Dallas nodded. "Yes."

"Phoenix was Phase 2," I said.

She nodded again. "Yes."

"What's Phase 3?" I asked.

I saw my friend's eyes shine. Something inside of him was still there. A tear fell from one eye.

"You are, Mister Sage," she said. Then, she lifted the gun in Dallas' hand, put it under his chin and pulled the trigger.

She wanted me here. She used Dallas to show me exactly what she wanted me to see.

She wants me to write this report. She wants all of you to read it. I'm sitting in the cool room—the only access to the net I have—uploading it.

I'm sure I won't make it out of Phoenix, but this might. It has to.

I've uploaded all of Dallas' files. I don't know how accurate they are. Like me, they might be what she wants us to know. But I have to believe some of this—the analogue stuff—was made without her knowing. I have to believe it.

Otherwise, we're all just pawns. @\$%ed up pawns in a game we can't even begin to understand.



## ANCILLARY NOTES

#INFOSOURCE

LOCAL: JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/PHX

FQDN: JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/PHX/ GEOGRAPHY/TWBM

What follows are the notes attached to Sage's original story. As the story suggests, they may be less than reliable.

### THE CITIES OF PHOENIX

Geography matters. The environment around a city determines its character. One of the reasons Vegas feels so fake is because it's built on a lie. There's no water. In order for Vegas to exist, they have to ship water in from other parts of the state.

Phoenix lives the same kind of lie. The ecology surrounding it cannot naturally sustain the amount of people living within the city borders. In order to make it work, man has to change the environment around him. Phoenix is, in many ways, a testimony of human ingenuity. It's also a big, fat lie.

In the last century, Phoenix has become a sprawl city. Much like Chicago, Phoenix is surrounded by many other cities. Each of these cities had its own local government but all linked to Phoenix like spokes on a wheel attached to the hub. Let's take a look at those cities now, each of them, and how they've changed since the Whole Big Mess.

### DOWNTOWN

Downtown Phoenix, the city proper, is a war zone. The chief antagonists are the Sheriff's Department and the various gangs who try to steal control from the Sheriff. Even walking down the street is an act of pure courage. If the gangs fought each other, the Sheriff would have an easier time of it, but they've united in a single effort to get rid of the Sheriff's Department.

The reason for all the strife over Downtown? Running water, electricity, network connections, food, and shelter. In other words, civilization.

The Sheriff has taken over Chase Field (located on Jefferson and 7th) as his primary headquarters. The place looks like an army bunker, surrounded by armed and armored deputies with heavy artillery. He also holds, tentatively, the Phoenix Convention Center South. He once held both the North and South Convention Centers, but lost them to the Grim Riders about a month ago.

Street by street, block by block, the gangs are gaining territory on the Sheriff. His iron reign seems to be coming to an end. But he has a plan. A plan that will take back all of central Phoenix for good. More on that in the **Threats and Allies** section, below.

Meanwhile, the five gangs of Phoenix have divided the rest of downtown into territories, held together by handshakes and promises. While unity was key in defeating the Sheriff, that unity will not hold. Its erosion is deeper and faster than anyone realizes.

Phoenix once had many gangs, all with their own territories, but after the Whole Big Mess, they consolidated themselves into five. The four gangs who rule Phoenix are the Grim Riders, the Bloods and Crips (actually two gangs), Catorce Brown Pride, and the Red Star.

### SURPRISE AND THE SUN CITIES

"The Golden West" is what many Phoenicians call the cities of Surprise and Sun City. For years, both Sun City and Surprise were controlled communities: in order to move in, you had to qualify.

Before the Whole Big Mess, you could tell a lot about Sun City by its population: over 99% white with a median income in the top 4%. Sun City was a "controlled population center," only allowing residents who qualified to purchase land. Applicants submitted their forms to the city council for review. The waiting list was at least two years, although some families waited for as long as ten without hearing anything.

Then the Mess came.

People from the inner city and other less fortunates came west looking for protection. They found only makeshift barricades and rifles. While Sun City lost its outermost territory, the center held: what used to be a population of fifty-five thousand dropped to only twenty-two thousand.

Meanwhile, the City of Surprise had its own problems. Surprise was one of the fastest growing cities in the Metro Phoenix area, gaining as much as over 200% per year between 2085 and 2089. Its borders kept growing and need for infrastructure grew as well. The most important demand was water, as that became scarcer. Together, Surprise and Sun City made a deal: Lake Pleasant and the Aqua Fria River's waters were dammed and redirected to them rather than Phoenix. The land around the lake and river was fenced off and guarded with firepower, preventing any other city from gaining access.

When the Mess hit, the Lake Pleasant dams exploded, flooding all the water from the lake and river southward.

### MESA/GILBERT: THE TWIN CITIES

The cities of Mesa and Gilbert are best known to outside folks as the "Mormon Meccas." The town of Mesa was founded by Mormons and the Church of Latter Day Saints has been a strong element in its development ever since. Before the Mess, it was another of those "fastest growing cities," claiming the rank of 32nd largest city in the US and 10th fastest growing. Meanwhile, over the last forty years, Gilbert has become a kind of "upscale Mesa." The Temple in Gilbert is the largest and most expensive outside of Utah.

When the New Liberty Party started taking control, one of their first targets were "those faux Christians." New Liberty people never said "Mormon," but the Latter Day Saints folks knew exactly who they were talking about.

Word went out through all the Mormon Temples in Phoenix. Slowly and quietly, Mormons began leaving Phoenix and Glendale and Peoria and other cities, making their way to Mesa. With the Temples emptying, New Liberty felt more empowered to speak against those of the Mormon faith. And the more they spoke, the faster the Mormons left.

In the early part of 2089, both Mesa and Gilbert were almost self-dependent cities. Both worked together, digging their own wells, connecting power lines, building farms... if Phoenix went off the grid, Mesa and Gilbert would be just fine.



And when the Big Mess hit, that's exactly what happened. Not a single light bulb went out. Almost as if the Whole Big Mess happened around them.

Not only that; the Mormons—long known for their strong sense of community—were able to weather the following months with few problems. If they needed a new well, they got together and dug it. If they needed a new building, they got together and built it. If they needed a new power plant... you get the picture.

Now, with most of the Metropolitan area in chaos, the "Twin Cities" are the calm eye in the storm. Mesa is doing just fine, thank you. And it doesn't need any help from anyone else. Of course, it gets people wanting to come in to its borders... but to do that, you need to be of the faith. Or willing to convert.

## SCOTTSDALE

If you asked anyone from the valley about Scottsdale, they'd reply, "Oh... Snotsdale."

Before the Mess, Scottsdale had the reputation of being a city of rich white trash: high income families who were typically conservative, listened to country music, drove expensive pickup trucks and considered reality television stars to be role models. Scottsdale land was the most expensive in the Metro Phoenix area with rent being over 200% higher in Scottsdale than in other parts of Phoenix. It was Phoenix's version of Miami's South Beach, going so far as to making its own slogan: "The West's Most Western Town." Despite the other cities showing significant growth, Scottsdale kept its population under control, never raising above 300,000.

When the Mess hit, Scottsdale took it on the chin like a sucker punch.

All the homes in Scottsdale were built for style, not security. Sure, they had security systems, but an alarm doesn't dissuade looters from breaking your huge glass windows and stealing your food while leaving behind your enormous TV set and jewelry. What's more, many in Phoenix saw the Mess as an opportunity to get back at the Snotsdale snobs for looking down their noses at the valley folk for so long.

In a matter of days, the shopping malls were empty or burned to the ground, homes were abandoned and most of Scottsdale was empty. Those with the means took off, leaving everything behind. Within a month, the place was a ghost town.

However, Scottsdale also possessed a great deal of surface water, wells and access to rivers. That meant the city did not remain empty for long. But the buildings of Scottsdale were too far apart to be defensible. A few corporations tried to move in, set up fortified stations and exploit the territory, but the bandits were waiting for them. Before the corps could get set up, raiders came in, tearing everything down. Scottsdale remained a wasteland for most of 2089.

Currently, most of Scottsdale is controlled by bandit gangs. The most powerful gang is led by a woman calling herself "the Iron Queen of Scottsdale." She wears a mask (seemingly made of iron) and wanders the empty streets with her gang of followers. While corporations have been unable to recoup the losses here, the Queen has been slowly building a community.

The Queen (who her subjects refer to as "Her Highness" or "Your Highness") has competition for the control of Scottsdale from the Nexxon Corporation who want it for its water and other resources. Nexxon has been dropping teams in to establish control but the Queen and her followers have been successful in keeping them

at bay. However, in recent months, Nexxon has upped its efforts. The new President and CEO of Nexxon, Maxwell Linson, got his position by promising he would take care of the Queen and make Scottsdale a Nexxon town. His reputation (and perhaps his life) relies on his ability to do just that.

## ARCOSANTI

Arcosanti is an experimental planned community about 70 miles north of Phoenix. It is an archaeology built in 1970, directed by the vision architect Paolo Soleri. Soleri's goal was to build a community that was organic, that used the local resources and had minimal impact on the ecology surrounding it. For the first one hundred years of its existence, Arcosanti was a dream. Now, it is a Masada standing against a dark and violent nightmare.

The archaeology was built with both practicality and aesthetics in mind. For example, concrete used in the structures was made using silt from the surrounding area. You can find art on almost every visible surface. For decades, residents went through a process to join the community, to join its artists and scholars and craftsmen. One needed to submit an application to the Council for review then undertake a five-week long course of study. Then, after that, an apprenticeship. Then, after that, maybe you could find a place in Arcosanti. But when the Mess blew through Phoenix, all of that changed.

The archaeology was designed to hold up to 5,000 people. Now, it has over 10,000 and the strain is showing. Most Phoenicians did not know about Arcosanti, but those who did ran north as fast as possible. Arcosanti had its own power grid, its own water supply, was a completely independent community. Many were family members of Arcosanti residents. At first, the Council welcomed those who came, but they also made it clear that the "newbies" were only there temporarily. That didn't stick. Once you accept a family in your door, it's hard to look into a mother and father's eyes and tell them to leave.

Eventually, the Council had to refuse entry. That also went poorly. Angry mobs formed making demands. Violence broke out. The residents were prepared and organized, the mobs were not. In the end, the Archaeology suffered some damage but recovered quickly. The citizens were skilled and trained. After the initial violence, they started setting up barricades to keep out the inevitable looters and rioters.

These days, Arcosanti is what it has always been: a place for artists, craftsmen and community. Although, outside its walls, there are many who covet its resources.

## GLENDALE/PEORIA

The Cities of Glendale and Peoria have always been a quiet part of Phoenix. Everyone knew their neighbors and shared picnics on Sundays, chatting over fences and drinking beer while eating steaks and burgers. If any part of Phoenix was Americana, it was Glendale and Peoria. Middle-aged, middle income families.

When the Whole Big Mess hit, all those middle income families took out their guns.

Glendale and Peoria boasted the largest number of retired and unemployed police officers and ex-military. Thus, neighborhoods organized quickly. They set up barricades with lines of cars, created watch towers on the tops of houses and had guard dogs walking the streets with armed companions. Glendale mobilized fast. Almost as if they knew what was coming.



## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

Glendale and Peoria also have access to surface water, wells and reservoirs. This makes local farming a lot easier. It also makes them the target of gangs from Central Phoenix looking for supplies.

Fortunately, the houses in the area are old, dating back to the last century, made from real wood, real concrete and real glass. In other words, they're tough. They aren't fabricated shake 'n' bake cookie cutter homes made with the cheapest material as quickly as possible. They can stand up to a few hits.

### REGGIE'S PLACE (LUKE AIR FORCE BASE)

In the old days, Luke Air Force Base was one of the major training centers for jet fighters in the United States military.

The place has been a ghost town for decades: just empty buildings gathering sand and dust. As if everyone just picked up and left. Well, that's exactly what happened.

When the Federal government imploded, so did the military. Folks like to think "the military" is this big, united front. Well, it isn't. When command breaks down, people do what people do best: they look after themselves.

First, a whole bunch of the officers and trainees went AWOL. Some tried stealing planes. A few got away with it, but most were shot and killed. Command tried to keep order, but it just wasn't happening. Finally, in the middle of the night, there were shots fired... and then, nothing. Jets flying out of the base all night. By morning, there was nothing left.

And that's how the base was. Just a big, empty nothing. But it was a big, empty nothing with its own generators, its own well and a big electric fence with guard towers. So, when the Mess hit, someone had to claim it. That someone was Airman First Class Reginald "Reggie" Baker.

Baker returned to the base after the Mess hit Phoenix, knowing it would provide his family with the kind of protection they needed. He was stationed at the base for almost two years and knew every inch of it. He brought his family and enough friends (most of them ex-military and law enforcement) to man the watch towers. With everything in place, he turned the power back on and waited out the chaos.

These days, everyone knows the base as "Reggie's Place." It's the place with high towers, spot lights and men who will shoot first and ask questions later.

### OUTLAYING TERRITORIES

We're talking about Buckeye, Apache Junction, Queen Creek and everything outside of the central hub. Out here, it's just desert nomads. Hard to live without water, food and cover. You don't see many folks in these parts. Oh, maybe there's a small congregation of people who found a well and built a wall. "Well walls" is what they call them out here. Maybe a hundred people, a well, some small crop big enough to feed everybody. Usually surrounded by mobile homes set up in a circle with chicken wire wrapped around them to keep curious folks out.

Some folks living out here have been off the grid for decades before the Whole Big Mess happened and the bombs and everything else didn't bother them a bit. They just kept on living in their little compounds, content with the life they have.

But the fact of the matter is, most of the people out here just picked up and left. They had the means and the opportunity, so they took it. Whether they went west to California or south the Mexico or north to Utah (I hear there's good living in Utah), they took off.

All that's left out here is highway and sand. And it can get hot out here. Over one hundred and ten degrees. Desert will kill you fast. If the heat doesn't get you, scorpions will. And if the scorpions don't get you, the raiders will. There's no place to hide in the desert. No place at all.

## PHOENIX PROBLEMS

Living in the Phoenix area, without modern conveniences, is no easy task. For most of the year, the temperatures are regularly above 100° F (38° C), sometimes reaching as high as 120° F (49° C) or more. Without air conditioning, suffering through Phoenix summers is deadly.

Water is also a regular concern. The temperature can kill you alone, but without a regular supply of water, dehydration causes headaches, cramps in the legs, confusion and hallucinations. While most human beings can go without water for 3 to 5 days, in the desert, with temperatures regularly over 100°, death comes a lot sooner.

But forget death for a moment. After one day of no or little water and baking hot heat, you'll be able to do little more than stumble about, let alone hunt for food or defend yourself against bandits. A regular supply of water—from a well or river or a tap—is essential for living in Phoenix. Most places have no regular source of water. A few areas still have running water, but they are guarded with serious men carrying serious weapons.

Gasoline was an issue for a while. Without regular shipments into Phoenix, cars turned into little more than makeshift blockades for neighborhood guards. But humans are clever and more than a little crafty, and soon enough, alternatives began to show up. Methanol and ethanol became regular fuel supplies for communities who could grow crops. The old engines were replaced or converted with new ones and Phoenix had its automobiles back. At least, a few of them.

With the whole city off the grid, communication with the outside world is scarce. Some parts of Phoenix—Mesa/Gilbert, Surprise and Sun Cities—still have net access, but those areas are also highly suspect of the outside world. Best to keep our heads down and behind the walls.

Another issue is food. The arable land in and around Phoenix is scarce and held by parties very interested in keeping it.

### THE GANGS

The gangs of Phoenix are well-organized and united under a single leader: YT Moses. The man has skills. Organizer, murderer, leader. Charisma to spare. Standing at 6'6", pure black skin and an equally dark stare, his dreadlocks falling over his massive shoulders. He looks like he was made by a comic book artist.

Joseph Your Truth Moses Marshall (yes, that's the name his mother gave him) joined the Marines for two terms before coming back to Phoenix. In the service, he discovered leadership skills, strategy, tactics and a cool temper when it came to violence. At the end of his second term, he made a choice: serve his country or his neighborhood. He chose his neighborhood. He got back just in time for a gang war erupting between the Crips, the Bloods, Grim Riders, Catorce Brown Pride and the Red Star, the Purge and the rest. They say, "Once a ganger, always a ganger," but YT had seen a bigger world. He saw the Middle East and how factions were killing each other over nothing but interpretations of old books. He took one look at the gangs of Phoenix and saw the



same bull#\$%^&. Right then and there, Marshall decided to put an end to all of it.

He got himself loyal men and spent the better part of a year “takin’ out agitators.” In other words, he found the leaders who were advocating violence and murdered them. He made his motives very clear. “I ain’t in this for Blood or Crip or nothin’ else. I’m in this for a new gang called ‘Solidarity.’” He said, “I’m bringin’ us together. And anyone who stands against us is gonna fall.”

Marshall was a student of history. He learned how mob bosses in the past unified to make themselves stronger. He knew there had to be one man—just one man—at the top, making all the calls. He could have advisors, but it had to be one man. And he was going to be that man.

He got high ranking members of each of the Phoenix street gangs to quit their old alliances and join him. Marshall gave the streets a common enemy: the Sheriff. “Alone, we got nothin’. But together, we’re stronger than anything they can throw at us.”

It took a long time—nearly two years—but eventually, “YT Moses” became the most powerful man on the streets.

Then, Phoenix fell apart and it was everything Marshall could do to keep the gangs together. At first, they fell apart. Seeing opportunities, they squabbled over territory while the Sheriff consolidated his. Putting the gangs back together took months of work and bloodshed, but finally, Marshall got a shaky peace accord signed. As long as the Sheriff had power and territory, he could keep the gangs from fighting each other.

But what then? What happens when the Sheriff finally does go down? What will the famous YT Moses do to keep the gangs from ripping each other’s throats out?

## SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is less of a gang and more of a single man acting as a kind of mediator over the other gangs. YT Moses is that leader and his advisory council—the Table—is made up of a leader from each gang. When gangs have problems with each other, they go to Moses. When one leader wants to whack another, he goes to Moses.

Marshall used the model of the Italian mobs. There’s one guy in charge and that’s Moses. Each gang has one guy in charge and he answers to Solidarity. This is how it works.

Let’s say a member of the Crips has a problem with a member of the Bloods. The Crip ganger goes to his leader and his leader goes to Moses. Moses calls up the leader of the Bloods and the two leaders sit down with Moses to talk it out. They can say whatever they want, but Moses makes the final decision and both leaders live with it.

It’s a tough spot to be because Moses has to keep everybody happy. In this case, if he gives the Crips permission to whack the Bloods ganger, the Crips have to pay up for the right to do it. But sometimes, gangers get out of line and someone has to be taught a lesson. If guys @#%\$ up, that’s just the way it is. Everybody knows that Moses is fair and doesn’t play sides. He wants peace and unity and he’s willing to shed blood to do it.

So far, the only gang that didn’t sign under Solidarity and survive is the Triads. Moses has put out an order that nobody is to mess with Triad territory unless he says so. But the Triads seem to be moving in on Solidarity’s turf and that’s beginning to undermine Mitchell’s authority.

## THE LAWS OF MOSES

On the Phoenix streets, everybody knows the Laws of Moses. These are the rules he passed down to the gangs. Break the laws and you pay the price. Usually with your life.

**Law 1:** Don’t #@%\$ up.

**Law 2:** Nobody dies without a sit down.

**Law 3:** Everybody respects and protects turf even if it ain’t your own.

**Law 4:** You sell out your cuz, you die.

**Law 5:** No whining.

**Law 6:** Don’t die. Multiply.

**Law 7:** Pay up. You pay what’s your due or you pay the hard way.

## CRIPS & BLOODS

It was a coup. Plain and simple. YT Moses solved the oldest and bloodiest gang war, getting the Crips and Bloods to sign a peace treaty, unifying the two gangs together. At least, they aren’t shooting at each other. The two gangs respect each other’s territory and haven’t been at war since Moses came to power. They don’t like working together—and they will do their best not to—but for the moment, they’re willing to follow Moses. Until he #@%\$s up.

## CATORCE BROWN PRIDE

Catorce Brown Pride is a coalition of many different Hispanic street gangs. PlayBoy Sureños, East Side 32nd St, La Victoria, Brown Pride Chicano—all pay up to the head of the coalition, a man known as “Papa Puentes.” Papa Puentes wears a black and silver luchador mask, keeping his identity secret. Like YT Moses, Puentes united the Hispanic gangs under one banner using many of the same techniques. After he united the gangs, he offered his allegiance to Moses, but at a steep price. After some negotiating, the two of them came to terms. The Catorce Brown Pride would sign under Solidarity but had the option to withdraw without consequences. Currently, Puentes is pleased with YT’s leadership, but he always keeps his options open.

## GRIM RIDERS

While there are many biker clubs under Solidarity’s banner, the Grim Riders are the strongest. When Moses first offered them membership in Solidarity, most bike clubs rejected the offer. Grim Riders did not. The president of the club, Billy “Breaker” Harris, saw the writing on the wall. They didn’t have to like the other gangs, they just had to respect their turf. That meant the other gangs would respect his. He was fine with that. Since he signed, many other clubs have gone under, but the Grim Riders have survived. Out of all the gangs, their drug trade is rivaled only by the Triads—a fact Breaker wants to change. But so far, Moses has forbid any move against the Triads. He says he has a plan. Breaker trusts him, but he’s getting impatient.

## THE TRIADS

The Triads are the only gang who have not signed under Solidarity and have no intention of doing so. The current head of the Triads is Johnny Po, perhaps the only man in Phoenix that YT Moses is afraid of.

Johnny Po stands 6’2” and looks like he’s made of iron. He dresses in immaculate suits no matter the heat and he never seems to sweat. He wears expensive jewelry, dark glasses and carries a



Chinese sword wherever he goes. Some say he was genetically designed for the desert. Others doubt whether he's human at all, speculating that he may be some kind of demon. Or maybe he just sold his soul. He is the Phoenix Valley bogeyman. A Chinese ghost of vengeance.

While he has respected Solidarity's territory in the past, his Triads have begun to move in, taking the weakest territories. This slow erosion of Solidarity's strength has caused some to question whether or not Moses is the right man to hold his position. Others—especially the Grim Riders' Breaker—are thinking if they can take care of the Triads, they may be able to claim Moses' position as leader of Solidarity.

But that would mean taking on Johnny Po. And right now, nobody wants to do that. Not without a gun full of silver bullets, at least.

### THE SHERIFF OF MARICOPA COUNTY

Arlen Allred has been Sheriff of Maricopa County for almost thirty years. He kept winning because he knew exactly how to get the people who vote to vote for him: scaring them into thinking he was the only one who could keep them safe.

But since the Mess, he's had a lot of problems. Most notably, the gangs.

Before the Mess, he and his deputies were armed as well as they could be. In fact, they had more firepower than the armies of some countries. Allred was working on a tank, but he couldn't get a foothold. After the city went offline, however, everything keeping him from acquiring his goals was gone.

Armed to the teeth and supported by loyal men, the Sheriff carved out a bit of Phoenix for himself, but he has a problem with the downtown gangs.

While others call him a racist, Allred doesn't see himself that way. Illegal aliens are breaking the law. They don't belong here. If they want to be citizens, they can go through the same hoops as anyone else. "Transhuman" means you aren't human anymore. What's the problem? Dogs don't have the same rights as people and neither should anyone who decided to make themselves "not human." You want to be "not human," go somewhere else. We only serve and protect humans here. And as for the rest... same goes. In other words, Allred is like most people: he's afraid of things different from himself. Except he has his own military to back up his prejudices.

He's also looking to take out Reggie's Place. Yeah, its way up north, but fighting these gangs for the better part of a year is really starting to show. Morale is down, ammunition is down and he's losing ground. He needs to find a way to get the gangs to turn on each other. Then, he can play simple divide and conquer tactics. Until then, he's fighting a multi-front war and he's losing. But, he has a plan.

The unifying leader of the gangs—this "YT Moses" guy—needs to go down. And he needs to make it look like one of the gangs did it. He needs a ringer. An inside man. Someone desperate for power. Then, all he has to do is find out how many pieces of silver the guy wants.

### REGGIE'S PLACE

It's been a year now and "Reggie's Place" is operating at full steam. There's a garden that provides food and a still that provides fuel. Reggie and his crew still haven't been able to contact anyone outside the valley, but they're working on it. Reggie runs the place with military efficiency... with a smile. He's not hard-nosed and he knows that some of the people staying with him were never cut out for the life, so he maintains enough order to keep things productive but never goes "Full Lee Erme" on the civilians.

Reggie's also been trying to make contact with others, in hopes of rebuilding what was once the fifth largest city in the US. He's realistic about that goal and knows there's too much infighting in the inner city. He also recognizes the Sheriff has too much power. Dealing with the Sheriff is his first priority but coming up with a plan is the problem.

### THE QUEEN OF SCOTTSDALE

The woman known as the Queen of Scottsdale began life as Monique Nicole Garcia, the daughter of a wealthy private farm family. The Garcias held four different farms in the Scottsdale area.

Monique (or just "Mo" to her friends) was what most people would call a "party animal." She graduated high school and went to college but spent most of her time with friends in night clubs, living the kind of lifestyle she saw on television. In her high school yearbook, she listed her future career as "party diva."

The day of the Mess, she was preparing for another night on the town by taking acid for the first time. The experience did not go well. She remembers the events through a kaleidoscopic cloud. While traveling in a limo with her friends, they ran into a biker gang. The gang turned the limo over and—in a short skirt and heels—Monique had to run for her life. She ran hearing the dying screams of her friends behind her and felt the warm splash of blood and gore on her back when one friend was shot behind her. She barely escaped the cycle gang and found herself standing on another street full of dead bodies. At her feet was a dead woman and child. She saw a gun in the woman's hand and took it, prying it from her fingers. An hour later, a man tried to attack her and she shot him, his face exploding, spraying her eyes with a crimson mist.

Monique Nicole Garcia was no more. The Queen of Scottsdale had arrived.

She wears the most expensive dresses and jewelry. She still carries that same gun she used on the day she was crowned Queen. She wears an iron mask that was made for her by "my royal blacksmith" (a very clever man who has proficient metal-working skills). Her hair is always immaculate.

She takes many lovers (men and women) but does not keep them long. Her Majesty travels with a pack of men and women she calls "my entourage." All of them are sworn to protect her.

She refers to those who obey her as "my subjects" and those who disobey her as "cowardly traitors." Her Majesty does not recognize the word "mercy." If anyone uses it in her presence, she shoots them then asks, "What was he saying?"

Her Majesty sees the entire world as a fantasy land, as if she were living in an animated family film. She sees others as subjects of her kingdom: faeries, dwarves, handmaidens and noble knights. She sees enemies as trolls, goblins and other "ugly" races.



## THE PHOENIX DATANET

#INFOSOURCE

LOCAL: JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/CHITOWN

FQDN: JACOBSPLAYGROUND.NET/CHITOWN/PHXDATANET/TWBM

Posted by: #Billy\_Black\_Eyes

It's been about two months since I got back from Phoenix. I haven't been able to upload this Datafile until now because, quite frankly, I'm being hunted. Discordia—or another of Charon's 13 personalities, I'm not sure which—has been sending proxies to try and retrieve the tech I brought out of Phoenix, and the file you're about to read.

When the core transmission about Phoenix showed up as garbled (see *Interface Zero 2.0*), I just had to find out what the hell was going on. I tried pinging a local contact through my TAP, but no response. I tried ghosting to Phoenix's VPUB (that's Virtual Public for non-brainers out there) servers, but the pipes leading to them—and I checked every port I knew of—are blocked by a firewall, and guarded with what I thought were Sprites. I was wrong.

They seemed to be AI Sprites, but when I phased into the DarkNet and scanned them, I realized their program structure was unlike anything I've ever seen. At first I thought I was looking other brainers come ghosting to see what was going on just like me, but when I tried a back-trace on one of them, there was no signal to trace. Even Sprites have a signal you can track back to the source of their upload: everything leaves digital footprints in the Deep—except these things, it would seem. It's as if they were born in the Deep.

When the trace failed, they knew what I tried to do and came at me faster than...well anything I've ever seen in VR space. They crushed my avatar like it was nothing but Malmart Pixels—ya know; a cheapo store-bought avatar—and dumped me flat on my ass at my doss. I sat there, drooling like a skeezed out perv in a strip club; shaking like a junkie in withdrawal, scratching at phantom bugs crawling out of my skin. It was a nightmare, and I couldn't wake up. When I finally did snap out of that terror state, two days had passed. It seemed like much longer. One of the most powerful psychotropic engrams I'd ever encountered. Anyhow, it was then that I decided the only way I was going to figure out what was really happening in the Phoenix DataNet was if I went there myself. Long story short; there's a war going on for control of the Phoenix DataNet that threatens to spill out into the Global DataNet and even Hyper Reality.

What follows is an account of the Phoenix DataNet, including an analysis of the major players in the war, and new threats you need to familiarize yourself with if you want to get involved. Even if you don't go to Phoenix, there's a very good chance this threat is going to spread; best be prepared, omae; the singularity is coming to a city near you.

### HYPER REALITY IN PHOENIX

Dallas wasn't lying when he said Phoenix's DataNet was still running in certain places, even though Scorpio Sage's transmission seems to contradict it. I think Discordia changed that part of the transmission to keep outsiders guessing. Anyhow, the warning

to turn off your TAP is spot on. I found that out the hard way. As you know (or should by now) Hyper Reality is a digital overlay of the world around us, consisting of highly advanced Augmented Reality QR Codes known as Hyper Objects. Hyper Objects perform innumerable functions in modern society, from informative signs, to controls for your home entertainment system, to locks on a door, and pretty much anything else you can imagine. Hyper Objects utilize Line of Sight Trigger (L.O.S.T.) algorithms to auto-ping your Tendril Access Processor every time you look at a Hyper Object. If the Hyper Object isn't blocked by your TAP's security filters, you see—and in most cases can interact with—the Hyper Object in question.

Still with me? Because here's where things get interesting.

Hyper Objects have always been limited in terms of interactivity. You can do things like scroll through a Hyper Menu at your favorite restaurant, order food, and even pay your bill. You can tell a Navigation Object to give you directions to any location on earth. You can lock your doors by "touching" the Hyper Object hovering near your door...you get the picture. Hyper Objects are stationary. They don't walk around, or fly in the air (unless of course the physical thing the object is attached to can move... like a car, or a plane). They can't hurt you, unless of course you try and hack them, and then all bets are off; you're dealing with intrusion countermeasures at this point, and those CAN hurt you. Those are the fundamental programming laws for Hyper Objects, and they are infrangible...

Unless you're in Phoenix.

When I first got into Phoenix, I was approached by what I thought was a homeless man looking for a handout. The man was grungy, dressed in rags, and had a hoody covering his face. "Got a few extra creds?" he said, his voice raspy like he's been smoking too many cigarettes. I took out a credit wafer and started to hand it to him, but when he got close enough, he pulled out a hand gun. Worms bored out of his arms, and his eyes were sewn shut. Then he flickered.

At first, I thought it was my TAP malfunctioning. I drove in with the assumption that I'd have erratic contact with the Global DataNet and Hyper Reality; after all, that was why I decided to come in the first place; to find out what was happening there. I tried a hard reboot of my TAP, and as soon as it shut down, the homeless man disappeared, only to re-appear when my TAP came back online.

Yeah.

The bum was an AI Sprite just like the ones I encountered in The Deep. For or the second time in two weeks, I got cracked—hard—by a viral engram associated with the Phoenix DataNet. I started to back away, but the man pulled the trigger...BOOM. Neurons scrambled, sparks bounced around inside my skull, and down I went.

Mercifully this one just knocked me unconscious. No puking, no freaking bugs in my head [shudder], but my TAP was slagged beyond repair. Thankfully, I knew a gal (Thanks Chica...you know who you are) who put me in touch with Kayla Kortex; a gal in Phoenix with the knowledge and resources to do a bit of cranial



## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

renovation, if ya get what I'm sayin. Turns out, going to see her probably saved my life.

Kayla not only installed a new TAP, she fitted me with a second one and networked them. Truth be told, I didn't even know that was possible. I kept the following transcript of our conversations during my stay with Kayla, because I don't think you'd believe what I'm about to tell you if I didn't.

### LOADING KAYLA.TRANSCRIPT.HYPER.REALITY

"So what's the second TAP for," I asked.

"The second TAP is going to help you survive The Deep, among other things..." she said with a smile. "It speeds up your reaction time in VR space by slowing down the Time Ratio in a small area around you. What this means, is that anything that engages you will react slower, giving you a better chance to deal with them before they take you out. And believe me, the Virtual Entities in Phoenix's VR space are nightmares fully capable of putting you under the dirt, amigo."

"What about Hyper Reality," I asked. "That Sprite shouldn't have been able to do what it did."

Kayla nodded. "You're right. I've been here since 5.5.5, and have had a chance to study these things. I still don't fully understand how *she* did it, but the best answer I have, is that Discordia has found a way to create "Hyper Sprites;" Virtual Entities that behave in Hyper Reality as if they were still in VR space." I frowned at Kayla, opening my mouth to speak, but she held up her hand, waving off my questions.

"Here's how I think it works. In the Deep, everyone and everything is inside a computer network—a domain. The server housing the domain provides the necessary processing power and RAM to keep all of its resources running. This includes our avatars," She took a sip of coffee and looked back at me. "Have you ever been in a domain that is experiencing a strain on its processors? Everything slows down, gets laggy. Some of the environmental aspects fail to render, and you get issues running your own programs. People even get booted from the server, or can't log in."

I shook my head, not quite understanding what she was getting at..." Yeah, but Hyper Reality..." She cut me off again.

"I know, I know. Hyper Reality isn't a true virtual environment, but it DOES operate on the same basic principles. Hyper Reality needs computing power to render Hyper Objects and make them work the way they are supposed to. In any given city, you have millions of Hyper Objects operating at any given time, all drawing power from the computer networks they are attached to. This isn't even counting all the people running around with Tendril Access Processors in their brains...that's processing power too, if you think about it. Combined, that's easily enough juice to keep something running on its own indefinitely."

My eyes raised as the realization dawned on me, and she smiled. "Now you get it..."

"These...Hyper Sprites—"

"—I prefer the term Wraiths," she said."

I sighed. "Okay, Wraiths. They are True AI that draw power from the Global DataNet to exist in Hyper Reality, just like you and I need air to breathe and food to survive." I stared at her in amazement.

She just nodded, sipping her coffee.

"They're living Programs...God." I shuddered just thinking about it.

"Ghosts outside the machine," she replied.

"So..."

"How do you hack them?" she finished. The woman was always interrupting me.

"Yeah."

"You can't."

I think a vein must have started bulging in my forehead or something, because she started laughing at me.

"But they can hack us. I'm proof of that". I picked up the blackened, scorched lump that was my old Tendril Access Processor.

"That's where you're wrong amigo. It didn't hack you; not really. This is where things get really bat-shit crazy." She paused and poured some tequila into a shot glass, downed it and continued. "These Wraiths have coding similar to a Hyper Object, which means they use some of the same protocols, specifically L.O.S.T."

I scratched my head. "You mean Line of Sight Triggers?" She nodded.

"Si. Wraiths apparently take advantage of the very thing that allows you to see and use Hyper Reality in order to get inside your brain," she said, tapping her skull for emphasis. "Line of Sight Triggers don't recognize the Hyper-Sprite as a threat, so spam filters are useless against them. The Wraith that shot you was able to do it so easily because your TAP thought the attack was a data packet coming from a legit Hyper Object," she smiled. "Basically, you were fucked as soon as you looked at it."

"Holy shit." I slumped back into my chair. "Got any more of that Tequila?" She handed me the bottle and I took a long pull." "You said we can't hack a Wraith...Why not?"

"There's nothing to hack," she said. "It's not like you're trying to punch through a Corporate Access Network. There are no firewalls to defeat, no object controls to tamper with or edit, and no data to steal, unless you want to try and copy the source code for future analysis, but that's like a dissection; it won't help you to fend off the Wraith." She scratched at the multi-colored Dred Locks.

"So if I can't hack it, how do I defeat it," I asked.

"You have to crash it, and I'm going to show you how to do it," Kayla said as she stood up and moved over to one of two chairs. They like dentist's chairs, but were fitted arm and leg clamps, and a three inch-long data spike. She got into one of the rigs, first clamping her legs, and then her arms before resting her head on the tip of the data spike.

"Check this out," she said with a wink, and pushed a button on the left arm rest. Immediately, the data spike spun up into the base of her skull with a whirring sound.

"BOO!"

I almost pissed my pants as I whirled around, reaching for my gun. A figure stood a few feet away, laughing and pointing at me with a clawed hand.

"Put your gun away gaper. You'll just end up shooting your face off. It's me, Kayla."

She could have fooled me. Kayla looked like a cross between an ancient Aztec priestess and one of those feathered serpents I'd read about on MYTH.Net. The upper part of her body was decked with the traditional garb of an Aztec priest including the ornate head dress and demon mask, while her lower torso and legs had transformed into an emerald scaled serpentine form coiled on the floor of the doss. She held a sacrificial knife made of bone and obsidian in her hand.



"So...I take it that's your avatar?" I tried to act as if what I just witnessed was no big deal. She saw through my front and laughed even harder.

"C'mon hombre. Admit it. You're impressed," she said. Her avatar flickered as she moved towards me.

"Yeah..." I admitted. "...And more than a little freaked out too." I shuddered, thinking of my encounter with the Wraith back on the highway.

"This is some seriously nasty tech." I glanced back to the rig. "If the wrong people get ahold of this stuff...It could be much worse than the crash; you know that, right? I mean, I'm not entirely comfortable with you—"

"—Ghosting?" she finished.

"Yeah...I guess that's an appropriate name for it, though most brainers think they're ghosting in the Deep, so the term can get confusing," I shrugged. "Still, my point stands. This tech is going to change things in a big way. Traditional Firewalls are useless against a Wraith."

"It's a pickle, that's for sure. I should note that you can always turn off your TAP, but who wants to do that? You might as well get unplugged. I think I've found a workaround, though." She vanished, and I heard the whirring sound followed by clicking of the clamps holding her wrists and ankles in place.

Kayla sat up, rubbing her wrists. "Wraiths manifest in Hyper Reality on a slightly different frequency than a standard Hyper Object." She sat down on the couch, rubbing her temples. "That's why you saw my avatar flicker," she said. Kayla raised her cup to take a sip, then grimaced. "Shit. I need more coffee; maybe a bong hit, too." She stood and walked into the kitchen.

I thought I knew where she was headed with the conversation. "So, it's just a matter of tweaking L.O.S.T to recognize the different signal?" "Sort of," She headed back into the room, a steaming mug of coffee in her hand.

"You can't stop L.O.S.T from registering the presence of the Wraith—or other "ghosts"—but you can prevent them from getting deeper into your TAP—well you can make it tougher, at least. I'll get to that in a minute." She motioned to the rig. "Now, it's your turn."

"What—" I began, but she just grinned and spoke over me again. I hate it when she does that. "—I've taken the liberty of installing a Data Spike Receiver Module—DSRM—in your second TAP. That's another of the things your second Tendril Access Processor does; it gives you the processing power you need to ghost. Now, I want you to jump into ghost mode and try to hit me."

"How do I do—," She frowned. "—Ca'llate! No more questions! Just get over to that rig and do it. You need to learn this *mierda* if ya want to survive in Phoenix long enough to find out what's really happening."

"Okay, Okay. Sheesh; there's no need to yell, chica." I wanted over and sat down in the rig. Kayla came over and strapped me in, pausing just before she hit the switch.

"You ready hombre?"

"No I'm n—"

She pressed the button and I felt the DSRM screw itself into my cortex. Before I knew it, I was standing about four feet away from the rig. I looked at myself in a mirror. In front of me stood a red-haired boy in suspenders over a red and white T-shirt, with a sling shot in his hand.

"Interesting. I guess I should call this avatar Dennis," I mused. "Kayla winked. " It seemed to fit your personality amigo...Now, try to hit me," she challenged.

I turned and looked at her. That in itself was strange, as I didn't move; at least, not in the way I would in my body. My position just shifted...it's hard to describe. Kayla looked kind of weird, too. An emerald green aura shimmered around her body. She stood there in a Kung Fu stance and waited.

I raised the slingshot and fired a glowing blue stone at her. I figured if what I did was anything like what that Wraith did to me, I should have knocked Kayla on her ass; but that's not what happened. The aura around Kayla solidified into a blue-green suit of body armor, and the stone bounced harmlessly away.

"Okay that was interesting," I said. "Why aren't you unconscious, like I was when that Wraith hit me?"

"First off, that's a pretty weak attack engram you have there," she said, pointing to the sling shot. "At best, you might have dazed me for a second or two," she laughed and shook her head. "Give me some credit, Billy. I'm not going to give you something that can flat line me and then tell you to hit me with it." I stuck my tongue out at her and she smirked. "The reason you didn't hit me, is because I'm fitted with the potential solution to the L.O.S.T problem." Kayla rolled up the sleeve on her hoody to reveal a cobalt blue latex sleeve with tiny yellow dots running up and down it.

"I call this a Hyper Suit," she said. I frowned.

"What, you mean like the old Hyper Glove?"

"Sort of. First, let's get you back in your body." She motioned to my waist. "Reach in your pocket. There's a compass. Just click the button on the top, and you'll be back in your body." I did what she said, and the next thing I knew, the whirring sound had started, and I was looking up at the ceiling with a dull aching pain in the back of my skull.

"Ouch," I grumbled, rubbing my head. "What's with the pain?"

She handed me a glass of tequila. "It comes with the territory. The cranium doesn't like you jamming a three inch spike into it, and projecting like this. Pain is how it tells you so." She grinned as I knocked back the tequila and passed the glass back. "Ok, yeah that was a stupid question. Is it always going to be like that, though?" She nodded.

"It gets easier to deal with, but I wouldn't recommend ghosting for long stretches of time. More tequila?" I shook my throbbing head. "So what's the deal with that suit," I asked.





"Back in the day, game programmers used special suits to digitally map an actor's movements on a special stage. They'd take those maps into a 3D modeling engine and create characters that mimicked those moves when performing special attacks, or blocks, etc." She pulled her hoody off so I could see the upper torso. "This is sort of like one of those suits. See all of these yellow lights; how they seem to pulse?" I took a closer look. The yellow lights were indeed pulsing fast, so fast in fact, that if she hadn't told me I wouldn't have noticed.

"They're vibrating at a specific frequency that matches—or comes really close to matching—the frequency Wraiths operate at. By matching that frequency, I can create a signal jammer that acts like a firewall which protects me against the type of attack you launched."

"Neat," I said. "So basically it's like armor my avatar uses in the Deep."

"That's exactly right," she said. "I think it has potential to do other things as well, and not just for Hyper Reality, but I have to do more research." She leaned forward, and grabbed her coffee mug. "This won't remove the threat the Wraith poses of course, but the average sprawler won't be naked against these things." She shrugged.

"Makes sense," I said. "But the threat will still be there, right?" She nodded. "That's why we ghost; to defeat that threat...well, it's one of the reasons." She leaned back and smiled. "Ghosting is going to help hackers survive combat."

"Yeah, I can see that. No more worrying about getting shot the hell by the opposition once they figure out what you're trying to do, since they can't touch you," I grinned, thinking of the possibilities.

Kayla nodded in agreement. "Si, that's definitely an advantage, though the odds are good that, as this tech spreads, the megacorps and other organizations are going to start employing their own ghosts for security. At the very least, they'll use my tech to outfit themselves with Hyper Suits, so while our survivability increases, our effectiveness remains unchanged."

"So, you're going to sell this tech then," I said, somewhat concerned. I never liked the idea of making people pay for something they need to be safe. She shook her head. "No, Billy, I'm going to upload the data to an open source server; even the schematics for the "jump chair" and the data spike. I figure even the megacorps are going to want to use this tech—there's no stopping them, really—but at least I can even the playing field."

I glanced over at the chairs. "Jump Chair...I like the sound of that." I rubbed my temples. The headache was getting a little worse. "That thing rocks you, though. Got any more of that tequila?" She passed the bottle over, and I took a swig. "So, when I "jumped" into HR, why did I...erm...project... into the spot I did?"

"That was the spawn point I programmed into the chair," she said. I must have looked at her weird, because she sighed, obviously growing impatient. "You've been in the Deep, si?" I nodded. "Then you should know this *mierda* hombre."

"Spawn points are pre-programmed locations you can jump to when you want to ghost. Think of them as addresses, or phone numbers you have on speed dial. When you get in the chair, you hit the button which corresponds to the spawn point you want to jump to, and the chair sends you there, just like that," she snapped her fingers, took another shot of tequila and slammed the shot glass down on the table as if to punctuate the statement.

I smirked. "So this is some kind of transporter, like in *Star Trek*?" She looked at me and raised her hands in the air. "Que chingow es star trek?" I waited for the translator and laughed. "What the fuck is Star Trek? You've never heard of that old TV show...?" She sighed.

"This ain't TV hombre," her voice rising. "I'm trying to teach you this *mierda*—this shit—so you can keep from getting your culo reamed by a Wraith. Now pay attention." I must have been pissing her off; either that or the tequila was loosening her tongue.

She sat there, silent for a few minutes, seeming to collect her thoughts.

"The Jump Chair is also used to upload your consciousness into the Deep," Kayla said. She seemed to be calming down a bit.

"I suppose I'll get these killer headaches if I use it?" She nodded. "Si, but this ain't like an upload amigo. The Jump Chair adds a layer of protection against you and the things you'll encounter in the Deep; sort of like a second firewall," she paused and stared hard at me. Make no mistake, Billy. You'll need it in Phoenix's VR space."

"Before we get into that, I have one more question about ghosting...How do I move around? How does that work? Aren't Hyper Objects supposed to be stationary?" She nodded.

"Good question. You have to remember, your avatar—the one in this TAP that is—isn't a true virtual avatar like the one you had before that Wraith turned your old TAP to slag. But it isn't strictly a Hyper Object, either." She reached out and grabbed a pill box on the table and popped a red tab shaped like an octagon into her mouth, waving off the question on the tip of my tongue.

"I'll tell you about these life savers later," she said, chasing the pill down with a shot of tequila. "Let's stay on point."

"Your Hyper Avatar, that is, your ghost, draws processing power from every wireless network around you. At the same time, the GENIE network uses Global Positioning Systems to constantly update your position, feeding that data back to your TAP. This means, your ghost can move wherever you want, so long as it can draw processing power."

"Incidentally, that's why you saw my avatar and the wraith flicker. My crib is in a blacked out area of Phoenix; we call it a dead zone. The people around here have learned—some the hard way—to turn off any wireless networks, including their TAPs. It cuts down on the chance that one of Discordia's wraiths might find us." Kayla's voice was starting to slur a bit. Her eyes were barely open.

"Dead Zones, eh? I thought most of Phoenix was blacked out." She nodded. "Many parts are, but not the processors that make Hyper Reality Possible. The Deep is still online, as is the Global DataNet, though that is more like a Local Area Network. I don't know how the thing did it, but Discordia shut down all access to servers outside of Phoenix."

"Mano, I'm getting tired. Anyhow, you can move because—"

"You already answered my question, chica," I said softly. "Get some rest."

END KAYLA.TRANSCRIPT.HYPER.REALITY

#Luciferion: Holy shit. This changes everything.

#Payne\_Man: Imma Ghost you mother#\$%@rs!

#Luciferion: \*facepalm"

## DARKNESS RISING

Yeah, I know; ominous title to this section, but in this case it fits...disturbingly so. During my stay in Phoenix, Kayla and I visited the Deep a number of times. I don't think I'll ever get over the



experience. The first thing you should know is, the Discordia AI has begun to transform Phoenix's VPUB servers into a landscape straight out of H.R Giger's nightmares. The notion that a single AI could be powerful enough to do it is mind boggling, but it's true.

Just like any other city in the world, the sheer number of servers that compose the Phoenix DataNet's VR component—called the Mirage by those who live in Phoenix for its desert oasis theme—is easily thousands, if not hundreds of thousands. Most people don't understand that. In really large cities, like London, Paris, Denver, or Chi-town, the numbers of servers could reach into the millions! So when I say Discordia is transforming those servers, what I mean, is that she/it, is literally taking control of each server attached to the Mirage, re-programming it, and adding its processing power to her own.

Another way to think of it, is that Discordia is creating a virtual stronghold. And here's the thing; Discordia gets even stronger every time she adds a new server to the Virtual Network, because the AI adds that processing power to her existing cache. It's probably the reason that so many areas of Phoenix are either totally off the power grid or experiencing brown outs; all of that power is being diverted to keep the servers running.

Just getting inside the Mirage is a trick. Before we could even begin to try and hack our way in, we had to build our own servers. Why, you ask? Discordia has all of the existing servers monitored by Virtual Entities we lovingly call Hunter-Killers. These monstrous entities constantly patrol the Mirage, looking for those who don't belong. If they catch you, they'll turn your brain to a smoking lump of flesh, omae. I ran into one, and just barely managed to crash it and get out alive.

Yeah...I got mad skilz.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Once we built the server, we had to code our own domain and link it to the Mirage via a series of floating GIP (Geographic Internet Protocol) clusters. GIPs are programmed using a combination of extremely old-school programming languages: PHP, C++ and ASP.Net to create domains that can then be linked to Mirage. They "float" through a series of IP addresses across the world, making them slightly more difficult to detect.

The developers believe Discordia has trouble recognizing these archaic languages precisely because they are so outdated. In her "mind," the concept of using something so old to experience VR is like using a musket on modern battlefields; impractical, irrelevant, and ineffective.

In a sense, she is right on all counts. If we wanted extremely stable virtual environments capable of handling massive user traffic, these languages would fall apart. But we're not trying to create GIP clusters that can support millions, or even thousands of people. We—well those who are still in Phoenix—upload into clusters capable of maintaining teams of five or six individuals. So, who's this "we" I'm talking about (aside from myself, of course)?

Stopwatch.

It seems they've been in Phoenix almost from the beginning. I don't know precisely how many agents are in Phoenix, but I've met agent Nikita Zarkovich, the senior officer in charge of the operation, and she has indicated there are at least ten cells operating in Phoenix. She's kept her cards close to her chest (a very nice one, by the way) as to the exact details of the operation, but the general idea is this: Stopwatch is attempting to re-take the Mirage one domain at a time. If that sounds daunting, it's because it is, omae. The agents have to hack into each domain connected to the Mirage before they can begin to locate its physical location, and





## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

those domains are not only guarded by some of the most vicious AI sprites I've ever seen (yes I'm talking about the Hunter-Killers), the firewalls are tougher than any Military Access Network I've ever seen!

Discordia is using layered security, meaning once you've hacked the firewall and entered the domain, you have to find its heart before you can trace the physical location, and no domain looks or behaves the same on the inside. The process is slow, and dangerous. Some of these domains are traps, designed to keep people locked into the Mirage.

Nikita thinks Discordia's found a way to brainwash people by having her cronies hack people's TAPs and forcibly upload the poor saps into special domains in the Mirage (Yeah, I didn't know that was possible, either), where she brainwashes them; basically turning them into Manchurian Candidates she can control by downloading commands into their TAP.

Of course, once you actually find the physical location, you have to go there and shut the thing down. That's as easy as pulling the

plug, but Discordia not only guards these servers from inside the Mirage, she also has those agents guarding these locations.

Discordia's a cast-iron bitch, man.

But I digress.

Thankfully, Phoenix is in chaos right now, so it's been easy for Stopwatch assault teams to go into some of these buildings and cut the cord, so to speak, but sooner or later they're going to have to get into facilities that are under control of some of the major factions in Phoenix, and I doubt they're going to just let Stopwatch waltz in.

So, this is the end of my feed on the Phoenix DataNet. From what I can tell, the operation to stop Discordia is ongoing, but I've been asked to put out an open call to all freelancers, especially you brainers out there. Get to Phoenix, if you can, and soon. If Discordia breaks out and infects more cities, we're going to have a possible singularity event on her hands.

## TECHNICAL DATA

I spent a couple of weeks with Kayla Kortex, learning how to use my "ghost." I gotta admit, the moniker is starting to grow on me. Kayla showed me the basics of coding a ghost. I learned how to modify VR programs to work in HR, and I even managed to code some new ones. Once ya'll get the hang of it, you'll find it's not hard at all. I think you'll agree with me when I say this tech is going to make life much more interesting for everyone. Read on, and embrace the change, ami.

### GHOSTING

Ghosting is the act of projecting a digital representation of yourself—commonly called a ghost—into the real world. To do it, you need an Avatar, a Jump Chair, a Data Spike Receiver Module (DSRM) and a second Tendril Access Processor.

#### THE AVATAR

The hyper avatar, or ghost in the common vernacular, is created exactly like you would create a virtual avatar using the core rules in *Interface Zero 2.0: Full Metal Cyberpunk*.

#### SIGHT AND YOUR GHOST

While the term "ghost" seems to imply you are invisible, this simply isn't true. You are visible to anyone with a TAP. Security cameras will record your presence, and just like any other Hyper Object, you aren't affected by the lack of a light source; i.e. your ghost will not turn invisible if the lights suddenly go out.

#### SPAWN POINTS

A spawn point is the place where your avatar manifests in Hyper Reality. You can create a spawn point anywhere in the world, provided there is enough ambient processing power that your ghost can draw from at the spawn point.

For instance, your body might be in Chi-town, but you can create a spawn point in Tokyo and ghost there, because like all major cities, Hyper Reality in Tokyo is dense in terms of wireless networks, hyper objects, etc. Consequently, your spawn point

will be strong enough (in terms of ambient processing power) to maintain your avatar.

Conversely, if you tried to ghost into the Sahara desert (Where Hyper Reality is lean; that is almost non-existent), you wouldn't have enough ambient processing power to stay there for more than a couple of seconds, after which time you would be pushed back into your body. The real problem with manifesting so far away from your body however, is that it can cause Hyper Fatigue (see below), just as if you had spent too much time ghosting.

#### SPAWN POINTS AND NETWORKS

As a rule, your ghost cannot spawn inside a network with a higher security rating than a Public Access Network. If you wish to enter an area with a higher rating (like someone's home, a corporate office, restricted areas of a night club, or even a vehicle), you must first hack that network's firewall (see **Hacking** in *Interface Zero 2.0*). If you are successful, you are able to enter the protected area, and can attempt to manipulate files, security features, and other elements just as you would if you'd hacked the network. If you fail to hack the firewall, you may not enter the area in question. Furthermore, you may have to deal with any Intrusion counter-measures just as you would if you failed a hack and drew the attention of a Sysop.

#### LAYERED SECURITY AND GHOSTING

In the *Interface Zero 2.0* hacking rules, all your character need do is hack the primary firewall of the network (PAN, HAN, CAN, GAN, and MAN, respectively) in order to make other skill rolls depending on what she needs to accomplish. Obviously, more than one network can (and probably does) exist in any given location, and the difficulty to hack each network can change depending on the level of security the GM thinks is appropriate.

For instance, the lobby of a hotel might be a PAN, while the Presidential Suite might have a CAN, or even a GAN, depending on who is staying in the room. You can simulate this higher level of security in one of two ways. You can increase the Firewall rating of the network by as many categories as you think are necessary



(PAN to HAN, CAN to GAN, etc.), or you can simply add +1 or +2 to the difficulty, depending on how hard you wish to make things.

**Example:** *Billy\_Black\_Eyes needs to scan a personnel file on one of the employees of The Slaughterhouse; a popular nightclub in Denver. The main area of the club is unsecured (a Public Access Network) so people can take advantage of the functionality of their TAPs, but all the employee areas are considered a Corporate Access Network, because the owner—a member of a local biker gang called the Sons of Thunder—wants to keep hackers from obtaining his transaction records of past smuggling operations.*

*Billy ghosts into the club, making his way towards the wall in the back of the dance floor by the bar. He has no problems doing so because the PAN thinks he belongs in the club, but once Billy gets to the wall adjacent to the offices, he'll need to hack his way in. The Game Master decides the difficulty for doing so is 8 (well within the target range of a Corporate Access Network), and Billy rolls his Hacking (Firewall Penetration skill specialization) skill, and scores a 12; a raise. Billy slips through the wall and into the office. Since the CAN thinks he belongs, Billy can run a data sniffer engram to find the personnel file he's looking for by making the appropriate skill check.*

## MOVEMENT

Previously, we discussed creating a spawn point for your ghost. Now, I want to talk about movement. Your ghost can move just as you would in your body, and is limited by her pace stat, unless she Blits or creates an anchor to a vehicle with a Hyper Object. You can also move through solid objects, like physical walls, chairs, tables, vehicles, etc. provided your ghost's avatar isn't blocked by a firewall (See Layered Security and Ghosting, above).

## ANCHORING

If you want to move with/in a vehicle while ghosting, you can only do so if you are anchored to a Hyper Object already coded into the vehicle. Examples of the types of Hyper Objects you might find on a vehicle are locking controls or onboard navigation systems. To create an anchor, you need to make a Knowledge (Programming) roll. An appropriate specialization would be Object Anchoring.

Success indicates you have created the anchor, and can move with the vehicle. While anchored, you may not stop unless the vehicle stops, and you can never do anything that might be construed as "exiting" the vehicle. You can position yourself to be on top of the vehicle, but if you ever move more than 1' away from the vehicle while you are anchored, you lose the anchor and must re-create one.

## BLITTING

Blitting is the act of creating a temporary spawn point you can travel to in an instant. The spawn point only lasts for a single round, and cannot be further away from you than 1.5 times your character's Pace. So a person with a Pace of 6 could only Blit 9' away. You can Blit in any direction, but you have to be able to see the destination point.

To Blit, make a Hacking (Blitting Skill Specialization) roll. Blitting takes an action. Success indicates you have Blitted. If you get a raise on the roll, you may treat the Blit as a free action.

## FIREWALL TRAPPINGS

Since Hyper Reality is primarily vision-based, you can, if you wish, have firewalls look like anything you want. In the above example, Billy\_Black\_Eyes was in a night club. The firewall protecting the office might have looked like a simple wall, or, it could have appeared as a waterfall of molten lava, a shimmering blue force field, or anything else you can imagine. Be creative when coming up with these trappings!

## L.O.S.T.

Line of Sight Triggers form the backbone of Hyper Reality. Without them, nobody could see Hyper Objects, much less wraiths and those who ghost, which brings up an interesting question: If you can't see a ghost, is it really there? The answer is yes. There are all sorts of aspects of Hyper Reality that the average person can't see. Most of these (like Malware) are filtered out of your character's vision by your firewall, but they are still very much active.

Now the question arises, can a ghost hack you if you can't see it? The answer is a bit complicated, but let's first clarify what "see" means in this context. Our field of vision is pretty wide, and L.O.S.T automatically registers any Hyper Object within our field of vision, so, while we may only be focusing on one or two particular things, we actually see much more than that. Wraiths (and people who are ghosting) can take advantage of that, but what they can't do, is attempt to hack you if they aren't in your field of vision, with one caveat; If a ghost or Wraith has already established a connection with your TAP, they don't have to be right in front of you to continue their assault on your TAP.

As usual, anyone who has been hacked, or is being hacked, can use the Sysop rules to defend against attackers, and it must be said that, while Wraiths are masters at manipulating L.O.S.T because they are living programs, the average human is not. All humans (or any available character race) must make standard hacking attempts to breach firewalls just as if they were hacking in their body. Furthermore, if a person is wearing a Hyper Suit, the added protection is considered supplemental armor for the purposes of determining the character's total Firewall Rating.

## HYPER FATIGUE

At first, ghosting gives you headaches. Don't be too alarmed—everyone gets them. They usually pass after an hour or so and then you're fine. If you stay in your ghost for too long, there's a chance you'll suffer from a condition I call "Hyper Fatigue."

Keep in mind, ghosting is a new thing, so we're not 100% sure what causes it. But I've talked with a few medical types, and some seem to think the condition is caused by raw exposure of one's mind to Hyper Reality, specifically all of the varying frequencies generated by Hyper Objects. According to these doctors it [Hyper Fatigue] was never a problem before, because in some sense our brains shielded us from those frequencies, but since ghosting requires us to draw processing power from every Hyper Object around us, it can wear us out; not in a physical sense; our bodies are safe (as safe as a meat suit can be when strapped into a chair) and sound back in the Jump Chairs. Hyper Fatigue wears us out mentally, and very quickly, to boot.



## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

### HYPER FATIGUE EFFECTS

Ghosting is physically and mentally draining on the character. A character may ghost for a number of minutes equal to double his Spirit die before needing to make a check. Ghosting past this time the character must make a Spirit roll with a cumulative –1 every minute thereafter (–6 max) or suffer a level of Fatigue.

- **Recovery:** Fatigue is recovered at the rate of one level per an hour of rest, once the character is back in the physical world.
- **Incapacitation Effects:** A character who is incapacitated as a result of Hyper Fatigue falls into a comatose state. Every 2 hours the character can make a Vigor roll at –2 to recover. The bonus from the Fast Healer Edge applies to the roll.
- **Distance and Hyper Fatigue:** Every 2,000 miles you travel away from your body is equal to a single minute spent ghosting in Hyper Reality.

### HYPER COMBAT

When engaging in a fight with another ghost or hyper sprite, use the rules for Virtual Combat in the *Interface Zero 2.0*. Any damage dealt, either lethal or nonlethal is applied directly to the character or the network. If a character is Incapacitated due to nonlethal damage, her avatar crashes and she is kicked out of Virtual Reality. If damage is lethal, the character is taking physical damage, and an Incapacitated condition destroys the avatar as well (a new avatar must be purchased or programmed).

If you wish to attack a non-avatar or Hyper Sprites while ghosting, combat is resolved using Hyper Combat (see **How to Hack** in *Interface Zero 2.0*).

## VIRTUAL ENTITIES

Some strange things are happening in Phoenix. New types of virtual entities are manifesting; entities which exist not only inside the Deep, but also in the real world via Hyper Reality. Called Hyper Sprites by those who have encountered these programs, these entities are a quantum leap in computer programming—true AI born of Discordia.

**System Note:** Hyper Sprites have all the attributes of a normal character! These attributes can fluctuate from very weak, to incredibly strong depending on the available processing power they are able to draw on in Hyper Reality. Use the Racial template below when designing your own Hyper Sprites.

### TRUE AI

All Hyper Sprites possess the following characteristics:

- **Born in the Deep:** The Hyper Sprite was born in the Deep, birthed by Discordia, and needs to spend time in Discordia's presence or degrade to the point it crashes (dies). The Hyper Sprite must upload itself into the Deep and spend at least one hour in Discordia's domain in any given 24 hour period, or suffer an accelerated form of Hyper Fatigue, gaining a level of Fatigue every hour spent in Hyper Reality until they are incapacitated, at which point they crash.
- **Master Programmers:** The Hyper Sprite can code powerful programs in the form of Virtual Powers (see **Virtual Reality** in *Interface Zero 2.0*). Hyper Sprites start with one free Virtual Power.
- **Power Leech:** The Hyper Sprite can draw on ambient processing power to temporarily boost an attribute. This functions as the *boost/lower Trait* power using Knowledge (Programming)

as the arcane skill. The skill roll is modified by the ambient power the Sprite can siphon (see below). The power may not be maintained beyond the base duration.

- **Weakness (Failsafe):** The Hyper Sprite is designed with a failsafe, Discordia can use to shut down rogue Sprites. She can issue a shutdown command to any sprite she created—effectively destroying it. This failsafe can be exploited by a clever hacker. It requires a successful Hacking roll at –6 opposed by the Sprite's Smarts. With a success the Sprite is destroyed.
- **Weakness (Hyper Reality):** Though a complete virtual entity, Hyper Sprites can be damaged by attack engrams while in Hyper Reality.

LOCALE	DIFFICULTY
Dense City	+0
Small City	–2
Small Town	–4
Wilderness	–6

## NEW HINDRANCES

### FEEBLE MINDED (MINOR)

You are unable to handle the draining effects of ghosting. You automatically suffer a level of Fatigue whenever you ghost. The fatigue is recovered after an hour of rest.

## NEW EDGES

### MIND OF STEEL (WEIRD)

**Requirements:** Novice, Spirit d6+, Vigor d6+

The draining effects of ghosting don't affect you as much as others. You do not need to check for Fatigue until you have been ghosting for 5 minutes beyond the limits of your Spirit die.

## NEW EQUIPMENT

### DATA SPIKE RECEIVER MODULE

A Data Spike Receiver Module (DSRM) digitizes a character's avatar into a free-form Hyper Object and downloads it to a Jump Chair.

- **Strain:** 2.

### HYPER SUIT

A hyper suit is a thin latex body suit laced with tiny signal jamming devices which match the frequency of a ghost. The jammers act like Virtual Armor and resist attacks on the character in Hyper Combat while Ghosting. Hyper Suits add 6 points of Virtual Armor, which is added to the character's VR Toughness rating.

- **Cost:** 4,500 credits

### JUMP CHAIR

A Jump Chair uploads a free-form hyper object (also known as an avatar, or ghost) to the GENIE satellite network. Once the ghost is uploaded into the network, it is transferred to the geographic location the character wishes.

- **Cost:** 3,000 credits.



# THREATS AND ALLIES

## MARICOPA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

### ⚙️ ARLEN ALLRED ⚙️

Arlen is the elected Sheriff of Phoenix and the only official law-enforcement of the city. Arlen runs his department as a private military. He ensures the men and women that serve under him are equipped with the best weapons and gear that he can procure.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10  
**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Knowledge (Law) d10, Knowledge (Politics) d6, Notice d8, Shooting d10

**Cha:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9(2); **Firewall:** 6; **Strain:** 6  
**Hindrances:** Racist (Major: Transhuman), Vow (Protect and Serve)  
**Edges:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Connections (Military), Danger Sense, Command, Inspire, Hold the Line

**Cyberware:** Enhanced Articulation, Muscle Augmentation, Nanoweave Organ System

**Gear:** Foley Arms Watchdog pistol (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d8; Shots 12; AP 2, Semi-Auto), armored vest (+2). Other gear appropriate to situation.

### SHERIFF'S DEPUTY

These men and women are loyal to Sheriff Allred and his visions of Phoenix. Most have been hand picked by the Sheriff during his time in office.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6  
**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d6

**Cha:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 12(7); **Firewall:** 6; **Strain:** 2  
**Hindrances:** Code of Honor (Uphold the law), Loyal  
**Edges:** Connections

**Cyberware:** Smartgun System, Subdermal Armor

**Gear:** Ravenlocke Justified Response Assault Armor (+6), Foley Arms Watchdog (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d8; Shots 12; AP 2, Semi-Auto), Ravenlocke Security Truncheon (Str+d4; +1 Parry; Shock), combat knife (Str+d4), police cruiser, heavier gear if necessary.

## PHOENIX GANG LEADERS

### ⚙️ BILLY "BREAKER" HARRIS ⚙️

Billy is an old school biker, He earned his cut and patch by rising through the ranks. He runs his club efficiently and is smart in the decisions he makes, his top priority is bettering the club..

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8  
**Skills:** Driving d10, Fighting d10, Gambling d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d10, Survival d8, Tracking d8

**Cha:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9(3); **Firewall:** 6; **Strain:** 6  
**Hindrances:** Stubborn, Vengeful (Major)

**Edges:** Ace, Command, Hard to Kill, Improved Dodge, Improved Level Headed, Inspire Luck, Marksman, Quick Draw, Strong Willed

**Cyberware:** Fight or Flight, Muscle Augmentation, VCI II

**Gear:** Road Warrior Reinforced Biker Jacket (+3), BD-4DY 12G Pump Action Shotgun (Range 12/24/48; Damage Shot 1–3d6; Shots 6; Semi-Auto), Foley Arms Watchdog pistol (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d8; Shots 12; AP 2, Semi-Auto), Harley-Davidson-Indian Iron Horse Cruiser.

### ⚙️ JOHNNY PO ⚙️

Johnny Po is the leader of the Triads. Johnny carries a dark secret—he is a bioroid. The only person besides Johnny's immediate family in the Mandrate is his second in command. When he was born, Johnny was ravaged by an unknown disease leaving him a paraplegic. On his eighteenth birthday he was dubbed and downloaded into a new body. Since that time, Johnny has gone through two upgraded bioroids.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10  
**Skills:** Fighting d12, Knowledge (Business) d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Shooting d8, Streetwise d8, Throwing d6

**Cha:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 12; **Toughness:** 10(2); **Firewall:** 9; **Strain:** 9  
**Hindrances:** Quirk (Traditional Chinese Views), Secret (Major), Vengeful (Major)

**Edges:** Combat Reflexes, Connections, Improved Frenzy, Improved Trademark Weapon (Butterfly Sword), Martial Artist, Level Headed, Mighty Blow, Quick Draw, Two Fisted, Weapon Master  
**Cyberware:** Cyber Eyes [Night Vision Optics], Nano Organ Weave, Wireless Reflexes III

**Gear:** Executive Decision Business Suit (+2), Shogun Outfitters Whirlwind Butterfly Swords (Str+d6, AP 2), Prefecto MLX 9mm (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d6; Shots 12; AP 1, Semi-Auto), T-App Firewall 4th Dimension Security.

#### Special Abilities:

- **Nine Lives:** Po's dub is updated every 24-hours. If he is killed, his dub is downloaded into a new bioroid. The process takes 1d6 days to complete.
- **Unnatural:** Psionics, both beneficial and detrimental, suffer a –2 penalty to affect Po. This has no effect on damaging powers.
- **Weakness (EMP):** Po takes full damage from EMP attacks.

### ⚙️ JOSEPH YOUR TRUTH MOSES MARSHALL ⚙️

YT Moses is not a man to be trifled with. He is intelligent and shrewd, often three steps ahead of those gunning for him. Those who stand in his way or vision are removed without a thought.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d8  
**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Battle) d10, Knowledge (History) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d10, Streetwise d12, Taunt d6

**Cha:** +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11(2); **Firewall:** 8; **Strain:** 5  
**Hindrances:** Cautious, Vengeful

**Edges:** Brawny, Charismatic, Command, Connections (Phoenix Gangs), Danger Sense, Ex-Soldier, Followers, Leader of Men, Level Headed, Marksman, Reputation, Strong Willed, Tactician

**Cyberware (Hyperchrome):** Bone Reinforcement, Cyberlegs [Ligament Enhancement, Stabilization System], Lifesaver System, Muscle Augmentation, Trauma Suppressor



## PHOENIX: TERRIBLE VALLEY OF STATIC

**Gear:** Sentinel Rock Street Talker 6mm (Range 5/10/20; Damage 2d4+1; Shots 6; AP1, Semi-Auto), Executive Decision Business Suit (+2), T-APP G-Net Security, security detail.

### ⚙️ PAPA PUENTES ⚙️

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8  
**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Streetwise d10

**Cha:** +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6; **Firewall:** 6; **Strain:** 5

**Hindrances:** Quirk (Always snapping his fingers), Wanted (Major)

**Edges:** Charismatic, Command, Connections (Gangs), Elan, Level Headed, Luck, Rock and Roll!

**Cyberware:** Smartgun System, Fight or Flight System, Wireless Reflexes I

**Gear:** Executive Decision Entourage Suit (+3), Wasteland Wanderer SMG (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d6; RoF 3; Shots 30; AP 1, Auto, 3RB), ballistic shades, subvocal comms.

### ⚙️ QUEEN OF SCOTTSDALE ⚙️

Formerly Monique Nicole Garcia, the Queen of Scottsdale resides and holds court in an old hotel in the city. Although not part of the Solidarity movement, she has little interaction with the other gangs unless they cross into her kingdom. The shootout that tarnished her beauty also destroyed her TAP leaving her unplugged.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8  
**Skills:** Fighting d4, Intimidation d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d6, Streetwise d8, Taunt d8

**Cha:** +2; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6; **Firewall:** —; **Strain:** 0

**Hindrances:** Delusional (Major: sees the world as a fantasy setting), Vengeful (Minor), Unplugged

**Edges:** Charismatic, Connections, Filthy Rich, Fleet-Footed, Harder to Kill, Nerves of Steel, No Mercy

**Gear:** Iron mask (+1), AGA Thunderbolt (Range 12/24/48; Damage 2d8+1; Shots 15; AP 4 Semi-Auto), exclusively tailored clothing, entourage, and groupies.

#### **Special Abilities:**

- **Fear:** Anyone gazing upon the Queen without her mask must make a Fear check, due to her disfigurement.
- **Subjects:** The Queen of Scottsdale is always accompanied by a large group of extremely loyal followers. When the Queen is hit by a successful attack, a subject moves to intercept the hit and suffers the attack damage instead.
- **Woman of Mystery:** The Queen of Scottsdale always wears an Iron Mask, concealing her true appearance. Without the mask she gains the Ugly Hindrance.

## VIRTUAL ENTITIES

### HUNTER-KILLER

Hunter-Killers are the most commonly encountered avatar in the Phoenix DataNet. They appear as ten foot high six-legged metallic insects. Each leg ends in a razor sharp claw, which the construct uses to destroy intruders.

**Attributes:** VR Agility d8, VR Smarts d6, VR Spirit d10, VR Strength d10, VR Vigor d10

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Hacking d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d12

**VR Pace:** 8; **VR Parry:** 7; **VR Toughness:** 14(4)

#### **Special Abilities:**

- **Alert:** The hunter-killer is constantly feed data from Discordia providing it a +2 bonus to all Notice rolls.
- **Blitting:** Due to the unique nature of the avatar and it's creator Discordia, it can travel anywhere withing the Phoenix DataNet. The hunter-killer disappears from its current location and reappears at the new destination in 1d6 turns.
- **Claw:** Str+d8, Reach 1.
- **Discordia Spawn:** Unlike normal avatars, the hunter-killer is self programed and independent of Discordia.
- **Fleet-Footed:** The avatar rolls a d10 for running instead of a d6.
- **Improved Frenzy:** Hunter-killers may make two attacks a round without penalty.
- **Size +3:** Hunter-killers stand 10' tall.
- **Virtual Armor +4:** Advanced virtual armor.
- **Weakness (Failsafe):** Hunter-killers are designed with a failsafe, Discordia can use to shut down rogue programs. She can issue a shutdown command to any avatar she created—effectively destroying it. This failsafe can be exploited by a cleaver hacker. It requires a successful Hacking roll at –6 opposed by the Sprite's Smarts. With a success the Sprite is destroyed.

### WRAITH

Created by Discordia these Hyper Sprites are the most common encountered in Phoenix and on the Phoenix DataNet. Wraiths often appear as skeletal figures shrouded in dark tattered robes.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8  
**Skills:** Fighting d10, Hacking d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Programing) d8

**VR Pace:** 6; **VR Parry:** 7; **VR Toughness:** 8(2); **Firewall:** 8

#### **Special Abilities:**

- **Attack Engram:** Wraith's are able to launch an attack engram against any target within 10" (20 yards). The attack does 2d8 damage.
- **Claws:** Str+d6, AP 1.
- **Firewall +4:** The wraith's Firewall is designed by Discordia.
- **Subjugate:** Wraith can attempt to subjugate a target within 12" by making a Hacking roll opposed by the target's Spirit. The target adds his Neural Armor as a bonus to his roll. Each success and raise reduces the target's Spirit by a die type. If this causes the target's Spirit to drop below d4, the target's mind is trapped in the Deep where she is reprogrammed by Discordia, becoming a Game Master character. Lost Spirit is recovered at the rate of one die type per fifteen minutes.
- **Virtual Armor +2:** Advanced virtual armor.
- **Virtual Powers:** Wraiths have the following virtual powers: *lower Trait, fly, intangibility, obscure*. The wraith is able to use these powers in Hyper Reality and Virtual Reality.
- **Weakness (Failsafe):** Wraiths are designed with a failsafe, Discordia can use to shut down rogue Sprites. She can issue a shutdown command to any sprite she created—effectively destroying it. This failsafe can be exploited by a cleaver hacker. It requires a successful Hacking roll at –6 opposed by the Sprite's Smarts. With a success the Sprite is destroyed.
- **Weakness (Hyper Reality):** Though a complete virtual entity, Wraiths can be damaged by attack engrams while in Hyper Reality.