

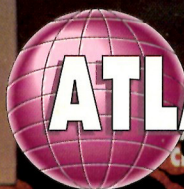
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HELL BENT

BY ROBIN JENKINS



You must own Underground
to play this adventure.



ATLAS GAMES

CHARTING NEW REACHES OF IMAGINATION™

MGI

HELL BENT

An Underground® Adventure for 3-6 players

"Farewell happy fields where joy forever dwells; hail horrors, hail infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell receive thy new possessor: One who brings a mind not to be changed by place or time. The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. What matter where, if I be still the same; and what I should be, all but less than He whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least we shall be free; the Almighty hath not built here for His envy; will not drive us hence: Here we may reign secure, and in my choice to reign is worth ambition though in Hell: Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I, lines 249-63

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TRU Entertainment, Inc.

Fax Transmittal Cover Sheet

Number of Pages : 26 Date: Aug. 25, 2021
(Including Cover Sheet)
To: Frederick Furrer Title: President
Company: Allied Mayhem, Inc.
Address: 143 Penn Square
Philadelphia, PA 19102

TRU Psychological Profile

CLASSIFIED

NAME: Michael Lewis (Mourning Star) DATE: June 10, 2021
PSYCHOLOGIST: Dr. Stavros Demetrios FACILITY: Devil's Anvil

PERSONAL DATA

MILITARY: Veteran	AGE: 21	SEX: Male
HEIGHT: 6' 2"	WEIGHT: 200 lbs.	SSI#: 00-562-15-3601
HAIR: Blonde	EYES: Blue	RACE: Caucasian
BIRTHDATE: 3/18/00	BIRTHPLACE: Lawton, OK	COMPANY: Allied Mayhem, Inc.

INTRODUCTORY PROFILE & COMMENTARY

Michael has a strong will for a man of his age. He is quick to judge and makes decisions without remorse for his mistakes. Michael is reluctant to discuss his past, and hides his emotions from others. No doubt these characteristics are due to his upbringing: Michael was physically abused as a child and mentally abused as an adolescent. Michael claims both his parents were alcoholics who argued and fought constantly. His father died in a car accident in 2009, when Michael was 9; his mother abandoned him a year later. Michael has not heard from his mother since.

From the age of 10, Michael went to live in Lubbock, Texas, with his aunt, Ethel Lewis. Michael describes this period as more painful than his childhood. From Michael's description, his aunt was fanatical in her religious faith (Baptist). Thus, much of this period of Michael's life was spent confessing childlike "sins" and paying penance through mental anguish. At his aunt's "insistence," Michael's free time was devoted entirely to religious reflection and spent engaged in church-related activities. At age 14, Michael ran away from home for the first time, then again at age 15. Michael denies any religious interest or affiliation.

From the age of 15, Michael was responsible for taking care of himself. Michael lacks any structured education beyond that of the 9th grade, having gained most of his education and common sense living on the street. This is illustrated by his reason for "volunteering" for TRU's combat study: his main concern is for the money.

Sometimes callous and cold, Michael appears emotionally void -- an indifference taught him by his harsh upbringing. For all his painful youth, Michael is a stable, industrious, intelligent (if passionless) young man. He is a quick-thinker and has a keen sense of analysis. Michael tested well on the IQ, personality, and aptitude

VR Analogy a Virtual Reality

by Peter Seems, BUSINESS DAY Science Editor

Imagine walking through the snow on a cold, winter's day and feeling the summer sun. Imagine coming home to a cramped apartment and finding instead a palatial summer home overlooking the Oregon Coast. Imagine all of the overweight, snide, and unattractive people you see each day; now imagine them all as handsome young men and beautiful women. Fantasy and imagination? Not any more — not with the aid of VIRA, the latest, hottest, sexiest entertainment technology to hit the streets.

VIRA, which stands for Virtual Reality Analogy, is the brainchild of TRU Entertainment, Inc., a Los Angeles-based entertainment conglomerate. The product is TRU's entry into the exploding virtual reality market. Utilizing neurological medical technology, VIRA combines this technology with a host of other current technologies, including the best of computer, satellite, and entertainment technologies.

The actual VIRA unit is deceptively simple in appearance. It is a small, electronic implant that draws its power from nerve impulses and brain wave activity. The VIRA uses these neurological impulses to simulate and stimulate a user's fantasies. It then overlaps them with the realities that user is currently experiencing.

Unlike other VR systems, which require heavy helmets, goggles, and other apparatus, VIRA is the sum total of simplicity: a thumb-sized computer chip implanted beneath the skin at the base of the user's brain. VIRA also differs from other VR systems, which present prefabricated reality illusions to the user by instead drawing upon the user's personal thoughts, experiences, and fantasies to create a unique and individual reality illusion.

"The beauty of the VIRA system," according to Sig Sanders, TRU's Director of Consumer Marketing & Public Relations, "is its portability. There aren't any neck-straining helmets or uncomfortable goggles to wear. In the VIRA system, everything fits neatly inside this little chip." Sanders describes the VIRA chip as a "brain scanner and mini-transmitter." The actual work of building the virtual reality is done at TRU Headquarters, in the zillions of crossing channels of a Cray computer specially designed and exclusively devoted to fabricating virtual reality narratives and images for the VIRA system.

Here's how the VIRA system works:

- The VIRA chip samples the user's personality for positive and negative elements, following only the positive channels; it then creates a positive personality profile based on this information.

- VIRA then samples the user's thoughts for positive thoughts and images based on the positive personality profile, compiles it, and sends the information via satellite to TRU's Cray line in Los Angeles.

- The Cray line then creates an analogy/reality based on the profile, tests it, and retransmits it to the VIRA chip.

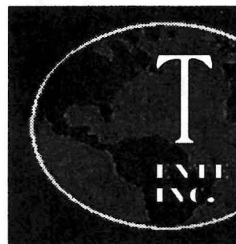
- The VIRA chip presents this palatable, portable fantasy to the user — all within less than one-quarter of a second.

"Besides portability," Sanders said, "the other great advantage VIRA has over other VR systems is its wide range of variability. Low settings alter images only slightly, allowing the wearer to conduct their regular, daily activities — such as driving a car, sitting in a business meeting, or walking on a sidewalk — without changing or interfering with the fundament of the reality surrounding the wearer. 'Rose-colored glasses' is what we like to call the lower settings: what you see is what you get — to a degree. When the wearer is at rest or taking a break from work, the VR can be set as high as the wearer wants to create mind-boggling dreams and vivid hallucinations. We call this setting 'la-la land.'"

TRU demonstrated the VIRA unit at this year's Consumer Electronic Show in Las Vegas. The TRU booth prominently highlighted the VIRA demonstration via a comfortable seat with the implant secured in the headrest of the chair. Curious individuals were encouraged to have a seat, rest their feet, and sample the wonders of the VIRA system. Public reaction to the demonstration was overwhelming: lines to try the VIRA system wound for thousands of feet through the Main Hall of the CES show.

No release date has been given for the VIRA system. "There are still a few minor bugs to work out of the system," Sanders claims. "Nothing major, mind you — just a couple fine points. The system already has Underwriters' approval and Washington's blessing. All VIRA needs now is a quick polish and it'll be ready for Christmas release." PS

BUSINESS DAY, Thursday, March 18, 2021



INTRODUCTION: EXECUTIVE ACTION

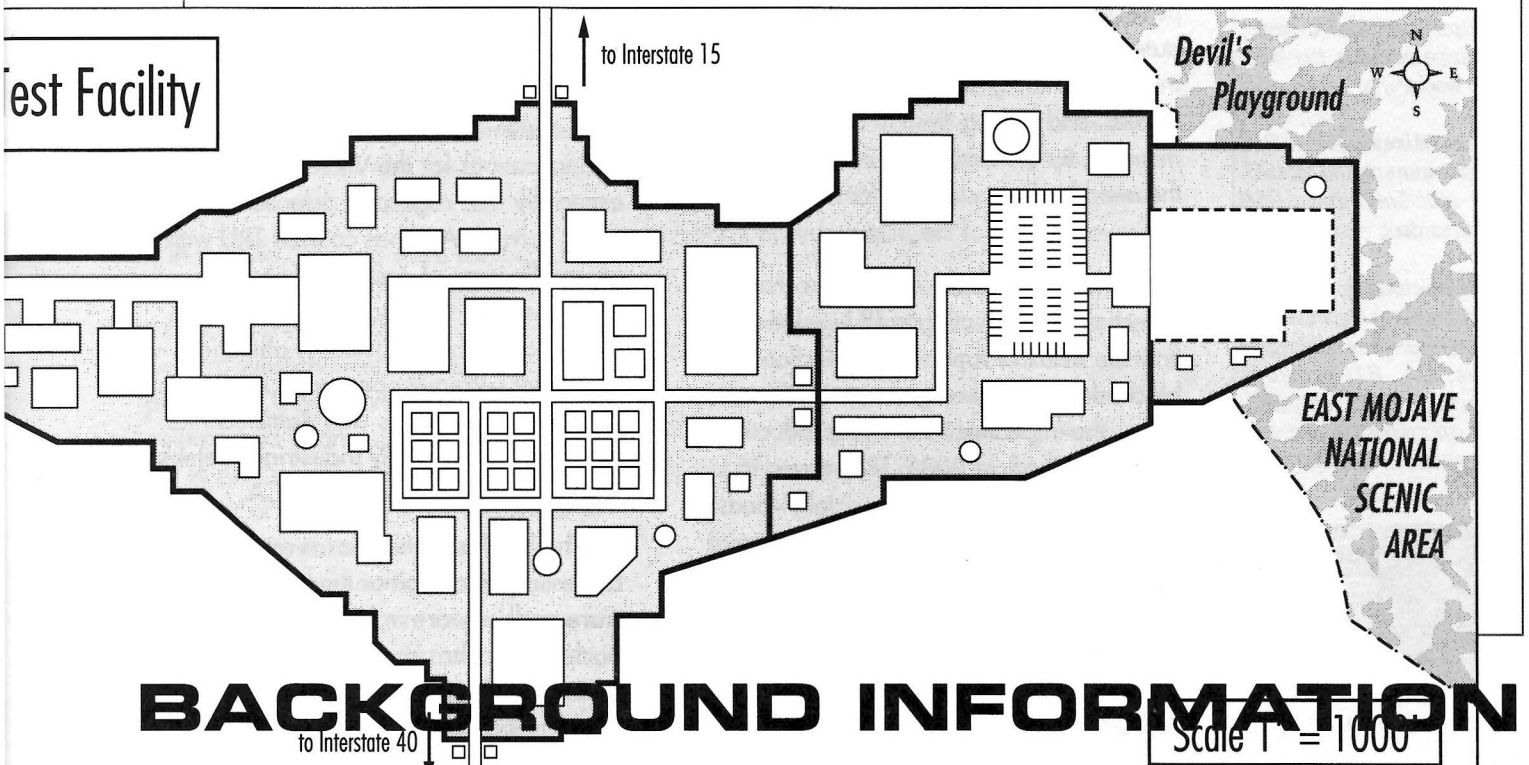
DATE: August 23, 2021 Monday
TO: Akaia Mirasachi, President and CEO
FROM: Jefferson Davis, V.P. R&D
RE: Upcoming VIRA Tests at Devil's Anvil Test Facility

I just got word from Kai Lee, Director of Operations at our Devil's Anvil Test Facility, that the VIRA equipment arrived Friday without incident. Dale Richards, our R&D Liaison with Battletechnics, informs me that the equipment tested perfectly at their Northern CA test facility, and that everything on their end is green for the gold. The first five test volunteers arrived at Devil's Anvil Saturday and underwent their final round of medical exams. Those findings, along with the group's most recent psychological profiles, are enclosed with this package. All five volunteers are in perfect health and positive state of mind. According to Dr. Stavros Demetrios, all five are ready to begin testing within the next few days, weather permitting.

On that note, I had my secretary call the National Weather Bureau this morning. Their station at Barstow forecasts clear skies over the next week, with a continuation of the heat wave currently in effect over Southern CA. Both Lee and Richards assure me that, in spite of the high temperatures at Devil's Anvil (102° F. at 1 PM yesterday), conditions are otherwise perfect for field testing the VIRA system. Consequently, the first test group will enter Babylon this Wednesday morning.

Our R&D field team will observe and record the first round of tests, compile their findings, and report back to us by Friday of this week. The second group of test volunteers is scheduled to arrive at Devil's Anvil on September 20 and will begin testing on October 4. I'll keep you posted on our progress and schedule a meeting at your earliest convenience to review Anvil's findings before we present them to the Board of Directors in December. If you have any questions, give me a call. As always, I am your loyal and humble assistant in this project.

Jeff Davis



TRU Entertainment, Inc.:

Formerly Tokyo Rotoscoping Unlimited, TRU is the world's leading computer animation production company.

Cray computers: Currently the fastest, most efficient, memory-intensive computer systems in the world. Cray computers utilize parallel processing systems in conjunction with superconductivity technologies created in Japan in the early '90s.

VIRA: Shorthand for "Virtual Reality Analog," a cybernetically implanted reality enhancement program created by TRU, Inc.

head end: The point of origin for the VIRA signal — in this case, TRU, Inc.'s, World HQ in Los Angeles.

Consumer Electronics Show:

A triannual electronics show held at three different locations across the U.S. (Las Vegas, Chicago, and New York). The CES serves as a showcase for new developments in the consumer electronics field.

Business Day magazine: The daily print and online news-magazine covering the business world.

Akaia Mirasachi: TRU, Entertainment Inc.'s, 50-year-old, Tokyo-born CEO and President.

Battletechnics, Inc.:

A Department of Defense sub-contractor based in Los Altos, CA. BTI provides cybernetic hard- and software to corporate and governmental military markets.

That's Entertainment

TRU Entertainment, Inc., one of the largest entertainment companies in the world, has a flair for breaking new ground. Their computer animation techniques pioneered in the last years of the 20th Century revolutionized the animation industry.

With the help of this new technology (and the aid of Japanese investors), TRU, Inc., skyrocketed to financial fame. Within no time, TRU was listed and actively promoted on all three stock exchanges (NYSE, Frankfurt, and Nikkei). By 2015, TRU tripled its corporate size and octupled its production output. This sudden growth put several antiquated motion picture and television production studios in their graves.

The key to TRU's success is computer animation. Using *Cray computers* and a host of experimental Japanese superconductivity and parallel-processing technology, TRU created a new way to look at the production of visual entertainment. This animated production approach bypassed the need for expensive studio lots, elaborate sets, and percentage-spoiled actors. Using models of locations and actors, in conjunction with detailed flowcharts for the zillions of possible turns a story could take, TRU computerized the entire process of movie-making by animating actors, stories, and locales, and storing them in computer memory. By the turn of the 20th century, the need for live actors, actions, and settings was a thing of the past.

At first, U.S. business resisted the change in technology, initiating tariff legislation to limit the influx of Japanese productions. The blockades were token gestures. Within two years, the impediments to TRU production were abolished. In 2005, TRU moved its facilities from Tokyo to Upper Hollywood.

The company now owns several buildings in Upper LA's Financial District and a "modest" production lot within a stone's throw of historic Hollywood (a stone's throw straight up, that is).

New Horizons

TRU recently made its bid in the field of virtual reality entertainment with the highly touted VIRA (Virtual Reality Analog) system: a virtual reality chip that "reads" a user's mind and transmits a profile back to base. From there, the VIRA *head end* creates a VR analogy specially suited to the individual and transmits it back to the brain of the user. The chip itself is small enough to be inserted just beneath the skin of the user's neck and connected to the brain via the brain stem.

TRU kept a tight lid on R&D of VIRA until this year, when they unveiled a demonstration at the *Consumer Electronics Show* in Las Vegas, NV. Public approval at the CES was overwhelming. Pre-orders of the VIRA system went beyond TRU's expectations. In an interview in *Business Day* magazine, TRU President and CEO, Akaia Mirasachi, described the interest in VIRA as "mind-boggling."

Projected profits from VIRA have opened a number of new doors for TRU. One of these new doors is the door to Allied Mayhem, Inc.

Operation: Archangel

AMI has taken a keen interest in TRU's VIRA system. R&D teams at AMI see several applications for the VIRA technology, especially with regard to defense technology. In private, AMI has courted TRU with unworldly sums of cash and unearthly promises of shared technology. AMI has offered a number of business affiliations — routes not currently open to TRU marketing. One such affiliation is with *Battletechnics, Inc.*, a small but highly industrious defense contractor based in Los Altos, CA.

What AMI is looking for is an infantry battlesuit that combines the best of all hardware and software in one common suit. Battletechnics has provided a unique angle on the "mechanically enhanced infantryman," a problem first addressed by the



Department of Defense in the 1960s in its *Man Plus Project*. Man Plus ultimately failed due to its antique technology (hydraulic movement), awkward design (massive exoskeleton), and dangerous application (repeated "injuries" — i.e., maimings of — military test subjects). As a result, Man Plus was written off as another familiar result in a long line of military research failures. That was before Battletechnics introduced *Operation: Archangel*.

Battletechnics took an "inside" approach to the enhanced infantryman by applying *neuroprosthetic* and cybernetic technology. Instead of hydraulics for strength and movement, BTI used bioengineered muscles driven by nerve impulses. Instead of a bulky, metal exoskeleton for support, BTI used metal implants and cybernetic skeletal replacements. Instead of dangerous applications, BTI got positive results — perhaps too positive.

Given a virtually unlimited arsenal of destructive firepower, the average test soldier succumbed to the strain and ran amuck with all barrels flaring. In the scarce few tests Battletechnics and AMI ran, every subject ran amuck, shooting everything and everyone in sight. Researchers did their best to stifle the "*berserker rage*" — a violent form of battle fatigue — but nothing Battletechnics tried could solve the problem: the subjects kept going berserk. Once again, the problem with the enhanced infantryman was more than just skin deep.

In the end, the tests were stopped and the project brought to a halt. Most of the test subjects were destroyed or institutionalized. Several subjects killed themselves. The promise of *Operation: Archangel* proved a military and financial disaster for BTI. This led to AMI's brief, but bloody *hostile takeover* of BTI in 2014. AMI covered its tracks with great alacrity. The media ran the usual damage control for its parent corporation, and AMI spent the next year distancing itself from the disaster and cloaking the project to cover its losses. That was before TRU introduced VIRA.

New — and Improved!

AMI's interest in VIRA was immediate. At the inducement of AMI, TRU created a VIRA-based software application to quell the berserker rage. The idea was to create a virtual reality analogy system to scan the soldier's mind for benevolent and malevolent associations. The VIRA would then create a model ala the entertainment version and broadcast it back to the soldier in the field. The goal was for the VIRA to limit the soldier's feelings of anxiety, pacifism, disdain for violence, battle fatigue, terror, or uncontrolled bloodlust. The VIRA would do so by giving the soldier softened or desensitized images for his actions. Sympathy for enemies or disdain for allies could thus be masked or altered by the head end.

For example, in one test a soldier with a disdain for killing people saw the enemy as a herd of deer running through a field. By analogy, the same soldier saw his comrades as fellow hunters dressed in blaze orange.

The success of TRU's VIRA system were immediate. At BTI's Northern California test facility, only one test subject experienced berserker rage — and then only momentarily. TRU researchers at the head end replaced the analogy immediately and successfully. R&D VP *Jefferson Davis*' report to TRU President Akaia Mirasachi claimed the VIRA system "allows battle-enhanced soldiers to conduct themselves rationally in battle and with the interest of the parent corporation in mind."

Mirasachi gave his approval to continue *Operation: Archangel* with a full range of *climatological/environmental tests*: desert, arctic, tropic, lunar, and underwater. The first in the series would be a group field test at TRU's Mojave Desert facility: *Devil's Anvil*. Preparations were made, test subjects hired, and final system modifications performed. A day-long roster of field tests were scheduled to take place in TRU's *Babylon* urban test facility. An initial date for the resurrected *Operation: Archangel* was set for late August. Ω

Man Plus Project: A late-20th-century Department of Defense project geared toward creating battlefield hardware and software applications for cybernetically enhanced soldiers. The project was cancelled due to lack of success and a subsequent lack of funds.

Operation: Archangel: A joint venture conducted by AMI and BTI to create cybernetically enhanced soldiers.

neuroprosthetic: Prosthetic devices controlled and powered by nerve stimuli.

berserker rage: A form of battle fatigue caused by loads of weapons and delusions of invulnerability.

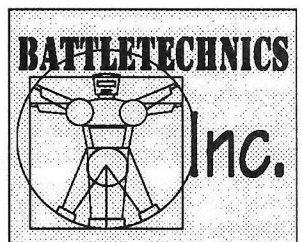
hostile takeover: AMI recouped their losses on *Operation: Archangel* by executing a successful, hostile takeover of BTI in 2019. During this particularly bloody coup, several BTI directors died, disappeared, or committed suicide.

Jefferson Davis: TRU, Inc.'s, Vice President in charge of Research & Development. Davis is the man at the top TRU's phoenix project, *Operation: Archangel*.

climatological/environmental tests: A full compliment of tests are necessary before BTI markets their battlesuit.

Devil's Anvil: TRU's top secret test facility located in the Mojave Desert.

Babylon: TRU's top secret urban test facility set in the near Devil's Anvil.





CHAPTER 1: JACOB'S LADDER

"And he dreamed and beheld a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and he beheld the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

Genesis 28:12

• RADIO TRANSMISSION BETWEEN
BASE AND RECON HELICOPTER 1,
0553 HRS, 8/25/21 •

Anvil: "Base to Eggbeater. What is your current location?"

Eggbeater: "Eggbeater to Base. We're crossing into Babylon. Some of the city buildings are on fire. We're reducing our ground speed to 15 MPH. We are awaiting permission to go to battle stations."

Anvil: "Base to Eggbeater. Security advises you to remain on alert, but not to go to battle stations. Do you copy?"

Eggbeater: "Roger your last message, Anvil. We are continuing toward our objective at an altitude of 100 feet. Gun cameras engaged on my mark...mark. Are you receiving our transmission, Base?"

Anvil: "Roger, Eggbeater. We are receiving footage with some static. R&D advises you to disengage engine silencers to clear transmission. ComLink also requests you bring up the lights and drop in for a closer look."

Eggbeater: "Roger, your request, Anvil. Silencers disengaged on my mark...mark. Spotlights engaged on my mark...mark. Dropping to hovering

speed, altitude 50 feet. How's that look, Anvil?"

Anvil: "Top-40, Eggbeater. Signal is loud and clear. Security requests your input on nature and origin of fires."

Eggbeater: "Roger, Anvil. From the amount of damage and the perimeter of flame it would appear the fires were set, possibly by Numbers 1-5. There is no sign of activity from this distance. Request permission to cross the perimeter for a closer look."

Anvil: "Roger, Eggbeater. Security amber lights your request. Proceed with caution."

Eggbeater: "Dinky-Di, Anvil. Closing on objective; ground speed 5 MPH, altitude 30 feet. Crossing perimeter on my mark... mark. Still no sign of — correction, Anvil. We have visual contact with Alpha Test. Unable to identify individual. Awaiting your orders to — (AUTOMATIC WEAPON FIRE) — Jesus Christ, Anvil! We are under fire! Repeat we are under fire. Request permission to — (EXPLOSION) — Mayday! Mayday! We're hit! We're going in, Anvil. Repeat: We are going —"

• END OF TRANSMISSION •

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

• D7 TRANSMISSION, 8/21/21
BABYLON, 1307 HRS •

Sneezy: "D7 to Base. Dopey reports that the fire is contained to a four-block square surrounding Town Hall. It looks like each adjacent block has been set on fire, possibly by Snow White. Dopey and Sleepy are suiting up to cross the perimeter."

Base: "Roger, Sneezy. Keep us informed of their progress. Security suggests you find a highpoint for covering fire."

Sneezy: "Roger, Base. We thought of that, but there's no building tall enough to see over the flames. Doc suggests sending two men to cover. What's Security's input on that, over?"

Base: "Negative your last request, D7. Having too many men inside the perimeter will open you to attack from outside. Security is of the opinion that the fire is a decoy. Do you copy?"

Sneezy: Roger, Base. We've seen no evidence so far to support that theory. From what we can tell, Snow White must be inside Town Hall. We checked every—
(SPEAKS OFF MIKE) D7 to Base, it looks like Dopey and Sleepy are ready to cross the perimeter. We'll be off channel until they get inside."

• 1325 HRS •

Sneezy: "D7 to Base. No word as yet from Dopey or Sleepy and no sign of activity inside perimeter. Doc thought he heard a gunshot, but it's hard to hear through the blaze. We believe Snow White is inside Town Hall and has taken Dopey and Sleepy hostage. Request permission to cross perimeter to investigate."

Base: "Roger, D7. Security OKs your request and advises you to split into two two-man teams with one man at the point. Do you copy, D7?"

Trouble in Paradise

On August 23, 2021, four men and one woman entered Babylon, a mocked-up city in the Mojave Desert. Two days later, they had not returned. At 0600 HRS on August 25, a Cherokee R-12 chopper was sent over Babylon on reconnaissance. The chopper came under fire shortly after crossing the perimeter of flame, took a hit, exploded, and fell to earth in a ball of fire.

A seven-man security team left Devil's Anvil on August 25 and entered Babylon at 1200 HRS. The team came under attack. They did not return. Security dispatched a Hind Yeltsin AT-40 helicopter to fly over the city on a second, more defensive reconnaissance mission. The helicopter broadcast footage of the downed Cherokee R-12 and several dead security troops to Devil's Anvil. The Hind Yeltsin AT-40 also came under intense fire from Babylon and was forced to abort its mission. Since then, no one has entered or left Babylon.

In the words of Kai Lee, Devil's Anvil's Director of Operations, TRU is experiencing a few "technical difficulties."

A Call to Arms

TRU is in over its head. Their best security troops proved useless; so did the Cherokee R-12 attack chopper and Battletechnics' on-loan Hind Yeltsin AT-40 helicopter gunship. If news of this disaster reaches the media or AMI, all bets are off. BTI employees already know what happens when sub-contracts go bad for AMI. TRU employees do not want to experience a similar fate.

For this reason, both TRU and BTI are scrambling to control the damage resulting from this runamuck test. They want the problem solved quickly and quietly, with the lowest profile possible and no media attention whatsoever. Doing so will require getting a security team into Babylon, recovering the "damaged" equipment, and, if necessary, wasting the field team run rampant in the city.

To make this work, at least one of the PCs should be affiliated with TRU, Inc., or Battletechnics. This may be a direct affiliation, via employment in an earlier career or adventure, or an indirect affiliation, via a former associate or an employer now working for either company. Also, at least one of the PCs should have an old tie with AMI (via their boosting or such) as a former member of AMI's Flying Deuces.

Lacking any of these affiliations, the PCs may be approached blindly by Phil Gnarly, TRU's Chief of Security. Gnarly has heard of the PCs' special talents in combat, and will contact them via electronic mail, registered post, telephone query, or direct meeting. If you have a better idea, feel free to use it. If all else fails, have one of the PCs discover a classified ad in the back of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine.

Making Contact

The following is a sample telephone call on Aug. 25 at about 1600 HRS made by Phil Gnarly. Read it aloud to the players. Do not read "_____ (PC's Name)" or any of the other blank or parenthetical copy, as doing so is a very old joke and would not be funny anyway. Likewise, phrases separated by slashes means reading one or the other, not both.

If the PCs do not have a contact, replace the phrase, "We worked together..." with, "You were referred to me by Bill Winkle of _____ (TRU/BTI/AMI)." Continue reading. Roleplay the conversation by allowing the contact PC to respond wherever it says "(PC's response.)" If the player makes no response, continue reading.

"Hello, _____ (PC's Name)? This is Phil Gnarly, Chief of Security for TRU Entertainment, Inc. I'm not sure if you remember me, but you 'n I worked together on the _____ (Project) at _____ (Company)/fought together in _____ (Country)?"
(PC's response.)

"So how've ya been?"

(PC's response.)

"Listen, I don't mean to be curt, but we've got a helluva situation here. Some crazed gunmen have taken a load 'a guns and holed themselves up in one 'a our research facilities. We sent in a few 'a our own, but they didn't make it back out.

"We need a professional — someone to lead a team into the facility and take these guys out without raisin' a ruckus. We're willin' to provide travel expenses, supply whatever weapons will be needed to get the job done, and pay a pretty good sum 'a money to boot. All we ask is no questions and no talk after th' fact. Now, I know you're capable of this. Your record of success is no secret. Does this sound like somethin' you might be interested in?"

(PC's response.)

What the PCs Don't Know

In relating the mission to the players, provide as little information as possible to satisfy their curiosities. At the same time, however, you must still manage to pique their interest in the job. All information is corporate classified — given only on a "need to know" basis. Anyone below the title of Director is unaware of the overall picture and is not at liberty to discuss the situation. P.S. — Gnarly is a Director.

Most of the researchers at Devil's Anvil are under the impression that a single test subject has run amuck and is shooting everything in sight. Most of these researchers are also unaware of the technologies being tested, and thus have no idea what is really going on.

Think CIA when dealing with the PCs and keep the deep, dark corporate secrets (AMI's affiliation, TRU's VIRA tie-in, the real situation, BTI's history of failure, and anything relating to "berserker rage") under wraps. Remember: What the PCs know *could* hurt you. Use your discretion. If you *have* no discretion, use the following examples.

What the PCs Do Know

If the PCs show any interest in the job offered by TRU, Inc., Gnarly relates the following details to them. In so doing, however, Gnarly asks the PCs to keep a lid on the entire affair. Relate the following information to the players in your own words.

- The crisis is at Devil's Anvil, one of TRU's desert R&D facilities. Gnarly tells the PCs not to look for it on a map; the facility location is classified.
- There are a total of five "crazed gunmen." They've killed seven security officers. Do not mention the loss of the Cherokee R-12 attack helicopter.
- TRU will pay \$1,000,000 per person for a job well done. TRU will raise the price by \$500,000 increments to a top figure of \$3,000,000 per. As an option, a flat fee of \$15,000,000 may be offered and split amongst the group as they deem fit. Payment comes *after* the job is finished and not before.
- Group size should be between 3-6 PCs and comprised of recently discharged veterans. If the contact PC is unable to raise a group of professionals, Gnarly offers to assemble a group. Note that this offer can be used for new players who have no prior affiliation as a group.
- Weapon requests should be kept within reason. All equipment (including that worn by the gunmen) must be returned when the job is finished.
- The flight leaves from LAX on Aug. 25 at 2000 HRS and arrives at Devil's Anvil one hour later. Gnarly accompanies the group from LAX to Anvil. The PCs will be briefed slightly on the plane and in greater detail once they arrive.
- Medical assistance or hospitalization resulting from "injury on the job" will be covered by TRU's medical plan.
- Contracts confirming this (including the promise of silence and payment plans) must be signed before leaving LAX.

Sneezy: "Roger, Base. We'll approach from east, via the side of the building to avoid direct fire. Grumpy has the point; Doc and Happy are next; Bashful and I are in the rear. We'll be off channel while we cross the perimeter, over."

• 1332 HRS •

Sneezy: "D7 to Base. We're across the perimeter and in defensive position. Grumpy is closing on south entrance to Town Hall from the east. Stand by for cover."

• 1345 HRS •

Sneezy: (SOUND OF GUNFIRE) "D7 to Base! We have three men down! Repeat: Three men down! Grumpy is down at south-east corner of Town Hall. (MORE GUNFIRE) Doc and Happy are down by south door. We are separated by gunfire and can't reach— (STATIC) —pinned down by sniper fire from— (STATIC) —window— (STATIC) —unable to approach. Request immediate backup and medi—(STATIC).

Base: "Base to D7. Security advises you to retreat through perimeter. Repeat: Security advises you to retreat through perimeter. Do you copy, over?"

Sneezy: "D7 to Base. Did not copy last message. Bash— (STATIC) —flanking maneuver to enter through north door. Will report back at — (STATIC) —hours, over."

• 1400 HRS •

Base: Base to D7, over.

• 1415 HRS •

Base: Base to D7, do you copy, over?

• END OF TRANSMISSION •

A Very Brief Briefing

The flight from LAX to Devil's Anvil is quick, so there's little time for anything more than small talk. The PCs should take the opportunity to get acquainted.

Once the PCs land at Devil's Anvil, they are hustled off TRU's private runway and driven across the desert sands to a large, concrete facility built into the foot of a mountain range. Once inside the facility, the PCs are given a brief and unenlightening tour of the facility, then led into a dimly lit briefing room. Inside are three men sitting around a large conference table. They are:

- Jefferson Davis, TRU Vice President in charge of Research & Development;
- Kai Lee, TRU Operations Director at Devil's Anvil;
- Dale Richards, Battletechnics Research & Development Liaison.

Gnarly joins the group in conference, but remains by the door throughout the briefing. His input is occasional, though limited. After the introductions have been made, everyone is seated and the lights are dimmed. Jefferson Davis leads the briefing. Read the following aloud.

"As you know, a group of five gunmen recently infiltrated this facility and holed themselves up in our Babylon test arena. Four of the gunmen are still there. The fifth is either dead, or has left the facility. These intruders have taken an expensive cache of equipment with them into Babylon, including hardware and software still in the early stages of development. It is our wish that all equipment be returned **with as little damage done to it as possible**. We are not so concerned with the lives of the gunmen.

"As far as we know, the group is comprised of four men and a woman. They are all battle veterans, and should be treated with extreme caution."

Davis turns to a large screen on the wall behind him. The lights dim and a map appears onscreen (see Map 1 on p. 12 for details). Continue reading aloud.

"This is an overview of Babylon, a small, urban test arena southwest of Devil's Anvil. There are no inhabitants in Babylon other than the five intruders. Copies of this map will be provided following this briefing."

At this point, relate Map 1 to the players, but do not show them the location numbers listed on that map. To avoid this, it may be necessary for you to trace a copy or redraw the map. If you wish to impress your players with your ability to create and utilize gaming props, feel free to

redraw the map to a larger size. Using Map 1, answer any questions they have (within reason) regarding some of the locations. Base your answers on the key listed in "Babylon Test Facility" and limit the information as described therein.

Once Davis has explained the map, he nods to Kai Lee, who takes over. Lee has a slight Japanese accent in his speaking manner. As he stands, the map disappears from the screen and is replaced by gun footage from a helicopter. The footage shows the bodies of seven security guards on the ground below. All seven are dead; buzzards pick at their remains. Read the following aloud.

"This is gun footage from a Hind Yeltsin AT-40 helicopter flown over the hotspot on a reconnaissance mission. As you know, seven TRU security officers were deployed to flush out the intruders and retrieve TRU's equipment. As you can see, there are five men down. Phil believes the other two are most likely down and out of commission inside one or more of the buildings."

The gun footage shows a man and woman in full battle armor popping out of a building and firing up at the chopper. The woman loads a light missile and aims it up at the chopper. The gun footage freezes on screen. Continue reading the following aloud.

"As the chopper hovered in for a closer view of the bodies, it came under machine gun fire and rocket attack from this building."

Lee stands on his toes as he points to the building with his finger. His shadow falls across the large screen as he does. Continue reading aloud.

"This is Town Hall. This is where the intruders are dug in. The building is a three-story civic structure — fake offices and such. It has two entrances, north and south, with access to all three floors made by elevators here and by two sets of stairs at either end, east and west."

Lee stands on his toes and points to these locations as before. Continue reading aloud.

"There is no basement to this building. It is made of brick and poured concrete. From what we've gathered, the building has incurred no structural damage. That's all we have at this point."

The screen cuts to black. The lights come up as Lee turns the briefing back over to Davis. Proceed reading the following aloud.

"I believe that covers it all. It should be a cakewalk, considering your experience. Any questions?"

As before, limit what you tell the players. Getting information in the corporate world is like getting a raise: coming late and in miniscule amounts. The following information may be related to the players during this question-and-answer session, or at any time before they enter Babylon:

- The names and some background on the intruders (see the Appendix for stats, and make up names);
- A list of weapons and other pertinent equipment the intruders have in their possession (see the Appendix);
- The times and particulars of the assault. The assault will be performed under cover of darkness and the PCs will be armed with all the nightvision equipment they require;
- The frequencies for closed video and radio contact. The PCs will be in contact with base at all times. One of the PCs will broadcast battle footage back to base via a helmetcam.

Once the PCs have finished, Davis says:

"If there are no more questions, I suggest you grab a bite to eat and rest up. Preparation for the assault begins at 2300 hours today. You'll land into Babylon at approximately 0100 hours tomorrow. Phil will accompany you up to the point of deployment. Feel free to ask him anything that comes to mind between now and then. Good luck."

With that, the briefing ends.

Into the Abyss

The PCs are led to the cafeteria, fed, and allowed to entertain themselves in the compound's recreation room. The PCs are alone wherever they go. If anyone asks Gnarly why, he says that most of the compound employees have been sent home until the situation is resolved.

At 2300 hours, the group is given a copy of Map 1 and led to the Security armory, where they are then armed and prepared for battle. At roughly 0100 hours, they are then led out to a helipad on the roof of the compound and loaded into a Hind Yeltsin AT-40 helicopter. Close examination of the chopper by any of the PCs will tell them that this is not the same helicopter shown in the gun footage (different shade of desert camouflage and no bullet holes). Once the chopper is off the pad, it spins around and heads west away from the mountains.

The trip to Babylon is quick — only a few minutes. As they approach the desert city, the PCs see the distant light of a bonfire near Town Hall. If the PCs ask what it is,

Gnarly says it's the perimeter fire the Troops encountered. The helicopter slows as it reaches the L/DZ (location 1) and comes to a hover. Read the following aloud.

The rotors spin with surprisingly little sound as the helicopter comes to a stop-and-hover maneuver at an altitude of 200' above the northeast corner of the Babylon compound. Gnarly taps you on the helmet. "This is it," he says through the headset in your helmet. "Hit the ropes."

The "ropes" are exactly that: four lines secured to the helicopter engine supports and coiled up inside the chopper. The idea is for the PCs to rappel down into Babylon, then head for their objective on foot. Barring any bizarre accident on their part (discourage it), the PCs deploy without incident. The lines disappear back up into the chopper. The chopper hovers momentarily, then spins around and disappears rapidly into the night. From this point on, the PCs are on their own.

Spirits in the Night

Read the following description aloud to the players.

As the chopper disappears, the slight whir of its blades are replaced by the soft crackle and hiss from the distant fire. From the air, you were able to see a large, flaming perimeter around Town Hall. Now all you see is the yellow-orange glow of the flames as they light up the night sky. The flames are strong enough to light your shadows; the dark forms dance and quiver on the ground beneath your feet like spirits in the night. Behind you, the electric security fence hums an ominous and deadly call. Aside from this, the night is deathly still. The city has an eerie, vacant feel to it — a plague-years emptiness that can only suggest impending doom.

To the right of the asphalt road upon which you stand is a weather-beaten sign. It reads:

"Welcome to Babylon. Population 0."

Babylon is a ghost town, more like a Hollywood set than an actual city. There are no inhabitants (other than the intruders); the buildings are crudely built and sparsely (if at all) furnished. If you've seen the types of buildings firemen and police officers train in, you have a good grasp of what Babylon's architecture looks like.

Allow the PCs a bit of time to orient themselves before asking what they do and gently prodding them into the heart of the city. Once the group has a game plan, refer to "Babylon Test Facility" and Map 1 to conduct them toward their objective.

Babylon Test Facility

The following is a key to Map 1. Locations 3, and 5–8 should not be shown or described to the PCs until they reach each location. The intruders have apparently set a perimeter of fire on each block adjacent to Town Hall.

1. L/DZ: The helicopter hovers here only long enough for the PCs to rappel down into the facility.

2. Bodies of Security Troops: Five of the bodies of the security troops are here. The intruders have put them in a pile and set them aflame. The PCs see the smoke from a distance, but cannot tell what is until they reach it.

3. Helicopter Wreckage: The Cherokee R-12 helicopter is imbedded in a two-story structure. The tires and bodies of the crew are still smoldering.

4. Town Hall: This is where the intruders are hiding out. There are two sets of double doors in the structure; one in front, the other in back. There are three floors to this building; all three are identical, except for the north and south entrances to the building, which are on the first floor only. Two security troops' bodies and three live intruders are also on this floor. The fourth intruder stands watch from

the north window of the third floor. She sees the PCs once they are inside the flaming perimeter and opens fire when they are within range. It's up to you to draw a simple map of Town Hall. Design it to your liking, but remember: the buildings in Babylon are merely props for R&D testing.

5. Escape Route: If all hell breaks loose, the intruders escape via this route.

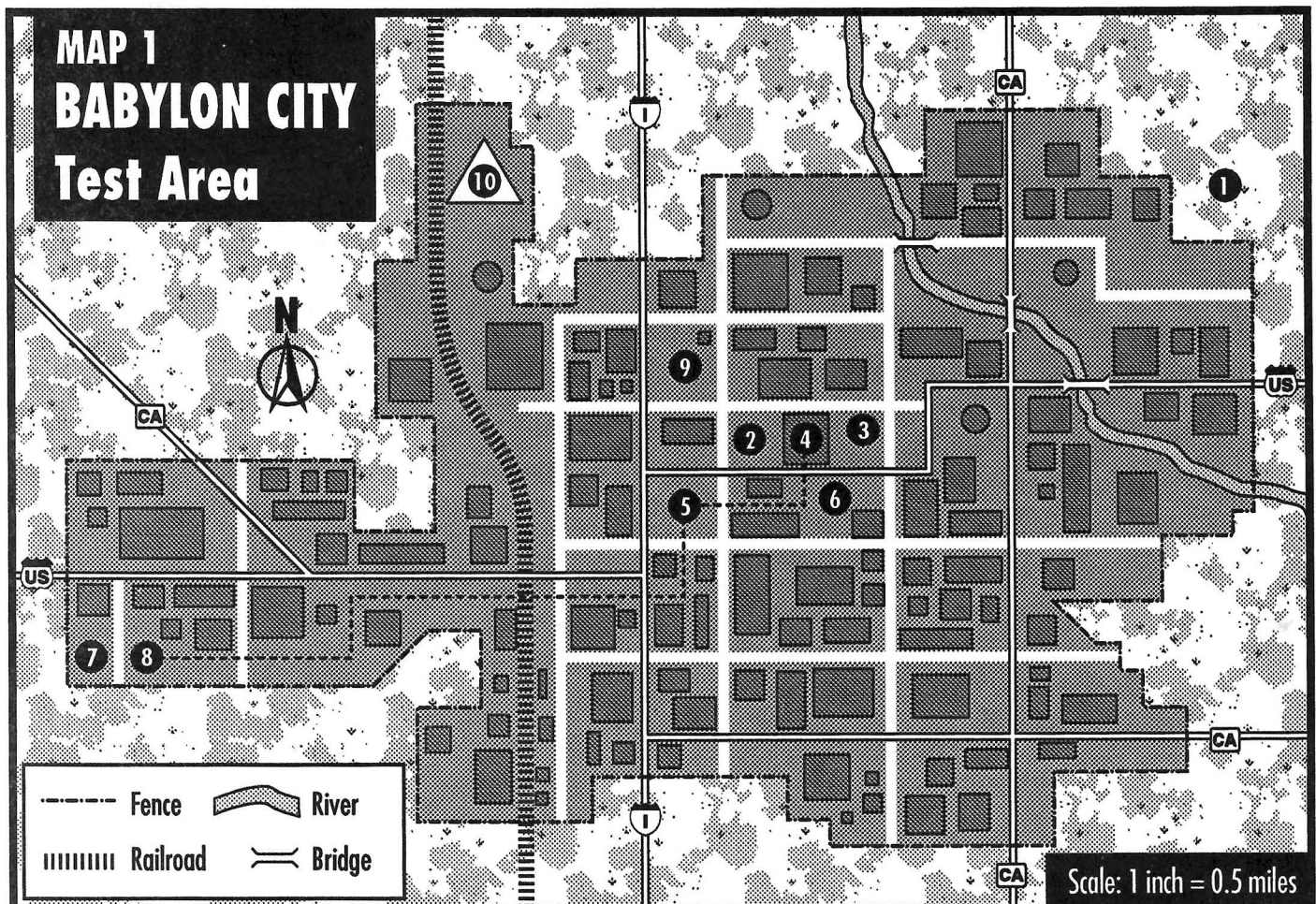
6. First Quote: A crudely scrawled quote is discovered by the PCs. It is written in blood on the wall of the building next to Town Hall (see "Battle Notes").

7. Break in Fence: The PCs discover this 10-foot hole in the electric fence and a single set of footprints leading west out of the compound.

8. Second Quote: The PCs find a second quote burned into the wall of a shed near the fence (see "Battle Notes").

9. Helicopter Landing Point: This is a city park. This is where the first helicopter lands (once the area is secured) and deploys a group of security guards.

10. Helipad: The second helicopter lands here to pick up the PCs (once their objective is achieved) and return them to Devil's Anvil.



Into the Fray

Now for a little gratuitous violence. Running the battle is your job; use your best discretion, along with Map 1 and the NPC templates (see Appendix), to run combat. Track the placement of the intruders and the movement of the PCs on Map 1; this will help immensely during the fire-fight. Note that **under no circumstances** will Gnarly send a helicopter back into the compound until the job is complete. PCs soon see why as they approach their objective: the wreckage of the Cherokee R-12 is buried nose down in one of the buildings (location 3). The rubber tires and the charred remains of the crew are still smoldering.

As the group gets closer to Town Hall (location 4), they see the perimeter fire and a large pyre comprised of all the bodies of the dead Security Officers (location 2). The PCs are in radio and video contact with base at all times; they may describe any of this information if they wish.

As they approach Town Hall, the PCs are met by a fusillade of bullets. They hear a loud *thump* as a grenade slams into a nearby storefront and explodes. Ask the PCs what they do, then run combat as you normally would.

Battle Notes

Keep the following notes in mind when conducting battle.

1. During battle, the PCs encounter four intruders, not five. The fifth is nowhere to be found. If the PCs explain this to Gnarly, he advises them to search all sectors of Babylon once battle is completed. No matter how closely the group searches, they will not find the fifth gunman.

2. The PCs must cross the fiery perimeter and storm Town Hall to capture or kill the four intruders.

3. If the scene looks bad for the intruders, they try to escape via the route marked "location 5" on Map 1. If capture is imminent, the intruders kill themselves with perfectly timed (i.e., once the PCs are near) grenades or gunshots to the head.

4. After the battle, the PCs find a quote scrawled in blood on a building next to Town Hall (location 6). It reads:

"The mighty have gone down to hell with their weapons of war."

If the PCs radio this information back to base, Gnarly tells them to check the rest of the compound for Number 5. He has no clue where the quote is from or what it means.

The PCs discover signs of Number 5: the fence in the western corner of the compound has a 10-foot hole in it

(location 7). One set of footprints in the sand leads out into the desert. Next to the hole in the fence, burned into the wall (location 8), is a second quote. It reads:

"For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

When the PCs radio this information back to base, Gnarly tells them: "I was afraid of this. Number 5 must be outside the Babylon compound."

The Eye of the Storm

Once the PCs achieve their objective by securing the fire zone, they are instructed by Gnarly to remove all equipment from the intruders' bodies and place it in a pile in the park (location 9). They are also told to start containing and extinguishing the fires until their chopper arrives at the helipad (location 10). The PCs now have an opportunity to look over the bodies of the intruders and examine their equipment. Feel free to describe the NPCs — what's left of them, anyway — and the unique nature of their equipment (see the Appendix for equipment descriptions).

Within minutes, the PCs see two helicopters coming over the early morning horizon. The first lands in the park. Its engine cuts and the rotors spin to a halt. A group of security officers deploy and begin the clean-up operation. The second helicopter lands near the northwest corner of town, on the helipad. It is there just long enough to load the PCs. Gnarly stands beside the chopper as the PCs arrive. "Bad news!" he shouts over the roar of the engines. "We found Number 5!"

Ω

Notes on the Quotes

Part of the intrigue in this adventure is the PCs' discovery of certain clues, facts, and associations. For this reason, sources for the quotes in this chapter are not listed with the quotes. A player with more than average biblical background will recognize the source of these quotes (the Bible); recognizing the books and verses, however, may be a stretch. For that reason, the sources are as follows: Quote 1 is from Ezekiel 32:27; Quote 2 is from Matthew 24:27. Don't tell the PCs where these quotes come from; let them figure it out for themselves. If the PCs suggest a computer search or library search for the origin of these quotes, they receive the information within four hours of initiating the search. Letting the PCs do the search may be time consuming. To save time, Gnarly suggests having researchers at Devil's Anvil perform the task and relays the information to the PCs once they have it.



CHAPTER 2: DAY OF WRATH

"Jed Stark raised the camera and began shooting his roll of infrared film, aiming the camera sights at that bobbing head. Then Wanda shrieked, for I saw them and came charging down on them, brandishing a polished steel shovel. It smashed the camera. It felled the girl and then the boy. Jed fought me for a desperate hissing moment before he was bludgeoned into helplessness. Then the android dragged them to the furnace and fed them into the flames, slowly, hideously. It capered and sang. Then it returned to my hotel.

"The thermometer in the power plant registered 100.9° murderously fahrenheit. All reet! All reet!"

Alfred Bester, "Fondly Fahrenheit"

I-15 Terrorist Attack Kills 15 Attack "Looks Like Ground Zero at San Luis Obispo"

By Jack Hammer
USA ALIVE

Aug 26, 2021

Barstow, CA —An unknown assailant fired an anti-tank rocket at motorists passing by on Interstate 15 early this morning, killing 11 and injuring countless others. Sources say the assailant fired a Fuzzbuster® rocket into a passing trailer truck. The truck, which was loaded with propane, set off a tremendous explosion that lit up the morning sky for 40 miles and leveled a mile-long section of I-15.

The blast claimed the lives of at least 11 people. Barstow police are working through the night to sift through the charred remains.

Outside Barstow City Hall, Police Chief Randall Barron spoke briefly to reporters, saying the death toll could climb as high as 30 before day's end.

"I haven't seen anything this gruesome since 2016," Barron said. "It looks like ground zero in San Luis Obispo. I mean, you expect to see this sort of thing in LA, but not here...at least, not often." The California State Patrol has closed Interstate 15 from Baker to Barstow pending further investigation and clean-up efforts.

"The sheer magnitude of damage is staggering. Identification is impossible. At this stage, it's hard to tell what belongs to who and who belongs to what vehicle," said California

Highway Patrolman, Louis Martinez. National Guardsmen from the 101st Battalion have been called in to secure the area and assist in the clean-up effort.

Barstow police report one of the 11 identified victims was shot in the back of the head at point-blank range with a large-caliber handgun. According to investigators, the victim's vehicle, a '19 Jeep Condor, was taken by the assailant. The California Highway Patrol has put out an APB on the vehicle. Police have no suspect and no motive for the attack.

California Governor Curtis Brown has planned a press conference for this afternoon. Condemning the violence, Brown called the attack an "act of terror." FBI officials quickly countered Brown's remarks, claiming any qualification of the heinous crime as a "terrorist act" would be "premature and unwarranted."

"We've been told to withhold public speculation until all the facts are in," FBI Regional Director Al Rick said.

The truck responsible for the explosion was en route to TRU, Inc., corporate HQ in Upper Hollywood. TRU corporate officials were unavailable for comment, although reliable sources within that organization have stated there is no known tie between the attack and their company. JH

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

• WCNN TV BROADCAST
8/26/21, 0800 HRS •

"This is World CNN.

"Our top story: An unknown assailant fired a rocket into a truck loaded with propane early this morning on Interstate 15 near Barstow, CA. The resulting explosion killed at least 12 people and injured dozens." **VOICE OVER THEME** as Justin Lucky appears on screen.

"Good morning. I'm Justin Lucky. An unknown assailant fired an explosive rocket into a propane tanker headed westbound on Interstate 15, 20 miles south of Barstow, CA. The attack occurred at 6 AM Pacific Standard Time. The shot set off a tremendous explosion that decimated a half mile section of roadway, killing at least 12 motorists and injuring dozens more. Our Guy Smiles was there."

CUT TO a bird's-eye view of utter chaos and destruction shot from a helicopter. A massive cloud of smoke pillars into the sky like a mushroom cloud. At least 30 cars are burning. Nothing remains of the semi except the burned out cab and a few burning tires.

Fire trucks cover the roadside, spraying chemical retardant on the blazes. Helicopters fly by overhead, dumping retardant and swinging in close for aerial footage. **GRAPHIC** in the corner of the picture says "Aug. 26, 2021, 6 AM PST."

"An assailant fired a Fuzz-buster® rocket into a truck

Chain Lightning

Gnarly says nothing during the trip back to Devil's Anvil. The sun shines bright and golden on the east horizon. It's roughly 0900. Once the helicopter lands, the PCs are taken inside a building. "Don't bother changing out of your battlesuits," Gnarly advises. "This job ain't over yet."

The PCs are led directly to the same briefing room they were led to the first time. Jefferson Davis is the only one there when the PCs arrive. Davis motions for Gnarly to close the door and dim the lights. As before, Gnarly remains by the door.

As the lights dim, the screen on the wall shows a color bar, then a scramble of data, which is replaced by the familiar World CNN logo. Read the sidebars on these pages aloud. After reading the sidebar, read the following aloud.

The broadcast ends and the screen goes blank. The lights come back up slowly. Davis sighs and looks around the room at each of you. "Well, we know who's responsible, don't we?"

Coming Clean

Davis looks at the PCs without saying a word. After a long pause, he runs his hand through his hair. Read the following aloud.

"Well, it looks as if the shit has hit the fan. The boys in R&D have an acronym for this sort of thing, so it must happen pretty often: they call it 'F.U.B.A.R.' I call it 'one major load of shit.'" Davis stares at the table for a moment. "I don't have to tell you that Number 5 is outside the compound; it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that one out. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what's next, now does it?"

Davis lights a cigarette and blows a cloud of smoke across the table. "Number 5 has to be eliminated — dead simple. The trick is, how to find him. I guess this is where we fill you in on a little background." Davis turns to Gnarly. "Phil?"

Gnarly nods, opens the door, closes and locks it behind him. Davis turns his attention to you. "What I'm about to tell you is strictly classified and goes no further than this room. Is that understood?"

If the PCs say, "No," Davis reminds them of the nondisclosure agreement in their contracts — the one that says "forfeiture of wages if details of the mission are divulged." Davis continues.

"Number 5, Michael Lewis, is part of a volunteer test group — the group you encountered in Babylon. The group didn't break into Babylon — that was a cover story — they were sent there to test some new battle software. TRU is involved in a major defense contract — one that involves a lot of big names — one that *could* spell beaucoup bucks for this corporation, if it ever works. The trick is getting it to work.

"I take it you saw the equipment on the bodies of the test agents? What you saw is known as 'troop enhancement.' It's similar to boosting, which you've all been through. This is maybe a couple steps up in destructive capability. Up to this point, that hardware has caused test volunteers to experience what's called 'berserker rage.' Having all those weapons of destruction is a big strain on the human psyche; once the soldier starts shooting, it's damn near impossible to stop him. That's where TRU comes in.

"Our donation to this project is the software — a virtual reality application that modifies reality for the combatant, making it easier to conduct combat. The software quells the berserker rage and allows the soldier to fight without mental fatigue. It's a complicated process, so I won't go into detail. I can tell you the equipment tested successfully at a Northern California test facility. The Babylon test is the first in a series of environmental tests. As you can see, it's also a major fuckup.

"The R&D troubleshooters believe the heat caused the equipment failure. One of them said, 'It's not the heat, it's the humidity.'" Davis laughs, but his smile fades



instantly. "He's currently on his way to our Arctic test facility. Anyway, this is the first case in which the software failed. This is also the first case in which the soldiers exhibited anything other than an uncoordinated appetite for destruction.

"Now that you know the score, it's your turn to run with the ball. I want you to find Number 5 and eliminate him. And go easy on the equipment: the suit costs more than you or I make in a decade."

Davis stands up and walks to the door. "How you do this is up to you. Come up with a game plan and Phil will set you up with everything you need." As Davis opens the door, he says, "and remember what I said about 'nondisclosure.' "

The Best Laid Plans

The PCs are given a bit of time alone in the briefing room, during which, Phil waits outside the door. If the PCs wish, they can see the WCNN tape again, or read a copy of the latest BBS copy of *USA Alive* (see p. 15). In any case, give the players this time to formulate a plan of attack.

A few things should be immediately obvious to the group. If they aren't, do your best to make them so.

- The PCs should start their investigation at Craterstate 15.
- That crater is crawling with cops of every shape and color of uniform. Suspicious characters (like a bunch of PCs in full battle regalia) are bound to attract detention. As a result, the PCs will have to visit the scene of the crime incognito. There are many ways to do this, as shown in "Deception is the Bitter Part of Valor."
- The PCs will need weapons to eliminate Number 5, so they'll need a spacious, reliable means of transportation — something big and roomy, capable of carrying 3-6 PCs and a load of weapons.

- The vehicle should be capable of off-road travel, since it's likely the roads near the scene are closed or blocked. Devil's Anvil has several 4- or 6-wheel drive Jeeps. Air travel is discouraged; the authorities are sure to monitor air traffic before all others.
- The PCs will need a private means of communication with Devil's Anvil, since it's likely the authorities are listening to every open broadcast in the region. Gnarly provides the PCs with a video transceiver and a priority channel for communications: a straightline, signal (scrambled) courtesy of TRU's CalSat 5. The satellite dish connects to the roof of the Jeep and looks like the dish on top of a TV news vehicle.

A Plan of Attack

The PCs must come up with a way to gain access to the crime scene. As an alternative, they may come up with a way to gain access to investigators or their evidence (chances of success here are less than with the former method, though). Some of these means may be decided at Devil's Anvil or at the scene of the crime. Whatever the case, let the PCs decide. Listed below are just a few of the many possible methods the PCs may employ.

Deception is the Bitter Part of Valor

The PCs may access the crime scene by disguising themselves, their means, and their motives. The following are sample methods to this approach.

1. **Try to Sneak In:** A particularly bad idea, especially since the clean-up will go on for days, time is of the essence, and cops are everywhere — and everywhen.
2. **Pose as Barstow Policemen:** Another bad idea, since Barstow's population is only 20,000, and there's a good chance every cop on the force knows every other cop.

tanker full of petrol, setting off an explosion seen as far away as Barstow and heard as far away as Los Angeles."

CUT TO CLOSE UP of firefighters fighting the blaze.

"Twelve bodies have been identified so far. Barstow Police expect a higher body count once the fires are completely extinguished."

CUT TO policeman standing next to an ambulance. He is talking and gesticulating with his hands. **GRAPHIC** identifies him as Barstow Police Chief Randall Barron.

"The gas explosion set off a chain of lightning-like explosions. About 40 cars were ignited by that explosion, and there isn't much left of anyone in any of those 40 cars."

CUT TO EXTREME LONG SHOT of a pillar of smoke.

CUT TO women crying, consoling each other.

CUT TO Guy Smiles, talking head, in front of the firefighters fighting the blaze. "California Governor Curtis Brown has scheduled a press conference for 1 PM PST. WCNN will broadcast the conference live. Just minutes ago, the Governor's office asked for federal assistance in the form of FBI investigators and local reserve deployments.

"Official sources report that the National Guard has been put on alert in the event that other acts of terror follow. Some time this afternoon, National Guardsmen stationed at Edwards Air Force Base are expected to be called in to help with the clean-up. For now, the California Highway Patrol, along with Barstow and Victorville City Police and Fire Departments are taking care of the clean-up. As yet, there is no known motive and no suspect in the case. This is Guy Smiles for WCNN."

• END OF BROADCAST •

3. Pose as California State Patrolmen: A good idea, since California is a big state. The problem is the PCs won't be able to come and go as they please; everyone in the CASP is expected to lend a hand in the clean-up.

4. Pose as National Guardsmen: A better idea, since everyone on the scene is anticipating the Guard's arrival. The problem is (as above) that the PCs will be expected to work and may find it hard to get away once they start.

5. Pose as FBI Agents: An even better idea, since it gives the PCs freedom of movement around the crime scene.

6. Pose as News Reporters or a TV Crew: The best idea, since it allows the PCs a means of recording the scene without drawing undue attention.

In all cases, and regardless of what method of deception the PCs select, roleplay the situation and determine the outcome based on their savvy, guile, and disguises. Most anything the PCs need can be provided by Gnarly. (Which should lead the PCs to wonder why all these costumes are lying around — save that for later conspiracies.)

Note that suspicions are at an all-time high in the desert. If the PCs blow it, they blow it. Depending on who catches them in a lie determines where they go: Barstow Police = Barstow, CA State Patrol = Victorville, National Guard = Edwards Air Force Base, FBI = Los Angeles.

If the PCs are captured, it's up to them what happens next. They can attempt a dazzling escape, attempt to shoot their way out of custody, or go with the flow and call Anvil with their one phone call. (A bad idea; Devil's Anvil will not accept the charges or even acknowledge the PCs' existence.) Do your best to help the PCs avoid this embarrassing *faux pas* — it will only sour the adventure. If necessary, have an authoritarian of the arresting variety free the PCs when no one is looking — telling them he's with TRU, to hightail it, and not to screw the pooch again.

It's Not What You Know —

It's Who You Know

Kidnapping an officer of the law is probably not the wisest or safest means of investigation, but it is a means nonetheless. Be aware that security is tight — really tight — so incredibly tight, that the local authorities are expecting just about anything at this point. As a result, catching them off guard isn't quite so easy. That isn't to say it's impossible. Use whatever means works best for you and your group. If the group will enjoy this method, encourage their madness. Be advised, however, of the following.

1. You'll Need a Map: It will be wise to draw a map of the area. Use a standard section of desert freeway as a model (four lanes with shoulders, separated by an empty median). Now draw a blast zone one-half mile in diameter over it. Now place the full complement of wreckage, clean-up crew: cops, state troopers, weekend warriors, men in dark glasses, witnesses, next of kin, TV crews. That's all you need; there's nothing else out here but sagebrush and sand. Determining logistics and likelihoods of success are up to you.

2. It's the Middle of the Day: Sticking a hand over someone's mouth and dragging them into the shadows won't be easy in broad daylight. And waiting until dusk is no good — too many delays, and the PCs are off the job. Pulling this one off will require some fancy, fancy footwork.

3. Most People Here Have Guns: They also have the ability and license to use them. PCs grabbing people by the throats and carrying them off in broad daylight is one sure way to see action. It's also a quick way for the PCs to find themselves out of a job — and into a jail cell.

4. There Are Options: Describe to the PCs the sheer number of people and foolishness of this act. Remind them it's not too late to try another course of action, such as...

Stealing Information

W.C. Fields once said, "Anything worth having is worth cheating for," which could prove good advice in this instance. All the PCs have to do is look around at all the television crews and witnesses and investigators, and they should be able to see a wealth of information just waiting to be accessed. There are several ways to do this.

1. Big Hack Attack: Nearly every investigative force here — local, state, federal, and public — has a van for collecting evidence. In those vans are laptop computers, portable computers, modems, and so on. Most of these vans are parked away from the scene and away from the investigative traffic. Often (such as at lunch), these vans are left unattended. They are locked, but that shouldn't be a problem for dirty tricksters. The computers are likewise locked, but again, that shouldn't be a problem.

2. Something in the Air: Most of the TV vans are broadcasting live feeds from their field production vans. Several stations are here: WCNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, local affiliates (KTLA), etc. Many of these stations use the CalSat network to beam their signals home. With help from base, the PCs could pirate the live feeds, and have Anvil filter the broadcasts and edit through the detritus. The information can then be sent to the PCs via their portable transceiver.

3. Meet the Press: The PCs could follow the press corps around and listen for any information that might be useful. From there, they can strike up conversations with eyewitnesses. By the same token, the PCs can pose as press officials and strike up conversations with other press officials, or simply play the interviewers themselves. With a bit of guile, the PCs could glean useful information from several sources — including Barstow Police Chief Randall Barron, California State Patrol Captain Louis White, and National Guard Captain Manuel Duarte. FBI Agents Smith and Jones won't be so likely to divulge information and may instead be rather suspicious of these "journalists."

Armed & Dangerous

Once the PCs decide what to do, Gnarly lets them out of the briefing room. Gnarly escorts the PCs to the armory and equipment bay. He stops them from divulging any information he is not privy to — a precaution that has kept him at his post for several years. The PCs receive the following equipment regardless of which plan of attack they choose:

- A portable TV transceiver, satellite dish, scrambler/descrambler, and priority channel on CalSat 5. The PCs' code name is "Rolling Thunder." Base is "Anvil";
- A sand-camouflaged '21 Jeep Scirocco, an all-terrain, 6-wheel, monster-truck lover's wet dream (not as big as a monster truck, but it'll drive over most things);
- A map of the area (redraw or photocopy Map 2).

Depending upon which plan of attack the PCs decided upon, they get the following equipment:

- Street clothes;
- Desert camouflage;
- High-power binoculars & nightvision apparatus;
- Barstow Police/CA State Patrol/National Guard/FBI uniforms, badges, and standard equipment;
- TV cameras, tripods, mikes, and laptop computers;
- Thieves tools, including auto theft equipment;
- Anesthetics and sodium pentathol (truth serum);
- Smaller scale weapons;
- A couple other larger weapons.

Once the PCs have been armed and equipped, they're ready to go. It is 1100 hours. Gnarly drives the PCs to the north gate and sees them out. He has no salutations or words of advice. His only comment is, "We'll be in touch."

Ground Zero: I-15

The PCs drive for as long as it takes to get near the blast zone (location 2 on Map 2). Gnarly warns the PCs via CalSat 5 that the National Guard have secured the area, and that the State Patrol have set up roadblocks on every road in the county. He also says TRU intelligence sources indicate that FBI officials are on the scene. "Be careful who ya talk to," Gnarly advises. "Some 'a those guys are tricky."

The PCs can approach "Ground Zero" directly (if they're in disguise) via Interstate 15, or other access roads; or indirectly (if they're sneaking) via the overland route. Note that the authorities are searching the area in off-road vehicles, and the National Guard are providing helicopter reconnaissance. Note also that the lay of the land in this area is relatively flat: there is only one promontory, and that is to the east of Ground Zero. If the PCs use this elevated lookout, make them aware of the fact (via Gnarly, if necessary) that they are visible to ground forces and recon choppers unless they are camouflaged. Likewise, if the PCs come within visual range on level with Ground Zero, they are similarly visible and should use camouflage.

The trip to Craterstate 15 takes about two hours by highway (the same overland). Once the PCs are within visual range of Ground Zero (at about 1,300'), read the following description aloud.

To the west, through several pillars of smoke, you see what Anvil officials have been calling 'Ground Zero.' If armageddon has a face, this is it.

Four gray lanes of Interstate 15 disappear into a crater half a mile in diameter and 20' deep dead center. Men and women scramble and slide down the crater sides like ants in the pit of an ant lion. About 30 incinerated cars and trucks lay strewn like toys around the gaping wound. About 1,000' from the western lip of the crater is the twisted frame of a cab-over truck. Out of 30 vehicles, all that's left are smoking shells, burning tires, and scattered debris.

The loss of life is greater than reports claim. Neat, sheet-covered bodies lie in rows, five by nine, like corpses waiting to be dumped into a mass grave. Tire tracks cover the desert around the charred pit. Red lights and sirens run constantly as vehicles, identified bodies, and fresh help come and go. Fire trucks battle the few remaining blazes at the edge of the blast. Police cars block traffic, rerouting it back the way it came and along secondary routes circumventing the scene of the inferno. Curious sightseers litter the desert, waiting for a look at a corpse. Overall, the scene looks like a strike zone during war time.

Tracks in the Sand

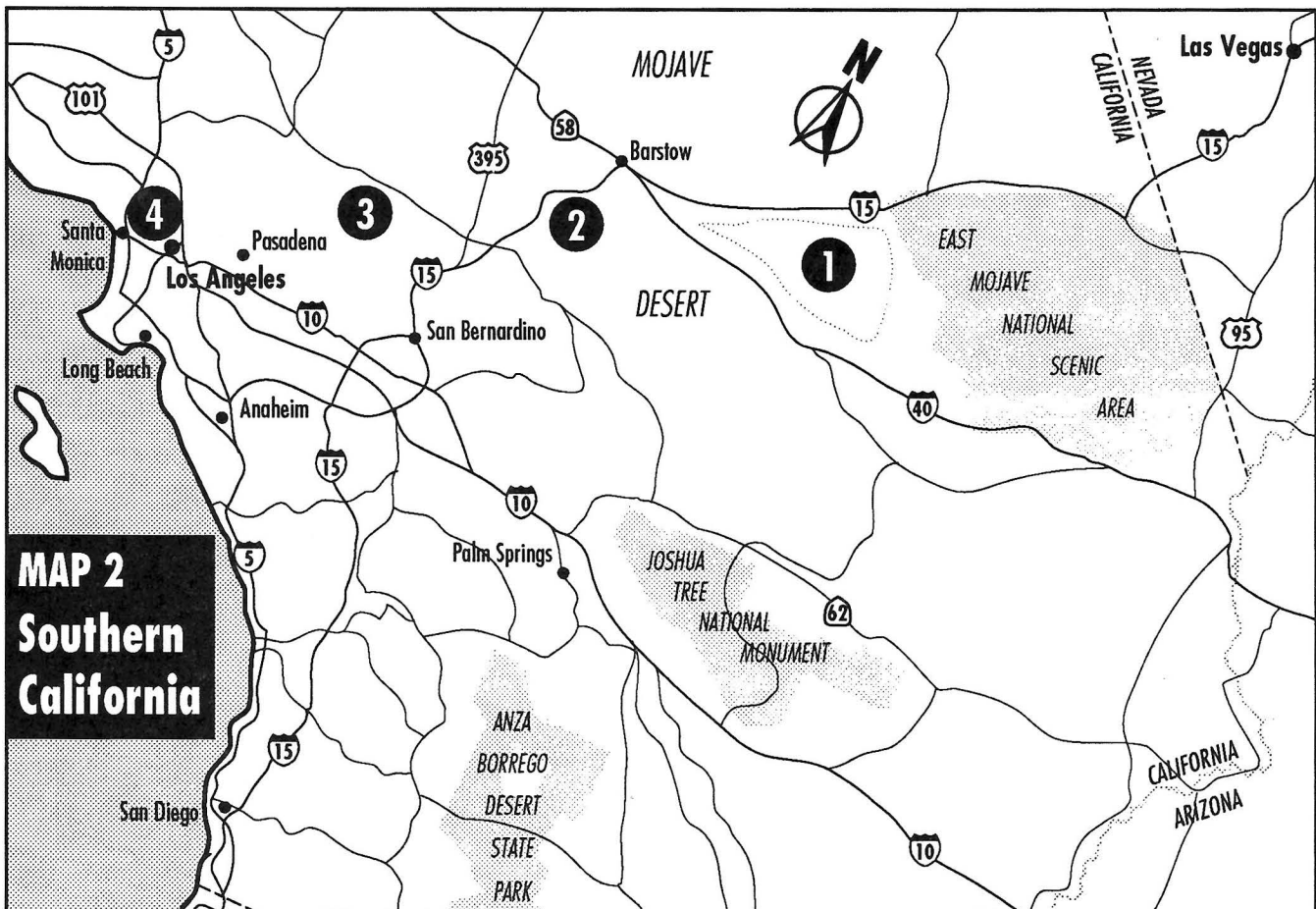
Regardless of how the PCs gain access to the crime scene, success garners one, any, or all of the following clues. Use your own judgment as to which and how many clues to allow depending on the players' roleplaying savvy.

- Pieces of charred wood and ashes lay in a pile nearly one mile east northeast of the blast.
- Scrawled in the sand near the ashes is a third quote:
"The watchman said, 'The morning cometh, and also the night.'"
- In the tanker's glove compartment are scraps of the driver's log showing the vehicle belongs to TRU, Inc. The log shows the truck was headed from Anvil Oil to TRU Corporate Headquarters in Upper Hollywood.
- Powder burns on one of the victims show he was shot in the head from behind at close range. The assailant used a large-caliber handgun. The victim was driving a '19 Jeep Condor, which is now missing.
- The CA Highway Patrol has an APB on a tan, '19 Jeep Condor, vanity plate "HOLYWOOD".

- Melted rubber from the wheels of a 4-wheel drive vehicle has been left for 500' on the pavement 100' from the edge of the crater. These same treads (which are similar to the tracks left by the PCs' Jeep) reappear as tracks in the sand heading west southwest. There is a pool of blood and a chalk outline near the tracks on the pavement.
- In the sand, next to the tire tracks, is a crumpled up "Baby On Board" sign.
- Scrawled in the sand next to the road, 1,000' east of the blast, is a fourth quote. It reads:
"Be therefore ready also, for the Son of man comes at an hour when you think not."

The Waste Lands

If the PCs follow the tire tracks, they drive across the desert in a straight line west southwest. Eventually, they cross US Highway 395. Five miles after that, the tracks disappear altogether, having been blown over by the wind (somewhere between locations 2 and 3 on Map 2).



The PCs have two options: scour the area for tracks, or extrapolate Michael's line of movement and go that direction. If the PCs scour the area, they find no tracks. If they move west southwesterly, allow them to continue as long as they like (they have the right idea, though their methods are flawed). Eventually, they find tracks leading to the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains (location 3 on Map 2).

The PCs should figure out that Michael's line of movement is a line west southwest. From this, they should conclude that they'll reach the San Gabriel Mountains shortly. If the PCs extrapolate the line further, they see that it runs into LA, into Hollywood, and directly to TRU, Inc. (location 4 on Map 2). Leave this latter deduction to the PCs; do not suggest it unless one of them is on that track. Otherwise, have Gnarly prompt them. If the PCs figure this out, Gnarly suggests they continue on their west southwesterly course.

If the PCs are way off track and haven't figured out that Number 5 is moving west southwest, Gnarly informs them that Kai Lee has discovered a pattern — a straight line of movement along a west southwesterly course. Lee suggests the PCs continue on their present course until they discover further evidence or reach the San Gabriel Mountains.

Whatever route they take, the PCs eventually find the tracks again. It is almost dusk. The PCs will need to use their headlights to see where they're going.

The Hanged Man

At about 2000 hours, the PCs come to a steep gravel road that climbs up toward the treeline into the San Gabriel Mountains. The tire tracks end here. If the PCs follow the road, they climb up into the mountains and come to a small plateau gouged into the mountainside. There is a cabin here. There are two pine trees and a parking lot in front of the cabin. In the lot in front of the cabin are two cars: a late-model, blue Ford pickup truck and a green, '19 Jeep Condor with the license plate "HOLYWOOD" (see Map 3).

If the PCs relate this information to base, they get static and garbled responses, which doesn't make sense since there's nothing but night sky between them and Devil's Anvil. Only a few broken sentences make it through:

1. "We are receiving a bad—"
2. "—be I—"
2. "—not sure how many at this—"
3. "—since US Highway 395."
3. ". . . delicately. Repeat: Be advised—"

Roleplay this by making static sounds or using a radio in the background. Do not read the broken messages to the PCs all at once; provide them over the course of the investigation of the cabin. If no one is monitoring the transceiver, the PCs miss all but the last two garbled messages.

Just between us, the complete messages are:

1. "Repeat last message, Rolling Thunder. We are receiving a bad signal. Something is garbling your transmission."
2. "Rolling Thunder, we've just been informed by intelligence sources that FBI Agents are tracking your movements. Sources are not sure how many at this time. We'll get back to you with more shortly."
3. "Bad news, Rolling Thunder. Be advised that our intelligence confirms you are being followed by as many as 10 FBI Agents on your trail since US Highway 395. Transmissions show that you are suspect in Ground Zero. Deal with the situation delicately. Repeat: Be advised. . . ."

If the PCs figure out the garbled message, give them a chance to avoid the situation by performing a quick investigation of the area. If they do not figure out the garbled message, the PCs will run afoul of the FBI agents. In the meantime, however, they are free to investigate the scene.

1. Inside the Jeep: There is nothing inside the Jeep, other than the possessions of the owner. If the PCs check the radio, they find it tuned to a Los Angeles radio station (93-KULT).

2. Inside the Ford: Likewise, there is nothing inside the truck, other than the possessions of the truck's owner — Gus Gruesome.

3. Outside the Cabin: If the PCs are lucky (you decide how lucky), they find deep prints leading away from the cabin, up the side of the mountain. Other than that, they find nothing else of interest.

4. Inside the Cabin: The PCs find lots of interesting things inside the cabin. First and foremost is the hanged man, Gus Gruesome, the cabin's owner. Gus is hanging upside down by his feet from a support beam that runs the entire length of the cabin. His hands are tied behind his back, and his throat is slit from ear to ear. On the floor beneath him is a pool of blood that's covered with flies and ants. Scrawled in blood on the floor next to the puddle is a sixth quote:

"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes."

Beyond that, there's nothing else of interest here.

The Datasoft Online Bible™

Neo-Vatican Version 4.0
Pope Juan I, Editor

The 21st Century is a time of change for the Roman Catholic Church. With the Neo-Vatican's move to Nicaragua have come a host of new policies. For example, women are allowed in the priesthood for the first time in the history of the church and the traditional Latin liturgy is now performed in Spanish, the new, official language of Roman Catholicism.

The most notable change, however, came before the Vatican's move to Central America, in the translation of the Catholic Church's most time-honored and highly revered document: the Holy Bible.

5. Out the Side Door: The side door opens onto stairs that lead to a tool shed next to the cabin. Between the cabin and the tool shed is a parking spot which is used for overload parking, unloading wood, etc. The tool shed is locked, but can be broken into easily. Inside the shed, there is little other than woodworking tools.

6. Behind the Cabin: If the PCs look around outside, they find a pile of chopped wood stacked against the house. If they go farther out behind the cabin, they find an overgrown access drive just beyond the trees at the end of the parking spot. Closer examination of this area shows recent tire tracks in the dirt. If the PCs walk any length down this hidden drive, they discover that it descends the side of the mountain.

A Quick Getaway

While the PCs are poking in and around the cabin, FBI Agents are sneaking up to surround them. If the PCs have someone on guard, they notice any of a number of clues, at your discretion, and in the following order:

- Repeated, furious attempts by Anvil to get through the static to the PCs;
- Headlights at the base of the hill, coming up;
- Sounds of vehicles coming up the main drive;
- Flashlights in the woods;
- A silence in the crickets' chirpings;
- Hushed voices and radio sounds in the woods.

If the PCs figure out something's afoot, give them ample opportunity to escape by Jeep (following the hidden access road by the tool shed) or on foot (following the foot-path up the hill or the hidden path down it). The best means of escape is via the access road. Subtly point the PCs in this direction if you feel so inclined.

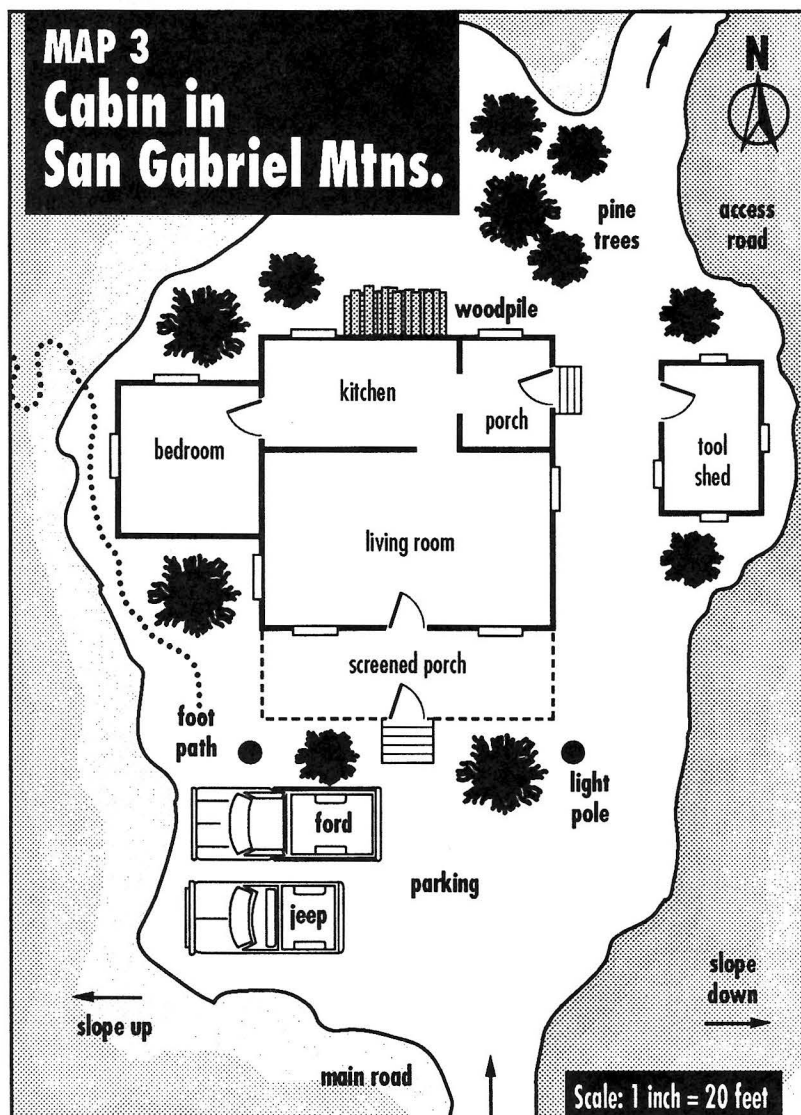
This scene does not require a violent resolution; the GM may allow the PCs to make a quick getaway if she so desires. In this case, skip ahead to "The Enemy Within."

If, however, your group is prone to violence, in need of violence, or in need of punishment for earlier violence, proceed to "Fire on the Mountain."

Fire on the Mountain

If the PCs haven't figured out what's happening, or if they didn't put someone on guard, the next thing they see is a bunch of bright spotlights trained on their Jeep and on the cabin. Read the following aloud.

A flood of light engulfs the cabin. Everywhere you look, there are spotlights. You hear the whirr of helicopter blades beyond the trees at a lower elevation. An electronic voice crackles in static from the forest.



"This is the FBI. We have you surrounded. There is no chance of escape. Your only chance of survival is surrender. Toss your weapons out of the building, then come out of the building, slowly, one by one, with your hands on top of your heads. Repeat. This is the FBI. We have you surrounded...."

Once you've described the situation to the PCs, ask what they plan to do. There are three courses of action the players may take (and a fourth course of inaction). If your players are wiler than the average coyote and come up with a course of action not listed herein, you're on your own. Do what you can to make it interesting while still managing to keep a loose rein on the PCs. If this fails, punish them for their ingenuity.

"And I'll Take the Low Road"

In their haste, the FBI Agents were unable to fully survey the cabin's surroundings, hence they are unaware of the hidden access road behind the tool shed. Likewise, they have not covered the footpath up the slope of the mountain. The PCs may at any time attempt to get into their Jeep and drive it down the path or escape via the footpath up the slope.

Movement toward either route inspires a barrage of heavy fire from the agents. In either case, the agents follow the PCs: on foot on the footpath, or (after a delay) in vehicles on the access road. Either way, the PCs eventually lose the Agents (barring any mistakes, or GM intervention). If the PCs escape by Jeep, go to "The Enemy Within."

"Come and Get Me, Copper!"

The PCs may decide to stay in the cabin and exchange fire with the FBI Agents for an indeterminate length of time. This is a dramatic idea, but it is not necessarily a good one — especially since reinforcements are on the way. Conduct the battle as you would any other lost cause. Once the battle is over, proceed to "Battle Resolutions" and pick the appropriate resolution based on the outcome of the battle.

"The Best Defense..."

The players may be thinking the last thing the FBI expects is a bum rush with barrels blazing. They are correct in this assumption. The FBI has no idea what level of skill or insatiable appetite for destruction the PCs have. Thus, the Agents may be expecting a fight, but they aren't expecting a direct assault.

There are several points that may necessitate a direct assault. First, the PCs need the Jeep to make it to LA. Second, they need the communications system in the Jeep to keep in touch with Anvil. (Without either, they're sitting ducks.) Third, they need to make it to LA without an entire corps of Agents on their tails. Fourth, they may feel a need to protect TRU, Inc. (and their own financial security) by covering their tracks.

If the PCs opt for the bum rush, run it as a battle royale. The PCs do not get initiative; the Agents are expecting some action, and will open fire at the first sign of trouble. The PCs may gain advantages based on their actions, however. PC goals are as follows.

- **Knock Out the Spotlights:** Without the lights, the Agents can't see. The PCs should have their nightvision equipment (if they don't already have a special enhancement) and gain the advantage on attack or escape.
- **Kill All the Agents:** Anyone returning to FBI HQ could identify the PCs; thus, killing all of them here makes it harder for the Bureau to put the finger on them.
- **Get Rid of the Evidence:** Hiding, confiscating, or destroying evidence of the PCs' presence at the cabin makes it harder for the Bureau to track them.
- **Block the Mountain Drive:** Blocking the drive with flaming wreckage, etc., will make it hard for other Agents to follow the PCs. That does not solve the problem of the National Guard choppers, though, which are on their way.
- **Do It Quickly:** As in, "before anyone else shows up." Reinforcements are on the way; time is of the essence.

The change of millennium marked a significant drop in Catholic numbers. Vatican excesses and organized crime involvement, along with widely publicized sexual affairs and grisly assassinations are listed as factors contributing to this massive decline. The pederasty trial of Pope John Paul George in the first year of the new century could have been the Vatican's swan song were it not for the ascension of Pope Juan I.

Pope Juan I brought a new outlook to the dying religion — an attitude of modernism to a political power grown exceedingly decadent and staunchly resistant to change as its numbers waned. Under Pope Juan I, the Vatican underwent a major facelift. It was Pope Juan I, for instance, who suggested letting women join the priesthood.

To combat the worldwide decline in membership, the Vatican needed a new source of inspiration. With the aid of the DataSoft® corporation in Mt. Tabor, New Jersey, Pope Juan I set about the task of translating the Bible into an easily accessible, multilingual, multimedia format. Two years of untiring dedication and voluminous expenditures paid off. In 2004, the Vatican, in affiliation with DataSoft Inc., released the first-ever Online Bible.

The Online Bible Version 1.0 featured several innovations, including the CompuChrist™ modem service (an online religious service), and a subscription to Heavenet™ (the Vatican computer network). In addition to multilingual translations and Quiktime® biblical movies, the Online Bible also offered the most extensive biblical data base in one package. The original package included Old and New Testaments, Apocrypha, Miltonic verse, and various other biblical texts. With all the translations an online services, the Online Bible Version 1.0 offered the most extensive religious data base to date.

The assassination of Pope Juan I in Berlin in 2004 cut short a brilliant papal career. That career, however, lives on in DataSoft's continually updated versions of the Online Bible, the most complete biblical text and most extensive religious data base in the world.

If the PCs take too long, other FBI Agents show up and begin driving up the main drive. Likewise, two Cherokee R-12 National Guard helicopters are currently en route and will show up and begin opening fire in less than half an hour. Proceed to "Battle Resolutions" and pick the appropriate resolution based on the outcome of the battle.

Sit and Spin

If the players dawdle, the FBI Agents repeat their warning one last time, then open fire on the building. Within half an hour, 20 more FBI Agents and two National Guard choppers show up and open fire on the cabin. See the Appendix for further information on FBI Agents and their equipment. Proceed to "Battle Resolutions" and pick the appropriate resolution based on the outcome of the battle.

Battle Resolutions

There are three possible outcomes to doing battle with the FBI. These outcomes are listed as follows.

1. The PCs Win: Time to hit the road; there's lots more where these guys came from. Kindly "coerce" the PCs into taking the hidden access route down the mountain by placing wreckage or other Agents on the main route. Go directly to "The Battle Within."

2. The PCs Lose: Time to roll them bones. Go directly to new characters — and another adventure.

3. The PCs Surrender: Time to surrender characters to the GM — that is, unless someone comes up with something quick (and it better be good). Go directly to jail and straight to new characters and a new adventure. If the PCs come up with something good, use your own discretion as to where to drop them back into the adventure (if at all).

As a final note, keep an open mind and free style when conducting combat with the FBI Agents. Give the PCs ample opportunity to escape when they finally decide to run for it.

Notes on the Quotes

The sources for the quotes in this chapter are as follows: Quote 3 is from Isaiah 21:12; Quote 4 is from Luke 12:40; Quote 6 is from John 12:35. As before, do not tell the PCs where these quotes are from. Unless the PCs recognize the quotes, let them ask researchers at Devil's Anvil to search for the source. Any hints they have will help locate the sources. Feel free to read any related material the PCs request from that source (as long as it doesn't get out of hand).

The Enemy Within

Once the PCs are down or over the mountain, they receive a crisp, clear call from base. Anvil comes through without a hitch. Gnarly asks what happened. Let the PCs tell their version. Once they're through, Gnarly repeats the complete warning message broadcast earlier (in "The Hanged Man") and explains Anvil's effort to warn them. He tells the PCs something caused a "major ruckus" over the airwaves, but he's not sure what. Read the following aloud.

"I don't understand all this technical jargon," Gnarly admits, "so I'm turning you over to Kai Lee." Lee tells you they determined that the static on the your priority CalSat 5 line wasn't a signal jam; it was a signal walkover: someone else was using the channel to access CalSat 5. Base also discovered computer access of a voluminous nature via that signal, uploading and downloading to a location west of you. The majority of information is outbound, which means one thing: Number 5's VIRA is operational and he's using CalSat 5 to access TRU's mainframe computer.

Lee says the transmitter in Number 5's helmet transceiver has a limited overland range of 30 miles (which is why Anvil wasn't able to track him once he left Babylon). He also explains that, during the Babylon tests, Anvil was scrambling, tracking, and relaying Number 5's signal to TRU's Hollywood mainframe. They used the same priority channel to mask the signal and keep Anvil's VIRA and mainframe access — indeed, the whole test — under wraps.

Lee says that, once Number 5 was out of ground range of Devil's Anvil, his VIRA signal terminated and he went off-line. At that point, R&D assumed his transceiver was out of commission. Consequently, no one thought to track Number 5's VIRA to see if it went online again — until now.

Lee explains that receiving the VIRA signal is easy — the signal and power originate from TRU in Upper Hollywood, which has enough power to beam a signal anywhere within satellite range (i.e., anywhere in the world). TRU communication experts have concluded that Number 5's helmet transmitter has the range to reach the heavens — and CalSat 5 — especially at night, with the aid of a clear sky.

"Which is why the walkover only occurs after dark," Lee says. "It also explains one more thing: for Number 5 to initiate a direct connection to TRU's mainframe, without aid from this facility, he has to be within 30 miles of TRU's dish."

Anvil researchers have no idea what images Number 5 is transmitting to or receiving from TRU's Cray. They are searching VIRA files to see which were recently downloaded and promise to hail the PCs once they have new information.



Through a Glass Darkly

Though not immediately obvious, the PCs might suggest that Number 5's VIRI is accessing biblical quotes stored in TRU's LA-based Cray mainframe. They might deduce this from the proliferation of quotes left behind like a trail of bread crumbs. If the PCs suggest accessing biblical and religious files, they score a bull's-eye: several of those files have been accessed as recently as 0100 HRS, August 27. If the PCs don't make the suggestion, Anvil computer experts make the connection at 0200 and inform them anyway.

Anyone with any communications and computer familiarity (PCs, or NPCs, if the players miss the chance) could suggest that Anvil monitor biblical quotes and track the download once it begins. This could be accomplished with the aid of a computer "worm": a tracking program used to infiltrate programs in a mainframe. The worm is triggered by a user opening a file; it then follows the access route back to the user. Using a worm, Anvil communications specialists should be able to monitor Number 5's signal and access his helmet camera by way of TRU's VIRI. The footage will be modified by the VIRI, but it should nevertheless allow base to get a fix on Number 5's location.

Here's a chance for the PCs to shine like diamonds in the desert. Anvil could send a "worm" into TRU's mainframe and have it lock on to biblical quotes that follow the thematic line the PCs' findings suggest. Let the PCs suggest a few key words. Otherwise, have Anvil suggest them. The worm could look for any synonyms as well. The best key words to look for: light, lightning, east, west, son, man. No matter who suggests the words, the words eventually prompt a successful connection. The quote Number 5 accesses is:

"As lightning comes out of the east, and shines unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man."

Matthew 24:27

Lee contacts the PCs with this info. "We've got a connection. The computer worm did it." Anvil begins tracking the signal back to Michael. "We're engaging the link to the VIRI now and tracing the signal back to it's — just a minute — we've got it. We're beaming it out to — What the —" There's a long pause with background noise before Lee speaks again, this time away from the mike. "Should we show —" The conversation ends as Lee covers mike. After a minute, he uncovers it. "You're not gonna believe this," he says. "We're beaming it out to you now." Ω



CHAPTER 3: ZERO HOUR

"Go then thou mightiest in thy Father's might, ascend my chariot, guide the rapid wheels that shake Heavens basis, bring forth all my war, my bow and thunder, my Almighty arms gird on, and sword upon thy puissant thigh: pursue these Sons of Darkness, drive them out from all Heavens bounds into the utter Deep: There let them learn, as likes them, to despise God and Messiah his anointed King."

John Milton. Paradise Lost. Book VI. lines 710-8

CLASSIFIED
TOP LEVEL ONLY



DATE: August 26, 2021 Monday
TO: Jefferson Davis, V.P. R&D
FROM: Akaia Mirasachi, President and CEO
RE: VIRA program test secrecy

Kai Lee informed me of the problems you've experienced during the first run of VIRA tests. I trust your ability to bring the situation under control. There are, however, a few points I feel obliged to make.

1. This matter must be kept in strict confidence. TRU liaisons have advised me that AMI executives are "concerned" with the delays we've had during testing. These delays must be resolved quickly and quietly if we are to meet AMI's 2022 deadline.

2. Keeping the lid on this may require drastic measures. Anvil Security Chief Phil Gnarly has been given approval to terminate all members of the initial desert test group. I trust this will be done without publicity and at the lowest possible profile.

3. Personnel involved in resolving the situation at Devil's Anvil must sign additional nondisclosures as provided in their security contracts. Refusal means immediate termination and prosecution for contract violation. In addition, and keep this between you and Gnarly, I want Security to conduct surveillance on all Anvil employees involved in damage control operations.

4. Last, the troubleshooters tracking renegade test subject "Mourning Star" must be silenced once the job is finished. I know your feelings on this matter, but I must reiterate the need to conduct this operation without fanfare or publicity.

Drastic times call for drastic measures. I know you will do your best to resolve this crisis in spite of your personal reservations.

Akaia Mirasachi

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

BREAK IN PROGRAM

STATIC: followed by **CHANNEL ZERO LOGO.** Loud **SOUND OVER** of a needle scratching a record, then **VOICE OVER.** "We interrupt this boring program for a 'Live as Hell' report from CHANNEL ZERO News."

CUT TO MEDIUM SHOT of Cat Scratch at the news desk. **SOUND OVER** with Systematic Overthrow's "Wet Ya Up" in the background. "Greetings, citizens. Cat Scratch here for CHANNEL ZERO News."

CUT TO CLOSE UP of Scratch. "Just minutes ago, Mourning Star, heroic Underground member, lit up the night sky over Los Diablos with a fireworks display bound to put the twinkle back into the eyes every black-eyed American boy."

CUT TO LONG SHOT of the Hollywood hills. A "boosted vet in full combat regalia exchanges fire with helicopters from the LA Peace Force. The vet fires a rocket at one of the choppers and ducks behind the Hollywood sign. The LAPF helicopter explodes in a golden fireball over the emerald green skyline of Upper Hollywood. **SOUND OVER** of cheering crowd. Follow with a **MONTAGE** of **CLOSE UP, MEDIUM, SLOW** and **EXTRA-SLOW MOTION** shots of the scene in rapid sequence. **SOUND OVER** of Systematic Overthrow's "Frag the G" mixed with repeated reverberation of the explosion."

WIPE TO SIDE VIEW of Scratch, grinning. "Mm—Mm—Mm. Gotta love that."

CUT TO HEAD ON of Scratch. "Rebelrebel! Undergrounders have rallied behind the act, calling it 'One for the Gipper,' whatever the hell that means." Scratch smiles.



A Decent Into the Maelstrom

The PCs are probably sitting at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains at this point in the adventure waiting for the feed from Anvil. There is a bit of jabber in the background of the feed, then the signal goes static and clear. Within an instant, the signal is back on. Read the following aloud.

Static and noise cover most of the signal coming from base. Diagonal lines cross the screen full of snow. The lines disappear and are replaced by black screen. The black screen lasts only for a second before someone at base says, "Here it is, now."

As soon as he does, the screen comes alive in purple and blue. The scene is dark, beautiful, and captivating.

It is evening, just before dawn. An ancient city lies at the foot of a mountain. Buildings of dark dimensions sprawl in every direction. Black stones loom toward heaven, jutting up from a quagmire of stench and filth like stalagmites in a deep and dismal cavern. Overhead, the sky is streaked with thick, impenetrable clouds of oily smoke that belch from the infernal stacks that pepper the land below. Flames shoot from the mouths of demonic effigies atop black, decaying mountains of stone. Here there is chaos, evil, and disarray. The entire valley lies within the shadow of god.

Serpentine streets run full of dark, demonic spawn, devilish hosts teeming in number and malevolent intent. There is nothing in this city untouched by the hand of the devil. In the corner of the screen, a graphic blinks 'Los Diablos' in yellow. In the distance, the morning star flares white hot like an ember over the bleak horizon.

Son of the Morning Star

Give the PCs a second or two to reflect on this scene, then read on.

There is something more in the night — something familiar yet unfamiliar, like the sound of the wind. The wind is distant and

hollow, like a piecemeal puzzle made with the motion of the breeze. At first, the wind is intermittent, like the soft breath of a whispering fan. Then it changes, metal blades against wheat, grows louder, and changes once again to become the beating of massive wings against the shrieking wind. The sound roars now as its source climbs over the edge of the mountain.

Sleek and black, thick-scaled and metal-winged, the dragon hovers up over the edge of the bluff. The sound of the demon's wings beat a rapid rhythm as they flail the night. Red eyes burn like fireballs in black sockets and its mouth gapes like a fiery chasm full of razor-sharp daggers. Hot jets blast from its flaring nostrils and blood-red spit drools from the corners of its mouth, dripping earthward in hissing trails. The dragon grins, and then it attacks.

The dragon's fiery breath blasts the picture. Metal talons rake and claw, forcing Michael back behind a giant "O". For an instant, the image falters as diagonal lines bisect the screen and flutter the picture. The dragon becomes a black helicopter, hovering near the bluff with empty, smoking missile tubes. The screen goes static again, crossed with lines, then realigns as the dragon rears its head for another attack.

The dragon snaps its head forward, belching flame against Michael's shield. The blast engulfs the picture. Lowering his shield, Michael unsheathes a flaming sword and swings it high overhead. "By the power of God," he shouts against the wind, "I condemn your soul to Hell!"

Michael points his flaming sword at the beast and fires a shaft of bright, golden light into the dragon's head. The bolt explodes, engulfing the dragon in a ball of flame. The demon lets out a deafening squeal and a last blast of flame that knocks Michael to the ground. The dragon writhes in the air, roaring and screeching as it flails the wind and plummets earthward. In the distance, another dragon crawls from the mouth of large caverns and take to the air.

Give the PCs a chance to digest this, then let them decide what to do next. This segment of the adventure should be investigative — figuring out Michael's location, intention, and motivation. Encourage the PCs to do their own thinking. Roleplay question-and-answer sessions with base while they are in transit to Los Angeles or evading the FBI. If the PCs are missing the point, drop hints through Lee or Gnarly.

Where is He? Identifying Michael's location should be a priority. This should be relatively easy for anyone who can read the map. If the PCs are unable to make the connection, Kai Lee triangulates that Michael must be within 30 miles, since CalSat 5 orbits in a relatively low orbit. He also suggests that Michael's line of travel has been directly west southwest. The footprints heading up the mountainside support this point. Last, there are only a few Los Angeles landmarks with letters in them. From there, it should be an easy matter of drawing lines to determine where Michael is: atop the Santa Monica Mountains, behind the ever-famous "Hollywood" sign.

Where is He Going? The PCs should try to figure out where Michael is headed. Drawing a line on Map 2 shows a trend directly west southwest. Extrapolation of that line intersects it with TRU's Corporate Headquarters in Upper Hollywood.

Why is He Going There? There are several possible reasons for Michael to go to TRU Headquarters. At this point, any guesses the PCs make will be only that. Similarly, Anvil doesn't have a clue why Michael is going to TRU HQ. He may be going there to destroy the building. He may be going there to destroy the computer. He may be going there to destroy the CEO. He may be going there to steal information.

Michael might be a corporate raider for AMI or TRU competitors. He may be a spy. He may be a government mole. He may be a complete lunatic. In any case, let the PCs toss theories about. Have base throw in a few, if you feel so inclined. Above all, hype the hysteria and punctuate the "Why?"

How is He Getting There? The PCs should deduce from their evidence that Michael is on foot. This should give them time to react. The trip to TRU HQ will take about two hours. The trip to the "Hollywood" sign will take another half hour, but by the time they get there, Michael will already be gone and on his way to TRU. Obviously, the best course of action should be for the PCs to go directly to TRU Headquarters.

Station Break

An aside: The Underground has capitalized on Michael's activities by breaking into the airwaves to broadcast their own news report and commentary on the recent activities of Mourning Star. A transcript of that newsbreak is listed in the sidebars.

Getting There is Half the Fun

Two routes to TRU Entertainment, Inc., are available to the PCs: one through the subsprawl of Los Angeles and one through the floating cities. The PCs may take either level and any route they desire in getting there.

Note that travel over either level has its disadvantages. These disadvantages may be played upon by the GM at her discretion. Travelling through the subsprawl has the usual inherent danger of running afoul of gangs, freelancers, and random acts of violence. Travelling through the floating cities gives the PCs a higher profile in the eyes of police and security forces. At the GM's discretion, either route may be turned into a side adventure. For example, the PCs could run into roadblocks sponsored by drug gangs in The Corners. Likewise, the PCs could be pursued by the Los Angeles Peace Force, who now have a complete description of them courtesy of the FBI.

Run these side adventures as you see fit. If time is short, skip the encounters and get the PCs to their destination unmolested. If they've been unruly, well, payback's a bitch. See *Streets Tell Stories* for details on security forces, LAPF, gangs, and related violence.

CUT TO MEDIUM SHOT of boosted vet with **GRAPHICS**, "Ice Nine, Underground Spokesman."

"Takin' it to the streets, my man, that's what it's all about. Dis here's a clear-cut case of premeditated, prededicated, precalculated destruction, freedom of speech through violent means, a glorious act of self-expression, boom and blast, Sturm and Drang, dis for dat. Wake up, amerikkka! It's time to bite the hand that bleeds you! Peace!" Ice Nine flashes a peace-sign at the camera.

CUT TO same **MONTAGE** sequence, colorized and hallucinized. **SOUND OVER** of distorted Cracker Bros. "Shenandoah Sunrise," followed by needle scratch. **VOICE OVER** of Scratch: "Underground satellites lifted some sweet! gun camera footage from CalSat 5. Figure this one out, my lil, pretty ones."

CUT TO P.O.V. SHOT of black, metallic dragon bursting into flame and crashing into the hillside. An ancient city lies at the foot of a mountain. Buildings of dark dimensions sprawl in every direction, black stones looming toward heaven, jutting up from a quagmire of stench and filth. In the distance, more dragons are taking to the sky. **VOICE OVER**: "Wake up, little Undergrounder. Slumberland is closed for the season." More **LONG SHOTS** of the dragons flying over the dark, evil city. **GRAPHIC** reading "Los Diabolos" appears in the corner of the screen.

WIPE TO SIDE SHOT of Scratch, smiling. "Now wuddn't that somethin'?"

CUT TO CLOSE UP of Scratch. "We'll keep ya posted on this and further developments — count on it. 'Til then, this is Cat Scratch sayin', 'Go make some noise, y'all!'"

CUT TO CHANNEL ZERO LOGO with **SOUND OVER**: Wet Job remix of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power!" followed by same loud scratch. "We now return you to Muppet Mayhem, which is already in progress."

*** END OF BROADCAST ***

City of Fallen Angels

The inset of Map 3 provides an overview of the Los Angeles subsprawl. If the GM requires a more detailed view of Los Angeles — one that shows both the subsprawl and the upper cities — use the foldout map provided in *Streets Tell Stories*, the Underground LA sourcebook. Otherwise, use the LA city map in any road atlas. Use your own judgment on how the region will have changed in 30 years. Whatever you do, don't go overboard; getting the PCs lost shouldn't be your goal.

Once the PCs arrive at TRU Headquarters, describe any of the following visually obvious sights to them. Getting into the facility shouldn't be easy; it's guarded well for a reason — especially now that someone's taking potshots at the grounds from somewhere in the mountains. The PCs may have to break into the facility (bringing Security around in great numbers), jump the fence, sneak in, or employ some other wily means of getting past the gates. Of course, they could always take the mundane route by calling Anvil and getting security clearance legitimately. Roleplay the situation and use your own judgment on what to do and how to handle special situations. The following is a key to Map 3.

TRU, Inc.: This is the world headquarters for TRU Entertainment, Inc. It is located in Upper Hollywood. A detailed rendition of the grounds is shown above the LA Inset. The shaded area indicates TRU property. It is enclosed by a tall, electric, chain-link fence. The voltage in the fence is enough to kill a person, and enough to deter a boosted vet from grabbing hold of it (MW damage). The black squares by the entrances are Gate Houses. They house one guard each during the day. At night, only one guard is on duty at each entrance. A large, motorized Gate runs between each of the Gate Houses. This Gate is closed at night and open during the day.

The guards on duty during the day are required to check for ID before allowing entry to the compound. They are also under orders to check a roster before allowing anyone to enter. If a person's name is not on the roster, the guards then ask the visitor for identification. They also ask who the visitor is there to see and the purpose of the visit. This information is relayed via phone to Security Headquarters (Location 3) for clearance. Under no circumstances will Security allow non-ID entry to the compound between the hours of 8 PM and 8 AM.

1. TRU Production Facilities: This five-story building houses TRU's production facilities. This is where the majority of animation and model/setting work is done.

2. Security: This three-story facility houses TRU's security personnel, records, and tracking systems. It also houses detention facilities, an armory, and extra keys to vehicles.

3. Hall of Records: This eight-story facility houses most TRU records on disk and in print. Print copies are housed in an extensive library filling the first five levels of the building.

4. Computer Wing, VIRA: This six-story building houses the Cray computer responsible for maintaining TRU's experimental VIRA project. It also houses all computer records relating to this project and contains all communications equipment involved in the project. Of particular note are two satellite dishes on top of the building: one to CalSat 4; the other to CalSat 5.

5. Computer Wing, Production: This six-story building is an mirror-replica of Location 5. It houses the Cray computer responsible for all TRU productions. It also houses computer records relating to productions and contains communications equipment likewise related. There are three satellite dishes atop this building. Two are aimed at CalSat 3; one is aimed at CalSat 4.

6. Business Office: This four-story building houses the business and payroll offices for TRU, Inc. Most of the company's business records (except the highly classified ones stored in the Administrative Building) are stored here.

7. Storage: This large, one-story facility is a physical storage building. It has a 30' ceiling and several huge doors. It houses TRU vehicles, equipment, desks, etc.

8. TRU Administrative Building: This 30-story building is the main control building for TRU Entertainment, Inc. It houses all the executive offices, meeting rooms, and such for the corporation. Below the "Ground Floor" (1st) are five "underground" Parking Levels. These levels are accessible from each of the cardinal points. Elevators and stairs lead from the Parking Levels to the 1st Floor Security Office of the TRU Building. Note that none of these elevators or stairs go beyond the "Ground Floor."

The "Ground Floor" entrance of the TRU Building is located in the north face of the building. Two large, glass doors open directly onto the Security Office. This office houses a large security desk, several couches and endtables, a centrally located fountain, wall paintings, and a couple small statues. The TRU logo covers the wall behind the desk. On, around, or behind the security desk are two TRU Security Guards (see Appendix), a small arsenal of weapons, and a console with five security television screens and a silent alarm button. In the south wall of the Security Office are two security-locked doors.

Beyond these doors are the Main Lobby and the 1st Floor Offices of the TRU Building. A set of four Elevators — two Regular, one Executive, and one Executive Express — are located in the center of the building. The Executive and Executive Express Elevators correspond with the location shown on the 30th Floor. Behind the Elevators are a set of Stairs that run all the way to the 29th Floor and end. Customer relations offices occupy the 1st–5th Floors. Sales offices occupy the 6th–15th Floors. Marketing offices occupy the 16th–25th Floors. Executive offices occupy the 26th–29th Floors. The 30th Floor is occupied by Vice Presidents of Sales and Marketing (Joe McCartney and Richard Whiteman, respectively) and by the President and CEO of TRU (Akaia Mirasachi). A detailed layout of the 30th Floor is shown in the inset.

A. Reception: Ivy Emm, Executive Secretary, sits at a desk against the south wall of this room. Both the east and west walls of this room are glass from floor to ceiling. There are two Executive Restrooms on this floor; both require security cards. There are two Elevators to the 30th Floor. Only the Executive Express Elevator (the one on the east) goes to the Roof. Both Elevators require security cards to get to the 30th Floor. Behind the Elevators are a single set of Stairs starting on the 30th Floor and going to the Roof. Access to the 30th Floor Stairs and to the Roof are available only via security card.

B. VP Marketing Office: This is the office of Richard Whiteman, Vice President in charge of Marketing. He is also a member of the TRU Board of Directors. His office is elaborate: it houses a large metal desk, three chairs, a large, standing globe, a meeting table with four chairs, a couch, a bar, and a big-screen television.

C. Meeting Room: This room has a table with eight chairs around it. The east wall of this room retracts and opens to Room D, making a larger Meeting Room.

D. Meeting Room: This room is identical to Room C, except that both the east and west wall retract.

E. Meeting Room: This room is identical to Rooms C and D, except that the west wall retracts.

F. VP Sales Office: This is the office of Joe McCartney, Vice President in charge of Sales. He is also a member of the TRU Board of Directors. His office is elaborate: it houses a large, wooden desk, three chairs, a meeting table, a couch and coffee table, and an entertainment center.

G. President & CEO Office: This huge office is the domain of Akaia Mirasachi, President and CEO of TRU Entertainment, Inc. He is also Chairman of the Board of

Directors. The office is guarded by two security corridors with double doors on each. The doors require security cards to open each set. Both of these cards are in the hands of TRU VPs. The double-door entrances are guarded by the Executive Secretary, Ivy Emm. Without a security card, they may only be opened by Ivy Emm and Akai Mirasachi buzzing the security lock simultaneously. In the event of any unwarranted attempt at entry, a silent alarm goes off and Security Officers arrive within one minute.

Inside, this office is immaculate, opulent, and spacious. The western third is reserved for entertaining: it houses a bar, a couch, and several comfy chairs. The eastern third is reserved for meetings: it houses a meeting table with eight chairs, a large-screen television, a podium, and other such furnishings. The center third is where Mr. Mirasachi conducts his business. Two chairs sit before a large, wooden desk. A large globe and planter sit near the north wall.

Climbing the Corporate Ladder

Once the PCs have gained access to the TRU compound, they must next gain access to the roof of the TRU Building. There are two ways to do this: through the outside or the inside. If the PCs decide to go outside the building, go to “Straight to the Top of the Heap.” If they decide to go inside, go to “Running the Security Gauntlet.”

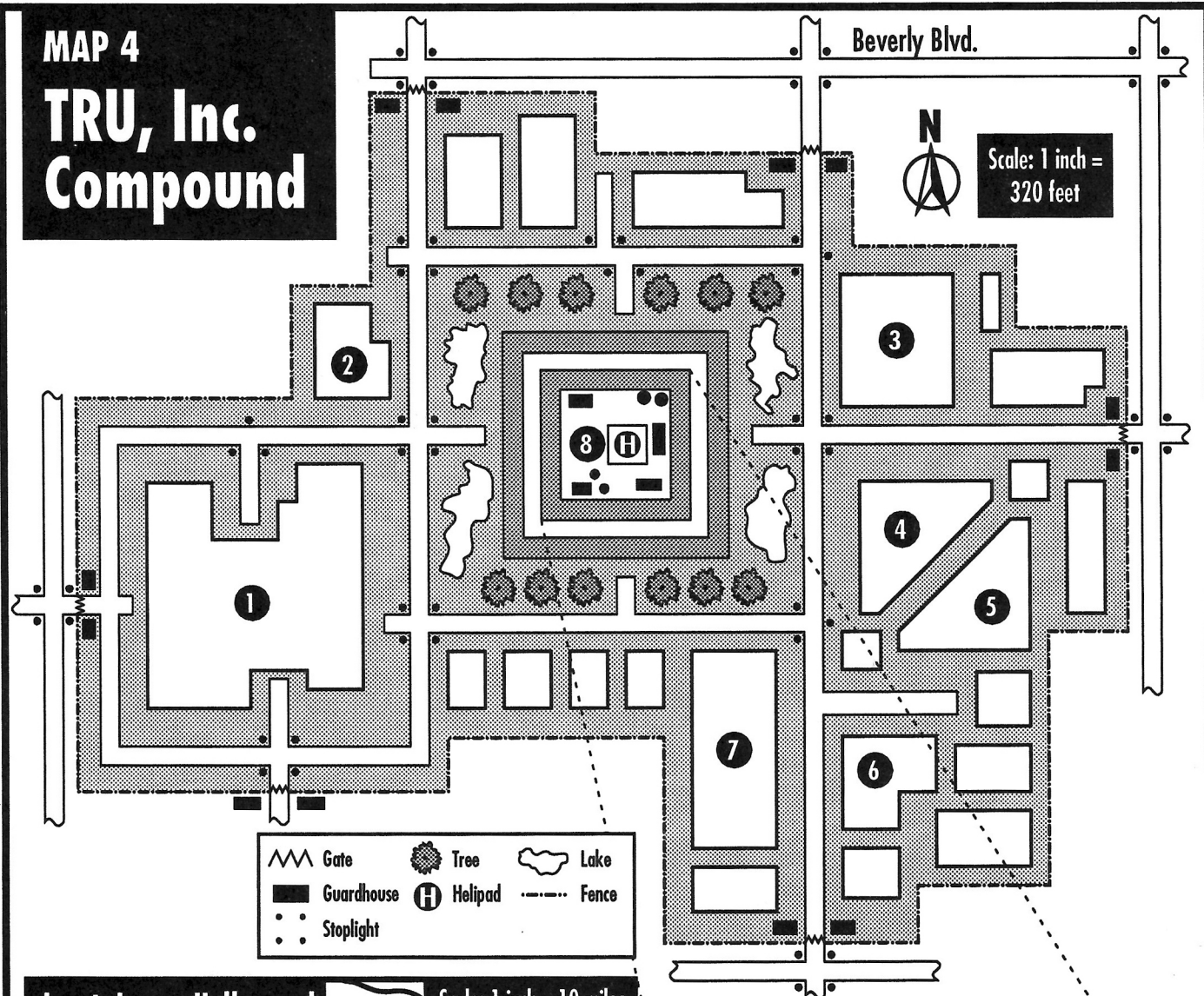
Straight to the Top of the Heap

The complexity of getting to the Roof by way of the outside of the TRU Building depends on what skill, smarts, or enhancements the PCs have at their disposal. There are two basic methods for getting there, however.

1. Climb the Outside of the Building: Climbing the TRU Building with bare hands, scaffolds, or a rope and grapple (ala Batman & Robin) could take time, but don’t put it past thrill-seeking PCs; they’ll try anything for excitement. In any event, the PCs must employ a modicum of stealth when performing this obvious action, as it is Security’s responsibility to deter people from climbing any of the TRU buildings. Use the climbing rules listed in the *Underground* rulebook along with your own common sense in determining the PCs’ chances of success in getting to the Roof via the outside of the TRU Building. If the PCs blow it, they pay the penalty of injury, discovery, or failure.

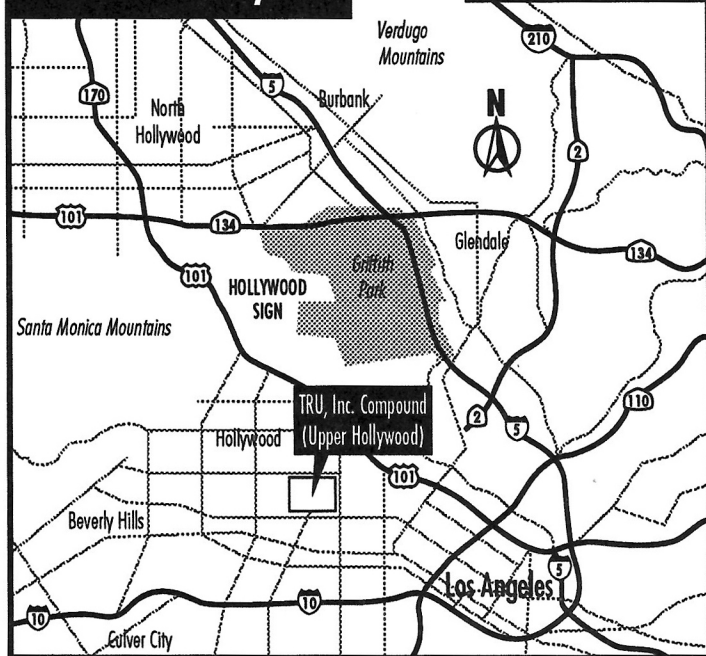
2. Use a Flying Vehicle: Buying, borrowing, or “requisitioning” a Helicopter, an Air Car, a few Nowlan Flying Harnesses, or a few Air Boards is another way of getting

MAP 4

TRU, Inc.
Compound

Inset: Lower Hollywood

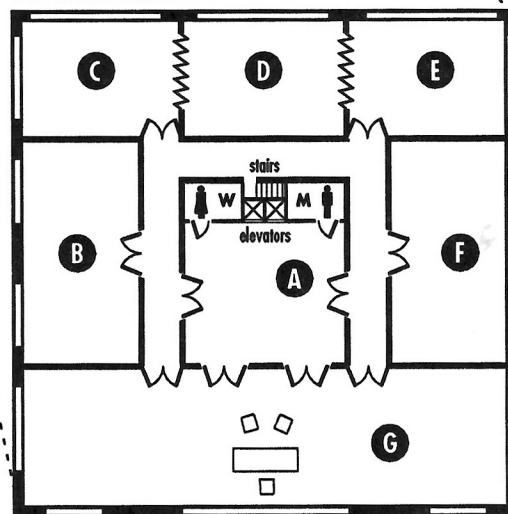
Scale: 1 inch = 10 miles



8

30th Floor

Scale: 1 inch = 80 feet



quickly to the Roof of the Building. Whatever vehicle the PCs employ, use your own discretion regarding their success or failure. For now, Michael is still in flight, thus quick action makes it possible for the PCs to beat him to the top. If the PCs dawdle, Michael will beat them to the top, and may attack them if he is unable to see that they are boosted vets like himself. Air Boards or Flying Harnesses make it possible for Michael to see them; Helicopters or Air Cars do not. Use your own discretion on whether or not to have Michael attack the PCs at this point.

In either case of success, proceed directly to "The Angel of Death."

Running the Security Gauntlet

In the corporate world, security is the basis of good business. As a result, getting the PCs through the front door of the TRU Building and into the Main Lobby is easy. Getting them past 1st Floor Security is harder. Several methods for getting inside the TRU Building are listed below. Note that getting to the Roof of the TRU Building will be difficult if the PCs did not get prior approval from Devil's Anvil (see below). The following is a listing of the various stages involved in this obstacle course, a route known as the "corporate security gauntlet."

Just inside the front doors of the TRU Building is the TRU Security Office. Two Security Guards stand at the helm of a large desk. In the south wall of the room are two security-locked doors leading to the Main Lobby, the 1st-30th Floors, and the PCs' objective: the Roof. Getting past the security-locked doors is the ointment; getting past the Guards is the fly therein.

The doors to the Main Lobby require security card access. As an alternative, visitors may check in with the Guards, who must then check and approve the visit before "buzzing" the doors to let the visitor in. The PCs could utilize any of a number of means of getting past the TRU Security Guards. Most of these methods are listed below. Regardless of which method they use, the PCs will have to run through the following obstacle course to get to the Roof of the TRU Building.

- Get past the Security Guards on the 1st Floor, then;
- Get through the security-locked doors and into the Main Lobby on the 1st Floor. If the PCs take the Stairs behind the Elevators, they quickly find that the Stairs only go to the 29th Floor. Regardless of whether the PCs take the Stairs or remain in the Main Lobby, they must then;

- Get into either Executive Elevator — an action that requires a security access card with the right security clearance or one-time approval. If the PCs get into either Regular Elevator, they only get as far as the 25th Floor. They must now exit the Regular Elevator and board either Executive Elevator. If the PCs get into the Executive Express Elevator from the start, they go directly to the Roof. If the PCs get into the Executive Elevator instead, they only get to the 30th Floor and now must;

- Get past Ivy Emm on the 30th Floor. From here, the PCs must either;
- Get into the Executive Express Elevator and get to the Roof, or;
- Get through the Reception Room's security locked doors and into the hallway, then;
- Get through the Stairwell's security locked door and onto the Stairs, then;
- Get through the security-locked door at the top of the Stairs and onto the Roof.

Piece of cake, right? Here are some of the many means the PCs may use in getting to the Roof of the TRU Building.

1. Get Prior Clearance: This is the easiest and quickest means of getting into the TRU Building. If the PCs call Devil's Anvil to secure approval for their visit, they are checked at the door and buzzed through. Once in the Main Lobby, they are met by Willie Whacker, Security Chief for the Executive Floors of the TRU Building. Whacker escorts the PCs to the Executive Elevator, taking them to the 30th Floor.

From there, Whacker escorts the PCs through the Reception Area, around to the Stairs, and up to the Roof. Once the PCs are on the Roof, they see Michael flying toward them in the distance. Proceed to "The Angel of Death." Keep in mind that Whacker is with the PCs throughout the encounter described in "The Angel of Death" and reacts to Michael's presence as his position deems he must. (Use your imagination on this one.)

2. Sneak In: Crafty players may devise ways to pass Security without being detected. This may involve disguising themselves in business suits, waylaying a corporate executive, stealing his security access card, and slipping into the Main Lobby without incident. For a variation on this theme, see "Take a Hostage" below.

Once inside the Main Lobby, the PCs reach the next stage of difficulty: getting on an Elevator. The security clearance of the executive the PCs waylaid will determine which Elevator they gain access to. For simplicity, have the

PCs roll 1d10 with the following results: 1–7 = Regular clearance, 8–9 = Executive clearance, 10 = Executive Express clearance. Regular Elevators do not require security cards, and Regular clearance security cards will not work on Executive elevators. Thus, if the PCs wind up with anything but an Executive Express clearance security card, they must run part of the gauntlet.

3. Use Personal Enhancements: The PCs may slip by Security, into the Executive Elevators, and past Ivy Emm on the 30th Floor by using any of a host of personal enhancements. For example, the PCs could use Control or Emotion Control to convince the Guards to let them in. In this case, they've made it past the first obstacle; now they must contend with the rest. By the same token, the PCs could use Chameleon, Invisibility, Sense Block, or Size Reduction to slip past Security and through the doors to the Main Lobby. Note that using Sense Block might raise the Guards' suspicions, prompting them to set off the silent alarm.

4. Bribe the Guards: In spite of all the hiring precautions used by security companies, the people they employ are only human, and every human has his or her price. Players may utilize the Empathy enhancement to determine what that price is and how to best approach the transaction. In any case, this is just the first step on the corporate ladder. Once inside the Main Lobby, the PCs must now figure out how to get to the Roof. Unfortunately, bribery will not convince TRU executives to let the PCs ride either Executive Elevator, which means they must employ another method for getting to the Roof in conjunction with this one.

5. Take a Hostage: As an alternative to "Sneak In," the players may decide to waylay an executive, take him hostage at gun- or other weapon-point, and force him to help them gain access to the Roof. The problem with this method is that it is rather obvious and offers several opportunities for going awry. In addition, once the PCs get to the Roof, they then have a hostage to keep an eye on.

6. Break and Enter: The PCs could take a direct route by simply shooting the Guards and blowing a smoking hole in the doors to the Main Lobby. Of course, getting past Security won't be so easy; once the Guards see guns, they're likely to show their own — and call for immediate backup. In this case, run the scene as you would regular combat. If the PCs fail to stifle Security in the first round, they sound a silent alarm. That's when all hell breaks loose.

Immediately after the alarm sounds, 20 more Security Guards show up and begin firing on the PCs, which naturally leads to more combat. In any case, once the PCs employ this method of entry, they must continue to employ

it throughout their climb to the Roof of the TRU Building. To top it all off, the PCs won't be happily received when it comes time to draw their paychecks at the end of the day.

7. Use Lots of High Explosives: There are those who believe that no problem is so large that it can't be solved by the liberal use of high explosives. No matter how bad this idea sounds, at least one person in every group will suggest it at least once per gaming session. Deter the players from this method if possible. Needless to say, using high explosives will cause a lot of undue destruction and raise a great deal of havoc. It will also lead the PCs down the straight and narrow path — to prison. To top it all off, as with "Break and Enter," the PCs will find payday a very hollow experience.

Regardless of which method of entry the PCs employ, if they get to the Roof successfully, go to "The Angel of Death." Keep in mind which means of entry the PCs used, as this will determine who comes up the stairs behind them (and how they react to the PCs when they see them).

The Angel of Death

Once the PCs are on the Roof of the TRU Building, they see Michael flying toward them from the Santa Monica Mountains. All of the Helicopters he was fighting have been aced, as evidenced by the three pillars of smoke that wind their ways leisurely up from the flaming wreckage of each.

As Michael flies closer, the PCs get their first clear view of the man they've been tracking for the past day. Michael is over six feet tall and weighs around 400 pounds; 200 pounds of his own, the other 200 attributed to the full regalia of battle armor, articulated weapons, jump jet, and electronic communications equipment he wears. His head is hidden by a full battle helmet, the visor of which glows and flickers with a fluorescent life of its own. Just from his physique and carrying capacity alone, the PCs should be able to tell right away that Michael is a boosted vet.

Of course, anyone wearing Pueblo Sniper or Firefight sees something entirely different.

The image they see of Michael is one of angelic proportion and beatific grace. Before them, floating on the wind, is the Son of the Morning Star, Michael, the avenging Angel of Death. His golden hair flutters in the breeze and his tremendous, white-feathered wings fan the sky as he hovers above the roof. In one hand, he holds a large, flaming sword that shines brilliant against the azure sky of dawn. The other hand holds a classically beatific pose: elbow bent, forearm raised, one finger pointed to heaven.

Note: Pueblo Sniper and Firefight are being garbled by Michael's VIRA — one of the "bugs" TRU and Battletechnics have yet to work out. In addition to this "enhanced vision" of Michael, wearers of the equipment are unable to shoot at the Angel of Death; the goggles recognize Michael as a friend and override any attempt to fire at him.

If the PCs do not attack immediately, Michael steps lightly down onto the helipad and turns his weapon away from them. Any PC with Empathy or any similar Telepathic enhancement senses no animosity toward the PCs. In fact, they sense great intelligence, wisdom, and kindred understanding behind the flickering mask of the helmet's visor. Read the following aloud.

Michael flips up the visor on his helmet. His blue eyes gleam with a deeper light as he describes his purpose. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

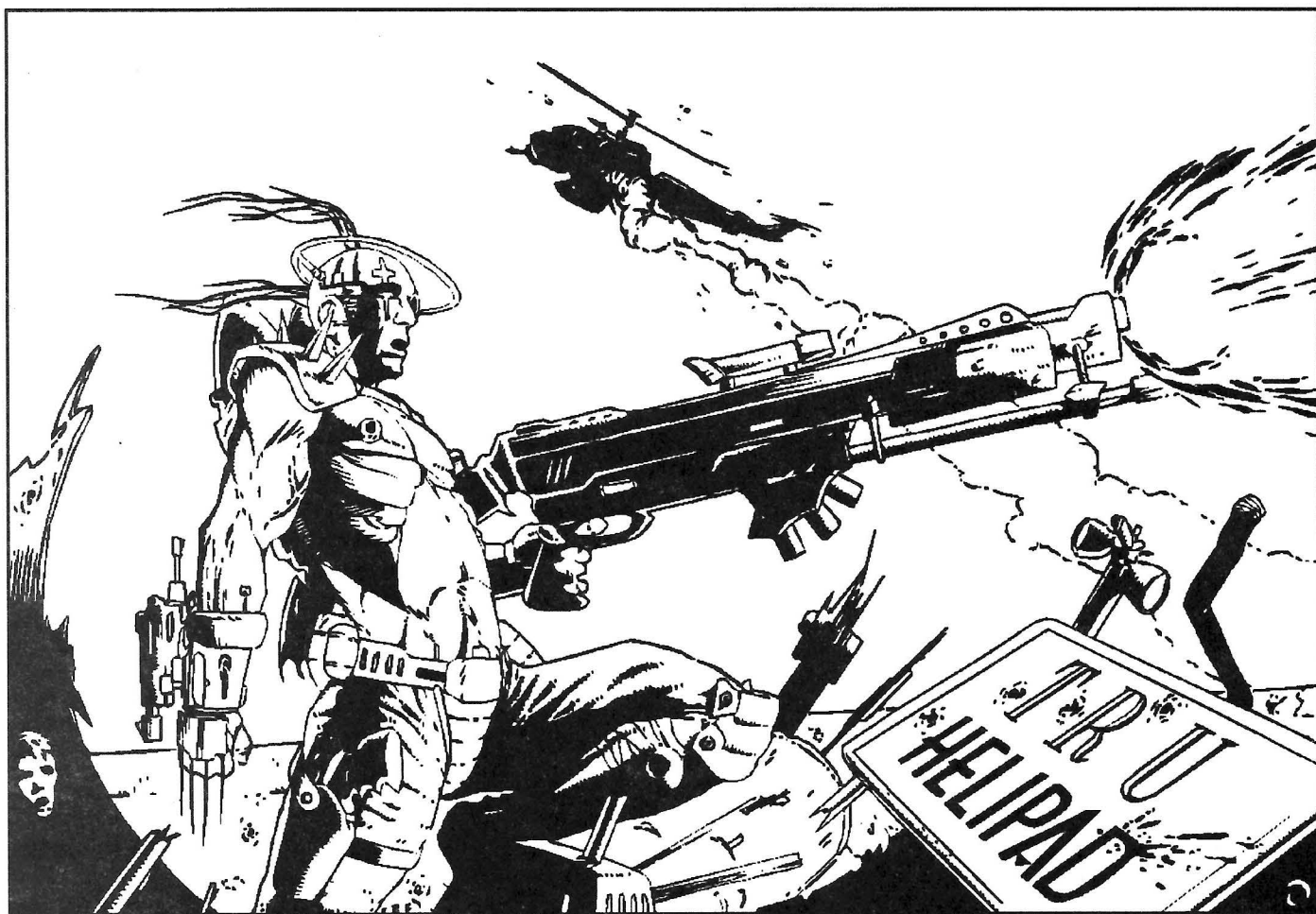
Michael steps slowly closer to you. Surprisingly, you sense no imminent danger, no animosity whatsoever from this man. He smiles again, an angelic smile. When he speaks, his voice booms with the depth that only the emotion of utter faith or fanaticism can bring.

"No man can serve two masters, my friends, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. It is not possible."

Note: If Willie Whacker or any other Security personnel are on the roof at this time, Michael opens fire on them, but not on the PCs. Run this combat only if you feel so inclined; otherwise, simply describe the action, in which Michael easily smokes the opposition. Do allow the players to react naturally and immediately, however. If the PCs attack, Michael does his best to incapacitate them, shooting to wound or disarm only (which he does quite easily).

What the Thunder Said

Right about now, the PCs are probably thinking this guy has gone all the way around the bend. They may be right in this assumption. Too much time in the desert will do that. So will too much time on VIRA. The PCs may have figured this out by now. If the PCs listen to Michael without firing upon him, he steps forward so they can see him clearly, pulls off his helmet, and continues speaking in a loud, booming voice. Read the following aloud.



"Stand still in bright array, ye saints, for we are cut of cloth and firmament the same. Thus stand here, angels armed and armored this day for battle. Rest." Michael holsters his weapon at his side (or sheaths his flaming sword, for those still on Pueblo Sniper) and holds his large hands palms up in supplication.

"Faithful you have been in warfare, and of God accepted, fearless in his righteous cause. As you have received, so have you done, invincibly. But of this accursed crew, the punishment to other hands belongs. 'Vengeance is mine,' so sayeth the lord, or whose He thus appoints.

"Greater number to this day's work is not ordained, nor multitude required. Stand, then, and behold God's indignation on these godless devils poured upon by me. Not you, but me they have despised, yet envied; against me is all their rage. And all because the Father (to whom in heaven supreme, kingdom and power and glory appertain) has honored me with strength and supervision, thus according to his will.

"Therefore, to me their doom God hath assigned, that they may have their wish — to try with me in battle which the stronger shall approve: they all or I alone against them. By their strength they measure all, of other excellence not emulous, nor care whom they excel. So be it. No other strife with them do I vouchsafe, save this: to match with them what they have brought this heavenly plain."

"Thus it is the will of God himself, in wisdom and design, for you to go before the killing fields. Yours is other destined, God-ordained, to fight another foe in time and other place." With that, Michael smiles again and gestures with his hand to leave the field of battle.

An Act of Faith

Once the PCs have listened to Michael's speech, they are faced with their biggest decision thus far: follow this apparent madman's advice or do what their instincts tell them they've been paid to do. This important point in their encounter with Michael is the crux of the entire adventure.

For that reason, allow the PCs enough time to make an educated choice. Take time to discuss the options with them without giving away things they would not logically know. Allow the PCs to talk amongst themselves; Michael does nothing to deter them (though he does twitch and talk to an unseen force as he prepares to continue doing battle with the forces of darkness). If the PCs consult TRU or Devil's Anvil, they are told in no uncertain terms to attack Michael, to shoot to kill, and to do so promptly.

An Explanation, Of Sorts

To all superficial appearances, Michael is about 20 cards short of a full deck. In reality, his mind is intact, though sublimated by the VIRA. The VIRA has drawn upon the most important element of his personality: the question of religious faith that marks his volatile character.

Throughout his difficult life, Michael suffered a troubled mind due to his religious upbringing. As an adult, that trouble compounded, becoming a broad and psychologically impairing schism between religious righteousness and corporate wrongdoing. Through his career in the corporate military (the only option available besides starvation at age 18), Michael struggled with the dichotomy of his faith and his profession, never able to justify the execution of one within the tenets of the other. That was before he had access to the voluminous library of religious references available through TRU's Cray and all its vast network of information.

Thanks to TRU's VIRA process, Michael now has a virtual reality that provides a religious justification for his military meanderings. It also provides a greater purpose for his existence. Within the analogy created by the VIRA, Michael perceives himself as Michael, the avenging angel. The greater purpose of his existence is to combat evil.

Through the vast library of references available online, Michael also found an allowance for killing in spite of the most important tenet of his religion: "Thou shalt not kill." That justification came through biblical stories of the War in Heaven, the references for which (the Bible, Milton, and other sources) were provided by TRU's Cray computer in Upper Hollywood, which is coincidentally where Michael has been heading all this time.

The War in Heaven

The War in Heaven is a segment of biblical history that took place before the creation of man. There are several versions of the story, but most include the following.

Lucifer, an angel who was then on God's good side, let his arrogance better him by questioning the Lord's authority and deciding that he was better fit to rule heaven. He defied god and initiated an attack against the forces of good, he being evil for failing to acknowledge god's dominion. In the ensuing battle, mountains were leveled and valleys were filled with warring factions. The day was nearly lost but for Michael, god's warrior angel, who saved the day at the last minute. Michael defeated Lucifer's army, and Lucifer was punished by being cast into hell, where he is free to rule over his army of fallen angels.

Perception vs. Reality

In making Michael Lewis combat capable, TRU's VIRA draws upon two sources: Michael's religious dilemma and biblical references to the War in Heaven. Whenever material is needed to make killing in combat palatable, the VIRA uses these sources to present simple, dualistic images in virtual reality: good vs. evil, angels vs. devils, Michael vs. Lucifer. Within the framework of this analogy, Michael sees himself as an agent of god. The VIRA also provides Michael a purpose: to destroy evil in its every manifestation. Unfortunately, the VIRA doesn't know when to quit.

Winged Assassin

What TRU didn't count on was the VIRA's information highway becoming a two-way street. Online, Michael's VIRA continued fulfilling its purpose by opening broader lines of communication. This allowed Michael to access information on his own and continue feeding his VIRA-created illusion with greater abandon. Throughout his download of information, Michael strengthened his delusion, giving himself the confidence to conduct himself toward his goal to destroy evil with an uncanny, single-minded determination. To Michael, the most cunning representation of evil in this world is TRU Entertainment, Inc.

During his access of TRU's computer, Michael worked his way into several classified files. Therein, he discovered several documents and programs his mind defined as evil. For example, Michael discovered the primary purpose of the VIRA program: to serve as an aid in corporate military actions. He also discovered a clandestine secondary purpose: to use the VIRA in hostile operations against other corporations. The VIRA would be used to control assassins to foment corporate overthrows and assist TRU in corporate takeovers. Last, he uncovered a memo mandating utter secrecy within the program — a mandate that included terminating VIRA test subjects and even the current group (the PCs) sent out to terminate Michael (see memo on p. 27). Michael gives the PCs a microCD from his battlesuit's Average Pack computer prior to the inevitable battle on the roof. It contains all this information and any other VIRA-related info (see Appendix). "This will explain everything," Michael says.

Michael perceives TRU, Inc., as evil incarnate and TRU CEO, Akaia Mirasachi, as Lucifer. His goal is to defeat Lucifer and cast him out of heaven (i.e., to kill Mirasachi) and to destroy the legions of the damned (i.e., to put an end to the VIRA program). Michael does this entirely under the protective guise of the VIRA's War in Heaven analogy.

A Few Notes to Keep in Mind

The following elements are crucial to understanding Michael's mental motivation via the VIRA.

- **Wish Fulfillment:** Dreams of superhuman powers and destinies are commonplace in a number of people. In Michael's case, those powers and destinies have taken on godlike, angelic proportions.
- **VIRA Addiction:** Consider VIRA a powerful, mind-expanding drug: once hooked, the user refuses to stop using it. By that token, Michael is addicted to the VIRA due to the collateral justification it gives his career and faith.
- **Start at the Top:** As in, here on the Roof, and work your way down. Michael must first do battle with Security and/or the Helicopters dispatched from LAPF. In addition, and depending on their reactions to his comments and actions, Michael may have to fight to subdue the PCs.
- **A Wealth of Knowledge:** Michael has access to the entire breadth of information on the VIRA program and will answer any questions regarding why he's doing this.

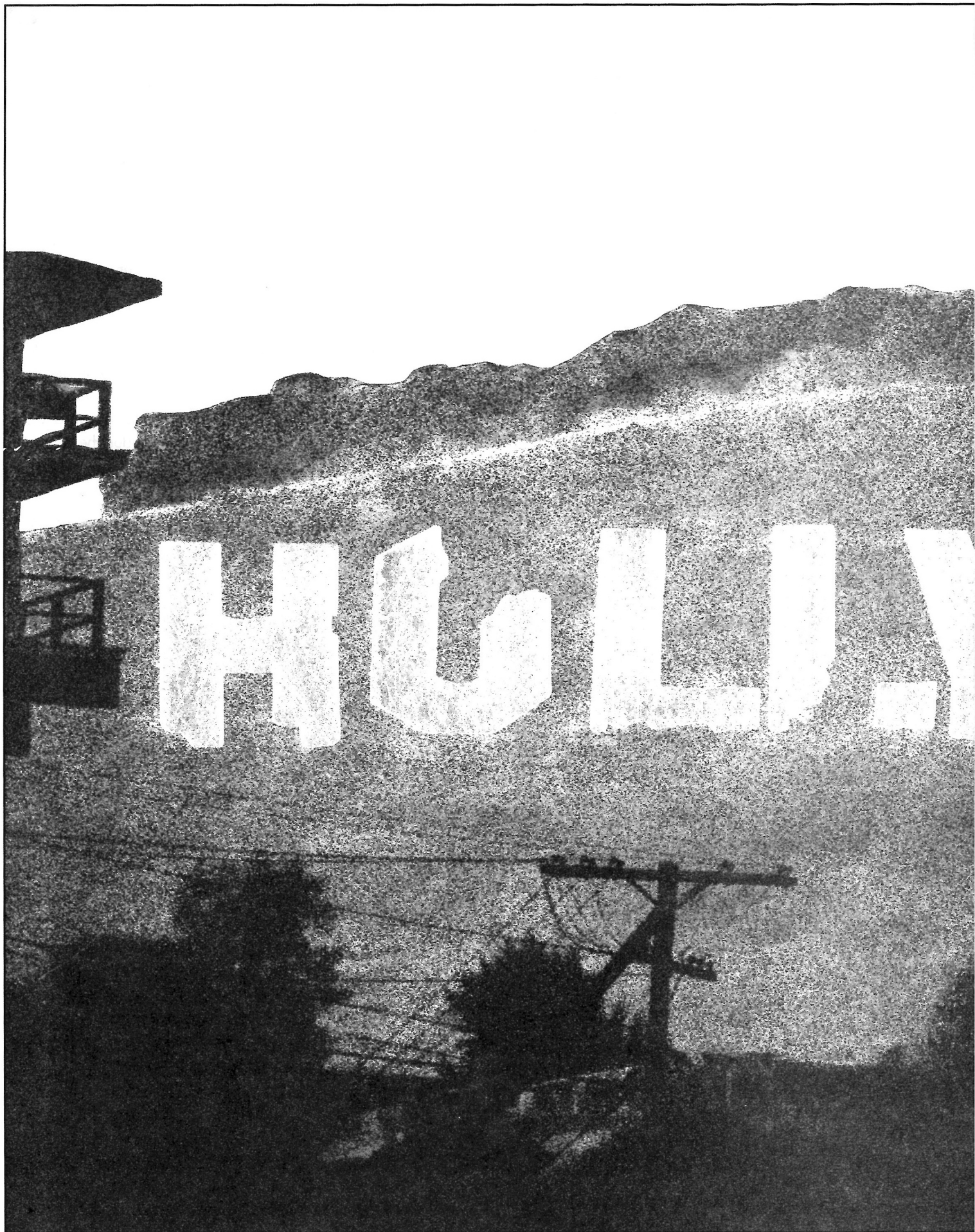
White Heat

Once Security shows up or the helicopters appear on the horizon, Michael pulls on his helmet and snaps down the visor. He then secures his 45 mm GCS BFW 2060/g firmly into the crook of his elbow, locked and loaded. Michael is prepared to do battle with the forces of evil. Once the Helicopters are in range, they offer a brief warning over their loudspeakers. Read the following aloud.

"This is the Los Angeles Peace Force. You are in violation of California statutes 2125.4, 3563.2, and 5923.1, and Los Angeles statutes 436.8, and 482.3. You are trespassing on TRU, Inc., private property. Drop your weapons and surrender. If you do not comply, we are authorized to use whatever means necessary to bring you to comply with our request. You have been warned." Without waiting for a response, both choppers begin strafing the Roof with automatic cannon and machine gun fire. Ω

Notes on the Quotes

Michael's first comment in "The Angel of Death" is a direct quote from Matthew 6:24 (*The Online Bible, Version 4.0*). His second comment is from Matthew 5:17 (also from *The Online Bible, Version 4.0*). For those of you who haven't thrown beaucoup bucks at degrees in English Literature, Michael's speech in "What the Thunder Said" is a "liberal" paraphrase of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book VI, lines 801-826.



CONCLUSION: A WAR IN HEAVEN

"From their foundations loosening to and fro they plucked the seated hills with all their load, rocks, waters, woods, and by the shaggy tops up lifting bore them in their hands: Amaze, be sure, and terror seized the rebel Host, when coming towards them so dread they saw the bottom of the mountains upward turned, 'til on those cursed Engines triple-row they saw themwhelmed, and all their confidence under the weight of mountains buried deep, themselves invaded next, and on their heads main promontories flung, which in the air came shadowing, and oppressed whole Legions armed..."

John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book VI, lines 642-55

• POLICE BAND TRANSMISSION
TRU SECURITY AND LAPF CHOPPER 11
0600 HOURS, 8/27/21 •

TRU: "TRU Security to LAPF 11.
Do you copy?"

LAPF 11: "Roger, TRU. We copy.

TRU: "LAPF Base has advised us
to remain in contact with
your during this operation
and to assist in any way
possible, over."

LAPF 11: "Roger, TRU. We appreciate
the help, over"

TRU: "What is your current
10-20, LAPF 11?"

LAPF 11: "We are currently over
Corman Avenue in Upper
Hollywood, approaching
TRU Compound from
southeast, over."

TRU: "10-4, 11. We have a
change in your orders
issued by LAPF Base."

LAPF 11: "Go ahead with revisions,
TRU. We are recording."

TRU: "Roger, 11. TRU Building
Security has informed us of
an additional three to six
intruders now located on
the roof of that building.
We believe these intruders
are in league with the sus-

pect involved in the attack
on the TRU Compound and
in the downing of LAPF 9.
Management has issued
an order to terminate all
suspects in the attack. Be
advised that these suspects
are heavily armed and
dangerous. TRU Security
has informed us of at least
one, possibly more missile
launchers in the group.
TRU, Inc., exonerates the
LAPF in any damages
made to TRU property in
this operation, provided
those damages are not
structural damages to TRU
property or monetary
damages in excess of
\$10,000,000, over."

LAPF 11: "Roger, TRU. We have a
record and are proceeding
to our objective.

TRU: "Thanks 11. Keep an eye
on these guys. They've
caused enough damage
and injury. We don't want
to make it any worse.

LAPF 11: "Roger, TRU. Thanks for the
concern and assistance.
We are standing by further
orders, over and out.

• END OF TRANSMISSION •

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Setup

Regardless what actions the PCs take, the helicopter opens fire indiscriminately on the entourage. The LAPF is under orders from TRU Security to terminate the entire group — an order issued from the top of the chain of command (i.e., CEO Mirasachi). If the PCs have the means and foresight to monitor police band broadcasts, they hear the conversation between Security and the LAPF listed on the previous page. If the players do not monitor the broadcast, it's up to them what assumptions they make.

The reason for the order is that Mirasachi no longer trusts the PCs' ability to wrap this job and maintain its complete secrecy. Mirasachi also understands the close bond between boosted vets — especially veterans of AMI's Flying Deuces.

This battle is intended to be open-ended, allowing several possible outcomes based on the players' freedom of choice. Read the following information carefully, consider all the possible outcomes, and be prepared to improvise. Advanced preparation will alleviate surprises. For instance, keep in mind the PCs' previous actions, any TRU Security escorts they have, and other special circumstances. Otherwise, run combat as you normally would in *Underground*.

Stage 1: Up on the Roof

Stage 1 begins with the appearance of the LAPF Chopper. The helicopter engages the PCs in battle regardless of whether or not Michael is alive and even if they've decided to fulfill their mission by terminating him. Shortly thereafter, 10 Security Troops break out onto the roof and open fire on the group. The PCs are now engaged in a battle on two fronts. If the PCs want to get away they must destroy the Helicopter and the Security detachment.

1. LAPF Helicopter 11: This Cherokee R-12 Helicopter has a two-man crew. You already know what the Chopper's orders are. All you need to do is execute them. The crew hovers near the TRU Building at a height of 30' above roof-level, making itself a sitting duck for only as long as it takes to issue a warning. The helicopter then strafes the roof with cannon fire, immediately takes off, circles the building, and returns to fire missiles and machine guns.

2. TRU Security: Once the LAPF Helicopter makes three attacks on the PCs, the Roof doors burst open and 10 TRU Security Troops (see Appendix) clamber through. They establish defensive positions behind cooling fans, etc., and open fire on the entire group. The Troops continue to do battle until their numbers dwindle to three. At that point, the remaining Troops make a break for the door and retreat.

Stage 2: The 30th Floor

The PCs have two options once they dispatch the LAPF Chopper and take care of TRU Security. They may run for it and leave the Roof, or follow the retreating Security Troops. If Michael is still alive and unrestrained, he follows the Troops.

1. The Getaway: If the PCs run for it, now's their chance. TRU Security and the LAPF haven't arrived yet, so the grounds around the TRU Building are still unguarded. If the players act quickly, they may escape by getting off the building and getting back to their Jeep. In this case, they will still need to run the Security Gate. Go to "Stage 4."

If the PCs search the Roof, they find a hangar with an Aircar inside. The hangar doors are locked, but again, that shouldn't deter the PCs. The doors have a Resistance of 18. The PCs must pick the Aircar door locks to get inside (a Very Difficult Challenge against Thief skill specialty Security). Getting the Aircar started means hotwiring it (a Very Difficult Challenge against Security). From this point on, the PCs are home free. Go directly to "Free At Last."

2. Security, 30th Floor: If the PCs follow the retreating Troops, the remaining Troops engage them in a firefight on the stairs. The fight lasts until either side is wiped out. Any attempt to open the doors to the 30th Floor are unsuccessful now that Security has cancelled clearance on all security cards. (Which is why the retreating Troops didn't retreat any farther than the stairwell.) That doesn't mean the PCs can't bulldoze through the door anyway.

If the PCs opt for this indelicate method, they must beat a 16 Resistance to break through. Only two people can try the door at any time. Of course, explosives always work; just remember what happens when bombs go off in enclosed areas. (They blow everything up *real good*!)

3. Michael's Agenda: If Michael is with the PCs as they break back onto the 30th Floor, he makes a beeline for the executive offices. Akaia Mirasachi and Richard Whiteman are in Mirasachi's office, along with a detachment of three Security Troops (Map 4, location G). Two more stand guard outside the office, one in front of each set of double doors. Michael drives toward his objective, opening fire on anyone who gets in his way and blowing holes in doors that block his passage. It is up to the PCs whether or not they follow Michael. If they do, continue the action listed below. Otherwise, go to "Stage 3." If the PCs ask Michael what he is doing, he tells them he must "destroy the demon that has caused the fall of so many angels."

When the group reaches Mirasachi's office, they are fired upon by the Guard outside the door. The doors behind him are locked, meaning the party has to break through if

they mean to get inside. Once the doors are open, the group is again engaged in a firefight with the remaining four Guards inside Mirasachi's office. (The Guard outside the other door joins them.) The Guards use the room's furnishings as cover. Mirasachi and Whiteman are hiding beneath Mirasachi's desk. The group was waiting here for the situation to clear or for the intruder's to pass so they could get to the Roof and evacuate via Aircar.

If Michael and the PCs kill the Guards, Michael flips the desk out of the way to expose Mirasachi and Whiteman. As he approaches, Mirasachi pulls a handgun and fires once, wounding Michael in the shoulder. Michael is on him immediately, disarming him, grabbing him by the throat, and throwing him against the south wall of the office. He motions Whiteman up against the wall, raises his gun, and says, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Mirasachi and Whiteman are on their knees begging for their lives as Michael fires an automatic burst into each of them.

Michael turns to the PCs. "God's will is done. We're free to go now." Proceed to "Stage 3."

Stage 3: Through the Building

If the PCs make it past the 30th Floor, they must now make it back through the security gauntlet. From this point on, the PCs run the risk of running into five-man groups of Security Troops sent after them. Think of these groups as wandering monsters and have the PCs run into firefights with them whenever you desire.

When the PCs get back to their Jeep, they must run through a blockade at the entrance of the Parking Ramp below the TRU Building. They will do this with relative ease provided they do not stop to fight. If they do, run combat as normal and dole out the results as determined.

Stage 4: On the Grounds

The PCs must now get through the TRU Compound without running afoul of additional Security Troops. If they go for the North Gate, they run directly into a blockade of 10 Troops. If they go to any other Gate, they only run into the two Guards normally stationed there.

The PCs may run the blockade at the North Gate as before, taking into account damage made to the vehicle and to the PCs (with 8 Troops firing at them). Once they're through the Gate, the PCs are "Free at Last." If the PCs take any other exit, they run through the barricade easily and without accruing any damage.

Things to Keep in Mind

The following is a list of things to keep in mind throughout this final scene.

1. If the PCs killed Michael early on, the LAPF Helicopter opens fire on them anyway, necessitating their escape and any subsequent combat.
2. The PCs have been double-crossed. Any attempt to contact TRU Security, TRU personnel, or anyone at Devil's Anvil again sets the TRU Security dogs loose. This foolishness in itself could instigate a side adventure with the PCs being chased by another group of "troubleshooters" from a rival corporation. By the way: it should be obvious by now that the PCs aren't getting paid for this job.
3. If Michael does go down in battle and isn't killed immediately, he warns the PCs, says "Goodbye," and pulls the pin on a grenade. The explosion obliterates any evidence of Michael's presence, except the Average Deck computer microCD which the PCs have in their hands.
4. If Michael makes it through the battle with the PCs, he suggests attacking TRU's Computer Wings to destroy the VIRA. If the PCs agree, run it as a side adventure. (You're on your own on this one.) Better yet, have the PCs wait until the heat is off and come back later to do this.

Free at Last

If the PCs make it through all this, their next step should be to lay low until the smoke clears. You may now calculate and reward Reward Points as listed in the Appendix. The PCs should also read the microCD Michael gave them. Consult the Appendix and relate the information listed under "Contents of Michael's Average Pack MicroCD" to the players. Besides all the documents they need to nail TRU and its execs to the wall, the disk also includes battle and VIRA footage, and an introduction to two important personages: The Dark One, videomeister extraordinaire at Media Giant International (formerly with Allied Mayhem, Inc.) and Red Jack, noted veteran's rights activist and former AMI Flying Deuces member.

A "Read Me" note on Michael's microCD suggests two moves for the PCs: give the documents and gun camera footage on disk to The Dark One to publicize as he sees fit; and contact Red Jack, who can provide the PCs with a safehouse and an introduction to the Underground. Your players have what they need to fight the power: the introduction to the Underground. Whatever terrorist acts come next are up to you.



APPENDIX: MAIL-ORDER MAYHEM

under
ground™

character record sheet

NAME Michael Lewis	CODE NAME Mourning Star	HT 6'2"	HAIR Blonde
UNIT AMI Flying Deuces	RANK Vigilante (Underground)	WT 200	EYES Blue

ATTRIBUTES

WOUND STATUS

LAST WOUND ☐

STRESS ☐

LAST STRESS ☐

STR

9

DEX

7

SPD

6

RES

7

MOVEMENT

MOVE

6

FASTER

9

TOP

12

INT

4

WILL

6

AURA

6

TOLERANCE

7

PSYCHOSIS: Schizophrenia

SKILLS

NAME	GOV ATT	ADD	RATING	NOTES
Acro. (Dodge)	DEX	+6	13	
Gun Combat	DEX	+6	13	
Martial Arts	SPD	+6	12	
MS (Demolition)	INT	+5	9	
Streetwise	WILL	+3	9	
Thief	DEX	+5	12	
Weaponry	DEX	+6	13	

ENHANCEMENTS

NAME	STRESS	RATING	BON/LIM	NOTES
Control	4	11	—	
Leaping	3(c)	11	—	
Boost STR	4(c)	12	—	
Boost DEX	4(c)	9	—	

TRAITS

Addicted to VIRA (Limiting)
Hates TRU, Inc. (Limiting)
Quotes Bible (Nonlimiting)
Listens to gospel music (Nonlimiting)

CODES

Helps Underground (Limiting)
Always avenges death of friends (Limiting)
Follows 10 Commandments IF POSSIBLE (Limiting)

CHALLENGE CHART

DIFFERENCE	GRADE
1-3	D
4-7	C
8-10	B
11+	A

WEAPONS

NAME	ACC	PEN	AMMO	RNG	STR	DMG
Fists (Martial Art)	—	9	—	—	6	STR/RO/LW/MW
40mm GCS M87/g*	-2	21	20	6/15/28	9	LW/MW/HW/IN
30mm Silver Bullet	-4	18	7	2/6/10	7	MW/MW/HW/IN
Fuzzbuster Rocket	-1	18	—	20/26/32	4	LW/MW/HW/IN

*after name means weapon fires full-auto

ARMOR

NAME	BONUS	NOTES
Battlesuit	+6	Special
Heavy Mondo	+5	

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Phil Gnarly, TRU Chief of Security

STR: 6, DEX: 5, SPD: 3, RES: 6, INT: 3, WILL: 3, AURA: 2

Administration (AURA): 4, Detective (INT): 9, Gun Combat (DEX): 10, Intimidation/Interrogation (AURA): 8, Martial Arts (SPD): 5, Military Science (INT): 4, Thief (DEX): 7, Vehicles (DEX): 5.

Equipment: .50 cal Urban Nightmare EP450, 30mm Silver Bullet SSF 2/30, Heavykev, Mondo Armor, Average Pack, Fibalert™, and Punkbuster™ Radar Detector.

Background: Though not a boosted vet, Gnarly has all the skill trainings without the enhancements. Gnarly has been with TRU Security since the company moved to LA. As Chief of Security, Gnarly is in charge of maintaining corporate secrets and managing a secure operation. Gnarly has many ties in the security community and knows a lot of "troubleshooters."

Quote: "Now, I know what you boys're capable of, so let's do this job right — and without an inordinate loss of life, OK?"

Suggested Uses: Gnarly is the GM's mouthpiece — the most immediate link between the PCs and TRU. If things go drastically wrong, use Gnarly's position to help straighten the PCs out (do it in the interest of a smooth, exciting campaign).

Kai Lee, Director of Operations, Devil's Anvil Research Facility

STR: 3, DEX: 3, SPD: 3, RES: 3, INT: 5, WILL: 4, AURA: 4

Administration (AURA): 4, Computer Science (INT): 12, Genetic Engineering (INT): 8, Invention/Repair (INT): 10, Languages (INT): 6, Medicine (INT): 8, Military Science (INT): 8, Science (INT): 8, Vehicles (DEX): 3.

Equipment: 9mm Walther, Mondo Armor, and Average Pack (with Eliza, Skill Software, Porta-Term, and Library Load).

Background: As Director of Operations at Devil's Anvil, Kai Lee is in charge not only of the entire operation of that test facility; he also plays an important role in the testing, administration, and management of all research projects tested at Anvil. Lee has been with TRU since the old Tokyo days, when the company was nothing more than a fledgling animation company specializing in computer rotoscoping techniques. Both Lee and TRU have come a long way together since then.

Quote: "What we have is a simple algorithm based on alpha and beta wave patterns, one that takes into account..."

Suggested Uses: Lee is another GM mouthpiece. Use him to assist the PCs in figuring out crucial matters of the plot that are difficult, scientific, or investigative, or in uncovering matters that have been simply overlooked by the PCs.

Jefferson Davis, TRU VP, Research & Development

STR: 4, DEX: 4, SPD: 4, RES: 4, INT: 6, WILL: 5, AURA: 4

Administration (AURA): 11, Business (INT): 10, Charm (DEX): 8, Intimidation (AURA): 8, Leadership (WILL): 8, Martial Arts (SPD): 6, Military Science (INT): 10, Streetwise (WILL): 8, Vehicles (DEX): 6.

Equipment: 20mm GCS 15Gsa, Heavykev, Personal Aircar, and Average Pack (with Eliza, Skill Software, and Library Load).

Background: A recent addition to TRU management, Jeff Davis comes from a Virginia-based branch of AMI's military R&D division. Davis talks in a thoughtful, educated manner, and has only a slight trace of drawl. He is a traditional Southerner in most ways, and a direct, no-nonsense businessman when it comes to his profession. Davis is not particularly fond of Operation: Archangel, and is not the firmest supporter of virtual reality technology.

Quote: "The bottom line is that the shit has hit the fan and no one is allowed to leave the room 'til we clean it up."

Suggested Uses: The PCs may make an ally by approaching Davis once this mess goes down. Davis is looking for an opportunity to sink the entire VIRA program. Be careful, however: all TRU employees are under TRU Security surveillance.

Babylon Test Subjects, 1–4 (excluding Michael)

STR: 6, DEX: 6, SPD: 6, RES: 6, INT: 6, WILL: 6, AURA: 6

Acrobatics (DEX): 8, Gun Combat (DEX): 7, Martial Arts (SPD): 6, Military Science (INT): 8, Streetwise (WILL) 6, Weaponry (DEX) 7. Add any one special enhancement for each rated at 8 Units.

Equipment: Heavy Mondo Armor, Average Pack (with Pueblo Firefight! and RecordIt!, Porta-Term, and Anti-Radar; and Video Camera and Microphone), Combat Goggles, Cellular Phone, Punkbuster™ Radar Detector and Signal Jammer, Nowlan Flying Harness™, Medikit, Gas Mask, Spotlight, Megaphone, Flexi-Cable, 40mm GCS M87/g, 30mm Silver Bullet SSF 2/30, Survival Knife, and 4 Heavy Grenades.

Background: These 3 men and 1 woman are volunteers with backgrounds similar to Michael's: they are boosted vets from AMI's Flying Deuces, 21–28 years of age. They are all whacked out, each as a result of their own private Idaho (i.e., VIRI).

Quote: "If you want us, here we are. Come and get us! But ya better hurry...."

Suggested Uses: These NPCs only serve one purpose: to fight the PCs and delay them from discovering Michael's escape.

FBI Agents

STR: 4, DEX: 3, SPD: 3, RES: 4, INT: 4, WILL: 4, AURA: 3

Administration (AURA): 4, Detective (INT): 5, Gun Combat (DEX): 5, Intimidation/Interrogation (AURA): 6, Martial Arts (SPD): 4, Military Science (INT): 6, Thief (DEX): 5, Vehicles (DEX): 4.

Equipment: 25mm Urban Nightmare EP425, 30mm Silver Bullet SSF 2/30, Heavykev, Average Pack (with Pueblo Firefight! and RecordIt!, and Porta-Term; Video Camera and Microphone), Combat Goggles, Fibalert™, Megaphone, and Spotlight. In addition, one Agent in the group will be equipped with a 20mm GCS DW 770/g and an AMC City Runabout.

Background: These are your standard issue FBI Agents. In any meeting with the PCs, they use their Megaphones to hail the group and demand their surrender. If the PCs do not comply, the Agents open fire and try to advance. These Agents will do their best to bring the PCs in alive for questioning. (Don't count on it if the situation becomes dire.)

Quote: "This is the FBI. Throw your weapons out the door and come out of the building with your hands in the air."

Suggested Uses: Use these Agents whenever the PCs get out of line or whenever you need to spice the adventure with combat. Do not, however, let them slow down the adventure too much; timing and placement are crucial to the plot.

TRU Security Troops

STR: 3, DEX: 3, SPD: 3, RES: 3, INT: 3, WILL: 3, AURA: 3

Detective (INT): 3, Gun Combat (DEX): 4, Intimidation/Interrogation (AURA): 4, Martial Arts (SPD): 3, Military Science (INT): 3, Thief (DEX): 3.

Equipment: 20mm GCS 15Gsa, Mondo Armor, Average Pack (with Pueblo MapIt! and RecordIt!; Microphone and Video Camera), Cellular Phone, Spotlight, Megaphone, and Fibalert™. One Guard in each group will be armed with a 30mm Silver Bullet SSF 2/30 and will have access to a TRU Security-owned BRS 49.

Background: Most of these Troops have families and are thus unlikely to throw their lives on the line for a measly \$150,000 a year. Whenever their forces are reduced by half (or at the first sign of bodily injury), these Guards retreat.

Quote: "Th—this is TRU Security. P—please put your hands in the air and th—throw your weapons on the ground." or "Base, this is an emergency! I need back up immediately!"

Suggested Uses: The only time these Rent-a-Cops show up is on TRU grounds, and only then when things get *really* hot.

Vehicles

Cherokee R-12 Attack Helicopter (Avail: E, Cost: \$500,000,000)

Handling: 0, SPD: 24, RES: 18

This light, two-man chopper continues the Department of Defense's line of quick-assault, air mobility line of vehicles. The Cherokee is not only sleek, fast (capable of up to 800 MPH), and silent, it is also armed to the rotors. Standard weaponry is 2 Small Cannons (treat as 40mm GCS M87/g), 2 Machine Guns (treat as 20mm GCS DW 770/g), and 8 Small Missiles. The Cherokee is equipped with nightvision screens, engine silencers, and a wide range of onboard communications equipment. In addition, the Cherokee has an onboard navigation computer (treat as an Average Home Computer with Pueblo Firefight!, MapIt, and RecordIt!, and Porta-Term, Vehicle Navigation, and Anti-Radar).

Hind Yeltsin G-15 Helicopter Gunship (Avail: E, Cost: \$5,000,000,000)

Handling: -1, SPD: 21, RES: 20

With the collapse of the old Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States turned its military/industrial complex to greener pastures by opening the market to foreign and corporate defense interests. One of the big hardware sales for the CIS is the Hind Yeltsin G-15 Helicopter Gunship. The term "Gunship" only loosely fits the Hind Yeltsin; the helicopter is actually more like an airborne destroyer than anything. The Hind Yeltsin G-15 is surprisingly mobile for its size, and fast in spite of its great bulk (achieving speeds of up to 600 MPH). This chopper employs engine silencers, radar blocks, and the latest communications equipment. It also employs satellite communications for navigation and has an onboard computer (treat as an Average Home Computer with Pueblo Firefight!, MapIt, and RecordIt!, and Porta-Term, Anti-Radar, and Vehicle Navigation/Maintenance). When it comes to armaments, there's little like it in the sky. The Hind-Yeltsin G-15 comes with: 2 Large Cannons (treat as AMI Char-Baby), 4 Small Cannons (treat as 40mm GCS M87/g), 4 Machine Guns (treat as 30mm ZAG), 8 Heavy Missiles, and two racks of 8 each Small Missiles. In addition, the Hind Yeltsin G-15 is capable of carrying a crew of 10 fully armed soldiers.

2019/21 Jeep Condor (Avail: C, Cost: \$14,000,000)

Handling: 0, SPD: 13, RES: 16

The end of the Cold War in the last decade of the 20th century signalled an open market for Department of Defense hardware. One of the companies to benefit most from this open-door policy was American Jeep-Mitsubishi. Many of the military's overland transport designs were sold to the company at a steal of a price. Without having to spend the money on R&D, AJM immediately turned the armed force's off-road vehicles into affordable, private transports. The Jeep Condor has a wide wheelbase that makes rollovers almost impossible. In addition, the Condor uses the latest satellite communications technology for cross-country navigation (treat as Vehicle Computer with Pueblo MapIt!, Porta-Term, and Vehicle Navigation). The vehicle is amazingly sturdy and surprisingly fuel efficient. Some models have a 6-wheel design, while others offer state-of-the-art "floater" axles that make travel possible on any terrain.

Fuzzbuster Rocket Launcher (Avail: E, Cost: \$3,000,000)

Accuracy: -1, Penetration: 18, Damage: LW/MW/HW/IN, Rng: 20/26/32, Rate: 1, STR: 4, RES: 13

This little unit is the choice of terrorist organizations the world 'round. Based on the earlier LAW (Light Anti-tank Weapon), the Fuzzbuster Rocket Launcher is the size of a bazooka, lighter than a suitcase, and packs a wallop equal to that of a Small Missile. The modular design makes it easy to hide, transport, or carry over long distances.

Reward Points

The following list of Reward Points should be given to each of the players based on how well they did:

- For successfully completing *Hell Bent*: 3 RP.
- For each successful investigation or deduction: 1 RP.
- For each battle won: 1 RP.
- For individual good roleplaying: 1 discretionary RP.

Contents of Michael's Average Pack MicroCD

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 3, Michael gives the PCs a MicroCD that contains the following files:

- A "Read Me" note that must be read before any of the files can be opened (see below);
- Footage for all the battles in which Michael and the Snow White test group engaged (except the battle with the PCs);
- Articles and reports explaining how VIRA works and how it will be employed (see pp. 2–5);
- Secret TRU documents suggesting corporate military uses for VIRA, including use in intercorporate assassinations;
- A BTI R&D report listing bugs in the VIRA application and strongly advising a delay in the 2022 release date;
- A TRU Security memo requesting the termination of all members of the Operation: Archangel test group;
- The memo from Akaia Mirasachi requesting the termination of the PC "troubleshooters" (see p. 27);
- An audio tape of LAPF Helicopter 11's original orders and TRU Security's amendments (see p. 39);
- A letter of introduction to Red Jack, noted vet's rights activist and Underground sympathizer; and
- A compressed file containing the DataSoft *Online Bible™ Version 4.0* (Pope Paul VIII, Editor).

The "Read Me" note reads as follows:

Fellow Vets,

By the time you read this, I will have wreaked God's vengeance on the demons responsible for the fall of so many honorable angels. If not, it is your God-granted goal to accomplish the task at which I've failed. Do this by direct force or by subtler means. This disk contains enough information to condemn any TRU employee involved in the VIRA program. The footage will best be used by The Dark One. Let him do with it as he pleases. The letter of introduction will help you get a new start in life with a vet-supportive group known as the Underground. I wish you the best of grace and all God's strength in your new destinies.

Mourning Angel

- If the PCs trailed Michael's Jeep to the cabin: 1 RP.
- If the PCs weren't spotted by the FBI: 1 RP.
- If the PCs didn't attack Michael at TRU: 1 RP.
- If the PCs helped Michael achieve his goal: 2 RP.
- If the PCs escaped from TRU immediately: 1 RP.
- If the PCs turned over Michael's disk as asked: 1 RP.
- If the PCs joined the Underground: 1 RP. Ω

Operation: Archangel Timeline

AUG 23

0600 Initial VIRA test group, Snow White, enters Babylon.

AUG 24

1800 Radio contact with Snow White lost.

AUG 25

0600 Cherokee R-12 shot down over Babylon.
1200 D7 Security Group enters Babylon.
1307 D7 engages Snow White in Babylon.
1400 Radio contact with D7 lost.
1600 Phil Gnarly contacts PCs about "troubleshooting" job.
2000 Flight to Devil's Anvil leaves LAX.
2100 Flight from LAX arrives at Devil's Anvil.
2200 PCs briefed by TRU managers, Jeff Davis and Kai Lee.
2300 PCs make preparations to enter Babylon.

AUG 26

0100 PCs enter Babylon Urban Test Facility.
0200 PCs engage in firefight with Snow White in Babylon.
0300 PCs investigate Babylon site for fifth subject, Michael.
0400 PCs begin cleanup of Babylon.
0600 PCs leave by helicopter for Devil's Anvil.
0600 Michael blows up TRU fuel truck on Interstate-15.
0700 PCs return to Devil's Anvil.
0800 WCNN broadcast taped.
0900 PCs are briefed by Jeff Davis.
1000 PCs equip and make preparations to leave Anvil.
1100 PCs leave for I-15, "Ground Zero."
1300 PCs arrive at I-15, Ground Zero.
1400 –
2000 PCs conduct investigation of I-15 Ground Zero site.
2100 PCs leave to follow tire tracks in sand west-southwest.
2300 PCs arrive at cabin in San Gabriel Mountains.
2400 PCs investigate Gus Gruesome's cabin site.

AUG 27

0100 PCs leave for TRU in Upper Hollywood.
(PCs engage in firefight with FBI.¹)
0500 Michael attacks TRU from Hollywood sign.
0500 PCs arrive at TRU in Upper Hollywood.
0530 PCs meet Michael on TRU Building Roof.
0600 PCs engage in firefight with LAPF.
0630 PCs escape from Roof and leave TRU compound.
(PCs engage in firefight with TRU Security.¹)
0700 PCs are in the clear.

¹ If the PCs opt for this action, adjust the adventure timeline by adding one hour to all following times.



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FRI, OCTOBER 31, 2021

GAMEZONE

A QUICK LOOK AT THE GAME

ACTION: *Hell Bent* is nonstop thrills from beginning to end.

ADVENTURE: The PCs are asked to perform a freelance job for TRU Entertainment, Inc. — a job that involves taking out a few test subjects who've gone berserk in TRU's desert test facility.

CONFLICT: The PCs match boosted vets with a distinct advantage: big guns and VIRA, a virtual reality battlefield aid.

FUN: Besides gratuitous combat, *Hell Bent* offers lots of player involvement and investigative roleplaying.

SIMPLICITY: *Hell Bent* is the perfect introductory adventure for Mayfair's *Underground*.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The narrative achieves an amazing level of lyric realism™."

Marc Rhine-Hagendazs
 review of *Hell Bent*

HELL BENT

Design by Robin Jenkins

Art by C. Brent Ferguson

By Jack Hammer
 ATLAS GAMES

Barstow, CA—An unknown assailant fired a rocket at motorists on Interstate 15 early this morning, killing 11 and injuring countless others. Sources say the assailant fired a Fuzzbuster® anti-tank rocket into a trailer truck.

The truck, which was headed for TRU Entertainment, Inc., in Upper Hollywood, was loaded with propane. The attack set off an explosion that lit up the sky for 40 miles and leveled a mile-long section of I-15.

At Barstow City Hall, Police Chief Randall Barron told reporters the death toll could climb to 30 by day's end.

"I haven't seen anything this gruesome since 2016," Barron said. "It looks like ground zero in San Luis Obispo. You expect this sort of thing in LA, but not out here...at least, not often." The California State Patrol has closed I-15 from Baker to Barstow pending investigation and clean-up efforts.

TRU officials were unavailable for comment, although reliable sources within that organization have stated they are aware of no known tie between the terrorist attack and their company. JH



Underground member, Michael "Mourning Star" Lewis, performs a little freelance havoc in the City of Angels.

TRU Execs Deny Hiring Boosted Vets for Devil's Anvil "Cleanup"

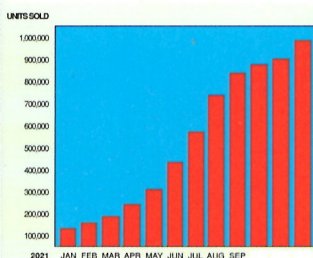
By Bertha Nation
 ATLAS GAMES

Los Angeles — TRU, Inc., executives denied allegations today that they hired "boosted veterans" to correct an in-house security problem. The problem occurred at TRU's Devil's Anvil Test Facility, a classified research facility in the desert near Barstow, CA.

The allegations were made this afternoon by the office of California Governor, Clarence Brown. Pat Hearst, Brown's Press Secretary, claims their office learned of the allegations from the LA office of the FBI during their investigation of the I-15 terrorist incident.

According to Hearst, agents were investigating ties between TRU and the I-15 attack. During their investigation, agents were engaged in a firefight with mercenary vets allegedly trailing the I-15 terrorist. The evidence, Hearst claims, comes from descrambled videophone broadcasts via CalSat 5.

In a video press release issued this afternoon, TRU CEO, Akaia Mirasachi, said there is "no truth whatsoever" to Hearst's allegations. Mirasachi assured the public TRU, Inc., was not involved in the terrorist attack. Mirasachi refused further comment on the subject. BN



TODAY'S WEATHER

