FICTION LEXICON

WORDS FROM THE FIELD

TERRA CONFLICTUS 2066

JESSE ALEXANDER

OPERATOR TACTICS

FICTION LEXICON

Complete Encyclopedia for Operator Tactics

EDITION 01 · 2026 · TERRA CONFLICTUS

OT.FL // REFERENCE // A5

Design & Writing: Jesse Alexander

CONTENTS

01 HOW TO USE THIS BOOK 4
02 OPERATOR SLANG 6
03 SYSTEM LANGUAGE 11
04 HUMAN LABELS 16
05 GENE-FORGED SLANG 21
06 ENVIRONMENTAL LANGUAGE 26
07 POP CULTURE FRAGMENTS 30
08 IDIOMS AND SAYINGS 35
09 TERRITORY SUPPLEMENTS 39
10 GAME SYSTEMS VOCABULARY 56
11 EXPANDED TACTICAL GLOSSARY 67
12 CANONICAL ENTRIES & PULL QUOTES 70

01 HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Every word in this book grew from pressure. Resource scarcity, infrastructure collapse, faction control, biological instability. Language does not emerge from nothing. It emerges from what people live with every day.

The main lexicon (Section I, categories A--G) collects all general OT vocabulary organized by type. Where a cluster of entries shares a distinct register -- Flooded London water ops, Crackerjack tournament culture, world history as everyday language -- a subheading marks the shift. The entries are part of one world; the subheadings are navigational, not hierarchical.

Section II: Territory Supplements -- contains vocabulary that is deliberately non-portable. These are words and phrases that only mean something if you've actually been to that territory. Organized by territory.

Section III: Canonical Entries -- contains SPLICE -- the player unit designation and the fullest entry in the lexicon.

Section IV: Pull Quotes -- is sixty field-ready one-liners for broadcast copy, in-world flavor text, and table atmosphere.

Formation rule cross-check tables -- appear in the individual source files (v1--v5) and are not reproduced here. This document is the reading copy, not the QC record.

Companion document: -- `04_Slang_NPC_Dialogue_Guide.docx` -- curated 28-term table-ready lexicon with NPC dialogue examples by faction and type. Use it for GM prep. This document is the full reference.

THE SEVEN FORMATION RULES

Every term in this lexicon traces to at least one of seven pressure sources:

1. **Resource Scarcity** -- Water, fuel, food, ammunition. The shortage creates the language.
2. **Infrastructure Collapse** -- Systems that broke and the vocabulary people invented to describe what replaced them.
3. **Faction Control** -- Power structures and the words that navigate them.
4. **Biological Instability** -- Gene-forging, drift, suppression. Bodies that have opinions about what they want to be.
5. **Environmental Hostility** -- Climate aftermath. The physical world as adversary.
6. **Cultural Memory** -- Events that became shorthand. People who became adjectives.
7. **Operational Necessity** -- The words that save time when time is the thing you do not have.

02 OPERATOR SLANG

What people say under fire. What people say about the people under fire. What people say when nobody official is listening.

"We're drinking sand on this one." Three days past resupply, no exfil window, and the nav drone's been dead since Tuesday. We're drinking sand on this one.

"Tag went cold." Had a clean line on the courier until he ducked into a Freehold relay. Tag went cold. Nothing to chase.

"Paper op." Command wants a clean sweep of the processing yard but won't commit air or armor. It's a paper op. Looks great on the brief. Looks like a body bag on the ground.

"Running someone else's tab." We lost two in the canal district covering an EO extraction they didn't sanction. Running someone else's tab again.

"Soft walls." Don't trust the perimeter on this site. Soft walls. Anybody with a jammer and ten minutes could walk through.

"Burning grid." She burned grid getting out of Gorodskie. Every relay between here and the Freehold knows her face now.

"Dead drop breathing." That cache has been sitting for nine months. If it's still sealed, it's dead drop breathing -- alive but nobody's checking.

"Teeth out." Full kit, weapons free, no negotiation posture. We're going teeth out on this one.

"Buying local." We're out of faction supply. Buying local now. He said it the way you say "the brakes are gone."

"That's a receipt." Someone owes someone. Could be a favor, could be a bullet. Either way it's on file. "She pulled us out of the canal. That's a receipt."

"Catalog run." An op that's really a shopping trip. Somebody up the chain wants something off the books and your team is the delivery truck. Nobody briefs the real objective.

"Furniture." Personnel placed in a location to fill a role nobody expects to survive. "Those four on the east wall? Furniture."

"Asking the building." When your intel is gone and you're reading the environment for what happened. Scorch marks, shell casings, who left in a hurry. "No one's talking. We're asking the building."

"Paid twice." An operative who took a job that turned out to serve two clients with competing interests. Neither one told them. "He got paid twice on the harbor job. Didn't know it until one client tried to kill him on behalf of the other."

"Ghost menu." The jobs your handler offers when the official contract has nothing on it. "The contract's clean but he's got a ghost menu if you want to eat this month."

HISTORICAL REGISTER -- EVENTS AND PEOPLE AS OPERATIONAL SHORTHAND

"That's a Prometheus day." Storm season. Systems failing in sequence. The kind of day where everything breaks at once and nobody pretends it wasn't predicted. "Power's gone, water pressure's dropping, and there's a bloom in the lower cistern. That's a Prometheus day."

"Pulling a Valkyrie." Running supplies through hostile territory when the odds say don't. She drove the convoy through the Balkanized Belt with three vehicles and no air cover. Pulling a Valkyrie. "Command said it couldn't be done. She said the Siege of New Moscow couldn't be done either."

"Phoenix rules." Urban combat where the environment is the weapon. Named for Captain Reeves at Neo-Toronto. She didn't outshoot the opposition -- she collapsed a parking structure on them and fought in the dust cloud. "We're not winning this in a straight line. Phoenix rules."

"Specter work." Patience-based ops in hostile terrain. Dune Specter doctrine. Sit, wait, let the environment do half the job. "He didn't fire for three days. Just sat in the sand and let them get careless. Specter work."

"Document War rules." When everybody in the AO wants the same thing and nobody's willing to share it. Named for the regional conflicts over pre-Upheaval records. "Three factions, one archive, no extraction window. Document War rules."

"That's Forbidden Zone math." A decision where every option ends badly and the only question is how badly. Named for the Indo-Pakistani exchange that nobody discusses directly. "If we blow the dam, we flood the settlement. If we don't, the EO column reaches the cache. That's Forbidden Zone math."

"Going Prometheus League." Giving something away instead of selling it. Ideological, stupid, or both -- depending on who you ask. Named for the faction-tech redistributionists. "She broadcast the coordinates on an open frequency. Going Prometheus League. Command's going to love that."

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

"Wet entry." Insertion by water in a flooded urban zone. Not amphibious assault -- just the only way in when the streets are canals. "Wet entry on the east side. Inflatable, no motor. If they hear us coming it's because we're breathing too loud."

"Clock's in the walls." When the mission timer isn't on your wrist -- it's built into the environment. Rising water, a purge countdown, a reactor cycle. You can't pause it. You can't negotiate with it. "Forget the patrol schedule. The clock's in the walls. That water doesn't care if we're ready."

"Washing the borough." Sabotaging water infrastructure to punish a civilian population. Political weapon disguised as infrastructure failure. "EO's washing the borough. Quarter million people lose clean water so somebody in a boardroom gets leverage."

"Reading rust." Navigating an unfamiliar facility by the condition of its surfaces. Corrosion patterns, water damage, wear marks on handrails. Where people walk, where they don't, where the building is dying. "No floor plans. We're reading rust. Follow the dry patches -- that's where the maintenance crew walks."

"Tide job." Any operation where the extraction window is determined by water level rather than enemy movement. The river doesn't care about your tactical situation. "This is a tide job. We've got until the dock goes under. After that, we're swimming or we're staying."

"Pulled the plug." Triggered a catastrophic infrastructure failure, intentionally or not. From the physical act of disconnecting a relay or shutting down a pump station. "Anvil pulled the plug on three boroughs of drinking water. Called it a tactical objective. Two hundred thousand people call it Tuesday without a tap."

"Pipe fight." A firefight inside active infrastructure -- relay stations, pump rooms, water treatment plants, power substations. The environment is full of things that break expensively. "We're in a pipe fight now. Watch your backstop. You put a round through that relay bank and we're the ones who broke it."

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

"That's Crackerjack weather." When conditions are designed to create drama rather than reflect reality. An environment that's been rigged for an outcome. Originally about the GSOTC terrain protocols. Now used anytime a situation feels like it was set up to make somebody perform. "Supply convoy hit three separate ambushes on the same route in one week. That's Crackerjack weather. Somebody's running the table."

"Going for the Triple Crown." Overextending to capture everything at once instead of securing the win you've already got. From the Crackerjack bonus rule. High reward, high exposure. "He tried to hold the canal, the relay station, and the processing plant at the same time with four operators. Going for the Triple Crown. He got none of them."

"Running Showboat." Attempting something visible and risky when the safe play exists. Sometimes it works. When it doesn't, you end up Pinned and the replay humiliates you. "She didn't have to breach the front wall. There was a side entrance. She breached the front wall. Running Showboat. Crowd loved it. I almost didn't."

"Bracket play." Operating with awareness of your reputation rather than your objective. You're not just trying to win this -- you're managing how you're seen across the series. "He let the Vipers extract. Clean tactical decision. But he let them extract with all their operators intact because he didn't want to look like he was playing rough. That's bracket play."

"Calling the Target." Loud, coordinated, transparent about your intent. A full-squad commitment to a single objective, broadcast to everyone watching. "They hit the eastern relay and called the target the whole way in. Every faction in range knew. That was the point. Nobody could respond in time and everybody saw them take it."

"Extraction weather." A situation that's survivable but will need medical attention -- the drones are coming but you're not walking out clean. "He took a Mortal Wound but he's extraction weather. He'll be back next round, with damage. Plan accordingly."

"Hot Extract." Getting out with everything you came for and doing it faster than anyone expected. "She was out of the building with the package before the perimeter sealed. Hot Extract. The surveillance team was still queuing the intercept when she cleared the zone."

03 SYSTEM LANGUAGE

How infrastructure talks. How the machines and supply chains and allocation systems describe what they are doing to the people who depend on them.

Ration clock -- How long your current supply allocation lasts at consumption rate. Everyone knows their ration clock. Nobody says it out loud when it's under forty-eight.

Gray water -- Not contaminated enough to kill you, not clean enough to trust. Most of what comes through municipal pipe in non-NAF territory is gray water.

Load shed -- When infrastructure cuts power to a district to keep another one running. Happens on a schedule in UKE territory. Happens without warning everywhere else.

Chain-fed -- Supplied through a faction logistics pipeline. If you're chain-fed, you eat on schedule. If you're not, you negotiate.

Brownout protocol -- Standing orders for what to do when systems degrade below operational threshold. Every PMC has one. Most of them start with "secure water first."

Ghost grid -- Infrastructure that shows up on maps but doesn't function. Roads that end in rubble. Power stations that haven't produced in a decade. The Great Drought left ghost grids across three continents.

Allocation drift -- When ration distribution no longer matches the population it was designed for. Common in border zones where refugees outpace census data.

Hard pipe -- A confirmed, functioning supply line. Fresh water, fuel, ammunition. You fight over hard pipe. Everything else is negotiable.

Phantom load -- Power draw from systems nobody authorized. Could be a black-market grow operation. Could be an unlicensed gene clinic pulling current for cryo. Phantom loads don't show on the grid report. They show on the blackout.

Wet inventory -- Biological product in a supply chain that isn't supposed to have biological product. Gene material, tissue samples, suppression meds being moved through food logistics. The manifest says grain. The temperature control says otherwise.

Gray count -- The unofficial population of a district. The registered number and the real number. The gap between them is where the black market lives.

Clinic draw -- The resource drain an unlicensed gene clinic puts on local infrastructure. Power, water, medical waste. A clinic draw on a small district is like a second hospital that nobody approved and nobody inspects.

Cascade fail -- When one infrastructure system goes down and takes three others with it. Water pumps need power, power needs cooling, cooling needs water. Cascade fail is when the circle breaks. Common in contested zones where nobody maintains the full loop.

Supply ghost -- Goods that exist in the allocation system but never arrive. Somebody's eating them between the warehouse and the drop. Supply ghosts fatten the black market and thin the districts.

Tolerance stack -- How many unofficial modifications a system is carrying before it fails. The pump's running three tolerance stacks deep. It'll hold until it doesn't, and when it doesn't it'll take the block.

HISTORICAL REGISTER

Drought clock -- Any system running on reserves that won't be replenished. Named for the Great Drought's slow-motion collapse of agricultural infrastructure. "That generator's been on drought clock for six months. When it stops, nothing replaces it."

Prometheus chain -- A cascade failure where one system's collapse triggers the next. "The water treatment failure started a Prometheus chain. Three districts went dark by morning."

Post-war pipe -- Infrastructure rebuilt after the Document Wars using whatever was available. Functional, ugly, unreliable in ways that don't show up until they matter. "That's post-war pipe. Looks solid. Shakes loose every time the temperature drops below freezing."

Reeves line -- The minimum defensible perimeter. From Phoenix Reeves at Neo-Toronto -- she drew a line on a map and said everything outside it was gone. "We're at the Reeves line. If we lose the pump station, we lose the district."

Volkov freight -- Supplies moved through hostile territory by brute force and speed. From the Siege of New Moscow. Expensive in personnel and vehicles. "They're running Volkov freight through the Belt. Losing a truck every third run. Still cheaper than negotiating passage."

Ghost country -- Territory that used to be governed and isn't anymore. Not contested -- just empty. "That whole corridor went ghost country after the Drought. Maps still show towns. The towns aren't there."

Makali margin -- The acceptable loss threshold for an extraction operation. Named for the Makali Extraction, where seventeen operatives went in and the margin was miscalculated. "What's the Makali margin on this one? Command says two. I say command hasn't seen the building."

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Purge override -- A command sequence that forces a water relay to dump its reserves into flood channels instead of distributing to the civilian network. Designed as an emergency measure for contamination events. In practice, it's a weapon. Whoever controls the override controls the water.

Relay dark -- When a water distribution node stops communicating with the network. Could be a maintenance failure. Could be someone cutting the comms on purpose. "Waterloo went relay dark at 2300. By midnight, three borough councils were on the phone."

Tide table ops -- Mission planning built around tidal schedules rather than enemy patrol patterns. In flooded urban zones, the river sets the operational tempo. Every operator in Flooded London checks the tide table before they check the threat brief.

Borough contract -- A security arrangement between a borough council and a private military contractor. Not faction employment. Borough contracts pay on completion, specify objectives in civilian terms, and include liability clauses that PMC lawyers find amusing. "It's a borough contract. They want the relay running. They're paying for proof."

Skeleton crew -- The minimum maintenance staff required to keep infrastructure running during off-hours. In contested zones, skeleton crews are the first casualties of sabotage operations and the last people anyone extracts. "Three people on a skeleton crew holding together three boroughs of freshwater. Nobody told them they were a military target."

Stack flood -- When a facility floods from multiple sources simultaneously -- rising river, broken internal pipes, and failed drainage. Each source alone is manageable. Together they overwhelm the pumps. "The dock hit stack flood at Round 4. River from below, burst pipe from the concourse, drainage grate backing up. The building was drinking itself."

Dead credential -- An access code or authentication token that should still work but might not. Maintenance crew codes, former employee badges, expired system passwords. "Okafor's credentials are either golden or dead. We won't know until we're at the terminal."

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

Crowd momentum bleed -- The gradual erosion of public credibility or faction goodwill through a series of small, visible failures. "The PCU's been on crowd momentum bleed since the Sandstorm Offensive. Three operations with ambiguous outcomes. The contracts are going to reflect it."

Broadcast threshold -- The performance level required to maintain faction backing, contract value, or public relevance. "That unit's operating below broadcast threshold. Command hasn't pulled them but the resupply numbers have been dropping for two cycles. They know."

Triage window -- The gap between an operator going down and their ability to return to function. The triage window is the most valuable resource in a sustained operation. "Patch has a forty-second triage window between engagements. He used thirty-eight of them on Anvil. That's not medicine. That's engineering."

Modifier cap -- The upper limit on how bad a situation can get before the environment compensates. Used in field contexts for any system that has a floor on misery. "PCU supply lines are on modifier cap. It's bad, but it's bad in a managed way."

Swiss bracket -- A multi-round engagement format where your record from the previous encounter affects your next pairing. Used for any political or tactical situation where past performance directly shapes future opposition. "The UKE's running Swiss bracket politics in the eastern sector. Every faction they deal with, the next one knows how the last deal went."

Triage debt -- Damage carried into a subsequent operation because there wasn't enough medical capacity to resolve it between engagements. "That squad's running two Mortal Wounds of triage debt into the third engagement. Their medic went down in Round 2. They're going to feel it."

Terrain protocol -- The environmental conditions a situation generates, framed as something partially chosen or designed. "The river crossing, the blown bridge, the contested checkpoint -- that's not terrain. That's a terrain protocol. Somebody picked those conditions."

04 HUMAN LABELS

What people call each other. Classification systems that pretend to be neutral. Words that carry weight depending on who is saying them and why.

Baseline -- Unmodified human. Not an insult, not a compliment. Just a fact. Until someone says it with the wrong tone.

Shelf -- Gene-forged from commercial stock. Mass-produced. Serviceable. The word carries the weight of "off the shelf" and nobody lets them forget it.

Bespoke -- Custom gene-forged, built to spec for a client with money. Bespokes don't have model numbers. They have names.

Pipe hitter -- Someone who gets it done regardless of conditions. Can be baseline or forged. Respect term. Earned, not assigned.

Dry -- Someone without faction backing. No supply chain, no med access, no cover. Being dry in a contested zone is a death sentence that takes its time.

Ticket -- A faction-backed operative with confirmed extraction rights. If you've got a ticket, someone is coming for you. Probably.

Warm body -- Disposable personnel. Hired for a single op, no long-term contract, no faction loyalty expected. You don't learn their names.

Anchor -- Someone too embedded in local infrastructure to extract. Could be an asset, could be a liability. Anchors know things but can't move.

Drifter -- Not a gene-forged term, despite how it sounds. Someone who moves between faction territories without declared allegiance. Some are intelligence. Some are just surviving.

Gravel -- Insult. Burned-out operative. Someone who used to be something and isn't anymore. "He's gravel now." Used to be a road. Now just loose rock.

"Catalog" -- Someone who's been gene-forged through a black-market clinic listed in the Surgeon's Catalog. Not a compliment. Not quite an insult. Depends on whether the work held. "She's catalog. Good work, though. Whoever did her knew what they were doing."

"Receipt holder" -- Someone who's owed by enough people that the debt itself is a form of power. Receipt holders don't need faction backing. They need a good memory.

"Test pattern" -- A gene-forged showing visible aberrant drift. The name comes from old broadcast signals -- something that used to be a picture and is now just noise.

"House pet" -- An operative kept by a faction patron for personal use rather than operational deployment. Fed well, equipped well, never in real danger. Other operators use the term the way dogs look at cats.

"Aftermarket" -- Someone who's been modified outside their original spec, usually without their original client's knowledge or consent. Could be an upgrade, could be sabotage. "She's aftermarket. Somebody added reflexes that weren't in the original order."

"Quiet money" -- A black-market broker who handles transactions without faction visibility. Not a fixer. Fixers get things. Quiet money moves value without leaving a trail. "You don't find quiet money. Quiet money finds your problem interesting enough to show up."

"Expiry" -- A gene-forged past their projected stability date. Used by baselines as a dismissal. Used by forged about themselves as a dark joke. "I'm an expiry. Every morning I wake up is overtime."

HISTORICAL REGISTER

"Prometheus baby" -- Anyone born during or immediately after Superstorm Prometheus. They're pushing forty now. They don't remember the old world, but they remember the chaos that replaced it. "She's a Prometheus baby. Learned to swim before she learned to read. Not a metaphor."

"Drought kid" -- Younger than Prometheus babies. Grew up during or after the Great Drought. Their baseline is scarcity. They don't waste water. They don't waste anything.

"Walker" -- Someone suspected of Void Walker affiliation or sympathy. Not faction-loyal, not black-market -- something else. Operating on a different set of priorities nobody can read.

"League" -- Used as an insult by faction-aligned operatives for anyone who shares intelligence or resources outside their chain of command. From the Prometheus League.

"Corsair" -- Anyone who operates maritime black-market routes. From Admiral Red Siren Volkov's Crimson Corsairs. Respect or contempt, depending on whether you need something shipped.

"Harrier" -- Someone who fights best in environments that are already broken. From the Hellfire Harriers at Neo-Toronto. "She's a Harrier. Give her a collapsed building and a dust cloud and she's more dangerous than a full squad in the open."

"Pre-war head" -- Someone old enough to remember the world before the Upheaval. Rare. They remember things that don't exist anymore and sometimes can't tell the difference.

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Relay rat -- Anyone who works maintenance in a water relay station. Not an insult from the people who use it -- the relay rats themselves adopted it. They work in damp corridors below the waterline and they keep the taps running. Operators who've seen what happens when the relay rats stop working tend to use the term with respect.

Borough badge -- An operator working on a borough contract rather than faction orders. Paid by a civilian council. The work is the same. The politics are different. Faction operators consider borough badges low-rent. Borough badges consider themselves the only ones doing work that matters to actual people.

Pipe boss -- The maintenance crew chief for a relay station or water treatment node. Not a military rank. Not a faction title. The pipe boss knows every valve, every override, every workaround in the facility, and they know the names of the families downstream.

Wet asset -- An operative or contact who specializes in flooded urban operations. Submersible insertion, canal navigation, underwater demolition, tidal extraction.

True believer -- An operative whose commitment to their faction's cause goes past professionalism into conviction. Dangerous because they won't surrender, won't negotiate, and won't stop.

Downstream -- Not a person but a way of referring to the civilian population affected by infrastructure operations. "Two hundred thousand downstream." It puts a number on the consequences without naming individuals. "Stop thinking about the firefight. Think about who's downstream."

Defector stock -- A gene-forged who crossed faction lines. Carries the build of one faction and the loyalty of another -- or of nobody. Other forged watch defector stock carefully, not because they distrust them, but because they wonder what it would take for them to make the same choice.

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

"Iron Operator" -- Someone who accumulates damage across a sustained engagement and keeps functioning. From the Crackerjack award. Not the same as being durable -- the Iron Operator makes their damage work. "She took two Mortal Wounds in the first engagement and carried them into the second and third. Iron Operator. The wounds didn't slow her down -- they made her angry, which is worse."

"Phoenix" -- Used (lowercase) to describe an operator who has been Out of Action and returned. Also used as an adjective for a unit or faction that lost catastrophically and rebuilt. "That battalion was wiped out at Neo-Toronto and reconstituted from survivors. Total phoenix unit. You can tell because they fight like people who know what it costs."

"Ghost Medal" -- Someone who operates so quietly and effectively in the margins that their successes go publicly unrecognized. "The Phantom Vipers are a Ghost Medal outfit. Three Crackerjacks, never finished below fourth, and nobody talks about them. They like it that way."

"Crowd Favorite" -- An operator or unit whose style generates audience engagement regardless of win/loss record. Not the best. The most watchable. "He's a crowd favorite and command knows it. His tactical record is middling. His recruiting effect is significant."

"Bystander" -- A faction delegate, syndicate representative, or observer at the GSOTC who participates in the trade show portion without competing. Clean clothes, no weapons. They watch operators fight while negotiating contracts at the same elevation.

"The Last Standing" -- The sole surviving operator in a full elimination. From the Crackerjack award. Not a compliment, exactly. A fact with weight. "She's the Last Standing from the Makali follow-up op. Walked out with four Mortal Wounds and nobody left. Command gave her two days and reassigned her. The two days were the generous part."

05 GENE-FORGED SLANG

Insider vocabulary from people whose bodies have expiration dates. The words they use about themselves, about each other, about the systems that made them.

"Batch number showing." When a shelf unit starts displaying the same behavioral tics as others from their production run. "Your batch number's showing, man. You ordered the same drink three times."

"Running hot." Drift symptoms presenting faster than the suppression meds can handle. "She's running hot -- hands were shaking during the brief and she didn't notice."

"Kitchen job." Black-market gene work. Done in a kitchen, a shipping container, a back room. Kitchen jobs either work perfectly or they come apart at the seams. Sometimes literally.

"Warranty's up." When a commercial-stock forged outlives their projected stability window. Used by forged about themselves, usually with a flat smile. "My warranty's been up for two years. Still here."

"Marked clean." Gene-forged who can pass as baseline on a standard scan. Valuable in territories where forged registration is enforced. "She's marked clean, so don't blow it by asking about her reflex time."

"Spec drift." When a bespoke starts deviating from their commissioned profile. Could be physical, could be behavioral. The client paid for a specific product. Spec drift means the product is becoming a person.

"Wet print." The original gene template before modification. Some forged want to see their wet print. Most don't. Knowing what you were supposed to be before someone started editing isn't always useful.

"Second generation." Gene-forged who reproduced naturally. The results are unpredictable. Faction medical doesn't track second-gen formally, but everybody else does. Informally. With a lot of side-eye.

"Printing errors." What aberrants call their own mutations when they're being funny about it. "The extra joint in my index finger? Printing error. Makes me a better shot, so I'm not filing a complaint."

"Reading the label." When someone figures out you're forged just from watching you move, react, recover. "He read my label in ten seconds. I blinked too fast after the flashbang."

"Cooking off." Aberrant drift accelerating visibly. Skin texture changes, behavioral shifts, reflex patterns going nonstandard. "She's cooking off. Started two weeks ago. Pretending it's not happening."

"Garage sale." A black-market gene clinic that's running on salvaged equipment and secondhand templates. "Got my suppression meds from a garage sale off the Belt. The pharmacist had one eye and better hands than any faction doc I've seen."

"Owner's manual." The genetic profile document a bespoke comes with. Most bespokes have never read theirs. The ones who have don't talk about it. "Found my owner's manual in a faction archive. Turns out I was supposed to be taller."

"Shelf life." How long a commercial-stock forged stays stable before drift begins. Shelf life is a medical term that became a punchline. "My shelf life was eight years. I'm on eleven. The warranty department can come find me."

"Going original." When a gene-forged's modifications start reverting toward their base template. The body rejecting the edit. "His night vision's fading. Going original. In six months he'll need a flashlight like the rest of us."

"Parts bin." Where black-market clinics source their genetic material. Could be faction surplus. Could be harvested. Nobody asks where the parts bin gets restocked. The asking price tells you enough.

HISTORICAL REGISTER

"Prometheus stock." Gene-forged programs that started during the chaos of 2042. Faction governments panicking, throwing money at biological solutions before the science was ready. "He's Prometheus stock. You can tell because half his mods are workarounds for the other half."

"Document War vintage." Older gene-forged from the era when factions were fighting over pre-Upheaval records. Fast, smart, unstable. "She's Document War vintage. Eyes like a scanner. Hands like a safe cracker. Drift started at thirty."

"Drought batch." Gene-forged produced during the Great Drought, when faction resources were thin and corners were cut. "Built cheap, runs hard. The meds don't quite fit the platform but the platform keeps going anyway."

"Void spec." Gene-forged rumored to have been built by the Void Walkers rather than a faction program. Some forged show modifications that don't match any known faction template. "She's either Void spec or the best kitchen job I've ever seen. Either way, I'm not asking."

"Reeves reflex." A gene-forged modification for urban combat response time, reportedly reverse-engineered from combat data at Neo-Toronto. "His close-quarters reaction time is Reeves reflex. Either somebody programmed it or he's been in more collapsed buildings than a demolition crew."

"Red Siren model." Aquatic-adapted gene-forged, designed for maritime operations. Named after Admiral Volkov's Crimson Corsairs. "She can hold her breath for eleven minutes and see in murky water. Red Siren model. Nobody talks about the rejection rate."

"Makali survivor." Not someone who survived the actual Makali Extraction. A gene-forged who's outlived their expected operational window by so long that their continued existence is statistically improbable. "I'm a Makali survivor. Every actuarial table says I should've drifted out two years ago. The tables can come find me."

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

"Wrong zoo." When a gene-forged ends up in a role or environment their build was never designed for. "Ghost Wire's wrong zoo. SCA built her for a theme park. Now she's clearing relay stations in the dark. The reflex mods work fine. The existential situation is harder to process."

"Running someone else's firmware." When your gene-forged modifications are being used for purposes your original client never intended. "He's running someone else's firmware. EO spec'd him for their own ops. Now he's breaching for a borough council. Same mods, different war."

"The build doesn't forget." When a gene-forged's physical training and reflexes take over in a crisis, even when they've left the life they were designed for. "She said she was out. Retired. Then the flashbang went off and her pupils adjusted in half a second. The build doesn't forget."

"Stock instinct." The baseline behavioral template of a gene-forged's animal source. It surfaces under stress. Most forged pretend it doesn't. "Red Dust goes quiet in a firefight. Completely silent. Then afterward he won't stop talking for an hour. Stock instinct. Wolf build. Hunt mode and pack mode are different animals."

"Entertainment grade." A gene-forged originally produced for civilian entertainment -- theme parks, resort security, companion roles. The modifications are real, but the spec was comfort and aesthetics rather than combat durability. "She's entertainment grade and she's faster than anyone on the squad. The SCA didn't build her to fight. They built her to be watched. She does both."

"Talking to the machine." When a cybernetics-fused gene-forged interfaces with a system in a way baselines can't replicate. "Neon Moth doesn't hack terminals. She talks to them. I've seen her put a hand on a relay bank and tell me what's wrong with it before the diagnostic runs."

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

"Running for the cameras." A gene-forged performing to their full specification rather than conserving. There is a cost. You pay it later. "Flicker ran for the cameras in Round 5. You could see it -- the way her movement stopped tracking to what a baseline could do. She's going to feel that in the drift readings."

"Spec drift on a deadline." The specific anxiety of a gene-forged operating at a high-visibility event knowing that their stability window is running and the world is watching for signs of deviation. "She's spec drift on a deadline. Fourth Crackerjack. Every year the broadcast analysts comment on her reaction time. She knows they're tracking the decline."

"Aberrant stock, tournament rules." Describing a gene-forged whose modifications are irregular enough that standard faction doctrine doesn't apply -- but who has been cleared to compete because the silhouette carries a weapon and follows orders. "The Prophet walks in and the Geiger counters tick. Aberrant stock, tournament rules. Nobody knows what his ceiling is."

"Second-gen program." A gene-forged whose lineage traces to an established faction build-out rather than early Prometheus-era work. Cleaner mods, more predictable drift. Also carries a faint note of institutional control. "She's second-gen NAF program. Reeves reflex, lynx-template. The documentation on her mods is thorough and that thoroughness is its own kind of cage."

"Biometric on record." The state of being permanently documented by a system you can't opt out of. Every Crackerjack competitor's biometrics are captured by the GSOTC's broadcast infrastructure. "She competed twice. Biometric on record. Whatever the commission does with those readings, she can't take them back. That's the price of the show."

"Null's kit." Medical compounds that no faction pharmacologist can identify. Originally specific to the Void Walkers' medic, now used as shorthand for any off-template biological modification or treatment that produces results outside established parameters.

"Recognition protocol." The micro-expression exchange between gene-forged who share a template or program. Instant, involuntary, not performed for cameras. Not quite community. More like species recognition.

06 ENVIRONMENTAL LANGUAGE

Names for the physical world after the physical world stopped cooperating. What operators call the places that are trying to kill them.

Thin water -- Water that's been recycled too many times. Technically potable. Tastes like the inside of a filtration unit. You can survive on thin water. You just won't enjoy it.

Cook zone -- Area where ambient temperature regularly exceeds safe exposure without cooling gear. Most of the PCU interior is cook zone six months out of the year.

Dirty air -- Contaminated atmosphere. Could be chemical, could be particulate, could be biological. You don't ask what kind until you're wearing a filter.

Green lock -- An engineered ecosystem that's achieved stable self-regulation. Rare, valuable, and usually faction-controlled. If you find a green lock, someone already owns it.

Salt line -- The boundary where rising seawater has contaminated the freshwater table. Everything below the salt line is dead agriculture. Most of coastal Europa runs along or below the salt line.

Bloom -- An uncontrolled biological event in a managed water system. Algae, bacteria, engineered organisms that stopped behaving. Blooms shut down districts. Sometimes permanently.

Sun tax -- The accumulated damage from operating in high-UV environments without adequate protection. Desert operators pay the sun tax in skin, eyes, and long-term cellular damage.

Breathable -- Not a compliment when applied to air quality. "It's breathable" means it won't kill you today. Tomorrow is a different calculation.

Hot soil -- Ground contaminated enough that what grows in it will kill you slowly. Looks like farmland. Isn't. "The settlement planted three fields before someone tested the soil. Hot soil. Everything that grew was poison wearing a green hat."

Scald -- Localized atmospheric event where heat and chemical contamination combine. Not a storm. More like the air deciding to burn you. "Scald rolled through the processing district last Tuesday. Everybody above the fourth floor got it."

Dead green -- Engineered vegetation that's still growing after its control system failed. Looks healthy. Isn't managed. Could be producing anything. "The park district went dead green six months ago. Whatever's growing in there now, it's not on anybody's list."

Soak -- When a flood event leaves contaminated water sitting long enough to change the chemistry of the structures it's touching. "That whole block's been in soak for three months. The concrete's not concrete anymore. It's a suggestion."

Melt window -- The seasonal period when permafrost thaw opens up terrain that's otherwise impassable. Also opens up whatever was frozen in it. "Melt window starts in six weeks. Last year it surfaced a pre-Upheaval fuel depot. The year before, it surfaced something nobody wanted to talk about."

Vapor lock -- When humidity gets high enough that cooling systems can't compensate and electronics start failing. "We hit vapor lock on the third day. Comms went first, then targeting, then nav. By day four we were reading paper maps like it was the fucking Upheaval."

HISTORICAL REGISTER

Prometheus weather -- Any storm system that triggers cascade infrastructure failure. Not the storm itself that kills you. What breaks afterward. "Prometheus weather rolling in from the coast. Secure water first, then power, then worry about the wind."

Drought soil -- Ground that hasn't recovered from the Great Drought. Looks viable. Isn't. "That settlement tried farming the floodplain. Drought soil. Nothing grew. Nothing was going to grow."

Zone air -- Atmospheric contamination in or near the Indo-Pakistani Forbidden Zone. You don't visit it. It visits you, when the wind shifts. "Wind's coming from the east. That's zone air if it holds. Filters on."

Prometheus tide -- A flood event driven by infrastructure failure rather than weather. A broken levee, a failed pump system, a cascade that puts water where it's not supposed to be.

Drought line -- The geographic boundary of the Great Drought's worst effects. "We crossed the drought line at noon. By evening the soil was powder and the nav was guessing."

Walker country -- Remote, ungoverned terrain where the Void Walkers supposedly operated. "That research station's been abandoned for twenty years. It's Walker country now. Whatever's in there is somebody else's problem."

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Tidal corridor -- A passage in a flooded urban zone that's only accessible at certain water levels. Usable hallway at low tide, underwater tunnel at high. "The spillway's a tidal corridor. We've got forty minutes before it fills."

Rising floor -- The condition inside a building when floodwater is entering from below. Not a flood event in the dramatic sense -- just the quiet, steady reality of water coming up through grates and seams. "The dock's got a rising floor. Ankle-deep now. Knee-deep by the time we finish in the relay chamber."

Rust line -- The visible watermark on interior walls showing how high the flooding has reached before. Multiple rust lines mean the building floods regularly. The height of the highest line tells you the worst-case scenario. "Check the rust line. This corridor's been chest-deep at least once. We're moving through somebody's worst day."

Canal wind -- The specific airflow pattern in flooded urban zones where streets have become waterways. Channeled between buildings, carrying moisture, particulate, and the smell of whatever the water's been in contact with. "Canal wind coming off the main channel. Rust, river, and something chemical. Standard London."

Submersible weather -- Conditions that favor underwater insertion -- low visibility, surface chop, tidal currents strong enough to mask the sound and wake of a small vessel. "It's submersible weather. Rain, chop, no visibility. Perfect for an approach. Terrible for everything after."

Infrastructure rot -- The slow, cumulative degradation of a building's structural and mechanical systems from years of repeated flooding. The kind of decay where every wall is damp, every electrical system is one short circuit from fire, and the maintenance crew knows exactly which supports you shouldn't lean on.

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

Adaptive terrain -- Any environment that has been deliberately reconfigured to present controlled conditions. "That sector's been adaptive terrain for six months. The EO moved the river access, planted cover at the chokepoint, cleared sightlines on the approach. Somebody prepared this field."

Camera zone -- An area of operation that is under active broadcast or surveillance coverage. Not necessarily hostile -- but observed. "Once we're inside the compound we're in camera zone. Everything we do is archived. Plan accordingly."

Calibration window -- The gap between active engagements when systems reset, terrain shifts, and recovery happens. "We have a calibration window -- six hours before the next faction rotation. Use the triage, restock, and assume the terrain on the other side is different from what the maps show."

Hot zone by design -- An area whose hazards were intentionally engineered rather than naturally occurring. "That industrial district's been a hot zone for three years. The contamination pattern doesn't match an accident. Hot zone by design. Someone wanted the access restricted."

Arena floor -- Any open terrain where you are visible, exposed, and the audience (real or figurative) can see what you do. "We're on the arena floor. No cover, no concealment, and three different faction positions with line of sight. Whatever we do here, someone's recording it."

07 POP CULTURE FRAGMENTS

What people create when institutions fail. Graffiti, bootleg media, survival manuals, underground broadcasts. The culture that grows in the cracks.

"Prometheus Was Right" -- Graffiti tag found across NAF coastal reconstruction zones. Nobody claims it. Everybody knows what it means. The storm that broke the old world had a name, and some people think it was overdue.

Dead Channel Radio -- Bootleg audio broadcast that runs on abandoned frequencies in EO territory. Music, rumors, coded supply listings. The host calls herself "Wavelength." Nobody's met her. She's been broadcasting for eleven years.

HYDRA-CLEAN -- Black-market water purification tablets sold in foil packets with a cartoon snake logo. Work about sixty percent of the time. The other forty percent, you're drinking something worse than what you started with.

"The Surgeon's Catalog" -- A rumored document listing every black-market gene clinic and what they specialize in. Supposedly updated quarterly. Nobody admits to having a copy. Everybody's seen a copy.

Gutter Bible -- Hand-copied survival manuals that circulate in dry zones and contested territory. Part field guide, part folk medicine, part faction propaganda depending on who copied it last. No two Gutter Bibles are identical.

"BEFORE THE WATER ROSE / WE HAD NAMES FOR COUNTRIES" -- Stenciled on a sea wall in Gorodskie Ekho. Attributed to nobody. Repainted every time the city authority scrubs it. They've scrubbed it fourteen times.

Matchstick -- SCA-produced bootleg stimulant. Comes in a red tube. Keeps you operational for thirty-six hours. The crash afterward is bad enough that some operators factor recovery time into their mission planning.

"Faction Man" -- A serial character in hand-drawn comics passed around PMC barracks. Faction Man has a different employer every issue and the punchline is always the same: whoever's paying, you're still the one getting shot at.

"THE SURGEON GENERAL RECOMMENDS YOU DON'T ASK WHERE THIS CAME FROM" -- Stamped on black-market suppression med packaging. The font is professional. The spelling is correct. The irony is intentional.

Skin Deep -- A bootleg serial drama distributed on data chips in EO and SCA territory. Follows a black-market gene clinician who's also an aberrant hiding her own drift. Twelve episodes. The actress is rumored to be an actual forged. The show's been banned in three territories, which tripled its distribution.

"DRIFT HAPPENS" -- Graffiti. Found on gene clinics, faction med bays, and the occasional bathroom wall. Sometimes with a smiley face. The smiley face makes it worse.

Clearance Bin -- A black-market medical supply vendor that operates out of shipping containers in port cities. The name is the joke. Sells everything from suppression meds to surgical tools to genetic templates of questionable provenance. Their slogan, painted on every container: "NO RETURNS."

"MY OTHER BODY WAS A BESPOKE" -- Bumper sticker found on cargo vehicles in the Freehold. The humor is specifically aberrant-community. Baselines don't get the joke. That's part of the joke.

The Reject Pile -- A zine produced by aberrant gene-forged, hand-copied and distributed through black-market networks. Part medical journal, part comedy, part survival guide. Issue 14 included a recipe for homemade suppression meds and a cartoon of a bespoke trying to return himself to the manufacturer. Issue 14 sold out in two days.

"BODY BY COMMITTEE" -- Graffiti on the wall of a defunct faction gene lab in NAF territory. Nobody knows who wrote it. The gene-forged community adopted it. It shows up on t-shirts now.

Dead Man's Catalog -- A subset of the Surgeon's Catalog that lists clinics where patients have died. Updated by anonymous contribution. Clinics on the Dead Man's list don't close. They just raise their prices. The logic being: if people still come after reading the list, the work must be worth the risk.

HISTORICAL REGISTER

"PROMETHEUS WARNED US / WE CALLED IT A STORM" -- Graffiti found on sea walls from Gorodskie Ekho to the NAF coastal reconstruction zones. Older than the "BEFORE THE WATER ROSE" tag. Considered the original.

"Phoenix Never Left Neo-Toronto" -- A bootleg docudrama about the Battle of Neo-Toronto. Forty minutes long. The last ten minutes are actual recovered audio from the Hellfire Harriers' comms during the final push. Nobody's confirmed the audio is real. Nobody's denied it either.

Tempest Brew -- Black-market stimulant named after the Tempest Riders. Supposedly based on the actual combat stim the Riders used during the Siege of New Moscow. The actual stim was a classified pharmaceutical. This is caffeine and something that makes your hands shake.

The Drought Hymn -- A song nobody wrote and everybody knows. Sung in water-scarce communities. No official lyrics. Versions differ by territory. The melody is always the same. Dead Channel Radio plays it once a year, on the anniversary of the Great Drought's worst month. Wavelength plays it anyway.

"VOID WALKERS WERE RIGHT / ASK YOUR FACTION WHY THEY'RE SCARED" -- Stenciled near abandoned research installations. Whoever's doing it has access to locations that shouldn't be accessible.

Makali Blues -- A card game played in PMC barracks. Named for the Makali Extraction. The rules change depending on who taught you. In every version, the game is rigged against the player who goes in first.

"EVERY FACTION HAD A NAME / BEFORE THE NAME HAD A FACTION" -- Printed on bootleg t-shirts sold in the Freehold. The historical reference is to the moment when corporate and military entities became governments. Most people wearing the shirt weren't alive when it happened. They wear it because it sounds right.

The League Broadcast -- A myth. Supposedly the Prometheus League's final transmission before they were dismantled, containing the locations of every cache they'd distributed. Nobody's heard it. Everybody's met someone who's met someone who has.

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

"THE RELAY KEEPS THE TAP RUNNING / WHO KEEPS THE RELAY RUNNING" -- Stenciled on the wall outside the Waterloo Water Relay. Nobody from the maintenance crew claims it. Nobody from the maintenance crew denies it either. The borough council had it painted over once. It was back the next morning, in a different color.

Tide Charts -- A hand-drawn comic series distributed in Flooded London PMC barracks and canal-side bars. Each issue follows a squad through one wet-entry operation. The operations always go sideways. The humor is in the debriefing afterward. Issue 7, "The Pipe Fight," won an underground culture award that doesn't officially exist.

"FLUSH THE BOROUGH / FLOOD THE CHANNEL / BLAME THE WEATHER" -- Graffiti found on flood barriers across Southwark, Lambeth, and Bermondsey. A three-line description of infrastructure sabotage from the perspective of the people downstream.

Borough Water -- A homebrew beer produced in the maintenance tunnels beneath Flooded London's water relay network. Brewed with filtration system runoff that the relay rats insist is cleaner than what comes out of the municipal tap. Tastes like copper and optimism. The Borough Council knows about it. They pretend they don't.

"DOWNSTREAM REMEMBERS" -- Painted on the hull of a civilian water barge in the Bermondsey canal. Two words that work as a threat, a promise, and a political statement depending on who's reading them.

The Anvil Tapes -- A series of intercepted EO operational recordings that circulate in Flooded London's underground intelligence market. The voice on the recordings is calm, professional, and completely indifferent to the civilian consequences. Operators listen to the tapes to study EO tactics. Civilians listen to them to get angry. Both reactions are correct.

"I WORK THE PIPE / YOU DRINK THE WATER / SAY MY NAME" -- Scrawled on the inside of a maintenance locker at the Waterloo Water Relay. Written by someone on the skeleton crew. The handwriting is careful. The anger is not.

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

"EVERY BULLET IS TRACKED / EVERY OPERATOR IS TRACKED / THE DATA BELONGS TO THE COMMISSION" -- A stencil found near GSOTC perimeter fencing and, increasingly, near faction data infrastructure in other territories. Started as verbatim reproduction of the commission's official language. Became protest graffiti.

Crackerjack spreads -- Betting pools on Crackerjack match outcomes. Technically illegal. Practically required for the event's economics. Operated in the observation gallery's unofficial tier, between the arms dealers and the gene-tech consultants. The commission's annual report lists betting operations under "technical observers." This is either an error or a choice.

The Siege Tape -- Rumored broadcast footage from the 2091 Crackerjack Siege that the commission has never officially released. Every few years someone in the press compound claims to have a copy. Nobody's produced it. "He says he has the Siege Tape. He also says he has the League Broadcast recording. I'm beginning to think he's running a business model."

"BUILT NOT BORN -- STILL HERE" -- Gene-forged graffiti found in GSOTC competitor staging areas after each tournament. Cleaned between competitions. Always reappears. The commission treats it as maintenance. The forged competitors treat it as correspondence.

Crackerjack almanac -- An unofficial, faction-agnostic publication tracking tournament statistics, operator records, and historical match data going back to the competition's founding. Faction intelligence services use it. "Ghost Falcon's in the almanac. Longest-range elimination in Crackerjack history: 34 inches, heavy cover, moving target. The almanac has the round, the match, the terrain protocol, and the weather. The weather was clear. It always is."

Dead Channel Radio: Crackerjack Night -- A single broadcast, aired by Dead Channel Radio on the night of the Crackerjack final. Plays match audio, operator comms fragments, and the specific crowd silence that falls when Anvil walks through open ground under fire. "Dead Channel ran Crackerjack Night again. They played the moment the crowd went quiet. They always play the moment the crowd went quiet."

08 IDIOMS AND SAYINGS

What people believe. The compressed wisdom of a world that learned its lessons the expensive way.

"Water finds its level." Things settle where they settle. No point fighting resource distribution -- it's going to consolidate around whoever controls the infrastructure.

"Don't count your extraction." Plan your way in. Don't assume your way out. Heard in every PMC briefing room from the Freehold to the PCU interior.

"Everybody's a baseline in the dark." Gene-forged advantages disappear when conditions strip everything back to survival basics. Also used sarcastically when a bespoke fails at something ordinary.

"The clock doesn't care." Ration clocks, mission clocks, suppression med clocks. The system runs on time and time doesn't negotiate.

"Dry before you're dead." You'll run out of resources before you run out of enemies. Logistics kills more operators than bullets.

"Two factions deep." So far from friendly territory that your problems have problems. We're two factions deep and the nav's gone dark.

"Built, not born." Said about gene-forged, usually by gene-forged. Not self-pity. Statement of fact, and sometimes pride. Depends on who's saying it and how many drinks they've had.

"Sand remembers." What gets buried comes back. Infrastructure, secrets, bodies. The desert surfaces things on its own schedule.

"The market always eats." Black-market systems don't shut down when factions collapse. They get busier. Said with resignation by people who've watched legitimate supply chains fail and watched the gray economy expand to fill the gap.

"Drift's not a disease. It's an opinion." Said by aberrants about their own condition. The body has an opinion about what it wants to be. The meds have a different opinion. Eventually one of them wins.

"Nobody's stock anymore." After enough field time, every forged has been modified by circumstance, injury, improvised medicine, and time. The original spec stops mattering. "We're all aftermarket eventually."

"Check the parts bin before you check the operator." If someone's malfunctioning, look at what they were built with before you blame them for it. Black-market gene work fails on its own schedule.

"The catalog doesn't lie. The catalog doesn't tell the whole truth either." About the Surgeon's Catalog specifically, but used for any intelligence source. Accurate information is not the same as complete information.

"Every kitchen's got a specialty." Some black-market clinics are good at one thing. The trick is knowing which thing. Said by people who've used kitchen jobs and survived to recommend them.

"You're only aberrant until you're useful." Factions that register and restrict gene-forged with visible drift have a funny way of making exceptions when they need what the aberrant can do. The policy is consistent. The enforcement isn't.

"I've seen the warranty. It doesn't cover this." Used for any situation that's gone beyond what anyone planned for. Originally a gene-forged joke about their own stability projections. Now used by everybody.

HISTORICAL REGISTER

"Prometheus didn't start the fire. Prometheus showed us it was already burning." About situations where a disaster revealed a failure that was already in progress. The storm didn't break the system. The system was already broken. The storm just proved it.

"You can't siege what's already empty." When there's nothing left to defend or take. "They're fighting over the processing plant. Plant's been dry for six months. You can't siege what's already empty."

"Phoenix didn't need a plan. She needed a building." About improvisational tactics. The best weapon is the environment you're in. Also used sarcastically when someone's plan is obviously just "walk in and figure it out."

"That's Document War thinking." Hoarding information that would be more useful shared. Protecting a resource by making it useless to everyone, including yourself.

"Nobody remembers who started the Drought." Because it wasn't a single event. It was a decade of accumulation. "You want to know whose fault the cascade was? Nobody remembers who started the Drought."

"Even the Corsairs pay for water." Nobody is above the resource economy. No matter how powerful, connected, or independent you are.

"The Forbidden Zone didn't negotiate." When a situation is past the point of diplomacy.

"The Void Walkers left for a reason." Said when someone's considering going independent. The Void Walkers did it. They also disappeared. "You want to go dry and work the margins? The Void Walkers left for a reason. What makes you think your reason's better?"

FLOODED LONDON / WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

"The tap doesn't argue." Water infrastructure either works or it doesn't. There's no negotiation, no middle ground, no partial function. "You stopped the purge or you didn't. The tap doesn't argue."

"Everybody lives downstream." Nobody is exempt from infrastructure failure. Faction commanders, PMC executives, gene-forged elite units -- they all need water. "You think EO's untouchable? Everybody lives downstream."

"Wet boots, dry brief." When the conditions on the ground bear no resemblance to the mission briefing. "Command said light resistance and stable footing. We got a pipe fight in waist-deep water. Wet boots, dry brief."

"Rust doesn't lie." The physical evidence of a building or system tells you more than any intelligence report. "Forget the briefing. Read the walls. Rust doesn't lie."

"The river takes the schedule." In flooded zones, the tidal cycle overrides every other operational concern. "Command wants us out by 0400. The tide says 0330 or never. The river takes the schedule."

"Nobody drowns on paper." Mission briefs don't account for rising water, collapsing infrastructure, or the reality of operating in a building that's slowly filling from below.

"You break the relay, you own the borough." Infrastructure is power. Not metaphorically -- literally. Whoever controls the water supply controls the civilian population's cooperation. Destroying it doesn't remove the power. It transfers it to whoever can fix it.

CRACKERJACK / TOURNAMENT CULTURE

"The cameras don't change how she fights." Said about an operator whose performance is identical under observation and in obscurity. A compliment with specific weight. Phoenix Reeves, cited as the original referent. "Four Crackerjacks, never below third. The cameras don't change how she fights."

"The crowd went quiet." The specific recognition of watching something that exceeds what should be possible. Not applause. The silence before applause. "Anvil moved through the kill zone with rounds sparking off his plate carrier. The crowd went quiet. That's the sentence. That's everything."

"The match is real. The tournament is real. But the Crackerjack is a trade show." About understanding the difference between the visible competition and the actual business being conducted. "They deployed a full assault team to retake that relay station. The relay station is worth nothing. The observation gallery was watching. The match is real. The tournament is real. But the Crackerjack is a trade show."

"Protect your medic." The most direct possible statement about operational priorities. "Two operators down, asset still in the field, two blocks to the extraction point. Protect your medic. Everything else is recoverable."

"Everything scares me. That's why I'm still alive." About appropriate situational awareness. Not bravado, not paralysis -- a calibrated fear response that processes everything as a potential threat without collapsing into inaction. Attributed to Vine (Tomas Gutierrez, Phantom Vipers).

"Interesting is where people get hurt." The word "interesting" in an operational context is a warning, not an endorsement. "The urban block scenario, right. Buildings are where they try to make it interesting. Interesting is where people get hurt." -- Dust (Amira El-Amin, Dune Specters)

"The readings are not encouraging." The pressure test completed. The data collected. The outcome not yet named, but the direction understood.

09 TERRITORY SUPPLEMENTS

Vocabulary that only makes sense if you have been there. Non-portable by design.

TERRITORY I: THE JAVA SCATTER

PFZ MARITIME SOVEREIGNTY / DROWNED-ARCHIPELAGO GEOGRAPHY / CABLE INFRASTRUCTURE / THE SCATTER-BORN GENERATION

A. Operator Slang --

"Running old map." Operating on pre-Upheaval assumptions in territory that has been physically redrawn. The Java Scatter's coastline changed by eight meters in fifteen years. "He routed us through the eastern channel. Eastern channel is four meters underwater at high tide. Running old map. We turned around before anyone saw us."

"Scatter-born on this." Said by someone who grew up with the new geography rather than the old one. Being scatter-born on a situation means operating from current reality, not inherited assumptions. "Ask her. She's scatter-born on the Makassar approach. She doesn't know the old chart and that's exactly why she's useful."

"Clear run." A hazard, not a compliment. The Java Scatter's water is genuinely clear -- visibility down to fifteen meters. Which means aerial surveillance sees what's beneath it. "The node approach is a clear run at low tide. Corsair eagle has line of sight to the node before anyone on the platform notices."

"Taking the tide chart." Operating within declared channels -- PFZ-registered transponders, legitimate manifest, the whole documented apparatus. Slow, visible, and survivable for people with legitimate business.

"Old City is still lit." Said of something that should be defunct but keeps running. From the Old City of Jakarta, eight meters underwater, where one traffic light still cycles green-yellow-red from a power source nobody has identified. "That Brotherhood network is supposed to be burned. Old City is still lit. Don't count it out."

"Platform cover." Maintaining commercial appearance while operating as a military or intelligence installation. From the PRC's Makassar platform -- six years of 'commercial logistics hub' while running full SIGINT operations.

B. System Language --

Scatter drift -- The gap between current maritime logistics routes and the charts those routes are plotted on. The Scatter's geography changes faster than any mapping system updates.

Node health -- The operational status of the cable infrastructure that the Scatter's entire strategic value rests on. Checking node health isn't IT maintenance -- it's the real intelligence picture of PFZ-PRC relations.

Elevation permit -- The bureaucratic documentation determining who has the right to live on land that's still above water. In the Scatter, elevation permit status is the difference between legal existence and being a climate migrant with nowhere to stand.

Drowned grid -- The submerged pre-Upheaval street infrastructure visible through clear water in the Scatter's drowned zones. Also applied to any intelligence network or logistics system that has officially ceased to function but retains enough structure to be useful.

Transit fee exemption -- A diplomatic tool disguised as a logistics accommodation. PFZ grants exemptions officially based on cargo type. Practically, they're rewards and punishments for political behavior.

Tide dead -- The gap in PFZ sensor coverage that opens during tidal transitions. Not a secret; both parties acknowledge it. "There's a twelve-minute tide dead in the southern approach corridor between 0340 and 0352."

C. Human Labels --

Scatter-born -- The generation of PFZ citizens who grew up with the post-Upheaval maps, not the old ones. They don't grieve the drowned coastlines because they never knew them. To older operators, scatter-born can seem unsentimental to the point of callousness about geography. To scatter-born, the older operators are navigating by a world that doesn't exist.

Cable-watcher -- Someone who understands that the real strategic resource in the Scatter is the cable infrastructure, not the islands. Anyone whose actual attention is on what moves through what's supposed to be just wire.

Platform crew -- Someone operating with faction backing under commercial cover. From the PRC's Makassar platform. Used broadly for anyone whose job title is a cover story.

Old chart -- Someone navigating by pre-Upheaval knowledge of a territory. Sometimes an insult. Sometimes a useful warning. "He's an old chart on the Scatter. His contacts are good -- the ones who are still alive."

Drowned district -- Someone from a Scatter community whose original geography was inundated. The loss was sudden and total -- the community didn't fail, the ground disappeared. Drowned district identity carries a specific relationship to property, legitimacy, and the concept of home.

D. Gene-Forged Slang --

"Salt tolerance." A gene-forged's capacity to operate in maritime environments outside their primary template. Any template operating outside its designed parameters is running on salt tolerance -- possible, but not what the spec sheet says.

"Avian ceiling." The operational knowledge limit of a Sea Eagle template -- the upper bound of what they can see from altitude, applied metaphorically to any gene-forged's awareness limit.

"Croc hours." Dawn and dusk, when saltwater croc-template gene-forged are at peak biological performance. Applied broadly to the specific window when someone is operating at the top of their capacity.

"Shelf-adapted." Operating in the deep Scatter long enough that behavior has diverged from the faction template. Not Drift, exactly -- more like the template finding new configurations for new pressures.

"Recognition protocol (Scatter variant)." The specific mutual acknowledgment between gene-forged of different templates who have worked the Scatter's informal network. Distinct from the standard recognition protocol because it crosses faction lines.

E. Environmental Language --

High Thirty -- Elevation of thirty meters above sea level: the minimum safe habitation threshold in the Scatter's new geography. Used as shorthand for barely viable.

Reef structure -- Collapsed pre-Upheaval infrastructure that has been colonized by new ecosystems to the point of functional integration. Applied to organizations or networks that have adapted to their own failure: what should be dead has become structural.

Clear water hazard -- The specific tactical problem of the Java Scatter's unusually transparent sea: visibility is an asset for surveillance and a liability for anyone who needs to move without being seen.

Cable shadow -- The dark zone maintained around cable node infrastructure -- no faction sensors, no patrol coverage, by design and mutual interest.

Scatter weather -- Atmospheric conditions that disrupt maritime surveillance without disrupting maritime operations.

F. Pop Culture Fragments --

"OLD MAPS ARE WRONG / NEW MAPS ARE TEMPORARY" -- Stenciled on PFZ transit hubs. The original stencil appeared in New Batavia's outer transit zone the year after the 2045 remapping. Nobody has claimed it.

The Scatter Almanac -- Unofficial, faction-agnostic navigation supplement tracking current island names against pre-Upheaval charts, plus patrol patterns, node health trends, and PFZ maritime fee schedules. Updated monthly by unidentified contributors.

"BUILT NOT BORN -- STILL WET" -- Gene-forged graffiti specific to aquatic-template operators in the Java Scatter. The "still wet" variant is an aquatic-template joke -- and a statement about persistence.

Scatter Day dive -- The annual underwater memorial dive conducted by drowned-zone communities on Scatter Day. Participants navigate the Old City underwater, following routes their families taught them. Dead Channel Radio has broadcast ambient underwater audio from the Old City on Scatter Day for three years.

G. Idioms and Sayings --

"The water between things." PFZ strategic doctrine compressed into a phrase. Sovereignty flows to whoever controls transit routes, not to whoever occupies territory. "You're thinking about the island. Think about what's between the islands. That's where the power is."

"Even the Corsairs need to land." No matter how autonomous or capable you are, you have dependencies. "She runs like she doesn't answer to anyone. Even the Corsairs need to land. Find out where she comes back to."

"Old chart, new current." Accurate intelligence applied to a changed situation. "His source is reliable. His source is also three years old and the Scatter doesn't hold still. Old chart, new current. Verify before you route."

"High Thirty or don't bother." A position, settlement, or plan that doesn't meet the minimum viable threshold isn't worth defending.

"The Old City is still lit." Something that has outlasted its context and keeps going anyway, from an unclear source, for unclear reasons. Said with a mix of practical recognition and genuine unease.

TERRITORY II: THE LAKEFIRE CORRIDOR

ACU GOVERNANCE / LUMICITE SUPPRESSION / OBSIDIAN WARDENS / FORTY MILLION LAKESIDE / THE GLOW THAT NOBODY OFFICIALLY EXPLAINS

A. Operator Slang --

"ACU numbers." Data that is accurate but measuring the wrong thing. The Dawn Broadcast shows clean water quality metrics every morning. The numbers are real. They don't measure Lumicite resonance, because Lumicite resonance is not on any official measurement list. "Don't tell me the numbers. Tell me what the numbers are measuring."

"Running Meridian." Operating with a legitimate function and a second, deniable one running simultaneously. From Meridian East's entire operational model. "She's Warden-badged, extraction-side. She's also running Meridian. Check what she's actually moving before you route anything through her."

"Below the survey coordinates." The restricted zone of knowledge -- what is known but not officially acknowledged. "I need what's below the survey coordinates on the infrastructure plan. Not the public data. The thing under it."

"Night shift ownership." Whoever controls operations after the official authority goes off-duty has practical authority over the territory, regardless of what the permits say. "ACU holds the permits. Meridian East has night shift ownership. Don't confuse the two when you're planning your window."

"It's lakefire." Real, visible to anyone paying attention, and officially nonexistent. From the amber glow of the Lumicite resonance in Lake Tanganyika. "The secondary pipeline is lakefire. Every audit team that's been through has seen the numbers don't add up. Nobody has officially said so."

"Reading the glow." Watching for signs of what's happening below the surface of a situation. "She's been reading the glow on this for six months. She doesn't know what she's reading yet. She knows she's reading something."

B. System Language --

Water governance contract -- The entire structure of legitimacy that makes ACU's authority real. The agreement between the ACU and forty million lakeside residents that the lakes stay clean and accessible in exchange for their acceptance of ACU governance. Everything the Wardens have is downstream of this.

Off-manifest -- The secondary economy running parallel to the official extraction record. The Copper Run has been running at 82% manifest accuracy for four years. The missing 18% funds Meridian East's regional operations.

Lakefire metric -- A reading that's real but not officially measured. When someone says they have "a lakefire metric" on a situation, they mean they have data the official framework doesn't acknowledge.

Cascade failure (Lake variant) -- Distinct from Prometheus chain. What happens when extraction destabilizes the Tanganyika lakebed and contaminates the source. Prometheus chain is tragic. Cascade failure (Lake variant) destroys what everyone was fighting over in the first place.

Permit ecology -- The system by which permits are used as governance weapons. Who gets 'ecological preservation' classifications determines who can operate. The permits are real. Their application is targeted.

C. Human Labels --

Lakeside -- Someone whose identity, livelihood, and continued existence is built around the clean-water promise. Forty million people in the Great Lakes corridor. Not faction-aligned; water-aligned.

Second manifest -- Someone with a legitimate role and a real role that are different things. From Meridian East's double-entry extraction records.

Deep extract -- Brotherhood of Shadows affiliated; someone who moves information rather than goods, through channels that don't appear on any official map.

Forty-year -- Someone who knows the classified information that changes everything. From the ACU's suppressed geological projection -- 40 years of viable lakebed, not the 80-year figure in the governance documents. "There are three assembly members who are forty-year on the projection. Find one of the three."

Warden-side -- Affiliated with ACU's governance framework without being military. Doctors, administrators, scientists who are genuinely trying to do what the water governance contract says -- and who may not know what's below the survey coordinates. Their ignorance is not complicity.

D. Gene-Forged Slang --

"Lake drift." A Drift symptom specific to gene-forged who have spent extended time in proximity to the Lumicite resonance zone. ACU medical has no category for it. The operators who have it call it lake drift. Different treatment protocol -- and the Compact clinic doesn't have it.

"Wild Dog hours." A pack operation at full coordination -- Wild Dog template running its designed function, distributed tactical decision-making across a networked unit. "Don't try to intercept a single element. The pack reads the interception attempt and reroutes around you before you complete it."

"Leopard clean." A gene-forged with no visible modification markers in a standard scan -- built for deep cover in civilian contexts. "She's Leopard clean. She'll walk through the Meridian East checkpoint and the scanner won't flag her."

"Running the pack." Operating as part of a Wild Dog coordination structure. Also used for any situation where distributed coordination beats individual capability. "Don't send her in solo. She runs the pack. On her own she's good. With three more Wild Dogs she's something else."

E. Environmental Language --

Lakefire -- The amber glow from deep in Lake Tanganyika -- slow pulse, Lumicite resonance, visible on clear nights from the western shore. The ACU sponsors a festival around it. Nobody officially discusses what causes it. It is not a natural phenomenon.

Clean numbers -- The ACU's Dawn Broadcast data: accurate, comprehensive, measuring the wrong things.

Tailings reach -- The outer boundary of extraction contamination. Applied to any operation that has bled past its planned scope.

Deep ACU -- The surveillance gap that ACU maintains around the actual Lumicite survey coordinates. Not equipment failure -- a deliberate hole in their own monitoring.

Copper corridor contamination -- The specific health pattern from sustained exposure to the Copper Run's acid drainage. A signature presentation that communities adjacent to the extraction zone recognize. Applied beyond the Corridor for any health impact from sustained proximity to extraction operations.

F. Pop Culture Fragments --

"THE WATER IS CLEAN / THE NUMBERS ARE CLEAN / THE WATER IS CLEAN" -- Found stenciled in lakeside communities, the repetition compressed with each iteration. Started as graffiti after a community challenge to an ACU Dawn Broadcast that showed perfect numbers during a period when the fishing catch was declining.

The Lakefire Festival circles -- Around the edges of the ACU-sponsored festival, discussion circles have formed where people ask questions the official event doesn't address. Per one ACU counterintelligence assessment: "the most dangerous information-exchange environment in the Corridor."

Makali Blues (Corridor variant) -- The base game exists everywhere. The Corridor version was adapted for the Copper Run's specific labor politics: the player who goes into the northern tunnels first always loses. "He plays Makali Blues like he's on the night shift. Never volunteers to go first. Never has to."

"MERIDIAN EAST: WE MOVE THE THINGS THAT MOVE" -- Bootleg parody of Meridian East's corporate branding. Officially a joke. Also a literal description. Management doesn't find it funny, which workers take as confirmation.

G. Idioms and Sayings --

"The numbers are always good." Said about any official data source in the Corridor. Used as a warning: trust the data; verify what the data is measuring. "She gave me the quarterly environmental report. The numbers are always good. Tell me what they're not measuring."

"Forty million lakeside." The weight of consequences when a suppressed truth breaks. Said when someone is minimizing the scale of what they're sitting on. "You think this is a faction problem. It's not. Forty million lakeside."

"What does the water governance contract say?" The rhetorical question about institutional legitimacy. "They're detaining the survey team to suppress their data. What does the water governance contract say about suppressing data that affects water access?"

"Night shift ownership." What matters after the official authority goes home. The practical governance of any operation at the moment when permits stop being enforced and whoever is physically present makes the decisions.

TERRITORY III: THE PATAGONIAN BASIN

SOUTHERN COMPACT INDEPENDENCE / CLASSIFIED AQUIFER PROJECTION / INTERIOR COMMUNITIES THAT REBUILT EVERYTHING / ITAIPÚ BALANCE / SOUTH OF 46

A. Operator Slang --

"Running Compact." Maintaining independence by being indispensable to too many competing parties to be safely absorbed by any one of them. The Southern Compact's entire survival strategy. "She's got three factions wanting something from her and none of them willing to let the others get it first. She's running Compact. Let her run it."

"Forty-year thinking." Acting on the classified information rather than the public version, in a situation where the public version is what everyone else is operating on. "He's negotiating the supply contract on the public numbers. She's negotiating on forty-year thinking. One of them is going to look prescient in five years."

"Both flow gates." Holding veto power from both sides of a contested situation. From the Itaipú Dam's joint management structure. "She's got documentation that implicates both parties. She's holding both flow gates. Don't approach until you know what she wants."

"South of 46." Beyond faction governance. Used for any situation or territory that exists outside institutional oversight. "That operation is south of 46. No faction support, no official record. Whatever you build out there, you're building without a supply chain."

"Andean math." The calculation that official projections have understated. From the classified glacier retreat data. Applied to any situation where the real numbers are worse than the official ones. "The timeline they gave us is Andean math. The actual extraction window is shorter. By a lot."

"Interior-built." Assembled without faction resources, in conditions that shouldn't have produced it. Interior-built things are unglamorous, functional, and surprisingly durable. "That network is interior-built. No Syndicate architecture, no faction logistics. Someone in the south put it together out of nothing and it's been running clean for eight years."

B. System Language --

Joint management architecture -- Any operational structure where two adversarial parties maintain shared control because either party achieving unilateral control would trigger an immediate response from the other.

40-year projection -- The classified data. To have "a 40-year projection" on something means knowing the real version that isn't being disclosed, because the public version serves someone's negotiating position.

Interior autonomous -- A community, network, or operational asset that functions without faction supply chains or logistics support.

Aquifer-stable -- Operating on the assumption that the underlying resource base is sound and will sustain long-term commitment. The Compact's public negotiating position. Not what the hydrologists believe.

Compact citizenship status -- A legal existence that can be revoked. A status that depends entirely on continued Compact goodwill. "He's operating on Compact citizenship status. That's a lever."

C. Human Labels --

Interior -- Someone from the deep Patagonian communities south of 46. They rebuilt everything from scratch without faction support. They treat faction infrastructure with the specific skepticism of people who built the alternative and found it worked.

Glacier-honest -- Telling the real numbers rather than the public figures. A compliment for accuracy and a description of danger simultaneously.

Dam-side -- Affiliated with Itaipú's joint management structure. Which flow gates you're responsible for tells everyone which party's interests you serve, regardless of your official title.

League-adjacent -- Having contact with or sympathy for the Prometheus League's operations in the Patagonian interior without being an active participant. Interior communities frequently have League-adjacent status because the League uses their rebuilt infrastructure as cover.

D. Gene-Forged Slang --

"Puma recon." Operating solo, ahead of the unit, in advance positions that the rest of the team hasn't reached yet. "Don't wait for confirmation. Send her on Puma recon. She'll have the approach mapped before the briefing is over."

"Maned Wolf hours." Intelligence operations -- patient, nocturnal, invisible. "The extraction can wait. Run Maned Wolf hours on the assembly building first. Three days of observation is worth more than one rushed approach."

"Interior drift." Drift that develops in gene-forged operating in the Patagonian interior without access to faction medical infrastructure. Interior drift doesn't track the same way as standard Drift and the treatments that work are not what any faction clinic would prescribe.

"Compact-built." A gene-forged from the Southern Compact's independent gene program -- a program that doesn't share its methodology with any faction's standardized gene-forging literature. "Her mods don't appear in any faction template catalogue. Standard gene-forged ID protocols won't flag her as modified."

E. Environmental Language --

46th parallel -- The geographic line south of which no faction maintains sustained operational presence. Used as shorthand for the outer boundary of institutional governance.

Andean ceiling -- The glacier-fed water systems that define the aquifer's long-term viability. Also the upper limit of any accurate projection about Southern Hemisphere water security.

Interior wind -- The constant southerly in the deep Patagonian interior. The wind is a geographic argument: it makes sustained faction occupation uncomfortable in ways that degrade logistics over time. Interior communities are adapted to it. Faction garrisons are not.

Estuary memory -- The old Buenos Aires street grid visible in the Rio de la Plata at low tide, laid at a forty-five degree angle to the new highland city above it. Extended: any geography that shows its history through what the water reveals.

Aquifer depth -- How far beneath the surface the real resource -- or the real intelligence -- actually sits.

F. Pop Culture Fragments --

"THE COMPACT HOLDS / THE DAM HOLDS / HOLD" -- Interior community graffiti, south of 46. Three words in decreasing specificity. Found in miniature on the backs of water management equipment throughout the interior. The sentiment: the things that are supposed to hold, hold.

Water Day (interior version) -- Interior communities mark the date differently from the official NAF observance: communal water testing, public reporting of actual water system metrics, open-format discussion. NAF and SCA observers have attempted to attend twice. It has not happened a third time.

The Itaipú canteen -- Shorthand for any situation where adversaries are forced to eat at the same table because the thing they're jointly managing requires it. "The alliance is real. The trust is not."

"ANDEAN MATH IS REAL / CHECK THE GLACIERS" -- Stenciled near water monitoring stations throughout the Basin, including two inside NAF-affiliated facilities in Santiago.

G. Idioms and Sayings --

"South of 46." Beyond faction governance; outside institutional oversight; operating in the zone where nobody is coming to help and nobody is coming to interfere.

"The dam holds." The joint management agreement is holding. The arrangement between adversarial parties is stable. In the Basin, used as a status report and, sometimes, something close to a secular benediction.

"Forty-year problem." A crisis that presents as long-term stability until the real timeline becomes clear. "They're treating this as a generational issue. It's a forty-year problem. By the time the next generation has to deal with it, the window for dealing with it will have closed."

"Interior-built." Made without institutional resources; functional, unglamorous, built from what was available. A statement of quality, not absence.

"Both flow gates." Having veto power from both sides; holding a position neither adversary can work around. The most powerful position in a contested negotiation.

TERRITORY IV: THE SHATTER-BELT

BOSPHORUS COMPACT NEUTRALITY / SONS OF THE SERPENT / MESOPOTAMIAN BLACK ZONE / ISTANBUL'S THREE LAYERS / THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE CALL IT HOME

A. Operator Slang --

"Running the Circuit." Operating through Istanbul's Bazaar Circuit -- the weekly rotating market that has used pre-Upheaval routes continuously and functions as the hemisphere's most reliable informal information exchange. "We can't use faction comms for this. Run the Circuit."

"Three layers in everything." Istanbul as a structural model for any location with multiple operating realities. Surface: what the commercial attachés see. Middle: the information economy, the actual function of most people claiming commercial roles. Third: the infrastructure that runs through the other two without touching them.

"Compact neutral." Professionally uninvolved; maintaining exact equivalence between competing parties because the value of that position exceeds any advantage from choosing sides.

"Belt position." Being between two larger parties, geographically or politically; having built an entire culture and identity around not being absorbed. "He's been staying independent for eleven years by making himself useful to both. Don't mistake that for weakness."

"Headwater logic." Controlling where a resource begins rather than where it ends. Upstream dominance as strategy. "She's not targeting the output. She's running headwater logic. Whatever she controls at the source, she controls downstream without a garrison."

"Crossing fee everything." Making yourself necessary to competing parties by controlling passage between them. "He doesn't have power. He has position. The position generates the power."

B. System Language --

Cable read -- Intelligence gathered from communications infrastructure that nobody admits is being monitored. The Bosphorus Compact has been reading communications passing through the seabed cables under the strait for eleven years.

Circuit integrity -- Whether the Bazaar Circuit's information channels are running clean; whether the information economy Istanbul runs on is operating without faction penetration.

Crossing leverage -- The specific power of controlling a route that neither adversary can navigate around. Closing it is a weapon that can only be used once. Threatening to close it has worked every time.

Sons infrastructure -- The transit network that moves personnel and material through official channels without those channels knowing what they're facilitating. Port authority personnel who don't know they're enabling it, pilgrimage routes that predate the Compact, buildings with seventeen different official designations since 2028.

Balkanized Belt -- The faction intelligence documentation's name for the Shatter Belt. Using it in front of locals is either an error or a provocation, depending on how much you know.

C. Human Labels --

Belt-born -- From the Shatter Belt; grown up between two large factions and built an entire worldview around the fact that neither absorbed you. Belt-born identity isn't resilience exactly -- it's the specific pragmatism of someone who has been explaining why they're still independent for their entire life and has gotten very good at the explanation.

Circuit regular -- Someone who understands that in Istanbul, information and commerce are the same thing; who moves through the Bazaar Circuit as both commercial participant and information broker without those activities being distinct.

Sons-adjacent -- Someone who has touched Sons of the Serpent transit infrastructure without being an active participant. "That port clerk is Sons-adjacent. She doesn't know what she's been moving."

Eight-thousand-year -- Someone from a Shatter Belt community that has sustained itself through multiple empires, political systems, and catastrophic events. "That community is eight-thousand-year. They've seen EO and PCU and three previous imperial formations."

D. Gene-Forged Slang --

"Snow Leopard patience." Operating in a fully surveilled environment without being triggered into reaction. "She's running Snow Leopard patience. She's seen the EO assessment team twice this week. She hasn't moved. She's mapping their pattern."

"Leopard hours." The slow, comprehensive intelligence collection cycle -- not an operation with a start and end, but a sustained behavioral pattern that accumulates data over weeks.

"Running the crossing." A gene-forged managing their template's biological signals in Istanbul in order to pass as standard human or non-threatening. "He's running the crossing. His Drift is at Stage 2 and there are three faction SIGINT teams in this building. Don't give him more stress to manage."

"Sons template." The unidentified gene-forged modification used by the Sons of the Serpent's operational units. It doesn't match any faction's template catalogue. Gene-forged who encounter it report recognition protocol failures -- the involuntary inter-template acknowledgment doesn't trigger.

E. Environmental Language --

Headwaters dark -- The highland zone in eastern Anatolia where no faction maintains surveillance coverage. The place where the rivers begin. "The Sons have operated in headwaters dark for eleven years. No faction has established sustained presence."

Black zone -- Territory in actual structural collapse -- not managed decay, not purpose-built poverty, but the genuine end of infrastructure. People who stayed and rebuilt are operating in conditions that most OT operators have only simulated.

Crossing weather -- Political conditions affecting how expensive or difficult it is to use the Bosphorus crossing. "Crossing weather's good this week. Both factions are moving logistics and neither wants a Compact restriction."

Serpent corridor -- Any route that moves personnel or material through officially legitimate channels without those channels knowing what they're facilitating.

Belt geography -- The physical shape of being between two large factions: the specific terrain of the Shatter Belt, where mountains, river valleys, and urban centers have been used for millennia as both barriers and corridors.

F. Pop Culture Fragments --

"THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE HERE CALL IT HOME" -- Shatter Belt graffiti, sometimes written in multiple languages on the same surface. Direct response to the faction intelligence documents' "Balkanized Belt" designation. The multilingual versions appear coordinated, though the coordination mechanism isn't visible.

The Bazaar Circuit price list -- Technically a price list for commercial goods. Actually the current information tariff: intelligence on each faction's Istanbul operations has a price, and the price changes weekly based on demand.

Sons "pilgrimage" aesthetic -- The Sons of the Serpent maintained visual cover as a religious transit movement for operational reasons. The aesthetic has become genuinely syncretic: communities along the pilgrimage routes have incorporated aspects of it into their actual civic identity. The Sons' ability to use the pilgrimage cover has increased as the cover has become more authentic.

Dead Channel Radio: Bazaar Circuit Nights -- Dead Channel Radio transmits an Istanbul special once a month. The broadcast includes market prices, rumor verification from three separate sources, and -- once -- the complete audio of a conversation between two Snow Leopard operators that should not have been recorded.

G. Idioms and Sayings --

"Three layers in everything." Any situation has a surface, a real function, and a third layer that neither of the first two acknowledges. "Three layers in everything. What you see, what's actually running, and what's moving through both of them that neither admits."

"The people who live there call it home." Said to faction-aligned operators who are treating a geography as a resource or a problem rather than as a place people have built their lives. "You're calling it the Balkanized Belt in your mission brief. The people who live there call it home. That distinction matters for every contact you make."

"Crossing fee independence." Maintaining autonomy by making yourself necessary to competing parties. The Bosphorus Compact's entire strategy. "She has no military capacity. She has access that neither party can replicate. The access is the power."

"Headwaters hold." Controlling where a resource begins is more durable than controlling where it ends. "He's not trying to win the downstream fight. He's running headwaters hold. By the time the downstream fight resolves, he'll own the source."

"Eight thousand years." Said of anything that has survived longer than the current political arrangement and will survive whatever comes after it. "You think a garrison solves this. Eight thousand years. The community was there before the faction and it'll be there after."

10 GAME SYSTEMS VOCABULARY

The mechanical language from every game in the Operator Tactics line. These words structure play at the table and structure reality in the fiction.

RPG CORE MECHANICS

Operator Loop -- The four-phase mission cycle that structures every session of play. Contract, Deploy, Execute, Debrief. Each phase feeds the next.

Mortal Wound (MW) -- Damage state. An operator with MW is still functional but degraded. Accumulation kills.

Out of Action (OOA) -- Removed from the current engagement. Not dead unless circumstances say otherwise.

Triage Window -- The gap between engagements when medical intervention can reduce MW count. Time-limited.

Augment -- A gene-forged special ability drawn from template biology. Each template has a unique Augment list.

Suppression Check -- Roll to maintain gene-forged stability under stress. Failure advances Drift.

Drift Stage -- Progressive instability in gene-forged biology. Stage 1 is manageable. Stage 4 is terminal.

Contract Terms -- The negotiated parameters of a mission. Defines payment, extraction conditions, acceptable losses.

Patron Loyalty -- Tracked relationship with faction employers. Determines contract quality and extraction reliability.

Field Stabilize -- Emergency medical action. 1 action. Adjacent ally at 1+ MW. Roll OPINT 4+. Success: remove 1 MW.

Pinned -- Suppressed by fire. Cannot advance without taking additional risk. Must use an action to break contact or accept exposure.

Overwatch -- Reaction fire position. Engages targets entering a declared arc. Costs movement on setup.

Flash and Clear -- Breach protocol. Stun grenade followed by immediate entry. High risk, high reward against fortified positions.

Exfil Window -- The time-limited opportunity to extract from an area of operations. Miss it and you're walking out the hard way.

Black Box -- Mission intel that the operators don't get to read. They carry it, deliver it, protect it. They don't open it.

Handler -- The faction contact who issues contracts and manages operator relationships. Not a friend. A professional interface.

SKIRMISH (CRACKERJACK)

GSOTC -- Global Special Operations Tournament Commission. Runs the Crackerjack. Part spectacle, part arms market, part faction intelligence exchange.

Terrain Protocol -- The environmental configuration for a Crackerjack engagement. Reconfigures in forty minutes between rounds.

Broadcast Threshold -- Minimum performance standard to maintain faction backing and contract value. Fall below it and resupply numbers drop.

Triple Crown -- Holding three objectives simultaneously in a Crackerjack engagement. Maximum exposure for maximum reward.

Iron Operator -- Crackerjack award. Operator who accumulates the most damage across engagements and keeps functioning.

Last Standing -- Sole surviving operator in a full elimination round. A fact, not a compliment.

Showboat -- Tactical risk taken for visibility rather than necessity. Sometimes works. When it doesn't, the replay is unkind.

Swiss Bracket -- Multi-round engagement format where prior record affects next pairing. Past performance shapes future opposition.

Modifier Cap -- Upper limit on situational penalties before the environment compensates. A floor on misery.

Crowd Momentum Bleed -- Gradual erosion of public credibility through a series of visible, small failures.

IRON LINE (MASS BATTLE)

Column -- A massed formation moving under unified command. Columns take ground. They also take casualties.

Battlegroup -- The player's force composition for a mass engagement. Mixed arms, defined doctrine.

Doctrine Card -- Faction-specific tactical modifiers applied at the battlegroup level. Defines how your force fights, not just what it contains.

Supply Line Integrity -- Whether your logistics chain is intact. Broken supply lines degrade combat effectiveness faster than enemy action.

Siege Clock -- Countdown for fortified position assaults. The clock runs whether you're ready or not.

Artillery Template -- Area-of-effect marker for indirect fire. Everything under the template takes the hit.

Flanking Bonus -- Combat advantage from attacking a formation's unprotected side. The geometry of mass combat.

Morale Break -- When a unit's capacity to absorb punishment exceeds its willingness to stay. Not cowardice. Math.

Reserve Commitment -- Deploying held-back forces. Timing is everything. Too early wastes them. Too late, nothing to reinforce.

Fog of War -- Information degradation in mass engagement. What you know decreases as the scale of the fight increases.

BIG GAME (KAIJU SCALE)

Kaiju-class Threat -- Aberrant biological entity at city-threatening scale. Gene-forging pushed past every safety margin and left running.

Containment Protocol -- Standing orders for Kaiju-class engagement. Step one: evacuate. Step two: contain. Step three doesn't always happen.

Kill Team -- Specialized operator unit configured for Kaiju-class engagement. Heavy weapons, expendable posture, very short life expectancy.

Weak Point Analysis -- Tactical assessment of Kaiju-class vulnerability. Every aberrant has a point where the biology didn't scale properly.

Civilian Corridor -- Evacuation route maintained during Kaiju engagement. Holding the corridor is the actual mission. The Kaiju is the obstacle.

Collateral Threshold -- Acceptable infrastructure damage during engagement. Exceeding it means you've won the fight and lost the city.

Scale Rating -- Classification system for aberrant threat size. The number tells you how many operators you're losing.

Resonance Spike -- Energy signature preceding Kaiju-class emergence. Detection window is narrow. Response time is narrower.

Biomass Calculation -- Mathematical model for aberrant growth rate. The calculation tells you how long you have before containment fails.

Aftermath Protocol -- Post-engagement procedures for contaminated zones. The fight ends. The cleanup takes longer.

HVT (HIGH VALUE TARGET)

Principal -- The High Value Target. Could be extraction, could be elimination. The mission brief specifies. The situation complicates.

Close Protection -- Bodyguard operations. Keep the principal alive. Everything else is secondary until it isn't.

Threat Matrix -- Assessment of all active dangers to the principal. Updated continuously. Never complete.

Advance Team -- Operators who arrive before the principal to secure the route and identify threats. Their work is invisible when it works.

Compromise -- When the principal's location, identity, or route is exposed to hostile parties. Triggers immediate protocol change.

Safe House -- Pre-established secure location for principal relocation. Safe houses have expiration dates. Some of them have expired.

Snatch Team -- Operators configured for forced extraction of a hostile principal. Speed over subtlety. Violence of action.

Counter-surveillance -- Operations to detect and neutralize enemy observation of the principal. The invisible war around the visible one.

Principal Down -- The worst radio call. Either you're extracting a casualty or reporting a failure. The tone tells you which.

Handoff -- Transfer of principal responsibility between protection teams. The thirty seconds of a handoff are the most dangerous of the entire operation.

COLD CASE (INVESTIGATION)

Cold Trail -- Evidence chain that has degraded past standard investigative utility. Doesn't mean dead. Means harder.

Witness Decay -- The degradation of witness reliability over time. Memory edits itself. Fear edits faster.

Evidence Lock -- Secured physical evidence in faction custody. Getting access requires clearance, favors, or creative interpretation of procedure.

Pattern Match -- When disparate data points resolve into a recognizable configuration. The moment the case breaks open.

Black File -- Classified case documentation. Exists in the system but cannot be accessed through normal channels.

Informant Chain -- Network of intelligence sources connected by degrees of separation. The chain is only as reliable as its weakest link.

Dead End Protocol -- Procedures for when every investigative lead has been exhausted. Not the end of the case. The beginning of the second approach.

Faction Interference -- When a faction's interests require a case to remain unsolved. Not conspiracy. Resource allocation with prejudice.

Scene Reconstruction -- Rebuilding the sequence of events from physical evidence. The building tells you what happened. You just have to read it.

Ghost Witness -- Someone who saw something, said something, and then became impossible to find. Not necessarily dead. Definitely not available.

SOLO OPS

Solo Loop -- The single-operator mission cycle. Contract, Prep, Infiltrate, Execute, Extract. No backup. No second chances.

Cover Identity -- Maintained false persona for solo infiltration. The cover needs to survive scrutiny. The operator needs to survive the cover.

Dead Drop -- Pre-established location for information or supply exchange without direct contact. Both parties visit. Neither party meets.

Blown -- Cover identity compromised. Triggers immediate exfiltration or improvisation. The difference between the two is training.

Lone Wolf Protocol -- Standing orders for solo operators who lose contact with their handler. You're on your own. Make decisions accordingly.

Tail Detection -- Counter-surveillance technique for identifying pursuit. The solo operator's most practiced skill.

Exfil Route -- Pre-planned extraction path. Solo operators maintain three. Two of them are probably compromised by the time you need them.

Asset Cultivation -- Building a relationship with a local source over time. Not friendship. Investment with an extraction date.

Clean Break -- Severing all contact with a location, identity, or network without leaving traceable connections. Harder than it sounds.

Burn Notice -- Official notification that an operator's identity and affiliations have been disclosed to hostile parties. Everything changes.

RAID RACERS

Convoy -- Vehicle formation moving goods through contested territory. The goods matter. The vehicles are expendable. The drivers know this.

Interceptor -- Vehicle configured for convoy disruption. Fast, armed, short operational range. Hit and run.

Route Black -- A supply corridor that has been declared non-viable due to threat density. Traffic stops. Black market traffic increases.

Pursuit Break -- Maneuver to lose trailing hostile vehicles. Terrain knowledge matters more than speed.

Cargo Value -- What you're carrying determines who wants to take it. High cargo value means high pursuit probability.

Road War -- Sustained vehicle combat across distance. Not a single engagement. A running fight that ends when someone runs out of fuel, ammunition, or vehicle.

Fuel Margin -- How far you can drive before you're walking. The number every convoy commander checks before departure.

Ambush Corridor -- Stretch of road with terrain that favors attackers. Narrow, limited cover for defenders, multiple firing positions for ambushers.

Vehicle Kill -- Disabling a vehicle in a convoy engagement. Not necessarily destroying it. Stopping it is sufficient.

Dust Runner -- An unescorted vehicle moving fast through contested territory, relying on speed rather than protection. Gamblers and couriers.

HEX CRAWL (EXPLORATION)

Hex -- Standardized territory unit for exploration mapping. What's inside the hex is unknown until someone walks into it.

Terrain Type -- Classification of hex geography. Determines movement cost, encounter probability, and resource availability.

Point of Interest -- A location within a hex that warrants investigation. Could be a ruin, a settlement, a hazard, or a cache.

Random Encounter -- Unplanned contact with threats or opportunities while traversing terrain. The hex doesn't care about your schedule.

Supply Burn -- Rate at which resources deplete during exploration. Terrain type affects burn rate. Desert burns faster than forest.

Discovery Roll -- Check to determine what the exploration team finds in an unknown hex. The dice populate the world.

Safe Camp -- Location determined viable for rest without immediate threat. Safe is relative. Safe means the threats are predictable.

Pathfinder -- Operator specialized in route-finding through unknown terrain. Their job is to make the hex less unknown for everyone behind them.

Hazard Density -- Concentration of environmental threats in a given hex. High density means every step is a decision.

Cache -- Pre-positioned supply deposit in the field. Could be yours. Could be someone else's that you found. Possession is the relevant law.

VEHICLES & EQUIPMENT

Technical -- Civilian vehicle with a weapon bolted on. The weapon is usually worth more than the vehicle. Standard contested-zone transport.

Hardpoint -- Reinforced mounting position for weapons systems on a vehicle. Factory hardpoints are reliable. Field-improvised hardpoints are exciting.

Armor Value -- How much punishment a vehicle absorbs before systems fail. The number is theoretical until tested.

EMP Hardened -- Electronics protected against electromagnetic pulse. Expensive modification. Saves everything when it matters.

Field Repair -- Fixing a vehicle with what you have, where you are. Not returning it to spec. Getting it moving again.

Payload Capacity -- What a vehicle can carry beyond its crew. Every kilogram is a decision between ammunition, supplies, and people.

Signature -- How visible a vehicle is to detection systems. Low signature costs money. High signature costs lives.

Operational Range -- How far a vehicle goes on current fuel before it becomes a very expensive roadblock.

Crew Served -- Weapon requiring more than one operator to function effectively. One aims, one feeds, one watches their backs.

Reactive Armor -- Explosive panels that detonate outward to defeat incoming projectiles. Works once per panel. Terrifying for the crew the first time.

GENE TEMPLATES & BIOLOGY

Template -- The animal-source genetic architecture underlying a gene-forged operator. Wolf, lynx, bear, raven, leopard, eagle. The template shapes everything.

Suppression Protocol -- The medication regimen that keeps gene-forged biology stable. Miss a dose and the template starts having opinions.

Aberrant -- Gene-forged whose modifications have deviated beyond recoverable parameters. Not broken. Different. And sometimes dangerous.

Template Rejection -- When the body refuses the genetic modification. Acute rejection is fast. Chronic rejection is slow. Both end the same way without intervention.

Biological Clock -- The projected stability window for a gene-forged organism. The manufacturer's estimate of how long the product works as designed.

Pack Bond -- Involuntary cooperative behavior in wolf-template gene-forged. Not loyalty. Neurology. The pack functions as a distributed system.

Predator Response -- Hardwired threat-engagement behavior from the animal template. Training modifies it. Stress reveals it.

Sensory Suite -- The full package of enhanced perception from the gene template. Night vision, auditory range, olfactory sensitivity. What the template gives you for free.

Regression Event -- Sudden reversion toward base template behavior under extreme stress. The engineered human disappears. The animal source surfaces.

Stability Rating -- Current assessment of gene-forged biological integrity. The number determines what missions you're cleared for.

FACTIONS & POLITICS

NAF -- North American Federation. Continental governance post-Upheaval. Military-industrial backbone. Chain-fed supply lines.

EO -- European Operations. Corporate-state hybrid. Clean aesthetics, dirty logistics. Washing boroughs since 2048.

UKE -- United Kingdom Enclave. Island fortress mentality. Load shed schedules and borough contracts.

PCU -- Pacific Consolidated Union. Desert doctrine. Sun tax territory. Dune Specters and cook zones.

SCA -- Southern Corporate Alliance. Entertainment grade gene-forging. Theme parks that produce operators.

UC -- United Command. Multi-faction military coordination. The Hellfire Harriers' home.

PFZ -- Pacific Free Zone. Maritime sovereignty. Cable infrastructure. The water between things.

Freehold -- Independent territory. No faction backing. No supply chain. Freedom that costs everything else.

Kavast -- State military command structure. The people who call SPLICE units a genomic accident.

ACU -- African Continental Union. Water governance. Dawn Broadcasts. Clean numbers.

WORLD HISTORY & EVENTS

The Upheaval -- The cascading collapse of pre-2040 civilization. Not one event. A decade of events that people gave one name to afterward.

Superstorm Prometheus (2042) -- The storm that broke North America. Two days of weather that took forty years to clean up.

The Great Drought (2056-2059) -- Agricultural collapse across three continents. Drought kids grew up in the aftermath. They don't waste water.

Document Wars -- Regional conflicts over pre-Upheaval records. Information as territory. Archives as objectives.

Indo-Pakistani Forbidden Zone -- Nuclear exchange nobody discusses directly. Zone air when the wind shifts east. Forbidden Zone math for impossible decisions.

Battle of Neo-Toronto -- Defining urban combat. Captain Phoenix Reeves. Collapsed structures as weapons. Dust cloud warfare.

Siege of New Moscow -- Major Valkyrie Volkov's supply run. Three vehicles. Hostile territory. Volkov freight as doctrine.

The Makali Extraction -- Seventeen operatives. Catastrophic outcome. The margin was miscalculated. Now a measurement for acceptable loss.

Crackerjack Siege (2091) -- GSOTC incident. The Heralds got cleared. The commission hasn't explained. Dead Channel Radio broadcast it live.

Prometheus League -- Faction-tech redistributionists. Broadcast coordinates on open frequencies. Going Prometheus League means giving something away.

11 EXPANDED TACTICAL GLOSSARY

The operational vocabulary that runs beneath the fiction. Combat terminology, medical language, intelligence tradecraft, and economic systems.

COMBAT & TACTICS

Bounding Overwatch -- Movement technique where one element covers while another advances. Leapfrog with rifles. The element covering is the one that survives if the advance triggers contact.

Kill Box -- Pre-designated area where all available fire converges simultaneously. Walking into a kill box is not survivable. Setting one up requires patience.

Contact Front -- The radio call that means everything you planned is now theoretical. Enemy engaged. Direction stated. Everyone reacts.

Dead Space -- Area that cannot be observed or covered by fire from a given position. Every position has dead space. The question is whether the enemy knows where yours is.

Displacement -- Controlled movement away from a compromised position. Not retreat. Tactical relocation. The difference matters to the people doing it.

Enfilade -- Fire delivered along the length of a formation rather than across its width. One bullet, multiple targets. The geometry that ends engagements.

Final Protective Fire -- The last line of fire before a position is overrun. Everything fires. Nothing is held in reserve. If this doesn't work, the next conversation involves surrender or death.

MEDICAL & SURVIVAL

Golden Hour -- The sixty minutes after wounding where medical intervention most affects survival. In contested zones, the golden hour is usually forty minutes shorter than sixty.

Walking Wounded -- Operator injured but ambulatory. Capable of self-extraction. Not capable of much else.

Tourniquet Clock -- Time elapsed since a tourniquet was applied. The limb has a deadline. The operator knows the deadline.

Blood Chit -- Document carried by operators promising reward for assistance if recovered by civilians. The reward is theoretical. The desperation is real.

Suppression Debt -- Accumulated gene-forged instability from missed or irregular medication. The body keeps a ledger. The ledger eventually collects.

Ration Strip -- Compressed nutrient bar. Technically a complete meal. Spiritually closer to eating a contract.

Water Discipline -- Rationing protocol for operations in water-scarce environments. Drink on schedule, not on thirst. The schedule knows better than your body.

INTELLIGENCE & COMMS

SIGINT -- Signals intelligence. What people say when they think the channel is clean. The channel is never clean.

HUMINT -- Human intelligence. Information from people. The most unreliable and most valuable source simultaneously.

Dead Letter -- Communication left at a prearranged location for later retrieval. Slow. Secure. The speed of trust.

Cipher Deck -- Encryption system for field communications. The deck changes weekly. Using last week's deck is a compromise event.

Open Channel -- Unencrypted communication. Either careless or deliberate. If deliberate, it's a message for the people listening.

Asset Handler -- Intelligence officer managing human sources. The handler knows names. The names don't know the handler. Ideally.

Sanitized -- Information with source details removed. Clean enough to share without burning the origin. The cleaner it is, the less you trust it.

ECONOMY & TRADE

Scrip -- Faction-issued currency. Worth exactly as much as the issuing faction's supply chain. When the supply chain breaks, scrip becomes wallpaper.

Barter Rate -- The exchange value between goods in a non-currency economy. Water, ammunition, and medical supplies set the rate. Everything else floats.

Faction Tax -- The percentage of all economic activity that flows to the controlling faction. The tax funds the supply chain that makes the territory livable. Or it doesn't.

Gray Trade -- Commerce that exists between legal and illegal. Not black market. Not legitimate. The space where most actual commerce happens.

Supply Auction -- Competitive bidding for limited faction resources. The auction reveals what people actually need, which is intelligence the faction keeps.

Debt Marker -- Physical token representing obligation. Changes hands. Accumulates. The person holding the most markers has the most leverage and the most enemies.

Clean Money -- Currency or trade goods with documented provenance. Clean money costs more because the documentation is the expensive part.

12 CANONICAL ENTRIES & PULL QUOTES

SPLICE

SPLICE -- *(n., operational slang; origin: genomic terminology)* -- A mixed-lineage contract unit operating outside state military affiliation. Informal name for any freelance operator group with operators of different gene-forged heritage or factional background. Originally deployed as contempt by state military culture: a splice is impure, undisciplined, genomically unverifiable, loyal to whoever's paying. Reclaimed by the freelance community over the past two decades. Usage splits by generation: older operators sometimes still flinch at it; operators under thirty use it clean. "Splice" as an insult requires the context of state military identity to land -- call a contractor a splice in front of their own unit and they'll probably just agree. Appears on kit, in unit designations, in Unstable Signals editorial copy, and in the mouth of every Kavast field commander who wants to make sure you know where you stand.

Register variants: --

State military (contempt): "Another splice. What's in the mix this time -- wolf and raven on the same frequency? That's not a unit, that's a genomic accident."

Freelance (professional): "We're a splice. Bear, lynx, and two baselines. We cleared the Outer Corridor in six hours. Your pack formation took two days."

Briefing (neutral): "Your splice is wheels-up at 0400. Three operators, one gene-forged. Standard contract terms."

Conflict Magazine / Unstable Signals: "SPLICE CULTURE: The mixed-lineage units rewriting contested zone doctrine. Field report inside."

As an insult that misses: "You're just a splice." "Yeah. And you're down three operators. Want to talk about unit composition some more, or do you want extraction?"

See also: `OT_Splice_Canon.md` for full design reference, etymology, and cross-document usage map.

PULL QUOTES

Sixty field-ready one-liners. Broadcast copy, flavor text, table atmosphere.

1. The briefing was accurate. It just wasn't right.

2. She came back. What came back with her was the problem.

3. The building was supposed to be empty in the way that buildings are supposed to be empty.

4. Four of us went in and four of us came out. The math on that felt worse, not better.

5. He survived the extraction and then had a hard time explaining it.

6. The mission was complete. The job was something else.

7. Nobody gave the order. The order got given.

8. The whole thing took about eleven minutes, which was nine minutes too long and two minutes too short.

9. We called it a win because the alternative word was longer.

10. The door was locked from the inside, which was interesting mostly because nobody was inside.

11. The information was good. The information was also old. These are different problems.

12. She said she'd been there before and she was right, she had been there before, and that's what worried us.

13. It stopped being a problem about the same time it stopped being a situation.

14. He came back from that with fewer opinions, which is not the same as fewer problems.

15. The fire was already there. We brought the fuel, which was not the plan.

16. Everyone agreed it was the wrong call. It was also the only call. These are different things.

17. It didn't go wrong at a specific moment. It had been going wrong the whole time.

18. The objective was met. The objective was also beside the point by then.

19. Three people knew what happened in that room. Two of them aren't talking about it and the third one can't.

20. We were early. The situation was earlier.

21. His batch number was showing before we even hit the first checkpoint.

22. She was bespoke but running baseline in a way that bespoke doesn't usually run.

23. The tag went cold about forty seconds before the target did.

24. Gravel doesn't complain about the load, but gravel also doesn't extract.

25. He called it a paper op. Three of his people left wet prints on a wall that's still standing.

26. She had the Reeves reflex but she didn't have the Reeves luck, which is the part that matters.

27. The gene-kit was good. The person inside the gene-kit had different ideas.

28. We were drinking sand by hour two and he was still marking it as a calibration window.

29. Stock instinct got him through the door. It didn't get him through the room.

30. He wasn't void spec. He was just void enough that nobody wanted to ask the commission.

31. The warm body they sent us turned out to be a drifter and a shelf, which is a combination I do not recommend.

32. She marked it clean on the biometric. What the biometric doesn't ask about is why.

33. His warranty was up but the spec drift was recent, which is an unusual combination and not the good kind.

34. The Syndicate called it a gray water deal. The operators who ran it called it something shorter.

35. Running hot in a cook zone is not a strategy. Some people find that out the way they find most things out.

36. I've run with corsairs, harriers, drifters, and one guy nobody could classify. The unclassified one was the problem.

37. The kit was Null's. Nobody asked how it got there because the answer was always worse than not knowing.

38. They cleared him on the recognition protocol. The protocol hadn't been updated since before he changed.

39. She called the target. The target was already called. That's a kitchen job and everyone in that room knew it.

40. Ghost country is still country. People learn that twice, usually.

41. The Makali Extraction went clean on paper. Ariel still walks with the other leg favored and you don't ask about it.

42. Anybody who says the IPFZ is navigable is selling something or has never been east of the salt line.

43. The Crackerjack Siege happened because the Heralds got cleared. The commission hasn't explained that and nobody's asked twice.

44. Phoenix Reeves survived Neo-Toronto by doing something nobody could describe and then never described it himself.

45. Gorodskie Ekho smells like a decision that got made fast and then lived in.

46. The Phantom Vipers never finished below fourth. They also never finished first, which is a different kind of never.

47. Valkyrie Volkov ran the Siege of New Moscow supply line with three vehicles and a modification cap and called it freight.

48. The GSOTC terrain reconfigures in forty minutes. The decisions made on that terrain last considerably longer.

49. Samudra Sattva has been expanding for six years. The people who mapped it three years ago are still using those maps.

50. The Void Walkers left before anyone told them to leave. That's the part that doesn't get mentioned.

51. Cipher took the UKE quantum unit and the commission responded by updating its filing system.

52. Ghost Falcon's thirty-four inch record still stands. There are people who argue about the conditions and they are all correct.

53. Granitsa doesn't kill you fast. It finds out what you are first.

54. What happened to the Hellfire Harriers on the Flooded London approach is not disputed. The order that sent them there is still disputed.

55. New Prague keeps everything. The University Archive has fourteen versions of the Document Wars and they're all accurate and none of them match.

56. The Dune Specters won in Samudra Sattva three times. The fourth time they won differently and two of them don't talk about it.

57. Superstorm Prometheus took two days and the Upheaval took forty years and nobody seems to understand those are the same event.

58. The Waterloo Relay burned before anyone was supposed to know it existed. Someone did the math on that eventually.

59. Metropoli Perdida has three eras of ruins stacked on each other and all three eras thought they were the last one.

60. Dead Channel Radio broadcast the Crackerjack Siege live. The commission issued a correction. Wavelength is still broadcasting.

COLOPHON

Operator Tactics: Fiction Lexicon
Edition 01, 2026
A5 format (148 x 210mm)

Design and writing by Jesse Alexander.
Orbital Ranch Studio.

Set in IBM Plex Sans, IBM Plex Mono, Archivo Narrow, and Newsreader.
Rendered via WeasyPrint. Layout system: OT Print CSS Canonical.

This document compiles all vocabulary from the Operator Tactics game line, including material from Terra Conflictus 2066, the RPG Quick Start, Crackerjack Skirmish, Iron Line, Big Game, HVT, Cold Case, Solo Ops, Raid Racers, and Hex Crawl.

`OT.FL // REFERENCE // COMPLETE`

`TERRACONFLICTUS.COM`

// DEBRIEF | **FICTION REFERENCE** | CLR: ACTIVE

01 BRIEF

THE COMPLETE VOCABULARY OF TERRA CONFLICTUS 2066

Every operator slang term, system language entry, human label, gene-forged idiom, environmental marker, pop culture fragment, and territory-specific phrase from the Operator Tactics game line -- compiled, organized, and ready for fiction deployment.

Nine game modes. Four territories. Seven categories. One world.

02 SPECS

ENTRIES	TERRITORIES	GAMES	CATEGORIES
500+	4	9+	7

GAMES RPG · SKIRMISH · IRON LINE · BIG GAME · HVT · SOLO

• TERRACONFLICTUS.COM