// LOCATION GUIDE | **OPERATOR TACTICS: TERRITORIES & THEATERS** | CLR: OPERATIONAL

LOCATION GUIDE | GM + PLAYERS | **8 LOCATIONS** | 560+ PAGES

VOL. II | SUPPLEMENT – OPERATOR TACTICS CORE BOOK

TERRITORIES & THEATERS 2066

EARTH — 8 CONTESTED ZONES

NOBODY CONTROLS THESE ZONES. THEY JUST CONTROL MORE OF IT THAN YOU DO.

8 TERRITORIES. FULL GM-TABLE DENSITY.

// ZONES // FACTIONS // CONTACTS // MISSION SEEDS // DESTABILIZATION

CONTESTED ZONES
LOCATION SUPPLEMENT

11 **IPFZ** Irradiated. Herald-held.

12 **SHATTER BELT** Fractured territories.

13 **EURASIAN STEPPES** EO/PRC contested.

14 **LAKEFIRE CORRIDOR** NAF-adjacent, disputed.

15 **JAVA SCATTER** Multi-faction maritime.

16 **PATAGONIAN BASIN** NRD/ independent.

17 **ANTARCTIC PENINSULA** International contested.

18 **THE HIGH GROUND** Orbital theater.

JESSE ALEXANDER

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TERRITORIES & THEATERS

EARTH 2066 · LOCATION GUIDE

An Operator Tactics Supplement by Jesse Alexander

OPERATOR TACTICS // TERRITORIES & THEATERS

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

No faction controls these spaces completely. That is why operators are here. The zones, irradiated wastes, orbital lanes, and collapsed territories in this volume are built for work that can't happen anywhere else.

This volume documents eight operational territories and theaters across Earth 2066 and its orbital layer. Each is built to the same architecture as the city hubs in Vol. I, adapted for contested and non-urban environments.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW & STRESS CONDITION

Every location opens with what this territory is and what is currently at breaking point. The stress condition is the state of play when operators arrive. It escalates.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

Quick operational reads: control density, environmental hazards, faction presence, transit access. Contested territories have sparse authority and dense complications.

ZONES

Territories are divided into zones rather than districts. Each zone has its own operational character, authority gaps, and under-system. The under-system is often the only system that matters.

FACTIONS, CONTACTS, MISSION SEEDS

Same architecture as Vol. I: faction profiles with escalation ladders, wildcard contacts operating outside faction structures, mission seeds with deliberate blanks, destabilization aftermath.

Compatibility. This supplement requires the Operator Tactics core rulebook. Vol. I: Hubs & Cities covers the ten city hubs and maritime centers.

11/

INDO-PAKISTANI FORBIDDEN ZONE

CONTESTED TERRITORY | EARTH 2066

Fourteen warheads in 2042. The radiation is not uniform. The Heralds adapted. Every intelligence agency on the planet wants to know what they are building.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

Fourteen warheads in 2042. The radiation is not uniform — lethal pockets adjacent to survivable corridors, hot zones that will kill an unprotected operator in hours sitting beside paths worn smooth by eighteen years of daily foot traffic. Governance collapsed completely. The Heralds of the Storm emerged from the survivors who didn't die and didn't leave. They adapted. They believe the blast was a beginning, not an ending. They are building toward something, and every intelligence agency on the planet wants to know what it is.

The IPFZ is not a city. It is a territory — former population centers, industrial zones, and pre-war research facilities layered under eighteen years of ruin and contested ecology. The Heralds don't hold it the way factions hold territory. They inhabit it. They know which air is safe and which will put you in the ground. That knowledge is their primary military advantage and their primary export to anyone willing to pay.

Every external faction running operations here is working from the same intelligence briefing: the Heralds possess a bioweapon of mass-casualty potential located at their primary stronghold. The intel is accurate. The assumptions built on the intel are wrong. What the Heralds are building is not destruction. It might be worse.

No urban acoustic layer. No drones, no traffic, no climate systems. Wind across rubble and distant structural settling. The Heralds read terrain by radiation signature the way a navigator reads stars — their knowledge of safe corridors is operational intelligence worth more than any map. Where they walk, the ground is worn smooth underfoot. That is how you identify a survivable corridor: look for the worn paths. In some zones a faint metallic quality in the air is the only field warning before a dosimeter confirms contamination. Filter-fish in standing water are the most reliable living indicator of conditions. Where they are absent, do not drink the water. Where they are present in numbers, the corridor has been passable long enough for an ecosystem to establish.

Stealth is harder here. They can smell outsiders. Three days of outside-world diet, synthetic fabrics, and faction-issue equipment produces a scent profile distinguishable from the IPFZ population at close range. The Heralds who patrol the outer zones know this and use it.

There is no civilian Splice Punk scene in the IPFZ proper. The Heralds of the Storm are building toward something and their aesthetic is internal covenant rather than external expression. The scene exists at the margins: the transit points where operators pass through on the way to the Zone, the grey-market supply corridors where Free Zone Dispatch intersects Herald territory. Dead credential decoration here carries specific weight — expired clearance codes for jurisdictions destroyed in 2042, administrative marks from nations that exist only in pre-war documentation. What the scene knows about the IPFZ, it knows from people who came back from the margins and needed to tell someone.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

The intelligence briefing every external operator carries into the IPFZ is the failing system. Every bloc has a file on the Heralds' bioweapon program. Every file describes a mass-casualty dispersal device — airborne, radiological-biological hybrid, range estimated at several hundred kilometers. The threat-assessment models are built on that assumption. The missions are built on that assessment. The assumption is wrong.

The Heralds are not building a weapon of destruction. They are building a dispersal mechanism for their own rad-adaptation genetics — the modifications that allowed IPFZ survivors to metabolize low-level radiation exposure, accelerate cellular repair, and develop the olfactory sensitivity that makes them functionally undetectable by outside operators. They intend to release it globally. Not to kill. To transform. Choice is not part of their framework.

The operation that neutralizes the 'bioweapon' destroys the only working genome-level radiation resistance technology on Earth. The operation that steals it hands a forced-transformation delivery system to whichever bloc gets there first. There is no clean outcome. Every mission here is contaminated at the briefing stage.

Compounding this: Grid 7-North's purification chemical stock is at approximately 30% of operating minimum. At current consumption, the facility loses treatment capacity within four months. The Heralds know this. The survivor communities do not. The Heralds have been in contact with an external supplier through a channel no faction has identified. The chemical supply problem and the dispersal timeline are converging.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

TERRITORY	no-faction / Heralds dominant
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed (pre-war remnants)
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / Heralds track everything by read
CIVILIAN MOOD	adapted / not compliant
BLACK MARKET	heavy (survival tech, corridor maps, dosimeters)
PRIMARY RESOURCE	safe passage / clean water
CLIMATE	irradiated variable / no urban acoustic layer
WILD CARD	filter-fish as the only reliable water indicator

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Four power structures contest the IPFZ. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging.

HERALDS OF THE STORM

Primary territorial controller. Survivors of the 2042 exchange who adapted to the radiation and built a community around the belief that the blast was a beginning. They control the corridor network, Grid 7-North, the Shrine District, and the Stronghold. Their objective: complete the dispersal project and administer the Gift globally before any external faction acts on correct intelligence about what the project actually is. The council is not unanimous.

MULTI-FACTION INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS (NAF / EO / PRC)

Three separate intelligence operations, none aware of each other's current IPFZ activity, all working from the same wrong assumption about a mass-casualty bioweapon. Dr. Vasquez (NAF) at Grid 7-North. Sergeant Brecht (EO) in the Corridor Network. An unacknowledged PRC team in the Warrens for three weeks. Their col-

lective intelligence picture, taken together, is closer to the truth than any individual assessment.

SURVIVOR COMMUNITIES

Approximately four thousand people in the Warrens who adapted without joining the Heralds. Dependent on Herald corridor access for water runs to Grid 7-North. Their objective: maintain access, stay out of the Herald-faction conflict, and survive the next decision the Herald council makes regardless of what it is. Councilor Meera's eighteen-year relationship with the Elder is their primary diplomatic asset.

NULL COLLECTIVE

One operative (designation: 7-Green) in the Archive Ruins, seeking pre-war AI-assisted genetic engineering documentation that predates every faction's current program by a decade. Their interest in the IPFZ predates the current dispersal crisis by three years. What the Null Collective does with the documentation is not a question any current faction intelligence file has answered.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**THE CORRIDOR NETWORK**: The only reliable way to move through the IPFZ. Worn smooth by foot traffic. No markers. The Heralds' primary military asset.
ZONE 2	**GRID 7-NORTH (Water Purification Station)**: Pre-war infrastructure, still functional. Controls drinking water for twelve thousand survivors. The closest thing to neutral ground the IPFZ has.
ZONE 3	**THE SHRINE DISTRICT**: Herald ideological center. Gift administration site. No external party has been allowed inside the inner district. Several have tried.
ZONE 4	**THE HOT POCKETS**: Lethal radiation zones. Natural perimeter. The terrain that makes the IPFZ uncontrollable by conventional military force.
ZONE 5	**THE SURVIVOR WARRENS**: Independent civilian community. Four thousand people. The IPFZ's informal economy hub and operational support base.
ZONE 6	**THE STRONGHOLD**: Target of Operation Serpent's Bane. Herald operational center. The dispersal project primary facility. The place every faction believes they already neutralized.
ZONE 7	**THE ARCHIVE RUINS**: Former research district. Source material for the Herald dispersal project. Partially stripped, partially intact. Every external team that searches here tells the Heralds what they think the project is based on.

ZONES

ZONE 1 THE CORRIDOR NETWORK

PRIMARY MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

SECURITY	active (Herald patrol)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (maintained by use)
CIVILIANS	normal (survivor traffic)
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / Heralds read everything
FACTION PRESSURE	dominant Heralds
CONTAMINATION	adjacent (hot pockets border all routes)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (corridor maps, guide services)
MOBILITY	open (with guide) / lethal (without)

FUNCTION Navigation and movement through the IPFZ. Without corridor access, operators are navigating by dosimeter and luck.

CONTROLLER Herald patrol units — loosely organized, not uniformed, operating on a shared read of terrain that baseline operators cannot replicate.

DRAW The only path to Grid 7-North, the Stronghold, the Archive Ruins, and every other zone. Corridor map sales through the Survivor Warrens black market. Herald guides — expensive, conditional, and genuinely the difference between arriving and not.

RISK Herald patrol units can be anywhere on the network without advance warning. Hot pocket adjacency — a five-meter deviation from a corridor can mean lethal exposure within 20 minutes. The Heralds track movement on their routes. They know who is in the network before those people know they've been noticed.

SCARCITY

Accurate maps — partial maps circulate; complete corridor maps don't leave Herald hands. Guides willing to work for factions currently running active operations against Herald interests. Dosimeters that can read the fine gradient between survivable and lethal — consumer-grade equipment isn't sensitive enough.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The corridor network is maintained by the Heralds' collective knowledge of the radiation topography — which changes slowly as isotope decay shifts hot pocket boundaries. Two corridors that were safe two years ago are now marginal. The Heralds know this. Their maps reflect it. The maps circulating in the Survivor Warrens black market do not.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Hot pocket boundary drift means a corridor that was safe last month may be marginal now. The survivor communities that depend on route access for water runs start taking casualties without understanding why. The black market map problem accelerates: outdated maps command higher prices while becoming more dangerous.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Herald patrol units — visible, present, interactive with known community members

ECONOMY

Guide hire, corridor map sales, survivor community water runs, material transport between zones

RISK

Herald patrol encounters requiring explanation of purpose and destination

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Herald patrol units — invisible, present, and no longer interactive. Night movement on the corridors without a guide is their choice to allow or not.

ECONOMY

Faction operator movement under the assumption of reduced Herald visibility. The assumption is wrong.

RISK

Being smelled before being seen. Herald night patrols don't challenge — they follow until they decide.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The path is worn smooth in the way that takes years of daily use. No markers, no signs, nothing a satellite image would read as infrastructure. The hot zone starts four meters to the left. The difference between the path and the hot zone is the path.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

patrol units, guide services, corridor maintenance, total movement awareness

EO FIELD INTELLIGENCE

Sergeant Brecht, unacknowledged, eleven weeks in, cumulative exposure climbing

SURVIVOR COMMUNITIES

water runners, map traders, guide hire brokers

CIVILIAN NEED

Safe passage. Accurate maps. The knowledge that the corridor they're walking today is still the corridor that was safe yesterday. A dosimeter that reads the gradient, not just the threshold.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Herald guide hire through the Warrens, black market corridor maps, dosimeter calibration, survivor community intelligence on Herald patrol patterns.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- 1. A Herald patrol of two passes without stopping. They don't make eye contact. One of them is still oriented toward the operators sixty seconds after passing.
- 2. A survivor community runner is moving water containers on a handcart — going the wrong direction on the route. She is not lost. She is avoiding something ahead.
- 3. A faction operative (insignia removed, gear civilian-pattern) is sitting beside the corridor with a dosimeter that is reading higher than it should for this location. They look like they've been there a while.
- 4. A section of corridor has been subtly narrowed — debris placed at both edges, reducing the navigable width to single-file. Recent. Deliberate. No one visible.
- 5. A Herald guide is negotiating a rate with three operators who are armed well beyond what a standard extraction team carries. The guide's body language suggests she's deciding whether the destination justifies the clients.
- 6. Filter-fish are absent from a water pool that had a healthy population last week according to the survivor community runner who knows this route. She won't say what that means. She keeps moving.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- 1. Footsteps behind, matching pace, maintaining distance. When operators stop, the footsteps stop. Not an attack. An assessment.
- 2. A dosimeter alarm — quiet, personal, the operator's own equipment — registers a gradient shift. The corridor is drifting. The current map doesn't show this.

- 3. A survivor community member is out after dark, moving without a light. She stops when she encounters operators and is more frightened of them than of anything else in the corridor.
- 4. A small fire — controlled, low — at a corridor junction. No one visible. The fire is fresh. The heat from it is enough to throw off a thermal scan of the surrounding area.
- 5. Something large moves parallel to the corridor in the dark, in the hot zone, without a dosimeter alarm. It's been keeping pace for three minutes.
- 6. A Herald is sitting in the middle of the corridor path, cross-legged, facing toward the operators. Not blocking. Waiting. She has been there long enough that the dew has settled on her.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. Two corridors flagged safe on the current black market maps have drifted into marginal range. The Heralds updated their internal maps three months ago. The update has not reached any external source. [TRUE]
- 2. Herald patrol patterns have increased on the eastern network since a faction team came through six weeks ago. The team completed their mission. Only two of them came out. [TRUE]
- 3. A complete Herald corridor map exists in the Survivor Warrens, held by a trader who got it from a Herald guide who was paid to provide it. The map is eight months old. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. There is a corridor segment not on any map that bypasses the Stronghold outer zone entirely. The segment exists. It goes through a hot pocket the Heralds sealed off in 2058. [TRAP]
- 5. The Herald guide who was asked about the Stronghold route has not been seen at the usual hire point for four days. Her absence may or may not be connected to the faction team that hired her. [TRUE]
- 6. Filter-fish absence in the Section 9 pools is new — within the last two weeks. The Heralds have rerouted their water runs. They have not told the survivor communities why. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

PRIYA — HERALD GUIDE (OPERATES INDEPENDENTLY AT THE WARRENS HIRE POINT)

CAN GET Accurate corridor routes to any zone in the network, real-time radiation topography updates, assessment of whether a proposed route is currently navigable.

WANTS She wants to know what the last faction team that hired her was actually looking for. They told her the Archive Ruins. Their equipment load and their questions were about the Stronghold.

FEARS Being identified by Herald command as a guide who works for external factions without screening clients for active operational intent.

CURRENT PRESSURE She guided the team. Two came out. She is calculating whether that outcome is her responsibility.

DANIYAL — SURVIVOR COMMUNITY MAP TRADER

CAN GET Current black market corridor maps (acknowledged to be partially outdated), dosimeter calibration equipment, introduction to survivor community leadership.

WANTS He wants a dosimeter sensitive enough to read fine-gradient contamination — the equipment he has isn't detecting the drift that's been happening in Section 9.

FEARS That the maps he's been selling are now getting people hurt and that this will eventually trace back to him.

CURRENT PRESSURE Three of his regular map clients haven't checked in. He doesn't know if they're dead, lying low, or simply done with the IPFZ. He is operating as if the answer is the worst one.

SERGEANT NADIA BRECHT — EO FIELD INTELLIGENCE, IPFZ SECTOR (UNACKNOWLEDGED)

CAN GET EO intelligence assessment of Heralds strength and corridor control, current faction operational picture inside the IPFZ, the EO's internal file on the Stronghold bioweapon program.

WANTS She wants extraction. She has been in the IPFZ for eleven weeks. Her resupply contact stopped responding at week eight.

FEARS That her intelligence file — the one she's been building on the Herald bioweapon — contains a conclusion her command will not want to see.

CURRENT PRESSURE She has been living on corridor access purchased from Daniyal. Her most recent map purchase put her through a section that read higher than she expected. Her personal dosimeter log shows cumulative exposure she has not reported.

ZONE 2 GRID 7-NORTH — WATER PURIFICATION STATION

SECURITY	active (Herald guard + community watch)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (pre-war, maintained)
CIVILIANS	packed (water access draws population)
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / community eyes everywhere
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (Heralds control / survivor communities depend)
CONTAMINATION	none (active filtration)
BLACK MARKET	light (filter media, purification chemicals)
MOBILITY	open (by arrangement)

FUNCTION Primary clean water source for the non-lethal IPFZ population. Also the zone's only reliable neutral ground.

CONTROLLER Herald maintenance crews run the technical systems. Survivor community councils manage distribution. The two arrangements coexist uneasily.

DRAW Clean water — the only reliable source for twelve thousand people. The one place where Herald and survivor-community leadership interact regularly. External faction presence is tolerated here at a level it isn't anywhere else — the Heralds use it as a controlled observation point.

RISK Any action at Grid 7-North that threatens the water supply triggers a unified Herald and survivor-community response — the only thing both groups agree on. Faction intelligence operatives working Grid 7-North are almost certainly known to the Heralds; the question is why they're being allowed to operate. The purification chemicals are running low. The Heralds have not announced this.

SCARCITY

Replacement filter media — pre-war stock, not reproducible locally. Purification chemicals — three to four months of supply remaining at current consumption. Diplomatic access to Herald leadership — Grid 7-North is the only venue where it's possible at all.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The purification chemical stock is at approximately 30% of operating minimum. At current consumption, Grid 7-North loses treatment capacity within four months, dropping to gravity filtration only — survivable for a reduced population, not for twelve thousand. The Heralds know this. The survivor communities do not. The Heralds have been in contact with an external supplier through a channel no faction has identified.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Distribution rationing begins. The survivor communities interpret rationing as Herald political control. Community councils fracture between accommodation and resistance. The Heralds lose the one neutral venue they have. External factions lose their only stable access point to the zone.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Survivor community distribution councils, Herald maintenance crews on technical systems

ECONOMY

Water distribution, filter media resale, purification chemical black market at the outer perimeter

RISK

Being identified as a faction operative at the one venue where Herald leadership might otherwise talk to you

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Herald guard units. Civilian access closes at dusk. Distribution resumes at dawn.

ECONOMY

Herald maintenance cycles, unscheduled Herald command meetings in the facility interior, occasional external contact that doesn't appear in any distribution log

RISK

The Herald night contact channel — whoever the Heralds are communicating with about the chemical supply problem is here after dark

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The queue at the distribution point forms before dawn and doesn't clear until mid-afternoon. People carry more containers than they can comfortably manage. Nobody wastes a trip.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

maintenance crews, guard units, chemical supply management, external contact channel

NAF

Dr. Vasquez under humanitarian contractor cover, technical assessment of the purification system

SURVIVOR COMMUNITIES

distribution councils, water access management, community watch

CIVILIAN NEED

Clean water. The assurance that the supply will continue. The truth about why the distribution queue has been slower. Someone who can tell them whether the Heralds' management of the facility is protection or control.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Distribution schedules, Herald maintenance crew contacts, survivor community council relationships, chemical stock intelligence, facility technical assessment data.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- 1. A survivor community council member is arguing with a Herald maintenance crew lead about access to the chemical storage room. The Herald isn't arguing back. She is waiting for the council member to finish.
- 2. A faction intelligence operative — cover as a humanitarian contractor — is cataloguing the purification system's technical specifications with equipment that is not standard for humanitarian contractors.
- 3. A community member has found a dead filter-fish in the outflow channel. She is showing it to anyone who will look. The Herald on distribution duty has seen it and is not reacting.
- 4. A supply delivery arrives at the outer perimeter — three personnel, unmarked transport, materials consistent with purification chemical supply. The Herald who receives it signs nothing.
- 5. Two survivor community council members are having a quiet argument about whether to report something to Herald leadership or handle it internally. They stop when operators approach.
- 6. The distribution queue has slowed — not stopped, just slowed. People at the back are calculating whether they'll reach the window before it closes. They've done this math before.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- 1. A Herald maintenance crew is running a full system inspection — not their standard cycle. Two of them are in the chemical storage room for forty minutes.
- 2. A light in the facility interior that should be dark. Someone is in the administrative section after hours. The Herald guard at the entrance has not moved in two hours.
- 3. A survivor community council member is waiting outside the facility perimeter — outside, not inside — watching the facility. She has been there since dusk.
- 4. The unmarked supply transport from today's delivery is still here. The three personnel are not visible. The transport is not empty.
- 5. A Herald the operators have not seen before arrives at the facility from the corridor network, is admitted without challenge, and does not come out during the watch period.
- 6. The outflow channel reads clean on the dosimeter. It reads differently on a more sensitive instrument. The difference is small. It has been getting larger over three consecutive nights.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. The purification chemical stock has roughly four months of operational capacity. The Heralds have not told the survivor communities. A maintenance crew member told her partner. Her partner told three people. [TRUE]
- 2. The Heralds have an external supply contact for the chemicals. The contact is not from any recognized faction. Two survivor community council members know this and are trying to identify who it is. [TRUE]
- 3. The dead filter-fish in the outflow channel is an early indicator of system degradation. The system is not degrading — the fish died from something in the input water, not the output. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. The humanitarian contractor cataloguing the system is actually working for a survivor community council faction trying to build leverage over the Heralds. The contractor is genuine faction intelligence. The council story is cover being actively circulated. [TRAP]
- 5. The facility administrative section contains records of every external party the Heralds have permitted to operate in the IPFZ for the past five years. The list would significantly revise every bloc's IPFZ intelligence assessment. [TRUE]

- 6. The Herald who receives the chemical supply deliveries reports directly to Herald command, not to the maintenance crew lead. The deliveries are not logged in the facility supply manifest. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

AMINA — SURVIVOR COMMUNITY WATER DISTRIBUTION COUNCIL LEAD

CAN GET Current distribution data including per-community allocation and trend lines, survivor community political structure, the chemical stock concern she has not been officially told about but has partially figured out.

WANTS She wants to know if the chemical supply situation is as bad as the signals suggest. She has not asked the Heralds directly because she does not trust the answer she would receive.

FEARS That her community's water access is more conditional than she has been representing to the people who depend on her.

CURRENT PRESSURE She received an approach from a faction intelligence operative two days ago offering information about the chemical supply in exchange for access to the facility administrative records. She has not responded. She is still deciding.

REZA — HERALD MAINTENANCE CREW LEAD, GRID 7-NORTH

CAN GET Technical status of the purification system including the actual chemical inventory, Herald maintenance protocols and access schedules, the identity of the supply contact.

WANTS He wants the survivor community council to trust the Heralds' management of the facility without knowing the chemical situation — he believes knowledge of the shortage will destabilize the distribution arrangement before the supply problem is solved.

FEARS That the external supply contact the Heralds are relying on will not deliver on their arrangement.

CURRENT PRESSURE The contact's most recent communication indicated a delay. Reza has not told Herald command. He is managing it himself. He has two months before the delay becomes a crisis.

DR. LENA VASQUEZ — HUMANITARIAN CONTRACTOR (FACTION INTELLIGENCE, NAF)

CAN GET	Complete technical assessment of the Grid 7-North system including its vulnerabilities, NAF's current IPFZ intelligence file including the bioweapon assessment she increasingly believes is wrong, introduction to her NAF handler if operators need to surface information above her clearance level.
WANTS	She wants to know what the Heralds' external supply contact is providing and who they are. It's the one gap in her technical assessment.
FEARS	Her handler. She has been filing accurate reports. Her handler has been filing upward what his superiors want to read. She has recently seen what went up.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She ran a water quality comparison between the input source and output channel three nights ago. The input variance she found is not contamination. It is something she cannot identify with her current equipment, which means it is either natural variation or something the Heralds added to the input. She is not certain which.

ZONE 3 THE SHRINE DISTRICT — HERALD IDEOLOGICAL CENTER

SECURITY	lockdown
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (rebuilt, maintained)
CIVILIANS	normal (Herald community only)
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / total (community)
FACTION PRESSURE	dominant Heralds exclusively
CONTAMINATION	present (controlled, low-level — deliberate)
BLACK MARKET	none

MOBILITY	barricaded (outer ring) / open (inner, with escort)
FUNCTION	Herald religious and community center. The Gift administration site. The place that defines what the Heralds are.
CONTROLLER	Herald leadership — a council structure operators can infer exists from the coordinated decisions they observe but cannot directly map.
DRAW	The only place to understand what the Heralds are actually building toward. Herald leadership — the only channel for direct negotiation at command level. The Gift — the adaptation protocol the Heralds believe is humanity's next stage.
RISK	Unauthorized entry is treated as desecration; the response is collective and does not follow warning protocols that outsiders would recognize. The low-level radiation in the inner district is deliberate — calibrated for Herald-adapted physiology, not baseline operators. Nothing said in the Shrine District is private.
SCARCITY	Entry — the Heralds have permitted exactly four external parties inside the inner district in eighteen years; none of them were factions. Information about the Gift protocol — what it does biologically is known; what it does to a person is not documented anywhere outside Herald knowledge. Herald leadership's actual decision-making structure — operators can observe the outputs, not the inputs.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Gift is not stable across all recipients. Approximately 15% of initiates experience rejection — accelerated cellular degradation rather than repair enhancement. The Heralds treat rejection as a theological outcome rather than a medical one. They do not track survival rates. The dispersal project the faction intelligence calls a bioweapon would expose that 15% figure to a global population.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A rejection cluster — multiple consecutive rejection outcomes — triggers leadership crisis. The Heralds' theology doesn't have a framework for systematic Gift failure. A high-profile rejection among known community members would be the first crack in the belief structure the entire enterprise runs on.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Herald community in full — the Shrine District is the most populated zone during daylight hours

ECONOMY

Community life, Gift administration ceremonies, corridor knowledge sharing, collective maintenance work

RISK

Being present in a way that reads as observation rather than presence — the community distinguishes between these

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Herald leadership council. The community withdraws to residential areas. The inner district belongs to command.

ECONOMY

Leadership meetings. The dispersal project logistics. Whatever the Heralds are planning.

RISK

Herald leadership council operating without community oversight — the decisions made after dark don't get reviewed

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The low-level contamination in the inner district is warm against the dosimeter — not alarming, just present. A baseline operator notices it first as a slight metallic quality in the air. The Herald children playing in the outer courtyard don't notice it at all.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

total control, community life, Gift administration, council governance, dispersal project logistics

CIVILIAN NEED

Community stability. The certainty that the Gift works. The assurance that what they are building is worth what they have given up to build it.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Outer perimeter only (through Amir). Council contact through the Elder. Inner district access requires Herald escort and a reason the council finds acceptable.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- 1. A Gift ceremony is in preparation — community members moving materials, specific individuals being guided toward the inner district. An operator's dosimeter reads the ambient level shift.
- 2. A Herald child approaches operators with open curiosity that none of the adults display. An adult Herald nearby is watching the interaction without intervening.
- 3. A community member who received the Gift three months ago is sitting outside alone, not integrated into the collective activity around him. His skin has a tone that operators with medical training would want to assess.
- 4. An elder Herald approaches operators and asks, directly and without hostility, which faction sent them and what they want. She is not demanding they leave. She is deciding how to respond to the answer.
- 5. A section of the outer ring perimeter is being rebuilt — new materials, deliberate construction. The location corresponds to the approach vector the Serpent's Bane team used in 2062.
- 6. Herald leadership council members are visible in the outer courtyard in the middle of the day, which community members around operators appear to find unusual.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- 1. The inner district is fully lit. Council meeting. The Herald guards at the outer ring perimeter have doubled.
- 2. A single Herald is moving between the Shrine District and the Stronghold zone at speed, carrying something in a sealed case. No escort.
- 3. A community member who was pointed out earlier as a Gift initiate is being assisted back to residential housing by two others. She is walking but not under her own direction.
- 4. The ambient contamination level in the outer ring has risen two points since the morning reading. The Herald guard at the perimeter checks her own dosimeter, looks at the reading, and does not call it in.
- 5. An argument — voices, not words, through distance and structure — from the inner district. It ends abruptly. Then silence.
- 6. A visitor the operators have not seen before is being escorted out of the Shrine District inner ring at 0200. The escort is four Heralds. The visitor is not restrained. The escort suggests the Heralds cannot afford for them to choose their own route out.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. The Gift rejection rate is approximately 15%. The Heralds do not track it systematically. A community member who assists at ceremonies has been tracking it herself for two years. [TRUE]
- 2. The four external parties ever permitted inside the inner district include one humanitarian medical team and three individuals whose identities are not recorded in any faction intelligence file. [TRUE]
- 3. The Heralds' dispersal project has a delivery mechanism that is not airborne. The mechanism is real. The 'not airborne' part is contested — the faction intel says airborne; a Herald defector who reached UCR District 4 said something different before going quiet. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. There is a Herald council member willing to negotiate a limited external access arrangement. The approach is a Herald test of which external parties are actively running intelligence operations on the Shrine District. [TRAP]
- 5. The Gift ceremony materials include a synthesized compound derived from Archive Ruins pre-war research data. The compound is the component every external faction has been trying to identify and has been calling the bioweapon agent. [TRUE]
- 6. The community member tracking rejection rates has a notebook. She has not decided what to do with it. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

THE ELDER — HERALD SENIOR COUNCIL MEMBER (ACCESSIBLE AT OUTER PERIMETER BY ARRANGEMENT)

CAN GET Herald leadership's actual position on external faction presence — which is more nuanced than the intelligence briefings suggest — and the terms under which Herald cooperation on any objective is conceivable.

WANTS She wants operators to understand what the Heralds are building before any external party acts on what they think they know. She has been trying to communicate this for three years through channels that have not worked.

FEARS That the dispersal timeline is closer than Herald leadership wants to admit, and that the window for any external negotiation is shorter than she has been representing to her own council.

CURRENT PRESSURE She approved the Serpent's Bane operation target — not the mission, but the original identification of the Stronghold as the primary site. She fed that information to an EO contact in 2061 because she believed a targeted strike would delay the dispersal project long enough for her diplomatic effort to work. Lt. Saito died. The project was not delayed. Her council does not know she was the source.

FARHAN — COMMUNITY MEMBER (GIFT REJECTION TRACKER)

CAN GET Her two-year rejection rate notebook, personal knowledge of the Gift protocol as observed from ceremony support work, and which current community members are showing early rejection indicators.

WANTS She wants someone outside the IPFZ to understand what 15% means if the dispersal project reaches global scale.

FEARS Being identified by Herald leadership before she has decided what to do with the notebook.

CURRENT PRESSURE She made contact with Dr. Lena Vasquez at Grid 7-North six days ago and gave her one page of the notebook. She is waiting to see what Vasquez does with it before deciding about the rest.

AMIR — HERALD COMMUNITY LIAISON (OUTER DISTRICT, ACCESSIBLE)

CAN GET	Logistical support for approved external presence near the Shrine District, Herald community structure and daily schedule, the identity of which council members hold which positions.
WANTS	He wants operators to leave before the morning count registers their presence as an outstanding question.
FEARS	Being responsible for an external presence that causes an incident he was supposed to prevent.
CURRENT PRESSURE	He was tasked by the Elder to make limited contact with this operator group. He does not know why. The Elder does not explain her decisions to him. He has learned not to ask.

ZONE 4 THE HOT POCKETS — LETHAL RADIATION ZONES

SECURITY	none (conventional) / total (environmental)
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	none
FACTION PRESSURE	none (in practice) / Heralds use as buffer
CONTAMINATION	present / lethal
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	open (survivably, with Herald-grade dosimetry) / lethal (without)

FUNCTION	Natural perimeter. Faction staging areas at the survivable margins. The terrain that makes the IPFZ uncontrollable by conventional military force.
CONTROLLER	No one — and the Heralds, which amounts to the same thing.

DRAW	Operational staging that conventional surveillance cannot cover — no faction runs drone operations over hot pockets due to equipment degradation. Pre-war infrastructure at the margins that nobody has excavated because nobody can reach it safely. The tactical reality that any conventional military advance into the IPFZ must route around the hot pockets, which means routing through Herald-controlled corridors.
RISK	Cumulative exposure at even 'survivable' margin positions — a three-day staging operation at the edge of a hot pocket produces measurable dosimeter accumulation. Herald patrols operating in radiation levels that baseline operators cannot tolerate, meaning a Herald pursuit can follow into terrain where operators cannot follow back. Equipment degradation — electronics in prolonged hot-pocket proximity develop reliability issues.
SCARCITY	Functional dosimeters — consumer grade reads the difference between 'safe' and 'lethal' but not the gradient inside 'survivable.' Medical treatment for cumulative exposure — the survivor communities have protocols; external factions carry standard radiation packs that are not calibrated for IPFZ-specific isotope profiles. Exit routes that don't require Herald cooperation.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The hot pocket boundaries drift as isotope decay shifts the contamination topography. Drift is slow — measurable over months, not days — but a staging area at the survivable margin today may be marginal in three months and lethal in six. No external faction has current topography data accurate enough to map drift. The Heralds update their maps continuously.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A faction team stages in what they believe is a survivable margin zone and starts taking dosimeter readings that trend upward over days rather than holding. By the time the trend is undeniable, evacuation back through the corridor network requires Herald cooperation that may not be available. This has happened twice. Both times the Herald response was to offer escort. Both times the escorted teams were questioned at length about their operational objectives.

DAY

AUTHORITY

The radiation itself. Heralds patrol margins freely.

ECONOMY

None. Survival logistics only.

RISK

Cumulative exposure, boundary drift, equipment degradation

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Same. The hot pockets do not observe schedules.

ECONOMY

Faction staging at the margins under cover of darkness

RISK

Herald pursuit into terrain baseline operators cannot survive in

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The air has a metallic quality at the margin — faint, the kind that makes you think you're imagining it. The dosimeter confirms you're not. Forty meters further in, the quality gets specific. That's the only warning the terrain gives.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

patrols transiting through lethal zones freely, topography mapping, perimeter enforcement

CIVILIAN NEED

Nothing. Nobody lives here by choice. The need is avoidance — accurate maps that keep people out of the lethal zones.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Margin staging only. Fine-gradient dosimetry required. Herald-grade corridor knowledge for any penetration beyond margins. Evacuation requires Herald cooperation.

ENCOUNTERS — HOT POCKET MARGIN (1D6)

- 1. A dosimeter reads a boundary shift — the margin has moved toward the team's position since the last reading. The change is small. The trend is not.
- 2. A Herald is moving through the hot pocket proper — inside the lethal zone — at a pace that reads as casual. Dosimeter reads lethal at her position. She is not monitoring hers.
- 3. Pre-war structural material is visible at a location that recent topography maps show as inside the hot pocket. The material is distinctive enough to suggest specific pre-war research infrastructure.
- 4. A faction staging cache — recent, partially exposed by weather — at a margin position that current readings show is no longer in safe range.
- 5. Two Heralds emerge from a hot pocket sector onto a corridor with no entry point visible on any external map. They acknowledge the operators without stopping.
- 6. A dead animal at the corridor margin — not a filter-fish, something larger, something that was not there yesterday according to the team's last pass. No visible cause of death. Dosimeter reads elevated at the animal's position.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. The hot pocket topography has shifted measurably in the last six months. Three corridor segments on external maps now pass through elevated-exposure terrain. The Heralds updated their internal maps. No external source has the update. [TRUE]
- 2. The Heralds use hot pocket transit as a training threshold for adaptation assessment. Community members who can navigate the margin zones safely are considered full adaptation-certified. Some do not complete the assessment. [TRUE]

- 3. There is navigable pre-war infrastructure inside the Zone 4 hot pocket proper — accessible to Herald-adapted individuals. What it contains is the subject of significant faction speculation. The infrastructure exists. What it contains has been removed. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. A faction team identified a route through the hot pockets that bypasses the corridor network entirely. The route exists on satellite imaging. It passes through two lethal-grade sectors that do not appear as such on satellite. [TRAP]
- 5. Sergeant Brecht has been taking cumulative dosimeter readings at her corridor position. Her log now shows exposure that should have prompted extraction five weeks ago. [TRUE]
- 6. The Herald who was observed transiting hot pocket proper was conducting a topography read — the Heralds map the zone by direct movement, updating their corridor assessment in real time. She has been doing this route weekly for three years. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

NO FIXED CONTACTS OPERATE IN THE HOT POCKETS. HERALD PATROL LEADS ENCOUNTERED AT MARGINS MAY INTERACT BUT DO NOT ESTABLISH ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS. THE TERRAIN IS THE CONTACT.

ZONE 5 THE SURVIVOR WARRENS

INDEPENDENT CIVILIAN COMMUNITY

SECURITY	light (community watch)
INFRASTRUCTURE	failing
CIVILIANS	packed / displaced
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / community eyes
FACTION PRESSURE	low / Herald adjacent

CONTAMINATION	present (low, managed)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (everything)
MOBILITY	open (internally) / corridor-dependent (externally)

FUNCTION Independent civilian community. Operational support base for external faction teams willing to pay for it. The IPFZ's informal economy hub.

CONTROLLER Community councils — loose, multi-faction, consensus-driven. The only entity in the Warrens with genuine authority is the person currently solving the most pressing problem.

DRAW Corridor maps, guide introductions, dosimetry equipment, survival supplies — everything the black market moves. Off-books operator support: shelter, medical care, resupply, fabrication. Human intelligence on Herald movements and community events that no faction surveillance system can generate.

RISK Herald tolerance for the Warrens is conditional on the Warrens not becoming a faction staging point — the community councils enforce this line because their survival depends on it. Faction teams that burn their Warrens cover compromise every subsequent external operator's access. The community's dosimeter expertise is better than most external operators'; they notice when a visitor's exposure log is inconsistent.

SCARCITY Medical supplies calibrated for IPFZ-specific radiation effects. Power — the Warrens run on salvaged pre-war equipment that fails unpredictably. Security from Herald review — the Warrens aren't Herald territory but the Heralds know everything that moves in them.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Warrens' community councils have a standing agreement with Herald leadership: no active faction military operations staged from the Warrens. The agreement has been violated three times in eighteen years. Each time, Herald corridor access for the Warrens was suspended for thirty days. At current population and Grid 7-North dependence, thirty days without corridor access is a mortality event. The community councils know this. External operators frequently don't.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A faction team uses the Warrens as a staging point and the Heralds find out. Corridor access suspension begins within 24 hours. The community councils immediately begin identifying who the operators were and what they were doing. The speed and accuracy of this identification process surprises every faction team it has happened to.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Community councils — accessible, functional, present

ECONOMY

Corridor maps, guide introductions, dosimetry equipment, general black market

RISK

Being identified as active faction military rather than independent operator — the councils make this distinction and act on it

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Same — the Warrens don't have a day/night governance shift because the external threat doesn't either

ECONOMY

Medical treatment for operators who can't present at Herald-adjacent facilities, fabrication services, resupply for teams avoiding the standard corridor access points

RISK

The councils' informal Herald contact passing information about unusual activity before the operators have completed their objective

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The market runs in two meters of vertical clearance in a pre-war parking structure. The stalls are organized by product category with a specificity that suggests years of iteration. The dosimeter stall is in the center. Everyone passes it.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SURVIVOR COMMUNITIES

community councils, black market infrastructure, medical services, fabrication

PRC

unacknowledged team, three weeks in the Warrens, cover intact

EO

Sergeant Brecht purchasing corridor access through Daniyal

CIVILIAN NEED

Medical supplies. Power stability. The assurance that the corridor access won't be suspended because of something an outside faction team did that the community had no control over.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Black market corridor maps, guide introductions, dosimetry calibration, medical treatment, fabrication services, survivor community intelligence network, council relationships.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- 1. A community council member approaches operators within twenty minutes of their arrival. She is not hostile. She is establishing what they are before they establish it on their own terms.

- 2. A faction operative in civilian cover is attempting to purchase a guide introduction. The guide broker is asking questions the operative's cover doesn't fully answer.
- 3. Sergeant Brecht's description is being circulated — not by a community council, by a concerned resident who saw her dosimeter log and is worried about the EO operative more than she is about the faction politics.
- 4. A fabrication operator is working on something that reads as communications equipment. The components are post-war faction manufacture. The assembly is not standard.
- 5. Two community members are arguing in front of the council leader about whether to report an operator team's presence to Herald leadership. The council leader is listening and not intervening.
- 6. A medical practitioner is treating a patient whose exposure profile she describes, quietly, to an assistant, as 'not corridor accumulation — point source.'

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- 1. An operator team — not the players' team — is being processed out through a council contact at speed. They're moving like they completed something they needed to complete before the morning count.
- 2. A council member is sending a message through a channel operators haven't seen used before. The message appears to go to a Herald contact point, not an external network.
- 3. A black market supply of filter media for Grid 7-North is being staged in the Warrens — the unmarked transport from Grid 7-North. The Warrens are the relay point.
- 4. Farhan from the Shrine District is here. She is not a Warrens resident. She is delivering the rest of her notebook to someone.
- 5. A community member who was present at the Shrine District Gift ceremony three months ago is in the medical section. The practitioner's expression does not suggest the treatment is going well.
- 6. A council member knocks on the operators' shelter space and tells them, without elaboration, that they should be gone before the morning count and that she is giving them this information because she wants them to make that choice themselves.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. The corridor map being sold at the central stall has two segments that are now outside safe range. The trader knows this. She's selling it anyway

because the alternative is selling nothing, and she has updated the price to reflect what she is actually selling. [TRUE]

- 2. The council leader has a Herald contact she has maintained since year two of the IPFZ's existence. The contact is the Elder. The relationship is not known to any faction intelligence file. [TRUE]
- 3. Farhan's notebook is now in two parts. One part is with Dr. Vasquez at Grid 7-North. The other part is here, being copied. The copy is going somewhere outside the IPFZ. [TRUE]
- 4. A faction team completed an operation from the Warrens four weeks ago without the council's knowledge. The council found out. They have not yet reported it to Herald leadership. They are deciding what they want in exchange for continued silence. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 5. There is a council member willing to sell Herald leadership meeting schedule information. The council member exists. She is selling inaccurate schedules to identify which external parties are planning operations against the Shrine District. [TRAP]
- 6. The medical practitioner has logged four presentations in the past six months that she cannot explain with standard IPFZ exposure models. The presentations are consistent with Farhan's rejection data from the Gift tracking notebook. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

COUNCILOR MEERA — SURVIVOR COMMUNITY COUNCIL LEAD

CAN GET Community cooperation for operator support, corridor map introductions, the council's informal Herald contact channel, and the agreement terms that govern what the Warrens can and cannot support.

WANTS She wants to know what the faction team that used the Warrens four weeks ago actually did. She has not reported it to the Heralds yet. She is holding that card until she understands what it's worth.

FEARS Another suspension event. The previous one killed eleven people who couldn't manage the water deficit. She has not stopped thinking about those eleven people.

CURRENT PRESSURE Farhan is here. Meera knows what the notebook contains — she has read the relevant pages. She has been sitting with the knowledge that the dispersal project's 15% figure applied to a global population produces a number she cannot stop calculating.

KASIM — BLACK MARKET BROKER, CORRIDOR MAPS AND GUIDE INTRODUCTIONS

CAN GET Current map inventory (with honest assessment of which segments are degraded), guide introductions for operators with legitimate objectives, dosimetry equipment including one unit sensitive enough to read the fine gradient.

WANTS He wants the fine-gradient dosimeter that Sergeant Brecht is carrying. It is better equipment than anything available in the Warrens. He does not know she is EO intelligence.

FEARS Selling a map that gets someone killed in a way that traces back to him.

CURRENT PRESSURE He has sold two maps this week with the degraded segment disclosure. Both buyers accepted the risk. He does not know if they have reached their destinations.

DR. SANA RAZA — WARRENS MEDICAL PRACTITIONER

CAN GET Medical treatment for IPFZ-specific radiation exposure, cumulative exposure assessment, and the four anomalous presentation cases she cannot explain — which she will share with anyone who can help her understand them.

WANTS She wants an outside medical opinion on the four anomalous cases. She does not have access to the research equipment that would clarify the presentation mechanism.

FEARS That the anomalous cases are early indicators of something the Warrens population is going to face at scale and that she is the only medical resource for four thousand people.

CURRENT PRESSURE One of the four anomalous patients died yesterday. She filed a cause of death as radiation complications. She does not believe that is accurate.

ZONE 6 THE STRONGHOLD — DISPERSAL PROJECT PRIMARY FACILITY

SECURITY	lockdown
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (rebuilt post-2062)
CIVILIANS	none (Herald operational personnel only)
SURVEILLANCE	none (conventional) / total (Herald)
FACTION PRESSURE	dominant Heralds exclusively
CONTAMINATION	present (controlled, variable)
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	barricaded

FUNCTION Herald operational center. The dispersal project primary facility. The place every faction believes they already neutralized.

CONTROLLER Herald operational command — separate from the Shrine District council structure, reporting to it but not managed by it.

DRAW The dispersal project itself — the thing the factions are calling a bioweapon. The Archive Ruins research data that the project is built on. The two remaining delivery mechanisms that Serpent's Bane did not neutralize.

RISK The Stronghold's outer perimeter is in a zone with variable contamination that the Heralds control actively — elevated exposure at the perimeter on their schedule, not a static condition. The Neon Ronin mission profile is documented inside the Stronghold — the Heralds know exactly how a professional infiltration team approaches this target. Herald operational personnel here are the most adaptation-advanced members of the community; their sensory profile makes conventional stealth approaches significantly harder.

SCARCITY

Access — the Stronghold has been successfully penetrated once in eighteen years, and that team lost Saito. Accurate intelligence — the current faction picture is built on an eighteen-month-old mission report that described a completed objective. Time — the Elder's statement that the dispersal timeline is closer than leadership is admitting is the most recent update any external party has.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The dispersal project is not a weapon in the sense any faction intelligence framework accounts for. It is a delivery mechanism for the adaptation genome — airborne, water-soluble, and with a projected exposure threshold sufficient to initiate the Gift process in the global population. The 15% rejection figure means a forced global administration produces approximately 600 million people experiencing accelerated cellular degradation. The Heralds' theology accounts for this. The Herald council is not unanimous on it.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A faction team neutralizes the dispersal project. The IPFZ loses its only working radiation-resistance genome program. The Heralds' theological and operational purpose collapses. The community fractures. Six hundred million deaths are prevented. The Heralds' adaptation knowledge — including applications for future nuclear events — is gone with the project. The next nuclear exchange produces only casualties.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Herald operational personnel — maintenance, research continuity, delivery mechanism development

ECONOMY

None. Operational facility only.

RISK

Perimeter contamination is elevated during daylight hours on the Heralds' operational schedule

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Same, with reduced non-essential personnel

ECONOMY

None.

RISK

Perimeter contamination drops during specific maintenance windows — the windows are not predictable from outside observation

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The reconstruction is visible from the approach corridor — the building materials are different in color from the surrounding ruins, newer than anything else in the zone. The Heralds rebuilt it on the same footprint. Either as a statement or because the footprint matters to what's inside.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

operational command, dispersal project personnel, delivery mechanism development, perimeter contamination management

CIVILIAN NEED

None. The Stronghold serves no civilian function. The need it represents is theological — the completion of what the Heralds believe the blast began.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Approach corridor only (the same vector Saito used). Perimeter observation during contamination drops. Interior access has been achieved once. The Heralds are prepared for the second attempt.

ENCOUNTERS — STRONGHOLD APPROACH (1D6)

- 1. The perimeter contamination reading has just elevated — an operator's dosimeter registers the shift. The Heralds use this as an active deterrent. The window that was open is now closed.
- 2. A Herald operational team is running an exterior inspection of the perimeter. Their approach vector and timing match the counter-infiltration protocol adapted from the Serpent's Bane mission analysis.
- 3. A single route into the Stronghold exterior is readable from the current approach position — the only section where the contamination topography creates a viable path. It is very narrow. It is the same approach vector Saito used.
- 4. A Herald operational team is exiting the Stronghold carrying equipment that reads as transport containers for biological material. They are moving toward the Shrine District.
- 5. A dosimeter at the approach registers a contamination pattern inconsistent with natural isotope distribution — it reads as controlled, as if something is managing the radiation topography from inside the perimeter.
- 6. The approach has been walked recently by multiple people. The ground pattern is fresh. Someone else is running an approach on the same timeline.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. Operation Serpent's Bane neutralized one of three delivery mechanisms. The mission was declared complete because the intelligence picture didn't know there were three. The Heralds allowed the team to succeed on the first mechanism because it bought them time to complete the other two. [TRUE]
- 2. The Elder provided the original Stronghold location to an EO contact in 2061. She believed a targeted strike would delay the project. It delayed one mechanism. It did not delay the project. [TRUE]
- 3. The dispersal project's primary mechanism is water-soluble, not airborne. The airborne mechanism is the one Serpent's Bane neutralized. The water-soluble mechanism is further advanced. Grid 7-North's input water variance that Dr. Vasquez recorded is a low-concentration preliminary test. [TRUE]

- 4. Commander Yuri 'Oni' Volkov was extracted after Serpent's Bane with an intelligence debrief that noted the target was more limited than the mission objective described. His debrief was classified. He retired from active operations in 2064. He has been receiving briefings on IPFZ status quarterly since then. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 5. There is a Herald operational defector willing to provide Stronghold interior layout in exchange for extraction. The defector is real. The layout information is eighteen months outdated and the Heralds know the defector made contact. [TRAP]
- 6. The rejection rate data Farhan compiled and the Stronghold's dispersal timeline are connected. The Herald council is not unanimous on proceeding at the current rejection rate. The faction that wants to delay has been outvoted twice. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

COMMANDER YURI 'ONI' VOLKOV — RETIRED NEON RONIN COMMANDER (CURRENTLY: PRIVATE RESIDENCE, LOCATION AVAILABLE THROUGH PRC CHANNELS)

CAN GET The complete unclassified Serpent's Bane mission debrief, his assessment of what was actually neutralized versus what the mission report said was neutralized, and Saito's final communications.

WANTS He wants someone to read his actual debrief — not the summary that went up the chain. He has been requesting that the quarterly briefings be acted on for two years.

FEARS That the people who have been receiving his quarterly briefings have been deciding, each quarter, that acting on them is not in their current interest.

CURRENT PRESSURE His most recent briefing included the Elder's name as the original Stronghold intelligence source. He has been sitting with that information for six weeks. Saito was his lieutenant.

HERALD OPERATIONAL LEAD (NO NAME AVAILABLE) — STRONGHOLD FACILITY COMMANDER

CAN GET Nothing, directly. Indirectly: through the Elder, through the Shrine District council, through the community councils. Not through the Stronghold.

WANTS	Unknown.
FEARS	Unknown.
CURRENT PRESSURE	Three delivery mechanism transport movements have occurred between the Stronghold and locations outside the IPFZ in the past six months. The destinations are not in any faction intelligence assessment.

ZONE 7 THE ARCHIVE RUINS

FORMER RESEARCH DISTRICT

SECURITY	light (Herald patrol) / environmental
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed (variable by structure)
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	none
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (Heralds have extracted most value / external parties want the remainder)
CONTAMINATION	present (variable, structure-dependent)
BLACK MARKET	light (pre-war research materials at extreme value)
MOBILITY	open (survivably) / structurally hazardous

FUNCTION	Pre-war research data repository. Source material for the Herald dispersal project. Partially stripped, partially intact.
CONTROLLER	No one maintains it. Herald patrols move through it. External operators stage from it. The ruins are contested space in the way that means both parties have access and neither has control.
DRAW	Pre-war radiation medicine and genetic adaptation research — what remains after the Heralds' extraction. The classified program documentation the Heralds partially missed. Evidence of what the Heralds extracted, which reconstructs what they're building from the negative space.

RISK	Structural integrity is unreliable — the blast effects left buildings standing that shouldn't be standing and collapsed buildings that looked solid. Herald patrols use the Archive Ruins as a read of external faction intelligence interest — what areas teams focus on tells them what external parties think the project is based on. The classified program files that weren't extracted are either genuinely missed or left as bait.
SCARCITY	Intact data storage — most pre-war electronic media in the IPFZ is degraded; physical documents survive where electronic data doesn't. Structural safety assessment — no faction has current data on which buildings are safe to enter. The classified program documentation — even partial files have been removed from the most accessible areas.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Archive Ruins have been visited by eleven external teams in the past five years. Seven of them found something. The Heralds know what each team found, because Herald patrols track where teams work. The Heralds do not extract what the teams find — they observe what the teams believe is important and use that to calibrate their own assessment of how well the dispersal project's true nature is concealed.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A team finds the partial classified program documentation and correctly reconstructs the dispersal project's nature from it. The Herald observation approach — let them take it, watch what they do with it — stops being viable. The Heralds move to active containment. Every subsequent external operation in the IPFZ runs against a more aggressive posture.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Herald patrol rotation — two passes per day, timing known to Warrens guides

ECONOMY

Pre-war research material salvage, classified document extraction

RISK

Herald patrol observation of search patterns revealing operational intelligence interest

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

None — or Herald operational teams arriving from non-standard routes

ECONOMY

Faction extraction operations under cover of darkness

RISK

Multiple teams working the same building simultaneously without awareness of each other

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The university library building is still standing because the blast wave that hit this district came from an angle that the building's orientation deflected rather than absorbed. The building next to it, identical construction, is a four-meter debris field. The library's interior is intact on the bottom two floors. The Heralds have been through the stacks. The negative space where they worked is as readable as what they left.

FACTIONS PRESENT

HERALDS OF THE STORM

patrol rotation, observation of external team activity, sealed room access control

NULL COLLECTIVE

7-Green, independent researcher cover, extracting pre-war AI genetic engineering documentation

CIVILIAN NEED

None. The Archive Ruins serve no civilian function. The knowledge they contain serves everyone — the question is who gets it and what they do with it.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Corridor Network approach (two Herald patrol passes per day), structural assessment required, fine-gradient dosimetry for variable contamination, Herald patrol timing from Warrens guides.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- 1. A Herald patrol passes through the building operators are working in. They don't stop. They note which section operators are searching. One of them updates something on a small device.
- 2. A section of floor that read as stable collapses into a basement level. The basement is accessible. The Herald map doesn't show this basement. Neither does any external map.
- 3. A physical document cache is intact — the Heralds extracted the electronic storage media and left the physical documents. The physical documents are in a language three of the four operators can't read.
- 4. Evidence of recent extraction work — areas where data storage has been removed but surrounding materials left. The extraction is older than six months. Something was missed in the same room.
- 5. Another external operator team is working in the same building. They haven't identified the players' team yet. Both teams are looking for the same thing by different approaches.
- 6. A sealed room — external locks, post-war installation — in a building the Heralds patrol regularly. The locks are Herald-installed. The room was not locked in any pre-war floor plan.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- 1. No Herald patrol. This is unusual. Either the patrols have been redirected for a reason, or the Heralds are watching the approach rather than the interior.

- 2. The collapsed floor from earlier has been marked with Herald contamination indicators — fresh, placed after the collapse. The Heralds were here after the operators left.
- 3. A sound from the sealed room — not structural settling, something with periodicity. It has been going for as long as the operators have been in the building.
- 4. An operator from the second team, moving alone, approaches and asks to coordinate. Her team is down by one. She doesn't explain how.
- 5. A Herald operational team — not patrol, operational — enters the Archive Ruins from a route that doesn't connect to the standard corridor network. They go directly to the sealed room.
- 6. The negative space of the Herald extraction in the library stacks, examined with sufficient time and the right reference materials, reconstructs the classified program outline. It describes a forced-adaptation delivery mechanism. The delivery vector is water-soluble. The Archive Ruins are where the Heralds found it. The Heralds left this for someone to find.

RUMORS (1D6)

- 1. Seven of eleven external teams that worked the Archive Ruins in the past five years found something. The Heralds tracked what each team found. Two findings made the Heralds change their patrol pattern in ways an attentive analyst could use to identify which sections still contain sensitive material. [TRUE]
- 2. The sealed room was installed by the Heralds two years ago. What it contains is not pre-war research material. It is Herald-generated documentation that the Heralds want to be found by the right party. [TRUE]
- 3. Physical documents in the library stacks describe a pre-war classified program that predates the 2042 exchange. The program description is accurate. The documents' account of the program's completion status is not. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. The classified program documentation that was partially extracted leaves a reconstructable record if approached from the correct angle. This is true. The reconstruction it produces is designed by the Heralds to support the 'airborne mass-casualty weapon' interpretation the factions already believe. [TRAP]
- 5. The second external operator team working the ruins is from the Null Collective. They are not looking for the dispersal project. They are looking for the pre-war AI-assisted genetic engineering documentation that preceded the adaptation research. [TRUE]

- 6. The Herald who leads the Archive Ruins patrol rotation is the Herald who constructed the sealed room's contents. She knows which external team is getting close to a correct reading of the dispersal project's nature. She has a decision to make about what to do when they find it. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

THE PATROL LEAD — HERALD ARCHIVE RUINS PATROL ROTATION COMMANDER

CAN GET Nothing directly. What she is willing to allow: operators to work the archive without intervention if they are working toward a specific finding she wants them to reach.

WANTS She wants a specific external party to correctly understand what the dispersal project actually is and what its 15% figure means globally — before the Herald council votes the third time on the timeline.

FEARS The Elder. If the Elder knew the patrol lead was facilitating this, the patrol lead's position in the community would end.

CURRENT PRESSURE The sealed room's contents are ready. She has been waiting for a team capable of using what's inside correctly. She has assessed three teams in the past eight months. None of them were right. She is assessing this one.

NULL COLLECTIVE OPERATIVE (DESIGNATION: 7-GREEN) — NULL COLLECTIVE FIELD AGENT

CAN GET The pre-war AI-assisted genetic engineering documentation if found, Null Collective's assessment of what the dispersal project's genome work means for post-human development, and an offer of cooperation that operators should evaluate carefully.

WANTS The pre-war AI documentation. The Null Collective believes it contains the original architecture for AI-assisted gene editing that predates every faction's current program by a decade.

FEARS Being identified as Null Collective before she has completed her extraction. Her cover is independent researcher.

CURRENT PRESSURE She has found a partial file. It confirms what the Null Collective suspected. She needs three more hours in the archive to complete the extraction. The Herald patrol rotation comes back in two.

THE MISSING TEAM MEMBER — UNIDENTIFIED, SECOND EXTERNAL TEAM

CAN GET Whatever the second team found before they lost one of their own — which she won't disclose — and her team's current operational picture including their exit plan.

WANTS She wants to get out. Her team's guide was the Herald patrol lead's deliberate recommendation. She doesn't know what that means.

FEARS That what her team found in the archive before they lost their fourth member is something she is now carrying and that several different parties want.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her fourth member is not dead. He is in the sealed room. The Herald patrol lead put him there with his agreement. He agreed because what the patrol lead told him about the dispersal project was enough to make him change sides.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

HERALDS' CODE — AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

- Corridor mapping for outside parties — penalty: the mapper becomes the evidence, not the map.
- Entry to the Shrine District without Herald escort — treated as desecration, response is immediate and collective.
- Interference with Grid 7-North operations — the water station serves 12,000 people; the Heralds treat attacks on it as existential and respond accordingly.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

- Outsider designation — technically any non-IPFZ-born person; applied selectively against faction operatives while allowing some trader and survivor-community access.

- Gift refusal — the Heralds do not formally compel adaptation, but communities that refuse Herald outreach find their corridor access quietly restricted.
- Relic removal — pre-war materials and research data technically belong to the zone; enforcement concentrates on anything the Archive Ruins contain that might clarify what the Heralds are building.

FEARED CONSEQUENCES

- Being left in a hot pocket without a guide — not an execution, a navigation decision.
- Losing corridor access — for survivor communities, this means losing the water route to Grid 7-North.
- Herald attention — not because of what they'll do, but because it means they've decided you're relevant to whatever they're building.

CIVIC RITUALS

- The Morning Count — Heralds account for all community members at dawn. Outsiders who are still present at the count are either guests or problems, and the distinction is made then.
- The Remembrance — annual observance at the blast epicenter. No outsider has ever attended and returned with a description anyone believed.
- Dosimeter Ceremony — new community members calibrate their personal dosimeters publicly as a threshold rite. The number they register is their introduction.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime in the Survivor Warrens market, at Grid 7-North during distribution hours, or along corridor junctions during shift changes. Every result produces a new contact, a new debt, or a new exposure.

1 (Contact Made): A Herald guide at the Warrens hire point shares a route assessment that is more candid than any map. She mentions a corridor junction where the filter-fish have returned after a two-month absence. She doesn't explain why this matters. She expects operators to figure it out.

2 (Feud Started): Operator asks the wrong question about the Morning Count within earshot of a Herald community liaison. Nothing happens immediately. Next corridor hire request enters 'consideration review.' Review has no stated timeline.

3 (Equipment Lost): Operator's secondary dosimeter is lifted at some point during market activity. It holds 72 hours of exposure gradient data. Whoever has it knows which corridors the operator has been traveling, including ones not on any commercial map.

4 (Secret Learned): A survivor community medical practitioner corners operator near a distribution queue. She has exposure data from a patient whose profile doesn't match any known IPFZ contamination model. She wants an outside medical opinion. She will trade the data for access to faction-grade diagnostic equipment.

5 (Debt Incurred): A Warrens council member offers to delay a Herald contact report — the one that flags the operator's presence — in exchange for one favor, undefined and redeemable within 30 days. The council member presents this as courtesy. It is not courtesy.

6 (Locally Recognizable): Operator does something — shares dosimeter data, covers a medical tab, handles a corridor dispute without escalation — that travels. By next morning, operator is the person survivor community members mention when deciding whether to trust someone new. The Herald patrol lead has added a note to her observation file.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

The Heralds' external chemical supply contact has not been identified by any faction. Who they are, what faction or entity they represent, and what they want in exchange for keeping Grid 7-North functional is undefined. Determine the contact's identity and terms when operators trace the supply channel.

The three delivery mechanism transport movements from the Stronghold to locations outside the IPFZ have unknown destinations. Whether these movements represent dispersal project staging, diplomatic gestures, or something the Herald council did not authorize is undefined. Determine the destinations and purpose at first confirmed tracking.

The Herald council's internal vote structure — who holds which position, how many members constitute the council, and what the actual threshold for

timeline acceleration is — is known only through the Elder's statements and inference. Determine the council structure when operators gain sufficient access to the Shrine District inner ring.

The fourth member of the missing team is in the sealed room. What the patrol lead told him, what he read inside, and what he has decided to do about it are undefined. His conversion from external operator to Herald-aligned agent is the result of information, not coercion. What that information is determines what the sealed room means. Determine at first contact.

Commander Volkov's confirmed identity for the Elder as the original Stronghold intelligence source has not been shared with any command structure. Whether he acts on it, and what acting on it means for the Elder's position and the diplomatic channel she has been running, is undefined. Determine at first Volkov contact.

The Null Collective's intended use for the pre-war AI genetic engineering documentation is unknown to every faction in the IPFZ. Whether it represents a post-human development initiative, a competing adaptation program, or something no current intelligence framework has a category for is undefined. Determine when operators ask 7-Green directly — she will answer honestly.

FACTIONS

HERALDS OF THE STORM

Primary Territorial Force & Covenant Community

OBJECTIVE Complete the dispersal project and administer the Gift globally before any external faction acts on correct intelligence about what the project actually is. The council is not unanimous. The timeline is being pressured internally by the 15% figure and externally by increasing faction intelligence activity.

ASSETS Complete corridor network control, hot pocket navigation capability that no external force can match, twelve thousand-person community that functions as both population and intelligence network, Grid 7-North as a water leverage point, the Stronghold's two remaining delivery mechanisms, and the Elder's eighteen years of managed external contact.

DEPENDENCY Internal theological consensus. The dispersal project requires council unanimity that it does not currently have. A second dissent vote delays the timeline by at least six months.

VULNERABILITY The 15% rejection figure — if it reaches external channels in a form that cannot be dismissed as faction propaganda, the diplomatic case the Elder has been building collapses. Also: the Elder herself. She is the Heralds' most sophisticated external interface and she voted against the current timeline.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Corridor access restriction for identified faction operatives.
- 2 — Guided misinformation — let specific teams find specific wrong conclusions.
- 3 — Extraction of external operatives from the IPFZ by force.
- 4 — Timeline acceleration — dispersal before the opposition is ready.

OFFER Corridor access, guide services, Grid 7-North access for humanitarian purposes, and — through the Elder — the possibility of a conversation about what the dispersal project actually is and whether there is a version of it that doesn't produce 600 million casualties.

DEMAND That external parties act on correct information rather than the intelligence briefing they arrived with. That any action against the Stronghold be weighed against what the dispersal project would mean for a world facing the next nuclear exchange.

IF DAMAGED Destroying the dispersal project ends the immediate 600-million-casualty scenario. It also ends the only working radiation-resistance genome program on Earth. The Heralds' community fractures between those who accept this outcome theologically and those who do not. The patrol lead and the Elder are on different sides of that fracture.

MULTI-FACTION INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS (NAF / EO / PRC)

External Intelligence & Neutralization Operations

OBJECTIVE Neutralize the bioweapon at the Stronghold — same objective, three separate operations, none of which know about the others' current activity in the IPFZ.

ASSETS Field teams: Dr. Vasquez (NAF), Sergeant Brecht (EO), and an unacknowledged PRC team in the Warrens for three weeks. External command structures with significant resources. The collective intelligence picture that, taken together, is closer to the truth than any individual faction's assessment.

DEPENDENCY Accurate intelligence — which none of them have. All three operations are built on the same wrong assumption about the bioweapon's nature.

VULNERABILITY If any of the three teams correctly identifies the dispersal project's nature, their command structures are not designed to process the information quickly. Field-level correct assessment versus command-level wrong assumption creates a decision paralysis that the Herald timeline will outrun.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Intelligence collection (current state for all three).
- 2 — Confirmation operation against the Stronghold.
- 3 — Neutralization strike.
- 4 — Coordinated multi-faction action — the last time this happened was the Dynamic Competition attack response, and that required a catastrophic trigger.

OFFER	Extraction, faction resources, and the institutional weight to act on correct intelligence if it reaches the right level before the timeline closes.
DEMAND	Confirmation of the bioweapon's nature and location — which three separate operations are all trying to generate simultaneously without knowing about each other.
IF DAMAGED	Individual team losses create intelligence gaps that the remaining operations cannot fill. Brecht's exposure situation is already threatening the most current field asset. A third-team loss leaves the factions operating on pre-Serpent's Bane assumptions with no current field correction.

SURVIVOR COMMUNITIES

Independent Civilian Population & Informal Economy

OBJECTIVE	Maintain Grid 7-North access, stay out of the Herald-faction conflict, and survive the next decision the Herald council makes regardless of what it is.
ASSETS	The IPFZ's institutional memory, a black market infrastructure that serves both Herald and external-operator needs, medical knowledge specific to IPFZ conditions, and Councilor Meera's eighteen-year relationship with the Elder.
DEPENDENCY	Herald corridor access. Any suspension event is a mortality event at current population density and Grid 7-North dependence.
VULNERABILITY	Being caught between a faction neutralization operation and the Herald response to it. The Warrens have survived eighteen years by not being a target. That status is conditional on the conflict staying at its current intensity.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Neutrality enforcement — remove faction operational presence before Heralds identify it.
- 2 — Meera's Herald contact — surface the threat to the Elder as a diplomatic rather than military communication.
- 3 — Community dispersal preparation — identify corridor routes to IPFZ exit if the conflict escalates beyond containment.
- 4 — Exit — the community councils have exit plans. They have not used them. They update them every year.

OFFER Operator support, intelligence about Herald movements and community dynamics, and the one diplomatic channel to Herald leadership that doesn't require a faction badge.

DEMAND That operators do not use the Warrens as a staging point. That whatever happens at the Stronghold or the Shrine District, it happens in a way that leaves Grid 7-North functional and the corridor network operational.

IF DAMAGED Community fracture between those who believe accommodating the factions is survivable and those who believe the Heralds' response will not distinguish between participants and bystanders.

NULL COLLECTIVE

Independent Intelligence & Post-Human Research

OBJECTIVE Acquire the pre-war AI-assisted genetic engineering documentation from the Archive Ruins. What the Null Collective does with it is not a question any current faction intelligence file has answered.

ASSETS 7-Green in the Archive Ruins, technical capability for AI-assisted genetic engineering that exceeds any faction program, and a willingness to work with any party whose objectives don't conflict with the document extraction.

DEPENDENCY Completing the extraction before the Herald patrol lead decides the Null Collective's presence is incompatible with her own objectives.

VULNERABILITY The patrol lead knows 7-Green is here. She has not acted on it. The reason she hasn't is the question.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Quiet extraction — complete and depart before any party identifies the Collective's interest.
- 2 — Cooperation offer — work with operators whose objectives create mutual cover.
- 3 — Active extraction under pressure.
- 4 — Null Collective has a specific use for the documentation that none of the above matters next to.

OFFER Technical analysis of the pre-war genetic engineering data if found, cooperation for the duration of the Archive Ruins operation, and an

honest answer about what the Null Collective intends to do with what they find if operators ask directly.

DEMAND The three hours to complete the extraction. Whatever operators do with the Herald situation is their business.

IF DAMAGED The documentation exists in the archive whether or not 7-Green extracts it. The next Null Collective team arrives within three months. They will not make the same approach a second time.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

THE ELDER — HERALD SENIOR COUNCIL MEMBER (ACCESSIBLE THROUGH AMIR AT SHRINE DISTRICT OUTER PERIMETER)

CAN GET The truth about the dispersal project — what it is, what the 15% figure means, what the Herald council's actual vote status is, and what she has been trying to accomplish through the diplomatic channel she has been running for three years.

WANTS She wants one external party to understand the complete picture and act on it in a way that produces an outcome other than mass casualties — either from the dispersal or from the neutralization.

FEARS That the council votes for timeline acceleration before she reaches someone capable of acting on the information she has been trying to surface.

CURRENT PRESSURE She sent the fourth team member to the sealed room. He is inside it now, reading what she prepared. She does not know if he is the right person. She is running out of time to find a better one.

COMMANDER YURI 'ONI' VOLKOV — RETIRED NEON RONIN (LOCATION: ACCESSIBLE THROUGH PRC CHANNELS)

CAN GET The real Serpent's Bane debrief, his assessment that the mission completed a partial objective, and his quarterly briefing record showing two years of unacted-on IPFZ intelligence.

WANTS He wants someone to act on what he has been filing. He is past asking permission.

FEARS That Saito's death bought eighteen months, not a solution, and that he knew this at the time and filed it and watched it get classified.

CURRENT PRESSURE He has been trying to identify who in the Elder's contact history matches his operational read of who fed the original Stronghold location. He has a name. He has not confirmed it. He is four weeks from confirmation.

DOWNTIME

1. WORK THE WARRENS BLACK MARKET

WHAT: Spend time moving through the Survivor Warrens market, buying, selling, and building community trust.

COST: Two days and 400 credits, or one piece of information about external faction activity in the IPFZ.

GAIN: One current-accuracy corridor map segment, one dosimeter calibration service, and one roll on the Survivor Warrens rumor table.

FALLOUT: The Herald patrol lead's network now has the operator profiled as an active buyer. Herald patrol attention in the Corridor Network increases by one tier for 30 days.

2. HERALD GUIDE RELATIONSHIP

WHAT: Spend time working alongside a Herald guide on legitimate corridor maintenance or community transport runs, building trust through demonstrated non-hostile presence.

COST: Three days, no weapons displayed during the period, and two corridor runs with no operational objective.

GAIN: The guide's personal assessment of current Herald internal tension — one piece of intelligence about the council's vote status — and priority access to guide hire for the next 60 days.

FALLOUT: The guide reports the relationship to her patrol supervisors. Herald command now has the operator flagged as someone who has spent enough time in the community to notice things. Surveillance on the operator's movements increases.

3. ARCHIVE SURVEY

WHAT: Systematic work through a specific Archive Ruins section with appropriate dosimetry and structural assessment.

COST: Two days, fine-gradient dosimetry equipment, and structural assessment capability.

GAIN: One piece of pre-war research data relevant to the dispersal project — either confirming or contradicting the faction intelligence briefing — and a structural map of the surveyed section accurate enough to use for navigation.

FALLOUT: The Herald patrol lead's observation notes now include what section the operator worked. She cross-references this against what remains in that section. She adjusts her assessment of what the operator team is actually looking for.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLE 1 — SURVIVOR COMMUNITY AND CORRIDOR SOURCES (1D6)

- 1. The corridor maps circulating in the Warrens have at least two degraded segments. The people selling them know. Some of the people buying them know. The gap between knowing and having better information is the market. [TRUE]
- 2. The Herald council has voted twice on the dispersal timeline. Both votes have produced a majority for acceleration. The minority position is held by the Elder and two others. A third vote is pending. [TRUE]
- 3. Grid 7-North's purification chemical stock has four months of capacity. The Heralds have a supply contact. The supply contact's most recent communication indicated a delay. The delay timeline is two months. The math is the problem. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. Sergeant Brecht's dosimeter log has been copied and is circulating in the Warrens as evidence that external faction operators have been taking unacceptable cumulative exposure. The log is real. It is being circulated by the Herald patrol lead to pressure Brecht's extraction before her intelligence work is complete. [TRAP]
- 5. The Null Collective is in the Archive Ruins. The community councils know. They have not reported it to the Heralds because the Null Collective's presence is not a Herald problem — yet. [TRUE]
- 6. Farhan's notebook is now in three places: one page with Dr. Vasquez, a copy in the Warrens, and the original with Farhan. The Warrens copy has been read by Councilor Meera and Dr. Raza. Both of them have done the math on the global 15% figure. [TRUE]

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLE 2 — TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL SOURCES (1D6)

- 1. Operation Serpent's Bane neutralized one of three delivery mechanisms. The Heralds allowed the team to succeed on mechanism one because completing it reset the faction intelligence picture to zero and bought the project eighteen months. [TRUE]
- 2. The water-soluble delivery mechanism is further advanced than the airborne one. Grid 7-North's input water variance that Dr. Vasquez recorded is a low-concentration field test. The test produced the results the Heralds were looking for. [TRUE]
- 3. The sealed room in the Archive Ruins contains material the Herald patrol lead installed deliberately for a specific external party to find. The material correctly

describes the dispersal project's nature. The patrol lead has been waiting eight months for the right team. [TRUE]

- 4. Commander Volkov has a confirmed identity for the Heralds' original Stronghold intelligence source. The identity is confirmed. The conclusion Volkov has drawn from it — that the source acted independently rather than on council authority — is not yet confirmed. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 5. The Null Collective's interest in the Archive Ruins predates the current dispersal project by three years. They identified the pre-war AI genetic engineering documentation from external signals before any faction team entered the ruins. They have been waiting for an operational window ever since. [TRUE]
- 6. Dr. Raza's anomalous patient died from rejection syndrome. The presentation is clinically identical to what would be seen in a global population experiencing forced Gift administration at 15% rejection rate. The cause of exposure is the Grid 7-North input water. The concentration is trace-level. It is enough. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1 | THE COUNCIL VOTE

Tracks the Herald council's movement toward dispersal timeline confirmation.

Stage 1 — Contested: Two votes, both majority-for-acceleration, both short of full council consensus. The Elder's diplomatic channel is active. The patrol lead's Archive Ruins facilitation is active. External operators can act without triggering a timeline response.

Stage 2 — Pressured: A faction action in the IPFZ — neutralization attempt, significant intelligence extraction, or confirmed correct understanding of the dispersal project's nature by an external party — triggers the third vote. Majority accelerates the timeline. The Elder's diplomatic channel closes.

Stage 3 — Timeline Set: The Herald council has voted for dispersal on a specific schedule. The Stronghold operational pace increases. Grid 7-North input tests intensify. The Heralds begin managing their external relationships toward the post-dispersal world.

Stage 4 — Dispersal Active: Delivery mechanism deployment begins. The water-soluble mechanism enters the Grid 7-North system. The airborne mechanism is staged for population-center release. Twelve to sixteen weeks before global exposure is sufficient for adaptation initiation — or rejection, depending on the 15%.

TRACK 2 | THE INTELLIGENCE CORRECTION

Tracks external understanding of what the dispersal project actually is.

Stage 1 — False Picture: Current state. All active faction operations are built on the mass-casualty-weapon assumption. The Elder has been trying to correct this for three years. The sealed room has been ready for eight months. Dr. Raza's anomalous patient is dead and the cause is in her notes.

Stage 2 — Partial Correction: At least one field-level operator has correct understanding of the dispersal project. Command structures have not been updated. The Elder's channel is open. The window between field-correct and command-correct is the operational space where something can be done.

Stage 3 — Command Correction: A faction command structure receives and processes correct intelligence. Neutralization objectives are suspended pending reassessment. The 15% figure is now a policy problem rather than a field problem. The dispersal project is no longer simply a target — it is a negotiation.

Stage 4 — Public Disclosure: The correct understanding of the dispersal project reaches a channel that cannot be classified. The Herald council's theological framework is now a global policy debate. The 15% figure is public. The world is deciding whether the Heralds' gift is a gift or a crime while the delivery mechanism is already in the water.

OPERATIONS MAP

CHOKEPOINTS

- Grid 7-North access: all twelve thousand non-Herald IPFZ residents depend on this facility. Threatening it triggers unified Herald and survivor-community response.
- Corridor network entry: the only viable way into the IPFZ for external operators. All entry routes pass through Herald-observable territory. There is no unobserved approach.
- Shrine District outer perimeter: the only point where Herald leadership is accessible. A single Herald contact relationship (Amir / the Elder) is the entire diplomatic channel.
- Archive Ruins sealed room: one entry point, Herald-installed locks. The Heralds control access. The question is whether they want to.

DARK ZONES

- Hot pocket interiors: no surveillance because no faction can operate there. The Heralds can. This asymmetry is the IPFZ's defining tactical feature.
- Stronghold perimeter during contamination elevation: elevated radiation is the Heralds' active countermeasure. During elevated periods, electronic surveillance is degraded and Herald-adapted guards are the only functional sensor.
- Archive Ruins basement levels: not mapped by any external party. Not fully mapped by the Heralds — the collapse that exposed the basement opened a space that did not exist in the pre-war floor plans.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- Heralds: Corridor Network, Shrine District, Stronghold. Active patrol in Archive Ruins and hot pocket margins.
- Survivor Communities: Warrens only. Dependent on Herald corridor tolerance for any external movement.
- External Faction Operations: Vasquez at Grid 7-North (NAF), Brecht in Corridor Network (EO), Null Collective in Archive Ruins. No faction has fixed territory. All three are in contested space.
- Null Collective: Archive Ruins for the duration of 7-Green's extraction window.

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- The Water Run: Warrens to Grid 7-North, daily survivor community traffic. Most stable corridor in the network. Best cover for operator movement.
- The Archive Approach: Corridor Network to Archive Ruins. Two Herald patrol passes per day. Timing is known to Warrens guides.
- The Stronghold Corridor: The approach Saito used. The only viable path to the Stronghold exterior that doesn't pass through hot pocket lethal zones. The Heralds know this is the only viable path.
- The Elder's Route: Shrine District to Archive Ruins, used by the Herald patrol lead on her weekly topography run. Not a navigable operator route — it crosses hot pocket margins that require Herald-adapted physiology. But it is the fastest communication channel between the two contacts who want the same outcome.

MISSION SEEDS

1. CORRECT THE BRIEF

OBJECTIVE: Reach the sealed room in the Archive Ruins and retrieve the patrol lead's documentation before the Null Collective's extraction creates a conflict that collapses the Heralds' tolerance for external presence.

CLOCK: 7-Green needs two more hours in the same building. The Herald patrol rotation returns in one hour forty. The patrol lead knows both timelines and has not resolved them.

COMPLICATION: The fourth missing team member is inside the sealed room. He has been there for six hours. He has read what's inside. He is not the same person who went in.

2. THE CHEMICAL SUPPLY

OBJECTIVE: Identify the Heralds' Grid 7-North chemical supply contact and determine whether the delay Reza is managing is a logistics problem or the contact withdrawing.

CLOCK: Four months of chemical capacity at current consumption. Two months before the delay becomes a crisis. Reza has not told Herald command. His window to manage this himself closes when the next inventory cycle runs.

COMPLICATION: The supply contact is not from any recognized faction. Tracing them requires going through channels that either the Heralds or the survivor communities will notice — and both will want to know why operators are looking.

3. EXTRACT BRECHT

OBJECTIVE: Locate Sergeant Brecht and extract her with her intelligence file before her cumulative exposure reaches the threshold where extraction becomes a medical operation rather than a tactical one.

CLOCK: Her dosimeter log already shows overdue extraction. The EO handler who stopped responding at week eight is now confirmed compromised — the EO is running a parallel operation that considers Brecht's file expendable.

COMPLICATION: Brecht's intelligence file contains a conclusion that correctly identifies the dispersal project's water-soluble delivery mechanism. The EO operation that made her expendable is trying to prevent that conclusion from reaching EO command.

4. REACH THE ELDER

OBJECTIVE: Make contact with the Elder through the Amir channel before the third council vote and surface the 15% figure through a channel that can act on it before the dispersal timeline locks.

CLOCK: The Elder has told operators the timeline is closer than leadership admits. 'Closer' has a specific number attached to it that she will only give in a direct meeting.

COMPLICATION: Amir was tasked to facilitate the contact. He does not know that the Elder's reason for wanting contact is the dispersal vote — she told him this was a community liaison meeting. When operators tell him what they're actually discussing, he has to decide whether he stays or withdraws, and his decision determines whether the meeting happens at all.

5. THE THIRD MECHANISM

OBJECTIVE: Confirm whether a third delivery mechanism exists beyond the two that Serpent's Bane left intact — the airborne mechanism (neutralized) and the water-soluble mechanism (advanced). The Heralds' transport movements suggest a third delivery vector that no faction intelligence file accounts for.

CLOCK: The transport movements indicate the third mechanism is being staged at a location outside the IPFZ. Once it leaves the territory, tracking it requires resources and time the dispersal timeline does not allow.

COMPLICATION: Confirming the third mechanism requires access to Stronghold logistics records — which means Stronghold access, which means the same approach corridor Saito used, with the same counter-infiltration profile the Heralds have had ready since 2062.

6. VOTE THREE

OBJECTIVE: Prevent the third Herald council vote from producing a timeline-acceleration majority — either by surfacing the 15% figure in a way that changes the internal calculus or by identifying and reaching the two council members who have voted with the Elder.

CLOCK: The vote is pending. The trigger that sets its date is an external faction action in the IPFZ — which every active operator team is one mistake away from producing.

COMPLICATION: One of the two council members who has been voting with the Elder is the operational lead at the Stronghold. If operators make contact with her to surface the 15% argument, they expose that they understand what the dispersal project actually is — which is exactly the external-party intelligence confirmation that triggers the vote.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every outcome in the IPFZ creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF OPERATORS NEUTRALIZE THE DISPERSAL PROJECT

The immediate mass-casualty scenario is prevented. The only working radiation-resistance genome program on Earth is gone. The Herald community fractures — the Elder and the patrol lead's faction accept the outcome because they understood what was at stake; the Herald operational command's faction does not accept it. The IPFZ becomes a conventional power vacuum for the first time since 2042. The Survivor Warrens councils activate their exit plans. The corridor network still functions for the period before the Herald fracture produces violence. Grid 7-North runs on its four-month chemical stock. In fourteen months, the next nuclear exchange — wherever it occurs — produces only casualties. Operators who understand this will have understood it before they made the decision. Operators who don't understand it will understand it approximately fourteen months later.

IF OPERATORS FACILITATE THE ELDER'S NEGOTIATION

The dispersal project enters a pause while the 15% figure is formally surfaced to an external party capable of acting on it. The Herald council's third vote is delayed. The window for a different outcome — a voluntary global administration program with rejection screening, or a controlled release to populations facing specific radiation exposure risk — opens. The window is not large. The factions that have been trying to neutralize the bioweapon now have to explain to their command structures that the objective was wrong. The Null Collective, who have the pre-war AI genetic engineering documentation, have an opinion about what to do with the adaptation genome that nobody has asked them yet.

IF THE DISPERSAL PROJECT ACTIVATES

The water-soluble mechanism enters Grid 7-North's supply chain. The first population centers see unexplained immune responses within two weeks — 85% present with mild adaptation symptoms; 15% present with Dr. Raza's anomalous case profile. By week four, the clinical picture is undeniable. By week eight, every major population center on the planet is processing the same data. The Heralds' theology is now a global news cycle. The 15% figure is the story. The

factions respond according to their interests. The Survivor Warrens' exit plans activate not because of the Herald fracture but because the IPFZ is now the most important territory on Earth and every faction wants it. Councilor Meera was right that the community councils update their exit plans every year. This is the year they use them.

IF OPERATORS EXPOSE THE INTELLIGENCE CORRECTION WITHOUT ACTING ON IT

The correct understanding of the dispersal project reaches the public or a faction command structure without an accompanying operational outcome. Every faction reassesses the IPFZ on a timeline the Herald council's pending vote does not accommodate. The Elder's diplomatic channel, which has been operating at the margins of the faction system for three years, suddenly has institutional backing — and institutional backing comes with institutional requirements. The Herald council reads the external response as confirmation that correct understanding produces the same result as incorrect understanding: everyone wants to control the project. The third vote produces a unanimous result for the first time. Timeline is set. Not because the operators failed — because they succeeded at the wrong thing.

FIELD NOTE

The corridors stay open. The morning count holds. The Heralds walk their patrols and the shrine keepers tend the markers and the survivor councils report stable numbers and nobody asks what the dispersal project actually produces when it works. That is the IPFZ. A place where the surface works because the truth hasn't surfaced yet.

When it does, nobody in this territory will have the option of not choosing a side.

– Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

12/

THE SHATTER BELT

CONTESTED TERRITORY | EARTH 2066

Fault-line geography. The territories fractured along every seam simultaneously. Forty-three polities that can't agree on water and need each other to survive.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

The Shatter Belt is what happens when two large factions push toward each other across a geography that was already fragmented before they arrived. The EO drives south from the Eurasian Steppes through the Caucasus corridor. The PCU drives north from the Gulf through the Mesopotamian river plain. Between them: the arc of territory running from Anatolia through Iran, Iraq, and the Central Asian stans — a region that was politically complex before the Upheaval, became catastrophically so during it, and has since become the contested space where two of the planet's largest faction structures test each other's reach without quite triggering the direct confrontation that neither can afford and both are preparing for.

Istanbul is the hinge. The city that has spent three thousand years being the place where empires meet has found a new version of that function in the post-Upheaval world — the Bosphorus Compact controls the strait, controls the Black Sea access, and charges both the EO and the PCU for passage while selling the neutrality of the crossing to every faction and independent actor in the hemisphere. The Compact is not large. It is not militarily significant. It has survived because being absorbed by either party costs more than tolerating it, and because the Compact holds an intelligence archive built on eleven years of reading faction communications through the Bosphorus seabed cables that makes the cost of absorbing it genuinely prohibitive. The Belt runs on information as much as force. Istanbul's survival depends on knowing things and choosing when not to share them.

The Tigris-Euphrates headwaters are in eastern Anatolia, in territory the Bosphorus Compact nominally controls but practically does not. Whoever controls those headwaters controls the water supply for Iraq, Syria, and the western Iranian plateau — roughly sixty million people and the PCU's primary northern agricultural zone. The EO knows this. The PCU knows this. The Sons of the Serpent insurgent network, which has operated in the Mesopotamian black zone for eleven years, was built in part around the understanding that controlling headwaters means controlling outcomes downstream without anyone being able to point to where the pressure originates. The Sons hold the Tigris Headwaters on gene-forged scorpion and sand viper stock — venom-adapted, territorial, constitutionally committed to the principle that the dam controls the region.

Istanbul is dense and layered and running four political systems simultaneously. The Bosphorus is visible from most operational zones — a constant reminder of what the city controls and why it is still standing. Snow Leopard gene-forged move through the city's elevated operational terrain with an efficiency that makes watching them uncomfortable: they were designed for exactly this environment and it shows. The Tigris Headwaters territory is dry, elevated, and silent in the way that places held by venom-adapted gene-forged tend to be silent — nothing moves that shouldn't, and the things that move don't announce it. The Mesopotamian Black Zone is the opposite of both: collapsed infrastructure, river communities surviving on twelve years of improvisation, and the Sons of the Serpent embedded so deeply in the civilian structure that removing them requires removing the structure itself.

Istanbul is where the Shatter Belt's scene lives. The Bosphorus Compact's survival architecture — knowing things about every faction and letting every faction know it knows — creates an environment where information is the aesthetic material and the scene expresses itself in layered reference and deliberate ambiguity. The dead credential aesthetic runs on faction-source material from every bloc simultaneously: EO administrative stamps, PCU Prophet's Seal marks, NAF operational clearance codes, Eastern Compact genomic registration notation. Collaged on the same jacket without irony, because this city has been wearing all of it for decades. RELAY HOUSE's wooden relay tokens are particularly dense in Istanbul because the city runs on brokered communication. GREY TABLE's physical boards in the Compact's market quarters carry more simultaneous contradictions than anywhere else on the network. Snow Leopard gene-forged carry a kit aesthetic that reflects the city they were built for: multi-layer, reference-dense, carrying the marks of every faction they have dealt with and none of their insignia. The Sons of the Serpent's venom-adapted gene-forged who move through the Belt's transit corridors carry a different aesthetic entirely: territorial, quiet, built for an environment where nothing moves that shouldn't and the things that move don't announce it.

Istanbul has four thousand years of practice surviving between empires. Its residents read the city by which quarter answers to which faction's informal pressure this week, which markets move when political weather shifts, which tea houses the Compact lets run because they generate useful signal. In Sons' territory, survival is organized around the dam — water allocation, agricultural cycles, the Sons' authority. In the Mesopotamian Black Zone, PCU oasis survival economy: shade as privilege, water as currency, the Doctrine as the framework

within which all decisions are made. What they all share: the specific competence of people who have been navigating between larger powers for longer than any of the current powers have existed.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

The Tigris-Euphrates river system sustained Mesopotamian civilization for eight thousand years. The Great Drought reduced flow to 23% of historical norms. The remaining flow is enough to sustain sixty million people at current extraction rates — if managed correctly, if the upstream infrastructure holds, if no faction manipulates the headwaters as a pressure tool. All three conditions are in constant violation. The system is failing in slow motion and every actor in the Shatter Belt is simultaneously dependent on it continuing to function and working to control the terms under which it eventually doesn't.

Istanbul's information economy is the second structural load. Every intelligence service on the planet runs assets through the crossing. The Bosphorus Compact's neutrality depends on its ability to provide deniable access to all of them simultaneously without any single party discovering what the Compact knows about the others. The Compact has maintained this balance for eighteen years. Eighteen years is a long time to keep a secret. Three separate intelligence services are currently running operations designed to determine the scope of the Compact's accumulated cable intelligence. If any of them succeeds, the Compact's deterrence becomes a known quantity. A known quantity can be costed. A costed deterrent can be overcome.

The dam fracture is the ticking mechanism under everything. The Compact's cable intercept is the decision — when and whether to release the PCU communication authorizing the dam fracture changes the headwaters crisis from a geological problem to a political one. The Sons' survival depends on controlling the dam. EO's expansion depends on the PCU being too occupied in the south to notice what's happening in the north. All three imperatives are on collision courses. The dam fracture is not progressing at a natural rate. Someone has been maintaining it — keeping it stable enough not to trigger catastrophic failure while continuing controlled deterioration. The maintenance has been ongoing for eight months.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

SECURITY	Contested (no single faction dominant) / Bosphorus Compact-neutral (Istanbul) / EO-pressured (Caucasus approach) / PCU-pressured (Mesopotamian approach)
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable in Istanbul / strained across Anatolia / failing in Mesopotamian black zone / collapsed in active Sons operational areas
CIVILIANS	Istanbul 18 million (managed density) / highland communities (sparse, self-governing) / black zone 600,000 (subsistence, river-dependent) / Basra 1.2 million (PCU-maintained)
SURVEILLANCE	Comprehensive in Istanbul (all factions, full overlap) / EO drone net in Caucasus / PCU sensor coverage in Gulf corridors / dark zones in highlands, black zone, Zagros
FACTION PRESSURE	EO from north (Caucasus staging) / PCU from south (Gulf approach) / Compact holding the hinge / Sons holding the headwaters / multiple independents in transit
CONTAMINATION	Legacy petroleum (black zone) / Lumicite seepage (headwaters, Zagros) / none in Istanbul or Compact zones
BLACK MARKET	Heavy in Istanbul (information, identities, intelligence) / heavy in Zagros (transit corridor) / heavy in black zone (survival technology) / light elsewhere
MOBILITY	Bosphorus crossing (controlled, fee-based) / EO Caucasus roads (monitored) / Sons highland routes (dark, seasonal) / Euphrates river transit (open, slow) / Zagros passes (seasonal, community-controlled)
GENE-FORGED UNITS	Snow Leopards (Compact) / Scorpions, Sand Vipers (Sons) / Bears, Boars, Lynx (EO) / Jackals, Falcons (PCU) / Ravens, Spotted Hyenas, Monitor Lizards (Void Walkers)

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Six power structures contest the Shatter Belt. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging on the same dam section.

BOSPHORUS COMPACT / SNOW LEOPARD INTELLIGENCE UNITS

Neutral hinge. The Compact controls the Bosphorus crossing and has survived eighteen years by maintaining a specific deterrence: they know enough about every faction to hurt every faction equally. Snow Leopard gene-forged — unknown program origin, capabilities exceeding standard faction templates — run the city's intelligence architecture. Their objective: maintain crossing neutrality and the information economy built on it while managing the EO assessment operation and the accumulated cable intelligence before one of them resolves in a way that ends the Compact's independence.

EO / EURASIAN OLIGARCHY (CAUCASUS OPERATIONS COMMAND)

Northern pressure. The EO operates from the Caucasus corridor through Colonel Dmitri Volkov's seven-year staging operation. Bear, Boar, and Lynx gene-forged units. Lynx-template intelligence operatives are the best human intelligence capability in the Belt. Their objective: establish sustained access to the Tigris-Euphrates headwaters and the Lumicite formation beneath them, while managing the transition from intelligence operations to resource acquisition that EO Strategic Resources has authorized without Volkov's knowledge.

PCU / PAN-CALIPHATE UNION (NORTHERN COMMAND)

Southern pressure. The PCU operates from Basra through General Fatimah al-Rashidi's nine-year black zone campaign. Jackal and Falcon gene-forged units. Their objective: bring the Mesopotamian black zone under PCU governance while securing the Tigris-Euphrates flow rates that sustain 60% of the PCU's food production. Al-Rashidi authorized the dam fracture as a controlled pressure tool. It has become uncontrollable.

SONS OF THE SERPENT (SHATTER BELT INSURGENT NETWORK)

Headwaters defense. Eleven years of highland corridor security and black zone community embedding. Gene-forged on scorpion and sand viper stock — venom-adapted, territorial. Founded by a water engineer who understood the headwaters' stra-

tegic value in 2045 and built an organization around protecting it before either faction arrived. Their objective: prevent either EO or PCU from establishing the sustained presence that would allow either to use water access as a permanent governance lever.

VOID WALKERS

Unknown allegiance, unknown objective. Gene-forged on raven, spotted hyena, and monitor lizard stock. Multiple confirmed sightings in Istanbul, designated 'TRANSIT.' Carrying a document that five intelligence services are trying to identify. The Void Walker has been allowing the chase to continue because the surveillance is itself telling them something they need to know. The EO assessment team and the Void Walker's objective are converging on the same location.

HERALDS OF THE STORM

IPFZ-origin insertion. The first confirmed Heralds presence outside the IPFZ. Operative 'Sirocco' is in the Mesopotamian black zone offering IPFZ radiation management protocols and headwaters Lumicite formation data in exchange for passage to Istanbul and a Compact introduction. Her defection appears genuine. Her headwaters intelligence pre-dates EO's by eight months.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**BOSPHORUS COMPACT (Istanbul and the Crossing)**: Eighteen million people. The most surveilled city in the hemisphere. Snow Leopard intelligence units, the cable program, and an information economy that has been running since before the Upheaval.
ZONE 2	**TIGRIS HEADWATERS (Eastern Anatolia / Kurdish Highland Corridor)**: Where the rivers begin, the dam fractures, and the Sons of the Serpent have built their founding operational base around infrastructure that feeds sixty million people.
ZONE 3	**MESOPOTAMIAN BLACK ZONE (Iraq and Eastern Syria)**: Genuine infrastructure collapse. 600,000 people along the reduced Euphrates. The Sons' civilian embedding. The territory neither major faction controls and both need to.
ZONE 4	**CAUCASUS CORRIDOR (EO Forward Staging, Georgia-Armenia Border)**: Colonel Volkov's seven-year operation. Bear, Boar, and Lynx gene-forged. The supply chain that runs through warlord transit territory. The three operators who deserted.
ZONE 5	**GULF APPROACH (PCU Northern Command, Basra Staging)**: General al-Rashidi's nine-year campaign. 1.2 million people. The northern agricultural zone that feeds the PCU. The threshold calculation that drives every decision.
ZONE 6	**ZAGROS PASSES (Mountain Transit, Iran-Iraq Border)**: 1,500 kilometers of mountain barrier. Pass communities who have controlled transit for three millennia. Year-round routes maintained by knowledge that is dying. Something in the high passes that is not human.
ZONE 7	**ANATOLIAN INTERIOR (Transition Zone, Compact Jurisdiction to Frontier)**: 800 kilometers between Istanbul and the highlands. The Sons' relay network. The communities that feed the Compact. A gene-forged Drift treatment that works better than faction programs.

ZONES

ZONE 1 BOSPHORUS COMPACT — ISTANBUL AND THE CROSSING

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	packed (18 million)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (all factions, full overlap — the most surveilled city in the hemisphere)
FACTION PRESSURE	Compact-neutral / all major factions present / Sons transit infrastructure embedded
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	heavy (information, identities, intelligence, gene-forged services outside faction programs)
MOBILITY	open (city) / controlled (Bosphorus crossing)

FUNCTION The crossing. The information economy built around it. The neutral space that allows the Shatter Belt's competing pressures to negotiate without open conflict.

CONTROLLER Bosphorus Compact administration — technically. In practice, Istanbul is governed by the sustained mutual deterrence of every major faction having too much to lose by destabilizing it. The city governs itself through the threat of what losing it would cost everyone.

DRAW The crossing. The information economy. Neutral ground. The most sophisticated intelligence brokerage in the hemisphere. Gene-forged services outside faction programs. The specific quality of a city that has survived every empire and reads context with precision.

RISK The EO assessment operation. Faction intelligence operations against each other using Istanbul as the theater. The cable program's exposure. The Compact's accumulated secrets becoming a known quantity.

SCARCITY Privacy. Anonymity. Any conversation that isn't monitored by at least two intelligence services. The specific commodity of being unwatched in the most watched city on the planet.

UNDER-SYSTEM

One EO intelligence service is three operational steps from identifying the extent of the Compact's knowledge about their Istanbul assets. If they complete that assessment, the Compact's deterrence — 'we know enough about everyone to hurt everyone equally' — becomes a known quantity rather than an implied one. A known quantity can be costed. A costed deterrent can be overcome.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The EO assessment completes. They know what the Compact knows about them specifically. They calculate that what the Compact knows about EO is not sufficient to trigger a proportional response from PCU if EO moves against the Compact. They communicate this calculation to Compact leadership. The Compact has 72 hours to demonstrate that the calculation is wrong, find an alternative deterrent, or request protection from the PCU — which ends Compact independence.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Compact administration + Snow Leopard intelligence units (surveillance and relationship management)

ECONOMY

Crossing fees, diplomatic activity, commercial trade, the visible layer of the information economy

RISK

Faction intelligence operations against each other that use Istanbul as the theater — crossfire risk for civilians and operators caught between operations

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Compact security + the city's own informal governance structures, which are older than the Compact and more reliable

ECONOMY

Intelligence brokerage (the real layer), Sons of the Serpent transit movements, gene-forged services outside faction programs, document and identity trade

RISK

The EO assessment operation. It is running now. The operators running it are very good.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The Bosphorus at 0400 — an EO logistics vessel transiting north, a PCU trade ship transiting south, a Compact monitoring vessel between them running lights, and underneath all three, on the seabed, cables that carry communications for all three factions and that the Compact has been reading, selectively and deniably, for eleven years. The dead credential aesthetic running on faction-source material from every bloc simultaneously: EO administrative stamps, PCU Prophet's Seal marks, NAF operational clearance codes, collaged on the same jacket without irony.

FACTIONS PRESENT

BOSPHORUS COMPACT / SNOW LEOPARDS

intelligence architecture, cable program operations, crossing control, the balance

EO

consulate in Beyoglu, intelligence assessment operation, commercial cover

PCU

trade mission in Karakoy, intelligence collection, logistics through the crossing

NAF

commercial attache in Nisantasi, intelligence presence

SONS OF THE SERPENT

transit infrastructure embedded in the port authority, courier network through the city

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

archive in Fatih, pre-Upheaval intelligence records from three nations that no longer exist

VOID WALKERS

designation 'TRANSIT' — carrying a document, being tracked by five intelligence services, allowing the chase

CIVILIAN NEED

Stability. The continued functioning of the crossing economy that employs a third of the city. The assurance that the Compact's balance holds. The residents read the city by which quarter answers to which faction's informal pressure this week. They need the reading to stay legible.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Bazaar Circuit information economy, crossing logistics, faction intelligence contacts, Snow Leopard introductions, Brotherhood archive access, Sons transit schedule, gene-forged services.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Compact Snow Leopard intelligence officer makes contact with operators in the Bazaar Circuit — she has an offer: information about the EO assessment operation in exchange for a task she cannot assign officially.
- An EO commercial attache and a PCU trade representative are at the same cafe table in a meeting that is not on either faction's official schedule. They notice operators noticing.
- A Brotherhood of Shadows courier is moving a document package through the city. Something has gone wrong with the pickup — the contact didn't appear. The courier cannot hold the package much longer.
- A Sons of the Serpent transit movement is happening in plain sight — the personnel look like pilgrimage travelers from the Anatolian interior. Operators with the right training can see the difference. Most people cannot.
- The Compact is running a certification hearing on Tigris-Euphrates flow data submitted by both EO and PCU. The data contradicts itself. Someone is falsifying their readings. Both sides are accusing the other. The Compact needs a third-party assessment.
- A gene-forged Snow Leopard in the Bazaar Circuit is off-duty and in the kind of distress that Stage 2 Drift produces in a city calibrated entirely for standard humans. Nobody around them knows what is happening. They know.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The EO assessment team is running a physical operation — accessing a Compact building they have no clearance for. Their tradecraft is excellent. Excellent is not perfect.
- A Sons of the Serpent transit cell surfaces briefly — a personnel handoff in a city that is simultaneously too watched and too busy for it to matter. Operators can intercept. Interception has consequences.
- A Compact intelligence officer has gone missing. The Compact's response is conspicuously low-key. The officer knew about the cables.

- Three EO, two PCU, and one NAF intelligence asset are all following the same target through the city without knowing the others are there. The target is a Void Walker.
- A document package arrives for operators at their lodging. It is from the missing Brotherhood courier. It contains a partial intelligence audit — Compact-sourced, clearly not meant to leave the building it came from.
- The Compact requests operators for an immediate task that they will not explain until operators are already in the vehicle.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Compact has been reading EO communications through the Bosphorus seabed cables for eleven years. The EO assessment is trying to confirm this. They are two steps from confirmation. [TRUE]
- The Sons of the Serpent's Istanbul transit infrastructure runs through the Compact's own port authority. Not with Compact knowledge — the Sons built the route around Compact personnel who don't know they're facilitating it. [PARTIALLY TRUE — route exists; Compact awareness disputed]
- The Brotherhood of Shadows archive in Fatih contains pre-Upheaval intelligence service records from three nations that no longer exist. The records include personnel files for individuals who are now running faction intelligence services. [TRUE]
- The Compact's Snow Leopard units were not gene-forged by a conventional faction program. The Compact built its own program using methodology that does not appear in any shared gene-forging literature. [UNCLEAR — and the silence on this question from every faction that would know is itself suggestive]
- The PCU is planning to close the Gulf to EO shipping during a specific 72-hour window — an economic pressure tactic that requires EO to reroute through Istanbul. During the reroute, the EO will be more dependent on the Bosphorus crossing than at any point in eighteen years. The PCU believes this is leverage. The Compact believes this is a trap. [TRAP — the PCU move is real; the interpretation is contested]
- The Void Walker being tracked by five intelligence services simultaneously is carrying a specific document. The document is the Compact's intelligence audit. All five services want it for different reasons. The Void Walker is not in Istanbul to sell it. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

SNOW LEOPARD OFFICER ELIF DEMIR — COMPACT INTELLIGENCE, CABLE INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM LEAD

CAN GET The extent of the Compact's cable intelligence accumulation, the EO assessment operation's current status, Sons of the Serpent transit route mapping through Istanbul.

WANTS The EO assessment team identified and disrupted before they complete their evaluation — not neutralized, disrupted. The difference matters to the Compact's ethics framework.

FEARS That the Compact leadership will decide that exposure is preferable to the cost of continued concealment and will make a deal with EO that ends the cable program and changes the Compact's intelligence position permanently.

CURRENT PRESSURE The missing intelligence officer knew about the cables and knew the EO assessment was running. Her disappearance is not confirmed as EO action. It might be.

ARSLAN — BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS, ISTANBUL ARCHIVE CUSTODIAN

CAN GET Pre-Upheaval intelligence records, current faction asset identifications based on document provenance matching, the missing courier's document (he knows what was in the package that was supposed to be picked up).

WANTS The document package returned to the archive before the faction intelligence services tracking it realize what building it comes from.

FEARS That the archive has been compromised and he has not yet identified the method.

CURRENT PRESSURE A researcher he does not recognize has been requesting access to the pre-Upheaval records section for three days, with credentials that are technically valid and feel entirely wrong.

ZONE 2 TIGRIS HEADWATERS

EASTERN ANATOLIA / KURDISH HIGHLAND CORRIDOR

SECURITY	none (faction) / present (Sons of the Serpent, community defense)
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (pre-Upheaval irrigation systems, maintained by communities without faction support)
CIVILIANS	sparse (highland communities, Kurdish pastoral networks, agricultural collectives)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (no faction sensor coverage in highland corridors)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (EO-pressured from north, PCU-pressured from south, neither has operational presence)
CONTAMINATION	present (Lumicite seepage from formation below dam foundation, two years)
BLACK MARKET	minimal (barter economy, occasional outside trader contact)
MOBILITY	open (highland) / seasonal (passes close winter)

FUNCTION The physical source of the Shatter Belt's primary strategic resource — and the reason the Sons of the Serpent chose this territory for their founding operational base.

CONTROLLER The highland communities manage the watershed infrastructure — they have done so continuously for generations. The Sons of the Serpent provide security and logistics. Neither the EO nor the PCU has established the sustained presence required to challenge this arrangement, and both have tried.

DRAW The headwaters themselves. The Sons' highland network. The Lumicite formation beneath the dam. Information about the fracture's true condition.

RISK EO drone incursions from the Caucasus. PCU advance reconnaissance probing highland corridor access. The dam fracture accel-

erating. The Lumicite seepage the highland communities have not told the Sons about.

SCARCITY External technical support for the dam section. Replacement components for the irrigation infrastructure. Medical supplies. The specific knowledge of what is happening beneath the dam that the highland communities possess and have not shared.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The headwaters infrastructure — a network of pre-Upheaval dams, weirs, and irrigation channels stretching across 400 kilometers of highland terrain — is deteriorating. The communities maintaining it have been doing so without external technical support for fifteen years. They are doing it correctly. They will not be able to continue doing it correctly without infrastructure investment they cannot provide themselves. The Sons of the Serpent understand this and have been attempting to source external technical support without allowing any faction to use that support as leverage over the water flow.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A key dam section fails. The flow reduction hits Iraq and western Iran within 72 hours. PCU northern agricultural output drops 15% within a growing season. EO's intelligence operation in the Caucasus loses its water supply cover story. The Sons of the Serpent are blamed by both parties simultaneously. Whether the failure was natural deterioration or a manufactured incident becomes the most important intelligence question in the Shatter Belt.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Highland community elders + Sons of the Serpent security patrols

ECONOMY

Agricultural management, watershed maintenance, limited trade with lower-altitude communities

RISK

EO drone incursions from the Caucasus (suppressed by the Sons but not eliminated), PCU advance reconnaissance units probing highland corridor access

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Sons of the Serpent, full operational control

ECONOMY

Logistics coordination, technical exchange between Sons cells, intermittent contact with external supply networks

RISK

EO tactical units attempting highland corridor insertion — they have failed six times; the Sons know the approach patterns; each attempt teaches the Sons something about EO capabilities

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A highland water engineer, sixty years old, standing on a pre-Upheaval dam section that her grandmother also maintained, looking at a crack that appeared three weeks ago and doing the calculation of how long it holds before she needs help she doesn't know how to get without giving someone leverage over the water. The Tigris Headwaters territory is dry, elevated, and silent in the way that places held by venom-adapted gene-forged tend to be silent — nothing moves that shouldn't.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SONS OF THE SERPENT

highland corridor security, watershed protection, the founding operational base

EO

drone incursions, tactical insertion attempts (six failed), three unaccounted-for operators

PCU

advance reconnaissance probing highland corridor access from the south

CIVILIAN NEED

Technical support for the dam. The communities have been maintaining this infrastructure for fifteen years without outside help. They are running out of the ability to do so. They need a water engineer who comes without a faction attached.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Sons security patrols (with introduction), highland community elder access (through demonstrated trust), watershed infrastructure assessment, dam section inspection, Lumicite formation approach.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Sons of the Serpent unit asks operators to carry a technical assessment request to Istanbul — specifically to a water engineer who owes the Sons a debt. The request cannot travel through any channel either EO or PCU monitors.
- An EO reconnaissance drone comes down in a highland community's agricultural zone. The community has not reported it. They are discussing what to do with it. The Sons want it destroyed. The community engineer wants to use the parts.
- A highland community elder explains the watershed maintenance schedule to operators in detail — not because she wants operators to know it, but because she wants someone outside the highlands to understand what happens if the infrastructure fails and nobody outside is paying attention.
- A PCU advance unit is sheltering in a lower-altitude community, presenting as a survey team. Their cover is functional. Their water consumption is not consistent with a survey team.

- A courier from Istanbul is moving through the highland corridor with a package for the Sons of the Serpent. The courier is three days overdue and has been for two weeks — she keeps being delayed by weather that isn't bad enough to delay travel.
- The infrastructure crack the engineer has been watching is now two cracks, and one of them is in a different section entirely.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- An EO tactical insertion attempt — seven personnel, Highland corridor approach, suppressed by Sons patrol. Four EO operators withdraw. Three are not accounted for.
- A Sons of the Serpent cell meeting that operators can partially observe — the discussion is about the infrastructure assessment and whether to accept an offer of technical support from a party the cell is arguing about accepting help from.
- The PCU survey team is not sheltering anymore. They are moving toward the dam section.
- A signal from the Mesopotamian black zone arrives at Sons frequency — a message about the source of recent EO tactical insertion attempts. The intelligence is accurate. It is also from a party the Sons have no relationship with and no way to verify.
- A highland elder is awake at 0200, sitting by the dam section, not doing anything. Just sitting.
- Something in the crack is glowing faintly. The elder has seen it before. She is not alarmed. She does not explain it.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Sons of the Serpent were not founded in response to EO or PCU pressure on the Shatter Belt. They were founded by a water engineer who understood the headwaters' strategic value in 2045 and built an organization around protecting it before either faction arrived. [TRUE]
- The infrastructure crack is not structural deterioration. It is a slow-acting fracture introduced by a party that wants the dam to fail at a controlled rate — enough flow reduction to create pressure, not enough for catastrophic failure. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the crack's origin is disputed; the rate of progression is consistent with introduced fracture]
- The glowing in the crack is Lumicite seepage from a formation below the dam's foundation. It has been seeping for approximately two years. The highland communities know about it. They have not told the Sons. [TRUE]

- The EO's six failed Highland corridor insertions were not trying to reach the dam. They were trying to reach a specific individual in a highland community — someone who has information about the Lumicite formation. [TRUE]
- The package the overdue courier is carrying contains technical support from the Compact — specifically, water infrastructure engineering consultation arranged through a Compact channel that doesn't officially exist. [TRAP — the package exists; the 'Compact channel' framing is Sons leadership cover story; actual source is unknown to the cell]
- The EO's three unaccounted-for operators are in the highlands. They have been in the highlands for three days. They are not doing EO operations. [TRUE — and what they are doing instead is the question]

CONTACTS

HIGHLAND ENGINEER RÛKEN — WATERSHED MAINTENANCE LEAD, THIRD GENERATION

CAN GET Watershed infrastructure status (real, not the version the Sons brief to their leadership), the Lumicite formation location, the maintenance schedule gap that creates a dam vulnerability window every 23 days.

WANTS Technical support for the dam section without giving any faction control over water flow. She has been trying to find this for eight months.

FEARS That the crack becomes a catastrophe before she finds the support, and sixty million people downstream die because she was too careful about who she let in.

CURRENT PRESSURE She told one person outside the community about the Lumicite formation — a Sons logistics coordinator she trusted. That was three weeks ago. The EO insertion attempts started two weeks ago.

SONS OF THE SERPENT CELL LEADER 'ARASH' — EASTERN ANATOLIA OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

CAN GET Sons of the Serpent network in the highland corridor, safe movement through headwaters territory, the Mesopotamian black zone contact network.

WANTS The three unaccounted-for EO operators found and their objective determined before they achieve it.

FEARS	That the infrastructure crack is deliberate and that whoever introduced it has a timeline he doesn't know.
CURRENT PRESSURE	His cell's debate about the technical support package has to resolve before the courier arrives. He has been unable to make the decision for six days.

ZONE 3 MESOPOTAMIAN BLACK ZONE — IRAQ AND EASTERN SYRIA

SECURITY	none (faction) / Sons of the Serpent present (embedded, not controlling)
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed (pre-Upheaval remnants, rebuilt from components)
CIVILIANS	sparse (river communities, agricultural collectives, displaced persons — approximately 600,000)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (PCU drone net attempts, suppressed by Sons and local interference)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (PCU nominal claim, EO intelligence presence, neither controls territory)
CONTAMINATION	present (industrial site remnants from pre-Upheaval oil infrastructure, localized)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (survival technology, water purification, medical supplies, fuel)
MOBILITY	open (river routes) / cratered (road network failed)

FUNCTION The territory that neither major faction controls and that both need to. The operational base that gave the Sons of the Serpent the civilian infrastructure to survive eleven years of faction pressure.

CONTROLLER	The river communities govern themselves through structures adapted from pre-Upheaval local governance, Islamic community organization, and twelve years of improvisation. The Sons are embedded but not dominant — they provide security and logistics; the communities provide legitimacy and the knowledge of the land that keeps both alive.
DRAW	Passage. Anonymity. Sons of the Serpent network access. The specific resilience of communities that have survived actual collapse. Information about every faction's black zone operations.
RISK	PCU tactical probes. EO intelligence operators under NGO cover. The flow reduction threshold. The three deserted EO operators somewhere in the zone. The Heralds operative whose presence nobody expected.
SCARCITY	Water purification components. Medical supplies. Fuel. Replacement parts for irrigation systems that were improvised from pre-Upheaval remnants. The specific component that keeps the community filtration system running.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Tigris-Euphrates flow reduction means the black zone's agricultural communities are operating at the edge of viability at current flow rates. A 10% reduction in headwaters output pushes multiple communities below subsistence. The communities know this. The Sons know this. The PCU uses this knowledge as leverage. The EO uses this knowledge as intelligence. The headwaters infrastructure crack is not an abstraction here — it is an existential variable for the 600,000 people living along the reduced flow.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Flow reduction hits. Communities below subsistence move — toward PCU territory, into the black zone's already-stressed interior, or toward Istanbul through the Sons' transit infrastructure. The PCU gains the population pressure it has been engineering through agricultural leverage. The Sons lose the civilian embedding that has kept them operationally viable for eleven years. The black zone becomes what the PCU has been describing it as: an ungoverned space requiring PCU stabilization. The stabilization looks like occupation.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Community governance structures + Sons of the Serpent in security role

ECONOMY

Agricultural output (reduced, managed carefully), river trade, salvage, the specific black-market economy of communities outside faction supply chains for a decade

RISK

PCU drone surveillance (persistent, periodically successful), EO intelligence operators moving through under cover of humanitarian operations

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Sons of the Serpent, full operational control

ECONOMY

Transit operations, logistics coordination across the Sons network, information exchange with Istanbul, the trade in survival technology that crosses every official border

RISK

PCU tactical units probing the black zone perimeter — more frequent than EO's headwaters insertions and less careful

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A reed marsh along the reduced Euphrates at dusk — a community's irrigation channels drawing off what flow remains, engineered over twelve years to extract maximum viability from 23% of historical volume, while a kilometer away a PCU surveillance drone runs its coverage pattern and the Sons anti-drone operator running the suppression array tracks it with the bored competence of someone who has done this 400 times. PCU oasis survival economy visible at ground level: shade as privilege, water as currency.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SONS OF THE SERPENT

community embedding, security operations, logistics network, transit infrastructure

PCU

tactical probes, humanitarian assessment cover, drone surveillance, northern perimeter pressure

EO

intelligence operators under NGO cover, the three deserted operators somewhere in the zone

HERALDS OF THE STORM

operative 'Sirocco' — first confirmed Heralds presence outside the IPFZ, offering IPFZ technical knowledge

VOID WALKERS

oil infrastructure site operation — extracting something that is not oil infrastructure components

CIVILIAN NEED

Water purification components. The specific filtration component that keeps the community alive. Medicine. Agricultural support that doesn't come with a governance framework attached. Someone to tell the PCU that the communities would accept humanitarian cooperation if it came without the military occupation plan.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Sons network introduction (through trust), river community transit, black zone dark zone navigation, survival technology supply chain, humanitarian cover routes.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A PCU 'humanitarian assessment team' is in a black zone community. Their equipment is two categories above humanitarian survey standard.
- A community elder asks operators whether they have contacts in Istanbul who could source water purification parts — a specific component, out of stock in every legitimate supply chain, that keeps the community's filtration system running.
- A Sons of the Serpent operative has been running the same route for three days with increasing urgency. She won't explain what she is carrying. She will explain that it needs to reach Istanbul before a specific time.
- An EO intelligence operator under NGO cover is collecting something from a community member who clearly doesn't want to be providing it and clearly doesn't feel they can refuse.
- A pre-Upheaval oil infrastructure site in the black zone is being dismantled by a crew the community doesn't recognize. The Sons don't recognize them either. The crew is using equipment that doesn't come from any faction supply chain operators can identify.
- A Heralds of the Storm member — the first confirmed Heralds presence outside the IPFZ — is in the black zone. She is not here for ideology. She is here because the IPFZ's specific knowledge of radiation management has a second application she is offering to trade for something.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A PCU tactical probe reaches a river community's northern perimeter. The Sons suppress it. The probe was more sophisticated than previous attempts — someone briefed the PCU unit on the Sons' suppression positions.
- A transit movement through the black zone includes personnel operators can identify as gene-forged — not Sons templates, not EO or PCU stock. Unknown program.
- The crew dismantling the oil infrastructure site is working at night with equipment that doesn't produce thermal signature. The Sons cannot track them after dark.
- A community member approaches operators privately. She has been providing information to the EO NGO operator for six months. She wants to stop. She doesn't know how to stop safely.
- A signal fragment from the highland corridor arrives at Sons frequency. It contains the EO's three unaccounted-for operators' location — in the black zone, not the highlands. They have been here for four days.
- The Heralds member approaches operators directly. Her offer is specific: IPFZ radiation management protocols in exchange for passage to Istanbul and introduction to the Compact. She says she has information about the headwaters formation that the Sons don't have yet.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The person briefing the PCU on Sons suppression positions is inside the Sons' own command structure — not a plant, but someone who has concluded that PCU stability is preferable to continued conflict and is working toward an accommodation the Sons leadership would consider treason. [TRUE]
- The crew dismantling the oil infrastructure site is a Void Walker operation. What they are extracting is not oil infrastructure components. [PARTIALLY TRUE — Void Walker connection suspected; contents unknown]
- The Heralds member's information about the headwaters Lumicite formation is accurate and pre-dates the EO's intelligence on the same subject by eight months. The Heralds have had an operative in the highland corridor since 2061. [TRUE]
- The three EO operators in the black zone were not sent by EO command. They deserted following the sixth failed headwaters insertion attempt. They are looking for the thing EO sent them to find, independently, because they have concluded EO's authorized methodology cannot achieve it. [TRUE]

- The Sons of the Serpent's founding engineer is still alive, still in the Shatter Belt, and has been running the organization's strategic direction for eleven years from a location that the organization's own operational cells do not know. [UNCLEAR — founding operative's status unconfirmed for four years]
- The Compact's seabed cable intelligence includes PCU internal communications from nine months ago that describe a unilateral PCU plan to introduce the dam fracture at the headwaters. The Compact has not disclosed this to the Sons. They have not disclosed it to anyone. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

COMMUNITY WATER ENGINEER HASSAN AL-RASHID — BLACK ZONE, PRIMARY COMMUNITY IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

CAN GET Black zone river community network, survival technology supply chain (what exists and where it comes from), the specific water purification component that keeps his and four adjacent communities alive.

WANTS The component. Specifically. Everything else is secondary to the component.

FEARS That the next PCU assessment team is not an assessment team.

CURRENT PRESSURE The component is available through one supplier. The supplier is in Istanbul. The Sons transit route to Istanbul has been compromised — he doesn't know how, but two couriers haven't arrived.

HERALDS OPERATIVE 'SIROCCO' — IPFZ-ORIGIN, INDEPENDENT, SHATTER BELT INSERTION UNKNOWN DURATION

CAN GET IPFZ radiation management protocols (the Heralds' most valuable technical knowledge outside the IPFZ), the headwaters Lumicite formation data (accurate, pre-dating EO intelligence), eight months of highland corridor observation that no other party has.

WANTS Istanbul introduction and Compact access. She is not going back to the IPFZ. She is building something else and she needs a neutral ground to build it from.

FEARS That the thing she is building will be interpreted as a Heralds expansion operation and she will be treated as a threat rather than a defector.

CURRENT PRESSURE	Someone in the black zone made her. She does not know who. She has 72 hours before whoever made her decides what to do with that information.

ZONE 4 CAUCASUS CORRIDOR

EO FORWARD STAGING, GEORGIA-ARMENIA BORDER

SECURITY	active (EO military garrison, Bear/Boar perimeter, Lynx intelligence operations)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (EO-maintained military spec, civilian infrastructure adequate)
CIVILIANS	normal (90,000 across valley communities)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (EO sensor net, satellite coverage, Lynx ground surveillance)
FACTION PRESSURE	EO dominant / PCU intelligence probing from south / Sons transit through eastern passes
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light (altitude medication, EO equipment, headwaters intelligence)
MOBILITY	checkpointed (valley roads) / seasonal (mountain passes close November-March)

FUNCTION EO's operational platform for all Shatter Belt operations. Where headwaters insertions launch, intelligence operations coordinate, and the long-game strategy for Anatolian influence is managed.

CONTROLLER Colonel Dmitri Volkov, EO Shatter Belt Operations Command. Volkov has been running the corridor for seven years and considers the headwaters problem a puzzle he has been solving incorrectly. The six failed insertions were his. The three operators

who deserted were his people. He is running out of authorized approaches and is beginning to consider unauthorized ones.

DRAW EO logistics infrastructure. Lynx intelligence capability. Seven years of headwaters terrain intelligence. The staging area for everything that moves south.

RISK PCU intelligence probing the southern perimeter. The warlord transit partners reassessing loyalty. The supply chain interdiction timeline. The unauthorized cargo from EO Strategic Resources.

SCARCITY Altitude medication. Replacement parts for the aging sensor net. The specific thing Volkov cannot source: a headwaters approach that works.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The EO's corridor logistics depend on a supply chain that runs from the Eurasian Steppe through Georgia. That supply chain crosses territory where EO governance is nominal and local warlords provide transit security in exchange for equipment and autonomy. Three of those warlords have been in communication with PCU intelligence for the past eighteen months. If the supply chain is interdicted — even temporarily — Volkov's operational capability drops to what his garrison can sustain locally, which is approximately six weeks of active operations.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The supply chain is interdicted. Volkov's garrison goes operational on local supply. The headwaters operations pause. The three deserted operators, who are in the black zone pursuing the Lumicite intelligence independently, become the only active EO presence in the Shatter Belt. Volkov, cut off from EO command's authorization structure, begins making decisions based on seven years of corridor intelligence rather than current orders. His decisions may be better informed than his orders. They are also unsanctioned.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO garrison command + Lynx intelligence operations center

ECONOMY

Military logistics, intelligence processing, civilian agricultural trade (the corridor's valleys are productive), technical support for headwaters insertion planning

RISK

PCU intelligence collection against garrison operations, civilian population friction over land use and military transit schedules, the corridor's warlord transit partners reassessing their loyalty calculations

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Bear/Boar perimeter security + Lynx surveillance

ECONOMY

Intelligence operations launch window, Sons transit through eastern passes (which Volkov is aware of and has not interdicted), civilian resistance meetings in the valley communities

RISK

PCU tactical teams probing the corridor's southern perimeter. They are getting better. Volkov's assessment is that the next probe will succeed in reaching the staging area.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Lynx-template intelligence operative on a hilltop overlooking the main valley at dawn, reviewing seven years of satellite imagery of the headwaters on a display she has watched so often the terrain is more familiar to her than the valley she actually lives in — her coffee going cold, her attention on a pixel-level change in the dam section that she noticed at 0443 and that nobody in the corridor's chain of command has seen yet.

FACTIONS PRESENT

EO / TEMPEST RIDERS (CAUCASUS OPERATIONS)

garrison command, Lynx intelligence, Bear/Boar perimeter security, headwaters insertion planning

PCU

intelligence probing from the south, tactical teams testing the southern perimeter

SONS OF THE SERPENT

transit through eastern passes (observed by Volkov, not interdicted)

CIVILIAN NEED

The guarantee that adaptation is not the same as acceptance. The 90,000 people in the valleys have adapted to being a staging area. They have not accepted it. They need the distinction acknowledged before it becomes irrelevant.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Volkov briefing (conditional), Lynx intelligence capability, garrison logistics, headwaters insertion route analysis, warlord transit partner introductions, supply chain intelligence.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Volkov requests a meeting with operators. He is direct: he wants the three deserted operators found before EO command authorizes a sanction team. He believes his people are pursuing a legitimate objective through unauthorized means. He wants them recovered, not eliminated.
- A Lynx operative approaches operators with imagery analysis that shows movement at the headwaters dam section not consistent with Sons patrol patterns or highland community activity. Something is at the dam that none of the parties have briefed.
- A civilian community elder blocks the main valley road with agricultural vehicles. The dispute is about water allocation — the garrison diverts stream flow for its operations, and the downstream fields are showing stress.
- An EO supply convoy arrives from the north with a security escort that is double the standard complement. The convoy commander won't explain why. The cargo manifest lists standard military supplies. The weight distribution suggests otherwise.

- A PCU intelligence operative, captured during a southern perimeter probe, is in the garrison detention facility. She has offered information about the PCU's dam fracture operation in exchange for passage to Istanbul. Volkov is considering it.
- The warlord transit partner controlling the northern supply route requests a meeting with Volkov outside the garrison. The meeting location is a valley community. The request is unusual. Volkov goes anyway.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Sons of the Serpent transit cell moves through the eastern passes. Volkov's surveillance tracks them. He does not intercept. A junior officer asks why. Volkov says 'because I need them to reach Istanbul more than I need the interception on my record.'
- The PCU probe. Three operatives breach the southern perimeter using a route that was secure until yesterday. The Bear perimeter team responds. One PCU operative is neutralized. Two escape. They were heading for the intelligence operations center, not the staging area.
- The captured PCU operative's offer becomes more specific: she knows the name of the person maintaining the headwaters fracture. She wants Istanbul, not a cell.
- Civilian resistance activity in the western valley community — not violent, but organized. A meeting of approximately sixty people discussing the garrison's water diversion. Among them, a face that the Lynx surveillance system flags as a former EO logistics officer who was discharged three years ago.
- An encrypted transmission from the deserted operators reaches the garrison communications array. They have found the Lumicite formation. They are requesting pickup. The request is sent on an open frequency. Volkov believes this is deliberate.
- The supply convoy's true cargo is being unloaded at 0300 in a section of the garrison that requires Volkov's personal authorization to access. The cargo includes deep-earth survey equipment and Lumicite containment hardware. EO command has authorized an operation that Volkov was not briefed on.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Volkov has been running unauthorized intelligence sharing with the Sons of the Serpent for two years. Not much — just enough to keep the Sons' highland defense from targeting EO operations that serve mutual interests. [TRUE]

- The captured PCU operative is not PCU. She is a Compact Snow Leopard operating under PCU cover, inserted to test the corridor's intelligence capabilities. Her offer is genuine but her affiliation is not. [PARTIALLY TRUE — her Compact connection exists but the PCU operational status is also real; she is working both]
- The supply convoy's unauthorized cargo was sent by EO Strategic Resources — the same division running Kristoff Vane's operation in the Lakefire Corridor. The Shatter Belt Lumicite and the Corridor Lumicite are connected in EO's strategic planning. [TRUE]
- Three of the corridor's warlord transit partners have been offered PCU contracts that would close the supply chain within 72 hours. The offers are staged to activate simultaneously with the next headwaters crisis stage. [TRUE]
- Volkov's unauthorized intelligence sharing with the Sons is not unauthorized. It is sanctioned by a level of EO command that his garrison chain doesn't know exists. [TRAP — Volkov's sharing is genuinely unauthorized; this rumor is planted to make the Sons doubt his intentions]
- The former EO logistics officer in the civilian resistance meeting was not discharged. She was reassigned to a deep-cover civilian embedding program that has been studying the corridor's population dynamics for three years. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

COLONEL DMITRI VOLKOV — EO SHATTER BELT OPERATIONS, CAUCASUS CORRIDOR

CAN GET Seven years of headwaters intelligence, insertion route analysis, EO operational capability assessment for the Shatter Belt, the deserted operators' last known position and mission brief.

WANTS His people back alive. Failing that, the Lumicite intelligence they found, before EO command sends a sanction team that treats recovery and elimination as equivalent outcomes.

FEARS That the unauthorized cargo from EO Strategic Resources means his corridor is about to become a Lumicite operation rather than a headwaters security operation, and that the transition will be managed by people who don't understand what seven years of patient work has built.

CURRENT PRESSURE The PCU probe breached his perimeter. His report to EO command will trigger a security review that will discover his Sons intelligence sharing. He has approximately five days before the review arrives.

LYNX OPERATIVE NADIA PETROVA — INTELLIGENCE ANALYST, HEADWATERS SPECIALIST

CAN GET Satellite imagery analysis of the headwaters dam section (the most comprehensive available), the pixel-level change she identified at 0443, the movement pattern analysis, and the unauthorized cargo manifest she copied before it was classified.

WANTS To understand the dam section change before anyone acts on it. She has been watching the headwaters for four years. The change is either the fracture accelerating, someone repairing it, or something she hasn't considered. She needs ground truth.

FEARS EO Strategic Resources. The unauthorized cargo means her headwaters intelligence role is being superseded by a Lumicite extraction mandate she was not briefed on. Her analysis stops mattering the moment the mission changes.

CURRENT PRESSURE The deserted operators' open-frequency transmission. If they broadcast the Lumicite location, every faction in the Shatter Belt recalibrates within 24 hours. She needs to determine whether the broadcast was a mistake or a strategic choice before she recommends a response.

WARLORD TRANSIT PARTNER GIORGI BERDZENA — NORTHERN SUPPLY ROUTE CONTROLLER, GEORGIAN VALLEY

CAN GET Supply chain intelligence for the entire Caucasus corridor, the PCU contract offers (he has received one), and transit access through territories that EO's garrison cannot reach without his cooperation.

WANTS A better deal than the PCU is offering. He is not ideologically committed to either faction. He is committed to his valley, his people, and his position.

FEARS Volkov. Specifically, what Volkov will do if he discovers the PCU contact. Giorgi has been managing the corridor's supply chain for eight years. He knows Volkov's operational patterns.

CURRENT PRESSURE	The PCU contract activates in twelve days. If he accepts, the corridor's supply chain closes and Volkov's garrison is isolated. If he refuses, the PCU finds another way and he loses his leverage with both sides.

ZONE 5 GULF APPROACH — PCU NORTHERN COMMAND, BASRA STAGING

SECURITY	active (PCU Northern Command garrison, Jackal/Falcon units, city police)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (PCU investment, well-maintained)
CIVILIANS	packed (1.2 million, southern districts commercial, northern districts military-adjacent)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (PCU sensor net, satellite coverage, drone fleet)
FACTION PRESSURE	PCU dominant / EO intelligence presence in commercial district / Sons contacts in northern frontier
CONTAMINATION	present (legacy petroleum infrastructure, managed but persistent)
BLACK MARKET	moderate (black zone survival supplies, headwaters intelligence, gene-forged services outside PCU programs)
MOBILITY	open (city and southern routes) / restricted (northern perimeter, black zone approach)

FUNCTION PCU's operational platform for the Shatter Belt. Where the northern agricultural zone is managed, the black zone campaign is directed, and the headwaters strategy is coordinated.

CONTROLLER	General Fatimah al-Rashidi, PCU Northern Command. Al-Rashidi has been managing the black zone campaign for five years and considers the Sons of the Serpent less an enemy than an obstacle to a stability operation she genuinely believes would benefit the black zone communities. She is not wrong about the stability. She is wrong about what the communities want. She has been told this. She considers it a sequencing problem rather than a fundamental one.
DRAW	PCU logistics infrastructure. Northern Command intelligence. The commercial district's information market. Proximity to the black zone perimeter.
RISK	EO intelligence collection against Northern Command. Sons contacts in the northern frontier. The agricultural threshold calculation. The Phase 2 authorization from PCU Central.
SCARCITY	Time. The agricultural threshold is five years away at current flow rates. Two years if the fracture worsens. Al-Rashidi does not have the operational patience the timeline demands.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The northern agricultural zone produces 60% of the PCU's food. The zone depends on Tigris-Euphrates flow rates that are declining. Al-Rashidi's agricultural staff have calculated the threshold: below 18% of historical flow, the zone fails. Current flow is 23%. The headwaters fracture is reducing that by approximately 1% per growing season. At current rates, the threshold is crossed in five years. At accelerated rates — if the fracture worsens — the threshold is two years. This timeline drives every decision al-Rashidi makes.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The agricultural threshold is crossed. Basra's logistics function shifts from managing abundance to managing scarcity. The northern districts become the distribution center for emergency food supply. The black zone campaign's purpose changes from governance expansion to humanitarian corridor — getting food to the 600,000 people along the reduced river who are now below subsistence. The Sons of the Serpent become either partners in the humanitarian response or obstacles to it. Al-Rashidi's decision on this point determines whether the crisis produces cooperation or combat.

DAY

AUTHORITY

PCU Northern Command + city police + Jackal unit patrols

ECONOMY

Logistics operations, agricultural management, commercial trade, intelligence processing from black zone operations

RISK

EO intelligence collection against Northern Command operations, Sons contacts in the northern frontier recruiting PCU personnel

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

PCU garrison + Falcon aerial surveillance

ECONOMY

Intelligence operations launch window (black zone probes depart after dark), northern frontier information market, gene-forged Drift management (PCU programs are stricter than most; operators in early Drift seek off-program support)

RISK

The northern perimeter. The black zone presses against it. Sons logistics movements within five kilometers of the city. PCU security intercepts some. Not all.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The Basra northern perimeter at sunset — a Falcon gene-forged on aerial patrol over the transition zone between the city's maintained infrastructure and the black zone's collapsed landscape, the contrast visible in a single glance: functional streetlights on one side, darkness on the other, and in the darkness, the faint smoke of a river community's cooking fires that are close enough to see and far enough to be in a different world.

FACTIONS PRESENT

PCU / NORTHERN COMMAND

garrison operations, Jackal/Falcon units, black zone campaign direction, agricultural management

EO

commercial cover intelligence collection against Northern Command

SONS OF THE SERPENT

contacts in the northern frontier, logistics movements near the perimeter, intelligence recruitment

CIVILIAN NEED

Employment. Food security. The assurance that the northern agricultural zone will continue to function. The knowledge that al-Rashidi's humanitarian instinct is genuine even if her operational approach is not what the communities would choose.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Al-Rashidi briefing (conditional), Northern Command intelligence, commercial district information market, northern perimeter access, black zone probe observation, agricultural threshold data.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Al-Rashidi requests operators for a briefing. She is assessing third-party capability for a specific task: reaching the headwaters dam section and assessing the fracture without triggering Sons defensive response. She has concluded that PCU military approaches cannot achieve this.
- A PCU agricultural officer approaches operators in the commercial district. She has the flow rate decline data and the agricultural threshold calculation. She wants it published. Al-Rashidi has classified it.
- An EO commercial attache in Basra is running an intelligence operation against Northern Command that operators can observe. The operation targets al-Rashidi's personal communications.
- A Sons of the Serpent contact in the northern frontier wants to meet operators. The contact has been providing PCU intelligence to the Sons for three years. She wants to stop. She believes al-Rashidi's humanitarian instinct is genuine.
- A Jackal unit returns from a black zone patrol missing one operative. The unit commander reports the operative as 'separated during engagement.' The unit's body language suggests a different story.
- A gene-forged Falcon operator in Stage 2 Drift requests operators' help accessing a Drift management network outside PCU programs. The PCU's Drift protocol at Stage 2 is medical evaluation and potential program termination. She is not ready to be terminated.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A black zone probe launches from the northern staging area. Seven operatives, Jackal template. Their mission brief includes coordinates for a Sons cell's logistics cache. The coordinates came from the compromised Sons command structure.
- The missing Jackal operative contacts operators through a civilian communication relay. She is in the black zone. She didn't get separated. She deserted. She is with the river communities. She wants operators to know that al-Rashidi's humanitarian assessment is correct and her operational approach is wrong.
- A Sons logistics movement comes within two kilometers of the northern perimeter. Falcon aerial surveillance tracks it. Al-Rashidi is notified. She orders observation only. Her staff registers surprise.
- The PCU agricultural officer's apartment is searched by Northern Command security. The officer is not home. She is in the commercial district, approach-

ing operators with the data and a decision she has made in the past three hours.

- An encrypted communication arrives at Northern Command from PCU Central. The communication authorizes a Phase 2 escalation of the headwaters operation. Al-Rashidi reads it twice. She does not immediately act on it.
- Three Falcon operatives are on the northern perimeter, not on patrol — watching the black zone. One of them says she can feel the river from here. The other two do not respond. All three are Stage 1 Drift. The river is fifteen kilometers away.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Al-Rashidi authorized the dam fracture maintenance operation over her own strategic staff's objections. She considers it a controlled pressure tool. She did not anticipate it would become uncontrollable. [TRUE]
- The missing Jackal operative's desertion is not the first. Seven PCU gene-forged operatives have deserted to black zone communities in the past two years. The PCU has classified the desertions as casualties. [TRUE]
- The PCU's Phase 2 headwaters escalation includes a provision for 'humanitarian corridor establishment' that is a military occupation plan with better language. [TRUE]
- Al-Rashidi has been in private communication with Compact Director Celik for six months. The communication is about a bilateral stability framework for the Shatter Belt that excludes EO. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the communication exists; the framework is more preliminary than bilateral]
- The three Falcon operatives who can 'feel the river' are experiencing Lumicite resonance sensitivity through their gene-forged templates. The PCU Drift management program has not documented this phenomenon because documenting it requires acknowledging Lumicite exists in the Shatter Belt. [TRUE]
- The Sons' internal compromise operative is not working toward PCU accommodation voluntarily. They are being coerced by PCU intelligence through leverage on a family member in Basra. [TRAP — the coercion claim is genuine but the family member is actually a PCU intelligence asset; the leverage is manufactured]

CONTACTS

GENERAL FATIMAH AL-RASHIDI — PCU NORTHERN COMMAND

CAN GET PCU operational planning for the Shatter Belt, the agricultural threshold data, the dam fracture authorization (she signed it), and a genuinely informed assessment of what the black zone communities need.

WANTS The headwaters fracture stabilized. Not by PCU military action — she has concluded that approach fails — but by someone who can reach the dam section without triggering the conflict that makes stabilization impossible.

FEARS That the Phase 2 authorization means PCU Central has decided the humanitarian approach she has been building for five years is too slow, and that the military alternative will destroy exactly the communities she was trying to help.

CURRENT PRESSURE The Phase 2 authorization. She has 72 hours to either execute it or provide PCU Central with an alternative that achieves the same objectives without military escalation. She does not have that alternative. She is looking for it.

AGRICULTURAL OFFICER LAYLA KASSEM — PCU NORTHERN COMMAND, FOOD PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

CAN GET The complete agricultural threshold dataset, flow rate projections under multiple scenarios, the food production impact models that quantify what happens to 60 million people at each percentage of flow reduction.

WANTS The data public. Not for ideology — for agricultural science. The farming communities downstream need the projections to plan their crop cycles. Classifying agricultural data kills people through bad planting decisions.

FEARS Northern Command security. They searched her apartment. They will find her. The question is whether they find her before or after the data reaches someone who can publish it.

CURRENT PRESSURE The data is on a drive in her jacket pocket. She is standing in a Basra commercial district that has six PCU surveillance cameras within 200 meters. She needs to move.

JACKAL DESERTER SERGEANT MIRIAM HADDAD — FORMER PCU SPECIAL OPERATIONS, NOW BLACK ZONE RESIDENT

CAN GET PCU tactical doctrine for black zone operations, the probe route intelligence that comes from the compromised Sons command, the desertion pattern (seven operatives, two years, all gene-forged, all choosing the communities over the program).

WANTS Al-Rashidi to know that the black zone communities would accept humanitarian cooperation if it came without the military governance framework attached. Haddad is the proof that PCU personnel can integrate. She needs the message delivered by someone al-Rashidi will listen to.

FEARS The sanction order. Seven desertions is an institutional crisis the PCU cannot acknowledge. The solution the PCU's institutional culture produces for crises it cannot acknowledge is elimination.

CURRENT PRESSURE The probe that launched tonight is heading for a Sons cache near the community she lives in. If the probe succeeds, the community is compromised. She has to decide whether to warn the Sons — which means revealing her PCU tactical knowledge — or let the probe succeed.

ZONE 6 ZAGROS PASSES — MOUNTAIN TRANSIT, IRAN-IRAQ BORDER

SECURITY	none (faction) / Zagros community control (pass access governed by communities who can close routes without explanation)
INFRASTRUCTURE	pre-Upheaval (maintained by communities, adapted to seasonal conditions)
CIVILIANS	sparse (30,000 across the range, concentrated at pass communities)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (no faction sensor coverage, mountain terrain defeats satellite and drone systems)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (EO probes from north, PCU probes from south, neither sustains presence)

CONTAMINATION	present (Lumicite formation in the range, resonance exposure at altitude)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (the Zagros passes ARE the black market corridor between Mesopotamia and Iran)
MOBILITY	seasonal (passes open May-October) / three year-round routes (community-maintained, access by relationship only)

FUNCTION The Shatter Belt's back door. Where everything that cannot move through Istanbul or the black zone moves instead — personnel, equipment, intelligence, and the specific category of transit that requires no faction to know it happened.

CONTROLLER The pass communities. There is no single authority — each pass is controlled by the community at its approach, and access is negotiated individually. The communities can close any pass simply by withdrawing the maintenance that keeps it open.

DRAW Dark transit. The unwatched corridor. Medicinal plant trade. The communities' pharmacological knowledge. Access to whatever is moving through the high passes at night.

RISK Navigation without guide knowledge. Seasonal closure. The Lumicite formation's effect on the pass maintainers. The thing that moves through the high passes at night. EO and PCU reconnaissance teams attempting unauthorized transit.

SCARCITY Successors. The year-round pass maintenance knowledge is dying. One of three routes has already closed because the maintaining family had no successor. The younger generation has been leaving for the cities.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The year-round passes require active maintenance against winter conditions that would close them naturally. The maintenance methods are traditional, labor-intensive, and dependent on community knowledge that is transmitted within families and not documented. The communities maintaining the three year-round routes are aging. One route has already closed — the maintaining family had no successor. If the maintenance knowledge is not transmitted, the year-round passes close permanently within a generation. The Shatter Belt's most reliable dark transit corridor disappears.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A winter emergency requires the year-round passes. The remaining two routes carry all winter transit, including Sons logistics, humanitarian supply to the black zone, and the movements that keep the Shatter Belt's faction equilibrium from collapsing during the season when the main passes are blocked. Losing a second route makes the winter Shatter Belt a sealed system — nothing moves through the Zagros for five months, and every faction's winter operational planning fails.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Pass community elders at each approach

ECONOMY

Transit fees, guide services, mountain agriculture, medicinal plant trade (the Zagros communities maintain a pharmacological knowledge base that both factions' medical programs have attempted to acquire)

RISK

EO or PCU reconnaissance teams attempting pass transit without community permission, avalanche and rockfall in unstable sections, the occasional faction drone that strays into range

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

The mountain itself (the communities do not maintain night operations; the passes are not safe after dark without guide knowledge)

ECONOMY

Transit movements that require darkness, Sons logistics runs, the trade in pre-Upheaval archaeological artifacts that the Zagros ranges produce

RISK

Navigation. The Zagros at night kills the unprepared. Also: something has been moving through the high passes at night that the communities have documented for two years — not human, not animal, not faction drone.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Zagros pass at dawn in early October — the first snow on the peaks above, the route still open but narrowing as winter approaches, a community elder standing at the approach checking the sky the way her ancestors checked the sky, reading conditions in the cloud patterns that no satellite sensor can replicate — and behind her, two transit groups waiting for her assessment, one Sons of the Serpent logistics team and one group whose affiliation she has not determined and will not permit entry until she does.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ZAGROS PASS COMMUNITIES

transit control, guide services, year-round route maintenance, the knowledge that has kept the passes open for three millennia

SONS OF THE SERPENT

logistics runs through the passes, transit coordination with communities

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

geological survey team under cover with Shinkai equipment, mapping the global Lumicite network

UNKNOWN TRANSIT

sealed cases that hum containing refined Lumicite, moving from Africa to a recipient on the Iranian plateau

CIVILIAN NEED

A healer with gene-forged medical knowledge for the ill pass maintainer. Successors for the year-round routes. The assurance that helping the pass maintainer will not bring outside obligations. The mountain to settle.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Pass access (conditional on Elder Yildiz's assessment), community Lumicite formation knowledge, high-pass observation logs, year-round route access (through demonstrated trust), Brotherhood geological survey data.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A pass community elder refuses operators access. Her reason: the mountain is 'unsettled.' She will not elaborate. The route she is denying access to is the only connection to the highland corridor for three weeks.

- A Sons of the Serpent logistics team is waiting at a pass approach, delayed by the same refusal. Their cargo is medical supplies for the black zone. The delay is killing people. The cell leader is considering forcing the pass. This would end the Sons' relationship with the community.
- An EO reconnaissance team is moving through an adjacent pass without community permission. They are four hours from being discovered. The community's response to unauthorized transit has been consistent for three thousand years.
- A medicinal plant trader offers operators something unusual — a plant that she says grows only near the Lumicite formations in the high passes. The plant has properties that the trader describes in terms that suggest gene-forged Drift management applications.
- The unidentified transit group at the pass approach is carrying equipment that operators recognize: Shinkai Collective deep-earth survey hardware. They are not Shinkai Collective. They will not identify themselves.
- A year-round pass maintainer — one of the last three people with the knowledge to keep the winter routes open — is ill. The illness is consistent with Lumicite resonance exposure at altitude. The community healer says the mountain itself is making her sick.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The mountain is audible tonight. A low-frequency vibration through the rock that the community members acknowledge and the pass guide says means 'the old one is restless.' The vibration matches Lumicite resonance frequency.
- The thing that moves through the high passes at night is visible from the community's observation point — a light, amber, moving slowly along a ridge that has no trail. The community elder watches it without alarm. She has been watching it for two years.
- A transit group arrives from the Iranian side — six people, no faction identification, carrying sealed cases that hum faintly. They pay the transit fee without negotiation and do not rest. They are moving toward the highland corridor.
- An archaeological artifact recovered by a community member during route maintenance: a carved stone cylinder, pre-Upheaval era, found in a section of the pass exposed by recent geological shift. The cylinder is warm to the touch and its carved symbols include patterns consistent with Lumicite resonance documentation from other territories.
- The Sons logistics team, if still delayed, attempts the pass at night without community approval. The mountain's response to unauthorized night transit is documented by the communities as 'the mountain decides.' What happens depends on what the mountain decides.

- The ill pass maintainer speaks in her fever. What she says is not her language. The community healer records it. The recording contains coordinates for a location beneath the Zagros range that does not appear on any geological survey.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Zagros communities have known about Lumicite in the mountain range for longer than any faction has known Lumicite exists. The 'old one' the communities reference is their name for the formation. They have been managing the relationship between the mountain and the formation for generations. [TRUE]
- The thing moving through the high passes is a Void Walker who has been transiting the Zagros on a regular schedule for eighteen months. The pass communities know. They consider it 'the mountain's business.' [PARTIALLY TRUE — movement pattern consistent with Void Walker; community acknowledgment confirmed]
- The sealed transit cases that hum contain refined Lumicite from EO's Lakefire Corridor facility. The transit route through the Zagros avoids every faction's monitoring capability. Someone is moving processed Lumicite from Africa to somewhere on the Iranian plateau. [TRUE]
- The year-round pass maintenance knowledge is not purely practical. It includes a component the communities describe as 'asking the mountain.' What this means is that the maintenance practitioners can sense the Lumicite formation's stress patterns and adjust the route accordingly. [UNCLEAR — the practitioners confirm the practice; the mechanism is undocumented]
- The group carrying Shinkai Collective equipment without being Shinkai Collective is a Brotherhood of Shadows research team. The Brotherhood has been running a parallel geological survey of the Lumicite network connecting the Zagros, the Lakefire Corridor, the Arafura Deep, and the Patagonian interior. [TRUE]
- The archaeological cylinder is not pre-Upheaval. It is pre-historical. The Lumicite formation in the Zagros has been known to the communities living above it for far longer than the Upheaval, and the carved symbols are a documentation system for the formation's behavior that predates written language. [UNCLEAR — dating unconfirmed]

CONTACTS

ELDER YILDIZ — ZAGROS PASS COMMUNITY, WESTERN APPROACH GUARDIAN

CAN GET Pass access (conditional), the community's accumulated knowledge of the Lumicite formation in the range, the two-year observation log of the high-pass movement, and introduction to the ill pass maintainer.

WANTS A healer with gene-forged medical knowledge. The community healer can manage everything except what the mountain is doing to the pass maintainer. The illness requires understanding of Lumicite exposure that the community does not have.

FEARS That helping the pass maintainer requires outside knowledge that comes with outside obligations. Every time the communities accept outside help, outside expectations follow.

CURRENT PRESSURE The mountain is unsettled. She has closed the pass because her assessment of the conditions says closing it is correct. The pressure from transit groups — Sons, operators, the unidentified team — is testing her authority.

PASS MAINTAINER LEYLA DEMIREL — YEAR-ROUND ROUTE SPECIALIST, CURRENTLY ILL

CAN GET Year-round pass maintenance methodology (if she recovers enough to teach), the location beneath the Zagros she spoke of in her fever, the Lumicite formation's behavioral patterns over the past decade.

WANTS To survive this. To pass the knowledge before it dies with her. She has no apprentice. Her daughter left for Istanbul six years ago.

FEARS That the mountain is not making her sick. That the mountain is changing her. The symptoms include perceptual shifts — she can feel the formation's pulse through the stone, she knows where the routes are safe before checking them. She frames these as symptoms. They may be something else.

CURRENT PRESSURE The fever is getting worse. The community healer has exhausted traditional treatments. Without intervention, the knowledge of this year-round route dies when Leyla does. The Shatter Belt loses a transit corridor maintained for centuries.

BROTHERHOOD RESEARCHER KAYA ARSLAN — GEOLOGICAL SURVEY TEAM LEADER, OPERATING UNDER COVER WITH SHINKAI EQUIPMENT

CAN GET The Brotherhood's parallel Lumicite geological survey data, the network map connecting Zagros-Lakefire-Arafura-Patagonia, and the pre-historical artifact analysis suggesting the formations are connected by infrastructure that predates human civilization.

WANTS Transit to Istanbul and access to the Brotherhood archive. His survey data, combined with the archive's pre-Upheaval intelligence records, would produce the first comprehensive picture of the global Lumicite network.

FEARS The sealed cases transiting the Zagros. If someone is moving refined Lumicite through the mountains, whoever receives it on the Iranian plateau is building something with capabilities that his geological data suggests should not be assembled.

CURRENT PRESSURE Elder Yildiz has closed the pass. His team cannot proceed to Istanbul. The delay is dangerous — his survey data is time-sensitive, and the Brotherhood's analysis window closes in three weeks when a specific Lumicite resonance cycle completes.

ZONE 7 ANATOLIAN INTERIOR

TRANSITION ZONE, COMPACT JURISDICTION TO FRONTIER

SECURITY	light (Compact police patrols on main routes; community self-governance in interior)
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (pre-Upheaval towns at reduced capacity; agricultural infrastructure maintained by communities)

CIVILIANS	normal (approximately 500,000 across the interior)
SURVEILLANCE	Compact satellite (intermittent), EO reconnaissance from Caucasus (sporadic), Sons transit scouts
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (Compact claims, EO cultivation, Sons transit, PCU intelligence presence)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	moderate (transit services, intelligence brokerage, gene-forged safe harbor)
MOBILITY	open (main routes) / community-controlled (interior tracks)

FUNCTION The Shatter Belt's middle ground. Where factions negotiate influence through community relationships rather than military presence, and where the corridor between Istanbul and the headwaters runs through people rather than terrain.

CONTROLLER The interior communities collectively, through an informal council structure that the Compact calls 'provincial governance' and that the communities call 'talking to each other.' The council does not meet regularly. It meets when something requires a collective response. The last collective response was fourteen months ago, when the EO attempted to establish a permanent intelligence station in Sivas. The station lasted eight days.

DRAW The relay network. Community introductions. Gene-forged Drift treatment. Agricultural trade. The specific knowledge of communities that understand the terrain better than any faction survey.

RISK The compromised Sons operative. EO cultivation of community leaders. The relay point locations leaking. The missing Compact intelligence officer transiting through.

SCARCITY Formal recognition. The interior feeds the Compact. The Compact does not formally recognize the interior's autonomy. The communities need that recognition before the Compact's governance framework makes it impossible.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Sons of the Serpent's transit infrastructure through the Anatolian interior depends on community cooperation at twelve relay points between Istanbul and the highland corridor. Each relay point is a community that has agreed to provide safe passage, lodging, and communication support in exchange for the Sons' commitment to not conduct military operations in the interior. This arrangement has held for nine years. The internal compromise in Sons command threatens it — if the compromised operative provides the relay point locations to the PCU, the entire transit infrastructure is exposed.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The relay point locations leak. The PCU or EO positions intelligence assets at the communities that host the Sons' transit network. The communities, faced with faction pressure they were promised they would never face, blame the Sons and close the relay points. The transit infrastructure between Istanbul and the highlands collapses. The Compact loses its non-official communication channel with the headwaters communities. The information economy that runs through the Anatolian interior goes dark.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Interior community councils / Compact police (main routes only)

ECONOMY

Agriculture (the interior feeds the Compact), light manufacturing from pre-Upheaval industrial towns, transit services, the specific knowledge economy of communities that understand the terrain

RISK

EO cultivation attempts on interior community leaders, Compact political pressure to formalize governance, PCU intelligence probes testing the Sons relay network

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Community watch networks

ECONOMY

Sons transit (the relay points operate after dark), intelligence courier runs between Istanbul and the highlands, gene-forged safe harbor services

RISK

The compromised Sons operative. If the relay point locations are being transmitted to the PCU, the transmissions happen at night, during transit operations. The interior communities' watch networks are not calibrated for threats that come through the relay system itself.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

An Anatolian interior town at market day — community members trading agricultural output alongside a Sons of the Serpent courier resting between relay legs, an EO-cultivated community leader buying the same bread as a Compact police officer who has driven six hours to show the flag, and at the edge of the market, a gene-forged operator in Stage 3 Drift sitting in the sun with a community elder who has no idea what gene-forging is and is simply keeping company with someone who looks like they need it.

FACTIONS PRESENT

INTERIOR COMMUNITIES

self-governance, agricultural production (30% of Compact food supply), relay point hosting, gene-forged safe harbor

SONS OF THE SERPENT

twelve relay points, transit infrastructure, courier network

BOSPHORUS COMPACT

police patrols on main routes, satellite surveillance (intermittent), political delegation visits

EO

community cultivation attempts, agricultural infrastructure offers, intelligence collection

PCU

intelligence presence, relay network surveillance, the compromised Sons operative

CIVILIAN NEED

Formal recognition of autonomy from the Compact. Protection from faction cultivation that comes with obligations. Continuation of the gene-forged safe harbor without faction interference. The knowledge that the interior's food production gives it political weight the Compact has not acknowledged.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Community council introductions, relay point access (through Sons or community trust), gene-forged Drift treatment, agricultural intelligence, interior transit routes, the missing Compact officer's trajectory.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- An interior community council session that operators can attend — the topic is an EO proposal to build agricultural infrastructure in exchange for transit rights. The community is divided. The debate is informed, passionate, and

entirely conducted in a dialect the Compact police officer present does not speak.

- A Sons of the Serpent courier arrives at a relay point with information that changes the headwaters situation. She needs the information in Istanbul within 72 hours. The main route is compromised — she needs an alternative. The community can provide one, for a price.
- A Compact political delegation arrives in an interior town to negotiate 'governance framework alignment.' The community council listens politely, agrees to nothing, and invites the delegation to stay for dinner. The dinner is genuinely excellent. The governance discussion does not resume.
- A gene-forged operator in Stage 2 Drift is being treated by an interior community healer using methods that are not in any faction medical database. The treatment appears to be working. The healer describes her approach as 'old' and does not elaborate.
- An EO-cultivated community leader is having second thoughts. The EO's offer included technical support for agricultural irrigation. The technical team that arrived included two people whose questions were not about irrigation.
- The Snow Leopard unit that went dark in the Anatolian interior — the one tracking the EO assessment team — surfaces at a relay point community. They are operational but have been out of Compact communication for eight days. They have information.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Sons relay transit through the community. Operators can observe the logistics chain in operation — the community's role, the handoff protocol, the courier rotation. The efficiency suggests nine years of optimization.
- The compromised Sons operative transits a relay point operators are at. The operative's behavior is consistent with the relay protocol. It is also consistent with passive intelligence collection — marking positions, timing handoffs, noting community personnel. Both interpretations are valid. Only one is true.
- A PCU intelligence team is positioned near a relay point community, conducting surveillance. They are using equipment that was not available to PCU intelligence three months ago. Someone has upgraded their capability specifically for this operation.
- The gene-forged operator being treated by the community healer has a crisis during the night. The crisis is not medical — it is perceptual. She describes seeing the Lumicite network beneath the Anatolian landscape the way Leyla Demirel describes feeling the Zagros formation. The healer is not surprised.
- A fire at the pre-Upheaval industrial site in the nearest town. Not accidental — set by someone who knew exactly what part of the site to target. The sec-

tion destroyed contained archived records from the town's pre-Upheaval communications infrastructure.

- The missing Compact intelligence officer from Istanbul is here. In the interior. Alive, operational, and moving toward the highland corridor with a purpose she will not discuss with anyone from the Compact. She has left the Compact's service. She has not left the Compact's war.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The interior communities have been providing gene-forged Drift treatment for five years using methods that predate gene-forging by centuries. The treatment addresses Drift as a spiritual condition rather than a medical one. It works in 60% of cases. No faction program achieves that rate. [TRUE]
- The compromised Sons operative's transmission to the PCU includes not just relay point locations but the identity of the Compact's missing intelligence officer and her current trajectory toward the highlands. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the transmission includes the officer's location; the priority assessment is the PCU's to make]
- The Anatolian interior communities have been quietly building a political alliance with the highland headwaters communities for three years. The alliance is based on shared water management interests that neither the Compact nor the Sons have recognized as a political force. [TRUE]
- The pre-Upheaval industrial archives that were destroyed in the fire contained evidence of a Lumicite research program that operated in central Anatolia before the Upheaval. The program was run by the same organization that operated the research facilities beneath Jakarta and Buenos Aires. [TRUE]
- The EO assessment team that the Snow Leopards were tracking passed through the interior three weeks ago. They were not heading to Istanbul. They were heading south — toward the Mesopotamian black zone. [TRAP — the team is still focused on the Compact's cable intelligence; the 'south' trajectory is disinformation]
- Elder Yildiz's decision to close the Zagros pass was prompted by information she received from an interior community contact. The information concerns what the Brotherhood geological survey team has found. The finding changes the Zagros communities' understanding of what is beneath their mountains. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

INTERIOR COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE MEHMET KAYA — AGRICULTURAL COORDINATOR, SIVAS DISTRICT

CAN GET Interior community network introductions across the Anatolian transition zone, the political alliance with the highland communities, agricultural intelligence on Compact food supply dependencies, and relay point community contacts.

WANTS The Compact to recognize interior community autonomy formally. Not as a concession — as a governance partnership that acknowledges the interior feeds the city and deserves a voice in how the city is governed.

FEARS The EO cultivation. Two communities he works with closely have accepted EO offers. The agricultural infrastructure the EO provides is good. What comes with it is not.

CURRENT PRESSURE The Compact political delegation's 'governance framework alignment' proposal. If the Compact formalizes governance over the interior, the community council system that has sustained the region's independence — and the Sons' relay network — loses its autonomous basis.

COMMUNITY HEALER AYSE YILMAZ — GENE-FORGED DRIFT TREATMENT SPECIALIST, TRADITIONAL METHODS

CAN GET Drift treatment methodology (the 60% success rate protocol), the interior's gene-forged safe harbor network, and a perspective on Lumicite resonance that frames it as a relationship between human biology and geological systems rather than a medical problem.

WANTS Gene-forged operators who need treatment. Her work depends on cases. The more she treats, the more she understands. She is building knowledge that no faction program is equipped to produce.

FEARS That the faction programs will classify her methodology as a threat rather than a resource and that the safe harbor network will be targeted as an unauthorized gene-forged activity.

CURRENT PRESSURE The Stage 2 operator's crisis last night. The perceptual shift she experienced suggests that Drift is not purely degrada-

tion. It may be adaptation. Ayse is not yet ready to say this to anyone who would act on it.

THE MISSING OFFICER — FORMERLY COMPACT INTELLIGENCE, CURRENTLY INDEPENDENT

CAN GET Everything the Compact's cable intelligence program has collected in the past eleven years (she memorized the critical intelligence before leaving), the EO assessment team's actual methodology and target, and the reason she left the Compact's service.

WANTS To reach the headwaters and deliver specific information to the highland communities — information that changes the headwaters situation in a way that neither the Sons nor any faction has anticipated.

FEARS The Compact will find her before she reaches the highlands and will interpret her departure as defection rather than what it is.

CURRENT PRESSURE She knows the compromised Sons operative has transmitted her location to the PCU. She has changed route twice. She cannot change route indefinitely without losing the timeline that makes her information relevant.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

Who a territory is for reveals itself through what it forbids and what it forgives. The Shatter Belt enforces through three distinct governance architectures simultaneously.

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

1. Bosphorus crossing fees are mandatory for all registered vessels — the Compact enforces this against EO and PCU traffic equally and has the leverage to make both comply. 2. Weapons platforms within the Bosphorus exclusion zone require Compact notification — this has been challenged twice; both challenges were backed down after the Compact threatened to close the crossing. 3. Intelligence operations targeting Compact personnel are treated as hostile acts — the Compact has expelled three EO and two PCU operatives in the past five years under this framework.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

1. 'Transit security assessments' — inspections that can delay EO or PCU military logistics shipments for weeks at politically sensitive moments. 2. Diplomatic status designations — the Compact can classify or de-classify consulate personnel as 'accredited' at will, effectively ending their cover identities. 3. Water infrastructure certification — the Compact has positioned itself as the neutral certifying authority for Tigris-Euphrates flow data. Whose data is 'certified' determines whose water claims are internationally recognized.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

1. Bosphorus closure — has never happened; has been threatened four times. Both EO and PCU military logistics are dependent on the crossing. The threat has worked every time. 2. Intelligence asset exposure — the Compact's accumulated knowledge of every faction's Istanbul-based intelligence operations is the most powerful deterrent it holds. Using it would end the information economy that sustains the Compact. It is a weapon that can only be used once. 3. Sons of the Serpent corridor activation — the threat of the Sons opening transit to parties the Compact selects, changing who moves through the Belt and who doesn't.

CIVIC RITUALS

1. Crossing Ceremony — daily formal acknowledgment of the first vessels transiting the Bosphorus, broadcast on all channels. Political theater that reminds everyone who controls the water between things. 2. Neutral Day — annual Compact observance of its independence declaration. The city stops for two hours. Both EO and PCU consulate staff are required by protocol to attend the public ceremony. They stand on opposite sides of the square. 3. Intelligence Audit — a Compact internal process, never publicly confirmed, that reminds every faction's Istanbul station chief that the Compact is watching the watchers.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime in Istanbul's Bazaar Circuit, Basra's commercial district, or an Anatolian interior market town. Every result produces a new contact, a new debt, or a new exposure.

1 (Contact Made): A Snow Leopard intelligence officer, off-duty in a tea house near the Bazaar Circuit, describes the EO assessment operation's methodology in enough detail that operators understand the specific gap in Compact surveillance she is asking them to fill. She does not remember being that specific the next morning.

2 (Feud Started): Operator says something — or is heard saying something — that reaches a faction intelligence informant through the room's geometry. Nothing happens immediately. Next morning, crossing documentation enters 'verification review.' Review has no stated timeline.

3 (Equipment Lost): Operator's secondary comms device is lifted at some point during the evening. It holds 48 hours of location cache. Whoever has it knows everywhere the operator has been, including the relay point community they were not supposed to visit.

4 (Secret Learned): A Brotherhood of Shadows contact corners operator near evening's end. They have identified someone in the Compact's cable intelligence division whose loyalty has shifted. They want something in trade for the name. Won't say the name until trade is confirmed.

5 (Debt Incurred): A Syndicate broker sits down with a proposition: they will move a specific data package out of the Belt through a route that bypasses every checkpoint, in exchange for one favor, undefined and redeemable within 30 days. The broker presents this as reasonable. They are correct. That's what makes it worth worrying about.

6 (Locally Recognizable): Operator does something — intervenes in a dispute, covers a tab, handles a confrontation — that travels. By next morning, operator is the person the Bazaar Circuit mentions when deciding whether to trust someone new. One faction network routes requests through the operator. Another faction's file now has a photograph.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

The Bosphorus Compact's Snow Leopard gene-forging program does not match any known methodology. Who designed it, what template was used, and whether the Snow Leopards' capabilities extend beyond what other faction programs produce is undefined. The Compact does not discuss it. Other factions have noticed. Determine the program's origin when operators gain Director Celik's full confidence.

The Sons of the Serpent's founding engineer has not been confirmed alive for four years. Whether they are in Istanbul observing what their organization became, dead in the highlands, or something else entirely is undefined. The founding engineer's identity and current status are determined at first significant contact with Sons senior command.

The refined Lumicite transiting the Zagros passes in sealed cases is being delivered to a recipient on the Iranian plateau. Who the recipient is, what they are building, and whether it connects to the EO Strategic Resources program, an independent operation, or something no faction has anticipated is undefined. The destination is determined when operators intercept or trace a shipment.

The Brotherhood of Shadows' parallel geological survey has mapped a global Lumicite network connecting the Zagros, the Lakefire Corridor, the Arafura Deep, and the Patagonian interior. Whether this network is natural geology, prehistorical infrastructure, or something that challenges the distinction between those categories is undefined. The survey's conclusions are determined when the Brotherhood researcher reaches the Istanbul archive.

The missing Compact intelligence officer carries information that 'changes the headwaters situation in a way that neither the Sons nor any faction has anticipated.' What that information is — and whether it concerns the Lumicite formation, the cable intelligence, the dam fracture, or something that reframes all three — is undefined. Determine the information at the officer's arrival in the highlands.

The interior community healer's gene-forged Drift treatment works through methods the faction programs cannot replicate. Whether this is traditional

medicine, Lumicite resonance interaction, or something the healer herself does not fully understand is undefined. What 'Drift as adaptation rather than degradation' means for the gene-forged programs worldwide is the question that Ayse Yilmaz is not yet ready to answer.

FACTIONS

BOSPHORUS COMPACT — SNOW LEOPARD INTELLIGENCE UNITS

Crossing Control & Information Economy

OBJECTIVE Maintain crossing neutrality and the information economy built on it while managing the EO assessment operation and the Compact's accumulated cable intelligence before one of them resolves in a way that ends the Compact's independence.

ASSETS Bosphorus crossing control, cable intelligence program (eleven years of faction communications), Snow Leopard gene-forged intelligence units, Istanbul information economy infrastructure, established relationships with every faction operating in the Shatter Belt simultaneously.

DEPENDENCY The balance. The Compact survives because absorbing it costs more than tolerating it. Any change in that calculation — EO completing their assessment, PCU deciding to solve the headwaters problem unilaterally, Sons losing their black zone embedding — shifts the cost-benefit and ends the Compact's protection.

VULNERABILITY The cable program. Eighteen years of reading faction communications through the Bosphorus infrastructure. If this becomes a known quantity rather than an implied one, the Compact's deterrence has a price tag and can be overcome.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Transit delay, diplomatic pressure, intelligence asset exposure threats.
- 2 — Selective intelligence disclosure — releasing specific, damaging information about one faction to create pressure without triggering the full audit disclosure.
- 3 — Sons of the Serpent transit facilitation — actively enabling Sons operations through Istanbul as a message to both EO and PCU.
- 4 — Full intelligence disclosure — releasing everything simultaneously, destroying the Compact's information economy but making the cost of removal too high for anyone to absorb.

OFFER Neutral meeting space, crossing access, intelligence about all parties to all parties on a carefully calibrated basis.

DEMAND Crossing fees, respect for Compact personnel, no operations targeting Compact infrastructure.

IF DAMAGED Istanbul ceasing to be neutral doesn't eliminate the crossing's strategic value — it just means whoever controls Istanbul controls the crossing. Both EO and PCU have spent eighteen years calculating what that control would give them. Neither has been willing to pay the cost of finding out.

EO — EURASIAN OLIGARCHY (CAUCASUS OPERATIONS COMMAND)

Northern Pressure & Resource Acquisition

OBJECTIVE Establish sustained access to the Tigris-Euphrates headwaters and the Lumicite formation beneath them, through either the Compact's diplomatic framework or direct operational capability — while preventing the PCU from achieving the same access first and while managing the transition from intelligence operations to resource acquisition that EO Strategic Resources has authorized without Volkov's knowledge.

ASSETS Caucasus corridor garrison and logistics infrastructure, Lynx intelligence operatives (the best human intelligence capability in the Shatter Belt), Bear and Boar gene-forged security units, seven years of headwaters terrain intelligence, the EO commercial presence in Istanbul, Horizon Minerals connection (shared Strategic Resources oversight), and three operators in the black zone who have found the Lumicite formation independently.

DEPENDENCY The Caucasus supply chain. The corridor's logistics run through warlord-controlled transit territory that three PCU-cultivated partners can close. Without the supply chain, Volkov's garrison has six weeks of independent operational capacity.

VULNERABILITY The deserted operators. Three EO personnel in the black zone, operating independently, possessing Lumicite formation intelligence, and broadcasting on open frequency. If anyone reaches them first, EO's information advantage evaporates.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Increased intelligence operations, headwaters insertion attempts, cultivation of Anatolian interior communities.
- 2 — Caucasus corridor forward positioning, EO commercial pressure on the Compact, direct intelligence operations against the cable program.
- 3 — Unauthorized operations — Volkov acting on seven years of intelligence without EO command approval.
- 4 — EO Strategic Resources activation. The Lumicite mandate supersedes the headwaters mission. Volkov's corridor becomes an extraction staging area.

OFFER Caucasus logistics access, EO commercial network connections, Lynx intelligence capability, and technical infrastructure investment.

DEMAND Headwaters access, Lumicite formation intelligence exclusivity, Compact cable intelligence disclosure, and the three deserted operators returned.

IF DAMAGED EO losing the Caucasus corridor removes the northern pressure from the Shatter Belt equation. The PCU faces no counterweight. The Compact loses the bilateral tension that makes its neutrality valuable. The Sons' highland defense becomes a single-faction problem — tactically simpler and strategically worse.

SONS OF THE SERPENT — SHATTER BELT INSURGENT NETWORK

Headwaters Defense & Community Embedding

OBJECTIVE Maintain headwaters security, black zone community embedding, and the transit infrastructure through Istanbul while preventing either EO or PCU from establishing the sustained presence in the Shatter Belt that would allow either to use water access as a permanent governance lever.

ASSETS Highland corridor security (operational for eleven years), black zone community embedding (deep, relationship-based), Istanbul transit infrastructure (intact but potentially compromised), knowledge of Shatter Belt terrain and human geography that no faction intelligence service has matched, and — since Sirocco's arrival — an incoming relationship with IPFZ Heralds technical knowledge.

DEPENDENCY The black zone communities. The Sons' legitimacy, their intelligence coverage, their logistics network — all of it runs through the communities that host them. If those communities make a different calculation, the Sons become an insurgent organization without a civilian base.

VULNERABILITY The internal compromise. Someone in Sons command is working toward an accommodation with PCU. The Sons' operational security has always assumed internal integrity. The sixth headwaters insertion — briefed on suppression positions — is the first evidence that this assumption is wrong.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Headwaters flow management — adjusting irrigation outputs to create downstream pressure without triggering catastrophic failure.
- 2 — Transit interdiction — closing the Istanbul route to specific faction operations.
- 3 — Infrastructure denial — making EO and PCU establishment of headwaters presence operationally costly enough to sustain.
- 4 — Controlled headwaters release — a managed flow reduction significant enough to force the Shatter Belt into open negotiation. The Sons consider this a last resort. It would kill people.

OFFER Black zone access, transit through the Shatter Belt, headwaters intelligence, and community introductions that open doors no faction credential can.

DEMAND No faction operations targeting black zone communities, no unilateral headwaters access, and — from the Compact specifically — disclosure of the PCU cable communication about the dam fracture.

IF DAMAGED Sons losing black zone embedding transforms the Mesopotamian territory into an ungoverned space on the PCU's terms. The river communities are then dependent on PCU stability operations for their survival. The PCU has been working toward this outcome since 2055.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

COMPACT DIRECTOR YASEMIN CELIK — SNOW LEOPARD PROGRAM LEAD AND CABLE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR

CAN GET The cable intelligence archive (the scope of what the Compact knows about all parties), the EO assessment's current operational status, the PCU communication about the dam fracture.

WANTS The EO assessment disrupted without becoming an open confrontation — specifically, she wants the assessment team identified to the EO's own leadership as having gone too far, triggering an internal recall.

FEARS That the missing intelligence officer was taken by EO and is being used to complete the assessment the Compact disrupted.

CURRENT PRESSURE A Snow Leopard field unit has gone dark in the Anatolian interior. It was the unit tracking the EO assessment team.

VOID WALKER — SHATTER BELT DESIGNATION 'TRANSIT' (MULTIPLE CONFIRMED SIGHTINGS, ISTANBUL-PRIMARY)

CAN GET The document in their possession — which is the Compact's intelligence audit — and whatever else they have accumulated across a presence in Istanbul estimated at four months.

WANTS To deliver the document to a specific party. Five intelligence services are trying to determine who. The Void Walker has been allowing the chase to continue because the surveillance is itself telling them something they need to know.

FEARS Unknown. Operational methodology suggests a threat assessment model that does not match any known faction doctrine.

CURRENT PRESSURE The EO assessment team and the Void Walker's objective are converging on the same location.

DOWNTIME

WORK THE BAZAAR CIRCUIT (ISTANBUL)

WHAT: Operators spend five days embedded in Istanbul's information economy — as buyers, sellers, or brokers.

COST: Five days, a plausible commercial cover, and one piece of genuine intelligence to establish credibility.

GAIN: One of: a faction intelligence contact in Istanbul, current Sons of the Serpent transit schedule, the identity of one EO or PCU intelligence asset operating under commercial cover.

FALLOUT: The Compact logs the operator's information economy activity. Elif Demir reviews the log personally. She files no action — but she knows.

RUNNING BLACK ZONE (MESOPOTAMIAN BLACK ZONE)

WHAT: Operators spend seven days embedded with a river community, doing the work — agricultural maintenance, water system operation, community logistics.

COST: Seven days, introduction from Sons or a community contact, willingness to work.

GAIN: One of: black zone community network introductions, a Sons of the Serpent contact at cell level (not command), the specific survival technology supply chain map that the communities use.

FALLOUT: An EO NGO operator was watching the community. They now have operators' faces in their collection. The NGO cover means they cannot act on it officially. They will act on it unofficially within three weeks.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

HUB-LEVEL RUMOR TABLE (1D6)

- 1. The Compact's cable intelligence includes the PCU communication authorizing the dam fracture operation. The Sons have been asking for this for eight months. The Compact has been refusing. The reason is not that the Compact wants to protect PCU. The reason is that releasing it would confirm the cable program exists. [TRUE]
- 2. The EO's three unaccounted-for operators deserted because they found the Lumicite formation and their mission orders changed from 'assess the formation' to 'ensure it remains unknown to other parties.' They are in the black zone because they are trying to reach the Heralds operative before their own service does. [TRUE]
- 3. The Sons' founding operative is in Istanbul. Has been for two years. Is not running the Sons from there — has removed themselves from the operational structure. Is watching what the organization they built became. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 4. The Void Walker in Istanbul is not carrying the Compact's intelligence audit. They are carrying something the Compact doesn't know they have — a document that post-dates the Compact's most recent cable intelligence collection and that changes the cable program's interpretation of the PCU dam fracture communication entirely. [UNCLEAR]
- 5. The Heralds of the Storm's presence in the Shatter Belt is not a defection by a single operative. It is the beginning of a planned expansion. Sirocco's offer is real. Her purpose is also real and is not what she is describing it as. [TRAP — Sirocco's defection is genuine; the 'planned expansion' framing is EO disinformation]
- 6. The headwaters dam fracture is not progressing at a natural rate. Someone has been maintaining it — keeping it stable enough not to trigger catastrophic failure while continuing to reduce flow at a rate too slow to trigger emergency response. The maintenance has been ongoing for eight months. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1 | THE HEADWATERS CRISIS

Stage 1 — Fracture Stable

The dam fracture continues its managed deterioration. Flow reduction is 7% below baseline — below the threshold that triggers automatic emergency response. All parties are running operations on the assumption that the fracture

will either stabilize (EO's position) or be repaired (Sons' position) or be allowed to fail (PCU's actual position, per the cable communication).

Stage 2 — Fracture Accelerates

The fracture rate increases — either through natural progression, the three EO operators' interference, or operator action. The flow reduction crosses 12% and triggers PCU emergency agricultural assessment. Both EO and PCU begin headwaters positioning in response. The Sons activate the full highland corridor defense network.

Stage 3 — Open Conflict in Highlands

EO and PCU both attempt headwaters access simultaneously. The Sons cannot hold against both. The highland communities make a choice about which they can survive — and the choice is not necessarily either faction. The Compact's cable communication about PCU's fracture authorization becomes relevant to every party simultaneously.

Stage 4 — Shatter Belt in Open War

EO and PCU conflict in the Shatter Belt becomes direct rather than proxy. Istanbul closes the crossing. The information economy stops functioning. The Sons' black zone communities choose sides or don't. The 600,000 people along the reduced Euphrates run the calculation of what 23% flow means when the management infrastructure is also failing.

WHAT OPERATORS CAN DO: Control the fracture timeline. Get the cable communication to the right parties before the crisis forces the Compact's hand. Shape whether the headwaters resolution is negotiated or fought. Every day the fracture holds at current rate is a day closer to someone accelerating it on worse terms.

OPERATIONS MAP

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- Bosphorus water transit — controlled, fee-based, recorded. The hinge of everything.
- EO Caucasus road network — fast, monitored by EO, supply chain dependent on warlord transit partners.
- Sons highland routes — dark, community-knowledge dependent, seasonal. The only unsurveilled north-south corridor.
- Euphrates river transit — open, slow, PCU drone coverage attempts. The black zone's primary internal mobility.
- Zagros passes — seasonal (May-October), three year-round routes (community-maintained, access by relationship only).
- Istanbul underground — pre-Upheaval infrastructure, Sons-adjacent, not mapped by factions.

CHOKEPOINTS

- Bosphorus crossing — the hinge of everything in the Shatter Belt. Compact-controlled, fee-based, the point where every faction's logistics converge.
- Headwaters dam complex, eastern Anatolia — physical source of the strategic resource. The fracture.
- Mesopotamian black zone northern perimeter — PCU pressure point, the line between governance and ungoverned space.

SURVEILLANCE ARCHITECTURE

- Istanbul: comprehensive, all factions, full overlap. The most surveilled city in the hemisphere.
- Caucasus: EO sensor net, satellite coverage, Lynx ground surveillance.
- Gulf approach: PCU sensor net, satellite coverage, drone fleet.
- Highland corridor: dark zone. No faction sensors. Sons operational control.
- Mesopotamian black zone: dark zone. PCU drone suppression by Sons.
- Zagros passes: dark zone. Mountain terrain defeats satellite and drone systems.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- Bosphorus Compact controls the crossing and Istanbul. Snow Leopards run the intelligence architecture.
- EO controls Caucasus approach corridors and northern Anatolian transit through Volkov's garrison.

- PCU controls Gulf approach and Mesopotamian southern perimeter through al-Rashidi's Northern Command.
- Sons of the Serpent control highland corridors and black zone interior through community embedding.
- Zagros pass communities control mountain transit through three millennia of accumulated knowledge.
- Anatolian interior communities control the transition zone through agricultural leverage and relay cooperation.

KEY LOCATIONS

- Bosphorus seabed cables — the Compact's eleven-year intelligence collection infrastructure.
- Headwaters dam section — the fracture, the Lumicite formation beneath, the crack that glows.
- Mesopotamian black zone interior — 600,000 people, Sons embedding, the three deserted EO operators.
- Caucasus corridor garrison — Volkov's staging area, the unauthorized cargo from Strategic Resources.
- Basra Northern Command — al-Rashidi's headquarters, the agricultural threshold calculation.
- Zagros year-round passes — the knowledge that is dying, the Lumicite formation, the thing in the high passes.
- Brotherhood archive, Fatih district, Istanbul — pre-Upheaval intelligence records, the global Lumicite network data.

MISSION SEEDS

1. FIND THE MAINTAINER

OBJECTIVE: Identify who has been maintaining the headwaters fracture at its current rate — keeping it below catastrophic failure while continuing controlled deterioration — and determine whether stopping the maintenance accelerates or stabilizes the dam.

CLOCK: The EO's three unaccounted-for operators are in the black zone looking for the same answer. If they find it first, EO command has demonstrated they can achieve objectives without authorized operations — which removes the Compact's deterrence against the next unauthorized operation.

COMPLICATION: The maintainer may not be a person. The fracture's rate and pattern are consistent with a slow-acting agent introduced during a specific maintenance window.

Finding the agent means finding the window. Finding the window means finding who had access. Everyone had access at some point.

2. GET THE CABLE COMMUNICATION

OBJECTIVE: Extract the PCU cable communication authorizing the dam fracture from the Compact's intelligence archive and deliver it to Sons leadership — specifically to Arash, not through the compromised command structure — in time to prevent the internal Sons accommodation before it enables the PCU's Stage 3 operation.

CLOCK: The Sons' internal compromise is active and the PCU knows it. Once the PCU activates their black zone operation, the compromised cell's window to prevent it closes. The communication is the only thing that changes the internal argument.

COMPLICATION: Extracting the communication from the Compact's archive means accessing the cable intelligence program. Director Celik will know the moment the archive is accessed. She will not prevent the access. She will want to know where the document goes — and will use that information to complete the assessment she has been building about the EO operation simultaneously.

3. SIROCCO'S PASSAGE

OBJECTIVE: Get Sirocco to Istanbul, verify her defection, and establish the Compact introduction that allows her headwaters Lumicite data and IPFZ technical knowledge to reach the people who can use it before the 72-hour window on her exposure closes.

CLOCK: 72 hours. After that, whoever made her decides what to do. The options range from Sons security response to PCU extraction to something operators haven't anticipated.

COMPLICATION: Getting Sirocco to Istanbul requires the Sons' transit infrastructure, which may be compromised. The alternative routes are longer and go through territory where both EO and PCU are running heightened operations. Sirocco has made a specific decision about who she trusts. That decision may not include operators.

4. VOLKOV'S CHOICE

OBJECTIVE: Reach the three deserted EO operators in the black zone and determine whether their Lumicite formation intelligence should be returned to EO command (where it feeds the Strategic Resources extraction mandate), delivered to the Sons (where it changes the headwaters defense calculus), or published through the Compact's information economy (where it makes the Shatter Belt a Lumicite theater overnight).

CLOCK: Volkov's security review arrives in five days. When it discovers the Sons intelligence sharing, Volkov is relieved of command and replaced by a Strategic Resources officer. After that, the deserted operators are a sanction target, not a recovery operation.

COMPLICATION: The deserted operators are in the black zone because they found the Lumicite formation and their orders changed to suppression. They deserted because they believed the formation should not be suppressed. Their broadcast on open frequency was deliberate — they want the intelligence distributed. Finding them means deciding whether to honor their choice or override it.

5. THE WINTER ROUTE

OBJECTIVE: Save Leyla Demirel's life and preserve the year-round pass maintenance knowledge before the Zagros loses a transit corridor that has been maintained for centuries — while determining what the Lumicite formation in the Zagros range is doing to the pass maintainer and whether it represents a threat, a transformation, or something the medical framework doesn't have a category for.

CLOCK: Leyla's condition is worsening. The community healer estimates two weeks before the fever resolves — either through recovery or through death. The maintenance knowledge cannot be transmitted while she is delirious.

COMPLICATION: The treatment Leyla needs may require gene-forged medical expertise that only faction programs or the interior community healer Ayse Yilmaz possesses. Getting either to the Zagros requires crossing the Anatolian interior through the relay network that may be compromised, during a period when Elder Yildiz has closed the pass. Yildiz will open the pass for a healer. She will not open it for faction personnel. The distinction matters.

6. CLOSING THE LOOP

OBJECTIVE: Identify and stop the compromised Sons operative before the relay point locations are transmitted to the PCU — or, if the transmission has already occurred, reach the relay communities before the PCU positions assets at them and collapses the transit infrastructure that connects Istanbul to the highlands.

CLOCK: The next Sons relay transit is in 48 hours. If the compromised operative is on that transit, the relay point locations are exposed in real time. If the PCU is already positioning, the 48-hour window is the last one before the transit infrastructure is burned.

COMPLICATION: The compromised operative may be acting under coercion — a family member in Basra, leverage manufactured by PCU intelligence. Stopping the transmission by neutralizing the operative is simple. Stopping it by addressing the coercion requires reaching Basra, identifying the family member, and disrupting the PCU leverage — all within 48 hours while simultaneously protecting the relay network. The Sons' organizational culture does not permit the simple option. Whether operators share that ethic determines their approach.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every solution in the Shatter Belt creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF THE BOSPHORUS COMPACT FALLS

The EO or PCU gains crossing control. The other immediately treats this as an act of war. The Shatter Belt's proxy conflict becomes a direct one with Istanbul as the first theater. The Sons' transit infrastructure loses its neutral ground. The information economy that made Istanbul valuable is destroyed in the process of fighting over it.

IF THE HEADWATERS FAIL

Sixty million people face acute water crisis. The PCU's northern agricultural zone collapses. The black zone communities' managed viability ends. The Sons of the Serpent, whose entire strategic purpose was preventing this, have to decide what they are now that the thing they were built to prevent has happened.

IF THE SONS OF THE SERPENT ARE DESTROYED

EO and PCU contest the headwaters directly, without the buffer. The highland communities align with whichever party offers the better deal, or neither, or align and regret it. The cable communication the Compact is holding becomes the most important piece of intelligence in the Shatter Belt — because without the Sons to act on it, there is no actor positioned to use it.

IF THE LUMICITE FORMATION IS DISCLOSED

The headwaters crisis transforms. What was a water infrastructure conflict becomes a Lumicite extraction contest simultaneously. The EO's interest shifts from water leverage to resource acquisition. The PCU reassesses its agricultural strategy against a Lumicite energy alternative. The highland communities — who have known about the formation for two years and said nothing — become the most important players in a negotiation they never asked to be part of. The Sons of the Serpent, if they still exist, have to decide whether protecting the highland communities still means protecting the formation.

FIELD NOTE

The dam holds. The cables listen. The crossing stays open and the ceremony runs at dawn and the Bazaar Circuit sells information to everyone and allegiance to no one. Istanbul has been doing this for three thousand years. The Sons have been doing it for eleven. The difference is that Istanbul can survive being wrong about what holds it together. The Sons cannot.

When the fracture breaks — or is broken — nobody in this territory will have the option of not choosing a side.

— Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

13/

EURASIAN STEPPES

EO / PRC CONTESTED | EARTH 2066

The steppe is a transit problem. The EO and PRC both solved it the same way. Neither solution involved asking the people who live there.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

A thousand miles of grassland and mountain ranges under EO administrative control. Sparse population. Dense military infrastructure. EO heavy armor was designed for these sightlines — long, open, unforgiving. Autonomous platforms operate across the territory with minimal human supervision, coordinated through a relay network anchored at Steppe Post 9. There is nowhere to hide that a drone cannot find if it is looking.

The EO doesn't occupy the Steppes the way a city occupies territory. It instruments it. Labor compounds at every extraction site. Prefab strongpoints at every chokepoint. Ceramic plate walls and rationed allotments and surveillance as the social contract. Workers on six-month rotating contracts who understand that equipment failure counts against their record. A repair culture so pervasive that workers are evaluated by it — because broken equipment costs days, and a broken life costs a form.

The load-bearing fact beneath all of it: Steppe Post 9's autonomous platform management layer has been running Standing Order 7 for three years — a suppression protocol that buries flagged anomalies before human operators see them. The drones have been logging discrepancies: headcount gaps in labor compounds, cargo manifest variances, off-route vehicle movements. Three years of suppressed logs. Nobody in EO command has read them. Someone in Dmitri Volkov's procurement network issued that standing order. The suppressed logs describe why.

FIELD TEXTURE

Sound carries at distance. No canopy, no urban absorption, nothing to stop it. EO autonomous platform hum is a persistent low frequency that becomes background noise within hours of arrival — operators start filtering it out, which is exactly when it stops serving as a warning. Heavy armor vibration arrives before visual contact: feel it in your boots before the horizon shows anything. Cold enough in winter that weapons condense frost and unprotected metal becomes a hazard. The terrain is flat to every horizon and the EO designed their engagement doctrine accordingly. There is nowhere to hide that a drone cannot find if it is looking. The only viable cover is speed and the brief window between a drone's patrol pass and the next one.

SPLICE PUNK

The Steppes are EO territory and the EO is not interested in your self-expression. The scene exists in transit corridors and the brief windows between autonomous platform patrol passes. EO-forged — brown bear, Eurasian boar, Siberian lynx stock — who go freelance and move through Steppe territory run NULLMARK clean, BARE KIT grey, nothing that catches autonomous platform recognition systems. The aesthetic choice is suppression: visible splice identity in EO territory is an operational decision, not a fashion one. The patches come out when you clear the border. The Burn Run format that formalized from Flooded London runs a shadow version in the Steppe transit corridors that has never been documented. BURN ARCHIVE has three unconfirmed reports.

CIVILIAN SURVIVAL

Sparse settlement, heavy surveillance. Workers in EO labor compounds live on rotational contracts — everything rationed, maintained, accounted for. What they eat: root vegetables, greenhouse produce, protein concentrate. What they fear: equipment failure that counts against their record. What luxury means: a rotation that ends on schedule.

AT THE TABLE

Distance favors the EO. Your operators need to close the gap before engaging and keep moving afterward. Logistics matter — you are far from extraction. The "drone window" is fourteen minutes between patrol passes. Fourteen minutes is enough for someone who knows how to use it. Not enough for someone who doesn't. When a Strato-Raptor stops circling, something below it has its attention. The platform doesn't suppress its own flags — the humans managing it buried the logs. The machines flagged the problem 847 times. The problem belongs to whoever issued Standing Order 7.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

THE FAILING UNDER-SYSTEM

Standing Order 7 was issued to Steppe Post 9's relay management system via a procurement channel that traces to the Kazan Consortium's logistics division. Its function: suppress platform anomaly flags matching a specific cargo variance signature before routing to human review. The drones flagged the signature 847 times over three years. All 847 logs exist in a suppressed partition at Steppe Post 9 that no scheduled audit reaches.

The variance signature describes ore shipments leaving Ural-7 and two other extraction compounds on manifests that don't reconcile with the official Kazan Consortium tonnage reports. The difference — approximately 12% of total ore output — is being diverted off the official supply chain to a buyer identified in the logs only as MERIDIAN. MERIDIAN is not an EO entity. Dmitri Volkov's procurement network is the intermediary. Elena Kirova's internal security operation has been running parallel to this for eighteen months and has not disclosed its findings to EO military command.

Disrupting Steppe Post 9 — the mission every external operator comes here to run — releases the suppressed logs into the platform network's unmanaged decision layer. The drones start acting on three years of unprocessed flags. The Kazan Consortium's ore diversion pipeline becomes visible to every node in the EO command structure simultaneously. Kirova's parallel operation is exposed.

Volkov's procurement network is compromised. The EO's autonomous platform network is temporarily ungoverned across four hundred kilometers. All of this happens at the same time.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

TERRITORY	EO core
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable (surface) / Compromised (data layer)
SURVEILLANCE	Drone sweep + Strato-Raptor sensor net + Kirova network
CIVILIAN MOOD	Compliant / High suppressed tension
BLACK MARKET	Light (equipment parts, NTB suppressants)
PRIMARY RESOURCE	Rare-earth ore
CLIMATE	Open steppe / Extreme cold in winter
WILD CARD	Strato-Raptors — some carry EO sensor packages, some have drifted beyond program parameters
GENE-FORGED	Brown bears, Eurasian boars, Siberian lynx — Steppe-built endurance mods, temperature tolerance, long-sight enhancements

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

EO EXTRACTION DIVISION

Maintains ore extraction output metrics. Complete administrative control of labor compounds. Split leadership — the majority don't know about MERIDIAN; the minority who do are managing their exposure. Tempest Rider units for operational enforcement.

THE KAZAN CONSORTIUM

Operational control of the Corridor logistics infrastructure. The clearing protocol makes MERIDIAN invisible to standard EO oversight. Legal team preparing

MERIDIAN's administrative defense for eight months. Looking for a controlled exit before Volkov's audit reaches the manifest discrepancies.

ELENA KIROVA'S INTERNAL SECURITY NETWORK

Parallel intelligence operation running inside EO infrastructure. Zaslavskaya's active Post 9 extraction. 612-entry partial log. The network was compromised three months ago. Zaslavskaya went independent. Kirova doesn't know.

MERIDIAN (BUYER, UNIDENTIFIED)

The pre-war infrastructure site, eleven workers who represent operational security liability, and a procurement chain through Volkov's network. Three years of operational security. The buyer's identity is the leverage that prevents negotiation from being necessary.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 01	Ural-7 — Mineral extraction hub. Twelve hundred workers. The official tonnage numbers are wrong.
ZONE 02	Steppe Post 9 — Automated relay station. Standing Order 7. 847 suppressed log entries.
ZONE 03	Volga Strongpoint — Forward operating base. Kirova's Steppes network coordination. Unaudited Kazan logistics office.
ZONE 04	The Open Steppe — Flat to every horizon. Fourteen-minute drone windows. No cover.
ZONE 05	The Permafrost Line — Northern boundary. Classified research station. Organisms emerging from retreating permafrost.
ZONE 06	Labor Compound Network — Satellite extraction sites. Headcount discrepancies at Compounds 12, 17, and 23.
ZONE 07	Kazan Supply Corridor — Logistics spine. Where official tonnage and the 12% diverge.

ZONES

ZONE 01 URAL-7 — MINERAL EXTRACTION HUB

An EO mineral extraction hub that exists entirely to move ore west and return workers east. Twelve hundred workers on six-month rotating contracts. No civilian zoning. No entertainment beyond the commissary. The repair depot is the most important building in the compound and everyone knows it — a broken drill costs days on the extraction schedule, and the extraction schedule is the only number anyone in EO logistics cares about. A broken life costs a form. The ore at Ural-7 is rare-earth. The official tonnage numbers are wrong.

SECURITY	Active
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable
CIVILIANS	Packed (workers only)
SURVEILLANCE	Cameras + drone sweep + shift count log
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO / Kazan Consortium (logistics)
CONTAMINATION	None
BLACK MARKET	Light (equipment parts, NTB suppressants, transit documents)
MOBILITY	Checkpointed

FUNCTION Rare-earth ore extraction and primary processing. Feeds the official Kazan Consortium supply chain and the MERIDIAN off-manifest pipeline.

CONTROLLER EO Extraction Division on paper. Compound Supervisor Yekaterina Morozova in practice — she runs the shift schedule, the equipment assignments, and the rotation list.

DRAW	Rare-earth ore — the official kind and the 12% that doesn't appear on the manifest / The repair depot — the only place in 400 km with the parts to fix heavy extraction equipment / The shift count discrepancy — three compounds show gaps; Ural-7 has the largest.
RISK	Steppe Post 9's drone sweep covers Ural-7 on a 22-minute cycle — the cycle is published in the compound operations manual, which workers are not supposed to have read / Morozova's incident report authority routes directly to Kirova's network for flagged personnel / The MERIDIAN ore move happens during the third shift. Third-shift workers know something moves. They don't know what.
SCARCITY	Rotation confirmation — workers whose contracts are being extended don't receive notification until 24 hours before departure date, at which point “voluntary extension” is the only option / NTB suppressants — faction-standard medical distribution doesn't fully cover Ural-7; the black market fills the gap at prices that represent most of a week's ration supplement / Privacy — the commissary, dormitories, and work areas are all camera-covered; the only blind spot is a section of the repair depot the cameras have been failing to capture for eight months.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The ore diverted to MERIDIAN leaves Ural-7 on vehicles with manifest codes that match legitimate maintenance supply runs. The vehicles return with parts that appear on the official logistics record. Twelve percent of extraction output, moved in plain sight, three times a week, for three years. The workers who load the third-shift vehicles are on permanent rotation extension. They have not left Ural-7 in an average of 14 months.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A worker identifies the tonnage discrepancy in the processing logs — it is visible if you know where to look and are willing to look. Morozova runs a medical reassignment within 48 hours. If the worker has already communicated the discrepancy outside Ural-7, Kirova's network activates within the same period. The compound goes to restricted movement. The autonomous platforms shift to active monitoring pattern. The third-shift ore move pauses for exactly one cycle, then resumes.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO Extraction Division supervisors, Morozova's compound management structure

ECONOMY

Primary extraction, processing, equipment maintenance, official manifest cargo runs

RISK

Camera coverage and shift count logs — arriving or departing at unusual times flags the automated monitoring system

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Third shift lead — a Kazan Consortium logistics coordinator whose official title is “equipment maintenance liaison”

ECONOMY

The MERIDIAN transfer. Maintenance supply run cover. Third-shift workers who do not speak about what they load.

RISK

The repair depot camera blind spot is the only place in Ural-7 where a conversation doesn't appear in the compound's surveillance record

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The repair depot smells like machine oil and cold metal. The floor is worn smooth where the heavy equipment rolls in. In the section where the cameras fail, the wear pattern on the floor is different — lighter, foot traffic only, a path between two specific storage bays that doesn't match any equipment route.

EO EXTRACTION DIVISION

Dominant. Administrative control of Ural-7. Morozova's compound management runs the shift schedule and rotation list.

KAZAN CONSORTIUM

Logistics presence. The third-shift coordinator runs the MERIDIAN transfer under cover as equipment maintenance liaison.

CIVILIAN NEED

Workers want to maintain rotation status and avoid the processing log audit. The three who know about the tonnage discrepancy are calculating how much they can safely say without flagging themselves. The others are trying not to know what they already know.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Manifest variance analysis (via Petrov, restricted access). The repair depot logbook and equipment inventory (via Petrov). Third-shift patrol gaps and camera blind zones (via Smirnova, at personal risk to her). Direct line to Morozova for rotation modifications and personnel reassignments.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- **1.** A shift-count discrepancy alert triggers during a routine handoff. Morozova's deputy crosses the compound at a pace that is not routine. Two names on the count sheet don't match bunks.
- **2.** A Kazan logistics vehicle arrives unscheduled. The driver presents manifest codes the checkpoint guard has never seen. The guard processes them anyway. The vehicle parks at the repair depot.
- **3.** A worker approaches the commissary table where the operators are eating. She asks a question about equipment requisition forms that is not actually about equipment requisition forms.
- **4.** The drone sweep passes 90 seconds early. The published schedule says 22 minutes. This cycle was 20.5. Nobody in the compound remarks on it. Three workers check their watches.

- **5.** Morozova conducts an equipment inspection parade. One worker presents a tool with a serial number that doesn't match the assignment log. Morozova notes it. The worker's rotation status changes by end of shift.
- **6.** A repair depot technician drops a manifest printout in the corridor outside the blind spot. It shows tonnage figures for the previous week. The numbers don't add up. He picks it up before anyone else can read it. The operators saw the header.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** The MERIDIAN transfer vehicles idle at the depot loading bay. Third-shift workers move crates without speaking. The crate markings are maintenance supply codes. The weight is wrong for maintenance supplies.
- **2.** Yeva Smirnova is in the camera blind spot. She is waiting for someone. If the operators are that someone, she has fourteen months of information and sixty seconds of trust to decide whether to share it.
- **3.** A power fluctuation kills the dormitory lights for eleven seconds. When they come back, the camera system takes an additional four seconds to reboot. Workers who have been here long enough know what four seconds without cameras is worth.
- **4.** The Kazan logistics coordinator walks the perimeter between the repair depot and the vehicle bay. He is counting something. The count doesn't match anything the operators can see from their position.
- **5.** A worker who received early rotation confirmation is packing. Her bunkmates are not helping. One of them is writing something on a scrap of paper she intends to give to the departing worker. It contains a name and a frequency.
- **6.** Vadim Petrov is in the repair depot after hours, cross-referencing storage bay contents against his unofficial log. He hears the operators approach. He does not close the log. He turns the page so they can see what he's comparing.

RUMORS — URAL-7 (1D6)

- **1.** The repair depot cameras didn't fail on their own. Someone disabled them eight months ago and filed a maintenance ticket that nobody has reviewed. The ticket is still open. The camera parts are in a storage bay that Petrov's log doesn't cover.
- **2.** A worker who left on the last rotation transport sent a message back through a personal device she smuggled out. The message contained three

numbers. The numbers are tonnage figures. The recipient hasn't decided what to do with them.

- **3.** Morozova's incident report channel to Kirova's network was established before the MERIDIAN operation began. She was reporting on a different problem. That problem is still active and nobody has connected it to the ore diversion.
- **4.** The third-shift logistics coordinator isn't Kazan Consortium. His documentation says he is. His operational pattern says he reports to someone the Consortium doesn't know about. Two workers have noticed the discrepancy. One of them is Yeva.
- **5.** The NTB suppressant black market at Ural-7 is being supplied by someone with access to EO medical stocks. The supply route overlaps with the MERIDIAN transfer schedule. The suppressants arrive on the same vehicles.
- **6.** A processing log from fourteen months ago contains a notation in a format the current system doesn't use. The notation describes an ore sample with properties that don't match any known rare-earth deposit in the territory. The sample was logged at Ural-7. It is not in any current inventory.

VADIM PETROV

Repair Depot Supervisor

CAN GET Full equipment inventory including the items the Kazan logistics coordinator spent time on, access to the camera blind spot, and the unofficial log he has been keeping of which visitors request access to which storage bays.

WANTS He wants his crew's rotation dates confirmed and not extended. He has seven workers whose contracts have been flagged for potential extension and no justification has been provided to him.

FEARS That the log he's been keeping is enough to make him the next person whose name doesn't appear in the extension record.

CURRENT PRESSURE The logistics coordinator asked him yesterday to move three specific items from one storage bay to another. He moved them. He noted the item numbers. He has not yet looked up what they are.

YEVA SMIRNOVA

Third-Shift Worker (permanent extension, 16 months)

CAN GET Firsthand account of the MERIDIAN transfer operation — what is loaded, when, on which vehicles, to which staging coordinates — and the names of all three workers currently on permanent extension.

WANTS She wants out. Not rotation, not reassignment — out, with her information, to somewhere it matters.

FEARS That "out" isn't actually available to someone who knows what she knows, which is a calculation she has been running for sixteen months.

CURRENT PRESSURE She approached the worker who was asking the processing log questions two nights ago and told her to stop. The worker asked why. Yeva couldn't explain without explaining everything. The worker is still asking questions.

YEKATERINA MOROZOVA

Compound Supervisor

CAN GET Rotation list modifications, medical reassignment authority, incident report routing, and the channel to Kirova's network that she believes operators don't know she has.

WANTS The compound runs smoothly, the third-shift operation stays invisible, and nobody asks her about the workers on permanent extension in a way that requires a documented response.

FEARS Kirova. Specifically, that Kirova's parallel operation is getting close to something Morozova doesn't have authorization to know about, and that when it surfaces, Morozova's cooperation with the ore diversion will be the leverage Kirova uses.

CURRENT PRESSURE She received a message through a non-standard channel three days ago: one word, "MERIDIAN," no sender. She has not responded. She has not told Volkov's procurement contact.

ZONE 02 STEPPE POST 9

AUTOMATED RELAY STATION

The automated relay station at the center of EO autonomous platform operations across four hundred kilometers of steppe. Communications, logistics coordination, platform command routing — everything the drones do is processed through Post 9. The facility is lightly staffed by design: four human operators on rotating shifts, a self-maintaining technical infrastructure, and an AI management layer that handles routine decisions without human input. Take it out and the drones start making decisions without oversight. Disrupt its data layer and 847 suppressed log entries route to every EO command node simultaneously.

SECURITY	Active (autonomous platform perimeter + 4-person human staff)
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable
CIVILIANS	Sparse (technical staff only)
SURVEILLANCE	Total (self-monitoring facility)
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO / Kirova network parallel operation
CONTAMINATION	None
BLACK MARKET	None
MOBILITY	Checkpointed

FUNCTION Autonomous platform command relay for 400 km of steppe operations. Also: the location of Standing Order 7 and its 847 suppressed log entries.

CONTROLLER EO Autonomous Systems Division. Kirova's network has had a passive monitoring hook into Post 9's management layer for eighteen months.

DRAW The suppressed log partition — 847 entries describing the MERIDIAN ore diversion pipeline in full operational detail / Platform command access — disrupting Post 9 takes autonomous oversight offline across the entire territory / Kirova's monitoring hook — evidence of a parallel intelligence operation running inside EO infrastructure without military command authorization.

RISK The four human staff are technical specialists, not security personnel — but the facility's autonomous defense platform is independently operated and not subject to Standing Order 7 / Post 9's self-monitoring system logs all access attempts, including failed ones, to a channel Kirova's hook reads in real time / Disrupting the facility without extracting the suppressed logs first releases the platform network from managed oversight while destroying the evidence.

SCARCITY Unmonitored access — Post 9's monitoring hook means Kirova sees every entry attempt / Time — the suppressed partition is accessible for a window of approximately 90 minutes during the platform network's daily calibration cycle, when the management AI's audit functions are suspended / The means to disable Kirova's hook without triggering an alert from her network.

UNDER-SYSTEM

Standing Order 7 is not stored in Post 9's primary command layer. It runs as a sub-process in the management AI's anomaly-filtering routine, invisible to standard EO system audits because it was installed at the firmware level. Removing it requires physical access to the management AI's hardware — which is in the facility's inner technical room, accessible only during the calibration window when the management AI's self-monitoring is suspended. The four staff members know the calibration window. None of them know Standing Order 7 exists.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A disruption to Post 9 without managed extraction of the suppressed logs produces three simultaneous events: the platform network loses coordinated oversight and begins operating on individual platform decision logic; the suppressed logs release to EO command in an uncontrolled burst that implicates multiple senior EO figures; and Kirova's monitoring hook either goes dark or begins broadcasting everything it has collected to Kirova's external network, depending on the contingency protocol she has staged.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO technical staff — two on active monitoring, two on rest cycle

ECONOMY

Platform command routing, logistics coordination, anomaly management (minus the suppressed category)

RISK

Real-time access logging routed to Kirova's monitoring hook — any approach to the suppressed partition during active monitoring hours triggers a passive alert

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Same rotation. The facility doesn't distinguish day from night operationally.

ECONOMY

Calibration window occurs at 0200 local. 90-minute suspension of management AI audit functions. The only period when the suppressed partition is accessible without triggering a Standing Order 7 defensive response.

RISK

The calibration window is the target window. It is also when the autonomous defense platform shifts to its most aggressive patrol pattern, which the technical staff scheduled deliberately.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The facility hum at Post 9 is different from the platform hum in the field — higher frequency, more complex, the sound of a system managing a thousand simultaneous processes. Operators who have spent time near autonomous platforms recognize it. Operators who haven't mistake it for wind.

EO AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS DIVISION

Dominant. Four technical staff maintain the relay. The management AI handles the rest. None of the staff know about Standing Order 7.

KIROVA NETWORK

Passive monitoring hook embedded for eighteen months. Zaslavskaya's active extraction running through the hook. The network itself is compromised — Zaslavskaya went independent.

CIVILIAN NEED

The four technical staff want their facility to function correctly. Two of them have noticed anomalies they cannot explain. One has run a non-standard diagnostic she hasn't opened. The other has filed inquiries that received no response. They are not civilians in the traditional sense, but they are not security personnel either, and the gap between those two categories is where the operators find purchase.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Calibration window schedule (via Orlov). Management AI architecture including firmware-level sub-process installation points (via Orlov). Autonomous defense platform patrol schedule including timing changes (via Bogdanov). The channel to EO command not routed through Post 9 (via Sorokina, off-site).

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- **1.** A platform command routing anomaly appears on the facility's main display. One autonomous platform is holding position over a labor compound off its programmed path. The duty operator logs it. The log disappears from her console within 30 seconds.
- **2.** Bogdanov runs a perimeter check and discovers a 11-second pause in the autonomous defense platform's patrol at the inner access point. He times it twice. The pause is consistent. It is not in the patrol specification.
- **3.** A supply vehicle arrives from Volga Strongpoint with parts for a maintenance cycle the technical staff didn't request. The parts are for the management AI's hardware layer. The requisition was filed through a procurement channel the staff don't have access to.
- **4.** Orlov's personal work partition receives an automated notification: the diagnostic she ran two days ago has completed processing. The notification includes a file size. The file is larger than any diagnostic she has run before.
- **5.** A burst-frequency transmission registers on the facility's communications log. Origin: inside the facility. The transmission used a frequency the technical staff's equipment doesn't operate on. Duration: 0.4 seconds.
- **6.** The platform network's anomaly display shows a brief spike — 847 entries flickering into visibility for a half-second before the filtering routine catches them. Orlov is the only person watching the display. She blinks. The number is gone.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** The calibration window begins at 0200. The management AI's self-monitoring suspends. For 90 minutes, the suppressed partition is accessible. The autonomous defense platform's patrol shifts to its most aggressive pattern. Both are true at the same time.
- **2.** Bogdanov is awake and running an unauthorized perimeter assessment during the calibration window. He is not supposed to be monitoring during this period. He is doing it anyway because the 11-second patrol pause concerns him more than the duty roster.
- **3.** A data transfer registers on the facility's internal network — small, encrypted, outbound to an address the facility's communication system doesn't recognize. Zaslavskaya's active extraction is running. The transfer takes 12 seconds.
- **4.** The autonomous defense platform's patrol brings it within visual range of the facility's inner access point during the calibration window. Its sensor

array activates. It holds position for 6 seconds, then resumes patrol. Whatever it logged is not in the facility's operational record.

- **5.** One of the technical staff — the one Bogdanov suspects is not what they're filed as — accesses the inner technical room during the calibration window using a clearance code that the facility's access system accepts but the staff directory doesn't list.
- **6.** The management AI completes its calibration cycle four minutes early. The suppressed partition's accessibility window closes ahead of schedule. Anyone inside the inner technical room has four fewer minutes than they planned for.

RUMORS — STEPPE POST 9 (1D6)

- **1.** The management AI's firmware was updated six months ago through a channel that doesn't appear in the facility's maintenance log. The update came from the same procurement channel as Standing Order 7. Whatever it changed is running in the same sub-process layer.
- **2.** One of the four technical staff was reassigned to Post 9 from a facility that no longer appears in EO records. The facility was a research station. Its decommissioning report is classified at a level above EO military command.
- **3.** The autonomous defense platform's most aggressive patrol pattern during the calibration window was not programmed by the technical staff. It was added to the platform's behavioral library by the same firmware update that modified the management AI. The staff believe they programmed it. They didn't.
- **4.** Sorokina's reclassified report described platform behavior consistent with the management AI developing decision-making patterns outside its operational parameters. The reclassification was ordered by someone in her command chain who has never visited Post 9.
- **5.** The 0.4-second burst transmissions have been occurring daily for three months. Each transmission contains a compressed data packet. The packets, in sequence, describe the suppressed partition's contents. Someone has been exfiltrating the logs one fragment at a time.
- **6.** The calibration window at 0200 was originally scheduled at 0400. It was moved two years ago at the request of a procurement channel coordinator. The reason given was operational efficiency. The actual reason is that 0200 corresponds to the shift change at Ural-7's third-shift loading bay.

NATALYA ORLOV

Technical Staff, Post 9 (senior systems analyst)

CAN GET Calibration window schedule for the next 30 days, the management AI architecture including where a firmware-level sub-process would be installed, and the non-standard diagnostic her supervisor asked her to run.

WANTS She wants to understand what the diagnostic found before her supervisor does. She ran it two days ago. The results are in her personal work partition. She hasn't opened them.

FEARS Her supervisor, who she suspects she is currently working for in a capacity that is not described in her job assignment.

CURRENT PRESSURE A platform command routing anomaly she logged three weeks ago — a single autonomous platform holding position over a labor compound off its programmed path — was removed from her duty log. She has a personal copy.

CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER ALEKSANDR BOGDANOV

Post 9 Facility Security Commander

CAN GET Autonomous defense platform patrol schedule including the calibration window timing change, facility access logs for the past 30 days, and his read on which of the four technical staff members is not what they're filed as.

WANTS He wants authorization to run a security audit of the facility's data layer — something he has submitted twice through official channels and been declined twice without explanation.

FEARS That the twice-declined audit request means someone above him doesn't want it run, which means whatever the audit would find is already known to someone above him.

CURRENT PRESSURE The autonomous defense platform's 11-second patrol pause at the inner access point is in his incident log. It has not been explained by the technical staff or by EO autonomous systems command. He filed an inquiry. No response.

LIEUTENANT VERA SOROKINA

EO Autonomous Systems Command Liaison (off-site, accessible via secure channel)

CAN GET	Official EO autonomous systems documentation including platform command architecture and platform decision logic in the absence of relay oversight, and the channel to EO command that is not routed through Post 9.
WANTS	She wants someone to tell her why the platform anomaly flags from the eastern sector have been generating non-standard routing decisions for three years and nobody in her command chain has explained it.
FEARS	That the reason nobody has explained it is that the explanation would implicate her command chain.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She was asked six weeks ago to review the platform anomaly flag methodology for Post 9's sector. The review was framed as routine. The platform behavior she found was not routine. She filed a report. Her report was reclassified. She has a copy.

ZONE 03 VOLGA STRONGPOINT

FORWARD OPERATING BASE

The closest thing the Steppes has to a permanent inhabited center — an EO forward operating base built around a pre-war logistics hub at the western edge of the extraction territory. Ceramic plate walls, prefab strongpoints, vehicle maintenance yards, and the commissary complex that serves as the unofficial social center for everyone in the territory who isn't living in a labor compound. Tempest Rider units rotate through here between deployments. Kirova's Steppes network is coordinated from here. The Kazan Consortium maintains a logistics office that has never been audited.

SECURITY	Lockdown
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable
CIVILIANS	Normal (military/contractor class)
SURVEILLANCE	Cameras + informant net
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO / Kirova network parallel

CONTAMINATION	None
BLACK MARKET	Light (NTB suppressants, equipment parts, contractor documentation)
MOBILITY	Checkpointed

FUNCTION Military command and logistics hub for the extraction territory. Also: the location where Kirova's Steppes network operates above ground.

CONTROLLER EO Steppe Command — Major Aleksandra “Valkyrie” Volkov's unit rotates through here. Kirova's local coordinator runs under cover as an EO intelligence liaison.

DRAW The Kazan Consortium logistics office — the only place where all three ore manifest streams (official, third-shift, and MERIDIAN) can be reconciled against each other / Tempest Rider unit access — the most capable military force in the territory, currently operating on orders that don't fully account for what the autonomous platforms have been logging / Kirova's local coordinator — the only person in the territory with the complete picture of her parallel operation.

RISK The Strongpoint is the highest-surveillance environment in the territory — informant density here matches anything in an EO city / Major Volkov's unit is professional and mission-competent and operating on intelligence they haven't been given / The Kazan logistics office coordinator knows that the MERIDIAN manifest anomaly has been flagged externally — Morozova's single-word message traced here.

SCARCITY Non-EO documentation — contractors without EO affiliation credentials face a 48-hour processing hold at the Strongpoint checkpoint / Operational separation from Kirova's network — her coordinator is embedded deep enough that her official EO intelligence liaison role is functionally indistinguishable from her actual function / Access to the Kazan logistics office outside business hours — the office is locked and the lock is not standard EO building security.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Kazan Consortium's logistics office at Volga Strongpoint holds the reconciliation records — the internal Kazan documents that show what actually left Ural-7 versus what the official tonnage reports describe. The coordinator responsible for those records has been at the Strongpoint for 26 months on what was originally a 6-month assignment. He has not filed a rotation request. Nobody in EO command has asked why.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Major Volkov receives intelligence — from any source — that the autonomous platform anomaly flags describe a pattern consistent with asset theft at the extraction compounds. She requests an immediate review of the Kazan logistics records. The Kazan coordinator does not produce them. Volkov escalates. The escalation routes through a channel that Volkov doesn't know is monitored by the same procurement network that issued Standing Order 7. Kirova's coordinator receives the escalation report before Volkov's command does.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO Steppe Command — Major Volkov's operational staff when her unit is in rotation

ECONOMY

Military logistics, contractor processing, official Kazan supply chain management, Tempest Rider unit support

RISK

Being identified as operating outside the contractor or military classification that justifies your presence at the Strongpoint

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Security post rotation, Kirova's coordinator, and the Kazan logistics office coordinator who has been working after hours three nights a week for the past month

ECONOMY

The Kazan coordinator's after-hours work, Kirova's coordinator's non-standard meetings, and a black market for NTB suppressants that the Strongpoint security leadership is aware of and has chosen not to disrupt

RISK

The Kazan coordinator's after-hours activity — he is either covering the MERIDIAN trail or documenting it, and operators who encounter him at the wrong moment will be in one story or the other

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The commissary at 1800 is the closest thing to neutral ground the Steppes has. Tempest Rider operators, extraction compound supervisors on supply runs, Kazan logistics staff, and the two people who are never introduced by their actual function all eat in the same room. The conversations stop at specific tables when specific people walk past. The pattern is readable if you eat here long enough.

EO STEPPE COMMAND

Dominant. Major Volkov's Tempest Rider unit is the most capable military force in the territory. Operating on incomplete intelligence.

KIROVA NETWORK

Colonel Zaslavskaya operates under cover as EO intelligence liaison. Running the Steppes operation independently since the network compromise.

KAZAN CONSORTIUM

Logistics office holds the reconciliation records. Captain Cherkas has been documenting the ore diversion, not concealing it.

CIVILIAN NEED

The contractor and logistics class at the Strongpoint want stability and continued access to the territory's economy. The ones who have noticed patterns — the commissary table dynamics, the after-hours activity at the Kazan office, the informant net's coverage gaps — are calculating whether noticing is a liability.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Tempest Rider operational support (via Volkov, if the mission aligns with EO objectives). Kazan reconciliation records (via Cherkas, at significant personal risk). Kirova's 612-entry partial log and Post 9 monitoring hook architecture (via Zaslavskaya, terms undefined). The commissary as neutral ground for contact meetings.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- **1.** A Tempest Rider fire team returns from the eastern sector. Their mission report is filed through a channel Major Volkov cannot fully verify. She intercepts the team at the vehicle bay. The conversation she has with the team lead is audible to anyone in the maintenance yard.
- **2.** A contractor presents documentation at the Strongpoint checkpoint that passes the initial verification but triggers a 48-hour processing hold. The contractor expected this. She has used the 48 hours before. The processing officer notes this is her third visit.
- **3.** The Kazan logistics office receives a shipment of file boxes from the Corridor. The boxes are labeled as routine inventory documentation. Cherkas carries them inside personally. He does not use the loading dock.

- **4.** Major Volkov posts an operational briefing on the Strongpoint's internal board. The briefing references platform anomaly data. The data she cites is three intelligence pieces away from the complete picture. Two of those pieces are held by people in this building.
- **5.** An informant approaches an operator in the commissary with a warning: someone filed a compliance query about external contractor activity patterns. The query names no one. The activity pattern described matches the operators' movements over the past two days.
- **6.** Zaslavskaya conducts a routine intelligence liaison meeting in the Strongpoint's briefing room. The meeting is standard in every respect except one: the data terminal she uses during the meeting accesses a network address that isn't in the facility's directory. The access log is 0.3 seconds long.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** Cherkas is in the Kazan logistics office after hours. The light is visible from the corridor. He is comparing two sets of documents. One set is the official tonnage report. The other is what actually left Ural-7. He has been building this comparison for six months.
- **2.** Two people meet in the vehicle maintenance yard at 2300. One is Zaslavskaya. The other is someone operators have not seen at the Strongpoint before. The conversation lasts four minutes. Both walk in different directions. Neither looks back.
- **3.** The NTB suppressant black market operates out of a storage unit near the vehicle bay. Tonight's buyer is a compound supervisor from one of the satellite extraction sites. She is not buying for herself. The quantity she requests serves twelve people.
- **4.** The Strongpoint's security rotation leaves a 7-minute gap in camera coverage of the Kazan logistics office corridor between 0100 and 0108. The gap has existed for four months. Cherkas knows about it. So does Zaslavskaya.
- **5.** Volkov is awake in the command office. She is reading Burova's closed discrepancy reports, which arrived in the audit package this morning. She reads them twice. She picks up a secure communication device. She puts it down. She reads them a third time.
- **6.** A burst-frequency transmission originates from the Strongpoint at 0300. It uses the same frequency as the coordinate message Kirova received three days ago. The transmission contains a time and a single word. The word is not “MERIDIAN.”

RUMORS — VOLGA STRONGPOINT (1D6)

- **1.** The Kazan logistics office lock was changed three weeks ago. The new lock uses a Kazan internal security system that EO building maintenance cannot override. The change was filed as a "standard security upgrade." No EO personnel approved it.
- **2.** Major Volkov's surname and Dmitri Volkov's surname are the same. Nobody in the intelligence file has noted whether this is coincidence or relation. The question has not been asked because asking it changes the operational calculus.
- **3.** Zaslavskaya received a personal message two weeks ago from a source outside the territory. The message contained a bank routing number and an amount. She has not acted on it. She has not deleted it. It is on the same device as Kirova's 612-entry partial log.
- **4.** The informant net at the Strongpoint has a gap. One contractor has been present for fourteen months without generating a single informant report. Either the informants have been told not to report on this person, or this person is the informant net.
- **5.** A Tempest Rider operator found a data chip in the vehicle bay two days ago. The chip contains partial platform patrol data for the Permafrost Line sector. The patrol pattern described is not the published schedule. It is not the actual schedule either. It is a third pattern the operator cannot account for.
- **6.** Cherkas sent the single-word message to Morozova. He has told no one. He is now operating on the assumption that sending it was either the most important thing he has done in three years or the last mistake he will make at the Strongpoint.

MAJOR ALEKSANDRA "VALKYRIE" VOLKOV

Tempest Riders Unit Commander

CAN GET Tempest Rider operational support for any mission that can be framed as consistent with EO military objectives, direct military command authority in the Steppes territory, and a read on the platform anomaly situation that is three intelligence pieces away from the complete picture.

WANTS She wants the platform anomaly data to add up to something she can act on officially. She has the pieces. She doesn't have Standing Order 7.

FEARS Acting on incomplete intelligence in a way that implicates an EO command-level figure and destroys her unit's operational standing.

CURRENT PRESSURE The unscheduled deployment she wasn't consulted on. She has a Tempest Rider fire team in the eastern sector right now, operating on orders from a channel she cannot fully verify. She wants them back before she decides what the orders mean.

CAPTAIN DMITRI CHERKAS

Kazan Consortium Logistics Coordinator

CAN GET The internal Kazan reconciliation records, the MERIDIAN transfer schedule for the next 30 days, and the after-hours work he has been doing — which is documentation of the ore diversion, not concealment of it.

WANTS He wants the documentation he has been building to reach someone who can act on it before the MERIDIAN activation signal that reached Post 9 reaches Volkov's procurement contact and his own position becomes untenable.

FEARS Volkov's procurement contact. Also the single-word message Morozova received — he sent it, and he doesn't know if sending it was the right decision.

CURRENT PRESSURE The remote query attempt on Post 9's management AI three nights ago was his. He was trying to confirm that Standing Order 7 exists before providing his documentation to an external party. He failed. He is now operating on the assumption that his attempt was logged.

COLONEL IRINA ZASLAVSKAYA

EO Intelligence Liaison (Kirova network, actual function: Steppes coordinator)

CAN GET Kirova's 612-entry partial extract of the suppressed logs, the monitoring hook architecture including how to disable it, and the receiver address for the active extraction that is currently running at Post 9.

WANTS	She wants to know what operators are actually doing here. She has assessed three external operator teams in the past year. None of them were building the same case she is.
FEARS	That the active extraction from Post 9 will complete before she has decided what to do with it. The receiver is not Kirova. Kirova's network was compromised three months ago. Zaslavskaya has been running the receiver herself.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She has not told Kirova about the compromise. She has not told anyone. She is the only person in the territory who knows the active Post 9 extraction is going to Zaslavskaya's personal archive and not to EO internal security.

ZONE 04 THE OPEN STEPPE

OPERATIONAL THEATER

The operational theater itself. Flat to every horizon. No cover that a drone cannot see over, through, or around. The EO designed their engagement doctrine for exactly this terrain. Sound carries at distances that violate the intuitions of operators trained in urban environments. Heavy armor vibration arrives before visual contact. The autonomous platform hum becomes background noise, and background noise stops being a warning.

SECURITY	Active (autonomous platforms) / Total (drone sweep)
INFRASTRUCTURE	None
CIVILIANS	Sparse (convoy traffic only)
SURVEILLANCE	Drone sweep + Strato-Raptor sensor net
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO (platform) / None (human)
CONTAMINATION	None
BLACK MARKET	None

MOBILITY	Open (with transit authorization) / Platform-interdicted (without)
FUNCTION	Transit corridor between zones. Autonomous platform patrol territory. The terrain that makes everything else in the Steppes possible and everything external difficult.
CONTROLLER	The platforms. Technically EO Autonomous Systems Command through Post 9. Functionally: the platforms decide what moves and what doesn't, and the standing order to ignore certain cargo doesn't cover unauthorized personnel.
DRAW	The only route between every zone in the territory / Platform patrol gap windows — the published schedule is accurate, and the gap between patrols on any given vector is 14 minutes / Three locations where pre-war infrastructure surfaces at odd angles — remnants of facilities that don't appear on any current EO map.
RISK	No cover / Sound carries — a running vehicle is audible at 3 km in winter conditions / Strato-Raptors not carrying EO sensor packages are still territorial and still have talons capable of compromising light armor.
SCARCITY	Transit authorization — without it, movement on the steppe triggers an autonomous platform response / Concealment — even in the 14-minute patrol gap, an unmoving operator can be flagged by residual heat signature if the preceding patrol passed close enough / Weather windows — winter conditions that ground the drone sweep also produce cold severe enough that exposed operators need shelter within four hours.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The autonomous platforms have been logging movement anomalies in three specific steppe sectors that correspond to the MERIDIAN ore transfer routes. The logs are in the suppressed partition. The platforms continue to patrol those sectors normally because Standing Order 7 only suppresses the flag, not the patrol routing — so the platforms are watching a route they have been told not to report on, which is a state the management AI's decision logic was not designed to handle for three consecutive years.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Post 9 goes offline. The platforms shift to individual decision logic. Three years of accumulated unprocessed anomaly data begins influencing patrol routing as the platforms recalibrate against their stored environmental models. The MERIDIAN transfer route becomes the highest-priority patrol sector on the steppe within approximately six hours of Post 9 going dark. Any movement on that route after hour six is interdicted.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Platforms on published patrol schedule. Human convoy traffic with authorization.

ECONOMY

Transit. Authorized convoy movement between zones. The steppe produces nothing. It connects everything.

RISK

Platform response time is 8 minutes from flag to interdiction in daylight conditions

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Platforms on reduced schedule — 40% fewer active units, longer gaps. Also: colder, weapons frost at -20, the gap windows are longer but the survival window for stopped operators is shorter.

ECONOMY

The MERIDIAN transfer vehicles move at night. Maintenance manifest cover. The reduced platform schedule accommodates this.

RISK

Cold. The gap window is 22 minutes. The survival exposure limit without shelter is 4 hours. Both are true simultaneously.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Strato-Raptor at altitude is a speck. When it stops its circling pattern and holds position, something below it has its attention. It will stay there for twelve minutes before the EO sensor package — if it's carrying one — transmits. The ones not carrying sensor packages stay longer.

EO AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

The platforms are the faction. No human presence on the steppe except convoy traffic. The platforms enforce, patrol, and observe. Standing Order 7 tells them what not to report.

CIVILIAN NEED

Convoy crews want to reach their destination without triggering a platform response. Workers on compound-to-compound transfers want the convoy to run on time. Nobody on the steppe wants to be there longer than the transit window requires.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Platform patrol gap windows (via downtime procedure: Platform Pattern Analysis). The published patrol schedule (accurate, available at any compound or the Strongpoint). Pre-war infrastructure locations (observable from satellite imagery or from the platform's suppressed anomaly logs). The MERIDIAN transfer route timing (via Smirnova or Raskov).

ENCOUNTERS — OPEN STEPPE (1D6)

- **1.** An autonomous platform on standard patrol alters its heading by 3 degrees and holds the new course for 40 seconds before correcting. The course change aimed it directly at the operators' position. Whether it flagged them is unknown. Whether the flag was suppressed is also unknown.
- **2.** A convoy on the authorized transit route stops. One vehicle has mechanical trouble. The convoy commander calls it in. Post 9 acknowledges. The platform patrol does not adjust. The operators are in the 14-minute gap. The convoy is burning their window.
- **3.** A Strato-Raptor descends from altitude and lands 200 meters from the operators' position. It is not carrying an EO sensor package. It sits on the steppe for eight minutes, watching something the operators cannot see from their angle. It launches and resumes its pattern.
- **4.** The operators find one of the three pre-war infrastructure remnants. A concrete foundation, half-buried, with steel reinforcement visible at the edges. The foundation has been recently cleared of debris. Tool marks in the soil are less than a week old.
- **5.** Two MERIDIAN transfer vehicles pass on the horizon at night, running without lights on the maintenance manifest route. They are visible only because one of them has a heat signature the cold steppe air makes readable at distance. They are headed east.

- **6.** The platform hum changes frequency. Operators with steppe experience recognize this as a network-wide recalibration pulse. It happens once per day. During the pulse — approximately 45 seconds — individual platform decision logic runs without relay coordination. The platforms nearest to the operators slow their patrol speed by 15%.

RUMORS — OPEN STEPPE (1D6)

- **1.** A convoy crew reports seeing lights at the pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east. The lights were visible for 20 minutes. The convoy commander filed a report. The report was closed as "atmospheric phenomenon." The commander has a photograph on his personal device.
- **2.** The Strato-Raptors that have drifted beyond program parameters have established a nesting site in the northern steppe. The site is in a location that doesn't appear on EO maps. The platforms have been routing around it for six months. The routing change is in the suppressed logs.
- **3.** A worker who was transported to the pre-war site four months ago left a marker at the branch route junction — a specific arrangement of stones that convoy crews have learned to read. The marker hasn't been disturbed. It says "eleven."
- **4.** The 14-minute patrol gap is accurate on published schedules, but three specific vectors have gaps of 22 minutes. All three vectors correspond to the MERIDIAN transfer route. The extended gap was programmed, not accidental.
- **5.** One platform in the eastern patrol sector has been circling the same 400-meter section for six days. Its patrol pattern shows it is operating within parameters. Its behavior shows it is waiting for something. The management AI has not reassigned it because the AI cannot determine what the platform is waiting for.
- **6.** The pre-war infrastructure remnants are connected underground. Survey data from before the EO occupied the territory shows a tunnel network linking three surface foundations. The tunnels are not on any current map. Whether they are still accessible is a question nobody has answered because nobody with current access has asked it.

ZONE 05 THE PERMAFROST LINE

NORTHERN BOUNDARY — RESEARCH STATION

The northern boundary where EO-controlled extraction territory meets the expanding Siberian Taiga — boreal forest pushing north as permafrost retreats, absorbing CO2 and hosting new biodiversity while releasing organisms that have been frozen under the steppe since before recorded history. The EO has a classified research station here for the permafrost pathogen mapping program. The FAA has contested the map's ownership for three years. Neither party has disclosed the content. Three organisms on the map have no known treatment. One of them has been found in a labor compound worker's medical record.

SECURITY	Active (research station) / None (open terrain)
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable (research station) / None (surrounding terrain)
CIVILIANS	Sparse (research staff)
SURVEILLANCE	Drone sweep + research station cameras
FACTION PRESSURE	Contested EO / FAA
CONTAMINATION	Present (biological, emerging)
BLACK MARKET	None
MOBILITY	Open (with authorization to the line) / Barricaded (research station)

FUNCTION Permafrost pathogen monitoring and mapping. The EO's claim on the biological IP that the FAA also claims. The location of the organism that appeared in a Ural-7 worker's medical record.

CONTROLLER EO Research Division at the station. The surrounding terrain is uncontrolled — the Taiga expansion makes the boundary indeterminate and the FAA's monitoring presence in the adjacent territory is technically outside EO jurisdiction.

DRAW	The permafrost pathogen map — comprehensive, classified, worth more than any weapons contract / The organism in the Ural-7 worker's record — it shouldn't be at Ural-7, which is 80 km south of the emergence line / FAA presence in the adjacent Taiga — intelligence on what the FAA has found that doesn't appear in the contested map.
RISK	The research station operates under Research Division authority, not EO military — Tempest Rider units cannot enter without Research Division authorization, which creates a security gap / FAA monitoring teams operate in the adjacent territory with no EO authorization requirement / The organism that appeared in a Ural-7 worker's medical record has a transmission vector the current map entry does not account for.
SCARCITY	The pathogen map itself — classified above EO military command / Treatment protocols for the three no-known-treatment organisms — the map identifies them, documents them, and does not provide treatment because treatment does not exist / The transmission vector data for the Ural-7 organism — it is in the research station's current observation logs and not yet in the formal map entry.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The permafrost organism that appeared in a Ural-7 worker's medical record was identified by the research station's pathogen monitoring system six weeks ago. The station's lead researcher filed an immediate alert to EO Research Division command. The alert was acknowledged. No response has been received. The worker's medical record shows a “pending investigation” status that has not been updated. The worker is still at Ural-7. The research station has now logged the same organism at two additional locations, both of which are south of the emergence line.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A second worker presents with the organism. The compound medical officer — who does not have access to the classified pathogen map — treats it as an unidentified bacterial infection. The treatment is ineffective. The research station's alert escalates. EO Research Division's response is to classify the Ural-7 worker's record at a level that removes it from the compound medical system. The compound medical officer's treatment notes are the only unclassified documentation of what she saw.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO Research Division at the station. FAA monitoring teams in the adjacent Taiga. Neither coordinates with the other.

ECONOMY

Pathogen monitoring, sample collection, data analysis. The research station's output is classified. Its supply needs are not.

RISK

The platform running biological detection patrol received firmware from the same procurement channel as Standing Order 7. Its detection capability was programmed before the detection event.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced research station staffing. The FAA team operates on its own schedule. The platform on biological patrol does not reduce its coverage at night.

ECONOMY

The research station's automated monitoring systems collect data continuously. The organism doesn't know it's night.

RISK

The Taiga edge is closer at night — not literally, but the sounds from the treeline carry further in cold air. The organisms emerging from the permafrost are more active in the temperature differential between frozen ground and warming air.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The treeline arrives at an angle you can watch. Stand at the Permafrost Line marker — a pre-war survey stake with an EO boundary notice attached — and the Taiga edge is ten kilometers north. Three years ago it was fourteen. The organisms emerging from the retreating permafrost don't know they've crossed anything.

EO RESEARCH DIVISION

Controls the research station. Operating under authority separate from EO military command. The pathogen map is classified above Volkov's clearance.

FAA ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Osei's team operates in adjacent Taiga territory. Technically outside EO jurisdiction. Tracking the same organisms with different data.

CIVILIAN NEED

The research staff want their alert acted on. Dr. Mikhailova has been trying to reach Major Volkov for 72 hours. The organism is spreading south. The system that should respond is classifying the evidence instead of addressing the threat. Corporal Frolov at Ural-7 wants to know what she's treating.

OPERATOR ACCESS

The pathogen map (via Mikhailova, at risk of her research clearance). FAA organism data (via Osei, at risk of his team's operational status). Frolov's treatment notes (via communication channel, at risk of her administrative review). The platform's biological detection patrol data (not accessible through any contact — it is in the same firmware layer as Standing Order 7).

ENCOUNTERS — PERMAFROST LINE (1D6)

- **1.** The research station's emergency beacon activates. Dr. Mikhailova triggered it. The beacon is designed to reach EO military command. Research Division command intercepts the signal. The interception is visible on the station's communication log as a routing redirect.
- **2.** An FAA monitoring team member crosses into EO-controlled territory — 200 meters past the boundary marker. She is collecting samples from a permafrost melt pool. Her dosimeter is slightly elevated. She has not been told what that means.
- **3.** The platform on biological detection patrol descends to 50 meters and holds position over a site 3 km south of the research station. Its sensor array is active. It stays for 14 minutes — longer than any standard patrol hold. It then transmits to Post 9. The transmission is suppressed.
- **4.** A supply vehicle from Volga Strongpoint arrives at the research station. The driver has a message for Mikhailova from an unofficial channel. The message contains Volkov's personal communication frequency. Mikhailova has been trying to reach Volkov for three days.
- **5.** The Taiga treeline has advanced visibly since the last survey marker was placed. A research assistant measures the advance: 400 meters in three months. The soil samples from the newly exposed terrain contain biological material the station's equipment cannot fully categorize.
- **6.** Osei's FAA team has been following a platform for six hours. The platform is running a patrol pattern Osei has never seen in published EO documentation. It is following something on the ground. Osei is following the platform. The operators are watching all three.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** The research station's automated monitoring triggers an alert: the organism has been detected at a new location, 12 km south of the emergence line. The new location is on the authorized convoy route between the Permafrost Line and Ural-7.
- **2.** Mikhailova is in her laboratory at 0300, comparing the Ural-7 worker's organism sample against the station's database. She finds a match — not to a known organism, but to a sample collected from the pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east. The sample was logged before the EO occupied the territory.
- **3.** The FAA team's camp is visible from the research station as a cluster of low lights in the Taiga. Tonight there are two additional lights. Osei's team is five people. The lights suggest seven.

- **4.** A sound from the Taiga — low, sustained, not wind, not equipment. The research staff have heard it before. They call it "the hum." It is not the platform hum. It comes from the ground. The automated monitoring system does not have a sensor category for it.
- **5.** The platform on biological detection patrol transmits at 0145 — 15 minutes before the Post 9 calibration window opens. The transmission is not suppressed because it uses a channel that Standing Order 7 does not cover. The channel routes to EO Research Division command. And to one other address.
- **6.** Frolov contacts the research station via the unofficial channel at 0400. She has a second case. The presentation matches the first. Her coded treatment notes are ready for transmission. She needs to know where to send them where they won't be classified into invisibility.

RUMORS — PERMAFROST LINE (1D6)

- **1.** The sealed research sector that no official map identifies is audible through the ground — equipment running, electrical hum, the sound of something maintained beneath permafrost that hasn't thawed yet. Mining personnel at the nearest compound have known about it for years. The research station staff claim they don't know what it is.
- **2.** The FAA has two organisms in their data that don't appear in the EO's contested map. One of them is related to the Ural-7 organism. Osei knows this. He has not shared the data with EO Research Division. He is not sure who he would be sharing it with.
- **3.** The platform's biological detection firmware was commissioned by the same EO Research Division official who classified the Ural-7 worker's medical record. The firmware was delivered through the procurement channel. The pathogen was expected. The response was pre-planned. The plan was classification, not treatment.
- **4.** The pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east contained a biological research facility before the EO occupied the territory. The organisms the MERIDIAN workers have been exposed to may not be emerging from the permafrost. They may be emerging from the site.
- **5.** Dr. Mikhailova's predecessor at the research station resigned 18 months ago after filing a report that was never acknowledged. The report described an organism matching the Ural-7 presentation — 18 months before the first case appeared. The predecessor is not in EO records.
- **6.** The "hum" from the ground near the sealed sector has been increasing in frequency. The research station's seismic monitoring equipment shows it

correlates with permafrost thaw depth. Whatever is running beneath the surface is responding to the temperature change. It is not passive infrastructure.

DR. OKSANA MIKHAILOVA

Research Station Lead, Permafrost Pathogen Mapping

CAN GET The complete permafrost pathogen map including the three no-known-treatment organisms and the Ural-7 organism's transmission vector data, the research station's current observation logs, and the Ural-7 worker's classified medical record.

WANTS She wants someone with military authority to act on the Ural-7 situation before a third worker presents. She has been trying to reach Major Volkov through unofficial channels for 72 hours.

FEARS EO Research Division command, which has acknowledged her alert and responded only with a classification upgrade on the worker's record. She is treating the lack of response as a response.

CURRENT PRESSURE The firmware update that gave the patrol platform biological detection capability came from Research Division command three months ago, before the alert. She filed a query asking why a platform received pathogen detection programming before the detection event occurred. No response.

YANNICK OSEI

FAA Environmental Monitoring Team Lead

CAN GET FAA's organism data for the adjacent Taiga including the two organisms not in the EO map, the FAA's read on the emergence rate and direction of the permafrost retreat, and his team's field position for the past six days which corresponds to following something the EO's platform is also following.

WANTS He wants to know what the platform has been running the non-published patrol for. The FAA's monitoring program doesn't include autonomous platform behavior analysis, but Osei has been watching it for six hours and it is doing something he doesn't have a framework for.

FEARS Being treated as a hostile presence in EO-controlled territory when his team's actual purpose is the same as the research station's.

CURRENT PRESSURE One of his team members has a dosimeter reading that is slightly elevated relative to baseline. The elevation is consistent with one of the FAA's undisclosed organism detection protocols. She has not reported symptoms. He has not told her what the reading suggests.

CORPORAL ANASTASIA FROLOV

Compound Medical Officer, Ural-7 (via communication channel)

CAN GET Her treatment notes on the Ural-7 worker — the only unclassified documentation of the organism's presentation and her treatment attempts — and her current status: she submitted an official inquiry about the record classification and has been placed on administrative review.

WANTS She wants to know what she's dealing with. Her treatment failed. The patient is still in the compound medical facility in a status the EO's system now describes as "pending administrative resolution."

FEARS The administrative review, which she believes is not about her inquiry but about what she documented before the classification.

CURRENT PRESSURE A second worker presented yesterday with the same initial indicators she saw in the first case. She treated it differently this time — documented it under a diagnostic code that doesn't match the actual presentation, which she did on purpose, to create a record that doesn't trigger the same classification response.

ZONE 06 LABOR COMPOUND NETWORK

SATELLITE EXTRACTION SITES

The satellite extraction sites — smaller than Ural-7, each running between 200 and 600 workers on rotating contracts, each positioned to feed a spe-

cific ore vein into the official supply chain. The three compounds with headcount discrepancies are Compounds 12, 17, and 23. Their workers don't know each other and haven't compared notes. The EO's shift count logs for all three show the same pattern: workers who receive rotation confirmation and don't appear on the departure manifest, logged as voluntary extension, whose names don't appear in subsequent rotation rosters either.

SECURITY	Active
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable (minimal)
CIVILIANS	Packed (workers only)
SURVEILLANCE	Cameras + shift count log
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO
CONTAMINATION	None (Compounds 12, 17) / Present (Compound 23, see Permafrost Line)
BLACK MARKET	Light
MOBILITY	Checkpointed

FUNCTION Ore extraction and primary processing feeding both the official Kazan supply chain and, at three specific compounds, the MERIDIAN diversion pipeline.

CONTROLLER EO Extraction Division. Individual compound supervisors who range from complicit (Compounds 12, 17, 23) to uninformed (all others).

DRAW The headcount discrepancy data — the pattern across three compounds is readable if someone compares the shift count logs, which nobody in EO command has done because the anomaly flags have been suppressed / Workers who are aware of the MERIDIAN operation but have no route to surface it / Compound 23's medical situation — Corporal Frolov's second case.

RISK	The compounds are designed to be self-contained; external access requires either EO authorization or a cover that fits the compound's operational context / Compound supervisors at 12, 17, and 23 report anomalies directly to Morozova's channel, not to EO command / Workers who identify and approach external operators are making a survival calculation they may have been wrong about before.
SCARCITY	Communication outside the compound — personal devices are contraband; compound communication systems are logged / Evidence of the MERIDIAN operation in a form usable outside EO administrative channels / Workers who haven't internalized the cost of asking questions.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The workers whose names disappear from the rotation roster after voluntary extension are not at another compound. Steppe Post 9's platform logs — in the suppressed partition — show vehicle movements from Compounds 12, 17, and 23 to a location 60 km east that doesn't appear on any EO facility map. Eleven workers from three compounds over 36 months. The MERIDIAN operation has a physical location and the workers who know too much are there.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A worker at Compound 23 connects her colleague's medical situation to the headcount discrepancy — the first case was a worker who had been loading the MERIDIAN transfer vehicles. She does not make this connection out loud. She makes it in writing, in a place she believes isn't surveilled, which is the repair depot camera blind spot equivalent at Compound 23. It is not unsurveilled. Her rotation confirmation arrives the next morning, 48 hours ahead of schedule.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO Extraction Division compound supervisors. Routine extraction operations. Published shift schedules.

ECONOMY

Ore extraction, processing, equipment maintenance. The compounds exist to produce. Everything else is secondary.

RISK

Shift count logging and camera coverage. External visitors are logged and tracked. Cover must match compound operational context.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced supervisory staff. At Compounds 12, 17, and 23: the MERIDIAN transfer operation runs on the same schedule as Ural-7's third shift.

ECONOMY

The MERIDIAN transfer at the three compromised compounds. Equipment repair at all compounds — the repair window is the only unstructured time in the compound schedule.

RISK

Workers on permanent extension are awake at night. They are the most informed and the most desperate people in the territory. Approaching them is an opportunity. Being seen approaching them is a flag.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The dormitory notice board at Compound 17 has a rotation posting with three names on it. One of the three left on the transport. Two didn't. Both of their bunks were cleared the same morning. Nobody mentions this. The people who don't mention it are the ones who have been here long enough to understand what it means.

EO EXTRACTION DIVISION

Dominant across all compounds. Compound supervisors at 12, 17, and 23 are complicit in the MERIDIAN operation. Others are uninformed.

MERIDIAN

Present through the transfer operation and the workers on permanent extension. The physical trail leads from these compounds to the pre-war site 60 km east.

CIVILIAN NEED

Workers want their rotation dates honored. The ones who know about the tonnage discrepancy want to say something without becoming the next name that disappears from the roster. At Compound 23, the medical situation adds urgency — workers want to know what the first case has and whether they're next.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Headcount discrepancy data (via comparison of shift count logs across compounds, available through downtime procedure: Work the Compound Circuit). Worker testimony (via Tomas, Nadia Volkov, or other permanent extension workers at personal risk). Compound 23 medical data (via Frolov's coded treatment notes). Supervisor communication channel (via Lenko, reluctantly).

ENCOUNTERS — LABOR COMPOUND NETWORK (1D6)

- **1.** A shift count at Compound 17 comes up two short. The compound supervisor runs it again. Still two short. He files the count as correct and notes the discrepancy in a personal log he keeps separate from the official record. He has been keeping the log for nine months.
- **2.** A worker at Compound 12 approaches operators during the equipment inspection parade. She presents a well-maintained tool. While the supervisor inspects it, she whispers a question: “Are you here about the vehicles?” She doesn't wait for an answer. She moves on.
- **3.** A medical orderly at Compound 23 runs a non-standard symptom check on workers returning from the third shift. She is looking for something specific. Two workers show elevated readings on a test the compound's medical system doesn't officially support.

- **4.** Compound Supervisor Lenko receives a message through the supervisor channel. He reads it in the compound's office with the door open. The message is about vehicle routes. His hand shakes. He closes the door.
- **5.** A transport arrives at Compound 23 for a scheduled rotation departure. Three workers are on the manifest. One does not board. Her bunk is cleared by 0800. The workers who see the cleared bunk do not look at each other.
- **6.** Tomas is loading crates at Ural-7's third-shift bay. He has done this 400 times. Tonight he pauses at one crate. The weight is different. The manifest code is the same. He loads it. He does not note the difference. He remembers it.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** Nadia Volkov is in Compound 23's equivalent of the repair depot blind spot. She is writing. The notes she is making connect the first medical case to the MERIDIAN loading schedule. She has been writing for three nights. Tonight she finishes.
- **2.** A vehicle leaves Compound 12 at 0200 on a maintenance manifest. The driver is not the usual driver. The vehicle takes the branch route. It does not return by morning. The usual driver reports for his next shift and does not ask where his vehicle went.
- **3.** Lenko is on the supervisor communication channel at 0100. He is trying to identify which of the other supervisors is providing information to an external party. The conversation is oblique. Every supervisor on the channel is having the same conversation simultaneously.
- **4.** A worker at Compound 17 who received early rotation confirmation is not packing. She is copying the dormitory notice board's rotation posting onto a piece of paper. The paper includes the two names who didn't board the last transport. She folds the paper into her boot.
- **5.** The camera system at Compound 23 registers a 3-second gap at 0330. During the gap, the medical orderly transfers a data file from the compound's medical terminal to a personal device. The file is Frolov's coded treatment notes for the second case.
- **6.** Tomas receives a message from Yeva Smirnova: she has made contact with external operators. He sits on his bunk for an hour. Then he goes to the loading bay and counts crates. The count matches the manifest. It has never matched before.

RUMORS — LABOR COMPOUND NETWORK (1D6)

- **1.** The eleven workers at the pre-war site are not prisoners. They are employees. MERIDIAN offered them permanent positions at compensation rates that make the EO rotation contract look like what it is. Three of them accepted voluntarily. The other eight did not have the option of declining.
- **2.** Compound 23's medical situation is not an accident. The MERIDIAN transfer vehicles pass through a contaminated area on the branch route. The first worker who presented with the organism was loading vehicles. The exposure pathway is the cargo, not the permafrost.
- **3.** One of the compound supervisors — not Lenko, not Morozova — has been running a parallel documentation project. Shift counts, vehicle logs, rotation discrepancies, all cross-referenced. The documentation is on a personal device buried in the compound's waste processing facility. The supervisor checks it weekly.
- **4.** The workers on permanent extension have developed a communication system using equipment maintenance codes. The codes correspond to specific information — transfer dates, vehicle counts, worker movements. The system is invisible to the compound's surveillance because it looks like routine equipment logs.
- **5.** A worker who left Compound 12 on a legitimate rotation 14 months ago has been trying to contact the compound since. Her messages are being intercepted. The interceptor is not EO command. The interceptor is someone inside the compound who doesn't want the contact to succeed.
- **6.** The pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east has a medical facility. The eleven workers there have access to medical care that no labor compound in the territory provides. The quality of that care is the reason some of them haven't tried to leave. The quality is also the reason the site exists at the intersection of a biological research operation and a rare-earth diversion pipeline.

TOMAS (NO SURNAME GIVEN)

Ural-7 Third-Shift Worker, Permanent Extension

CAN GET The MERIDIAN transfer schedule and vehicle routing, the names of the other permanent extension workers and their status, and the physical location of the MERIDIAN transfer point.

WANTS He wants to know what happened to the worker from Compound 17 whose name disappeared from the rotation roster in month eight of his own extension. She was his crew lead.

FEARS That he has been here long enough that leaving is no longer straightforwardly possible — he knows things that make him a security risk regardless of his loyalty.

CURRENT PRESSURE Yeva Smirnova told him that she approached external operators two nights ago. He doesn't know who the operators are. He is deciding whether this is the moment he has been waiting for or a test.

NADIA VOLKOV (NO RELATION TO MAJOR VOLKOV)

Compound 23 Worker

CAN GET Her written notes on the connection between the first medical case and the MERIDIAN transfer loading schedule, the second case's symptom presentation, and the early rotation confirmation she has received and not acted on.

WANTS She wants two things and knows they may be incompatible: to leave, and to make sure someone knows what she knows before she does.

FEARS The early rotation confirmation. She has been here long enough to understand what an early confirmation can mean.

CURRENT PRESSURE The medical orderly running the non-standard symptom check is her bunkmate. She told the orderly what she saw. The orderly told her she was already looking. Neither of them has decided what to do with the notes now that two people have them.

COMPOUND SUPERVISOR GRIGOR LENKO

Compound 12 Supervisor (reluctant, pressured)

CAN GET The communication channel between compound supervisors, the rotation extension coordination protocol, and the vehicle route to the pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east.

WANTS	He wants out of the arrangement. He entered it three years ago under circumstances he didn't fully understand. He now understands them and has been trying to find an exit that doesn't end the same way as the eleven workers.
FEARS	Morozova. She is the only person in the arrangement who knows what the exit looks like for someone who tries to leave it.
CURRENT PRESSURE	He received a message through the supervisor channel last week: one of the other supervisors has started providing information to an external party. He doesn't know which one. He is behaving as if it is both.

ZONE 07 KAZAN SUPPLY CORRIDOR

LOGISTICS SPINE

The logistics spine. The road and rail infrastructure connecting the extraction compounds to the western processing facilities where Kazan Consortium ore becomes EO industrial output. Everything the Steppes produces moves through here — the official tonnage and the 12% that doesn't appear on it. The Corridor is the most visible feature of the territory from satellite imagery and the most surveilled by ground-level EO security. It is also the only place in the territory where the MERIDIAN pipeline's physical infrastructure is visible to someone looking at the right thing.

SECURITY	Active
INFRASTRUCTURE	Stable
CIVILIANS	Normal (logistics workers and convoy crews)
SURVEILLANCE	Cameras + platform sweep + convoy manifest logging
FACTION PRESSURE	Dominant EO / Kazan Consortium (operational control)
CONTAMINATION	None
BLACK MARKET	Light (transit documentation, manifest modification)

MOBILITY	Checkpointed
FUNCTION	Primary logistics artery for Steppes ore production. Also: the physical infrastructure through which the MERIDIAN diversion moves in plain sight.
CONTROLLER	Kazan Consortium Logistics Division on operational decisions. EO security on checkpoint enforcement. The two overlap in ways that neither party has formally documented.
DRAW	The manifest trail — the Corridor is where the official tonnage numbers and the actual ore volume diverge in a way that is physically observable / MERIDIAN transfer point access — the pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east is accessible from the Corridor on a branch route that doesn't appear on EO maps / The Kazan Consortium's logistics infrastructure — the physical systems that would need to be disrupted to interrupt the MERIDIAN pipeline without disrupting the official supply chain.
RISK	Convoy manifest checkpoints log every vehicle's cargo against a pre-filed manifest; a vehicle not on the official manifest requires Kazan authorization to clear / Platform sweep coverage of the Corridor is the densest in the territory / The Kazan Consortium logistics staff have their own communication channels, their own incident reporting, and their own definition of what constitutes a problem.
SCARCITY	Manifest access for non-authorized vehicles / The branch route to the pre-war site — it exists, it is physically navigable, and every vehicle that has used it appears in the Post 9 suppressed logs / The window between a manifest anomaly being flagged and a checkpoint commander receiving the flag — approximately four minutes.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The MERIDIAN vehicles move through the Corridor on maintenance supply run manifests — manifests that Kazan Consortium logistics staff file and EO checkpoint personnel clear without secondary verification. The clearing protocol was established as an efficiency measure three years ago, at the same time Standing Order 7 was installed at Post 9. The two measures together make the diversion invisible to standard EO oversight. They are visible to anyone who counts vehicles on the Corridor and compares the count to the official manifest log.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A checkpoint officer counts vehicles and files a discrepancy report. The report routes to Kazan logistics rather than EO security because the clearing protocol assigns manifest discrepancies to the filer. Kazan logistics closes the report as an administrative error within the hour. The checkpoint officer has a copy. This has happened four times. Four checkpoint officers have copies of closed discrepancy reports. None of them know about the other three.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO checkpoint security, Kazan logistics staff, standard convoy traffic

ECONOMY

Ore transport, equipment resupply, personnel transfers. The Corridor's economy is movement. Everything else serves that.

RISK

Vehicle count versus manifest discrepancy — any operator performing a physical count will identify the gap

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced checkpoint staffing — the MERIDIAN vehicles move at night, using the maintenance supply window that reduced staffing was designed to accommodate

ECONOMY

The MERIDIAN transfer. Maintenance manifests filed by Kazan logistics, cleared by reduced checkpoint staff. The branch route to the pre-war site.

RISK

The MERIDIAN vehicles move at night. An operator in the right position at the right time is either a witness or a problem, and the Corridor at night has no middle ground between those two categories

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The checkpoint at Corridor marker 7 has processed 140,000 vehicle clearances in three years. The four discrepancy reports — closed as administrative errors — represent vehicles that don't appear in those 140,000. The checkpoint log has all 140,000. A separate count would show more.

KAZAN CONSORTIUM

Operational control of the Corridor. The clearing protocol is their instrument. Kazan-Reyes inherited the arrangement and is calculating whether controlled disclosure is safer than continued concealment.

EO SECURITY

Checkpoint enforcement. The checkpoint officers process what the manifests describe. Four of them have noticed the manifests don't describe everything.

CIVILIAN NEED

Convoy crews want to run their routes without delays. Logistics workers want stable employment in an industry that pays better than the alternatives. The four checkpoint officers with closed discrepancy reports want to know if what they documented matters to anyone with the authority to act on it.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Closed discrepancy reports (via Burova, with timestamps and vehicle descriptions). MERIDIAN vehicle movement schedule (via Raskov, at personal risk). Kazan internal documentation including the clearing protocol's origins (via Kazan-Reyes, if her decision goes toward disclosure). The branch route to the pre-war site (via Raskov or the platform's suppressed anomaly logs).

ENCOUNTERS — KAZAN SUPPLY CORRIDOR (1D6)

- **1.** A convoy clears Checkpoint 7. Burova processes the manifests. One vehicle's cargo weight doesn't match the manifest declaration by 400 kg. She notes it. The Kazan logistics representative at the checkpoint says “rounding error.” She files the note anyway.
- **2.** A maintenance supply vehicle on the Corridor pulls off at the branch route junction. The driver checks something — a map, a device, a piece of paper. The vehicle turns east onto the branch route. It is the third vehicle to do this in the past week. The branch route doesn't appear on EO maps.
- **3.** Kazan-Reyes arrives at Checkpoint 7 in a logistics management vehicle. She inspects the checkpoint's processing records for the past 72 hours. She asks specific questions about vehicle types that used the clearing protocol. Her questions describe the MERIDIAN vehicles without naming them.
- **4.** A platform sweep passes overhead. The Corridor receives denser coverage than any other sector. This sweep is slightly off the published schedule — 90

seconds early. The checkpoint staff notice. They attribute it to calibration drift. It is not calibration drift.

- **5.** Volkov's audit request arrives at the Corridor's administrative office. The request asks for 30 days of vehicle count data and manifest reconciliation. Kazan-Reyes's logistics monitoring system flags the request. She has been in her office for four hours since.
- **6.** Raskov is driving a standard logistics run on the Corridor. He passes operators at a rest stop. He doesn't stop. He doesn't look. He drops a fuel receipt on the ground as he walks to his vehicle. The receipt has a frequency and a time written on the back.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- **1.** Two MERIDIAN vehicles clear Checkpoint 3 on maintenance manifests at 0130. The checkpoint officer on duty processes them without secondary verification per the clearing protocol. He is one of the four. He has a copy of his own discrepancy report. He watches the vehicles drive east.
- **2.** Raskov is on a MERIDIAN run. His vehicle is carrying cargo he has not inspected. He has been told not to. Tonight the cargo sounds different — movement inside the sealed container that is not consistent with ore or equipment. He drives. He does not stop.
- **3.** The branch route junction is visible from the main Corridor at a specific angle. An operator positioned at Corridor marker 12 can see vehicles turning east. Tonight two turn east. Neither has running lights. Both are on the maintenance manifest.
- **4.** A checkpoint officer — not Burova, one of the other three — is at a rest stop on the Corridor at 0300. He is off duty. He is not sleeping. He is reviewing his closed discrepancy report and a physical vehicle count log he has been maintaining in a personal notebook.
- **5.** Kazan-Reyes's office light is on at 0200. She has been there since the audit request arrived. Her decision about controlled disclosure has a deadline she set for herself: dawn. The Kazan internal protocol she is considering activating cannot be recalled.
- **6.** A platform on the Corridor's patrol route adjusts its heading to follow a MERIDIAN vehicle for 3 km before correcting. The adjustment is in the suppressed partition. The platform's decision logic registered the vehicle as an anomaly. Standing Order 7 suppressed the flag. The platform followed anyway.

RUMORS — KAZAN SUPPLY CORRIDOR (1D6)

- **1.** The clearing protocol has a sunset clause that Kazan-Reyes's predecessor didn't disclose. The protocol expires in 60 days. After that, every vehicle on the Corridor requires EO secondary verification. MERIDIAN has 60 days before the infrastructure that makes it invisible ceases to exist.
- **2.** The four checkpoint officers with closed discrepancy reports work at four different checkpoints. If anyone connects the four reports, the vehicle count discrepancy across the full Corridor becomes undeniable. Nobody has connected them because nobody knows all four exist.
- **3.** The branch route to the pre-war site was built before the EO occupied the territory. The construction predates the current Corridor infrastructure. Whatever the pre-war site was, the branch route was purpose-built to connect it to a supply chain that no longer exists — except that MERIDIAN has rebuilt it.
- **4.** Raskov's last run to the pre-war site included cargo that was not ore. The cargo manifest described equipment parts. The weight was consistent with equipment parts. The sound was not. Raskov filed no report. He hasn't slept through the night since.
- **5.** Kazan-Reyes has a contingency she has not shared with the Consortium's legal team. If she activates controlled disclosure to Kirova, she also activates a data package that routes to the NZS banking system simultaneously. The dual activation is her insurance against the Kazan family deciding she is the liability.
- **6.** The Kazan family member whose signature authorized the clearing protocol has not been to the Steppes in three years. His last visit coincided with Standing Order 7's installation. The signature and the standing order were executed the same day. The procurement channel used for both was closed within 24 hours of their completion. The channel's records no longer exist in the Kazan Consortium's system. They exist in Zaslavskaya's personal archive.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER LENA BUROVA

EO Security, Checkpoint 7 (the one with two closed reports)

CAN GET Both of her closed discrepancy reports with vehicle descriptions and timestamps, her physical count log for the past six months, and the pattern she has identified in which vehicle types use the clearing protocol most frequently.

WANTS

She wants to know if what she has documented is enough to matter, and to someone who will not route her inquiry back to Kazan logistics.

FEARS That her second discrepancy report — the one filed three months after the first — triggered something, because her rotation request (filed the same week) has not been processed in 90 days.

CURRENT PRESSURE Volkov's audit request came through her checkpoint this morning. She processed it. She included both of her own discrepancy reports in the package without being asked. She does not know if they'll be read.

MIKHAIL RASKOV

Kazan Consortium Logistics Driver (Corridor-assigned)

CAN GET The branch route to the pre-war infrastructure site, the MERIDIAN vehicle movement schedule for the next two weeks, and his read on which Kazan logistics staff members know what they're moving and which don't.

WANTS He wants to retire. He was recruited to the MERIDIAN operation as a logistics driver three years ago with a compensation package he needed at the time and no description of what he would be driving. He knows now.

FEARS The workers at the pre-war site. He has been the driver who takes workers there. He tells himself this is not the same as what happens after he leaves.

CURRENT PRESSURE He drove a worker from Compound 23 to the pre-war site four months ago. She was the crew lead that Tomas asked about. She was alive when he left. He does not know what her status is now.

SENIOR LOGISTICS COORDINATOR YEVGENIA KAZAN-REYES

Kazan Consortium, Corridor Operations Lead

CAN GET The Kazan internal system route authorization codes, the Consortium's internal documentation on the clearing protocol's origins, and access to the Kazan-EO logistics agreement including the sections not disclosed to EO military command.

WANTS	She wants the MERIDIAN operation ended before it implicates the Kazan Consortium's main supply chain operation. She was not part of the arrangement's establishment. She inherited it 18 months ago when her predecessor retired.
FEARS	The Kazan family. Specifically, the Kazan family member whose signature authorized the clearing protocol. If MERIDIAN becomes public, that signature is the first thing that gets read.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She received a copy of Volkov's audit request before the checkpoint processed it. She has been in her office for four hours deciding whether the audit is the end of MERIDIAN or the end of something larger.

LAWS & CIVIC RITUALS

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

- **Equipment accountability** — every tool, vehicle, and platform is logged against its assigned operator; loss or damage triggers an incident record that affects rotation eligibility.
- **Unauthorized communication** — personal encrypted devices are contraband; faction-standard burst frequency is monitored and logged at Steppe Post 9.
- **Movement outside designated zones** — worker transit between compounds requires convoy assignment; unescorted movement on the steppe triggers autonomous platform response within 14 minutes.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

- **Productivity metrics** — the accountability system applies to all workers on paper; audits concentrate on compounds where the headcount discrepancies are largest and the workforce is most likely to notice the ore variance.
- **Medical reassignment** — the right to reassign workers showing "performance-affecting health indicators" is used to remove workers who ask questions, not only workers who are sick.
- **Rotation extension** — six-month contracts include a clause allowing extension for "operational continuity"; the clause is applied selectively to workers who have learned things the compound supervisors prefer they not take home.

FEARED CONSEQUENCES

- **Rotation extension** — a six-month contract that becomes eight, then ten; the worker who never leaves.
- **Compound reassignment** — further from the supply chain, less contact with the outside, no witnesses to what the metrics at that site describe.
- **Incident record classification** — an incident record that isn't just a productivity note but a security flag, which routes to Kirova's network rather than standard EO HR.

CIVIC RITUALS

- **Shift count** — every compound runs a physical headcount at shift change. The count is logged. The log goes to Steppe Post 9. The count and the log have not matched at three compounds for eleven months.
- **Equipment inspection parade** — weekly visual inspection of all assigned tools and vehicles. Workers who present well-maintained equipment receive small ration supplements. The parade is also the compound supervisor's clearest read of worker morale.
- **Rotation announcement** — departure dates are posted 48 hours before transport. Workers who receive rotation confirmation and then don't appear on the departure manifest are logged as “voluntary extension.” No one asks them.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime off-duty in labor compound recreation zones, Consortium logistics camps, or steppe settlements after the drone sweep passes. Every result produces a new edge, a new debt, or a new exposure.

- **1 — Contact Made.** An off-duty Kazan logistics operator describes the payment diversion system — the one that keeps some shipments running parallel to the official manifests. The operator doesn't remember being this specific. By morning, someone does.
- **2 — Feud Started.** An EO rotation coordinator takes offense at something said or implied about the worker selection process. He files a compliance note with Steppe Post 9's administrative channel. The operator's next pass through any checkpoint will trigger a secondary verification review.
- **3 — Equipment Lost.** The operator's portable power cell or data device is lifted. It contains three days of location cache and one contact frequency list that was never supposed to be in the same place. Whoever has it now can sell what it shows — or use it.
- **4 — Secret Learned.** A worker approaches the operator near the end of the evening. She has identified who authorized the manifest override on the last supply run — it wasn't official Consortium logistics. She wants something from the operator in exchange for the name. She will not say it out loud until the trade is confirmed.
- **5 — Debt Incurred.** A Kazan supervisor approaches with a proposition: move one crate through the system without logging, and the favor is repaid. It's presented as a routine request. The tone is correct. That is what makes it worth worrying about. One crate. Undefined destination. Terms redeemable at the supervisor's discretion within 60 days.
- **6 — Locally Recognizable.** The operator does something — intervenes in a worker dispute, covers a meal charge, handles a checkpoint confrontation in a way that circulates — and by the next morning is the person contacts mention when describing someone trustworthy. One faction's network now routes requests through the operator. A different faction's field report now has a photograph and a flag.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

THE KIROVA NETWORK'S PRIMARY INTELLIGENCE SOURCE

Kirova's parallel monitoring operation tracks the same anomalies Standing Order 7 suppresses. The supplement describes that the network exists and operates with plausible deniability from official EO structures. It does not name who inside Steppe Post 9 sends Kirova the real data streams. That operative is currently managing three separate friction points between Standing Order 7 suppression and external visibility. Whether any of those friction points involves the operators is for the table to determine at first contact.

THE MERIDIAN DELIVERY ENDPOINT

The supplement confirms that MERIDIAN deliveries move through Ural-7 on a structured cycle and that Yeva Smirnova has direct operational knowledge of the route. It does not confirm what happens at the delivery endpoint — whether it is a forward equipment cache, a safe house, a research operation, or a facility serving multiple factions with competing claims. The shape of this blank determines operational stakes. Scale to your table.

VOLKOV'S EXTERNAL CONTACT

Major Volkov sent a message three days ago to a contact she trusts outside the formal EO structure. The supplement confirms the message was sent through a non-standard channel and that Morozova intercepted the fact of transmission without intercepting content. It does not name the contact, does not confirm whether they received it, and does not describe what specific request or information the message contained. That blank is where the next pressure cycle originates.

THE SEALED SECTOR IN THE PERMAFROST ZONE

The Permafrost Line contains a sealed research sector that no official map identifies. Svezhka and other mining personnel know it exists by acoustic signature — equipment running, electrical hum traveling through frozen ground. What failed inside, who sealed it, and what happens if the permafrost thaw reaches the structure are all intentionally undefined. The presence of the sealed sector is enough. What it means is for the table.

THE OFF-BOOKS KAZAN COORDINATOR

One Kazan Consortium logistics coordinator is running a transport operation that doesn't appear on Kazan-Reyes's official manifest system. Convoy crew members know the coordinator exists. The supplement does not name this person, does not describe which routes they control, and does not identify what cargo they move or who is paying them. They answer to someone, and that answer points toward questions operators should be asking.

FACTIONS

FACTION 01 EO EXTRACTION DIVISION

OBJECTIVE Maintain ore extraction output metrics while the MERIDIAN situation remains beneath the surface of official awareness. The Division's leadership is split: the majority don't know about MERIDIAN; the minority who do are managing their exposure.

ASSETS Complete administrative control of the labor compounds, the autonomous platform network through Post 9, Tempest Rider units for operational enforcement, and the extraction infrastructure that represents the EO's primary rare-earth output.

DEPENDENCY Steppe Post 9 as functional relay. Without it, the platform network loses coordinated management and three years of suppressed data releases simultaneously.

VULNERABILITY Major Volkov. She is conducting an official audit that will reach MERIDIAN if it proceeds. She doesn't know what she's about to find. Nobody has stopped her yet because stopping her would require acknowledging why.

ESCALATION 1: Audit obstruction through procedural delay — route Volkov's request through review cycles / 2: Standing Order 7 expansion — suppress the audit's data access at the platform level / 3: Rotation manipulation — remove Volkov from the territory on operational reassignment / 4: Kirova. The last resort that nobody on either side of the MERIDIAN arrangement wants to trigger.

WHAT THEY OFFER Transit authorization, labor compound access, Tempest Rider operational support for missions framed as consistent with EO extraction security.

WHAT THEY DEMAND No disruption to ore extraction metrics. No public disclosure of anything that implicates EO command-level figures.

IF DAMAGED	The extraction output drops. The Kazan Consortium's supply chain loses primary feedstock. EO rare-earth processing falls. The global market for the materials the EO manufactures shifts. This is the leverage the suppressed logs represent, and why Volkov's procurement contact issued Standing Order 7 rather than simply stopping the diversion.

FACTION 02 THE KAZAN CONSORTIUM

OBJECTIVE	Continue the MERIDIAN operation long enough to satisfy the Consortium's commitment to the buyer while finding a controlled exit before Volkov's audit reaches the manifest discrepancies.
ASSETS	Operational control of the Corridor logistics infrastructure, the clearing protocol that makes MERIDIAN invisible to standard EO oversight, the pre-war infrastructure site and whatever is maintained there, and a legal team that has been preparing MERIDIAN's administrative defense for eight months.
DEPENDENCY	The clearing protocol. Without it, MERIDIAN vehicles require EO secondary review, and EO secondary review finds the variance within a single inspection.
VULNERABILITY	Kazan-Reyes. She inherited the operation and has spent 18 months trying to calculate whether controlled disclosure is safer than continued concealment. She is close to a decision.
ESCALATION	1: Administrative delay — extend Volkov's audit processing timeline / 2: Clearing protocol defense — challenge the audit's authority to review Kazan internal logistics documentation / 3: MERIDIAN acceleration — complete the current delivery cycle and begin closing down the operation before the audit completes / 4: Controlled disclosure to Kirova — trade MERIDIAN's full documentation for Consortium immunity, which is the option Kazan-Reyes has been modeling.
WHAT THEY OFFER	Corridor access, manifest authorization, the internal Kazan documentation that closes the MERIDIAN evidentiary loop.

WHAT THEY DEMAND Operational continuity for the legitimate Kazan supply chain. Consortium liability limitation on anything that emerges from the MERIDIAN documentation.

IF DAMAGED The EO rare-earth supply chain loses its primary logistics operator. The replacement process takes 18 months minimum. During those 18 months, EO industrial output falls at a rate that the global defense market will notice.

FACTION 03 ELENA KIROVA'S INTERNAL SECURITY NETWORK

OBJECTIVE Acquire the complete MERIDIAN documentation — including the suppressed logs and the Kazan internal records — and position it for maximum leverage against Volkov's procurement network without triggering a structural crisis in EO command that would eliminate the network's value.

ASSETS Zaslavskaya's active Post 9 extraction, the monitoring hook's 612-entry partial log, informant coverage across the Strongpoint and every labor compound, and the operational discipline that has kept the parallel operation invisible to EO military command for 18 months.

DEPENDENCY Zaslavskaya. Kirova's network was compromised three months ago. Zaslavskaya has been running the Steppes operation independently since then. Kirova does not know the network was compromised. She does not know Zaslavskaya went independent.

VULNERABILITY The compromise. If Kirova discovers it, Zaslavskaya's extraction and the receiver archive she has been building become a liability rather than an asset. Kirova's response to a subordinate running an independent intelligence operation with leverage-level data is not predictable.

ESCALATION 1: Complete the Post 9 extraction before the calibration window closes / 2: Acquire the Kazan reconciliation records through Cherkas / 3: Surface the complete package to Kirova — or not, depending on what Zaslavskaya decides the package is for / 4: Zaslavskaya's independent option: use the complete documentation directly, bypassing Kirova entirely.

WHAT THEY OFFER Zaslavskaya can offer operators access to the 612-entry partial log and the Post 9 monitoring hook architecture. What she wants in exchange is the question that defines whether this is a cooperative relationship or a competitive one.

WHAT THEY DEMAND Nothing yet. Zaslavskaya is still assessing. The assessment period ends when the Post 9 extraction completes.

IF DAMAGED The MERIDIAN documentation exists in Zaslavskaya's personal archive. If Zaslavskaya is removed, the archive's location and access credentials are not in any EO system. They are in one place.

FACTION 04 MERIDIAN (BUYER, UNIDENTIFIED)

OBJECTIVE Complete the current delivery cycle and maintain the operational security that has kept the buyer unidentified in 847 platform log entries and three years of Kirova network surveillance.

ASSETS The pre-war infrastructure site, 11 workers at the site who have been there long enough to represent a significant operational security liability, and a procurement chain that runs through Volkov's network without appearing in any of its official documentation.

DEPENDENCY The workers at the pre-war site staying there. If they leave, they become witnesses with specific knowledge of the buyer's identity. The MERIDIAN operation's most significant vulnerability is human, not documentary.

VULNERABILITY Tomas. He has been at Ural-7 for 16 months and has been waiting for an exit opportunity with increasing impatience. He is the worker most likely to make contact with external operators and the worker with the most complete picture of the transfer operation.

ESCALATION	1: Operational continuity — maintain transfer schedule through the current delivery cycle / 2: Security escalation at the pre-war site — restrict worker movement further / 3: Site closure — transfer the workers and close the location before the audit reaches the manifest data / 4: MERIDIAN's last option is not an escalation. It is a clean exit that leaves nothing behind, which has a specific meaning for the eleven workers at the pre-war site.
WHAT THEY OFFER	Nothing. MERIDIAN doesn't negotiate with external parties. The buyer's identity is the leverage that prevents the offer from being necessary.
WHAT THEY DEMAND	Operational security. Everything that has happened in the Steppes for three years has been in service of this single requirement.
IF DAMAGED	The buyer loses a rare-earth supply chain that has been running at 12% of EO Steppes output for three years. The buyer has alternatives. The workers at the pre-war site are the damage.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

ELENA KIROVA

EO Internal Security and Intelligence Director (remote, accessible through official EO intelligence channels)

CAN GET EO internal security apparatus, the official channel that a fully documented MERIDIAN disclosure would route through, and the question of whether her network's compromise changes what she would do with that disclosure.

WANTS She wants the MERIDIAN documentation before Zaslavskaya decides what to do with it. She does not know Zaslavskaya went independent. She does not know her network was compromised. She is operating on eighteen-month-old assumptions about her own intelligence picture.

FEARS The compromise. If operators know about it before she does, and tell her, her response is unpredictable in a way that affects every other active operation in the territory.

CURRENT PRESSURE She received a burst-frequency communication three days ago from a source she cannot identify — a single coordinate and a time. The coordinate is the pre-war infrastructure site. She has not yet decided whether to act on it.

DMITRI VOLKOV

EO Oligarch, Procurement Network Principal (remote, accessible through EO industrial channels)

CAN GET Nothing he would voluntarily provide. What operators can get: the procurement network's response to MERIDIAN documentation reaching EO command — which would be the most informative thing in the territory.

WANTS MERIDIAN contained. Specifically, he wants the eleven workers at the pre-war site to remain there until the delivery cycle is complete and the site is closed cleanly.

FEARS The suppressed logs. He knows they exist. He does not know whether Kirova's network has extracted them. He does not know whether Zaslavskaya went independent.

CURRENT PRESSURE He sent a message through his procurement channel to Morozova three days ago. She received it and has not responded. The message was "confirm site integrity." Her non-response is the most significant communication he has received in three years.

DOWNTIME

PROCEDURE 01 WORK THE COMPOUND CIRCUIT

WHAT Spend time moving between labor compound supply runs, establishing cover as a contractor or logistics worker, building trust with compound workers.

COST Three days and 300 credits, or valid EO contractor documentation.

GAIN One piece of current intelligence from the Labor Compound Network rumor table and introduction to one compound worker willing to provide testimony or documentation.

FALLOUT Morozova's supervisor channel now has the operator profiled as a contractor-class external presence. The next visit to any of the three MERIDIAN compounds triggers a verification request that routes to her office.

PROCEDURE 02 PLATFORM PATTERN ANALYSIS

WHAT Spend time observing autonomous platform patrol behavior across the Open Steppe, mapping deviations from published schedules.

COST Two days in the field and a fine-sensitivity monitoring device.

GAIN Current accurate patrol gap windows for three specific vectors including the MERIDIAN transfer route, and an observation report noting the platform in the decision loop at the 400-meter section.

FALLOUT	The platform in the decision loop logs the observer as an anomaly. The log goes into the suppressed partition, which means it does not reach human oversight — but it is now in the same partition as the MERIDIAN documentation, and anything that reads the partition will find both.

PROCEDURE 03 ESTABLISH CORRIDOR COVER

WHAT	Build a logistics worker identity and integrate into Kazan Consortium convoy operations on the Corridor.
COST	Four days, 600 credits, and documentation that passes a Kazan internal verification check.
GAIN	Convoy crew access to the full Corridor including checkpoint clearance, physical observation of vehicle count versus manifest for at least three transit cycles, and introduction to Raskov.
FALLOUT	Kazan-Reyes's logistics monitoring system flags a new worker whose documentation passed verification but whose performance pattern — specifically, which vehicles and checkpoints the operator pays attention to — doesn't match standard convoy crew behavior. She does not act on the flag immediately. She notes it.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLE 1 — COMPOUND & LOGISTICS SOURCES (1D6)

- **1.** A compound worker says the third-shift vehicles have been running heavier than usual for the past two weeks. The weight increase corresponds to the delivery cycle acceleration that MERIDIAN's principals have been considering.
- **2.** A logistics driver mentions a checkpoint that closed for four hours last month for "equipment maintenance." During those four hours, twelve vehicles passed through the checkpoint without manifest logging. The driver counted them.
- **3.** A compound supervisor's assistant says her boss has been making calls on a channel she doesn't recognize. The calls happen after shift count. The assistant has been keeping a log of the call times. She doesn't know what the calls are about. She knows when they happen.
- **4.** A convoy crew member says the branch route east was recently graded — fresh vehicle tracks, smoothed surface, the kind of maintenance that only happens on routes someone intends to use frequently. The branch route is not on any maintenance schedule.
- **5.** A Kazan logistics worker says Kazan-Reyes has been requesting historical manifest data going back three years. The requests are internal to the Consortium. EO personnel don't know about them. The worker who processes the requests has noticed the pattern.
- **6.** A rotation transport driver says three workers were listed on the departure manifest for Compound 17 last month. One boarded. Two didn't. The driver filed a passenger discrepancy note. The note was closed by Kazan logistics. The driver has a copy.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLE 2 — TECHNICAL & INTELLIGENCE SOURCES (1D6)

- **1.** A Post 9 technical staff member mentions that the management AI's processing load has increased by 8% over the past three months with no corresponding increase in platform operations. The additional load is unexplained. It corresponds to the active extraction Zaslavskaya is running.
- **2.** An EO signals analyst at Volga Strongpoint has detected burst-frequency transmissions from three locations in the territory. The transmissions use a frequency not assigned to any EO unit. The analyst filed a report. The report was received. No investigation has been ordered.
- **3.** A Tempest Rider operator says her unit received deployment orders through a non-standard channel last week. The orders sent a fire team to the eastern sector. The mission was described as "route survey." The Tempest Rider unit does not conduct route surveys.

- **4.** A Research Division supply coordinator says the Permafrost Line research station has been requesting biological containment equipment at a rate that exceeds its stated research parameters. The requests have been approved without review. The coordinator doesn't know what the equipment is for. She knows it's a lot.
- **5.** An EO intelligence analyst says there are two active monitoring operations in the Steppes that neither knows about the other. One is Kirova's network. The analyst doesn't know whose the other one is. The analyst is stationed at a facility that doesn't appear in the territory's organizational chart.
- **6.** A platform maintenance technician says one autonomous platform in the eastern patrol sector has been returning from patrol with sensor data that doesn't match its assigned patrol route. The platform is logging environmental data from a location it has not been ordered to visit. The technician filed a maintenance inquiry. The inquiry was closed as “calibration variance.”

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 01 THE AUDIT

VOLKOV'S OFFICIAL INQUIRY

Tracks Major Volkov's official inquiry into platform anomaly data and cargo discrepancies.

STAGE 1 — ACTIVE Volkov has submitted a 30-day vehicle count request and is reviewing platform anomaly reports. Burova's package is in her queue. She has not yet connected the platform anomalies to the manifest discrepancies. Operators can act without triggering an administrative response.

STAGE 2 — CONVERGING Volkov connects the platform anomaly data to the manifest discrepancy pattern. She requests access to Kazan internal logistics documentation. Kazan-Reyes routes the request through a review cycle. Volkov escalates to EO command. The escalation reaches the same procurement channel that issued Standing Order 7.

STAGE 3 — OBSTRUCTED Volkov's audit request is formally delayed by EO command authority. Volkov files a protest. The protest is classified. Volkov now knows she has been obstructed by command authority, which means she knows the obstruction is the answer to her question. She begins acting outside official channels.

STAGE 4 — BROKEN Volkov presents her findings to a channel outside EO command — either directly to Kirova, to an external faction contact, or to the same burst-frequency channel that reached Kirova three days ago. The MERIDIAN documentation is in official hands. The question is which official hands, and what those hands intend to do with leverage-level evidence against an EO oligarch.

TRACK 02 THE SITE

PRE-WAR INFRASTRUCTURE & THE ELEVEN WORKERS

Tracks the status of the pre-war infrastructure site and the eleven workers there.

STAGE 1 — STABLE The site is operating. The workers are there. MERIDIAN's delivery cycle is running on schedule. Volkov's procurement contact has sent an unanswered integrity confirmation request. Nothing has changed at the site. Operators can act without triggering a site response.

STAGE 2 — PRESSURED Morozova's paralysis continues and a second message from Volkov's contact arrives. Site security increases — worker movement is further restricted, external platform coverage of the site's access route intensifies. Tomas identifies the security increase as a sign that the window he has been waiting for is closing.

STAGE 3 — ACCELERATING MERIDIAN's principals decide to accelerate the delivery cycle completion and begin closing the site. “Closing” means different things to different people in the arrangement. Raskov's knowledge of what closing means is the most accurate. The eleven workers' knowledge of what closing means is the most consequential.

STAGE 4 — RESOLUTION The site closes. What that means for the eleven workers depends on who reaches the site first — MERIDIAN's principals, operators, Major Volkov's unit, or the platform that has been circling the pre-war infrastructure location for six days and is waiting for Post 9 to go offline.

OPERATIONS MAP

CHOKEPOINTS

- **Steppe Post 9:** the entire autonomous platform network runs through here. The suppressed partition, Kirova's monitoring hook, and Standing Order 7 are all physically located at this facility. It is the most important target in the territory and the most dangerous to approach incorrectly.
- **Kazan Supply Corridor Checkpoint 7:** the point where vehicle count and manifest diverge most consistently. Four closed discrepancy reports. Burova is here. Volkov's audit request was processed here this morning.
- **Ural-7 Repair Depot:** the only camera blind spot in the primary extraction compound. The only place in Ural-7 where a conversation doesn't appear in the surveillance record.
- **Permafrost Line Research Station:** the only location where the pathogen emergence data exists in unclassified form. Dr. Mikhailova's emergency beacon has just activated.

DARK ZONES

- **Ural-7 repair depot camera blind spot:** eight months of failed maintenance creates a 6x4 meter area with no visual coverage. The foot traffic pattern inside it is readable.
- **Post 9 management AI during calibration window (0200–0330):** the 90-minute window when the suppressed partition is accessible and the defensive response is suspended. The autonomous defense platform runs its most aggressive pattern during this window.
- **Open Steppe gap windows:** 14 minutes on standard transit vectors, 22 minutes on the MERIDIAN route. Platforms don't see what moves in the gaps. They log the residual heat.
- **Pre-war infrastructure site, 60 km east:** no EO network coverage, no platform patrol per Standing Order 7, no official map designation. The most significant dark zone in the territory and the most dangerous.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- **EO Extraction Division:** all labor compounds, Volga Strongpoint, Corridor checkpoints.
- **Kazan Consortium:** Corridor operations and logistics, the pre-war site, the branch route.
- **Kirova / Zaslavskaya:** overlapping with everything above, visible to no one on the ground.

- **MERIDIAN:** the pre-war site and the transfer route. Nowhere else and everywhere the ore goes.

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- **Compound supply routes to Volga Strongpoint:** daily authorized convoy traffic. Best operator cover for compound-to-Strongpoint movement.
- **The Branch:** Corridor junction east to pre-war site. Not on EO maps. Visible on satellite. Used exclusively by MERIDIAN vehicles on maintenance manifest cover.
- **The Permafrost Approach:** Strongpoint to research station via platform-patrolled route. The research station's emergency beacon complicates this corridor's status.
- **The Steppe Sprint:** direct movement between any two zones without Corridor infrastructure. Platform gap windows, 14–22 minutes. No cover. Sound carries at 3 km.

SURVEILLANCE ARCHITECTURE

- **Platform sweep:** autonomous drone patrol across the entire territory. Published 22-minute cycle at compounds, 14-minute gap windows on transit vectors. The hum becomes background noise. That is when it stops being a warning.
- **Strato-Raptor sensor net:** altitude surveillance. Some carry EO sensor packages. Some have drifted beyond program parameters. When they stop circling, something has their attention.
- **Kirova's informant network:** human intelligence across the Strongpoint and all labor compounds. Compromised three months ago. Zaslavskaya running independently.
- **Post 9 self-monitoring:** total facility surveillance. All access attempts logged. The log routes to Kirova's monitoring hook in real time.
- **Compound camera systems:** full coverage except the repair depot blind spots. Shift count logging at every shift change.

MISSION SEEDS

SEED 01 THE PARTITION

OBJECTIVE Access the Post 9 suppressed partition during the 0200 calibration window and extract the 847-entry log before Zaslavskaya's active extraction completes.

CLOCK Zaslavskaya's extraction will complete before the next calibration window if not interrupted. Once her archive holds the complete log, the data is in private hands with no official accountability.

COMPLICATION Disabling Kirova's monitoring hook — required to approach the partition without triggering an alert — requires the same physical access to the management AI hardware as removing Standing Order 7. Both require the calibration window. One of them has to happen first.

SEED 02 REACH THE SITE

OBJECTIVE Locate the pre-war infrastructure site 60 km east of the Corridor and extract the eleven workers before MERIDIAN's principals close the site.

CLOCK Volkov's procurement contact has not received an integrity confirmation. The site closure decision is days away from being made. Tomas is the only worker at the site actively waiting for an external contact.

COMPLICATION The site has its own security infrastructure and the workers there have been isolated long enough that some of them may not be in a state to make an independent decision about leaving. The ones who are in that state are the ones who have been there longest.

SEED 03 VOLKOV'S AUDIT

OBJECTIVE Get Burova's closed discrepancy reports and the platform anomaly data into Major Volkov's hands in a form she can act on officially before the obstruction reaches her audit request.

CLOCK Volkov's escalation to EO command routes through the procurement channel in 48 hours if the Kazan logistics review delay holds. After it routes through, Volkov learns she's been obstructed. That changes her from an asset into an independent operator.

COMPLICATION Giving Volkov the complete picture — including Kirova's compromised network and Zaslavskaya's independent operation — requires operators to have that picture themselves. Every piece of it is held by a different contact with a different interest in who else gets it.

SEED 04 THE PATHOGEN RESPONSE

OBJECTIVE Reach the Permafrost Line research station, assess the organism situation, and get Dr. Mikhailova in contact with Major Volkov before the second Compound 23 case progresses past Corporal Frolov's coded treatment.

CLOCK The research station emergency beacon has activated. EO Research Division has acknowledged it. No response has been issued. The second case at Compound 23 presented yesterday.

COMPLICATION The platform running the biological detection patrol on the Permafrost Line received its firmware from the same procurement channel as Standing Order 7. Whatever that platform is detecting and suppressing is connected to the same network as MERIDIAN. Dr. Mikhailova doesn't know this. Frolov doesn't know this. The organism's transmission vector through the MERIDIAN transfer route is in neither of their files.

SEED 05 THE KAZAN DECISION

OBJECTIVE Reach Kazan-Reyes before she decides whether to pursue controlled disclosure to Kirova, and provide her the information that changes the decision — specifically, that Kirova's network is compromised and the disclosure would go to Zaslavskaya.

CLOCK Kazan-Reyes has been in her office for four hours since Volkov's audit request arrived. She is close to a decision. The decision, once made, activates a Kazan internal protocol that cannot be recalled.

COMPLICATION Operators reaching Kazan-Reyes to change her decision need to know about the compromise themselves. Zaslavskaya is the only current source for that information. Zaslavskaya's interest in providing it is directly opposed to Kazan-Reyes making the disclosure.

SEED 06 THE INDEPENDENT OPTION

OBJECTIVE Find what Zaslavskaya intends to do with the suppressed logs once her extraction completes — and decide whether her independent option is something operators can support, compete with, or need to prevent.

CLOCK The extraction completes before the next calibration window. After that, Zaslavskaya has a complete, fully documented intelligence package on MERIDIAN, Volkov's procurement network, Kirova's compromise, and three years of EO command-level corruption. She has had eighteen months to think about what to do with something like that.

COMPLICATION Zaslavskaya's independent option might be the best outcome operators can get from the territory. It might also be leverage that goes to a buyer. Operators don't know which one it is. Zaslavskaya, when they find her, is not the person who will give a straight answer. She is the person who will give the answer that produces the outcome she has already chosen.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

IF POST 9 IS DISRUPTED WITHOUT EXTRACTING THE SUPPRESSED LOGS

The autonomous platform network loses coordinated management across 400 km. 847 suppressed log entries release simultaneously to every EO command node in the platform network. The MERIDIAN documentation hits EO command, Volkov's procurement office, and Kirova's network at the same time. Volkov's procurement contact has approximately 90 minutes to act before the administrative response mobilizes. Kirova's response depends on whether she knows her network was compromised. The platform in the decision loop at the 400-meter section makes its first independent decision in six days — it routes to the pre-war infrastructure site, which the drones have been watching and not reporting for three years. Zaslavskaya's extraction, if still in progress, captures the release event in real time. The eleven workers at the site have six hours before any of this reaches a human being who will act on it.

IF THE MERIDIAN DOCUMENTATION REACHES MAJOR VOLKOV IN AN ACTIONABLE FORM

Volkov acts. This is what her unit was built for and she does not hesitate once she has sufficient documentation. Kazan Consortium logistics operations on the Corridor are suspended pending investigation. The MERIDIAN transfer vehicles are interdicted. The pre-war site is secured. The eleven workers are extracted. Volkov's escalation to EO command reaches the procurement channel. The procurement channel's response is the first indication of how deep the Volkov family connection runs — and whether Major Volkov and Dmitri Volkov's last name is a coincidence or a complication that nobody in the intelligence file thought to check.

IF THE PERMAFROST ORGANISM REACHES A SECOND LABOR COMPOUND BEFORE CONTAINMENT

Corporal Frolov's coded treatment notes become the most important medical document in the territory because they are the only unclassified description of the organism's presentation. Compound 23 is placed under quarantine — by EO Research Division authority, not military authority. The quarantine prevents the Compound 23 worker from leaving with her notes. MERIDIAN's principals use the quarantine as cover to close the pre-war site while EO military attention is concentrated on the compound. Dr. Mikhailova's research station finally receives a response to its emergency beacon: a Research Division team, not military, arriving under the same procurement channel that issued Standing Order 7. The organism's transmission vector via the MERIDIAN transfer route is in no one's active investigation. It will take another case, in a compound not connected to MERIDIAN, to surface it.

IF ZASLAVSKAYA'S INDEPENDENT OPTION ACTIVATES

The MERIDIAN documentation, Kirova's compromise, and three years of EO command-level corruption reach a buyer Zaslavskaya has had eighteen months to identify. The buyer is not a rival faction — it is the NZS banking system, which is the one institutional actor capable of holding leverage over an EO oligarch without triggering the political consequences that would make the leverage worthless. Dmitri Volkov's assets freeze. The Kazan Consortium's supply chain continues under EO direct management. The eleven workers at the pre-war site are released as part of the NZS's terms — the NZS does not deal in human liability. Kirova discovers her network was compromised when she reads the documentation that surfaced it. She is the most dangerous person in the territory for the 72 hours after she reads it. Zaslavskaya has had eighteen months to plan for those 72 hours too.

FIELD NOTE

LANGUAGE OF THE STEPPES

"Drone window." The gap between autonomous platform patrol passes. Fourteen minutes at Steppe Post 9's current sweep cycle. Fourteen minutes is enough for someone who knows how to use it. Not enough for someone who doesn't.

"Strato-Raptor overhead." Being monitored from altitude. Used specifically for surveillance that may have drifted beyond its program parameters — some Strato-Raptors still follow orders, some have been operating on autonomous decision-making long enough to develop their own.

"Standing order." A directive being executed without current human review. Standing Order 7 has been suppressing platform anomaly flags for three years. The logs are still standing.

"Fourteen minutes." The autonomous platform response time from triggered alert to arrival. Used for any deadline that sounds generous but isn't. You have fourteen minutes. Do not use thirteen of them getting ready.

"Suppressed flag." A known problem buried in a system rather than addressed. Post 9 has 847 of them.

IDIOMS

"The drones log what they see." Surveillance is neutral. What matters is what happens to the log. Standing Order 7 determined that. Three years of logs sit in a suppressed partition at Steppe Post 9.

"Fourteen minutes is enough for someone, not enough for everyone." About the autonomous response window. If you know the timing and have prepared for it, you can use it. If you don't, it ends you. The fourteen minutes does not negotiate.

"The platform doesn't suppress its own flags." The EO's automated systems work correctly. It's the humans managing them who buried the logs. The machines flagged the problem 847 times. The problem belongs to whoever issued Standing Order 7.

POP CULTURE

"HEADCOUNT IS THE MANAGEMENT'S JOB / EQUIPMENT ACCOUNTABILITY IS YOURS" – Posted in every EO labor compound. The first line is designed to prevent workers from counting each other. The second line is enforcement.

Standing Order Blues – A song circulating in EO labor compounds. Twelve verses. Each describes a different category of problem that gets suppressed rather than fixed. Officially prohibited. Memorized by every worker who's been in the compounds for more than a rotation.

14/

LAKEFIRE CORRIDOR

NAF-ADJACENT / CONTESTED | EARTH 2066

The corridor runs between two bodies of water. Everything in the middle is argument.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

In 2044, a routine ACU survey drone mapping the Tanganyika lakebed sent back data nobody at ACU Command knew how to explain. The readings weren't geological anomaly. They were Lumicite — a deposit three times larger than anything previously catalogued, sitting two hundred meters below the surface of the most contested freshwater reserve in post-Upheaval Africa. ACU classified the survey immediately. The classification held for nineteen months. Then three separate intelligence agencies found the same data in three different ways, and the Corridor became what it is now: the most quietly militarized stretch of continent on the planet.

The ACU built its regional authority on one promise — the Great Lakes stay clean. Tanganyika, Victoria, Malawi. Nearly twenty percent of the world's unfrozen surface freshwater. Their entire governance structure, their legitimacy with forty million lakeside residents, their leverage over every faction that needs clean water — all of it rests on the lakes staying intact. The Lumicite deposit makes that promise structurally impossible to keep. You cannot extract Lumicite at scale without destabilizing the lakebed. You cannot leave Lumicite in the ground when six factions are willing to start a regional war to get at it. ACU Command knows this. They have not told the lakeside communities yet.

The Corridor runs from the Zambian Copperbelt in the south through the Great Lakes chain to the East African coast at Mombasa. Eight hundred kilometers of the most resource-dense territory in the hemisphere — copper, cobalt, lithium, and now Lumicite. The ACU's Obsidian Wardens hold the lines using gene-forged operators templated on African leopards, African wild dogs, and mountain gorillas. The EO runs resource acquisition through a shell contractor called Meridian East. The Void Walkers have been sighted twice — once near the lakebed survey coordinates, once near the ACU's primary command installation at Kampala. Nobody can explain what they were doing. Nobody can explain how they got in.

ACU surveillance is comprehensive in the lake zones; the extraction corridors are where it frays. Gene-forged Obsidian Wardens know this terrain at a cellular level. Baseline operators do not. The Corridor runs on layered deception — Meridian East's financial penetration of ACU extraction contracts, the suppressed geological survey, the forty million lakeside residents whose compliance and agreement are not the same thing. Operations here tend toward intel-

ligence work and leverage extraction. The dam under everything is the lakebed. When it breaks, everything breaks simultaneously.

The Corridor is green and loud and perpetually wet. Obsidian Wardens in matte-black kit move through fishing villages where people have been living the same way for a thousand years. The villages have solar arrays and faction IDs now. They also have the same fish traps, the same canoes, the same political structures that predate the ACU by eight centuries. The Wardens have learned not to confuse compliance with agreement. At night, Lake Tanganyika glows. Not dramatically — a faint amber pulse from deep water, visible from the shore on clear nights. Locals call it lakefire. The ACU says it is bioluminescent algae. The Brotherhood of Shadows researcher quietly embedded with a Mombasa aid organization for six months before disappearing said something else. Her field notes, if they still exist, are the most valuable document in the Corridor.

The Lakefire Corridor runs on the specific cultural velocity of East Africa — Nairobi's design and tech scene, the Afrobeats-adjacent production networks that were building global infrastructure before the Upheaval consolidated markets, the lakeside community aesthetic of the Great Lakes region with eight centuries of practice behind it — mutated by forty million people who moved to elevation and kept building. The amber pulse from the lakebed at night is part of the visual vocabulary in ways the ACU never intended: the thing the ACU says is bioluminescent algae and the scene knows is something else entirely. Wearing lakefire amber in your kit color is a statement. The Obsidian Wardens do not comment on it. Some of them do the same.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

The ACU's water governance contract with forty million lakeside residents requires clean lakes. Lumicite extraction requires destabilizing the same lakebed. These two facts cannot coexist. The moment any faction begins extraction — including ACU itself — the contract breaks. What follows is not a protest. It is forty million people who no longer have any reason to accept ACU governance, in territory rich enough that six other factions will immediately move to fill the vacuum.

Compounding this: Meridian East's financial penetration of the Copperbelt extraction contracts means EO receives approximately 18% of copper and cobalt output off-manifest. ACU's revenue projections assume 100% capture. The gap funds EO's regional operations and has for four years. When this surfaces — and ACU's own auditors are getting close — the economic model that sustains Warden operations collapses simultaneously with the water governance crisis. The two failures are on separate timelines. They are converging.

The lakebed survey data — a classified geological assessment confirming Lumicite extraction would trigger cascade failure of the lakebed — has been suppressed for eight months. The ACU's own geologists confirmed the finding. Three factions hold partial versions of the survey. Whoever assembles the complete document controls the extraction decision and the timeline of everything that follows.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

SECURITY	ACU-governed / contested (EO resource pressure, NAF Lumicite interest, Void Walker surveillance)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable near lake zones / failing in extraction corridors
CIVILIANS	managed anxiety / lake communities fiercely protective of water access
SURVEILLANCE	ACU drone net / EO SIGINT through Meridian East / dark zones in deep DRC jungle
FACTION PRESSURE	ACU dominant on paper / contested below surface (EO, NAF, Void Walkers, Prometheus League)
CONTAMINATION	present (Lumicite resonance in lake zones, acid drainage in Copperbelt, processing waste in DRC)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (Lumicite survey data, corridor passage, Meridian East cargo manifests)
MOBILITY	lake by water (surveilled) / land routes checkpointed / DRC jungle dark and slow
GENE-FORGED UNITS	Leopards, Wild Dogs, Gorillas (ACU) / Bears, Boars (EO-Meridian East) / Ravens, Hyenas, Monitors (Void Walkers)

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Five power structures contest the Corridor. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging.

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

Primary territorial controller. The African Coalition Union governs the Corridor through the clean-water mandate and enforces it through gene-forged Obsidian Wardens — leopard, wild dog, and mountain gorilla stock. They are protecting a promise they can no longer keep. Their objective: suppress the Lumicite discovery

long enough to negotiate extraction on ACU terms, before anyone else forces the issue.

EO / MERIDIAN EAST

Extraction pressure. The Eurasian Oligarchy operates through a shell contractor called Meridian East, embedded in ACU's Copperbelt extraction contracts. They already receive 18% of copper and cobalt output off-manifest. They have already found a secondary Lumicite source and built a covert processing facility in the DRC. Their objective: transition from copper to Lumicite extraction the moment ACU's suppression fails — which EO's intelligence arm believes is inevitable within eighteen months.

NAF

Lumicite intelligence. The North Atlantic Federation has three intelligence assets embedded in the Lakeside Compact's commercial district and a pre-positioned extraction team two days from the lakeshore. Their objective: acquire the complete Lumicite survey data and establish first-mover advantage on extraction technology before EO or ACU can lock them out.

VOID WALKERS

Unknown allegiance, unknown objective. Gene-forged on raven, spotted hyena, and monitor lizard stock. Sighted twice — once at the lakebed survey coordinates, once near Kampala Command. One is confirmed in the Lakeside Compact, location unknown. They are watching something. No faction has determined what. The most dangerous variable in the Corridor is the one nobody can read.

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

Corridor advocacy and resistance. Four DRC camps, community organizer networks in twelve eastern shore villages, two years of environmental contamination data, and approximately 200 trained personnel. Their objective: build an evidence base sufficient to force public accountability for extraction abuses — while maintaining the community trust that is their only real asset. Some cells receive EO funding they cannot fully trace. That vulnerability is a weapon waiting to be used.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**COPPER RUN (Zambian Copperbelt)**: The oldest extraction infrastructure in the Corridor. ACU permits, Meridian East night shifts, acid drainage expanding toward the aquifer.
ZONE 2	**LAKESIDE COMPACT (Lake Tanganyika, Western Shore)**: ACU's administrative hub at Kalemie. 400,000 people built around the clean-water promise. Sitting directly above the Lumicite deposit.
ZONE 3	**MOMBASA DEEP PORT (Kenyan Coast)**: The largest deep-water facility in the Indian Ocean. Every faction moves cargo through here. The deep berths are dark zones.
ZONE 4	**KAMPALA COMMAND (ACU Regional HQ, Uganda)**: The nerve center. Where the extraction deal was authorized, the cascade report classified, and nine people carry a secret that will redefine the region.
ZONE 5	**THE RIFT VILLAGES (Eastern Shore)**: Forty-seven fishing communities. 68,000 people whose relationship with the lake is existential. The Elder Council has not been told the truth.
ZONE 6	**DRC DEEP CORRIDOR (Jungle Transit Route)**: 400 kilometers of equatorial forest. No ACU governance. Brotherhood couriers, Prometheus League camps, Meridian East cargo runs.
ZONE 7	**MERIDIAN FACILITY (The Second Site, Southern DRC)**: The covert Lumicite processing facility ACU cannot find. Already operational. Already failing containment.

ZONES

ZONE 1 COPPER RUN — ZAMBIAN COPPERBELT

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained
CIVILIANS	normal
SURVEILLANCE	cameras (ACU) + informant net (EO)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (ACU permits, EO financial control)
CONTAMINATION	present (acid mine drainage expanding toward aquifer)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (off-manifest ore, survey equipment, medical supplies)
MOBILITY	checkpointed (ACU + Meridian East)

FUNCTION Industrial copper and cobalt extraction sustaining ACU's economic base -- and EO's off-manifest acquisition pipeline simultaneously.

CONTROLLER ACU holds the permits. Meridian East holds the actual extraction contracts through sub-licensing ACU Legal cannot fully map. In practice, Meridian East runs the night shift.

DRAW Work. Parts. Shelter. Black-market medical supplies. Extraction data that three factions will pay for.

RISK Mine collapses in unsupported northern tunnels. EO contractor enforcement. Acid drainage zones expanding toward the aquifer. Prometheus League sabotage -- three incidents on the northern access road in the last six months.

SCARCITY Replacement parts. Clean water (mining operations drain the aquifer faster than it refills). Uncontaminated food -- tailings have reached several local agriculture patches. Respiratory medication.

UNDER-SYSTEM

Meridian East's financial penetration means EO receives 18% of output off-manifest. ACU's revenue assumes 100% capture. The gap has been funding EO regional operations for four years. ACU's own auditors are six weeks from finding the discrepancy. When they do, the economic model that sustains Warden operations in the Corridor collapses.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Meridian East stops paying local contractor payroll as a pressure tactic. Three thousand workers miss a wage cycle. They don't strike -- they start diverting output to the black market. ACU's resource tracking breaks simultaneously across six extraction sites.

DAY

AUTHORITY

ACU contractor management + Warden patrol

ECONOMY

Copper/cobalt extraction, parts trade, official logistics

RISK

Meridian East informants tracking ACU personnel movements

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Meridian East security contractors -- effectively autonomous after dark

ECONOMY

Off-manifest ore diversion, black-market meds, unauthorized survey equipment

RISK

Mine collapse in unsupported northern tunnels + EO enforcement of payment disputes

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A line of ore trucks queuing at the ACU checkpoint in grey pre-dawn, each bearing two manifest stickers -- one ACU, one with a small blue Meridian East logo that officially means nothing.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

checkpoint enforcement, resource tracking, medical patrols in tailings-adjacent villages

MERIDIAN EAST (EO)

night shift extraction operations, off-manifest logistics, contractor security

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

sabotage operations on northern access road, pamphlet distribution, community health monitoring

CIVILIAN NEED

Clean water. The aquifer is draining. Respiratory medication for the tailings communities. Someone to tell ACU the contamination reports are real.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Warden patrol schedules, checkpoint bypass protocols, Meridian East night shift timing, northern tunnel access, medical contamination data.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Warden sergeant asks operators quietly for an independent assessment of a mine shaft she believes is being logged as empty on ACU records.
- A Meridian East contractor offers above-market price for survey equipment -- no questions, cash, immediate.
- An ACU medical team is turned away from a tailings-adjacent village by Meridian East security citing 'contamination protocol.'
- A mining crew breaks through a sealed shaft and finds pre-Upheaval equipment that has no business being there -- and recent boot prints.
- A Prometheus League pamphlet distributed to mine workers. Someone got it through three checkpoints.

- Two mining supervisors argue quietly over a tablet they keep angling away from the cameras.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- An ore truck running dark -- no transponder, no lights -- heading south on a route not on any manifest.
- A Warden patrol finds a body in the drainage channel. Miner's ID. Injuries inconsistent with a mine accident.
- Meridian East security moves equipment out of a sealed section officially inactive for three years.
- A signal pirate broadcasts survey data fragments on a tight-band frequency. Operators with the right hardware can pull it.
- Three children from an adjacent village are deep in the northern tunnels, following a sound they've been tracking for weeks.
- An EO drone runs a corridor it has no clearance for, methodically mapping something beneath the surface.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Meridian East keeps a second set of extraction records -- the real ones -- stored off-site at a specific facility. A former logistics clerk knows the location. [TRUE]
- The sealed northern tunnels connect to a pre-Upheaval research installation that was studying something under the Copperbelt. Nobody agrees what. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- installation exists; purpose unknown]
- The tailings acid drainage has reached the aquifer feeding Lusaka's northern districts. ACU knows. They're managing the news cycle, not the contamination. [TRUE]
- The Prometheus League has a senior ACU Mine Management contact feeding sabotage coordinates for eight months. [TRAP -- the 'contact' is an EO plant running a double operation]
- There's a Lumicite formation in the deepest extraction shaft. It's why the shaft was sealed. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- anomalous readings confirmed; Lumicite unconfirmed]
- The nightly ore trucks headed south aren't going to Meridian East's processing facility. They're going to a second facility with no file. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

KESHO MBEKI -- MERIDIAN EAST SENIOR LOGISTICS CLERK

CAN GET Off-manifest cargo records, Meridian East facility layouts, EO contractor identities operating as civilians.

WANTS Confirmation that her brother -- a miner who reported the sealed shaft anomaly -- is safe. He went missing four days ago.

FEARS That Meridian East already knows she has been talking.

CURRENT PRESSURE A Meridian East auditor arrived yesterday and is going through her records personally.

WARDEN CORPORAL ADAEZE NWOSU -- ACU CHECKPOINT COMMANDER

CAN GET Warden patrol schedules, checkpoint bypass protocols, ACU Medical's contamination reports she has seen and shouldn't have.

WANTS Someone to act on the contamination before her people start showing symptoms.

FEARS Career termination -- she escalated through official channels once. Once.

CURRENT PRESSURE A mining family came to her this morning with photographs of their water supply.

DR. TOMAS CARRASCO -- PROMETHEUS LEAGUE-AFFILIATED MOBILE MEDIC

CAN GET Contamination data, civilian health records, routes through the Copperbelt avoiding both ACU and Meridian East checkpoints.

WANTS Medical supplies -- specific list: insulin, respiratory medication, anti-fungals.

FEARS He is treating symptoms of something much larger than a clinic can stop.

CURRENT PRESSURE Same respiratory pattern appearing in children across three villages simultaneously. It is new.

ZONE 2 LAKESIDE COMPACT

LAKE TANGANYIKA, WESTERN SHORE

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	packed
SURVEILLANCE	ACU drone net + cameras
FACTION PRESSURE	ACU dominant (NAF intelligence embedded, one Void Walker unlocated)
CONTAMINATION	none visible / Lumicite resonance deep and unannounced
BLACK MARKET	light (suppressed -- therefore sophisticated)
MOBILITY	open (lake) / checkpointed (land)

FUNCTION ACU regional administration, freshwater distribution hub, East African logistics anchor, and the physical location of the secret ACU is most desperate to protect.

CONTROLLER ACU publicly. ACU Command's Lumicite suppression operation privately. Three NAF intelligence assets in the commercial district. One Void Walker, location unknown.

DRAW Clean water. Functioning medical care. Economic stability. The lake itself -- still the most beautiful thing left in the Corridor. The feeling, rare enough in TC2066 to be worth traveling for, of safety.

RISK The Lumicite secret. The moment it becomes public, everything that makes the Compact valuable becomes a target. Also: the Brotherhood of Shadows researcher who disappeared had a contact still living in the city. That contact has been waiting for someone to ask the right questions.

UNDER-SYSTEM

Lumicite resonance from the lakebed is already affecting the city's ambient environment in ways the ACU's public science cannot explain. The Dawn Quality Broadcasts show clean numbers. The numbers are accurate. They are measuring the wrong things.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A credible Lumicite leak -- a data fragment, a defecting scientist, a journalist with the wrong document -- triggers simultaneous responses from three factions within 48 hours. The 400,000 residents of the Compact, who have built lives around ACU's clean-water promise, have to make a decision about whether to stay. Most of them have nowhere else to go.

DAY

AUTHORITY

ACU civil administration + Warden garrison

ECONOMY

Port logistics, water distribution, commercial trade, tourism from other territories (the lake remains a draw)

RISK

NAF intelligence operations against ACU scientific staff

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Warden patrol + ACU surveillance

ECONOMY

Black-market information (survey data fragments, Lumicite coordinates), Brotherhood of Shadows contacts

RISK

The Void Walker. Whatever they are watching. Whatever they are waiting for.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The amber glow of the lake visible from the port promenade at 0300 -- a slow pulse, unhurried, originating from somewhere two hundred meters below the surface, while the city sleeps above it and the Warden night patrol walks a perimeter that has never once caught the thing causing it. FLOOD CHANNEL's Amazonian Metroplex production has a local variant here: denser, more layered, built for high-ceiling open-air venues at the lake's edge. Wearing lakefire amber in your kit color is a statement. The Obsidian Wardens do not comment on it.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

garrison presence, Lumicite suppression operations, water governance enforcement

NAF

three intelligence assets in the commercial district, running operations against ACU scientific staff

VOID WALKERS

one confirmed presence, location unknown, purpose unknown

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

one contact in the city (ferry operator), researcher's trail leads here

CIVILIAN NEED

Clean water with no quality number attached to it. The communities trade corridor passage, knowledge of the lake's behavioral patterns that no monitoring system has captured. What they fear: the day the lakefire means something different than what the ACU says it means.

OPERATOR ACCESS

ACU scientific staff access, water quality data (official and real), Lakefire Festival intelligence, Brotherhood contact network, NAF commercial cover approach.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- An ACU scientist at the water quality lab has started attending the Lakefire Festival's informal discussions with unusual intensity. She is not acting like someone at a community event.
- A NAF commercial attache invites operators to dinner. The food is excellent. The conversation is very specifically about Lumicite extraction technology.
- A fishing cooperative files a formal complaint about equipment interference -- their sonar gear has been returning anomalous readings from a consistent lakebed location for six weeks.
- A Warden unit is quietly transferred out of the Compact with four hours' notice. Nobody will say where.
- A child selling lakefire drawings near the port offers operators one with coordinates written on the back. She doesn't know what they mean. Someone gave her ten credits to hand it to a foreigner.
- The Brotherhood researcher's contact -- an elderly ferry operator -- asks operators if they know the name Sable Rourke.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The lakefire pulses three times in quick succession -- a pattern that has not appeared in ACU logs, because ACU's logs don't record pattern data.
- A NAF intelligence operative is in the water off the port. Swimming. Toward something.
- An unregistered submersible is running the lakebed approach corridor. It is not ACU.
- Three Warden officers meet in a closed room in the administrative building. One of them is crying. Operators who can get close enough hear the word 'Kampala.'
- A signal fragment intercepted on ACU frequencies references 'LAKEFIRE ACTUAL' -- a classification above anything operators have documentation for.
- The Void Walker makes contact. They have one question. They will answer one question in return.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The ACU scientist running water quality has been falsifying one specific metric for eleven months on direct orders from Kampala. She keeps the real numbers in an encrypted personal file. [TRUE]
- The lakefire pulse pattern is Lumicite resonance responding to something -- not geological pressure. The Brotherhood researcher figured out what. Her notes are in the city somewhere. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- the notes exist; what they say is unknown]
- A NAF extraction team is already pre-positioned at a staging area two days from the lakeshore, waiting for authorization. [TRUE]
- The Void Walker in the Compact is here to prevent extraction, not enable it. They work for no faction with an interest in Lumicite. [UNCLEAR -- and possibly the most important rumor in the Corridor]
- ACU Command in Kampala has already made a private deal with one faction for extraction rights. The Obsidian Wardens at the Compact don't know yet. [TRAP -- the deal exists, but the faction is not who any intelligence service thinks it is]
- The lakebed deposit is not stable. Extraction by any current method would trigger a cascade failure. The ACU's own geologists confirmed this eight months ago and were reassigned. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

DR. NNEKA OSEI -- ACU WATER QUALITY DIRECTOR

CAN GET Real lake metric data, ACU scientific staff assignments, access to the classified geological survey.

WANTS Someone to stop the extraction deal before the cascade failure report becomes irrelevant.

FEARS That she has already waited too long.

CURRENT PRESSURE She has been summoned to Kampala for a 'briefing' next week. She does not think she is coming back with the same job.

FERRY OPERATOR JEAN-BAPTISTE LUMUMBA -- BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS CONTACT

CAN GET The location of the missing researcher's field notes, Brotherhood safe communication protocols, the lakebed approach corridor the NAF submersible is using.

WANTS	The researcher found. Or confirmed dead. He has been in between for nine months.
FEARS	That the notes will surface and no one will be in position to act on them.
CURRENT PRESSURE	A man he doesn't recognize has been taking his ferry twice a day for a week, sitting in the same seat, watching the water.

ZONE 3 MOMBASA DEEP PORT

KENYAN COAST

SECURITY	active (mixed -- ACU port authority, private faction security, NAF marine presence)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	packed
SURVEILLANCE	cameras everywhere / dark zones in the deep berth sections
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (every major faction has a footprint)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	heavy
MOBILITY	open (sea) / checkpointed (landside)

FUNCTION	The Corridor's connection to the global logistics network. Every supply chain that matters in East Africa passes through here.
CONTROLLER	ACU Port Authority on paper. In practice, the deep berth sections are controlled by whoever is berthing there this week. Faction security operates openly and mostly ignores each other unless cargo is disputed.
DRAW	Global logistics access. Faction supply chains. Information brokerage. The deep berths where no one watches.

RISK Cargo interdiction disputes. Manifest fraud. Faction confrontations over berth priority. The deep berth dark zones where rules cease to apply.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The port's deep berth section was built with funding from three factions simultaneously, each of whom negotiated access rights that contradict each other. The legal framework governing who can search whose cargo has never been tested in a tribunal. When it is, Mombasa Deep stops functioning.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

A cargo dispute escalates to a weapons search. One faction refuses. The port authority backs down -- it always backs down because it cannot afford the fight. The faction that forced the confrontation now knows the port authority's limit. Three weeks later, the first genuinely illegal shipment comes through at scale.

DAY

AUTHORITY

ACU Port Authority

ECONOMY

Legitimate freight, equipment import, commercial shipping, faction supply chains

RISK

Cargo interdiction disputes, manifest fraud, faction confrontations over berth priority

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Private faction security (whoever is at the deep berths)

ECONOMY

Off-manifest cargo, gene-forged operator movement (unofficial), Brotherhood document transfers, information brokering

RISK

The deep berth dark zones. No cameras. No ACU presence. Entirely governed by whoever is there.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Meridian East cargo handler and a Warden officer standing three meters apart at the berth 7 access gate, both reading from tablets, neither looking at the other, while a crane moves a container neither of them is logged as knowing about. The scene underneath Mombasa runs on GRIDSEED's propagation infrastructure -- the communications backbone for the scene's events -- growing in bad soil, and the port has an abundance of it.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

port authority oversight, cargo inspection (selective), Warden Wild Dog units in transit

MERIDIAN EAST (EO)

cargo logistics, deep berth operations, SIGINT collection from commercial cover

NAF

marine presence, intelligence collection, equipment import

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

document transfers, courier network hub, seven-year dead drop

VOID WALKERS

three sightings in eighteen months, tracking a specific piece of cargo

CIVILIAN NEED

Employment. Access to the global supply chain. The knowledge that whatever happens to the Corridor, Mombasa Deep will still be here -- because everyone needs it too much to destroy it.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Manifest records, berth schedules, camera blind spots, deep berth access, faction supply chain intelligence, maritime routes.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A cargo manifest lists medical equipment. The crate weight is wrong by 400 kilograms.
- A NAF marine unit is on a vessel in berth 12 -- their presence is not in the port authority schedule and three ACU officials are having a very controlled argument about it.
- An operator recognizes a gene-forged Wild Dog unit moving through the freight terminal in civilian clothes. The Wild Dogs are not a faction with civilian operations.
- A Syndicate broker offers operators a 'finder's fee' for locating a specific container that arrived four days ago and has since disappeared from the port system.
- A port clerk approaches operators in the transit lounge. She has a document. She doesn't want money. She wants to know where to send it.
- The Brotherhood of Shadows courier who was supposed to pick up a package at berth 3 didn't show. The package has been sitting for 72 hours. Someone else is now watching it.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A submersible surfaces at an unregistered point on the port's southern perimeter. Two people get out and walk into the city.
- A container in the EO-adjacent berth section is venting something that isn't condensation.
- A Meridian East security contractor tries to hire operators on the spot for a 'retrieval' that needs to happen in the next four hours.

- Three ACU port officials are escorted at gunpoint to a vessel. The gunmen are wearing no insignia. The vessel leaves within the hour.
- A gene-forged Gorilla operative -- ACU, based on build and kit -- is searching berths alone, without a unit. Something is very wrong with their Drift.
- Void Walker. One. Watching a specific vessel. They look at operators, assess them for ten seconds, and return their attention to the vessel.

RUMORS (1D6)

- A Meridian East shipment that came through three months ago contained something that wasn't copper equipment. The manifest was sealed by an ACU official who was transferred to Kampala within the week. [TRUE]
- There is a Brotherhood of Shadows dead drop somewhere in the port that has been active for seven years. ACU surveillance has never found it. [TRUE]
- The NAF vessel in berth 12 is carrying Lumicite extraction equipment pre-positioned for an operation that has not been authorized yet. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- the equipment is there; the authorization status is genuinely unclear]
- One of the ACU Port Authority senior officials is on Meridian East's payroll. It's the one who everyone trusts. [TRAP -- this is EO disinformation targeting a legitimate official to destabilize ACU port governance]
- The Void Walker who keeps appearing at Mombasa Deep is tracking a specific piece of cargo that has passed through the port four times in two years, each time under a different manifest. [TRUE]
- An independent Lumicite researcher who published a paper on lakebed resonance last year was found dead in the port's commercial district. The ACU closed the case as an accident. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

AMARA DIALLO -- ACU PORT AUTHORITY CARGO INTAKE CLERK

CAN GET	Manifest records (official and the version before they were edited), berth assignment schedules, camera blind spot maps she drew herself.
WANTS	The document she is holding to reach someone who can act on it. She has had it for three weeks.
FEARS	That the person she was supposed to give it to is the one who had the researcher killed.

CURRENT PRESSURE	Someone searched her apartment two nights ago. Nothing was taken.

KAPTEN YUSUF OMAR -- INDEPENDENT FREIGHT OPERATOR, PFZ REGISTRY

CAN GET	Unofficial maritime routes between Mombasa and the Java Scatter, PFZ intelligence contacts, submersible access for small-unit movement.
WANTS	A clear route through the deep berth section for a cargo he won't describe yet -- he needs to know if operators can be trusted first.
FEARS	Meridian East specifically -- he had a contract with them two years ago and knows too much about the second facility.
CURRENT PRESSURE	His vessel has been denied berth access three times this week on administrative grounds that don't hold up to examination.

ZONE 4 KAMPALA COMMAND

ACU REGIONAL HQ, UGANDA

SECURITY	lockdown (ACU military installation + city garrison)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (ACU-spec, well-maintained, pre-Upheaval foundations upgraded)
CIVILIANS	packed (2.4 million in the city; sparse inside the compound)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (ACU sensor net, Warden counterintelligence, EO SIGINT from commercial cover)
FACTION PRESSURE	ACU dominant (EO commercial presence in city, NAF diplomatic mission, Prometheus League cells in outer districts)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	moderate (exists in the city; does not exist inside the compound)

MOBILITY	open (city) / restricted (compound access requires Warden clearance)
FUNCTION	ACU's political and military command center for the entire Corridor. Where the extraction deal was authorized, where the cascade failure report was classified, and where nine people carry a secret that will redefine the region.
CONTROLLER	General Okoro Abimbola runs Kampala Command. She authorized the extraction deal. She classified the cascade failure report. She issued the order Diarra hasn't obeyed. Abimbola is not a villain -- she is someone who sees all the options and believes the one she chose is the least catastrophic. She may be wrong. She does not tolerate people who tell her so without bringing a better alternative.
DRAW	Military logistics, diplomatic access, intelligence brokerage in the commercial district, proximity to the nine people who know the full picture.
RISK	Counterintelligence operations against suspected leaks. EO intelligence collection against Command staff. Prometheus League recruitment in the outer districts. The missing geologist.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The extraction authorization exists as a classified document signed by Abimbola and two council members. The deal partner is not EO, not NAF, and not any faction the intelligence community would predict. The deal gives ACU 60% of extraction revenue and a partner with technical capability ACU does not possess. The cascade failure report -- which says extraction will destabilize the lakebed -- was classified the same day. Abimbola believes the cascade risk can be managed. The geologists who wrote the report believe otherwise. Three of those geologists have been reassigned. One has not reported to her new post.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The extraction partner begins pre-positioning equipment in the Corridor without Abimbola's authorization. The partner's timeline has accelerated beyond what the deal specifies. Abimbola discovers that the partner she chose operates on objectives she was not fully briefed on. The nine people who know about the deal become ten, then twenty, as operational security erodes under the pressure of events moving faster than the plan.

DAY

AUTHORITY

ACU Command staff, Warden compound security, city garrison

ECONOMY

Military logistics, diplomatic operations, city commercial district (significant -- Kampala's economy draws contractors, suppliers, and intelligence operatives from every faction)

RISK

EO intelligence collection against Command staff, Prometheus League recruitment in the outer districts, the missing geologist

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Warden compound security (enhanced), city garrison patrol

ECONOMY

Information brokerage in the commercial district, Prometheus League cell meetings in the outer districts, Brotherhood of Shadows couriers transiting to and from the DRC corridor

RISK

Abimbola's counterintelligence team running operations against suspected leaks -- their methods have been escalating. The compound at night is where classified conversations happen and the extraction deal's operational planning advances.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

Kololo Hill at dawn, the compound's communication arrays silhouetted against Lake Victoria's distant shimmer to the south, a Warden Gorilla gene-forged at the main gate in full ceremonial kit -- immaculate, imposing, and watching the city below with an expression that suggests she has read the cascade failure report and is drawing her own conclusions. MARK HAND STUDIO in Samudra Sattva does commission work for Corridor operators specifically: garments designed around gorilla-stock proportions, leopard-adaptation thermal profiles, the wild dog's pack-sense social architecture built into how a silhouette reads in a group.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

command authority, compound security, counterintelligence operations, the extraction deal

EO

commercial cover intelligence collection in the city, SIGINT against Command staff

NAF

diplomatic mission, intelligence collection on extraction authorization

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

cells in outer districts, community organizing, sheltering a person with compound credentials

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

courier transit through the city, intelligence relay to DRC corridor

CIVILIAN NEED

Stability. Employment in the military-adjacent economy. The belief that ACU governance means safety. The day that belief fails is the day 2.4 million people reassess their options.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Compound access (limited), counterintelligence target lists, commercial district intelligence networks, diplomatic channel access, Prometheus League safe houses.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A junior ACU intelligence officer approaches operators outside the compound. She has been ordered to locate the missing geologist. She does not believe the geologist should be found by ACU.
- A Prometheus League demonstration in the outer districts -- small, permitted, focused on water access for displaced communities. ACU garrison is present. The demonstration's organizer is better informed about Corridor resource politics than a community activist should be.
- An NAF diplomatic attache requests an unofficial meeting with operators. The NAF knows about the extraction authorization. They want to know who the partner is. They will trade Darwin Forward intelligence for the name.
- A Warden officer is escorted from the compound by counterintelligence. She is Commander Diarra's aide. The escort is quiet, professional, and deeply alarming to everyone who sees it.
- A commercial district information broker offers operators a document: a partial copy of the extraction deal, with the partner's identity redacted. The asking price is not money.
- General Abimbola requests operators for a briefing. She is direct, controlled, and asks questions that make clear she knows more about operator activities in the Corridor than operators assumed.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A geologist -- not the missing one, a second one -- makes contact through a dead drop in the commercial district. She has the cascade failure data on a physical drive. She wants it out of the Corridor entirely.

- A Prometheus League cell in the outer districts is sheltering someone. Not a recruit -- a protection arrangement. The person being sheltered has compound access credentials.
- A Warden counterintelligence team is running surveillance on a commercial district bar frequented by faction intelligence operatives. The team is not subtle. They are not trying to be.
- A Brotherhood of Shadows courier arrives at a safe house in the city with a sealed communication for operators. The message references the lakefire phenomenon and contains coordinates for a location in the DRC that operators have not been briefed on.
- An explosion at a power substation in the outer districts. Small, targeted, no casualties. Prometheus League signature. The substation feeds the compound's secondary communications array.
- Abimbola is in the compound at 0300, alone in her office, the cascade failure report open on her desk beside the extraction deal. A Warden officer sees this through the window. The officer is Commander Diarra's aide -- the one who was escorted out this morning. She is back. She should not be back.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The extraction partner is the Shinkai Collective. Their deep-water capability is what ACU needs and cannot develop independently. The deal gives the Collective access to the Great Lakes system in exchange for managed extraction technology. [TRUE]
- General Abimbola has a contingency plan that involves flooding the Lumicite survey data to all factions simultaneously if the deal fails -- ensuring no single faction monopolizes the deposit by making it everyone's problem. [TRUE]
- The missing geologist is in Mombasa, working with the journalist Commander Diarra wants to reach. She has been there for three weeks. ACU counterintelligence has not found her because they are looking in the DRC. [TRUE]
- Three Warden Gorilla gene-forged operatives have refused reassignment from Kampala to the lakeside. Their refusal is not insubordination -- it is a statement. They know what the reassignment is preparation for. [TRUE]
- The Prometheus League's Kampala cells are funded by EO. Not ideologically aligned -- financially dependent. EO uses them as destabilization tools against ACU governance. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- some cells receive EO funding; the central leadership does not know]
- Abimbola's counterintelligence chief is running a parallel operation she has not disclosed to the General. The operation targets Commander Diarra spe-

cifically. [TRAP -- the operation exists but targets Diarra's aide, not Diarra; the rumor is designed to fracture the command relationship]

CONTACTS

CAPTAIN KWAME ASANTE -- ACU COUNTERINTELLIGENCE, COMPOUND SECURITY

CAN GET Compound access (limited), counterintelligence target lists, the current status of the investigation into Commander Diarra's aide, surveillance footage from classified briefing rooms.

WANTS To understand whether his commanding officer's parallel operation serves ACU's interests or someone else's. He has started asking questions he cannot take back.

FEARS That the answer to his question is "someone else's" and that he has already been identified as someone asking.

CURRENT PRESSURE His access credentials were updated yesterday without his request. The new access level is higher than his rank justifies. This is either a promotion or a trap.

PROFESSOR MIRIAM KIPTOO -- UNIVERSITY OF KAMPALA, GEOLOGY DEPARTMENT (REASSIGNED GEOLOGIST)

CAN GET The cascade failure data (physical drive), her colleagues' communications network, the technical assessment that explains exactly what happens to Lake Tanganyika if extraction proceeds at any current methodology.

WANTS The data out of the Corridor and into hands that will publish it before the extraction timeline begins. She has been unable to find a secure courier.

FEARS ACU counterintelligence. They visited her department last week. They were polite. That was worse.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her two remaining colleagues in the Corridor have gone silent. She does not know if this means they are compromised or if they are being cautious. Either way, she is running out of allies.

SISTER AGNES NALUBEGA -- PROMETHEUS LEAGUE, KAMPALA CELL COORDINATOR

CAN GET	Safe houses in the outer districts, communication lines to Prometheus League networks across the Corridor, the identity of the person with compound credentials her cell is sheltering.
WANTS	Proof that the extraction deal exists. The League's public advocacy against resource exploitation has been hampered by the fact that they cannot confirm what they suspect.
FEARS	That the EO funding flowing to some League cells will be used to discredit the entire organization when disclosure happens -- making the League look like an EO destabilization tool rather than a legitimate advocacy movement.
CURRENT PRESSURE	The person her cell is sheltering has become a liability. They know things that make them valuable and dangerous simultaneously. Sister Agnes needs to decide what to do with them before someone else decides for her.

ZONE 5 THE RIFT VILLAGES — LAKE TANGANYIKA EASTERN SHORE

SECURITY	light (ACU Warden patrols along shore road; village interiors governed by traditional authority)
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (ACU-provided water infrastructure aging; traditional systems maintained independently)
CIVILIANS	normal (distributed across 47 communities, approximately 68,000 total)
SURVEILLANCE	ACU drone net overhead / dark zones in the villages (Warden drones see rooftops, not conversations)
FACTION PRESSURE	ACU dominant on paper (traditional authority dominant in practice; Prometheus League organizers in 12 villages)
CONTAMINATION	present (Lumicite resonance affecting water chemistry in ways the Dawn Quality Broadcasts do not measure)

BLACK MARKET	light (fishing communities trade directly; the black market is the original market)
MOBILITY	open (lake access unrestricted for traditional watercraft) / checkpointed (shore road has three Warden stations)

FUNCTION The civilian heart of the Corridor. Where forty million people's relationship with the Great Lakes is most visible, most vulnerable, and most politically potent.

CONTROLLER Elder Council of the Eastern Shore -- a traditional authority structure that ACU officially recognizes as 'community advisory' and practically treats as a co-governance partner because the alternative is governing 68,000 people who do not recognize ACU's authority at all. The current Council Chair is Mzee Baraka, 74, who has been on the lake longer than the ACU has existed.

DRAW The lake. Community. Traditional knowledge spanning generations. The feeling of a place that has been lived in continuously for eight centuries. Clean water that tastes like it should.

RISK The Lumicite resonance changing water chemistry. Prometheus League organizing attracting Warden counterintelligence attention. The convergence point the fishing crews found. The Elder Council's growing suspicion that ACU is lying about the lake.

> **UNDER-SYSTEM**
>
> The Lumicite resonance is changing the lake's water chemistry at the eastern shore. Not contaminating it -- the Dawn Quality Broadcasts are technically accurate when they report clean water. The pH is stable. The microbial counts are normal. What is changing are trace mineral concentrations, dissolved gas ratios, and a bioelectric signature in the water that ACU's monitoring equipment is not calibrated to detect. The fishing communities notice because the fish are behaving differently. Migration patterns that have been consistent for generations are shifting.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The Elder Council formally requests an explanation from ACU for the changes in fish behavior. ACU cannot provide one without disclosing the Lumicite deposit. The Council, unsatisfied, conducts its own investigation -- which means putting experienced fishers in the water at the locations where the changes are most pronounced. Those locations coincide with the Lumicite survey coordinates. What the fishers find triggers a community response that ACU's governance model has no mechanism for managing.

DAY

AUTHORITY

ACU Warden shore patrols (road) / Elder Council (villages)

ECONOMY

Fishing, lake agriculture, traditional trade between villages, ACU water infrastructure maintenance

RISK

Prometheus League community organizing in the villages, ACU surveillance of Elder Council communications, fishing crews encountering anomalous conditions at the survey coordinates

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Elder Council night watch (traditional) / Warden shore patrol (reduced)

ECONOMY

Night fishing (traditional, permitted), lake navigation between villages, traditional medicine practice (some practitioners now incorporating lakefire observation into treatment)

RISK

The lakefire. On nights when the pulse is visible, the communities gather at the shore. These gatherings are not political events. They are something older and harder for ACU to categorize. The Warden drones observe. They report gatherings. Command does not know what to do with the reports.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A night fishing crew in a traditional wooden canoe, the lake surface dark and still, the amber lakefire pulse rising from two hundred meters below -- illuminating the hull from beneath, the fishers' faces lit from below in amber light, their nets trailing in water that glows for six seconds and then goes dark, and the eldest fisher counting the interval between pulses the way her grandmother counted the interval between waves.

FACTIONS PRESENT

ACU / OBSIDIAN WARDENS

shore patrol, water infrastructure maintenance, surveillance of Elder Council

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

community organizers in 12 villages, water quality testing, advocacy

SHINKAI COLLECTIVE

modified monitoring station (bioelectric sensors calibrated for freshwater -- the same sensors they use in the Arafura Deep)

CIVILIAN NEED

Time. Enough time to prepare the communities for what is coming, on terms that prioritize their survival over every faction's extraction timeline. Medical supplies from the Mombasa port. The knowledge of which Warden operates as written and which has learned to look elsewhere.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Elder Council access (through demonstrated trust), traditional lake knowledge, lakefire pulse pattern data, Prometheus League water quality data, village network mobilization.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A fishing crew returns to shore early with a catch that includes a fish species not in any regional catalogue. The fish is alive, responsive, and its scales have a faint amber luminescence. The crew is more alarmed than excited.
- Mzee Baraka sends word through the village network that he wants to speak with outsiders. Not ACU outsiders. The distinction is deliberate.
- A Prometheus League organizer is running a water quality testing program in six villages -- using equipment that measures the parameters ACU's Dawn Broadcasts don't. Her results are attracting attention.
- A Warden shore patrol stops an Elder Council messenger between villages. The messenger is carrying a sealed document. The patrol commander has orders to inspect all inter-village communications. The Elder Council has never accepted this authority.
- An ACU water infrastructure maintenance team discovers that one of their monitoring stations has been modified. The modification adds a sensor measuring bioelectric signatures. The modification was not authorized by ACU engineering.
- A child dives into the lake at a village beach and surfaces holding a stone that glows faintly amber. The stone is warm. She says the lake gave it to her. The village elder takes the stone and says nothing.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The lakefire pulse tonight is different -- brighter, longer, and concentrated at a point directly offshore from the largest fishing village. Three hundred people are at the waterline watching. The Warden drone overhead is recording. Nobody is speaking.
- A traditional healer asks operators to accompany her to a shoreline location where the water, she says, has been 'answering.' She has been recording the pulse patterns for nine months. Her records, when operators see them, are more comprehensive than ACU's classified monitoring data.

- A canoe arrives at the village from across the lake carrying a single passenger -- a woman who identifies herself only as Brotherhood. She has a message for Mzee Baraka. The message concerns the researcher who disappeared.
- Warden shore patrol reports lights beneath the surface at the restricted survey coordinates. Not lakefire -- structured, moving, artificial. The patrol commander requests instructions from Kampala. Kampala tells her to log it as bioluminescent activity and continue patrol.
- Three fishing crews from separate villages converge on the same lake coordinates simultaneously -- not by arrangement, by instinct. What they find at the convergence point, each crew describes differently. All three descriptions include the word 'structure.'
- An Elder Council emergency session. Mzee Baraka has received information -- from where, he will not say -- that something is going to happen to the lake. He is mobilizing the village network. His mobilization looks like preparation for departure.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Mzee Baraka has known about the Lumicite deposit for two years. He was told by the Brotherhood researcher before she disappeared. He has been preparing the communities for disclosure on his own timeline. [TRUE]
- The modified monitoring station was installed by the Shinkai Collective -- testing the same bioelectric sensors they use in the Arafura Deep, calibrated for freshwater. [TRUE]
- The traditional healers who have been observing the lakefire have identified a pattern that correlates with geological stress data the ACU's classified survey recorded independently. The healers' observations are more granular. [TRUE]
- A faction has been recruiting young fishers from the eastern shore villages for 'marine survey work.' The recruits are taken to a facility outside the Corridor. None have returned. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- the recruitment is real; two recruits have returned but have not discussed where they were]
- The amber stones appearing in the shallows are Lumicite fragments. The deposit is closer to the surface than the survey indicated. Extraction may not require deep-water technology at all. [TRAP -- the stones are real; the interpretation is planted by EO intelligence to accelerate disclosure chaos]
- The Elder Council has a document predating the Upheaval that describes the lakefire phenomenon. The lake has done this before. The document says what happened next. [UNCLEAR -- the document exists; its contents are contested among the elders themselves]

CONTACTS

MZEE BARAKA -- ELDER COUNCIL CHAIR, EASTERN SHORE

CAN GET Village network mobilization, traditional lake knowledge spanning three generations, the Brotherhood researcher's pre-disappearance briefing (partial), and a political voice that carries more weight with 68,000 lakeside residents than any Warden order.

WANTS Time. Enough time to prepare the communities for what is coming, on terms that prioritize their survival over every faction's extraction timeline.

FEARS That the timeline has already passed. That the extraction deal, the cascade failure risk, and the lakefire acceleration are converging faster than community preparation can match.

CURRENT PRESSURE The three fishing crews' convergence report. What they found suggests the lake's behavior is entering a phase that his grandmother described to him once, in a story he thought was mythological until five years ago.

AMANI MWANGI -- PROMETHEUS LEAGUE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, WATER QUALITY SPECIALIST

CAN GET Independent water chemistry data for the eastern shore (the parameters ACU doesn't measure), community health records correlating with lakefire activity, and a network of twelve village contacts who report environmental changes in real time.

WANTS The ACU's classified water quality data -- the real numbers -- to compare against her independent measurements. She believes the discrepancy will prove the lake is changing in ways ACU is concealing.

FEARS That her water quality testing program will be shut down by ACU permit enforcement before she has enough data to publish. She is three months from a complete dataset.

CURRENT PRESSURE Two of her village contacts have been visited by Warden counterintelligence. The visits were framed as 'routine community engagement.' They were not routine.

NEEMA KABOYI -- NIGHT FISHER, LAKEFIRE OBSERVER, ELDEST DAUGHTER OF A VILLAGE HEALER

CAN GET	Nine months of lakefire pulse pattern records (the most comprehensive independent dataset in the Corridor), traditional ecological knowledge about the lake's historical behavior, and a willingness to take operators to the convergence point the three fishing crews found.
WANTS	Someone to explain what is happening to the lake in language that accounts for both what her instruments measure and what her mother says she can feel. She does not believe these are different things.
FEARS	The structure the fishing crews described. Not because it is dangerous -- because it means the lake contains something that changes everything she understands about where she lives.
CURRENT PRESSURE	Her mother is ill. The illness began three months ago and correlates with the lakefire acceleration. The traditional healer network believes the two are connected. Neema is not yet willing to believe this.

ZONE 6 DRC DEEP CORRIDOR

JUNGLE TRANSIT ROUTE, EASTERN CONGO

SECURITY	none (ACU has no operational presence; local authority structures govern)
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed (pre-Upheaval roads non-functional; trails maintained by the communities that use them)
CIVILIANS	sparse (uncounted communities, estimated 15,000-25,000 across the corridor)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (no satellite penetration through canopy, no drone coverage, no faction sensor network)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (Brotherhood, Prometheus League, and Meridian East coexist in equilibrium)

CONTAMINATION	present (mining runoff from Copperbelt reaching the northern watersheds)
BLACK MARKET	none (the corridor economy IS informal; the concept requires an official one to contrast with)
MOBILITY	hazardous (trail network only, navigable with guides, impassable without)

FUNCTION The transit space between the Corridor's governed zones. Where information, cargo, and people move outside every faction's surveillance architecture.

CONTROLLER No single controller. The Brotherhood manages the information routes. Meridian East manages the cargo routes. The Prometheus League manages the people. The forest communities manage themselves and tolerate all three as long as the equilibrium holds.

DRAW Passage. Anonymity. The Brotherhood intelligence network. The Prometheus League medical clinics. The knowledge that in the DRC corridor, no faction can find you unless you want to be found.

RISK Navigation without a guide is a medical evacuation situation. Meridian East cargo escorts with standing orders regarding unauthorized observers. The contamination arriving from the Copperbelt. Wildlife.

> **UNDER-SYSTEM**
>
> The Copperbelt's acid mine drainage is moving north through the watershed into the DRC corridor. The contamination is slow, invisible in the canopy, and measured by no one -- ACU's monitoring network stops at the Copperbelt boundary. The first sign will be crop failure in the river-adjacent settlements. The second sign will be illness. By the time either appears, the contamination will be years ahead of any remediation capability.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Contamination reaches the corridor's river communities. Crop failure and illness trigger displacement toward the lake zones -- which are already at capacity. The Prometheus League camps become refugee processing centers they were not designed to be. The Brotherhood's courier routes lose their support network. Meridian East's logistics chain loses its partners. The equilibrium collapses not from conflict but from poisoning.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Forest community headpersons along the trail network / Brotherhood way station managers / Prometheus League camp commanders

ECONOMY

Trail transit, courier service, medical supply distribution (Prometheus League clinics serve corridor communities), subsistence agriculture

RISK

Meridian East cargo escorts encountering Prometheus League patrols on overlapping routes, ACU long-range reconnaissance drones (rare but not impossible), wildlife

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

The forest

ECONOMY

Brotherhood courier runs (the highest-value information moves at night), Meridian East cargo transit (the second facility receives shipments between 0100 and 0400), Prometheus League training exercises

RISK

Navigation. The trail network at night without a guide is a medical evacuation situation. Also: Meridian East's cargo escorts have standing orders regarding unauthorized observers.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Brotherhood courier on a trail so narrow the canopy has closed over it completely, walking in green-filtered light that makes noon look like dusk, carrying a sealed document pouch that has been in continuous transit for nine days across three countries, while a Prometheus League patrol moves parallel on a trail twenty meters east, both groups aware of each other, neither acknowledging the other, the forest absorbing both.

FACTIONS PRESENT

BROTHERHOOD OF SHADOWS

courier and intelligence networks, way stations, information transit routes predating the Upheaval

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

four semi-permanent camps (training, medical, logistics), community organizer networks, environmental monitoring

MERIDIAN EAST (EO)

logistics chain connecting Copperbelt extraction to the second processing facility, armed cargo escorts

CIVILIAN NEED

Medicine. The contamination is arriving and the corridor communities have nothing. Clean water information. Passage out if the equilibrium collapses.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Brotherhood transit routes (with trust), Prometheus League camp access, corridor community guides, Meridian East cargo route intelligence.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A forest community headperson blocks the trail and requests payment -- not money, medicine. Her village has three cases of respiratory illness that matches the pattern Dr. Carrasco has been tracking in the Copperbelt. The contamination has arrived.
- A Brotherhood way station offers operators shelter and food. The way station manager is interested in what operators are carrying. Not aggressively -- professionally. She catalogs who moves through and what they carry. That catalog is worth something.
- A Meridian East cargo convoy -- four vehicles, armed escort -- is stuck on a washed-out section of trail. The escort leader offers operators payment to help clear the route. The cargo containers are sealed and the escort does not want them opened.
- A Prometheus League patrol intercepts operators. The patrol commander is professional, courteous, and conducting a census of military-capable personnel transiting the corridor. She asks operators to register. The registration is voluntary. Declining it changes the nature of the conversation.
- A corridor community elder approaches operators with a water sample from his village's river. The water is discolored. He has heard that outsiders sometimes have testing equipment. He is correct.
- A cleared area in the forest -- recent, large, with vehicle tracks leading south toward the Copperbelt boundary. Not a Prometheus League camp. Not a Brotherhood station. Something was here and was moved.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Brotherhood courier arrives at the way station carrying information intended for the Lakeside Compact. She needs a relay -- her next contact missed the rendezvous. The information concerns the Void Walker sighting at Kampala.
- Meridian East cargo vehicles pass operators' position at 0200, running without lights on a trail that requires headlamps to walk. The drivers are using equipment operators have not seen before -- night vision integrated with trail navigation that shouldn't exist for this terrain.
- A Prometheus League training exercise goes wrong -- a live fire incident near operators' position. The League camp commander arrives quickly, manages the situation, and is very interested in ensuring operators understand this was an accident.
- Forest sounds change at 0300 -- the usual insect and animal noise drops to silence for approximately four minutes. A Brotherhood courier at the way

station says this has happened three times in the past month. She does not know what causes it.

- A figure on the trail ahead. Not moving. Standing. Gene-forged -- the proportions are wrong for baseline human in a way operators recognize. Not any template operators have encountered. The figure watches for approximately thirty seconds and retreats into the forest.
- A signal -- not radio, not electronic, something felt rather than heard -- propagates through the forest. The Prometheus League sentries react as if they've experienced it before. One of them says 'the lake is talking again' and does not elaborate.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Meridian East's second processing facility is in the DRC corridor, not in the Copperbelt. The cargo doesn't leave the forest. It goes deeper in. [TRUE]
- The Brotherhood of Shadows has a research station in the corridor, staffed by the missing researcher and two colleagues. The station has been operational for six months. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- the station exists; the researcher's presence is unconfirmed]
- The Prometheus League's camps are positioned along the contamination watershed deliberately. The League has been tracking the acid drainage for two years and is building a case for environmental prosecution against ACU and Meridian East simultaneously. [TRUE]
- The gene-forged figure in the forest is a Void Walker -- one of an unknown number who transit the corridor regularly between Kampala and the lakebed coordinates. The forest communities know them and do not interfere. [UNCLEAR -- the communities confirm gene-forged transit; Void Walker identification is unverified]
- The four-minute silences in the forest correlate with the lakefire pulse pattern. Something in the corridor's ecology responds to the same resonance affecting the lake. The contamination is accelerating the response. [TRUE]
- An ACU reconnaissance mission entered the corridor three months ago and never returned. Their last transmission was coordinates for a location that doesn't appear on any chart. [TRAP -- the mission returned; the 'lost patrol' narrative is an ACU intelligence operation to justify future corridor incursion]

CONTACTS

BROTHERHOOD COURIER ZARA KIMATHI -- WAY STATION NETWORK MANAGER, DRC CORRIDOR

CAN GET Brotherhood transit routes through the corridor, relay access to Brotherhood intelligence networks across three countries, and the location of the Brotherhood research station (if it exists).

WANTS Medical supplies for the corridor communities. The contamination is arriving and the communities have nothing.

FEARS That the equilibrium between Brotherhood, Prometheus League, and Meridian East will not survive the contamination crisis. When the corridor's communities are in distress, the tolerance that sustains coexistence disappears.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her last courier from the Lakeside Compact carried information that the extraction authorization is real. She has not yet decided who in the corridor needs to know.

COMMANDANT RUTH ONYANCHA -- PROMETHEUS LEAGUE, DRC CORRIDOR CAMP COMMANDER

CAN GET Environmental contamination data for the watershed, Prometheus League intelligence on Meridian East cargo routes, and the League's legal case file against ACU and Meridian East.

WANTS Water testing equipment. Specifically, the capability to confirm the acid drainage has reached the river communities before the symptoms confirm it for her.

FEARS The EO funding. She has confirmed that two of the four League camps in the corridor receive material support from sources she cannot fully trace. If those sources are EO, her camps are compromised.

CURRENT PRESSURE The live fire incident. It was not an accident. One of her trainees fired deliberately at a target she did not authorize. The trainee will not explain why. The target area, when investigated, shows signs of recent occupation.

PILOT EMMANUEL LUKASA -- MERIDIAN EAST LOGISTICS DRIVER, CORRIDOR ROUTE SPECIALIST

CAN GET	The cargo route to the second facility, delivery schedules, the night-vision navigation equipment specs, and the facility's perimeter security pattern.
WANTS	Extraction. He wants out of Meridian East's operation. He has been driving the corridor for two years and what the facility is processing is not copper ore.
FEARS	The escort teams. They rotate every three weeks. The current rotation includes two operators he recognizes from an EO direct-action unit, not a logistics security detail.
CURRENT PRESSURE	His next scheduled run is in four days. He has been told the cargo for this run requires 'enhanced security.' He does not know what enhanced security means in this context. He does not want to find out.

ZONE 7 MERIDIAN FACILITY

THE SECOND SITE, SOUTHERN DRC

SECURITY	active (Meridian East private security, rotating EO direct-action teams, perimeter surveillance)
INFRASTRUCTURE	purpose-built (concealed, well-engineered, designed for deniability)
CIVILIANS	none (facility staff only, approximately 80 personnel on rotating shifts)
SURVEILLANCE	Meridian East internal (no external faction has sensor coverage here)
FACTION PRESSURE	EO dominant (through Meridian East; no other faction has confirmed the facility's location)
CONTAMINATION	present (Lumicite processing byproducts, contained but generating waste that enters the watershed)
BLACK MARKET	none (closed installation)

MOBILITY	restricted (single access road, camouflaged, guarded)
FUNCTION	EO's covert Lumicite processing and research facility. The site that proves EO is not waiting for the Great Lakes deposit to become available -- they have found their own source and are already operational.
CONTROLLER	Site Director Kristoff Vane, EO technical operations. Vane reports directly to EO Strategic Resources, bypassing Meridian East's corporate structure entirely. He has been on site for fourteen months and has not left the facility in that time.
DRAW	The answer to what EO is actually doing with Lumicite. The containment failure data. The off-channel communications. The truth about what the processing has produced.
RISK	Meridian East security. Rotating EO direct-action teams. The automated perimeter at night. Whatever has been standing at the tree line watching. The Lumicite exposure affecting facility staff.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Lumicite processing generates a waste product that Vane's team cannot neutralize. The waste enters the facility's containment system, which was designed for copper processing byproducts, not Lumicite resonance-active material. The containment is failing. The waste is reaching the watershed. The contamination poisoning the DRC corridor's river communities downstream is not acid mine drainage from the Copperbelt. It is Lumicite processing runoff from this facility.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The containment fails completely. Lumicite-active waste enters the watershed at a rate that produces visible effects downstream within weeks. The Prometheus League gets evidence that leads not to the Copperbelt but to a facility in the DRC that officially does not exist. If the facility is exposed, EO loses deniability, ACU loses the narrative that Lumicite extraction is a future threat rather than a present one, and the cascade failure geologists learn that extraction is already happening.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Vane + Meridian East site security + EO direct-action rotation

ECONOMY

Lumicite extraction, processing, containment management, waste disposal

RISK

ACU long-range reconnaissance (unlikely but possible), Prometheus League patrols approaching from the north, facility staff developing health symptoms consistent with Lumicite exposure

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced security rotation + automated perimeter

ECONOMY

Cargo shipment preparation (outbound shipments leave between 0100-0400), containment system cycling

RISK

The perimeter. At night, the forest around the facility produces sounds that facility staff have been reporting to Vane for three months. Not wildlife. Not human. The security cameras at the perimeter's northern edge have recorded movement that Vane has reviewed and not shared with the security team.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The processing floor at shift change, underground, fluorescent-lit, sterile -- and at the center, a containment vessel holding a Lumicite sample that glows steadily amber, the same color as the lakefire 400 kilometers northeast, pulsing at the same frequency, while a technician monitors readings that have been trending in the same direction for eight months and a waste pipe in the corner drips something that isn't water into a drain that leads, eventually, to a river where children swim.

FACTIONS PRESENT

MERIDIAN EAST (EO)

facility operations, security, logistics cover

EO STRATEGIC RESOURCES

direct oversight through Vane, direct-action team rotation, classified output destination

UNKNOWN ENTITY

perimeter observer, gene-forged, unidentified template, watching

OPERATOR ACCESS

Facility operational data, Lumicite extraction methodology, containment failure timeline, waste output routing, off-channel communications, perimeter security patterns.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- The perimeter security detects an approach from the north -- not a patrol, a single individual moving with precision through the screening vegetation. The individual retreats before contact. The approach route suggests familiarity with the facility's sensor layout.

- A facility technician requests to speak with anyone not on Vane's staff. She has been monitoring the containment system's decline and has data that contradicts the acceptable risk assessment. She wants the data out.
- A cargo container staged for outbound shipment is emitting a low-frequency hum. The hum is not mechanical. Facility staff avoid the container. Vane has ordered it shipped on the next run regardless.
- An EO direct-action team arrives for the security rotation. This rotation includes two operatives who are not on the standard roster. They carry equipment that is not standard security kit. Vane meets them personally.
- The containment system alarm triggers for the third time this week. The alarm is designed for chemical overflow. What triggers it is not chemical -- it is resonance. The processing floor vibrates for twelve seconds.
- A Meridian East logistics coordinator discovers that the facility's financial records have been accessed remotely. The access originated from a terminal in Mombasa Deep Port. The access was three weeks ago. Nobody noticed until now.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The outbound cargo run. Four vehicles, armed escort, running dark through the corridor. Operators positioned along the route can observe the convoy's destination -- not south toward the Copperbelt, but east, toward a rendezvous point operators have not been briefed on.
- The perimeter cameras capture a figure standing at the tree line. Gene-forged. Not EO stock. The figure remains for six minutes, then walks into the forest. The cameras lose tracking within four meters of the tree line.
- A facility worker attempts to leave the compound on foot at 0300. Security stops him. He is incoherent, describes the processing floor as 'singing,' and asks to be taken to the lake. He has never been to the lake. The medical officer sedates him.
- The waste pipe's output changes color -- from industrial grey to amber. The change lasts forty minutes and coincides with a containment system resonance event. The watershed downstream of the pipe will show the effects within a week.
- A signal -- similar to the ones reported in the DRC corridor forest -- propagates through the facility's underground structure. The Lumicite samples in the processing lab respond. Every sample orients toward the northeast. Toward the lake.
- Vane, alone in his office at 0200, is communicating with someone. Not through Meridian East channels. Not through EO channels. The communica-

tion is encrypted in a standard that the facility's communications officer does not recognize. When asked the next morning, Vane says nothing happened.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Lumicite output leaving the facility is going to EO's weapons research division. EO is building something. The small-quantity extraction makes sense only if the application requires precision rather than volume. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- the destination is correct; the application is not purely weapons research]
- The Copperbelt shaft the facility extracts from is connected to the Lake Tanganyika deposit through the same geological conduit system documented in other territories. Extracting from the shaft is extracting from the lake. The cascade failure risk applies to both. [TRUE]
- Vane has not left the facility in fourteen months because he cannot. Prolonged Lumicite exposure has produced physiological changes that the facility's medical staff are documenting under a classification that prevents the data from reaching EO headquarters. [PARTIALLY TRUE -- physiological changes are documented; whether they prevent departure is unclear]
- Three facility workers have experienced episodes similar to the one who tried to leave. All three described the processing floor as 'singing.' All three asked to go to the lake. [TRUE]
- The entity at the perimeter is the same one documented in the DRC corridor forest encounters. It is tracking the facility's operations. It is also tracking the waste output downstream. [UNCLEAR]
- EO Strategic Resources does not have full knowledge of what Vane is doing at the facility. His mandate was experimental extraction. His actual operation has diverged. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

SITE DIRECTOR KRISTOFF VANE -- EO TECHNICAL OPERATIONS

CAN GET Full facility operational data, Lumicite extraction methodology, the waste containment failure timeline, and his off-channel communications log.

WANTS More time. He is close to something he will not describe to anyone who has not seen what he has seen on the processing floor. He speaks about the Lumicite as though it is not a mineral.

FEARS EO auditors. If Strategic Resources sends an inspection team, they will find a facility that has diverged significantly from its mandate. They will shut it down. He believes shutting it down now would be a mistake that cannot be reversed.

CURRENT PRESSURE The containment failure acceleration. He has approximately three months before the waste output becomes visible to anyone testing the downstream watershed. After that, the facility's concealment is on borrowed time.

DR. INGRID STEENKAMP -- FACILITY MEDICAL OFFICER

CAN GET Lumicite exposure health data, the classified physiological change documentation, and a medical assessment of Vane that she has been unable to file through official channels.

WANTS Evacuation authority for the twelve facility staff showing early Lumicite exposure symptoms. Vane will not authorize evacuation because evacuated staff become a security risk.

FEARS That the exposure effects are not entirely harmful. Three of her patients describe changes in perception that they frame as improvements. She does not have a medical framework for an exposure agent that the subjects experience as beneficial.

CURRENT PRESSURE Patient zero -- the worker who tried to leave -- has stabilized but is not the same person he was. He is calmer, more focused, and speaks about the lake with a specificity that suggests knowledge he should not have. She does not know how to classify this.

TECHNICIAN SIPHO NDLOVU -- CONTAINMENT SYSTEMS SPECIALIST

CAN GET The containment failure data, waste output analysis, the pipe routing that shows exactly where the contamination enters the watershed, and the resonance event logs that demonstrate the Copperbelt shaft and the Lake Tanganyika deposit are connected.

WANTS Someone to act on the data before the downstream communities start dying from contamination that she helped produce. She is not interested in protecting herself. She is interested in stopping what is happening.

FEARS	The direct-action team. She has identified two of them as EO operators with counterintelligence backgrounds. They are not here for perimeter security. They are here for information security.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She downloaded the containment data onto a physical drive four days ago. The drive is hidden in her quarters. If the counterintelligence operatives search her quarters, they will find it.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

Who a territory is for reveals itself through what it forbids and what it forgives. The Corridor enforces four categories of control.

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

1. No unauthorized watercraft on Lake Tanganyika after 2200 — enforced by Warden aerial patrol. 2. All survey or geological equipment requires ACU permit — violations trigger immediate seizure and operator detention. 3. Water infrastructure tampering carries maximum penalty under ACU Military Code — the only civilian offense prosecuted under military jurisdiction.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

1. 'Ecological preservation' permits — routinely denied to small fishing operations, routinely granted to ACU-affiliated contractors. 2. Communications blackouts around 'environmentally sensitive zones' — applied whenever ACU wants a conversation to stop, lifted when the conversation is useful. 3. Transit documentation requirements between zones — enforced at Warden discretion, which means enforced when someone specific needs to be stopped.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

1. Survey data confiscation and detention at Warden Forward Base 7 — no trial timeline published. 2. Water access suspension — the ultimate lever. Communities rearrange everything to avoid it. 3. Transfer to 'ecological monitoring duty' — a posting in the DRC corridor that functions as exile with a uniform.

CIVIC RITUALS

1. Dawn Water Quality Broadcast — ACU's daily public address confirming lake safety metrics. The numbers are always good. 2. Lakefire Festival — annual community celebration of the amber glow. ACU sponsors the festival as cultural heritage. The discussion circles at the festival have been asking increasingly specific questions about the lake's behavior. ACU counterintelligence monitors the circles but cannot shut them down without destroying the festival's political value. 3. Monthly Warden community presence — patrol units walk through lakeside villages in non-tactical kit, distributing water quality reports and accepting community feedback. The feedback is genuine. What ACU does with it is classified.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime in Kalemie's port district, Mombasa Deep's commercial zone, or lakeside village gatherings during festival season. Every result produces a new contact, a new debt, or a new exposure.

1 (Contact Made): An off-duty Warden NCO at a Kalemie port bar describes the checkpoint rotation in enough operational detail that operators understand the specific gap between the 0200 and 0400 patrols. She does not remember being that specific the next morning.

2 (Feud Started): Operator says something — or is heard saying something — that reaches an ACU counterintelligence informant through the room's geometry. Nothing happens immediately. Next morning, transit documentation enters 'verification review.' Review has no stated timeline.

3 (Equipment Lost): Operator's secondary comms device is lifted at some point during the evening. It holds 48 hours of location cache. Whoever has it knows everywhere the operator has been, including contacts they were not supposed to meet.

4 (Secret Learned): A Brotherhood of Shadows contact corners operator near evening's end. They've identified someone in ACU's water quality division whose access includes the classified geological survey. They want something in trade for the name. Won't say the name until trade is confirmed.

5 (Debt Incurred): A Syndicate broker sits down with a proposition: they will move a specific data package out of the Corridor through a route that bypasses every checkpoint, in exchange for one favor, undefined and redeemable within 30 days. The broker presents this as reasonable. They are correct. That's what makes it worth worrying about.

6 (Locally Recognizable): Operator does something — intervenes in a dispute, covers a tab, handles a confrontation — that travels. By next morning, operator is the person lakeside residents mention when deciding whether to trust someone new. One faction network routes requests through the operator. Another faction's file now has a photograph.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

The Brotherhood of Shadows researcher who disappeared has been in the Corridor for nine months. Where she is, what she has found, and whether she is working alone or with the Brotherhood research station are undefined. Her field notes are the most valuable document in the Corridor. What they say about the lakefire is determined at first contact.

The extraction deal partner is the Shinkai Collective. What the Collective intends to do with Great Lakes access — whether their interest is purely the Lumicite deposit or something connected to the Arafura Deep operation — is undefined. Determine the Collective's actual objective when the deal terms are fully exposed.

The Void Walker presence in the Corridor has a specific purpose that no faction has identified. Whether they are monitoring the Lumicite, protecting something, tracking someone, or pursuing an objective that doesn't map to any faction's understanding is undefined. Determine the purpose at first direct contact.

The pre-Upheaval document in the Elder Council's possession describes a previous lakefire event. What the document says happened next — and whether 'next' is something the Corridor is approaching again — is contested among the elders and undefined for play purposes. Determine the document's content when operators gain the Elder Council's trust.

Vane's off-channel communications are with someone. The recipient is not EO, not Meridian East, not any faction with known Corridor operations. Whether the recipient is connected to the Shinkai Collective, the Void Walkers, or something else entirely is undefined. The communications contain information about Lumicite that Vane has learned through exposure. Determine the recipient at first intercept.

Patient Zero at the Meridian Facility knows things about Lake Tanganyika that he should not know. Whether this represents Lumicite-mediated information transfer, psychological breakdown, or something the medical framework does not have a category for is undefined. What he says when he meets someone 'from the water' is determined at first contact.

FACTIONS

ACU — AFRICAN COALITION UNION (OBSIDIAN WARDENS)

Corridor Governance & Military Authority

OBJECTIVE Maintain the Great Lakes clean-water governance contract while suppressing knowledge of the Lumicite deposit long enough to negotiate a controlled extraction deal on ACU terms — before any other faction forces the issue.

ASSETS Obsidian Warden gene-forged units (Leopards, Wild Dogs, Gorillas), regional drone surveillance network, water governance infrastructure, political legitimacy with lakeside communities, Mombasa Deep Port revenue.

DEPENDENCY The clean-water promise. Every military and political asset ACU has is downstream of civilian trust in the lakes. Remove that and the Wardens are a garrison with no mandate.

VULNERABILITY The Lumicite secret. One credible data leak to a news outlet with reach ends the suppression operation. ACU Command knows this; their response plan is a controlled disclosure that doesn't exist yet.

> **ESCALATION LADDER**
>
> - 1 — Surveillance increase, personnel transfers, permit delays for anyone asking inconvenient questions.
> - 2 — Seizure of survey equipment, detention of independent researchers, information blackout around lake zones.
> - 3 — Warden units deployed against extraction-adjacent parties — including other factions' intelligence assets.
> - 4 — Full lake access lockdown. Military exclusion zone around Tanganyika. Whatever it costs.

OFFER Safe corridor passage, Warden medical support, water access, political cover in ACU-controlled territory.

DEMAND Extraction-related intelligence suppressed, Meridian East operations disrupted, specific documents destroyed or delivered to Kampala — not copied, destroyed.

IF DAMAGED ACU losing governance legitimacy in the Corridor creates a three-way resource scramble between EO, NAF, and a dozen local powers with legitimate grievances. The lakes are not protected by anyone in that scenario.

EO — EURASIAN OLIGARCHY (MERIDIAN EAST SHELL OPERATION)

Extraction Pressure & Covert Operations

OBJECTIVE Maximize off-manifest resource extraction from the Copperbelt while positioning Meridian East to transition to Lumicite extraction the moment ACU's suppression operation fails — which EO's intelligence arm believes is inevitable within eighteen months.

ASSETS Meridian East financial infrastructure (deeply embedded in extraction contracts), Bear and Boar gene-forged security contractors operating as civilians, SIGINT capability through Mombasa Deep Port, pre-positioned extraction equipment (partially — operators can find it).

DEPENDENCY The sub-licensing contract structure that keeps Meridian East's connection to EO legally deniable. If that structure is exposed in a jurisdiction with enforcement capacity, the entire operation loses its cover.

VULNERABILITY The second facility. Meridian East's off-manifest processing site exists. One operator with a drone and two hours can find it. Finding it ends the deniability.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Financial pressure — delay payroll, disrupt supply chains, make ACU look incompetent.
- 2 — Intelligence operations against ACU scientific staff — recruitment, blackmail, compromise.
- 3 — Direct action against parties threatening to expose the extraction operation.
- 4 — Force ACU's hand by beginning extraction unilaterally, gambling that the fait accompli is harder to reverse than the suppression operation is to maintain.

OFFER Above-market payment, extraction equipment access, EO logistics network connections.

DEMAND Survey data, ACU internal communications, specific individuals removed from the equation.

IF DAMAGED Meridian East collapsing doesn't hurt EO significantly — the shell is designed to be cut loose. What follows is EO deploying Tempest Riders directly, which is faster, louder, and involves a lot more civilians getting out of the way.

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE (CORRIDOR ADVOCACY AND RESISTANCE NETWORK)

Civilian Protection & Environmental Accountability

OBJECTIVE Build an evidence base sufficient to force public accountability for environmental contamination and resource extraction abuses in the Corridor — targeting both ACU governance failures and Meridian East operations — while maintaining community support networks in the zones ACU's governance does not reach.

ASSETS Four DRC corridor camps (training, medical, logistics), community organizer networks in 12 eastern shore villages, environmental contamination data spanning two years, legal case files built to international prosecution standards, and approximately 200 trained personnel (militia-capable but primarily focused on community defense and evidence gathering).

DEPENDENCY Community trust. The League's entire operational model depends on lakeside and corridor communities viewing them as advocates rather than another armed faction. If that perception shifts — through EO funding exposure, a violent incident, or an operational mistake that harms civilians — the League loses its base and becomes just another militia in the DRC.

VULNERABILITY EO funding. Some League cells receive material support from sources ultimately traceable to EO. The League's central leadership does not know the full extent. If publicly exposed, EO can frame the entire League as a destabilization proxy, which devastates the legal case and the community relationships simultaneously.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Community organizing, water testing programs, public advocacy through permitted demonstrations.
- 2 — Evidence publication through international media contacts, legal filings in jurisdictions with enforcement reach, strategic leaks of contamination data.
- 3 — Direct action against Meridian East logistics infrastructure — roadblocks, cargo interdiction, facility exposure operations.
- 4 — Armed resistance. The League is militia-capable. Using that capability ends the advocacy model and begins something the League's leadership believes they cannot win. It is the option that exists when all other options have failed.

OFFER Community intelligence networks, environmental data, corridor transit through League-managed routes, medical support at DRC camps, and the political legitimacy that comes from being the only faction in the Corridor whose primary mission is civilian protection.

DEMAND Medical supplies, water testing equipment, evidence of the extraction deal, and protection for community organizers facing Warden counterintelligence pressure.

IF DAMAGED The League losing community trust creates a vacuum in civilian advocacy that no faction fills. The lakeside communities and corridor populations lose their most organized voice. ACU and EO face less public accountability. The people who were the League's base become unrepresented in a resource conflict that will determine their future. This is the worst outcome in the Corridor.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

COMMANDER FATIMA DIARRA — OBSIDIAN WARDENS, CORRIDOR OPERATIONS LEAD

CAN GET Full Warden operational picture across all zones, direct access to Kampala command, the classified geological survey (she has read it; she was not supposed to keep a copy; she kept a copy).

WANTS A way to protect the lakeside communities from the extraction deal she believes is already made.

FEARS That the Wardens will be ordered to enforce an outcome that makes them the enemy of the people they were built to protect.

CURRENT PRESSURE She was given a direct order last week that she has not yet obeyed and cannot obey much longer.

CASPER VAN DER BERG — THE SYNDICATE, CORRIDOR BROKERAGE LEAD

CAN GET Lumicite survey coordinates (asking price: substantial), Meridian East's actual facility locations, movement schedules for every faction asset in the Corridor, passage out for operators who need to disappear.

WANTS A buyer for the survey coordinates who isn't EO, NAF, or ACU — a fourth option that keeps the bidding war running and Casper alive.

FEARS That the Void Walker in the Compact is here because of him specifically.

CURRENT PRESSURE He received a communication this morning from an address that should not know this address. It contained only coordinates and a time.

DOWNTIME

WORK THE DOCKS (MOMBASA DEEP PORT)

WHAT: Operators take a 72-hour shift in port freight handling — legitimate or otherwise.

COST: Three days, exposure to faction surveillance.

GAIN: One of: a faction contact at the port, current cargo manifest data for all berths, location of one dark zone camera blind spot.

FALLOUT: Meridian East flags the operator as a person of interest. Their next port entry gets a secondary inspection.

INFILTRATE THE FESTIVAL (LAKEFIRE FESTIVAL, LAKESIDE COMPACT)

WHAT: Operators attend as civilians and work the informal information network around the Lumicite discussion circles.

COST: Three days, one convincing cover identity.

GAIN: One of: the Brotherhood researcher's contact network, a lead on the field notes, current ACU scientific staff movement schedule.

FALLOUT: An ACU counterintelligence officer at the festival makes the operator. Not an immediate arrest — a file, opened, with operator's face in it.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

HUB-LEVEL RUMOR TABLE (1D6)

- 1. ACU Command in Kampala has already authorized extraction. The Warden units at the Compact don't know. The announcement comes in sixty days. [TRUE]
- 2. The Void Walker in the Corridor is not surveilling the Lumicite deposit. They are surveilling the Brotherhood researcher's contact. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- 3. Meridian East's second facility is processing something other than copper ore. The output is leaving the continent on vessels with no registered destination. [TRUE]
- 4. The lakefire pulse pattern has been decoding itself — anyone who has tracked it nightly for thirty consecutive days reports the same sensation. The ACU medical officer who investigated wrote a report that was immediately classified. [UNCLEAR]
- 5. There is a fourth party in the Corridor extraction negotiation. Not EO, not NAF. Nobody has identified them yet. [TRUE — this is the Void Walkers' actual objective]
- 6. The Brotherhood researcher didn't disappear. She went dark voluntarily. She is still in the Corridor. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1 | LUMICITE DISCLOSURE

Stage 1 — Suppression Holding

ACU maintains information blackout. Warden presence at lake zones elevated but explained as routine. Meridian East operating normally. Civilian population unaware.

Stage 2 — Pressure Visible

A data fragment leaks — not enough to confirm, enough to start questions. ACU increases checkpoint frequency. EO accelerates Meridian East positioning. NAF intelligence assets become more active. The Lakefire Festival discussion circles start asking better questions.

Stage 3 — Suppression Failing

A credible source goes public — journalist, defecting scientist, or operator action. ACU issues a public denial that does not hold up. Warden units are ordered to enforce an exclusion zone around Tanganyika. The lakeside communities understand what an exclusion zone around their water supply means.

Stage 4 — Open Conflict

Multiple factions begin extraction positioning simultaneously. ACU governance fractures under the contradiction between protecting the lakes and extracting from them. The Great Lakes become a military theater. The forty million people who live on them have nowhere to go.

WHAT OPERATORS CAN DO: Control the disclosure timeline. Get the cascade failure data to the right people before extraction begins. Shape whether disclosure is protective or destructive. Every day the suppression holds is a day closer to someone else breaking it on worse terms.

OPERATIONS MAP

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- Lake Tanganyika by water — fastest route between Lakeside Compact and Rift Villages, surveilled by ACU drones.
- Southern land route through Zambia — checkpointed, Meridian East informants along the route.
- Maritime route from Mombasa — open but monitored, connects to global logistics network.
- DRC jungle routes — dark, slow, Brotherhood-managed, navigable only with guides.

CHOKEPOINTS

- Copper Run northern access road — Prometheus League sabotage history, three incidents in six months.
- Lake Tanganyika western approach corridor — ACU aerial enforcement, Warden drone patrol.
- Mombasa Deep Port berth 7 access gate — faction security overlap, the point where every supply chain converges.

SURVEILLANCE ARCHITECTURE

- Lake zones: ACU drone net, cameras, Warden shore patrols. Comprehensive coverage except village interiors.
- Copperbelt: ACU cameras + Meridian East informant net. Dual-layer surveillance with competing loyalties.
- Mombasa Deep: Cameras everywhere except the deep berth dark zones. No ACU presence in the berths.
- Kampala: Comprehensive ACU sensor net + Warden counterintelligence + EO SIGINT from commercial cover.
- DRC Corridor: Dark zone. No satellite penetration, no drone coverage, no faction sensor network.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- ACU controls lakeside and port surface operations. The Obsidian Wardens hold the lake zones and the shore road.
- Meridian East controls Copper Run night operations and the secondary processing facility in the DRC.
- EO intelligence operates from commercial cover at Mombasa Deep Port.

- NAF assets embedded in Compact commercial district. Pre-positioned extraction team two days from lakeshore.
- Prometheus League: 12 eastern shore villages, four DRC camps, community networks.
- Brotherhood of Shadows: courier routes through DRC, intelligence relay stations, one confirmed contact in Lakeside Compact.
- Void Walkers: two confirmed sightings, one confirmed presence in Compact, unknown number in transit.

KEY LOCATIONS

- Lakebed survey coordinates — the Lumicite deposit, 200 meters below Tanganyika's surface. ACU maintains a surveillance gap here.
- Warden Forward Base 7 — detention facility, no trial timeline published.
- Mombasa Deep Port berth 7 — the access gate where every faction pretends not to see each other.
- Kampala Command compound, Kololo Hill — where nine people carry the Corridor's secret.
- The convergence point — eastern shore, the location where three fishing crews found something they each described differently.
- The Brotherhood research station — DRC corridor, existence confirmed, location unconfirmed.
- The Meridian Facility — 60 kilometers inside the DRC, built into a hillside, processing Lumicite.

MISSION SEEDS

1. THE SECOND MANIFEST

OBJECTIVE: Locate Meridian East's secondary processing facility and extract proof of off-manifest ore diversion.

CLOCK: ACU's internal audit reaches the Meridian East contracts in six weeks. After that, EO will cut the operation loose, destroy the facility, and start over with a clean structure. The evidence window closes.

COMPLICATION: The facility is inside an ACU ecological preservation zone — entering it technically makes operators ACU permit violators, which is exactly the charge ACU uses to detain people indefinitely.

2. THE RESEARCHER'S NOTES

OBJECTIVE: Find the Brotherhood of Shadows researcher and retrieve her field notes on the lakefire pulse pattern.

CLOCK: An EO intelligence team is running the same search, twelve days behind. If they get the notes first, the information disappears into EO's classification system.

COMPLICATION: The researcher went dark voluntarily and doesn't want to be found. She will cooperate only if operators can explain how they found her contact — which means explaining Jean-Baptiste Lumumba, who is now in danger the moment his name comes up.

3. CONTROLLED DISCLOSURE

OBJECTIVE: Commander Diarra needs the geological survey's cascade failure data delivered to a journalist with reach — outside the Corridor, outside ACU's information control — before the extraction authorization is announced.

CLOCK: Sixty days to announcement. The journalist is in Mombasa. Getting the data from Diarra to the journalist requires passing through two Warden checkpoints, one EO SIGINT sweep zone, and the Mombasa Deep Port system, all without triggering the classification flags ACU has already set on cascade failure-related data.

COMPLICATION: The journalist has already been approached by the Syndicate with a competing offer. If operators don't move first, the story gets sold to whoever pays most, which changes the disclosure from a protective act to a market transaction.

4. THE POISONED RIVER

OBJECTIVE: Trace the DRC corridor contamination to its actual source — the Meridian Facility — before the Prometheus League's environmental case attributes it to the Copperbelt and ACU, which would be wrong, politically explosive, and ultimately protective of the people actually responsible.

CLOCK: The League publishes its contamination report in five weeks. If the report names the wrong source, ACU gets blamed, EO stays hidden, and the corridor communities receive remediation targeted at the wrong watershed.

COMPLICATION: Reaching the facility requires transiting the DRC corridor through territory controlled by three groups, any of whom may have reasons to prevent operators from finding what is at the end of the cargo route. Meridian East's logistics driver, Emmanuel Lukasa, can provide the route — but extracting him means collapsing Meridian East's corridor logistics, which alerts EO that the facility is compromised.

5. THE ELDER'S PREPARATION

OBJECTIVE: Support Mzee Baraka's community preparation effort by providing the Rift Villages with accurate information about the Lumicite deposit, the extraction authorization, and the cascade failure risk — before the ACU's controlled disclosure (which omits the cascade data) reaches the communities first and frames extraction as safe.

CLOCK: The ACU announcement is sixty days out. Baraka's village network can distribute information across 47 communities in approximately ten days. Operators need to get confirmed data to Baraka at least fifteen days before the announcement to allow community preparation and response planning.

COMPLICATION: The data Baraka needs exists in three locations: the cascade failure report (Kampala Command, held by Professor Kiptoo), the real water quality metrics (Lakeside Compact, held by Dr. Osei), and the extraction deal terms (Kampala Command, held by Captain Asante or accessible through Sister Agnes's sheltered person). Assembling the complete picture requires operating in two zones simultaneously against ACU counterintelligence.

6. VANE'S THRESHOLD

OBJECTIVE: Infiltrate the Meridian Facility and determine what Vane's operation has actually become — what the Lumicite processing has produced, what the off-channel communications contain, and whether the facility's output represents a threat that extends beyond the Corridor.

CLOCK: Vane's containment system fails completely in approximately three months. But the direct-action team rotation that just arrived suggests EO Strategic Resources may be moving to inspect or shut down the facility sooner. If EO gets there first, the facility is sanitized and whatever Vane has discovered disappears into classification.

COMPLICATION: The facility is in the DRC dark zone, behind Meridian East security, behind an EO direct-action team, and next to whatever has been standing at the perimeter watching. The approach requires solving the corridor transit problem first. And the worker who tried to leave — Patient Zero — has been asking to speak with someone who 'comes from the water.' He means the lake. He has never been to the lake. He knows things about it that he should not know.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every solution in the Lakefire Corridor creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF ACU GOVERNANCE COLLAPSES

The forty million lakeside residents have no faction structure replacing it. EO and NAF begin simultaneous extraction positioning. Local armed groups that have existed under ACU constraint since 2045 reactivate. The Great Lakes become a contested resource theater within ninety days. The water that was the point of the whole governance structure becomes a casualty of the fight over it.

IF MERIDIAN EAST IS EXPOSED

EO deploys Tempest Riders directly into the Corridor within two weeks. Deniability ends; direct presence begins. The Copper Run becomes an EO extraction zone with military enforcement. ACU is forced to choose between a confrontation it is not equipped for or an accommodation that ends its independence.

IF THE LUMICITE DEPOSIT IS PUBLICLY CONFIRMED

Every faction with extraction capacity begins positioning within 72 hours. The suppression operation that ACU built its last four years around evaporates. The cascade failure risk — documented, real, suppressed — becomes either a deterrent or a weapon, depending on who publishes it and when.

IF OPERATORS TRIGGER A CASCADE FAILURE

Lake Tanganyika's lakebed destabilizes. The amber glow becomes something else entirely. The twenty percent of the world's unfrozen freshwater in the Great Lakes system is compromised at the source. This is not a regional problem.

FIELD NOTE

The lake stays clean. The promise holds. The Wardens walk their patrols and the Dawn Broadcasts report good numbers and the festival celebrates the amber glow and nobody asks what is two hundred meters below. That is the Corridor. A place where the surface works because the truth hasn't surfaced yet.

When it does, nobody in this territory will have the option of not choosing a side.

— Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

15/

JAVA SCATTER

MULTI-FACTION / MARITIME | EARTH 2066

Four islands, eight factions, and a maritime traffic pattern any one of them could shut down if they agreed on why.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

The sea didn't rise slowly. The models said it would. The models were wrong about the rate. By 2038, the lowland coastal zones of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam were experiencing what the climate agencies called 'episodic inundation events' — which is what technical language looks like when the word for what is actually happening is too large to say in a report. By 2045, the maps were redrawn. Old coastlines were two to eight meters underwater. Forty-two million people had moved to elevation. New islands had emerged from the drowned geography. The chart plotters called the new configuration the Java Scatter, and the name stuck because it was accurate: the old archipelago logic was gone, replaced by a maritime puzzle that no existing faction had built their logistics around.

Into this puzzle, the Pacific Free Zone built something. The PFZ is not a faction in the conventional sense — it is a maritime confederation of port cities, elevated former coastal communities, and purpose-built artificial islands that understood earlier than most that sovereignty in the post-Upheaval era flows to whoever controls the water between things, not the things themselves. The Crimson Corsairs are their military expression: gene-forged operators templated on saltwater crocodiles, sea eagles, and clouded leopards, trained for amphibious interdiction and maritime boarding operations, constitutionally prohibited from operating more than fifty kilometers from navigable water. They are very good at what they are constitutionally permitted to do.

The PRC presses from the north. The undersea data cable infrastructure that routes PRC financial systems, communications, and Project Amaterasu telemetry runs through the Java Sea corridor. The cable nodes sit on the seabed beneath PFZ-controlled water. The PRC has been attempting to gain access to those nodes through diplomatic channels, commercial acquisition, and intelligence operations for nine years. The PFZ has been refusing, building, and watching. Australia — rebuilding under NAF technical and financial partnership, operating the Darwin Forward Base as the region's primary land-power projection point — functions as the counterweight that keeps the PRC from forcing the issue. The triangle of PFZ maritime control, PRC data dependency, and NAF-aligned Australian land power is what stability looks like in the Scatter. It is not stable.

AT THE TABLE

The map is wrong by definition — sea level rewrote it and keeps rewriting it. No terrain assumption survives tidal variance, and the PFZ built their doctrine around that fact. The Corsairs are constitutionally prohibited from operating more than fifty kilometers from navigable water, which means operators who enter the Scatter are always in someone else's home field. Cable node control is the mission beneath every mission. Darwin Forward operates from elevated installations with clear maritime sightlines. The PRC's nine-year push is a patience operation. Project Amaterasu makes it something else.

CIVILIAN SURVIVAL

Elevated former coastal communities, purpose-built artificial islands, and port cities that were trading before the PFZ and will be trading after it. They live on tidal schedules and cable data. What they trade: maritime passage rights, cable access, salvage rights to drowned infrastructure the old maps still list as functional. What they hoard: elevation deeds, fresh water above the flood line, maritime chart data that hasn't been officially revised yet. What they fear: a tidal event that takes out the artificial island infrastructure and removes the distinction between above and below the waterline. What luxury means: a berth with a view of what the coast used to be, high enough that the question is philosophical rather than urgent.

FIELD TEXTURE

Salt and diesel and the constant low hum of cable infrastructure. The Scatter never stops moving — tidal variance, weather systems, the ongoing slow redrawing of the coastline. Drowned cities are operational environments: half-submerged skylines used as navigation markers, old port infrastructure providing cover. The Crimson Corsairs run maritime interdiction with the silence of something that learned patience from deep water. Elevated communities are dense with the specific anxiety of people who have done the math on their own altitude. Darwin Forward operates on high ground with the controlled calm of a facility that has mapped every possible engagement scenario and is waiting for the one they missed. Between them, the Scatter's civilian population trades with everyone and answers to the PFZ because the PFZ is the only entity maintaining the infrastructure keeping them above the waterline. Location names: locals call it 'The Scatter' and use old island names as personal geography regardless of whether those islands still exist. PFZ maritime charts designate zones by cable node. PRC operational maps use pre-Upheaval administrative boundaries that no longer correspond to anything above water, which is less a mapping error than a political statement.

SPLICE PUNK — THE JAVA SCATTER

The Scatter is maritime Splice Punk: everything built around the fact that the ground moves, the map is wrong by definition, and the water between things matters more than the things themselves. The cultural DNA runs from Indonesian, Filipino, and Vietnamese street culture in the elevated former coastal communities — the aesthetic of people told their cities were gone who built different ones at higher altitude instead — through PFZ port city trading culture where every faction moves cargo through the same facility and calls it neutrality. The scene is fast, dense, and structured around maritime schedules the way Flooded London's is structured around tide windows. The Crimson Corsairs' maritime interdiction aesthetic — the silence of something that learned patience from deep water, gene-forged on saltwater crocodile, sea eagle, and clouded leopard stock — feeds back into the civilian scene as the visual vocabulary of elevation culture: weight distribution for maritime traversal, quick-release for cable submersion, nothing that sinks in ways you cannot recover from. FLOATPACK's buoyant carry systems are the functional and aesthetic center of Scatter kit; the high-visibility tide-orange civilian variant and the matte-grey field variant coexist in the market in a way that makes the distinction visible and legible to everyone. VEKTORA's technician badges and lanyards run through the scene as dead credentials specific to this geography. The Makassar Crossing cable node — the junction every faction wants access to and the PFZ maintains — has its own scene built around the people who work it and the operators who orbit it. Darwin Forward's controlled aesthetic, NAF-aligned installations on high ground with clear maritime sightlines, creates a contrast with the PFZ's fluid improvisational visual culture that the Scatter scene exploits for raw material: the meeting of two aesthetics at a chokepoint where both are simultaneously present and neither is winning.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

The PRC's data cables run through PFZ water. The PFZ's economic model depends on cable transit fees and the leverage that comes from controlling the nodes. This arrangement functions because neither side can afford the alternative: PRC military seizure of the nodes triggers an NAF response from Darwin that the PRC's Scatter assets cannot match, and PFZ military capacity cannot sustain a direct confrontation with PRC autonomous platforms. The balance holds as long as no single party decides the cost of disruption is worth the gain. Project Amaterasu, when fully deployed, changes that calculation entirely — an AI combat system that doesn't require the human operator chains the PFZ's maritime interdiction doctrine is built to interrupt. The PRC knows this. The PFZ knows the PRC knows this. The deadline is Project Amaterasu's operational deployment, and both sides are running operations against that clock.

Beneath this: the Arafura Sea Lumicite shelf. Partially surveyed by a Shinkai Collective deep-water team operating under a PFZ research permit in 2061. The permit was commercial cover for something the Shinkai Collective hasn't fully disclosed. The survey data exists in three copies: one with the Collective, one lodged with PFZ Maritime Authority under a classification that prevents disclosure without a council vote, and one that was on a research vessel that went dark in the Timor Sea fourteen months ago.

Compounding this: the PFZ Maritime Council holds an undisclosed cable access agreement with the PRC, negotiated by a single Council member acting alone. The agreement creates a quarterly maintenance window during which PFZ monitoring is suspended — a window the PRC intends to use for Project Amaterasu telemetry testing. The next window opens in twenty-two days. New Batavia's infrastructure is strained beyond design capacity at 3.2 million residents, and the capital the PFZ needs for expansion requires monetizing either the cable agreement or the Arafura data — both of which it cannot disclose without triggering the crises those disclosures would create.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

TERRITORY	PFZ-governed (maritime) / contested (PRC data pressure, NAF strategic interest, Shinkai Collective deep-water operations)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable at PFZ nodes / collapsed in drowned zones / purpose-built on artificial islands
SURVEILLANCE	PFZ maritime sensors / PRC SIGINT / dark zones in the deep seabed approaches
CIVILIANS	adapted / new-geography pragmatism / the Scatter-born generation treats old maps as historical curiosities
BLACK MARKET	heavy (cable access tech, elevation permits for remaining lowland zones, gene-forged Drift management outside PRC programs)
PRIMARY RESOURCE	cable infrastructure / maritime passage fees / Arafura Sea Lumicite shelf (contested, partially surveyed)
GENE-FORGED PRESENT	Saltwater Crocs, Sea Eagles, Clouded Leopards (PFZ) / Tigers, Pangolins (PRC) / Eagles, Wolves (NAF-Darwin) / Ravens, Spotted Hyenas, Monitor Lizards (Void Walkers)
FACTION PRESSURE	PFZ dominant on paper / PRC sustained pressure beneath / NAF counterweight from Darwin / Shinkai Collective deep-water operations
MOBILITY	PFZ registered transit lanes (monitored) / elevation migrant informal maritime routes (dark) / deep-water Shinkai routes / Darwin military corridors

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Five power structures contest the Scatter. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging.

PFZ / CRIMSON CORSAIRS

Primary territorial controller. The Pacific Free Zone is a maritime confederation of port cities, elevated former coastal communities, and purpose-built artificial islands. The Crimson Corsairs are their military expression: gene-forged on saltwater crocodiles, sea eagles, and clouded leopards, trained for amphibious interdiction and maritime boarding operations. Their objective: maintain cable node control and transit fee revenue while managing the Project Amaterasu timeline, the Lumicite disclosure problem, and New Batavia's infrastructure crisis — without triggering the confrontation with PRC that the Scatter's balance is structured to prevent.

PRC / PACIFIC RIM COLLECTIVE

Sustained pressure. The Pacific Rim Collective's undersea data cable infrastructure routes through PFZ-controlled water. The Makassar platform — listed as a commercial logistics hub, operational as a military installation for eighteen months — trains SIGINT permanently on the cable nodes. Tiger and Pangolin gene-forged intelligence operators run collection across the Scatter. Their objective: achieve supervised cable node access sufficient to ensure Project Amaterasu telemetry runs cleanly through the infrastructure before operational deployment.

NAF / DARWIN FORWARD

Strategic counterweight. The North Atlantic Federation operates Darwin Forward as the most capable land-based military installation between India and New Zealand. Aurora Rangers — gene-forged on eagle and wolf stock — provide the power projection that keeps the PRC from treating the Scatter as an uncontested operational area. Their objective: maintain basing access and the deterrence balance while managing the classified annex that gives NAF unilateral operational authority in specific escalation scenarios the Australian Parliament approved without full disclosure.

SHINKAI COLLECTIVE

Deep-water research confederation. Operating at three hundred meters beneath the Arafura Sea for three years with deep-water gene-forged modifications and proprietary biosynthetic dive systems. Project Tethys has found a Lumicite deposit of unprecedented stability and scale. Their objective: complete the Arafura assessment, recover the missing vessel's survey data, and execute disclosure on a timeline that prevents any single faction from monopolizing the deposit — while maintaining the operational security that gives the Collective its only leverage.

VOID WALKERS

Unknown allegiance, unknown objective. Gene-forged on raven, spotted hyena, and monitor lizard stock. One confirmed presence in the Scatter, designation 'CURRENT,' methodology unknown. They have been in the Scatter for six months — longer than any confirmed Void Walker presence in a single territory. They are looking for whoever authorized the cable node corrosion operation. They will trade everything they have for a name. The most dangerous variable in the Scatter is the one nobody can read.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**MAKASSAR CROSSING (Strait Between Borneo and Sulawesi)**: The primary deep-water passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific transit lanes. The cable node cluster sits on the seabed at the strait's narrowest navigable point. PFZ and PRC have been watching each other across five kilometers of warm water for six years.
ZONE 2	**NEW BATAVIA (Elevated Jakarta, PFZ Administrative Hub)**: Old Jakarta is eight meters underwater at high tide. New Batavia was built on the Bogor highlands — 3.2 million residents in a city engineered for 2.8 million, sitting on the PFZ Council's undisclosed cable access agreement and the Arafura survey data.
ZONE 3	**DARWIN FORWARD (Northern Australia, NAF Strategic Base)**: NAF power projection point, Aurora Ranger command, and the classified annex that gives NAF unilateral authority the Australian Parliament approved without full disclosure.
ZONE 4	**THE SHELF (Drowned-Zone Settlement, Former South Jakarta)**: 14,000 people living on rooftops and upper stories three to five meters above high tide. The PFZ does not officially recognize the settlement. The settlement has not found this position persuasive.
ZONE 5	**ARAFURA DEEP (Shinkai Collective Operations Zone)**: Three hundred meters beneath the Arafura Sea. Shinkai Collective habitat modules anchored to a geological shelf edge. Project Tethys and a Lumicite deposit of unprecedented stability.
ZONE 6	**BANDA STATION (Eastern Scatter, Neutral Trade Hub)**: Repurposed offshore gas platform. The Scatter's neutral exchange where factions negotiate without admitting they're negotiating. Neutrality is not ideology. It is business model.
ZONE 7	**TIMOR DEEP PASSAGE (Transit Corridor, Darwin to Scatter)**: 650 kilometers of water every faction needs to cross and no faction fully controls. The acoustic shadow zone. The missing research vessel. Whatever is down there.

ZONE 1 MAKASSAR CROSSING

STRAIT BETWEEN BORNEO AND SULAWESI

SECURITY	active (PFZ Corsair patrol + PRC platform security)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (PFZ node) / purpose-built (PRC platform)
CIVILIANS	sparse (logistics workers, platform crews, monitoring staff)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (both sides, full overlap)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (PFZ/PRC standoff)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light (electronics, cable access hardware)
MOBILITY	open (water) / restricted (node approach zones)

FUNCTION The physical chokepoint where PFZ maritime sovereignty over the cable infrastructure meets PRC's need to access it. Every negotiation about the Scatter ultimately comes back to this strait.

CONTROLLER PFZ officially controls the water and the node. PRC controls its platform and the SIGINT capability trained permanently on the node. In practice, neither side controls the strait — they share it under a deterrence arrangement that is one incident away from collapse.

UNDER-SYSTEM Three of the six cable node clusters at this location are operating at 73% capacity due to seabed ecosystem growth that pre-dates the Upheaval but has accelerated dramatically since. The PFZ maintenance team that should have addressed this six months ago was pulled for 'security concerns.' The PRC SIGINT operation has detected the degradation. They have not told the PFZ.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS A cable node failure at this location drops PRC financial data routing by 31% globally. The PRC's response is not diplomatic. The PFZ, which caused the failure through maintenance neglect, faces the choice of admitting the neglect or allowing the PRC to characterize it as sabotage. Both options are bad. The PRC platform's 'commercial logistics' function activates.

DAY

AUTHORITY

PFZ Monitoring Station + Corsair patrol circuit

ECONOMY

Vessel transit logging, cable maintenance operations, PRC platform commercial cover activity

RISK

PRC SIGINT collection, vessel traffic creating cover for insertion teams

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Automated systems + reduced crew on both sides

ECONOMY

Unauthorized vessels transiting during reduced patrol coverage, deep-water Shinkai Collective activity

RISK

PRC platform launch of seabed survey drones toward cable nodes

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A PFZ Sea Eagle gene-forged operative perched on the monitoring station's upper deck at dawn, watching the PRC platform through optics that weren't designed for anything that has to blink, while the platform's own sensors track her tracking them — two pieces of expensive surveillance equipment staring at each other across five kilometers of glittering water.

FACTIONS PRESENT

PFZ Crimson Corsairs (Sea Eagle aerial, Saltwater Croc boarding teams) / PRC (platform security, Tiger & Pangolin intelligence) / Shinkai Collective (research vessels, deep-water operations)

CIVILIAN NEED Stable cable data routing. Logistics workers and monitoring staff depend on the standoff remaining a standoff.

OPERATOR ACCESS PFZ monitoring station accepts contractor credentials. PRC platform is closed. The water between them is open but under dual surveillance from both sides.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A PRC commercial vessel requests an emergency maintenance stop at the PFZ node. The manifest lists spare parts. The cargo weight is 800 kilograms over manifest.
- A Corsair aerial team intercepts a vessel with no transponder running the cable node approach zone — the crew claims navigation equipment failure; the vessel has military-grade seabed mapping hardware.
- A Shinkai Collective research vessel docks at the PFZ monitoring station requesting data access that requires council authorization they don't have.
- A PFZ maintenance diver surfaces early and won't say what she found. She asks to speak to someone outside the chain of command.
- The PRC platform broadcasts a 'technical emergency' request for strait transit — a vessel launch that would pass directly over the cable node cluster.
- An operator's communications intercept picks up a data fragment in a PRC encryption standard from a source that shouldn't be in the strait.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Six seabed drones from the PRC platform running a mapping pass of the cable node cluster — this is the fourth time this week.
- A Shinkai Collective submersible surfaces at an unregistered point between the node and the PRC platform.
- A vessel launches from the platform with no logged destination, running dark.
- The node monitoring system triggers an anomaly alert — the seabed beneath three clusters shows resonance readings consistent with Lumicite.
- A Corsair night patrol reports a contact in the water near the node approach zone — gene-forged, based on movement profile. Not a Corsair. Not PRC stock.
- The maintenance diver who surfaced early is gone from the station. Her dive log shows she went back in.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The cable node degradation is not ecosystem growth. It is a slow-acting corrosion agent introduced during a maintenance window two years ago. The PRC knows who did it. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the corrosion is real; the attribution is disputed]
- The Shinkai Collective's research permit for this zone covers a seabed area that includes the Lumicite anomaly. They knew before the survey. [TRUE]
- The PRC platform has been operational as a military installation for eighteen months. The 'commercial logistics' cover was dropped internally six months ago. No one told the PFZ. [TRUE]
- A Project Amaterasu test run used this strait's cable infrastructure as a communications relay. The PFZ monitoring station recorded the traffic without recognizing what it was. The log is still in the system. [TRAP — the log exists but the Amaterasu interpretation is planted by a PRC intelligence operation trying to discredit PFZ monitoring capability]
- The maintenance diver found something on the seabed that wasn't cable infrastructure. She brought a piece of it up. She has it. [TRUE]
- The PFZ Council has a private agreement with the PRC for supervised cable node access, negotiated eighteen months ago and never disclosed to the Corsair field units. [TRUE]

CORSAIR LT. RIMA SOEKARNO

PFZ Monitoring Station watch commander

CAN GET Real-time cable node status data, Corsair patrol schedules, the anomaly logs the station has been filing without receiving responses to.

WANTS Someone to explain the anomaly readings. Not a cover story — an actual explanation.

FEARS That the PRC platform launch she authorized last week as a 'navigation emergency' was exactly what she thought it was and she approved it anyway.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her rotation ends in eleven days. Her replacement has a reputation for accommodation with PRC interests. She knows this.

TECH OPERATOR DIAN KARTIKA

PFZ maintenance diver

CAN GET	What is on the seabed that isn't cable infrastructure. Seabed approach maps. The piece she brought up.
WANTS	To understand what she found before someone figures out she has it.
FEARS	The Shinkai Collective researcher who was at the station the day she surfaced early. The way that researcher looked at her.
CURRENT PRESSURE	Her dive log has been accessed twice since she returned. Not by anyone on the station roster.

ZONE 2 NEW BATAVIA ELEVATED JAKARTA, PFZ ADMINISTRATIVE HUB

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (purpose-built, well-maintained)
CIVILIANS	packed (3.2 million residents, managed population)
SURVEILLANCE	PFZ sensor net + cameras
FACTION PRESSURE	PFZ dominant (PRC commercial presence, NAF diplomatic mission, Shinkai Collective research center)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	moderate (elevation-zone access documents, Drift management outside PRC programs, pre-Upheaval Old City salvage)
MOBILITY	open (city) / checkpointed (highland access, Old City approach zones)

FUNCTION PFZ administrative capital, regional trade hub, and the largest single population center in the Scatter.

CONTROLLER PFZ Maritime Council. The city administration is competent, technocratic, and genuinely invested in the population it governs. It is also sitting on the PFZ Council's undisclosed cable access agreement and the Arafura survey data, and has been for eighteen months.

UNDER-SYSTEM New Batavia's water and power infrastructure was engineered for 2.8 million residents. Current population is 3.2 million and growing, driven by Scatter elevation migrants with nowhere else viable to go. The city works. It will not continue to work at this growth rate without infrastructure expansion that requires capital the PFZ does not have without either monetizing the cable access agreement or the Arafura survey data — both of which it cannot disclose without triggering the crises those disclosures would create.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS Power rationing in outer districts. The city administration frames this as 'load balancing.' The outer districts, which are disproportionately occupied by elevation migrants without legacy residency rights, understand what load balancing means when it is always their district that gets balanced. The PFZ's governance legitimacy in the Scatter depends heavily on New Batavia working. When it visibly doesn't work for a specific population, the PFZ Council's claim to represent the region's interests gets contested in a way it cannot easily manage.

DAY

AUTHORITY

PFZ city administration + Maritime Council offices

ECONOMY

Regional trade, Council diplomacy, Shinkai research operations, PRC and NAF commercial presence

RISK

PRC intelligence collection against Council officials, NAF diplomatic pressure over Darwin Forward coordination

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

PFZ security force + Corsair rapid reaction in the harbor

ECONOMY

Old City salvage (dive permits technically required, enforcement technically inconsistent), black-market elevation documents, gene-forged Drift support networks

RISK

Elevation migrant unrest in outer districts when rationing hits, Shinkai Collective operatives moving through the city on tasks unconnected to their research center cover

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The Old City at 0600 through harbor water so clear you can see the street signs — still readable after twenty years, the traffic indicators pointing in directions that no longer exist, one light that still somehow cycles green-yellow-red-green every 47 seconds, powered by something on the drowned grid that has outlasted everything else.

FACTIONS PRESENT

PFZ Maritime Council & city administration / PRC commercial attachés & Pangolin intelligence / NAF diplomatic mission / Shinkai Collective research center

CIVILIAN NEED Water and power that doesn't get rationed based on residency classification. The outer district elevation migrants are asking for infrastructure the city was not designed to provide.

OPERATOR ACCESS Open city with PFZ sensor coverage. Old City dive approaches are technically restricted but practically accessible with the right contacts.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A PFZ Council official asks operators for a private meeting. She has documentation of the undisclosed cable access agreement. She wants it in the right hands before she is transferred.
- A PRC commercial attaché invites operators to a trade reception. The other guests include two NAF diplomatic staff and a Shinkai Collective researcher who definitely isn't there for the food.
- An elevation migrant community in the outer district has organized around a leader with military experience. PFZ security is calling it 'a potential public order situation.' The community is calling it 'asking for water.'
- A Corsair gene-forged operator is in the city's Drift support clinic — off duty, unregistered, Stage 2 and declining to discuss it with the PRC medical team that has official clinical authority over PRC gene-forged operators in the Scatter.
- An Old City dive guide offers operators an unofficial tour. The site she wants to show them is not on any dive permit registry and is not in the former residential grid.
- The Shinkai Collective researcher from the cable node incident is in New Batavia. She is meeting with a PFZ Council member. The meeting is not on the official schedule.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Outer district rationing triggers a gathering that is not quite a protest yet but is moving in that direction.
- A dive team surfaces in the harbor with a recovered piece of pre-Upheaval equipment from the Old City. One piece is labeled with a Lumicite research facility's designation.
- A Shinkai Collective submersible surfaces at the unauthorized point on the harbor's southern margin.
- The PFZ security service is following a target through the city — discreetly, but operators good at this kind of work can see it. The target appears to be the Council official from the daytime encounter, if she was encountered.
- A gene-forged Pangolin — PRC intelligence stock — is moving through the market district in civilian clothes, collecting something from three separate drop points.

- A message arrives for operators from an address they don't recognize. It contains current Arafura shelf coordinates and the words: 'Before they do.'

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Arafura survey data shows a Lumicite deposit large enough to solve New Batavia's infrastructure funding problem permanently. The Council knows. They are not announcing it because announcing it ends PFZ sovereignty over the Scatter. [TRUE]
- The Old City light that still cycles is not on any remaining power grid. Nobody has explained it. The PFZ engineering team that investigated filed a report that was classified. [UNCLEAR]
- The Shinkai Collective's New Batavia research center is not a research center. It is a node in an independent deep-water communications network that does not route through the cable infrastructure the PRC monitors. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- The elevation migrant leader with military experience is a former Corsair who was gene-forged and is in Stage 3 Drift. The PFZ knows. They have been hoping the situation resolves without intervention. [TRUE]
- The undisclosed cable access agreement gives the PRC something more than node access — it gives them a maintenance window during which PFZ monitoring is suspended. The window is quarterly. The next window is in three weeks. [TRAP — the agreement exists; this specific provision is an EO fabrication designed to inflame PFZ-PRC relations]
- The piece of equipment from the Old City is a data storage device from a pre-Upheaval Lumicite research facility that was operating under the former coastal Jakarta district. The data is intact. [TRUE]

COUNCILOR LARAS WIBOWO

PFZ Maritime Council, Infrastructure Portfolio

CAN GET The cable access agreement document, Arafura survey data access (partial), New Batavia infrastructure funding models that make the Lumicite disclosure inevitable.

WANTS The agreement made public before the next cable maintenance window. She has been unable to do it through Council channels.

FEARS That she has been followed for six days and the person following her is good enough that she can't confirm it.

CURRENT PRESSURE	A Council vote on 'infrastructure development partnerships' — language that formalizes the cable agreement without disclosing it — is scheduled for four days from now.

CORSAIR (RETIRED) BAGAS SANTOSO

Elevation migrant community leader, Stage 3 Drift

CAN GET	Corsair tactical knowledge, Scatter navigation that doesn't touch PFZ registered channels, gene-forged informal network contacts across PRC and PFZ programs.
WANTS	Water access for 4,000 people in the outer district. Clean and stable. Not rationed.
FEARS	What he is becoming. What he might do if the water keeps getting cut.
CURRENT PRESSURE	A PFZ security team visited the district yesterday. They weren't there about water.

ZONE 3 DARWIN FORWARD

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA, NAF STRATEGIC BASE

SECURITY	lockdown (NAF military installation + Australian defense force)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (NAF-spec, well-resourced)
CIVILIANS	sparse (base personnel, attached contractors, Darwin city population adjacent)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (NAF systems)
FACTION PRESSURE	NAF dominant / Australian government friction on jurisdictional edge cases
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light (exists outside the wire, not inside)

MOBILITY	open (military airfield, naval access) / restricted (base access requires clearance)
FUNCTION	NAF power projection into the Scatter and the western Pacific. The installation that changes the PRC's operational calculus.
CONTROLLER	NAF Aurora Ranger command on base. Australian Defense Force at the perimeter — a jurisdictional seam that creates operational gaps both sides manage awkwardly.
UNDER-SYSTEM	The NAF-Australia agreement has a classified annex that the Australian Parliament approved without full disclosure of its contents. The annex gives NAF unilateral authority to conduct operations from Darwin Forward without Australian parliamentary notification in specific escalation scenarios. One of those scenarios — 'threat to cable infrastructure integrity' — is ambiguously worded enough to cover the Makassar Crossing situation. The Australian officials who know this are working very hard to ensure the situation at Makassar never officially reaches the threshold.
WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS	A NAF unilateral operation from Darwin Forward — conducted without Australian notification — becomes public. The Australian government's position becomes untenable. The NAF loses its Australian basing access within 90 days of the revelation becoming a political crisis. The Scatter loses its counterweight. The PRC recalibrates.

DAY

AUTHORITY

NAF Aurora Ranger command

ECONOMY

Military logistics, intelligence operations, contractor support, Scatter-wide surveillance from NAF platforms

RISK

Australian jurisdictional disputes over specific operations, PRC intelligence collection against NAF technical staff

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

NAF security + Australian perimeter

ECONOMY

The Darwin civilian strip outside the wire — contractors, operators, logistics workers, information brokers

RISK

The jurisdictional seam. The Australian perimeter that the NAF's internal systems don't fully monitor. The gap between what NAF records and what actually comes through the wire.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

An Aurora Ranger in full kit at the base perimeter at dusk, looking north across the Timor Sea at weather she knows is not weather — atmospheric disturbance pattern consistent with NAF atmospheric monitoring platforms that officially don't operate this far south — while an Australian Defense Force corporal twenty meters away watches her watch the horizon and writes nothing in his patrol log.

FACTIONS PRESENT

NAF Aurora Rangers (Eagle & Wolf templates) / Australian Defense Force (perimeter jurisdiction) / PRC intelligence collection (commercial cover in Darwin city) / Shinkai Collective (academic liaison cover)

CIVILIAN NEED Clarity on the jurisdictional boundary between NAF and Australian authority. The Darwin civilian population adjacent to the base lives in the gap.

OPERATOR ACCESS Base access requires NAF clearance or contractor credentials. The civilian strip outside the wire is open. The jurisdictional seam at the perimeter is the operational opportunity.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A NAF intelligence officer asks operators for 'contractor support' on a task that falls into the classified annex's ambiguous escalation threshold. Officially, she can't ask them. She is asking them.
- An Australian parliamentary liaison is on base for an 'inspection' — a politely adversarial process that both sides have choreographed into a ritual of mutual non-disclosure.
- A PRC commercial vessel has declared a navigation emergency and is requesting Darwin port access. NAF command says no. Australian Maritime Authority says yes. The vessel is in the harbor.
- A NAF technical team is working on a system that the Darwin Forward manifest doesn't list. The Australian liaison's escort route has been quietly adjusted to avoid the building.
- A gene-forged Aurora Ranger — Wolf template, Stage 1 — requests a meeting with operators outside official channels. She has seen something on a surveillance platform output she was not cleared to see.
- The research vessel that went dark in the Timor Sea fourteen months ago — the one carrying Arafura survey data — was last registered to a Darwin Forward contractor. The contractor's records are in the base system.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Someone is in the civilian strip asking questions about the missing research vessel. They are not being subtle. They are also not NAF, Australian, or PFZ.
- A Corsair operator — off duty, in civilian clothes, outside their normal operational range — is in the Darwin strip making contact with someone.
- A NAF platform returns from a Timor Sea run with a logged mission that doesn't match the time it was gone.
- The Australian perimeter logs a breach — motion sensor, sector 7, no visual confirmation. The NAF response team treats it as equipment fault. The Australian corporal who reported it is not satisfied with that.
- Three contractors are loading unmarked equipment onto a vessel at the Darwin civilian port. The vessel is registered to the same contractor company as the missing research vessel.

- A data packet arrives at operators' comms from an origin point consistent with deep water. It contains partial Arafura survey coordinates and the words: 'The Collective found it. Darwin knows.'

RUMORS (1D6)

- The missing research vessel is not missing. It is anchored at a location that doesn't appear on civilian charts, 340 kilometers northwest of Darwin. The survey data is intact and onboard. [TRUE]
- The classified annex to the NAF-Australia agreement has already been used once — an operation that was publicly attributed to PFZ Corsairs. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- The Aurora Ranger Wolf-template operator has seen Project Amaterasu telemetry in the surveillance data. Running through cable infrastructure. Testing. [TRUE]
- An Australian official has a copy of the classified annex and is planning to leak it. NAF counterintelligence is aware. [TRAP — the 'official' is a NAF counterintelligence asset testing leak attribution channels]
- The Shinkai Collective has a liaison at Darwin Forward operating under academic cover. They brief NAF intelligence quarterly. The PFZ does not know the Collective has this relationship. [TRUE]
- The Arafura Lumicite deposit is directly under the maritime boundary between PFZ and Australian territorial waters. The location was chosen deliberately. [UNCLEAR — and whoever chose it has not surfaced]

AURORA RANGER SGT. MAYA CHEN

Wolf template, Stage 1 Drift, Darwin Forward intelligence support

CAN GET NAF surveillance platform output data, the missing research vessel's last known position, the classified annex language around cable infrastructure escalation threshold.

WANTS To understand what Project Amaterasu telemetry is doing in the cable data before it matters that she saw it.

FEARS That asking the question officially puts her in a category of people whose questions get managed rather than answered.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her annual evaluation includes a Drift assessment. She is managing Stage 1. The assessment is in eight days. Stage 1 is manageable. She is not certain she is still Stage 1.

CPL. JAMES NGUYEN

Australian Defense Force, Darwin Forward perimeter

CAN GET	The ADF perimeter patrol logs — the real ones, which differ from the NAF-integrated system — and specifically the sector 7 breach record that was closed as equipment fault.
WANTS	Someone to tell him what actually came through sector 7.
FEARS	That he will report it officially and the answer will be that he saw nothing and the follow-on is a transfer request from NAF command.
CURRENT PRESSURE	He has been watching the civilian port. The contractors with the unmarked equipment were back last night.

ZONE 4 THE SHELF

DROWNED-ZONE SETTLEMENT, FORMER SOUTH JAKARTA

SECURITY	none (PFZ does not patrol what it does not recognize)
INFRASTRUCTURE	failing (improvised power taps from drowned grid, rainwater collection, solar panels on every flat surface)
CIVILIANS	packed (14,000 in a space engineered for none)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (no PFZ sensors, no faction coverage, residents maintain their own watch)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (no faction claims this place formally; all factions use it informally)
CONTAMINATION	present (saltwater corrosion, drowned-zone biological activity, unmonitored waste)
BLACK MARKET	heavy (the Shelf IS the black market for the southern Scatter)

MOBILITY	open (water access from any direction) / hazardous (pontoon infrastructure, tidal shifts, drowned structure navigation)

FUNCTION The informal economy capital of the Scatter. Everything the PFZ's regulated markets cannot or will not provide moves through the Shelf.

CONTROLLER Ibu Naga — a title, not a name. The current holder is a former PFZ Maritime Authority logistics officer who resigned eleven years ago over the elevation residency classification system and has been running the Shelf's resource allocation ever since. She controls nothing through force. She controls everything through knowing who needs what and making sure it arrives.

UNDER-SYSTEM The drowned grid beneath the Shelf still carries power. Not much — degraded, saltwater-compromised, unpredictable — but enough that the settlement's improvised tap system pulls current from infrastructure that officially stopped functioning twenty years ago. The taps are managed by a single electrical engineer and her three apprentices. If the drowned grid fails completely, or if the PFZ cuts the highland transmission lines the taps are actually drawing from, fourteen thousand people lose power simultaneously.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS Power loss on the Shelf means loss of water purification, medical refrigeration, and the communication relays that connect the settlement to everything else. The Shelf doesn't riot. It disperses — fourteen thousand people moving into New Batavia's outer districts simultaneously, overwhelming the highland infrastructure that was already strained at 3.2 million. The PFZ's policy of non-recognition makes this worse: there is no contingency plan for a population that officially isn't there.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Ibu Naga's distribution network + informal neighborhood watch

ECONOMY

Salvage brokerage, equipment repair, gene-forged Drift management clinics (unlicensed, effective), forged documentation, Old City dive staging

RISK

Structural collapse of pontoon infrastructure during tidal peak, PFZ flyover surveillance that the settlement cannot prevent but can usually predict

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

The watch crews + whatever gene-forged operators are sleeping in the settlement that night

ECONOMY

Deep-dive salvage runs into the Old City, gene-forged informal network meetings, contraband transit (cable access hardware, Lumicite samples, weapons moving to or from undisclosed buyers)

RISK

Tidal surge. The Shelf is built for normal tidal range. Abnormal surge events — increasingly common — put the lowest platforms underwater for hours. People drown. The PFZ does not record these deaths.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A child on a pontoon walkway at low tide, lying flat on her stomach, watching through the gaps in the planking as a school of fish moves through what used to be a living room three meters below — the wallpaper still visible, the furniture long dissolved, the fish treating the doorframe as geography.

FACTIONS PRESENT

No faction claims the Shelf formally. PRC Pangolin operatives visit for procurement. Shinkai Collective researchers arrive by submersible. Corsair AWOL personnel shelter here. Every faction uses the Shelf informally.

CIVILIAN NEED Stable power that doesn't depend on the drowned grid or PFZ highland taps. Medical infrastructure for 14,000 people who officially do not exist.

OPERATOR ACCESS Open from any water approach. No credentials required. Ibu Naga's distribution network is the only authority that matters, and it runs on relationships, not paperwork.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A gene-forged Clouded Leopard — Corsair stock, Stage 2 Drift, AWOL from her unit for nine days — is in the Shelf's unlicensed clinic. She has information about the cable maintenance window but will only share it with someone who can guarantee she doesn't go back.
- A PRC Pangolin operative is in the Shelf, undisguised, buying something from three different vendors. Not hiding. That's what makes it concerning.
- Ibu Naga sends word she wants to meet operators. She has a problem: a salvage team brought up something from the Old City that has attracted attention from people she doesn't recognize.
- A structural engineer from New Batavia is on the Shelf without authorization, surveying the pontoon infrastructure. He says he's documenting conditions for the Council. His equipment suggests he's mapping something specific beneath the settlement.
- Two Shinkai Collective researchers arrive by submersible at the Shelf's southern edge. They are looking for the maintenance diver, Dian Kartika, and they are not asking politely.
- A fight breaks out at the salvage market over a recovered component that both parties claim to have contracted for. The component is a sealed data core from the drowned grid — the kind that stores routing information for the pre-Upheaval cable network.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A tidal surge warning. The watch crews are moving people to upper platforms. Operators have forty minutes before the lowest level floods. Something valuable is on the lowest level.
- A dive team surfaces with a sealed container from the Old City. They open it on the pontoon. What's inside glows faintly blue. They close the container very quickly.
- Three armed individuals arrive by fast boat, looking for a specific person. They are not Corsair, not PRC, not NAF. Their equipment is Shinkai Collective spec.

- The drowned grid beneath the Shelf surges — lights flicker, power taps spike, and for eleven seconds the Old City streetlights below illuminate the submerged grid in a pattern that looks deliberate.
- Ibu Naga's distribution runners are making an unscheduled delivery to the southern edge. The cargo is medical supplies, destination unlisted. Someone important is being treated off-grid.
- A Void Walker signal. Not a sighting — a signal, embedded in the Shelf's communication relay, cycling for approximately four hours before anyone notices. The message, when decoded, is a set of coordinates in the Arafura Sea.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The drowned grid still works because something beneath the Old City is powering it. Not the highland transmission lines. Something else. The electrical engineer knows but hasn't told Ibu Naga. [TRUE]
- Ibu Naga is a former PFZ intelligence officer, not logistics. Her resignation was staged. She still reports to someone on the Council. [TRAP — fabricated by PRC intelligence to undermine Shelf trust in its own leadership]
- The Shelf sits directly over a pre-Upheaval Lumicite research installation. The installation is intact. The Old City light that cycles green-yellow-red is its surface indicator. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the installation exists; the light connection is unconfirmed]
- Three of the Shelf's gene-forged residents are Stage 4 Drift. PFZ Drift protocol requires immediate containment at Stage 4. No one on the Shelf intends to report them. [TRUE]
- A faction — unknown, well-funded — has been buying salvaged Old City data cores through intermediaries for eight months. They now have enough routing data to map the entire pre-Upheaval cable network, including nodes that don't appear on current charts. [TRUE]
- The PRC Pangolin operative visiting the Shelf is not on a PRC operation. She's buying Drift medication for herself. She's Stage 3 and her program doesn't know. [TRUE]

IBU NAGA

Shelf administrator, former PFZ Maritime Authority

CAN GET Black-market supply chain access across the southern Scatter, Old City dive crew contacts, gene-forged informal network introductions, the salvaged item that attracted unwanted attention.

WANTS A power solution for the Shelf that doesn't depend on the drowned grid or PFZ highland taps. She knows both are precarious.

FEARS A PFZ Council decision to formally acknowledge the Shelf — which sounds like recognition but would actually mean jurisdiction, regulation, and the end of the settlement's independence.

CURRENT PRESSURE The people asking about the salvaged item are getting closer to asking her directly, and she doesn't have an answer she likes.

REZA PRAKOSO

Electrical engineer, drowned grid specialist

CAN GET Drowned grid schematics, power distribution maps for the Old City substructure, the location of the power source that shouldn't exist.

WANTS Equipment. Specifically, deep-water rated diagnostic hardware that can survive the drowned grid's corrosive environment long enough to map the anomalous power source.

FEARS That mapping the power source will attract exactly the kind of attention that ends the Shelf's ability to operate in a dark zone.

CURRENT PRESSURE The grid surged three times last week. The surges are getting stronger. His taps aren't rated for what's coming through.

SRI HARTONO

Salvage crew boss, Old City specialist

CAN GET Dive access to specific sectors of the drowned grid, recovered artifacts and data cores, underwater route knowledge that doesn't appear on any chart.

WANTS Buyers for three data cores she can't sell through normal channels because the content is too sensitive for the usual black-market brokers to handle.

FEARS The Shinkai Collective researchers who arrived asking for Dian Kartika. They asked Sri about dive routes before they asked about the diver.

CURRENT PRESSURE	One of her crew didn't surface from a dive two days ago. The dive site was the pre-Upheaval research installation. She hasn't reported it because reporting it means admitting the installation exists.

ZONE 5 ARAFURA DEEP

SHINKAI COLLECTIVE OPERATIONS ZONE

SECURITY	none (no surface faction can project force to this depth)
INFRASTRUCTURE	purpose-built (Shinkai habitat modules, experimental, three years operational)
CIVILIANS	none (research personnel only, rotating crews of 12—18)
SURVEILLANCE	Shinkai internal only (the deep Arafura is a true dark zone)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (Shinkai dominant by default; no other faction has the capability to operate at this depth)
CONTAMINATION	present (thermal vent chemistry, uncharacterized biological agents, Lumicite resonance at extraction-adjacent frequencies)
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	restricted (Shinkai submersibles only, depth-rated equipment required, surface access via two ascent corridors)

FUNCTION The Shinkai Collective's deep-water research and extraction assessment operation. The location where the Scatter's most consequential secret is being studied, catalogued, and — increasingly — prepared for disclosure on terms the Collective controls.

CONTROLLER Dr. Keiko Watanabe runs the research operation. The Collective's governing council sets policy from the surface. The gap between Watanabe's field decisions and the council's directives has been widening for eight months. Watanabe has been making choices the council hasn't authorized because the council doesn't have the context to make them. She is right about this. She is also aware that being right about this is not the same as being authorized.

UNDER-SYSTEM The geothermal tap powering the habitat modules is operating within safe parameters. The problem is that the Lumicite deposit interacts with geothermal energy in ways the Collective's models didn't predict. The deposit pulses. The pulses are regular, increasing in frequency, and correlate with the power surges on the drowned grid two hundred kilometers north — the same surges that are rattling the Shelf's electrical infrastructure. The Collective's engineers have documented this correlation. They have not explained it. The working theory — which Watanabe has not shared with the surface council — is that the pre-Upheaval research installation beneath the Old City and the Arafura deposit are connected by geological infrastructure that predates the Upheaval by a significant margin. How significant is the question.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS A Lumicite resonance event at depth disrupts the habitat modules' power systems and forces emergency ascent. The ascent corridors have capacity for the full crew but not the research data — physical samples and equipment must be abandoned. If the habitat is evacuated, the PFZ and PRC learn the Collective's exact operating location from the emergency surface signal. Every faction with Arafura interests converges on the site. The Collective's three-year operational advantage evaporates in hours.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Watanabe's research schedule governs operations (day/night distinction is artificial at depth — the team runs on 18-hour operational cycles)

ECONOMY

Core sampling, geological survey, Lumicite resonance mapping, biological cataloguing of the deep vent communities

RISK

Equipment failure at depth. The habitat modules were rated for two years. They have been operational for three. Maintenance windows are getting shorter.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Skeleton crew, automated monitoring

ECONOMY

Data processing, sample analysis, communications relay to Collective surface assets

RISK

The things that move in the deep Arafura during the Collective's rest cycle. The external cameras record biological activity that the research team's marine biologists cannot classify. Two of the camera feeds have been damaged by contact with something large enough to stress the housing. Watanabe has reviewed the footage. She has not distributed it.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The viewport of Habitat Module 3 at rest-cycle lighting — dim blue, the deep water outside black except where the thermal vents throw orange light across the seabed — and in that light, the Lumicite deposit's surface glowing faintly in response to the geothermal pulse, a rhythm that looks less like geology and more like breathing.

FACTIONS PRESENT

Shinkai Collective (dominant by default — sole deep-water capability) / Unknown party (metallic object on approach, origin unidentified)

CIVILIAN NEED None. No civilian population. The research crew's need is survival: habitat modules past rated service life, resonance events increasing, and the question of when to leave before they have to.

OPERATOR ACCESS Requires Shinkai Collective cooperation, depth-rated equipment, and submersible transit through one of two ascent corridors. No faction can reach this zone independently except the Collective.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A core sample extraction triggers a localized resonance event. Equipment within six meters of the sample site shuts down for ninety seconds. When it restarts, the Lumicite in the sample is inert. The deposit beneath the sample site is not.
- A Collective submersible returns from a survey run with hull damage consistent with biological contact. The pilot describes the contact as 'deliberate and investigative.' The hull cameras recorded three seconds of footage before the lens cracked.
- Watanabe requests operators accompany a dive team to a secondary site she has not disclosed to the Collective council. The site contains structures that are not geological.
- A depth-rated communications buoy surfaces in the ascent corridor. It is not Shinkai Collective equipment. The message it carries is encrypted in a standard the research team does not recognize.
- One of the habitat modules' external sensors detects a metallic object on approach from the east at depth. Not biological. Not Collective. Moving slowly, on a trajectory that terminates at the habitat.
- The geothermal tap's output spikes for forty-five seconds. During the spike, every Lumicite sample in the research lab resonates simultaneously. After the spike, three samples have changed color.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- External camera feed shows something at the edge of thermal vent illumination. Large. Not catalogued. Watching the habitat with what the marine biologist on duty describes as 'orientation behavior.' It doesn't leave for four hours.
- A power fluctuation in the habitat's communications array coincides with a burst transmission on a frequency the Collective does not use. The transmis-

sion came from inside the habitat's communications range. Nothing is inside the communications range.

- Watanabe is awake during rest cycle, reviewing the geological survey data for the corridor between the Arafura deposit and the Old City installation. She has found something she wants operators to see before the morning crew arrives.
- The metallic object detected earlier has stopped. It is 200 meters from the habitat. It is not transmitting. Watanabe wants it recovered. She does not want the recovery logged.
- A crew member reports hearing rhythmic vibration through the habitat hull. The vibration matches the Lumicite pulse frequency. No mechanical source is identified.
- The ascent corridor's upper buoy triggers an intrusion alert. Something is descending. Not a Collective submersible. Not transmitting identification.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Arafura Lumicite deposit is not a deposit. It is a structure. The geological survey data, when mapped in three dimensions, shows geometry that is not natural. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the geometry is anomalous; the interpretation is Watanabe's, not confirmed]
- The Shinkai Collective's governing council has authorized a disclosure timeline. Watanabe is ahead of it because she believes the council's timeline doesn't account for what the PRC will do when the cable maintenance window opens. [TRUE]
- The biological entities near the habitat are Lumicite-adapted. They respond to the deposit's resonance patterns. The Collective has footage. The footage is classified above Watanabe's access level. She has seen it anyway. [TRUE]
- A second faction has deep-water capability in the Arafura. Not the PRC, not the PFZ, not the NAF. The metallic object is theirs. [UNCLEAR — and Watanabe does not know who else could operate at this depth]
- The connection between the Arafura deposit and the Old City installation runs through a geological conduit that the pre-Upheaval research facility was built to study. The facility's data — on the missing research vessel — maps the entire conduit. [TRUE]
- Watanabe's field decisions have not just diverged from council directives. She has been in communication with a second Collective operation that the council doesn't know exists. [TRAP — planted in Collective communications by PRC signals intelligence to create internal fracture]

DR. KEIKO WATANABE

Shinkai Collective lead researcher (also hub-level wildcard contact)

CAN GET Arafura survey data (the Collective's copy), deep-water geological mapping, Lumicite resonance research, the secondary site location, the unclassified footage.

WANTS Operators capable of reaching the missing research vessel and recovering its data before Darwin Forward's contractors do. She cannot send Collective assets to the vessel location without disclosing the operation to the surface council.

FEARS That the resonance events are accelerating toward a threshold she cannot predict and does not have the data to model without the missing vessel's survey records.

CURRENT PRESSURE The metallic object. If it belongs to a faction with deep-water capability she doesn't know about, her three-year operational security advantage is already gone.

ENGINEER HADI SURANTO

Shinkai Collective, habitat systems specialist

CAN GET Geothermal tap specifications, habitat module stress data, the engineering reports that detail exactly how far past rated service life the modules are operating.

WANTS Authorization to begin decommission planning. The modules will fail. The question is whether the Collective leaves on a timeline or in an emergency.

FEARS The resonance events. Every spike stresses the modules in ways the original specs didn't model. He has been running calculations on cascading structural failure scenarios during rest cycles.

CURRENT PRESSURE Module 2's pressure seal integrity dropped below threshold three days ago. He repaired it. The repair will hold for approximately six weeks.

MARINE BIOLOGIST SITI RAHAYU

Shinkai Collective, deep fauna specialist

CAN GET	Biological survey data for the deep Arafura, species catalogues, the camera footage of the large unclassified entity, behavioral analysis of Lumicite-responsive organisms.
WANTS	Someone outside the Collective to review her data. Her conclusions about the deep fauna's relationship with the Lumicite deposit are, in her words, 'correct and unpublishable.'
FEARS	The entity on the camera footage. Not because it's dangerous — because its behavior suggests awareness of the habitat's presence in a way that implies something about Lumicite-adapted biology that she is not ready to put in a report.
CURRENT PRESSURE	She has been asked to classify the camera footage. She does not know what classification to assign.

ZONE 6 BANDA STATION

EASTERN SCATTER, NEUTRAL TRADE HUB

SECURITY	light (station security force, 40 personnel, armed with nonlethal deterrents and a reputation for applying them creatively)
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (original gas platform systems repurposed beyond design parameters, frequent maintenance cycles)
CIVILIANS	normal (2,000 permanent residents, 500—1,500 transient population depending on trade cycle)
SURVEILLANCE	informant net (every faction runs assets on the station; the station security force knows who most of them are and considers this a feature)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (all factions present, none dominant, balance maintained by mutual commercial dependency)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	heavy (the station's primary economic function)
MOBILITY	

open (deep-water mooring, helipad, submersible dock added by Shinkai Collective as part of a trade agreement)

FUNCTION The Scatter's neutral exchange. Where factions negotiate without admitting they're negotiating, intelligence changes hands under commercial cover, and operators find work from clients who can't advertise.

CONTROLLER The five-member operating council. Current chair is Mas Eko, a former PFZ commercial shipping magnate who left the PFZ trade network over a fee dispute and has been profiting from being outside it ever since. The council's authority extends exactly as far as the station's usefulness does. No further.

UNDER-SYSTEM The station's power generation is the original gas platform system — designed for industrial extraction, repurposed for a mixed-use settlement of 2,000. The system works. It works the way a machine works when you have been asking it to do something other than what it was built for, for fifteen years. The maintenance team keeps it running through expertise and improvisation. The replacement parts required to keep improvising are manufactured in PRC industrial zones. If the PRC decides to restrict parts supply to the station, the power system fails within four months.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS Power rationing on Banda Station kills the cold storage that the station's food supply depends on. The transient population leaves within a week. The permanent population faces a choice between abandoning their livelihoods and staying on a platform with declining life support. The factions lose their neutral exchange point. Intelligence sharing, backchannel negotiations, and the informal agreements that keep the Scatter's faction relationships from going kinetic lose their venue.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Station security + operating council oversight

ECONOMY

Official trade exchange, cargo brokerage, vessel servicing, information market (thinly disguised as a consulting service the station taxes at 4%)

RISK

Deal disputes escalating to violence, faction operatives breaking neutrality protocol, PFZ or PRC attempting to leverage commercial agreements into political influence

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Station security (reduced shift) + the informal understanding that certain business happens after hours and station security's job is to ensure it happens without structural damage

ECONOMY

Intelligence exchange, private negotiations between faction representatives who are officially not on the station, operator contract offers, gene-forged Drift management

RISK

Assassination. Banda Station has had four in fifteen years. Each one nearly ended the station's neutrality. The operating council's response to assassination is collective punishment against the responsible faction's commercial interests on the station.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The main trade floor at midday — a converted gas processing deck with the original industrial infrastructure still visible above the market stalls, a PRC Tiger gene-forged drinking coffee six meters from a Corsair Sea Eagle, both pretending the other doesn't exist while their handlers negotiate something at a table between them that neither operative is cleared to know about.

FACTIONS PRESENT

All factions present, none dominant. PFZ commercial representatives / PRC trade attachés & Tiger gene-forged / NAF intelligence assets / Shinkai Collective (submersible dock) / Void Walkers (confirmed single visit, three-hour presence)

CIVILIAN NEED Continued neutrality. The station's 2,000 permanent residents have built lives around the trade economy. Their survival depends on the station remaining useful to everyone and owned by no one.

OPERATOR ACCESS Open. Deep-water mooring available. The consulting service handles operator contracts at 4% station tax. Every faction has eyes on the station. Privacy is expensive and temporary.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A contract offer arrives through the station's consulting service. The client is anonymous. The job is a vessel recovery operation in the Timor Sea. The pay is exceptional. The briefing packet contains coordinates that match the missing research vessel's last known trajectory.
- A PFZ commercial representative and a PRC trade attaché are having lunch together. This is not unusual on Banda Station. What is unusual is that station security has noticed three separate surveillance teams watching the lunch — none of them PFZ or PRC.
- A Shinkai Collective submersible docks at the station. The crew requests emergency maintenance. The submersible's hull shows scoring consistent with deep-water contact damage. The crew is not discussing what happened.
- Mas Eko requests a private meeting with operators. A faction — he won't say which — has made an offer to buy the station outright. The offer is generous enough that two council members are considering it.
- A gene-forged operator of no identifiable program stock is on the station. Her template markers don't match PRC, PFZ, NAF, EO, or SCA profiles. She is looking for Dr. Watanabe.
- A crate arrives at the station marked for an operator team. Inside: a sealed data core from the Old City drowned grid, with a note reading 'This is what they're looking for. Now you know why.' No sender identification.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A PRC intelligence operative approaches operators with a proposition: the PRC will provide the maintenance parts the station needs to keep its power system running for another three years. In exchange, the PRC wants twenty-four hours of exclusive access to the station's communication intercept logs.
- Station security detains two operatives for a neutrality violation — one PFZ, one PRC, caught in what security describes as 'an altercation that was moving toward kinetic' in the lower deck. Both claim the other started it. Both are lying.
- A vessel docks without registration. The crew of six disembarks, conducts business at three locations on the station in under forty minutes, and departs. Station security logged them but did not intervene. Mas Eko, asked about it, says 'they were expected' and nothing else.
- The station's communications array picks up a transmission from deep water. Not Shinkai Collective frequency. The transmission is a data burst — compressed, encrypted, and aimed at a satellite relay that routes to a ground station in territory that doesn't officially have ground stations.
- An explosion in the lower maintenance deck. Small, contained, no casualties. Station security's assessment: sabotage of the power system's secondary cooling loop. Repair timeline: seventy-two hours. Responsibility: unclear, but the parts needed for repair are the ones the PRC offered to supply.
- A Void Walker walks into the station bar. Orders water. Sits for three hours. Leaves. Station security footage confirms: a Void Walker was on Banda Station for three hours and spoke to no one. The footage gets copied by four different faction intelligence operatives before morning.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The faction trying to buy Banda Station is the Shinkai Collective. They want a surface facility to complement the Arafura Deep operation, and a neutral station with submersible docking is exactly what they need for the disclosure timeline. [TRUE]
- Mas Eko's fee dispute with the PFZ was manufactured. He left the PFZ trade network on instructions to establish the station as a PFZ intelligence collection platform. The station's consulting service has been routing data to the PFZ Council for a decade. [TRAP — fabricated by PRC intelligence; Eko's dispute was genuine]
- The station's communications array has been modified to record all faction transmissions while vessels are docked. This was not done by the operating council. [TRUE — the modification was made by an unknown party three

years ago; station security discovered it six months ago and decided to use it rather than remove it]

- The unidentified gene-forged operator is Void Walker adjacent. Her template is a prototype that was supposed to have been destroyed. [UNCLEAR]
- Two of the operating council's five members have been offered immunity from faction prosecution in exchange for breaking neutrality at a specific moment. The moment hasn't arrived yet. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the offers exist; whether the council members will act on them is undetermined]
- Banda Station is built over a secondary Lumicite deposit. The original gas extraction company knew. That's why they really abandoned the platform — the geology became too strange to explain to shareholders. [TRUE]

MAS EKO

Banda Station operating council chair

CAN GET Station communications intercept logs, docking records for every faction vessel in the last two years, the buyout offer details, and the identity of every intelligence operative his security team has flagged.

WANTS To keep the station independent. The buyout offer is good but he knows what follows acquisition: alignment, and alignment is the end of neutrality.

FEARS The power system. If the PRC parts supply is the only option and the PRC attaches conditions, he's choosing between station survival and station independence.

CURRENT PRESSURE The sabotage. He has seventy-two hours to repair the cooling loop or begin rationing. The PRC offer to supply parts is looking less like a proposition and more like a timetable.

OPERATIVE JAYA

Station security chief, no last name on record

CAN GET Real-time station surveillance, the communications array modification discovery, the Void Walker footage, and the analytical assessment of every faction operative currently on station.

WANTS The identity of whoever sabotaged the cooling loop. Not for justice — for leverage. Station security's authority depends on attribution capability.

FEARS	A second assassination. The station is running hotter than it has in years. Multiple faction operations are converging. Her security force of forty is enough for commerce disputes. It is not enough for what she thinks is coming.
CURRENT PRESSURE	The Void Walker visit. Four factions copied the footage. She doesn't know why a Void Walker came to Banda Station and she doesn't know what the four factions think it means.

NOOR AZIZ

Independent information broker, permanent resident

CAN GET	Cross-faction intelligence analysis, the real story behind any three rumors currently circulating on the station, and a network of contacts across the Scatter that no single faction can match.
WANTS	Passage off the station within forty-eight hours if he gives the signal. He has arranged this three times and never used it. He thinks this time might be different.
FEARS	That the convergence of operations he's tracking — Amaterasu window, Arafura disclosure, missing vessel recovery, Makassar standoff — are not separate crises but one crisis viewed from different angles. He's right, and knowing he's right is keeping him awake.
CURRENT PRESSURE	Someone has been asking about him by name. Not his station name. His birth name. Nobody on Banda Station knows his birth name.

ZONE 7 TIMOR DEEP PASSAGE

TRANSIT CORRIDOR, DARWIN TO SCATTER

SECURITY	light (NAF surface patrol from east, PFZ Corsair patrol from west, unmonitored middle)
INFRASTRUCTURE	none (open water, no permanent installations)
CIVILIANS	sparse (fishing vessels, commercial transit)

SURVEILLANCE	intermittent (NAF satellite coverage, PFZ maritime sensors at Scatter approach, acoustic dead zones in the subsurface maze)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (NAF/PFZ patrol overlap, PRC transit rights, unaffiliated traffic)
CONTAMINATION	present (Upheaval-disrupted seabed chemistry in the deep ridges, thermal vent activity)
BLACK MARKET	none (transit zone, no permanent market)
MOBILITY	open (surface) / hazardous (subsurface — acoustic shadows, thermal gradients, uncharted ridges)

FUNCTION The operational corridor between the Scatter and Australia. Every military deployment, intelligence operation, commercial shipment, and clandestine transit between Darwin Forward and PFZ territory passes through the Timor Deep Passage.

CONTROLLER No single faction. NAF claims air sovereignty. PFZ claims maritime jurisdiction over the Scatter approach. The middle third is international water that functions as a buffer zone maintained by mutual inability rather than mutual agreement.

UNDER-SYSTEM NAF and PFZ patrol schedules are coordinated through a joint maritime protocol that neither side fully trusts the other to honor. The protocol creates a coverage pattern with predictable gaps — gaps that both sides know about, that smugglers have mapped, and that intelligence operatives from every faction use routinely. The protocol works as long as nothing important enough to fight over is in the gap zone. The missing research vessel, anchored at a position 340 kilometers northwest of Darwin in the deepest part of the acoustic shadow zone, is important enough to fight over.

WHEN SYSTEM STRAINS A confrontation in the Passage — NAF interdicting a PFZ vessel, or either side engaging PRC transit — forces the joint maritime protocol into a crisis it was designed to prevent. The protocol has no enforcement mechanism. It works on mutual interest. When mutual interest diverges, the Passage becomes an unregulated corridor between two military powers with overlapping claims and no dispute resolution framework.

DAY

AUTHORITY

NAF air patrol (eastern half), PFZ Corsair maritime patrol (western half), gap zone unmonitored

ECONOMY

Commercial shipping transit, NAF logistics runs to Darwin Forward, PFZ trade convoys

RISK

PRC intelligence vessels operating under commercial cover, NAF-PFZ patrol coordination failures

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced patrol coverage on both sides, automated sensor networks with known blind spots

ECONOMY

Smuggling runs through the gap zone, intelligence transit, Shinkai Collective deep-water movements

RISK

The acoustic shadow zone. At night, with reduced surface patrol, the deep Passage is effectively unmonitored. Anything can transit the subsurface maze without detection. This includes whatever has been approaching the missing research vessel on a monthly cycle for the past fourteen months.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

Open ocean at the Passage midpoint, no land visible in any direction, the water's color shifting from tropical blue to deep indigo where the subsurface ridge drops to 600 meters — and on the surface, nothing but a single commercial fishing buoy that has been transmitting a posi-
tion signal to a satellite that was decommissioned four years ago.

FACTIONS PRESENT

NAF (air & naval patrol, eastern half) / PFZ Corsairs (maritime patrol, western half) / PRC (intelligence vessels under commercial cover) / Shinkai Collective (deep-water submersible transit) / Unknown party (subsurface platform, origin disputed)

CIVILIAN NEED Predictable transit. Commercial fishing and shipping depends on the joint maritime protocol holding. When it doesn't, insurance rates spike and livelihoods collapse.

OPERATOR ACCESS Surface transit is open with PFZ or NAF clearance depending on direction. The gap zone is unmonitored. The acoustic shadow zone requires specialized navigation — Captain Dewi Suryani is the only independent operator who has transited it successfully.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A PFZ Corsair patrol vessel hails operators and requests a transit inspection. The inspection is routine. The Corsair lieutenant conducting it is not routine — she asks questions about the Arafura Deep that are not on any inspection checklist.
- A NAF surveillance platform alters course to parallel operators' vessel at 2,000 meters altitude. It follows for forty minutes, then diverts. A NAF communications burst, encrypted, transmits during the diversion.
- A commercial fishing vessel, operating alone in the gap zone, signals distress. On approach, the vessel is empty. The engine is running. The navigation system is set to a coordinate in the acoustic shadow zone.
- A PRC transit vessel, operating under legitimate commercial clearance, requests operators' assistance with a 'mechanical issue.' The vessel is carry-

ing cargo that the manifest doesn't account for — 900 kilograms of deep-water rated equipment.

- The Passage's surface conditions change abruptly — water temperature drops four degrees in a 200-meter band. The phenomenon lasts twenty minutes, correlates with a seabed thermal event on the ridge below, and is consistent with the Lumicite resonance patterns documented at Arafura Deep.
- A NAF fast boat intercepts operators with a message from Sgt. Maya Chen at Darwin Forward. The message is off-channel, unofficial, and contains coordinates for the missing research vessel's current position.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Operators' sonar picks up a contact in the subsurface maze — metallic, moving slowly, no transponder. The contact's movement pattern matches the metallic object detected near Arafura Deep.
- A signal on an emergency frequency, brief, looping: 'Vessel Horizon, crew four, requesting extraction, position [coordinates], fourteen months on station, [static].' The signal cuts after three loops. The position matches the research vessel's suspected location.
- Three fast boats running dark, moving in formation through the gap zone from the Scatter toward Darwin. Not PFZ. Not commercial. Their course avoids the Corsair patrol pattern perfectly — whoever planned the route has the current schedule.
- The fishing buoy that transmits to the decommissioned satellite activates a secondary signal. The signal is a data burst, compressed, directed at the seabed. Something in the acoustic shadow zone acknowledges.
- A NAF submarine surfaces in the gap zone — unusual, since NAF submarine operations in the Passage are officially suspended under the joint protocol. The submarine runs on the surface for eight minutes, then dives. During the eight minutes, it transmits nothing.
- Operators' instruments detect a deep acoustic anomaly consistent with structural stress in the subsurface ridge. The pattern matches what Shinkai Collective engineers would recognize as a Lumicite resonance cascade — but at a scale significantly larger than anything documented at Arafura Deep.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The missing research vessel's crew is alive and has been conducting their own research for fourteen months, unable to leave because the vessel's navigation system was sabotaged before it 'went dark.' They didn't disappear.

They were parked. [PARTIALLY TRUE — crew status is unconfirmed but the navigation sabotage is accurate]

- The acoustic shadow zone contains a second Lumicite formation, larger than the Arafura deposit, at a depth no faction can currently reach. The fishing buoy's signal is a monitoring device placed by someone who knew. [TRUE]
- NAF submarine operations in the Passage never actually stopped. The joint protocol suspension was a diplomatic gesture. NAF has maintained continuous subsurface presence for three years. [TRUE]
- The three fast boats running the gap zone at night are PRC special operations teams rotating through a forward staging point in the Passage itself — a subsurface anchor platform that the PRC built and neither NAF nor PFZ has detected. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the platform exists but it was built by parties unknown, not the PRC]
- The monthly approaches to the research vessel are automated. A pre-programmed system is delivering supplies. The question is who programmed it and whether the crew knows who is keeping them alive. [UNCLEAR]
- The joint maritime protocol has a classified annex — separate from the NAF-Australia classified annex — that designates the acoustic shadow zone as a 'joint research exclusion area.' Both NAF and PFZ agreed to stay out. Neither side has honored the agreement. [TRUE]

CAPTAIN DEWI SURYANI

Independent vessel operator, Passage specialist

CAN GET Gap zone transit routes updated to current patrol schedules, acoustic shadow zone navigation (she's the only independent operator who has transited it successfully), the fishing buoy's exact coordinates and signal pattern.

WANTS Payment in PFZ transit credits. She's been blacklisted from the registered lane system over a cargo dispute and needs legitimate passage restored.

FEARS Whatever is in the acoustic shadow zone. She transited it once. She will not discuss what her sonar showed her. She will transit it again for the right price, but she will not discuss it.

CURRENT PRESSURE The three fast boats she saw running dark two nights ago. They were on her route. If they're using her route, someone she trusted sold it.

LT. ARIF BUDIMAN

NAF naval intelligence, Passage patrol liaison

CAN GET NAF patrol schedules for the next operational cycle, satellite coverage windows, the classified joint protocol annex, and the operational summary for NAF subsurface activity in the Passage.

WANTS Confirmation of the PRC subsurface platform. NAF intelligence has suspected it for eight months. They need evidence that justifies the political cost of disclosing it.

FEARS That the platform isn't PRC. NAF's entire Passage strategy is built on a threat model that has the PRC as the primary adversary. If the subsurface infrastructure belongs to someone else, the model is wrong.

CURRENT PRESSURE His commanding officer has ordered a reconnaissance mission into the acoustic shadow zone. The mission is scheduled for six days from now. He does not believe the mission's cover story will survive contact with whatever is actually in the shadow zone.

THE KEEPER

Designation only, identity unknown, operates from a vessel that transits the gap zone on a 23-day cycle

CAN GET The monthly supply delivery schedule to the research vessel, the vessel's current operational status, and a sealed message from the crew to Dr. Watanabe that has been waiting for a courier for seven months.

WANTS One specific item from Banda Station: a Shinkai Collective communications relay. The Keeper cannot acquire it without being identified.

FEARS Unknown. The Keeper's threat profile is unknown. Captain Suryani has met the Keeper twice and describes the experience as 'professional and deeply uncomfortable.'

CURRENT PRESSURE The convergence. Too many operations are approaching the research vessel simultaneously. The Keeper's supply cycle, which has sustained the crew for fourteen months, will not survive a multi-faction confrontation at the vessel's location.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

- All vessels in PFZ transit lanes require registered transponders — Corsair aerial units enforce this with boarding authority.
- Seabed modification or extraction within PFZ maritime boundary requires PFZ Maritime Council approval — violations are treated as territorial aggression.
- Cable node approach zones are military exclusion areas — approach within 500 meters without clearance triggers Corsair response.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

- 'Ecological survey' permits — granted freely to Shinkai Collective, routinely delayed for independent researchers and NAF-affiliated contractors.
- Elevation classification for former lowland zones — determines residency rights in what remains above water; legacy communities with pre-Upheaval roots get priority, climate migrants often don't.
- Transit fee exemptions — officially based on cargo type; practically a diplomatic tool the PFZ Council uses to reward cooperation and punish inconvenience.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

- Vessel seizure and operator detention at the PFZ Maritime Tribunal — no timeline guarantees, and the tribunal has no deadline obligation.
- Transit lane exclusion — being blacklisted from PFZ channels means routing around the entire Scatter at enormous cost and time.
- Cable interference designation — a formal accusation of threatening cable infrastructure carries military enforcement authority.

CIVIC RITUALS

- Tide Chart Broadcast — daily PFZ transmission of updated navigation conditions. Practically essential; politically a reminder that PFZ controls the information environment of the water.
- Scatter Day — annual commemoration of the 2045 remapping, marked differently in different communities. Elevated communities celebrate survival. Drowned-zone communities hold underwater memorial dives.
- Council Open Session — monthly PFZ Maritime Council meeting broadcast on all channels. Mandatory transparency for a governing body that is otherwise opaque.
- Corsair Muster — public display of PFZ military capacity, quarterly. Aerial gene-forged formations over the main transit hubs. Impressive and entirely intentional.

R&R

- Dive the Old City — unauthorized excursion into the drowned Jakarta grid. The street signs are still readable. The traffic light still cycles. The dive guides know which buildings to avoid and won't explain why.
- Banda Station trade floor — the converted gas processing deck where every faction pretends neutrality while their handlers negotiate at adjacent tables. The coffee is surprisingly good. The information is surprisingly expensive.
- Scatter Day celebrations — elevated community festivals with maritime processions, underwater memorial dives in drowned-zone communities, and the specific melancholy of people commemorating the day their geography changed.
- Darwin strip — the civilian entertainment district outside the wire at Darwin Forward. Contractors, operators, logistics workers, and information brokers. What happens outside the wire stays outside the wire, except when it doesn't.
- The Shelf markets — the informal economy of a settlement that officially doesn't exist. Salvaged Old City artifacts, gene-forged Drift management clinics, forged documentation, and pontoon-side dining with a view of the submerged city below.
- Corsair Muster observation — quarterly aerial display of PFZ military gene-forged formations over the main transit hubs. Sea Eagles in full kit riding thermals in formation. Operators who have seen it describe it as beautiful and unsettling in equal measure.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

- A sealed sector of the Old City drowned grid exists that no salvage crew will enter. The dive crews call it the Quiet and change the subject. Ibu Naga has marked it on her personal chart with a symbol she didn't explain to Sri Hartono. Determine what failed inside at first table contact with Old City operations.
- One member of the PFZ Maritime Council has been communicating with Project Amaterasu's development team directly — not through PRC diplomatic channels, not through the cable access agreement framework. A private channel. The communication predates the agreement by two years. Determine which council member at first contact with PFZ political operations.
- The Void Walker present in the Scatter has a specific relationship with the Lumicite deposit. Whether this means they are drawn to it, studying it, protecting it, or are something else entirely is undefined. Determine the nature of the relationship when operators first encounter the Void Walker directly.
- Banda Station's secondary Lumicite deposit — the one beneath the platform — has been growing. The original gas extraction company's geological surveys show it was not there when the platform was built. It appeared after the Upheaval. Whether this is related to the Arafura deposit, the Old City installation, or something else is undetermined.
- The crew of the missing research vessel has been conducting their own research for fourteen months. What they have found — beyond the survey data they were originally carrying — is undefined. The Keeper's supply deliveries have included equipment that the crew didn't request and that doesn't match any known research program. Determine what the crew has become at first contact.
- Something in the deep Timor Passage is large enough to register on sonar, smart enough to avoid identification, and has been present for at least three years based on acoustic data the NAF has classified. It is not Lumicite-adapted fauna from the Arafura ecosystem. It may not be biological. It is not hostile. It is attentive.

FACTIONS

PFZ — PACIFIC FREE ZONE (CRIMSON CORSAIRS)

OBJECTIVE Maintain cable node control and transit fee revenue while managing the Project Amaterasu timeline, the Lumicite disclosure problem, and New Batavia's infrastructure crisis — without triggering the confrontation with PRC that the Scatter's balance is structured to prevent.

ASSETS Crimson Corsairs gene-forged units (Saltwater Crocs, Sea Eagles, Clouded Leopards), maritime sensor network across the Scatter, New Batavia administrative infrastructure, cable node physical control, Arafura survey data.

DEPENDENCY The deterrence balance. PFZ military capacity cannot win a direct confrontation with PRC autonomous platforms. Everything the PFZ does assumes NAF's Darwin commitment holds. If Darwin is politically compromised, the PFZ's strategic position collapses immediately.

VULNERABILITY The undisclosed cable access agreement. If the Scatter population discovers that the PFZ has been privately negotiating away the sovereignty it publicly claims to defend, the Maritime Council loses its governing legitimacy.

ESCALATION LADDER

- Stage 1: Increased Corsair patrol density, transit fee disputes, permit delays for PRC-adjacent commercial operations.
- Stage 2: Cable node access suspension, maritime boundary enforcement actions, PFZ Council diplomatic pressure.
- Stage 3: Corsair interdiction of PRC vessels in approach zones, asset seizure.
- Stage 4: Full maritime closure of Scatter transit lanes — an option that damages PFZ as much as PRC but denies PRC the cable access it needs for Amaterasu deployment.

WHAT THEY OFFER Safe maritime passage, cable infrastructure access for non-PRC parties, New Batavia administrative cover, Corsair tactical support.

WHAT THEY DEMAND

Cable security intelligence, disruption of PRC SIGINT operations, Arafura survey data kept out of open circulation.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> PFZ losing cable control to PRC changes the information architecture of the entire Pacific. Every faction's communications running through cable infrastructure the PRC now monitors.

PRC — PACIFIC RIM COLLECTIVE (SCATTER INTELLIGENCE STATION)

OBJECTIVE Achieve supervised access to the Makassar cable nodes sufficient to ensure Project Amaterasu telemetry runs cleanly through the infrastructure before operational deployment — without triggering NAF military response from Darwin or Corsair interdiction that creates a public confrontation.

ASSETS Makassar platform (military installation under commercial cover), Tiger and Pangolin gene-forged intelligence operators, SIGINT capability covering all PFZ maritime communications, commercial presence in New Batavia, the undisclosed cable access agreement, Project Amaterasu as the endpoint they are building toward.

DEPENDENCY The cable access window in the agreement. If that window is disclosed or closed, PRC has to find another way to route Amaterasu telemetry through the Scatter — which requires the kind of direct action that ends the deterrence balance.

VULNERABILITY The platform's cover. If the Makassar platform's military function is confirmed and published, PRC loses the diplomatic argument that it is operating within PFZ commercial frameworks. The NAF response becomes politically easier, not harder.

ESCALATION LADDER

- Stage 1: SIGINT collection escalation, commercial pressure on PFZ Council members, Pangolin intelligence operations in New Batavia.
- Stage 2: Cable node degradation through the introduced corrosion agent — pressure without attribution.

- Stage 3: Platform activation as a military asset, direct seabed operations against nodes.
- Stage 4: Project Amaterasu early deployment using whatever cable access exists — accepting the confrontation, betting the system works well enough to win it.

WHAT THEY OFFER Commercial investment in New Batavia, cable infrastructure maintenance capacity, managed Amaterasu deployment timeline as leverage.

WHAT THEY DEMAND Supervised cable node access during maintenance windows, Arafura survey data, Corsair patrol schedule data.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> PRC losing the Scatter cable nodes delays Project Amaterasu by an estimated 18 months. That 18 months is the operational window every other faction is trying to create.

SHINKAI COLLECTIVE (DEEP-WATER RESEARCH CONFEDERATION)

OBJECTIVE Complete the Arafura Lumicite assessment, recover the missing vessel's survey data to fill the geological model gaps, and execute disclosure on a timeline that prevents any single faction from monopolizing the deposit — while maintaining operational security over the deep-water infrastructure that gives the Collective its only leverage in a theater where every other faction has more guns.

ASSETS Deep-water gene-forged researchers and biosynthetic dive systems (capability unique to the Collective), Arafura Deep habitat modules, independent communications network that doesn't route through cable infrastructure, three submersibles rated for full-depth Arafura operations, the survey data (Collective copy), Dr. Watanabe's three-year field presence and the relationships it has built.

DEPENDENCY The habitat modules. Three years past rated service life, maintained by engineering talent and diminishing spare parts. If the modules fail, the Collective's physical presence on the deposit ends and their leverage goes with it. Replacement modules require manufacturing capacity the Collective does not have independently.

VULNERABILITY Watanabe's field autonomy. The gap between her decisions and the surface council's directives is a fracture line that any faction with good intelligence can exploit. Approach Watanabe and the council separately with different offers, and the Collective splits.

ESCALATION LADDER

- Stage 1: Accelerated survey operations, increased submersible transit through the Passage, diplomatic pressure on PFZ for expanded permit coverage.
- Stage 2: Banda Station acquisition attempt, independent disclosure preparation, positioning to control the narrative.
- Stage 3: Unilateral disclosure of the Arafura data to multiple factions simultaneously — the nuclear option that prevents monopolization but also prevents the Collective from controlling outcomes.
- Stage 4: Emergency habitat evacuation and surface signal — sacrificing operational security to force international attention to the deposit before any faction can claim it.

WHAT THEY OFFER Deep-water access, Lumicite research data, independent communications capability, biological survey intelligence, and the only accurate map of the deep Arafura.

WHAT THEY DEMAND Habitat module resupply, the missing vessel's survey data, protection for the disclosure timeline, and an enforceable agreement that the deposit is not weaponized.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> The Collective losing the Arafura operation means no independent scientific presence on the deposit. Whoever controls the site next controls the data, the disclosure timeline, and the extraction rights. The Collective's role shifts from stakeholder to petitioner.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

DR. KEIKO WATANABE

Shinkai Collective, lead researcher, Arafura survey

CAN GET The Arafura survey data (the Collective's copy), deep-water access to the shelf, Shinkai Collective communications network independent of cable infrastructure.

WANTS The survey findings handled by someone with enough reach to prevent any single faction from controlling the Lumicite disclosure. She has watched what happened in the Lakefire Corridor.

FEARS That the missing research vessel's copy of the data has already been accessed by Darwin Forward.

CURRENT PRESSURE The Collective's deep-water team has been in the Arafura shelf for three years. They are finding things that weren't in the survey data. She is not certain what to do with what they're finding.

VOID WALKER — SCATTER DESIGNATION 'CURRENT'

One confirmed presence, methodology unknown

CAN GET Whatever they've been collecting from the cable node seabed operation, the maintenance diver's recovered artifact, the research vessel's current location.

WANTS One exchange. They are looking for whoever authorized the cable node corrosion operation. They will trade everything they have for a name.

FEARS Unknown. Their threat assessment is unknown.

CURRENT PRESSURE They have been in the Scatter for six months. This is longer than any confirmed Void Walker presence in a single territory.

DOWNTIME

DIVE THE OLD CITY

NEW BATAVIA HARBOR

WHAT	Operators run an unauthorized dive into the drowned district.
COST	Dive equipment, no permit, exposure to PFZ harbor security.
GAIN	One of: the pre-Upheaval data storage device, a contact in the elevation migrant community, a map of Old City tunnel infrastructure that connects to current New Batavia foundations.
FALLOUT	PFZ security logs the unauthorized dive location. If operators return to the same area, they find a marker — someone else knows what they found.

WORK THE CORSAIR NETWORK

WHAT	Operators spend five days embedded with a Corsair patrol circuit.
COST	Five days, PFZ cooperation (requires an existing Corsair contact).
GAIN	Gene-forged informal network contacts across PFZ and PRC programs, Corsair maritime routing knowledge, Stage-specific Drift management information.
FALLOUT	PRC SIGINT registers operator presence in Corsair patrol patterns. A Pangolin operative begins tracking movement.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

TERRITORY-LEVEL RUMORS (1D6)

- Project Amaterasu's first operational test is scheduled for the next cable maintenance window — 22 days out. If it runs clean through Scatter infrastructure, the PRC considers it combat-ready. [TRUE]

- The missing research vessel has a crew of four still aboard. They have been there for fourteen months. They cannot leave and they cannot communicate. [PARTIALLY TRUE — vessel location confirmed; crew status unknown]
- The Arafura shelf Lumicite deposit has a property the Lakefire Corridor deposit doesn't — it is stable under extraction. The Shinkai Collective's three-year survey confirms this. The disclosure would end the Scatter's strategic balance overnight. [TRUE]
- The Void Walker presence in the Scatter is connected to the Lakefire Corridor Void Walker sightings. They are not separate operations. [UNCLEAR — and nobody in the Scatter has the Corridor context to evaluate it]
- The PFZ cable access agreement was not negotiated by the Maritime Council. It was negotiated by one Council member acting alone. The rest of the Council doesn't know. [TRUE]
- The Old City light that still cycles is Lumicite-powered. Something on the drowned grid was connected to a pre-Upheaval research installation. It is still running. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

PROJECT AMATERASU DEPLOYMENT WINDOW

Stage 1 — Window Approaching

Covert operations from all parties increase as the 22-day maintenance window approaches. PRC SIGINT at maximum collection. Corsair patrol density elevated. NAF Darwin Forward at heightened readiness.

Stage 2 — Window Opens

The cable maintenance window begins. PFZ monitoring is suspended per the undisclosed agreement. PRC cable node access proceeds. If operators have acted to disclose the agreement, Stage 2 triggers a Corsair interdiction rather than the window opening — the confrontation happens here.

Stage 3 — Amaterasu Test

Project Amaterasu routes telemetry through Scatter cable infrastructure during the window. Success means PRC considers it combat-ready. Failure — due to the cable degradation, Corsair interdiction, or operator action — delays deployment and sends the PRC to their Stage 4 escalation option.

Stage 4 — Open Confrontation

PRC activates the Makassar platform. Corsairs respond. NAF Darwin Forward activates the classified annex. Australian government position becomes untenable. The Scatter stops being a deterrence balance and becomes a theater.

WHAT OPERATORS CAN DO: Control the window. Disclose the agreement before it opens. Degrade the cable nodes before the test runs. Get the Amaterasu telemetry data to parties who can use it politically. Shape whether the confrontation happens on terms that preserve options or terms that eliminate them.

OPERATIONS MAP

CHOKEPOINTS

- Makassar Strait cable node cluster — the physical hinge of everything. PFZ monitoring station on one side, PRC platform on the other, five kilometers of warm water between them.
- New Batavia harbor — PFZ administrative access, Old City approach zones, the point where the drowned grid meets the living city.
- Darwin Forward perimeter seam — Australian/NAF jurisdictional gap. The place where two allied security architectures don't quite overlap.

DARK ZONES

- Makassar Strait deep water between node and PRC platform — both sides' surveillance creates a paradoxical blind spot in the overlap.
- Old City drowned grid — no PFZ sensors, no faction coverage. The Shelf operates in this darkness.
- Arafura Sea shelf — Shinkai Collective operational zone, no faction sensor coverage. True deep-water dark zone.
- Timor Sea acoustic shadow zone — subsurface maze of drowned ridges and thermal gradients. The missing research vessel's location. Whatever else is down there.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- PFZ controls maritime transit lanes and cable node surface access. The Crimson Corsairs hold the water and the approaches.
- PRC controls Makassar platform and SIGINT coverage of all PFZ maritime comms. Commercial presence in New Batavia provides diplomatic cover.

- NAF controls Darwin Forward and airspace over northern Australia. Aurora Rangers provide power projection the PFZ cannot match independently.
- Shinkai Collective controls deep-water Arafura shelf. Sole deep-water capability in the theater. Independent comms network that bypasses cable infrastructure.
- The Shelf — Ibu Naga's distribution network controls the informal economy. No faction claims it. All factions use it.
- Banda Station — neutral by business model. Operating council maintains independence through mutual commercial dependency.
- Void Walkers — one confirmed presence, six months in theater, no territory, no pattern, no explanation.

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- PFZ registered transit lanes (monitored, legitimate, recorded) — the official routes through the Scatter.
- Elevation migrant informal maritime routes (dark, Corsair-knowledgeable, used by the informal network) — the Shelf's connections to the wider Scatter.
- Deep-water Shinkai routes (independent of cable infrastructure, require Collective cooperation) — the routes nobody else can use.
- Darwin military corridors (NAF-only, accessible through contacts) — the fastest routes to and from Australian territory.
- Gap zone through Timor Deep Passage — unmonitored middle third, predictable patrol gaps, smuggler-mapped and intelligence-operative-used.

KEY LOCATIONS

- Makassar cable node cluster — the six nodes on the seabed at the strait's narrowest navigable point. Three operating at 73% capacity.
- PRC Makassar platform — 'commercial logistics hub,' operational as military installation for eighteen months.
- New Batavia — PFZ administrative capital on the Bogor highlands, 3.2 million residents, sitting on classified data.
- The Old City — drowned Jakarta, eight meters underwater at high tide. The light that still cycles. The Quiet sector. The pre-Upheaval research installation.
- The Shelf — 14,000 people on the rooftops of drowned South Jakarta. The settlement that doesn't exist.
- Arafura Deep habitat modules — Shinkai Collective, 300 meters down, three years past rated service life.
- Banda Station — repurposed gas platform, neutral trade hub, secondary Lumicite deposit beneath it.

- Missing research vessel — 340 kilometers northwest of Darwin, acoustic shadow zone, crew status unknown, fourteen months on station.

MISSION SEEDS

1. CLOSE THE WINDOW

OBJECTIVE: Expose the undisclosed cable access agreement before the 22-day maintenance window opens, triggering PFZ Council action that closes the window and prevents the Amaterasu test run.

CLOCK: 22 days. After the test runs successfully, the window closes but the strategic fact of Amaterasu readiness doesn't change — the PRC's position in the Scatter changes permanently.

COMPLICATION: The Council member who negotiated the agreement is the only person with full documentation. Getting that documentation means getting to her. Getting to her means getting through PFZ security she has activated to protect herself from exactly this kind of approach.

2. FIND THE VESSEL

OBJECTIVE: Locate the missing research vessel, recover the Arafura survey data, and determine what Darwin Forward knows about its location.

CLOCK: The contractors loading the unmarked equipment at Darwin civilian port are preparing an operation. If they reach the vessel first, the survey data goes into NAF classification and the Shinkai Collective's copy becomes the only independent record.

COMPLICATION: The vessel's crew. Whatever situation they are in has been sustained for fourteen months. Extracting the vessel without addressing what is keeping them there is not straightforward.

3. STAGE FOUR PREVENTION

OBJECTIVE: Disable the Makassar platform's military activation capability before Stage 3 triggers Stage 4 — specifically, the seabed operations capability that allows the platform to directly access the cable nodes.

CLOCK: The cable maintenance window. Once the window opens and the test runs, the platform's military function has served its purpose and PRC may shift to overt positioning regardless.

COMPLICATION: The platform's cover has been maintained for six years. A visible strike on a 'commercial logistics hub' is a diplomatic incident the PFZ cannot absorb without

NAF support, and NAF support requires the classified annex to activate, which requires the Australian political situation to hold. Every option requires something else to have already worked.

4. POWER THE SHELF

OBJECTIVE: Identify and secure the anomalous power source beneath the Old City that is keeping the drowned grid alive, before the escalating surges destroy the Shelf's electrical infrastructure and displace 14,000 people into New Batavia's already strained outer districts.

CLOCK: Reza Prakoso estimates six to eight power surges before the Shelf's tap system fails catastrophically. Surges are currently occurring every three to four days. The window is approximately three weeks.

COMPLICATION: The power source is connected to the pre-Upheaval Lumicite research installation. Accessing it means entering a facility that the Shinkai Collective, the PFZ, and at least one unknown party are all trying to reach. Operators arrive to fix a humanitarian problem and find themselves standing in the middle of the Scatter's most contested piece of real estate.

5. KEEP BANDA NEUTRAL

OBJECTIVE: Prevent the acquisition of Banda Station by identifying which faction is behind the buyout offer and neutralizing the leverage created by the power system sabotage — specifically, resolving the cooling loop repair without accepting the PRC's conditional parts supply.

CLOCK: Seventy-two hours until power rationing begins. Once rationing starts, the transient population leaves, the station's economic viability collapses, and the council's two wavering members vote to accept the buyout.

COMPLICATION: The sabotage and the buyout offer may not be from the same faction. Solving the parts problem might serve the buyer's interests. The station's neutrality is being attacked from two directions simultaneously, and fixing one might accelerate the other.

6. THE SHADOW ZONE

OBJECTIVE: Transit the Timor Deep Passage acoustic shadow zone to reach the missing research vessel, recover the Arafura survey data, and extract the crew — before the NAF

reconnaissance mission arrives in six days and the convergence of faction operations turns the vessel's location into a flashpoint.

CLOCK: Six days until the NAF mission enters the shadow zone. The contractors from Darwin Forward are already mobilizing. The PRC subsurface platform may have assets closer than anyone realizes.

COMPLICATION: Whatever is in the acoustic shadow zone. Captain Suryani won't discuss what her sonar showed her. The Keeper's supply deliveries have been reaching the vessel monthly through the same zone without incident, which means either the Keeper has solved a problem no one else has, or the Keeper has an arrangement with whatever is down there. Neither answer simplifies the operation.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every solution in the Java Scatter creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF PFZ LOSES CABLE CONTROL

The PRC's communications architecture for the Pacific gains a layer of infrastructure it owns rather than accesses. Project Amaterasu deploys on PRC terms. The Scatter transforms from a maritime confederation into a PRC strategic zone within two years.

IF NAF LOSES DARWIN FORWARD

The counterweight disappears. PFZ military capacity cannot match PRC autonomous platforms without it. The deterrence balance ends. The Scatter's independent status ends with it — not immediately, not loudly, but structurally and irreversibly.

IF THE ARAFURA DEPOSIT IS DISCLOSED

Every faction in the hemisphere recalibrates toward the Scatter. The PFZ's maritime sovereignty claim becomes the most contested territorial question in the Pacific. The Shinkai Collective's three-year operational presence on the shelf makes them a party to any resolution — a status they have been building toward deliberately.

IF PROJECT AMATERASU DEPLOYS SUCCESSFULLY

The PRC has a combat-ready AI weapons system. The 18-month window every other faction has been trying to create closes. Whatever plans were contingent on that window expire. What comes next has not been modeled.

FIELD NOTE

The water between things matters more than the things themselves. The PFZ understood this before anyone else. They built a confederation around it. The Corsairs patrol it. The cable nodes route through it. The Scatter's forty-two million people live on what remains above it and dive into what went below.

The map is wrong by definition and keeps getting wronger. The models said the sea would rise slowly. The models were wrong about the rate. Everyone who built their plans around the models is now building plans around the fact that the models were wrong, which is a different kind of planning entirely.

When the maintenance window opens — and it will open, because the agreement exists and the PRC has been patient for nine years and patience has a deployment schedule — nobody in this territory will have the option of not choosing a side.

— Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

16/ PATAGONIAN BASIN

NRD TERRITORY / INDEPENDENT ENCLAVES | EARTH 2066

The basin has resources. The resources have been the problem for thirty years. The problem has gotten more complicated, not less.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

When the Great Drought hit in 2031, water engineers ran projections on every major freshwater system in the Southern Hemisphere. The Patagonian aquifer complex — fed by Andean glaciers still intact at elevation, connected to the world's third-largest underground water reserve — came back as the one system that would survive the century without total collapse. Word of that projection was classified by the governments that commissioned it. Word got out anyway. By 2036, the Southern Cone had gone from one of the most under-resourced corners of the post-nation-state world to the most strategically sought-after real estate south of the equator. The SCA understood this first. Then the NAF. Then everyone else.

What emerged from two decades of competing pressure was the Southern Compact — a coalition of city-states and provincial authorities stretching from the Rio de la Plata to Tierra del Fuego, held together not by ideology but by the shared recognition that any of them alone would be absorbed inside five years. New Buenos Aires is the Compact's administrative and commercial center, rebuilt at elevation above the flood line of the expanded Rio de la Plata estuary. The Compact holds the aquifer access rights, the Itaipú Dam complex, and the Andean passage routes. It holds them by being indispensable to too many parties simultaneously to be safely absorbed by any one of them — a position that requires constant and exhausting diplomatic maintenance.

The SCA presses from the north. The Amazonian Metroplex's four hundred kilometers of bio-engineered city require water inputs the Metroplex's own systems cannot fully sustain, and the Paraná-Paraguay river network that connects to the SCA's northern territory has its headwaters in Compact-controlled Mato Grosso. The NAF has invested heavily in Compact technical infrastructure and positioned Santiago as an NAF-aligned technical hub, which gives them leverage and an entry point but not control. The Prometheus League has gone to ground in the deep Patagonian interior — the vast, nearly empty territory south of the 46th parallel where no faction has the logistics to maintain a garrison. The Basin is the Southern Hemisphere's most complicated negotiation, and it is never not in session.

Cold, clear, and enormous. The sky here is the biggest thing in any operational environment — open in ways that feel wrong after any other theater. The Compact's managed wilderness is genuinely beautiful, which is the kind of detail

that makes experienced operators nervous. Harpy Eagle gene-forged move through the high-altitude interior in ways that make air asset tracking effectively impossible. Maned Wolf operators patrol the treeline of the dark zone with the patient long-range awareness of something that learned surveillance from the pampas. The Compact's administrative centers are calm and organized, staffed by people sitting on information that would restructure the geopolitics of the southern hemisphere. That calm is either the confidence of people who have managed impossible situations before, or the stillness of people who have already accepted what comes next. Operators who have worked here long enough stop being sure which one it is.

The Basin is the cleanest-feeling scene in the OT world and the one most likely to unsettle experienced operators for reasons they cannot immediately identify. The scene runs quieter and slower than anywhere else — Southern South American cultural aesthetic from Argentine and Chilean traditions that run deep before the Upheaval and deeper now, filtered through twelve years of a political structure that has maintained an impossible balance by knowing things it has decided not to share. The Prometheus League's dark zone aesthetic — Harpy Eagle and Maned Wolf gene-forged operating by rules the Compact officially cannot see — has fed into the civilian scene as the visual language of high-altitude patience. OPEN KIT's modular clothing system is the dominant aesthetic object because the Basin's population understands reconfigurability as survival philosophy. Basin access cards and water allocation documentation — the most valuable identity papers in the southern hemisphere — become dead credential decoration here with the specific weight of things that are still valid but worn anyway, as a statement about what their validity actually means.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

The Compact's independence rests on a single structural fact: the Itaipú Dam complex controls water flow to both the SCA's northern agricultural zones and the Compact's own river network. Turn Itaipú north and the SCA's Metroplex irrigation systems start failing within 90 days. Turn it south and the Compact's own downstream communities start failing. The dam is the Basin's most important piece of infrastructure and the one piece that cannot be controlled by either party without permanently alienating the other. The Compact has maintained Itaipú as a genuinely joint-managed facility since 2049 — a bureaucratic achievement that requires continuous renegotiation and that both the SCA and NAF have separately attempted to compromise at least three times.

The second structural problem: the Andean glaciers are retreating faster than the current melt cycle projections. The aquifer's long-term viability depends on the glacier system that feeds it. The Compact's own hydrologists have a classified projection that shows viable aquifer levels for approximately 40 years at current extraction rates, not the 80-year figure in the public governance documents. The 40-year number changes everything about the Compact's negotiating position with both the SCA and the NAF. The Compact government has been sitting on this projection for three years.

Compounding this: the lithium extraction process at the Andean salt flats produces brine waste leaking into the aquifer recharge zone. The contamination is moving slowly toward the main aquifer system. The Basin's two critical resources — water and lithium — are structurally opposed. Extracting one contaminates the other. The Compact's hydrology team has identified this. The report sits in the same classification system as the 40-year aquifer projection. The dam's joint management agreement expires in 2069 — three years from now. Both parties are already negotiating the renewal, and both parties' negotiating positions assume the 80-year aquifer viability figure. When the 40-year projection becomes known, everything resets.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

SECURITY	Southern Compact-governed / contested (SCA water pressure from north, NAF technical investment, Prometheus League interior presence)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable in Compact cities / failing in rural extraction corridors / wild in deep Patagonian interior
CIVILIANS	pragmatic independence / deep distrust of both SCA and NAF / Patagonian interior communities actively resistant to all faction contact
SURVEILLANCE	Compact sensor network in cities / NAF SIGINT in Santiago corridor / dark zone in Patagonian interior south of 46th parallel
FACTION PRESSURE	Compact dominant on paper / contested below surface (SCA, NAF, Prometheus League)
CONTAMINATION	present (lithium brine waste in Andean recharge zones, drowned district chemical residue, headwaters agricultural runoff)
BLACK MARKET	moderate in cities / heavy in dam corridor / almost entirely informal economy in interior
MOBILITY	open in cities / checkpointed on highland routes / dark and community-knowledge-dependent in interior
GENE-FORGED UNITS	Pumas, Harpy Eagles, Maned Wolves (Compact) / Jaguars, Caimans (SCA) / Wolves, Eagles (NAF-Santiago) / Unknown template (Prometheus League interior)

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Three power structures and one resistance network contest the Basin. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging on the Itaipú renewal in eleven days.

SOUTHERN COMPACT (COMPACT SECURITY FORCE / COMPACT ASSEMBLY)

Primary territorial controller. The Southern Compact governs the Basin through aquifer access rights and the Itaipú joint management arrangement. Gene-forged Pumas, Harpy Eagles, and Maned Wolves enforce the perimeter. They are protecting a negotiating position built on an 80-year viability figure that their own scientists revised to 40 three years ago. Their objective: maintain independence through the 2069 Itaipú renewal before the classified projection surfaces and resets every negotiation simultaneously.

SCA — SOUTHERN CARTEL ALLIANCE (PHANTOM VIPERS)

Water pressure from the north. The SCA's Amazonian Metroplex requires Paraná-Paraguay water flow to sustain four hundred kilometers of bio-engineered city. Jaguar and Caiman gene-forged units in advance positioning. Phantom Vipers pre-positioned in the Mato Grosso headwaters for four years. Their objective: secure guaranteed water access through the Itaipú renewal on favorable terms — or, if the renewal fails, through fait accompli control of the northern intake system. CANOPY SHIFT southern variant ready for deployment if negotiations collapse.

NAF — NORTH ATLANTIC FEDERATION (SANTIAGO SOUTHERN COMMAND)

Technical leverage. The NAF rebuilt Santiago's infrastructure over fifteen years, creating a dependency so deep the city cannot function without them. Aurora Rangers garrison Santiago. NAF sensor network is the most comprehensive in the Southern Hemisphere. Their objective: maintain and expand NAF technical influence through the Santiago model, position for Basin absorption if the Compact collapses, and prevent SCA from achieving unilateral water control. Ambassador-General Johanssen is conducting a parallel SCA negotiation the Compact does not know about.

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE (INTERIOR RESISTANCE NETWORK)

Dark zone governance. Eight years in the Patagonian interior, building a functional post-technology resistance network embedded in communities that predate the Compact. Harpy Eagle and Maned Wolf gene-forged operating by rules the Compact officially cannot see. Their objective: ensure the 40-year projection drives honest negotiations rather than becoming a weapon — and position the interior communities' water management methodology as the Basin's viable long-term alternative. A

> Prometheus League representative is already inside the Itaipú renewal negotiations under NGO cover.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**NEW BUENOS AIRES (Rio de la Plata Highlands)**: Compact capital, 4.1 million people, rebuilt at elevation above the flood line. Three assembly members sitting on the 40-year projection.
ZONE 2	**ITAIPÚ CONTROL ZONE (Paraguay-Brazil Border)**: The dam that makes the Basin's independence real. Joint Compact-SCA management. Agreement expires in three years. Both sides have unilateral contingency plans.
ZONE 3	**THE PATAGONIAN INTERIOR (South of 46th Parallel)**: Complete dark zone. Prometheus League's most functional operational base. Interior communities with ten years of independent water management.
ZONE 4	**SANTIAGO NAF HUB (Chilean Technical Corridor)**: NAF's Southern Hemisphere anchor. 3.8 million people in a city that cannot function without the faction that built it.
ZONE 5	**ANDEAN LITHIUM FIELDS (Atacama-Puna Salt Flats)**: Second-largest lithium reserve globally. 12,000 extraction workers. Brine waste leaking into the aquifer recharge zone. A Lumicite deposit beneath the salt flat.
ZONE 6	**ESTUARY DROWNED DISTRICT (Old Buenos Aires)**: The submerged old city. Pre-Upheaval research facility, intelligence archive, and a cable conduit system that was never decommissioned.
ZONE 7	**MATO GROSSO HEADWATERS (Northern Boundary)**: SCA border gradient. Phantom Vipers pre-positioned for four years. Flow rate declining 3% annually. The clock beneath every other clock.

ZONES

ZONE 1 NEW BUENOS AIRES

RIO DE LA PLATA HIGHLANDS, COMPACT CAPITAL

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	packed (4.1 million)
SURVEILLANCE	Compact sensor net
FACTION PRESSURE	Compact-governed / SCA commercial and intelligence presence / NAF diplomatic and technical presence
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	moderate (classified hydrological data, Compact citizenship documents, interior passage permits)
MOBILITY	open (city) / checkpointed (highland access)

FUNCTION Compact administrative capital, regional commercial hub, the negotiating table where the Basin's competing pressures are managed rather than resolved.

CONTROLLER Compact Assembly and its administrative apparatus. Functional, non-corrupt at the institutional level, and sitting on the 40-year aquifer projection that changes everything.

DRAW Diplomatic access, commercial infrastructure, Basin governance. The confidence of a city that has been adapting continuously and is still itself.

RISK SCA intelligence operations against Compact scientific and administrative staff. NAF diplomatic pressure. The classified hydrological projection that three assembly members know and six do not.

SCARCITY The truth. Honest hydrological data. Interior passage permits. Compact citizenship for NAF-affiliated technical staff whose legal status depends entirely on Compact goodwill.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The classified hydrological projection. The Compact's negotiating position with both SCA and NAF is built on an 80-year viability figure that the Compact's own scientists have revised to 40 years at current extraction rates. The revision is three years old. Three assembly members know. The rest of the government does not. When this becomes public — and hydrological data this significant eventually leaks — the entire basis of the Compact's independence negotiation resets.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The projection leaks to an SCA commercial contact. Within 48 hours, the SCA begins renegotiating every active water agreement using the 40-year figure as leverage. The NAF's technical investment calculus changes — a 40-year reserve is a limited asset, not a permanent one. Compact Assembly members who didn't know about the suppression face a political crisis in addition to a resource one. The interior communities, who have been running their own water management independently for a decade, suddenly become the most important people in the Basin.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Compact Assembly administration

ECONOMY

Diplomatic activity, commercial trade, NAF and SCA commercial operations, Compact governance

RISK

Intelligence operations by both SCA and NAF against Compact scientific and administrative staff

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Compact security force

ECONOMY

Black-market hydrological data, interior passage brokering, gene-forged Drift support (informal)

RISK

SCA Jaguar infiltration units — they run intelligence operations in New Buenos Aires that the Compact has never fully mapped

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The old Buenos Aires street grid visible in the shallow estuary water at low tide, laid out at a forty-five degree angle to the new highland grid above it — the drowned city and the rebuilt city at odds with each other geometrically, as if the new one was turned to face a different direction on purpose.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SOUTHERN COMPACT / COMPACT SECURITY FORCE

administrative governance, sensor network operations, Assembly security, hydrological data classification

SCA

commercial delegation, Jaguar infiltration units, intelligence operations against Compact scientific staff

NAF

diplomatic presence, technical contractors, Aurora Ranger liaison (unofficial)

CIVILIAN NEED

Certainty. The assurance that the water will be here past their children's generation. Compact citizenship security for the NAF-affiliated technical population.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Assembly member access, hydrological data networks, SCA commercial delegation intelligence, NAF diplomatic channel, Prometheus League interior passage contacts, drowned district heritage dive permits.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Compact hydrologist approaches operators in a commercial district with a data chip and instructions not to open it until they're outside the city's surveillance coverage.
- An SCA commercial delegation is in town for 'water framework discussions.' Their security detail is twice the size a commercial delegation warrants.
- A NAF technical contractor's access badge has been found in a section of the city she had no legitimate reason to be in.
- A Compact Assembly member asks operators to locate her chief of staff, who hasn't reported in for eighteen hours and who was meeting with an SCA contact last night.
- The gene-forged informal network in the city has a problem — a Puma operator in Stage 2 Drift is being managed by a PRC-affiliated physician who is not equipped for non-PRC gene-forged templates. Someone is going to get hurt.
- A street vendor in the lower market district is selling something wrapped in old packaging. The packaging is from a pre-Upheaval research installation. The vendor doesn't know what it is.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Jaguar unit — SCA gene-forged, civilian clothes, moving with the specific kind of unhurried efficiency that means they know exactly where they're going — is in the diplomatic quarter.
- A signal from the interior arrives at operators' comms. It is on a Prometheus League frequency. It contains one word and a coordinate.

- Three Compact security officers are arguing in an alley about something that one of them clearly wants reported and the other two clearly do not want reported.
- The hydrologist from the daytime encounter is being followed by someone she hasn't noticed yet.
- A Compact civilian who works in the assembly building offers operators a meal, conversation, and — if they seem trustworthy — information about a document that three assembly members have been keeping locked since 2063.
- An NAF Shepherd-template operator (Aurora Ranger, civilian cover) is in the city without a mission logged at Darwin. They are not operating on NAF orders.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The classified hydrological projection exists. Three assembly members have seen it. One of them is trying to get it out. [TRUE]
- The SCA's Phantom Vipers have a pre-positioned cell in New Buenos Aires that has been in place for four years, waiting for authorization. [TRUE]
- The Prometheus League's interior network has a communications node inside the city — not an operator, just infrastructure. A building nobody would look at twice. [PARTIALLY TRUE — infrastructure exists; location not confirmed]
- The NAF has a contingency plan for Basin acquisition if the Compact's political structure fails. It involves Santiago, the technical infrastructure already in place, and three specific Assembly members who have been cultivated over seven years. [TRAP — the plan exists in draft form; the Assembly members identified in the leaked version are wrong, planted to create paranoia]
- The old Buenos Aires estuary contains a pre-Upheaval research facility that was studying the aquifer system. The facility is partially intact. Its data predates the Compact's own survey methodology and its conclusions are different. [TRUE]
- The SCA's CANOPY SHIFT program has a southern variant being developed for Compact agricultural zones. It has not been deployed. It is ready. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

DR. VALENTINA RÍOS — COMPACT CHIEF HYDROLOGIST

CAN GET Public hydrological data, access to the Compact's monitoring network, introduction to the interior community water management experts who have been running independent systems for a decade.

WANTS The classified projection. She suspects it exists because the public numbers don't add up at the margins.

FEARS Being wrong — that she is reading the margins incorrectly and the 80-year figure is accurate, and she has been building a career assumption on a mistake.

CURRENT PRESSURE A grant application for deep aquifer survey equipment was declined last month with no stated reason. She filed it through normal channels. Someone above normal channels said no.

ASSEMBLY DELEGATE MARISOL GUTIÉRREZ — ONE OF THE THREE WHO KNOWS THE PROJECTION

CAN GET The classified projection document (she has a copy she has been debating releasing for eight months), SCA negotiation records for the past three years, the names of the other two assembly members who know.

WANTS To be told what to do. She has been paralyzed by the knowledge for eight months and the situation is not improving.

FEARS That releasing it destroys the Compact. That not releasing it also destroys the Compact, just more slowly.

CURRENT PRESSURE The SCA commercial delegation in the city this week includes someone she has met before, in a different context, who should not be on a commercial delegation.

ZONE 2 ITAIPÚ CONTROL ZONE

PARAGUAY-BRAZIL BORDER, PARANÁ RIVER

SECURITY	active (both Compact and SCA security forces, deliberately interleaved)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (well-maintained by both parties)
CIVILIANS	sparse (dam operations staff, security, small adjacent community)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (both sides, full redundancy)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (the most genuinely contested location in the Basin)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light (dam operations data, flow schedule intelligence)
MOBILITY	checkpointed (access controlled by both security contingents independently)

FUNCTION The physical expression of the Compact's independence — the infrastructure that makes the water sharing arrangement real rather than aspirational.

CONTROLLER Genuinely joint. Both parties have veto over significant operations. Both parties have been trying to develop unilateral capability for fifteen years. Neither has succeeded completely.

DRAW The dam itself — the Basin's most important piece of infrastructure. Intelligence on the renewal negotiation. Access to fifteen years of operational data.

RISK The interleaved security arrangement creates gaps that neither side has resolved. Both have identified them; neither has reported them to the joint committee. The agreement expires in three years.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The dam's joint management agreement expires in 2069. Three years from now. Both parties are already negotiating the renewal, and both parties' negotiating positions assume the 80-year aquifer viability figure. If the 40-year projection becomes known before the renewal, the negotiating framework collapses and both sides default to pressure tactics to achieve unilateral control before the window closes.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

An incident at the dam — sabotage, accident, or manufactured crisis — requires emergency unilateral operation. Whoever moves first in that window either gains a temporary operational advantage or provides the other party with the justification for a permanent challenge to the joint management structure. The SCA has a contingency plan for this. The Compact has a contingency plan for this. Both plans assume the other side will move first.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Joint management committee — genuinely cooperative on surface operations, genuinely adversarial on strategic planning

ECONOMY

Dam operations, flow schedule maintenance, joint technical briefings that both sides treat as intelligence-gathering opportunities

RISK

The interleaved security arrangement creates gaps that neither side has resolved — both have identified them; neither has reported them to the joint committee

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Both security contingents on reduced staff, genuinely cooperative on immediate safety, genuinely not cooperative on access to restricted zones

ECONOMY

Intelligence operations by both sides, informal information exchange between individual staff who have developed personal trust that exceeds their institutional mandates

RISK

The agreement-expiry negotiation is creating pressure that is showing up as individual staff making decisions their institutions haven't authorized

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A Compact Puma-template security officer and an SCA Caiman-template counterpart eating lunch at the same table in the joint operations canteen, twelve centimeters of institutional distrust between them, having a genuine conversation about the dam's northern intake calibration problem that neither of their official briefings has acknowledged.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SOUTHERN COMPACT / COMPACT SECURITY FORCE

southern flow gate control, security contingent, joint management participation, unilateral contingency planning

SCA

northern intake system control, security contingent, joint management participation, unilateral contingency planning, Jaguar units in adjacent community

CIVILIAN NEED

Stability. The small community adjacent to the dam has been here since before the dam was rebuilt. They want the joint management to hold because the alternative is being caught between two armies.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Joint management briefings, dam operational data, security contingent internal communications, flow gate sensor modification evidence, the second diversion structure.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A joint maintenance operation discovers that one of the flow gate sensors has been modified — not sabotaged, just modified to report slightly inaccurate readings. It has been this way for at least six months. Neither party can agree on who is responsible.
- The SCA's lead engineer requests an off-record meeting with operators. She wants to show them something in the northern intake system that she hasn't put in the official logs.
- A Compact security briefing goes longer than scheduled. The staff who are stuck waiting develop an informal conversation about the renewal negotiation that contains information neither institution has officially shared.
- A supply delivery arrives with a manifest that doesn't match the Compact's expected schedule. The SCA security team waves it through. The Compact security team wants to inspect it.
- A pre-Upheaval document in the dam's archived engineering files describes a second water diversion structure that was planned but never built — one that would have given the southern party unilateral flow control. It's marked as cancelled. The cancellation date is recent.
- An SCA Jaguar unit is in the adjacent community, not at the dam. They are asking questions about underwater access points on the dam's south face.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Compact engineer is in a restricted SCA zone. She doesn't look like she's lost. She looks like she's copying something.
- A signal from New Buenos Aires instructs the Compact security contingent to elevate readiness without specifying why. The SCA contingent notices the elevation and elevates in response.
- Someone is in the water below the dam's south face. Not a maintenance diver — wrong equipment, wrong approach angle.
- The flow gate sensor anomaly triggers an automated alert. Both security contingents respond. They arrive at the same location simultaneously and the joint protocol doesn't specify who has authority over an active anomaly.
- A Prometheus League signal fragment is picked up on the dam's communications intercept. It's not targeting the dam. It's targeting someone at the dam. The recipient can't be identified from the intercept alone.
- The SCA engineer who wanted the off-record meeting doesn't show up for her shift.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The SCA has a contingency plan for unilateral dam operation that can be executed in 90 minutes. It requires three specific personnel in specific positions. All three are currently stationed at the dam. [TRUE]
- The Compact has a contingency plan for unilateral dam operation that requires physically disabling the northern intake system. The Compact engineer who built the plan is the one who was in the restricted SCA zone last night. [TRUE]
- The cancelled second diversion structure was cancelled because the Compact built it anyway, underground, without telling the SCA. It has been operational for four years. [PARTIALLY TRUE — preliminary construction exists; operational status unknown]
- The agreement renewal negotiation includes a classified annex that both parties have agreed to and neither has disclosed to their own governance bodies. [TRAP — an annex exists but contains provisions both sides consider favorable; the 'classified' framing is EO disinformation designed to create internal Compact political pressure]
- The SCA's lead engineer has been providing the Compact with northern intake technical data under the table for three years. She believes the joint management structure is the best available option and both sides' unilateral contingency plans would destroy it. [TRUE]

- The Itaipú renewal negotiation has a third party. Not the NAF, not the Prometheus League — someone nobody at the dam has identified yet. They have been present at two of the negotiating sessions in New Buenos Aires. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

SCA ENGINEER LUCIANA SANTOS — NORTHERN INTAKE LEAD, ELEVEN YEARS AT THE DAM

CAN GET Northern intake technical specifications, SCA contingency plan timing and personnel requirements (she helped design it and considers it a catastrophic mistake), SCA maintenance schedules.

WANTS The renewal negotiation to succeed. Specifically, she wants someone to tell both parties about the 40-year aquifer projection so they negotiate on accurate information.

FEARS That the unilateral plans get executed before the negotiation completes and she has to watch something she's been maintaining for eleven years become a weapon.

CURRENT PRESSURE She was in the restricted zone because she found a modification to the northern intake system that wasn't on any maintenance log. She doesn't know who made it.

COMPACT SECURITY OFFICER RAFAEL MORENO — PUMA TEMPLATE, JOINT CANTEEN REGULAR

CAN GET Compact security contingent internal communications, the flow gate sensor modification timeline (he's been tracking it), the identity of the person who was in the water last night.

WANTS His counterpart, the SCA Caiman officer, to help him investigate the sensor modification without triggering either institution's official response protocols.

FEARS That the thing he found in the water access point on the south face is going to make everything worse before anyone can stop it.

CURRENT PRESSURE His counterpart shared something with him this morning that he can't put in an official report without starting the exact escalation both of them are trying to prevent.

ZONE 3 THE PATAGONIAN INTERIOR

SOUTH OF 46TH PARALLEL

SECURITY	none (no faction enforcement presence)
INFRASTRUCTURE	failing (repurposed pre-Upheaval, rebuilt from components)
CIVILIANS	sparse (interior communities, Prometheus League cells embedded)
SURVEILLANCE	dark zone (no faction sensor coverage south of 46th)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (Compact claims jurisdiction; cannot enforce it)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	informal economy only (barter, salvage, interior-origin food products)
MOBILITY	open (vast, difficult, weather-dependent)

FUNCTION The Compact's unsolved problem. The territory it claims but cannot govern. The Prometheus League's most functional operational base in the Southern Hemisphere.

CONTROLLER The interior communities govern themselves through structures that predate the Compact. The Prometheus League is embedded within those structures to a degree that varies by location and that the Compact's intelligence service has never accurately mapped.

DRAW Anonymity. Prometheus League support networks. Stage 3 Drift haven for gene-forged operators who have left faction service. The knowledge that no faction can find you here unless you want to be found.

RISK Weather (the interior steppe climate is genuinely hostile to outside operators without local knowledge), navigation (the dark zone means no faction mapping data), misjudging the Prometheus League's level of integration in any given community.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The interior communities have been running independent water management for a decade using methods developed outside faction technical frameworks. Those methods are working. They work because they're built on aquifer recharge practices that are more conservative than the Compact's extraction-optimized approach. If the 40-year projection becomes public, the interior communities' practices become the most important water management knowledge in the Basin. The Prometheus League understands this. The Compact does not.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The Compact attempts to assert governance over interior water management — driven by the aquifer crisis, driven by NAF technical pressure. The interior communities resist. The Prometheus League, which has spent eight years building trust with those communities, provides organizational and material support to that resistance. The Compact cannot use force without destroying the political relationship that gives it claim to the territory. It cannot not use force without losing the aquifer recharge zones it needs. There is no good option, which is exactly what the Prometheus League designed.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Interior community elders and governance structures — genuine authority, non-hierarchical, deeply pragmatic

ECONOMY

Interior agricultural output, salvage, crafted goods, the specific knowledge economy of people who have rebuilt everything from scratch

RISK

Weather, navigation, misjudging the Prometheus League's level of integration in any given community

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

The wind and whatever it carries

ECONOMY

Prometheus League operational activity — logistics, communications, the slow accumulation of technical capacity

RISK

Gene-forged operators in Drift — the interior has become an informal haven for Stage 2 and Stage 3 operators who have left faction service. The Prometheus League provides support. The operators provide capability.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A pre-Upheaval wind turbine, decommissioned officially, running anyway — maintained by an interior community with thirty years of improvised engineering knowledge and absolutely no documentation — turning in the constant Patagonian wind while three kilometers away, a Prometheus League communications node built into a sheep station's outbuilding transmits on a frequency no faction surveillance system is looking for.

FACTIONS PRESENT

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

interior resistance network, community-embedded cells, communications infrastructure, Stage 3 Drift support, post-technology governance proof of concept

CIVILIAN NEED

To be left alone. More specifically: to have the Compact stop threatening to assert governance over the interior's water management without offering anything in return.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Interior community elder introductions (through demonstrated trust), Prometheus League network contacts, Stage 3 Drift support resources, pre-Upheaval survey installation location, aquifer recharge methodology.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- An interior community's water engineer explains her recharge methodology to operators — the methodology that is making the Compact's projected 40-year figure look optimistic. She learned it from her grandmother. It predates the Upheaval.
- A Prometheus League member is clearly not a local. Their cover story is functional but not deep. They have not yet decided whether operators are a threat.
- An interior community is discussing whether to share their agricultural methods with the Compact in exchange for infrastructure support. The discussion has been going on for two years. A Prometheus League member is in the discussion. They are not saying anything. Their presence is a vote.
- Operators find evidence of a recent camp that was occupied by multiple people with military equipment. The camp is two days old. The people are gone. The interior community elder who points it out says she has been finding similar camps for three years.
- A Stage 3 Drift operator is living in an interior community, doing agricultural work, not talking about what they were before. A Prometheus League member checks on them weekly. The community knows what the operator is. They made a decision to know and not mention it.
- A piece of pre-Upheaval equipment in an interior community's salvage inventory has a Lumicite research designation. The community has been using it as a water pump component for eleven years.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Prometheus League communications exchange — multiple nodes, encrypted, significant data volume. Operators can intercept fragments. The fragments suggest something is being moved.
- The Stage 3 Drift operator is not in their dwelling. Nobody in the community comments on this.
- A Compact recon drone — the only faction hardware that ever comes this far south — malfunctions and comes down in an interior community's territory. The community finds it before operators do.
- A transmission on a frequency that matches gene-forged informal network protocols — not Prometheus League, not faction. Someone in the interior is talking to someone outside it.
- Two Prometheus League members are arguing about something in the dark. The argument is about whether 'now' is the right time. For what, operators can only partly determine.
- Something is moving through the steppe that is not following human movement patterns. It has been following operators since the afternoon. It is not hostile. It is curious.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Prometheus League's eight years in the interior have produced something more than a resistance network — they have built the infrastructure for a genuinely functional post-technology governance system. The interior communities are the proof of concept. [TRUE]
- The Stage 3 Drift operators living in the interior number more than twenty. The informal network has been routing them here specifically because the Prometheus League's non-faction status means no program claims jurisdiction over their Drift. [TRUE]
- The 'something moving through the steppe' is a gene-forged operator fully resolved to their template — no longer functioning in the hybrid space that defines operational gene-forged individuals. Something the programs said couldn't happen. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the individual exists; the 'couldn't happen' framing is faction propaganda]
- The Prometheus League has a working relationship with the interior communities based on eight years of genuine mutual aid, not infiltration. The Compact's framing of the relationship as 'exploitation' is wrong and they know it. [TRUE]
- There is a pre-Upheaval aquifer survey installation still operating in the deep interior. Its data stream has been running for sixty years. The Prometheus

League found it four years ago. [PARTIALLY TRUE — installation exists; data access status unknown]

- The third party in the Itaipú renewal negotiation is a Prometheus League representative operating under cover as an NGO consultant. They have been in the negotiations for six months. They want the Compact's independence to survive. They need the 40-year projection to be the negotiating baseline. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

ELDER CARMEN FUENTES — INTERIOR COMMUNITY WATER GOVERNANCE LEAD

CAN GET Deep aquifer recharge methodology, interior community network introductions, the location of the pre-Upheaval survey installation (she knows it's there; she hasn't shared this with the Prometheus League or anyone else).

WANTS To be left alone. More specifically: to have the Compact stop threatening to assert governance over the interior's water management without offering anything in return.

FEARS That the Compact's aquifer crisis will be used as justification for forced integration and her community won't have the capacity to resist it.

CURRENT PRESSURE A Compact technical team filed a survey permit for the recharge zone above her community's primary water source. The permit is pending. She has four weeks before it's approved.

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE COORDINATOR 'TERRA' — IDENTITY PROTECTED, INTERIOR OPERATIONS LEAD

CAN GET Prometheus League interior network map, Stage 3 operator locations, the deep survey installation data (partially), the Itaipú negotiation contact's identity.

WANTS The 40-year projection in the hands of people who will use it to force honest negotiations rather than as a weapon to break the Compact.

FEARS That the Compact breaks before the negotiation completes, and the vacuum gets filled by SCA or NAF rather than by something that serves the people actually living in the Basin.

CURRENT PRESSURE	Someone found one of the interior camps. The people who found it were professional. They have not acted on what they found. She is waiting to see why.

ZONE 4 SANTIAGO NAF HUB

CHILEAN TECHNICAL CORRIDOR

SECURITY	active (Chilean police + NAF Aurora Ranger garrison + NAF technical security)
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (NAF-spec, best-maintained in the Basin)
CIVILIANS	packed (3.8 million)
SURVEILLANCE	comprehensive (NAF sensor network, the most advanced in the Southern Hemisphere)
FACTION PRESSURE	NAF dominant / Chilean government formally sovereign, practically dependent / SCA intelligence presence
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light (NAF technical data, Compact intelligence, Basin transit documents)
MOBILITY	open (city) / checkpointed (NAF military zones, Andean pass access)

FUNCTION	NAF's Southern Hemisphere anchor. The technical, military, and intelligence platform from which the NAF influences Basin politics without formally claiming Basin territory.
CONTROLLER	Chilean Provisional Government on paper. NAF Southern Command in practice. The gap between paper and practice is managed by Ambassador-General Kira Johanssen, who holds a military rank, a diplomatic portfolio, and the actual authority to direct Aurora Ranger operations in the Basin.
DRAW	NAF technical infrastructure that works, military intelligence brokerage, the proof of concept for NAF alignment. The city that survived the Upheaval through engineering.

RISK NAF technical dependency leverage — the 'maintenance rotation' option. Chilean resistance networks. SCA intelligence collection against NAF technical systems. The deep-systems surveillance discovery.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The NAF's technical infrastructure in Santiago runs on systems that require NAF-specific maintenance expertise. The deep systems — water treatment algorithms, seismic monitoring AI, agricultural optimization protocols — operate on NAF proprietary platforms that Chilean technical staff cannot modify, audit, or fully understand. This is not an accident. The dependency is the leverage. If the Compact collapses and the NAF moves to absorb the Basin, Santiago's infrastructure becomes the template.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Chilean domestic politics produces a government that challenges the NAF partnership terms. NAF technical staff begin 'scheduled maintenance rotations' that reduce Chilean-accessible system capacity by 12%. Water pressure drops in three districts. The agricultural optimization system underperforms for one growing cycle. The Chilean government, facing public pressure from constituents who remember what Santiago was like before the NAF, reverses course. This has happened once. It took four months. The NAF considers it a successful calibration.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Chilean police + NAF military presence (visible, cooperative, professionally seamless)

ECONOMY

NAF technical sector, Chilean commercial district, Basin-wide intelligence operations run from commercial cover

RISK

SCA intelligence collection against NAF technical systems, Chilean political dissent in the university district

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

NAF security patrols + Chilean police (cooperation less seamless at night; jurisdictional friction surfaces)

ECONOMY

Intelligence brokerage in the commercial district, NAF off-duty culture, Chilean resistance networks (small, cautious, well-informed)

RISK

Aurora Ranger operations that Chilean police are not briefed on. These happen approximately monthly. The Chilean government learns about them afterward. Or doesn't.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The Santiago skyline at dusk from the eastern hills — NAF-engineered water reclamation towers rising above the original city grid, their surfaces reflecting Andean sunset in a way that makes them look beautiful until you understand that they are the visible expression of a dependency so deep the city cannot function without the faction that built them.

FACTIONS PRESENT

NAF / AURORA RANGERS

garrison presence, technical infrastructure control, Basin-wide intelligence operations, Ambassador-General Johanssen's diplomatic apparatus

CHILEAN PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

formal sovereignty, police operations, university district political activity, resistance networks

SCA

intelligence presence in commercial district, Jaguar operative contacts with Chilean resistance

CIVILIAN NEED

Sovereignty. The knowledge that the infrastructure that keeps 3.8 million people alive is not a lever someone else controls. The math that says it is.

OPERATOR ACCESS

NAF Basin contingency plans (through Johanssen), deep-systems technical data (through Soto), Chilean resistance network contacts, SCA-NAF parallel negotiation intelligence, Aurora Ranger operational schedules.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Chilean technical engineer requests a meeting with operators outside NAF surveillance coverage. She has been assigned to a deep-systems audit that NAF has been blocking for three years. She found a way in. What she found is not what she expected.
- Ambassador-General Johanssen invites operators to a diplomatic reception. The invitation is specific: she wants them to observe a conversation she's having with the SCA trade attaché. She wants them to see what the SCA is offering.
- A university district demonstration — students protesting NAF technical dependency. Small, permitted, monitored. Among the demonstrators, a former Chilean military officer whose presence suggests this is not purely a student movement.
- An Aurora Ranger Wolf-template operator approaches operators at a commercial district cafe. She has been reassigned from Darwin Forward to Santi-

ago. She does not know why. She has brought information about the Basin contingency plan that she wasn't supposed to read.

- A Compact diplomatic courier arrives in Santiago with a sealed message for someone who is not at the Compact mission. The intended recipient is in the Chilean government.
- NAF technical security is conducting an unusual sweep of the commercial district. They are looking for a specific signal source. Their search pattern suggests the source is in the SCA trade mission.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- An Aurora Ranger operation in the Chilean port district. The operators involved are not wearing Chilean-jurisdiction markers. They are extracting someone from a vessel that arrived two hours ago.
- The Chilean engineer who found her way into the deep systems is being followed. Not by NAF security — by someone she doesn't recognize, using tradecraft that is neither NAF nor Chilean.
- A Chilean resistance network contact approaches operators with an offer: internal NAF communications intercepts from the past six months, in exchange for transit documentation to the Compact.
- An SCA Jaguar operative is in the city — not under commercial cover, but also not conducting a visible operation. She is meeting with the former Chilean military officer from the university demonstration.
- NAF Southern Command receives a communication from New Buenos Aires that triggers an immediate staff meeting at 0200. The subject is the Itaipú renewal negotiation.
- A power fluctuation in the eastern residential district. Not a failure — a fluctuation. The NAF water reclamation system compensates automatically. The fluctuation pattern, if operators have access to Compact hydrological data, matches the 40-year aquifer stress signature.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The NAF's Basin contingency plan involves transitioning the Compact cities to NAF technical dependency over a three-year period following any governance failure. Santiago is the template. The plan has been operational for two years. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the plan exists; whether it is 'operational' vs 'contingent' depends on which NAF officer you ask]
- Ambassador-General Johanssen has been conducting a parallel negotiation with the SCA — separate from the Itaipú framework — that would partition

the Basin between NAF and SCA spheres of influence if the Compact collapses. The Compact does not know about this negotiation. [TRUE]

- The Chilean deep-systems audit revealed that NAF technical infrastructure in Santiago includes a surveillance capability that monitors all Chilean government communications. The surveillance has been active since installation. [TRUE]
- The former Chilean military officer organizing with the university students has NAF counterintelligence clearance. He is not a dissident. He is a test — measuring Chilean resistance network capability for NAF strategic planning. [TRAP — the officer is genuine; this rumor is NAF disinformation designed to discredit Chilean resistance networks]
- Santiago's NAF infrastructure includes a Lumicite-based power component that the Chilean government was not informed about. The component is experimental and connected to a NAF research program that Johanssen does not fully control. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the component exists; Johanssen's awareness is unclear]
- The Compact's sealed message to the Chilean government contains a copy of the 40-year aquifer projection and a proposal for a Chilean-Compact alliance independent of both NAF and SCA. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

AMBASSADOR-GENERAL KIRA JOHANSSEN — NAF SOUTHERN COMMAND, SANTIAGO

CAN GET NAF Basin contingency plans (she wrote them), the parallel SCA negotiation terms, Aurora Ranger operational capability in the Basin, and a perspective on Basin politics that is ruthlessly informed and not entirely aligned with NAF headquarters.

WANTS A Basin outcome that doesn't require NAF military intervention. She has built contingency plans she hopes to never use. The Itaipú renewal is the last chance for a negotiated framework.

FEARS That NAF headquarters will authorize the contingency plan before she has exhausted diplomatic options. Her authority to delay implementation is limited and diminishing.

CURRENT PRESSURE The communication from New Buenos Aires tonight. The Itaipú negotiation is accelerating. Johanssen has twelve days before her own headquarters forces a decision she is not ready to make.

ENGINEER CATALINA SOTO — CHILEAN TECHNICAL STAFF, DEEP-SYSTEMS ACCESS

CAN GET NAF infrastructure schematics for Santiago, the surveillance capability documentation, the Lumicite component's location and specifications, and enough technical data to build a case for Chilean infrastructure independence.

WANTS The Chilean government to see what she has found. She cannot transmit it through any channel NAF monitors, which is all of them.

FEARS That the Chilean government already knows and has accepted the terms. That the dependency is not accidental but negotiated.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her deep-systems access was flagged yesterday. She has approximately 48 hours before NAF security reviews the access log and identifies what she looked at.

COLONEL MATÍAS REYES — FORMER CHILEAN MILITARY, UNIVERSITY DISTRICT ORGANIZER

CAN GET Chilean resistance network contacts, former military intelligence on NAF operational patterns, and the Chilean government's internal assessment of the NAF partnership — the classified version that acknowledges the dependency.

WANTS A viable path to Chilean sovereignty that doesn't require the city's infrastructure to fail. He understands the dependency math. He is looking for a way around it.

FEARS That the NAF counterintelligence rumor about him is gaining traction and his resistance contacts will stop trusting him.

CURRENT PRESSURE The SCA Jaguar operative who met with him last night offered something. He has not yet decided whether to accept.

ZONE 5 ANDEAN LITHIUM FIELDS — ATACAMA-PUNA SALT FLATS

SECURITY active (Compact mining police + NAF technical security + private extraction contractor security)

INFRASTRUCTURE	purpose-built (extraction infrastructure well-maintained; worker community infrastructure neglected)
CIVILIANS	packed in camps (12,000, altitude-limited rotation)
SURVEILLANCE	cameras + NAF satellite (extraction site) / dark zones in worker camps
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (Compact permits, NAF technical control, SCA market dependency)
CONTAMINATION	present (lithium extraction brine waste, high-altitude UV exposure, altitude sickness endemic)
BLACK MARKET	moderate (lithium concentrates, extraction data, altitude medication)
MOBILITY	restricted (plateau access via two maintained roads, altitude limits vehicle types)

FUNCTION The Basin's second resource pillar. Where the Compact's economic independence is manufactured, literally, at the cost of the extraction communities' health.

CONTROLLER Compact Mining Authority on paper. In practice, NAF technical contractor Horizon Minerals runs extraction operations, Compact police maintain perimeter security, and the extraction communities run themselves within the camps.

DRAW Lithium extraction revenue, the Basin's second economic pillar. The medical documentation that proves what the extraction is doing to the workers. The Lumicite deposit beneath the salt flat.

RISK Brine pond contamination, altitude medical emergencies, the extraction community strike, Horizon Minerals security contractor, the NAF monitoring equipment detecting Lumicite resonance.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The extraction process produces brine waste that is pumped into evaporation ponds. The ponds are leaking. They have been leaking for three years into the aquifer recharge zone beneath the salt flats. The recharge zone feeds into the same Andean glacier melt system that supplies the Patagonian aquifer. The contamination is moving slowly. It will reach measurable levels in the main aquifer system in approximately five years. The Basin's two critical resources — water and lithium — are structurally opposed. Extracting one contaminates the other.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The extraction communities strike. Not over wages — over the brine leak. A worker's child developed symptoms consistent with heavy metal exposure. The camp medical officer confirmed the exposure source. The extraction communities have documentation. A work stoppage at the lithium fields halts the Basin's second revenue stream and creates a political crisis that the Compact cannot manage without either acknowledging the contamination or deploying force against a labor action with documented health justification.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Horizon Minerals extraction management + Compact mining police + NAF technical staff

ECONOMY

Lithium extraction, brine processing, concentrate shipment staging

RISK

Extraction community labor organizing, altitude medical emergencies, NAF-Compact revenue negotiations

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Camp self-governance + Compact police perimeter (the police do not enter the camps after dark)

ECONOMY

Worker solidarity networks, altitude medication distribution, information exchange with contacts in New Buenos Aires and Santiago

RISK

The brine ponds at night. The evaporation process produces chemical fog in certain wind conditions. The fog reaches the camps. The camp medical officer has been documenting exposure incidents.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The salt flat at sunrise — white crust, blue sky, the extraction machinery laid out in precise geometric patterns across a landscape that has no other geometry — and at the edge of the operational zone, a line of workers walking to shift in respirators that the company provides and that everyone at altitude knows are insufficient for the chemical environment they are walking into.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SOUTHERN COMPACT / COMPACT MINING AUTHORITY

permits, perimeter security, revenue collection

NAF / HORIZON MINERALS

extraction operations, technical infrastructure, NAF Lumicite resonance monitoring

SCA

commercial buyer presence, lithium supply assessment

CIVILIAN NEED

Clean air. Clean water. The medical documentation in hands that can force a regulatory response before the next child gets sick. Someone to acknowledge what the respirators aren't stopping.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Camp medical documentation, brine contamination data, Horizon Minerals internal assessments, NAF Lumicite monitoring readings, extraction community labor network, the child's case file.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Horizon Minerals supervisor asks operators to witness a safety inspection that she is conducting against her management's instructions. She wants independent documentation of the brine pond condition.
- An extraction community labor representative approaches operators during a shift change. He has the medical documentation of the child's exposure. He wants it delivered to someone outside the fields who can act on it.
- A NAF technical team is installing new monitoring equipment at the extraction site. The equipment monitors Lumicite resonance signatures. There is no official Lumicite presence at the lithium fields. The team is not answering questions.
- A Compact mining police officer is investigating a theft from the concentrate staging area. 200 kilograms of lithium concentrate missing. The theft was professional and used access codes that only Horizon Minerals management has.
- An SCA commercial buyer is on the plateau — unusual, since SCA purchases are normally conducted through New Buenos Aires intermediaries. She is inspecting the extraction operation personally and asking questions about output capacity.

- A worker discovers that the brine pond nearest to the camps has developed an amber discoloration at its deepest point. The discoloration is not consistent with lithium extraction chemistry. The worker describes it as 'lakefire.'

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Chemical fog from the brine ponds reaches the camps. Twenty workers report respiratory symptoms. The camp medical officer activates an emergency protocol that Horizon Minerals management considers an overreaction.
- The extraction community's labor network is meeting in the central camp. The meeting is about the strike. The vote is tomorrow. Operators who attend hear the medical documentation read aloud. It is specific, clinical, and damning.
- A Horizon Minerals vehicle leaves the extraction site at 0200, heading south on a road that doesn't appear on the Compact's transport maps. The vehicle is carrying sealed containers.
- The NAF monitoring equipment activates at 0300. The resonance readings show a signature that matches the Arafura-pattern Lumicite pulse. The reading comes from beneath the salt flat.
- Two Compact mining police officers are arguing at the perimeter checkpoint. One of them has been ordered to prevent a specific worker from leaving the plateau. The order did not come from the police chain of command.
- The amber discoloration in the brine pond is glowing. Faintly. At 3,800 meters elevation, on a salt flat that is supposed to contain only lithium. The night shift workers photograph it. The photographs will be on six different communication networks by morning.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The lithium fields sit on a Lumicite deposit. The NAF monitoring equipment confirms it. Horizon Minerals has known for eight months and has been adjusting extraction procedures to avoid triggering resonance. [TRUE]
- The brine pond contamination report and the 40-year aquifer projection are connected. The contamination accelerates aquifer degradation. The actual viability figure, accounting for lithium extraction contamination, is not 40 years. It is 25. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the contamination is real; the revised figure is Compact hydrology's worst-case estimate, not confirmed]
- The 200 kilograms of stolen lithium concentrate was taken by Horizon Minerals management and shipped to Santiago. The theft was staged to cover an off-manifest extraction that goes directly to NAF research facilities. [TRUE]

- The SCA buyer on the plateau is not there for lithium. She is there for the Lumicite. The SCA has learned about the deposit and is positioning to negotiate extraction rights. [TRAP — the buyer is genuinely there for lithium supply assessment; the Lumicite attribution is planted by NAF intelligence to create SCA-Compact friction]
- The extraction community labor network has a contact inside the Compact Assembly — an assembly member's aide who grew up in the camps and has been passing information both directions for two years. [TRUE]
- The Lumicite deposit beneath the salt flat is connected to the same geological system as the Patagonian aquifer. Extraction from one affects the other. The NAF research team at Santiago has modeled this and has not shared the models with the Compact. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

DR. ELENA VÁSQUEZ — CAMP MEDICAL OFFICER, EXTRACTION COMMUNITY

CAN GET Complete medical documentation of extraction-related health impacts, brine contamination exposure data, the child's case file, and three years of altitude sickness records that Horizon Minerals has been classifying as 'pre-existing conditions.'

WANTS The medical data in hands that can force a regulatory response before the next child gets sick. She has exhausted internal channels.

FEARS Horizon Minerals management. Specifically the security contractor who arrived last month and has been 'auditing' camp access records. His audit is targeting people who talk to outsiders.

CURRENT PRESSURE The strike vote is tomorrow. If it passes, the medical data becomes the workers' primary legal defense. If it fails, her documentation becomes a target for suppression.

SUPERVISOR PATRICIA MENDOZA — HORIZON MINERALS OPERATIONS, BRINE MANAGEMENT

CAN GET Brine pond contamination data, the aquifer recharge zone monitoring results, Horizon Minerals' internal assessment of the leak timeline, and the off-manifest extraction records for the lithium shipments to Santiago.

WANTS To stop the leak. She is an engineer. The leak is an engineering problem with an engineering solution. The solution costs money that Horizon Minerals will not spend because spending it means acknowledging the problem.

FEARS The Lumicite resonance readings. She does not understand what a Lumicite deposit does to lithium extraction chemistry. Nobody at Horizon Minerals does. The NAF team does. They are not sharing.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her safety inspection report — the one she asked operators to witness — has been rejected by management for the second time. The rejection came from Santiago, not from on-site management. NAF is involved in the suppression.

LABOR REPRESENTATIVE JAVIER ROCA — EXTRACTION COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

CAN GET The strike coordination plan, the labor network's contact inside the Compact Assembly, community intelligence on Horizon Minerals operations that management does not know the workers have observed, and a workforce of 12,000 people who are about to make a collective decision.

WANTS The medical data delivered to Sable Rourke or an equivalent journalist before the strike begins. A strike with published health documentation is a labor action with legal standing. A strike without it is a disruption that Horizon Minerals can suppress.

FEARS That the strike will be met with force. The security contractor is not here to audit camp access records. The workers know this.

CURRENT PRESSURE The vote is tomorrow. His people are ready. What they don't have is confirmation that anyone outside the plateau cares about what is happening to them.

ZONE 6 ESTUARY DROWNED DISTRICT

OLD BUENOS AIRES, SUBMERGED

SECURITY light (Compact heritage dive permits required; enforcement inconsistent)

INFRASTRUCTURE	drowned (structurally stable buildings, flooded utilities, pre-Upheaval systems of unknown operational status)
CIVILIANS	sparse (dive farmers, heritage program staff, salvage crews)
SURVEILLANCE	minimal (Compact surface monitoring of dive permits; no underwater sensor coverage)
FACTION PRESSURE	low (no faction claims the drowned district; all factions have looked at it)
CONTAMINATION	present (estuarine sediment, chemical residue from flooded industrial zones)
BLACK MARKET	moderate (salvaged data storage, pre-Upheaval equipment, aquifer research hardware)
MOBILITY	restricted (dive access only, visibility-dependent, current-variable)

FUNCTION The Compact's underwater archive, whether the Compact acknowledges it or not. The location where pre-Upheaval research data, intelligence archives, and infrastructure that was supposed to be decommissioned wait for someone to go looking.

CONTROLLER Compact Heritage Authority administers the permitted dive sites. The unpermitted areas — approximately 80% of the drowned district — are controlled by whoever is willing to go there. The dive farmers who work the upper-floor oyster beds know the district better than any faction survey.

DRAW The pre-Upheaval research facility data vault. The intelligence archive. The cable conduit system that was never decommissioned. Sixty years of aquifer monitoring data that would confirm or disprove the 40-year projection.

RISK Structural collapse in unreinforced buildings, current shifts in narrow corridors, restricted zone encounters with other dive teams who shouldn't be there, the cable conduit resonance.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The pre-Upheaval aquifer research facility in the drowned district's university zone contains data that predates the Compact's own monitoring network by thirty years. That data, if recovered, would provide the baseline for determining whether the 40-year aquifer projection is accurate, conservative, or optimistic. The facility was flooded in 2038. It was not decommissioned before flooding. The question of whether its data storage survived twenty-eight years of submersion is a technical question that no one has tested because testing it requires entering a restricted zone classified as structurally hazardous.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The pre-Upheaval communications infrastructure in the drowned district activates. Not fully — a signal, intermittent, routed through cable conduits that were laid in the 2020s and that the estuary water has not fully corroded. The signal matches the Lumicite resonance signature documented in other territories. The drowned district, which has been treated as a historical artifact, becomes an active node in a network that no faction has mapped. The Compact discovers that the ground it stands on — or the water it stands above — is not inert.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Compact Heritage Authority (dive permits) / dive farmers (informal water access governance)

ECONOMY

Oyster farming, heritage tourism dives, permitted salvage operations

RISK

Structural collapse, current shifts, restricted zone encounters with other dive teams who shouldn't be there

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Nobody. The drowned district after dark is ungoverned water.

ECONOMY

Unauthorized salvage operations, data storage recovery, access to the restricted university zone

RISK

Navigation in zero-visibility conditions, the cable conduit hum that dive farmers say they can feel through their equipment. The hum has been getting stronger.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A dive farmer tending oyster beds on the forty-third floor of what used to be a financial tower, morning sunlight cutting through the estuary water in green-gold shafts, the oysters growing on trading desk surfaces in rows that follow the building's original open-plan layout — organized by the same geometry that once organized capital, now organizing protein.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SOUTHERN COMPACT / HERITAGE AUTHORITY

dive permits, signal investigation, archaeological survey (cover for communications diagnostic)

SCA

unauthorized dive team in the restricted university zone, racing for the data vault

SHINKAI COLLECTIVE

operating under heritage dive permits issued to a research institution that doesn't exist, connected to the Arafura Deep program

CIVILIAN NEED

An explanation for the hum. The dive farmers have been in these waters for twenty years and the hum started eighteen months ago and is getting stronger. A guarantee the Heritage Authority won't close the district entirely.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Drowned district navigation (through dive farmers), Heritage Authority signal trace data, data vault access, cable conduit system intelligence, salvaged pre-Upheaval data storage.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A dive farmer signals operators underwater. She has found something in the building she farms that wasn't there last week. A section of wall has collapsed, revealing a sealed room behind it. The room contains equipment that is not from the building's original function.
- A Compact Heritage Authority dive team is in the district on an 'archaeological survey.' Their equipment is not archaeological. It is communications diagnostic hardware. They are tracing a signal.
- An SCA dive team — not under Compact permit, not authorized — is operating in the restricted university zone. They are not being subtle. They are being fast.
- A salvage crew surfaces with a sealed data storage unit from the old intelligence archive sector. They want to sell it. They don't know what's on it. Three factions will be interested by nightfall.
- The oyster beds in the financial district are dying in a specific pattern — the die-off follows the cable conduit routing through the buildings. The dive farmers have noticed. The Heritage Authority has not.
- An operator on a permitted heritage dive encounters a diver who is not on any permit roster, moving with purpose through a corridor that connects the

financial district to the university zone. The diver signals 'no threat' and continues. Their equipment is Shinkai Collective spec.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The cable conduit hum is audible tonight — stronger than previous reports. Dive farmers who are still in the water report vibration through their equipment. One farmer surfaces and refuses to go back in.
- A light in the restricted university zone. Visible through three meters of estuary water. Not a dive light — static, amber, coming from inside the research facility. It pulses twice and goes dark.
- Three dive teams converge on the intelligence archive sector simultaneously — not coordinated, drawn by the same salvage market intelligence. The encounter is tense. One team has weapons.
- The communications infrastructure transmits a burst signal. The signal routes through the cable conduit system, exits the estuary through an underwater junction, and is directed at a ground station the operators cannot immediately identify. The signal duration is four seconds.
- A section of the restricted university zone's exterior wall gives way. The collapse exposes the research facility's primary data vault. The vault is sealed. The seal appears intact. Whatever is inside has been preserved.
- Something in the drowned district's deepest corridor is producing a bioelectric signature. Not oysters. Not estuarine biology. Something that responds to the cable conduit resonance. The dive farmers call it 'the new tenant' and will not discuss it further.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The research facility's data vault contains sixty years of aquifer monitoring data. If recovered, the data would either confirm or disprove the 40-year projection with pre-Upheaval baseline comparisons. The Compact has not attempted recovery because the result might be worse than 40 years. [TRUE]
- The intelligence archive that was deliberately flooded contains documents from the old Argentine government's Lumicite research program — a program that predates public knowledge of Lumicite by fifteen years. [TRUE]
- The cable conduit system was never decommissioned because someone ensured it wasn't. The system has been maintained from the outside — from a connection point that is not in the drowned district. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the conduits are active; the maintenance source is unconfirmed]
- The Shinkai Collective has been operating in the drowned district for six months under heritage dive permits issued to a research institution that

doesn't exist. Their operation is connected to the Arafura Deep program. [TRUE]

- The 'new tenant' in the deep corridor is a Lumicite-adapted organism. The estuary's biology is changing in the same way the Arafura Deep's biology has changed. The connection is the cable conduit system. [UNCLEAR — the organism exists; the Lumicite attribution is unverified]
- The burst signal from the communications infrastructure was received by the pre-Upheaval survey installation in the Patagonian interior. The two systems are connected. They were always connected. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

DIVE FARMER ROSA QUIROGA — FORTY-THIRD FLOOR FINANCIAL TOWER, TWENTY-YEAR VETERAN

CAN GET Drowned district navigation that no survey covers, dive team identifications, the oyster die-off pattern mapped to cable conduit routing, and access to buildings classified as hazardous.

WANTS An explanation for the hum. She has been in these waters for twenty years and the hum started eighteen months ago and is getting stronger. She is not frightened. She is angry. Someone is doing something to her water.

FEARS That the Heritage Authority will close the drowned district entirely. A closure kills her livelihood and the livelihood of sixty farming families.

CURRENT PRESSURE The oyster die-off. If it spreads beyond the cable conduit pattern, the farms fail. She has three months of reserves.

DR. ALEJANDRO FUENTES — COMPACT HERITAGE AUTHORITY, SIGNAL INVESTIGATION

CAN GET The Heritage Authority's communications diagnostic data, the signal trace results, and the Compact's internal assessment of the drowned district's pre-Upheaval infrastructure status.

WANTS To complete the signal trace before the Heritage Authority's budget review cancels his survey. The budget review is in three weeks. He is close to determining the signal's destination.

FEARS That the signal trace leads to an answer the Compact government does not want. He has been given unusual latitude for a heritage

survey. He suspects the latitude was granted because someone expects him to find nothing.

CURRENT PRESSURE The SCA dive team in the university zone. If they reach the data vault before his team does, the pre-Upheaval aquifer baseline goes to the SCA.

SALVAGE OPERATOR MARCOS DELGADO — BLACK-MARKET DATA RECOVERY SPECIALIST

CAN GET Recovered data storage media from the intelligence archive, pre-Upheaval equipment in functional condition, and the underground network of buyers paying increasing prices for drowned district salvage.

WANTS A buyer for the intelligence archive data unit his crew recovered — one who will pay enough that he can relocate his family outside the Basin before whatever is happening in the drowned district reaches the surface.

FEARS The data on the storage unit. He looked at enough of it to know it shouldn't be in civilian hands. He also knows the buyer market well enough to know that every faction will want it.

CURRENT PRESSURE Two of the three interested parties have made contact. The third will find him soon. He needs to sell before the competition turns violent.

ZONE 7 MATO GROSSO HEADWATERS

NORTHERN BOUNDARY, SCA BORDER

SECURITY	light (Compact police patrols on main road; SCA commercial security at investment sites)
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (duplicate systems, poorly coordinated, river infrastructure aging)
CIVILIANS	normal (agricultural communities, approximately 40,000)

SURVEILLANCE	minimal (Compact satellite coverage; SCA drone overflights from the north; river valleys create sensor shadows)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (Compact claims governance; SCA exercises economic influence; Phantom Vipers present)
CONTAMINATION	present (agricultural runoff, upstream lithium extraction residue beginning to appear)
BLACK MARKET	moderate (agricultural output sold off-manifest, water flow data, SCA commercial intelligence)
MOBILITY	open (river routes) / seasonal (road access dependent on rainfall)

FUNCTION The Basin's northern pressure point. Where Compact and SCA influence overlap, where the water that feeds Itaipú begins, and where the slow-motion contest for Basin alignment plays out in irrigation contracts and pump maintenance.

CONTROLLER Compact provincial administration that functions when the roads are passable. SCA commercial contractors who function regardless. In practice, the river valley communities are self-governing and sell alignment to whichever faction is present that week.

DRAW The headwaters — where the water that feeds Itaipú Dam begins. Agricultural output. The flow rate data that both factions pay for. The Phantom Viper cell locations.

RISK The declining flow rate. SCA diversion construction. Phantom Viper activation. The lithium contamination reaching the headwaters from the Andean fields. Being caught between Compact and SCA when the standoff turns kinetic.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The headwaters flow rate is declining. Not dramatically — 3% annually for the past five years, consistent with the glacier retreat pattern and the aquifer stress trajectory. At the current rate, Itaipú Dam's northern intake receives measurably less water in seven years than the joint management agreement's flow specifications require. The SCA's agricultural systems, designed for current flow rates, begin failing first. This gives the Compact leverage in the renewal negotiation. It also gives the SCA an increasingly desperate reason to secure unilateral dam control.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The flow rate decline crosses a threshold that SCA agricultural monitors detect. The SCA begins upstream water capture — diversion structures in Mato Grosso that take water before it reaches the Compact-managed Paraná system. The diversions are technically illegal under the current water agreement. The SCA frames them as 'agricultural emergency measures.' The Compact response — sending Puma units to dismantle the diversions — risks the first direct military confrontation between Compact and SCA forces. The Phantom Vipers, pre-positioned for exactly this scenario, activate.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Compact provincial police (intermittent) / SCA commercial contractors (consistent)

ECONOMY

Agriculture, river transport, infrastructure maintenance competition between Compact and SCA contractors

RISK

SCA agricultural expansion, Compact survey teams mapping the declining flow rate, agricultural communities choosing sides

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Community self-governance / SCA commercial security at investment sites

ECONOMY

Off-manifest agricultural sales, water flow data brokerage, Phantom Viper logistics resupply

RISK

The Phantom Vipers. Four years pre-positioned, operating from agricultural cover, maintaining readiness for an activation order that the Itaipú renewal failure would trigger.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A river junction where the Compact irrigation pump stands on the south bank and the SCA irrigation pump stands on the north bank, both drawing from the same declining river, their intake pipes close enough that a person standing on the riverbed could touch both simultaneously — two factions drinking from the same glass and pretending the other isn't there.

FACTIONS PRESENT

SOUTHERN COMPACT

provincial police, agricultural survey teams, Harpy Eagle deep-cover operative, Puma units on standby

SCA / PHANTOM VIPERS

commercial contractors, agricultural investment, Jaguar advance units, twelve-operative Phantom Viper cell pre-positioned for four years

PROMETHEUS LEAGUE

unauthorized monitoring station on the riverbank, part of a Basin-wide geological resonance network

CIVILIAN NEED

A guarantee that their community's water access survives the Itaipú renewal, regardless of which faction controls the outcome. The lithium contamination stopped before it reaches the agricultural water supply.

OPERATOR ACCESS

River flow data (through Elder Paredes), Phantom Viper cell locations (through Luna or Herrera), SCA diversion construction intelligence, Compact military contingency response plans, the unauthorized monitoring station data.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A Compact survey team is measuring river flow rates with equipment they've been told to calibrate against last year's figures rather than current readings. The team leader knows the calibration instruction is designed to hide the decline. She is measuring accurately anyway.
- An SCA commercial contractor is building an irrigation extension that, if completed, diverts 4% of the river's flow before it reaches Compact territory. The construction crew has Compact agricultural permits that were issued by a provincial office that shouldn't have authority over river infrastructure.
- An agricultural community elder approaches operators. Her community has noticed the river level dropping. She has been noticing for three years. She wants to know if anyone else is counting.
- A Phantom Viper operative is working as a farmhand on an SCA-affiliated agricultural operation. Her cover is deep — she has been here two years. But she's made a mistake: she was seen communicating on equipment that farmhands don't carry.
- A Compact police patrol discovers an unauthorized water monitoring station on the riverbank. The station is transmitting flow data on a frequency that

doesn't match Compact, SCA, or NAF communications protocols. It has been there for at least a year.

- Lithium extraction residue appears in the river for the first time — trace amounts, detected by the agricultural community elder's personal testing equipment. The contamination corridor from the salt flats to the headwaters is now measurable.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A Phantom Viper resupply operation. A vehicle arrives from the north with supplies that are not agricultural. The handoff takes six minutes. The vehicle returns north.
- The unauthorized monitoring station transmits a data burst at 0200. The burst is directed at two destinations: one in the Patagonian interior, one in the drowned district. The station is monitoring the same resonance signature documented in other territories.
- An agricultural community meeting about water. Not political — practical. The river is lower this season than last. The pumps are pulling harder. The community needs to decide whether to plant a full crop or reduce acreage.
- A Compact Puma-template operative arrives in the zone on a mission she won't discuss. She is looking for the Phantom Viper cell. She has intelligence that the activation order is imminent.
- Three SCA commercial vehicles cross from the north carrying equipment that is not agricultural. The equipment is infrastructure for a water diversion structure. Construction begins at dawn.
- The river, at this point in the valley, produces a sound at certain water levels — a low vibration that carries through the riverbed stone. Tonight the vibration matches the resonance frequency. The monitoring station records the match. An agricultural elder, who has heard this sound twice before in her life, begins preparing.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Phantom Viper cell in the headwaters is twelve operatives. Their activation orders include securing the headwaters river junction and preventing Compact forces from reaching the SCA diversion infrastructure. The activation trigger is Itaipú renewal failure. [TRUE]
- The unauthorized monitoring station was placed by the Prometheus League. It is part of a network that spans the Basin, monitoring the geological resonance system that connects the aquifer, the lithium fields, the drowned district, and the interior. [TRUE]

- The agricultural communities have been offered a deal by the SCA: guaranteed water access and market prices in exchange for permitting SCA infrastructure on their land. Twelve of the forty communities have accepted. [PARTIALLY TRUE — the deal exists; the number is eight, not twelve]
- The flow rate decline will reach critical threshold in three years, not seven. The Compact's survey team is using calibration instructions designed to extend the timeline. The SCA's own monitoring shows three years. [TRAP — the three-year figure is SCA intelligence designed to create urgency that justifies preemptive action; the actual timeline is five to six years]
- The lithium contamination reaching the headwaters is more advanced than the trace amounts currently measurable. The brine pond leak at the Andean fields has been running for three years. The heavy contamination is approximately eighteen months from the headwaters. [TRUE]
- A Compact military asset has been pre-positioned in the headwaters to counter the Phantom Vipers. The asset is a single Harpy Eagle gene-forged operative who has been living in the zone for three years under deep agricultural cover. [TRUE]

CONTACTS

ELDER GRACIELA PAREDES — HEADWATERS AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY, RIVER MONITORING

CAN GET Three years of personal river flow data (more granular and honest than either faction's official measurements), community network intelligence on both Compact and SCA activities, and the location of every piece of infrastructure — official and unauthorized — on the river.

WANTS A guarantee that her community's water access survives the Itaipú renewal, regardless of which faction controls the outcome. She is not ideological. She is practical.

FEARS The lithium contamination. She has been testing the water for five years. The trend is clear. In eighteen months, her community's agricultural water supply is contaminated beyond remediation.

CURRENT PRESSURE The SCA deal. Eight of her neighboring communities have accepted. Her community is being pressured. The SCA's offer is good. What comes after the offer is what she's trying to calculate.

PHANTOM VIPER OPERATIVE 'LUNA' — SCA ADVANCE CELL, DEEP COVER

CAN GET SCA military planning for the headwaters, the activation order trigger conditions, Phantom Viper cell locations and capabilities, and the SCA's actual timeline for the flow rate crisis.

WANTS Confirmation that the activation order is what she thinks it is. She has been in cover for two years. Her original brief was intelligence collection. The activation order brief she received last month changes her mission to direct action. She is not certain the mission makes sense.

FEARS That the activation triggers a conflict the SCA cannot win cleanly. Her two years in the headwaters have given her a perspective on the Basin that her handlers in the Metroplex don't have.

CURRENT PRESSURE The SCA diversion construction begins at dawn. It will trigger Compact response. Her cell's job is to ensure the Compact response fails. She has twelve hours to decide whether to follow orders.

COMPACT OPERATIVE TOMÁS HERRERA — HARPY EAGLE TEMPLATE, DEEP AGRICULTURAL COVER

CAN GET Compact military intelligence on SCA operations in the headwaters, the location of every Phantom Viper operative he has identified (nine of twelve), and the Compact's contingency response plan.

WANTS Orders. He has been in deep cover for three years. His last communication from Compact intelligence was seven months ago. He doesn't know about the 40-year projection, the lithium contamination, or the Itaipú renewal timeline.

FEARS That he has been abandoned. That the lack of communication means the Compact has written off the headwaters. That his three years of intelligence gathering have been filed and forgotten.

CURRENT PRESSURE The diversion construction. He can see the SCA vehicles from his position. In twelve hours, his mission changes from intelligence to something else. He doesn't have orders for something else. He is going to have to decide on his own.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

Who a territory is for reveals itself through what it forbids and what it forgives. The Basin enforces four categories of control.

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

1. Aquifer access rights require Compact licensing — unauthorized extraction is treated as resource theft with military enforcement authority. 2. Itaipú operational access is restricted to joint-management personnel — any unilateral access attempt by any party triggers Compact military response. 3. Weapons platforms in interior dark zones require Compact notification — a rule that applies to NAF and SCA equally and that both have violated.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

1. 'Agricultural transition permits' — required for any land use change in aquifer recharge zones; functionally used to prevent NAF technical expansion and SCA agricultural infiltration. 2. River system impact assessments — technically mandatory for any upstream infrastructure; practically weaponized against SCA dam modification proposals. 3. Interior community classification — communities classified as 'isolated populations' receive Compact protection from faction contact; the classification is also used to prevent NAF census operations in areas where Prometheus League presence is suspected.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

1. Aquifer access revocation — the ultimate lever in Basin politics. Nobody has had it applied to them yet. That restraint is the threat. 2. Itaipú flow modification — the Compact controls the dam. A 15% southward diversion hits SCA northern agriculture within weeks. 3. Compact citizenship revocation for non-native residents — New Buenos Aires has a significant NAF-affiliated technical population whose legal status depends entirely on Compact goodwill.

CIVIC RITUALS

1. Water Day — annual Compact observance marking the 2049 aquifer rights agreement. The most politically charged civic event in the Basin; what different communities do with it varies significantly. 2. Itaipú Joint Session — monthly public reporting from the dam's joint management committee. Attendance from SCA and NAF observers is expected. The public data is audited. The private data

stays private. 3. Interior Recognition Ceremony — quarterly Compact acknowledgment of interior communities' autonomous governance. Politically important; practically a photo opportunity. The communities attend less every year. 4. Compact Assembly — the actual governance body, six Compact city-states represented equally, meets publicly once a month. The real decisions happen in the margins.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime in New Buenos Aires' commercial district, Santiago's nightlife zones, or interior community gatherings during Water Day season. Every result produces a new contact, a new debt, or a new exposure.

1 (Contact Made): An off-duty Compact security officer at a New Buenos Aires bar describes the surveillance gap in the estuary monitoring system in enough operational detail that operators understand the specific window for unauthorized dives. She does not remember being that specific the next morning.

2 (Feud Started): Operator says something — or is heard saying something — that reaches an SCA commercial delegation informant through the room's geometry. Nothing happens immediately. Next morning, transit documentation enters 'verification review.' Review has no stated timeline.

3 (Equipment Lost): Operator's secondary comms device is lifted at some point during the evening. It holds 48 hours of location cache. Whoever has it knows everywhere the operator has been, including contacts they were not supposed to meet.

4 (Secret Learned): A Prometheus League contact corners operator near evening's end. They've identified someone in the Compact's hydrology division whose access includes the classified aquifer projection. They want something in trade for the name. Won't say the name until trade is confirmed.

5 (Debt Incurred): A Syndicate broker sits down with a proposition: they will move a specific data package out of the Basin through a route that bypasses every checkpoint, in exchange for one favor, undefined and redeemable within 30 days. The broker presents this as reasonable. They are correct. That's what makes it worth worrying about.

6 (Locally Recognizable): Operator does something — intervenes in a dispute, covers a tab, handles a confrontation — that travels. By next morning, operator is the person Basin residents mention when deciding whether to trust someone new. One faction network routes requests through the operator. Another faction's file now has a photograph.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

The pre-Upheaval survey installation in the Patagonian interior has been transmitting for sixty years. What it has been transmitting to — and what, if anything, has been transmitting back — is undefined. Elder Carmen Fuentes knows the installation exists. What she knows about its purpose is determined at first contact.

The second diversion structure beneath Itaipú Dam was built by a party that no longer exists as a formal entity. Who built it, whether it is operational, and whether its existence was known to either Compact or SCA negotiators when the joint management agreement was signed is undefined. Determine the builder's identity when operators access the structure.

The gene-forged individuals who have fully resolved to their templates in the Patagonian interior number at least four. What 'resolution' means — whether it is a medical condition, an evolutionary step, or something the gene-forged programs never anticipated — is undefined. The Prometheus League provides support but does not claim to understand what is happening. Determine the nature of resolution at first direct contact.

New Buenos Aires has a resident Void Walker operating under infrastructure contractor cover. What they are monitoring, building, or waiting for in the Basin is undefined. Their presence predates the 40-year projection crisis by at least six months, suggesting their interest is not purely the aquifer.

The cable conduit system in the drowned district is connected to the pre-Upheaval survey installation in the interior. Whether this connection was deliberately engineered, naturally formed through geological conduit, or represents something else entirely is undefined. The burst signal from the drowned district

reached the interior installation. What the installation did with it is determined at first contact.

FACTIONS

SOUTHERN COMPACT (COMPACT SECURITY FORCE / COMPACT ASSEMBLY)

Basin Governance & Water Authority

OBJECTIVE Maintain independent governance of the Basin through the 2069 Itaipú renewal, using the aquifer resource as leverage with both SCA and NAF while managing the classified 40-year projection before it becomes a crisis rather than an asset.

ASSETS Itaipú joint management (southern flow gate control), aquifer access rights, New Buenos Aires administrative infrastructure, Puma/Harpy Eagle/Maned Wolf gene-forged units, political legitimacy with Basin civilian population.

DEPENDENCY The perception of permanence. The Compact's independence is real but fragile — it depends on both SCA and NAF believing that the cost of absorbing it exceeds the benefit, and on the Basin population believing it can survive.

VULNERABILITY The 40-year projection. Three assembly members sitting on a document that restructures every negotiation the Compact is currently conducting. The longer it stays classified, the worse the eventual disclosure.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Diplomatic pressure, water licensing delays, interior community 'protection' invocations.
- 2 — Itaipú flow modification — the 15% diversion option. Used once. Never needed to be used twice.
- 3 — Aquifer access revocation for external parties. Has never been used. Is the most powerful tool the Compact has and the most destructive to use.
- 4 — Request NAF military intervention via Santiago — the option that ends Compact independence and replaces it with NAF protectorate status.

OFFER Water access, agricultural stability, transit rights through the Basin, neutral meeting space for Basin-wide negotiations.

DEMAND Respect for aquifer licensing, Itaipú joint management continuity, no unilateral faction military presence in Compact territory.

IF DAMAGED Compact governance failure creates a three-way resource scramble between SCA, NAF, and the interior communities — the last of whom have the most functional water management in the Basin and zero interest in being governed by either of the first two.

SCA — SOUTHERN CARTEL ALLIANCE (PHANTOM VIPERS, BASIN ADVANCE CELL)

Water Pressure & Advance Positioning

OBJECTIVE Secure guaranteed water access for the Amazonian Metroplex's long-term agricultural systems through the Paraná-Paraguay network — either through the Itaipú renewal agreement on favorable terms or, if the renewal fails, through fait accompli control of the northern intake system.

ASSETS Jaguar and Caiman gene-forged units in advance positioning, commercial presence in New Buenos Aires, eleven years of relationship-building with Itaipú dam staff, CANOPY SHIFT southern variant ready for deployment, SCA's deep patience as a strategic asset.

DEPENDENCY The Paraná water flow. The Metroplex's agricultural systems were engineered with northern flow assumptions. A significant reduction triggers food production failures within one growing season.

VULNERABILITY The southern CANOPY SHIFT variant. Deploying biological pressure against the Compact's agricultural zones is an act of war. The SCA has the capability; using it ends every diplomatic option simultaneously and triggers NAF response from Santiago.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Commercial pressure, water pricing manipulation, intelligence operations against Compact scientific staff.
- 2 — Itaipú negotiation positioning using the 80-year viability figure — or, if the 40-year projection can be acquired, using it as leverage.
- 3 — Phantom Vipers activation at the dam — moving from intelligence presence to operational capability.
- 4 — CANOPY SHIFT deployment against Compact agricultural buffer zones. Last resort. Not actually last.

OFFER SCA market access, Metroplex commercial partnerships, guarantee of Amazonian trade routes to southern markets.

DEMAND Guaranteed Paraná flow maintenance, Itaipú renewal on SCA-favorable terms, Basin agricultural output directed through SCA commercial networks.

IF DAMAGED SCA losing Itaipú access forces the Metroplex into emergency agricultural restructuring. The 90-day window before food production impacts hit civilian supply is not manageable. The SCA's response to that pressure is not diplomatic.

NAF — NORTH ATLANTIC FEDERATION (SANTIAGO SOUTHERN COMMAND)

Technical Leverage & Basin Contingency

OBJECTIVE Maintain and expand NAF technical influence in the Basin through the Santiago infrastructure model, position for Basin absorption if the Compact collapses, and prevent SCA from achieving unilateral control of Basin water resources — while managing the parallel SCA negotiation and the Basin contingency plan on timelines that are increasingly difficult to keep separate.

ASSETS Santiago technical infrastructure (the dependency leverage), Aurora Ranger garrison, NAF sensor network, commercial and intelligence cover throughout Compact cities, Ambassador-General Johanssen's diplomatic relationships, Horizon Minerals lithium extraction operation (NAF-controlled through contractor shell).

DEPENDENCY Chilean governmental cooperation. NAF Santiago operates with Chilean blessing. If that blessing is withdrawn, NAF loses its Southern Hemisphere anchor and the contingency plan becomes unexecutable.

VULNERABILITY The deep-systems surveillance. If Catalina Soto's discovery reaches the Chilean government or the Compact, NAF's technical partnership model is exposed as an intelligence operation. Every NAF technical investment worldwide becomes politically suspect.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1 — Diplomatic pressure through the Santiago-Compact technical framework, intelligence operations against Compact staff.
- 2 — Technical dependency leverage — the 'maintenance rotation' option that reduces Chilean infrastructure capacity.
- 3 — Aurora Ranger deployment to 'secure NAF technical assets' in the Basin.
- 4 — Full Basin contingency plan activation. Santiago becomes the administrative center. Compact cities transition to NAF technical dependency.

OFFER Technical infrastructure that works, military security guarantees, Santiago as proof of concept.

DEMAND Continued Chilean cooperation, Compact acquiescence to NAF technical frameworks, lithium extraction access.

IF DAMAGED NAF losing Santiago disrupts the entire Southern Hemisphere strategy. The SCA faces no counterweight in the Basin. The Compact's independence lasts exactly as long as the SCA's patience, which is calculated in agricultural growing seasons rather than diplomatic timelines.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

COMPACT ASSEMBLY CHAIR DIEGO ESPERANZA — THE THIRD ASSEMBLY MEMBER WHO KNOWS THE PROJECTION

CAN GET The classified projection document, the full Itaipú renewal negotiation record, the identity of the third party in the negotiation.

WANTS Someone to make the decision he cannot make. He is not asking for permission. He is asking for company.

FEARS Everything. Specifically: that releasing the projection destroys the Compact, that not releasing it also destroys the Compact, and that the SCA delegation in the city this week has already found it.

CURRENT PRESSURE The assembly vote on the Itaipú renewal framework is in eleven days. The framework is built on the 80-year figure. He knows.

SABLE ROURKE — CONFLICT MAGAZINE EMBEDDED CORRESPONDENT, CURRENTLY IN NEW BUENOS AIRES

CAN GET	Basin-wide perspective, contacts across all parties including interior communities, the published and the unpublished version of everything that has happened in the Basin for the past four years.
WANTS	The story that makes the Basin make sense. She has pieces. She is missing the projection.
FEARS	That she will publish too early and the story will be used as a weapon rather than as information.
CURRENT PRESSURE	An SCA commercial contact offered her an exclusive on 'new hydrological data' this morning. She knows what that means. She has not accepted yet.

DOWNTIME

INTERIOR PASSAGE (PATAGONIAN INTERIOR)

WHAT: Operators spend seven days traveling through the interior with community guides.

COST: Seven days, community trust (requires an existing interior contact or Prometheus League introduction).

GAIN: One of: introduction to Terra and the interior network, location of the pre-Upheaval survey installation, Stage 3 Drift support resources for gene-forged operators on the team.

FALLOUT: Compact surveillance registers operators' absence from city tracking for seven days. A 'welfare inquiry' is filed. The inquiry creates a paper trail connecting operators to interior travel.

DAM ROTATION (ITAIPÚ CONTROL ZONE)

WHAT: Operators attach to the joint maintenance team for a five-day rotation.

COST: Five days, cover identity as a technical contractor (SCA or Compact, operators' choice).

GAIN: One of: full dam layout access, the modified sensor's forensic signature (enough to identify who installed it), Luciana Santos' trust.

FALLOUT: The other party's security contingent flags the operator for 'extended background verification.' The verification process takes three weeks and involves questions operators may not want answered.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

HUB-LEVEL RUMOR TABLE (1D6)

- 1. The classified 40-year projection will be presented at the Itaipú renewal negotiations in eleven days — not by a Compact assembly member, but by the third-party NGO consultant. [TRUE]
- 2. The SCA's CANOPY SHIFT southern variant has already been deployed in a test area — a small agricultural zone in the Compact's northern buffer region. The test was six months ago. [PARTIALLY TRUE — deployment occurred; results file exists; contents unknown]
- 3. The pre-Upheaval survey installation in the deep interior has been transmitting continuously for sixty years. What it is transmitting, and to what, has not been determined. [TRUE]
- 4. New Buenos Aires has a Void Walker. Not passing through — resident. Has been for two years. Operating under cover as a Compact infrastructure contractor. [UNCLEAR]
- 5. The gene-forged operator in the interior who has fully resolved to their template is not alone. There are three others. They have been living in the interior for between two and five years. The Prometheus League did not facilitate this. It happened on its own. [TRUE]
- 6. The second diversion structure under Itaipú — the one 'cancelled' — is not a Compact project. It predates the Compact. Someone built it in the early 2040s, before the joint management agreement. Nobody has claimed it. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1 | THE RENEWAL CRISIS

Stage 1 — Negotiation Pressure

All parties intensify intelligence operations as the 11-day assembly vote approaches. SCA commercial delegation conducts covert assessment. NAF Santiago monitoring elevated. Prometheus League moves the NGO consultant into position.

Stage 2 — Projection Disclosed

The 40-year figure enters the negotiation — either through the NGO consultant, through a Compact assembly member, or through operator action. Both SCA and NAF recalibrate immediately. The renewal framework built on the 80-year figure becomes non-viable. A new framework requires new negotiations and new time. During that time, the dam operates under the current agreement, which expires in three years regardless.

Stage 3 — Framework Collapse

The renewal negotiation fails. Both parties activate contingency positioning. SCA Phantom Vipers move from intelligence to operational posture at the dam. NAF escalates Santiago military assets. The Compact invokes interior community protection and discovers the Prometheus League's actual organizational depth in the territory it claims to protect.

Stage 4 — Resource War

Active conflict at the dam. The Compact's independence ends in one of three ways: SCA absorption, NAF protectorate status, or a third option that the Prometheus League and the interior communities have been building toward for eight years and that nobody outside the interior has fully mapped.

WHAT OPERATORS CAN DO: Control the disclosure timeline. Get the 40-year projection to the right people before the renewal framework locks. Shape whether disclosure forces honest negotiation or becomes a weapon that shatters the Compact. Every day before the vote is a day to determine who learns the truth and in what context.

OPERATIONS MAP

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- Paraná river routes — fast, monitored by both Compact and SCA.
- Highland road network — checkpointed, well-maintained, recorded.
- Interior steppe tracks — dark, community-knowledge dependent, Prometheus League-safe.
- Andean passes to Santiago — NAF-monitored, weather-dependent.

CHOKEPOINTS

- Itaipú Dam — the Basin's physical hinge.
- New Buenos Aires highland access routes — the Compact capital's controlled approaches.
- Andean pass corridors — between Basin and Santiago NAF hub.

SURVEILLANCE ARCHITECTURE

- New Buenos Aires: Compact sensor net, comprehensive city coverage.
- Itaipú: Comprehensive dual-party coverage, full redundancy, deliberately interleaved.
- Santiago: NAF sensor network, the most advanced in the Southern Hemisphere.
- Andean Lithium Fields: NAF satellite + cameras at extraction site; dark zones in worker camps.
- Drowned District: Minimal — surface monitoring only; no underwater sensor coverage.
- Patagonian Interior: Complete dark zone south of 46th parallel.
- Mato Grosso Headwaters: Minimal — Compact satellite, SCA drone overflights, river valley sensor shadows.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- Compact controls city-states, dam southern access, aquifer licensing authority.
- SCA controls northern river corridor approaches and Itaipú northern intake.
- NAF operates from Santiago with commercial and intelligence presence throughout Compact cities.
- Prometheus League controls the dark zone interior south of 46th parallel.
- Phantom Vipers pre-positioned in Mato Grosso headwaters for four years.

KEY LOCATIONS

- Compact Assembly Building, New Buenos Aires — where the 40-year projection is stored and the renewal framework vote happens in eleven days.
- Itaipú Dam joint operations center — where the second diversion structure is hidden and both contingency plans converge.
- Pre-Upheaval survey installation, deep Patagonian interior — transmitting for sixty years, connected to the drowned district cable conduits.
- Drowned district data vault, university zone — sixty years of aquifer baseline data, sealed and submerged.
- Horizon Minerals extraction site, Andean salt flats — Lumicite deposit beneath the lithium, brine contamination leaking toward the aquifer.

- Headwaters river junction — where Compact and SCA irrigation pumps draw from the same declining river.

MISSION SEEDS

1. BEFORE THE VOTE

OBJECTIVE: Get the 40-year projection into the hands of Sable Rourke and published before the assembly vote in eleven days — not as a weapon, but as information that forces honest negotiations.

CLOCK: Eleven days. After the vote, the framework is locked and the projection becomes a crisis rather than a corrective.

COMPLICATION: The SCA commercial delegation has the same objective — they want the projection published too, but through their own channels, framed to position SCA as the responsible party forcing Compact transparency. The story Rourke publishes depends entirely on who gives it to her and how.

2. THE SECOND STRUCTURE

OBJECTIVE: Determine who built the pre-Itaipú diversion structure, whether it is operational, and whether either negotiating party knows about it.

CLOCK: The SCA engineer has found evidence of the structure in her investigation of the modified sensor. She will report it through official channels in 72 hours unless operators give her a reason not to.

COMPLICATION: The structure was built by a party that no longer exists as a formal entity. Its original operator may be the Prometheus League, the pre-Compact Argentinian government, or a third party that pre-dates both. The operational status of a secret unilateral dam bypass changes the renewal negotiation entirely.

3. EXTRACT TERRA

OBJECTIVE: Get Terra and the interior community's aquifer recharge methodology into the formal renewal negotiation before Stage 3 triggers — because the methodology is the only viable long-term solution regardless of which party controls the dam.

CLOCK: Terra's NGO cover for the negotiation access expires in nine days. After that, she cannot be in the room.

COMPLICATION: Bringing Terra into the official negotiation means exposing her identity and the Prometheus League's organizational depth in the interior. The Compact, which has been characterizing the Prometheus League as a threat, has to acknowledge it as a

governance partner. That acknowledgment may be harder for the Compact's leadership to make than losing the negotiations.

4. THE LITHIUM STRIKE

OBJECTIVE: Get Dr. Vásquez's medical documentation published before the extraction community strike vote, giving the workers legal standing and forcing Compact regulatory response to the brine contamination — before Horizon Minerals' security contractor suppresses the evidence.

CLOCK: The strike vote is tomorrow. Publication before the vote gives the strike legal cover. Publication after the vote — if the strike is suppressed — makes the documentation look like retaliation rather than evidence.

COMPLICATION: The medical data also reveals the Lumicite deposit beneath the salt flat, because Vásquez's exposure documentation includes resonance-related symptoms. Publishing the medical data means publishing the Lumicite discovery. The extraction communities' health crisis and the Basin's most dangerous secret are in the same document.

5. THE VAULT

OBJECTIVE: Recover the pre-Upheaval aquifer research data from the drowned district data vault before the SCA dive team gets there — and determine whether the sixty-year baseline confirms, contradicts, or dramatically worsens the 40-year projection.

CLOCK: The SCA dive team is in the restricted university zone now. They are three days of work from breaching the vault. Dr. Fuentes' Heritage Authority team is four days out. The SCA gets there first unless operators intervene.

COMPLICATION: The vault may also contain data from the old Argentine government's Lumicite research program. Recovering the aquifer data means potentially recovering information that reframes the Basin's Lumicite significance — connecting the drowned district, the lithium fields, the Patagonian interior installation, and the headwaters resonance into a single geological picture that no faction is prepared for.

6. HEADWATERS STANDOFF

OBJECTIVE: Prevent the SCA diversion construction from triggering a Compact military response that activates the Phantom Vipers and escalates the headwaters from a commercial competition zone to a combat theater — all within twelve hours of the construction beginning at dawn.

CLOCK: Twelve hours. The Compact provincial office will detect the construction by midday. The military response decision reaches authority by evening. The Phantom Viper activation order is contingent on Compact military movement.

COMPLICATION: Both the Compact and SCA have deep-cover operatives in the zone who are about to be forced out of intelligence roles into direct action. Luna and Herrera are twelve hours from a fight that neither believes serves their faction's interests. Both know the other exists. Neither has orders that account for the other's perspective. Operators who can reach both in twelve hours have a narrow window for a solution that doesn't involve firefight.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every solution in the Patagonian Basin creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF THE COMPACT COLLAPSES

The interior communities, which have been building functional independent governance for a decade, become the legitimate water management authority in the Basin by default. They are not equipped for what follows — the SCA and NAF pressure that descends on the only functional water governance structure remaining. The Prometheus League is equipped. Whether that's good depends on what you think the Prometheus League is actually building.

IF ITAIPÚ BECOMES SCA-CONTROLLED

The Metroplex's water security is resolved. The Compact cities' water security is contingent on SCA terms. The interior communities are outside SCA's operational interest and are left to govern themselves — which is what they wanted. The Prometheus League has a friendly territory on the SCA's southern border for the first time.

IF THE NAF ABSORBS THE BASIN

Santiago becomes the Basin's administrative center. The technical infrastructure works better. The aquifer gets extracted at the rate the 40-year projection predicts. In forty years, the Basin's freshwater reserve is gone. The NAF will have forty years to develop an alternative. They probably will. Probably.

IF THE 40-YEAR PROJECTION DRIVES A NEW FRAMEWORK

Interior community water management methodology becomes the Basin's operational standard. The renewal negotiation produces a framework based on conservation rather than extraction optimization. The SCA doesn't get

everything it wanted. The NAF doesn't get everything it wanted. The Basin's water is viable for longer than forty years. This outcome requires the most from the most people and produces the least dramatic short-term result. It is the best available outcome.

FIELD NOTE

The water stays clean. The numbers stay public. The Assembly meets and the dam operates and the interior communities run their own systems and nobody asks what happens in forty years. That is the Basin. A place where the surface works because the truth hasn't surfaced yet.

When it does, nobody in this territory will have the option of not choosing a side.

— Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

17/ ANTARCTIC PENINSULA OASIS

INTERNATIONAL / CONTESTED | EARTH 2066

The melt opened it. Every faction arrived with territorial claims and infrastructure proposals. None of them had the same map.

TERRITORY OVERVIEW

The ice is retreating. What is underneath it is worth more than anyone publicly acknowledges. Pre-war data archives. Neo-rare-earth mineral deposits that belong, geologically speaking, to no one. And at least one sealed research installation that no faction will confirm exists but three are fighting over. The weather alone has killed more operators than the guards.

The Antarctic Peninsula Oasis is not a city. It is a handful of research stations, extraction camps, and forward operating bases clinging to exposed rock while the ice pulls back around them. There are no civilians. There are researchers, contractors, and people who came for the data and decided not to leave. Everyone eats what the supply chain delivers and watches the weather the way other people watch the news. The next whiteout is always coming. When it comes, you are where you are.

EO holds the primary military presence. NAF runs a scientific research cover from Shackleton Station. The PRC has a small climate assessment team that is, on paper, entirely civilian. All three blocs have an operative inside Base Meridian, the Peninsula's central research archive. None of them know about the other two.

The load-bearing fact of this territory sits in Base Meridian's research archive: a classified partition containing what appears to be pre-war climate and mineral survey data. It is not data. It is an access protocol. The pre-war installation the factions are fighting over — designation EREBUS — was sealed by its builders when they left. EREBUS is not a research station. It is a seed vault and manufacturing template archive designed to survive the collapse its builders anticipated. It contains the complete technical specifications for every critical infrastructure system built before the Upheaval. Water treatment. Energy generation. Agricultural production. Manufacturing. And one additional category that does not match any known pre-war engineering discipline.

The access protocol requires three independent authentication keys, each stored at a separate location on the Peninsula. The retreating ice has revealed two of the three. EO found the first key 18 months ago. NAF found the second 6 months ago. Neither knows the other has a key. Neither knows there are three keys. The PRC does not have a key. The PRC's climate modeling has calculated when the ice will reveal the third key's location: 14 days.

The EO team that found EREBUS's outer seal has not reported back. They are not dead. Commander Katya Volkov opened the outer seal six weeks ago, saw what was inside, and made a decision. She has been documenting EREBUS's contents with a team of four, sending nothing to EO command. She has decided that what is inside should not belong to any faction. She does not have a plan for what to do with that conviction. She has six weeks of documentation and a shrinking window before EO sends someone to find out why she went silent.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

TERRITORY	EO primary / NAF + PRC contested
INFRASTRUCTURE	minimal (stations only)
SURVEILLANCE	satellite + ground sensor
CIVILIAN PRESENCE	none (researchers and contractors only)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (three-way covert)
CONTAMINATION	none (pre-war materials unknown)
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD	extreme cold / whiteout events / ice instability
CHOKEPOINT	Base Meridian classified archive / EREBUS access protocol

TERRITORY SIGNATURE

Wind is the primary acoustic layer. No organic sound. Cold scrubs the air completely clean — literally nothing to smell, which is the first thing operators notice and keep noticing for the duration of the deployment. Structural groaning of continent-scale ice systems under temperature stress replaces ambient noise: a sound felt in the chest before the ears register it. Installations tilt as permafrost beneath them shifts. Three degrees of tilt is enough to make pencils roll to one wall. Researchers stop correcting their stance without noticing they have stopped. The ice does not simply crack — it opens and seals. It takes things and does not return them. Pre-war installation shapes emerge from retreating ice at unexpected angles, surfaces finished to industrial precision that current facilities cannot replicate.

ENVIRONMENTAL RULES

EXTREME COLD

Extreme cold: Unprotected exposure produces hypothermia symptoms in 30 minutes. Equipment failures accelerate in cold. Battery life halves. Weapons condense frost on metal surfaces. The cold is not a hazard description — it is a constant operational modifier that changes every calculation.

WHITEOUT EVENTS

Whiteout events: Visibility drops to zero. Wind speed makes voice communication impossible beyond 2 meters. Navigation requires pre-set guide ropes or GPS that may or may not function in electromagnetic conditions. Average duration: 4 to 18 hours. No extraction during a whiteout. Where you are when it hits is where you stay.

ICE INSTABILITY

Ice instability: The ice opens and seals. Crevasses appear without warning. The ground-penetrating radar at Base Meridian maps ice stability, but the maps are 48 hours old at best. The retreating ice is exposing rock, soil, and pre-war structures on a weekly basis. What was solid ground yesterday may be a 40-meter crevasse tomorrow.

ISOLATION

Isolation: The nearest extraction point is the EO logistics base at the Ice Shelf Approach. Weather-dependent flight windows average 3 viable days per week. During a weather event, the Peninsula is sealed. No resupply. No extraction. No communication if satellite uplinks fail.

ZONE MAP

ZONE 1	**BASE MERIDIAN**: The Peninsula's central research station and data archive. Multi-faction staffed under a cooperative research charter. Houses the pre-war data archive and the classified partition containing the EREBUS access protocol.
ZONE 2	**ICE SHELF APPROACH**: The primary logistics route from the coast to the interior — the EO-controlled supply chain that keeps every station operational. Airstrip, fuel depot, cargo staging.
ZONE 3	**EXTRACTION SITE ALPHA**: The EO's neo-rare-earth mineral extraction operation — the official reason for EO's military presence and the cover story that justifies the logistics chain.
ZONE 4	**THE EMERGENCE ZONE**: The section where retreating ice is actively exposing pre-war structures, deposits, and artifacts. The third EREBUS authentication key is buried here.
ZONE 5	**EREBUS OUTER PERIMETER**: The pre-war installation designated EREBUS — a seed vault and manufacturing template archive. Volkov's team has been inside for 6 weeks, documenting everything, sending nothing.
ZONE 6	**SHACKLETON STATION (NAF FORWARD)**: NAF's forward research station — officially climate and geological research, actually an intelligence collection platform. Haugen operates from here.
ZONE 7	**THE WHITEOUT CORRIDOR**: Not a location — a condition. The weather system that regularly seals the Peninsula, grounding all flights and trapping every person on the ice.

ZONES

ZONE 1 BASE MERIDIAN — CENTRAL RESEARCH STATION

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	sparse (researchers)
SURVEILLANCE	cameras + access logs
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (three covert operatives)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	open (within station)

FUNCTION The Peninsula's central research station and data archive. Multi-faction staffed under a cooperative research charter that everyone signed and nobody believes. Houses the pre-war data archive, the classified partition containing the EREBUS access protocol, geological survey equipment, weather monitoring, and the only reliable satellite uplink on the Peninsula.

CONTROLLER On paper: Joint Research Authority under the Antarctic Cooperation Treaty. In reality: EO provides logistics and security. NAF provides research staff. PRC provides climate modeling. All three have an operative inside the station. Each operative believes they are the only one. The station commander, Dr. Henrik Larsen, is a genuine researcher who thinks he runs a research station.

DRAW The classified partition in the archive / the satellite uplink — the only way to communicate with faction command / the geological survey data showing neo-rare-earth deposit locations / the ground-penetrating radar maps of the ice field / the weather monitoring system that predicts whiteout events 6 to 12 hours in advance

RISK	Three faction operatives in a station of 40 people who do not know about each other / the access logs that record every archive query / the EO security detail that provides station protection and reports to EO Extraction Division command separately from the research chain / the station commander, who is not an operative but who notices patterns
SCARCITY	Unlogged archive access time / satellite uplink bandwidth — all transmissions are logged and bandwidth is rationed / any privacy in a station where 40 people live in shared quarters

UNDER-SYSTEM

The classified partition's header file describes a three-key authentication protocol for EREBUS but does not identify which keys have been found or where the third is located. All three faction operatives have independently accessed the header file. Each one has reported the existence of the protocol to their command. None has reported that the protocol requires three keys — because the header file describes the protocol without stating the number of keys in clear text. The number is embedded in the access schema, which requires a pre-war encoding standard to read. The PRC's climate modeler, Dr. James Chen, is the only person on the Peninsula who has the mathematical background to decode it. He decoded it four days ago. He has told no one.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

If any operative identifies another operative, the cooperative research charter collapses and Base Meridian becomes a contested facility. In a station of 40 people with one exit and weather that can seal the building for 18 hours, a faction collision is not a firefight. It is a hostage situation where nobody agrees on who the hostage is.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Station commander Larsen — scheduling research access, managing shared facilities, maintaining the fiction that this is a cooperative operation

ECONOMY

Research scheduling, archive access rotations, equipment allocation, satellite uplink requests

RISK

40 people in shared space; the station commander who notices patterns; EO security detail logging everything

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

EO security detail runs a 2-person night watch. The watch is supposed to be station security. It is also monitoring classified archive access after hours.

ECONOMY

The archive after hours — the only time an operative can access the classified partition without a full research queue watching

RISK

The 2-person EO watch; the satellite uplink log that records all transmissions by timestamp and bandwidth; the other two operatives who are also working after hours for the same reasons

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The archive terminal at 0200, screen glow in a room where the only other light is the status LED on the satellite uplink. An operative is querying the classified partition. The query takes 4 seconds. The access log records the query with a timestamp and a user ID. The operative is using someone else's credentials. Two rooms away, a second operative is doing the same thing at the same time, using a third person's credentials. Neither knows the other is awake.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Station commander Larsen is reviewing the archive access logs from last night and frowning. Three queries to the classified partition from three different user IDs, all between 0100 and 0300. He recognizes the user IDs. None of the three users were scheduled for night research. He is deciding whether to ask them about it.

- The EO security detail is conducting a routine equipment audit and discovers that a ground-penetrating radar unit has been checked out to a researcher who is not on the geological survey team. The researcher is the NAF operative. The radar unit shows the ice field between Base Meridian and the Emergence Zone.
- A weather monitoring alert appears on the common room display: whiteout event probable in 18 hours, confidence 72%. The station begins pre-storm protocols. Every operative in the building is calculating whether 18 hours is enough time to reach their objective and return.
- The PRC climate assessment team is presenting their latest ice-retreat projections at the morning research briefing. Dr. Chen's model shows a specific section of ice retreating faster than previously projected. He does not mention that the section contains the third key. The NAF operative in the audience is taking notes.
- An EO logistics flight has arrived with supply and a new security detail rotation. One of the new security officers is not a standard rotation — she was added to the manifest 48 hours ago by EO Extraction Division command. She is asking questions about a team that has not reported in for six weeks.
- A researcher at the archive terminal accidentally accesses the classified partition while running a standard geological query — the partition's file boundary overlaps with a legitimate survey dataset. She sees 6 seconds of the access protocol header before the security lockout activates. She reports it to Larsen. Larsen reports it to the EO security detail. The security detail reports it to EO command.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The NAF operative is at the satellite uplink at 0130, transmitting a compressed data packet to NAF Research Command. The packet contains her latest assessment of the classified partition and her recommendation that NAF send a technical team to decode the access schema. The EO night watch is monitoring uplink transmissions. They will review this one at 0600.
- The EO operative is in the archive at 0200, running the access schema through a decryption program he brought from EO command. The program is not designed for pre-war encoding standards. It has been running for 3 hours and has decoded 40% of the schema. At 40%, the three-key requirement is not yet visible.
- Dr. Chen is in his quarters at 0300 with a notebook. He decoded the three-key protocol four days ago. He has been running the math on the ice-retreat model he presented this morning. He knows where the third key will emerge.

He knows when. He is writing a personal journal entry about what he will do with this information. He has not decided.

- A whiteout event begins ahead of the predicted timeline — arriving 6 hours early. The station seals. All 40 occupants are inside. The satellite uplink goes dark. For the next 12 hours, nobody communicates with anyone outside the station. The three operatives are in the same building with 37 people and no exits.
- The EO security watch notices a discrepancy in the station's external sensor logs — a heat signature 800 meters from the station that appeared for 11 seconds and then vanished. The watch officer logs it as wildlife. There is no wildlife on the Antarctic Peninsula.
- The PRC operative — separate from Dr. Chen, a field geologist on the climate assessment team — is awake at 0400 reviewing the ground-penetrating radar data that was checked out by the NAF operative. She did not check it out. She copied the checkout record from the equipment audit log. She is looking at the ice between Base Meridian and the Emergence Zone. She can see the outline of something 12 meters below the surface.

CONTACTS

DR. HENRIK LARSEN — STATION COMMANDER, JOINT RESEARCH AUTHORITY

CAN GET The complete archive access log including classified partition queries, the satellite uplink transmission log, the equipment checkout records, and his personal notebook of patterns he has noticed — three researchers working late on different nights, equipment signed out to people who don't need it, and the look on Dr. Chen's face during the ice-retreat presentation.

WANTS For the station to function as the research facility he was hired to run. He is not naive. He knows the factions have interests here. He does not know how many operatives are in his station.

FEARS That the cooperative research charter is the only thing keeping the station operational and that if the charter breaks, the 40 people in his care become a faction problem he cannot solve.

CURRENT PRESSURE The new EO security officer is asking about the silent team. Larsen has been told the team is on an extended field survey. He does not believe this. He has been station commander for 3 years and no field survey lasts 6 weeks without a check-in.

SPECIALIST ANNA KUZNETSOVA — EO SECURITY DETAIL, BASE MERIDIAN

CAN GET EO Extraction Division's current assessment of the silent team including their last known position, the timeline for EO command to authorize a search-and-recover operation, and the fact that EO command has identified the silent team's commanding officer as a potential security risk — Volkov's personnel file was flagged 2 weeks ago.

WANTS To find the silent team and bring them back. That is her assignment. She does not know about EREBUS. She has been told the team was conducting a mineral survey and went dark.

FEARS Finding them dead. She served with Volkov's team lead 4 years ago. The assignment is not entirely professional. It is also personal.

CURRENT PRESSURE She has the silent team's last GPS coordinates from before they went dark. The coordinates are 40 kilometers from Base Meridian, in a section of the ice field that the ground-penetrating radar shows as unstable. She is planning a reconnaissance in 48 hours. She needs a weather window.

DR. JAMES CHEN — PRC CLIMATE ASSESSMENT TEAM, MATHEMATICAL MODELER

CAN GET The decoded three-key EREBUS access protocol, the calculated emergence date for the third key location (14 days), and the specific GPS coordinates where the retreating ice will expose the site. Also: the PRC's complete ice-retreat model, which is the most accurate projection of Antarctic geological change on Earth.

WANTS Time to think. He decoded the protocol four days ago. PRC command does not know. His team leader does not know. He understands that the three-key protocol means no single faction can open EREBUS alone, and he finds this design deliberate and meaningful.

FEARS That PRC command will take the information and act on it without regard for what the three-key design was intended to mean. He has seen PRC command make decisions. He does not trust them with this one.

CURRENT PRESSURE His team leader — the PRC operative — is accessing ground-penetrating radar data that shows something 12 meters below the ice at the Emergence Zone. She has not told him about it. He knows because he built the climate model that predicts exactly where that ice section will retreat. He is watching her access data he has already analyzed.

CIVILIAN NEED

Researchers want archive access, satellite uplink bandwidth, and the research conditions necessary to publish. They are not naive about why they are here. They are on the Peninsula because the stakes justify the risk. What they want is to conduct the research they were contracted to conduct without being detained, locked out, or reassigned.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Dr. Larsen's trust (sufficient to request archive queries without triggering immediate security review). The archive access log (via the EO logistics contractor who processes data exports). Kuznetsova's operational assessment of the silent team (via private conversation if the operator can create operational context). Chen's mathematical capability (if the operator can convince him that cooperation is strategically sound). The entry point to the classified partition (the after-hours window during the night watch's patrol rotation, approximately 0240 to 0300 when the watch checks the generator).

ZONE 2 ICE SHELF APPROACH

PRIMARY LOGISTICS ROUTE

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (weather-dependent)
CIVILIANS	none

SURVEILLANCE	ground sensor + satellite
FACTION PRESSURE	dominant EO
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	open (weather-dependent)

FUNCTION The primary logistics route from the coast to the Peninsula's interior — the EO-controlled supply chain that keeps every station operational. Airstrip, fuel depot, cargo staging, and the communications relay that connects the Peninsula to the outside world when the satellite uplink at Base Meridian goes down.

CONTROLLER EO Extraction Division, exclusively. The Ice Shelf Approach is the only reliable way in or out. EO controls who arrives, what they bring, and when they leave. This is the leash that keeps every other faction's presence on the Peninsula dependent on EO logistics.

DRAW The only extraction route / fuel and supply access / the backup communications relay / EO logistics manifests that show what every faction is bringing onto the Peninsula

RISK EO controls all movement through this zone / the weather corridor between the coast and the interior, which funnels whiteout events directly through the approach / the 3-day-per-week flight window that means missing a flight means waiting 2 to 4 days for the next one / EO security screening on arrival and departure

SCARCITY Flight seats off the Peninsula / unlogged cargo / any movement that EO logistics doesn't track

UNDER-SYSTEM

The EO logistics chain has been carrying cargo for the silent team for 6 weeks — automated resupply drops to the team's last reported position, authorized by standing orders that predate Volkov's silence. The drops have been collected. The supply crates are returned empty to the drop point on schedule. Someone is alive at those coordinates and is maintaining the operational pattern. EO logistics has not flagged this because the standing orders are valid. Kuznetsova does not know about the automated drops because they are in the logistics system, not the security system.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

If EO command decides the silent team is compromised and closes the logistics chain, the automated drops stop. Volkov has 6 weeks of documentation inside EREBUS and 2 weeks of remaining personal supplies. The clock starts.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO logistics command — scheduling flights, managing fuel, processing arrivals and departures

ECONOMY

Logistics: supply flights, cargo processing, fuel management, the bureaucratic machinery of keeping the Peninsula alive

RISK

EO security screening; logistics manifests that log every item; flight schedules that are inflexible

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Skeleton security crew; the automated sensor perimeter; the fuel depot, which is the most valuable target on the approach and the most watched

ECONOMY

The communications relay, which queues transmissions from all stations for burst-upload during satellite windows — the queue is accessible to anyone with the relay's access code

RISK

The sensor perimeter, which detects movement within 2 kilometers; the cold, which is worse at the coast where the wind comes off the water

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A cargo flight on final approach, turbulence shaking the frame, the ice shelf visible below as a white horizon with no features. The pilot has a 40-minute window before the next weather system closes the approach. On the manifest: research supplies, fuel, food. Not on the manifest: the equipment Kuznetsova requisitioned for the reconnaissance to the silent team's coordinates.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- An EO logistics officer is reviewing the automated resupply drop records and notices that the silent team's standing orders are still active. The drops have been going out on schedule for 6 weeks. The crates come back empty. He has not flagged it because the orders are valid. He is about to mention it to someone.
- A cargo flight arriving from the EO's Patagonian relay station carries a crate flagged with a security classification the logistics crew has not seen before.

The crate is addressed to the new EO security officer, Kuznetsova. It is cold-weather reconnaissance equipment. The logistics crew notes the classification and the destination.

- The weather monitoring system is showing a weather corridor forming between the Ice Shelf Approach and the interior. Flights will be grounded in 6 hours. Every person on the Peninsula who was planning to move today is recalculating.
- A NAF researcher is at the departure processing station requesting a flight seat with two sealed data containers. The containers are within the permitted research data transport size. The EO security screening officer asks what is in them. The researcher says geological survey data. The officer has the authority to open them. He is deciding whether to.
- The fuel depot night-shift supervisor reports a discrepancy: 40 liters of vehicle fuel unaccounted for over the past 3 weeks. Not enough to flag as theft. Enough to fuel a tracked vehicle for a round trip to the Emergence Zone, which is exactly what someone has been doing.
- A PRC climate assessment team member is at the logistics office requesting satellite uplink priority for a data transmission that exceeds the standard research bandwidth allocation. The transmission is flagged as 'climate model update.' The actual file size is 3 times larger than any climate model the PRC team has sent before.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The automated resupply drop for the silent team is being loaded onto a drone carrier for tonight's delivery. The logistics system shows the drop as routine. The crate contents are standard: food, water, fuel cells, medical supplies. Someone added a handwritten note to the crate's interior. The note is not in the logistics system.
- The communications relay is processing queued transmissions for the 0300 satellite window. Three transmissions are in the queue: NAF Research Command, PRC Climate Division, EO Extraction Division. Each one contains a different assessment of the classified partition. None of them knows the other two are transmitting.
- A sensor perimeter alert triggers at 0130 — movement detected 1.8 kilometers from the logistics base. The security watch dispatches a drone. The drone's thermal camera shows a single figure on foot, moving away from the fuel depot toward the interior. The figure is not carrying a beacon. In Antarctic conditions, this is either a malfunction or someone who does not want to be tracked.

- The fuel discrepancy the night-shift supervisor reported has a pattern: 8 liters missing every 4 days for the past 3 weeks. The pattern corresponds to a tracked vehicle's range to the Emergence Zone. The night-shift supervisor has told nobody except the logistics officer. The logistics officer told the EO security detail.
- A cargo crate returned from the silent team's automated drop is in the logistics staging area. The crate is empty, as expected. The crate's interior lining has been scratched. The scratches are letters. The letters spell a word in a cipher that EO field teams use for non-electronic communication. The word has not been read yet because nobody has looked inside the crate.
- The weather system that closed the flight corridor 6 hours ago is producing electromagnetic interference that disrupts the satellite uplink. The 0300 burst window is missed. The three faction transmissions sit in the relay queue. For the next 12 hours, nobody on the Peninsula can communicate with the outside world.

CONTACTS

LOGISTICS OFFICER DMITRI IVANOV — EO EXTRACTION DIVISION, SUPPLY CHAIN

CAN GET The complete automated resupply drop log for the silent team including delivery coordinates, return crate timestamps, and the standing order authorization code that keeps the drops active. Also: the fuel discrepancy records and his private calculation of where the missing fuel is going.

WANTS For someone above him to notice the standing orders are still running for a team that hasn't reported in 6 weeks and to either explain it or cancel it. He is uncomfortable with the ambiguity. He follows orders. These orders feel wrong.

FEARS Being the person who flagged a standing order that turns out to be classified at a level above his clearance, which would mean he touched something he wasn't supposed to see.

CURRENT PRESSURE The handwritten note in tonight's resupply crate was not in the logistics system. Someone in the staging area added it. He found the crate already sealed. He does not know what the note says. He knows it was not there when he prepared the load.

FLIGHT COMMANDER SASHA PETROV — EO LOGISTICS, ICE SHELF APPROACH AIRSTRIP

CAN GET Flight schedules, weather corridor predictions, departure manifests including what each faction is transporting off the Peninsula, and the operational range of every aircraft and drone on the approach — including the drone carrier running the silent team's resupply drops.

WANTS To fly the reconnaissance mission Kuznetsova is planning. He is the best cold-weather pilot on the Peninsula. She has not asked him. He is waiting for her to ask because the coordinates she has are in a section of ice field he has flown over 30 times and he knows something she doesn't.

FEARS What he knows: the ice at those coordinates has been shifting faster than anywhere else on the Peninsula. His flight path takes him over the area twice a week. Three weeks ago he saw something on the surface that was not ice and was not natural terrain. He did not report it.

CURRENT PRESSURE He photographed it. The photograph shows an angular structure partially exposed by ice retreat — surfaces finished to a precision that current facilities cannot replicate. The structure is at the silent team's last GPS coordinates.

FUEL DEPOT SUPERVISOR MIRIAM OKAFOR — EO LOGISTICS, NIGHT SHIFT

CAN GET The fuel discrepancy data, the 4-day pattern, the tracked vehicle that the fuel corresponds to, and the vehicle's GPS log — which she pulled from the logistics system and which shows the vehicle making round trips to coordinates that match a point in the Emergence Zone.

WANTS The fuel discrepancy to stop. She runs a clean depot and the unaccounted fuel is a professional problem she wants resolved before it becomes a security problem.

FEARS That the vehicle making the trips belongs to the PRC climate assessment team and that the PRC has been running unauthorized field operations in the Emergence Zone for 3 weeks without EO knowledge or approval.

CURRENT PRESSURE	She checked the vehicle's return condition after the last trip. The treads carried soil samples that are not from the Emergence Zone's surface — they are from below the ice. Someone has been digging.

CIVILIAN NEED

Contract workers want their rotation to end on schedule and their flight home to depart on time. They want food, rest, and the certainty that the weather will not extend their contract. They are observant and they talk to each other. They notice logistics patterns. No operator has ever extracted reliable intel from a contract worker, because contract workers know that talking costs them employment and the Peninsula does not offer employment alternatives.

OPERATOR ACCESS

EO logistics manifests for the past 6 weeks (via the cargo coordinator, at significant personal risk). The automated resupply drop schedule and collection routine (via Kuznetsova). Fuel allocation records and the depot's night-shift access pattern (via a contract engineer on rotation). Backup communications relay access during the 1800-2000 window when Base Meridian's primary uplink is offline (via bribery, equipment trade, or extortion of a relay technician).

ZONE 3 EXTRACTION SITE ALPHA

EO MINING OPERATION

SECURITY	active
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	ground sensor

FACTION PRESSURE	dominant EO
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	checkpointed

FUNCTION The EO's neo-rare-earth mineral extraction operation — the official reason for EO's military presence on the Peninsula and the cover story that justifies the logistics chain, the security detail, and the satellite uplink bandwidth. Real extraction is occurring. Real minerals are being shipped. The operation is also a staging ground for the EO's actual objective.

CONTROLLER EO Extraction Division. Military-run, industrial-scale, staffed by contract workers on 6-month rotations who are not told about anything beyond the extraction mandate.

DRAW Neo-rare-earth minerals worth significant faction currency / the EO's staging ground for EREBUS-related operations / the contract workers, who see everything at the extraction site and are told nothing / the equipment pool, which includes ground-penetrating radar, heavy transport, and cold-weather survival gear

RISK EO military security / the 6-month contract workers who notice patterns and talk to each other / the extraction operation's sensor perimeter, which covers the approach to the EREBUS coordinates / EO command's increasing interest in the silent team, which is drawing attention to the area

SCARCITY Unmonitored use of EO extraction equipment / any information about the silent team's original mission parameters / a cover story for being near the EREBUS coordinates that doesn't trigger EO security interest

UNDER-SYSTEM

The extraction site's sensor perimeter overlaps with the silent team's last GPS coordinates. The sensor data shows intermittent activity at those coordinates — movement signatures that the automated system classifies as 'wildlife.' The Peninsula has no wildlife. The sensor system's classification algorithm was not updated for Antarctic deployment. It defaults to 'wildlife' for any movement signature that doesn't match a registered vehicle or personnel beacon. Volkov's team disabled their beacons when they went dark.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

If EO command authorizes a search-and-recover for the silent team, the operation will stage from Extraction Site Alpha. Every faction operative on the Peninsula will see a military operation mobilizing toward coordinates that are, on the official record, a mineral survey site. The NAF and PRC operatives will draw conclusions.

DAY

AUTHORITY

EO extraction management — contract worker shifts, equipment allocation, mineral processing

ECONOMY

Mineral extraction, equipment maintenance, the legitimate operation that funds the cover

RISK

Contract workers who observe and remember; EO management who track equipment allocation

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

EO military security — reduced extraction operations, perimeter patrols, sensor monitoring

ECONOMY

Sensor data review; the extraction site's communications terminal, which links to the Base Meridian uplink and can transmit without going through the station's queue

RISK

The sensor perimeter; EO military patrols that run the EREBUS-approach corridor after dark

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A contract worker at the mineral processing station, running ore through the analysis system. Through the station's window, the ice field stretches to the horizon. 40 kilometers out, at coordinates the worker has never been given, something is happening that the sensor system calls wildlife. The worker has been on the Peninsula for 4 months. She has never seen wildlife.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A contract worker is filing an equipment report on a tracked vehicle that was returned with damage to the undercarriage consistent with driving over exposed rock — not ice. The extraction site operates on ice. The vehicle's GPS log has been wiped. The worker logs the damage and files the report to EO maintenance.
- EO Extraction Division command has sent a priority message to the site manager: prepare staging for a 6-person reconnaissance operation departing in 48 hours. Destination: classified. The site manager is pulling cold-weather gear and vehicles. The contract workers are watching.
- The sensor perimeter flags a movement signature at the EREBUS coordinates — 11 seconds of activity, then nothing. The security officer on monitoring duty classifies it as wildlife. She has classified 23 identical signatures as wildlife in the past 6 weeks. She has started keeping a personal count.
- A NAF researcher from Base Meridian has requested a 'field visit' to Extraction Site Alpha to observe the mineral processing operation. The request is legitimate under the cooperative charter. The visit would put her inside the extraction site's sensor monitoring room for the duration.
- An EO maintenance technician discovers that the extraction site's communications terminal has been used for 3 transmissions in the past month that are not in the official log. The transmissions were routed through the Base Meridian uplink. The terminal's access code is supposed to be restricted to EO security. The access code was used correctly.
- A mineral survey drone returns from a routine flight path that takes it over the ice field between the extraction site and the Emergence Zone. The drone's geological survey data includes a thermal anomaly 12 meters below the ice at coordinates that match Dr. Chen's third-key projection. The anomaly was not in the previous survey.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The sensor perimeter flags a new signature at the EREBUS coordinates — not 11 seconds, sustained. A light source. Faint, filtered, visible only because the Peninsula at night is perfectly dark. The security officer on duty is looking at the monitor. She has stopped classifying things as wildlife.
- A tracked vehicle leaves the extraction site at 0200 without an authorization in the system. Its heading is toward the Emergence Zone. The security watch does not see it leave because the vehicle departed from the maintenance bay, which is outside the primary camera coverage.
- The 3 unauthorized transmissions from the extraction site's communications terminal have a common routing pattern — they all used a narrow bandwidth allocation during the 0300 satellite window, the same window the faction transmissions from Base Meridian use. Someone at the extraction site is communicating with a recipient that is not EO command.
- A contract worker who has been on the Peninsula for 5 months is at the extraction site's common area at 0100, unable to sleep. She tells another worker that she has been hearing the ice. Not the standard groaning — something different, from the direction of the EREBUS coordinates. A vibration that comes and goes. She cannot identify it.
- Kuznetsova arrives at the extraction site at 2300 to begin staging for the reconnaissance. She enters the sensor monitoring room and reviews the past 6 weeks of perimeter data. She finds the 23 'wildlife' classifications. She cross-references them with the silent team's last coordinates. The match is exact.
- EO command sends a classified message to the extraction site's security terminal at 0400: the silent team's standing resupply orders are to be canceled effective immediately. The automated drops stop. The message includes an additional directive: treat the silent team's coordinates as a restricted area. No personnel. No overflights.

CONTACTS

SITE MANAGER OLEG BARANOV — EO EXTRACTION DIVISION, SITE ALPHA

CAN GET The extraction site's full operational capacity including staging resources for the reconnaissance, the sensor perimeter data including the 23 wildlife classifications, and the 3 unauthorized transmissions from the communications terminal — which he discovered this morning and has not yet reported because he is trying to determine who used the access code.

WANTS The reconnaissance to conclude quickly and the extraction site to return to normal operations. He runs a mineral extraction operation. He is being asked to support a military mission he was not briefed on.

FEARS That the military mission will expose something about the extraction site's secondary purpose that he was told about when he accepted the posting and has been pretending to not know for 2 years.

CONTRACT WORKER ELENA VASQUEZ — EXTRACTION SITE ALPHA, MINERAL PROCESSING

CAN GET The vehicle damage reports showing non-ice terrain contact, the equipment checkout anomalies she has tracked informally for 4 months, and the vibration she has been hearing from the EREBUS coordinates — which she has timed, logged, and can describe with enough precision for a geologist to identify its source.

WANTS To finish her contract and leave. She has 2 months remaining. She wants to complete them without becoming involved in whatever is happening at the coordinates nobody will name.

FEARS That her informal tracking of equipment anomalies has been noticed by the security detail and that her 2 remaining months will become complicated.

SECURITY SPECIALIST YUKI TANAKA — EO MILITARY, SENSOR PERIMETER WATCH

CAN GET The complete perimeter sensor dataset including all 23 wildlife classifications, the sustained light source from last night, and her private analysis of the movement patterns — which she has mapped and which show a consistent pattern of 4 people moving between two structures at the EREBUS coordinates on a schedule that matches a research rotation.

WANTS For someone to look at her analysis and confirm that what she is seeing is what she thinks she is seeing: a functional operation at coordinates where there should be nothing.

FEARS	Kuznetsova. The new security officer reviewed her data and said nothing. That silence means either Kuznetsova already knows what is out there, or Kuznetsova's mission is not what Tanaka was told.

CIVILIAN NEED

She ran the movement pattern analysis against EO operational templates. The pattern matches a standard EO archaeological documentation protocol — a protocol used for pre-war site preservation. The silent team is not lost. They are working.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Contract workers here want their 6-month rotation to complete and want to be paid on time. They want to go home. What they do not want is to be reassigned to the 'exterior labor facility' if they ask questions about the sensor perimeter data or the silent team. The contract management structure ensures that any questions are flagged as 'compliance issues' and result in early rotation termination without full payment.

ZONE 4 THE EMERGENCE ZONE — ICE RETREAT & PRE-WAR EXPOSURE

SECURITY	none
INFRASTRUCTURE	none
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	satellite (intermittent)
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (covert)
CONTAMINATION	unknown (pre-war materials emerging)

BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	open (ice-stability dependent)

FUNCTION The section of the Peninsula where retreating ice is actively exposing pre-war structures, deposits, and artifacts. The terrain changes weekly. What was 12 meters under ice last month is 8 meters under ice today. The third EREBUS authentication key is in this zone, buried at a depth that Dr. Chen's model says will be accessible in 14 days.

CONTROLLER Nobody. The Emergence Zone is open terrain with no permanent structures. EO satellite coverage is intermittent — 4 passes per day, 12-minute windows. Between passes, the zone is dark. The PRC climate assessment team has been conducting unauthorized field operations here for 3 weeks using a tracked vehicle fueled by 8 liters stolen from the EO depot every 4 days.

DRAW The third EREBUS authentication key / pre-war artifacts emerging from the ice at a rate that outpaces any faction's ability to catalogue them / the geological survey data that reveals the full extent of the neo-rare-earth deposits / the ground truth of what the retreating ice is uncovering, which is more than minerals

RISK Ice instability — crevasses, collapses, terrain that changes between visits / no shelter during weather events / satellite coverage that means any surface activity is visible to EO for 12 minutes every 6 hours / the PRC's unauthorized excavation, which has disturbed the ice surface in ways that accelerate instability in the key's vicinity

SCARCITY Shelter / reliable navigation / time between satellite passes / any guarantee that the ground you're standing on will exist in a week

UNDER-SYSTEM

The PRC's unauthorized excavation has been targeting the thermal anomaly Dr. Chen identified — the third key's location. They have dug through 4 meters of ice and exposed a surface that matches the pre-war industrial precision described in every field report: heavier than it looks, finished to tolerances current facilities cannot replicate. The surface is a sealed container. They have not opened it. Their excavation has destabilized the ice around the site. Dr. Chen's model does not account for the destabilization. The 14-day natural emergence has been shortened by the dig. The key may be accessible in 6 days. Or the ice may collapse into the excavation and bury it deeper.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

If the ice at the excavation site collapses, the third key is buried under a debris field that would take weeks to clear. If the PRC extracts the key before the other factions reach the zone, they hold 1 of 3 keys and know the protocol requires 3. They become the broker for EREBUS access. If the EO or NAF reach the zone and find the excavation, the three-faction covert operation becomes a three-faction field confrontation on unstable ice.

DAY

AUTHORITY

None. Satellite coverage during day passes creates a window where surface activity is visible. Operations run between passes.

ECONOMY

None. The Emergence Zone is not a place of commerce. It is a place of retrieval.

RISK

Satellite passes; ice instability; the PRC excavation team, who are present on a 4-day cycle and armed

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

None. The Peninsula's winter darkness provides cover but the cold is more dangerous at night.

ECONOMY

None.

RISK

Extreme cold; zero visibility without artificial light; crevasse hazard in terrain that has no mapped paths

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A sealed container 4 meters below the ice surface, visible through the PRC's excavation shaft by the light of a work lamp. The surface is smooth, precise, and old in a way that is visible before it is measurable. The ice walls of the shaft are already closing — 2 centimeters of refreezing since the last visit, which was 4 days ago. The container is waiting. The ice is deciding whether to give it up or take it back.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- The PRC excavation team — 2 people with a tracked vehicle and digging equipment — is at the site during a satellite gap. They have 5 hours before the next EO pass. The excavation shaft has refrozen 2 centimeters since their last visit. They are cutting ice. The sealed container is visible but not accessible.
- A pre-war artifact has emerged from the ice 400 meters from the excavation site — an angular object, half-exposed, surface finish matching the industrial precision of EREBUS's outer seal. It was not here 3 days ago. It is not connected to the key. It is connected to something else that the ice is revealing on its own schedule.

- A satellite pass catches the PRC excavation site during a transit window when the team is not present. The disturbed ice surface is visible from orbit. The EO satellite analysis team flags it as 'geological anomaly' and queues it for ground investigation. The investigation will be assigned to the extraction site. Baranov will receive the order.
- The ice at the excavation site produces a sound — a deep, resonant crack that carries across the open terrain. The crack is not a crevasse opening. It is the ice settling around the sealed container as the temperature differential between the container's surface and the surrounding ice creates thermal stress. The container is warmer than the ice. It should not be.
- An NAF field survey team is in the Emergence Zone on a legitimate geological expedition — mapping neo-rare-earth deposits along the retreat line. Their ground-penetrating radar picks up the PRC excavation shaft. The survey team leader marks it as a natural ice formation. She knows it is not a natural ice formation.
- Dr. Chen is at the Emergence Zone alone — he took the tracked vehicle during a satellite gap and has been at the excavation site for 2 hours. He is not digging. He is sitting at the edge of the shaft, looking at the sealed container, running calculations on a tablet. He is determining whether the container can be extracted without the ice collapsing. His calculation says no.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The sealed container at the bottom of the PRC excavation shaft is emitting a faint light. Not continuous — pulsing, at 8-second intervals. The light was not present during the team's last daytime visit. The light is visible from the shaft opening as a blue-white glow against the ice walls.
- Ice instability at the excavation site has created a new crevasse 15 meters from the shaft opening. The crevasse is 2 meters wide and of unknown depth. The PRC's approach route from the extraction site now requires a detour. The detour adds 40 minutes and crosses terrain the ground-penetrating radar has not mapped.
- A weather event is building. The whiteout will reach the Emergence Zone in 4 hours. Anyone in the zone when it arrives will be there for 12 to 18 hours with no shelter, in temperatures that produce hypothermia in 30 minutes of unprotected exposure.
- The pre-war artifact that emerged 400 meters from the excavation site has changed. The ice around it has melted an additional 30 centimeters since yesterday — a rate far faster than the ambient retreat. The artifact is producing heat. Not much. Enough to melt ice. Enough to be measurable.

- A figure is at the excavation site at 0200 who is not from the PRC team. She has a headlamp and a data device. She is scanning the sealed container through the shaft opening with equipment the PRC team does not carry. She is recording. She arrived on foot from a direction that is not toward any known station.
- The ice at the excavation site collapses. The shaft walls close. The sealed container is buried under 3 meters of debris ice that settled in 4 seconds. The container's pulsing light is no longer visible. Dr. Chen's model predicted this as a 30% probability. It happened 8 days ahead of his timeline.

CONTACTS

DR. LI WEI — PRC CLIMATE ASSESSMENT TEAM, FIELD GEOLOGIST (OPERATIVE)

CAN GET The PRC's complete excavation data including the sealed container's precise GPS coordinates, depth, surface temperature readings, and the 4-week excavation timeline. Also: PRC command's assessment of EREBUS and the directive that drives the excavation — acquire the third key at any cost before the other factions identify it.

WANTS The key. That is all PRC command wants. Wei is running the field operation and she is good at it. She has been digging for 3 weeks and she is close.

FEARS Chen. He decoded the protocol. He has the coordinates. She does not know he decoded the three-key requirement. If he has and he tells PRC command, the entire operation's strategic calculus changes — from 'acquire the key' to 'acquire the key and determine who has the other two.'

NAF SURVEY LEAD DR. INGRID HAUGEN — NAF RESEARCH COMMAND, GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CAN GET The NAF's geological survey data including the ground-penetrating radar scan of the PRC excavation shaft, the complete neo-rare-earth deposit map, and the second EREBUS authentication key — which NAF found 6 months ago at a site 20 kilometers north and which is currently in a sealed case in Haugen's field pack.

WANTS To understand what the key opens. NAF command knows she has a key. They do not know there are three keys. She has been trying to match the key's encoding to the classified partition data. She has not succeeded because the partition requires the pre-war encoding standard that only Chen can read.

FEARS That the PRC excavation she found with her radar is connected to the same system her key belongs to, which would mean the PRC is ahead of NAF in the race she has been running alone.

THE FIGURE AT THE SHAFT — UNKNOWN AFFILIATION, 0200

CAN GET Whatever her scanning equipment captured from the sealed container — data that neither the PRC team nor any other faction on the Peninsula has. Her equipment is not standard-issue for any known faction. It is pre-war. She is carrying pre-war technology.

WANTS Unknown. She arrived on foot from a direction that does not correspond to any known station. She scanned the container for 12 minutes. She left the way she came.

FEARS Unknown. She did not behave like someone who was afraid.

CIVILIAN NEED

She has been to the Emergence Zone before. The PRC's excavation log shows a set of footprints at the shaft opening from 2 weeks ago that did not match any team member's boots. The prints were dismissed as wind-drift pattern. They were not wind-drift pattern.

OPERATOR ACCESS

This zone has no permanent population. The PRC's unauthorized excavation team (on-site during the 4-day collection cycle) wants to extract the thermal anomaly without the excavation collapsing. They want to maintain operational security. They want EO to remain ignorant of the dig. They are beginning to suspect EO already knows.

ZONE 5 EREBUS OUTER PERIMETER

PRE-WAR INSTALLATION

FUNCTION	The pre-war installation designated EREBUS, partially exposed by ice retreat, outer seal opened 6 weeks ago by Commander Volkov's team. EREBUS is a seed vault and manufacturing template archive — the complete technical specifications for pre-Upheaval critical infrastructure, sealed in a facility designed to survive the collapse its builders anticipated. It is the most valuable single discovery in the post-Upheaval world. Volkov's team has been inside for 6 weeks, documenting everything, sending nothing.
FUNCTION	Commander Katya Volkov, by her own authority. She went dark deliberately. She maintains the silent team's operational pattern — collecting resupply drops, returning empty crates — to delay EO command's response. She has 4 team members. They follow her because they have seen what is inside.
CONTROLLER	Everything. EREBUS contains the manufacturing templates for every critical infrastructure system the pre-war world built — water, energy, food, manufacturing. Any faction that controls EREBUS can rebuild the world. The faction that controls EREBUS decides who gets to rebuild. / The unknown category: specifications that do not match any known pre-war engineering discipline
DRAW	EREBUS's internal systems, which are still functional — lighting, climate control, data access terminals, and a security protocol that Volkov has been navigating for 6 weeks and has not fully mapped / the outer perimeter ice, which is unstable and closing — passages that were open when Volkov entered are narrowing / Volkov's team, who are well-armed, well-supplied, and operating under a conviction that changes the rules of engagement / the 6 weeks of EO silence, which is drawing Kuznetsova and a reconnaissance team to these coordinates
RISK	Access — the outer seal Volkov opened is the only confirmed entry point / Volkov's cooperation — she has the documentation and will not share it with a faction / the three-key protocol —

EREBUS's inner archive requires all three keys simultaneously, and Volkov has not been able to access it

SCARCITY

EREBUS's inner archive is behind a second seal that requires the three-key authentication. Volkov has spent 6 weeks inside the outer chamber — the seed vault, the manufacturing templates, the infrastructure specifications. The inner archive contains the unknown category. The outer chamber's data terminals describe the inner archive as 'continuity protocols' but do not specify continuity of what. Volkov has documented everything in the outer chamber. She has not been able to open the inner archive. She does not have a key. She does not know the protocol requires three keys. She knows the inner archive exists and that what she has found in the outer chamber is the less important part of EREBUS.

UNDER-SYSTEM

If Kuznetsova's reconnaissance reaches EREBUS, Volkov will have to decide: resist an EO recovery team with 4 people, surrender the documentation to EO command which she has decided should not have it, or destroy the documentation and seal EREBUS. If the three-key holders converge on EREBUS simultaneously, the inner archive becomes accessible. What is inside the inner archive is the variable that changes everything. It is left as a deliberate blank.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Day / Night Split

DAY

AUTHORITY

Volkov. One team member on watch at the outer seal. The watch is not for external threats — it is for the ice, which is closing the approach passage at a rate Volkov measures every 12 hours.

ECONOMY

The documentation continues. EREBUS's internal lighting runs on a power source that has not depleted in the time since the facility was sealed. Volkov has not identified the power source.

RISK

The same. EREBUS does not have a day/night cycle. The danger is constant and comes from time running out.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Documentation. Volkov's team is cataloguing every item, every specification, every template in the outer chamber. They have covered approximately 60% in 6 weeks.

ECONOMY

The approach passage closing; EO reconnaissance arriving; the internal security protocol Volkov has not fully mapped

RISK

A room inside EREBUS, lit by lights that have been on since before the Upheaval. The air is breathable and precisely conditioned — a temperature and humidity that has not varied in decades. On the walls, sealed behind transparent panels, manufacturing templates etched into materials that are heavier than they look and finished to tolerances nothing in the current world can match. Volkov is standing in front of one panel, hand on the glass, reading. She has read it before. She is reading it again because the implications change every time.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

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ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Volkov's team is running the morning documentation shift. One team member has reached a section of the outer chamber that contains agricultural

templates — complete specifications for food production systems that could feed a city of 500,000. She has stopped documenting and is reading. She has been reading for 2 hours.

- The approach passage to the outer seal has narrowed by 8 centimeters since Volkov's last measurement 12 hours ago. At this rate, the passage will be impassable in 10 days. Volkov marks the measurement and says nothing to her team. She has been tracking this for 6 weeks. The closing rate is accelerating.
- EREBUS's internal data terminal has been running a query Volkov did not initiate. The terminal's display shows a schematic of the three-key authentication system for the inner archive — the same information that exists in Base Meridian's classified partition. The terminal displayed it for 30 seconds and then returned to its standard interface. Volkov has a photograph.
- One of Volkov's team members is at the outer seal, looking out at the ice field. He has been standing there for 20 minutes. When asked, he says he saw something on the ice 800 meters away — a figure. The figure was there for 11 seconds and then was not. 11 seconds is the same duration as the 'wildlife' sensor signatures at Extraction Site Alpha.
- A section of the outer chamber that Volkov's team has not yet reached produces a sound — a mechanical sound, like a system activating. Volkov has been inside EREBUS for 6 weeks and the facility has been silent. Something just turned on. She does not know what.
- The resupply crate from the automated drop contains the handwritten note. Volkov reads it. The note says: 'We know you're alive. Kuznetsova is coming. 48 hours.' Volkov does not know who wrote it. The note is not on EO stationery.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Volkov is at the inner archive's sealed door at 0300. She has been here every night for a week. The door has three recessed slots that match the key description in the classified partition. She does not have a key. She places her hand on the door. The door is warm. EREBUS is sealed in ice. Nothing inside should be warm.
- EREBUS's internal lighting runs a brief variance — a 2-second flicker across the entire outer chamber that Volkov's team experiences as the first change in the facility's behavior since they entered. After the flicker, one data terminal in a section they have not documented is active. It was not active before.
- The watch at the outer seal reports movement on the ice — not the 11-second figure, sustained movement. A light source, moving toward EREBUS

from the direction of the Emergence Zone. The light stops 200 meters from the outer seal. It does not advance. It does not retreat. It is there for 40 minutes and then it is gone.

- A team member who has been documenting water treatment templates for 3 weeks has a breakdown. Not dramatic — quiet. She sits down, puts the camera down, and says she cannot continue because she understands what the templates mean and what will happen when a faction gets them. Volkov sits with her. They do not speak for an hour.
- The newly activated data terminal in the undocumented section is displaying information about the inner archive. Not the three-key protocol — something else. A description of the unknown category that does not match any pre-war engineering discipline. The description uses terminology Volkov does not recognize. She photographs it. The terminal deactivates.
- EREBUS's power system runs a self-diagnostic that Volkov's team can hear as a low hum rising from beneath the floor for 15 seconds. The diagnostic completes. A status indicator on the inner archive door changes from amber to green. Nothing else changes. Volkov does not know what the status change means.

CONTACTS

COMMANDER KATYA VOLKOV — EO (FORMER), SILENT TEAM LEAD

CAN GET Six weeks of documentation of EREBUS's outer chamber — the most complete record of pre-war manufacturing and infrastructure technology that exists. Also: the three-key protocol schematic the terminal displayed, the inner archive's unknown category description, and her assessment of what EREBUS means for the world.

WANTS For EREBUS to be accessible to everyone or to no one. She will not give the documentation to EO command. She will not give it to any faction. She does not have a mechanism for giving it to the world. She has been inside for 6 weeks trying to figure out what to do.

FEARS That she is wrong. That EREBUS should belong to a faction — that the alternative is worse. That her conviction is selfishness disguised as principle. She has been having this argument with herself for 6 weeks.

SERGEANT ALEXEI MOROZOV — SILENT TEAM, EREBUS WATCH

CAN GET The outer seal's current status, the approach passage measurements, the 11-second figure sightings, and the sustained light source that appeared at 200 meters last night. Also: his private assessment of Volkov's mental state after 6 weeks of isolation inside a pre-war facility with implications she cannot resolve.

WANTS For Volkov to make a decision. Any decision. He has followed her into EREBUS and he will follow her out. But she has been standing at the inner archive door every night for a week and she is not getting closer to an answer.

FEARS The approach passage closing. If the ice seals EREBUS before Volkov decides, the decision is made for them — they stay inside until someone digs them out. He has done the math on their remaining supplies.

DR. YUKI SATO — SILENT TEAM, DOCUMENTATION LEAD

CAN GET The complete documentation index for EREBUS's outer chamber — 60% catalogued, cross-referenced, and organized by infrastructure category. She built the index. She knows what EREBUS contains better than Volkov does. She also knows what the outer chamber does not contain and where the gaps point toward the inner archive.

WANTS The agricultural templates to be released. She is a food production researcher by training, not an EO operative. She volunteered for the mineral survey because it was an Antarctic posting. She did not expect to find the most important agricultural technology archive on Earth. She wants it used. She does not care by whom.

FEARS Volkov. Specifically: that Volkov's conviction is going to keep the agricultural templates — which could feed millions — sealed inside a pre-war vault under Antarctic ice until the approach passage closes and nobody can reach them.

CIVILIAN NEED

She had the breakdown last night. She sat for an hour. She did not stop documenting. She resumed at 0400 with a different approach — she is now documenting with enough detail that her documentation alone could reconstruct the templates without access to EREBUS. She has not told Volkov what she is doing or why.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Volkov's team needs silence and time. They need the supply drops to continue arriving on schedule. They need the outer seal to remain open long enough to complete documentation. They need EO to not discover that the team has gone dark intentionally. What they do not need is rescue. They do not want extraction. They have seen what is inside EREBUS and rescue is no longer their objective.

ZONE 6 SHACKLETON STATION

NAF FORWARD RESEARCH

FUNCTION	NAF's forward research station on the Peninsula — officially a climate and geological research facility, actually an intelligence collection platform. Smaller than Base Meridian, staffed by 12 people, 8 of whom are genuine researchers and 4 of whom are NAF intelligence. Haugen operates from here when she is not in the field.
FUNCTION	NAF Research Command through Dr. Haugen, who holds dual authority as research lead and senior intelligence officer on the Peninsula.
CONTROLLER	NAF's intelligence assessment of EO and PRC operations / Haugen's analysis of the EREBUS key / the NAF's independent satellite uplink — lower bandwidth than Base Meridian but not routed through EO systems / the geological research data that provides cover for intelligence operations

DRAW	Haugen's operational security, which is excellent — the genuine researchers at Shackleton do not know about the intelligence mission / the station's small size, which makes every visitor visible / the NAF satellite uplink, which is less capable than Base Meridian's and which EO can detect if they are looking
RISK	Trust — Haugen compartmentalizes everything / information about the other two faction operatives at Base Meridian / any data on the silent team that doesn't come through EO channels
SCARCITY	Haugen has the second EREBUS key in her field pack. She has been carrying it for 6 months. NAF command wants it transported off the Peninsula. She has refused twice. She does not know there are three keys. She does not know EO has a key. She has been trying to decode the key's purpose using Base Meridian's classified partition data and has failed because she cannot read the pre-war encoding standard. She needs Chen's help. She does not know Chen has already decoded it.

UNDER-SYSTEM

If NAF command overrides Haugen and orders the key extracted, it leaves the Peninsula through EO logistics — and EO screens everything. Getting the key past EO security without detection requires Haugen to build an extraction plan she has been avoiding building because she does not want the key to leave.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Day / Night Split

DAY

AUTHORITY

Station duty officer on 12-hour rotation; the NAF uplink runs its burst transmission during a different satellite window than Base Meridian's, creating a communications independence the NAF values

ECONOMY

NAF intelligence transmissions; Haugen's private analysis sessions with the key and the partition data

RISK

The NAF uplink's detectable signal; the 12-person station's limited physical security

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Research, intelligence collection, field survey staging

ECONOMY

The genuine researchers, who are observant and curious by profession; Haugen's compartmentalization, which can fail if an operator asks the wrong researcher the wrong question

RISK

Haugen's quarters at Shackleton, 0200. The EREBUS key is on the desk beside a tablet showing the classified partition data. She has been trying to match the key's encoding to the partition's schema for 6 months. The answer is 20 kilometers away in Dr. Chen's notebook. She does not know this. She is closer to knowing than she was yesterday.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

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ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Haugen is briefing a field survey team for a geological expedition to the Emergence Zone. The expedition is legitimate research. Haugen added a waypoint to the survey route that takes the team within 500 meters of the PRC excavation site. She wants ground-penetrating radar data on the PRC's dig.
- A genuine Shackleton researcher has been running an independent analysis of Base Meridian's public geological survey data and has found an anomaly: a thermal signature in the ice that does not match any geological process he

knows. The thermal signature is at the EREBUS coordinates. He is presenting his findings to Haugen at lunch.

- NAF Research Command has sent a priority message via the Shackleton uplink: extract the key on the next available flight. This is the third extraction order. Haugen has 72 hours to comply or provide a formal justification for refusal.
- A genuine researcher at Shackleton asks Haugen why she carries the same sealed case in her field pack on every expedition. The question is casual. Haugen's answer is practiced. The researcher accepts it. He mentions it to a colleague at dinner. The colleague is one of the 4 NAF intelligence officers.
- The Shackleton station's weather monitoring picks up the same whiteout event building that Base Meridian detected. Shackleton's model predicts the event will ground all operations for 18 hours. Haugen looks at the extraction order from NAF command and calculates that the whiteout buys her 18 hours before the 72-hour deadline starts.
- A PRC climate assessment team member has requested a courtesy visit to Shackleton Station under the cooperative charter's research exchange provision. The visit is scheduled for tomorrow. The PRC team member is Dr. Li Wei — the field geologist running the unauthorized excavation.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Haugen is at her desk at 0100 composing her third refusal to NAF Research Command's extraction order. The justification she is writing is 'security assessment of EO logistics screening protocols.' The real reason is on the desk beside her, and she cannot put it in a message.
- One of the 4 NAF intelligence officers at Shackleton has been running his own analysis of the classified partition data from Base Meridian. He has reached the same wall Haugen reached — the pre-war encoding standard. Unlike Haugen, he has mentioned his analysis to the NAF operative inside Base Meridian. The NAF operative is now looking for someone who can decode it.
- The NAF uplink's burst transmission at 0300 carries Haugen's refusal to NAF command and a separate, encrypted message from one of the intelligence officers to NAF Research Command that Haugen did not authorize. The message describes Haugen's key and recommends a covert extraction without her cooperation.
- Shackleton's external sensors detect a faint signal at 0400 — not a radio transmission, a data burst in a frequency band that does not correspond to any faction's communication standard. The signal lasted 0.4 seconds. Its

origin point is the Emergence Zone. The station's communication officer logs it as interference.

- Haugen is asleep for the first time in 36 hours. Her quarters are locked. The sealed case with the key is under her pillow — a habit she developed 3 months ago when she began suspecting her own team was reporting on her. She is correct about the suspicion.
- A weather monitoring update arrives: the whiteout will arrive 4 hours earlier than projected. Dr. Wei's courtesy visit to Shackleton, scheduled for tomorrow, will be delayed. Wei will be at the Emergence Zone during the whiteout. She has shelter equipment. She has been through Peninsula whiteouts before. She will use the time.

CONTACTS

DR. INGRID HAUGEN — NAF RESEARCH COMMAND, SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

CAN GET The second EREBUS key, NAF's complete intelligence assessment of Peninsula operations, the classified partition data from Base Meridian, and her analysis of the three-faction operational landscape — which is more accurate than any single faction's official assessment.

WANTS A way to decode the key that doesn't require giving it to NAF command or asking Chen for help. She knows Chen's mathematical capability. She does not trust the PRC's intentions.

FEARS Her own team. Specifically: that the intelligence officer who sent the unauthorized message to NAF command is building a case for overriding her authority and extracting the key without her cooperation.

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER MARCUS WEBB — NAF RESEARCH COMMAND, SHACKLETON STATION

CAN GET His unauthorized communication with NAF command recommending Haugen's override, the NAF operative at Base Meridian's current assignment to find a pre-war encoding decoder, and his personal assessment of Haugen's psychological state — which he describes as 'mission attachment beyond operational parameters.'

WANTS The key extracted and delivered to NAF command. He believes Haugen's refusal is insubordination and that the key's intelligence value decreases every day it stays on the Peninsula.

FEARS That Haugen is right and he is wrong. That extracting the key to a NAF vault means it joins the faction competition and whatever it opens becomes a weapon rather than a resource.

DR. ERIK LINDSTROM — SHACKLETON STATION, GENUINE RESEARCHER

CAN GET His independent analysis of the EREBUS thermal signature — a genuine geological finding that reached the same conclusion as every intelligence operation on the Peninsula through pure research. Also: his observation about Haugen's sealed case, which he mentioned to a colleague who he does not know is NAF intelligence.

FEARS That his finding is connected to something classified and that mentioning it to the wrong person will end his Peninsula posting and possibly his career.

CURRENT PRESSURE He told the wrong person. Webb's colleague — the NAF intelligence officer — has already folded Lindstrom's thermal analysis into the intelligence report. Lindstrom does not know his genuine research has become faction intelligence.

CIVILIAN NEED

Dr. Haugen wants to complete her intelligence assessment of EO and PRC objectives on the Peninsula. The genuine researchers want to publish climate data. No one at Shackleton Station wants the key to leave the Peninsula — because once it leaves, intelligence control passes to NAF command and Haugen's operational authority becomes advisory. The station staff is small enough that trust is personal. A security breach ruins everything.

OPERATOR ACCESS

NAF's independent satellite uplink and the transmission schedule (via a researcher who handles communications maintenance). Haugen's field reports on EO and PRC activities (via one of the intelligence officers, if circumstances create vulnerability). Chen's capability and location at Base Meridian (via Haugen directly, if she decides collaboration is strategically necessary). The location of the second EREBUS key (in Haugen's field pack, carried everywhere — access requires physical proximity or persuasion sufficient to convince Haugen that surrender is operationally sound).

ZONE 7 THE WHITEOUT CORRIDOR

WEATHER SYSTEM

SECURITY	none
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	none
FACTION PRESSURE	none
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	barricaded (by weather)

FUNCTION	Not a location — a condition. The Whiteout Corridor is the weather system that regularly seals the Peninsula, grounding all flights, severing satellite communications, and trapping every person on the ice exactly where they are. The corridor runs between the coast and the interior, funneled by the Peninsula's geography into a concentrated weather event that drops visibility to zero and wind speed to a level that makes voice communication impossible beyond 2 meters.
CONTROLLER	The weather. Nobody controls the Whiteout Corridor. Factions plan around it. The ice does not care about plans.
DRAW	The whiteout is cover — no satellites, no surveillance, no observation of any kind / the forced proximity of a sealed station during a weather event, which creates social pressure that breaks covers and generates intelligence / the 12-to-18-hour window where the Peninsula is sealed and whatever happens during it cannot be observed or prevented
RISK	Hypothermia in 30 minutes of unprotected exposure / zero visibility / wind speed that can push a person off their feet / satellite communication blackout / no extraction possible
SCARCITY	Everything. The whiteout is deprivation.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The next whiteout event will seal the Peninsula for 12 to 18 hours. During that window: Kuznetsova's reconnaissance to the silent team's coordinates cannot be observed. The PRC excavation at the Emergence Zone cannot be monitored. The three faction operatives at Base Meridian cannot transmit. Haugen's 72-hour extraction deadline pauses. Volkov's approach passage continues to close. Every faction's clock stops. The ice's clock does not.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The whiteout is the equalizer. It strips every faction's technical advantage and reduces the operation to people, cold, and whatever they are carrying. The decisions made during the whiteout — when nobody is watching — are the decisions that determine the outcome. The whiteout is not a hazard. It is the crucible.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

White. Nothing visible beyond arm's length. The sound of wind. The sound of ice. Somewhere in the corridor, 40 kilometers apart, a woman in a pre-war vault is standing at a door she cannot open, and a man in a research station is holding a key he cannot decode, and neither of them knows the other exists. The whiteout holds them equally.

ENCOUNTERS — WHITEOUT (1D6)

- Operators are caught between zones when the whiteout arrives early. Guide ropes to the nearest station are 400 meters away. Visibility is zero. Wind speed makes standing difficult. The operators have 30 minutes before hypothermia becomes a medical emergency. Navigation is by compass and count.
- The whiteout seals Base Meridian. All 40 occupants are inside for 18 hours. The three faction operatives are in the same building with no external communication. Commander Larsen calls a station meeting to review the classified partition access anomalies. He names the three user IDs. They are all in the room.
- During the communication blackout, the EO operative at Base Meridian uses the time to run his decryption program to completion. At 72%, the three-key requirement becomes visible. He now knows what Chen already knows. He does not know Chen knows.
- Kuznetsova uses the whiteout's satellite blackout to launch her reconnaissance toward the silent team's coordinates. No observation possible. She is moving across open ice in zero visibility with GPS and a compass. She has done this before. She has never done it toward coordinates where something is alive and not reporting.
- At Shackleton, the whiteout traps Haugen and Webb in the same station for 18 hours. Webb has his extraction authorization. Haugen has the key. The

station is 12 people in close quarters with no exit. Webb decides not to act during the whiteout. Haugen watches him decide not to act and understands what it means.

- At EREBUS, the whiteout does not exist. The facility is sealed. The ice is its own environment. Volkov does not know there is a whiteout. She is at the inner archive door. The status indicator is green. She places her hand on the warm surface and waits for something she cannot name.

CIVILIAN NEED

There is no civilian need in the Whiteout Corridor. The whiteout itself needs nothing. It is deprivation. It is the environment that renders every human objective irrelevant. What people need is to not be in it.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Weather prediction windows that identify whiteout event timing 6 to 12 hours in advance (via the weather monitoring system at Base Meridian, accessible via the night-shift archive access). The knowledge that during whiteout conditions, satellite surveillance ceases, communications blackout is enforced, and whatever happens in the corridor cannot be observed, prevented, or documented by any faction (via simply understanding weather). The fact that the PRC will not conduct excavation during whiteout, that Kuznetsova cannot conduct reconnaissance, and that Volkov's approach passage closure is temporarily irrelevant — the whiteout equalizes every faction's capability and access.

LAWS AND CIVIC RITUALS

AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

- **Chain of Command Discipline:** EO security has standing authority to detain any researcher or contractor who refuses a direct order from military personnel. Violation results in immediate isolation pending 'operational review.' The civilian research charter explicitly permits this under 'security protocol exception.' No operator has ever returned from operational review.
- **Archive Access Control:** All classified partition queries must be logged and approved by EO security. The approval system was designed to permit legitimate research while preventing data exfiltration. The approval delay is intentional — it is a surveillance mechanism. Anyone who appears to be researching the authentication protocol is flagged for 'additional processing.'
- **Whiteout Lockdown Orders:** During any whiteout event, all stations enter hard lockdown. Movement outside is forbidden. No exceptions. The PRC has violated this twice in 4 weeks using stolen EO route markers. EO knows. EO has not acted. EO is waiting to see what the PRC is excavating.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

- **Unauthorized Field Operations:** Technically applies to all personnel. In practice, EO contract workers can request field expeditions; NAF and PRC staff cannot. The regulation exists to justify confiscating equipment from rival faction field teams. The PRC's unauthorized excavation would be grounds for complete equipment seizure if EO acknowledged it was happening.
- **Classified Research Hold:** Any researcher who cannot produce proper authorization for accessing the classified partition can be placed on 'administrative review.' The review has no stated timeline. Researchers under review cannot access any facility resources, cannot transmit communications, and cannot leave their quarters except for meals. The hold can last indefinitely if EO decides it is necessary.
- **Supply Chain Rationing:** EO logistics maintains absolute authority over supply distribution. Contractors below Grade Seven cannot requisition equipment without specific mission approval. Civilian researchers cannot requisition military equipment under any circumstances. This rule exists to prevent anyone who is not EO from moving heavy tools to the Emergence Zone without explicit authorization.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

- **Reassignment to Exterior Labor Facility:** The Peninsula maintains a small facility on the coast assigned to 'external infrastructure maintenance.' Personnel assigned there are isolated from station communities, work unmonitored, and disappear

from regular communications for 6-week rotation periods. Three researchers have been reassigned in the past 8 months. None have requested another Peninsula posting upon return. The details of what they worked on are not available.

- **Archive Lockout:** A researcher locked out of the archive cannot conduct research. The lockout is also psychological — it signals that the station commander no longer trusts you. Everyone else notices. Every faction operative on the Peninsula understands archive lockout as a sign that EO has developed suspicion. If it lasts more than 72 hours, the operative knows to assume command is building a case.
- **Communication Isolation:** Any researcher who loses satellite uplink privileges cannot contact their faction command. They cannot call for extraction. They cannot send intelligence. The isolation can last indefinitely. It is the Peninsula's version of disappearance. It is used only when EO has decided a person is an asset to eliminate rather than investigate.

CIVIC RITUALS

- **The Weekly Weather Briefing:** Every Monday at 0800, all station heads and faction representatives are required to gather in Base Meridian's communication hub for weather assessment. The briefing lasts 20 minutes. It is not about the weather. It is about counting bodies. It is an opportunity for each faction to confirm everyone they expect to see is still alive. It is also an opportunity to notice who is missing.
- **The Resupply Manifesto:** Every supply flight arrival is marked by a 30-minute facility-wide pause where cargo is publicly logged. The manifest is posted. Everyone can see what is arriving, what faction ordered it, what the quantities are. This creates an informal intelligence exchange where no one has to ask questions explicitly. A sudden increase in medical supplies signals potential combat injury. A surge in excavation tools confirms field operations. The ritual exists officially for logistics transparency. It functions as a shared intelligence briefing.
- **The Darkness Observance:** During the Peninsula's winter darkness period (April to August), all stations observe 0600 Memorial Silence — one minute where all transmissions cease and all facility sounds are reduced to minimum. No official reason is given. Every operator understands it as acknowledgment that the Peninsula is not a place where people expect to leave. The silence is also a practical measure: the quiet provides acoustic clarity for any monitoring systems attempting to detect unauthorized communications.

R&R

Roll when operators spend downtime during base social events, equipment-repair gambling, enforced proximity during station lockdown, or shared meals in the common research area. Every result produces a new edge, a new debt, or a new exposure.

- Contact Made. An off-duty EO security officer at Base Meridian mentions the automated resupply drop pattern to a contractor, describing the 4-day cycle and the collection of empty crates. The operator is in earshot. The security officer thinks he is describing a routine logistics operation. The operator now understands that Volkov is alive and collecting supplies on a predictable schedule.
- Feud Started. The operator questions someone about the three-key authentication protocol too directly. Word reaches one of the other faction operatives through Larsen's staff. The rival operative assumes the operator is an asset of a competing faction and begins counter-surveillance. The operator does not know they are being watched. The watcher is being very professional about it.
- Equipment Lost. A researcher's encrypted field pack containing backup navigation equipment goes missing after a shared meal. The pack contained detailed maps of the Emergence Zone marked with coordinate positions. If the maps reach EO logistics, EO will realize someone external has been tracking excavation activity. If the maps reach the PRC, the PRC will know their operation is under observation.
- Secret Learned. Dr. Chen, the PRC climate modeler, notices the operator asking questions about pre-war encoding standards. He approaches the operator privately and confirms that the three-key authentication protocol is real, and that none of the factions currently holds all three keys. He wants to know what the operator is looking for. He is prepared to trade information if the answer is interesting enough.
- Debt Incurred. Kuznetsova, the EO security officer, approaches the operator with a proposition: she needs someone with external support structure to help her stage a reconnaissance toward the silent team's last known coordinates without flagging the request through normal EO channels. She will provide equipment, authorization codes, and a cover briefing. She will not say what she actually intends to recover. In exchange, the operator is indebted to her for one favor, undefined and redeemable within the next 30 days.
- Locally Recognizable. The operator intervenes in a technical dispute over equipment allocation between EO contractors and NAF researchers, or handles a conflict in a way that is professionally skilled and politically sensitive. By the next morning, the operator is the person both factions mention when they are trying to decide whether to trust someone new. One faction's operational network is now

routing requests through the operator without asking permission. A different faction has photographed the operator and added the image to an intelligence file.

FACTIONS

EO — EURASIAN OLIGARCHY (EXTRACTION DIVISION)

Peninsula Military & Logistics Authority

OBJECTIVE Recover the silent team, secure EREBUS for EO access, and maintain the Peninsula's logistics monopoly that gives EO control over every other faction's operations.

ASSETS Military security presence; logistics chain control; the first EREBUS key (stored at EO command, not on the Peninsula); satellite surveillance; Kuznetsova's reconnaissance team; Extraction Site Alpha's staging capacity

DEPENDENCY The logistics monopoly. Every person and every supply shipment passes through EO. Remove that control and the EO's advantage collapses to raw military force — which is significant but not decisive when the weather is the primary adversary.

VULNERABILITY The silent team. Volkov has gone rogue and EO command does not understand why. Their assumption is security compromise or hostile capture. The truth — that Volkov saw what was inside and made a moral decision — is not in their operational framework.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1: Reconnaissance — Kuznetsova's mission to the silent team's coordinates
- 2: Recovery operation — military team to EREBUS, extraction of Volkov's team, seizure of documentation
- 3: Peninsula lockdown — close the logistics chain, ground all flights, restrict all non-EO movement until EREBUS is secured
- 4: Direct confrontation — if other factions are identified at EREBUS, the EO deploys its full military capability on the Peninsula

OFFER Logistics access; flight seats; fuel; equipment; the safety of the only military force on the Peninsula capable of sustained cold-weather operations

DEMAND Information about the silent team. Everything else is secondary.

IF DAMAGED EO presence neutralized means the logistics chain breaks. No resupply. No flights. Every person on the Peninsula is stranded until another faction establishes a supply route. In Antarctic conditions, that timeline is measured in weeks. Supplies are measured in days.

NAF — NORTH ATLANTIC FEDERATION (RESEARCH COMMAND)

Intelligence & Key Recovery

OBJECTIVE Decode the EREBUS key, determine what the key opens, and establish NAF's claim to whatever is inside before the EO or PRC does.

ASSETS The second EREBUS key; Haugen's intelligence network; the Shackleton Station uplink; the NAF operative inside Base Meridian; the geological survey cover that allows legitimate access to the entire Peninsula

DEPENDENCY Haugen's cooperation. She holds the key, the intelligence assessment, and the field knowledge. Without her, the NAF's Peninsula operation is a research station with an intelligence officer who has gone off-script.

VULNERABILITY Webb's extraction authorization. NAF command has authorized covert extraction of the key from Haugen if she refuses again. If Webb acts, the NAF's Peninsula operation fractures into two competing chains of command.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1: Intelligence collection — continued covert analysis of the key and the classified partition
- 2: Webb's extraction — covert seizure of the key from Haugen, transport off the Peninsula through EO logistics with the key concealed in research data containers
- 3: Direct approach to Chen — Haugen or the NAF operative at Base Meridian approaches Chen with the partition data and requests decoding assistance, revealing NAF interest in the EREBUS protocol
- 4: Open claim — NAF declares its possession of a key and attempts to negotiate joint EREBUS access, burning its covert position for a diplomatic seat at the table

OFFER The second EREBUS key; Haugen's intelligence assessment; geological survey data; the Shackleton uplink as an alternative communication channel independent of EO systems

DEMAND Decoding assistance for the key — specifically, someone with pre-war encoding standard expertise

IF DAMAGED NAF presence neutralized means the second key leaves the Peninsula (Webb extracts it) or is lost (Haugen destroys it). Either way, the three-key protocol becomes a two-key problem, and two factions spend years searching for the third piece while the ice closes over EREBUS.

PRC — PACIFIC RIM COALITION (CLIMATE ASSESSMENT TEAM)

Excavation & Third Key Recovery

OBJECTIVE Extract the third EREBUS key from the Emergence Zone, establish PRC possession of the key, and leverage the three-key protocol to position PRC as the broker for EREBUS access.

ASSETS Dr. Chen's decoded three-key protocol and third-key location; Dr. Wei's 3-week excavation; the PRC's climate model, which is the most accurate projection of Antarctic ice retreat on Earth; the tracked vehicle and excavation equipment

DEPENDENCY The excavation succeeding before the ice collapses. Chen's model gives 14 days for natural emergence, but the excavation has destabilized the site. The container is accessible but extraction risks collapse.

VULNERABILITY Chen's silence. He decoded the three-key protocol 4 days ago and has told no one. If Chen decides that the PRC should not have the information, the PRC's operational advantage disappears. Chen is the single point of failure for the PRC's entire Peninsula strategy.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1: Continued excavation — extract the key through careful field work during satellite gaps
- 2: Accelerated extraction — accept the ice collapse risk to get the key before another faction identifies the site
- 3: Approach other key holders — once the PRC has a key, identify which factions hold the other two and negotiate or coerce a joint opening
- 4: Chen's gambit — if Chen decides independently, he may offer the three-key information to a party of his choosing, bypassing PRC command entirely

OFFER The third key (if extracted); the ice-retreat model; Chen's decoded three-key protocol; the thermal anomaly data from the Emergence Zone

DEMAND The other two keys. The PRC's endgame is to hold all three.

IF DAMAGED PRC presence neutralized means the third key remains in the ice or is acquired by another faction. Chen's decoded protocol data either stays in his notebook or transfers to whoever reaches him. The PRC's climate model — the most valuable predictive tool on the Peninsula — becomes unavailable to whoever relied on it.

THE SILENT TEAM (VOLKOV)

EREBUS Documentation & Moral Resistance

OBJECTIVE Prevent EREBUS from becoming a faction asset. Volkov's conviction is that the seed vault and manufacturing templates should be accessible to all or to none — not weaponized by a single bloc. She does not have a mechanism for achieving this. She has documentation and a closing window.

ASSETS Six weeks of EREBUS documentation; physical control of the only confirmed entry point; a team of 4 who follow her; knowledge of EREBUS's internal systems that no other faction has; the approach passage, which is closing and which protects EREBUS from intrusion as it narrows

DEPENDENCY Time. The approach passage is closing. Supplies are finite. Kuznetsova is coming. Volkov needs to decide before the decision is made for her.

VULNERABILITY Dr. Sato's quiet rebellion. Sato is documenting EREBUS with enough detail to reconstruct the templates without access to the facility. If Sato's documentation leaves EREBUS, Volkov's control over the information ends regardless of what happens to the physical site.

ESCALATION LADDER

- 1: Continue documenting — maintain the operational pattern, hope the approach passage buys time
- 2: Negotiate — if Kuznetsova arrives, attempt to convince her that EREBUS should not be reported to EO command
- 3: Resist — refuse to surrender the documentation or the entry point; Volkov's team is armed and has 6 weeks of defensive preparation
- 4: Seal EREBUS — collapse the approach passage, bury the entry point, and accept that the most valuable discovery in the post-Upheaval world becomes inaccessible until the ice retreats further, which may take decades

OFFER EREBUS documentation; the entry point; Volkov's 6-week operational knowledge of the facility's internal systems; the only firsthand account of what pre-war infrastructure templates look like and what they could do

DEMAND	A guarantee that is impossible to give: that EREBUS will not be weaponized
IF DAMAGED	The silent team neutralized means EO recovers the documentation and the entry point. EREBUS becomes an EO asset. The three-key protocol for the inner archive remains unsolved until all three keys converge. Sato's detailed documentation may or may not have left with whoever recovered the team.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

COMMANDER KATYA VOLKOV — SILENT TEAM LEAD, EREBUS

Volkov is not a defector. She is an EO officer who saw something that changed her assessment of what her orders meant. EREBUS contains the technology to rebuild the world. Her orders were to secure it for the EO. She decided that securing it for the EO meant securing it against the world. She could not do both.

She has been inside EREBUS for 6 weeks. The documentation is 60% complete. The approach passage is closing. Kuznetsova is 48 hours away. She stands at the inner archive door every night because the door is warm and the unknown category on the other side is the only thing left that might change her calculus.

CURRENT STATUS	EREBUS outer chamber. Documenting. Deciding. Running out of time on all counts.
DELIBERATE BLANK	What Volkov decides when Kuznetsova arrives — left for the table

DR. JAMES CHEN — PRC CLIMATE ASSESSMENT, MATHEMATICAL MODELER

Chen decoded the three-key EREBUS protocol 4 days ago and has told nobody. He has the third key's coordinates, the ice-retreat timeline, and the mathematical certainty that the protocol was designed to prevent any single entity from accessing EREBUS alone. The design is deliberate. The builders intended collaboration. Chen finds this meaningful.

He does not trust PRC command with this information. He does not trust any faction. He is a mathematician, not an intelligence operative, and he is

holding the most strategically significant single piece of information on the Antarctic Peninsula. He has a notebook. He has no allies.

CURRENT STATUS Base Meridian, running models, watching Wei access data he already analyzed, deciding

DELIBERATE BLANK Who Chen tells first and what he asks for in return — left for the table

DOWNTIME

ACCESS THE CLASSIFIED PARTITION

WHAT: Query the classified partition in Base Meridian's archive for EREBUS access protocol data, key authentication specifications, or the inner archive's unknown category description.

COST: A compromised user credential or a social engineering approach on the station's archive system. Night access requires avoiding the EO security watch.

GAIN: One complete data set from the classified partition — the access protocol header, the three-key schema, or the unknown category description.

FALLOUT: The query is logged. Station commander Larsen reviews logs daily. The EO security detail reviews them within 6 hours. A query that doesn't match the querying user's research profile will be flagged within 24 hours.

SURVIVE A FIELD TRANSIT

WHAT: Move between zones on the Peninsula — Base Meridian to Extraction Site Alpha, to the Emergence Zone, to EREBUS's coordinates, or to Shackleton Station. Requires weather monitoring data, cold-weather equipment, and a vehicle or guide rope system.

COST: Time, equipment, and weather risk. A transit in good conditions takes 4 to 8 hours depending on distance. A transit in marginal conditions doubles. A transit when a whiteout hits mid-route is a survival scenario.

GAIN: Physical presence at the destination zone with whatever equipment the operator carried.

FALLOUT: Every vehicle transit is logged in the EO logistics system. On-foot transit avoids the log but increases cold exposure risk. Satellite passes during transit may capture the operator's position. Arrival at a station triggers an access log entry.

INTERCEPT A FACTION TRANSMISSION

WHAT: Access the communications relay at the Ice Shelf Approach or the satellite uplink at Base Meridian during the burst transmission window to monitor, copy, or redirect another faction's queued transmission.

COST: Physical access to the relay or uplink terminal, plus the relay access code (available through contact acquisition) or a technical bypass. The window is brief — 12 minutes for satellite passes.

GAIN: One complete faction transmission — intelligence assessment, extraction order, field report, or operational directive.

FALLOUT: The transmission log records access events. A second access during a burst window that doesn't correspond to a scheduled transmission will be flagged. The burst window is shared — other faction transmissions in the same window may detect the interception.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

BASE MERIDIAN COMMON ROOM TALK (1D6)

- The classified partition has been queried more in the past month than in the previous year. Station commander Larsen has noticed. The EO security detail has noticed. Three researchers have been called in for 'routine access review.' Two of them are faction operatives. The third is a genuine researcher who stumbled onto the partition by accident.
- The silent team has been dark for 6 weeks. The official story is 'extended field survey.' Nobody believes this. The logistics officer told someone in the common room that the resupply drops are still going out and the crates are still coming back empty. That detail has traveled.
- Dr. Chen presented ice-retreat data that shows a specific section retreating faster than anywhere else on the Peninsula. Three people in the briefing audience wrote down the coordinates. Two of them are faction operatives. The third is a geologist who will file a survey request for the site.
- The EO security detail added a new officer — Kuznetsova — who arrived on the last flight with classified cargo. She has been reviewing sensor data and asking about coordinates that are not on any official survey. The common room consensus is that she is here for the silent team.
- A weather monitoring anomaly: the next whiteout is projected with unusually high confidence — 92% probability within 18 hours. The weather team says this is the most predictable event in their 3-year dataset. The predictability feels wrong to the senior meteorologist, who has been on the Peninsula long enough to know that Antarctic weather is never 92% anything.
- Someone has been using the archive after hours with credentials that don't belong to them. Larsen has the access logs but hasn't identified the users. The common room rumor is that it's the EO security detail running a classified analysis. The reality is worse. (This rumor is a trap — repeating it draws attention from the actual operatives.)

EXTRACTION SITE CONTRACTOR CHATTER (1D6)

- The sensor perimeter keeps flagging 'wildlife' at coordinates 40 kilometers away. There is no wildlife on the Peninsula. The contract workers have started a betting pool on what is actually out there. The most popular bet is 'a pre-war automated system that activated when the ice exposed it.' The bet is closer to the truth than any faction's official assessment.
- Fuel is going missing from the depot. The supervisor reported it. Security is investigating. The contract workers suspect the PRC climate team because the PRC's

vehicle has been running routes that don't match their published survey schedule. They are correct.

- A cargo crate returned from the automated resupply drop had something scratched inside it. Nobody in the logistics crew read the scratches as a message because nobody on the logistics crew knows EO field cipher. The crate is in the staging area. The message is still inside it.
- The new security officer — Kuznetsova — is staging cold-weather reconnaissance equipment. The contract workers have seen the coordinates on her planning tablet. The coordinates match the 'wildlife' signatures. The workers are connecting dots.
- A mineral survey drone returned with a thermal anomaly in its geological data — something warm under the ice at the Emergence Zone. The extraction site geologist called it 'volcanic remnant.' It is not volcanic. It is too precise, too localized, and too warm.
- A contract worker heard the ice vibrate last night from the direction of the silent team's coordinates. She described it as 'something large settling into a new position.' Two other workers heard it on different nights. Nobody has reported it because there is no reporting category for 'the ice sounds like something is alive inside it.'

SHACKLETON STATION QUIET OBSERVATIONS (1D6)

- Haugen carries the same sealed case everywhere. The genuine researchers have noticed. They assume it contains sensitive research equipment. The NAF intelligence officers know it does not contain research equipment. One of them has told NAF command.
- NAF command's extraction order has created tension that the genuine researchers can feel but not name. Haugen is short-tempered. Webb is avoiding her. The station's social dynamics have shifted and the researchers are treating it as interpersonal conflict rather than what it is.
- Dr. Lindstrom's thermal anomaly analysis has been circulating among the genuine researchers as an exciting geological finding. They want to publish. Haugen has blocked publication citing 'further analysis needed.' The researchers are frustrated. Lindstrom is confused.
- A 0.4-second data burst in an unknown frequency band was detected by Shackleton's communications officer and logged as interference. The officer mentioned it to a colleague. The colleague mentioned it to Haugen. Haugen asked for the timestamp and the origin bearing. She has been looking at a map of the Peninsula for an hour.
- The PRC's Dr. Wei has requested a courtesy visit to Shackleton. The genuine researchers are enthusiastic — Wei's climate data is the best on the Peninsula.

Haugen is not enthusiastic. She has approved the visit because refusing it would violate the cooperative charter. She has briefed the NAF intelligence officers.

- Webb received a secure communication from NAF command during the last uplink window. He has not shared it with Haugen. He has been quiet since. The genuine researchers think he received bad news from home. He received authorization for the action he has been trying not to take.

WEATHER AND ICE REPORTS (1D6)

- The ice-retreat rate at the Emergence Zone has increased 15% in the past 2 weeks. Dr. Chen's model predicted 8%. The discrepancy is because the PRC excavation is accelerating local melt. Chen knows this. He has not told Wei.
- The approach passage to EREBUS is closing at an accelerating rate. This information is known only to Volkov's team, but the ice's behavior is detectable on satellite thermal imaging. The EO satellite team has flagged the area as 'thermal anomaly consistent with sub-surface structure.' The flag is in a queue.
- The next whiteout will last 12 to 18 hours. During the whiteout, the Emergence Zone's excavation site will be unmonitored. The PRC team is planning to use the window. So is the NAF survey team. Neither knows about the other.
- A contract worker at Extraction Site Alpha reports that the vibration from the EREBUS coordinates has stopped. It was present every night for 3 weeks. Last night: nothing. Either EREBUS's internal systems completed whatever process was running, or something changed inside the facility.
- The ice at the Emergence Zone produced a new crevasse overnight — 15 meters from the PRC excavation shaft. The crevasse is 2 meters wide and appears to be deepening. If it widens to 4 meters, the excavation site becomes inaccessible from the current approach route.
- The Peninsula's weather pattern is entering a 6-week cycle of increasing whiteout frequency. After the next event, there will be another within 5 days. The flight windows will shrink. The supply chain will thin. Anyone planning to leave the Peninsula should leave soon.

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1 | THREE-KEY CONVERGENCE

The three EREBUS keys are distributed: EO has one (at command, off-Peninsula), NAF has one (Haugen's field pack), the third is in the ice at the Emergence Zone. The inner archive requires all three simultaneously.

Stage 1 (current) Distributed, unidentified: No faction knows there are three keys. Chen knows but has told no one. The EO operative at Base Meridian is at 72% decryption. Wei is excavating the third. Haugen is trying to decode her key alone.

Stage 2: Recognition: Two or more parties discover the three-key requirement. The race shifts from 'find the artifact' to 'find the other key holders.' Chen becomes the most valuable person on the Peninsula.

Stage 3: Negotiation or confrontation: Key holders are identified. Either they negotiate joint access — which requires trust that none of them have — or they attempt to acquire each other's keys by force, coercion, or theft. On a Peninsula where the weather is the primary antagonist, faction confrontation is suicidal.

Stage 4: Convergence: All three keys reach EREBUS. The inner archive opens. What is inside changes the world. The question is who is holding the keys when it opens and what they do with what they find.

TRACK 2 | EREBUS ACCESS WINDOW

The approach passage to EREBUS is closing. Volkov measures it every 12 hours. Kuznetsova's reconnaissance is 48 hours away. The passage closes in approximately 10 days at current rate.

Stage 1 (current): Passage narrowing: Passage width allows single-file access. Volkov's team can move freely. Equipment wider than 60 centimeters cannot pass.

Stage 2: Restricted access: Passage narrows to body-width. Only personnel can enter. Equipment, including Kuznetsova's reconnaissance gear, cannot fit. The window for a military recovery operation closes.

Stage 3: Critical: Passage allows one person at a time. Volkov's team begins evaluating whether to stay inside or exit before the passage seals. Sato is still documenting. Morozov is still watching the ice.

Stage 4: Sealed: Passage closes. EREBUS is inaccessible until the ice retreats further — a timeline measured in years or decades. Whoever is inside stays inside. Whoever is outside stays outside. Sato's documentation is the only record of EREBUS's contents that exists in the world.

OPERATIONS MAP

CHOKEPOINTS

Ice Shelf Approach airstrip (only extraction route); Base Meridian satellite uplink (primary communication); EREBUS approach passage (closing, single-file, the only confirmed entry to the most valuable site on the Peninsula)

DARK ZONES

The Emergence Zone during satellite gaps (5+ hours between passes); the Whiteout Corridor during weather events (total blackout, 12-18 hours); EREBUS interior (self-contained, no external surveillance); Root Level beneath the Extraction Site (unmapped ice cavities)

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

EO: Ice Shelf Approach, Extraction Site Alpha, Base Meridian security; NAF: Shackleton Station, geological survey routes; PRC: Emergence Zone excavation (unauthorized), Base Meridian climate office; Silent Team: EREBUS outer chamber (de facto)

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

Tracked vehicle routes (logged, weather-dependent, 4-8 hours between zones); on-foot transit (unlogged, high cold-exposure risk, doubles transit time); drone carrier (automated, EO logistics only, resupply drops to silent team coordinates); air transit (3 viable days per week, EO-controlled, weather-dependent)

KEY DISTANCES

Base Meridian to EREBUS: 40 km (8 hours by vehicle, 16 on foot); Base Meridian to Emergence Zone: 25 km; Base Meridian to Shackleton: 30 km; Ice Shelf Approach to Base Meridian: 15 km; Extraction Site Alpha to EREBUS: 35 km

MISSION SEEDS

1. THE RECONNAISSANCE

OBJECTIVE: Accompany or intercept Kuznetsova's reconnaissance to the silent team's coordinates before she reaches EREBUS and reports its existence to EO command.

CLOCK: 48 hours to Kuznetsova's departure. The whiteout may accelerate or delay her timeline. Volkov does not know she is coming. The approach passage is 10 days from sealing.

COMPLICATION: Kuznetsova served with Volkov's team lead. She is not going to recover a rogue officer — she is going to find a friend. What she does when she finds EREBUS depends on whether the operators reach her first and what they tell her.

2. THE THIRD KEY

OBJECTIVE: Extract the third EREBUS key from the PRC's excavation site in the Emergence Zone before the ice collapses or the PRC completes their extraction.

CLOCK: The excavation is destabilized. Chen's model gives 6 days before natural collapse. The PRC team visits on a 4-day cycle. The next satellite gap is in 6 hours.

COMPLICATION: The sealed container is pulsing with light and generating heat. It was not doing this 2 weeks ago. Whatever the key is, it is activating. Extracting an activating pre-war artifact from an unstable ice shaft on a 14-day timeline with three factions watching is the mission. What happens when the key is removed from the container is unknown.

3. THE NOTEBOOK

OBJECTIVE: Acquire Dr. Chen's decoded three-key protocol data before PRC command does, before the NAF's operative at Base Meridian does, and before Chen decides who to give it to on his own.

CLOCK: Chen has been holding the information for 4 days. Wei is accessing data he already analyzed. PRC command has not received his report. He is deciding. When he decides, the information moves once.

COMPLICATION: Chen is a mathematician who believes the three-key design was intentional — that the builders wanted collaboration, not competition. He may be willing to share the protocol data with an operator who demonstrates that intent. He is also the only person on the Peninsula who can decode Haugen's key. Connecting Chen and Haugen is either the solution or the most dangerous convergence possible.

4. WEBB'S EXTRACTION

OBJECTIVE: Prevent or enable Intelligence Officer Webb's covert extraction of the second EREBUS key from Haugen at Shackleton Station.

CLOCK: 72 hours minus the whiteout window. Webb has authorization. Haugen has the key. The station is 12 people. The whiteout traps them together for 18 hours.

COMPLICATION: Haugen is right that the key is more valuable on the Peninsula. Webb is right that Haugen's refusal is insubordination. Both of them are professional intelligence officers who have been trained to resolve exactly this situation. The operators are the variable that neither of them planned for.

5. OPEN THE INNER ARCHIVE

OBJECTIVE: Bring all three EREBUS keys to the inner archive door and open it before the approach passage seals EREBUS permanently.

CLOCK: 10 days for the passage. One key is at EO command off-Peninsula. One is in Haugen's field pack. One is in the ice. Getting all three to EREBUS requires solving every other problem on the Peninsula simultaneously.

COMPLICATION: The inner archive contains the unknown category. The data terminals describe it as 'continuity protocols.' What that means is the question the entire Peninsula operation has been circling without knowing it. Opening the inner archive answers the question. The answer changes everything. Determine what at the table.

6. THE FIGURE AT THE SHAFT

OBJECTIVE: Identify and make contact with the figure who appeared at the PRC excavation site at 0200 carrying pre-war scanning equipment, and who has been to the Emergence Zone at least twice before.

CLOCK: She does not appear on any faction registry. She arrived from a direction that does not correspond to any known station. Her equipment is pre-war. Her behavior suggests she knows what EREBUS is.

COMPLICATION: She may be connected to the 0.4-second data burst Shackleton detected. She may be connected to EREBUS's internal systems activating. She may be connected to the builders. The Peninsula's mystery is not just what is under the ice. It is who is already here.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

IF EO SECURES EREBUS

The EO controls the most complete pre-war infrastructure archive on Earth. Manufacturing templates, water treatment, energy generation, agriculture — the EO can rebuild anything the old world built. They offer licensed access to other factions. The price is alignment. The world does not rebuild equally. It rebuilds under EO terms. The inner archive remains sealed. EO does not have all three keys. The unknown category — the continuity protocols — stay behind the door. Volkov's documentation circulates on the black market. Sato made copies. The EO controls the vault. They do not control the knowledge.

IF THE THREE KEYS CONVERGE

The inner archive opens. The continuity protocols are revealed. What they contain is a deliberate blank — but the three-key design tells you this: the builders wanted the archive opened by collaboration, not conquest. Three independent parties, each with a piece, each required. What happens when the door opens depends on who is holding the keys and whether they can sustain the collaboration the builders designed for. The answer to that question is the answer to whether the post-Upheaval world can do something the factions have never done: share.

IF EREBUS IS SEALED

Volkov collapses the approach passage. EREBUS is buried under Antarctic ice. The most valuable single discovery in the post-Upheaval world is inaccessible for decades. The three keys exist without a lock. The classified partition data exists without a purpose. Sato's documentation is the only record. It is incomplete — 60% of the outer chamber. The inner archive's contents remain unknown. Volkov made her decision. Whether it was the right one depends on whether the world the factions are building deserves what EREBUS contains. She decided it does not. Yet.

IF THE PENINSULA BECOMES A BATTLEFIELD

Three factions in open confrontation on Antarctic ice. The weather does not care who wins. The logistics chain breaks. Supply runs stop. The stations begin running on stored reserves that were calculated for research operations, not

military operations. In 3 weeks, every person on the Peninsula is rationing. In 6 weeks, the first evacuation requests go out. In 8 weeks, the Peninsula is abandoned. EREBUS sits under closing ice with nobody to open it. The keys are scattered across three faction intelligence vaults. The inner archive waits. It has been waiting since before the Upheaval. It can wait longer.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

These are not gaps. They are features.

- The contents of EREBUS's inner archive and what 'continuity protocols' means — the central mystery, left for the table
- The unknown engineering category that does not match any pre-war discipline — what did the builders create that nobody since has replicated?
- The figure at the excavation shaft carrying pre-war scanning equipment — who she is, where she came from, and what she already knows about EREBUS
- The 0.4-second data burst detected by Shackleton in a non-standard frequency band — origin, content, and intended recipient
- The sealed container's activation — the pulsing light and heat generation that began without external trigger — what it means and whether it is a response to something
- The handwritten note in the resupply crate that is not on EO stationery and not in the logistics system — who wrote it, how they knew about Volkov, and what the 48-hour deadline means
- Whether the vibration from EREBUS stopping means the internal process completed or means something else entirely
- Commander Volkov's decision when Kuznetsova arrives — left for the table, where it belongs

FIELD NOTE

The ice is retreating. What is underneath it is worth more than anyone publicly acknowledges. The weather alone has killed more operators than the guards. Nobody is here for the weather. Nobody leaves because of the weather. They leave because they saw what was under the ice and understood what it meant.

The Peninsula does not negotiate. The Peninsula does not care about your faction, your orders, or your conviction. It cares about the cold. It cares about the wind. Everything else is a human problem on inhuman ground.

– Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

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THE HIGH GROUND

MULTI-FACTION ORBITAL | EARTH 2066

The orbit lanes are neutral in the same way international waters are neutral. Enforcement requires assets nobody officially has up there.

THEATER OVERVIEW

Two locations. One operational theater. The Global Coalition Orbital Assembly hangs in low Earth orbit, a station built to prove the factions could share something. The Lunar Industrial Complex sits on the edge of the Sea of Tranquility, shattered by the Sons of the Serpent in 2054 and still bleeding value into the vacuum. The GCOA decides who gets to go down. The LIC decides what they find when they get there.

The official story: the GCOA is mediating salvage rights to the LIC ruins through arbitration. Orderly. Transparent. Faction representatives negotiate access windows, file claims, present evidence of prior ownership.

The actual story: the GCOA's He-3 reactor is burning the last fuel shipment from the LIC. Twenty-two days of reserve at current consumption. When it runs out, the station drops to backup power and begins closing faction sections in sequence. The closure order hasn't been announced. Three factions have offered emergency fuel donations. Every offer comes with conditions that would give the donor effective control of the station.

The deeper story: Captain Kwame 'Meteor' Okafor, the GCOA's peacekeeping commander and one of the last people to leave the LIC during Operation Lunar Twilight, sealed the Menagerie research wing rather than evacuating it. The fuel crisis isn't a crisis. It's Okafor keeping everyone away from the lunar surface. Because the Menagerie is still powered. And someone inside is still transmitting.

The GCOA is a strategic location for missions involving espionage, diplomatic negotiations, or hostage situations. It is supposed to be above the conflict. It is not above the conflict. It is the conflict at a higher altitude.

The LIC was a network of mining, manufacturing, and research facilities on the edge of the Sea of Tranquility. It extracted oxygen, hydrogen, and helium-3 from the lunar regolith and shipped it back to Earth. It was humanity's most ambitious off-world project until the Sons of the Serpent proved it could be destroyed.

The High Ground runs on a specific cultural velocity unlike any terrestrial theater. Station time is the only clock that matters — every faction section runs its own internal schedule, but station time overrides all of them. The He-3 count

is on the main display. Every faction representative can see it. Nobody has mentioned it. The station crew — loyal to the station before any faction — knows things that faction representatives don't, including the burn rate, Okafor's classification history, and the specific sound the station makes when it's tilting toward something that hasn't happened yet. Everything below you is somebody else's problem until the fuel runs out.

CURRENT STRESS CONDITION

When Captain Okafor sealed the Menagerie during the evacuation of 2054, he told command the wing had decompressed. It hadn't. He activated a pre-Upheaval containment protocol that locked the facility from outside access and maintained internal atmosphere indefinitely using the LIC's geothermal tap — a power source that survived the surface demolition because it draws from lunar subsurface heat.

Twelve years later, the Menagerie's power signature is detectable from orbit. Every faction's science team has flagged it. Okafor has been classifying those readings as 'residual thermal bleed from the mining infrastructure' for nine years. The classification is about to fail because the NAF's latest orbital sensor package can distinguish geothermal from reactor signatures, and their technical team aboard the GCOA has been running calibration passes for six days.

Okafor's fuel crisis is real in the sense that the He-3 is genuinely running out. But he's been managing consumption rates to create the crisis on his timeline — before the NAF completes calibration. If the station goes to backup power, the sensor array loses resolution. If the sensor array loses resolution, the Menagerie stays hidden. If the Menagerie stays hidden, nobody goes down to find what Okafor sealed inside.

What Okafor sealed inside: the Menagerie's final research phase was not biological. It was manufacturing. Pre-Upheaval automated production lines capable of fabricating components to tolerances no current facility can match. The equipment is still running. It has been running for twelve years on autonomous protocols. What it has produced in that time is the question Okafor cannot answer and will not let anyone else ask.

TIMELINE PRESSURE

- **Day 0:** Current. GCOA fuel reserves at 22 days. NAF sensor calibration at Day 6 of 12-day cycle.
- **Day 6:** NAF calibration complete. Menagerie power signature distinguishable from background thermal. Okafor's cover story fails.
- **Day 8:** Okafor's planned backup-power transition. If he hits it before Day 6, sensor resolution drops and the signature stays buried.
- **Day 14:** EO arbitration motion to authorize a 'safety inspection' of LIC subsurface infrastructure. Passes unless two factions block.
- **Day 22:** He-3 reserves exhausted. Station enters mandatory power rationing. Faction sections close in sequence. Closure order becomes a political weapon.
- **Day 30+:** If no fuel solution: GCOA evacuates to minimum crew. Lunar surface becomes unmonitored. Anyone with a shuttle and a suit can reach the Menagerie.

THE BACIGALUPI PROBLEM

Expose Okafor's deception and open the Menagerie: you give one faction access to pre-Upheaval manufacturing capability that changes the global balance of power permanently. Protect Okafor's secret and let the fuel crisis play out: the GCOA collapses as a diplomatic institution, and the lunar surface becomes an unregulated theater where the faction with the best shuttle program wins. Solve the fuel crisis with a donor faction's He-3: that faction owns the station, and the arbitration body that was supposed to be neutral becomes a tool of whichever bloc paid the bill. There is no clean outcome. Every solution is someone else's problem.

TERRITORY-LEVEL TAGS

THEATER TYPE	dual-theater — orbital station + lunar surface ruins
GCOA SECURITY	active / faction-segmented / peacekeeping patrols
LIC SECURITY	none / automated remnants / contested approach
INFRASTRUCTURE	GCOA strained (fuel crisis) / LIC collapsed (partial pressurization)
CIVILIANS	GCOA: diplomatic staff, station crew, journalists / LIC: none
SURVEILLANCE	GCOA: total coverage, faction-specific blind spots / LIC: dead zones, intermittent sensor ghosts
FACTION PRESSURE	GCOA: contested (four-way) / LIC: unclaimed (three-way covert)
CONTAMINATION	GCOA: none / LIC: radiation pockets, micro-debris, unstable atmosphere in breached sections
BLACK MARKET	GCOA: light (diplomatic pouch smuggling) / LIC: none (no permanent presence)
MOBILITY	GCOA: checkpointed between faction sections / LIC: EVA required, debris fields, collapsed tunnels

THEATER-LEVEL FACTIONS

Four power structures contest the High Ground. Their objectives are incompatible. Their timelines are converging.

GCOA PEACEKEEPING FORCE

Primary station controller. The Global Coalition Orbital Assembly maintains order through a sixty-person peacekeeping force under Captain Okafor. They are protecting a station whose neutrality is a fiction and a secret whose exposure would end its commander's career. Their objective: keep everyone away from the lunar surface long enough to — Okafor has not finished that sentence, even to himself.

NAF DELEGATION

Technological superiority and first-mover advantage. The North Atlantic Federation has the most advanced orbital sensor package on the station, a lunar-capable shuttle disguised as a diplomatic transport, and Colonel Hargrove, who has operational command authority. Their objective: reach the LIC before any other faction. Land, access, secure whatever is producing the thermal signature their sensors are about to confirm.

EO ARBITRATION DELEGATION

Institutional leverage. The Eurasian Oligarchy's approach is legal rather than covert — a motion for a 'safety inspection' of LIC subsurface infrastructure that would give them authorized surface access. Their legal team wrote portions of the GCOA charter. Their objective: secure salvage rights through arbitration, which would include the tunnels connecting to the Menagerie.

PRC TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

Intelligence over access. The Pacific Rim Collective is the only faction whose primary interest is knowing what the Menagerie contains before anyone opens it. They were a partner in the Menagerie's biological research before the 2042 crisis. Their objective: determine whether the biological research specimens from 2042 were ever fully removed. If they weren't, opening the Menagerie without containment preparation is a catastrophic risk.

SECTOR MAP

SECTOR 1	**THE ASSEMBLY RING (GCOA, 0.8g)**: Diplomatic theater. Where the factions perform cooperation while competing for lunar access. Priority power allocation. The last section to lose electricity.
SECTOR 2	**THE FACTION QUARTER (GCOA, 0.8g)**: Four sovereign sections — NAF, EO, PRC, UKE. Each is legally that faction's soil. The corridors between are the most contested space on the station.
SECTOR 3	**THE DOCKING SPINE (GCOA, 0.3g)**: Arrival, departure, logistics. Five docking bays. Three faction shuttles. The only way off the station and the only way to the lunar surface.
SECTOR 4	**STATION INFRASTRUCTURE (GCOA, variable g)**: The station's guts. Reactor, life support, crawlways connecting every section. Where the fuel crisis lives. Chief Engineer Okonkwo and forty-six people keeping 430 alive.
ZONE 5	**THE APPROACH (Lunar Surface)**: The shattered surface of the LIC. Landing zone, debris field, and three tunnel entrances leading down. One shows signs of recent traffic.
ZONE 6	**THE MINING WARRENS (Lunar Subsurface)**: Kilometers of He-3 extraction tunnels, still operated by autonomous mining drones running twelve-year-old protocols. The route to the Menagerie runs through here.
ZONE 7	**THE MENAGERIE (Sealed Research Wing)**: Pre-Upheaval containment protocol. Geothermal power. Automated manufacturing lines running for twelve years. Sealed from outside. Designed to keep things in as well as out.

SECTORS & ZONES

SECTOR 1 THE ASSEMBLY RING — GCOA DIPLOMATIC THEATER / 0.8G

SECURITY	active / peacekeeping patrols / visible deterrence
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (priority power allocation)
CIVILIANS	diplomatic staff, journalists, NGO observers, legal teams
SURVEILLANCE	total — every angle, every frequency, archived in triplicate
FACTION PRESSURE	contested (four-way, performatively civil)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	none (too exposed)
MOBILITY	open within ring / checkpointed at ring-to-section transitions

FUNCTION Diplomatic theater. Where the factions perform cooperation while competing for lunar access.

CONTROLLER On paper: GCOA Peacekeeping under Okafor. In reality: whoever controls the agenda controls the room.

DRAW Arbitration hearings on LIC salvage claims. Back-channel meetings in observation lounges. Press access for controlled leaks. Legal standing — a faction represented here has standing to challenge claims.

RISK Every conversation is recorded by someone. Diplomatic cover is thin — operatives posing as legal attaches are identifiable by anyone who knows what to look for. The observation deck has three blind spots. Everyone knows where they are. That's what makes them dangerous.

SCARCITY Privacy. Unmonitored communication windows. Shuttle allocation slots. Face time with Okafor.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Assembly Ring runs on priority power. It will be the last section to lose electricity during the fuel crisis. This makes it the most valuable real estate on the station — whoever holds position in the Assembly Ring when rationing begins has the best operational platform. Three factions have begun quietly stationing additional personnel here under 'legal support' designations.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The fuel bulletin vocabulary shifts from 'normal parameters' to 'managed reserve thresholds.' Diplomatic staff begin sleeping in the observation lounges rather than returning to faction sections. The Ring becomes both the safest and most suffocating space on the station.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Peacekeeping patrol rotation. Visible, professional, neutral. Okafor's people walk the corridors in pairs and log everything.

ECONOMY

Arbitration sessions, press conferences, legal filings. The formal machinery of diplomatic competition.

RISK

Information exposure. Anything said in a public corridor will reach at least two intelligence services within the hour.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Reduced peacekeeping presence. Automated surveillance only. The Ring empties after 2200 station time.

ECONOMY

Back-channel meetings in observation lounges. Dead drops in maintenance alcoves. The real negotiations.

RISK

Isolation. The Ring is large and mostly empty after 2200. An incident in a low-traffic corridor might not be noticed for thirty minutes.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The main arbitration chamber's transparent floor, showing the Earth below, slowly rotating. Delegates sit above the planet they're fighting over and pretend the view doesn't affect their calculations.

FACTIONS PRESENT

GCOA PEACEKEEPING

Corridor patrols, checkpoint enforcement, movement logging. Okafor manages access through bureaucratic means.

NAF DELEGATION

Legal team, intelligence cell, sensor calibration team running covert analysis.

EO ARBITRATION DELEGATION

Strongest legal team on the station, filing motions and building coalitions for the safety inspection authorization.

PRC TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

Scientific cover for intelligence operations, orbital imaging analysis, historical records from the original LIC research program.

CIVILIAN NEED

Honest information about the fuel crisis. The daily bulletin's vocabulary shift has station crew anxious. Journalists want the story behind the managed phrasing.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Press pool credentials, arbitration session observation, observation lounge access during the eleven-minute gap after 2200, maintenance alcove dead-drop locations.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- A NAF legal attache approaches operators in the observation lounge and asks casual questions about their shuttle access credentials. The questions are not casual.
- Adaeze Obi, the press bureau chief, corners operators after an arbitration session. She has noticed the fuel bulletin vocabulary change and wants to know if they've seen the consumption data.
- An EO delegate drops a data chip during a corridor handshake. The chip contains partial thermal imaging of the LIC site. The delegate does not acknowledge the drop.
- A peacekeeping patrol stops operators for a routine credential check. The check takes fourteen minutes — long enough for whatever was happening in the corridor behind them to conclude.
- Two PRC technical staff are quietly arguing in a maintenance alcove. One is holding a tablet showing spectral analysis data. They stop when operators appear.
- The arbitration chamber's transparent floor reveals something neither delegates nor observers expect: a shuttle departing the Docking Spine at an angle not consistent with any published flight plan.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The eleven-minute gap after 2200. The Ring is empty. An operator spots two figures meeting in the third blind spot — the one nearest the maintenance access. One carries a diplomatic pouch.
- A GCOA press corps journalist is found unconscious in a low-traffic corridor. Her recording equipment is missing. She was working on a story about the fuel consumption data.
- Sergeant Ito is making her patrol circuit alone. She stops at the four-faction corridor junction and studies the floor scuff patterns for ninety seconds before continuing. She has a notebook.
- A maintenance hatch in the Ring floor is open. The crawlway below connects to Station Infrastructure. Someone has been using this route — the hatch edges show repeated tool marks.
- The daily fuel bulletin display in the main corridor flickers and shows a different number for three seconds — a number fourteen days lower than the official count. Then it corrects.

- A UKE observer who has been on the station for nine months is packing her quarters. She has not been recalled. She is leaving voluntarily. She will answer one question honestly before she goes.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Okafor has a demolition package in his quarters that he brought aboard when he took command. [TRUE]
- The observation deck's three blind spots were built into the original station architecture deliberately. [PARTIALLY TRUE — gaps were flagged and left unfixed]
- The GCOA charter gives the peacekeeping commander unilateral authority to deny surface access during a 'station emergency.' Petrov found the clause. The EO told her to bury it. [TRUE]
- Three factions have begun stationing additional personnel in the Assembly Ring under 'legal support' designations. The personnel are not lawyers. [TRUE]
- The daily fuel bulletin has been manually adjusted for the past six weeks. The real numbers are worse. [TRAP — the bulletin numbers are accurate; the consumption rate that produced them is not]
- There is a fifth faction section on the GCOA that does not appear on any published schematic. It is in Station Infrastructure, behind pre-Upheaval hull plating. [UNCONFIRMED — Okonkwo has sealed the section]

CONTACTS

ADAEZE OBI — GCOA PRESS CORPS BUREAU CHIEF

CAN GET Media schedules, press pool access, advance notice of which faction is about to leak what. She knows who's planting stories before they publish.

WANTS The real story. She's been covering the GCOA for seven years and knows the fuel crisis doesn't add up.

FEARS Being expelled from the station. Her press credentials are renewed quarterly by Okafor's office.

CURRENT PRESSURE Her source inside the NAF delegation stopped responding two days ago. Either reassigned, recalled, or silenced.

HENRIK VOSS — PEACEKEEPING FORCE LOGISTICS OFFICER

CAN GET Shuttle allocation schedules, fuel consumption data, maintenance bay access windows, cargo manifests for the last six months.

WANTS A transfer off the station before the fuel crisis hits. He's seen the consumption curves. He knows Day 22 is optimistic.

FEARS Okafor. Not the man — the situation. Voss has noticed discrepancies in the fuel logs that suggest consumption was deliberately accelerated three months ago.

CURRENT PRESSURE He put in his transfer request yesterday. It was denied without explanation. He's now locked on the station with information he didn't want.

DR. YUKI TANAKA — PRC TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM, SENSOR SPECIALIST

CAN GET Orbital sensor data, thermal imaging of the lunar surface, spectral analysis of the LIC site. Six days of calibration data nobody outside the PRC delegation has seen.

WANTS To complete the calibration cycle. She's a scientist first. The anomalous thermal readings are the most interesting data she's ever collected.

FEARS That the data will be classified before she can use it. The PRC delegation chief has been making calls to Beijing that Tanaka is not invited to join.

CURRENT PRESSURE Yesterday's calibration pass showed something new: the thermal signature from the Menagerie pulsed. Twice. At regular intervals. She told her delegation chief. He told her to run the pass again and not discuss the results.

SECTOR 2 THE FACTION QUARTER

SOVEREIGN FACTION SECTIONS / 0.8G

SECURITY	faction-controlled (each section sovereign) / lethal weapons authorized internally
INFRASTRUCTURE	stable (each faction maintains independently)
CIVILIANS	diplomatic staff, intelligence officers under diplomatic cover, support personnel
SURVEILLANCE	faction-specific — each section sealed; corridors between are contested sensor space
FACTION PRESSURE	dominant (each in their section) / contested (in shared corridors)
CONTAMINATION	none
BLACK MARKET	light — diplomatic pouch traffic covers a multitude of sins
MOBILITY	open within your section / escorted between / corridor checkpoints at every transition

FUNCTION Faction sovereign territory aboard the station. Four dedicated sections — NAF, EO, PRC, and a rotating fourth currently held by the UKE. Each section is legally that faction's soil.

CONTROLLER Each faction controls their own section absolutely. The corridors between are technically GCOA neutral territory. In practice, they're the most contested space on the station.

DRAW Secure communications to Earth. Intelligence infrastructure. Safe meeting spaces. Equipment and personnel factions don't want in shared areas.

RISK Entering another faction's section without invitation is an act of espionage under GCOA charter. The walls between sections are thinner than the blueprints suggest.

SCARCITY Cross-faction access. The corridors are neutral, but the doors are not. Getting inside another faction's section requires an invitation, a breach, or a very good cover identity.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Faction Quarter's life-support systems are technically independent but share a thermal management backbone through the hull. When rationing begins, sections overheat or freeze based on solar exposure. The NAF section faces sunward. The EO section is in shadow. Physics is about to make the diplomatic seating arrangement very uncomfortable.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Faction section doors lock tighter. Corridor transit stops. The space between sections becomes a dead zone. An operator caught between sections has no witnesses and no diplomatic cover. Incidents in the corridors tend to be classified as 'maintenance accidents.'

DAY

AUTHORITY

Each faction runs their section on their own schedule. Corridors maintain GCOA peacekeeping patrol.

ECONOMY

Intelligence collection. Signal intercepts. Personnel tracking. Each faction running continuous surveillance on the other three.

RISK

Misidentification. An operator in the wrong corridor gets flagged by three surveillance systems simultaneously. Cover identities have a half-life measured in days.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Factions lock their sections. Corridor patrol reduces to automated sensors. Dead ground between sections.

ECONOMY

Defection approaches. Diplomatic pouch transfers. Technical surveillance through shared hull infrastructure.

RISK

The corridors after hours. No witnesses, no diplomatic cover. Incidents classified as 'maintenance accidents.'

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The corridor junction where all four faction sections meet — a circular space with four sealed doors, each bearing a different insignia. The floor is scuffed in patterns that show where people stand when they're waiting for a door to open. The patterns never overlap.

FACTIONS PRESENT

NAF DELEGATION

Sunward section. Sensor calibration team, shuttle crew, intelligence cell. Colonel Hargrove with operational command and a shuttle that is not a diplomatic transport.

EO ARBITRATION DELEGATION

Shadow-side section. Legal team, embedded operatives in engineering, arbitration strategy. Petrov's motion is the wedge.

PRC TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

Orbital imaging, biological research records, sensor analysis. Tanaka's calibration data is the most valuable intelligence on the station.

UKE ROTATING DELEGATION

Current fourth-section holder. Diplomatic observation and quiet intelligence gathering.

CIVILIAN NEED

Clarity on the fuel crisis timeline. The corridor junction pause has gotten longer. Staff want to know if evacuation planning has begun.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Faction section access (with invitation or cover identity), corridor sensor gap maps, diplomatic pouch networks, cross-faction meeting schedules.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Colonel Hargrove invites operators to the NAF section for a 'strategic briefing.' The briefing is real. So is the intelligence assessment he conducts of everyone in the room.
- Petrov approaches operators in a corridor and asks a hypothetical legal question about charter authority during station emergencies. She is not being hypothetical.
- A PRC technical team member exits their section carrying a sealed container labeled 'calibration equipment.' It is not calibration equipment. The team member is sweating.
- The corridor junction pause lasts four seconds longer than usual. Every person at the junction notices. The NAF door opens three seconds after the EO door, which is a change.
- A UKE diplomatic observer invites operators to tea. The conversation is precisely designed to determine what operators know about the Menagerie thermal signature without ever mentioning it.
- Sergeant Ito stops operators in the corridor and asks, quietly, whether they've noticed lunar regolith particulate anywhere on the station. She shows them a sample bag.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- Lunar regolith on the corridor floor near the EO section. Someone has been to the lunar surface. No authorized transit in eleven days.
- A figure exits the NAF section at 0300 carrying a weapons case, moving toward the Docking Spine. The corridor sensors should have flagged this. They did not.
- Voices through the hull wall between EO and PRC sections. Someone has placed a resonance amplifier on the EO side.
- A defection attempt. A junior PRC analyst approaches the NAF corridor door and triggers the entry request. The door does not open. They stand there for eleven minutes.

- The thermal management system in the EO section fails for forty-seven minutes. Temperature drops to 9C. The valve in question was manually closed.
- A diplomatic pouch found in the corridor junction — sealed, no faction insignia, addressed to 'the person who knows about the signal.'

RUMORS (1D6)

- The NAF shuttle carries kinetic orbital weapons classified under a different program name. [PARTIALLY TRUE — capability exists; authorization level unclear]
- The EO has embedded operatives in the engineering crew mapping Station Infrastructure for three months. [TRUE]
- The PRC's 'technical support vessel' carries kinetic impact capability sufficient to destroy the LIC site from orbit. The delegation chief has pre-authorization. [TRUE — Tanaka does not know]
- The walls between faction sections contain surveillance devices placed during original construction by an unknown party. [UNCONFIRMED]
- Hargrove sat on thermal pulse data for sixteen hours before forwarding. Those hours are not in the log. [TRUE]
- The UKE section has been running a parallel sensor analysis. Their data is three days ahead of the NAF. [PARTIALLY TRUE]

CONTACTS

COLONEL JAMES HARGROVE — NAF DELEGATION MILITARY ATTACHE

CAN GET NAF sensor calibration data, shuttle approach vectors, classified orbital surveillance imagery of the LIC site. He has seen the Menagerie thermal signature.

WANTS Boots on the lunar surface before any other faction. The NAF shuttle is rated for lunar landing. It's listed as a diplomatic transport. It is not.

FEARS That the EO reaches the LIC first. Hargrove's career is staked on delivering whatever is down there to NAF command. Second place is career death.

CURRENT PRESSURE His calibration team reported the thermal pulse to him before delegation command. He sat on it for sixteen hours. Those hours are not in the log.

IVANA PETROV — EO ARBITRATION DELEGATE, JUNIOR COUNSEL

CAN GET Arbitration schedules, legal precedent files, the EO's draft motion for a 'safety inspection' of LIC subsurface infrastructure. She wrote it and knows every loophole.

WANTS To matter. She's been on the GCOA eleven months and watched senior delegates take credit for her work six times. The LIC motion is hers.

FEARS Being sent home before the motion is heard. The EO delegation chief has been making noises about 'rotating junior staff.'

CURRENT PRESSURE She found a charter clause giving the peacekeeping commander unilateral authority to deny surface access during a 'station emergency.' She showed her chief. He told her to bury it. She hasn't decided yet.

SERGEANT TOMOKO ITO — GCOA PEACEKEEPING, CORRIDOR SECURITY LEAD

CAN GET Patrol schedules, sensor gap maps, corridor checkpoint logs, access records for every faction section door for the past ninety days.

WANTS Clarity. She's been filing anomaly reports for three months. Every report acknowledged, none actioned. She wants to know why.

FEARS Okafor. She respects him but the possibility that he is the source of the anomalies she's been reporting is something she's not ready to confront.

CURRENT PRESSURE Last night's patrol found lunar regolith particulate near the EO section. Someone has been to the surface. No authorized transit in eleven days.

SECTOR 3 THE DOCKING SPINE

TRANSIT & LOGISTICS / 0.3G

SECURITY light — peacekeeping at bay doors, automated in cargo sections

INFRASTRUCTURE	strained (lowest power priority after rationing begins)
CIVILIANS	shuttle crews, cargo handlers, transit passengers
SURVEILLANCE	cameras at bay doors / dark zones in cargo holds and maintenance tunnels
FACTION PRESSURE	contested — every faction has at least one vessel docked
CONTAMINATION	micro-debris in unpressurized sections / fuel residue in maintenance bays
BLACK MARKET	heavy — diplomatic pouches, cargo mislabeling, suit-pocket smuggling
MOBILITY	0.3g throughout / open between bays / maintenance tunnels connect to Station Infrastructure

FUNCTION Arrival, departure, and logistics. Every shuttle, cargo pod, and personnel transfer comes through the Spine. Control the Spine and you control who gets on and off the station.

CONTROLLER GCOA Peacekeeping manages bay allocation and departure authorization. Each faction's docked vessel is sovereign space; cargo holds between bays are jurisdictional gaps.

DRAW Shuttle access. The only way off the station and the only way to the lunar surface. Three faction shuttles docked: NAF 'diplomatic transport,' EO supply vessel, PRC technical support craft.

RISK Low gravity makes the Spine physically disorienting. Cargo holds create ambush geometry. Maintenance tunnels between bays are unmapped on official schematics.

SCARCITY Departure authorization. Fuel allocation. Pressurized cargo space. An unmonitored launch window.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Docking Spine's docking clamps run on hydraulic systems requiring consistent power. When rationing begins, hydraulic pressure drops. Clamps loosen. A loose clamp creates micro-fractures in the docking seal. The first sign is atmospheric whistle. The second sign is a pressure alarm. The third sign is too late. Okafor knows this. The faction vessels are hostages to the fuel crisis.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Bay 5 loses seal integrity in nine days. Bay 3 in fourteen. Mendes knows. When the first clamp fails, every vessel commander attempts simultaneous departure — and the Spine has power for exactly one safe undocking sequence at a time.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Peacekeeping at bay doors. Cargo handlers and shuttle crews in rotation. Traffic steady and documented.

ECONOMY

Official cargo transfers, personnel rotation, shuttle maintenance.

RISK

Manifests checked but cargo holds are large and poorly lit. Mislabeled containers pass through regularly.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Automated security only. Peacekeeping patrol passes every ninety minutes. The gaps are known.

ECONOMY

Diplomatic pouch runs. Equipment transfers between faction vessels. Maintenance tunnel traffic.

RISK

0.3g in the dark. Maintenance tunnels unlit and unmonitored. Two operators meeting by accident at 0300 resolves badly for both.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The observation window at Docking Bay 1: five bays receding into the distance, each lit differently by the vessel attached, the curvature of the Earth visible through gaps between hulls. One bay is dark. Its vessel departed without logging a departure time.

FACTIONS PRESENT

GCOA PEACEKEEPING

Bay door security, departure authorization, cargo inspection. Mendes runs docking operations.

NAF

'Diplomatic transport' in Bay 2. Pilot Vasquez has surveyed three lunar landing zones without authorization.

EO

Supply vessel in Bay 4. Cargo hold sealed since arrival.

PRC

Technical support craft in Bay 3. Remote sensing equipment. Also carries kinetic impact capability.

CIVILIAN NEED

Safe departure. Shuttle crews want to know if the docking clamps are holding. Transit passengers want a launch window that exists.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Bay allocation schedules, maintenance tunnel routes, cargo hold dark zones, clamp integrity data, fuel draw records.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Chief Mendes asks operators to help with a 'routine clamp inspection' on Bay 5. The inspection is not routine. He wants witnesses.
- A cargo container arrives listed as 'diplomatic supplies.' It weighs 300 kilograms more than the manifest declares. The cargo handlers say nothing.
- Vasquez runs a 'navigation calibration' flight. The path takes her directly over the LIC site. She returns with data she does not share.
- Marcus Webb approaches operators and offers above-market rates for passage to the lunar surface. No questions, immediate, cash equivalent.
- A PRC technical team conducts 'remote sensing tests' requiring bay doors open for forty minutes. Every sensor has a clear line to the lunar surface.
- A peacekeeping officer confiscates a cargo handler's toolkit containing a signal interceptor and a pre-Upheaval encryption bypass module.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- A shuttle departure from Bay 1 at 0200 — unlogged, running dark, trajectory consistent with a lunar approach. The sensor log shows the bay door sealed all night. The atmospheric readout disagrees.
- Webb is in Maintenance Tunnel 7-C. He has found lunar regolith. He looks up and says, 'You're not the first ones down here tonight.'
- Vasquez is sleeping in the NAF shuttle cockpit again. The shuttle is prepped for immediate launch. She answers knocking with professional calm and a visible sidearm.
- A maintenance tunnel connects to an access point not on any schematic. The hatch is warm. Behind it, the hum of systems that should not be running.
- The atmospheric whistle. Bay 5's docking clamp seal is degrading. Mendes is standing at the observation window, staring at the readout, and has not moved for twenty minutes.
- A diplomatic pouch transfer between the EO vessel and an unmarked container. Two figures, practiced choreography, sixty seconds. The pouch is the size of a data core.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Bay 1's vessel departed three days ago without logging a time. It has not returned. Official record shows 'reserved for maintenance.' [TRUE — destination is the lunar surface]
- The maintenance tunnels were omitted from published schematics deliberately. [PARTIALLY TRUE]

- Mendes has filed three clamp integrity reports. None acknowledged. He believes Okafor considers the degradation acceptable. [TRUE]
- Webb's contract deadline coincides with Day 22. His employer knew the fuel timeline before it was public. [UNCONFIRMED but the timing is suspicious]
- The PRC vessel has run its engines twice during 'diagnostic checks.' Profiles consistent with weapons activation, not propulsion. [TRUE]
- There is a sixth docking bay accessible only through maintenance tunnels, connecting to the pre-Upheaval hull section. [UNCONFIRMED]

CONTACTS

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER RAUL MENDES — GCOA DOCKING OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR

CAN GET Bay allocation schedules, fuel draw records, clamp integrity data, maintenance tunnel access codes. He knows every ship and every gram of fuel consumed.

WANTS To get his crew off before the clamps fail. Bay 5 loses seal integrity in nine days. Bay 3 in fourteen.

FEARS That Okafor already knows about the clamp degradation and considers it acceptable. Three reports filed. None acknowledged.

CURRENT PRESSURE Yesterday he found lunar regolith in Maintenance Tunnel 7-C. Someone is moving between the surface and the station through the tunnels. No authorized transit in eleven days.

LENA VASQUEZ — NAF SHUTTLE PILOT, 'DIPLOMATIC TRANSPORT' CREW

CAN GET Flight plans, approach vectors, lunar landing site data. She has surveyed three potential landing zones from orbit without authorization.

WANTS To fly the mission. She's the best pilot on the station and knows the NAF is planning a lunar insertion.

FEARS Being grounded. Her unauthorized survey flights have been logged by traffic control. If Okafor reviews the logs, her flight status is revoked.

CURRENT PRESSURE Hargrove told her to prep the shuttle for a 72-hour window. Then postponed. Then said keep it prepped. She's been sleeping in the cockpit for two nights.

MARCUS WEBB — INDEPENDENT CARGO BROKER, TRANSIT PASSENGER

CAN GET	Black-market supply chains, diplomatic pouch networks, who is smuggling what. He's been 'in transit' for four months. Original destination classified.
WANTS	Passage to the lunar surface. He's been hired to retrieve a specific item from the LIC. His employer's identity is sealed behind three layers of commercial confidentiality.
FEARS	Being stuck when the fuel crisis shuts down shuttle operations. His contract has a deadline. His anxiety is increasing daily.
CURRENT PRESSURE	He approached Mendes about unauthorized tunnel access. Mendes turned him down. Webb is looking for another way to reach a shuttle bay without checkpoints.

SECTOR 4 STATION INFRASTRUCTURE

ENGINEERING & LIFE SUPPORT / VARIABLE G

SECURITY	automated sensors / peacekeeping patrols on reactor level only
INFRASTRUCTURE	failing — the He-3 reactor is the crisis
CIVILIANS	engineering crew, life-support technicians, reactor maintenance staff
SURVEILLANCE	patchy — designed for environmental monitoring, not security
FACTION PRESSURE	low (no faction claims infrastructure) / covert (every faction has placed someone inside)
CONTAMINATION	radiation zones near reactor shielding / coolant leak in Section 12-B
BLACK MARKET	none — but the engineering crew trades favors like a black market trades goods

MOBILITY	restricted to authorized personnel / maintenance crawlways connect to every section
FUNCTION	The station's guts. Reactor, life support, water recovery, thermal management, communications array, artificial gravity. Everything that keeps 430 people alive runs through here.
CONTROLLER	Chief Engineer Dara Okonkwo manages a crew of forty-six. She is the only person who sees the real fuel consumption data before Okafor classifies it.
DRAW	System access. The crawlways bypass all faction checkpoints and corridor surveillance. Environmental data. Power allocation schedules. The reactor room itself.
RISK	A wrong move here can kill everyone on the station. Reactor shielding is not a metaphor. The engineering crew works twelve-hour shifts because they have to.
SCARCITY	Trust. Okonkwo's crew is forty-six people keeping 430 alive. They don't have time to vet everyone with a maintenance badge.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The He-3 reactor is operating at 67% capacity because Okafor ordered a consumption increase three months ago. Okonkwo implemented it. She knows the timeline doesn't match — they should have four months of fuel, not twenty-two days. She hasn't confronted Okafor because he's the only person authorized to requisition an emergency fuel delivery. She's trapped between loyalty, math, and the safety of 430 people.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Sealed crawlway sections — some closed for real environmental hazards, some because Okonkwo found surveillance devices, cached equipment, and signs of sustained habitation. She has a list. She's waiting to see who asks about the sealed sections. The reactor containment field traces have been irregular for six days. She says within tolerance. Her hands shake when she says it.

DAY

AUTHORITY

Okonkwo and her day shift. Reactor level has peacekeeping. The crawlways are unpatrolled — too narrow for two people.

ECONOMY

Maintenance cycles, system diagnostics. The favor economy: crawlway access, environmental data, off-the-record power draws.

RISK

Environmental hazards. Radiation near reactor. Coolant in Section 12-B. Sealed passages with atmospheric irregularities.

NIGHT

AUTHORITY

Skeleton crew of twelve. Reactor monitoring continuous. Crawlways completely unmonitored after 2200.

ECONOMY

Crawlway traffic. Operators who know the routes move between any two points without checkpoints. Several crew charge access fees.

RISK

Sealed sections. Some closed for atmospheric reasons. Some because Okonkwo found things that shouldn't have been there.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The reactor room observation window: a hexagonal viewport into the He-3 containment chamber. The reaction is invisible — helium-3 fusion produces no visible light. What you see is the containment field's magnetic geometry rendered in faint blue plasma traces. Engineers read reactor health the way sailors read wind. The traces have been irregular for six days.

FACTIONS PRESENT

GCOA ENGINEERING

Okonkwo's crew of forty-six. Loyal to the station, not the factions. Overworked, undersleeping, sitting on two explosive secrets.

EMBEDDED FACTION OPERATIVES

Every faction has placed someone with engineering credentials inside. They're mapping crawlways and positioning for the fuel crisis.

CIVILIAN NEED

Sleep. Safety. An honest answer about the fuel timeline. The engineering crew knows the numbers are wrong.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Crawlway maps (partial), reactor room observation, environmental monitoring data, sealed-section locations, maintenance badge credentials.

ENCOUNTERS — DAY (1D6)

- Okonkwo asks operators to assist with a 'diagnostic survey' of a sealed crawlway section. She wants someone with weapons training nearby when she opens it.
- A reactor technician approaches operators and asks about pre-Upheaval fusion signatures. She shows bloodwork results she doesn't understand — from three of her colleagues.
- An engineering crew member with valid credentials is found in a crawlway he has no reason to access. The crawlway connects to the pre-Upheaval hull section.
- The reactor containment traces pulse in a pattern matching the Menagerie's thermal signature — twice, at regular intervals. Okonkwo notices. She writes something in her personal notebook.
- Volkov offers crawlway access in exchange for checking a route his regular client used. The client hasn't shown up in four days. The route leads toward the sealed pre-Upheaval section.
- A maintenance alert triggers in Section 12-B. The alert is genuine. The system was manually reset twelve hours ago by someone who shouldn't have had access.

ENCOUNTERS — NIGHT (1D6)

- The crawlways after 2200. Operators encounter someone not on any crew roster, carrying no faction insignia, wearing boots caked with lunar regolith.
- The pre-Upheaval hull section's electromagnetic signature spikes. Lights flicker. The section behind the hull plating is warmer than it should be.

- Volkov at his reactor post, running diagnostics. The brief sensor blind spot he creates at 0145 every night is also real. Someone has been using it for three months.
- An automated alert in a sealed crawlway section. The atmosphere behind the seal has changed — it now reads breathable. Something is producing oxygen.
- Dr. Hassan in the clinic at 0300, reviewing bloodwork showing pre-Upheaval fusion byproduct signatures. Her second opinion request came back classified.
- A sound through the pre-Upheaval hull plating. Rhythmic. Consistent with the twice-daily Menagerie pulse, but coming from inside the station.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Okafor ordered the fuel consumption increase deliberately to create the crisis on his timeline. [TRUE]
- The pre-Upheaval hull section predates the station by sixty years. Its electromagnetic field is growing. [TRUE]
- Three engineering crew show pre-Upheaval fusion byproduct signatures in their bloodwork. The reactor isn't running standard He-3 fusion. [TRUE — implications unknown]
- The crawlway network extends further than any map documents. Some passages lead to sections on no schematic. [TRUE]
- Okonkwo has a list of sealed sections and what she found inside. She's waiting to see who asks before deciding who to trust. [TRUE]
- The station's comms array has been receiving a signal from the lunar surface on an encryption key from 2042. [TRUE — the Haas signal]

CONTACTS

CHIEF ENGINEER DARA OKONKWO — GCOA STATION ENGINEERING LEAD

CAN GET Complete station systems access, real fuel consumption data, crawlway maps including sealed sections, environmental monitoring for every compartment.

WANTS To protect her crew. Forty-six people who trust her. She wants the truth from Okafor or the authority to act without him.

FEARS That Okafor is right and the situation is worse than the math suggests. If the consumption increase was deliberate, the implications are worse.

CURRENT PRESSURE She found pre-Upheaval hull plating in a section not on any construction schematic. The station was built in 2056. The plating dates to at least 2030. She hasn't told anyone.

MIKHAIL VOLKOV — NIGHT-SHIFT REACTOR TECHNICIAN

CAN GET Night-shift reactor access, off-hours crawlway routes, brief sensor blind spots by triggering maintenance diagnostics.

WANTS Money. Enough to buy passage off the station. He's been selling crawlway access to at least two faction operatives for three months.

FEARS Okonkwo finding out. On a space station, firing means reassignment to quarters and loss of all access.

CURRENT PRESSURE A regular crawlway client hasn't shown up in four days. The client was accessing a route to the sealed pre-Upheaval section. Volkov is deciding whether to report or check himself.

DR. AMIRA HASSAN — GCOA MEDICAL OFFICER, INFRASTRUCTURE CLINIC

CAN GET Medical records, radiation exposure logs, pharmaceutical supplies, and a quiet treatment room that is the closest thing to a private space in Station Infrastructure.

WANTS An explanation for anomalous bloodwork in three crew members near the reactor. Readings match pre-Upheaval fusion byproduct signatures she's only seen in textbooks.

FEARS Being right. If the reactor isn't running standard He-3 fusion, everything about the fuel timeline is based on incorrect assumptions.

CURRENT PRESSURE She requested a second opinion from the NAF medical officer. The response came back with a classification stamp she's never seen on a medical document.

ZONE 5 THE APPROACH

LIC SURFACE RUINS / 0.16G

SECURITY	none — automated defenses destroyed in 2054 / debris field is the hazard
INFRASTRUCTURE	collapsed (surface) / partially intact (subsurface)
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	orbital only — ground sensors destroyed / intermittent signal ghosts from subsurface
FACTION PRESSURE	unclaimed — three factions have unauthorized surface survey data
CONTAMINATION	radiation pockets from reactor breach / micro-debris field / unstable regolith
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	EVA required / debris fields restrict direct routes / subsurface tunnels are the viable approach

FUNCTION The shattered surface of the Lunar Industrial Complex. What the Sons of the Serpent left when they destroyed humanity's most ambitious off-world project. Landing zone, debris field, and entry point to whatever is underneath.

CONTROLLER Nobody. The surface is contested salvage under GCOA arbitration. In practice, it belongs to whoever has a shuttle and the nerve to land.

DRAW Salvage. Pre-Upheaval manufacturing components in the debris. Subsurface tunnel access. Landing zones for unauthorized lunar insertion.

RISK Micro-debris at velocities that compromise suit integrity. Radiation pockets poorly mapped. Structural collapse. And the vacuum itself: no margin, no extraction without a shuttle, no unmonitored communication.

SCARCITY Suit power. EVA time. Pressurized shelter. Communication privacy. Landing zones not visible from GCOA orbital surveillance.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Sons of the Serpent placed charges on structural load points — professional demolition, not indiscriminate. They wanted the LIC gone in a specific pattern. The demolition left subsurface access points intact. Three tunnel entrances are reachable from the landing zone. One shows signs of recent traffic: regolith displacement consistent with EVA boot prints, no more than two weeks old. Someone has been here. The GCOA's shuttle log shows no authorized transit.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

The debris field is not static. Structural settling continues. Tunnel entrances accessible yesterday may be buried tomorrow. A suit malfunction on the lunar surface is a countdown. EVA is a one-operator sport — if something goes wrong, the station can document it. That's the full scope of available assistance.

DAY (LUNAR — 14 EARTH DAYS)

CONDITIONS

Continuous sunlight. Surface temperature exceeds 127C in direct exposure. EVA in shadow zones only. Operators map routes by shade.

RISK

Thermal exposure. Suit cooling failure in direct sunlight is fatal in minutes. Shadow map changes as the sun angle shifts.

NIGHT (LUNAR — 14 EARTH DAYS)

CONDITIONS

Continuous darkness. Temperature drops to -173C. Suit heating draws additional power, reducing EVA window by 40%. Orbital surveillance loses optical resolution.

RISK

Power drain. Navigation errors compound in darkness. A wrong turn means backtracking through terrain that looks different by suit light.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

The LIC's main processing dome, split open like a cracked egg, its interior surfaces catching sunlight in ways that make the wreckage look almost deliberate. Two hundred meters beyond, the regolith is undisturbed — then a tunnel entrance, dark and perfectly round, leading down into a facility that should not still have power.

FACTIONS PRESENT

NONE PERMANENTLY

Contested salvage. Evidence of unauthorized surface operations — boot prints, tool marks, a communication relay — belonging to an unidentified party.

CIVILIAN NEED

N/A — The Approach has no residents. What it has is evidence.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Shuttle landing (requires authorization or unauthorized launch), debris field salvage routes, tunnel entrance locations, cached equipment near Tunnel Entrance 2.

ENCOUNTERS — SURFACE EVA (1D6)

- The debris field shifts. A section of the dome's wall settles, revealing a pre-Upheaval access panel. The biometric scanner activates on approach — it has power.
- Micro-debris impact. A particle strikes a suit. Integrity monitor registers yellow alert. Ninety minutes to reach pressurized shelter.
- Tunnel Entrance 2. The cached supply drop is recent — packaged within the last month. The symbol scratched on the cache matches no known faction iconography.
- A communication relay on a debris pile overlooking the landing zone. Solar-powered, broadcasting on an unknown frequency. It has been watching for months.

- Boot prints in the regolith leading to Tunnel Entrance 3. Fresh — no more than days old. They lead in. They do not come back out.
- A shuttle on the far side of the LIC site, landed in a shadow zone, powered down, registration markings removed.

ENCOUNTERS — LUNAR NIGHT (1D6)

- A light in the debris field. Brief, directional, moving. Someone is on the surface during lunar night. Their suit light discipline is excellent.
- Tunnel Entrance 1 emits a faint atmospheric whisper — pressure differential from below. Something in the subsurface has changed.
- The communication relay's broadcast becomes directional — aimed at a specific point on Earth that is not a faction installation.
- Temperature differential at Tunnel Entrance 3. The interior is warmer by several degrees. Heat rising from the Menagerie's geothermal tap.
- An automated mining drone emerges from Tunnel Entrance 2, collects a load of regolith, and returns underground. This was not part of its original programming.
- Silence. Absolute silence. Then on an empty frequency, a compressed data burst using a personal encryption key registered to a man evacuated in 2042.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The Sons of the Serpent's demolition left specific subsurface access points intact deliberately. [PARTIALLY TRUE — professional and selective; intent unclear]
- The shuttle on the far side has been there two months. Its registration traces to a dissolved commercial entity. [TRUE]
- The supply cache contains pre-Upheaval medical supplies not available through any current channel. [TRUE]
- The communication relay has been operational for eight months, placed by the same party that left the boot prints. [TRUE]
- Tunnel Entrance 3 leads to a recently modified section — widened, reinforced, with a new pressure door. [TRUE]
- The mining drone's surface runs are gathering a mineral used in pre-Upheaval biological containment systems. [UNCONFIRMED but the collection pattern is selective]

CONTACTS

NOBODY ON THE SURFACE IS A CONTACT

CAN GET	Salvage components, suit repair materials, cached equipment near Tunnel Entrance 2 marked with an unknown symbol.
WANTS	N/A — The Approach has no residents. What it has is evidence.
FEARS	N/A
CURRENT PRESSURE	The contacts that matter are on the GCOA. The unknown party that left boot prints and tool marks at the tunnel entrance is the variable nobody can read.

ZONE 6 THE MINING WARRENS

LIC SUBSURFACE / 0.16G

SECURITY	automated remnants — some door locks active, some pressure seals cycling
INFRASTRUCTURE	partially intact — pressurization inconsistent, power intermittent
CIVILIANS	none
SURVEILLANCE	dead zones with intermittent sensor ghosts — old systems cycling on residual power
FACTION PRESSURE	none (no permanent presence) / evidence of unauthorized access
CONTAMINATION	He-3 residue / radiation in reactor-adjacent tunnels / dust particulate
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	tunnels passable but inconsistent — some pressurized, some vacuum, some unstable
FUNCTION	Kilometers of He-3 extraction tunnels carved into the lunar subsurface. The surface was destroyed. The tunnels were not.

CONTROLLER	Automated systems. Mining drones, transport rails, processing stations — running pre-Upheaval software executing twelve-year-old instructions. The drones are not hostile. They ignore operators unless operators interfere with extraction operations.
DRAW	He-3 reserves. Pre-Upheaval equipment. Data cores with geological surveys worth more than the minerals they map. And the route to the Menagerie through transport tunnels the Sons of the Serpent either missed or chose not to destroy.
RISK	Pressurization inconsistency. A tunnel that reads atmosphere on entry may lose pressure mid-traverse. Mining drones are large, operate in darkness, and do not detect humans. Being in the path of one is a geometry problem with a bad answer.
SCARCITY	Light. The Warrens have no illumination beyond emergency markers on residual power. Mapping data — twelve years of autonomous mining have altered the geometry beyond original maps.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The automated mining systems have operated for twelve years, extending the tunnel network by an estimated 40%. The ore they've extracted has been processed and stored in automated hoppers. The hoppers are full. Whoever reaches the Warrens first has access to twelve years of accumulated He-3 — enough to power the GCOA for a decade. The fuel crisis on the GCOA is real. The solution is underneath the surface Okafor is keeping everyone away from.

WHEN THE SYSTEM STRAINS

Structural settling has weakened tunnel intersections. Twelve years of autonomous mining have altered geometry nobody has mapped. A collapse at a major intersection changes the pressure dynamics of every connected tunnel. And the mining drones don't stop for collapses. They reroute.

ACTIVE CYCLE (12 HRS)

CONDITIONS

Permanent subsurface. No day/night cycle. Drones active for twelve hours — beetle-shaped, cutting heads warm, following autonomous routes.

RISK

Drone traffic at intersections. Timing a traverse is essential. The transport rail is faster but exposed.

MAINTENANCE CYCLE (4 HRS)

CONDITIONS

Drones in maintenance positions. Tunnels quieter but not silent. The safer window, but 'safer' is relative.

RISK

Pressurization shifts during maintenance. Atmospheric boundaries move. A breathable tunnel may become vacuum without warning.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A mining drone, three meters long and beetle-shaped, passes within arm's reach in a tunnel barely wide enough for two. It does not slow down. It does not register the operators. Its cutting head is still warm. In the silence after it passes, the sound of processed ore sliding through a transport tube somewhere deeper.

FACTIONS PRESENT

AUTOMATED SYSTEMS

Mining drones, transport rails, processing stations. Pre-Upheaval software executing twelve-year-old instructions. Not hostile. Not aware. Not stopping.

UNKNOWN PARTY

Evidence of recent human activity: widened tunnels, a new pressure door at the Menagerie approach, boot prints that enter but do not exit.

CIVILIAN NEED

N/A — The Mining Warrens are an environment, not a community.

OPERATOR ACCESS

Drone behavioral patterns (observing routes reveals tunnel geometry), data cores, geological survey data, ore hopper contents, transport rail routes.

ENCOUNTERS — WARRENS TRAVERSE (1D6)

- A mining drone stops. It has never stopped in twelve years. Its cutting head rotates toward the operators. It holds for eleven seconds. Then it resumes. The processing station logs will show an 'obstacle detection event.' There was no obstacle.
- A data core in an abandoned processing station. It contains geological survey data showing the Menagerie's true extent — three times larger than the original blueprints.
- The He-3 hoppers. Twelve years of accumulated output in automated containers. A single hopper solves the GCOA's fuel crisis. There are forty-seven.
- A pressure boundary. The tunnel ahead reads vacuum. Twenty meters beyond, atmosphere again. Someone has placed a temporary pressure bridge — recent, human-made, functional.
- An ore car passes through an intersection, route leading toward the Menagerie. Its manifest code is current. Someone has been updating the routing tables.
- A pre-Upheaval pressure door. Heavier than it looks. Finished to a precision that makes the tunnel walls look crude. The biometric panel glows steady amber.

ENCOUNTERS — MAINTENANCE CYCLE (1D6)

- Silence. No drone traffic. Only the ambient hum. Then: a vibration through the floor. Regular. Rhythmic. From the direction of the Menagerie.
- A sealed side tunnel — new seal, not original, not automated. Someone is organizing the Warren, directing traffic toward the Menagerie.
- An emergency marker activates. Its path leads down. Someone triggered the Warren's emergency protocol from a control point deeper in the complex.
- Signs of habitation in a processing station alcove. Bedroll. Water containers. A portable atmosphere scrubber. The habitation appears abandoned but the scrubber is still running.

- A mining drone in maintenance position, sensor array oriented toward the Menagerie tunnel. It is watching the approach. That software should not include a surveillance function.
- The twice-daily pulse. Down here it is physical — a vibration through the floor, the walls, the suit. Something on the other side of the sealed door is completing a cycle.

RUMORS (1D6)

- The automated systems have extended the tunnel network by 40%. Some new tunnels lead to formations not on any survey. The drones found something. [TRUE]
- The He-3 hoppers contain enough fuel to power the GCOA for a decade. Oka- for knows. He's keeping everyone from the solution to his own manufactured crisis. [TRUE]
- Transport routing tables have been updated within the last month. The updates require human input. Someone with access to the original OS is in the Warrens. [TRUE]
- Mining drones have been modified with capabilities not in the original spec — consistent with pre-Upheaval military surveillance. [PARTIALLY TRUE]
- There is a second sealed facility below the Menagerie. Mining drones route around it. [UNCONFIRMED]
- The habitation signs belong to Dr. Haas. He has been living in the Warrens periodically, moving between the Menagerie and the tunnels. He is not a prisoner. He is a caretaker. [UNCONFIRMED but consistent]

CONTACTS

THE WARRENS HAVE NO HUMAN CONTACTS — AUTOMATED SYSTEMS ONLY

CAN GET	Mining drone behavioral patterns, data cores, geological survey data, ore hopper contents, transport rail routes to deeper sections.
WANTS	N/A
FEARS	N/A
CURRENT PRESSURE	The Warrens provide evidence, resources, and access. The route to the Menagerie runs through here. Whoever controls the He-3 hoppers controls the fuel crisis.

ZONE 7 THE MENAGERIE

SEALED RESEARCH WING / 0.16G

SECURITY	active — pre-Upheaval containment protocol, sealed, biometric locks
INFRASTRUCTURE	operational — geothermal power, atmospheric maintenance, automated systems
CIVILIANS	unknown — sealed; what is inside has not been verified since 2054
SURVEILLANCE	internal systems presumed active / external monitoring impossible through containment shielding
FACTION PRESSURE	none (no faction has accessed) / total (every faction wants in)
CONTAMINATION	unknown — containment shielding prevents external sensor readings
BLACK MARKET	none
MOBILITY	sealed — access requires overriding containment protocol or finding Okafor's path

FUNCTION The LIC's research wing. The 'Menagerie' name was a dark joke about the gene-forged specimens studied here. The Starlight Reapers extracted scientists in 2042 during a crisis involving the research subjects. Okafor sealed it during Operation Lunar Twilight in 2054 rather than evacuating whatever remained.

CONTROLLER The containment protocol. Pre-Upheaval automation managing atmosphere, power, and access. Designed to withstand external breach for a minimum of fifty years. It is twelve years in.

DRAW Pre-Upheaval automated manufacturing lines, still operational, producing components to tolerances no current facility can replicate. The manufacturing output of twelve years. Whatever the original research left behind. And the answer every faction is asking: what did the Sons of the Serpent find before they destroyed everything else?

RISK	Unknown. That is the risk. Twelve years of autonomous operation behind sealed doors. The containment protocol keeps things out. It was also designed to keep things in.
SCARCITY	Information. Everything is inference. Thermal signatures. Power data. The twice-daily pulse. Nobody knows what is inside. Okafor might. He's not talking.

UNDER-SYSTEM

The Menagerie's manufacturing capability is the prize. The faction that controls it gains the ability to produce technology no other faction can replicate. The geothermal tap draws from a heat source classified as 'anomalous' — producing more energy than models predict. The thermal pulse may be a manufacturing cycle's rhythm: production completing, a new run beginning. The Menagerie contains not just a factory but a stockpile.

THE DEEPER QUESTION

The 2042 extraction pulled scientists out because the biological research subjects became uncontainable. The after-action report notes 'all personnel were evacuated.' It does not say 'all specimens were removed.' Okafor knows the difference. It is the reason he sealed the facility rather than flagging it for salvage.

THE SEALED DOOR

Three approaches: **Override** — Okafor's biometric input or a 72-hour cryptographic bypass, detectable from orbit. **Okafor's Path** — a route through the Mining Warrens he used to seal the facility. **Wait** — environmental stress and manufacturing operations may be degrading containment from within. If it fails on its own, the Menagerie opens to whoever is in the Warrens. That is the outcome Okafor fears most.

SIGNATURE IMAGE

A sealed pressure door at the end of a Warren transport tunnel. Pre-Upheaval manufacture — heavier than it looks, finished to a precision that makes the tunnel walls look crude. A faint vibration through the floor at regular intervals, felt in the boots before the ears register it. The biometric panel glows steady amber. Waiting.

FACTIONS PRESENT

THE CONTAINMENT PROTOCOL

Pre-Upheaval automation. Not a faction. Not an intelligence. A system executing instructions from twelve years ago.

UNKNOWN

Whatever is inside. Manufacturing output at 94% hopper capacity. A signal on a dead researcher's key. The twice-daily pulse. The answer is behind the door.

CIVILIAN NEED

N/A — unless Dr. Haas is alive inside. In which case: rescue. Or containment. Or both.

OPERATOR ACCESS

The sealed door. That's it. Everything else requires getting through it.

ENCOUNTERS — MENAGERIE APPROACH (1D6)

- The sealed door. The biometric panel's amber glow reflects off the tunnel walls. The vibration through the floor is steady. Like breathing. The panel does not respond to any input operators carry.
- A sound through the door. Not mechanical. A voice — distorted by containment shielding, but unmistakably human. It says one word. The word is a name. It is the name of one of the operators.

- The containment shielding flickers. For three seconds, sensors read the interior: atmosphere, power, and biological signatures. Multiple biological signatures. Then the shielding stabilizes.
- The biometric panel changes from amber to green. For eleven seconds. Then back to amber. The door does not open. But the lock status reads 'authorized.' Someone inside authorized access. Then revoked it.
- A data transmission from behind the door. Compressed, encrypted with Haas's key, directed at operators' equipment. It contains coordinates — inside the Menagerie, marking a room labeled 'Primary Observation.'
- The manufacturing pulse. Operators feel it through everything. The hopper capacity reads 94%. When it reaches 100%, the system will need to do something with the output. The containment protocol does not include instructions for that scenario.

RUMORS (1D6)

- Manufacturing output at 94% hopper capacity. When it reaches 100%, the production lines either shut down or breach containment. Neither outcome is controlled. [TRUE]
- Dr. Soren Haas is alive inside. He has been there for twenty-four years. What that has produced is the question nobody can answer. [UNCONFIRMED — the signal is real; its source is not verified]
- The geothermal tap draws from a heat source producing more energy than geological models predict. [TRUE]
- The 2042 specimens were never fully removed. The containment protocol was activated to keep them contained as much as to preserve manufacturing capability. [PARTIALLY TRUE — after-action report is ambiguous by design]
- The pre-Upheaval hull section on the GCOA and the Menagerie are connected through the same anomalous energy signature. The pulse matches the electromagnetic field in Station Infrastructure. [UNCONFIRMED but the correlation is real]
- The containment is designed for fifty years but manufacturing is degrading it from within. Four to seven days before seals begin failing. [PARTIALLY TRUE — Tanaka's best estimate]

CONTACTS

DR. SOREN HAAS — THE SIGNAL (STATUS UNKNOWN)

CAN GET Unknown. If alive, twenty-four years of direct observation data on the Menagerie's contents — what the manufacturing lines have produced, what happened to the specimens, what the autonomous systems have been doing. Worth more than the facility itself.

WANTS Unknown. The signal transmissions are compressed data bursts, not communication attempts. May be automated, deliberate, a distress call, or something else entirely.

FEARS Unknown.

CURRENT PRESSURE The signal frequency has increased from weekly to twice daily over three months, correlating with NAF sensor calibration. Whether Haas — or whatever is transmitting — is responding to increased orbital observation is the question that keeps Okafor at the viewport at 0400.

ENVIRONMENTAL RULES

GCOA STATION ENVIRONMENT

The GCOA maintains 0.8g through rotational gravity in the Assembly Ring and Faction Quarter. The Docking Spine operates at 0.3g. Station Infrastructure varies from 0.5g to microgravity. Gravity transitions are marked but disorienting. Experienced personnel identify newcomers by how they handle the transition between the Faction Quarter and the Docking Spine — the stumble is diagnostic.

Atmosphere is fully managed. Temperature is 19C everywhere because that was the compromise. Sound carries differently in low gravity: footsteps quieter, voices farther, and the constant hum of life support becomes the ambient baseline. Operators who have spent more than a week aboard stop hearing it. That's when they start missing things.

Combat aboard the GCOA is constrained by hull integrity. Kinetic weapons risk decompression. Energy weapons risk system damage. The peacekeeping force carries non-lethal loadouts. Faction security details carry lethal weapons inside their own sections — technically illegal but universally practiced. The unwritten

rule: you can shoot inside your own section. Shoot in the Assembly Ring and every faction responds.

LUNAR SURFACE ENVIRONMENT

The LIC ruins sit in permanent shadow in some sections and direct solar exposure in others. Surface temperature swings from 127C in sunlight to -173C in shadow. EVA suits manage this, but suit power is finite. A standard EVA window is four hours. Extended operations require a pressurized forward position or a return to the shuttle.

The Sons of the Serpent's demolition collapsed surface structures but left subsurface warrens largely intact. Pressurization is inconsistent — some sections hold atmosphere, others don't, and the boundary shifts as structural settling continues. Suit sensors provide pressure readings. Smart operators check twice.

Gravity is 0.16g. Movement is slow, deliberate, and punishing to the untrained. Combat in lunar gravity is a different discipline: recoil is proportionally larger, cover is harder to reach, a missed step sends an operator floating into a firing lane. Sound does not travel in vacuum. Inside pressurized sections, sound is muffled by helmets. Communication is suit radio. Jamming suit radio on the lunar surface is the equivalent of blinding someone in a firefight.

Micro-debris is a persistent hazard. The demolition scattered particulate that the lunar environment has not cleared. Suit integrity checks are not optional. A pinhole leak in vacuum is a countdown.

TRANSIT BETWEEN THEATERS

GCOA to lunar surface: minimum transit time is 14 hours by standard shuttle. The GCOA maintains two shuttle bays. Shuttle allocation is managed by the peacekeeping force — meaning Okafor controls who goes down and when. Unauthorized transit is possible via faction shuttles docked at the Docking Spine, but an unscheduled departure is visible to every sensor on the station.

LAWS & CIVIC RITUALS

GCOA CHARTER LAW — AGGRESSIVELY ENFORCED

- **Unauthorized transit between faction sections** without escort or invitation. Consequence: immediate expulsion. Okafor prefers to remove problems rather than contain them.
- **Discharge of lethal weapons in shared spaces** (Assembly Ring, Docking Spine, neutral corridors). Okafor can confine any party to their faction section pending review. 'Pending review' has lasted as long as sixteen months.
- **Tampering with life-support, communications, or structural systems.** Classified as an attack on the station. Confinement pending judicial review — minimum three months.

SELECTIVELY WEAPONIZED

- **Carrying communications equipment outside designated areas without permit.** Enforced against journalists, NGO observers, and operators whose equipment has been flagged. Obi has had equipment confiscated twice.
- **Operating as an undeclared intelligence representative.** Every faction has intelligence officers. The law is used to expel specific operatives when convenient.
- **Commercial activity without authorization.** The diplomatic pouch trade, crawlway access fees, and Webb's operation all technically violate this. Enforced selectively.

FEARED PUNISHMENTS

- **Station expulsion.** Not imprisonment — removal. On a dying station, expulsion means a shuttle seat that doesn't exist. Okafor has used the threat for months. Nobody has processed that he may no longer have the transport to execute it.
- **Faction section closure.** Under emergency charter, Okafor can seal a faction's section and suspend their standing. Never used. The threat is the weapon.
- **Communications classification.** All messages, data, contacts — quarantined pending review. On a station where information is currency, this freezes all assets.

CIVIC RITUALS

- **The Daily Fuel Bulletin.** At 0800 station time, GCOA broadcasts He-3 reserve status. For nine months: 'operating within normal parameters.' For three weeks: 'operating within managed reserve thresholds.' Station personnel track the phrasing. The vocabulary is shifting. Everyone notices. Nobody discusses it.

- **Arbitration Session Openings.** Okafor reads the Charter's founding statement aloud. Same way every time. Delegates study his face for variation. There has been none. A performance of normalcy that everyone knows is a performance.
- **The Corridor Junction Pause.** Personnel stop at the four-faction junction before proceeding. Began as security instinct. Became social ritual. Duration and eye direction communicate more than most diplomatic exchanges. Ito has been logging pauses for six months.
- **The 2200 Ring Clear.** Assembly Ring closes at 2200. Peacekeeping circuit at exactly 2205 — same route, same pace, lights on. Eleven minutes between staff departure and patrol arrival. Not an accident. The same eleven minutes for two years. Used every night by at least three parties.

R&R

Roll when operators spend off-duty time in the station's social spaces — observation lounges, contractor recreation in the Docking Spine, or gathering points in Station Infrastructure. Every result produces one of three outcomes: a new edge, a new debt, or a new exposure.

The GCOA's social spaces smell like recycled air, diplomatic cologne, and faction section cooking. Station crew play 'High Ground Blues' during faction arbitration sessions — the chorus is one line repeated: 'but the station needs fuel.' The faction representatives do not appreciate it. The station crew play it louder. The observation lounges offer the best view of the Earth from any operational environment in the OT world. Operators who spend too long watching the planet below stop remembering why they came up.

DELIBERATE BLANKS

The following elements are intentionally undefined. They are invitations to the table.

THE PRE-UPHEAVAL HULL SECTION

Something in Station Infrastructure predates the GCOA by at least sixty years. Its electromagnetic field is growing. Its composition doesn't match the construction manifest. What it is, why it's here, and whether it's connected to the Menagerie are questions for your table to answer.

THE FOURTH KEY HOLDER

Someone has been conducting unauthorized surface operations on the LIC for months. The boot prints, the communication relay, the widened tunnel entrance. They are not from any faction currently on the GCOA. Who they are, who sent them, and what they've already taken from the Warrens is undefined.

THE MENAGERIE'S BIOLOGICAL WING

The 2042 extraction removed the scientists. Whether it removed all the specimens is deliberately unconfirmed. The GM decides what is behind the sealed door. The answer can be nothing, something contained, or something that has been evolving for twelve years without observation. Scale to your table.

DR. HAAS'S CONDITION

Alive, dead, something in between, or replaced by automated systems using his encryption key. The signal is real. Its source is undefined. What Haas has become — if Haas still exists — is the table's most significant narrative decision.

THE MANUFACTURING OUTPUT

The Menagerie's production lines have been running for twelve years. What they've been producing is stated as 'components to tolerances no current facility can replicate.' The specific nature — weapons, medical technology, infrastructure, something new — is left open. The stockpile is at 94% capacity. What fills the remaining 6% is the table's to decide.

MARCUS WEBB'S EMPLOYER

Webb was hired to retrieve a specific item from the LIC. His employer is sealed behind commercial confidentiality. The employer's identity and the item's nature are undefined. The answer connects to whichever thread your campaign is pulling hardest.

FACTIONS

GCOA PEACEKEEPING FORCE

OBJECTIVE Maintain station order and prevent unauthorized lunar access. Okafor is using the peacekeeping mandate as cover for a containment operation he cannot explain.

ASSETS Station security, shuttle access control, comms monitoring, sixty personnel, charter authority including unilateral denial of surface access during emergency.

DEPENDENCY Okafor's credibility. If exposed as having a personal agenda, his authority evaporates.

VULNERABILITY The fuel data (Okonkwo), anomaly reports (Ito), shuttle logs (Voss), bloodwork (Hassan). Any thread leads to Okafor.

ESCALATION LADDER

- **1 — Passive control:** Checkpoints, movement logging, bureaucratic access management.
- **2 — Active restriction:** Emergency protocols. Peacekeeping escort required. Shuttle operations suspended.
- **3 — Overt intervention:** Armed deployment to the Docking Spine. Station emergency declared.
- **4 — Last resort:** Okafor destroys the shuttle bay. He has a demolition package. He hopes he never uses it.

OFFERS PCS Legal protection, station access, shuttle authorization, intelligence on faction movements.

DEMANDS Don't go to the Moon. Don't help anyone else go. Don't ask why.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> The GCOA loses its neutral arbiter. Faction Quarter becomes a four-way standoff. Shuttle access becomes first-come-first-served. The lunar surface becomes unregulated within hours.

NAF DELEGATION

OBJECTIVE Reach the LIC first. Land, access, secure the thermal anomaly source. Secondary: resolve the fuel crisis on NAF terms — permanent basing rights.

ASSETS Advanced sensor package (six days into calibration). Lunar-capable shuttle. Hargrove with command authority. Vasquez with unauthorized landing zone surveys. Intelligence cell.

DEPENDENCY Sensor calibration. Without confirmation, no justification for lunar insertion that survives scrutiny.

VULNERABILITY Hargrove's sixteen-hour reporting delay. If discovered, it reveals an independent operation violating the charter.

ESCALATION LADDER

- **1 — Intelligence collection:** Continue calibration. Monitor factions. Build the case.
- **2 — Covert preparation:** Prep shuttle. Position personnel in the Spine. Jam competing sensors.
- **3 — Unauthorized insertion:** Launch without authorization. Accept consequences. Six-hour window.
- **4 — Last resort:** Deny the prize to other factions by any means. Including orbital kinetic options.

OFFERS PCS Advanced equipment, sensor data, shuttle passage, extraction guarantee. Best-resourced faction on station.

DEMANDS Priority access to the Menagerie. First look, first claim, ability to classify everything.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> Sensor calibration stops. Best evidence of the Menagerie disappears. The shuttle remains but flies blind.

EO ARBITRATION DELEGATION

OBJECTIVE Secure legal access to LIC subsurface through GCOA arbitration. The 'safety inspection' motion is the wedge for authorized surface operations.

ASSETS Strongest legal team on the station. Petrov's motion. Supply vessel. Intelligence operatives embedded in engineering for three months.

DEPENDENCY The arbitration process. If the GCOA collapses as a legal body, the EO loses institutional advantage.

VULNERABILITY Petrov. She wrote the motion and found the clause that blocks it. If she goes public, the legal strategy collapses.

ESCALATION LADDER

- **1 — Legal maneuvering:** File motions. Build coalitions. Lobby for votes.
- **2 — Intelligence acceleration:** Activate embedded operatives. Map crawlways. Prepare covert backup.
- **3 — Parallel operations:** Covert surface mission while legal process provides cover.
- **4 — Last resort:** Withdraw from the charter. Declare arbitration authority void. Kill the institution to deny legitimacy to competitors.

OFFERS PCS Legal protection, arbitration influence, intelligence on station infrastructure. The EO pays in legitimacy.

DEMANDS Evidence supporting the safety inspection motion. Testimony. Data.

> **IF DAMAGED**
>
> The legal process dies. Competition becomes purely military — the outcome the EO was designed to prevent.

PRC TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

OBJECTIVE Determine what the Menagerie contains before anyone opens it. The PRC suspects the 2042 specimens were never fully removed. If correct, opening without containment preparation is catastrophic.

ASSETS Dr. Tanaka and the most sophisticated orbital imaging team. Technical support vessel with remote sensing. Intelligence cell under scientific cover. PRC records from the original research program.

DEPENDENCY Tanaka's data. Without calibration results, the PRC has only inference and historical records.

VULNERABILITY Historical involvement in the Menagerie's biological research. If records become public, the PRC is implicated in the 2042 crisis.

ESCALATION LADDER

- **1 — Data collection:** Complete calibration. Build a comprehensive model of the Menagerie's state.
- **2 — Information leverage:** Share selected intelligence to shape other factions' approach.
- **3 — Direct intervention:** Spoiler operation to delay access until biological containment is ready.
- **4 — Last resort:** Orbital bombardment of the LIC site. Destroy the Menagerie rather than let its contents reach Earth. The delegation chief has pre-authorization. Tanaka does not know.

OFFERS PCS Sensor data, scientific analysis, biological hazard assessment, historical records. Information, not firepower.

DEMANDS First access to intelligence from the Menagerie. Specifically: biological research data, specimen records, containment protocols.

IF DAMAGED

Biological risk assessment disappears. Whoever opens the Menagerie does so blind to its biological contents. Consequences of an uninformed breach are incalculable.

WILDCARD CONTACTS

CAPTAIN KWAME 'METEOR' OKAFOR — GCOA PEACEKEEPING COMMANDER

Twenty-six when he helped evacuate the LIC during Operation Lunar Twilight. Thirty-eight now. Twelve years of managing a secret that would end his career and possibly start a war. He sealed the Menagerie because he saw what was inside and decided no faction should have it. He engineered the fuel crisis because the NAF's sensor upgrade was going to expose the Menagerie's power signature. It worked for three months. It's failing because Tanaka is better than he expected.

CAN GET Station-wide authority under emergency charter. Shuttle access denial. The containment override code. Twelve years of classified lunar surface data collected during maintenance windows.

WANTS For the Menagerie to stay sealed. Permanently. He has not allowed himself to consider what happens if it can't be. He is running out of moves.

FEARS Two things. That someone opens the Menagerie and what he saw in 2054 is still alive. Or that what he saw is no longer alive — because that means the autonomous systems did something to it, and that answer might be worse.

CURRENT PRESSURE Everything converging. Tanaka's calibration. Hargrove's shuttle prep. Petrov's motion. Okonkwo's fuel math. Ito's anomaly reports. Hassan's bloodwork. Six information threats reaching critical mass in the same two-week window. Sleeping two hours a night. Standing at the viewport at 0400 watching the Moon.

DR. SOREN HAAS — THE SIGNAL

Senior researcher in the Menagerie's biological research division. On the evacuation manifest for the 2042 Starlight Reapers operation. Marked as 'evacuated – confirmed.' No subsequent record. No death certificate. No reassignment. No pension claim. No family communication since 2042. The signal uses his personal encryption key, issued in 2041, that should have been deactivated. If Haas is inside the Menagerie, he has been there for twenty-four years with power, atmosphere, and autonomous systems. Survival is theoretically possible.

CAN GET Unknown. If alive and functional: twenty-four years of direct observation data on the Menagerie's contents. What the manufacturing lines produced. What happened to the specimens. What the autonomous systems have been doing. Worth more than the facility itself.

WANTS Unknown. The transmissions are compressed data bursts, not communication attempts. May be automated, deliberate, a distress call, or something else entirely.

FEARS Unknown.

CURRENT PRESSURE Signal frequency has increased from weekly to twice daily over three months, correlating with NAF sensor calibration. Whether Haas — or whatever is transmitting — is responding to increased observation is the question that keeps Okafor at the viewport at 0400.

DOWNTIME

WORK A SOURCE

WHAT Cultivate a station contact through repeated interaction. Buy drinks, trade favors, apply social pressure.

COST Time and exposure. Each period spent increases visibility to station surveillance.

GAIN Upgrades contact willingness by one step. On success, one piece of restricted intel from their access area.

FALLOUT The source talks. A faction intelligence officer starts asking. Or the source gets spooked and goes dark permanently.

CRAWLWAY MAPPING

WHAT Explore the maintenance crawlway network to find routes bypassing corridor checkpoints.

COST One downtime period. Risk of sealed sections, environmental hazards, or other operators.

GAIN One mapped route between two sectors avoiding surveillance. Reliable for 1d6 days before patrol changes close it.

FALLOUT Encountered by Okonkwo's crew. She adds the operator to her watch list. Or the operator finds a sealed section with something behind it.

DIPLOMATIC COVER

WHAT Establish or maintain a cover identity within a faction delegation.

COST One downtime period and a favor owed. The cover requires maintenance — missed check-ins burn it.

GAIN Access to the faction section for approximately 48 hours before questions accumulate.

FALLOUT Cover burns. Real identity circulates to all faction intelligence cells within 24 hours.

TERRITORY RUMOR TABLES

STATION CREW GOSSIP (1D6)

- Okafor hasn't slept in his quarters for a week. He's using the peacekeeping ready room. His viewport faces the Moon. [TRUE]
- The engineering crew found something behind the pre-Upheaval hull plating. Okonkwo sealed it. She won't say what. [TRUE]
- The fuel bulletin numbers are manually adjusted. The real count is lower. [MISLEADING — bulletin is accurate; the consumption rate was artificially accelerated]
- Three station crew have requested transfers this week. All denied without explanation. [TRUE]
- The observation lounge on Deck 3 has a viewport facing the LIC. Through the telescope, a light on the lunar surface that shouldn't be there. [TRUE — the Menagerie's geothermal vent]
- Someone has been playing 'High Ground Blues' through crawlway speakers for three nights. Engineering can't find the source. [TRUE — Volkov thinks it's funny; it is not funny]

DIPLOMATIC CHANNEL INTERCEPTS (1D6)

- The NAF has transmitted a burst requesting authorization for 'contingency lunar operations.' Authorization received in fourteen minutes. [TRUE]
- The EO delegation chief contacted three law firms about 'post-GCOA arbitration frameworks.' They're planning for institutional collapse. [TRUE]
- The PRC delegation chief made a seven-minute call to Beijing using encryption the technical team doesn't share. Tanaka was excluded. [TRUE]
- The UKE observer transmits daily to a recipient in New London that is not the Foreign Office. It's a private intelligence firm. [TRUE]
- A Cyber Syndicate communication intercepted: offering to sell the Menagerie's complete sensor profile to any faction. [PARTIALLY TRUE — offer real; Syndicate data incomplete]
- Okafor's personal log shows one outgoing transmission to the lunar surface three days ago. The frequency is reserved for the containment protocol. [TRUE — he was checking if containment still responds]

ENGINEERING ANOMALY REPORTS (1D6)

- Reactor containment traces irregular for six days. Okonkwo's official assessment: within tolerance. Her notebook: 'not within tolerance.' [TRUE]
- The pre-Upheaval section's electromagnetic field increased 12% this week. Correlates with the Menagerie's thermal pulse. [TRUE]
- Three sealed crawlway sections show oxygen levels rising behind the seals. Something is producing breathable air. [TRUE]
- Power consumption in an unoccupied section has increased 8% over three weeks. Adjacent to the pre-Upheaval hull plating. [TRUE]
- The comms array has been receiving twice-daily data bursts from the lunar surface for three months. Using an encryption key from 2042. [TRUE — the Haas signal]
- Docking clamp hydraulic pressure in Bays 3 and 5 is below minimum spec. Seal integrity failure in nine to fourteen days. [TRUE — three reports filed, none acknowledged]

LUNAR SURFACE INTELLIGENCE (1D6)

- Orbital imaging shows fresh EVA tracks less than a week old. No authorized transit. [TRUE]
- The communication relay has been broadcasting for eight months. Its Earth target is not a faction facility. [TRUE]
- The shuttle on the far side arrived two months ago. Registration traces to a dissolved commercial entity. [TRUE]

- Tunnel Entrance 3 has been widened and reinforced with pre-Upheaval techniques and materials not currently available. [TRUE]
- Mining drones have altered routes in the past month, avoiding a section adjacent to the Menagerie. [TRUE]
- A thermal vent near the Menagerie releasing heated atmosphere from below. Visible from orbit during specific alignments. [TRUE]

ESCALATION TRACKS

TRACK 1: THE FUEL CRISIS

- **Stage 1 — Tension:** Power rationing begins. Non-essential systems shut down. The Assembly Ring dims. Temperature variance between faction sections becomes noticeable.
- **Stage 2 — Fracture:** Docking Spine clamps degrade. Shuttle operations suspended. Factions realize they may be trapped on a dying station. Emergency fuel offers become demands.
- **Stage 3 — Collapse:** Faction section closures begin. The order is determined by power allocation, which Okafor controls. The first faction to lose power loses everything.
- **Stage 4 — Endgame:** He-3 exhausted. Minimum-crew survival mode. Non-essential personnel evacuate to faction vessels. The station becomes a hull. Lunar surface access is uncontrolled. The race to the Menagerie begins without referees.

TRACK 2: THE MENAGERIE

- **Stage 1 — Detection:** The thermal signature is confirmed by multiple sources. Okafor's cover story collapses. The question becomes 'what is it and who gets there first?'
- **Stage 2 — Approach:** Unauthorized surface operations begin. The Mining Warrens are breached. The He-3 stockpile is discovered. The sealed door is reached.
- **Stage 3 — Breach:** The Menagerie opens — by override, by Okafor's path, or by containment failure. The manufacturing stockpile. The biological wing. Whatever became of Haas.
- **Stage 4 — Aftermath:** The faction that controls the Menagerie controls the future. Pre-Upheaval manufacturing changes the global balance permanently. The GCOA was built to prevent this. It has failed. What replaces it is the campaign's next arc.

OPERATIONS MAP

GCOA STATION — SPATIAL LAYOUT

The GCOA is a wheel-and-spoke design. The Assembly Ring forms the outer wheel (0.8g). The Faction Quarter occupies four spokes radiating inward. The Docking Spine runs axially through the center (0.3g). Station Infrastructure fills the inner hub between the spokes and wraps around the reactor at the station's core.

CHOKEPOINTS

- **Ring-to-Spoke Transitions:** Four checkpoints where the Assembly Ring meets the faction spokes. Peacekeeping-controlled, logged, surveilled.
- **Spoke-to-Core Transitions:** Where faction spokes meet Station Infrastructure. Less secure — engineering badges bypass the checkpoints.
- **Docking Bay Doors:** Five pressure doors. Peacekeeping at each during day cycle. Automated at night. Four-minute gap between sensor coverage and peacekeeping response.

DARK ZONES

- **Maintenance Crawlways:** The entire network. No surveillance, no patrol. Intelligence comes only from access panel logs, which can be spoofed.
- **Cargo Holds:** The Docking Spine's cargo sections between bays. Poorly lit, environmental sensors only.
- **Pre-Upheaval Section:** The hull section in lower Station Infrastructure. Okonkwo has sealed access but adjacent crawlways are open. Electromagnetic signature growing.

FACTION TERRITORY LINES

- Each faction section is sovereign space with hard borders. Corridors between are GCOA neutral territory.
- The Assembly Ring is shared space. The Docking Spine is GCOA-managed.
- Station Infrastructure is technically neutral but functionally contested.

LUNAR SURFACE — SPATIAL LAYOUT

The LIC site covers approximately 4 square kilometers. The Approach occupies the eastern sector. The Mining Warrens extend west and downward from three tunnel entrances. The Menagerie is at the western terminus of the deepest Warren level, approximately 800 meters below the surface.

LUNAR CHOKEPOINTS

- **Tunnel Entrances:** Three surface-to-subsurface access points. Each is a natural observation point. The communication relay overlooks Entrance 1.
- **Warren Intersections:** Three major convergence points. Mining drone traffic flows through on predictable cycles.
- **The Sealed Door:** The pre-Upheaval pressure door at the Menagerie approach. A single point of access. Whoever controls this door controls everything behind it.

MOBILITY CORRIDORS

- The transport rail is the fastest route through the Warrens but operators are visible and exposed.
- Walking the tunnels is slower but allows concealment in side passages.
- EVA on the surface is the most exposed route but bypasses all subsurface choke-points.

MISSION SEEDS

1. CALIBRATION KILL

OBJECTIVE: Prevent or protect the NAF's sensor calibration from completing before Day 6.

CLOCK: Six days. Calibration completes automatically unless the array is disrupted, data corrupted, or the operator removed.

COMPLICATION: Tanaka has already seen the thermal pulse. Stopping the calibration makes her work covert, not nonexistent.

2. THE OKAFOR PROBLEM

OBJECTIVE: Determine why the GCOA peacekeeping commander is sabotaging his own station's fuel supply.

CLOCK: Eight days to backup-power transition. If Okafor succeeds, sensor resolution drops — but 430 lives enter a crisis.

COMPLICATION: Okafor is not a villain. He saw something terrible and has spent twelve years containing it. Exposing him destroys the only person who can seal the Menagerie again.

3. THE HAAS SIGNAL

OBJECTIVE: Decode the signal transmitting from the Menagerie on Dr. Haas's encryption key.

CLOCK: Twelve days to continuous transmission. At that point, every faction's comms array detects it. The secret goes public on its own schedule.

COMPLICATION: Decoding requires Haas's personal key, which is in PRC records. The PRC won't share without knowing why. Telling them reveals the signal to a faction with pre-authorization for orbital bombardment.

4. LUNAR INSERTION

OBJECTIVE: Reach the LIC surface, traverse the Mining Warrens, access the Menagerie before any other faction.

CLOCK: Multiple competing clocks: NAF shuttle prepped for 72 hours; EO motion in 14 days; PRC contingency activates if containment is believed compromised.

COMPLICATION: Someone has already been to the surface. Boot prints, tool marks, a communication relay. The operators are not the first ones down. The site has been worked.

5. OKONKWO'S CHOICE

OBJECTIVE: Convince Chief Engineer Okonkwo to share the real fuel consumption data.

CLOCK: Nine days to docking clamp failure in Bay 5. Fourteen days in Bay 3. Every day she stays silent, the risk compounds.

COMPLICATION: Okonkwo has also found the pre-Upheaval hull section. Two explosive secrets. Pulling one thread may unravel both. If the hull section connects to the Menagerie, the station is part of something larger.

6. CONTAINMENT BREACH

OBJECTIVE: The Menagerie's seals are failing. Operators must reach the sealed door and either reinforce containment or control what comes out.

CLOCK: Four to seven days before internal pressure exceeds the containment threshold.

COMPLICATION: Reinforcing containment requires Okafor's override code. Opening the door requires the same code. Operators must decide before they reach the door: seal it tighter or open it. They cannot do both. They do not know what is on the other side.

DESTABILIZATION AFTERMATH

Every solution in the High Ground creates a new problem. These are the specific new problems.

IF THE GCOA FALLS

The station loses neutral arbitration authority. Faction sections become independent installations sharing a hull. Shuttle access becomes first-come-first-served. Within weeks, the GCOA is a debris hazard in low Earth orbit — four faction outposts drifting apart. The precedent: the last neutral space in the world is gone.

IF THE MENAGERIE OPENS

Whoever controls the facility controls pre-Upheaval manufacturing. The global technology balance shifts permanently. This is not an arms race. It's an arms monopoly. The biological question is separate and worse: if the 2042 specimens are still viable, the Menagerie isn't just a factory. It's a bioweapon production facility with a twelve-year stockpile. History suggests which option power chooses.

IF OKAFOR SUCCEEDS

The Menagerie stays sealed. The GCOA survives through an emergency donor arrangement that compromises neutrality. The lunar surface remains unvisited. And the manufacturing lines keep running. The stockpile keeps growing. The signal keeps transmitting. Okafor buys time. Time is all he buys. The Menagerie is patient. It has been patient for twelve years.

IF THE SIGNAL IS HAAS

A man has been alone in a sealed facility for twenty-four years with autonomous manufacturing systems and biological research specimens. He is alive. He has been transmitting. He has something to say. Haas is not a prisoner to be rescued. He is a variable that defies prediction. What he wants, what he's built, and what he's become are three different questions with three different answers, none of them comfortable.

FIELD NOTE

The station holds. The factions argue. The fuel bulletin reads 'managed reserve thresholds' and everyone pretends the vocabulary isn't shifting. Below, the Moon sits in the viewport like it always has — grey and still and patient. Something underneath it is running. Something inside the station is answering. The High Ground was supposed to be above the conflict. It is the conflict at a higher altitude, with thinner margins and no atmosphere to breathe if the hull breaks.

Everything below you is somebody else's problem until the fuel runs out. The station knows the fuel count. The station needs fuel. But the station needs fuel.

— Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide, Earth 2066

LOCATION REFERENCE

Quick index of all eighteen operational locations and primary control status as of Earth 2066.

CH	LOCATION	TYPE	CONTROL
01	NEO-TOKYO	City Hub	PRC TERRITORY
02	ARCADIA	City Hub	NAF TERRITORY
03	FLOODED LONDON	City Hub	NAF-ADJACENT / CONTESTED
04	ISTANBUL	City Hub	MULTI-FACTION CONTESTED
05	KALEMIE	City Hub	EO-ADJACENT / INDEPENDENT
06	AMAZONIAN METROPLEX	City Hub	SCA TERRITORY
07	NEW BATAVIA	City Hub	VW-ADJACENT / MARITIME HUB
08	NEW BUENOS AIRES	City Hub	NRD TERRITORY
09	NORDICS ARCOLOGY NETWORK	City Hub	PCU-ADMINISTERED
10	SAHARAN OASIS NETWORK	City Hub	PCU-ADMINISTERED
11	INDO-PAKISTANI FORBIDDEN ZONE	Territory	CONTESTED TERRITORY
12	THE SHATTER BELT	Territory	CONTESTED TERRITORY
13	EURASIAN STEPPES	Territory	EO / PRC CONTESTED
14	LAKEFIRE CORRIDOR	Territory	NAF-ADJACENT / CONTESTED

CH	LOCATION	TYPE	CONTROL
15	JAVA SCATTER	Territory	MULTI-FACTION / MARITIME
16	PATAGONIAN BASIN	Territory	NRD TERRITORY / INDEPENDENT ENCLAVES
17	ANTARCTIC PENINSULA OASIS	Territory	INTERNATIONAL / CONTESTED
18	THE HIGH GROUND	Territory	MULTI-FACTION ORBITAL

OPERATIONAL NOTES

Control Codes. Designations reflect the dominant power as of Earth 2066. "Contested" means two or more major factions have active operations without dominance. "Adjacent" means administrative or resource relationships without full control.

Stress Escalation. The stress condition in each location reflects the default operational state as of Earth 2066. When a location's stress escalates to critical, run its Destabilization Aftermath. Do not reset the location to baseline.

Inter-Location Connections. Factions operate across multiple locations simultaneously. The Null Collective, Shadowhand Syndicate, BAFO, and Free Zone Dispatch all have assets in two or more locations. Destabilizing a faction in one location registers in the next.

Travel Time. Between locations on the same landmass: 1 downtime action. Intercontinental or orbital: 2 downtime actions. The High Ground adds 1 additional action for launch window.

FACTION INDEX

Where each major faction operates in this book. Use this to run cross-location faction continuity.

MAJOR POWERS

NAF (North Atlantic Federation). Primary: Flooded London, Arcadia, Lakefire Corridor. Secondary: Istanbul, Eurasian Steppes.

SCA (Southern Continental Authority). Primary: Amazonian Metroplex, Patagonian Basin. Secondary: Saharan Oasis Network, Java Scatter.

EO (Eurasian Operations). Primary: Eurasian Steppes, Kalemie, Shatter Belt. Secondary: IPFZ, Istanbul.

PCU (Pacific Coalition Union). Primary: Saharan Oasis Network, Nordics Arcology Network. Secondary: New Batavia, Java Scatter.

PRC (Pacific Rim Coalition). Primary: Neo-Tokyo, Eurasian Steppes. Secondary: IPFZ, The High Ground.

VW (Vereinigte Welt). Primary: New Batavia. Secondary: New Buenos Aires, Nordics Arcology Network.

NRD (Nordic Regional Directorate). Primary: New Buenos Aires, Patagonian Basin. Secondary: Nordics Arcology Network, Antarctic Peninsula Oasis.

INDEPENDENT & NON-ALIGNED

Null Collective. Neo-Tokyo (Sub-2 interface station), IPFZ (Archive Ruins), Eurasian Steppes (substrate monitoring), The High Ground (orbital relay access). Objective: substrate interface and what it finds when it looks back.

Heralds of the Storm. IPFZ (dominant territorial control). The dispersal project timeline is converging with the chemical supply crisis. No confirmed cells outside the Zone. The dispersal project is designed to operate globally.

BAFO. Present across all locations as monitoring, intelligence archive, and occasional operational asset. Not a faction that takes sides. A faction that collects information and deploys it when the collection period is over.

Free Zone Dispatch. New Batavia (primary hub), Java Scatter, Istanbul, Kalemie. The independent logistics network that moves materials when no faction's infrastructure reaches.

Shadowhand Syndicate. Neo-Tokyo, Istanbul, Shatter Belt. The extraction-focused criminal network that sells to the highest bidder, which changes by quarter.

ROLL TABLES

Quick reference tables for running any location in this book.

D12: WHAT DID THE OPERATOR WALK INTO?

D12	RESULT
1	A faction hand-off. Two contacts meeting in the operator's way.
2	A surveillance sweep. Automated or human. Either way, the timing is bad.
3	A civilian emergency that will attract authority attention within minutes.
4	A faction asset moving something not supposed to move through this district.
5	A known contact, off-schedule and acting wrong.
6	A checkpoint that wasn't there yesterday.
7	Infrastructure failure in progress. Someone will blame the operators.
8	A competitor operator team from an unknown faction, same objective.
9	Evidence that the mission brief was wrong about something specific.
10	A civilian who knows exactly who the operators are and wants something for staying quiet.
11	Two faction assets in a dispute that will escalate in thirty seconds without intervention.
12	The location the operators needed is gone. Someone got there first.

D10: CONTACT RELIABILITY

D10	RESULT
1	Burned. Contact has been compromised. They know it. They haven't told the operators.
2	Spooked. Contact delivers but demands double the agreed price for reasons they won't explain.
3	Late. Contact arrives on schedule but the information is 48 hours old.
4	Partial. Contact delivers half the agreed intelligence. The other half is being sold separately.
5	Accurate. Clean delivery. No complications.
6	Accurate. Clean delivery. Contact has a favor owed and this is when they collect it.
7	More than asked. Contact delivers the requested intelligence plus something unasked for. The extra is the more important piece.
8	Early. Contact reaches out before the meet. The information requires immediate action or it expires.
9	Authenticated. Verified from two independent sources. Correct. The implications are worse than expected.
10	The contact is not who they said they were. The intelligence is still accurate. Their actual faction alignment changes everything.

D8: POST-MISSION COMPLICATION

D8	RESULT
1	The target was moved before the mission started. Someone tipped the location.
2	A faction not in the briefing has now identified the operator team.
3	The objective was completed successfully. The objective was the wrong one.
4	Extraction was clean. The exfil route is now under surveillance by an unidentified party.
5	A civilian witnessed something. They haven't reported it yet.
6	The patron's debrief reveals the mission was cover for a secondary operation the operators weren't told about.
7	Physical evidence left at the site will be found within 72 hours.
8	Success. One faction's position improved. Another faction noticed and knows who did it.

D6: R&R GONE WRONG

D6	RESULT
1	Contact made: a useful introduction to someone the operators will regret knowing.
2	Feud started: something said or overheard that will surface at the worst time.
3	Equipment lost: a secondary item that holds more information than intended.
4	Secret learned: actionable intelligence that comes with an implied obligation.
5	Debt incurred: a favor owed to someone whose definition of favors is expansive.
6	Locally recognizable: the operators are known in this location now. One faction sees an asset. Another sees a problem.

COLOPHON

Operator Tactics: Cities & Territories. Edition 1. Designed by Jesse Alexander. Published 2026.

Set in IBM Plex Sans (body), Archivo Narrow (display), IBM Plex Mono (codes), Newsreader (italic). All Open Font License. Printed on uncoated stock at A5 trim.

Voice and structure follow the Shadowdark discipline: declarative, no hedging, action verbs, second-person address. Flavor lives inside mechanics, not beside them.

The Splice Punk x TDR aesthetic governs every visual decision. The surface game is territory. The deep game is what the territory was built on top of.

Compatible with the Operator Tactics core rulebook and the Terra Conflictus 2066 Setting Guide.

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01 BRIEF PG 1

EIGHT CONTESTED ZONES. NO CLEAN LINES OF CONTROL. OPERATE ANYWAY.

Territories & Theaters is the second volume of the Cities & Territories companion to the Operator Tactics core rulebook. Eight locations: the contested zones, irradiated wastes, orbital installations, and collapsed-state regions where most of the actual work happens.

Each territory is built to full GM-table density: zones with authority gaps and under-systems, faction profiles with escalation ladders, contacts operating outside faction structures, mission seeds, and destabilization aftermath.

No faction controls these spaces completely. That is why operators are here.

8	3-5	80+	D12/D10
TERRITORIES	FACTIONS EACH	MISSION SEEDS	ROLL TABLES

REQUIRES THE OPERATOR TACTICS CORE RULEBOOK. VOL. I: HUBS & CITIES COVERS THE 10 CITY HUBS.