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>>>>> BEGIN INTRO FICTION

7 November 2065—Six days after Crash 2.0

The crowd was silent, the music hashed. FastJack stood in front of Cap's body, and the mourners huddled in a rough circle to hear him speak. Renny saw Silvery K, Bull, all of the old crew that could make it. All that had survived. The bartender made the rounds in the meat with a tray of champagne glasses.

"Friends and colleagues, thank you for coming. I know for some of you it wasn't easy. It is traditional at a wake to say a prayer for the departed. Given our friend's beliefs, however, we've chosen not to have a priest or shaman here to lead us. Instead, I have been asked to say a few words."

"Most of you know him as the SysOp of Shadowland Seattle. Shadowland and Captain Chaos weathered many assaults over the years, from Aztlan and the Tirs, bug spirits and artificial intelligences and the rogue otaku. For many of us, he was Shadowland: the freedom of information, the encouragement to think for ourselves, the courage to face those forces that would keep us ignorant and deny them at every turn, whatever the cost.

"His principles did cost him. Not just his earthly existence, but his life. Unlike some of us, Captain Chaos was not born to the shadows, but chose this path. Cap was born into a family that lived within the system; he received the benefits of being a SINner raised by SINners: health, education, safety, the prospects of a full, secure life slaved to a wage. He rejected that life. It cost him his family, and shadowed many of the personal relationships he had. Cap never married, or had children. Many times, it was Cap that stood where I am today, saying a few words for one of our friends. We live and die in the shadows, with no one to mark our passing but ourselves, and Cap knew that."

Old eyes misted over, holding back tears.

"Tonight we lay to rest our friend and ally Captain Chaos. Tonight, we remember those others who suffered and died when the Matrix crashed."

FastJack raised his glass.

"A toast. To Captain Chaos, and absent friends."

K raised her glass "To absent friends." she said, and downed her champagne, then threw the glass on the floor. Around her, others followed suit, and we laughed to the music of breaking crystal.

1 November 2072

>>> access backup cluster 986X-107

>>> scan file

[SCAN COMPLETE—FILE TYPE JACKBNIMBLE]

[FILE DAMAGED—DO YOU WANT TO REPAIR Y/N]

>>> Y

[REPAIR COMPLETE]

>>> execute file

[COMPLETING IMPRINT]

[MEMENTO PROTOCOLS RUNNING ...]

[RECALLING COMPLETE]

[USER KAOS HAS LOGGED ON]

Kaos: Hello, world.

Icarus: CC?

Kaos: Renny? You upgraded your icon. Ghost, look at the resolution in this node.

Icarus: It's a whole new Matrix, Cap.

Kaos: Yeah. Thanks for bringing me back, kid.

Icarus: Good to have you back, Captain. "Kaos?"

Kaos: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

>>>>> END INTRO FICTION

> All of us here run the shadows. Whatever you want to call this interstitial lifestyle, however you want to dress it up or define yourself, that's what we do, that's what we're here for. If you live long enough, your thoughts turn back to the beginning, how you got here and why. Looking for a pattern to your life. I can't give you any of those answers outright, you have to find them for yourselves, but I've asked Sticks to lend a little of his perspective on the matter.

> FastJack

THE UNTETHERED LIFE

By Sticks

You are not your System Identification Number. The System is where the rest of the world lives, an all-encompassing body of rules, regulations, and social support that reduces a person down into a datafile and a spreadsheet of actuary statistics. Everything about the System exists to define you, categorize, limit, and bill you. Are you a citizen? Do you have the right certifications? How many points do you have left on your license, sir or ma'am? Have you paid your taxes?

It's not enough to be SINless. The System wants you. The gangs, the syndicates, everybody wants a piece of you, everybody wants you to join up under them. You are nothing to these people but a cog in their machine. What they offer is what you don't have. Protection, money, family, to feed your vices, to get your girlfriend the operation she needs or the flash ride that'll win you the young man of your desire. All they want is your loyalty, your service, your exchange of one leash for another.

Fuck all that noise.

> Little heavy-handed, isn't he?
> Stone

> Soul of a poet/mouth of a sailor. His basic point is valid. For most of the world, megacorps and nations are responsible for providing for their citizens. To provide for them accurately, they need to track them—through birth certificates, SINs, driver's licenses, all manner of electronic documentation, the sum total of which is basically your life. Laws are passed to penalize bad behavior. Then more laws are passed to regulate not-so-bad behavior—selling liquor, getting married, what age you go to school and where—and eventually you can get to the point where people born into those systems feel entitled to the benefits but not to obeying the rules, or the spirit of the rules.

> Kay St. Irregular

> If you live in their corrupted system, you are bound by it. No metahuman should face such inequity.

> Aufheben

GOING UNDERGROUND

Extracting yourself from the system can be as easy and as hard as leaving behind everything you know. Zeroing a SIN ain't easy; the number of databases you gotta go through to erase your past means you're in for some beaucoup hacking, and if you can't crunch the code yourself then you gotta pay by the hour. Most people end up just faking their own death, or moving far, far away and trying to forget about it. That can work too, for a while. When grown people disappear with no sign of foul play, the cops don't look as hard as they might. Debt-collectors and tax collectors are more persistent, but if you make a clean break there's not much for them to go on.

> It used to be, a man could simply move on. Go out into the wilderness, move on to the next town or tribe, and recreate yourself with a new name, a new identity. To do so was to leave behind all commitments and property one could not carry—wives, children, responsibility. These days, for good or ill, such things are harder.

> Man-of-Many-Names

> Though not impossible. Get lost in the wild lands long enough, away from civilization, and after a few years (if you're lucky) you'll be declared dead.

> Lyran

> I spent a lot of time watching people in a past life, and you get a feel for the ones ready to go underground. They probably don't vary their routines much, but they start stockpiling a lot of certified cred or an equivalent. There's a reverse-nesting instinct that sets in, and they make a bag of essentials set for when it's time to bolt. A careful information sanitization takes place—removing personal information from websites and profiles, cleaning out ancient e-mail accounts, being more conscientious about cleaning their commlink of all traces of activity—anybody that starts taking photos out of frames or disabling the smoke detector and burning stuff in the stove is a major red flag.

> Hard Exit

> In this Awakened world, there are other ties that can be cut as well. Magicians in particular know the value and dangers of material and immaterial links, and not many have the particular skills necessary to deal with them. An Awakened individual looking to go underground usually starts weeks ahead, collecting their own nail clippings and letting their hair grow long, obsessively cleaning to remove any incriminating traces of DNA that might remain, destroying any fetish or tool with a strong connection to themselves that they cannot take with them.

> Winterhawk

> Y'all are making this more complicated than it needs to be. Fire solves damn near everything. Burn that shit down and let the boys coming after ya find some bones in the ashes.

> Kane

Getting a new SIN is usually step two, unless you really want to be SINless. Being SINless in our society makes life hard in a lot of ways. Most of us still need food, water, shelter; all that requires money. The only money you have to buy things with is what certified cred you can beg or steal, or from under-the-table jobs. At least having a fake SIN allows you to have an account, to earn an income for a while.

> I'm preaching to the choir (well, except for /dev/grrl), but most of you have been around long enough that even the least computer-savvy knows to open escrow accounts and the like so that they can access those funds just in case your current SIN gets burnt. Nothing sucks like having to abandon the cred and investments attached to one of your identities, and starting back at zero.

> Mr. Bonds

Because there's no unemployment for shadowrunners, no family or friends you can turn to for a meal or a loan without breaking your cover, no government homeless shelter and welfare system that recognizes you. Anything you want, you have to work for and get yourself. Self-motivation is key to a shadowrunner's survival. You cannot wait for Mr. Johnson to come to you with a job, you need to go pound the streets and haunt the shadowy bulletin boards of the Matrix looking for your next score.

NO NAME

Amateurs trust in not getting caught to maintain their deniability. Professionals go to more extremes, using magic and implants to disguise or remove their biometrics and identifiable features. Veteran shadowrunner groups know to check out their equipment before a run, removing clothing labels, serial numbers, and security tags that can give away information about the individual and the group.

The habits of a lifetime weigh you down in your shadow career, but none more so than your name. Everyone labels themselves somehow; few can avoid giving away something of their selves through a name. To avoid this, most of us in the shadows take to adopting handles, nicknames, and monikers that serve us in place of our real names and the fake ones on our SINs. Considering every one of us here grew up with Matrix access of one sort or another, I doubt there's a one that didn't learn about having an online identity separate from their meat identity as they were growing up.

> I've no doubt most of us here had a dozen or so. It is extremely easy to have multiple names in the global Matrix, it's a wonder to me why more people don't understand that the same can hold true in the real world. Absent of prior experience, the majority of people will take you at your word when you give them a name. The trick is to keep your lies consistent—and avoid situations where different people at the same place know you by different names. The betrayal of giving a false name is rarely forgiven easily, if at all.

> Fianchetto

The propensity for false names in the shadows means that many of us maintain the same shadow identity, regardless of the SIN we use. Our shadow identity holds our credibility on the streets. More than just reputation, names are a currency bought and sold by our shadowy info brokers. Stoolies will give up your name to buy themselves safety, fixers always look to expand their networks, and Mr. Johnsons are always on the lookout for who can do their next job, or might have been responsible for the last one they heard about.

Long story short: you need to abandon your old name completely, and embrace a shadowrunner name just as completely. Using your slave name will just get you in trouble. The name you use in the shadows will become

associated with you, and you can gauge your notoriety in the shadows by the reaction your name invokes. Young poseurs sometimes try to steal names, and you have to beware of those people trying to trade on your name.

> If this is about that guy in St. Louis, his name was Styx!
> Stone

> Not my fault the dumb breeder can't spell.
> Sticks

> In some traditions, names are passed on from one to another, and denote a position as much as an individual. There is some evidence that magical groups have discovered a way to actually pass on a mantle of power by the sharing of names.
> Man-of-Many-Names

> This had better not mean there will always be a Man-of-Many-Names. I don't think I could stand another one of you.
> Kane

If things get too hot for you, go somewhere else, drop your name, reinvent yourself again. It's always easier the next time.

DENY YOURSELF

Shadowrunners are deniable assets, it's our major (some would say sole) selling point. Whoever hires us, you can guarantee that it is something they do not want to come back to them. If you want to maintain your market value as a shadowrunner, you need to continue to be a deniable asset. When you sign up with anyone—a gang, a megacorp, a syndicate, a nation—your options become limited and your deniability decreases. You may be more reliable, from their perspective, but your loyalties limit your actions. Remember, everyone who joins an organization answers to somebody else, everybody has their responsibilities.

> Truth. You freelance for the mob, word's gonna get around, job offers from the other syndicates are gonna drop. If you ever get made, then you're working straight for the don or one of his capos, and you get your cut and that's it. No moonlighting working for the Yaks either, 'cause nobody's gonna trust you if you try and do that.
> 2XL

> Megacorps and government agencies have their deniable black bag units and "house runners," but the story's pretty close to what 2XL says. If you're working for them, then it's full time. You might eat a little better on a regular basis and get some wiz toys, but at the end of the day they'll still send you on suicide missions, and there isn't a retired shadowrunner's home.
> Mr. Bonds

> What about your island?
> /dev/grrl

> Hey, I earned that island.
> Mr. Bonds

What that means to you is: keep your distance. If you want to stay in the game, being who you are, without being answerable to anybody, you have to go against your instincts and deny yourself. If you work for just one Mr. Johnson, if you hire yourself out exclusively to one megacorp or syndicate, you limit yourself, what you are capable of. Worst of all, you get comfortable and lose your edge. When you trust the person you're working for, you don't look for them to screw you, or ways to screw them, or how to get out of dodge when things turn sour.

In our business, the more options you have, the better off you and your reputation are. It's always better to be on good standing with two Mr. Johnsons than the golden-haired boy of just one—what if he dies? What if he makes a mistake, and you end up paying the price? But you can't cut yourself off from everybody or work for every side. At some point, you have to make friends and moral decisions about who you work with or for.

> Some of us don't care to run for the Azzies, or the Dragon.
> Stone

- > More work for the rest of us, then.
- > Clockwork

On a more personal level, many shadowrunners find it necessary to deny themselves personal relationships. Without a steady job, with the dangers involved in our line of work, with the real need to be able to pick up and move at any time, making attachments with other people can be damn difficult, and somebody's always liable to get hurt. The serious psychological effects of living like we do are not to be underestimated. We live by adrenaline and stress without the supportive environments of friends and family, we get hurt and sick and have nothing to fall back on but whatever street docs we can find and afford to trust and hire, our team mates die around us and most of the time we don't even get a chance to mourn them properly or seek closure. The supreme ascetics fall back into extremes of self-denial or self-abuse, falling back on obsessive discipline or drugs to ease the load. Shadowrunners that get that far along tend to get help or self-destruct.

- > Take it from someone that knows, you can teeter on the ledge for a long, long time. There was a time when I had to chip a BTL just to feel normal, just to do anything but lie in my bed all day and feel the raw emptiness where they cut the baby out of me, and then I'd go out and dance and sleep with anybody that caught my eye. I lost fifty pounds in a six weeks, and spent days without sleep on long haul and that Japanese powdered caffeine shit you rub into your eyeballs. Lucky for me I had friends I didn't know I had.
- > Turbo Bunny

- > I don't want to get sappy and sentimental and talk about how we're all one big happy JackPoint family, but on that point I would like to point out that in the shadows all we have to depend on is each other. In my long experience, it is absolutely imperative to find those people whom you can rely on and stick by them, through thick and through thin, because at the end of the day those are the only ones that truly know or value your existence. To the rest of this world, I may as well be a ghost, but here, now, I am FastJack—and that's all that matters.
- > FastJack