

ARGENTINA

By Quijote

> Compiling newsitems for last year's *SOTA* file, I noticed headlines on martial law invoked in Buenos Aires. I've got to admit I didn't pay much attention; like most people I was focused elsewhere. When I started digging for the current upload however, I noticed just how much attention is heaped on Amazonia and Azflán, and how, outside merc circles, there's precious little chatter on Latin America's own third A—Argentina. After checking it out, I get the impression that is just the way the megas and the local regime want it. With all eyes up north, nobody's really been paying attention to the drek being pulled down south. For this little trip, I've arranged for Quijote, a veteran fixer of the local shadowscene, to be your guide. My sources say nothing goes down south of the Rio de La Plata that he doesn't know about.

> Captain Chaos

ARGENTINA AT A GLANCE

Government Type: Authoritarian Presidential Democracy

Population: 39,144,735

Human 72.5%

Elf 7%

Dwarf 4%

Ork 14%

Troll 2%

Other 0.5%

Estimated SINless: 35%

Corporate Affiliation: 45%

Education:

Less Than Sixteen Years: 60 %

High School Equivalency: 27%

College Degrees: 9%

Advanced Degrees: 4%

Major Ethnic Groups:

Spanish and Italian Latin 90%

Mestizo, Amerindian, or other ethnic groups 10%

Major Languages Spoken:

Spanish 90%

English 50%

Major Religions:

Roman Catholic; 92% (<30% practicing)

Protestant: 2%, Jewish 2%, other 4%

Currency: Argentine Peso (ARP) **Exchange rate:** ARP\$ 4.25 = 1 nuyen

Armed Medical Coverage

Where does Argentina stand in the churning chaos of South America? Well, the answer is “on the brink.” Of what exactly nobody really knows... the current national State of Emergency bodes ill, and I suspect times are going to get a lot worse soon enough.

FIGHTING WINDMILLS

You've probably heard the expression “climate of fear,” but if you've lived in Argentina for any amount of time, you know exactly what it means. Fear in one form or another is pervasive: terror of the Green Goliath Amazonia (perpetually poised on the border), dread of persistent poverty (unemployment hovers around 40 percent), fear of our own government (no waves or else), and a horror of the foreseeable chaos and uncertainty that are the inevitable alternatives. You've probably heard how Argentines are a passionate people. Well, these days it seems we're reduced to being passionately terrified, frightened of imaginary foes within and without.

In many ways, our present resembles our past, but don't be fooled. The pleasant and ambitious nation in the brochures is actually nothing of the sort. To anyone stepping beyond the patrolled sectors of downtown Buenos Aires, a casual glance tells a different tale, one of the *avenidas* strewn with the debris of riots and the roadblocks where corpsec APCs support state troopers. Starting to get the picture? Good. Argentina is all about appearances.

Argentina is in fact a deeply troubled country, ruled by a self-perpetuating oligarchy under the guise of a populist, if authoritarian, democracy. True power here lies not in the hands of the neo-fascist *Partido Popular Reformista*—which governs pretty much unopposed—but in that of its corporate puppetmasters.

> Listen to the man, people. Arrojo & co. are fascists to the marrow, opportunists and sell-outs masquerading as patriots and nationalists.
> Antifa

> Say what you will, but Fernando Arrojo has kept the country going through good times and bad. How many of you can say that of your government? We've had to give up a few things. So what? Haven't you? We're independent to enjoy the things we are given. Without Arrojo, we'd be speaking Portuguese!
> Xeneize

Argentineans abide a regime that has curtailed civil rights and increased the gulf between the haves and have-nots, because all our alternatives seem worse. The popular view (until recently) has been that, unlike his predecessors, Presidente Arrojo has at least kept (some of) us employed and out of Hualpa's claws. The Amazonian threat has worn thin though, despite the State's continuous cant of remaining vigilant and defending the homeland. How did we reach this sorry state of affairs? Well, there's a tale....

> Too true. After what happened to Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, and the close call two decades ago, fear of Amazonian aggression is always on people's minds. Moreover, if it wasn't, the state-biased media and awareness campaigns make sure it is.
> Allende

> Easier to rule unopposed if the people are more afraid of Awakened bogeymen than the secret police.
> Nero

> You mean all those mercs are just pulling garrison duty?
> Hickman

> No, every so often you get a flare-up, triggered by smugglers running the Rio de la Plata, a botched recon op or infiltration. The border remains heavily militarized on both sides, but Quijote is right, the promised Amazonian offensive never quite comes.
> Picador

FORGING A LEGEND

It hasn't really been the best of times or the worst of times. Well, not until recently. The jury is still out on where it will go from here. Argentina navigated the troubled first decades of the century better than most, worse than some. Like a tired old prizefighter too dumb to quit, Argentina kept climbing back on her feet. VITAS was a hard left hook and took a tragic toll, with the poor hit hardest. The Awakening sucker-punched us, with the pope's denouncement of magic and metahumans and then the Church's about-face only causing confusion and instability. Goblinization and the Night of Rage fanned racist flames, spurred by conservative Catholics, and the Crash kicked our economy in the groin for the umpteenth time... and all that was before the body blows really started raining down.

> Move along. Nothing to see here. It is South America after all.
> Decker del Sur

Green Giant, Red Blood

The real trouble began in the mid-Forties. Gorged on conquests in the North and the easy capitulation of Uruguay, Amazonia turned its expansionist claws south to discover that, unlike its previous opponents, Argentina was not daunted or unprepared (just arrogant and naive). Awakened forces backed by the Amazonian regulars swept into the northeastern provinces, to encounter entrenched Argentine lines. Over the following weeks fierce fighting against relentless and outlandish foes exhausted the defenders and they yielded ground. A naval counterstrike against Metropole was hit by unseasonal stormy seas and forced home. Before the campaign became a total rout, the Argentine Command ordered troops to regroup in the town of Resistencia on the River Paraná.

> Despite boasting one of the foremost militaries in the region and the Amazonian great dragons being engaged elsewhere, the Argentines had their hoops handed to them. Just goes to show how conventional armies still had a hard time coping with battlefield magic in the Thirties.
> Colonel Cobra

On the brink of defeat, Colonel Fernando Arrojo, a well-liked, field-promoted tactician, rallied his men to acts of bravery and heroics, his battle cry “¡Resistencia! ¡Muerte y Gloria!” becoming famous. When the Amazonian offensive came, the street-fighting was brutal, with blood exacted for every building lost. Arrojo employed scorched earth tactics, setting alight every quarter he had to concede. As Argentine numbers were whittled away, volunteers rushed to reinforce the ranks—at least until the city was cut off. The siege lasted 28 days; the defenders endured bombings, artillery barrages, tactical magic and hunger. As a

final desperate sortie was planned, the Amazonians abandoned the field without explanation—according to the history books, out of grudging respect for Resistencia’s valiant defenders—and a legend was born.

Sowing the Seeds...

So what really happened? The irony is that to preserve our freedom, our rulers sold us into bondage. You won’t find the facts in the official histories, but here’s what I’ve been able to piece together. With Resistencia about to fall and our conventional forces outmatched, our desperate government turned to the only power it thought capable of halting the Amazonian onslaught: the Corporate Court. Sure enough, Amazonia received a warning through diplomatic channels that if it didn’t pull back, the Court (eager to test its clout) would put its full weight and resources behind Argentina.

> Ever wonder why Amazonia dislikes the Nipponese megas almost as much as it does the Azzies? Well, MCT, Renraku, Shiawase and Fuchi sided with Aztechnology on aiding Argentina, Yamatestsu and Saeder-Krupp abstained, and Ares was overruled.

> Pyramid Watcher

> We had a leftist government back then, and the sell-out is one of the reasons today’s Democracia Siempre has a hard time gathering the growing anti-establishment factions under one banner.

> Tránsito Soto

> That and the fact many believe it’s been infiltrated by Hualpa’s agents.

> Pitt

> Which brings up another point. Native Indians, metahumans, and many critters suffer insidious prejudice because of a perceived association with Amazonia which doesn’t really bear out. The local conservative Catholic Church would like to add the Awakened to that list, but the corps are having none of it.

> Ambassador

The price Argentina would pay for the aid would soon become clear; the discreet concessions the government had to sign for deliverance allowed the megas to loosen legislative shackles and buy up local businesses wholesale with government collusion. A latter-day Resource Rush of corporate depredation swept across Argentina. Political opposition was steamrolled, corruption scandals suppressed, the government made appeasing speeches, and the megacorps helped build up the national army while plundering what they could, all the while the unrest and social divide continued to grow. Then, like now, the fear of Amazonian aggression kept things quiet—the unspoken dread of what might happen should the megas pull out.

Reaping the Whirlwind

The pressure cooker burst in ‘50 when now-General Arrojo and a cadre of high-ranking military officers (sponsored by old money families) deposed the corp-pandering leftist government and established a temporary junta to “return power to the people.” Thankful for a glimmer of hope all sorts (both leftists and Peronistas) flocked to his cause and the promise of restored democracy. This lent the coup a legitimacy it didn’t really possess. Publicly, Arrojo called for boycotts and strikes against all megacorps and subsidiaries, successfully urging workers to walk out and bring factories to a halt, helping restore the economy to its rightful owners—the Argentinean people.

Meanwhile, Arrojo approached the megas with a backroom deal. If they agreed to pull back into the shadows and appeared to hand power to “the people’s government,” he would protect their interests and ensure they continued to benefit from the previous arrangements. Arrojo was about to retire from military life and throw his hat into the political ring (fronting the fledgling nationalist Partido Popular Reformista)—all he asked for was the corps to hand a “symbolic” 5% of their local assets back to the State as a sign of good faith *and* sponsor his candidacy. A year later, “free” elections were held and the PPR rose to power on a platform of nationalism and economic and social stability. Of course, that much vaunted stability has come at the expense of the swollen numbers of poor and disenfranchised.

Arrojo has done his best to bolster the middle class, dependent on the megas and upper class for income and hence favorable to his policies as well as providing a convenient buffer between the ultra-rich and the ultra-poor. Meanwhile Arrojo’s pandering to conservative old money, the powerful military apparatus and almighty corporate interests became ever more blatant. You could almost hear the timebomb ticking down.

>>>BEGIN SIDEBAR

Timeline

2047: Amazonian forces invade and conquer sovereign Uruguay and advance on Argentina. Siege of Resistência.

2047-49: Corporate influence pervades government, wide-scale corruption and resource rush.

2050: Popular revolt followed by nationalist military coup unseats Leftist government.

2051: Gen. Fernando Arrojo cabinet is first elected to power with popular and covert corporate backing.

2051-63: Increasing unrest and founding of the Democracia Siempre movement. Legio secretly established.

2061: Jaime Prado disappears, insurgents gain an ally in the country’s biggest media group.

2063: Massive general strikes and walk-outs run from October through December, brutally repressed by police forces.

2064: Martial law declared in Buenos Aires after Easter processions turn into violent anti-establishment marches.

>>>END SIDEBAR

FACTS OF LIFE

Despite the current martial law, Argentina isn't a police state—yet. The clean and orderly streets, numerous public events and bullish economy hide the ugly truth that the *miserables* are kept down by the promises of a corrupt warhero, mind-numbing media, ubiquitous drugs and chips, and the weapons of roving security vehicles and drones. The appearance of civility and calm in Buenos Aires and other sprawls still survives under the growing pressure of the teeming millions living in the *villas miseria* (shantytowns) and in the corporations' factory towns and *ranchos*.

Before foreign runners get into trouble here, there are a few local peculiarities I should highlight. For instance, while Pedro Saraiman is allowed to pack a licensed automatic weapon as nod to the dangerous times we live in, Pedro Public better not be seen with anything bigger than a knife. Also gov-pol will always cede operations control and jurisdiction to corporate security (military units, on the other hand, dislike the practice). Also don't forget that a surprising number of people still buy into Arrojo's image and the PPR's agenda even in the face of the mounting evidence. The ranks of the *Jóvenes Patriotas* policlub are jam-packed, and most of the middle class won't think twice about turning you in to the cops if they think you're up to something subversive or anti-Argentine.

> Life would be more difficult for us shadow types if fewer of these people had dirty laundry. As it is, business is fine.

> Sepulveda

> Unless you run afoul of the secret police, the *Navaja Roja*. They really dislike free agents.

> Nero

The media are immensely influential in Argentine life, force-feeding apathy, resignation, and daydreams to keep people's minds off their daily misery. The regime even gets a daily one-hour primetime slot on all channels for patriotic posturing, infobulletins and recruitment drives. In return we get free broadcasting and Matrix access (it helps that the Censorship Directorate is understaffed), though I wouldn't buy a word from the nightly news at face value.

But as the saying goes, "You can only fool some of the people some of the time..." and the *miserables* have had enough of the wool over their eyes. The streets are no longer orderly; massive strikes, marches and clashes with security forces have become facts of life over the past few months. Smoldering wrecks of cars litter the side streets and the *Navaja* interventions are becoming more and more frequent. The pressure cooker is back on the boil and ready to blow.

> With a little push here and there from Amazonian agents, of course. Infiltration and sedition work better than bloodshed.

> Juan Solo

TANGO PARTNERS

If you believe the news, the situation on the Amazonian border has grown ever more tense. Truth be told though, the real trouble is on the homefront. The political climate in Buenos Aires has become one of turmoil and conspiracy. Nobody reads the markets like the megacorps and all the major actors are maneuvering their pawns to contain, take advantage, or simply escape the coming storm. It doesn't take much to see the Easter riots were only the first rolls of thunder from a squall that's been brewing on the horizon for a very long time.

> Things might be different if Arrojo and company were on top of their game, but the cabal is starting to show the strain of too many competing interests. A falling out is inevitable.

> Lariot

The most influential corporate players are represented on Arrojo's privy council—his *Consejeros Políticos*—the most powerful political force in the country, bar none. The council ensures that the economic climate remains favorable and supports Argentine independence. It counts all the Big 10 among its members, except Wuxing and Cross (who have no real local presence), and is chaired by Martim Ramalho, a Brazilian ex-pat who handles Aztechnology's interests and hates Amazonia with a vengeance. The *Consejeros* work together to ensure the regime stays in power, but they have the best interests of their corps at heart and under the current tensions the cracks in the fragile alliance are starting to show.

Of the big boys, Aztechnology has always been closest to Arrojo. A not-so-secret deal to outfit Argentinean forces through Spain (ensuring Azzie deniability) is the main reason our military remains formidable, but Aztech's Televisa also backs the establishment at every turn. The biggest financial player in town, BANCOMEX has proven invaluable to finance the *Legio's* conspiratorial agenda (I'll be getting to them soon enough)—Arrojo knows how much he owes the Big A.

Beyond that though, Arrojo and his cronies like to play favorites. Ares and Saeder-Krupp don't seem to be getting involved and are playing their respective hands close to their chests, while Novatech's starting to distance itself from the government. The Japanacorps, the Azzies' erstwhile allies on the council, are tired of Aztechnology getting preferential treatment

and being forced to outbid one another for presidential favor. These problems go beyond boardroom and backroom politics are stirring all sorts of trouble in the shadows.

> I've been privy to a few covert meets and I can tell you the Japanacops are planning to hang Arrojo out to dry. They're gonna shift their support to the more pliable Xavier Alameda, an up-and-coming "reformer" within the PPR—regardless of whether the Prez can bring things back under control or not.

> Tránsito Soto

> Like they say: it takes two to tango. Arrojo should know better.

> Trueba

MCT and Renraku control much of the tech and heavy industries and share most of the retail and commerce sector with Novatech and Aztech. They're helping Aztechnology subsidize the Ministry of Defense to subcontract mercs to patrol hotspots and silence the anti-government outbreaks from the *villas miseria*, since they have a vested interest in quelling the unrest.. With the mounting number of strikes and riots the past couple of months, the *Inspector General de Policia Delgado* and *Ministro de Defensa Ruiz* are starting to feel their assets stretched thin.

> The pay is good, but most mercs hate urban police actions more than any other type of op. Personally, I wouldn't touch one of these contracts with a ten-foot pole, but there are all types out there.

> Picador

> Yes there are, my dear.

> METalhead

> Why am I not surprised?

> Picador

Shiawase runs a lot of facilities in the hinterland, both energy production sites (dams, fission plants) and bio-agricultural facilities. However, shadowfolk know that, like Ares's and Yamatetsu's low-key presences, many of these facilities are actually weapons development and biogenetics labs. Shiawase Biotech and Yamatetsu are particularly infamous for tinkering with South American wildlife, both native to the pampas (prairies) and that smuggled out of Amazonia. Makes you wonder if Hualpa isn't right to support GreenWar and their ilk.

> Unexpectedly, Ares facilities also see a lot of traffic in paracritters. Wonder what's going on?

> Roaming Rake

> Probably developing war-forms like UniOmni's doing up Salish-Shidhe way. Or maybe it's something darker. What do we know about Ares' research on paracritters?

> Rubik

> Green Globe and Transys are other corps with a couple of research labs hidden away in the backwaters. Nobody knows what GG is doing behind its high fences but Transys is working closely with the local centaur population.

> Pampero

Novatech Argentina is the engine behind the mega's success in the region and has been since the Fuchi days. While the company's shrewd Managing Director António Ortega has nurtured ties with several Ministers, he's also been cultivating new friendships and expanding operations across the Rio de la Plata. Having cornered a number of lucrative grid contracts early on, Novatech has been gearing to change allegiances before Arrojo comes down. The regime's possible involvement in the disappearance of Ortega's close friend and Edimpresa CEO, Jaime Prado, has provided him with a personal excuse to back away from the establishment and cozy up with the opposition.

> Arrojo's lost a large chunk of his media platform and provided the opposition with potential allies in one swoop. Not only have the subversives been getting more airtime, but they've also started hacking into legal broadcasts with conspicuous ease. Maybe Novatech's given them some backdoor codes by way of a deal sweetener?

> Adaga Andina

> Nothing like a pirate newflash of a brutal police crackdown crashing episode 500 of *Punto Caliente* to grab Pedro Public's attention.

> Radiopirata

ALL THE PRESIDENTE'S MEN

President General Arrojo's future rests on how well he handles the current crisis. Corporate power is out of control and unemployment has hit the 40 percent mark. Before long, even his conservative friends (nationalists, Peronistas and hard-line Catholics) are going to be looking for suitable replacements in the Army and the Party. Fernando Arrojo has proven a wily politician, though, and he still has a couple of aces up his sleeve.

THE RAZOR'S EDGE

The **Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado** (SIDE), or *La Navaja Roja* as it is known on the streets, is Arrojo's not-so-secret police and intelligence arm—and the primary reason why it's taken so long to mount any significant opposition to his rule. The streetname, which translates loosely to “bloody razor,” is a tribute to their dreaded interventions: silent and precise, seeding terror among the enemies of the regime and disappearing without a trace.

SIDE is even more subtle and sophisticated than any of its twentieth century counterparts. When it isn't orchestrating health problems, traffic accidents, or having people publicly commit suicide, *La Navaja* also indulges in counterintelligence activities, ingenious social engineering and turning unwitting citizens into sleeper agents. People aren't (just) vanished from their homes or dragged in for interrogation anymore, they're plagued by untraceable electronic and magical harassment until they turn themselves in! Fear doesn't come from knowing what the SIDE does, but rather from not knowing how it does it.

> The SIDE uses the gov-pol's *Cuerpo de Intervención* whenever heads need to be broken.

> Indigo Montoya

> Not that the *Cuerpo* are pushovers. They're decked out with the best the corps have to offer in cyber and gear, and are handpicked for their badassness. You do *not* want to be on the wrong end of one of their sorties.

> Covadonga

> Though nobody's going to fess up, besides informers in all the shantytowns, SIDE's got agents in the right-wing policlubs and organizations like the Jóvenes Patriotas and Union Nacional Peronista, which they use as shock troops to keep the leftists in line and harass any seditionists in the *villas miserias*.

> Eco

> SIDE also runs external intel and is tight with the *ELES* in southern Amazonia and particularly insurgents in Uruguay.

> Adaga Andina

All is not well behind the walls of the Palacio de las Necesidades HQ though. SIDE is in the midst of a major internal shakeup after President Arrojo tired of former director Luis García's inability to bring in insurgent leaders and demoted him. Adding insult to injury Arrojo promoted Col. Emilio Torres, the former director of the magical branch, to his place.

> That's half the story. García orchestrated successful raids on several opposition meets and rallies, dragging in a bunch of the original leaders, at least until the *miserables* really closed ranks and SIDE failed to make further inroads.

> Tango2

> Can you say inside job? They knew exactly when and where! The *Cuerpo* comes in guns blazing. The *Navaja* ran cleanup—they always let some folks get away to spread the bad news. The *Cuerpo* are not so forgiving.

> Rosa Alva

SIDE has long stood divided by an internal power struggle between the military intelligence faction (led by García) and the magical intelligence branch (behind Torres) with the military dominating. Now the change has shaken the department deeply, but rumor has it that while newly-promoted Torres was settling old scores and ordering purges, Garcia and several of his closest allies pulled a vanishing act. Obviously Torres is thoroughly pissed and wants him brought back badly—and so the most hated and dangerous man in Argentina becomes the most hunted.

> That tusked bastard Garcia wasn't offed! I saw him two days ago down by the docklands skulking into La Cova with a crew. He's gone to ground and he's up to something.

> Indigo Montoya

> Like joining forces with his pal Ángel, or even Democracia Siempre?

> Nero

> Doesn't sound like his style and there's too much bad blood there anyway. He's more likely to persuade Córdoba into a palace coup. Nobody really knows the devious fragger's gameplan.

> Tango2

THE SECRET LEGION

Although this may come as a shock, I would like to emphasize that in his way Arrojo really is a patriot. He probably believes he's doing what's best for the country in the long run, and he's never been tied to a single case of abuse of office or active corruption. To back me up, there's a secret even some of his corporate allies would be surprised to know: Arrojo is a preeminent member of the *Legio*, a secretive and conspiratorial anti-Amazonian fraternity that boasts members in almost all the remaining Latin American militaries.

> Quijote's blabbing about the *Legio* like this makes it seem almost common knowledge, when it's actually a well-kept secret, one the shadow community generally keeps to itself around here. After all, you never know when you need a friend in a high place to pull your bacon out of the fire. Of the major corps only the Azzies and Ares seem aware of *Legio*.
> Adaga Andina

> Which explains why Aztech is so eager to pour support into the military. *Legio* sounds like a perfect ally against the snakes.
> Sepherim

> It's not as if they're all in national militaries anymore either; plenty of small merc companies have hidden *Legio* allegiances. You'd be surprised at some of the faces that show up at the Sparta Country Club, one of the *Legio*'s topdog hangouts.
> Picador

The *Legio* is strongest in Argentina and Peru, where high-ranking military officials belonging to the group run continuous low-level (and deniable) operations against Amazonia. It guarantees that the tense border situations aren't resolved and that Amazonian aggression isn't allowed to win out. The group's ethos ties together a bunch of strangely mismatched fascist ideals like pan-American patriotism, manifest destiny, and military honor with the base fear of being subsumed by the Green Goliath and possibly even suffering an indigenous and metahuman backlash.

Legio's other top man among the local military is Colonel Jaime Córdoba, an outspoken campaigner for Argentine independence (from *all* outside influences). His intolerance for corporate pandering keeps him from rising further while Arrojo is in office. The president would have the upstart discreetly dealt with—if the rank and file weren't far more loyal to Córdoba than they are to him. On the other hand, Córdoba remains quiet because *Legio* faces the unfortunate dilemma that it can't afford to change sides and back anti-establishment sedition. Even if it wished to, the political instability that would follow would leave Argentina open to further hostile/external influences—something it cannot allow.

> So even if the military have sympathies for the insurgents, they're between a rock and a hard place. Nice.
> Romeu

> No fraggin' way. Fascist conservatives the lot of them! People forget the German "immigration" after WWII. For all its Latin-posturing, that's part of *Legio*'s heritage too.
> Timmerman

> If worse comes to worse and a revolution seems inevitable, Cordoba and his cohorts will probably pull a *coup d'etat* if necessary – to provide the necessary stability for democratic transition, of course, just like Arrojo before them.
> Picador

THE FOURTH POWER

Arrojo doesn't have all the aces. His recent moves have alienated several media powerhouses, and in this country that's seriously bad news. In Argentina, the media's part of the apparatus to keep the people in line, bombarding the masses 24/7 with equal doses of nationalist grandstanding, anti-Amazonian propaganda, unending publicity and mindless daydreams. The omnipresent tridsets are complemented by colorful *mediapilares* (mediaposts) that brighten street corners with constantly updated (state-vetted) newsfaxes, corp ads and police bulletins, the megascreens lighting up the ragged skylines of the *villas miseria*.

For decades, Argentina's tv and later trid industry churned out endless hours of no-brainer soaps, chat and variety shows gobbled up by audiences throughout Latin America and beyond. Its production of low-brow entertainment lagging only behind Brazil's. In this respect, little has changed—only the names are new, to go with the new powerbrokers: AGE (Ares), Televisa (Aztechology), Sakura (MCT), Edimpresa (indy) and Canal Nova (Novatech). But today's intricate MPOV simsoaps, brain-numbing variety shows, inane gameshows, imported *newscafés* chains, and broadcast sports events serve a darker purpose. Most media is owned by Arrojo's corporate allies and cronies and produces brain-numbing, glitzy entertainment geared specifically towards keeping the people distracted while feeding them reactionary social indoctrination through beloved chatshow hosts and million nuyen gameshows.

> Some such productions have their transmissions laced with anti-Amazonian and anti-revolutionary subliminals, or ones that suggest the two are one and the same.
> Gato Vádio

- > UN investigators looked into that a couple of years back and found no evidence.
- > Ambassador

- > Have we forgotten who pays UN wages?
- > Rapaz Z

The regime's lockdown on media was pretty much complete until '61, when media mogul Jaime Prado had a falling out with the regime. Edimpresa dropped the reactionary line almost across the board and started giving airtime to the anti-establishment movements that were starting to come together. Prado apparently died in early-62 in a fire that consumed his La Rocca mansion. Nobody was ever recovered though.

- > Most people believe it was a *Navaja Roja* hit but unsurprisingly nobody saw a thing.
- > Juan Solo

- > Actually, some people thought he might have had an extreme case of SURGE, some sort of spontaneous combustion.
- > Doc Cuevas

Prado's unassuming trophy wife, Mariana, unexpectedly took over the reigns of the media group and took up her husband's agenda—both publicly and in the shadows. It's no secret she hates Arrojo with a vengeance, but it's less known she's found an ally in Novatech South Am's director António Ortega, a childhood friend of her husband. She's also showed sympathy towards the opposition movement, Democracia Siempre, giving them positive news-coverage when she can. Unwilling to order a crackdown which might reveal the cracks in his carefully built façade, Arrojo's been trying to appease Mariana Prado for the past couple of years with little success.

Just before Easter, a particularly scathing exposé on SIDE black ops in the *villas miseria* proved the final straw. The Ministro del Interior issued a warrant against Mariana for "suspected treason and unpatriotic behavior". Edimpresa cameras were on hand to broadcast her arrest, making things even more uncomfortable for the regime. In response they froze Prado's assets and suspended Edimpresa's license, pulling it off the air. Cue the Easter riots...

Pirate broadcasters like Buenos Aires' *La Voz del Pueblo* have taken up Edimpresa's torch, trying to break through to the middle class and show some of what's been going on behind the scenes. Pirates aligned with Democracia Siempre in particular are hacking into offline Edimpresa relays and other channel's broadcasts with suspicious ease.

- > Help from Novatech? Hope they haven't sold out.
- > Esteban T

- > Unconfirmed, but it would be disappointing. You'll appreciate other news I've heard though: the antifascist NGO International Spotlight has started calling in favors and pulling serious strings to get Prado on this year's Peace Nobel shortlist. It's an uphill battle, but several countries and some corporate sponsors have been surprisingly supportive. Wonder how Prez Arrojo's going to handle that hot potato?

- > Antifa

PODER AL PUEBLO

A chaotic cocktail of grassroots groups—policlubs, labor unions, civic and militant groups—that make up the challengers to the regime evolved haphazardly in the absence of long since stifled organized political opposition. The disorganized resentment and hopelessness that's been bubbling away among the *miserables* erupted into civil disturbances and revolt last Easter following Mariana Prado's arrest and the gag order on Edimpresa. They're only just starting to shape up into something more. If anyone can tap into this melting pot of diverse factions, sharing little but their opposition to the corps and the regime, it's the Democracia Siempre (DS) coalition.

- > Hard to make out the difference between activists and gangers in some places. In others, there's no difference at all.
- > Tránsito Soto

The leftist Democracia Siempre is cobbled together with hope, bringing together the three biggest opposition factions: the remains of the left-wing political opposition and policlubs, the surviving labor unions, and the network of community groups that have developed in the *villas miseria*. Besides the three main groups you also get metahuman rights groups, youth communes, student groups, native rights movements and societies, and support from international policlubs and NGOs.

After SIDE's initial culling, the surviving members of the DS's ruling Comité, had a 50,000¥ prize placed on their heads—and yet in a country renowned for deprivation no one has turned them in. The current Comité triumvirate are José Hidalgo (representing the left-wingers and youth groups), Raimundo Núñez (the unions and rural workers) and Eva Alba (the *villas miseria* communities).

- > There are rumors that the DS is getting covert help from certain megas and even elements within the Vatican, who aren't pleased with the Argentine hierarchy's toadying but the only money trails I dug up lead to anti-corp or antifa groups like Equity, Eidelweiss Pirates, and I-Spotlight.
- > Severotaku

Eva Alba deserves particular attention. A former social worker turned activist, she's become known as "Santa Evita." Most people believe she's either a spirit of some sort, or that she Awakened or SURGED in '61. I've heard that her skin glows with a light (some say *saintly* light) of its own, changing according to her mood when she speaks.

- > There's whispers that she's Evita Peron reincarnate, here to deliver us. Eva herself has never made the claim, though she hasn't denied it either.
- > Rapaz Z

IT'S A CRIME

Organized crime plays a peculiar role in Argentina's turbulent landscape. While it is the one sector of the economy that remains untroubled and prosperous, it too has its idiosyncrasies. On one hand, its drug and chip trade conveniently keep the unwashed masses and the middle class sararimen blissfully oblivious and apathic. On the other, the high-handed government inspired by ultra-nationalist ideals frowns upon underworld syndicates as dangerous loose cannons. Fortunately for the government, the problem had an easy solution.

Three syndicates have ruled the roost for the better part of this century: a blue-collar outfit called Los Lobos (after the boss Carlos Lobo) dealing in blackmarketeering, loan-sharking, illegal gambling and lotteries; the local branch of the Andes Cartel run by an ork known as Cantañeda; and, most relevantly, a multi-faceted organization run by the Buenos Aires crimelord, *el Ángel*. For non-locals it might come as a bit of shock to learn that Ángel is Colonel Gabriel Fernández, a career Army officer and the man responsible for Buenos Aires Civil Defense Division. You won't find his soldiers dealing on the curb—he delegates that to gangs—but they move his product, run protection scams and provide object lessons.

- > Not surprising. The military here have always been hip deep in racketeering, drug trade and smuggling anyway, Ángel's just expanded his sights.
- > Covadonga
- > The Andes Cartel wants a bigger slice, and there's a tidy bounty on Ángel's head.
- > Juan Solo

The Arrojo cabinet and SIDE have turned a blind eye towards *el Ángel*'s activities over the years. His competitors have suffered an inordinate number of crackdowns and setbacks, while Ángel's amassed a huge amount of underworld power and official clout. Some (myself included) think there's a connection, which makes sense since Fernández was a contemporary of former-SIDE boss Luis García on the rolls of the Military Academy.

- > We suspect Gabriel was a deep-cover sleeper for SIDE, whose goal is to keep the slums under control through vice.
- > Rapaz Z
- > Not doing a very good job, is he?
- > Juan Solo
- > Explains why Democracia had a couple of his chiphouses firebombed in La Boca and Quilmes though.
- > Doc Cuevas

The twist is that Arrojo's government may have made a serious mistake building up Ángel's organization. When Arrojo pulled the carpet on García, they never expected that nasty piece of work to do what he did, so there were no plans in place when García and cohorts went to ground. Simultaneously, Ángel severed his ties with SIDE, filed for extended leave from the Army, and placed his underworld empire on red alert. Time will tell how fragged up this will get.

- > Quijote assumes Ángel has sided with García, which sets the government and SIDE in line for a world of hurt, especially if the spookmaster throws in with Democracia Siempre. But, it's equally possible Ángel could simply be preemptively reacting to Torres' expected purge and protecting himself.
- > Severo
- > Whatever. Biz is about to get way more interesting.
- > Tango2

SOUTHERN SOLACE

Enough with the drama, time for some scenery. Colonized by the Spanish and recipient of a bewildering variety of immigrants like many Latin American nations, Argentina is home to a variety of terrains and climates almost as diverse as its cultural and ethnic heritage.

From the verdant pampas and jungles of the interior and North to the Atlantic coast and the jagged peaks of the Andes, there's something for everyone somewhere in Argentina: backwater *pampero* towns nestled near megacorp facilities and agricorp ranches; rough merc prefab-towns besieged by encroaching Amazonian rainforests on the banks of the Paraná and Plata; disreputable leisure towns owned by syndicates; ghost villages deserted by those looking for better lots in the cities; and pristine Andine slopes in places like the Bariloche resort, home to best skiing in the southern hemisphere for most of the year and the perfect out-of-the-way spot for the elite to unwind. The jewels of the nation are our cities, however. All seem to have peculiarities and characters of their own, but two stand out.

BUENOS AIRES

The pride of Argentinean culture is also a living remnant of Europe in the Americas. Buenos Aires is a stronghold of corporate power and strives to be the economic and political counterweight to Metropole. Despite the corp cruisers perpetually anchored at port, no one needs reminding that the capital is within artillery range of Amazonian forces.

> The competition between the two countries goes on at all levels. Argentina may be pissed Novatech is spreading its wings across the border, but Amazonia is livid that Buenos Aires continues to get twice the traffic of any of its ports.

> JWK

Though towering glass skyscrapers and arcologies have taken over downtown, the city retains its Old World charm. You can still find vibrant memories of another age in its picturesque colonial mansions and tree-lined avenues. In fact, roadways have been elevated to avoid heavy traffic in old residential areas like Alto Palermo and La Recoleta, where many of Arrojo's cronies and corp execs live among well-patrolled alamedas and breezy coffee-shops.

> One thing you have to give them—Argentineans know how to unwind. There's always something going on in Buenos Aires. Even these days, there seems to be a truce in place wherever people gather to have a good time. The music and dancing helps people forget the troubles . . . and provides a nice cover to conduct all sorts of business.

> Rosa Alva

Equally colorful is the central corporate district with MCT's Corrientes arcology (the biggest south of Tenochtitlán) towering over the Renraku Quarter (formerly Plaza de Mayo) and Aztechnology's amazing Nuevo Azteca-style waterfront complex. Also of note is Ares' impressive Retiro compound, which hosts the annual Buenos Aires Arms Fair (the biggest in South America).

Beyond the city core, in all directions, lies the legacy of poverty and oppression that's the regime's heritage. Buenos Aires is encircled by *villas miseria*, shantytowns of narrow streets and leaning buildings that are home to an inexhaustible supply of unskilled labor for corporate factories and mills and menial work. Each *villa miseria* has its own personality and lifestyle: some are governed by gangs, some by dedicated community groups; but in all of them the resentment towards the entrenched establishment is ready to explode violently. Though not as big as the Easter uprisings, protests involving thousands of people regularly march downtown to make their voice heard—only to meet police lines with corp security and drone backup.

Some of the megas run "mercy clinics" on the edges of the *villas miserias* for PR. Free basic medicare and some prescription drugs. Some of the docs even run chopshops in the back and will sew you up, no questions asked.

> Yeah, you can see the pamphlets, signs and bloodstains on the sidewalks for days after. Really puts Pedro Sarariman on edge, no matter how many times the news tells him the situation is under control. It's getting so you can cut the tension with a monowhip.

> Salazar

> Wanna bet those prescription drugs have "unforeseen" mood control side-effects and cause sterility?

> Doc Cuevas

> A colleague of mine vanished when he was investigating a tip that the mercy clinics might be linked to last year's outbreaks of cholera and typhoid in the La Boca slums.

> Newshack Anonymous

> With the government looking the other way, the clinics are also where the corps run human trials for new cyber, bio and genetech on volunteers. A few hundred nuyen a month to test run unproven tech looks much more attractive when you don't have food in your belly.

> Marcos

- > Which makes them appealing targets for tech poachers and they know it. Security is tight.
- > Tango2

Be careful though, in these troubled times, Buenos Aires has restricted licenses on cyber and weapons for “self-defense” to only card-carrying corporate citizens or contract mercenaries (with ID).

RESISTENCIA

Backwater township turned national icon and rough merc haven, Resistencia still bears the scars of its history as the bloody battlefield of yesteryear—a memorial to Argentine resistance. It remains only partially restored as a living reminder of the Amazonian threat.

- > Resistencia is also an unlikely tourist hotspot. The *Memorial Glorioso*, a cenotaph built over the mass grave used for Argentine dead during the siege gets a steady stream of visitors both local and foreign. Good site for a discreet meet, too.
- > Don Segundo Sombra

Resistencia has become the primary staging point for the war/defense effort in northern Argentina. It serves as a command hub for border operations along the Río de la Plata and the North. Besides the military bases and merc company encampments, the town boasts a commercial strip and a flourishing red-light district. Both a military airstrip and one of the few civilian airstrips sit a couple of miles south of the town, but military presence makes trying to slip in that way problematic.

Life isn't easy or pleasant on the border. Real action is usually short-lived, although things can get brutal. Sometimes it's an honest mistake, like the young feathered serpent that chased a deer out of the jungle and into the river last month; other times, trigger-happy partisans or military hotheads on either side will start trouble—the result of which is blown out of proportion for public consumption by the Ministry of Communication.

- > Surprisingly, Resistencia is also a major smuggling hub. The military governor turns a blind eye to traffic in and out of Amazonia and down the Andes route in exchange for generous kickbacks. Los Lobos are particularly strong here.
 - > Speedy Gonzalo
- > The border is far more porous than either country likes to admit. Getting small groups through in small boats and hovercraft under darkness provides a steady income to small operators in the Tri-river area.
- > Oriental 33