

SURVIVING AMONG GIANTS

by Don Dinero

> Someone once told me that most Latin American governments qualified as criminal organizations. The gag might be only partially true, but there's still plenty of real underworld activity down there. I've asked Don Dinero at Iquitos' Green Eden datahaven to give us an overview of the main players, from nationalist drug dealers to smugglers running the Andes.

> Captain Chaos

Transmitted:

Crime is Latin America's most profitable business field, no doubt about it. Some drug lords are wealthier than corporate CEOs and command immense power and respect within their domains.

So, why is it that foreigners almost never hear about them? Barring a few, well-publicized detentions, these people have remained in relative anonymity. Is it because of modesty? Not really. Fame simply is not their friend. Here in Latin America, discretion isn't a commodity, it's a necessity.

When ORO became the global corporate empire we love to hate as Aztechnology, it didn't forget its original source of power. The Azzies were determined to monopolize drug production in Latin America, whatever the cost. Those *narcos* who didn't bow to Tenochtitlán learned that the price of independence was their lives.

> The Azzies didn't just rely on some high-profile network to take out the competition. Aerial strikes, commando raids and heavy-duty magic—they used the full repertoire. That's what I call a war on drugs!

> Ryan

> The Cartels aren't exactly slouches in the violence department either. Snitches and traitors are dealt in the goriest possible way. A favorite is to slit their throats and pull out their tongues through the cut. They call it "the Medellín tie."

> FlyT

With Aztechnology going for the throat and the nascent simsense technology eating their profit margins, the Cartels were forced to rethink their strategy. Huge amounts of money were invested in legitimate businesses in Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil, giving them much-needed wealth and, above all, political clout. When Hualpa and his scaly cronies took over Brazil, the Cartels were ready for them. The two sides hammered out a deal, born of convenience and mutual hatred of Aztlan. Amazonia would let them carry on with their biz more or less as usual, and in return the Cartels helped stabilize the fledgling country and became a hidden line of defense against Aztlaner expansionism. The Cartels were dead, long live the Ghost Cartels.

> Both sides have been trying to get an edge over the other since then. I suspect what's going on in Ecuador is related to this bigger struggle.

> Machiavelli

For the past few decades, the Cartels have struggled to secure a niche between the two enemy countries and deal with challengers like the yaks in Peru's and Triads in Chile, but this could change pretty fragging soon. The drug lords are setting their eyes on the horizon, looking forward to a not-so-distant future where they once again have the upper hand and they've got a card or two up their sleeves.

Awakened Gold

The Ghost Cartels finally scored big when they began dealing Bioengineered Awakened Drugs (BADs). How the *narcos* managed to modify Awakened plants is still a matter of intense speculation, but the results are undeniable. BADs have taken the global market by storm in the past couple of years, offering junkies a tainted glimpse of the Awakening. I say "tainted" because it seems that some of these puppies have, ah, interesting side effects besides a strong addiction. Whether this is intentional or not remains to be seen.

> Ok, can anyone enlighten those of us who don't do Awakened psychotropics?

> Blaqasphalt

> A Novatech suit I knew was hooked on Trance. He developed Alzheimer-like memory problems after a year of intense use (gotta love weekend parties in Punta del Este). Last I heard they'd shipped the poor slot to an asylum.

> Johnny Hotel

> The Cartels' latest gem is called Overdrive. Originally believed a failed experiment, it turned out to be powerful mojo for Matrix users. Get it if you can, 'cause it's worth its weight in gold.

> Tweaker

> Junkies who fry their own brains deserve what they get.

> Bosco

> Maybe, but that'd explain what I heard at the Green Eden not so long ago. It seems that one Cartel cut a deal to have an Otaku gang run their Matrix ops. Wanna bet the kids get paid in OD?
> Decker del Sur

The Cartels have cornered the BAD market so far, but others are racing to close the gap. Many are investing heavily in R&D, but most go for the easy route and try their luck with a few extractions. Exactly what part of breaking into heavily guarded labs in the middle of the rainforest qualifies as "easy" is a mystery to me, but that doesn't stop Johnsons from hiring runners. Just remember: if the Cartels find out you're doing this, odds are you'll never work again in Latin America ... or live long enough to get out.

Forward to the Past

I first heard of the Great Colombia policlub in Cali five years ago. For those lacking a handy history knowsoft, the Great Colombia was a failed Independence-era country, which included the lands of Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. The group's nationalist, anti-Aztlaner platform smells like another Amazonian op, but I was surprised to learn that its main backers were none other than the Cartels.

From what I've learned, it seems that a few drug lords never forgot their Colombian roots and they're now playing a very dangerous game, attempting to reclaim what they believe was once theirs. Henry Uribe in particular has been very active, contacting enemies of Aztechnology in an attempt to gather support. His reputation as a former Colombian senator has allowed him to meet with the UN's General Secretary, politicians and corporate authorities.

> Uribe is at the top of Aztechnology's drek list. How the frag he's still alive is anyone's guess.
> SergioP

> Let me spell it for you: A-M-A-Z-O-N-I-A. With Aztlan on the rise and Yucatan the bloody mess it is, anything that keeps the Azzies off-balance looks good in Hualpa's book (especially if he can later manipulate this new buffer state).
> Serious Paul

> Chummer, anything that upsets Aztechnology looks good on anyone's book. It might as well be Lofwyr or Damien Knight who's protecting Uribe.
> Lone Gunman

Needless to say, the policlub has been declared a terrorist organization by Tenochtitlán. Folks belonging to it are sent to Gorgon Island, a maximum-security prison off the Pacific coast of former Colombia. *La Gorgona*, as locals call it, is an Azzie version of Alcatraz: no one gets out. Ever.

> Don Dinero is starting to believe the Azzie's propaganda. I've met people who escaped and lived to tell the tale, though admittedly it wasn't a pretty one.
> KAM

> Great Colombia is a useful, all-around tool for the Cartels. Need an Aztechnology facility blown up? Just give the policlubbers some mil-spec weapons and claim it was in the name of life, freedom and the pursuit of novacoke.
> Che

> Funny you mention that. Didn't the Azzies lose a whole shipment of weapons to air pirates last year?
> Lynch

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Of all the underworld players you're used to, only the East Asian syndicates have a truly significant Latin American presence. **The Yakuza** are very active within Peru and Amazonia, with sizable power bases in both countries' Japanese communities. Most oyabuns in Japan tend to ignore their existence, though, as their Latin American brethren are too meta-friendly for their tastes.

> The Shizuia-gumi's decadence has brought shame to our respected brotherhood with their actions.
> Niitaka

> Oh my, a samba-dancing tusked oyabun. The horror, my friends, the horror! <display_sarcasm>
> Bung

> Some Japanese gumis have discreetly begun supporting the Nagai-gumi in an effort to "correct" the situation in Amazonia. Dinner in Tokyo, wetwork in Metrôpole and breakfast at Chiba's Silver Palace, anyone?
> Neon Flower

> While the Yaks tear the holy Nipponese drek out of each other, Codigo Verde and those freaky Quiumbandistas are moving on the Japs' turf. Give it a while and there won't be any Yaks left in Amazonia.
> Bira

The Triads have quietly built a stronghold for themselves in Chile. Both the 88 Cranes and the Silver Carps have managed to coexist with the Ghost Cartels, based on the principle that there's enough profit for all. Yes, there occasionally is honor among thieves.

> It's not going to last. The Mapuches have staged several attacks against all three groups. Sooner or later one will be tempted to disguise its own strikes as just another terrorist incident, and it will be downhill from there.
> Valpo Vic

Like an ugly pest that won't go away no matter what you do, **Tamanous** cells are also active all over the continent. Its organlegging activities thrive in Latin America's misery, but the group is usually spread too thin to be an actual force anywhere. The only exception is Caracas, but given the city's corrupt nature and abundance of chopshops that's no surprise.

> <tips_hat>
> Carmaux

WHO'S WHO IN THE GHOST CARTELS

by Kika

> Kika worked for the Olaya Cartel most of her life, beginning as a drug mule and graduating to razor girl. Shortly after being caught by Montevideo's police, Kika's bosses tried to terminate her "just in case." I contacted her before the surgeons gave her a new face and got this as parting gift for the Cartels.
> Don Dinero

Twelve years. Twelve-goddamn-years of whoring myself for them and they screwed me in the end. I might as well print it on a t-shirt. Well, I got another slogan for the *cabrones*: hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, especially if you put a sniper's bullet in her brain.

Though people often think of them as a monolithic entity, the Ghost Cartels are in fact an alliance of smaller groups, each with their own turf, hierarchy and MO. Many come and go with each police raid or Azzie wetjob, but some have survived long enough to be considered the ratpack's alpha dogs. These have learned to cooperate, share resources and coordinate their actions, increasing their power far beyond what they could do alone.

> The Cartels' leaders hold a secret "Ghost Summit" every year where they discuss long-term goals and strategies.
> FlyT

> I've heard that rumor before, but I highly doubt the Cartels' would give Aztechnology the opportunity to wipe out their entire leadership with a single hit. Ares nuked Chicago for less than that, y' know.
> Picador

The Andes Cartel

This is what people usually imagine when they think about South American drug dealers. It's one of the three Guayaquil-based Cartels, though most of its operations take place in southern Aztlan and Argentina. The group's leader is Manuel Tamayo, a cattle rancher whose family was murdered by Aztechnology Corporate Security. He fled Colombia and took over the Andes Cartel, turning it into his private army and striking against any and all possible Azzie targets.

Tamayo is said to be the most outspoken supporter of the Great Colombia policlub. Many suspect the movement receives supplies through FARC guerrillas, which were absorbed by the Andes Cartel years ago. Word is that the dwarf also fancies himself a second Tirofijo, the legendary FARC commander, and that he has taken part in several field operations.

> Kika's right on the money. Tamayo has personally tracked down and executed five of the six men who killed his family. The sixth has proven to be a bit more difficult to catch, as it's none other than Diego Chávez, Aztechnology's Chief Operating Officer.
> Pyramid Watcher

> The other Cartels love Tamayo—he does the dirty work while they reap the profits. I wonder how long it will take for "Tirofijo" to recognize he's being used.
> Andean Soldier

The Olaya Cartel

Formerly the Cali Cartel, the group had to pull a hasty relocation to Guayaquil when Aztechnology declared open season on them. Rather than fighting their way back to Colombia, the leaders invested their remaining money in Ecuador and Peru ... and Spirits did it pay off. Olaya is the biggest faction within the Ghost Cartels, with so much political and economic clout across Latin America that “Olaya Corp” is a common joke.

You might recognize Olaya’s top dog, as Jaime “the Boss” Salazar also happens to be KondOrchid’s CEO. Salazar is a young maverick, barely in his thirties, but don’t let his age fool you. His uncle and second-in-command happens to be Henry “the Diplomat” Uribe, who complements Salazar’s ingenuity and audacity with his political experience and chessmaster mind. Any time the GCs need to cut a deal, they send the Diplomat.

> You can thank Uribe for supporting laws that restrict BTLs in several countries, thus favoring the Cartels’ goodies.
> El Sprito

> Uribe is also tight with the Catholic Church, of all organizations—his brother Alfredo is a Bishop in the Roman Curia.
> Padre Pedro

The crisis in Peru is a potential gold mine for the Olaya Cartel right now and its pay-per-hit Shining Path terrorists, but Ecuador’s situation is worrisome. President Monasterios’ reform policies are striking Cartel interests, while the Genesis Consortium is quickly becoming the dominant economic force in the country. Time will tell if Salazar and Uribe can handle these threats.

> When he’s not busy running the Cartel and KondOrchid, li’l Jaime is slowly becoming a Grand Tour regular under the friendly guidance of former supermodel Claudia Romanov.
> Mizz Manners

Smaller Cartels

There are several smaller outfits spread throughout the region, some of them run by a bigger group’s proxy and some independent. The former includes the **Castañeda** group, which has survived everything the Argentinean government has thrown at them in the past few years. Among the latter is the **Morales Cartel**, which has a near-monopoly of Bolivia’s drug exports. They have very good ties with Velazco’s government, though it’s hard to tell who manipulates whom.

> The Morales are El Comandante’s hidden hand, especially in Peru and Paraguay.
> Don Dinero

> That might cause trouble with the Cachoeira Cartel in Ciudad del Este. After Amazonia and Argentina, these guys aren’t in the mood to tolerate another meddler, even if it’s one of their own.
> Kurupi

FREE TRADERS

by Privateer

> I first met Privateer while looking for a discreet way to enter Bogotá. He’s been a smuggler long enough to build a solid rep, so I figured he’d be the right man to write about this.
> Don Dinero

John Hawkins had it right when he set sail from England to smuggle slaves to Spain’s Silver Empire. An indy trader can make good profits in Latin America, taking advantage of largely unguarded borders and corrupt authorities. Just like the sixteenth century though, you’re toast if the military catches you.

Many smugglers use the Andean Highway, taking goods brought to Chile from Asia all the way up to southern Aztlan. Others take the road the other way, bringing supplies from Amazonia to rebels in Argentina and other countries. Still others use the highway as a backdoor to Amazonia’s rainforest—a t-bird loaded with telesma can set up a talislegger for life.

> More like cost him his life. The Amazonians don’t take such thefts lightly.
> Lynch

> It takes some skill and a decent airship to hop across the Andes range, but sensor coverage is so patchy it’s usually worth it.
> Lone Ranger

Air Piracy

As the rainforest overran land routes and insecurity became routine, people began looking to the skies for a solution. Nowadays most cargo is transported by lighter-than-air aircraft and t-birds, which allow corps and smugglers to

bypass the aforementioned problems. Most of them, at least. Unfortunately, if someone wants something badly enough, he'll find a way to get it. It was a matter of time before criminals got their own airships and piracy reached new heights (pun intended). Air pirates are so common now that GloboTrid's latest show is *Pirate Queen of the Andes*. 'Nuff said.

> GloboTrid's even basing it on Maia Escobar, a real pirate. She was so effective that when the Amazonians finally caught her, they chose to give her a Letter of Marque against the Azzies.

> Bandeirante

> Maia's the exception to the rule. Most pirates are fed to piranhas.

> Paquito

Unlike their flashy Carib colleagues, though, air pirates go for maximum discretion. They lay low and stay near the treetops or mountains, scouting the surrounding area with drones and land-based sensors they've previously hidden. This isn't a rigger-only biz: deckers who can find out zeppelin schedules and routes will always find a job here.

Once they find a suitable target, communications are jammed while choppers and armed drones take care of any escorts. These are usually just drones or armed merchants, but it varies depending on the cargo's value—so don't come and crying to me if you meet a full wing of F-B Eagles. A few gangs have those nifty Aguilar helicopters, though most of those are second-hand relics from Aztechnology's tenure in Bolivia and Yucatan (hey, you use what you can get).

Once the escorts are under control, a small group boards the freighter. This is a very risky operation that can easily kill rookies. Some crews simply choose to pump enough lead into the target until it agrees to land at a specific spot, where the pirates quickly loot any valuables before the cavalry arrives.

> Aerial Industries' latest model works as your standard LTA craft while you cruise the skies or stand by for targets, enhancing the blimp's low signature with stealth materials. The trick is that part of the ship's structure can detach itself and become a small fighter plane with enough firepower and maneuverability to take on those slow-moving zepps.

> Air Sailor

> Aztechnology Security pirated the design and began camouflaging a few as innocent-looking cargo blimps. I'd call it poetic justice, except that one of those killed two friends of mine. Bloody things are even showing up near Denver.

> Josie Cruise

> What about water piracy?

> Salgari

> Gingerbread Man sent us another colorful update on the Caribbean League. You might want to check it out in this very same download.

> Captain Chaos

> That doesn't cover everything, Cap. There are plenty of Jolly Roger flags on the Amazon River, raiding small cargo boats and holding passengers for ransom. The Rio de la Plata is a completely different story. Military patrols make piracy pretty much a death wish down there, though short-haul smugglers have it slightly easier.

> Artemus

GAME INFO: LATIN AMERICAN CRIME

The fall of the Latin American drug lords -and their rebirth as the Ghost Cartels- has previously been detailed in the *Aztlan* and *Underworld* sourcebooks. *Shadows of Latin America* updates some of the information therein and addresses the status quo in 2064.

Criminals stripped of their homeland by Aztechnology, the Ghost Cartels have evolved into a continental network of drug syndicates, mastering the game of survival, cutting deals with governments and corporations to ensure their continued existence and prosperity. Now that they feel on safer ground and have new goods on the market, the drug lords are planning a spectacular comeback. It might take years of meticulous planning, but one day they hope the Great Colombia will arise from Aztlan's corpse. Colombia for the Colombians, that's what the Cartels want people to believe.

The Ghost Cartels have a deadly foe in Aztechnology and Domingo Ramos' David Cartel (see *Aztlan* chapter, p. XX), but if knowledge is power then the drug lords have an ace ready to trump their opponents. While not as powerful as Amazonia or a megacorp, the Cartels know what makes Aztechnology tick—after all, they used to be partners in crime.

Internal conflicts, like the brewing struggle between the Morales and Cachoeira Cartels, are another challenge. Many envy the fortunes Jaime Salazar and Henry Uribe have amassed and the clout they wield. Others resent that the fight with Aztechnology is mostly paid for with the blood of the Andes Cartel. All these cracks could be what Aztechnology needs to take down the Cartels once and for all, or allow smaller local upstarts to extend their grasp.

Spread as they are throughout Latin America, the Ghost Cartels could be an integral part of any run set in the region. Their interests are insidious and pervasive: whether it's a street dealer hooking an unsuspecting runner on the latest BAD, or a plan to rescue a top member of the Great Colombia policlub from the dreaded Gorgon Island, there are plenty of ways for creative gamemasters to generate Cartel-themed games or even campaigns.

The Cartels activities and interests need not to be limited to Latin America though, as they have ties with several underworld powers all over the globe. Even these allies might prove to be less than reliable, as they might try to obtain the Cartels' secrets. The following are only a fraction of the possible hooks to get runners involved with the Cartels:

The Good Doctor

Zeta-ImpChem is trying to produce its own brand of BADs, but the Eurocorp's efforts have failed so far. Having learned the identity of a geneteck expert in the Cartels' employ, Z-IC hires the runners to extract him while he is visiting Metrôpole for medical treatment. Things get complicated when their target is carjacked by a local gang, who take him to the *favelas*. The runners must find their mark in Metrôpole's slums before either the gangers tire of terrorizing the old man and kill him, the Cartels catch up with them or other corps and syndicates hear about the situation.

Hooked

Intrigued by rumors surrounding Overdrive, especially its alleged Dissonance effects, the Chilean cell of Ex Pacis hire the runners' team for a little mission. They want the runners to steal a crate of the drug that the Cartels are smuggling in KondOrchid LTAs over the Andean Highway (see game information for Bolivia, p. XX). The brats pose as a tribe of Resonance Otaku from Argentina, who've been interfering with the rogue otaku's plans lately. Once the runners deliver the goods, Pax's followers intend to rat them out to the Cartels, hoping to remove both witnesses and opponents.

Blood for Blood

Manuel Tamayo is no friend of Aztechnology, but he's ready to make a deal with the devil, if that's what it takes to bring down Diego Chávez. He wants the runners to help him contact Oliver McClure to offer him the opportunity to get rid of another Chávez—Domingo Chávez to be precise. Domingo is one of McClure's biggest foes on the Aztech Board and his removal would significantly ease McClure's situation. All McClure has to do is use his position to give Tamayo and his runners a window of opportunity against Diego, and Tamayo will order his FARC rebels to take down Domingo while visiting Panama City. Of course, Diego Chávez isn't Chief Operating Officer for nothing, and if the runners aren't careful he'll get a whiff of Tamayo's plan.

BIOENGINEERED AWAKENED DRUGS (BADs)

Genetically modified Awakened drugs are a specialized but extremely lucrative market. Though the Ghost Cartels were the first to create them, competition is rife. Many individuals and organizations are trying to reproduce the Cartels' feat, but most opt to target their R&D facilities in Latin America's rainforests. Of course, the drug lords protect their secrets with extreme security measures, making this a risky proposition at best.

Gamemasters are encouraged to create their own BADs, using the rules and guidelines in *Man & Machine* within certain limits. Awakened drugs are both rare and expensive; the Cartels have successfully genetically tweaked Awakened plants to produce enhanced compounds, but without proper harvesting and preparation (perhaps involving magical rituals in some instances), many grant no effect. Mass-produced Awakened drugs are still a *narcotraficante's* wet dream.

Overdrive: A nova-hot stimulant hitting the market, Overdrive is especially prized by foolhardy otaku and deckers. The drug enhances the brain areas where ASIST processing occurs, giving users +2 Hacking Pool for its duration (10 – Body hours, minimum 1 hour). Long-term use of Overdrive dangerously unbalances the brain's electrochemistry, eventually leading to psychotic breaks (and possible Dissonance in the case of otaku).

Trance: This is a highly addictive opiate, popular with partygoers who can afford it. It puts the user in a blissful trance for 1d6 hours, during which he is also aware of metahuman auras in close proximity. Once Trance wears off, though,

users must make an Essence (6) Test or permanently lose 1 point of a Knowledge skill (gamemaster's choice). If the character rolls all ones or suffers an overdose, she gains a Mental Flaw like Amnesia or Oblivious (see pp. 22–23, *Shadowrun Companion*)

Ecuadorean Gold: A highly addictive narcotic in gel form. While its origins are unknown, this BAD is believed to be produced from the honey of gene-modified bees fed on a specific type of orchid whose pollen causes hallucinogenic effects. It infuses the user with an overwhelming sense of euphoria and quasi-sexual pleasure for 10d6 minutes. Ecuadorean Gold is popular because it has particularly mellow aftereffects, but it is both highly addictive and makes users inexplicably susceptible to mind control magic and even mundane commands if authoritative and forceful enough. Consider an addict to have Willpower -1 for every month of use when resisting thought control or probing spells and social adept powers, or when resisting the urge to obey mundane commands while under the effect of a dose.

Compound	Availability (per dose)	Cost	Street Index	Legality
Overdrive	6/3 days	750¥	4	4-X
Trance	5/2 days	300¥	2	5-X
Ecuadorean Gold	5/3 days	450¥	2	4-X

Compound	Vector	Speed	Addict.	Tolerance	Edge	Fix Factor
Overdrive	Inhalation	1 Turn	6M/5P	2	3/50	3 days
Trance	Inhalation, injection	2D6 Turns	5M/4P	2	5/50	3 days
Ecuadorean Gold	Injection	2D6 Turns	5M/6P	2	3/50	5 days

Note: Availability and Street Index are for Latin America. A character might have to wait longer and pay much more to get a dose elsewhere.