

The Louisville Free Trade Zone



Louisville Free Trade Zone

>>{ Hoi chummers, welcome to the River City 2070's style. Time to dump all the barefoot hillbilly nonsense and face the facts about the Jefferson Sprawl. Y'all heard me right; I said sprawl. The Louisville metro area covers more than five thousand square kilometers sprawls right across the Ohio on both Kentucky and Indiana. There are three airports that are constantly hopping and a population of about 1.5 million people. Sounds like a sprawl to me. }<<--Kigmatzomat

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Flashback: 20th Century

In the late 1990's the Louisville city limits proper was only a small section of what was considered the Louisville area. Back in the 1940's and 50's there were a lot of little communities that got in the habit of considering themselves cities of their own. Some had their own police, sanitation departments, mayors and town councils and all the political drek that goes along with putting up a city limits sign.

Around the late 1970's all these little towns had run together so that a number of people weren't even aware that there were towns there. The politicians didn't give a drek, and kept on passing laws that only affected ten or twelve block areas and collected city taxes. This came to an end in the 1990's when the trouble of keeping up all these little townships became too much work. Between the dozen little towns, Louisville proper, and Jefferson County governments, there were too many politicians in the game.

Weird thing is that some people realized this and changed it.

Rallying around "mayor for life" Jerry Abrahamson, a unified Louisville-Jefferson County government was formed. Townships got to keep their names and pretty city limits signs but didn't have to deal with maintaining an independent government. This streamlined the hell out of the government and got it to the point where Louisville actually worked.

This was a good thing because Louisville's suburbs had got to the point they weren't always in Jefferson county or even Kentucky. Upper class "Private Communities" scattered across Bullitt and Oldham counties in Kentucky and Jeffersonville and New Albany in Indiana helped house the 1.2 million people in the metro area. For decades the region has been known as "Kentuckiana" and is often referred to as the northernmost city of the South and the southernmost city of the North.

Because of the relative efficiency of the highways and intercity loops, you could be get from any point in Jefferson county to any other point in around twenty minutes; thirty if you were going to or leaving from somewhere just outside the county. Rush hour typically added only 15 minutes to the commute of the average driver. Needless to say, Louisville did not suffer from the freeway shooting problems that plagued California. We also had a piss-poor mass transit system totally reliant on busses because someone had a pathological hatred of light rail.

While you're probably shaking your head wondering what this has to do with now, I do have a point to get to. See, if you don't understand how Louisville worked back then, you won't understand what happened during the Resource Rape, the Crash and the Night of Rage.

Or rather, what didn't happen.

Flashback: 21st Century

When the megacorps were set loose at the turn of the century, they began romping and stomping all over the natural resources of North America. Guess what; Kentucky really didn't have any that weren't already being exploited to the hilt. There were no minerals worth plundering, and everywhere there was coal someone was already mining it. The forests are on rough terrain and not worth the effort of logging. The land isn't suited to cultivating too many things and the cash crop of choice, tobacco, was already using any usable terrain.

The Night of Rage became the Long Weekend of Worry. We had some unjustified lynchings but things were too ... sprawling to really work up a good region-wide riot. The poor in the West End had it the worst, of course. The inevitable fires killed several hundred people and the run-down area just ran down some more.

>>{Anyone who lived in Portland back then would never call that the "Weekend of Worry." Too many people died or lost their homes in the fires to trivialize it.}<<Old Pete

>>{And anyone who went through that Night in New York, Chicago, or LA would've called it A Minor Inconvenience.}<<Eeastcoast

>>{If I did to your family what happened to mine we'd see who's Inconvenienced, you little punk!}<<Old Pete

>>{Yeah, time to close this thread. I understand Pete's point of view but remember: this is being written by someone whose mother was two during the Night of Rage.}<<Administrator

So nothing happened. Absolutely nothing changed in Louisville itself. Oh, a few of the larger companies went to megacorp status; like General Electric, Ford, Toyota, and Humana-Providian but aside from their accounting departments no one could detect a change.

Well, almost nothing. In 2032 a misguided attempt to protest the corporate activity in the western states, a small group of ecofreaks tried to blow up a section of the Colgate production plant that was "polluting the Ohio River and making Mother Earth cry out in agony."

>>{The place was a seething cesspool on the face of Gaia. }<<--Heather

>>{Not until some misguided fruitloop blew up the chemical recovery system and turned the region into a toxic zone, you drek head. }<<--SidheSellsSidheShells

The Blast

Had they done their homework the terrorists would have known that the bomb they placed wasn't attached to the production facility but to the chemical reclamation and waste disposal system. See, when Colgate got the permits to put a potential source of toxic waste they were ordered to install a massive waste system to keep the outflow in the safe zone.

In a cost-cutting maneuver, the company had cut a deal to provide waste disposal (read "sewage") facilities for the city of Jeffersonville in return for some hefty tax breaks and a little cash inflow to maintain the disposal facility. This meant the facility was equipped with a wide variety of chemical scrubbing systems and utilized chlorine and ozone in large quantities. When a bomb ruptures all the storage tanks and vaporizes the chlorine you get a series of secondary explosions. And if those explosions have a ready supply of ozone around to act as a catalyst you get **large** secondary explosions.

>>{Is that right? It's been a while since I dropped out of high school but still that seems wrong. }<<--RicknRoll

>>{It's close enough for government work. Basically, they blew up the only explosive things on site and happened to do it the same day as chemical delivery. Freak of bad luck since the bomb shouldn't have done more than mucked up the chemical recover plant. Instead it set off a disaster-movie-of-the-week chain reaction. }<<--MOS89D

The blast was right on the river and was audible miles away. It wasn't a particularly "pretty" explosion. The gases didn't generate big pyrotechnic displays like a cheap Trid gasoline bomb; this was almost entirely concussive as the facility detonated like a fuel air bomb. A shallow crater twenty feet deep and almost a hundred feet across was created and windows on virtually all buildings facing the river for a quarter mile were transformed into high-velocity shrapnel, eviscerating thousands of wage slaves. Riverfront Park, a recent addition to the area, was first stripped bare then nearly submerged by the thirty-foot wave.

>>{What isn't mentioned very often is that there were a handful of survivors at the park. The landscaped berms deflected the blast and debris. Then there were fuel tanks for river barges were right next to the park to deal with.

>>{Imagine a nice, pretty day, a three year old playing in a sandbox when suddenly the ground shakes, your ears bleed, and you can see trees sent flying over head. When the tot digs himself out of the sand a river of fire forty feet high erupts not that far away from where the car was parked. Welcome to my 3rd birthday.}>> --River Rat

Had that been the only damage from the blast it would have been a disaster. But it got worse. Dozens of vehicles on the Kennedy and 2nd Street Bridges right near the Indiana shores were hurled into the river or flipped over, including several fuel trucks. A thousand liters of gas gave that spicy reddish haze of hell that every disaster needs. But why use a dash when you can use the whole bottle? Diesel tanks, used to refuel the

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barges and riverboats, had been split by the blast but had remained quiescent until given their queue. More than a million liters of fuel stretch all the way across the river and five miles west from the burning I65 Bridge, igniting the banks as it went. A coal barge was caught in the blaze and got hung up against the supports of the Sherman Minton Bridge. The heat from the coal fire melted the road deck and warped the frame before the barge burned through and sank.

Over a thousand people were killed between the blast and the fire. More than twelve thousand were injured. The river burned for 8 hours and the fires it set continued for another 4 days before finally being controlled, forcing twenty thousand people to be evacuated. The river fire damaged the locks, dams, and the supports of both bridges.

Commerce across North Am was significantly disrupted for six days. Louisville houses a major rail line, a major north-south and east-west interstate artery and the United Parcel Service (UPS) primary air shipping hub (Hub 2k). Most people forget that the Ohio itself is a high-volume thoroughfare for barges carrying tens of thousands of tons of raw materials. It took 2 months to reconstruct an intermediate bridge and the river was rendered unusable for six months while the locks and dams were repaired. The concept of "disaster area" could have had Louisville's photo next to it. Several companies went out of business and the annual "Thunder over Louisville" fireworks show was cancelled for the first time since its inception.

>>{I'm still bitter about that. It's not like we didn't need a party to raise our spirits. Too many molly coddlers thinking the explosions over the river would have been "traumatic."}>> --Secretaryit

>>{Damn straight. I flinched every time I heard thunder for years. I joined the Army when I turned 18 because I figured that it would either kill me or cure me cheaper than the decades of therapy I'd already been through.}>> --River Rat

The bombers were never found; according to anonymous tips left by their so-called friends the fools had planned on watching the explosion from the river walk. The explosion should have turned them to paste and the wave would have washed their fluid remains back into the river in an act of cosmic justice. Poorly written eco-manifestos were found in their homes, along with prototype detonators and timers.

Despite the extent of the devastation, it wasn't as bad as the Tower falling onto the Loop in Chicago. That didn't stop astral devastation particular to the Ohio Valley. See, the bed of the Ohio in this area is a giant fossil bed. The long-gone local Indians referred to this as a land of the dead. Add one massive simultaneous death knell and a lot of environmental mayhem and you manage to charge an astral battery of some kind.

Downtown has a permanent background count and an unnatural occurrence of spontaneous spirit appearances. Fortunately the effect is fairly localized and fades roughly a mile from the river. The majority are water spirits but the incidence of spirits of

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all ilks is about 400% the norm. The spirits are generally harmless, or at least cause no harm, but they are disturbing.

>>{I've never heard of spontaneously manifesting spirits. Is 400% anything to worry about? }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Do you really think that all the spirits and noncorporeal critters out there were summoned by someone? Spontaneous manifestation happens. Rarely, on the whole, but it happens. Still, it's so rare that it means in Louisville someone who works downtown, right near the river where the odds are greatest, will probably only a see a spirit once every couple of years. }<<--Hunter4Hire

>>{Most of the reported manifestations are creepy but not harmful. Mobs of little glowing trilobites, a cross between a crab and a cockroach, swimming through the air. }<<--LilJohn

>>{They aren't always harmless chummer. Those things go nuts around foci. Saw a mage once get cornered by a swarm. She wasn't thrilled when they were kinda sniffin' at her. She completely lost it, though, when they glommed onto her power focus. She was screamin', cussin', and started letting loose seven kinds a' hell on these things. I dunno if it was the bugs or the strain of the spells but she was bleeding out her nose when she stopped. }<<--Lillard

Since then several Indian groups have wandered in to investigate and lay claims. So far they've been stymied.

>>{It's understandable that the local powers that be wouldn't want outsider injuns coming in and laying claim to some territory, but this is just plain odd. The fossil beds, previously a park, are now cordoned off and inaccessible by the general public. Armed guards wearing FTZ security badges patrol the area constantly. }>>--Feather Not Dot

Creation of the FTZ

Anyway, this came at a critical junction during the big hoo-hah of the day. The CAS was splitting off and money was tight everywhere. Louisville found itself an orphan as neither the CAS nor the UCAS wanted to deal with the cost of reconstruction. So in a fit of political wangling that would have made Mayor for Life Jerry proud, the Kentuckiana region pulled a few pages from the Denver playbook and got itself declared a free trade zone.

This had some significant corporate backers; Ford had both a light and heavy truck manufacturing plant, the UPS air freight hub for all North America, several companies had warehouse and repair facilities in Louisville as it cut 1-2 days off any shipping times via UPS at no cost, and there were numerous data hosting facilities. The Louisville FTZ would rely on corporate sponsorship and certain transit fees to rebuild itself but would be an extra-territorial region affiliated with both the CAS and UCAS.

>>{Freaking traitors to their country is what they are.}<<--Patriot165

>>{Which country, yankee?}<<--Re-re-R.E.Lee

>>{It's been two centuries, give it a rest or I'll close the thread. }<<--Edministrator

>>{Anyone care to explain how a city completely ensconced in the UCAS became a CAS/UCAS FTZ? }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{It was the chaos of the day. Kentucky waffled quite a bit about whether to join the CAS or the UCAS. We've got our share of Appalachia and tend to say "y'all" so the CAS seems like a good choice. On the other hand, the UCAS is wealthier and has a better infrastructure. Louisville established itself as an FTZ while the fight was still raging in the statehouse. Both Washington and Atlanta figured it was better to ensure they had some kind of grip on the city. Indiana had always felt that Jeffersonville and New Albany were foreign territory. As no one wanted to foot the bill for repairs they all willingly let the area go. }<<--HistoriCal

Fort Knox was almost a deal breaker for the whole FTZ as neither side wanted to cede an FTZ that much firepower. Louisvillians argued that Denver's security situation was obvious unworkable so a single, unified defense force was required. The CAS and UCAS delegations both agreed in theory. Things were at a deadlock until documented proof of spontaneous spirit manifestations was provided. This was at the time when most people heard "magic" and thought "Ghost Dance." Fort Knox was considered a valid first-responder to an uncontrolled magical threat.

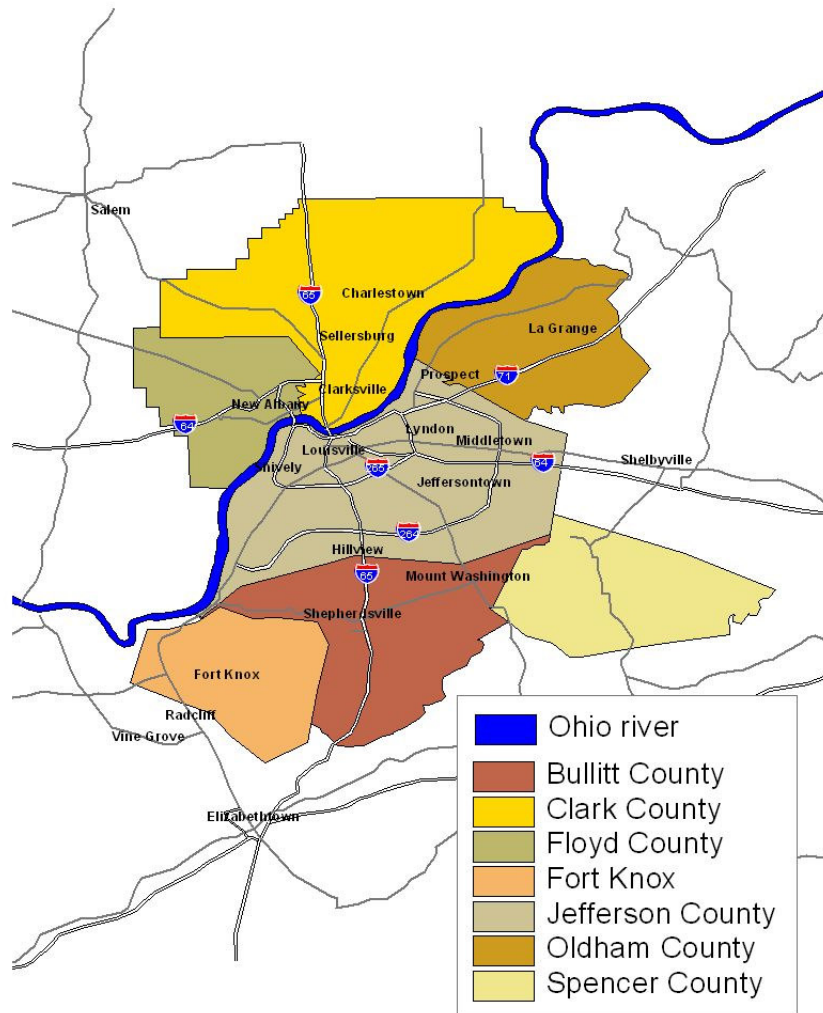
>>{Like a bunch of tanks would do anything to spirits. }<<--HeinousJohn

>>{Spirits are pretty resilient to mundane weapons at the human-portable level but a tank round will disrupt anything I've ever seen conjured. }<<--Flak

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>>{Don't forget elemental rounds. Water spirits hate fire and tanks have had various flammable rounds for quite some time. }<<--Tracker

Louisville wound up with the entire Kentuckiana region; Jefferson, Bullitt, Oldham & Spencer counties in Kentucky and Floyd and Clark Counties in Indiana. The total land mass is right around 5,300 km². There's a few chunks of land on either side of the previous borders that got shifted but nothing to get huffy about. The only main break with the old county boundaries was at Fort Knox in Hardin & Meade Counties.



FTZ Legal Code

Our legal code is just as byzantine as anywhere else but can be summed up easily. Anything legal either in the CAS or UCAS is guaranteed to be legal in Louisville.

>>{That "or" is pretty important. Certain medicines, bits of technology, magic, and "services" can be had in Louisville that can't be had either to the North or to the South. Since Louisville is a FTZ, SINers from the CAS and UCAS can legally come here to get their jollies, pop some pills, or gather semi-illicit cargo, all without officially leaving the country.}<<--TheDickster

>>{Kentuckiana's got a history of this kind of thing. Selling weapons to Indians, running slaves/supplies back and forth during the Civil War, providing booze along the river during Prohibition, even selling fireworks that were illegal to use at the point of sale! This is just a bigger scale.}<<--HistoriCal

Note that Louisville doesn't necessarily outlaw everything that both the CAS and UCAS do. We've adopted some of the more tourist-friendly policies from across North Am. The drinking age is 18, prostitution is legal but unionized, gambling is legit as is marijuana and a few other light recreational drugs with license.

>>{Drug license?!? Think of the children!}<<--SallyDruthers

>>{Get off your moral high horse lady. Consumer Drug License holders must be child-free and on birth control implants, vehicles will only operate in AI-driven mode, and they cannot hold any job that is expected to negatively impact the public good i.e. no doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, cops, equipment operators, mechanics, etc. The licenses are public record and companies are allowed to restrict which positions are allowed to be filled by anyone with a current CDL. }<<--OldPete

>>{If it's available to tourists it sounds like it could be fun. }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Yeah, tourists and the do-nothings that would be on it anyway. With the high tax rate on drugs it amounts to a stupid-tax. }<<--SimpleMan

>>{Because a lot of corps have rules about drug use regardless of jurisdiction the city is laden with high end "spas" that can flush all traces of the drug out of your system. It's not cheap but beats getting canned once you get home. }<<--Quicklime

>>{Dude! Is BTL on that list? }<<--FourTwenty

>>{I'm amazed anyone on BTL would live long enough or be motivated enough to look up that reference. No, BTL is not allowed. }<<--OldPete

>>{Not entirely true. The legislation limits simsense feeds to certain signal parameters but the limits are well past "cold sim" even if they don't go all the way to "hot sim." This is essentially the "California Hot" level.

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>>{It isn't advertised as such, but several of those "spas" QuickLime mentioned have "mental stimulation" products that are essentially BTL. If their accounting records are to be believed, such "mental stimulation" accounts for some 45% of most spas revenue stream. I suspect that there are off-the-books products that are being bought in scrip or casino chips handed directly to the spa employees. }<<--Zodiox

>>{Well sonuva.... Just when you think you couldn't get any more bitter you learn something like this. }<<--OldPete

Extradition out of Louisville is on a case-by-case basis. The requests require joint approval by the Governor, Mayor and Zone Security Commandant. The Governor can grant permanent amnesty to petitioners of any nationality, which has made the FTZ a magnet for popular exiles and peoples of celebrity causes. Outgoing Governors are the most likely to grant amnesty, especially to controversial individuals.

The Mayor can, and occasionally does, block extradition. They can't grant amnesty which means that extradition can happen with a change of office or in the political climate.

>>{They don't say it loudly but the Zone Commandant can block extradition too. It makes the FTZ a convenient place for friends of the Commandant (or his government) to hide until the heat dies. }<<--MOS89D

A good thing is that citizens of the FTZ do not pay income tax. That was another contentious point during the negotiations but the fact neither CAS, UCAS or either state was funding the reconstruction brought the point home. We do have the highest sales tax in North Am plus spectacularly high taxes on transportation (roads, train lines, lock & dam fees, and air fare) and entertainment (hotels, rental cars, taxis, gambling, prostitution, etc.). Most of those impact tourists though so it's no skin off our noses.

>>{Gambling is one of the few places legit people use hard currency instead of cred. Louisville has several casinos so chips and payout tickets are one of the prime ways to get paid. }<<--Ridgemont

>>{I thought casinos were down on people taking chips. }<<--Ricky Tick

>>{Used to, they were against it to stop counterfeiting chips. The new secure RFID chips are randomly numbered with a ridiculously large name space. Guessing a valid chip number combo is less likely than picking the lottery numbers. The chips are scanned by the tables so dupes will likely be found quickly. There's just no easy way to dupe a quantity of chips without the master list. Now they just frown on chip theft to avoid the cost of replacement. }<<--Aces&8s

>>{Chips in the 100-1000¥ range from small, "independent" casinos near Fort Knox are the common cred of the gray market. Those places will let people "rent" quantities of chips for a fee .

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Some of these chips haven't been played in years and only see the inside of their casino on the rare occasion a fixer wants to have the chips validated. }<<-Aces&8s

>>{There's a hefty trade in good sized (1,000-10,000¥) sports book payout tickets. Many fixers will buy them to use in place of certified cred. }<<-Hague

>>{Wait a tick. If runners get paid with a large gambling ticket do they pay taxes? }<<-Brak

>>{Yeah but its for the best. Tax evasion is something no government shows mercy towards. }<<-LilJohn

>>{Matter of fact, the FTZ has a tax adjustment form that covers all undocumented taxes, like small gambling payouts and "independent entertainers" (aka prostitutes). Many reformers have targeted the so-called "graft tax" but it is such a cash cow that it will never be repealed.

Runners are advised to pay the Graft Tax under one SIN each year. Several politicians involved in payoff scandals have avoided tax evasion charges by showing they paid the Graft under an alias. For obvious reasons no SINs are seriously examined when paying the Graft Tax. }<<-IRSnake

Louisville Borders & Paperwork

Identity in Louisville is pretty murky. "Natives" were given dual CAS/UCAS citizenship as well as the new Louisvillian status. Those born in Louisville are given a Louisvillian ID as well as inheriting the citizenship of their parents. Immigrants retain their original citizenship and acquire a Louisvillian ID once they are declared residents. Most folks who can trace their families back a couple of generations in town have triple citizenry (CAS/UCAS/Lville), recent immigrants are dual (Lville/country of origin) while tourists or those who haven't been granted residency only have single citizenship.

>>{Post-Crash2.0 Louisville became a goldmine for IDs. Anyone who could find an apartment could manage to get a LouisvilleID in those early days, so a lot of tourists did so. The tangle of entry and exit information plus the historical web of citizenship resulted in some hardcore abuses of the system. Shadow runners in the area found themselves in the perfect situation, as they leveraged every safe house and squat to gather fistfuls of IDs valid across North Am. }<<--NameGiver

Entry into the FTZ is pretty simple for UCAS citizens: make sure your Comm is in Active mode and drive in. I64, I65, and I71 are all equipped with some pretty serious sensor gear that scan vehicles and as long as the identities provided by the Comms match the sensor scans you'll probably get in no problem. If the sensors don't match, or the computer decides to "randomly" target you, your vehicle will be flagged to go through the checkpoint. Unlike days past, the checkpoint is 90% automated, with a huge array of sensors looking for drugs, explosives, undocumented people or animals, weapons, etc, etc. The staff are really there to see how stressed you are and, sometimes, to perform an astral scan.

>>{Yeah, "random" my dermally armored tuckus. My ID is legit, totally pre-Crash, and I get searched every freakin' time I enter the city. Doesn't matter what vehicle I'm in, it's even happened when I was on a bus. }<<--Bigger'nyou

>>{While I know for a fact that there are biases in the programming, they should not go off every time you enter the city. Most likely someone forged your ID at some point and the security system has it flagged. If you can avoid crossing the border for 103 days it will drop off the priority list. }<<--Zodiox

>>{103 days, huh. That's handy to know. Can I ask how you know that? }<<--CoreDump

>>{You can ask but do not expect me to answer. }<<--Zodiox

If you try to dodge the checkpoint you will draw the wrath of Zone Security, which is not fun. The initial response is a police interceptor. This isn't your standard police cruiser but a performance vehicle like a Westwind only modified. A trio of combat drones will

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accompany the interceptor; two ground, one air. Gridlink will clear traffic and they will open fire if you don't pull over.

>>{For some reason no one is really quite clear on, there was a t-bird run on Louisville about three years ago under the guise of a cargo hovercraft. It happened late at night and there was a lot of politicking to keep it off the Net so not many people knows about it. It caused a heck of a lot of damage and resulted in some serious upgrades. About two miles from the checkpoint there is a scout-class LAV on all the interstate entryways and some heavy combat drones. }<<--ManinBlue

>>{Anti-tank drones to be exact, equipped with a mixture of armor defeating missiles. They use a military-grade remote targeting system to establish an active lock based on the sensors on the pursuit vehicles, the LAV, the AT drones and the extensive fixed border sensor net. Avoiding a sensor lock under those conditions would require an EMP. }<<--UDP

>>{Drek! How does a city afford that kind of gear? }<<--TwoCanSam

>>{I think it's covered later but FYI there are several military R&D facilities in the FTZ that use Fort Knox as their proving ground and Zone Security gets experimental milspec below cost in return for being beta testers.

Not everything works as well as advertised so sometimes you cut a break when the new Mega Zap-O-tron 688k the Zoners are fielding explodes. Hopefully you aren't in the blast radius when it does.}<<--RiverRat

Besides the interstates, there are a number of secondary roads that cross the zone border but those are more of a hassle to legit folks and an opportunity for shadowfolk. The checkpoints aren't quite as automated and if there are any problems with the equipment, staff, or an involved inspection it can cause backups that take hours to resolve. Locals from just outside the FTZ that routinely visit the city can get special access licenses on their vehicles that let them bypass the checkpoint inspection about 75% of the time.

>>{Reduced automation on secondary entry points means lower grade sensors and no LAV or AT drones. They still have a pursuit vehicle and the standard combat drones but the drivers tend to be less experienced. }<<--UDP

>>{Sneakin' in isn't as bad as you might think, assuming you are smart enough to use a clean vehicle and avoid carting in ammo or guns. Chemsniffers are something the city did splurge on at every access so ammo smuggling requires some very careful procedures or hidden routes. Best bet is to hire a legit local or two to be decoys and send them on a few miles ahead. It may take you a day or two to make it in, but eventually the Zoners will snag your decoy, letting you breeze by. }<<--SlickRick

>>{So what do you do about weapons? }<<--CptLock

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>>{You arrange something with a local. There are numerous ways that hardware makes its way into the streets. A lot of it is the friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend who works at a corp facility and can make some stuff vanish. Plus there is so much cargo run through here that sometimes things fall off the back of the truck, if you know what I mean. }<<--SlickRick

CAS and UCAS citizens can simply board a plane or suborbital and be inside the zone in just a couple hours with no more hassle than visiting any other city within their respective borders.

>>{Air travel's gotten a lot better thanks to the automated security checkpoint, at least as long as your ID is solid. I suspect that the original flight at Kitty Hawk was delayed and the industry has yet to catch up though. }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Louisville airports aren't bad but they're nothing special. Standiford (aka Louisville International) is getting long in the tooth but it's in a good location. KIA is pretty spiffy but out a ways. Convenient to the casinos, though. Book a private charter to Bowman if you can pull it off. Security's lower on the whole. }<<--TowerPower

Louisville Environment

Weather here is utterly, statistically predictable: it will change dramatically in ten days. Much like the storied "lake effect," the Ohio River has an impact on weather. A 60km length of river measuring 2km wide can have a significant thermal effect. In conjunction with the tall hills that form the walls of the Ohio Valley to the north and south, we have what amounts to a climatic "pot hole" that weather fronts either dodge or are trapped in.

Temperatures range from 35C in the summer to -15C in winter.

Winters are generally mild with bouts of storms. Snow, as most people know it, is rare. A slushy ice, known locally as "wintery mix" is the norm. It coats everything with a 5mm layer of ice at first and then the slush drifts and refreezes into foot-thick slabs of ice. Out of towners, even northerners used to meter-deep snowfalls, have lots of trouble with the black ice and luge-like ice ruts that form.

Summer has an average of 45 days of 30+C. The FTZ may be called the Vegas of the Midwest but our heat is anything but dry. Humidity tends toward 75% and often reaches 90%. If you don't know what that means, turn your shower on at just below body temperature and run it for 15 minute with no ventilation. Now you know what Louisville summer is.

Spring and fall last about a month each and aren't worth discussing. Rain and gray clouds interspersed with strong winds are all they amount to.

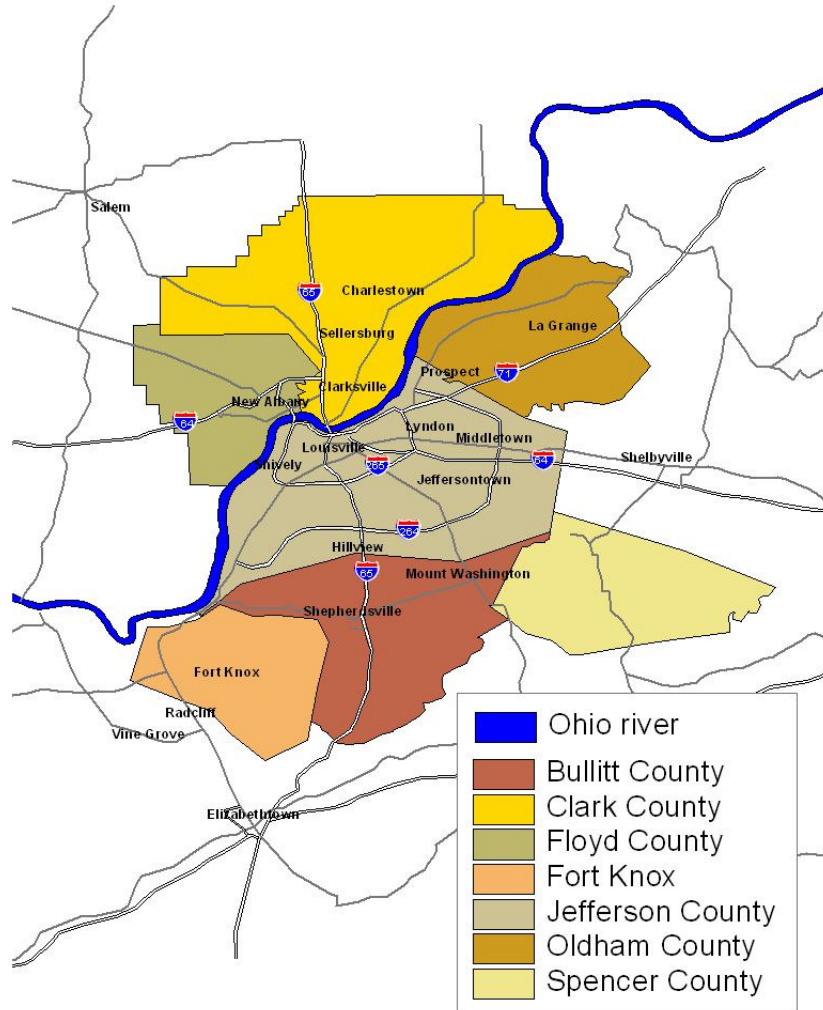
Seattleites should avoid claiming they have it worse. Louisville, and most cities in the Ohio Valley, see fewer days of sunlight than Seattle. Less rain but more humidity and endless gray skies.

Unlike LA where the pollution causes the gray, here the low hanging clouds trap pollution. The valley walls keep out winds and concentrate the crud in the air. The region is filthy with highly allergenic plants, so no allergy is left untouched.

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Louisville Areas

A true river city, the city grew organically around from the Ohio River. Way back when, the falls of the Ohio (no Niagara, think 3' rock ledges) blocked river transit and forced people to portage around. Add a mile-wide river to cross, and you have an excellent location for a city.

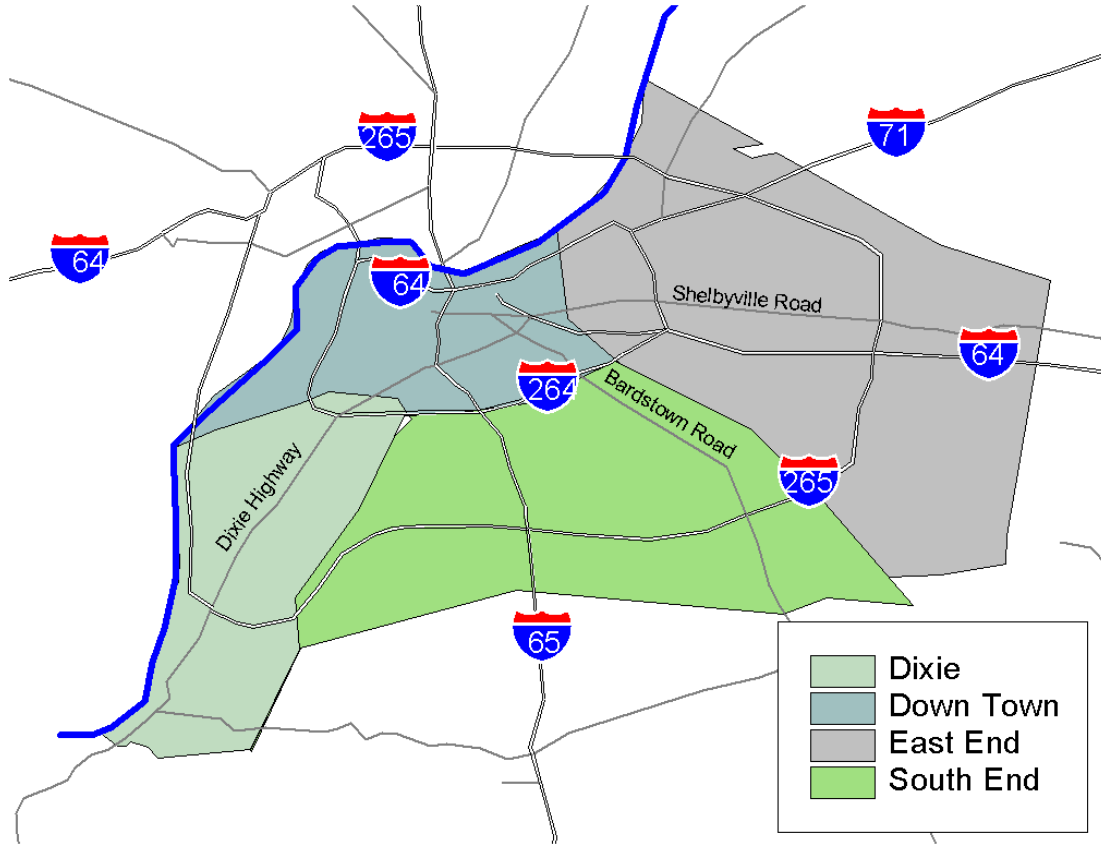


Think of the city as a pistol crosshair. You have I65 going north/south and I64 going east-west. I264 makes a half loop around the southern portion of the city and the whole shebang, Kentucky to Indiana is circled by I265. A wide, irregular buffer surrounds I265 but its good enough for government work.

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Jefferson County

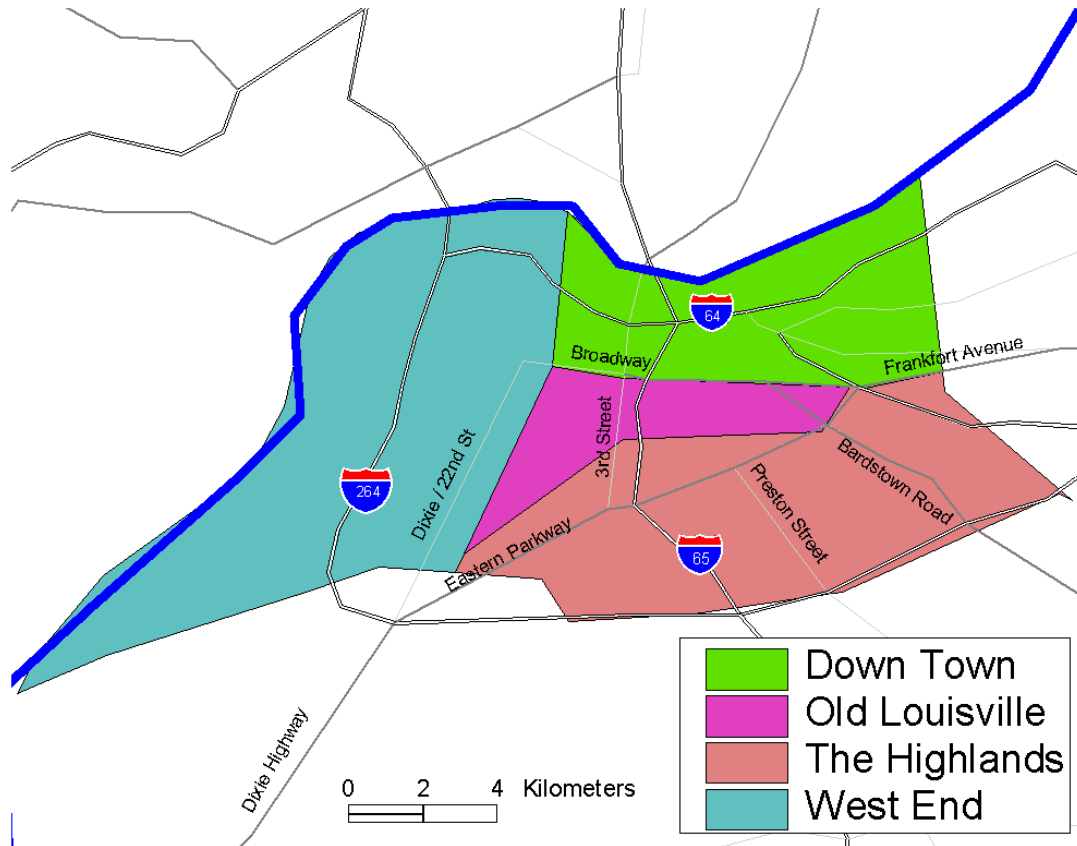
The meat of the Jefferson Sprawl is the old Jefferson County. It contains the bulk of the population as well as the majority of the landmarks and big money makers.



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Downtown

Downtown is at the crossing of I65 & I64 on the southern side of the river. Depending on where you live, Downtown is either just the business district or everything inside the Watterson (I264).



Downtown: Business District

It's no New York by any means but has a decent skyline on the Louisville side. Some decent 75-story skyscrapers are near the river, having been rebuilt post-Blast. Farther from the river you have smaller buildings, including some 19th century historic structures that are less than six stories tall. Louisville's always had some eclectic architecture and the post-Blast stuff continued the vein.

>>{Eclectic is being polite. The Humana building looked like a milk carton with a fat lip. LGE's green and purple roof lights made it look like it was the Joker Signal. Providian had a domed top that resembled roll-on deodorant (or something pornographic). The cubist Artisan building was sufficiently avante garde to actually be ho hum. The new stuff....I think cthulu was involved in some of the design stage. }<<---Snorklepuss

There are several points of interest downtown. On Main Street you can find the Kentucky Center for the Arts (KCA), the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Frasier Arms Museum, and the Louisville Slugger Museum.

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Louisville Slugger Museum is easy to find; look for the building with a 40' baseball bat leaning against it on Main Street. It has some of the original slugger manufacturing equipment and does turn out a limited number of bats each year for special events but mainly it turns out mini-Sluggers (Punches?) that are about 12" long. Hillerich & Bradsby, the owners of the Louisville Slugger brand, have a primary manufacturing facility in southern Indiana.

>>{IIRC their bread and butter has become golf equipment more than baseball. A guy I went to college with worked there last I heard, trying to engineer the next generation of Calloway clubs. }<<--Mentat

>>{Speaking of golf, Louisville has a half-dozen high-end golf courses, now more than a century old. There are two public courses part of the parks system, which is pretty rare. The Masters tournament is sometimes at the Fuzzy Zeller course. }<<--ProFromDover

Runners should really consider stopping in the Frasier. The founder, Owsley Brown Frazier, was a gun collector that at some point realized he owned a totally insane amount of historical weapons and should open a museum. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of historical firearms and weapons present, ranging from a rifle owned by George Washington to one of Geronimo's bows, Custer's pistols and Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick." The Frazier also has ties to the UK and has a significant collection of medieval weapons and armor.

>>{Some of the items are counterfeit, unfortunately. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{That's a serious accusation to make based on a viewing through a case. }<<--ManInBlue

>>{Astral signatures don't lie. Many of those items have auras commensurate with forgeries. Geronimo's bow is legit and should be viewed by any mage. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{There have been repeated requests from the NAN to give back some of the artifacts. The former director, Todd Haines, rebuffed them all as the bow was part of Geronimo's terms of surrender. }<<--Feather Not Dot

>>{I just went to the museum and wow, is that bow impressive! }<<--LilJohn

>>{All I see is an old wooden bow; what do you see? }<<--SteveOh

>>{Echoes of the past. Sometimes it looks like Geronimo is there holding it, others you can see the battlefields or hunting trips the bow was used on, and watch the arrows fly. Speeches and councils of war. }<<--LilJohn

>>{That explains the sizeable budget for magical defenses. }<<--QuickLime

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The Frazier has historical demonstrations that show period approaches and techniques. I'm told that there are a couple of adepts among the re-enactors who swear the old martial combat manuals include certain mystical attributes. I'm not sure about that but I can say that two adepts squaring off against each other in a friendly competition is a treat to watch.

>>{Hey, it can be fun even if it isn't friendly. }<<--Rains

There's a decent little bar district along Main Street near the 2nd Street Bridge in some old (~150 yro) warehouses and office buildings. If you squint you can actually see some of the old French influences, ala New Orleans. The bars wander the gamut and tend to be something other than the generic mass-market pabulum. They also have a distressing tendency to go out of business every 10 years or so.

Right now you can find Jake's (blues), E-Main (cyber café), Mercury Lounge (neo-metal), Crushed Velvet (cordial bar), and one of the longest running gender-bending clubs in North Am, The Connection.

>>{I live under a rock. What's a "cordial bar"? }<<--Swamper

>>{Oh, yummy drinks! They're like desert; some of them are even served in "glasses" made of chocolate or candy! Mmmm! }<<--Heather

>>{Yech! A diabetic nightmare. }<<--OldPete

>>{Should I even ask about "The Connection"? }<<--Swamper

>>{Don't sweat The Connection. It's a century-old gay bar and drag show. I'm guessing part of it used to be a theatre because the drag shows aren't done on a cheesy runway; they have a 300-seat cabaret. It's pretty well established in the community, some of the racier plays on the Actor's Theater or KCA calendar are hosted there. }<<--OldPete

>>{ *You* have been to the Connection? }<<--Heather

>>{Girly, The Connection was a tradition when I was InfantPete. }<<--OldPete

Downtown: Old Louisville

Immediately south of the business district is Old Louisville. Block after block of 19th century homes that have been restored umpteen times on quaint little streets housing college kids, drug dealers, artisans, thieves, engineers, lawyers and hackers. Wait, I already said thieves.

It's a place grannies visit in the day to talk about the "good old days" and then scurry back to the CountryKitchenBuffet before the locals wake up/get off work and come home. The fortune of the area changes from block to block and decade to decade. Last year's

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slum is this year's renovation darling and vice versa. All's fine during daylight but watch your back at night.

>>{The gangs in Old Louisville are pretty lame, more like a half dozen bored punks. }<<--Caller54

>>{Punks or not, a PredII will still cause a bad day. }<<--Skipjack

The Saint James Art Fair is a regional hoo-haw that happens every summer. U of L art students sell last year's art projects to pretentious pricks for far more than anyone who has to work for money would ever spend. Screws up traffic for days but means that the artsy types get to eat another semester. Lots of fake talismongery done there as the elists try to buy real dreamcatchers. I suppose they hang them in their employees' cubes so as to steal even that bit of joy.

>>{Somebody's having a bad day. }<<--Heather

Downtown: Old Louisville: University of Louisville

Old Louisville's big landmark is the Belknap Campus of U of L. It's a tree-lined facility of about 2.5 km². There's almost always a building being torn down or being rebuilt somewhere to make life difficult for freshmen trying to learn campus by landmarks that only exist on maps. The university's nominal boundaries are 4th Street on the west, Arthur Street/I65 on the east, Cardinal Boulevard on the north and Eastern Parkway on the south. U of L is a messy little campus since it has two train tracks running through it and it sprawls across 4th, Eastern, and Cardinal.

The east side of campus along I65 is composed of a sports complex with multiple tennis courts, running track, multipurpose fields, and a swimming facility. Speed School is on the south, with its own little mini-campus on the other side of Eastern. The main library, several dorms, and frat row are on the west. North is the business school, school of music, and Grawmeyer Computing Center.

>>{It's a fraternity, not a frat. You wouldn't call your country a ^%\$\$\$\$#!
{CONNECTION DROPPED} }<<--ThetaEtaMoo

>>{Thanks }<<--Heather

>>{My pleasure. }<<--Quicklime

U of L is almost 250 years old and an established facility. It has the standard undergrad programs but includes an engineering school, business school, school of education, school of music, law school medical school and school of thaumaturgy. The university is actually pretty deep into cyber, going back to the 20th century. The first functional artificial heart was a U of L project as was an early hand transplant and some of the first nerve-bonding processes. Since the 2020s there has been a Medical Engineering program

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that has grown along with what we now call biotech.

The school of Thaumaturgy is something of a sore point in the community. On the one hand, southerners like their ghost stories and the weirdness around the river justifies a need for a local research institute. On the other hand, Louisville's pretty religious. It may not be exactly the heart of the Bible belt but it is the home of a Baptist seminary and several large protestant organizations so religion is deeply entrenched. There are some 1600 churches or places of worship in the phone book. (We're traditional, we still say "phone book.")

>>{The School of Thaumaturgy's located on the southwestern portion of campus, pretty much isolated by the train lines. }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{Sucks for you spookies but I'm real happy you aren't in the middle of campus. Seems like every other year some Merlin wannabe would summon up something they couldn't handle and it would freak everyone out. }<<--Gradof58

>>{All the buildings on campus are warded now so it's down to every third year and most of those are illusions by somebody trying to be funny. }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{Anyone want to comment on the Computing Center? }<<--GdP

>>{Sure. It's the programming and comp.sci department. Yet another bastard stepchild handed from one department to another when the literally old-school types had no idea what to do with it. Comp.sci was under Speed and the Business school at different times. It finally managed to acquire its own Dean and break free. Like most UL programs, it's all right but nothing too cutting edge. Security's actually pretty good, though still not impregnable, but the main defense is the round-the-clock presence of junior code monkeys all peaking and prying at the system, some of them with authorization. Not a bad place to visit if you've got some hardware that needs upgrading. Don't expect anything nova hot but it's better than you can get over the counter. }<<--Quicklime

>>{I'll vouch for that. Anybody with wireless cyber and not a lot of cash should stop in there and get some basic firewall and encryption software. You can also get low-grade agents on the cheap. Nothin' a hacker'd want but good enough for doing some web-crawlin' without your attention. }<<--Yeesusrist

>>{Some of the agents are old thesis projects and can be spotty in their performance. Deja-2, for instance, is generally an R:2 agent but it was optimized for visual pattern matching and operates as an R:4 program when trying to ID something or someone from a photo. Your best bet is to get with the student employees in the data center and get them to point you in the right direction. }<<--Zodiox

Downtown: Old Louisville: U of L : Speed School of Thaumaturgy

Way back when, in 2012, the lid on magic was pretty much blown open when Dunkelzhan did his infamous trid interview. Crystal wavers, neowiccans, and kooks across the planet did the happy dance. Most of the science community stuck their head in the sand for a couple of years until the Great Ghost Dance scared the crap out of everyone. Once the United States considered magic to be a weapon that existed, the scientists started digging their way out to gain their share of the research grants.

But not academia. Oh, no. It was chock full of either the wackiest nut job that could just manage some minor spell or pompous, self-important windbags drunk on power.

>>{And those descriptions hold to this very day. }<<-- PilingHigherandDeeper

When U of L finally conceded to host a chair of magic, which they insisted on calling parapsysics, it was attached to the school of Arts and Sciences. The first incarnation was the kooks and windbags mentioned above and it was a horrible failure. Most of the instructors had little to no experience in experimental methods and they tended to have lax or non-existent controls in place. Campus was evacuated any number of times due to magic gone awry.

Then the department was put under the physicists. There were none of the campus-wide manifestations but there was also very little in the way of progress. Staff churn was high and the entire physics program nearly collapsed at one point. Finally it was transferred to the engineering school where it has remained ever since.

>>{I can't believe they gave it to physicists. }<<-- PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{Why not? They are scientists. }<<--Sol2042

>>{Yeah, that's the problem. Magic was like a horrible, horrible blow to scientists. First off, it can only be performed by a living person so no automation. No machine can perceive the events leading up to the result and they surely can't deal with astral space. Secondly, it either defies the laws of thermodynamics or requires multidimensional theories of gradient entropy, which leads to either mental breakdowns or fist fights in the faculty lounge.

>>{Lastly, it was the first completely new field of science in a full generation and it required starting from scratch. Scientists do well at safely making progress but they hate to move forward if they don't understand the data they have.

>>{Engineers, in contrast, are used to using empirical data to derive functional approaches. Concrete, for instance, was used for nearly 2,000 years to great effect with no real comprehension of the mechanisms that controlled it. To an engineer if it's repeatable, reliable, and predictable even if it isn't comprehensible, then it is applicable.

>>{And that's really what the engineers did; they translated empirical data into usable applications. Scientists, or theoretical thaumaturgists to be proper, have since come through and explained why things worked and derived better systems for spell theory and summonings that likely would not have happened without a "lucky accident" by an engineer. }<<-- PilingHigherandDeeper

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>>{So are you a thaumaturgist or an engineer? }<<--ElJefe

>>{Well, as an Applied Thaumaturgy PhD candidate, a little from column A and a little from column B. I'm the engineer working at the fringes of the field, taking the latest theories and trying to make them do something useful. }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

Today the SSoT is a middle of the road facility. Both the CAS and UCAS are a little leery of the FTZ's independence so the collegiate organizations are more standoffish than they normally would be. In this case the FTZ works against us as both sides see us as being in the pocket of the other.

>>{Sad but true. }<<--BookWyrn

SSoT's one advantage is that it is essentially independent; no serious governmental or corporate ties. Yeah, the FTZ foots part of the bill but to date the political value in keeping the appearance of an autonomous SSoT outweighs the advantage of having a private pool of mages.

>>{Which doesn't stop a lot of SSoT graduates from finding jobs in the government. Zone Sec hires quite a few mages every year just to provide astral perception at the borders. Licensed practitioners with no criminal record can get hired during Thunder and Derby. They tend to team up the contractors with an FTZS mage, a spirit bodyguard, and a couple of tattletale watchers. }<<--UDP

There are close ties between the University Medical program and the SSoT due to crossover with the bio-tech students. U of L has eschewed the belief that biotech is a field unto itself and treats it as an engineering undergrad program with most of the normal elective slots being filled with pre-med courses. Graduates receive a degree in Medical Engineering (BS.MdE) and immediately go into med school.

>>{Now that has to suck. }<<--DocAndCover

>>{Yes and no. The program is close to a double major when you look at the number of required high-level biology and engineering courses but it means you don't have to take as many fluffy-bunny A&S courses. }<<--EngineerMD

>>{But why bother? There are some perfectly good biotech programs out there that don't have such a serious course load. }<<--DocAndCover

>>{True enough but it depends on what *kind* of biotech you want to practice. For your generalists and typical hospital residents, those programs are perfect. If you want to work with the bleeding edge hardware, aka beta-tester, it helps to have that full engineering + medical background to not only figure out if a problem is caused by hardware or biology but be able to design a solution. Especially if the problem is potentially life threatening. }<<--EngineerMD

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SSoT & biotech students are in the same first-year courses as the other engineers. The coursework begins diverging significantly during the sophomore year but that's pretty much a drop in the bucket compared to the students who drop their freshman year.

>>{In any SS building you're likely to hear someone state that the freshman class halves in size at the drop date, end of the first semester, second semester drop date, and end of the second semester. After all the chaff has been winnowed out, engineering students have a slightly higher retention rate than other programs. Of course at that point the classes are a tiny fraction of their original size. I can't say it's based on statistics but it feels right. }<<--EngineerMD

>>{Is it really that bad? }<<--LilJohn

>>{It's a big shock to most freshmen, who generally didn't have a whole lot of trouble with general education. SSoT believes in a serious workload the first two semesters. The work actually gets easier as the courses get more advanced. 'Course that could be because the only people left are the ones who understand it. Med school is a real brain buster, though. }<<--EngineerMD

There are more multidisciplinary projects at U of L than normal thanks to mixing between SSoT, MdEMD, and classic engineering. University Hospital didn't pioneer medical magic but a joint University program did assemble the first codified magical regimen from admission to release. The basic approach remains unchanged even though it has been revised multiple times over the years.

>>{This is a good thing for the shadowfolk. There are plenty of MdEMD and SSoT dropouts who at least have a positive view of combined biotech/magic healing regimens. }<<--DocRobbers

>>{I'd rather have a real doc than a dropout myself. }<<--Rains

>>{Fine, just take your bullet-riddled body to the big hospitals and see how long the questioning takes. }<<--DocRobbers

>>{Touche. }<<--Rains

>>{Mages will be particularly happy since most shadowdocs have a mage on tap that can at least provide assensing. }<<--LilJohn

Downtown: Highlands

Some would say the Highlands are the spiritual center of Louisville. Located east/southeast of downtown, it is a vibrant community, chock full of old book stores, coffee shops, mom'n pop restaurants, 2nd hand stores, and bars. And, according to the photographs and local lore, it's been that way for more than a century, well before the advent of Starbucks. Local places have changed family hands but didn't go corporate. Don't believe me? A restaurant that claims to have invented the cheeseburger (Kaelin's) has survived against the BurgerGods for quite a long time. Like I said above,

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Louisvillians are traditionalist sheep.

>>{One of the best parts of Louisville is the Highlands. I guess it's kinda like SoHo or the Haight in SanFran, only less freaky and more enduring. Louisville kind of lucked out in that it has copious housing from the different growth periods, so the property values haven't soared as outrageously as they did in bigger markets. }<<--HeineBrother1

>>{Huh. Lucky in the sense that Vitas wiped out about 45% of the populace and the city is only slightly larger than it was in 2000. }<<--OldPete

>>{Harsh. Bitter much? }<<--Heather

>>{I'm old girlie, it comes with the territory. }<<--OldPete

>>{I really hadn't thought about it that way when I said it. }<<--HeineBrother1

>>{Eh, she was right, I was being harsh but I'm also old enough not to care. Anyone's feelings I hurt will out live me. By the way, when are you going to have some more of the Jamaican Blue coffee? }<<--OldPete

>>{Thursday, if it doesn't vanish in customs. Again. Let me know it's you and the first quarter kilo's on the house.}<<--HeineBrother1

>>{My friends and I have a significant thirst for the Blue. If it does not show up on Thursday let me know and I will do what I can, where I can. }<<--Zodiox

The north end of the Highlands is anchored by numerous bars, though they decrease in frequency as you go south. An old tradition is the Bambi Walk, which starts at the Bambi Bar and involves walking north, having a drink at every bar you encounter. Depending on what's opened or closed, you can expect to have about 2-3 dozen drinks. We've got at least 2 microbreweries in the Highlands and numerous "tap rooms" that are full of vanity beer and a few real microbrews.

>>{You people are depraved. }<<--MamaWama

>>{And you're deprived. }<<--SimpleMan

Downtown:West End

What can we say, it's our Barrens. It was burned during the Night of Rage. It was flooded when the Ghost Dance made the Ohio overreach the floodwalls. It burned again during the Blast. The people were forgotten or ignored during Crash 1.0 and 2.0.

The places are small, one-story shotgun homes and camelbacks. They've been rebuilt haphazardly as renovation attempts were made and surrendered to the local looting and vandalism.

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>>{Shotgun home and camelback?}<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Old, 19th Century old, construction for narrow lots. No hallway, one room leads to another. The origin of the term is sketchy but the common joke is that one good shotgun blast will kill everyone there.

>>{A variant of a shotgun is a camelback, which has a second floor over half the house giving it a hump back appearance hence camelback. There's also an "Irish" cottage, which looks like a shotgun but isn't. It has 2 front doors; one on the main house and the other on a front room that was often rented out to students or transient workers.

>>{You'd see shotguns in sections of Baltimore and Maryland if they hadn't been burned during the Night of Rage or demolished by the Megas. }<<--OldPete

The area isn't completely dead; there are too many people who refuse to leave or have nowhere else to go. Every scut job in Downtown, New Albany, and Jeff are filled by people who live here. Gridlink is non-existent, utilities are spotty, devil rats infest the sewers, crime is rampant and police coverage is a joke.

>>{Ahh, home. }<<--Grinder

The only good thing about the West End is it is green, lots of trees. Probably does a lot of good for Louisville's air quality. Otherwise, it's a dump. There are a number of minimum wage manufacturing jobs, mainly box shuffling, metal work, or tending soy-vats.

Sorry two good things: you can get your illicit hookup in the West End. One of the rail bridges and the locks and dams are right along the river in the West End and numerous things tend to fall off the train cars or barges. Sometimes big things, sometimes small things. But lots of things. Many of the old warehouses and offices that burned had basements or underground parking that survives and no one has a clue how much black market cargo is lurking beneath the ashes.

>>{The West end is a bigger area than most Louisvillians realize. Most people treat it as 22nd street to 44th street and north of Broadway, which is only about 16 square kilometers. It really runs southwest to Algonquin Parkway, tripling the area. It stays pretty shabby south and east of there but it's kind of Dixie or Old Louisville there. This fringe is where the prosperous criminals live while the whack jobs and desperados stay in the bombed out sections. }<<--Swamper

>>{Housing's not as sparse as you might think. There were a couple of housing programs that created quite a few tenement districts. That's the best place to get your ill gotten goods. If you're after something more private, find a bombed out place and do some ground soundings 'til you find a basement. Excavate a bit and you've got a spider hole. }<<--Luke'sFather

>>{I thought coffin hotels were bad but spider holes?!? }<<--Donvon

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>>{They aren't the norm by any means. Doesn't mean any place deep enough to shield you from Zoner sensors and too rough for dogs is a handy place. }<<--Grinder

The West End is, unsurprisingly, filthy with gangs. Channel Cats smuggle pretty much anything along the Ohio from Dixie to the East End with their base near the old Marine hospital. Panzermensch hire out themselves and their armored jalopies as wheelmen, when they don't smash them racing down Broadway or North Dixie.

>>{Don't underrate the Panzers. The rusted body panels may have come from a '32 Americar you can be sure there are solid armor plates and a honkin' big motor under the hood. }<<--Gremlin

>>{The armor may be 6mm sheet steel and the motor from a delivery truck. I've seen one of those tear loose from the motor mounts and destroy the vehicle. Not pretty at 100kph. }<<--Zentradi

There are branches of the Crips, Bloods, Halloweeners, Ancients, and Red Hot Nukes but they are relatively small change. Hey, there are traditionalist wolves as well as sheep.

East End

East of downtown, beyond the Watterson across from the Highlands is the affluent East End. It consists of several sub-cities that have stubbornly clung to their little petty bits of power (St. Matthews cops are the devil, Jeffersontown has its own Mayor, Middletown is better paved, Lagrange has higher taxes) but it's generally lumped into one sprawling mass. Lots of gated communities dating back more than a century, numerous corp enclaves, and more than a few kingpins live out there.

South End

This is something of a catchall, grabbing everything south of the Watterson between the East End and Dixie. It's a hodgepodge of manufacturing, residential, and commercial in the area between Preston Highway and Bardstown Road. Thriving, but messy.

Runners should get used to visiting the South End for stuff. There are numerous small machine shops, garages and scrap yards churning out rebuilt cars, custom drones, and one-off weapons.

>>{What moron uses a one-off, redneck gun? }<<--Slade

>>{Not from around here, are ya? Zoners are good at detecting guns and ammo at the borders. A tabletop CNC lathe & laser cutter can turn out an AK knock-off in under an hour and they're probably to tighter tolerances than any east asian budget models since the Tongs and Yak take the good ones early.

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>>{Laser sights can be fabbed with no trouble by anyone with soldering iron skills. Smartlink adapters require a chip fabber but the mounts can be replaced pretty easily.

>>{The most common service is providing barrels. The tolerances are good but the materials are cheaper which is fine since most are only used for one night before being destroyed or bored out for use in a larger gun. }<<--Jesse

>>{Newbies should take care when buying a weapon. There's a trend to partially re-rifle a barrel to change the ballistic properties. Trouble is, the first or second time it is done the barrel becomes less effective and ups the chances of a jam. By the 3rd or 4th time you've really got a smooth bore, which is crap for accuracy. }<<--KalZone

The South End has most of the ethnic regions. Northwest, between Dixie and the West End, is Little Saigon on Old 3rd Street Road. Louivakia is along Preston Highway just south of the Waterson Expressway full of Soviet Union refugees from Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Chekeslovakia. Further south on Preston is Little Mexico between Outer Loop and Gene Snyder.

Gangs in the South End tend to be local. Louisville isn't particularly biased on the whole but self-segregation is human nature and integration didn't get very far before the chaos of the 4th World hit. As a result the regional gangs fall out mainly by ethnicities. Not entirely though, since those of caucasian and african descent tend to be in pretty much any gang due to their sheer numbers and ubiquitous presence everywhere.

The Lobos and the Wetback Army fight over Little Mexico.

Louisvakia is a foothold for the Russian Mafia, the Milosovics, and the Crimson Jihad.

Little Saigon is a crazy quilt of gangs holding territories only a few blocks across. Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Laosian, Thai, Taiwanese, and Hong Kongi groups run protection rackets and raise mayhem with the neighbors, which in a way ensures the inevitable retributory incursions partly justify the protection money.

Things in the South End are really run down. Vitas, and the Blast, took an inordinate toll on the region for multiple reasons. Compared to the West End, there was a lower population density. VITAS took on average 30% of the population with each pass and did so with no regard to race, income, or location. The median South End household was 3.3 people versus 5.1 in the West End. Yeah, more West Enders died per household but it was more likely that one of the breadwinners died in the South End. The South End survivors had more options, meaning that many of them left in droves for greener pastures. The steady depopulation left more houses empty.

That opened up the area up for significant decay. The houses in the South End were newer; better insulation, more efficient construction, better wiring, but generally less

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solid. Those 19th century homes in the West End and Downtown can take a lot of neglect without suffering structural damage. The walls are framed in heavy timbers and faced in lathe board and plaster, which is darn near concrete on its own. South End's late 20th century construction was very material efficient but that means fewer framing elements that are individually lighter. Wallboard is light and easy to work with but falls apart readily. Which describes the houses and condos in the South End.

Most of them were gutted and refaced but it's new gilt over cheap frames. The wallboard cracks and the siding pulls apart as the frame continues to warp. The roofs are irregular and the windows leak or are drafty. The place needs a massive bulldozing but there's not enough money in it for anyone. The corps did some half-hearted renovation projects and offered some cut-rate home loans to workers. They provide enough support that their employees don't vanish but little more.

Most people work either as box shufflers for UPS and other warehouses or toil in the soyfood factories. I sometimes think that the ultra cheap QA/QC-failed soyfood is half of what keeps their workers with them.

>>{The corps *charge* for food that failed QA/QC?!? Is that even legal?}<<--
Max(Factor)

>>{Stuff it, nobbly. It's mostly stuff that isn't shaped right or didn't get the right dye job. Tastes about the same, mostly, and it passes safety regs. }<<--Frag jack

>>{It's the freaking 21st century. Why are people still moving boxes? }<<--Think Tank

>>{Simple economics. People have a lot of dexterity and even a high school dropout has more problem solving skills than most drone AI. It's still cheaper to have people do first tier package sorting than any machine. }<<--HistoriCal

Dixie

The main western thoroughfare is the wide, wide, wide Dixie Highway (aka Highway 60). It is 12 lanes wide in a few spots with pairs of dedicated turn lanes in both directions and four lanes carry traffic each way.

The area is southwest of the West End and heads out towards Fort Knox. Dixie used to be like the South End, full of 20th century construction falling apart, but with the mini-casinos explosion came new malls and housing complexes for the staff. As long as you stay within a mile or so of Dixie Highway things tend to be relatively new and in good repair. Beyond that it quickly turns into the land of prostitutes, pimps, penny-ante gamblers, and low end hustlers trying to make a buck off the soldiers.

>>{It's a great place to do your shopping if your ID is less than solid. Most places will take scrip or chips and don't care drek who you are. }<<--Aces & 8s

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>>{If you plan on using chips for your minor purchases I recommend going with one of the local chains that's big enough to be widely accepted but still not so big they'll get a 'tude about people using their chips as scrip. The Thoroughbred clubs are a good one to use as they went from 18 tawdry strip clubs to 27 equally tawdry casinos. }<<--Haskell

Dixie still has the greatest number of strip joints but they've been joined by numerous small casinos and "spas" that serve the Fort Knox troops. Most of the Zone Sec staff will head on to the big casinos in New Albany but the out of town troops here for training don't want to waste hours of precious leave on the drive.

>>{The mob can't get their hooks into the big casinos because of all the attention they get but are sitting in the catbird seat on these little places. }<<--RickiTic

>>{You didn't hear it from me but those joints will give good credit for milspec gear. }<<--TonyTomatoes

>>{CID has been hot'n heavy to find the buyers for all of the tech that vanishes from the fort. }<<--JAGy

>>{Shouldn't they go for the sellers? }<<--MamaWama

>>{Those get caught in time but the real concern is how the gear is getting out of the FTZ. }<<--JAGy

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Floyd County

Northwest of Downtown, on the north side of the river, is New Albany. It was a sleepy little town with branch of IU and some other light industry but now it's our Las Vegas. Riverboats were installed at the turn of the millennium and in the FTZ they thrive like cockroaches at a frat house. The place was a semi-farming community but has been turned into a kind of manicured, sterilized, landscaped, botanical garden/park/wildlife preserve that makes people feel relaxed as they gamble the house away.

Originally it was just Caesar's Palace but since then it went gonzo. We have Wynn, Gold Dust, Hoosier Daddy, Lucky Duck, the Red King, and Halcyon & On. They used to be limited to the rivers, being technically riverboats, but that was thrown out long ago. The Red King is, in fact, a casino boat and it makes cruises up and down the Ohio.

>>{Yeah, they were "river boats" the same way a bridge is a river boat; they both extend over water. The boats were "permanently moored" on docks and possibly, maybe floated a bit but their "anchors" were all but support columns. }<<--PotCommitted

>>{True enough. The only thing that ever made Indiana think twice about the FTZ was the loss of Caesar's but by the Blast there were nine other casinos across the state. Plus, Caesar's was going to be producing no significant revenue until Louisville got back on its feet and there was no budget for the work needed to be done on the Ohio. }<<--HistoriCal

The casinos are something of a fixture now, though they still cause some strife among the morality police. The revenue they generate is appreciated by the community in the form of relatively low taxes even if it is sin money.

At the top of the heap is the Halcyon & On. It is designed to be reminiscent of the hanging gardens of Babylon and has done more to park-ify the area than anything else. It sprawls over about 150 acres, 75 of which are a golf course. The place is chock full of hydroponic and aeroponic gardens with decorative and exotic plants. At least a few are dual-natured to help provide some mystic security. At least one rumor has it that the latest designer dual-natured plant life originated at the Halcyon & On.

>>{It's a fact, not rumor. *Hederacea*, or common ground ivy, has mutated in the Louisville area into *Glechoma bimondus*. The small flowers, typically purple, are nearly translucent on the physical plane but shine with an orange light on the astral. *Hederacae* is horribly invasive but *Bimondus*, like many dual natured life forms, is fairly sensitive to environmental factors. }<<--Hortus_Rex

>>{I heard it was english ivy that was hybridized. }<<--Deb.b.i.e

>>{Not a surprising rumor since Halcyon is draped in *Glechoma helixa* however it is false. *Hederacae* had managed to invade the gardens and spontaneously expressed. It took a sasquatch visitor commenting on the "pretty citrus fruit flower vine" for anyone to notice. }<<--Hortus_Rex

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>>{This explains some things. We SSoTs are used to the balancing act between secrecy and publication but the Halcyon people were far too vague and evasive when they were discussing a grant to study the survivability of *Glechoma bimondus*. If this were a natural, or at least unintended, mutation they would be totally in the dark.

}<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

The Wynn, Caesar's, and Gold Dust are typical casino fare. The Wynn has lots and lots of waterfalls (apparently Jason Wynn The First loved waterfalls) and the Wynn name or stylized "W" is on everything they can cram it. Caesar's looks like Rome had a yard sale with busts, columns, and faux marble everywhere. The Gold Dust is a throwback to its Vegas roots, with intentionally gaudy fixtures and gold sparkles.

Hoosier Daddy is more local, at least in theme, and like most casinos it goes overboard. It is full of Indiana memorabilia, especially basketball. The place is full of old 2D flatpics, jerseys, balls, nets, and other detritus of history. They spent a fortune to recreate several of the most famous games for full simsense.

>>{And remember, in Louisville the signal limits are high so this is just a step below BTL. }<<-- Zodiac

>>{While people having some NCAA BTL in a fantasy suite may not sound bad, the real problem is in the VR casino games. Most people feel disappointment when they lose money but with Calhot signal levels able to feed you happy thoughts, you don't feel nearly as bad. And when you win, the jolt of pleasure is enough to require spending those winnings on new pants. }<<--Aces&8s

Lucky Duck is a revamped Circus Maximus, which used to be Festival before that and Cirque, Masquerade and Level 7. What I'm saying is the Duck is *ooooooooold* and biding time 'til it gets demolished. It's tacky, worn, smoky, tattered, used up, at best a dive and more realistically a dump.

Security in the Duck is lax at best and only concerned with preventing property damage. Sensor coverage is sparse with numerous known gaps. The Zoners have issued more than a dozen citations to the Duck for lack of security response to crimes on their grounds.

>>{Which makes it a fantastic place for a meet. The security has more holes than swiss cheese and the place tends to have enough of a crowd that groups don't stand out. }<<--Grinder

>>{No lie. With a little practice it isn't too hard to find the noobs & wannabes hangin' around in the hopes of scoring some nuyen. }<<--Gremlin

Last up is the river boat, the Red King. To the uninitiated it appears to be a steam paddle wheeler but the smokestacks, calliope and stern wheel are for show. A gas turbine and water jets really drives the 'King and that sums up the place: a veneer of artistically

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rendered faux Old South concealing cutting edge tech. It has some of the best VR, open-air holos, and security tech. Security is discrete but thorough so don't make trouble or try to bring in any unlicensed hardware.

>>{Too many sensors to really discuss a job but with the isolation of being on the river this place is a decent place to pick up a payoff or make a first contact. }<<--Horace9

Clark County

Everything North-by-Northeast of Downtown is Jeffersonville fading into Clarksville. Jef has a boatyard, malls, residential stuff, but truth be told it's really just a suburb of the Business district across the river. There's a decent nightlife right down near the River with numerous bars, clubs, and pool halls. After that it gets kinda sleepy.

Clarksville is analogous to the East End of Southern Indiana. You've got plenty of malls, eateries, and other people-serving commercial endeavors. Most of the industry is located in Jeff along the river in the poorer quarters.

Oldham County

La Grange has long been a bedroom community of Louisville with most of the populace working in the city. At one point it had the distinction of having the highest income per capita (relative to the regional cost of living) anywhere in North America and they still like to think they're that way. Snooty buggers one and all. It's now a kind of monstrous gated community sans gates; they'd be tacky.

>>{Most 'Grangers contract with a security company for services above and beyond that provided by the Zoners, who aren't as concerned with trogs who might be enjoying a spring day on public roads as the snooty types think they should be. }<<--Busker

The residents had enough money to last out the Blast or were so in debt over their fancy schmancy digs that they had no choice but to stick around.

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Bullitt County/Southern Knobs

Head away from the Ohio and you'll enter some rough hills that form the boundary of the Ohio Valley. South of Louisville, that means Bullitt County.

The eastern area is a suburb community of about 15,000 called Mount Washington. The populace was very blue collar and hurt pretty bad by VITAS and The Blast. The area ran down when a large percentage of people moved away or died. In the last few decades it has become a haven for orcs, trolls and other awakened sentients. The area is 48% orc, 28% human, 21% troll and 3% other.

>>{The town used to be a rather picturesque example of a small town. It kinda fell apart back in the 40s. Even as the incoming goblins started to make repairs, the bigots fled the "trog invasion" so it still looks grungy.}<<--Busker

>>{Most of the orc and human population are minors in the school system, which is bursting at the seams.}<<--K-6

The old Hillview/North Bullitt area and Shepherdsville have been absorbed into the South End, which leaves us Lebanon Junction. Describing LJ is easiest done by comparison. In the South End there are a sizeable quantity of white trash living in mobile homes, watching Combat Biking on an old trid while eating macaroni-and-soy-cheese and getting smashed on the cheapest inebriant at the Stuffer Shack. Those people look down on LJ as being backwards and poorly educated.

LJ is a true artifact. It was last a thriving community when the telephone lines were first installed and it was a place to top off water tanks on the steam locomotives. For the past 150-odd years it has been decaying without ever actually collapsing. No one is sure exactly how that has happened but so it is. The people are as hillbilly as you can have in the area and die hard racists. We're talking KKK types who think Alamos20k are nancy boys.

>>{Pretty strong words.}<<--HistoriCal

>>{Try growing up there.}<<--Administrator

Tensions are high between LJ and Mt. Washington. It's only about a 15-minute drive between the two. Only the fact that Zoners have a large contingent at the I65 border right outside LJ keeps it tense rather than all out war.

>>{"Tense" is a very clean word to describe sheet wearing thugs burning crosses and effigies on the church lawn, drive by shootings during school functions, fire bombings, and attempted lynchings. Zoners can't be everywhere at once and until the flat heads do something truly horrific, they won't wipe them out.}<<--TuskerDhu

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>>{'s funny how a monkey boy can be trained to talk purty, kinda like a parrot left next to a trid. Why, I figure you might even be handy
forrrrRRRRRR***{CONNECTION DROPPED}}<<--PureBred

>>{Holy Shock! Was that what I think it was?}<<--Quicklime

>>{Very impressive. I did not realize the server had psychotropic IC. }<<--Zodiox

>>{Let's hope he'll be nicer if he ever comes back. }<<--Edministrator

>>{Are you kidding? I don't think he'll remember his name when that thing gets done with him. }<<--Quicklime

>>{That's all right, I know who he is. }<<--Edministrator

Spencer County

There's really no excuse for Spencer county being absorbed by the FTZ except that a couple of muckety-mucks had houses out at Taylorsville Lake. There were just enough people who commute to Louisville from Taylorsville to justify the effort on paper, though just barely.

>>{Kentucky cried bloody murder when it figured out just how badly it got screwed. Louisville was, by far, one of the largest sources of revenue for the state. Losing it hurt, a lot. The cost of fixing the Blast had been weighed against the loss of revenue in the region. The billions required to repair the infrastructure paled in comparison to the unemployment and social services required to sustain the area until things were back to normal. The state hadn't counted on the Megas falling over themselves to get into the FTZ and it bouncing back so fast.
>>{Spencer county, which wasn't particularly affluent, would have provided a significant source of revenue for the state as the gateway to the FTZ. Now that title is held by Shelbyville, which was already a relatively profitable community, so that lost revenue is like salt in a wound. }<<--HistoriCal

Fort Knox

Fort Knox is one of the oldest mobile armor facilities in the world, dating back to the 1930s. Some revisionist historians think that if the CAS/UCAS split hadn't occurred that the armor school would have relocated to another base for better mixed unit training but it is nothing more than an entertaining read. Today, Fort Knox is a proving ground and training facility.

The base primary mission realigned following the formation of the FTZ into the home base and training ground of Zone Security. The secondary mission is equipment testing and as a training ground for joint mixed-force operations. As a neutral setting it can host CAS/UCAS war games with fewer rivalries. Both the CAS and UCAS share much of the same military technology even decades after the split. They are involved in several joint

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development projects, sometimes in conjunction with the Europeans, and quite a bit of the final testing and R&D of armored systems is done at Fort Knox.

The Fort has a population of 15,000 on-base residents with another 16,000 civilians or personnel who live off base. Security is zoned with the outer perimeter being pretty well open to anyone with a valid, non-criminal ID. This area includes the Patton Museum and several non-essential base facilities. The base itself has a pretty solid security system from what I'm told and is on par with corp facilities. That shouldn't be considered an insult, the base covers about 400 square kilometers.

Most of it is the proving and training grounds. Security is very high, both to protect any prototypes from spies as to keep civilians out of the line of fire.

>>{Any idea what they use for security? }<<--Footloose

>>{Some really wicked neat toys. They've got something called a Hive. It is a mobile drone hangar about 3 meters on a side with a pretty whiz computer network and onboard generator. They haul it out somewhere with a helicopter and then several onboard Agents deploy the drones to establish a perimeter. It's got a lot of off-the-shelf drones used as semi-disposable spotters and a smaller number of advanced spotter drones. It carries a mix of 3-4 combat drones with the specific configuration depending on the deployment locale. Hives tend to get moved every 4-10 days to keep their exact coverage distribution a mystery. }<<--Crank

>>{Hives were developed at Fort Knox but are now standard equipment in many military organizations. The new buzz, if you'll pardon the pun, are the swarm drones. Swarms are composed of a dozen or so individually disposable drones that operate on a short-range network to share information and processing power. Each drone is pretty stupid if it gets away from the swarm, think Pilot 1 stupid, but they really only run one Pilot AI shared between them in a swarm. }<<--TheDickster

>>{The theory isn't new and dates back to the 1970s or even to Von Neumann. However some recent improvements in Agent design, distributed computing, and network theory have made it likely that swarms will see the light of day sometime soon. }<<--Zodiak

>>{How does this vary with some of those nanobot rumors on the net? }<<--SimpleMan

>>{They do not really, except that these are supposed to be macro scale and without as much ability to run amok. I am pretty sure no one wants another Renraku Arcology on their hands. }<<--Zodiak

Neighboring Cities

I'm a Louisvillian, born and bred, and if I'm traveling, I usually go somewhere warm where the drinks are served with little umbrellas. So I've tapped some pals to write this up. Kalvan's volunteered to cover Frankfort and I'm trying to get my hands on info on Cincinnati and Nashville.

Frankfort (By Kalvan)

There are three major areas: Downtown, The West Side, and The East Side. Downtown has a severe building code that only the State is exempt from, which makes architectural change difficult.

>>{Difficult? The place is a freaking time warp. And the government has no sense of style so it's a complete mishmash. You can tell by the changes of government building architecture when the state had money. }<<--BlueBlood

Expansion on the east and west sides are limited by the Woodford, Anderson, and Shelby county lines, which is really secondary to all those horse farms. The north is hindered by the rather up and down of Devil's Hollow Road and the cliff-like elevation changes of U.S. 127 and Bald Knob Road, leaving Georgetown Road (which Main Street becomes after the U.S. 60/Wilkinson Street/Versailles Road intersection) the only major avenue left for expansion.

Run targets, well let's see. We have the Budd Company Plant, Alcoa, Bendix, The Buffalo Trace, Jim Beam, and Old Granddad distilleries, and possibly Ritron. If we expand the area a little, we can include the Georgetown Toyota Plant, The Purnell's "Old Folks" sausage plant in Simpsonville, Woodford Reserve distillery in Woodford County, and maybe some college fun runs against Georgetown College, Midway College, or Centre College in Danville.

>>{"Fun runs"?}<<--Jake

>>{I'm guessing you're not a product of the collegiate education system. Lots of colleges have rivalries and pull pranks. Sometimes it gets out of hand. These days a couple of the better funded frats and sororities will pay decent cash to smite down a rival greek. }<<--Zorba

But that would be ignoring political runs. As you may know, crooked politics here in the Bluegrass State are a spectator sport. Runners can be employed in making bribes, collecting blackmail, setting demonstrations up for failure, planting data in offices, and getting rid of incriminating evidence. You won't be able to retire in style or even afford beta grade cyber or cultured bioware doing this sort of stuff, but you can make pretty high ranking contacts.

Getting Around

The city's road systems are pretty good. There are a few unpleasant locations, like Spaghetti Junction, where I64, I65 and I71 meet, and the I265/I71 interchange but overall it's better than most cities of the same age and size. Gridlink coverage is worse than out of towners expect though, with power-link available only on primary roads. The navigation aspect is pretty clear, thanks to RFID tags integrated into signage and roadway reflectors to provide coordinates, lane directionality, and lane positioning. Traffic data is available on all primary and secondary roads, tertiary roads and many subdivisions lack continuous information streaming along the roads but often have transmitters at intersections to provide periodic updates.

The bus system, operated by Transit Authority River City (TARC), is okay. It's really a collector system for the light rail. As part of the post-Blast FTZ reconstruction, rail lines were included on the new bridges and along the I64 corridor downtown. Rail spurs were extended on I65 to Standiford and Kentuckiana airports and around I264 & I265. An FTZ-perimeter loop has been proposed but has not been approved.

The rail system operates 24x7 to support the UPS hub, the Ford plants, and various production facilities, however the trains become increasingly sporadic as the hour becomes later. They are generally timed to coincide with the major shift changes. Since the light rail is open 24x7, so are the buses but again, they are primarily there to deliver people to the few trains and vice versa.

>>{TARC isn't bad. I've had better and worse experiences with urban transportation. It's not too forgiving to tourists who don't work within the recommended event hours. }<<--SimpleMan

>>{Such as? }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Well, on a typical week the bar's close at 4am, so Friday and Saturday nights there are trains about every 20 minutes until 5am, then the trains become hourly. Most events are on Fridays or Saturdays so they generally have train support until the wee hours but sometimes Light Up Louisville is mid-week to avoid a ball game or other event. Since that tends to occur at around 9pm, there are trains every 20 minutes until 10pm, then the trains leave on the half hour until midnight, with hourly trains from then on. }<<--SimpleMan

Louisville has three airports: Standiford Field, Bowman Field, and Kentuckiana. Standiford is located at I65 & I264 between Old Louisville and the South End. Bowman is between the Highlands and the East End on I264 and Kentuckiana is in Jeffersonville at I265 and I65.

Standiford is a standard commercial airport and has the UBS shipping hub, making it a very busy airport. There's no support for suborbitals and no hangar space for super jumbos (though the runways are big enough) but otherwise it's a standard urban airport.

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Bowman is a smaller field catering to private owners, small commercial operations, and corporate aircraft. It has several dedicated helipads, a VTOL field, dirigible mooring, a variety of aircraft repair services, and a flight school.

>>{Oh come on, dirigible mooring? How often does that get used? }<<--Flatfoot

>>{For more than a century at this point, though technically most of the usage was from blimps. There are anywhere from one to three blimps hovering over the Downs during the Derby. The field also saw extensive usage when dirigibles were used to ferry heavy equipment back and forth across the Ohio during Blast reconstruction. }<<--HistoriCal

Kentuckiana is the newest airport and is the only suborbital facility in the area. It used to be the Clark County Airport but was totally rebuilt back in 2045. It is on the northern outskirts of town where the noise of the SOs launching isn't inflicted on the entire city. Kentuckiana also has a small (?) super jumbo hangar complex that is generally idle except for the big influx of tourists during Derby.

There's also a small airport in La Grange, built back at the turn of the century. Bluegrass Field tends to be the bailiwick of local bigwigs with their private planes. Most are turbo props or the tinier jets. The three runways are larger than Bowman and are able to handle standard commercial flights. The tower has decent tech in good repair, even if it isn't cutting edge. The big limitation is the dearth of hangar space.

>>{If you look you can find a handful of small, private runways around the region. Farmers used 'em for crop dusting and the occasional CEO would have a light plane at their "country farm." The majority of them are registered but I'm confident there are a few hay fields that serve double duty as runways. }<<--Greenthumb

>>{It's surprising how many blue-sky pilots there are in Louisville. Seneca High School has a pilot vo-tech program that has been teamed up with Bowman field's training facilities for nearly a century. VR training and drone piloting has significantly broadened the boundaries. A good portion of the kids go onto either the military or as commercial pilots and most of the rest at least keep their VFR license. }<<--TowerPower

>>{I suspect there will be an up tic in aerial misconduct over the next few years. I recently found a small group of students practicing with a military flight simulator program. }<<--ZodiAx

>>{Were they any good? }<<--TowerPower

>>{ Not my specialty. The flight logs indicated that all four of them had more than five hundred simulator hours each in a Peregrine-MarkIII. The training milestones showed they were qualified for visual, night, and instrument flight, VSTOL, and carrier operations. }<<--ZodiAx

>>{Huh, the MarkIII is only recently out of initial testing. It's supposed to be a

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next-gen supersonic air combat drone. I'd be surprised if the test pilots had many more simulator hours. }<<--TowerPower

>>{How can you be certain they are not the test pilots? }<<--ZodiAx

>>{Because Huh, no reason I guess. It could even qualify as "course work" if they were in the vo-tech program. What makes you think they might be the pilots? }<<--TowerPower

>>{I would not expect normal high school students to have access to the host system. Plus I found no signs of hacking. Should they be sufficiently skilled at hacking to amass more than 2,000 combined flight hours without leaving a trail that I can find, I should retire now. }<<--ZodiAx

Industry in the FTZ

Louisville, like most river cities, has had a long-standing industrial base. Heavy industry prior to the Blast was two Ford truck plants, General Electric Appliance Park, the JeffBoat facility, and numerous machine shops and foundries churning out auto parts.

Light industry and specialized metalwork was plentiful. Due to the medical research and number of hospitals in town there were several medical prosthetic and biomechanical device manufacturers. There were many repair depots that found advantage in being close to the North Am UBS hub.

Post-Blast, there was a need for cash and a lot of potential tax incentives. Several corps located facilities in town to take advantage of the FTZs ability to buy materials through whichever of the CAS or UCAS was more favorable. The end products also counted as being produced locally for sale in the U/CAS so no import/export fees. It also meant the assets were protected by yet another layer of bureaucracy so the blackest of black R&D projects were moved out here.

>>{Wait, what does that matter? Corps are extraterritorial, aren't they?}<<--SimpleMan

>>{Yes and no. Corps are extraterritorial but they don't necessarily claim all their facilities as such. Furthermore due to post-Crash2 changes to the law, they can't. A corp might not want to declare a simple soy factory extraterritorial so that they can pawn the cost of police security off on the local community. The second part means that if they don't own/lease the entirety of a property, they can't declare it extraterritorial. So satellite offices in buildings they don't own don't count. They can own the whole thing and lease most of it out, but then they are responsible for police enforcement and the like which they may not want for a simple strip mall.

>>{Lastly, since the U/CAS got spines, they've been charging import/export fees for materiel transported across their territory unless it both originates and is delivered extraterritorial properties of the same corp. }<<--LeagleBegal

>>{There's one other thing, corps can't get insurance on extraterritorial property except through their own company-owned shell and what's the point of that? So again, expensive facilities that aren't likely to have bad stuff happen to them like soyfood processors will be left as a "privately owned" property. That way in the slim chance that something bad does happen to the soyfood processor they get a payout. }<<--TravelingSalesman

>>{Who in the world insures a megacorp?!? }<<--LilJohn

>>{Not the whole megacorp, just a given facility. And there are a lot of cash-heavy, investment only companies out there. Insurance is a company with long-term payouts and occasional short-term nightmares. Tornadoes, floods, forest fires, and other big catastrophes can seriously impact the short-term bottom line. Over the course of several decades they make good money but most corps can't

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see that far. So with the exception of insurance offered to employees, the megas don't bother with it. }<--TravelingSalesman

Net result is that Louisville has massive and broad ranging industrial base to serve the region from Indianapolis to Nashville. Multiple soyfood processing plants, numerous consumer electronics and heavy equipment manufacturers that are almost universally non-extraterritorial.

I'm getting tired of that word, I'm gonna shorten it to XT, 'kay?

Back to the world, most of the XT facilities are seriously secure sites. We're talking bleeding edge tech factories and gen-after-next R&D. Plus military tech. Fort Knox helped out immensely on that front. While its focus had been shifted to training for armor divisions, it's still a prime place to showcase new weapons tech. Bullitt County's hilly terrain was perfect for weapons and explosives testing, assuming you didn't need to test anything at range, which is when the corps arrange to rent the Fort Knox firing range.

>>{So kiddies, the lesson here is that there's a lot of R&D here. It's not Silicon Valley, it's more like Los Alamos where the R&D is blacker-than-black and in need of that extra layer of legal mumbo-jumbo provided by the FTZ. The paydata is very rich but also very well guarded. }<<--TheDickster

>>{It also means there is lost paydata out there. Crash2.0 wiped a lot of information. Property records that were hidden behind a maze of shell corporations tended to become lost when that maze fell apart. I know of at least one facility that was mothballed after the resident genius died and was looted of quite a healthy stockpile of stuff that had been left behind. It wasn't exactly the latest model of doodads but you don't always need the latest model of electron microscope. }<<--MarySue

>>{That is not a safe activity. I am aware of at least one team that found a facility with an active security system. It is unclear if the Crash altered the programming of the defenses or if they were already set to be highly aggressive. Regardless, heavily armed drones engaged the intruders with anti-tank munitions. }<<--Zodiox

>>{Yeah, but imagine if they'd found those drones inactive! }<<--Ohmiga

>>{Don't bother Zodiox, there's some people you just can't reach. }<<--OldPete

>>{Isn't military tech really expensive? Wouldn't they be charged a lot on those import fees?}<<--SimpleMan

>>{Good call. Yes and no. The FTZ has a special trick. If Ares ships steel and parts from a UCAS facility to Louisville, there're no import/export fees. If those materials are turned into a tank and sold to the CAS there are no import/export

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fees because the FTZ is in both the CAS and UCAS. }<<--LeagleBegal

>>{That's A lot of profit. }<<--SimpleMan

>>{And that profit is how the FTZ got Ares, Shiawase, and Saeder-Krupp to build four mile-long bridges, rebuild the locks and dams, and rehab downtown in only five years. The corps are making money hand over fist from the FTZ but it meant that the governments didn't have to pick up the tab (which they couldn't have in less than a few decades) so it's generally seen as a good thing. }<<--HistoriCal

Louisville Matrix

Contrary to hillbilly images, Louisville's been heavily wired for decades. Back during the Fifth World Louisville had several corporate headquarters and, during the height of the Internet growth, a number of local 'net startups. None of them acquired national attention by the masses but they were valuable enough to generally be acquired by larger entities or their staff poached.

Louisville has also been **un**wired for a while. The geology runs to rock or swamp away from the river and laying cable can be expensive as sin. Multiple wireless data providers set up shop and had a solid, if not spectacular business. This was no AR but it was a simple cellular-type data service that blanketed nearly half the greater metro area.

It was around this nucleus of geekdom that brought Louisville attention during Crash1.0. Yeah, everything fell down here, they weren't wizards. They did, however, tend to recover faster. Companies that had out-sourced to Louisville's data centers were often up a week sooner than those who weren't. Past success breeds future expectations so many companies located servers in Louisville. They didn't move corporate headquarters or anything that flashy but when companies talked about having "redundant, offsite servers" there was a good chance that Louisville was where one of those redundant servers wound up. International companies that hadn't gone Mega liked the fact that Louisville was an FTZ and not explicitly within the CAS or UCAS but central to both and easily accessed with whatever staffing they had.

Crash2.0 made it even more evident that Louisville was a little shining gem of technical competence in the Midwest. Lots of companies had maintained those old wireless systems, mainly as back-ups in case a power failure killed the landlines. It was pretty simple to strap a few more broadcast units on the towers and ship transceiver/repeaters to their clients to upgrade to modern wireless. Those towers also immediately began serving modern wireless to most of the metro area, kicking off the migration from Pocket Secretaries to Comms.

>>{Louisville remains a hive of early adopters. So far the only tradition where personal electronics are concerned is to upgrade early and often. }<<--Mentat

>>{We are also a test market. If you are in the right demographic, you can easily make pocket money doing product reviews or get a free lunch trying new foodstuffs. }<<--PennyPincher

>>{Which means "get an ID in a popular demographic." }<<--Skip

Louisville Culture

The Louisville scene is a little odd. It's been compared to Seattle since the late 1980s when several local bands almost made the leap to go national at the same time. Louisville never actually made that leap into the social consciousness and by the same token the big national events aren't quite as popular around here. The masses are still sheep but they are traditionalist sheep, preferring local bands at local bars and the same festivals their grandparents went to.

It has been called the biggest small town in the world and has its own "Louisville Small World" syndrome where you can connect almost any two people in three degrees of separation or less, often in just two. It's a very friendly place, where people still waive at their neighbors.

>>{This is a strength and a weakness. Native runners almost always know someone on the inside. However that also means that there's someone on the inside who knows *them*. The use of gel ammo is quite popular in these parts just to avoid redneck jihad. Remember, the Hatfields and McCoys have relatives in Louisville. Matter of fact I went to school with both a Hatfield and a McCoy and my great, great, great Grandma was said to have known Devil Anse.}<<--Hillbilly

There are a number of internal rivalries between parts of town but it's generally at the healthy level rather than the pathological. The big rivalry is at the college level. The University of Louisville has a centuries-old grudge against the University of Kentucky based on funding, prestige, and politics.

>>{Way understated. Louisville was historically disliked by the rest of the state for being rich snobs but since Louisville taxes were a huge part of the state budget the city felt like it was being bitten by leeches. Bitter funding battles were often waged at the state capital and the universities were one place it played out. }<<--MamaWasACardDaddyWasACat

>>{Cards are gonna stomp the Cats this year. Baakin is an excellent center and Coach Rudy will make Cat fans cry. }<<--Card2065

>>{ You're on BTL, bird brain. Rudy got lucky last year when Hannigan dislocated his shoulder and Michaels got banned for his completely justified reaction when Hannigan got mauled. Baakin's not going to be able to carry the team this year and Michael's got a crew of recruits to back Hannigan up. }<<--CatsPaw

>>{ Yeah, like throwing chairs was a real mature response. It was like Bobby Knight possessed him. Too bad Bobby didn't leave Micheals any plays or tactics to go along with the tantrums. }<<----Card2065

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>>{ I swear to God, I'm going to load an Agent on this board just to keep this crap under control. Thread closed. }<<--Administrator

Religion is a big deal around here, even if it doesn't get a lot of attention. The Presbyterians have their national headquarters in Louisville, we have a Baptist seminary, a fairly large Catholic archdiocese, many Methodists, quite a few Jewish temples, several mosques, three large Hindu temples, some Orthodox Greek churches, two small Amish communities, and at least one snake-handler church.

The big wild card is the Southern Christian Church. A full blown mega church built back at the turn of the millennium, SCC has a weekly attendance of 25,000 person, down from nearly 37,000 during the height of the crazy days of VITAS, goblinization, and the Crashes but up from the 18,000 that showed up in the early 2000, and has a campus that can actually compete with U of L.

The carefully unspoken stance of the former SCC clergy was that magic was too great a temptation for mortals but not *eeevil* per se. The new senior minister, David Allen Wycke, seems to be of the opinion that all spirits are temptations sent from the devil and that every encounter with magic is another step towards the dark. He hasn't denounced magic directly yet but it's only a matter of time before he does.

>>{Play nice or I **will** load some IC on this thread. }<<--Administrator

>>{--deleted--}<<---BibleThumber

>>{Good children.}<<--Administrator

>>{SCC has long been known as Southern Christian Cult in the area. They perform full background & credit searches, require multiple referrals from current members, have dues & specified fees, assigned seating, etc, etc. I dunno if it was always like this but right now getting into SCC is harder than joining a snobby Ivy League country club. }<<--SimpleMan

>>{No lie. I'm a member by birth and let me tell you, I couldn't get in otherwise. Take a country club, stir in a fraternity, and mix vigorously in the blood of Christ and you have the SCC. It's not really a cult but it really can appear to be a Louisville Star Chamber to outsiders. Good Ol' Boy politics are alive and well in the region and when you factor in a spot of religious fervor and the knowledge that the congregation is 2% of the FTZs population and you have an incredibly loud voting block. }<<--GuyGitcha

In contrast, the Presbyterians have followed the Vatican's lead and declared that magic is a force of nature that is neither good nor evil but may be used for both. The various Baptists are fighting it out, with the more radical congregations giving the rest a bad

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name. The fire-and-brimstone Baptists are of the opinion that magic is the devil, unless it's done by the preacher in which case it's a faith healin' miracle and send your money to the number on the screen.

Night Life

Despite the serious influx of Jesus, we like the party. Heck, it might be due to the Jesus; the man did turn water into wine. Anyway, drinking is almost a regional sport around here. Regular bars are open until 4am and most really don't get swinging until after 11pm on the weekends. The greater Downtown region has almost uncountable numbers of corner bars, so street traffic is high at all hours of the day and night.

We have a decent local music selection, in part from being a border city. Our biggest problem is fragmentation. There are too many selections for any one to get very big. In the past week I have heard bluegrass, rockabilly, country, western, rock, goth, metal, industrial, ebm, synthpop, j-pop, thrash, punk, horror-core, fusion, mini-mono, emo, hip-hop, gangsta, funk, retro, classical, worldbeat, celtic, and 80s music. Not all that was live but it was on locally produced net shows.

>>{Jeez Louise, is this ever spot on. It can be nigh impossible to get a group of locals to go somewhere because they each want to hear something different. }<<--Skip

>>{What is "80s music"? }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Hah! It's a local artifact. The problem Skip described has existed for close to a hundred years. For some reason, way back when, the only music people could all agree to enjoy was from the 1980s. Bars caught on and booked 80s bands. Decade after decade, bands kept playing 80s hits and DJs sample and remix them repeatedly. Louisville is about the only place you'll hear it live. Like the man said, it's become tradition and Louisvillians are traditionalists. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{Visitors should get used to nearly every louisvillian referring to any kind of soft drink as a "coke". Waitresses will say "Would you like a coke?" which you might rationally say, "Yes, I would like a Coca-Cola." Then they will confuse you with "We have Pepsi, Big Red, Ale-8, and diets, which do you want?" }<<--fourstring_samurai

On the media front, Louisville's claim to fame is the LEO, Louisville's Eccentric Observer, a totally independent 'zine with surprisingly good coverage. Visitors write it off as a scream sheet but that's ignorance. LEO's about a century old now and has always been free, even when it was a print product.

>>{Wait, how could anyone have a free magazine using paper? }<<--MamaWama

>>{Advertising. LEO has always had a large circulation and deep market penetration. A lot of the early ads were for ...personal services but legit ads with

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physical coupons proved the market value was huge. All the major entertainment venues advertise in the LEO, along with many upscale stores trying to get the elite wanna-bes. Circulation only went up when they went digital. }<<--HistoriCal

LEO's repeat audience draw is the regular features and syndicated columns like News of the Stupid, Horoscopes by Swami Steve, and humorist Dick Gaines combined with only slightly biased entertainment reviews. Most of the reviews are done by locals, so they have personal bias rather than the inherent corporate bias you get in the major news outlets. The writing quality is fair to excellent, depending on the author. LEO has several investigative journalism awards that generally lead to more "professional" corp shills making official pronouncements to the masses.

Despite LEO's relatively small budget, they don't get hassled as much as you might expect. They may be the local blabbermouth, but they are the **local** blabbermouth, and don't you forget it. In the normal news media world, at least one corporate voice box will be free to air some local nabob's dirty laundry because they are small fish compared to the global entertainment pond. But sometimes the shills are told by their corporate masters to keep something quiet because of the profit and that's when LEO proves its worth. LEO may air local dirty laundry, but enough of the time the dirt can be traced back to a non-local corp that that local politicians, movers, and shakers find it worthwhile to keep around.

>>{Why hasn't a corp just bought it up? }<<--Roadie

>>{Can't. During the megacorp exploitation explosion, the LEO owners decided to go public to raise cash, cut liability and at the same time built a massive safeguard. They put non-voting stock out on the market and by their charter it can only be 40% of the company. The voting stock is actually held in a co-op open only to Louisvillians and regardless of how many shares you own you only get one vote per person. Sales, mergers, etc must be approved by 75% of the voting stock. Good luck with that. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{LEO is a good place to dump data too hot to handle. Every so often you find something too much trouble to try and leverage but that gets you so hot under the collar that you can't stand to let it happen. }<<--GuyGitcha

>>{Their reporters and editors sometimes hire 'runners, mostly for bodyguard work. They tend to be pretty picky, though. Ethics are a pain. }<<--Inktank

Kentucky Derby

It's 2 minutes of sports with six weeks of hoopla. The Derby holds the distinction of being the largest annual spectator sports event in the world. Around 150,000 people are at the Downs on Derby day. The record to date is 184,000.

>>{For a *horse race*?!? No freakin' way! }<<--SportsNut

>>{Way. What other sport can have more than 40 acres of seating? I'm sorry, 40 acres of *cheap* seating in the infield, the grandstands and towers are profitable gravy. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{Derby is more than just the race; it's pageantry, a chance to see and be seen, and a massive party. I have no idea how many gallons of bourbon are consumed but I guarantee it's a lot. }<<--OldPete

>>{Blech, mint juleps! What a horrible waste of bourbon! }<<--MamaWama

>>{I agree but the glasses are a collector's item so lots of people buy 'em and the mint julep is a pittance of the cost of a glass. I went to the infield in college with some friends. They all got the glasses but hated bourbon so handed them to me to drink. I loathed the first one for defiling the bourbon, disliked the second one, felt the third was lacking, the fourth was surprisingly refreshing, fifth was pleasant and the sixth was enjoyable. Plus my breath was minty-bourbony fresh! }<<--Mentat

Derby is preceded by a series of events, mainly for charity. There are the normal stuff like the annual Derby Parade (meh, good for the kids) and the full and mini marathons but then it gets to local flavor.

Kiddies and folks with sweet tooth go to the Balloon Glow & Cheesecake festival. The balloon glow is a prep for the hot air balloon race that happens the week before Derby, where the crews lay out their rigs and partially inflate the balloons to test the burners and everything. They do it at dusk so you see all these balloons illuminated from the inside by their burners. Not sure where the cheesecake festival came in but I've got no complaints.

>>{A local bakery sponsored the balloon glow one year and had booths selling their wares; cheesecake sold like hotcakes. They saw the marketing on the wall and went whole hog the next year. Demand got so great they couldn't feed the masses on their own so it became a cheesecake festival. }<<--HistoriCal

>>{Mmmm, cheesecake! }<<--Heather

The riverfront sees a lot of activity with the urbanites' favorite being the Chow Wagon. Hot dogs, brats, barbeque, burgers, burgoo and beer purchased with tickets so you don't realize how much cash you're spending while mediocre live music blasts away nearby. It's really much better than it sounds, especially if you're there during work hours. The Chow Wagon is a great place to watch the steamboat race between the Belle of Louisville

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and the Delta Queen, another historical steamboat from New Orleans. It is hotly contested if the race is fixed or not but it's an amusing afternoon, especially after your third beer.

There are several goofier events, like the bed race (brass beds pushed by locals as a fundraiser), the occasional jet-pull (UBS hooks a tow chain up to a freighter and teams compete to see who can pull it the farthest), and numerous other one-off events like poker, canasta, golf, hole-in-one tournaments, urban brawl, etc. that are glad to take advantage of the out-of-towners.

The big favorite is Thunder over Louisville. It is a massive fireworks show, the largest historical event in North Am, with literally a half dozen barge loads of munitions. It lasts for more than thirty minutes of continuous aerial bombardment. It is preceded by a huge air show where historic and current aircraft meander or blaze down the river to give crowds on both sides a thrill. If crowds are light you'll only have to share the area with a half-million other people but crowds around 750,000 are pretty typical.

>>{Holy freakin' shock! }<<--SportsNut

>>{Yeah, it's completely mind boggling. What makes it even more impressive is that most of the attendees are not Louisvillians. I think on average only about 10% of the FTZ populace goes to Thunder on any given year. The other 650,000 are visitors. Buy each of them a couple sodas, some soyburgers, a doodad for the kids, couple beers for the folks and the occasional T-shirt, hat, or mug and you've just pumped a hundred odd million into the economy. Y'all come back, y'hear! }<<--HistoriCal

Louisville Politics

It shouldn't come as any surprise that Louisville does not have a "normal" political structure, there are just too many fingers in the pie. What evolved is a format similar to the U/CAS at the federal level rather than a typical city.

At the top of the executive branch you have the Governor, the high mukety muck of mukety mucks. The Governor is a locally elected position open only to native Louisvillians but one that has to be ratified by both the CAS and UCAS senates. The Governor sits for 4-year terms and is limited to two terms. Below the Governor is the Mayor, which is elected independently of the Governor for 3-year terms, limited to 4 consecutive terms, and requires no ratification by either the CAS or UCAS.

>>{Charles Pruitt is our Guv'ner with the honorable Alex Basjis Mayor. }<<--
HistoriCal

Attached to the executive division is the ZDF Commandant, a high-ranking military officer originating in alternately the CAS and UCAS and appointed by that body's president. The Commandant must be approved by the FTZ senate as well as the CAS /UCAS Joint Chiefs that did not provide the candidate. The Commandants serve a single 6-year term.

>>{It seems that six years is long for a single term but short for a high ranked military posting. }<<--JackBunny

>>{A compromise. It is a hassle for the ZDF's ranking officers to cycle regularly. Countering that,the U/CAS military made a large investment in the two or three star generals typically given the post. }<<--OldPete

>>{Aaand each side wants to make sure any off the books skunkworks are kept small by only having a couple of years in control. }<<--SimpleMan

>>{ZDF Commandants tend to be Army generals on the main. The Navy cranks a bit, but the fact is that the Navy generally has a more indirect role in area control. The best Commandant was General Eric Vicks from the CAS Marines. He'd already been through the wringer when he was in charge of peace keeping forces along the Euro-Russian border. }<<--MOS89D

>>{I think Johnny Davencrest proved his worth and gives the Air Force types some credit. }<<--TowerPower

>>{I'm not going to knock Davencrest but he was pretty atypical for the modern Air Force. He preferred whirly birds and the low & slow tank killers. Those are forward-positioned combat assets compared to the supersonic fighter jocks so he had a much better appreciation for ground control forces. }<<--Think Tank

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The Commandant has his own watchdog in the form of the Chief of Police, an elected official who is nominally in charge of law enforcement within the FTZ while the Commandant focuses threats to the border or crimes that cross the border. In this globalized world of ours, pretty much everything crosses a border, leaving the Chief with domestic disputes and traffic violations. Instead the Chief acts as the civilian liaison and keeps the ZDF interacting with the public as police rather than an occupying military force.

>>{Sounds like a crappy job. }<<--AmericanTourista

>>{Oh, it is but the CoP is the top law dog role for the native born. And CoP is a good way to segue to a wider political role. }<<--Quicklime

Unlike the weirdness in the executive branch, the judiciary is lightness and simplicity. There are only four tiers of criminal courts in the FTZ; district, circuit, appeals, and supreme. With the exception of supreme court justices, judges are voted into office. The supreme justices are appointed in rotation by the CAS president, UCAS president, and the Governor and must be ratified by the Mayor and the FTZ senate. District Attorneys are elected but the staff prosecutors are merit hires.

>>{Whatsa merit hire? }<<--Todd

>>{Officially it is a position granted based on ability and promotion in the ranks. In application it is a political appointment with extra hoops, mainly not getting caught. }<<--Barister

There are 24 seats in the senate; 20 elected from within the FTZ and the rest are appointed by the presidents of the CAS and UCAS and the governors of Kentucky and Indiana. The senate proposes legislature and is generally a place of civility and genteel treachery. Senators serve 2-year terms with a 10-term limit, excluding the appointees, which can serve an unlimited number of terms. In the case of a deadlock, the Mayor is allowed to cast the breaking vote. The 20 senatorial districts were set by the treaty and require unanimous approval of the senate to be redrawn.

>>{Which means they are eternal and forever, amen. No way to get 20 elected yabos and 4 appointed outsiders to agree. Well, not without coercion. }<<--HistoriCal

The house has 74 members at the moment, as there are currently 37 districts in the FTZ. It changes over time, as each district is limited to no more than 50,000 people. Redrawing house districts is done following each census and requires the approval of the Governor and Mayor. All house representatives are limited to serving 6 consecutive 3-year terms.

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Finally we come to the working stiffs in the various departments. Like any city of the size, there are thousands of civil servants in some 75 departments. Fire, health, tax, registration, street, garbage, sewerage, water, animal control, boating, fishing, hunting, permits, etc. Each has a director, various district heads and numerous functionaries, all merit positions. There are something like 60,000 civil servants in the FTZ.

>>{If you've been doing the math, that comes to more than three hundred elected politicians. Add their staff to get up to two thousand politicos, each with a potential axe to grind. }<<--Flakey J

>>{Yeah, and probably twice as many people inside the system that have a beef with them and six times as many outside. }<<--10ccs of Sanity

>>{Some of the worst infighting is in the departments. There's always someone who feels they were wrongly passed over for a promotion. And sometimes they are right. It gets particularly nasty after each election as the newcomers look for cushy do-nothing government jobs for their cronies and cousins. The low-level corruption is common but probably not what pays well for runners. }<<--
TruthInAdvertising

>>{Matter of opinion, isn't it? We may not make megabucks but there's a steady paycheck in digging up dirt on civil servant middle managers since disgrace & death are about the only ways jobs come open. }<<--Stevil

Louisville Shadows

There are lots of opportunities for smart runners in Louisville. Around Derby there are theft and griever jobs with plentiful targets of opportunity as well as bodyguards for said targets of opportunity. Look past the celebrities looking to party and there are numerous wealthy and well-connected individuals looking to buy or sell horses or just to see if their investment pays off. The horses themselves are also big business, with each Derby horse being a quarter million nuyen investment that has just barely broke even.

Politics everywhere is a dirty business. The old Kentucky home is rife with nepotism, cronyism, back room deals, kickbacks, and partisan politics. It was bad when it was governor vs. Louisville Mayor but it is far, far worse now that it is FTZ Governor vs FTZ Mayor vs. FTZ senate vs. Kentucky governor, Indiana governor, President of the CAS and President of the UCAS.

>>{If you haven't figured it out, the FTZ is home to black, or at least seriously gray, operatives from CAS & UCAS }<<--UDP

>>{Why? }<<--Dave

>>{Opportunity. Lots of targets in the form of wealthy gamblers and high profile Derby guests. The corp R&D facilities and the suits that visit them are all targets. }<<--ManInBlue

>>{Whichever country provided the FTZ Commandant tends to be more aggressive as they have no fear of forced extradition. }<<--RiverRat

Our retired runner population is really high, what with the lack of extradition, ease of immigration and the availability of plentiful entertainment and activities. I dunno how many runners returned to the light after Crash2.0 but it had to be a good number as the city was booming with highly skilled individuals from nowhere. Hit a place run by a now-legit runner and you may find yourself breathing Ohio River water. These types occasionally have shadows from the past come back to haunt them. They often need some help burying it again and at least they know what the shadows were like.

>>{There's plenty of those 'sins of the father' work out there from the Daywalkers. }<<--Skippy

>>{Daywalker? What, are you a vampire or somethin'? }<<--Ace

>>{Jeez, they're people who came out of the shadows, daywalkers compared to shadowrunners. }<<--Skippy

>>{No matter what you call them, they probably did something they don't want anyone else to know about and sometimes need help keeping the bodies buried. They don't always have cash but can provide contacts and info that are often better than money. }<<--FlakeyJ

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Religion is only a baptism away from politics and can be just as dirty. I personally stay far away from devout Johnsons as they're only one prophetic dream away from fanaticism. Still, there's a lot of cash in the offering bowls, especially in the mega-churches, archdiocese and national headquarters.

>>{Be careful taking religious jobs. The FTZ has numerous expatriates and refugees that belong to fringe religions, if not outright cults. These people are targeted by countrymen loyal to the dominant power. On the flip side, they are often extremists with violent agendas.}<<--Job's Lawyer

>>{Word. The Dahli Lama isn't likely to hire runners but the Aum Shinrikyo is falling over itself to hire runners against Chinese nationalists.}<<--Steve Ohhh

>>{You lie! Aum Shinrikyo is a peaceful group!}<<--Vehamara

>>{Of course they are. Who could infer violent tendencies from a religious sect purchasing a helicopter gunship with a full combat loadout and up to date electronic warfare rig?}<<--Steve Ohhh

Louisville is a great place to acquire things. Many of the best hackers in town are security consultants, with plenty of free time on their hands to work on side apps. Custom code, tricked out comms, upgraded drones or cyber, it's all here. Be careful of one-offs, though. Lots of R&D projects trickle into the shadows and they can be the devil to maintain. I've seen people with cutting edge ware that freaks out and can only be surgically replaced because there are no spare parts.

The University Hospital is still pretty cutting edge, especially since it is well integrated with the School of Thaumaturgy. They could do some serious shadow clinic work if it wanted to. The rumor mill says that UH contributed to the "cyberzombie" projects six or seven years ago. But unless you've got major contacts you'd be better off with one of the independents that scurry about. The tech tends to be good so worry more about the references of the doc.

>>{Louisville's got our own Dr. Frankenstein, though it's pronounced "frohnk-in-steen" for some reason. Last version I heard had him on a small houseboat tooling up and down the Ohio and the larger tributaries doing upgrades and augmentation for a fee.}<<--GrimmBrother

>>{Doc Frohnk does good work if you can find him. Very smooth and streamlined. He's got no trouble selling you the cyber ahead of time so your tech can check it over and add any upgrades prior to implant. However he vanishes for weeks at a time so if you can't do the upgrades in an afternoon you may wait a month for the surgery.}<<---HandOverFist

>>{Any truth to the rumors he's got a cyberzombie?}<<--OldPete

>>{No, I don't think so. A buddy had some work done by Frohnk and a mage we

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both knew watched over him and provided magical care. Zombies are supposed to make the astral go weird and I'm sure the mage would have noticed. }<<--
HandOverFist

>>{If the houseboat moves often enough the astral taint wouldn't have a chance to build up. }<<--BalRoger

Louisville Supernatural

Louisville is a progressive place but its traditionalist core means the old stories stick around. Every Halloween the historical societies get people out on Corn Island to tell ghost stories around a big bonfire. I won't say these are true or not but they are what people talk about.

Pope Lick Monster

He's your classic half-goat demon person. Everything from a tainted birth, an angry circus freak, or the result of some freaky blood sacrifice from a train accident, the Pope Lick Monster is said to lurk near the Pope Lick Creek train trestle and lure people onto the tracks where they either fall to their deaths or are struck by the train.

>>{The legends about PLM faded in the 1960s when the trains stopped being the focal point of the world. With the advent of the Awakening they've come back with a vengeance. People have started dying again on the trestle. Some of them were typical thrill seekers filled up with bravery juice but at least a few had shown no interest in the PLM nor going up on the trestle, making their deaths complete mysteries. }<<--OldPete

>>{The mysteries are the ones that showed signs of being struck by trains. }<<--SidheSellsSidheShells

>>{Unsubstantiated rumors from people who've never seen the damage caused by someone falling off a bridge. }<<--OldPete

>>{Check the coroner's report for Case File A311642.5 and explain to me how a fall from a train trestle caused a person to be cut in half with "vice-like tool marks." }<<--SidheSellsSidheShells

>>{That report is sealed. }<<--OldPete

>>{No, that report is encrypted and data bombed. High level, too. }<<--Zodiox

>>{Odd for a falling death. But what do I know. }<<--SidheSellsSidheShells

Waverly Sanatorium

People tend to forget that back before VITAS there were other nasty plagues. Waverly tried to do what it could for tuberculosis, a horrible lung destroying disease. TB killed tens of thousands across the state. Waverly was a premier medical facility at the time, though it was in truth little more than stopgap measure until new medicines were acquired. Contrary to most of the folklore, accounts of Waverly by patients portray the Sanatorium as a place run by people doing the best they could in the face of a disease that was poorly understood.

Waverly probably had more than a thousand people die in the ~15 years it was in

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operation. True, some rather horrific medical procedures were attempted to save lives, but they were generally of the "you can die today or you can try to live with just one lung tomorrow" choices. Even though the surgeries were butchery by today's standard they were voluntary and done with the intent of giving people as much of a chance to survive as possible until a real treatment was found.

{Huh. I'd expected more fanciful stuff. }<<--OldPete

Often the stories mix the extremely risky medical procedures of the 1930s TB clinic with the stories of mistreatment that closed the facility when it was a nursing home in the 1980s. The nursing home was run by a different company doing everything on the cheap with the usually predicted poor results.

Regardless, it has long been seen as a hotbed of paranormal activity and many books, stories, B-movies, and faux reality shows have focused on the place. The attention has fanned up post Awakening but the people willing to visit have dropped. The background count can be something awful at times and mystics of all kinds agree the place has been charged with magical energy.

>>{I've heard the spirits of children can be heard wailing with pain from hundreds of feet away}<<--Heather

>>{Quiet, fruit loop. People with TB had trouble breathing, let alone wailing. }<<--SidheSellSidheShells

>>{I went to Waverly a few years ago, me and a few buddies. I'm an Adept, though my Granma calls it The Sight. One of my great-greats was at Waverly so I figured I'd see about saying hello. I did a bit of reading and decided to go on Christmas, since it was a time that the hospital went that extra mile to make people's lot in life easier. We brought a couple of wreaths, some printouts of old carols, and a handful of low-tech toys (tops, yoyos, rubber balls, etc) wrapped up in shiny paper. I also had a weapon focus but I was hoping not to need it.

>>{It was indescribable. The sounds of music could be faintly heard and bits of light would appear within the shell of the building. I hung the wreath on the door and it was like turning up the volume a little bit. We heard children playing and the sounds of sleigh bells. My buddy started laying out the presents when it started getting really weird.

>>{The presents didn't unwrap but footsteps started appearing in the snow. Kid-sized footsteps, accompanied by little indentations that would go along with a ball being bounced, or a little flurry of snow as if a top was being spun. Jefe had put the sheet music on a tree stump under some beers. When we turned around the beers were empty but still sealed and the prints were gone. The sounds of singing got louder and clearer, matching the songs we'd brought.

>>{Finally we heard sleigh bells approaching and a kinda hazy, foggy horse with a sled came out of the trees. The kid-steps ran towards it and the clamor of kids could be heard. A muffled voice, kind of like what you hear in that old flatvid

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about the sad little big-headed bald kid, could be heard.
>>{We weren't scared by it but kinda felt like we were close to wearing out our welcome and headed out. I haven't been back since but I've considered dropping off some more toys.}<<--LilJohn

{Just the kind of ignorant claptrap you would expect from {CONNECTION DROPPED}}<<--IvyLeaguer

>>{Thanks. }<<--SidheSellSidheShells

>>{Don't mention it. }<<--ZodiAx

The Falls

I'm neither ninja nor mage so my knowledge of the Falls is pretty sparse. Historical records say that the Falls are a fossil bed, chock full of Devonian-era trilobites and other ancient sea animals. Depending on the river stage you could walk out quite a ways and see the little stone buggies everywhere.

The falls were turned into a park by the set of locks and dams that enable shipping. The locks and dams were rebuilt post-Blast with the addition of intensive security systems. The air space above the Falls are verboten, which really played hob with some of the flight paths for Standiford Field as planes used to circle around the river to land from the north. The walls are pretty darned high, enough that you can't see over it from the I-65 Martin Luther King bridge. They've got netting across the top of the place, supposed to be some kind of variant bioweave that can damp down the worst of the astral effects while still masking the area.

The general scuttlebutt is that the region is intensely active magically. The background count fades with distance from the river rather than the exposed beds. Apparently the entire stretch of fossils, including under the river, was mystically charged by the simultaneous deaths during the Blast.

>>{Boy is it charged. I've been on the bridge supports where you can see into the site and can tell you the energy is intense. }<<--LilJohn

The area for about a mile from the river has a perceptible, to mages, aura that is said to resemble fog. Within that zone summonings have a much higher failure rate and incidence of unusual spirit form, spell casting is more difficult and nearly 500% the number of confirmed spontaneous manifestation of other regions.

>>{The river seems to mask most of the magic field but I've noticed indistinct shapes beneath the waves. I haven't been able to catch up to them but they look very big and ancient. }<<--CapnJill

>>{Spirits downtown have a weird habit of looking fishy or vaguely crustacean. }<<--Caller5

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>>{I'm not sure if we really have such a high incidence of spontaneous manifestation. Sure, we have more confirmed but we have an agency with on-call staff dedicated to monitoring manifestations and astral phenomena, unlike virtually anywhere else. It would be surprising if we did **not** have a higher confirmed rate. }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{So, what, you think it's an urban legend? }<<--Heather

>>{No, the data post-Blast is quite clear that the manifestations spiked but the disparity in data collection techniques and even populace involvement should discourage the use of overly specific comparisons like "500%" }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{Doc, if you had to make a guess what would you say is going on? }<<--RiverRat

>>{Well, I really shouldn't. I have no specific knowledge of the site nor any information beyond that published in the research journals. However, the dominant theory is that the Law of Sympathy came into play. The Law of Sympathy basically states that like calls to like, which is why blood works so well in ritual magic affecting living things.

>>{ In this case the fossils captured the released energy and the background count is the astral glow, like hot metal. The odd thing is the zone hasn't moved one meter and the intensity has remained constant, at least within the relatively broad limits of human observation. We would normally expect some drift in boundary and/or some seasonal variance in intensity.

>>{ However surveys performed over the thirty-ish years since the Blast mark the boundary as rock solid, pardon the pun. The only suppositions that make sense are that the zone is anchored to a piece of fossil bed that at some point had broken free and that whatever mechanism is in play has plateaued and will require centuries for trends to be perceptible.

>>{ The real travesty is the chilling effect of the security on research. SSoT may not be the most cutting edge magical research school but it can still provide an extensive amount of free and highly motivated labor in the form of grad students who need a thesis. It's been decades and we still have no clear idea why the fossil bed charged or what the potential ramifications are. }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{You don't think this would cause another wave of UGE, do you? }<<--MamaWama

>>{And why did you call him "doc"? }<<--Heather

>>{Old college joke. What does PhD stand for? Piled higher and deeper. I'm working in my thesis so I'm still piling.

>>{I wouldn't worry about Falls powered UGE causing fish-babies. UGE is the result of latent genes responding to their environment. While I can't absolutely rule out further bouts of UGE as the mana levels rise, the most the Falls would do is move the schedule up a bit. Any fish-babies would have happened eventually anyway.

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>>{What really worry me are the larger aspects that as yet have gone unanswered. These fossil beds exist fairly close to the surface from here to Indianapolis. Is there something special about this particular stretch of fossils or does the entire bed have the same potential? Does it require a sizeable number of deaths to charge the beds or will it eventually occur due to the natural death rate? How does the size of the fossil bed impact the background count, duration of charge, or threshold for charging? }<<--PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{Hey doc, what would you say if all the trilobites were missing? }<<--Skyber

>>{I'd say you should smoke something else. }<<-- PilingHigherandDeeper

>>{If you want to smoke the same thing I do, get a drilling rig and see what you find. }<<--Skyber

FTZ Astral Security Division

Back in 2032 half the incentive to form the FTZ was the threat of astral *things* invading Louisville. ASD was given a huge budget and was the justification for most of the heavy weapons now in the Zoners' hands. Lots of people expected Louisville to be a spirit-infested hellhole and the ASD was equipped & budgeted appropriately. All the really heavy weapons, drones, and specialty gear the Zoners have been purchased under the ASD aegis. Initially every call brought out SWAT, if SWAT had anti-tank weapons.

Today a 911 call with any hint of magic gets an ASD First Response team typically consisting of an astral sensitive and an augmented or physad bodyguard though sometimes the astral sensitive is a physad with a normal cop for a partner. ASD has phenomenal response times since many paranormal creatures can vanish in an instant. Calls from remote locations are often visited by an astrally projecting mage and a couple of reasonably beefy spirits.

>>{ASD are the only Zoners welcome in the shadowy parts of town because they always show up when called and don't arrest people for anything but a magic-related crime. }<<--Grinder

>>{They may not arrest you but they will narc on you. }<<--Zentradi

>>{ASD refuses to testify in cases outside their jurisdiction. Frustrates the other Zoners and the DAs to no end. }<<--Barister

>>{The one exception is when ASD personnel are injured. Then you'll be lucky to stand trial. If not you'll wind up a smear. }<<--Gremlin

When Chitown *did* become infested with body snatching, soul eating, giant insects things got tense. Paranoia was high and ASD saw a huge call spike for a while. But they kept a tight grip on things, made sure to keep up their response time without getting twitchy or overreacting.

>>{The ASD gets a lot of justified credit for preventing a panic. They were probably scared drekless of another Bug City but didn't show it.}<<--Tracer

>>{Burnout was high and lots of people retired earlier than expected. ASD did a lot of consulting with the Chicago containment force to help them get the most out of their assets. }<<--Man in Blue

>>{Any truth to the rumor that Chicago containment was a variant of a worst case, "plan z" the ASD had on the books? }<<--SidheSellSidheShells

>>{No comment. }<<--Man in Blue