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> Sorry, but there will be no live shadowtalk on this file; all appended comments will be uploaded and scanned for redistribution. Aztlan caught wind of our new expose and has infiltrated our file sharing network and tagged copies of this file with a psychotropic virus. If you're reading this now, our controlled seeding has worked. If you're one of the unlucky ones Aztechnology caught in their trap, you have my condolences for bearing the price we pay for the truth.
> Captain Chaos

AZTLAN: HEART OF DARKNESS

> In front of you is a file with a collection of perspectives on Aztlan. It is not the whole story, it is not even half the story, but going into Aztlan blind *will* flatline you, so what you read here could be the difference between life and death. Read up.
> Captain Chaos

>>>> INSERT TIMELINE BOX

2015: President Pavon renames the nation of Mexico to Aztlan.
2018: Aztlan joins the Sovereign Tribal Council of the Native American Nations.
2027: The Catholic Church is denied tax-exempt status by the Aztlan government, which then launches a series of audits and charges of fraud against the Church.
2034: Aztlan leaves the Sovereign Tribal Council, protesting its ineffectiveness.
2035: Aztlan invades southern Texas.
2036: Invasion expands to the California Free State; Aztlan occupies San Diego.
2041: A presidential order declares the Catholic Church a "revolutionary and terrorist organization" in Aztlan.
2044: Aztlan nationalizes all foreign industry in the nation.
2045-2047: The nation is expanded to include the other nations of Mesoamerica, either through military annexation or voluntary application to the republic.
2048: The megacorporations retaliate against Aztlan's nationalization of foreign industry with Operation Reciprocity, which then leads to the Veracruz Settlement.
2049: The CAS, California Free State, and Aztlan reach détente, and sign cease-fire agreements and lift trade sanctions.
2051: Yucatan rebels start initiating the first organized raids on Aztlan assets, a rebellion that escalates over the following years.
2061: The dragon Ghostwalker attacks and destroys Aztlan property in the jointly-occupied city of Denver.
January 27, 2062: Ghostwalker, after declaring himself ruler of Denver, removes Aztlan participation in the city's governance.
February 5, 2062: Aztlan launches Operation Rancho Obrero, a slash-and-burn offensive against the Yucatan rebellion. During the ongoing operation, natural disasters strike the peninsula and there are reports of strange spirit attacks.
XX, 2064: A peace summit begins to establish the Yucatan as a semi-sovereign state, but it is targeted by a bomb attack which kills Juan Atzcapotzalco and the shaman Quauhtlatoa on live trid. Aztlan implicates the feathered serpent Dzitbalchén in the attack.
XX, 2064: Dzitbalchén is turned over to Aztlan authorities by Pobre, the new feathered serpent governor of the Yucatan. Dzitbalchén is scheduled for trial and faces execution if found guilty.

>>>> END TIMELINE BOX

THE COUNT OF DAYS

> The following is a transcript of a speech given at meeting of the Sons of the Alamo in Austin during February 2064. The speaker is Pennybacker, a long-time veteran of the South Austin resistance against the occupying Aztlaner forces in that city.
> Captain Chaos

"Welcome and I'm glad you all could make it tonight. I will try to keep my words short as I know that every second we spend together puts all of us at risk. As you all know, the meeting last month was hit by a satellite-guided bomb and we lost a lot of good people. Every effort has been made to make sure that doesn't happen again tonight.

"We call ourselves the Sons of the Alamo and I see we've attracted many new fighters on that image, but it is crucial to understand that we are fighting a different enemy than was fought in 1836. Our enemy is Aztlan, not Mexico, and there is a difference. I'm going to help you understand that difference by telling you something about the history of those we fight.

> It's a subtle difference, but a powerful one. Aztlan is not Mexico, and to call an Aztlaner a Mexican is an insult, and to call a Mexican an Aztlaner could get you killed.
> Spur

"Mexico, as the world once knew it, was brought down from within. Not by those who would later form the Aztlan government, but by the Catholic Church. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or Institutional Revolutionary Party to us gringos, had long controlled the Mexican government until a series of scandals rocked it in the early 21st century. Links surfaced that tied government officials to bribes from corporations and drug cartels, not to mention to the violent death of a popular labor activist. The PRI government collapsed and a new coalition government swept in, backed substantially by the Catholic Church.

> Even years prior, the Catholic Church was looking at South America to stage a comeback against declining followers in the rest of the world. Their own desperate straits drove them to take more direct action in Mexico.
> Holly

"But a Church-backed Mexican government was not meant to be. VITAS and the Awakening swept into Mexico and proved too much for the new government to handle, especially when the Vatican alienated Mexico's newly goblinized. A coalition of business interests, keen on helping their reputations after being linked to the PRI scandals, granted assistance to the suffering population and when the Mexican government collapsed among violent protests, they formed a caretaker government that would stay in place until 2015.

> Though the Church was behind bringing the scandal to light, the truth of the matter is that many of the corporations operating in Mexico *were* tied to the drug cartels and both *were* bribing government officials. But in the Year of Chaos, that was all quickly forgotten.
> Pyramid Watcher

"Spearheading this effort was a local corporation named ORO, which was formed by a coalition of Central American druglords to launder and invest their illicit money. ORO grew out of that, however, by taking advantage of two things: exclusive rights to a vast deposit of valuable molybdenum off the coast of Panama and the Central American nations' delay in signing the Business Recognition Accords, which allowed ORO to turn Central America into a software piracy hub and undercut their competition. In 2015, ORO then decided to guide Mexico's return to democratic elections by installing a new nation-wide, computerized direct-voting system through the Matrix.

> It's still widely suspected that ORO knew about the molybdenum deposit far in advance, since when it was "discovered", ORO had already wrangled exclusive control of that offshore shelf and had managed to eliminate or buy out any possible competition.
> Strider

> Much of the bitter feelings other megacorporations hold towards Aztechnology can still be traced to the ORO days. ORO made a fortune off of ignoring foreign software and intellectual property copyrights, pirating other corporations' work, repackaging it, and selling it cheap worldwide through semi-legal channels. Since the corporations didn't have extraterritoriality in Central America yet and they still were just beginning to solidify their power, there wasn't much they could do until ORO was already an influential business power.
> Nuyen Nick

"I don't think anyone here is surprised to learn that ORO abused their control of the voting system and used it to ensure the victory of its own puppet party, the Azatlán Party. The Azatlán Party was the brainchild of Francisco Pavón y Guetterrez and had formed in popular backlash to the failures of the Catholic Church's efforts. Pavón was one of Mexico's first known shamans and rebelled against the Vatican's proclamation against the Awakened, claiming that the foreign ways had failed Mexico and that the Awakening showed that the people should look to the old ways, when Central America was one of the most advanced empires in the world. ORO ensured that the already-popular idea became policy and a new re-imagining of the nation took root, starting with its official renaming to *Aztlan*, to celebrate the mythological origins of the old Aztec Empire it emulated.

> There is much more to the re-Naming than a simple honorary.
> Wordsmyth

> You would know, old man.
> The Laughing Man

> Despite ORO getting him into power, Pavón never really saw eye-to-eye with them. The increasing privatization and exploitation of Aztlan bothered him, resulting in a number of arguments behind closed doors. He died in 2033 (many believe he was poisoned), just as he was privately considering starting a new party to oppose the government.
> Corona

"Understand that when we fight Aztlan here in South Austin, we are battling this philosophy. As the United States fragmented, Aztlan prospered with the successes of local corporations such as ORO and Pemex. The nation grew wealthy and proud, backing the Native American insurgents in America and even invading the Texan land we now bleed to liberate. Proud nationalism fueled the Aztec mythological revival, and vice versa, and even ORO renamed itself Aztechnology in 2022 to both take advantage of the image and to further popularize it. Its Central American neighbors, struggling with the transformation into 21st century economies, petitioned Aztlan for inclusion in its success and by 2050, every single Central American nation had joined the Aztlan Republic and been worked into the government and the mythological philosophy, which came to embrace elements of many Central American historical empires.

> As a result today, the Path of the Sun religion in Aztlan isn't entirely Aztec, but a mix of Mesoamerican mythologies where Aztec religion is perhaps the most prominent. In reality, the Path of the Sun is a tailor-made belief system perfect for social control of the nation and corporation; and when the nation expanded, the religion was expanded alongside it.
> Socio Pat

"Aztlan saw the rising power of the megacorporations as a threat, however, and rose to combat it in 2048 by nationalizing all businesses operating in its borders. The corporate response was Operation Reciprocity and the outcome was the Veracruz Settlement, which allowed megacorporations to conditionally operate within Aztlan and granted the Panama Canal to Corporate Court control. Aztlan shook off the sting of that compromise by moving south into Colombia and Venezuela, but they didn't get far before being stopped by an equally-expansionist Amazonia, resulting in a Cold War border situation that still exists today.

> Pennybacker glosses over Operation Reciprocity but it's much more than a footnote in history. Essentially, a backroom council of AAA megacorps hatched a plan to teach Aztechnology a lesson. They organized along three sites. The first site was Force Kwanto, a Japanese (read: Japanacorp) carrier group staging "exercises" in international waters just offshore of San Diego. The second site was a private airfield in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. The third site was the Desert Range Proving Grounds airbase in Ute. A diversionary force of drones, specifically designed to look like penetrating bombers on sensors, left from site two at daybreak and put on a good show of what appeared to be an attack on targets in eastern Aztlan. Aztlan air defense forces went on alert, and in a "normal response" to Aztlan's heightened readiness status, the Force Kwanto carrier group put up its own jamming and turned for safer waters. But what the jamming concealed were corporate naval assault elements launching from the group while an air strike element launched from site three utilizing a protected corridor from Force Kwanto to slip into Aztlan airspace over Ensenada and bomb targets identified by the naval assault elements. Aztechnology's corporate military assets in Ensenada were destroyed and Aztechnology got the message.
> Picador

> Both Aztlan and Amazonia claim that Colombia and Venezuela sent appeals to join their republics. While some elements in both nations did favor one side or the other, there's no evidence that either nation ever did formally appeal to either Aztlan or Amazonia. The more likely case is that both had eyes on that land anyway, and planned to take it regardless.
> Arclight

"Some of you think we've nearly won, that South Austin is close to liberation. You are naïve and underestimate our opposition. You look around to your chummers now, wondering how I can say this. But listen, because I've been fighting Aztlan for two decades and I know better than you greenhorns. Yeah, Aztlan was kicked out of Denver two years ago by Ghostwalker, and yeah, in those same two years Aztlan appears to have been losing its war in the Yucatan. But the Aztec nationalist spirit burns brightly in their hearts, as Texan pride does in yours, but the Azzies would not hesitate to offer your hearts to their gods. You will not break the Aztlaner military occupation here until you break the Aztlaner spirit here and that is both what we fight and why our fight is not yet over."

PYRAMID SCHEME

> This memo was "leaked" to Shadowland by an anonymous source. I suspect the leak came from the author, Rodolfo Serraza, Cuba's Admiral of the Navy and former Aztlan Jaguar Guard. I've since been able to independently

verify the information, so I'm including it here. Note that the memo leaked is only a synopsis of a full document; Serraza apparently wanted us to have enough information on his former employers to hurt them, but not enough to compromise Cuban intelligence.

> Captain Chaos

FROM: Office of the Admiral of the Navy

TO: Office of National Strategic Assessment

SUBJECT: Synopsis of Memorandum on the Government of Aztlan for the Office of the President

The key point of this synopsis is to stress the inseparable connection between Aztlan and Aztechnology. In fact, it would not be incorrect to describe the Aztlan government as a secret division of Aztechnology and when we interact with the nation, we must act as if we are simultaneously interacting with the corporation.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

The government of Aztlan is a federal republic on the surface, with a three branched power structure similar to the UCAS, consisting of an executive, legislative, and judicial branch. The executive branch includes the "elected" president and the appointed cabinet. The president serves a six year term and has no re-elected term limit. The legislative branch consists of a bicameral congress: an 80-member Senate elected from 40 legislative states (including states such as Colombia, Guatemala and the other incorporated Central American nations as well as the Federal District that contains Tenochtitlán) and a 500-member Chamber of Deputies elected by population distribution. Senators serve six year alternating terms and Deputies serve three year terms, and neither may serve two consecutive terms.

> They can, however, leave for a term and then run again. They usually spend the downtime kissing Aztechnology hoop as much as possible, so that they are sure to get back in.

> Capricorn

> As far as limited power of the Congress goes, it's all in the Senate. If the madhouse in the Chamber of Deputies manages to get its act together long enough to pass a bill, the Senate can make it law with a simple majority. But if the Senate passes a bill, it automatically becomes law unless two-thirds the Chamber of Deputies votes against it. Since getting two-thirds of the deputies to act together is a feat comparable to large miracles, the Senate does most of the lawmaking.

> Hanging Chad

> The current president, by the way, is Flavia de la Rosa, who was elected for her second term by Aztechnology in 2059. The next election is in 2065 and rumor is that de la Rosa is taking a better-paying job in Aztechnology instead.

> Webster

All of this structure is formality, however, because the electoral system is fully in the control of Aztechnology. ORO designed the computer system that tabulates Aztlan's votes and Aztechnology inherited it. The private consulting firm that verifies Aztlan's elections is owned by Aztechnology through three shell companies. And Aztlan formally does not allow United Nations inspectors to observe their voting process. Though the people vote, essentially Aztechnology chooses the outcome of every election by tweaking the numbers however they need to as the votes are tabulated in their system.

> The control is more complete than even that. Not only does an elected official owe their success to Aztechnology, but Aztechnology makes sure they do their job the way they want. If an official acts out of line, suddenly he finds his funding vanishing, his computer network locked down, his mailbox filling up with incriminating video and his staff being threatened.

> IQ

> Usually it doesn't even require direct intimidation. Most government officials make squat for pay; they hope to get jobs for the private sector (read: Aztechnology) when they are done. So they are more than happy to do whatever the Big A wants because someday they want a corner office with a nice view.

> Hidalgo

> The Azatlán Party always wins majority control, of course, and there hasn't been a non-Azatlán president since the party's formation. *The Partido de Acción Nacional* did have a powerful following in the 2059 elections, but the Azzies just gave them a handful of Congressional seats and pundits claiming they suffered low voter turnout from their base.

> Pyramid Watcher

> Scan this though: on election night in 2059, half a world away in India, twenty-one top computer criminals are found dead, plugged into the decks. Now, word on the street is that they were trying to hack the Aztlan election and change the outcome...but why?

> Squeaker

> Someone hired them, but the tracks were conveniently covered when the Heart of Darkness fried their brains to ash.

> Demonseed Elite

ECONOMIC CONTROL

Aztechnology's control doesn't end with the government. Within Aztlan's borders, Aztechnology is the government, the economy, and the military. Though its experiment to nationalize all industry in Aztlan was short-lived, the Veracruz Settlement of 2048 does still ensure that in the case of all corporations operating in Aztlan (including subsidiaries owned by foreign corporations), the largest single shareholder is an Aztlaner citizen or majority-owned Aztlaner corporation. Though this major shareholder does not necessarily have a majority share of the corporation's stock, other foreign shareholders may find their corporation's operational charter invalidated if they are not at "arm's length" as far as ownership or voting is concerned.

> In most cases, this single largest shareholder is the Aztlan government, but sometimes it is Aztechnology, an Aztechnology subsidiary or an Aztechnology employee. Even in rare cases where it's none of these, it's still an Aztlaner citizen who is subject to Aztech—err...Aztlan laws.

> Nuyen Nick

> The "arm's length" clause comes into play when one of the shareholders is a shell company belonging to another shareholder. If Aztlan learns of this state and the combined share ownership makes the parent and shell companies the single largest owner, say adios to the charter. On rare occasions Aztlan has even enforced this on voting blocs which are not technically owned by the same entity, but vote the same way repeatedly. That's resulted in some vicious Corporate Court lawsuits and lots of jobs for us.

> The Chromed Accountant

Aztechnology also employs a number of techniques to control and oversee Aztlaner currency and trade. Their national currency, the *peso*, actually comes in two forms, the *peso norma* (standard pesos which exists as coins and paper bills as well as electronically) and the *peso libre* (free pesos which exists only in electronic form). Standard pesos can be used freely within Aztlan, but they can not be converted to foreign currency or corp scrip and also can not be taken outside the country. If you wish to do either of those things, you have to convert the standard pesos to free pesos, which are put on a credstick issued only by Aztechnology (usually through a number of wholly-owned "national" banks). You may then use those as you desire; but another step is in place if you pay someone else in Aztlan with that credstick. The free pesos they just received from you will automatically convert to standard pesos the next time they sync with their bank and they are obligated by law to do so before spending them. It is a felony and easily traceable, since free pesos transactions have a very specific audit trail. This ensures that Aztechnology knows exactly where any of its currency that could leave the country or be converted is going and how it is being transacted.

As an extension of that level of economic control, Aztlan's stock market is an entirely virtual exchange, but requires any broker trading on it to complete an extensive government-licensing program (this *includes* computerized expert system "brokers"). Because of the complexity involved in acquiring a license, most foreign investors choose to use local brokerage houses instead of completing the process for their own in-house personnel.

> Aztlan slipped all those esoteric economic laws in under the pretense of combating drug cartels, claiming it makes it impossible for them to move cash in and out of Aztlan or launder it through investment schemes. It'd be a plausible excuse if we here didn't know better and realize Aztechnology was founded by drug cartels.

> Moneymaker

MILITARY CONTROL

Aztlan's active armed forces stands at 60,000, which you are probably surprised to learn is smaller than our own Cuban military. It is largely a defensive military with very little force projection. The Navy includes no aircraft carriers and the Air Force has few long-ranged bombers. It has only a handful of intercontinental missiles and no nuclear warheads. However, as I am sure you know, this is not the whole story.

Aztechnology maintains an active "corporate security force" nearly three times that size. Some of this is used to guard Aztechnology extraterritorial property, but much is used to augment Aztlan military and law enforcement, providing it with the assets it lacks. Aztlan also outsources its intelligence gathering to Aztechnology, which conveniently allows one pool from which both may draw and also gives Aztechnology total infiltration into the nation's security.

- > The Aztech soldiers tend to be a couple years ahead of the SOTA, while the national military is a few years behind. This creates more than a few morale problems, especially when you have situations like the Yucatan, where mostly national army troops were used on the front-lines of the toxic zone.
- > Argent

Then there are the *guerreros*, or warrior orders, of which I'm sure you've only heard legends. I will try to add some truth. The *guerreros* are Aztechnology-backed and religiously-indoctrinated initiatory groups, but their members may be assigned to work with Aztlan national forces as deemed appropriate by Aztechnology. Membership requires magical talent and an impressive military and civic background. In many cases, purity of Aztlaner blood also factors into a warrior's advancement. Contrary to foreign belief, the *guerreros* are trained to be less lethal than regular soldiers; taking prisoners alive is not only preferred, it's religiously significant. From these prisoners, the *guerreros* obtain blood tokens that make them more potent in combat. There are four orders of equal influence but in different aspects.

- > The truth is slim here, but the blood tokens seem to be foci that are made from the bodies of captured prisoners.
- > Silicon Mage
- > Made from their bodies as they are sacrificed, you mean.
- > Eli

Ocelomeh (The Jaguars)

The Jaguars are the most commonly encountered *guerreros* by those who engage Aztlan or Aztechnology assets. The Jaguars are exemplary fire team combat veterans and are organized in exclusive units of Jaguar Guards, elite special forces that only operate within Aztlan national borders, often protecting the most sensitive corporate and national sites. Not all Jaguar Guards are *Ocelomeh*, but all magical troops in the Jaguar Guards are.

Jaguars are trained to act in a role on a team and their magical abilities usually reflect this. One *Ocelomeh* mage might be a team's medic, trained primarily in spells of healing. Another might be fire support and be trained in physical combat magic.

The Jaguars can often be seen at national religious ceremonies in full regalia, wearing light linen tunics bedecked with feathers and flowers. Outside of ceremonial garb, however, they wear standard military uniforms, distinguishable only by a unique shoulder-flash emblem.

- > Or sometimes by their blood tokens. If you see a corpsec guard with a rope of human hair tied to his belt or a finger bone around his neck, chances are he's *Ocelomeh*.
- > Picador

Cuacuahtin (The Eagles)

Cuban military forces may have encountered *Cuacuahtin* warriors and never realized it, simply passing down stories of valorous individuals within an opposing unit. The Eagles are recruited, like other *guerreros*, from various national and corporate military units, but unlike the Jaguars, the Eagles are returned to their original units after undergoing indoctrination. The Eagles are generally put in command of normal soldiers, bolstering their troops with their religious zeal and magical ability. Many are trained in techniques which allow them to enhance the ability of the soldiers around them or protect the soldiers from harm.

Unlike the Jaguars, the Eagles operate outside of Aztlan as their unit is ordered. Like the Jaguars, they are only distinguishable by a unique shoulder emblem.

- > I heard a story from a merc friend of mine who was working down in Yucatan a few years back. He was telling me about how six Aztlaner soldiers held a valley against forty Yucatan rebels, with spirit support, for six hours. After the Aztlaner bodies were finally recovered, the rebels identified one of them as an Eagle warrior.
- > ASDF

Otontin (The Brave Ones)

The *Otontin* are deep infiltration agents, and as such are the least likely ones you've encountered. They are primarily trained in techniques of stealth and deception and an *Otontin* warrior acts alone and usually behind enemy lines. It is their duty to get close to foreign targets that are the most protected, usually for extraction, but sometimes for assassination. Once recruited as an *Otontin*, connections to the warrior's past are erased: unit, family, and friends. They live only for their order and for their mission and assume an identity as needed.

- > Not all the *Otontin* are behind enemy lines. A number of them are being used to infiltrate the underground Catholic movement.
- > Jerusalem

Cuachicqueh (The Shorn Ones)

The *Cuachicqueh* are modern shock troops, or maybe you could call them corporate-military terrorists. They operate in complimentary pairs and like the *Ototintin* are used often deep behind enemy lines. Unlike the *Ototintin*, they are decidedly less subtle and are trained for sabotage, terror strikes, or brute-force kidnappings. They sometimes maintain contacts with insurgents or terrorist groups in the target area but sometimes act entirely independent of those forces. Unlike those groups, they do not take credit for their actions and if the blame falls on one of these other groups, that usually only works to their advantage.

Many devout *Cuachicqueh* can be identified by the historical shorn head and Mohawk or single braid look, but not all undertake this tradition.

> Aztechnology keeps fresh ritual samples of every warrior, in case of their capture. In addition, each one carries a poison pill to ensure they will not reveal anything if taken alive.

> Sin Fronteras

> Poison pill? That's ancient history, chummer. The warriors carry a dose of nano-cutters now. If the need arises to use them, they consider it a holy sacrifice. That's hardcore, omae.

> Italy

FAITH IN THE FIFTH SUN

> Sometimes the best way to get the scoop on a religion is to let the religion sell itself. This section comes from an Aztlan tourist information packet. Of course, you know me better than to believe I'd just let the Azzies represent themselves; I've asked Socio Pat to provide inserts separating truth from fiction. He takes Aztec religion very seriously and has followed it for years and is a source I trust implicitly.

> Captain Chaos

> Don't think I'll forget about the money you owe me, Cap. ;)

> Socio Pat

OLD WONDERS, NEW WORLD: THE PATH OF THE SUN

Everywhere you go during a visit to Aztlan, the many gods of the Path of the Sun will smile down upon you. We are a nation rich in history in faith, but to truly appreciate any visit, you should come with a basic introduction to our spiritual world.

Teocallis, Houses of the Gods

You will see them towering above the Tenochtitlán skyline and you will see them standing humbly on the sides of desert roads. Small or large, every *teocalli* is a temple and a house of the gods and so all are divine. You can identify a *teocalli* right away by its traditional four-sided, stepped-pyramid design and flattened summit which houses an image of the deity to which the *teocalli* is consecrated to and an altar for offerings. They are not only places of worship but also of education and participation; each *teocalli*, even the tiniest roadside ones, includes a subtle dataterminal which a visitor can access to learn about the local god, make donations to the priesthood, or even submit petitions to the deity, which are carried to it by the priests at the next sunrise.

>>> **Socio Pat:** Every visitor with a SIN, that is. Aztechnology runs the computer network the *teocallis* use and you can bet your ass they will tag a visitor's SIN. From it, they can build a database that tracks not which *teocalli* you visited, but ties your name to donations and petitions. The Azzies use this information mostly on their own citizens, building a profile of their nation and finding out who gives and who doesn't. It's an invisible social pressure in Aztlan; the faithful find themselves rewarded while the unfaithful run into glass ceilings, piles of red tape, you name it. The larger *teocallis* are also internally hollow and house environmentally-controlled quarters for the priesthood, as well as other civic duties, such as armories, emergency provisions, etc. Don't think for a second that they are easy targets; these temples are usually guarded by Jaguar Guards and they glow (sometimes flare) in the astral with background count, indicating some serious juju is going on.

> I haven't been able to get close enough for serious study, but I suspect the background count is aspected. To the Path of the Sun, no doubt, which means it'd be a headache for you and me, but a boon to the Azzies. My advice: don't face them down on their home ground.

> Magister

The Old Gods

One reason there are so many *teocallis* in Aztlan is because there are so many gods! The Path of the Sun worships dozens of deities of the old Aztec ways, as well other gods from Mesoamerican cultures that are honored in our republic. Some gods are universal (literally!), like Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent of Knowledge and Laws, while some lesser deities are significant in the lives of certain people, like Yacatecuhtli, the God of Traveling

Merchants and patron of international business. Holidays and festivals honoring the gods are numerous and exciting and there is always one to attend. *Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of the Dead, runs from the evening of October 31st to November 2nd, and it is a time of simultaneously celebrating and mourning those who have passed. To Aztlaners, death is not a somber affair, but one of joy, because we believe that life springs from death. Another fascinating festival is *Nemontemi*, the five "nothing days" between the end of one Aztec year and the start of the next. These days, which fall at the beginning of February, are considered unlucky for business and so Aztlaners spend them at religious ceremonies or gathering with family and exchanging gifts.

>>> **Socio Pat:** I've included a handy list of the major gods, all of which have large *teocallis* in Tenochtitlán and are pretty widely worshipped. The Path of the Sun's pantheon can be confusing, because in addition to the dozens of gods, many gods have multiple aspects with separate names. For instance, the god Tlaloc who is responsible for the rains and agriculture also goes by the name Epcóatl and is the patron deity of children and some small cults worship him as Oztoteotl, the god of caves.

> Images of the gods feature heavily in Aztlan iconography, even in neon-flashing digital crawls and carved into the architecture. If you're familiar with their images they can help you identify sections of the sprawl quickly, especially in cases where the iconography is used in place of textual signs.

> Demonseed Elite

>>>>>Begin Boxed Text Style

Major Aztlan Deities

Deity	Areas of Responsibility
Quetzalcóatl	Sky, wind, knowledge, laws
Huitzilopochtli	War, the sun
Tezcatlipoca	Fate, conflict, night, death
Tlaloc	Rain, agriculture
Xuihtecuhtli	Light, fire
Xipe-Totec	Cycles, seasons, diseases

>>>>>End Boxed Text Style

Those Who Serve

Serving in the priesthood is an important and honored following in Aztlan, which shows from the nearly 150,000 priests in our nation. The priests of the Path of the Sun are known as *teopixque* (singular: *teopixqui*) and are more than just religious stewards, they are civic stewards also in areas such as health care and education. The civic link is evident in the structure of the priesthood: its official head is the *Huey Tlatoani* ("Revered Speaker"), who in past times was the emperor but these days is the elected president. Below the *Huey Tlatoani*, three High Priests preside over the religious observance in the nation: the High Priests of Quetzalcóatl, Tlaloc, and Huitzilopochtli. If you visit Aztlan during a high festival period, you may even see one of them personally leading the ceremony!

>>> **Socio Pat:** Though the President and the *Huey Tlatoani* is the same person, they are two distinct roles. There is separate protocol that is used depending on which one you are addressing. The three high priest positions under the *Huey Tlatoani* seem to have very fast turnover, though as far as I can tell, every one of them has been magically talented. It's not mentioned here, but there is also an influential Vicar General position under the *Huey Tlatoani* that chooses new priests from the thousands of applicants and oversees administrative functions for the priesthood. The current Vicar General is a man named Cesar Botello, a shrewd politico without an ounce of magic. It is also important to note that the percentage of magically active *teopixque* sits at 24 percent and is rising; much higher than in other sectors or in other religious organizations.

> It's not just the priesthood; the percentage of magically-active population in Aztlan is higher than the world average and among the highest concentrations on the globe. Probably due to the Azzies' aggressive system for identifying magical potential in the population.

> Mad Libbie

> If it's just a matter of identification, why does Aztlan also have one of the highest concentrations of metahuman and SURGE expression?

> Holly

The Importance of Sacrifice

You may have seen docudramas on the Ancient Wisdom Channel showing Aztecs sacrificing people to their gods under the dark of the moon. It is true that it once happened and while human sacrifice is no longer performed in Aztlan, sacrifice is still a central concept to our belief system. We believe that we live in the age of the Fifth Sun, with four previous cataclysms having destroyed prior suns and humanity. To return humanity to life and give us a new sun, the gods sacrificed themselves for us. To thank them for that sacrifice and to keep our sun rising each day, the Aztlan people make small sacrifices to the gods. But do not worry for your safety, these sacrifices are purely symbolic, such as a monetary donation to the priesthood or state charities or sometimes a drop of blood from a pricked finger onto a piece of ceremonial paper which is then burned in offering at a *teocalli*. Our sacrifices are not the scary scenes of the trid but a way to honor how fortunate and precious our lives all are.

>>> **Socio Pat:** There have been documented cases of public human sacrifice in Aztlan, though these cases involved criminals sentenced to capital punishment. When pressed, the Aztlan government claims these acts are not "cruel and unusual punishment", because the offender is magically anesthetized just before decapitation by an obsidian blade. Witnesses from the astral do confirm that an exchange of magical energy does take place between the victim and the presiding priest, but can't say whether it is the casting of a spell or not. More significant is the link between the concept of sacrifice and Aztlan magical traditions, as can be seen in the use of blood magic. Though not officially sanctioned by the government of Aztlan, there are countless reports of Aztlaner shamans and hermetics who employ blood-letting of themselves and the sacrifice of others as a means of augmenting their magical ability.

> The Azzies will never come forward and admit it, but they use blood magic all over the place. Where do you think the background count on their *teocallis* comes from? I've heard of secret rituals inside *teocallis* where the heart is ripped out of a metahuman victim and placed inside an offering bowl and burned while a circle of priests use the poor bastard's life energy to boost their ritual.

> Black Isabella

> The real question isn't whether or not they are using blood magic, but what are they using it *for*?

> Eli

> Sacrifice is noble and necessary to keep the sun rising each morning and to keep the *tzitzimine* demons from devouring us all. You should not condemn us but thank us for preserving your lives from a far worse fate.

> Yaoxochitl

The Catholic Insurgency

>>> **Socio Pat:** The tourist screed doesn't mention it, of course, but in Aztlan the Catholic Church is forbidden, declared a "revolutionary organization" in 2041. Catholic practice isn't illegal entirely and the Path of the Sun actually incorporates a lot of Catholic symbology into its rituals to appeal to the masses. But no Catholic religious organizations are allowed to operate within Aztlan and Catholic prostelyzing is illegal. The Roman Catholic Church didn't take this lying down and simply went underground, founding secret churches and holding sponsored rites in the backlands. For a number of years there were only low level enforcement efforts against these underground churches, but with the Yucatan situation resolving, Aztlan has redoubled its efforts of late to shut down these secret Catholic operations.

> It's going to be quite the fight; the New Jesuits protect these underground churches and have used the past few years to establish themselves secretly in Aztlan.

> Decker del Sul

> I actually think it's the other way around. The underground churches are there to hide and protect the New Jesuits while they occupy themselves with something else entirely. Overthrow of the Aztlan government, maybe, but they seem to be more on the defensive than the offensive, like they are protecting something or someone other than their flock.

> Hangfire

> These New Jesuits don't mess around. They are a full-fledged paramilitary force, chromed to the gills and packing heavy ordnance. I've heard they don't use magic but they do *know* magic, heavily versed in the theory if not personally experienced in the application.

> Argent

> Disinformation bulldrek. I've *seen* these Catholic hatchetmen dish out the mojo, and serious heaping servings of it too.

> Pyramid Watcher

BRIGHT SKY, LONG SHADOWS

> The first half of this section comes from a Mexican ganger and runner named Tren. The locals didn't want to give me the scoop on their lifestyle, but I pulled some leverage and got some perspective. The second half is courtesy of Argent, covering the import shadowrunner life and the forces in the nation working against Aztlan.
> Captain Chaos

LA ONDA MEXICANA

Look, I don't know who this Captain Nemo or Captain Chaos gringo is. I don't care. But he arranged to have me busted out of an Aztech prison, so I'm paying back a debt. That's all there is to it. He wanted to know what life is really like in Aztlan, from the perspective of a Mexican. It ain't pretty, but we deal. We have our own way of doing things and our own style; we call it "la onda Mexicana." Don't bother to try to learn it, if you weren't born with it, you will never be one of us.

In Aztlan, we don't care if you have horns or pointy ears, what matters is your blood. You're either a peninsular with blood that traces back to Spain, a traditional with Mesoamerind local blood, or a *mestizo*, who is a mixed blood. The peninsulars are the *cabróns* who think they run the show here, living in their corporate *castillos*, wearing their suits and flashing their fake smiles. Most of the *mestizos* struggle to pull in a few pesos cleaning toilets or working in the agricultural zones, playing up their Spanish blood and doing everything it takes to try to climb the ladder to being a corporate-affiliated worker someday. They are *los muertos*, already dead inside. Then you have the Mesoamerinds, most of them stuffed off in a corner of the nation, living in absolute poverty. Aztlan has never done anything for them except rip off their heritage and they have no part in the nation. Their village, their language, their traditions, that's all that matters to them.

> It's amazing the contrast in Aztlan sometimes. You can leave a near-arcology *castillo* in Tenochtitlán full of corporators pulling in six-figure salaries and then drive a few hours away and find Mesoamerinds living on subsistence farming who hardly even know Aztlan exists.
> Gina E

Then there's Mexicans like me and the traditionals who are with us; *mestizos* and Mesoamerinds who came to the Sprawl to follow the Aztlan dream and build a better life. *Ni madres*. The system doesn't want us, our blood isn't Spanish enough. We choke down smog in between the shadows of the *teocallis* and *castillos*, but we've built our own world there. We have our own gangs, our own shops, our own languages and connections. We don't surf data havens or build bragsheets. Everything is word of mouth here and it's all family and you're either Mexican or you're not. And if you're not, you either prove to us you have *huevos grandes* or we cut yours off.

> Tren's not exaggerating. The locals have no love for the imported shadow community. They have their own gritty system of personal honor, sort of like *machismo*, but the chicas play the game just as well. It's gang rules down there, and the only way an outsider can get in good with them is to prove he's got more guts, but without insulting their honor. It's not an easy task and you don't get second chances.
> Cruz

> If you're in, though, you're golden. Without them, you're an import relying on Aztechnology to support you. And they will stab you in the back as soon as it suits them. But the Mexicans will take care of you like you're family; sharing their doss, their jobs, whatever you need.
> Cutter

We make our living doing the illegal dirty work for the Aztlaners or selling brainbenders to their kids. If some corporator wants to pay me to off another corporator so he can get a promotion, that's fine with me. He gets me a gig as a janitor in the *castillo*, arranges for some doors to be left open, I put a few rounds in the target and walk away with some shiny trinkets from his apartment and maybe even his trophy wife. La onda Mexicana. Got it?

CRACKS IN THE PYRAMID

If you're not from Aztlan, but find yourself working here, you're called an import. Doesn't matter if you're sneaking in for one gig or staying as a frequent hire, you're an outsider and you just get used to that fact. In Aztlan, locals tend to be hired for local work, meaning anything internal (Azzie vs. Azzie posturing). Imports are usually hired for jobs working for or against foreign elements, such as the foreign shareholders and managers of corporate subsidiaries here. The work pays well (in *pesos norma*, unless you're a one-time hire) but you have to be comfortable with the fact that we're even more expendable than the Mexicans and traditionals. Life is pretty damn cheap south of the border.

> Frequent-hires are usually attached to one Johnson. He keeps you paid, sets you up with housing, gives you a place to lay low, and will of course leave your body in a ditch as soon as he doesn't need you anymore.
> Italy

- > The imports down here tend to gather in communities, much like expatriates. They have their own imported fixers who run import bars where they hang out and talk shop.
- > Tequila Max

The import runner community works almost exactly the same in Aztlan as it does in Seattle, but there's one exception to keep in mind. In Aztlan, gun laws are very lax and guns are an everyday fashion accessory. You do not even need to own a license for a pistol or submachine gun. Pretty sweet, neh? Well, also keep in mind that the reason Aztlan doesn't make a big fuss about this is because their law enforcement and Aztech sec-goons are carrying bigger, badder, and more lethal weaponry and armor than you. For them, *everything* is legal and used. Oh, and if an Aztlan cop inflicts collateral damage while taking out a perp, guess who is legally at fault? That's right, the perp. So, first rule: don't attract the *Policía* when doing biz. Second rule: if you do, make sure it doesn't end with you getting caught.

- > Too many runners who got excited about packing heat in Aztlan are now packing cells in Aztechnology prisons. And that's if they are lucky; capital offenders end up as sacrifices.
- > Cruz

Aztlan has recently begun a law enforcement crackdown against "terrorist groups" operating within their borders. If you thought they were hard-hooped before, they are doubly-so now. With the Yucatan rebellion resolved, they've moved more corporate security assets towards handling these internal affairs and it shows. Independent (read: not Aztechnology-sanctioned) organized crime was already an endangered species in Aztlan; the laws around the *peso* make it hard for them to operate. But now it's damn near hell. However, there are a few groups worth mentioning.

David Cartel

In 2007, three Central American drug cartels (Medellín, David, and Masaya) joined together to create ORO, the proto-corporation that became Aztechnology. Of those three, only the David Cartel, based out of the city of David in the state of Panama, still operates in its original form. In fact, after the recent crackdowns on the Mafia and the Yakuza in Aztlan, it can be considered the only traditional criminal syndicate operating in the nation.

- > The cartel's boss, of course, is Domingo Ramos, son of the cartel's head in 2007, Julio Ramos. Not to mention the part about Domingo being on the Aztechnology board of directors.
- > Pyramid Watcher

- > After the Yucatan situation entered peace talks, Aztechnology turned around and just wiped the mobsters and yaks off the face of Aztlan. No holds barred, entirely ruthless. It was over so fast, the "War on Crime" only lasted a few days.
- > Cindy Kit

The David Cartel has its fingers in every imaginable criminal pie in Aztlan, but its specialty is organic and technological drugs (coke and beetles). Primarily for sale abroad, they make every effort to undercut the prices and exceed the quality of their competitors in the Ghost Cartels and Jamaican Posses.

- > Yeah, using Aztechnology labs to refine their product.
- > Beaker
- > This drug war was also a political war; by undercutting the Ghost Cartels, they were cutting off funding to the Yucatan rebels.
- > SWO

Nahualli

Aztechnology's control over Aztlan's currency system makes it very difficult for international criminal elements, even freelancers like us, to operate in secrecy. That is where Nahualli comes in. Traditionally, the term *nahualli* refers to an Aztec belief in an animal that shares a soul with each individual when they are born, becoming sort of their totem and protector. It also referred to sorcerers whose power came from control of their animal twin, among other things. In Aztlan, the Nahualli are a mysterious cult of otaku who operate throughout the regional grid and will, for a price, tweak the numbers in money transactions to get around Aztechnology's oversight of the peso.

- > If you need a *pesos libres* transaction to look like a "first-step" so that Aztechnology doesn't come after you, you want to find these crackpots. Totally weird but they can mess with the data like no other, so that the Big A has a

helluva time figuring it out. There's a sizable bounty on their heads, but there's no way the shadow community would turn these chums in.

> Telnet

> No one knows quite where they operate from, physically or in the Matrix. If you ask around in the right online circles, a meet can be set up. The meets are always a bit edgy; the Nahualli know Aztech is hunting for them, but they are confident on their online home turf.

> Cutter

> You'll know you've met the real deal when you're facing an extremely hi-rez icon that shifts between an image of a child and the image of an animal.

> Demonseed Elite

El Solo

This area of the world has a long history with rebels, usually leftist rebels. The Zapatistas, Sandinistas, even the Yucatan Rebellion. The lattermost group has recently scored what they consider a victory and many of the farmers-turned-warriors are returning home to try to figure out how to live off a land that has gone mad. But there were some among them who weren't merely fighting for Yucatan independence and aren't happy with the outcome. They are anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist extremists who want nothing less than the destruction of Aztechnology and these days find themselves cut off and alone. So alone that they've made it their name, *El Solo*.

> These slags are so committed to toppling Latin American imperialism that they would not take any support from Amazonia during the Yucatan rebellion. They feel that the Amazonians are just another imperialist power trying to use the rebellion as pawns, and of course, they are likely right. But being a rebel group out here without Aztlan or Amazonian support ensures one hard life.

> Sin Fronteras

> They used to be one of the groups that supported *Llama de la Libertad* (the Flame of Freedom), but they didn't buy into Pobre's peace settlement and are very suspect of his recent behavior. Since then, they've been on their own.

> Wreckoon

El Solo is led by a man named "Liberator X" of which very little is known. He issues manifestos on the Matrix and through pirate feeds hosted by the Round Square in the Caribbean, decrying both Aztlan and Amazonia as slavemasters. The group is a strange mix of high tech and low tech; they use private wireless networks to organize and form flash-riots that leave entire corporate complexes trashed but pursuers on their trail have been known to fall into jungle booby traps like pit spike traps that have nothing modern about them.

> They just know how to get the absolute most out of anything they use, whether it's technology or the dirt beneath their feet. Trust me, *hombre*, it's the only reason they are still alive.

> Cruz

> They currently act mostly against Aztechnology assets in southern Aztlan, but have also hit pan-corporate targets in the Canal Zone and north Amazonian targets. I would think they must have some sort of operation in Caracas, but if they do, it's *real* quiet.

> Argent

PLACE OF THE HERON

> Would you believe that Cap was thinking of putting some generic touristy datacrud in here because he couldn't get any locals to help him out? Understandably, people are little quiet and reserved around here, 'cept me, that is. I stepped up and bailed the Cap out, volunteering to share with him some of what I know. I'm not a native of Aztlan but I've been operating here for years while ducking some heat up north and I know my way around. It's a smuggler's job to know.

> Lead Foot

Where does the name *Aztlan* come from, anyway? It's the name of the mythical land where the Aztec used to live, according to their own myths and translates roughly to the "Place of the Heron" or "Place of Whiteness." They were forced out of that land by some catastrophe, however, and migrated south and east, to the central plateau where Tenochtitlán now is. But that's all the history I'm going to give you, time to tell you how it really is, in the here and now.

THE MEXICAN PLATEAU

The northern and western half of modern-day Aztlan is dominated by the Mexican Plateau, a large expanse of high and dry tablelands surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges: the Sierra Madre Occidental on the west, the Sierra Madre Oriental on the east, and the Sierra Madre del Sur on the south. It is mostly inhospitable savannah, but if you hug the edges, it makes primo t-bird smuggling territory. This is also the region where you'll find Aztlan's two largest cities, both of which are great destinations for work.

> Countless tiny tumbleweed towns dot the Mexican Plateau, most of them populated by down-on-their-luck Mesoamerinds pushed off the valuable land to the south. No real work to be had here, but if you need to vanish and you're stuck in Aztlan, this is as good a place as it gets.

> Black Isabella

> Many of the mountains surrounding the plateau are volcanic and Aztlan underwent a large population migration project to move towns away from dangerous flow zones after some major disasters. Recently though, the most volcanic ranges have been dotted by Aztechnology research teams and the number of eruptions are starting to lower dramatically.

> Pyramid Watcher

> Not just Aztechnology research teams. I mean Aztechnology doesn't usually employ too many wujen that I know of.

> Lo Down

Tenochtitlán

The capital of Aztlan lies in the Mexico Basin, a mountainous depression filled with shallow lakes that has been a center for civilization in the region for millennia. Two words describe Tenochtitlán best: crowded and dirty. I know the Seattle runners are rolling their eyes, but Seattle is a lush paradise compared to here. It's a snake's nest of twisting elevated roadways and super-routes and the airspace is just as packed with short-hop VTOLs, copters, and even the occasional feathered serpent. And dirty...smog doesn't even begin to describe it. The air here is so bad that breathers are a required fashion accessory and they take it very seriously.

> No kidding. Your expensive Europa EdenAir breather will get you laughed at here. Breather decoration is all hand-made down in Tenochtitlán. Absolutely beautiful stuff, if you put out of your mind why they are worn.

> Rico

> Tenochtitlán is an elevated city, on average over 3,000 meters up in the mountains. And the build of the basin and the nature of the weather here just trap all the smog in. It's absolutely lethal if inhaled for even a short period of time during the warmer half of the year. The locals have a name for it, *Los Humo Grande*. The Big Smoke.

> Webster

The general rule of thumb is: the more central in the city you are and the higher altitude your doss is, the more pesos you are rakin' in. Ground level smog traps are the home of the SINless Mexicans. Sitting smack dab in the center is the Zócalo, the plaza that houses the Aztechnology Pyramid and the primary *teocallis* of the major gods.

> The Temple of Tezcalipoca is right across the street from the Great Temple of Quetzalcóatl and the difference is striking. The latter is flashy and opulent while the former is rather plain and subdued, despite being nearly as large. But take a gander in the astral sometime, the Temple of Tezcalipoca is radiating with power, perhaps even more than its bigger brother across the way.

> Eli

San Diego/Tijuana Sprawl

The San Diego/Tijuana Sprawl is Aztlan's second largest urban center, its high-tech industrial powerhouse, and the home to most of the foreign subsidiaries that operate in Aztlan. You know all those wiz military jets, boats, and drones Aztechnology makes? They are assembled in San Diego. If it has a military application, chances are it is built here. This is also where all the high-tech agricultural machinery is assembled for shipping north to the Pyramid Operations subsidiary in CalFree. The city also has a legacy of top-notch genetic engineering and chemical engineering research, a legacy that hasn't gone away since Aztlan moved in.

> And Tijuana's infamous reputation for black clinics hasn't gone away either, and has only flourished since San Diego and Tijuana conjoined. Tijuana is definitely the bad side of this Sprawl and is literally packed with shady docs and dirty clinics willing to patch up, graft on, or sculpt over anything biological or cybernetic. Just remember: no refunds!

> Cutter

Of course, all this valuable research and military intelligence (not to mention the relatively lower smog and less crowding compared to Tenochtitlán) also draws the local branches of every AAA megacorp and dozens of smaller corporations as well. This makes San Diego a hub of corporate intrigue in Aztlan and a popular locale for import runners.

THE MAYA REGION

The southern and eastern half of Aztlan is known as the Maya Region and is almost a polar opposite of the Mexican Plateau. This half is hot and wet tropical lowlands covered in a thick blanket of rainforest and subject to wildly rainy weather and patches of out of control jungle growth. Most of the cities down here are along the coast and the rich farmland has been taken over by Aztechnology agricorp interests. Because the coasts are well-patrolled, the jungles are thick and dangerous and the land is firmly under Azzie control, smuggling is less common down here and more of the shadowrun hiring is done through locals than imports.

> The major news item down here is the Nicaragua Canal, which Aztechnology has already broke ground on, despite protests from the Corporate Court. The canal would utilize the San Juan River in the Aztlan state of Nicaragua and would travel along the southern shore of the Lago de Nicaragua and then across the Isthmus of Rivas. The canal proposal would allow for ships four times the size of what the Panama Canal Zone currently allows and would be augmented by a parallel high-speed cargo rail line for cargo too important to wait to pass through the locks by ship.
> 0111011001

> The Corporate Court is having a fit because it would make the pan-corporate Panama Canal Zone obsolete and really tweaks the nose of the Veracruz Settlement. However, they've been unable to block the project because it falls on Aztlan soil and is being spearheaded by Aztechnology contractors.

> The Keynesian Kid

> Aztlan has been negotiating preferential rates for Wuxing on the Nicaragua Canal. What Aztlan is getting out of the bargain, besides Wuxing's silence on the Court, I'm unsure.

> €spion

Puerto Limon/Isla Viva Aquacology

Puerto Limon is a little slice of Aztlan paradise and is where all the rich and famous come to play, relax, and catch up on the latest in cosmetic enhancement. The Costa Rican port's spas and resorts double as recovery centers for the numerous cutting-edge leónization and body-sculpting clinics hosted here.

> As such, it's a popular hotspot for extraction gigs. The security here tends to be less than in the corporate enclaves up north because it would interfere with the recovery.

> Toro

> Aztech black ops and extended shadow assets also frequently end up here when they get "treated" to new identities.

> Number Eight

Off the coast of Puerto Limon is the shallow water aquacology called Isla Viva. A number of Aztechnology subsidiaries including Maritech Enterprises, Genetique, Productos Cultivatos, and Trés Chic Cosmetics own space in this combination above- and below-water arcology. It not only houses their research staff in absolutely beautiful suites with a view to kill for, but their bio-research and aquaculture labs and farms are on-site also. The stepped-pyramid arcology rises out of the sea, and to top it all off, is covered from apex to sea level in flowering vines and lush terrace gardens.

> Which double as added security. I hear the vines are astrally sensitive and when an astral form passes through their aura, they release a pheromone into the air. Specially designed chemical sniffers built into the outer walls detect the pheromone and register a signal to on-site security riggers.

> Keymaster

> The extra astral security makes sense if the rumors about the Aztechnology cybermantic clinic being inside Isla Viva are true.

> Findler-Man

THE FRINGE

Let me tell you something, now is not the time if you're thinking about getting into the Aztlan smuggler business. Used to be that much of the Aztlan military and Aztechnology security forces were occupied in places like the Yucatan and Denver. Not anymore. A big wyrm kicked their butts out of the Mile High City and the Yucatan

situation is being "peacefully resolved." What that means is that there are a lot of soldiers being reassigned, and guess where they are being moved to? That's right, the borders.

> Aztlan has always had a very sophisticated sensor array watching over their borders, but they were stretched thin on manpower to respond to problems. They relied on automated responses like surface-to-air missiles and overworked border patrols, but no longer.

> Picador

Amazonian Border

If you ask me, this contested land is in the hands of the plants. The jungle is so insane down here that the border shifts daily and neither Aztlan nor Amazonia can really tell where it is. It's mostly defined by exploratory strikes by Aztlan into Amazonia or vice versa and because of the uncontrollable land, is mostly occupied by mobile recon forces. Most of the assets being moved down here are covert paramilitary units being used to probe into Amazonia's borders and gather intelligence (some of which is obsolete within weeks when the landscape shifts).

CAS Border

It's not war, but it's damn near close. The Aztlan border that cuts through what used to be Texas has always been a touchy spot, but has gotten a lot worse lately. The "Eastern Fortification Zone" between Austin and Corpus Christi has had fresh soldiers rotated in from the Yucatan and the CAS has been forced to respond with an increase in its own troop strength. The Sons of the Alamo and their sympathizers have been pressuring the CAS government to follow through on campaign promises to liberate San Antonio and press the conflict in Austin, but the administration has been hesitant in the face of fresh Aztlan combat veterans.

> What keeps me up at night are the Sons of the Alamo leaders' threats that if the CAS doesn't grow the spine to go to war, the Sons of the Alamo will force them into a position where they have to.

> Diamondback

> Trigger fingers on both sides are extremely itchy and Aztechnology's acquisition of Atlantic Security in Miami nearly started the fireworks. Last minute negotiations prompted by the Caribbean League forestalled any military action...for now.

> Cruz

Pueblo Border

Before the past year, this border was largely a quiet expanse covered in sensors on both sides with a rare dogfight or t-bird clash between the PCC and Aztlan. Pueblo shoved its military west to Los Angeles and Aztlan, as much as it wanted to, couldn't field a real response with the rebellion flaring in their backyard. Times change, omae. Aztlan has shifted sizable military assets up to San Diego and El Paso. The PCC is starting to develop serious military strategies for responding to their nightmare scenario: an Aztlan two-pronged attack from the southeast and southwest, aiming for Los Angeles and Denver. The situation isn't quite as dire as with the CAS, but Pueblo is no longer willing to write off the possibility of war.

> If you want to see some real gears turning on this, look further north to the Ute. Aztlan diplomats (or Aztechnology lobbyists, it's all the same) have been getting chummy with Judge Utall's shaman/landowner coalition and the Native Workers' Union. If those two parties end up with a majority of the Elected Council, you can bet the first bill on the kiosks will be a declaration of war against the PCC. The Ute Nation has been eyeballing northwestern Pueblo for decades.

> Wichita Witch

>>>EXECUTING BEACON.SPT<<<

>>>REDIRECTING...<<<

>>>REDIRECTING...<<<

>>>CONNECTED...BEGIN FILE TRANSFER MIRROR.CHT<<<

> Cap, what the frag is this?

> Red Wraith

>>>TRANSFER COMPLETE...OPENING<<<

> I apologize for any panic my intrusion into this document may be causing. Do not blame your sysop, he was unaware of my tampering with his file transfer network. I have usurped this network to deliver a transcript which must be shared before it is silenced, and forces are in motion even now to make sure it never sees the light of day. You are about to glimpse a portion of the Truth. As frightening as it is, it must never be extinguished.

> Salai

> Whoever the hell that is, he cut through my security like it wasn't there. I haven't seen anything like it since the Arcology shutdown.

> Captain Chaos

THE SMOKING MIRROR

The air around me is dry and warm and somewhere distant, there are birds chirping. I imagine the sun in shining, but I can not see it. I have gouged out my own eyes and cut out my own tongue. I fear He could use them to find me. I do not even trust my own body; I type this from a chair to which I am restrained. My name is not important; my real identity was removed from my own memory thirteen years ago. What is important is that I am a member of the *Otontin* order, one of its most senior. I hope that by sacrificing myself to bring this knowledge to light, I have pleased Quetzalcóatl and Xuihtecuhli and may serve them in the eastern paradise of the sun.

In the ancient days before even the Aztec empire, Quetzalcóatl the Feathered Serpent was tricked by his twin, Tezcatlipoca, who showed the Feathered Serpent a smoking mirror which reflected images of atrocities he had committed while under the influence of a potion his dark twin had made. The peaceful god fled in shame, but it has always been believed that Quetzalcóatl would return from his exile and bring a new age of enlightenment. In 1519, the Aztec king, Montezuma II, falsely believed that Cortés was the returning god and welcomed him into the empire, foolishly inviting his own downfall and that of his people. We too, of modern Aztlan, have been fooled. Maybe it is not too late for us.

> Hey guys, do you have the news on? Some big explosion just tore up a whole block of suburb south of Gallup, in Pueblo. They are saying it was a gas line rupture, but you have to wonder...

> iSpy

THE CULT OF TEZCATLIPOCA

During Quetzalcóatl's exile, his dark twin Tezcatlipoca ruled, demanding war and human sacrifices to keep the apocalypse at bay. He has gone by many names: Tiltlacahuan ("He Whose Slaves We Are"), Moquequelo ("The Mocker"), Nahuaque ("The Night Wind"), Yaotzin ("The Enemy"), but the result has always been darkness, slavery, and death. The celebrations held at the Great Teocalli in Tenochtitlán today are a ruse; Quetzalcóatl has not returned and Tezcatlipoca still rules through his servants. I know, because I am one of them.

The leaders of Aztlan serve the leaders of Aztechnology and the leaders of Aztechnology serve Tezcatlipoca. Whether they are devout or not, they are his priesthood. His High Priest assumes the mantle of Aztec kings and conducts secret rituals in the Temple of Tezcatlipoca to which they attend. I attended one of these, where I was initiated into the higher mysteries and learned the truth of who I serve. Burning braziers surrounded myself and dozen other *guerreros* and from them issued a smoke that when inhaled allowed me to see the astral, even though I normally can not. Around us, a circle of priests chanted while their blood flowed between them in plastic tubing and machinery connected to their necks. I recognized some of these priests as the High Priests from the temples in Tenochtitlán, and around them swarmed attendants who checked the machines and others who led young men and women to the center of the circle, where an offering bowl awaited. Bloody sacrifices followed and I could see the astral space blaze with the combined aura of the priests as they worked their magic. Then He arrived. Tezcatlipoca.

His dark serpentine form writhed in the astral above us, his spiritual flesh swirling with emptiness like the smoking mirror that is his name. His twisted body stretched and wings made of a vast void unfurled, snuffing out the fiery cast of the priests' combined aura. At each of us, the elite *guerreros*, he stared with abyssal eyes and forged a connection to our souls. We were unmade and remade there, and when the ritual ended and Tezcatlipoca departed, we knew our abilities were no longer bound by the limits of men but we were also now bound to Him as slaves.

BLOODY FINGERPRINTS

One of Tezcatlipoca's epithets is The Enemy on Both Sides, and he is said to encourage conflict so that the strongest will be bred and prevail. He tolerates, some might say encourages, conflict between his servants, though in the end they all serve the same agenda. The board of Aztechnology is rife with factions that have their own goals and through a custom of patronage from members of the board, most senior Aztlan and Aztechnology officials and even the *guerreros* serve one of these factions. The separate pull of these individual factions and the combined push of Tezcatlipoca's agenda is what guides the fate of Aztlan.

> I think you might have been onto something, iSpy. That was no gas explosion near Gallup; the Pueblo military detected the flight of a cruise missile in their airspace just before the explosion. The origin was in international waters off the Pacific coast.

> Mongwa

> How do you know that?

> Diamondback

- > I have my sources.
- > Mongwa

My patron was a man named Oscuro, who led the faction that controlled the blood mages and the priesthood. He aspired to bring about the end of the Fifth Sun, so that the world would crumble and only Aztlan would have the power and foresight to survive and protect humanity. His effort failed and it ruined him; I saw him shortly after, afraid for his life and aged by decades. Not long after, he vanished. Control of the priesthood fell to another on the board, the High Priest of Tezcatlipoca. I could tell he did not trust me, I was Oscuro's man. He was right, but with the wrong reasons. Under Oscuro, I saw that what I was doing was not holy and now I only hope to die a noble death.

The board, and likewise the nation, is now dominated by a faction of arrogant mages who seek power unimaginable in scope. They claim to be descendents of scholars who once served Quetzalcóatl but did not follow him into exile and chose instead to stay and cultivate what they had learned. They hunger to control every aspect of the nation and channel its resources toward vast and complex magical projects, such as the magical linking of the *teocallis*. They speak of taking the "long view" and I gathered from their sneering comments that they considered Oscuro's work to be the premature graspings of a fool.

- > If the background count at the *teocallis* is aspected, it would augment their magic similar to power sites. If those *teocallis* were linked...
- > Jacinda

There are also those that the priests refer to as the "merchants and goldsmiths." They are the members of the board who do not care much for the religious trappings of the Cult but are led by selfishness, avarice and a desire to spread their influence (and that of Aztechnology's) across the globe. This group has cannily picked up presence on the board in the wake of others' failures, but they are content to follow their blind greed while the mages' lead the agenda. They may feign disinterest in Tezcatlipoca's plans, but it is their money and power that fuels and conceals the dark schemes.

Finally there are the feathered serpents, who seem focused on the past rather than the future and are guided by ancient rivalries among themselves. It is said that Tezcatlipoca favors them and sends them on missions to unearth secrets of the past, but with one of their own facing execution, I find myself wondering. I know that since Quauhtlatoa's assassination, a feathered serpent has become the overseer of Teotihuacan. I have also heard that other serpents seek the *Chicomoztoc*, or "Seven Caves of Origin" in the north and that some travel covertly into Amazonia seeking something else of great power.

- > The feathered serpent facing execution that he's talking about is Dzitbalchén. He's on trial for the assassination of Juan Atzcapotzalco and Quauhtlatoa at the Yucatan peace summit. Check out the Yucatan file for more information.
- > Corona

- > Hey, so these serpents are uncovering ancient artifacts for Aztechnology? What about the Apep Consortium? Apep, in Egyptian myth, was a giant serpent who tried to swallow the sun.
- > Digger

- > I don't know much about Apep, but I do know that the *Chicomoztoc* come from an ancient Aztec myth that says that the earliest Aztecs emerged from the earth from seven caves before migrating south towards Tenochtitlán. Oddly enough, the Hopi Amerinds share the same root language and have a similar myth, only without the migration part. They also believe in a succession of worlds that were destroyed by cataclysms before the current one, very similar to the Aztec five suns.
- > Holly

- > So if the Hopi have the same myth, minus the migration, and the Hopi run the Pueblo Corporate Council, one has to wonder if the caves would be somewhere there.
- > Ancient History

- > Certainly makes you think about all the feathered serpents with links to Aztechnology that were living in Denver until Ghostwalker showed up.
- > Zaratosa

I can tell my time here is now short, He has sensed my betrayal. Even this far away from Tenochtitlán, it now takes effort to make my fingers move and type out these final words, as if I am not the only one commanding them. I hope that those I have entrusted to release this file succeed and that this information is enough to wake my people and others to the lies that have been perpetuated in Quetzalcóatl's name.

Outside, the birds are still chirping, and though I can't see it, I know the Fifth Sun is shining.

> For whatever reason, the Pueblo authorities are still floating the "gas leak" excuse for that explosion near Gallup. Seventeen bodies were recovered from that site. I sliced my way into the medical examiner's computers; none of the bodies were marked as missing eyes or a tongue, but they may have been too mangled to tell.

> Red Wraith

GAME INFORMATION

Aztlan is a nation of stark contradictions; old gods and high-tech industry, wealthy corporate executives and destitute subsistence farmers, beautiful *castillos* and smog-filled sprawls. It is a dangerous nation for those who aren't on Aztechnology's side and even more dangerous for those who learn of its hidden secrets.

GETTING IN/OUT

Legally, there are two ways for non-citizens to enter Aztlan: travel visa or resident alien status. Both are subject to intensive background checks before acceptance and even those that are accepted are subject to extreme amounts of surveillance while they are in the nation. Travel visas can be issued for up to 60 day periods. Resident alien status is indefinite as long as the corporation employing the non-citizen continues to employ them. Both of these methods can be revoked at any time by Aztlan without stated reason, appeal, or advanced notification. As far as the physical details of entry, Aztlan has four major international airports which handle both suborbital and semiballistic flights in Monterrey, San Antonio, San Diego, and Tenochtitlán as well as countless other ones which handle shorter flights.

Illegal entry over the nation's borders is a more common method for shadowrunners who wish to avoid Aztechnology surveillance. Aztlan's northern border with Pueblo and the CAS is a demilitarized buffer zone and the most difficult to cross secretly. The southern border with Amazonia is more sparsely patrolled and easier to sneak across due to the geography, but has its own dangers in the local flora, fauna, and Amazonian government. The most successful method of illegal entry is via the coasts, especially through cargo shipments. Aztlan doesn't possess enough manpower to fully cover every square inch of coastline nor is it able to scan every cargo crate that enters the nation, though it makes a show of trying.

RUNNING IN AZTLAN

Shadowrunning in Aztlan comes down to working for or working against Aztechnology (sometimes both). The corporation is so tightly woven into the fabric of the nation that no matter the job, you are either favoring or hurting Aztechnology interests in some way and it is highly likely the corporation will get involved in some aspect.

The Nicaragua Canal

Aztlan has already broken ground on this ambitious project, but the Corporate Court would prefer to see that it never reaches completion. Aside from Wuxing (which has worked out preferential usage deals with Aztlan), the other corporations are working through shadow assets to sabotage the Canal's construction in various ways, either through overt physical destruction or through quieter intimidation of key personnel. Aztlan, of course, has much to gain from the Canal and Aztechnology is working overtime to protect the development.

Border Skirmishes

Activity on Aztlan's northern borders with Pueblo and the CAS is heating up and work for shadowrunners on either side of the border is increasing. The tense military situation makes the nations involved loathe to use military assets which could trace back to them, so they turn to deniable assets for missions across the border. In Austin, the Sons of the Alamo are trying to force a war between the CAS and Aztlan, a situation neither nation really wants. Meanwhile, Aztlan has been sending agents into Pueblo to search for ancient magical artifacts or evidence of the mythical "Seven Caves of Origin" which they believe might be somewhere in the southern Rocky Mountains.

In With the Locals

Aztlan's local "Mexican" shadow community isn't particularly friendly with the import runners and they have a near-monopoly on Aztechnology runs within the nation. Non-native runners looking for work in Aztlan are sure to butt heads with the locals at some point and will either face the trials of earning their respect or the dangers of earning their ire. Runners who make enemies with the Mexicans will find working in Aztlan difficult, if not deadly. But getting in good with the locals is a difficult process which includes proving yourself to a community built on principles of machismo.

The Cult of Tezcatlipoca

Some members take the religious emphasis seriously while others see it as little more than a form of corporate culture, but the shadowy factions in the Cult run Aztechnology's board, the Path of the Sun, and the nation of Aztlan. Runners may find themselves caught up in the internal politics of the Cult as power shifts and conflict arises between its members. The recent fall of Oscuro and the weakening of his faction of blood mages opened up a power struggle that resulted in Chavez's magical nationalists taking the lead, but the internal struggles have not gone away. Each faction employs runners (many of them unaware of the scope of their work) to increase their power in the Cult and even within factions some elements have rivalries with others. The work is ever-present and very profitable but exceptionally dangerous.

THE PATH OF THE SUN

On the surface, the Path of the Sun is a harmless belief system that conducts national religious ceremonies and contains dozens of smaller magical groups embracing similar themes. Hidden at the top of the Path's power structure, however, are a handful of secret and nefarious magical groups that utilize dark techniques to power their magic. The Blood Mage Gestalt (p. 70, *Threats*) is an example of one of these secret cults, but there are others, such as the unnamed groups to which Domingo Chavez and Anna Villalobos belong and the rumored cult that counts the feathered serpents as members. These secret groups often share in common their use of blood magic (p. 133, *MitS*) and the powerful members of these groups are also taught the secrets of Shared Potency metamagic (p. 45, *T2*).

Gamemasters are free to create rules for shamans who take Aztec gods as their idols or they may adapt existing ones for this purpose (p. 152, *MitS*). As a rule of thumb, Quetzalcóatl usually corresponds to the Plumed Serpent totem, Huitzilopochtli to the Sun nature totem, Tlaloc to a male version of the Great Mother idol, Xuihtecuhtli to the Fire-Bringer idol, Xipe-Totec to the Dark King idol, and Tezcatlipoca to the Adversary idol.

Teocallis

It is increasingly common for Aztlan's larger teocallis to possess a background count, ranging from 3 to 5 at the larger teocallis (the temples to Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca in Tenochtitlán have a permanent background count of 5). Smaller teocallis may find themselves host to elaborate rituals that temporarily boost their background count only to have it fade later. This background count is aspected towards use of the Path of the Sun and therefore the temples act as power sites for them while hindering the magic of others.

On rare occasions, magical rituals conducted by the most powerful members of the Path of the Sun have resulted in mana warps, or foveae. These tend to be temporary and fade back to standard background count, but at the gamemaster's discretion, there may be a few standing mana warps at areas of significant past rituals. For more information on background count, aspected power and mana warps, see pages 83-86 in *Magic in the Shadows*.

Currently under the direction of Domingo Chavez, the Blood Mage Gestalt is continuing its effort to link the background counts of numerous teocallis into an astral network. The purpose behind this effort is unknown, with rumors ranging from using the combined power for a great summoning ritual to raising the ambient mana level of the nation to building a magical shield around Aztlan.

GUERREROS

The orders of *guerreros* are military magical orders within the Path of the Sun. Unlike most of the magical groups in the Path of the Sun, the *guerreros* are made up of a majority of adepts, though full magicians are also found in each one. Only four *guerreros* orders exist, each with a different military role, but they all share a similar religious belief system and employ the use of blood magic like the secret Path of the Sun orders.

Also like the secret Path of the Sun orders, the most powerful *guerreros* in each order are taught the Shared Potency metamagic technique. During an initiatory ritual they join in a spirit pact (p. 124, *MitS*) with a powerful entity they identify with the god Tezcatlipoca. This pact and the Shared Potency technique allow numerous powerful individuals to increase their Potency through their link with Tezcatlipoca (for more on Potency, see page 123 of *MitS*). The exact nature and power level of Tezcatlipoca is left up to the gamemaster.

Blood Tokens

Blood tokens are a special variant of Infusion Foci (p. 68, *SOTA64*) or Spell Category Foci currently known only to exist in Aztlan. To use a blood token, the user must know the Sacrificing metamagic technique (p. 133, *MitS*) and must have been present at the first bonding of the blood token. Functionally, they work just like standard infusion foci or spell category foci, but their creation is very different.

Blood tokens are made from a body part taken from a sacrificial victim at the time of death and the type of focus is usually related to both the victim and the body part (for instance, the ear of a meddling journalist who was snooping into Aztlan affairs might be used for a Detection spell category blood token while the tongue of an anti-Aztlan activist might be used for a Commanding Voice infusion blood token). The victim must have been someone of some significance for the enchanting ritual to work; blood tokens are not made from Joe Aztlaner off the street, but usually from people specifically targeted by the *guerreros* orders for sacrifice.

The focus formula stage of the blood token artificing works like a standard focus and an enchanter will create the formula while studying the victim under captivity. Unlike other focus formulas, the blood token formula is unique for the focus and the victim and can never be sold or reused. The enchanting test is made at the sacrificial ritual, which unlike the standard base time for enchanting, has a base time of only six hours, divided by the enchanter's successes. For purposes of the enchanting test and the first bonding karma cost, the focus is considered to be using virgin telesma and both the test and karma cost are adjusted by the victim's Essence (or Magic Rating, if higher), as if alchemical radicals were being used. Divide the Essence or Magic Rating by two (rounding up) and subtract that number from the enchanting test target number and the first bonding karma cost.

In addition, the astral presence of a blood token is unusually strong; the Force of the blood token is considered at +2 for the purpose of astral combat or mana spell damage resistance tests.

THE BIG SMOKE

Tenochtitlán, due to its unique geography and high pollution, has different effects on visitors and residents. The high altitude of Tenochtitlán's geographical basin means thinner oxygen, and newcomers unaccustomed to it suffer penalties. They suffer a -1 to their Body attribute for all tests to resist diseases and toxins, and unaccustomed magicians suffer a -1 to Willpower for the purposes of drain resistance tests. Acclimating to the thin air takes 12+1d6 days (rule of six does apply) and characters with extended volume bioware (p. 66, *Man and Machine*) do not suffer these penalties.

The intensity of Tenochtitlán's pollution, which is often trapped in the valley basin, is a separate problem. On any given day, the gamemaster rolls 1d6 to determine the Power of the excessive air pollution. Those without air filters that negate the Power of the pollution with their Ratings face a toxin resistance test with the Power of air pollution that causes Moderate Stun with a speed of 30 minutes. The Stun damage heals slowly, at the rate of Physical damage (see p. 126, *SR3*) and only when the character is breathing clean air.

In addition, the acid rain in Tenochtitlán is intense. All creatures not immune to toxins or corrosives are considered to have a Mild Allergy to acid rain (see p. 15, *Critters*). Normal acid rain can cause a +1 penalty to all target numbers while the character is exposed to it, and "hard" acid rain can cause a +2 penalty and lead to permanent health damage after long-term exposure. Protective clothing eliminates this penalty.