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| <b>Nanopunk: Berlin, Spring 2008</b><br><b>Scenario Draft Excerpt</b> |
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The four decades after the turn of the millennium were a period of political and social turbulence, disastrous warfare and corporate ascension. A market crash of cyber stocks in 2007 threatened to turn into full-scale global war, but for the intervention of the United Nations. In the ensuing chaos, several nuclear weapons were detonated in the Middle East, turning much of the region into an uninhabitable wasteland. The decades that followed saw a nuclear winter and daily reports of atmospheric radioactivity became common. Widespread poverty and crime turned the United States of America, formerly a liberal democracy, into a fascist entity. Despite the instability, the corporations of Earth continued to grow into huge international entities, with power approaching that of small nations. Zero-gravity high orbit manufacturing, banking and asteroid mining paved the way for their expansion into space. By the time the nano-revolution rolled around, several megacorporations had attained a foothold in space. One of them, InSystem, even colonized Mars and a few large asteroids.

The advent of nanotechnology in 2042 rapidly and radically revolutionized every aspect of human existence. The first self-sustaining nano-assembler - capable of primitive and slow self-replication - was built by a United Nations science team based in sub-Saharan Africa. Under the auspices of the UN, uncountable trillions of nanobots found their way into daily life all over the world. Relief supplies and industrial infrastructure flooded all the impoverished nations of Earth. Permanent injury and even death became much less common. Gender, race, and appearance could be varied at will. Weapons of heretofore unimaginable power were stopped only by their counterpart in medical advances. The quality of life for the average citizen skyrocketed. Scientific progress expanded by leaps and bounds, particularly in the abstract field of artificial intelligence. Gleaming, mile-high, nanobot-built cities seemed to challenge the glory of the sky itself.

Flushed with success and respect, the United Nations became the ascendant power on the planet, extending its reach into space, demolishing autocratic regimes in Europe and even partitioning InSystem into slightly smaller megacorporations. The UN's ambitious social program of universal welfare, careful monitoring and correction of nanotechnology, and establishment of a pervasive underground police force all helped to curb violent crime and poverty. It was only the sudden invasion by a spacefaring alien power and a resurgence of armed National Socialist forces in Europe that broke the power of the mighty United Nations.

The aliens, commonly known as "lizardmen", arrived in a fleet of hovering, silver saucers and attacked the Americas, Africa and Asia with overwhelming force and unknown technology. Despite savage and often heroic fighting in places like New York City, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Tokyo and Beijing, the aliens eventually crushed all major opposition and drove humanity underground and into the wastelands. Australia disappeared under an enormous opaque dome with the same properties of an alien shield, and has been hidden ever since. Most orbital bases were destroyed or lost in the years of guerilla war that followed. New alien technology had a devastating and demoralizing effect on human resistance forces. Gravity-ignoring hovercraft, near-invincible shields and nuclear-reaction suppressing fields were some of the most dramatic surprises in store for Earth. The latter two effectively rendered conventional United Nations nuclear weaponry useless.

On the same day, a fanatic, well-armed and widespread group of neo-Nazis quickly captured every institution of government in Berlin, proclaimed the Fourth Reich under the clone of Adolf Hitler and immediately declared war on France and Poland. Within days, the Nazis quickly recaptured the continent, re-establishing the Festung Europa of old times. The remaining elements of the United Nations, caught off guard from two sides and acting from remote locations outside of Europe, activated a desperate contingency plan and released numerous military-grade survival cyberware and nanotech devices to the people. This capability, combined with widely distributed auto-doc systems made humans possible to revive after death in many circumstances. Unable to understand this technology and surprised at the refusal of the human resistance to stay dead, the alien advance stalled.

Within the year, all human territory came under the control of the Nazis or the aliens (at which point the mysterious and unspoken alliance between them became common knowledge) with several exceptions. Great Britain and Israel held out for a while against the encroaching Nazi forces, and later sued for peace under conditions favorable to the Reich. The United Nations forces guarding Moscow began to fail, but the Russians retreated farther eastward and underground and the invasion became untenable. Even now, more than two decades later, the Russian front is at a stalemate, and little information about what happens on the other side is available. There are reports of human civilization still existing in the asteroid belt, but these are unreliable and increasingly sporadic. While capturing North America, the aliens flipped the city of Chicago upside down as a show of force, effectively pacifying the region. A few days later, the same thing occurred to Tokyo, but overnight and with no warning. Whether or not this was an act of retaliation by the aliens is still unknown. In a surprise move, one of the three saucers garrisoned in New York City, then United Nations headquarters, was destroyed in what appears to be a nuclear explosion. The consequences for the entire Eastern Seaboard were severe.

Faced with no real military options and the prospect of a grinding, cataclysmic conventional war, the free nations of the Solar System surrendered. Officials from the Fourth Reich and the aliens met with the scattered United Nations and orbital leadership, and agreed to a peace accord. Unwilling or unable to manage Earth, the aliens kept conventional military and scientific forces in the area, while the Nazis administered day to day affairs from Berlin. The Reich fortified their position and began to transition from a wartime economy. However, it widely rumored that the Nazi regime released a comprehensive set of cleansing nanoplagues into the world, as a final act of war. This was denied by government forces, but the degradation of widespread UN military cyberware was considered evidence to the contrary. The aliens slowly pulled out of the Americas, Africa and Asia, leaving them in ruins, and took up a patrol orbit around Earth. The mysteries of Russia and Australia ceased to occupy the foremost of everyone's mind. Battered but not broken, humanity began to heal.

A full generation of mostly-benevolent neglect passed under this uneasy peace. Megacorporations, military interests and politically correct science flourished under the Reich. Though nominally ruled completely and autocratically by Chancellor Hitler, in practice the Reich's interests are served by a conglomeration of generals, corporate leaders, scientists and advisors. The cyberware released decades ago by the United Nations has all but failed completely - the promise of resurrection after death is gone. Alien actions indicate that leaders on the alien homeworld have taken more of an interest in the social and technological progress of the race of man over the past generation. In particular, a large amount of Earth's scientists are exported offworld by the aliens for what is dubbed "benevolent research needs" in alien laboratories across the galaxy. No scientist has yet come back. North America's eastern seaboard has fielded a particularly high percentage of scientists in the past, though now Europe feels most of the brain-drain. As a result, renewed interest in nano- and cybertechnology has been slow to develop. On the other side of the Atlantic, things are much different. . .

Much of North America lies in ruins or severe neglect, with pockets of resistance deemed too insignificant to investigate by the Nazi regime. However, some inhabitants have started to rebuild the shattered civilization around them. A new type of city-state has begun to emerge in the wastelands - one in which, by nanotechnological standards, life is harsh and security scarce, but which has been making progress. One of these is the state of Greater Michiana, based in the ruins of the once-great city of Detroit. Some technology has survived the devastation of war - many hydroponic nanofarms and environmental terraformers still function, providing food and clean air to the residents, respectively. The knowledge needed to usefully fix the current infrastructure or build more, however, has been largely lost. There are other, similar civilizations - an anarchist hacker's paradise in the radioactive desert of what used to be Nevada and New Mexico, a civilization rumored to still be adept with nanotech submerged in the Caribbean, and a commune undergoing a cultural renaissance that survives in Compton Island after it broke off from the mainland of Southern California.

The technological capability of Greater Michiana is that of the early twenty-first century, but it has been able to secure a kind of stability in the region. Michiana has managed to revive the old mentality of industrialization - and has been steeply building its cities stronger and higher. In the great libertarian and isolationist traditions of midwestern America, Michiana takes its sovereignty very seriously, and is reputed for its strong border patrol and reconnaissance operations. "Live free or die" is the unofficial motto. For the most part, the Nazis don't venture out into North America, but when they do, Michiana never hesitates to offer armed, if ultimately futile, resistance.