

AFTER ALL THE VIOLENCE AND DOUBLE-TALK... PARTS 1-3

RAVENSGATE: THE FOUNDRY, ISSUES #32-34

SATURDAY, 13 JULY 2002, BASTILLE DAY BALL, AL-AMARJA SHRINE TEMPLE



Bastille Day is that festive time of the year for the city's prominent ethnic French community. The 2002 Bastille Day Ball at the al-Amarja Shrine Temple benefits the Not In Our Town Victims' Recovery Fund is exclusive (\$5000 a ticket), and Joshua has secured some tickets for the gang.

Joshua considers the ball a major intelligence-gathering opportunity in light of recent events:

- A public difference of opinion between the mayor and her media-magnate father turned ugly on national television, when he lost it during her Congressional testimony and had to be escorted out. Salome has since moved into a loft on Garfield Hill near Brewers Field, with her bodyguards taking up all adjacent apartments.
- Mayor Salome Throckmorton-d'Aubaine left for a two-week vacation to Europe, dragging along Dani, Max and a bodyguard. Due to an oddity in the city charter—there's no clear line of succession in the event the mayor's office becomes vacant—Salome left Phil Snow in charge.
- Not only is 1993 Collegium Caine alumnus Noel deCuir one of Salome's bodyguards, but also the vacationers were followed throughout Europe by ex-Checkerheads now employed by Throckmorton Group Security.
- While, um, taking a midnight stroll on a St.-Tropez beach, Max noticed something odd about the pattern of satellites criss-crossing the night sky. Sure enough,

Throckmorton Technological International was re-routing satellites to track the vacationers.

- The J.P. d'Aubaine-instigated witch-hunt aimed at COMETPRO, the Checkerheads, The Foundry and Vic Charlton blew up in J.P.'s face. It inspired three days of rioting, put J.P.'s favorite politicians behind in the polls, and caused a mass exodus of advertisers from the *Journal*.
- An anonymous donor has set up a *billion*-dollar endowment for the use of the Ravensgate Mercury Weekly and KAOS-FM, under the not-for-profit aegis of Ravensgate Independent Press.
- When confronted, the TGS operatives shadowing Salome and Dani let slip that some colleagues of theirs were working on a research project in Prague for TGS executive Maxwell Blanke. Along with Hellman Jessup, "Poppy Lem" Throckmorton and J.P., Blanke is a Temple member.

The ball is of added significance to Oscar, because one of the auction items is an allegedly-original manuscript of "The Anjou Wine," Chapter 42 of Dumas' *Three Musketeers*. This item is high on the mysterious shopping list that undercover cop Nikko Wylde discovered before her death.

As is expected, Max and the MILF ("Mayor I'd Like to...") attend together, as do Oscar and Margaret. Jason's ball date is Denise "Kinsenka" Auckland, the mysterious cat-girl from another dimension, and Namor attends with flame-haired Jen Locksley. Dani attends with mayoral bodyguard, and Collegium Caine alum, Noel deCuir. Vic's date is Valerie Wilson, sister of *Ravensgate Mercury Weekly* publisher Veljon Wilson.

[François, never one for crowds, elects to stay behind with some of the Second Cadre students.]

Congressmen Jessup and Gavriel are conspicuous by their absences, and Journal publisher Jean-Pierre d'Aubaine tries in vain to keep a low profile. JP is assailed with the presence of his estranged daughter on the arm of Max, and with the sight of Vic. The Foundry gets an eyeful of the social dynamic within the Throckmorton extended family, as Throckmorton Group Security execs (and Afrikaner expatriates) JanWillem vanZiebbe and Maxwell Blanke show their true colors around DDWL exec Theo Watkins.

Watkins' beeper goes off, and he and his date make a hasty exit before any confrontation with the Afrikaners can happen.

Oscar, while circulating throughout the crowd, notices something odd about the manuscript in the temple's display case—specifically, the hidden script between the lines of Dumas' prose. He confers with two other ball guests, Father Costas Gregorič and Rabbi Enrico Benezra. The latter tells him, "*Get your hands on that manuscript. If you know someone who's rich enough to win a bidding war, have them get their hands on that manuscript.*"

The Foundry formulates a plan to make the manuscript disappear: Vic and Valerie will accost Jean-Pierre d'Aubaine as a distraction, while Oscar attempts his first displacement spell. Everything goes as planned—sort of. Vic prompts the apoplectic fit he's expecting, while Oscar makes *the entire display case* disappear!

At that moment, The Samurai Seven, and their equipment upgrades, burst into the ballroom: "*This is a robbery!! Everyone hand over their wallets, money clips valuables,*

and whatever's in that...case? Hey!! Where's the case?!?!" The hired goons from Throckmorton Group Security open fire on the robbers, people scatter, and general chaos ensues as members of The Foundry find places to change costumes. "Poppy Lem" Throckmorton makes his way to the Grand Master's dais and the same secret door Salome Throckmorton-d'Aubaine used in Issue #2, "al-Amarja Can-Can."

François, observing a student flight exercise aboard the *Mistrunner*, hears Phil Snow's radio call from inside the temple at the same time Joshua calls in. Out in the parking lot, an SUV's door opens, and a feminine hand lets a small cat down to the pavement.

In the middle of the three-way firefight between The Foundry, Throckmorton Group Security and the Samurai Seven, a huge (9-foot-tall) earthen creature wearing the British-flag hockey mask of Ghoul Britannia shows up via the secret passage—and is engaged in combat by a mysterious black-garbed figure. Energon shreds the Samurai Seven's armor, the rest of The Foundry break off to fight the golem, and the heroes get a glimpse of how dirty the TSG goons fight. Eventually, the Samurai Seven fall or surrender, and 'Porter makes short work of the golem—and half the termite-riddled Temple—when he teleports it skyward and lets gravity take over.

The mysterious black-clad figure is known only as The Raven, and he hands Tabula Rasa a business card with an embedded memory chip ("We are not at cross-purposes.") before he disappears. COMETPRO shows up to collect the Samurai Seven, and The Foundry takes full advantage of the opportunities provided them by evacuation of the rickety old building. They rifle through the Temple's inner sanctum, discovering volumes of meeting minutes written in a code—alternating Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, Greek and Hebrew letters—that uses the 1-0-16 cipher key. The heroes take surreptitious photos of the meeting minutes before leaving.

The Temple is red-tagged and stands empty for nine months as repairs are made. Oscar reveals to the group that the secret text embedded in the manuscript's watermark consisted of a manual for making golems.