

The Ice

Testimony of Subject Gamma-7

[Editor's Note: The following is a heavily edited transcript of a debriefing with a former MagnaCore PMC operator.¹ This account provides a rare, ground-level view of the undeclared corporate wars that defined the mid-21st century. While the subject's testimony is raw, it aligns with the fragmented data we have recovered concerning the so-called "Arctic Thaw" flashpoint. - Chronicler Beta]

The contract never called it a war. The official term was "Asset Protection and Resource Viability Operations," a mouthful. We just called it the Ice.

For four years, that's where I lived and worked, on the melting edge of the world, fighting for a corporation that paid us in MagnaCredits and supplied us with gear that was barely rated for the temperatures. The company handbook called us "Human Resource Assets." The medics called our casualties "Operational Impact Events." Death became "Asset Depreciation."

The official story is that the Arctic conflict was a series of minor skirmishes over drilling rights. That is a clean, boardroom version of the truth. The reality was a slow meat grinder that chewed up people like me for four brutal years.

Legally, we were security contractors. This fine distinction meant none of the old rules of war applied. Our enemy was another corporation's "Risk Management Division," a rival entity, not a nation. We were all "Expendable Personnel Resources," ghosts fighting over a frozen prize that most of us would never see a credit from.

The prize was the Barents Sea oil and gas fields, newly accessible due to what corporate called "Enhanced Environmental Accessibility Events." Everyone else called it the

¹ Subject Gamma-7's testimony consistently uses the modern designation "MagnaCore," though during his service, the entity was formally known as the Ural-Siberian Industrial Group. This is a common conflation among veterans of the era. //Chronicler Beta

Thaw. MagnaCore wanted it. A consortium of Western energy firms, backed by AstraNova's orbital logistics network, wanted it too. So they sent us.

Life was brutal in ways the contracts never mentioned. We operated from mobile drilling platforms, city-sized fortresses that crawled across the ice on massive tracks. The constant grinding of those tracks became the soundtrack of our lives. It was a deep, mechanical groaning that vibrated through the metal deck plates and into your bones. You'd wake up at morning feeling like your skeleton was humming.

The cold was a constant enemy that fought us every second of every day. At minus fifty Celsius, the air itself seemed to push its weight against your chest with every breath. Exposed skin froze in under a minute. I watched a guy touch a metal railing with his bare hand and leave skin behind when he pulled away. I can still hear him scream.

Metal turned brittle in the cold, making our older-generation MagnaCore security mechs constantly break down.² The maintenance crews called it "Environmental Equipment Interaction." We just called it another way to die.

Inside the platforms, the air always smelled like diesel exhaust and burnt coffee. The recycled air was so dry it made your nose bleed, and the constant hum of the heating systems created this low-frequency buzz that got deep into your head. Some guys started talking to themselves. Corporate called it "Isolation-Related Performance Degradation."

The fighting took the form of sabotage and ambush, never a pitched battle. Corporate doctrine called it "Asset Denial Operations" and "Resource Access Interference." Sometimes we'd be defending our platform from drone swarms that seemed to appear out of the whiteout like mechanical wasps; small, fast-moving things that AstraNova could guide with pinpoint precision from their satellites. The drones made this high-pitched whining sound that cut

² The subject is likely referring to the T-7 "Ursa" class mech, a precursor to the T-9 "Grizzly." Its hydraulic systems were notoriously prone to freezing in sub-zero conditions, a flaw that was reportedly responsible for more asset losses than direct enemy action. This highlights MagnaCore's early doctrine: field overwhelming numbers of cheap, reliable, but technologically inferior hardware. A strategy of attrition. //Chronicler Alpha

through even the platform noise. You'd hear it in the distance and feel your stomach drop, because you knew what was coming.

Other times we'd be sent out in armored crawlers to sever the undersea cables of a rival platform, leaving them blind and deaf in the middle of a polar night that lasted for months. The crawlers stank of diesel and human sweat, and the constant vibration from the tracks made your teeth ache. In the darkness outside, you could see the aurora sometimes, green curtains of light dancing across the sky like the world was on fire.

I remember one operation. Corporate designated it "Operation Thermal Reduction." We called it "Frostbite." Our target was a rival's automated drilling rig, squatting on the ice like a metal spider about forty kilometers from our base. The plan was simple: get in, plant the charges, and get out. "Standard Resource Denial Protocol," according to the briefing sheets.

AstraNova's eye in the sky saw us coming. They had thermal satellites that could pick out a human heat signature through a blizzard from three hundred kilometers up. An orbital strike would have been too obvious, and too easy to trace back to them. Instead, they used something they called a "Precision Environmental Modification Device," a low-orbit microwave emitter that could melt ice with surgical precision.³

We never saw it coming. The ice shelf had been compromised, melted from below in a perfect circle, like someone had used a giant cookie cutter. Our twenty-ton crawler went through the ice like a stone dropped in water.

I was in the rear compartment when it happened. The whole vehicle just tilted forward and started sliding down into water so black it looked like oil. The emergency lighting kicked in, bathing everything in red, and someone was screaming over the comm system. The water

³ This account is consistent with AstraNova's doctrine of plausible deniability. The use of non-kinetic, environmental attacks was a common tactic in their early conflicts. It allowed them to achieve strategic objectives while maintaining a clean public record. The "Icarus" data cache contains references to similar operations in the South China Sea, where AstraNova-backed PMCs used directed acoustic waves to trigger undersea landslides, disabling rival corporate drilling platforms. //Chronicler Beta

rushed in through the front viewports with a sound like thunder, and suddenly we were drowning in liquid that was so cold it felt like being stabbed with a thousand knives.

Out of twelve men, four of us made it out. I don't remember much about the escape. We hauled ourselves onto a chunk of broken ice and watched our crawler disappear into the black water, taking eight good people with it.

We were stranded a hundred kilometers from base, with nothing other than our survival kits and the clothes on our backs. The emergency rations tasted like cardboard mixed with salt, and we had to melt ice for water using tiny chemical heat packs that barely worked in the cold. At night, the temperature dropped to minus sixty, and we huddled together in our emergency shelter, basically a glorified plastic bag, listening to the ice crack and groan around us like the world was breaking apart.

The wind never stopped. It cut right through our gear, and the sound it made across the empty ice sounded like thousands of whispering voices. By the second day, Martinez started answering back. By day three, he was having full conversations.

That same day, we saw lights in the distance. We thought it was rescue, that someone had finally come looking. We fired our emergency flares and waited, shivering in our inadequate gear, watching those lights get closer.

It turned out to be a MagnaCore salvage crew, sent to recover the crawler's reactor core before it could contaminate the local environment. Environmental damage meant corporate fines, and corporate fines meant someone's quarterly bonuses got docked.

They weren't looking for survivors. We were just what corporate would later call "Unexpected Personnel Recovery," a lucky bonus that didn't affect their primary mission parameters.

When we got back to base, they docked our pay for the lost equipment. All of it: the crawler, the weapons, even our personal gear that went down with the vehicle. Corporate

policy called it "Asset Recovery Responsibility." The official report listed our eight dead teammates as "Personnel Assets Lost to Environmental Factors." No names, no service records, just numbers in a ledger.

That was the nature of the conflict. It was a war fought by accountants and lawyers, measured in quarterly reports and acceptable loss ratios. Every death was a "Human Resource Depreciation Event." Every injury was "Personnel Performance Degradation." Every act of courage or sacrifice was just "Expected Operational Behavior."

I stayed for another year after Frostbite. I didn't want to, but leaving early meant breach of contract. That meant they could pursue you for "Premature Asset Abandonment," corporate debt that would follow you for the rest of your life. So I kept doing my job, and kept following orders.

The worst part wasn't the cold or the fighting or even watching friends die for resources that none of us would ever see. The worst part was how normal it all became. After a while, you stopped flinching when the drone swarms came. You stopped mourning the dead because there were always more to replace them. You stopped thinking of yourself as human and started thinking of yourself as what corporate said you were: an asset, a number on a spreadsheet that could be written off if the cost-benefit analysis went the wrong way.

The history books, if anyone still reads them, will say the Arctic conflict was a minor footnote in the Resource Wars, a brief corporate skirmish over drilling rights that lasted four years and involved minimal casualties. But for those of us who were there, the Ice was everything. It was where we learned that in the new world, human life had become just another commodity to be expended in the pursuit of profit.