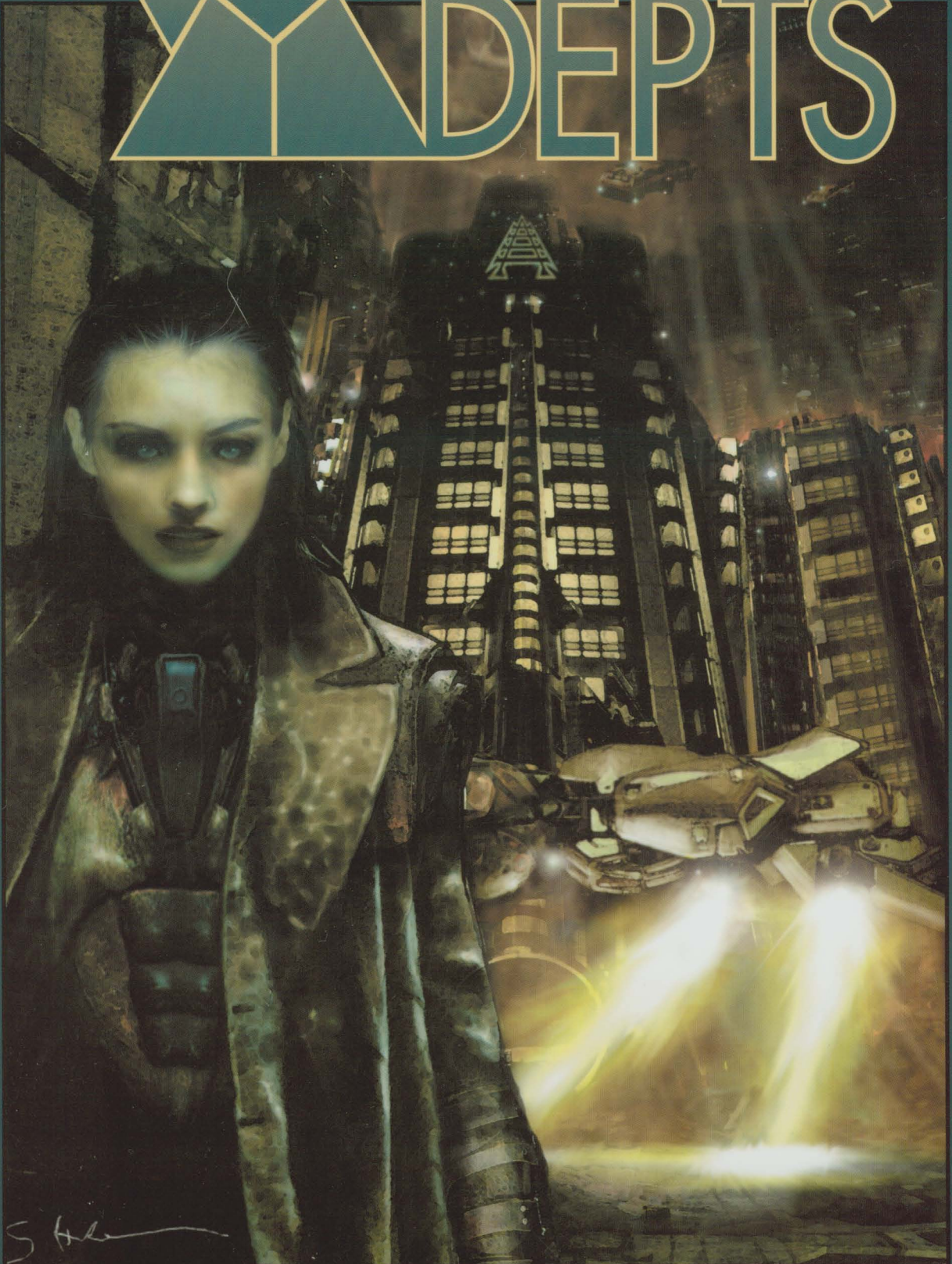


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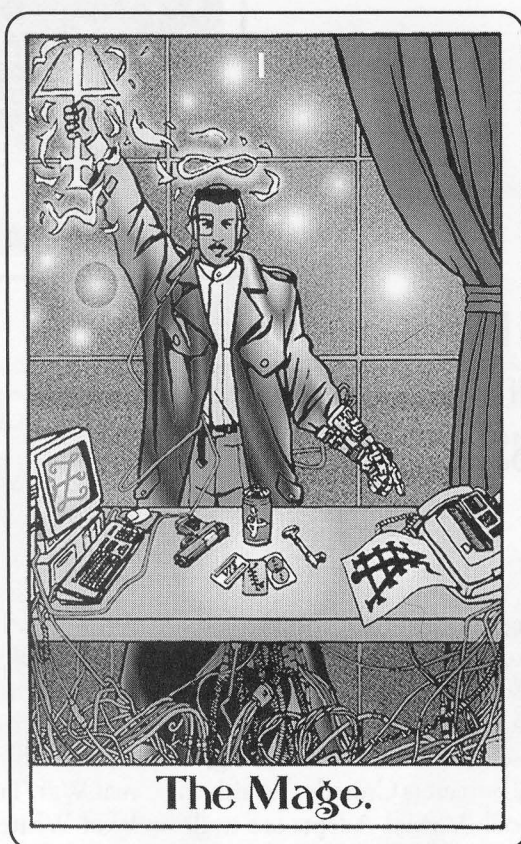
VIRTUAL DEPTS



S.H.

T R A D I T I O N B O O K :

VIRTUAL DEPTS™



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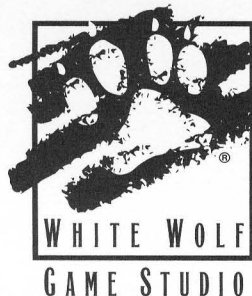
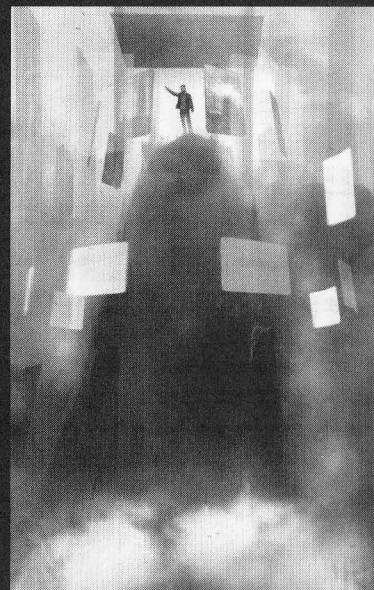
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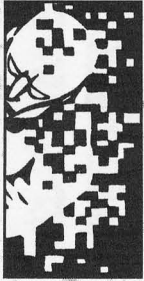
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PROLOGUE: STRAY DOG



Holly dropped out of the Web, tore off the VR goggles and gloves and staggered out of her recliner. The dizziness nearly overwhelmed her. She pitched into the wall, the kitchen table and the refrigerator on her way to the sink.

Bracing herself on the counter, she hung her head and shut her eyes. She made a conscious effort to slow her breathing. It was an exercise C0y0te had taught her when she had first gone Virtual. VR sickness wasn't fun then and it sure as hell wasn't any fun now.

While she stood motionless, she ran through events to figure out what had gone wrong. She had successfully hacked through the bank firewalls with no difficulty and found the target account right where it was supposed to be. She transferred the funds to an Adept account and was in the process of making her getaway when, of all things, an It-X pit bull countermeasure entered the site as she was leaving. And the dog was fast! Despite C0y0te's warnings to never do it, she dove headfirst through the exit portal back to realspace. How was she supposed to know that a dog would show up? And talk about fast!

She waited until her eyes stopped rotating before she reopened them. The tiles at her feet had stopped spinning, which was good. She eased her head up and deliberately poured herself a cup of water. It dribbled down her parched throat as she drank, like runoff along a dry creek bed. She didn't even mind the mineral aftertaste of city tap. Water was water, whatever the source might be.

She took a deep breath and stood upright. Returning to her computer, she eased herself back into the seat and wiggled her mouse. The OS popped onscreen.

Her portal to the bank was still active.

Fear took over. She shut down the portal and did a quick scan of her data logs. Her IP had been traced. As if that wasn't bad enough, she had also received an unauthorized download but had no idea of the filename or where it went. The irony of the situation was not lost on her. The hacker had now become the hacked.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" She ran a diagnostics sweep of her hard drives for anything saved within the last five minutes. She got two hits. One was a data cache she copied from the bank. The other was an unknown file type in a partition relegated to virtual downloads. She quickly double-checked the partition for errors. So far, it was clean.

She ran a virus check on the sector. Nothing came up. She ran a Prime check to see if the offender was a rote. An alert confirmed her suspicions. The dog had followed in after her; the only way to get rid of it was to face it virtually.

Donning goggles and gloves still moist with sweat from her first foray, she set up a sub-partition in the sector, a zone she could upload into without fear of immediate attack from the countermeasure. It would also

buy her the time she needed to program a dogcatcher to subdue the dog long enough for her to hack into it and shut it down.

She took three quick breaths and hit the Escape key.

...

The sector is a black room with bright red outlines. A number of stacked crates representing data pockets are scattered throughout the room, completely blocking her view of the rear wall.

Something flies at her from the side. She turns in time to see the giant pit bull smack into the invisible wall of her sub-partition and bounce with a yelp to the floor.

Unsure how well the barrier will hold, she immediately begins rendering. Within minutes, a strapping man in white coveralls and a matching hat stands beside her, armed with a dog collar and stun gun. She readies her soldier and maneuvers herself between him and the wall behind.

The barrier shimmers away.

Seeing that nothing bars its way, the dog growls and leaps for the dogcatcher's throat. The dogcatcher delivers a vicious backhand with the stun gun, sending the dog reeling into a nearby crate. It scrambles to its feet for another attack at the same time that the dogcatcher cinches the collar around its neck. After a moment's dancing, the dog's head is pinned firmly on the floor.

Holly wastes no time. Sliding beside the dog, she renders a keyboard and plugs the cable into the dog's temple. The countermeasure's source code pops up in front of her. Skimming over it with the practiced eye of a professional coder, she locates the Trigger procedures and includes herself and the dogcatcher as friendly data types. She unplugs the cable, grabs the keyboard and retreats back behind the dogcatcher. "Release it."

The dogcatcher relaxes his arm and withdraws the collar. The dog does nothing.

...

Holly took off her goggles and let out a long sigh of relief. Two times in as many months she'd been faced with a life-threatening situation. First it was a speeding drunk driver that would've pisted her had she not Corresponed 10 yards away. Now this. She was now a target and she was determined to find out why.

She logged online and sent C0y0te an instant message. While she awaited his reply, she noticed a warning light blinking in the lower right corner of her display.

"Rote detected in Sector 0F178A6D."

She looked up the index. It was in the sub-partition she had just been in. Confused, she requested a detailed explanation. Her face flushed with anger. "Goddamn him!" she snarled, and pounded her fist onto the armrest of her chair.

She rifled off a second message to C0y0te and marked this one urgent. He'd always told her to reserve it for an emergency. Caroming cars and It-X pit bulls most certainly qualified.



INTRODUCTION: BACK TO BASICS

We're stuck in a thought, right... we've been thinking it so long we've forgot... when you stop thinking it, you see it for what it is... and you can start thinking better ones...

— Jack Frost (Grant Morrison, *The Invisibles*)



The Avatar Storm forced all the Traditions to re-examine their purpose, and none more so than the Virtual Adepts. The whiteout of the Digital Web was a huge loss to the computer-based Tradition, but in the end it seemed more like a miracle. Dumped from their place of power, the Adepts reexamined their core beliefs and found a century of whitewashing by

the New World Order. Subtle psychological Science had rewritten the Adepts' past, covering up the one thing that terrified the Technocracy — the true origin of the Virtual Adepts.

The Adepts no longer consider themselves the new kids on the block. Their real roots stretch back to the creation of the Technocracy. The Adepts' old rhetoric was "information wants to be free." Now that it's been freed, the Adepts understand it better than ever.

BY THE NUTIBERS

Adepts see the world in mathematical terms. It's not as glamorous as the mythical language of the Verbenas or as romantic as the gothic imagery of the Hollow Ones, but its potential is amazing. Stare at a TV, play a video game, use the Internet — in all of these, you're experiencing little bits of information, ones and zeroes that make sense only when they're placed in the right order. When you apply that knowledge to the building blocks of reality, you can work miracles.

The Adepts have moved beyond their obsession with computers. They use phones to access the Digi-Web (and yes, the effect looks as cool as it did in the *Matrix*). They warp gravity and pull lightning from electrical sockets. They change your mind with viral language or make music that pries open reality. And yes, they still use computers, too.

They are the coolest, most arrogant \$0Bs around and they've got a right to be.

They're Adepts.

THEME: DEUS EX MACHINA

Deus ex Machina: 1. Latin for God in the Machine. 2. Adept slang for *We Are the Ones Who Change the World*.

— from a blog on Elite slang, author unknown

Few people remember when rationalism first swept across the world. There was such joy in imagining that

man could truly understand the universe. Where has that joy gone? It's been squashed under the jackboots of people with no sense of imagination or humor.

The Virtual Adepts want to bring wonder back to the world. They plan on doing this by coding people's dreams into Reality 2.0 — not as an escape route or hiding place, but as a beacon of hope for everyone. Everybody who codes knows that you test your programs before you take them online. Get R2.0 up and running, then download it to realtime. Then, and only then, will the Dream come alive.

MOOD: A DREAM HIJACKED

The predecessors to the Adept Tradition clued the Technocracy to the idea that the entire universe is based on numbers. Much to their horror, the Technocracy took that premise and twisted it, polluting it with their own need for power and control. Instead of seeing the potential in diversity, the Union focused on reducing people down to ones and zeroes. The Adepts were reviled, attacked, and ultimately forced to leave the Technocracy.

Then came the Traditions. Here was a group that should have understood and embraced their new allies. Instead, the Trads treated the Adepts with suspicion and sometimes open hostility. Despite their need for a "new" Tradition, the Council of Nine still wanted

LEXICON

Abbreviations: To save time, a lot of Adepts abbreviate. Traditions become "Trads," the Cult of Ecstasy "CoE," etc. They also substitute numbers for letters — 2 for "to" or 8 for "ate." For example, "H8 Technos? Call RentAdepts."

Alt: Short for alternative lifestyle. Used to describe political factions within the Adepts.

Bodybags: Derogatory term for people.

Coding: Altering an object's behavior with pre-set instructions. It's most commonly used to describe computer programming but may also refer to the use of magic to alter reality.

Digi-Web: Short for Digital Web, referring to environments created in Virtual Space.

Elite: A Virtual Adept or someone exceptionally talented.

Hacker: Someone adept at coding.

Hypersphere: A way of describing reality using theoretical physics. Space and time exist on the

"boundary" of the hypersphere. Virtual space exists within it.

Kibo: Knowledge in, bullshit out. In Adept slang, it refers to someone who specializes in information gathering. It can also be used as a curse — "buried in kibo" is the same as saying "buried in bullshit."

Lame: A non-Adept, but it can describe a new Adept as well. Also *lamer*.

Meatspace: Normal space-time, also known as *realtime*.

Misspelled words: Adepts routinely misspell words to confuse filters and authoritarian searches. For example, ph*ck instead of fuck, \$h!t instead of shit and so on.

Virtual Space: Inside the hypersphere, a place removed from space and time. Virtual space contains the Digi-Web.

payback for the Technocracy's vicious Pogrom. The Adepts made convenient scapegoats.

Big mistake. The Virtual Adepts have reclaimed their power and they're not going to sit around and take it anymore. They won't allow Technocratic Conventions to rewrite their history into some cheap hack with delusions of grandeur. They will not allow the Traditions to stereotype them as talented children who need to grow up. The nightmare *will* end and the Adepts will be the ones to end it.

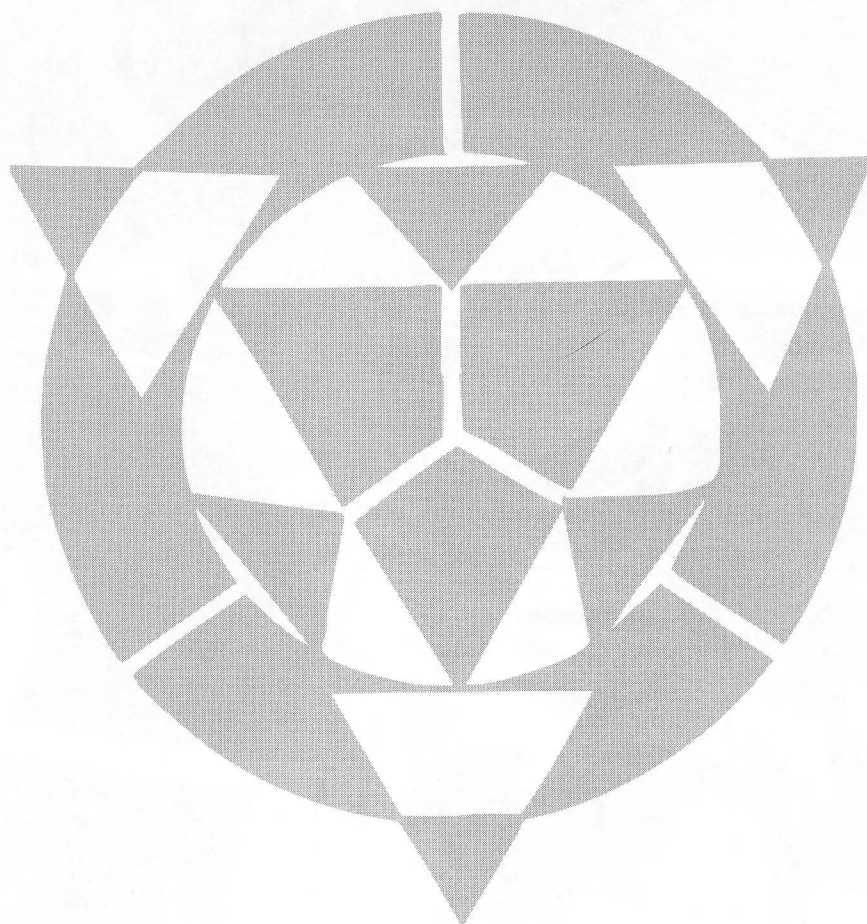
The Avatar Storm, which trapped so many mages on Earth, woke the Adepts up. The reality they fight for is here. They started this whole thing by helping create the Technocracy, and by the god in the machine, they're going to finish it.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1.0 v2: Primer contains what little the Adepts know about their origins. It's not the full picture but it's as good as any Adept is going to get — at least until the White Tower falls...

Chapter 2.0 v2: Source Code analyzes the apparent chaos surrounding the Adept Tradition. It tackles the different paths of their paradigm, from a more united picture of the Spheres to factions like the Chaoticians and the Nexplorers.

Chapter 3.0 v2: Gurus and Gremlins introduces Adept archetypes, from the movers and shakers of their Tradition to stereotypes of Adept mages. It also includes *Cell-V*, an all-Adept cabal born of a tragic past, along with notes for how to use them and other all-Adept cabals in a chronicle.





CHAPTER I.0 V2: PRITTER

The world isn't run by weapons anymore, or energy, or money. It's run by little ones and zeroes, little bits of data. It's all just electrons.

— Cosmo (Ben Kingsley) to Martin Bishop (Robert Redford), *Sneakers*



Two months ago...

BOOKsmart rubbed his eyes. Two days ago a cabal of Cyberpunks raided a NWO research lab and came back with one less man and 37.5 gigabytes of raw data. They'd left the data with him for evaluation. After 29 hours, he badly needed a break.

His self-assigned duty was to sift through facts and misinformation to glean what he could of the Adepts' forgotten past. Already he had pieced together a substantial amount, but there were too many holes that had yet to be filled to link the current with the grossly unknown (and under-appreciated) past.

A secured chat window popped up on his communications terminal. COyOte looking to cash in on a favor. "Bam," BOOKsmart typed back, the shorthand request to fire away.

"A newbie wants 2 run her project by you. OK 2 give her your account?"

BOOKsmart used his tongue to scrape off the last remnants of Cheetos from his molars. He wasn't too keen on baby-sitting a Lamer. "What's in it 4 me?" he wrote back.

"New Fetch rote."

Now *that* was worth his time and effort. "Go 4 it." He typed in his front line account handle. COyOte zipped him the Fetch rote, wrote that she wouldn't be long, and signed off.

Eight minutes later, a new chat window appeared, with the line "COyOteGuest: hi... thx 4 ur time."

"No prob. Name?"

"holly. no handle yet. sorry."

BOOKsmart smirked. Ah, to be young and newly Awakened again.... "Don't sweat it. We've all been there. What can I do 4 u?"

"I'm making a program 2 teach Lamers about VAdepts. would u like 2 check it out. might have some things you haven't heard yet, too. :)"

"Doubtful. How long's the prog?"

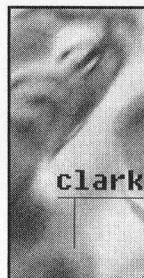
"Almost an hour."

He glanced at the clock. An hour break would do him good. "Send the link." She did. After a quick virus check and

system partition, he was ready to go. "c u there" Holly said and her window closed.

Protecting himself with his standard VR robes, he clicked on the link and uploaded into the Digital Web.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS FOR LAMERS, PART I: BACKGROUND



B00ksmart stood in the middle of a silver plated hemisphere no larger than four arm spans in diameter. He wore standard monk attire — a plain brown woolen robe cinched at the waist with a gold cord and wire-rim glasses without lenses, imbued with Tass.

"Can you hear me?" Holly's voice echoed in the chamber.

"Perfectly."

"Which channel do you want? Telepathic or vocal?" Holly asked.

"Give me both."

You cool with me recording this? she asks over the TC.

That's fine, he thinks back.

Zip. Anytime you're ready.

B00ksmart looked up at the dome. "Start."

He watched the ambient lighting diminish to half its strength. As it did, a small orb of violet radiance manifested before him, until the only source of illumination was the orb itself. It spoke in Holly's voice.

"Hi! I'm Quix, your guide through *Virtual Adepts for Lamers*. Almost everything you wanted to know about your new Tradition's history can be found in this program. I say 'almost' because... well, to be blunt about it, we just realized we've been fucked with for a good half-century and have just gotten around to retrieving lost files. So, in the event something in here doesn't give you the answers you're looking for, tough shit. If you want to know that badly, dig it up yourself.

"That said, let's begin."

THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

Quix disappeared, stranding B00ksmart in pitch-blackness. "With the exception of the Sons of Ether," Quix said from nothingness, "the other Traditions have storied histories dating back into the B.C.s. There's no doubt that we have a past just as steeped. The only problem is we have no way of telling which of the other seven Traditions we were even a part of."

A spark of life ignited to B00ksmart's right. He watched it trace a map of the Mediterranean Sea and its adjoining nations. "Although our official origin occurred during the Dark Ages, the impetus for that beginning arose thousands

of years before. The great philosophers of Greece sought to give definition to their world. Geniuses like Pythagoras, Archimedes and Euclid gave birth to mathematics, which in turn set the foundation for the hard sciences that followed." Formulas and scrolls flew out of the map to encircle B00ksmart like aimless ghosts with nowhere to go.

The map reconfigured to display ancient China. "Thousands of miles away, Chinese scholars devised the rudiments of algebra centuries before Europeans would later accomplish the same." Algebraic equations floated out of the map and joined the others still flying about the darkened room.

The map morphed into Europe and then the Middle East. With each change, more formulas joined the already lit flock. "While Christianity spread throughout the Western world, new techniques were developed to numerically define how reality worked." The formulas flew faster. "One discovery led to the next, on and on until humanity's understanding of the universe threatened to rival that of humanity's anointed gods." The spinning built to a frenzy. "Men of faith, however, refused to let that happen. They proclaimed mathematical and scientific pursuits to be contrary to the will of God. His Word was the only word worth knowing; to disagree was to renounce Him directly." The formulas violently dissipated. Threads of wispy numerals fell helplessly through the air. Their glows ebbed. Before they could hit the ground, they were gone.

"Afraid of what might happen should they go against God, scholars put their books away... at least in public. Thankfully, the mages who had been enticed by the promises of the hard sciences continued to pursue them behind closed doors."

THE ORDER OF REASON

All about B00ksmart, stars blinked to life. Suddenly, his robes and hair billowed as he plummeted to a fast-rising earth. Suddenly, he stood to the side of a muddied peasant road in a struggling village whose denizens miserably drudged about their chores. "To say that men's lives sucked in the Dark Ages would be an understatement. The rich had the power, the poor were lucky to get table scraps, and a Tradition called the Celestial Chorus had everyone so scared shitless of God, they were afraid to breathe the wrong way." The village morphed into a glorious cathedral, where priests ministered to hapless peasants.

Nice, thought B00ksmart into the Telepathic Channel. *I dare you to show this to a Chorister.*

I like living, thank you, Holly retorted.

The cathedral was now a tavern back room, where a trio of men spoke conspiratorially over wooden mugs of frothy ale. Though B00ksmart sat with them, their voices were too muted to overhear. Over his shoulder, Quix continued. "Fortunately, not every mage agreed with his brethren. Some actually cared about the people enough to see what could be done to help them out. They met in back rooms and darkened alleys, well away from prying eyes and nosy clergymen. Before long, they came upon a plan to bring power back to the people. They aimed to define the rules of reality in such a way that they could teach them to anyone who would listen. The more who believed them, the stronger their reality would become. The Order of Reason was born."

"Is this a history of the Adepts or the Technocracy?" B00ksmart quipped.

Holly sounded a little miffed. "Give it a second. It gets better."

The tavern disappeared. Busts of famous scientists and thinkers sprouted up like cartoon flowers. "Through the logic of science, the Order managed to push the Church — and the Celestial Chorus — out of the limelight. They took notes, compiled data, and wrote papers for other scientists and philosophers to mull over. Along the way, they came up with new inventions that improved the quality of life for humanity and made books accessible to everyone." From nowhere, a huge leather tome attempted to decapitate B00ksmart.

"Stop!" he shouted as his arms rose to deflect the blow. Code rotes flowed and the blow never came. The book froze a foot from his face. It blinked like a turn signal.

What the frag was that?! he demanded over the TC.

VR 101 for the Lamers. It intros them to what virtual space can do.

That's great, he retorted with heaping sarcasm. *Brain the students. That'll keep 'em interested.*

First off, it wouldn't hurt them physically. Not a lot, anyway. Second, it keeps them awake through the rest of the tutorial. And third, it transports them to a 'Factoid,' a little window of trivia relevant to the lesson. Touch the book.

B00ksmart glowered and touched the book. As it pinched away, a text box expanded in its place.

When he finished reading, the text box folded up into nothingness.

Not bad, he admitted to Holly. *Do me a favor, though. For the rest of this beta-test, keep objects away from my headspace.*

Right. Hold on. Silence for a minute, then: *Go ahead.*

"Continue," he commanded the tutorial.

The invisible floor sucked the busts away. Quix flitted around B00ksmart's shoulders until she was again in front of him. "With the Chorus sufficiently stomped on, the Order of Reason put into motion their INI file for universal domination."

FACTOID: THE GUTENBERG PRESS

The Order of Reason owes much of its success to one invention: the Gutenberg Press. Invented in 1436, it allowed for the mass production of books, journals and pamphlets, thereby undercutting the Church's monopoly on information and literacy. Ever since, the Virtual Adepts have endeavored to keep the data flowing.

THE DIFFERENCE ENGINEERS

A wooden floor plank stretched out beneath B00ksmart's feet. It tracked out in every direction while walls pixilated on all sides. He found himself standing in a university classroom littered with bickering scientists. "For the most part, the Order agreed on how it should go about its business. One sticking point, however, was the practice of withholding new innovations from the Sleepers until they were 'ready' to accept them. Detractors of this practice believed that people could handle much more than the other Technocrats gave them credit for. This became a point of contention that eventually led the first Adepts to break with the Order many years later."

The arguing dies down. Up front, eight men inform the rest of their decision. The detractors sulk. "Unfortunately, back then, they made up a serious minority. In the end, the Conventions — the Technocracy's version of Traditions — won out, and the practice became policy."

The classroom wiped away, leaving behind the sulking scientists. Each got jettisoned to his own private part of the blackness. "Forced to publicly follow the leader, the dissenters privately pursued their own agendas. They resented how the Technocracy controlled what they were supposed to think, but they lacked the political clout to do anything about it. They needed inspiration to fight on, and they needed it in the worst possible way." Each sulker busily worked on his own. Suddenly, a squat bearded man shone. He proudly stood beside his creation. "In 1822, an Electrodyne Engineer by the name of Charles Babbage provided that inspiration. He—"

"Pause." *You forgot about the Missouri Valley Quakes of 1810 and 1811.*

The what? Holly asked.

The Missouri Valley Quakes. It was the first beta-test of Reality 2.0. A huge failure, I might add, but noteworthy nonetheless. You should have one of the other scientists do that turn signal thing so Lamers can learn about it.

"Please," reverberates Holly's voice from beyond. *Tell me about the quakes.*

B00ksmart sighed. "Fine. Three quakes rocked the center of the Missouri Valley in December 1811 through January 1812. The largest of them — the New Madrid Earthquake —

measured over 8.0 on the modern Richter scale. This, of course, is based on empirical data collected onsite."

"Who did it?"

"The first Difference Engineers. They theorized that reality was a perception that could be altered through Correspondence, Pattern and Entropy. They had hoped to create a new lake and reroute the Mississippi River. They did both, only with a destructive force they didn't anticipate. The initial quake happened at the time they implemented their plan — creating their original lake — but the latter two were byproducts of the first. More lakes were created, as well as the New Madrid fault line, which exists to this day. The Technocrats believe New Madrid was a plate anomaly that had always been there but only then revealed itself. I always thought it'd be fun to put a sign on it letting the bastards know it was" — he paused for effect — "our fault."

Holly groaned. "I should boot you."

"It just goes to prove that not everything's what it's cracked up to be."

"Continue," Holly ordered the tutorial.

"The implications of Babbage's new invention were huge. Through computation, the dissenters discovered what they believed to be an outlook on reality that would unify the other Spheres. High on the possibilities of their new discovery, the dissenters petitioned for a new Convention, one they called the Difference Engineers — publicly because of Babbage's engine, privately because they differed in opinion with their colleagues. The Technocracy examined the petition in depth before accepting it. Thrilled to finally get their way, the Engineers improved upon the engine's design, incorporating steam as its power source and giving it the ability to store data for future manipulation." Babbage's steam engine wavered. When it stopped, it had a large steam generator attached to it.

"Pause," B00ksmart orders. *That's not what it looked like.*

Do you have a photo?

No, but I know that's not what it looked like. It was smaller, more compact.

Holly was obviously annoyed. *Get me a sketch and I'll incorporate it into the program.*

"Continue."

TRANSMISSION RECEIVED

Lightning struck the difference engine, shattering it into splintered shrapnel. The pieces headed for B00ksmart's face disappeared, but other pieces bounced off his robes.

You're really starting to piss me off with that shit, he warned.

Overhead, thunderclouds formed. A second bolt struck, this time hitting a wire extending out into the horizon. B00ksmart's perspective was sucked in after the bolt, chasing after the current at a dizzying speed. "Electricity became the focus of the Difference Engineers' next major breakthrough. After years of study, they invented the first telecommunications system."

The electrical impulse burst out of the wire onto a gigantic metal plate. B00ksmart flew off of it, over a telegraph operator's shoulder and back around to the other side. When he stopped, he stood at normal height.

He watched the operator translate clicks from a receiving message. As the last click struck the receiving plate, a pinprick of violet light sparked off the metal, twirled about in a spiral and hovered over the operator's shoulder. With a snap, the violet spark became Quix. "Whoa... head rush!" The orb shook out virtual cobwebs that peppered the air like flakes of dandruff. "Ah, much better..."

Cute, B00ksmart thought wryly.

"For a while, only the Order of Reason used the telegraph, fine-tuning and improving upon their design until 1832, when the New World Order, a branch of the Order of Reason-turning-Technocracy, released knowledge of its 'potential' to Sleepers during a return cruise from Europe to America. Michael Farraday, the inventor of the electromagnet, and Samuel Morse would later go on to incorporate the ideas 'overheard' on that trip into the first public telegraph 12 years later."

A huge zipper split the room in half. Like a jacket, the walls crumpled away, revealing a low-altitude satellite image of North America. B00ksmart and Quix floated in the stratosphere as telegraph wires webbed and wound across America. "Not only were the Difference Engineers well ahead of the curve with regards to the technology," explains Quix, "they

THE FREUD FACTOR

B00ksmart paused the program. *The Difference Engineers were aware of what Bell was doing.*

How? Holly challenged. *The Technocracy investigated the Difference Engineers, but found nothing.*

And well they shouldn't. The Difference Engineers figured out how to make the telephone work. They petitioned the Inner Circle to let them implement it. The Inner Circle rejected them, so they went to Plan B. Keep in mind that this was around the same time that the New World Order was prepping the Masses for modern psychology. Who was the spearhead for this? Sigmund Freud, whose mentor at the University of Vienna was Ernst Brucke, the very same man who theorized that all living organisms — including humans — are energy systems that obey the Law of Conservation of Energy. Energy, I might add, that is bioelectrical in nature. The Difference Engineers saw the NWO's work as an opportunity to do a little mind tweaking of their own, under the guise of 'investigating how information is processed in the mind.' A couple years of studying and one fortuitous dream session later, Alexander got his bright idea for the phone.

Holly's response was more playful than chiding. *I had no idea you were into conspiracy theories. He raised a critical eyebrow. When you've been a Kibo for as long as I have, maybe then you'll realize that all of life is a conspiracy.*

went beyond it. They discovered that Correspondence, a Sphere generally relegated to Void Engineers, possessed the power to not only manipulate space and distance, but how data was transferred, translated, and transformed.”

The telegraph wires morphed into phone wires, which multiplied as fast as the West was populated. “The next step was to turn dots and dashes into voice. The Difference Engineers resolved that issue as quickly as they had the telegraph’s development. Unfortunately, the Inner Circle wasn’t too keen on releasing it to the public so soon.” The exponential growth of phone wires suddenly froze. “They were aiming for a turn-of-the-century release. They couldn’t guess that an un-Awakened man by the name of Alexander Graham Bell would beat them to the punch by two decades.” The phone wires once again proliferate across the country.

FROM REALSPACE TO VIRTUAL

Quix fell into the map like a drop of water. The ripples slowly erased the map, replacing it with a photo of a steam-powered difference engine next to an early version of the telephone on a stool. The rest of the newly formed room was sterile and white. B00ksmart meandered up to the two objects as Quix appeared out of the phone receiver.

“The telephone,” Quix explained, “marked a new age of transmitting information. No longer requiring steam to power their devices, the Difference Engineers speculated that not only could voices be translated by electric signals, but so could data of any format. By the time the phone was made publicly available in 1878, the Difference Engineers were already working with the Electrodyne Engineers to advance to a new level.”

The telephone rang. A cartoon-rendered man with a big bowler hat and oversized shoes shambled into the room from the distant horizon, skidded past the phone, and backtracked to answer it. “Hello?” he asked in an exaggerated voice.

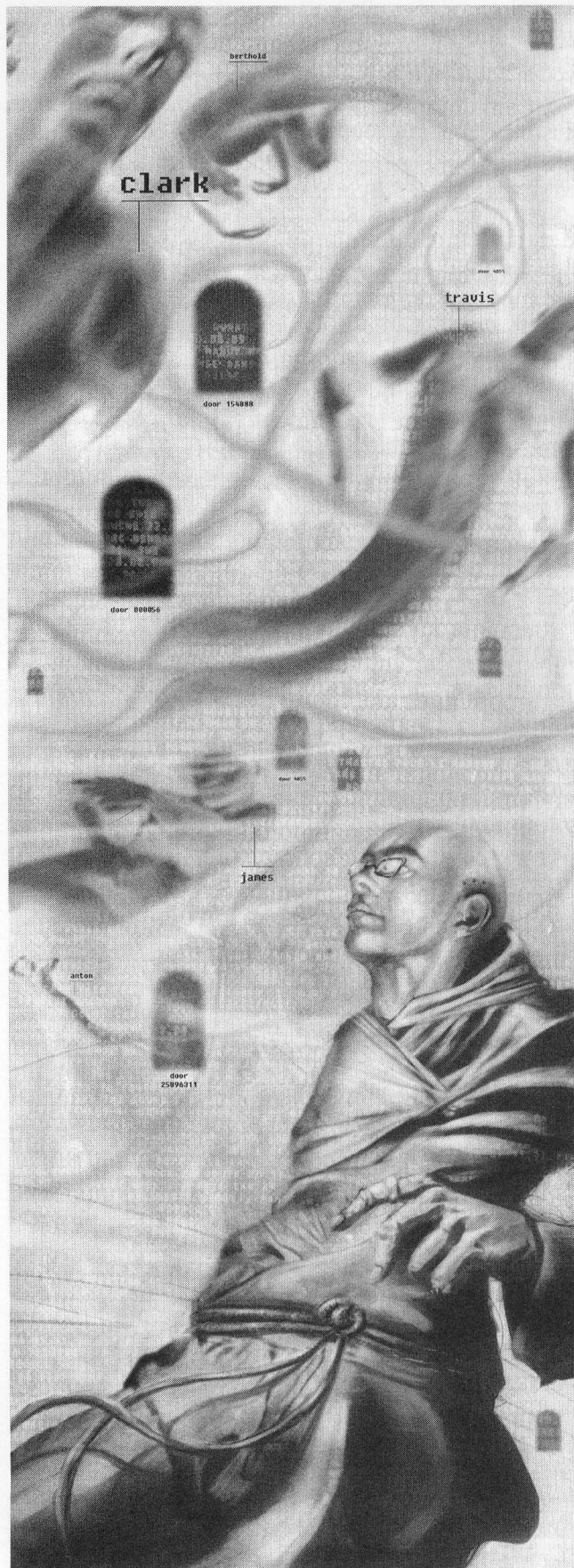
As he talked, Quix flitted up to B00ksmart’s ear. She whispered, “Besides offering an alternative means of storing data, the telephone opened the Difference Engineers’ eyes to a potential new realm, one inhabited by the information they transmitted. Follow me and I’ll show you.” Quix’s glow darkened as if in stealth. She snuck over behind the cartoon man to the rear of the phone. “Come on,” she beckoned in a harsh whisper.

Don’t you think this is a bit childish?

Holly laughed. *Humor me.*

B00ksmart sighed and walked around to meet the orb. The back panel of the phone swirled with an ethereal blue-gray glow. Quix wound herself up and disappeared into it. B00ksmart tapped it with a finger.

The white room exploded into a virtual representation, a three-dimensional explosion that obliterated the theater into



a spectacular barrage of light and color. Spirited electromorphs — electric silhouettes of sprinting men who represent all communication over the virtual landscape — raced about in every direction, a grander display of power and light than anything Disney had ever come up with for his Main Street.

Quix arced up from the motherboard flooring. She had to yell to be heard over the general din of the realm. "This new 'virtual' reality existed beyond the boundaries of conventional reality, and begged its discoverers to dip into its uncharted depths. Enthralled with what this realm had to offer, the Engineers successfully petitioned for an official name change in 1880. We've been Virtual Adepts ever since." Triumphant music trumpets in the background as the number of speeding currents multiply exponentially.

Okay, muttered B00ksmart as he covered his eyes from the intense glow about him. *That's a bit over the top. The Lamers' vision will be overexposed enough as it is. You don't have to hurry them to blindness.*

Sorry. Holly paused the program. The radiance levels of the room diminished to that of a standard office space. *Better?*

B00ksmart blinked the sunspots from his vision. *Much.*

"Continue," commanded Holly's disembodied voice from above. The animated currents streaked all about for several moments. Suddenly, digital light displays shrunk into a single point, winking away. B00ksmart once more stood in the sterile white room. This time, however, he stood alone with Quix. "Things have never been the same."

A PARTING OF WAYS

Twelve haphazardly dressed scientists in grungy lab coats and outlandish safety goggles sprung out of the floor. None of them looked quite right, as if they had all come straight out of a really bad sci-fi flick. "The Virtual Adepts had long counted the Electrodyne Engineers to be kindred spirits. Though heavy into the machine end of things, the EEs were able to manufacture whatever it was their clients — the other Conventions — asked them to build. While they often found their creations hamstrung by NWO, Void and Progenitor conservatism, they found Virtual Adepts' grandiose requests both refreshing and challenging. When the Adepts asked them to construct an electrical difference engine that could tap into a realm that existed only in the imagination, the EEs leapt at the chance."

A prototype difference engine poofed inside the circle of frantically chattering scientists. It employed a punch card system that fed the device its commands and data. A head taller and three arm-spans wider than the tallest Engineer, the engine was a classic example of Victorian design, complete with copper gaskets, wooden bracings and gigantic steel cogs. "Right before the turn of the century, the Electrodyne Engineers granted the Adepts' wishes. The electric computer was the first version of today's modern computer. Though it ran off of balsa punch cards, it was faster and far more powerful

than the best steam-powered difference engines. It also gave Adepts a significant key to unlocking the secrets of the 'Net,' a nickname derived from the extensive telephone network already connected into the virtual realm."

The scientists in the picture faded away, leaving behind the proto-computer and an empty lab. "Though the Virtual Adepts were embroiled in a political contest with the rest of the Conventions, the Electrodyne Engineers had realized that their own private battles with the authority were now a lost cause. Knowing they couldn't win over the Technocracy to their way of thinking, they changed their name to the Sons of Ether and joined the Traditions five years later."

The proto-computer blinked. B00ksmart reached out and touched the device.

FACTOID:

WHY DID THE SONS OF ETHER LEAVE?

There are two prevailing theories. The most accepted explanation is that the Technocracy denounced the existence of the ether. As all of the EE's beliefs were grounded in the ether's existence, the Convention decided that enough was enough and left the Technocracy for the Traditions.

The second, most recent, theory serves as a corollary to the first listed above. As the EE's problems with the Technocracy escalated, the head of the Convention fell head over heels for a Verbena priestess he encountered during a mechanized fox tracker field test in the Welsh countryside. The two hit it off immediately.

When Iteration-X later killed her for being a mage, the head of the EEs was outraged. Using his own experience as an example of how poorly the Inner Circle treated the Convention, he rallied the EEs to escape from the prison that was the Technocracy and join the Traditions, where they could finally live and think as freely as they deserved.

B00ksmart wheeled about. *You've got to be joking. You can't include this. It's completely unsubstantiated!*

Is it? Holly asked coyly. *Not according to 'Gearhead' Peritone. He was there when the two of them met. And Eli Godwin set up the hotel reservations where Mr. Ether and the Life Chick trysted. And I've got a NWO invoice questioning Godwin's expenses there. Here. You can read everything for yourself.*

B00ksmart accepted the TC request to download. As the information poured in, his anger slowly dissipated. *The IP signatures seem to be accurate,* he conceded. B00ksmart accessed his personal files. *The encryption protocols seem to match up, too. I need more time to study this. If it turns out to be legit... congratulations.* The final word came out grudgingly.

He could sense Holly preening. *I think you'll find everything in order. Shall we continue?*

"Continue," B00ksmart muttered.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Factoid winked out, as did the lab and proto-computer, leaving behind only horizonless white. A huge paintbrush swept over the blank canvas to depict a simulation of Victorian life in the streets of New York. B00ksmart and Quix walked down the middle of a street. As they went, the progress of time charted through the changing styles of dress, transport and architecture around them.

Quix pulsed conversationally. "Left to their own devices (pun intended) the Adepts adapted their computers for integration into the Net. It was laborious, painstaking work, made all the more difficult by World War I. Quietly fomented by the Technocracy, it became a dramatic period of military innovation." Before them, a video hologram turned

FACTOID: THE ZIMMERMAN TELEGRAM

Written by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman to the German Minister to Mexico, von Eckhardt, in January 1917, the telegram instructed von Eckhardt to offer Mexico American lands and money in return for joining the German cause. British Intelligence intercepted the telegram during transmission, but it kept the information from American intelligence until late February. The reason? To discover what America's reaction would be to Germany's breach of the Sussex pledge to limit submarine warfare during the war.

The telegram:

To the German Minister to Mexico
Berlin, January 19, 1917,

On the first of February we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this, it is our intention to endeavor to keep neutral the United States of America.

If this attempt is not successful, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement....

You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above in the greatest confidence as soon as it is certain that there will be an outbreak of war with the United States and suggest that the President of Mexico, on his own initiative, should communicate with Japan suggesting adherence at once to this plan; at the same time, offer to mediate between Germany and Japan.

Please call to the attention of the President of Mexico that the employment of ruthless submarine warfare now promises to compel England to make peace in a few months.

Zimmerman
(Secretary of State)

on, playing newsreels from the War. "Forced to contribute to the war effort, the Virtual Adepts scrounged up what they could to further their own personal projects. The most notable of these endeavors was Bell's telephone company, which helped spread the Adepts' influence in the Net.

"At this point, the war was primarily a European affair. The United States remained staunchly neutral throughout most of the conflict. All that changed, however, when the Zimmerman Telegram fell into American hands." A piece of paper blew about in a gusty gale and stopped at B00ksmart's feet. It was a Western Union telegram filled with lines of encrypted code. Two months after receiving the telegram, the United States officially declared war on Germany."

The paper blinked. B00ksmart bent over and picked it up.

"Since the province of the Adepts was information, the blame for the deciphered telegram immediately fell on them. The Technocracy forced censure on a number of British Adepts, confiscating their projects and installing N.W.O. watchdogs to oversee them for the next 10 years. The truth of the matter is that we don't know whether the Adepts were responsible or not. What we do know is that the apparently unjust censure really upset the rank and file."

The Factoid transformed into another video hologram showing more newsreels of the war winding down. "By the time World War I ended in 1918, the Adepts' goals were two years behind schedule. They had hoped to upgrade their first generation computers by 1920, but the rigors of war were too much to overcome. Increased scrutiny by 'Big Brother,' the NWO, gave Adepts little if any wriggle room to make up for lost time."

The newsreel stopped and a giant eraser wiped away the Victorian scene. As it did, the underlying canvas revealed a 1920s generator slowly building its output.

BUILDING TO A CRASH

"After the war, Europe and the United States experienced an economic heyday, especially in America." To B00ksmart's left, people danced to the classic rhythms of jazz transitioning out from the diminished whines of the generator. Quix bounced to the tune as she continued her exposition. "The 'Roaring '20s' was a decade of excess, despite government efforts to curtail it. People were in a partying mood and they found any way possible to sidestep Prohibition laws to celebrate.

"The Virtual Adepts saw the world adapting to their ideal. Nearly every household in the United States had electrical outlets powering new electric appliances developed largely by the Sons of Ether, who had kept themselves busy since leaving the Technocracy. Seeing the progress made by their expatriates, the Adepts were eager to ride on their coattails."

The generator slid over to the side. In its place, a bubble stock ticker appeared. It spit out tickertape in a posh high-rise office in period décor. "The '20s was also a time when high finance came front and center. Run off of electricity,

the Stock Market was more accessible to the common man. Everyone who was anyone speculated on stocks during the latter half of the decade, which only added to the high times of the era. It was good to be an American, and the nation wanted in on the profits.”

The stock ticker spat out tape faster and faster. The generator slid back in, superimposing itself over the ticker. Its whirring and whining soon drowned out the clicking of the ticker. “Then came the Crash.” Both the generator and stock ticker exploded in a three-dimensional spray of tickertape, glass and metal. When the debris stopped falling, BOOKsmart peeked over his protective forearm. Paper and shards of glass clung onto his robes.

You’ve got an unhealthy infatuation with destruction, girl.
Holly chuckled. *How’d you guess?*

The litter faded away. The white room became grainy, then slowly blew into a gentle whirlwind that turned sandier with each revolution. BOOKsmart’s robes whipped around as the whirlwind increased in velocity until a full-blown dust storm raged across America’s heartland. BOOKsmart pulled on his hood and pinched it shut against the gale.

Quix had no trouble resisting the wind’s force. “America was plunged into the grips of the Great Depression. Adept Chaoticians pored over the effects of the Crash. Their conclusions: the system was inherently flawed, so much so that it would have dire consequences on an international scale. The hardest to be hit (outside of the United States) would be Germany, which was still finding it difficult to recover from paying restitution for the First World War.”

BOOKsmart paused the program. *Incomplete and misleading. What’s wrong with it?* Holly retorted.

You implied that the Chaoticians weren’t involved with the Market until after it crashed. You obviously don’t know any number crunchers. There’s no way they’d waste an opportunity to predict the shit out of it, and that’s just what they did. They saw the Crash coming two years earlier and warned the Syndicate about it. Those money-grubbing bean counters were too fucking greedy for their own good, and it cost the world dearly.

Holly nodded. “Continue.”

The swirling grains of dust transformed into numbers and equations that jumbled together to form statistical formulas. “The Chaoticians informed the Conventions that the Crash provided the ideal opportunity to establish a government to oversee all aspects of world finance. By centralizing the economy, such a Crash in the future could be avoided, thereby stabilizing the markets and bringing a return of past prosperity.

“How the Conventions applied the recommendations would forever alter the Adepts’ perspective of the Technocracy.” The formulas slid about like a marching band at halftime until they formed a three-dimensional swastika that ominously zoomed out into the theater.

THE RISE OF HITLER

The swastika swept over BOOKsmart and Quix like a shockwave. In its wake were thousands of marching Nazi troops throughout the streets of Berlin. They passed through BOOKsmart as if he didn’t exist. His dread of the rising evil was palpable.

What Sphere did you use to augment the fear factor? he asked through clenched teeth.

Holly’s pleased response contradicted the mood of the tutorial. *Spirit.*

BOOKsmart stared into the hate-driven eyes of the soldiers as they filed past. Quix drew in closer, as if she was just as terrified. “Prior to the Crash, Adolf Hitler was slowly building power among National Socialists in Germany. The nation was suffering under the financial yoke thrust upon them by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the First World War. When the Depression hit, however, it provided a tremendous boon to the Socialist movement.”

The street full of soldiers turned into an outdoor plaza full of soldiers. At the podium stood Hitler, addressing his men with the furor and charisma of a man possessed. “Hitler’s campaign was viciously simple. Fault for the nation’s economic plight fell heavily upon the Jews and Communists who ran the nation’s banks. By wresting control from them, he claimed, Germany would reclaim its past glory. The people agreed. After years of political backstabbing and double-dealing, Hitler took control of both major titles — Chancellor of the German Cabinet and later President of Germany in 1933.”

The ordered assembly of soldiers transformed into a thronging mix of military and private citizens, all in a frenzy over what Hitler preached. Though physically unaffected by the crowd, BOOKsmart retreated to the outer edges to free himself from the rabid masses. Quix hastily followed. “Hitler’s gambit worked. The nation shook off its economic shackles and managed to turn its economy around. Germany reconquered territories lost after World War I, then expanded its influence into Austria and Czechoslovakia. By 1940, another great war had seized European soil.”

Out of the corner of his eye, BOOKsmart spotted a large Nazi flag blinking for attention. Temporarily relieved of the Spirited mood of the crowd, he touched the hem of the flag.

THE ADEPTS TAKE A STAND

BOOKsmart turned from the flag. The throng of Nazi supporters in the plaza faded away, taking the sickening feeling of hatred with them. The white setup room returned.

“By October 1941, the Virtual Adepts had had enough. Not only did the Technocracy ignore their early warnings about the Market, it interpreted their suggestion to establish a united financial government to the lowest common denominator — the domination of mankind by a fascist world

FACTOID:

WHERE DID HITLER COME FROM?

How did a man twice rejected from a prestigious academy of art become the greatest villain of the Twentieth Century? Two parts hatred, one part drive, one part luck... and one part New World Order.

That's right. The New World Order caught on to Hitler early into his career. They used dreams to teach the hungry megalomaniac everything he would need to know about mass psychology and manipulating it as he saw fit.

It's unlikely that the N.W.O. supported his anti-Semitic rhetoric. They saw only an opportunity to bring the world out of the Great Depression under one unified banner.

One more item of proof that the Technocracy — for all its careful planning — no longer works for the people... only themselves.

Bullshit was B00ksmart's first remark.

What? Holly responded.

Everyone likes to blame history's evil on the Technocracy. What they didn't know is Hitler had another agenda. He was a member of the Thule society, an occult order linked to the Order of Hermes.

A Tradition?

That's right. A Tradition. And there are a number of other supernatural types who call dibs on him, too. It's a conspiracy-fest when it comes to Hitler. Care to know the scariest one?

What's that?

A lot of people attribute Hitler's success to Joseph Goebbels, his minister of propaganda. Goebbels managed to manipulate and control the German information flow with a flair that was undeniably key to Hitler's success.

Holly was shocked. *Are you saying Goebbels was an Adept?!*

A chunk of Hitler's success had to do with information, and information has traditionally been our strongest suit. So if you're going with conspiracy theories, try that one first.

Holly sounded ill at the thought. "Continue," she said.

government. To add insult to injury, the German propaganda machine churned out films that 'statistically' proved that Aryans were superior to Jews, blacks, Poles and anyone else who didn't fit the Aryan profile... and *people bought into it!* Nothing galled the Adepts more than seeing the Nazi 'statisticians' exploit math so shamelessly. Insulted on every front, the Adepts vowed to set things aright... no matter the cost."

A blinding flash appeared. B00ksmart and Quix were in the cockpit of a Japanese Zero flying low over the Hawaiian coast. Radio chatter could barely be heard over the roar of the plane's engines. "The Adepts threatened to make the rest of the Technocracy see the error of its ways should it

ignore their demands to stop supporting the Axis. On December 7, 1941, they carried out that threat. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, made possible by Adept misinformation and redirection, brought America into the war." The plane made a beeline for the American fleet already put out to water. "Though it took four years to accomplish, Hitler's Third Reich was over."

To his right, B00ksmart spotted incoming fire from another destroyer. It struck the wing, rendering it useless. The pilot struggled with the steering until the plane headed straight for the deck of one of the destroyers. Right before it hit, B00ksmart yelled, "PAUSE!"

FACTOID: ATROCITIES

The Technocracy has performed a number of atrocities over the centuries, but never before have so many been concentrated during one span of time as from 1933 to 1945. Some in the New World Order helped spread Hitler's doctrine of prejudice across the world. Members of Iteration X promoted the atrocious practice of scientific experimentation on thousands of innocent Jews during the Holocaust. The Syndicate financed the war effort by compromising the lives of the poor to fuel the might of the German military.

But the Virtual Adepts were not without fault. Taking a cue from Winston Churchill — who sacrificed the town of Coventry to keep the Germans from knowing that Britain had cracked their Enigma Code — Adepts altered information detailing Japan's plans to attack Pearl Harbor. Knowing that then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt would never allow the attack to occur, the Adepts skewed the intelligence to make it look like the Japanese would attack the Marshal Islands instead.

Though the Adepts made sure a number of destroyers in Pearl Harbor were already out of port when the attack occurred, 2,390 Americans still died, many of them still asleep. The Adepts believed it was a small price to pay to end the growing German threat.

The greatest atrocity, however, occurred during the course of the War. Acting as if World War II was nothing more than an elaborate game, some Adepts defected to the German side and devised complex ciphers to stymie their colleagues in British and American intelligence. It proved to be a major reason why the War lasted much longer, despite American involvement after 1942. The defectors were also responsible, in part, for setting up Operation Paperclip, the defection of Nazi scientists (including some who were working at the concentration camps) to Technocratic forces in the United States.

While most of the defectors were never caught in life, their deeds have recently come to light in death, through hidden files buried deep in the Digital Web.

The nose of the Zero hovered a mere foot away from the gun turret. A blinking gun turret.

How am I supposed to touch the Factoid if I can't get out? You don't. It'll touch you.

You're going to crash me into a Factoid? I thought the whole intention of them was to give supplemental info. Why force Lamers to read one?

It's data every Adept needs to know. I couldn't introduce it into the normal timeline, so this was the best way to do it. She was disquietingly somber as she explained her motives.

He was intrigued, plane crash or no. *It won't hurt, will it? Nope.*

B00ksmart absorbed that for a moment. "Continue." His face flew forward into a tremendous ball of fire.

The heat from the fire cascaded off of B00ksmart; he found himself kneeling beside a marker on the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. It was a clear afternoon but the lap of the Pacific's waves against the underside of the monument gave a sobering reminder of what happened over half a century before.

B00ksmart looked up at the list of men and women who lost their lives that fateful day. As he read the names, the words underwent a subtle transformation.

As B00ksmart finished the text, the words once more subtly transformed into the list of names. He took a few moments to read them before rising to his feet. Quix remained respectfully silent as he headed for the exit.

SUSPICIONS

B00ksmart walked out of the Memorial into a black hallway lined with videos showing newsreels of the War ending. "In early 1944, the advantage of World War II clearly belonged to the Allies. The Technocracy withdrew its support from the Axis in favor of the Allies and, one year later, the War came to an end.

"A number of questions were raised, however, regarding events that transpired during the course of the war. Suspicious eyes focused on the Virtual Adepts, whose duplicitous activities went more or less undetected for the duration. They cleaned up their affairs and let the Technocracy search to its heart's content."

At the end of the hallway, men were questioned one at a time before a council. B00ksmart and Quix watched the proceedings. It was evident that the Adepts were the ones in the hotseat. "All their ploys worked, but too well. Just as a detective has doubts when a crime scene has no fingerprints, so, too, did the Technocracy believe that the Adepts were guilty of something. They sent in moles to discover their hidden agendas. Sadly, the Adepts were too proud with past accomplishments to notice."

ALAN TURING

The hearing room froze over with ice. B00ksmart could see his breath in the air before the area slowly heated up. The façade melted to reveal a copper statue of a man sitting behind the first electric computer.

Quix flew around it a few times as if in awe. "Alan Turing. It's a name you might've heard in passing or seen as an official holiday on Adept calendars." At B00ksmart's feet, one of the tiles blinked. He tapped it with his sandal.

FACTOID: WHERE CAN I GET A NIFTY ADEPT CALENDAR?

Why, at Sm0kEE's Trad Emporium! Click on the link for a free account today!

B00ksmart couldn't believe what he was reading. *You advertised?*

I had to, Holly said defensively. It was the only way I could get enough server space on the Web to do the tutorial.

You don't need 'server space.' That's what Correspondence is for!

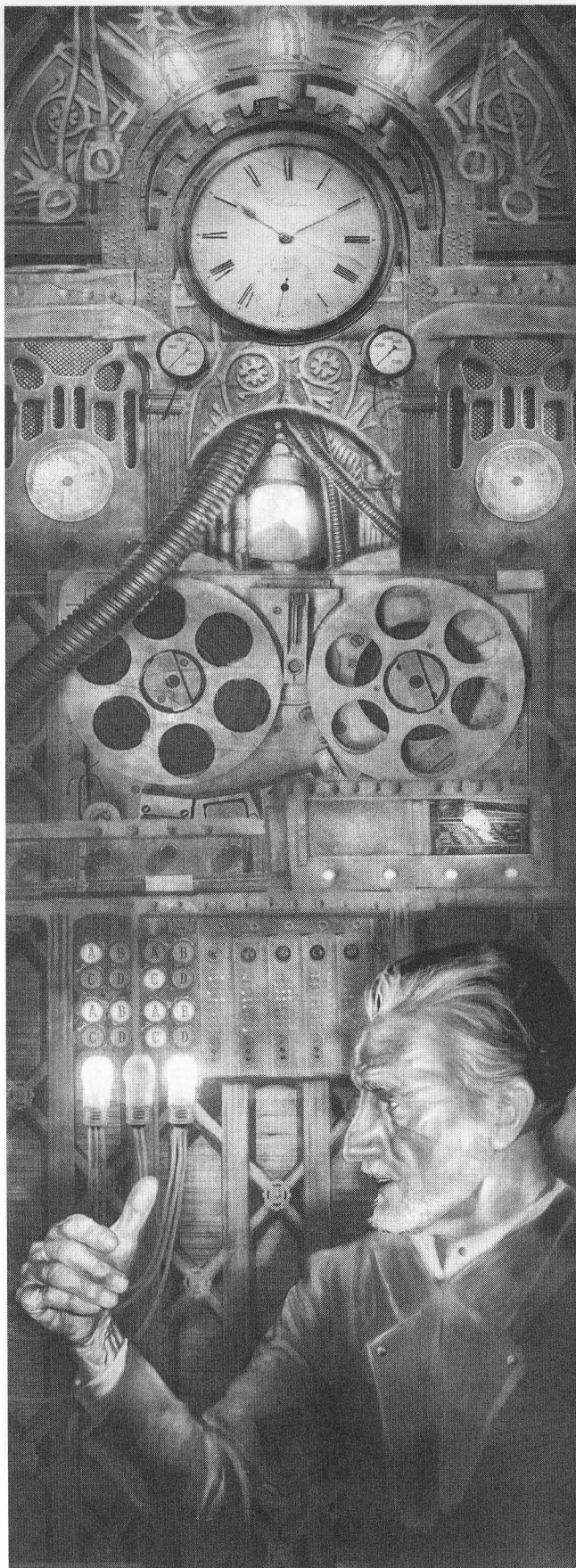
Look, I've been through a lot of pressure putting this together. Compress me some megabytes here, will ya?

Whatever, he growled. "Continue," he snapped.

B00ksmart pushed through the Factoid to the foot of the statue. Quix continued the tutorial. "Turing made his name during World War II when his electrical difference engine helped crack Germany's Enigma Cipher and made D-Day possible. Though difference engines at the time were already capable of great computations, Turing's adaptation was the precursor of today's modern computer."

A panel in the statue's pedestal slid open, revealing a large tape-driven computer spanning the length of two office walls. "Turing's vision went well beyond computations. He envisioned a gateway to a virtual reality much like the Consensus version that could be accessed and manipulated via computer. He believed that reality itself could be defined by equations that could be programmed to create a new and improved reality that would benefit Awakened and Sleeper alike. This reality would be the Adepts' grand project and enable them to show the Technocracy the true power of Correspondence.

"Turing, however, knew that he and the Adepts could do it alone. Rightfully afraid to approach the other Conventions for aid, Turing did the unthinkable. He made contact with the banished Sons of Ether. Though it took some convincing on Turing's part to earn their trust, earn it he did. In return for Adept-designed computers, the Etherites took the designs and ran with them. The result was the first trinary, or 'fuzzy logic,' computer." The panel closed. When it reopened, a corridor was there, leading to a massive airplane hangar. B00ksmart and Quix entered.



The entire floor space was covered with aisle upon aisle of massive tape-driven consoles. Technicians sidled past one another to take readings and enter instructions directly into the decks. B00ksmart heard the screech of dot matrix printing to his left. On his right, other technicians crunched results and worked out new commands to be entered.

“The trinary computer,” Quix explained, “was capable of simulating human thought. While other computers were hamstrung by the constraints of TRUE and FALSE, Turing’s invention added another option: MAYBE. This enabled faster processing times and more accurate data handling, both vitally important if the Adepts wanted to successfully probe the nature of the Net.

“The discovery made Turing the ultimate Adept Elite. Rallying behind him, the Adepts prepared to venture out into the virtual realm that awaited them. The Technocracy, however, didn’t intend to let that happen.”

THE TECHNOCRACY STRIKES BACK

B00ksmart followed Quix into an aisle of the hangar. But instead of computer consoles, he saw the entire expanse of the Net. “For years, the Virtual Adepts got the better of the other Conventions. In 1947, the Technocracy turned the tables. An Iteration X agent infiltrated the Adepts and tapped into a monthly conclave meeting held over the Net.” Off to the side, a firewall ignited around a section of the Net. While numerous electromorphs tried to break through, only a select few got in. All of them were the same red color save one, which was a hint more yellow than the others. None of the other electromorphs, however, paid it any attention. “Though the agent was unable to put any faces to the voices, he was able to eavesdrop unnoticed and gather the incriminating information that the Technocrats were desperately looking for, including Turing’s virtual reality and the Adepts’ renewed relations with the Sons of Ether.” The electromorphs left and the firewall dropped, signaling the end of the conclave.

The Net warped away. An expansive apartment cluttered with papers, spare parts and a sizable computer replaced it. B00ksmart and Quix entered the drawing room of the newly rendered structure. They watched Turing read over a letter and some photographs with visible fear. He shook his head, unsure what to do next. Quix lowered her voice. “Three years later, the Technocracy reached a consensus decision — Alan Turing had to be neutralized. Their first attempts were blackmail, threatening to release to the media photos of him with another man.” Turing took a deep breath, burned the photos, and disappeared into the computer room. “Turing ignored the threats. When the photos hit the newsstands, the scandal ruined his political career in Britain. Turing, however, refused to let it stop his research. The New World Order took the next logical step.”

Someone subtly worked the lock from the hallway. A Man in Black quietly walked in, spotted Turing in the

computer room, and snuck inside. A long second of silence ensued, followed by the solitary report of a gun.

BOOKsmart and Quix rushed into the computer room. They arrived in time to see the Man in Black put Turing's prints on the gun and drop it beside his body. Blood pumped out of bullet wound on his temple. The Man in Black made some last minute alterations to the dead man's pose, then exited as quietly as he entered.

BOOKsmart stared disbelieving at the legend bleeding at his feet. A beep drew his eyes upward. Several monitors printed data for an experiment already underway. He leaned in to read what the data said, but the text was too blurry to read. BOOKsmart waited for something to happen. Nothing did.

He turned to Quix. "What's going on?"

"Watch and see."

The computer winked out like a television tube being turned off. BOOKsmart flinched, then looked around. A telephone on a nearby nightstand blinked.

He touched the phone.

The text box closed. Quix continued the tutorial. "Without their sympathetic leader, the Technocracy expected the Adepts to numbly comply with whatever it commanded. The two sides greatly underestimated one another."

Turing's computer room dissolved. BOOKsmart and Quix were once more in the setup room. This time, however, it was not empty.

TECHNOCRACY NO MORE

A small chess table stood alone with a game already in progress. BOOKsmart noted that the black obsidian pieces had the clear crystal pieces in checkmate. "Turing's death was the final byte of the Adepts' ever-diminishing patience. The rotes Turing used to transfer to the Net were improved and, in June of 1955, the entire Adept community went virtual." Every piece but one lone pawn vanished from the chessboard. "They took with them every scrap of data they had about the Technocracy, including detailed plans of the New World Order's precious Time Table.

"The Technocracy was devastated and outraged." The black pieces ignited and shook with anger. "Of all the known Adepts, only three were captured, and all attempts to trace the others led nowhere. Unable to extract any information from the captives, the NWO executed them and ordered that all Adepts be killed 'with extreme prejudice.' The Adepts were officially on their own."

The chessboard faded. The room digitized into the Web. Activity on the phone lines was frenetic, save for scattered pockets of inactivity that prevented other signals from entering. "For the next four years, the Adepts burrowed deep into the Web. Contact between one another was sporadic, a brief communication between two inactive pockets, and never in person lest one of them lead the Technocracy to their private parties. A few, however, managed to main-

FACTOID:

WHAT HAPPENED TO TURING?

The public believes that Alan Turing killed himself as a result of his ruined political career. Nothing could be further from the truth.

According to testimony by other Adepts working with Turing at the time of his death, he was in the middle of an intricate experiment when the Man in Black burst in and shot his prone body at close range. Thinking him dead, he left it to the technicians to clean up the mess.

Turing, however, was not wholly in his body at the time of his physical assassination. Minutes before, he had uploaded his Avatar over the phone line into his computer. His goal: to synchronize rotes with other Adepts and the Sons of Ether to digitize his computer into itself, thereby proving that virtual space was in fact a level *below* that of Consensual reality.

The experiment was a tremendous success, but at an incredible price. With his physical form no longer functioning, Turing could not return to his body. Trapped in a recursive loop caused by the special rotes he used to project into virtual space, his Avatar was lost in a sudden info dump caused by the computer's digitization. Frantic, the Adepts scoured the data for a way to find him.

After two days of intense analysis, the Chaoticians had nothing concrete to report. Some theorized that his Avatar was obliterated in the Net the moment it lost contact with Turing's life signs. Others surmised that he had become integrated directly into the Net at the same time his computer had. Whatever the explanation, one thing was certain. Turing's digitized computer had become a Kernel for the entire Net, arranging and managing the memory allocation of every phone call, electronic dispatch and application that would ever run on what would become the Digital Web.

Years after Turing's presumed death, Nexplorers searching the farthest reaches of the Web have returned with stories that could disrupt the hardiest of surge protectors. It is not uncommon to hear accounts that the fringes of the Web echo with the screams of an eternally tortured man, or that shadows of a man matching Turing's description spontaneously appear out of nowhere, only to disappear just as quickly. One explanation for these phenomena is that Turing's Avatar was being parceled apart to expand the Web one molecule at a time. Though it has its proponents, detractors cite that Turing's molecules could not sustain the exponential growth that the Web continues to exhibit.

Fifty years later, his birthday is still celebrated with the utmost reverence. Whatever the explanation behind his disappearance, everyone agrees that his sacrifice must never be forgotten.

tain ties to the Sons of Ether, who considered the Adepts kindred spirits." One of the inactive zones allowed a red-colored electromorph to pass through. It interacted with a yellow electromorph inside, then left unmolested.

Red electromorphs interacted with one another elsewhere on the Web. Green electromorphs soon joined them. "Satisfied that the Virtual Adepts were legitimate expatriates of the Technocracy, the Sons of Ether petitioned the Tradition's Council of Nine to allow the Adepts to join. Two years later, the Council agreed, but several conditions had to be met before they would become a fully recognized Tradition. Besides the standard five-year probationary period, the Adepts had to share everything they knew about the Technocracy. They were also required to fill the ninth and final seat on the Council as representatives for the Sphere of Correspondence and keep the rest of the Council updated on whatever they were working on until their probation had expired. The Adepts jumped at the opportunity." The green electromorphs interacted with the yellow ones in their protective zones on the Web.

B00ksmart watched the Web telescope out of the white room. "The Adepts had successfully come full circle. Unfortunately, they did not come to the fold intact."

THE LEARNING CLIFF

An oil refinery appeared, billowing smoke into the air. B00ksmart flinched in reaction to the hard hat suddenly affixed to his head. Quix, too, wore a miniature hard hat that kept slipping down as she spoke. "Crude oil goes in, refined oil comes out. It's very similar to the process we Adepts apply to raw data. We take gigabytes of miscellaneous information, separate out the useful from the useless, and archive the refined data for future study.

"The Technocracy, however, had learned a lot from the Etherites' treason. The NWO secretly infected each Convention with different viruses geared to exploit each Convention's greatest weakness. For the Adepts, that weakness was information." The machinery in the refinery wound down. After an over-the-top drill whir and a few hammer pounds, the machinery restarted. This time, however, crude instead of refined oil came out. "Called the Turing Virus, the infection caused Adepts to 'forget' much of what they knew about hyper-mathematics and theoretical physics. It also made them believe that information wasn't meant to be processed, but should instead be freed in its raw, 'pure' form. As such, the Adepts became unwittingly reliant upon Technocracy computers and technology to satisfy their thirst for releasing 'trapped knowledge.'"

Unprocessed oil spilled over onto the ground. B00ksmart lifted up his robes and backed away from the growing slick. He never saw the cliff spontaneously appear behind him. As he plummeted, Quix flew down beside him. "42 years of valuable R&D time were squandered as a result of the virus," she yelled over the rushing air, "but not everything the

Adepts did in that time was pointless! They had a lot with which to keep themselves busy!"

B00ksmart's eyes widened as the ground sprinted up to meet him. He gritted his teeth and resisted the urge to pause the program. Below him, he spotted an exposed root blinking. Hastily, he reached for it... and froze in midair as the text box opened beneath him.

FACTOID:

THE MECHANICS OF A MNEMONOVIRUS

Derived from the Greek word for "memory," mnemonoviruses are the unheralded "info-assassins" of the virtual world. They strike without warning and erase almost all traces of their passage, making them the most dangerous viruses in the Web.

How a mnemonovirus works is simple. In its dormant state, the virus congregates at points of high information traffic, such as switchboxes, network hubs and radio and television transmitters. The virus gets picked up by passing electromorphs, who in turn transfer it directly to the receiving victims—mages' virtual Icons—aurally, as base-level static. Once inside of a viable host, it lies dormant until triggered to stop by a pre-engineered stimulus—in most cases a keyword, although there have been instances where a particular musical note is just as effective.

Should the virus become active, it migrates from neuron to neuron in the target's database, or virtual brain, in search of specific data packets. The virus' developer specifies what packets to look for: it could be a particular person, place, time, or idea. A virus that has located the proper data pocket erases the data within and replaces the virtual data space with thousands of viral copies, which in turn exit the data packet in search of other conforming data packets. The process continues until the virus has sought out and divested all applicable data packets. It then moves on to the next target the same way it infected the first—aurally, over communication channels in the Web.

Ironically, mnemonoviruses cause a surprising side effect. Because of the sudden availability of data space, sufferers have noted an increase in learning potential. This, however, does little to stem the loss of newly acquired data that the infection is programmed to erase.

The Turing Virus is the most famous mnemonovirus to date, a co-development of the NWO and a former Adept Elite disgruntled with perceived slights made against him by his former colleagues. Though the Adepts later developed their own version of the T-Virus (see the **Worm** rote on pp 65-66), it is intended solely for keeping the Tradition's secrets secure in the event that a potential initiate chooses to join another Tradition.

ARPANET

The text box disappeared and B00ksmart fell as fast as before. Without warning, a waterslide caught him and smoothly shuttled him through tunneling spirals before dumping him into a shallow pool of chlorinated water. He sloshed his way out of the pool. Quix skipped over the water's surface onto the pool deck, where she bounced to a stop. She floated up and spun herself dry.

"I needed that! Where was I...? Oh, yes. This way, please." Quix led B00ksmart off the deck into what looked on the outside like a changing room. When they entered, however, it was anything but.

Contradicting the size of the exterior façade, a computer research lab stretched out, table after table littered with transistors, wires, cables, cathodes, computer boxes and reels of magnetized tape. Every workstation had a person slaving over something, and both the chatter and cigarette smoking were nonstop. A logo hanging from a nearby wall read: "Advanced Research Project Agency."

Quix moved forward through the lab. B00ksmart hesitantly followed. "ARPANET was the brainchild of Dr. J.C.R. Licklider, a Sleeper with a unique vision... for Sleepers, anyway. At the same time the Adepts were in virtual limbo between leaving the Technocracy and joining the Traditions, ARPA was created by the U.S. government in reaction to the Soviet Union launching the first man into space. Its goal: to research the hell out of anything and everything that wasn't purely military in nature.

"Though not an original member, Licklider focused the team on computer science. Despite complaints that a government agency shouldn't be wasting time on something that the computer industry would get to, he managed to flip the entire paradigm of computing on its head. He believed, just as the early Adepts did, that computers should do much more than calculate math problems; they could revolutionize how people communicated with one another, not only in how they processed data, but how they could transfer data from one computer to the next... regardless of whether the connected computers were alike."

B00ksmart watched Quix scuttle off to the side and orbit a nearby researcher busily configuring a prototype keyboard. "ARPA came up with protocols and worked out what would be needed to create the phone network between computers before submitting the project to the Director of ARPA in June 1968. With the understanding that the project would streamline military communications, the Director authorized it two weeks later."

Completing his keyboard, the researcher took his invention to show it off to others. Quix splattered herself on the abandoned table. A purple outline of the United States glowed brightly on the black surface. The outline pulsed in time to her voice. "Having set up a number of Interface Message Processors, or IMPs, across the country, a grand test

of the system was in order. In October 1971, representatives from each site met at MIT and attempted a massive login to everyone else's IMP." Over a hundred dots appeared across the map. Lines connected all but one of the dots. "Save for one site that was completely down, the network connection was complete. ARPANET was born."

RIGHT UNDER THEIR NOSES

"Pause." B00ksmart stared up in the direction he believed Holly was observing. *I'm glad to see you included this, but you forgot to mention the funniest part.*

What's that?

ARPA was an Iteration X project.

He could almost hear her jaw drop. *Bullshit.*

B00ksmart smirked. *No bullshit. Iteration X was assigned to take over computer science duties after the Adepts went virtual. As we took all of our research and computers with us, they basically had to start from scratch. Hence the government-funded agency that 'happened' to focus on computer research.*

So Lickliter was Technocracy?

No, no, no... only the Director. Everyone else on the team was already computer savvy, which was more than the Technocracy could claim at the time. He chuckled. *What's hilarious is that three of the 100 IMP sites were run by Adepts. They were actually there with Iteration X agents at MIT when they did the massive login.*

That's amazing! Holly was beside herself. *I have to include this!*

You should. He then added, *And you should also include that the one failed IMP site belonged to us, too.*

He really wished he could see her reaction to that little tidbit of trivia. *How?* was all she could come up with.

Easy, really. He shut down his system before he left for Cambridge, and used Correspondence to be there to answer his own phone call wondering what went wrong.

I don't understand. Why would he sabotage his own IMP site?

He smiled proudly. *Nothing ticks off a Technocrat more than getting a less than perfect score.* "Continue."

WAR ⊕ OF THE W ⊕ RDS

The room transformed back to the swimming pool, outside the changing room that wasn't. Quix led them off the deck toward a gate in the fence leading to an expansive park, complete with bike paths, playground, and tree-spotted fields.

They passed a series of park benches occupied by children and adults in varying periods of dress reading a wide array of books. B00ksmart noted that every title was science fiction. "One of the Adepts' lasting legacies on the Masses dates well before the advent of the computer. At the turn of the century, the Sons of Ether popularized their fantastical

inventions in literature. Though a few actually wrote novels — Jules Verne being the most famous example — they also inspired Sleeper authors to let their imaginations run wild.

“The Technocracy’s reaction to the books was tentatively encouraging. It believed that the genre would help the Masses accept new technologies, thereby reducing the time between development and public disclosure. There was only one problem: the Technocracy thought that the Virtual Adepts were the ones who popularized the novels.

FACTOID: INSPIRATION TACTICS

A hand-held television appeared instead of a text box. Quix floated on the screen. “Inspiring a Sleeper takes finesse, stealth, and a lot of luck. Most of the time, the target of an inspiration is too lost in other thoughts to pick up the Adept’s clues. The following tactics were designed to minimize wasted effort and maximize a return on the bookshelves.

Wrong Number: “This is the most common tactic used, which stands to figure considering how much Adepts love using the Net. A demonstration.”

The scene changed to a writer staring blankly at a typewriter. The phone rang. “Hello?” he answered.

“Dude! I had the weirdest dream last night! I was playing a video game and —”

“I’m sor—”

“— it sucked me *inside of the game!* You know how I deliver pizzas and all, right?”

“But —”

“In virtual space, I was a totally kick-ass swordsman! Nobody could beat me! All these people challenged, right, but one by one I wiped them out. For some reason my sister was in the dream, too. Some hover-skater chick who would tool about town harpooning magnets onto cars and skiing behind them. Freaky shit, but the swordsman thing was so cool! Isn’t that weird?”

The writer waited to make sure the speaker was finished before he answered. “I’m sorry, but you’ve got the wrong number.”

The other end paused. “Oh. My bad.” He hung up.

The writer hung up his end and retreated back to his typewriter. He glanced at the phone for a moment, then at the blank paper in his typewriter. A smile slowly crept across his lips.

He started typing.

Anonymous Letter: Quix reappeared on the screen. “The biggest problem the Adepts had with writers was their surprising level of cluelessness. When the Wrong Number doesn’t work, the inspirer resorts to the tried and true postal service. E-mail, as you will see, also works.”

A writer bored at a computer desk replaced Quix. The writer minimized his word processor and opened up his e-mail program.

“The Adepts ran with it. Claiming responsibility for science fiction’s ‘invention,’ they began their own inspiration campaign. Among their popular gimmicks were the ‘Wrong Number,’ the ‘Anonymous Letter,’ and ‘Spray Shooting.’” As Quix explained the gimmicks, B00ksmart saw a wino pass out on a nearby bench. The bagged bottle tucked beneath his forearm rolled away from him. It blinked invitingly.

B00ksmart smirked. He quietly touched the bag.

“You’ve got mail,” chimed the computer.

“Of course I do,” retorted the writer. One by one he deleted the spam mails he received. When he got to one from his friend Barry, however, he grinned. “How ‘bout that! You finally decided to write.” He opened the message.

“Sorry it’s been so long since I last wrote,” it began. “I’ve been bedridden for two weeks. The doctors think it’s a virus, but they’re not sure which one. Whatever it was, I was getting some serious hallucinations. For a while I thought I was part of a Mafia-run pizza delivery service that was totally legit. Freaky.

“Anyway,” Barry continued, “I just wanted to know if I could take a rain check on that dinner thing we had tomorrow night. I’m still a little weak and all, so I thought I’d take it easy for a bit. Talk at you later — Barry.”

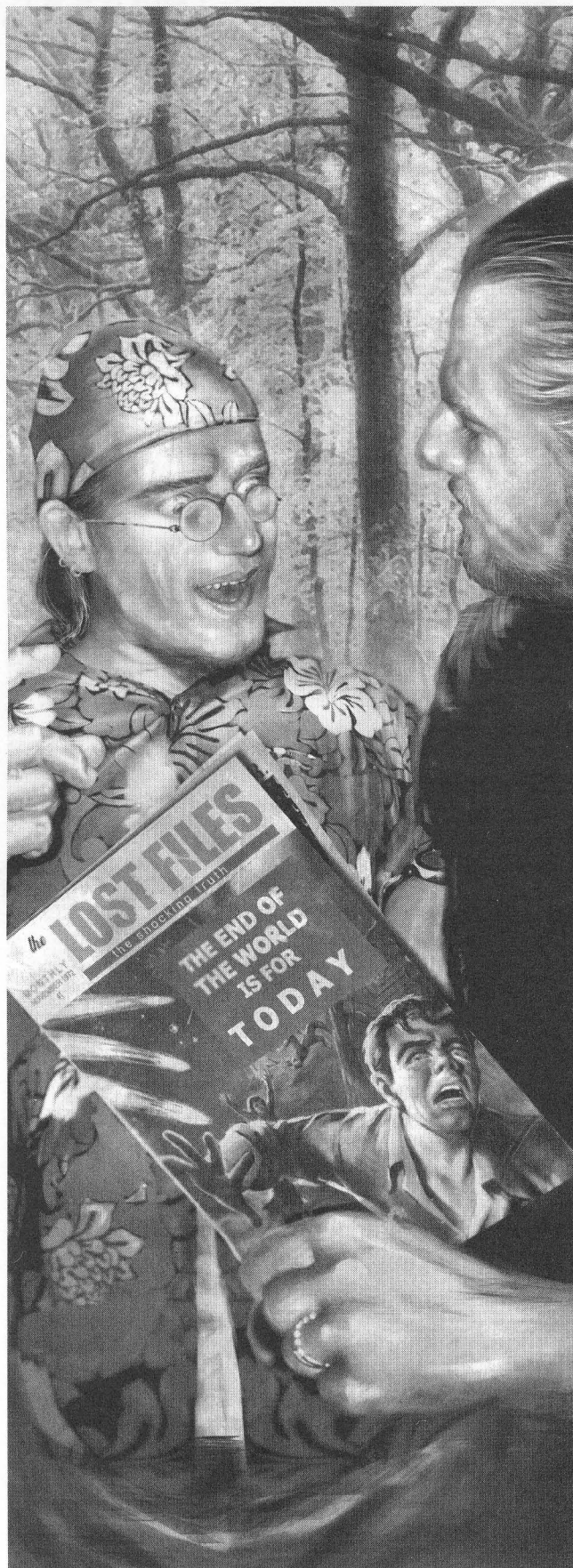
The writer sighed and closed the e-mail, then reopened it. *A Mafia-run pizza delivery?* He thumbed at his chin over the possibilities...

Spray Shooting: Back to Quix. “Sometimes an Adept doesn’t want to search for the right author. The inspirer will instead go to a bar known to serve writers, order some ale, and ramble aloud to no one in particular about ‘amazing machines’ and ‘alternate worlds.’ If the Adept is lucky, more than one novel will come out of the visit, and at minimal effort.”

On the television, an Adept dressed in garish silver clothing entered a pub with a smattering of people, some with laptops opened and active. Naturally, all eyes — including the writer’s — turned toward him.

He ordered a Guinness and thanked the barkeep. “Thanks. You have no idea how badly I need this. I nearly got crushed by a pizza guy who was yellin’ at me to get the fuck outta the way, even though I had the total right of way. I tell him to fuck off. The snot-nosed driver then gets out brandishing a *gun* of all things and tells me that he better not be late delivering his pizza, or he’ll hunt me down and shoot me where I stand. He waves his gun around for a minute, then gets back in and speeds off.

“I’m totally frazzled by this, of course, so it’s no surprise that I nearly get run over again, this time by a courier on a skateboard who’s let go of a car bumper to grab



onto another car turning right before me. He does this fancy little footwork thing — barely missing me by less than an inch — and zips off after the other car.

“As if *two* near-death experiences weren’t enough, I then get pushed over by a burglar running away from two cops. We both tumble, he drops a fancy sword, and the cops catch him. They don’t even bother to help me up!” He took a big swig of beer. “I tell you, the world’s virtually crashed in on itself. Won’t be much longer before you’ve got sword-toting skateboarders carrying pizzas of death and destruction in the streets.” Another swig. “Not much longer at all.”

He finished off the beer, thanked the barkeep and left the pub. The writer glanced at his laptop, then at the door.

Near Death Experience: “The best way to make a writer remember is to make sure he or she will never forget. Chaoticians — masters of predicting probabilities — have taken this to a new level and use a complex series of coincidental events to drive their point home. They would take the situation told by the spray-shooting Adept and actually put the writer into it.”

The writer walked down the street. Everything that supposedly had happened to the Adept happened to the writer. When all is said and done, he pulled out a notepad and furiously wrote down everything.

B00ksmart withdrew his hand from the bag. The handheld disappeared. Quix continued the lesson. “After the Adepts left, very little was done with writers. The Technocracy picked up the torch the Adepts dropped and did some inspiring of their own. Only then did it realize that the Sons of Ether were up to the same tricks. A combination of pure and fantastical science fiction was released, some espousing the hard sciences and denouncing fairy tales, others pushing for whimsy over the boredom of logic.

“While this literary war raged on, the Adepts were a non-factor. Save for the accidental inspiration during rowdy nights of drinking in public, the Tradition was too focused on surviving to care what books were being written. Only after they finished their probation period and were comfortable in their new role did they resume their inspiration campaign in earnest.”

Watching Quix as she explained, B00ksmart walked hard into a bookshelf brimming with sci-fi and fantasy novels. Over the channel, he heard Holly giggle. *That wasn’t funny*, he snapped.

Sure it was, she laughed.

“Throughout the ‘70s,” Quix interrupted, “few if any Adepts, Etherites or Technocrats could tell who was responsible for inspiring which novel. So integrated had their ideals become that everyone was claiming responsibility for whatever was published, even in cases when a story was wholly borne of a Sleeper’s imagination. Though the war between Technocracy and Traditions was long established, the Adepts and

Etherites found their relationship frayed by the ambiguity." BOOKsmart and Quix heard a commotion through the trees lining their path. They wound their way through. Two men — one dressed in grungy '70s clothing, the other in a crumpled suit of the same period with a pocket protector in his jacket pocket — hotly engaged the other, with the suited one waving a book angrily with every syllable he uttered. The grungy man, however, refused to back down. "The result was a shared temper tantrum that kept the two sides from working together for half a decade." Both men stomped off in opposite directions.

Watching the Son of Ether depart, BOOKsmart noticed a flickering ray of sunlight through the trees. He looked up into the canopy, but the leaves were not rustling enough to explain the odd display. He let the ray strike his robe at the knees. A film projected onto his clothing. He recognizes it as *Bladerunner*, but with a yellow tinge.

Well? Holly asked impatiently over the channel. *Are you going to touch it or not?*

Touch what? BOOKsmart said.

The Factoid! Can't you see it blinking?

BOOKsmart turned his eyes skyward in exasperation. *I hardly call this blinking*, he muttered beneath his breath as he bent over to touch the projection.

The text box disappeared. *Tripled?* BOOKsmart asked. *I didn't think it was that high.*

FACTOID: FILM WARS

The sci-fi wars have found a new battleground — the silver screen. Film has transformed words into visual reality, dazzling moviegoers with special effects that make them 'ooh!' and 'aah!' and clamor for more. Much of the credit goes to Sleeper filmmakers whose vision outpaced everyone's — including the Technocracy's — expectations.

Two of the factions have played an important role in the growth of the industry. The Technocracy mastered Film projectors and sound effects shortly after the first "talkies" hit theaters in 1927. As science fiction novels were adapted into screenplays, the Sons of Ether invested themselves into bigger and better special effects to guarantee that their inspirations were visually appealing and accurately portrayed.

The Adepts, however, remained aloof from the industry until 1984, when the release of *Tron* gave the world a glimpse at the Digital Web. Unfortunately, it gave the wrong impression on what Virtual Reality was about, and the Technocracy jumped all over it with a spate of VR-themed films that exaggerated the dangers of the technology.

Sufficiently flamed by the experience, the Adepts abandoned the industry for nearly a decade. Ironically, it took a pair of un-Awakened brothers, a leather-clad Oakley-sporting cast and vertically streaming computer code to define the Adepts' vision as the Tradition never could. Since its release in 1999, Adept recruitment has tripled, and every Tradition has seen a rise in Awakenings.

Rounded up, Holly allowed. *Still pretty impressive, don't you think?*

"Most impressive," he answered in his best Darth Vader impersonation.

I don't get it.

"Never mind," he said with chagrin. "Continue."

A VIRTUAL LOCK

The canopy of oaks suddenly filled in with branches and leaves. The projection ray cut off. Darkness enveloped the forest. Only Quix's violet pulse could be seen.

Overhead, thin green lines traced about. The more they traced, the more the sky resembled a tremendous motherboard. "Before 1980, no clear lines of delineation could be drawn between science fiction novels and the groups responsible for inspiring them. At the same time, the success of ARPANET signaled the dawn of a new wave of connectivity. Circumstances were perfect for someone to mesh the two goals together. That someone was William Gibson."

Three-dimensional buildings rose out of the motherboard like a crude imitation of the virtual UNIX system depicted in *Jurassic Park*. "A Sleeper (we think), Gibson integrated his passion with a new outlook for the future. The release of *Neuromancer* in 1984 was the defining book of this vision, and the Cyberpunk genre was born. Although the Adepts had nothing to do with the book's inception, they knew a golden opportunity when they saw one."

As Quix spoke, the buildings evolved from colored blocks to fleshed-out facades. "They groomed other writers in the mold of Gibson, Sterling, Stephenson and Rucker to make Cyberpunk the predominant mode of sci-fi storytelling." The simplistic roads between buildings transformed into rough streets that became cobbled and aged. Electromorphs that started out as glowing stick figures gained girth and detail. Other Icons appeared, the next more complex than the ones preceding them. Overhead, the sky changed from matte black to mottled gray to cloudy blue before a brewing storm blew in from the east.

As rain started to fall, BOOKsmart drew up his hood. Quix continued. "Try as they might, the Etherites and Technocrats were unable to break the Adepts' stranglehold on the market. The Adept paradigm won out." Lightningsplintered the darkening sky. The thunder that followed reverberated through the building walls behind him. Quix sailed up over the edge of the virtual skyline and glowed bright with pride. In a declaration that would make an evangelist proud, she exclaimed, "The War of the Words is over and we are now victorious!"

"Pause!" BOOKsmart shouted over Quix's deafening echo. Everything froze.

Over the top? Holly offered.

To put it mildly.

I'll clean it up.

You do that. "Continue."

THE QUEST FOR VIRTUAL REALITY

When Quix finished gloating, she floated back down to BOOKsmart's level. The rain abated and the sun poked through the clouds. "Adepts had long experienced Virtual Reality on a very intimate level. Rarely did another Tradition encounter an Adept in person outside of the Web. For Adepts, Virtual Reality was the only reality to know."

Quix led BOOKsmart into an empty theater. The marquee read 'Virtual Adepts for Lamers: The Quest for Virtual Reality.' They went inside without paying and sat down. The house lights dimmed, the slide show stopped and the film began. The screen was black as Quix's voice came through the speakers. "The Adepts were already working on making VR a reality before ARPANET became a fully fledged project. Early efforts, however, were dependent upon computers capable enough to handle the processing power necessary to run them."

The screen depicted a brief history of inventions leading to the contemporary impression of what VR was all about — a heads-up display, sensor gloves and wires in every direction. "As a result, VR technology lagged seriously behind. Films, however, had no problem offering optimism to an impatient public. Promises of fully interactive VR worlds were becoming more prevalent and each year the Masses (those who were in the know, anyway) expected to hear breakthrough news. That news, however, never came." The film hiccupped, stalled, and burned. BOOKsmart squinted away from the bright empty screen left behind.

The projector turned off and the house lights brightened. The strain in BOOKsmart's eyes abated. Quix spoke on while a projectionist fixed the reel. "I'm sure you're wondering why VR hasn't hit the market yet. The initial answer to that question is selfishness. We didn't want to give up our control over the Web. If the Masses had the technology to enter it, everything Turing sacrificed for and the Tradition furthered could be erased like that." The sound of fingers snapping echoed through the theater. "As it was, the Technocracy had already tapped into the Adepts' private world and were mucking about with all the finesse of a floppy disk in a CD-ROM drive. Adding Sleepers to the mix would guarantee a virtual Blue Screen of Death. That was something the Adepts and — they suspected — the Technocracy weren't going to tolerate."

The projectionist announced that the reel was fixed. The house lights dimmed once more.

SEARCHING FOR VIRUSES...

Instead of picking up where the film last left off, it now showed a man in a plastic yellow lab coat furiously crunching data on a network of top-of-the-line trinary computers. BOOKsmart recognized the man immediately. "How'd you get H0usefly to cooperate on this?" he asked, incredulous. "Because I know there's no way he'd let you render him without his permission."

"You'd be surprised what a lab rat will do for a college coed," Holly purred with unmistakable pride.

BOOKsmart grinned but said nothing as Quix continued with the tutorial. "As you know, the Virtual Adepts were infected with the Turing Virus by the Technocracy when we left for the Traditions in '55. At the time, however, none of us knew that we'd been infected, let alone meme-wiped. We might never have known, either, had it not been for a series of events that transpired between February and April of 1998."

BOOKsmart and Quix were no longer seated in the theater. They stood behind H0usefly as he worked. BOOKsmart noted that one of the items on his littered desk was a disk labeled 'ITX P-131.' He smirked as Quix explained what he already knew. "The first event was an oversight on Iteration X's part. During a Cyberpunk raid of a known Syndicate holding in New York City, a Hacker discovered a missing link in one of the company's internal web pages. After testing the source with **Don't Cross the Streams** [see p 64], the Hacker opened up the code to trace the link that should've been there. What he found instead was a hidden link leading directly to the It-X mainframe in NORAD. He traced the line, skulked about, and lifted over 20 Gigs of data before they traced him back. The data sat in a secure cache on the Web until the Cypherpunks —"

"Pause." *Cryptogramics*. "Continue."

"— could whittle it down and reapportion it to the rest of the Traditions.

"The second event happened during a Core War between Adepts two weeks later. While the reasons for the battle weren't important (though they're hilarious enough to warrant some digging into when you get the chance), the outcome was tremendously eye opening. As the L0ser was dealt a 'killing' blow by the server, the virus scanner went haywire. At the time it was written off to a system glitch caused by overtaxed memory on the host server. When the problem followed the L0ser wherever he went, however, Adepts took a closer look at him. They ran every virus scrubber they could, but nothing came of it; he still tested positive for infection. Believing it to be a corrupted Icon — don't ask me how that happens; I'd rather not think about it — the Tradition kicked him out of the Web until he got himself cleaned.

"The final event was here." Quix glided over to the other side of the workstation. H0usefly didn't notice her. "As the first to parse out the retrieved data, H0usefly began separating the data into manageable packets. Feeling like he'd been working at it for hours, he glanced at his clock. It had only been 25 minutes. He continued. When next he looked at the clock, it was five minutes later. Convinced that the clock had stopped, he checked the clocks on his trinary computers. Not only was it more than 30 minutes since he started working, it was *three days* and 30 minutes! Shocked, he asked his computer to explain what had happened.

"Chaoticians are renowned for keeping notes that not even they can read. H0usefly, however, had worked as a librarian before he Awakened, and was thus accustomed to documenting

everything to the letter in a regimen he could do in his sleep. According to his notes, that's exactly what he did. He parsed out the exact same amount of information every single time, only to start over and redo it a grand total of 6,458 times.

"After intense study, days of starting over and some much-needed aid from other Adepts, he came to a startling conclusion — the Adepts were infected with the Turing Virus." B00ksmart watched H0usefly throw his hands in the air victoriously, then spout out a stream of curses so long that the data stream could fill a terabyte hard drive three times over. "The name of the virus came from the very reason why he kept repeating his work. During a segment of analysis, H0usefly employed a vocal translator to read the data aloud to him. As it so happened, the data lifted by the Hacker included information about Alan Turing's research hangar, which It-X announced as a new research facility in an e-mail to the head of the NWO. Whenever H0usefly heard Turing's name spoken, the T-virus actively erased all information about the project from his memory. Forgetting that he had heard the e-mail, he checked his notes to see where he left off and listened to the e-mail again. And again. When he finally printed the data and read it in print, he wrote down his findings before he could forget them and stored them in his trinary computers in and out of the Web. He later found references to mnemonoviruses in the purloined information and put two and two together."

DEBUGGING

B00ksmart and Quix Corresponded with H0usefly to another point in the Web, where he presented his findings to other Elite Adepts in a grandiose Greek amphitheater. B00ksmart couldn't help but laugh at the comedy of watching a bunch of Elites redo the same scene every time Turing's name was mentioned. Quix was just as humored. "The next obstacle to overcome was figuring out a way to purge the virus from their systems. They knew what the mnemonovirus did, but they had no idea what it looked like or how it worked. Diagnostic programs used to detect computer viruses were modified to scan Icons for the T-Virus (calling it by its full name caused too many setbacks). In late Y2K, they had a good handle on what they were up against."

The Elites fast-forwarded through research and experimentation. "Throughout the research, the Elites took H0usefly's cue and wrote out everything they were about to do before they did it, lest they trigger the virus and have to start anew. Through trial and far too many errors, the team finally hit upon a solution: the Tesla Vaccine." The fast-forward stopped. They loaded the vaccine into a hand-held and handed it to H0usefly. He took a deep breath and turned on the device. His Icon jolted as if he had French kissed a light socket. "A combination vaccine and cure, the Tesla Vaccine — named for the intense shock to the system it gave the recipient upon injection — was a master stroke of virtual programming that did much more than eradicate the T-Virus." The team triggered the T-Virus by giving him the original audio file that instigated the entire

search in the first place. H0usefly grinned and declared the vaccine a success. The room exploded into celebration. B00ksmart grinned proudly.

"Over time, the Tradition was able to make vital connections between the long-ignored disciplines of hyper-mathematics and theoretical physics and the very nature of the Digital Web itself. This, coupled with the aftereffects of the White Out (more on that in a bit), completely reformatted the Adepts' beliefs, leading us to where we are today."

While B00ksmart rejoiced in the celebration, he spotted the hand-held blinking on a nearby counter. He gladly touched it.

FACTOID: THE TESLA VACCINE

The Tesla Vaccine is a simple macro designed to look like a decoy data pocket with receptors identical to those created on standard data pockets that contain information about Turing's sacrifice, hyper-mathematics, or theoretical physics. When a T-virus attaches itself to the outside receptor, the macro "injects" itself with the information the virus seeks to erase, as well as an accompanying code that lets the macro know when the virus has finished erasing the decoy information. The macro then reformats the interior of the data pocket, eradicating all traces of the mnemonovirus. The macro then waits for another T-Virus to take the bait.

The Tesla Vaccine serves the dual function of cure and vaccine. Though there are occasional instances when an out of touch, infected Adept reconnects to the Tradition, the vaccine has served more in the capacity for which it is named. Every Lamer is required to be vaccinated upon admission to the Tradition, and Cryptogramics are ever vigilant for "mutated" viral strains that might crop up.

WHITE OUT

The celebration abruptly stopped. Quix's amusement just as abruptly vanished. "The victory over the T-Virus was a hollow one given what transpired one year before. For the Adepts, it was the darkest day of our entire history, and one that we will not soon forget."

The Web reappeared. It brimmed with activity in all directions. "Leading up to the Millennium there was concern over the Y2K phenomenon. Anticipating the dilemma, the Adepts set about helping companies bring their computer equipment and software to Y2K compliance. Satisfied that the threat had been diverted, the Adepts returned to their formatted sectors of the Web to celebrate the Millennium in their own way."

B00ksmart — by now just as somber as Quix's tone — grimly watched as he Corresponded from one resplendent Adept sector to the next. In each, the Adept's Icon was



blissfully ignorant of what was coming. “When the clock struck midnight, in each time zone, the Masses held their breath for the worst and exhaled with relief when nothing happened. The Adepts on the Web, however, didn’t have time to do even that much.”

The perspective suddenly shifted to the entirety of the Web. Static swept over the virtual sectors of the Adepts, swept again, then completely reformatted them into nonexistence. BOOKsmart watched in horror as macabre clips of Icons being reformatted away assaulted his eyes. The screams of the dying mages layered upon one another. BOOKsmart tried to stop the screams with his hands. They only seemed to get louder. Finally, it all ceased.

BOOKsmart opened eyes he didn’t realize he had closed. The Web was once more quiet, but the formatted sectors were gone. Quix floated limply beside him. “The White Out killed hundreds of Adepts and mages from other Traditions. When the survivors dug around for answers, they discovered that the other Traditions had suffered from an Avatar Storm that struck at roughly the same time. While the Storm only seemed to cut off communications and travel between the Umbra and realspace, it devastated mages who had gone virtual. The Digital Web still stands, but Adepts don’t take

it for granted anymore. Few stay in it for more than a week, afraid of a recurrence of the White Out.

“But, as in all tragedies, some good did come out of it. The Adepts refocused their attentions onto what really mattered: improving the lot of humanity. If you take no other lesson from this tutorial, let this be the lesson you never allow yourself to forget.”

The Web dissolved. BOOKsmart was once more in the silver-plated dome in which the tutorial started. *Well done*, he said over the TC, still emotional over how the history tutorial had concluded.

Thanks, Holly replied. She sounded like his praise truly touched her. *I just hope the Lamers don’t take it for granted*. After an awkward silence, she asked, *Think you could stand to keep going?*

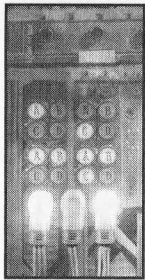
There’s more? he asked with mild surprise.

I bring it current. You know, the ‘Where We Are’ kind of thing. I also have another part at the end covering the Tradition’s impressions of others.

BOOKsmart flipped a small toggle on the side of his glasses. *It’s early. I’ve got time.*

Okay. I’ll load up Part Two.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS FOR LATTERS, PART II: GO TO...



The dome darkened. A Cartesian relief map of the globe wrapped around the walls in soft white. No nations were listed. Only borders were marked, with thicker white borders outlining continents. B00ksmart looked over the map and nodded appreciatively. *I like.*

“Hello again,” said Holly’s programmed voice through unseen speakers. “Now that you know where you come from, it’s time to tell you where the Adepts go... and avoid going.”

UNITED STATES AND CANADA

The continent filled in with white and telescoped out of the wall. “The United States is by far our favored home in realspace. Birthplace of more than half of the Tradition’s greatest innovations, it continues to service our special needs for technology, power and development. Sadly, the side effects of terrorism have made communications over the Web tricky. While the efforts to stop future acts of terrorism are noble, Sleeper agencies like Homeland Security and the FBI have made it more difficult to have quiet conversations about mage business. The Technocracy hasn’t made the situation any easier on us. Be careful what you say and to whom you say it. Consider any phone, computer hook-up or radio frequency an open channel.

“Canada is a lot like the U.S., but with one distinct advantage: the world doesn’t hate it. Unfortunately, they’ve got a ton of untouched real estate. If you intend to move there, don’t drive. Besides the chance of hitting a bear or moose, the area is crawling with werewolves. No sense giving them something to stalk to make their night.”

OMAHA

A small Adept symbol appeared in the center of the map. “As a central hub to the phone systems of the nation, Omaha used to be the Tradition’s most important locale. Before the White Out, it provided Quintessence for the Adepts’ main Chantry, called the Crystal Palace. Although the Chantry has since been relocated, Omaha continues to serve a vital role in keeping Adepts connected.”

SILICON VALLEY

Another symbol lit up, this time in Northern California. “Silicon Valley is the current tap site for the new Crystal Palace. Home of America’s computer industry, the area is a Quintessence-rich depository that the Adepts use to construct and test programs vital to the Reality 2.0 project. Care must be taken, however, when working in the area. Panopticon agents have increased patrols in the region and

some of the Conventions are involving themselves more and more for their own research agendas.”

MAJOR METROPOLI

A number of regular dots appeared, each representing a major U.S. or Canadian city. “The metropoli of the United States all have something to offer us. Research materials can be found in major universities. Increased use of DSL and cable modems has expanded the Web considerably. Most importantly, the Technocracy has raidable locations loaded with data about Time Table revisions. Prime Hacker grounds. If you like excitement these are the places you want to visit.”

AUTO FACTORIES

A handful of red Xs sprung up, several in Pittsburgh and Detroit. “If you want to commit suicide, visit Motor or Steel City. It-X likes to hang out over there. They used to use scrap from the assembly lines to construct squads of cyberkillers, and some Adepts claim they still do. These things are tough enough already. You don’t need to make it easier for them and pop up on their Friends List.”

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Red zones colored in areas throughout the map. Most of them in under- or undeveloped areas like Yosemite, Yellowstone and the Yukon. “The only reason to visit these places is... actually, there’s no reason at all. If you can’t get a high-speed connection, you weren’t meant to be there.”

MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

North America receded back and Central America zoomed out. All of it was red. “Avoid Central America if you can help it. Poverty and corruption are rampant, technology is dated, and vampires are everywhere. If you can’t help it, stay indoors at night, come out during the day, and siesta when everyone else siestas. You could try going virtual, but I wouldn’t recommend it. The White Out had a weird effect on the Web here. Quintessence gets sucked out of you faster than it would anywhere else. No one seems to know why, but only a reckless few are willing to get to the bottom of it. Oh, and don’t drink the water... seriously.”

MEXICO CITY

A bright red X appeared on the appropriate location. “Vampire Central, though I never actually saw one. It’s one of those rumors that *feels* true, even though you can’t prove it. Well, I guess you can prove it if you troll yourself out in the middle of the night, but I doubt you’d return to share the data.”

EUROPE

Central America receded back into the rest of the map while Europe telescoped out. "History galore, if you're into that. Invest in a plug adapter; your laptop will love you for it. Of course, that only applies if you're in a city that's stayed current (get it... current?) with the latest technology.

"If you happen to run into a Hermetic mage or Chori-ster, I'd normally suggest you rub it in their faces that we're on top and they're not. As long as you're in Europe, though, live and let be. They've got far more resources to tap into than us (read, they don't need outlets to make our lives miserable) and won't hesitate to use them. The usual caveat to the Technocracy still applies."

GREAT BRITAIN

The entire country filled in with the Adept symbol. "Like the U.S., but with better accents. More than a quarter of our developments came from England, and a fair number of prominent sci-fi writers came from here. Also, driving on the wrong side of the road is so cool!"

FRANCE

Cities sprung up as Adept symbols. Red zones appeared almost everywhere else. "France is an amazing mix of 'must-see' and 'not on your life.' The must-see parts are naturally the major cities that have all the amenities any self-respecting Adept would never consider depriving herself of. The rest of the country is green and purple — as in trees and grapes. You'd be lucky to find a toilet that flushes, let alone an electrical outlet. At least the monorail that passes through is modern..."

GERMANY

A number of cities were represented with Adept symbols. "Two words: Autobahn and Oktoberfest. Berlin is a blast."

ITALY AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Portugal, Spain and Italy zoomed out for review. "Like American cities, these countries offer great opportunities and not a few Technocracy targets to hack into. The major difference, though, is that the people are catch-as-catch-can. Some days you'll run into a string of really zip people, only to bump into every prick this side of the Atlantic the very next day. If you can handle the fluctuations, more power to you. If not, get what you need out of them and move on."

ASIA

Asia zoomed out as Europe zoomed back. "A lot like France, only bigger. Parts of Asia have lots to offer. The rest of it doesn't. If you don't like crowds, avoid it like the plague. Should you decide to hang, expect to be harassed, not by the locals or the Technocracy, but by the Akashic Brotherhood. They don't trust us one bit and will scrutinize every move you make to figure out what you're really up to. The sad thing is,

many of them don't know enough about computers to figure it out one way or the other..."

JAPAN

Japan lit up as another large Adept symbol. "Toys, toys, toys! America makes them, but Japan makes them better. If you want top-of-the-line goods, this is where you need to be. Computer hardware, electronics — you name it, you got it. Always worth a trip, even if it's a short one."

CHINA

China lit up as a giant red-and-white target. "The greatest challenge on earth. One of the few Communist nations still in existence, China restricts Internet access to the public, denying hundreds of millions the right to disseminate information for themselves. Over 22 all-Adept cabals have traveled over to liberate information held in government databases, a tactic aptly called the Chinese Take-out. 15 have come back successful. Those who come back empty-handed are given a hearty clap on the back for doing that much. Three cabals never returned.

"Unlike the rest of the world, Adepts must request permission to do a Chinese Take-out during the annual conclave held at the Crystal Palace. As no one wants the mission to fail, every member of the proposed cabal must be of Elite status to even be considered. A rundown on targeted data must also accompany the request. Should the cabal get the okay from the Tradition Council, the team uploads a modified form of the Worm rote set to trigger after 15 minutes of torture. This ensures that Adept secrets remain just that. The rote's removed should the team return unscathed."

HONG KONG

A single Adept symbol appeared south of China. "Absorbed in 1997 by the Chinese government from British rule, Hong Kong is an exception to the rule. It maintains a democratic sub-government that relies on China only for defense and foreign diplomacy. As a result, it's emerged as the foremost locale for state-of-the-art technology. Whatever you want, odds are you can find it, although the legitimacy of the transaction might not be entirely according to Hoyle.

"Because of China's involvement, care must still be taken when going there. Once you're inside, however, prepare to relive your childhood. Hong Kong is the biggest toy store any Adept could ever wish for. If you've got bad credit, borrow someone else's. It's one trip that's impossible to come home from empty handed."

TAIWAN

Taiwan zoomed out. The island's colors oscillated between red and the Adept symbol. "Taiwan is a carbon copy of Hong Kong, only much more politically volatile. The island is embroiled in a tug-of-war with mainland China over who controls it. Though the conflict has threatened to

come to blows on several occasions, it never has. That's not to say it won't happen. If you go, keep one foot in the Web, just in case you need to beat a hasty retreat."

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea lit up with a big Adept symbol. "No other nation has gone from obscurity to top of the stack quicker than South Korea. Not only is it one of the world's largest manufacturers and exporters of microchips, but it's also leapfrogged several generations of technology to offer broadband Internet access to over 40 percent of its population.

"So connected is South Korea, five major mobile telephone companies fight one another to hand out free cell phones in order to provide citizens with service. It's an Adept's virtual wet dream... or should that be a wet virtual dream? Well, either way it's great news for the enterprising Lamer hoping to make a name for herself abroad. Just try to avoid looking the anchovy heads right in the eye as you eat them. I don't know if it's bad karma or not, but it's better to play it safe."

AUSTRALIA

Asia receded and Australia came to the fore. "America Down Under. A bit generalized, but in terms of connectivity, it's dead on the mark. Every major city is modern, so there's no worry about bad connections or obsolete hardware (though you still need to bring those adapters). The best thing of all, though, is that the Technocracy is a relative no-show, at least compared to the U.S. and Europe. This isn't to say they're not there—far from it. It's just that they're not as gung-ho about coming after us. I think the Aussie outlook loosened those wedgies of theirs..."

AFRICA

Australia zoomed back. Africa filled in with red, but didn't zoom out. "Africa's too Third World. We're going to fix that in Reality 2.0, but for this reality, the continent as a whole is best left to the other Traditions."

"Pause." *That's not true*, B00ksmart complained. *Cairo, Monaco, and Capetown are all useful cities once you get to know how to work the systems.*

VIRTUAL ADEPTS FOR LAMERS, PART III: STYLE



For the third time within an hour, B00ksmart stood in the center of the silver-plated dome. This time, however, he was not alone. Beside him stood a young girl in her early 20s, with close-cropped auburn hair and bright blue eyes. She wore contemporary mall rat style with virtual flair.

He looked at her through his glasses to determine if she was part of the program. She wasn't. "Are you going to visit everyone who uses this?" he asked a little more sardonically than he intended to.

Oh. Well, I doubt we'll see too many Lamers clamoring to go there any time soon.

You're right, he retorted sarcastically. *I'm only an Elite. What would I know?* "Continue."

SOUTH AMERICA

South America lit up brightly. All of it turned red, but the most striking feature was the number of red Xs that appeared throughout the continent. "Whereas China is the biggest challenge, South America is the most dangerous. The Technocracy has thousands of secret facilities.... Okay, maybe not thousands, but they have a lot. The difficulty doesn't really come in infiltrating, but rather in travel. Because of their remote locales, the facilities are next to impossible to escape from after a botched cabal raid. It's also hard to sneak up in an open-top jeep on a seldom-used jungle road monitored by state-of-the-art security equipment.

"Raiding a South American Techno-site is never taken lightly. If you're really jonesing to do it, the most successful tactic is to join up with other Traditions, particularly Verbena and Dreamspeakers. Of course, they may want nothing to do with you, but that's another challenge altogether."

THE DIGITAL WEB

South America retreated back into the map. Suddenly, everything outside of the map lit up. "Of all the locations you could go to, the Web is the most likely one you'll visit on a regular basis. There used to be a time when Adepts were so at home here that they never returned to realspace. Since the White Out, you never hear anyone staying more than a month at a time, with at least a one-week stop in realspace in between.

"We are the undisputed masters of the Net, but we're learning that it's a tool, not a replacement. Consensual reality is, for all its faults, stable. We have no idea when, if ever, the next White Out will hit the Web. There's no such fear in realspace, and that's why we're going to make it the better place and not the Web."

Holly shook her head. "Actually, I haven't finished Part Three yet. Before I do, is there anything I need to change in the first two parts?"

"Other than what I addressed, it's all pretty solid." He paused, knitting his brow. "Did you just say that you wanted to finish Part Three *now*?"

She sheepishly smiled. "Yeah. One reason why I asked for your help was to get your honest opinion on what I've done."

"And the other reason?" He regretted asking.

She cleared her throat. "I need you to define some things for me. You know, how we see the world and all."

He considered the request as a parent might consider a request made by a deserving child. He tapped the side of his glasses, read the data and nodded. "If you make it quick." He rendered chairs for each of them and took a seat.

"Cool!" She held out an empty palm. A recorder suddenly appeared. Sitting, she set it up and began the interview.

BATTER UP: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

"This is probably going to sound pretty stupid," she qualified, "but, do we know how the universe began? I've heard some pretty out-there stories from the other Traditions, but never our own take on it."

B00ksmart smirked. "Are you looking to learn the Adept Creation Myth?" She nodded. He thought for a moment. "I guess the best way to explain it is through example."

He held out his hand. A baseball appeared. "This is the universe. I don't suppose you're a fan of America's pastime, are you?" Holly shook her head in mild embarrassment. "You really should be, if for no other reason than to watch a Chaotician have a brain cramp. They totally get off when the announcers talk about ERA and batting averages and have incredible tantrums when a player makes an error. Hilarious. Anyway..."

He grabbed both sides of the ball and twisted. The ball split to reveal a perfectly sliced cross-section. "A baseball is made up of three parts: a rubber core, tightly spun yarn and a leather cover. Reality is also composed of three parts. At the core is the Correspondence Point, the central point to all points in reality. The yarn makes up the Hypersphere. You know it better as virtual space. The leather represents consensual reality, or the Tellurian."

He pointed at the core of the baseball. "The universe began at the core. Popular opinion says it was the Big Bang. Of course, there's no way to answer that question for sure unless someone was there to witness it. For now, it's what we got. So, to answer your question, the universe was created by the Big Bang." He twisted the ball back together and tossed it at her.

She caught it with a sigh. "That's it? I was expecting something a little more... *creative* than that."

B00ksmart smirked. "The Adepts don't buy into that 'dragon lays an egg, Earth is created' bullshit the other Traditions believe. The 'creative' part comes in how the whole system works."

"How *does* it work?"

He let out a long sigh. "Make sure your recorder's recording. I'm only going to cover this once."

READING SIGNS: INF0RMATI0N

B00ksmart held out the intact baseball. "All right. To recap: Correspondence Point core, Hypersphere twine, leather Tellurian. In order to understand how all of it relates, you must start at the center and work your way out."

The baseball's stitching came undone. The leather cover sloughed off and the twine unwound as if a marlin was hooked on the other end. Finally, the last of the twine snapped away, leaving the plain rubber core resting in B00ksmart's palm. "The Correspondence Point is made up entirely of information. Don't confuse it for a three-dimensional object; it's literally a one-dimensional point that occupies no space whatsoever. Thus, when I say it's made up of information, think of it as Information with a capital 'I.'"

"Okay," Holly slowly nodded. "Information with a capital 'I,' then, is the sum of all information."

"No," he corrected, "there is no sum. It's Information, that's it. See, the trick to grasping this is to imagine it as a child might. A child doesn't know a forest is made up of trees until you tell him it is. You need to go back and see the forest for what it was before the trees got involved."

"I think I got it," she assured him.

"Good." B00ksmart reached out with his other hand. The edge of twine floated between his pinched fingers for him to display. "The Hypersphere is the extrapolation of the core." He presses the end against the rubber core and slowly winds the twine around it. "Just like the Correspondence Point, the Hypersphere has no space or time. What the Hypersphere *does* have, however, is the ability to let Information with a capital 'I' be perceived as information with a lowercase 'i.' For simplicity's sake, let's refer to perceived information as 'info.'"

He released both the core and the twine. Suspended, the twine whipped around the core, slowly building it out to baseball size. B00ksmart waited for it to finish before continuing. "All the components of reality reside within the Hypersphere. This includes the Quintessence that provides the energy required to translate the info as real objects. What those objects become, of course, depends upon the perspective of those who perceive them."

He tossed the unfinished ball in the air. As it arced back to his hand, the leather cover and red stitching glommed onto it. He caught the finished baseball. "This is one perspective, the world we both know today." He tossed the ball up again. The red stitching flew off and gold stitching replaced it. "This is another perspective that existed during the Dark Ages, when the Choristers controlled what knowledge the Masses had access to." Again, he tossed the ball. Blue stitching replaced the gold. "And this is how the Tellurian would look if the Sons of Ether get their way."

"The Tellurian has the potential to be anything." He tossed the ball to Holly. By the time she caught it, the stitches turned back to red.

She looked over the ball in her hand. "What exactly do we want the Tellurian to look like?"

B00ksmart levitated the ball out of her hand. "Ideally, we'd like the Tellurian to look like this..." The leather and stitching flew off the ball. No covering replaced it.

"We want to get rid of the Tellurian?!"

"No, no, no," he assured her. "Far from it. Look closely at the ball." Confused, she leaned in. "Closer."

Holly's nose nearly scraped the edge of the ball. At first, she saw nothing. As she exhaled, however, a luminescent ripple cascaded around the ball along an unseen cover. "What—?" She pulled back. "I don't understand."

B00ksmart levitated the ball towards him. "The cover is an empty canvas. Your breath momentarily painted it in your unique style, an expression of you that everyone was able to share en masse." As he spoke, another distinct ripple passed over the transparent cover. "That was someone else's expression." Two other ripples. "And more." His face relaxed as he related the Adepts' dream. "When we're done with the Tellurian, everyone will have a hand in how reality's expressed. Not just a handful of mages. Everyone."

"Won't that cause more problems than it'll help?" She straightened in her chair. "I mean, if you think about it, everyone's visions on what the world should look like are bound to clash at some point."

"At many points," he conceded.

"So wouldn't it follow that people will try to force other people to see the world as they see it? Giving people that kind of power is begging for trouble."

He shook an admonishing finger at her. "Somebody's forgotten basic magic. What's the first thing you learn about casting? To make the Effects as coincidental as possible. The reason for this is..."

Holly grudgingly followed the hint to fill in the blank. "Paradox."

"Which is caused by?"

"Doing something that conflicts with the Sleepers' perceptions on what can and cannot happen in the real world."

"Exactly. Consensual reality is grounded in what the Masses believe to be truths of the world. This is why reality-altering Effects fail so miserably — the public won't buy the changes have really happened." He referred to the naked baseball. "In Reality 2.0, consensual opinion will hold that the world is what you make it. If a man wants to kill people, he can, but the victims will be virtual constructs designed to play the role of victims, not other people like himself. If a girl wants to transform every horse into beautiful white unicorns, any horse she sees — virtual construct or not — will be a unicorn to her. You and I, however, will still see horses, unless we choose to share her perspective."

"I see," Holly nodded with a smile. "It doesn't matter what other people do. Unless you've got a death wish, what other people do in their 'world views' has no effect on your own."

"Exactly."

"But what if someone wants to affect other people's world views? Won't that throw everything out of whack?"

B00ksmart shook his head. "Let's say someone wants to take over the world. In his mind, he will. Even in the event that someone wants to be dominated, it could very well be a self-imposed service to a virtual construct."

"The Tellurian will become a giant partitioned hard drive!" she enthused. "How do we do it?"

"With an assload of code tweaking."

PICKING OFF THE RUNNER: REALITY 2.0

B00ksmart turned his attention to the ball. It defaulted to a normal baseball. "The Tellurian is a gigantic processor that compiles the info of the Hypersphere. How that info is compiled depends on what instructions are given in the source code between the Hypersphere and the Tellurian. Whoever controls the source code dictates how the info is compiled and, inevitably, how the Tellurian will look. Currently, the Technocracy has the most control."

A virtual keyboard rendered in front of him. A cable behind the keyboard snaked up to the ball and connected into it. "In order for Reality 2.0 to work," he explained as he placed his fingers on the home keys, "we have to hack directly into the source code, tweak the protocols, then download Reality 2.0 over the current version." He typed out a command. The cover of the ball glowed for a moment but was otherwise unchanged. "Once downloaded, we can systematically break down the Masses' reliance on Technocracy science." He typed out another command. The stitching became undone, but the cover remained in place. "We then help the Masses learn to think for themselves." He typed out a third command. The cover slowly faded until it became completely invisible. The luminescent ripples began anew.

"Every alt has a role in this little venture of ours. The Reality Crackers and Nexplorers are in charge of putting Reality 2.0 into place. The Cyberpunks help prep the Masses for Reality 2.0 by revealing Technocracy 'truths' for the lies that they are. The Cryptogramics are responsible for sifting through terabytes of data that might expedite the download, and the Chaoticians anticipate any problems that might arise leading to and during its implementation." He picked up the naked baseball. "It'll take a concerted effort to make this happen. If your tutorial teaches Lamers only one thing, let it be this." The ball rippled to emphasize his point. With a twist of his hand, the baseball disappeared. "We've got the power to make the world infinitely better than it is now. There's no reason to have the power to wield it otherwise."

VIRTUAL ADEPTS FOR LATTERS, PART IV: STYLE GALLERY



While Holly absorbed the importance of BOOKsmart's lesson, he rendered a slinky toy and oscillated it back and forth between his hands. Her eyes glazed over watching the rhythm of his simplistic toy.

"What about the other Trads?" she asked as an afterthought. "How are we supposed to deal with them between now and the time Reality 2.0 hits the market?"

He stopped the slinky's oscillation. "Carefully, as always. Our relationships with the other Traditions aren't what you would call ideal. You know, that might be something to include in this tutorial of yours. A breakdown on the other Trads, as well as supernaturals, in general, might go a long way to easing tensions between us and them."

Holly nodded. "I considered it, but I'm not experienced enough to give a fair opinion of them."

He shook his head in surrender. "Fine, I'll tell you what I know about them. Is your recorder still on?"

She checked. "Yep."

"Let's get this over with. Starting with 'A's..."

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

"To Akashics, everything is about the mind, fine-tuning it into a razor-sharp instrument. To achieve this, they do excessive amounts of martial arts training. It supposedly makes them more balanced with the world somehow, but apparently technology has no part in it. They want everything simple like it was before the Dark Ages.

"The one aspect of their philosophy I like is their individuality. No two Akashics will tell you the same thing, yet they're wholly supportive of their Trad as a whole. I think they're as independent as we are, only on the other side of the spectrum. Useful for prepping the Masses to think for themselves, but the simplicity part's got to go."

CELESTIAL CHORUS

"Brainwashers who exacerbate the problem more than they solve it. Knocking these righteous bastards out of power was the one thing the Order of Reason got right. Their 'holier than thou' bullshit gets downright ancient. If you get caught in a room with one, give two Hail Marys, throw salt over your shoulder, and run, not because he'll hurt you, but because he'll sermonize your damn ear off."

CULT OF ECSTASY

"I actually like how these guys think. Of all the Trads, their ideal is the best fit to our own, even above the Etherites. I like to consider them compatriots, the Yin to our Yang, the

Tenille to our Captain. We cover Space; they cover Time. In the end, I think they just might play a pivotal role in making Reality 2.0 work.

"Ecstasics do so many drugs they make a Cyberpunk look like he was on the road to recovery. They really know how to have fun and are more than willing to pass the duchy. Don't get caught up in their parties too much, though. Just enough to make friends and ease them into our way of thinking. They'll try to turn the tables on you, but if you keep your head straight, you should be fine."

DREAMSPEAKERS

"You'd think a bunch of mages who talk to ghosts would have their heads too far up their asses to notice anything else. Well, you'd be wrong. Surprisingly enough, they know more about us than we seem to know about them. I don't get the impression that they're totally against us, though. I think that they think we're misguided. The sentiment is definitely shared."

EUTHANATOS

"Never, *ever* let them near your trinary, not unless you want to reformat the sucker and start from scratch. These guys bathe in Entropy. Chaoticians get along great with them, but more power to 'em.

"The whole death angle is weird. If you know someone who could benefit from a little dying, give these guys a call and present your evidence. Oftentimes they ask for intelligence on something that they haven't got access to in return for services rendered. Definitely worth the price, but don't forget to sniff out their reasons why."

HOLLOW ONES

"Flexibly pointless. I've met a number of them through the years and every one of them has a different take on why the world is a moral cesspool. They don't care about Ascension, they don't care about humanity... they just don't care.

"One thing I'll give them credit for is their blatant disregard for what other people think of them. If you call one a limp-dicked poseur who'd serve the world better as a department store mannequin, she'd shrug, say 'perhaps,' and move on as if you hadn't said a word. You'd have to be pretty disaffected to not give a shit like that.

"Now that I think about it, maybe it's not all that good..."

ORDER OF HERITIES

"For the most part, they're classical Merlins as outdated as the Arthurian legends. All that hocus-pocus

mumbo-jumbo you see ‘great illusionists’ do on those TV specials can be attributed to these pricks. A small percentage of them, though, are on the right track. Like us, a minority of them studies the world in mathematical models that would make a Chaotician proud. But like I said, that’s a small minority.

“They controlled the source code before the Choristers did and look to do it again. They’re political, backstabbing, and ignorant of Sleeper needs. You’d think they’d learn from their mistakes, but you know what they say about old dogs and new tricks.”

SONS OF ETHER

“Kissin’ cousins if ever we had one. Like us, they used to be Technocrats. They rely on science a bit more than we do, but how they use it is far less rigid than the tired ways of the Technocracy. What’s more, they’re incredibly useful. If you need something built, go to them.

“Surprisingly, they don’t celebrate the Web as much as we do. You’d think that virtual space would be a mad scientist’s ultimate playground. While they dabble in it, they don’t see the importance of the Hypersphere like we do. Whether this is due to stubbornness or lack of foresight I couldn’t say. It does give us pause, however, and make us wonder how deep our kinship truly runs.”

VERBENA

“Sado-masochists. I was once in a cabal that had a Verbena priest. Every time he wanted to cast a rote or work his magic, he bled himself or a nearby animal he caught and threw the blood at whatever he was enchanting. I asked him later why he did that. He went off about ‘life being something an Adept wouldn’t understand’ and ‘why don’t I go back to my sterile computer room and play with my digits.’ We didn’t talk much after that.

“If you want to provoke someone just for the sake of provoking, create a hologram of yourself and taunt one. You won’t bleed, and he’ll get pissed and likely bleed himself more to try to cut you. Otherwise, let them be. Someday we or another Tradition will get around to domesticating them and hopefully teach them to be halfway useful.”

AHL-I-BATIN

“Before I leave the Traditions behind, I should say a little something about the Ahl-i-Batin. You might know them better as the Subtle Ones or the Hidden Ones. Whatever you call them, you can’t exactly call them an actual Tradition. They’re a hybrid of the Ecstatics and Akashics who got all hot and bothered about Mount Qaf and the Correspondence Point. Granted, they held the Council seat for Correspondence before us, and yes, they might know a few secrets about the Sphere that we don’t. I’m willing to bet, though, that we’ve got far more secrets than they’ve got.

“In other words, a non-factor.”



TECHNOCRACY

"Actually, I think you covered the Technocracy pretty well already. All I can add is be careful, hit them whenever the opportunity arises, and do what you can to turn their own Time Tables against them."

VAMPIRES

"Since vampires drink blood and we've got it, mixing company with them isn't the wisest idea. Thankfully, they don't know about the Web. Not like we know it, anyway. In that respect, they're just like the Sleepers. In fact, they're Sleepers who forgot to die. And have superpowers. And don't have to worry about Paradox..."

"Okay, maybe they're not all that similar to Sleepers. What I do know is that they're as much a part of the Masses as Sleepers are. In that respect, they're just as dangerous to use vulgar magic on as any other Sleeper. Granted, you won't suffer as much Paradox as you normally would, what with them being supernatural and all, but suffer you will. The best way to deal with one who's about to kill you is to tell them as calmly as possible that you're a mage. With luck, it'll make him hesitate long enough for you to Correspond away."

WEREWOLVES

"We managed to get a little more data on werewolves than vampires by virtue of the former's predilection to enter the Web. Not too many go there, which is good, and it seems the only ones that do are called Glass Walkers. Werewolves don't care for the Web all that much. The electric light parade might make them sick or something, but some will still brave a monumental upchuck to root around and see what virtual space is all about."

"If you can help it, avoid meeting them in realspace. They get really big and really nasty really quick. A lot of them can even short-circuit technology. This is why it's always a good idea to surge protect your portables."

FAIRIES & GHOSTS

"Fairies don't exist. Ghosts, on the other hand, do, but only on the Web. No one's sure exactly what they are. Some theorize that they're residues of emotional trauma that cast a faint afterimage of the source around a specific site. Others believe ghosts to be improper downloads of people from realspace into the Web who inadvertently fried their brains trying to get in. Either way, ghosts have no conscience. As such, they're freaky to come across, but nothing to be afraid about."

TUTORIAL CONCLUDED

B00ksmart leaned back into his chair. "That about covers it. Got everything you needed?"

Holly listened over the recording. "Got it." She stood up with him and extended a hand. "Thanks a lot for checking over the tutorial. I and dozens of prospective Lamers really appreciate it."

"That's all right. It got me out of the apartment." He clicked on the side of his glasses. He cringed. "Later than I thought I would be. Let me know how things pan out. And for Reality's sake, make sure that the tutorial's well hidden. Petition the Crystal Palace to include it in their archives for safekeeping."

She grinned at the suggestion. "Definitely."

He rendered a keyboard and typed out a command. He digitized away.

Holly accessed the mainframe to confirm B00ksmart's exit. Quix spontaneously appeared before her. "He's left the building," it told her in her own voice.

Holly smirked. "Did we download what we wanted from his computer?"

"That we did," responded the guide. "A terabyte of data."

She rubbed her hands together. "Looks like I've got some homework tonight."

• • •

Safely back in his apartment, B00ksmart creaked out of his seat and stretched his back and legs. It was about time he ditched the worn leather chair and upgraded to something with a little more padding.

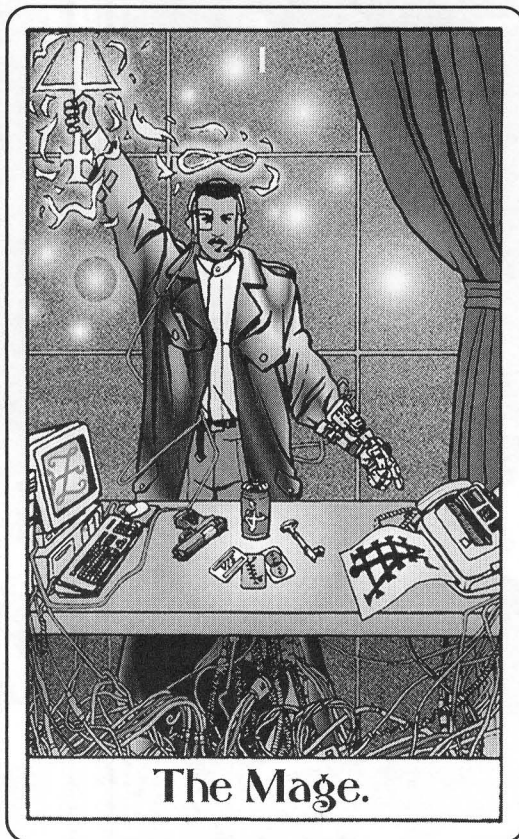
A green light blinked to life on one of his monitors, the one corresponding to the partition he used to upload his Icon to the Web. "What is it?" he asked the computer.

"Files have been copied, B00ksmart," it answered in a very Hal-like manner. It referenced the copied files onscreen.

He read them over and nodded appreciatively. "Hacked through eight partitions? That little minx!"

"I took the liberty to trace her protocol," offered the computer. "Would you like me to intercept?"

B00ksmart scanned over the files again before shaking his head. "No, let her go. She didn't get anything vital. Besides, she'll get her comeuppance soon enough." He had already decided to recommend her for promotion. Hopefully she'd live long enough to enjoy it.



The Mage.



CHAPTER 2.0 V3: SOURCE CODE

...if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason — for then we would know the mind of God.

— Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*



Hello! Yes. I'm talking to you. The one reading the book. Does that surprise you? I'm part of a Tradition that specializes in Correspondence. Did you think we couldn't see you? You can call me COyOte and no, not every Adept has an Indian sounding name — I just happen to like Loony Tunes.

If you're looking for the newest guidelines in hacker chic, go to Defcon or H2K. I'm too old for that \$hit. Yes, in the day, I did my fair amount of cracking.

Remember the RUHot2 virus? Shut down the ARPAnet (god — it needed to be killed; stupid, dated, piece of crap tech). No? Damn. Nobody remembers anything past the last five

minutes. Well, now I'm a Reality Coder. For all those who don't have their dictionaries handy, that means I hack God. This qualifies me to talk a bit about our little corner of the universe. About the Virtual Adept Tradition.

Good enough for a ph*ck!ng resume?

Then let's begin.

```
/mode #lamerlecture +s
```

```
/invite lameholly #lamerlecture
```

```
/invite curious_others #lamerlecture
```

```
/dcc all H0usefly_lectures_on_Adepts/w/COyOte_comments
```



AM I COOL OR WHAT?

Kewl: On the net, slang for 'cool,' usually used sarcastically. The truly cool are called 'uber.'

— culled from somewhere on the Internet

<Here are some fresh files straight off the H0usefly server (he's our resident uberlibrarian). And if you haven't figured it out yet, the editorial comments are mine. — love COyOte>

Before the Avatar Storm, the Virtual Adepts were known as the new geeks on the block, stocked up to the gills with whiz-bang tech and an insight into the Technocracy the other Trads *<that would be short for Traditions, lamer>* lacked. In short, we thought we were kewl and they thought we were lame. And since nobody took anybody too damn seriously, nothing major really happened.

The times they are a-changing.

After running around for almost a century screaming that "information wanted to be free," the Adepts finally found out just *what* information wanted to be free — information about our own Tradition, about our past, about our now, and about our future. We now have a better picture on what the Virtual Adepts are supposed to be — and it certainly isn't anything like we expected!

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Number Six: "Who are you?"

Number Two: "The new Number Two."

Number Six: "Who is Number One?"

Number Two: "You are Number Six."

Number Six: "I am not a number — I'm a free man!"

— *The Prisoner*

Other Traditions *<and yes, the Technocratic Union as well>* work off of the principle of a hierarchy. This can be as simple as Sifu and Sidai (Akashic terms for Master and Student) or as complicated as a 150th Degree Kabbalistic Avenger (Order of Hermes). *<At least, that's what we've been told.>*

Well, Adepts don't work like that.

There are only two kinds of Adepts you'll meet — those who *know* things and those who *do* things. Sometimes these are one and the same, but more often they break into two groups: Kibos and Hackers.

THOSE WHO KNOW: KIBOS

Everybody knows a Kibo. These are the people who obsessively hoard data. They may know the stats on every Lacrosse team *<too long to list here>*. Or maybe they've got a list of all of the holidays on a banner in Giles' magic shop *<"Winter Solstice, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa & Gurnenthar's Ascension," in case you were wondering>*. Either way, Kibos are essential to our dream of a better future. They bring in the details that allow us to fine-tune Reality 2.0. They also provide data that serves as

tactical information in our struggle against our old "partners," the Technocratic Union.

The word "Kibo" stands for "Knowledge in, Bullshit out," and that's a fairly accurate way of describing them. Sometimes what they've got to say is a load of crap. Sometimes it's the fertilizer for great ideas. The Code of the Kibo demands that they always share information upon request, even with the enemy. There's nothing that says the information has to be accurate or easily accessible. Kibos have derailed more than one Technocratic plan by initiating a core dump containing six decades of information on the quality and quantity of yak \$hit. *<Bottom line? If you need information, talk to a Kibo. But always, always double-check your source first.>*

THOSE WHO DO: HACKERS

Hackers are the doers of the Adept Tradition and, more often than not, our heroes. You might not remember the Kibo who found the information but you'll remember the Hacker who used it to break into that ultra-secret military installation in Dulce.

Contrary to what the Technocracy-controlled media wants you to believe, Hackers aren't all about cracking open systems and writing viruses. A Hacker is someone who is an artist with tech, somebody who can coax just a little bit more out of the wiring than you'd think possible. Among the Adepts, most Hackers are folks who explore virtual space, but not all of them. We've got Hacker mechanics and Hacker neuro-linguists. We've even got Hacker medics. Wherever there is something that needs doing, there's a Hacker.

Hackers operate on two principles — *Reputation* and *Need*. Your *Rep* comes from the things you've done *<and how much you brag about them — honestly, hype it or lose it>*. Hackers may also perform a number of deeds gratis so that their Rep spreads faster.

INFORMATION AND THE ADEPTS

Number Two: "We want information."

Number Six: "You won't get it."

Number Two: "By hook or by crook, we will."

— *The Prisoner*

How do Adepts define information? Information is data exchanged between two or more parties. The two parties do not have to be sentient or even living. A beetle eating a corpse is receiving as much information as two amateur philosophers sitting in a café drinking cappuccinos and discussing Nietzsche. It's just in a different format.

Information can be as complex as the DNA of a starfish or as simple as basic arithmetic. All information can be reduced down to its basic mathematical components (ones and zeroes) and then re-translated later. *<If you don't believe that, you don't know how your modem works, do you?>*

In the end, the Adepts firmly believe that everything can be broken down into information — and they've got the entire realm of virtual space to prove it.

Hackers also respond well to peer pressure; they may do a task depending on how many people are asking for it or who's asking for it even if it doesn't increase their Rep (thus, the principle of Need). *<In the end, you're kewl if you've got a good Rep, but you're uber if you know (and do) what Needs to be done.>*

BOTTOM LINE: SO WHO'S IN CHARGE?

The Bottom Line? Nobody — and everybody. A Kibo based out of Asia is going to get props for knowing stuff in his backyard, but may be considered a lamer in Central Africa. A Hacker who sets up cell sites in Qatar may be the Correspondence Guru in his corner of the globe, but he's not going to be called up to program a net-attack against the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

If you need somebody, look for him, but don't look for any big bosses. We're all in this mess together.

ADEPT ANARCHY AND THE AUTHORITY

Adepts running with multi-Tradition cabals find that their tendency towards anti-authoritarianism doesn't sit well with some of the more hide-bound Trads. To be true to their ideals and yet acknowledge the needs of their allies, most Adepts adopt the following code:

- **Follow the leader:** If you're joining a multi-Trad cabal and they've already got a leader, fine. Follow him for the moment, until a better opportunity presents itself.

- **Never challenge a leader in a conflict:** Except in cases where the decision is so brutally stupid that it will get you killed, don't waste everyone's time by arguing with the leader while the bullets are flying.

- **Never let a lamer stay in charge:** When it's nice and relatively peaceful, and everyone's settled in, then, and only then, play "challenge the leader."

- **Play nice:** Anytime you want to challenge a leader, make the challenge a friendly one. Play a game of chess. Sucker him into a video game. Do a debate. Don't play to win — and by this, we mean specifically don't cheat. Any lamer can stack the deck in their favor. An Elite lets the mage with the best skills win the game. If you're the mage with the best skills, then you'd better win! A side note — if you've got an Order of Hermes mage in your cabal, see if you can learn about something called *certāmen*. It's like a live-action video game and is *trés* cool.

- **Beware of politics:** Adepts who are used to getting respect for their superior skills are generally surprised when they don't get leader props even after they've proven themselves. If you have this problem, talk to your cabal-mates. If you're going to lead people, you may as well take the time to know them first.

- **Revenge is a dish best served not at all:** If, after following the above code, you're still not in charge, stop obsessing about it. After all, you joined the cabal for a reason, didn't you? If that reason isn't enough to stop you from going on some power trip, get out and stop bothering them. It's not worth their effort to try and keep you in line and it just makes all Adepts look lame.

WHAT'S IN A NAITIE?

Unless you've been living under a rock for the past century or so, you know that all Adepts adopt a new name when they come into the Tradition. Now, we could tell you that Adepts do this because they feel like geeks but they want to sound cool.

We'd be lying.

NAITIES & NUTTERØLOGY, PT. I: WHY DØ WE CARE?

Why do we care what our names are? Because we associate names with our Essence. This can be used to find teachers, students, Kibos, or even the best Hacker. Of course, you can also use these "True Names" to modify other people's Essences (usually to influence them). That's why you'll rarely find an Adept who pronounces his name correctly and you will never find an Adept's name spelled correctly in print. *<Of course that means my name really isn't CØyØte. No surprise, that — who spells their name with zeroes instead of "o"s? Makes them look like a big pair of bug eyes...>*

To find the true source of our name change, we give a tip of the hat to the Order of Hermes. They'd been babbling on and on about True Names for so long we thought they suffered from a bad bout of Kibo. Turns out they were right.

Let's explain this in Adept fashion. If you've got a computer, most of them work off of zeroes and ones, the infamous binary code *<of course, our computers work off of i, 0, and 1 but that's a different lecture>*. While you could write up every program in this code, it's time consuming and *trés* lame. So, the uberprogrammers of the past came up with "languages." Languages are shortcuts that we program in that are then translated back into binary for the computer to understand. Get it?

So enough with Computer Basics 101. How does this apply to the real world? Back when we were just little energy bits floating around the void, we distinguished ourselves by variances in our energy. For argument's sake, let's call these energies 0, 1, 2, and 3. When things got more complicated, we invented language and came up with another way of putting it — Primal, Pattern, Dynamic, and Questing. Get it? Yep, that's right — we're talking about our Avatars.

So what does that have to do with your name? Well, back in the old, old days people didn't just pull names out of a hat. They had their shaman/priest/mentor/guardian spirit make the call. The lucky namer would take a look at the tyke, analyze its Avatar, and then give it a name. For those of you who just missed that, Name = Avatar.

Nowadays, it's not the same. People are lazy and you've got just as good a chance of being named after Aunt Petunia's precious dog as something actually relevant. That's not good enough for the Adepts. We're taking our names back.

So ditch the lame name and get an Elite one that describes you properly. Now.



NAMES & NUMEROLOGY, PT. 2

It's COy0te here with a little clarification. All Virtual Adepts choose a new "handle" when joining the Tradition, and this name reflects Essence. Adepts calculate true names using numerology. Breaking it down to basics, numerology reduces your name to a single number from one to nine. You do this by assigning numbers to the letters (based on order in the alphabet) and adding those numbers up. If the result is greater than nine, you break apart the sum into single digits, add the new numbers together, and get a smaller number with the desired results. So, for example, my name (COy0te) would be:

$$\text{COy0te} = 3+0+25+0+20+5 = 53 = 5+3 = 8$$

We then take it one step further and divide that final number by three (the significance of three is covered in H0usefly's "Spheres of Influence" lecture). That comes up with the following chart:

Base Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Divided by 3	0.33	0.67	1.00	1.33	1.67	2.00	2.33	2.67	3.00
Rounded Off	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3

The rounded-off numbers translate to the Essences:

- 0 = Primordial
- 1 = Pattern
- 2 = Dynamic
- 3 = Questing

In casual conversation, most of us leave it at the rounded number but if you want to get really philosophical, keep the divided number. We don't think many people have "pure" Essences. Instead, most Avatars are a little mix of different Essences and our numbering system reflects that. It's become sort of an in-joke, much like when people talk about astrology. ("Hey! I'm a Primordial with a bad Pattern rising...") By this point, you've probably noticed that there are a lot more chances to have a name that indicates a Pattern or Dynamic Essence. Correct! That accurately reflects what we think the distributions of such Essences are within the Adepts.

ANSWERS FOR GRASSHOPPER

You've got a cool handle. You know about Kibos and Hackers. But how do you learn \$hit? What's the point of actually having powers if you've got no ideas how to use them?

Never fear! For we Adepts have as tried and true a system as any Trad.

Do you remember the best teachers you ever had? Do you remember what made them so cool? Right! It's because, on some level, they understood you. They were like you, even though they knew more than you. The first thing that has to happen before you find a cool teacher is to find yourself. *<Hence the naming bullshit: know your Avatar, know yourself.>*

The next thing to do is to find people like you. And here's where other Trads think we break into chaos. They see an infinite amount of bragging and useless challenges. They don't get it. These are tests. Here's an example — you want to learn how to decipher a cryptogram? You take a cryptogram and throw it at a bunch of people. The guy who unlocks it the quickest is probably the guy you want to talk to. But with magic, it gets subtler than that. Hacker attacks, Correspondence rites, Forces battles, Mind messing — these are designed to hunt out the person you need *<we call these "Flame Wars" just to confuse the issue among outsiders>*.

Once you've found the right teacher, how do you know if you're getting anywhere with the lessons? By doing things. In the end run, you can either do it or you can't *<survival of the fittest, bub; use it or lose it>*. But since a lot of people feel more comfortable with terms, here they are:

Lame: Lame's the term we use to describe everybody other than us — including first-timers to the Trad. Here's how you can distinguish between the two. If it's *big-time Lame*, it refers to the Sleepers, the Black Hats, or the Trads. Otherwise, it's just *Lame*. If you're one of the lamers, don't sweat it; everyone starts there and though you may be lame, at least you're *our* lame. Anyone who's still struggling through the Basic Spheres is called this.

Elites: That's most of us. We've got a handle on what we're doing and why we're doing it. Most of us tend to be Elite in some areas and Lame in others. Prove an Adept lame and it drives him nuts and gets him to work harder *<much to the amusement of others>*. Also, we do accept that some Trads can be Elite. I know a couple of CoE (Cult of Ecstasy) that are totally Elite with Time. And there's a Verbena chick who gives new meaning to the word Life. Technocrats aren't Elite, no matter how cute their little toys are. They only cross that line when they defect to our side. *<Here, Techie, Techie, Techie... come to the dark side...>*

Adept: This is a Trad designation for when you know enough about the Spheres to do some serious damage. We only adopted it because we think it's funny. *<Look! It's an adept Adept!>*

Wired: The Wired ones are the Top of the Pops, occasionally also known as Master Mojos. By this point, folks manifest in more than one place at a time and can ping your server like it's going out of style. They've got serious connections to the fabric of reality.

Going Jobe: Here's a term borrowed from a fairly lame Stephen King movie. In the movie, this once lame guy super-evolves, then pops into virtual reality and becomes one with the world. The Jobes — they're kind of like that. Word to the wise — if a Jobe pops up and makes a request, consider doing it. Since they're usually working in multiple spaces at once, Jobes often lack the patience for a sense of humor. *<The last Adept who turned one down ended up getting dropped off into a gulag in eastern Siberia — we think...>*

Dropouts: Since we have a system that has no steady teachers, no degrees, and no grades, we don't get a lot of failed apprentices. Rule Number One: if you and your teacher aren't getting along, find a new teacher. Still, sometimes we get remedial students who came from the shallow end of the gene pool. For these lamers, we've hard-coded a program into virtual space called **Learn-It** (see pp. 62-63). It's there for everyone, open code. *<Heck, even the enemy can use it! We dare them.>*

There are rare occasions where someone can't cut it among the Adepts. When that happens, we find them a place among the Trads. Strange though it may sound, the Hollow Ones are good for this kind of stuff. If the failed Adept is technologically inclined, Frankensteins are a close second. Last, but not least, you could always foist them on the Cult of Ecstasy. There's nothing bad about partying for the rest of your life.

In any case, we usually hit our departing friend with the **Worm** rote (see pp. 65-66). This is designed to eat out any specific Adept secrets while leaving all the good stuff intact so our ex-Adept doesn't go away crippled and pissed. It works easiest on willing targets, so we get permission ahead of time, if possible.

Rarely, an Adept steps out of line completely, jumping back to the Technocracy — or worse yet, becoming a Nephandi. There have even been a couple of real serious Nexplorers who went Marauder. In this case, we kill them. Sorry. It's a rough world out there.

New folks transferring in... we like them. We give them a big hearty welcome and then drop them into "shark-infested waters" (Technocracy Constructs, supernatural hotspots or the like) as soon as we can. We figure if they survive, they've got what it takes to be an Adept. If not, well...

Once those first deeds are done and recognized, Adepts cease to consider the survivor anything but an Adept and it's bad form to mention any previous affiliations.

FACTIONS.LOTS.ORG



If you're the kind of person who needs a pat on the back and lots of acclaim, join an alt. Alts in the common tongue are the factions of the Adept Tradition. *<Back in the 90s, they used to be*

known as legions. Times change. Go figure.> Here's where you get the big kudos; members of the alts are the heroes of the Adept Tradition. Never forget that.

CYBERPUNKS

Names: Mutualists, Collectivists, Anarchists, Social Reconstructionists.

History: From the beginning of the Technocracy, one of the larger debates among the Order of Reason regarded the final shape of the world government after the Technocracy took control. Would it be oligarchic? Capitalistic? Fascist? Communist? Some Technocrats became fascinated with ideas presented by the ancient Greek Stoics and Cynics. These ideas later came into focus in the 19th century writings of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin and became known popularly as the anarchist movement. In practical application, anarchist "nations" would be made up of a series of self-governing cells, small self-sufficient villages connected with other villages through a simple network of trade. No higher governmental authority would be needed. The Technocrats excited by this idea noted that the ideal anarchistic village mimicked the function of living organisms, something the Progenitors were studying in depth. They believed that a successful network of these villages could produce a civilization more stable and viable than any artificial system imposed by the Technocracy.

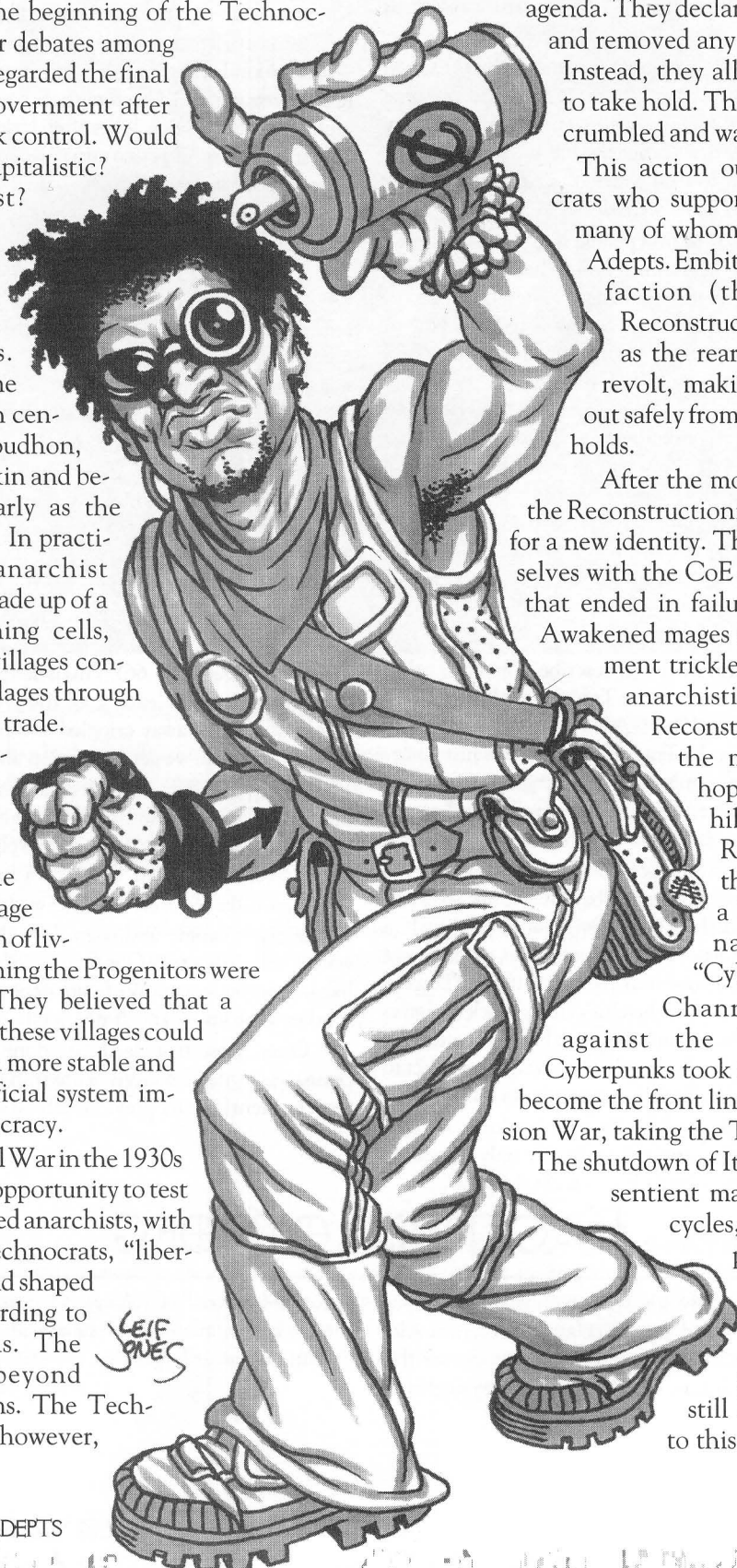
The Spanish Civil War in the 1930s provided the perfect opportunity to test this premise. Dedicated anarchists, with the help of some Technocrats, "liberated" part of Spain and shaped the local towns according to their political ideas. The towns thrived beyond anyone's expectations. The Technocracy as a whole, however,

became concerned that such self-sufficient towns would breed ideas that deviated from the Technocratic agenda. They declared the idea anathema and removed any aid to the anarchists. Instead, they allowed a fascist regime to take hold. The anarchy experiment crumbled and was relegated to history.

This action outraged the Technocrats who supported this experiment, many of whom were already Virtual Adepts. Embittered, a number of this faction (then called "Social Reconstructionists") volunteered as the rear guard for the Adept revolt, making sure everyone got out safely from Technocratic strongholds.

After the move to the Traditions, the Reconstructionists floundered around for a new identity. They tried to ally themselves with the CoE during the 1960s, but that ended in failure. In the early '70s, Awakened mages from the punk movement trickled in, attracted to the anarchistic tendencies of the Reconstructionists, and shifted the mood from a sort of hopeful awareness to nihilistic depression. The Reconstructionists threw away any hope of a better world and re-named themselves "Cyberpunks."

Channeling their anger against the Technocracy, the Cyberpunks took it upon themselves to become the front line troops of the Ascension War, taking the Technocracy head-on. The shutdown of Iteration X's artificially sentient mainframe for a full 10 cycles, a deed that led to a purge of Sleeper hackers worldwide, was the high point of their history. Some angry Technocrats still hunt the Cyberpunks to this day for that one act.



The Avatar Storm shook up the senior membership of the Cyberpunks. While it was interesting to explore the dystopian ideal, without access to the Digital Web to occasionally escape it, nobody actually wanted to live in it. In addition, Technocratic-influenced police increased pressure against both the hacker and anarchist movements. To respond to these dual pressures, the Cyberpunks reached back into their past and rediscovered the idealism that founded both the anarchist and punk movements. Rather than just blindly lashing out at Technocratic installations, Cyberpunks started to attack the myths upon which the Technocracy's control was founded. By opening up the Sleepers' eyes to the injustices behind the success of the Technocracy, they caused no end of problems for the Union's Timeline.

Opinions: Kill, Maim, Destroy! The Cyberpunks have always been our most violent alt, reveling in the more destructive aspects of the Tradition. The Cyberpunks maintain that the best way to build a brand new world is from the ashes of the old. Considering the monolithic size of the Technocracy, most Cyberpunks realize this is a fool's dream, but they keep at it, hoping they can find the spark that will set fire to the world. Most recently, the Cyberpunks have begun attacking the Technocracy on an ideological level, breaking down the myths that allow the Technocracy to work unchallenged among the Sleepers. *<They tackle everything from issues with the World Trade Organization to why some children's cookies contain fat no human can digest. >* This has gained them a growing cult of followers among the Sleeper masses, much to the consternation of the Technocracy, which is forced to take more and more repressive measures to keep control.

Style: Cyberpunks have the rep of being the least subtle alt. Most of them were raised on a steady diet of video games, and they act accordingly. They treasure

the Forces Sphere, especially weapons that do large amounts of damage in real and virtual space. Correspondence rotes get them around the web, and any decent Cyberpunk has an implant loaded with rotes he can use at a moment's notice. The more recent additions to the Cyberpunks communicate with people via online games and chat rooms, impressing Sleepers with their prowess and Elite-ness. This translates to meatspace demonstrations and far more public debate than the Technocracy would like.

Getting In: Though they are loud and brash, the Cyberpunks are one of the hardest alts to find. Cyberpunks justifiably fear retribution, having attacked the Technocracy time and time again. Unless you accidentally meet a Cyberpunk face to face, the Labyrinth is the only reliable way to get their attention. The Labyrinth is an online computer "game" that pops up every three months somewhere in virtual space under a number of variant names. *<Minos' Lair, the Minotaur's Challenge, etc. Go bone up on Greek Mythology if you really want to find more names.>* The Labyrinth game subjects players to a series of tests that, by the end, concludes with a series of cracker attacks against Technocracy assets. Cyberpunks contact the winners who complete the Labyrinth, and then lift players from their places in meatspace before the Technocracy locates them.

Rules: A group based on anti-authoritarianism doesn't hold to a lot of rules, but here's what little they have. First, never pass up a chance to mess with the system. Second, never abandon a Cyberpunk in trouble. Third, there are no rules. Cyberpunks, for better or worse, are the least concerned with Sleeper lives and have been known to sacrifice Adepts or other Trads for their cause if the situation warranted it.

CYPHERPUNKS

Names: Cryptogramics, Cyphers, Cryps, the Thought Police.

History: The Cypherpunks originated as a backlash from the Cyberpunk's crash of the It-X mainframe. Many of the Adepts involved at the time didn't understand how serious the Technocracy reaction was. While realspace authorities cracked down on hackers among the Adepts and Sleepers, the Technocracy led simultaneous attacks on a number of Adept resources in virtual space. To prevent the decimation of the Adept Tradition *<as well as political fallout from the more vindictive pricks on the Council of Nine>*, a group of leading mathematicians started encrypting and hiding Adept data streams. Thanks to their ingenious work, for every successful attack by the Technocracy, three or more Adept locations vanished or became undetectable. Assuming the victory was theirs, the Technocracy finally relented and returned to their primary task — the domination of reality. The vanished Adepts were, of course, safely concealed behind a web of deception created by the newly named "Cryptogramics."

With the Technocracy-Adept "war" ended, the Cryptogramics lost their sense of purpose *<that's a common trait among the alts; we've got short attention spans>*, but regained it when the antics of the Cyberpunks threatened to expose the Adepts again. The Cryptogramics rose to the challenge once more, cleaning up the Cyberpunks' mess. Other Adepts began to jokingly call the Cryptogramics "Cypherpunks" behind their backs.

This pattern continued for almost a decade with the Cypherpunks reacting to Cyberpunk excess. Some angry Cypherpunks took extreme measures to prevent Cyberpunk disasters by terminating their fellow Adepts. Much of their frustration came from the original Adept doctrine of "information wants to be free." This prevented any serious attempts at encrypting any information at all. A number of Cypherpunks quit the alt after realizing that most of their best work would be sabotaged by the people they most wanted to help.

The Cypherpunks' turn came in the early 1990s, when a group of Cypherpunks stole and decoded a set of unreleased documents from the defunct MK-Ultra project *<as I recall, they were looking into a way to protect Adepts against telepathy>*. It revived interest among Adepts in the field of neuro-linguistics — the ability to control thoughts using language.

After about a year, most of the Adepts abandoned the new project, but several dedicated Cypherpunks *<like H0usefly. Props to you, fellow Adept!>* couldn't let it rest. It took them awhile to figure out why, but when they finally did, their revelation shook the core of our Tradition. Apparently, as we left the Technocracy, the Technocracy poisoned the data we were taking with us with a neural-code virus, hiding our origins and the depth of our knowledge about the Union. In effect, the Technocracy crippled their greatest enemy. They crippled us.

Shocked and angered about their new discovery, the Cypherpunks joined forces with the Chaoticians to find an antidote to the Technocracy virus. They successfully created it, and gave it to the Nexplorers and Reality Coders to unleash on the anniversary of Turing's birth *<uber-Adept holiday>*. Since then, nothing has been the same. The Adepts returned to their place of power with a vengeance. The Cypherpunks even began teaming up with the Cyberpunks to find new and effective ways to strip away the control of the New World Order. It's a brave new world, and the Cypherpunks are riding its wave as the heroes of the revolution.

NEURO-LINGUISTICS

Neuro-linguistics, in the Adept world, is the ability to rewire the brain using images or sounds. Before you get too creeped out by this, this phenomenon happens to people all the time. By reading this book, you've got new connections forming, neurons moving, neurotransmitters firing in novel ways — we call this "memory." *<Actually you call it memory, too. Now you know how it works.>* The Adepts have simply found a more efficient way to do this. We've got a matrix of 64 different symbols that, when combined into words, influence both behavior and memory. Neat, huh?

The NWO, It-X, and the Progs have a joint approach similar to this called "neural coding." This is composed of a sort of targeted Alzheimer's and a string of words, images, or data that programs/triggers the virus. It's very retro in design and a lot clunkier than our version. Still, it's effective. *<As we saw with the T-virus. Bastards.>*

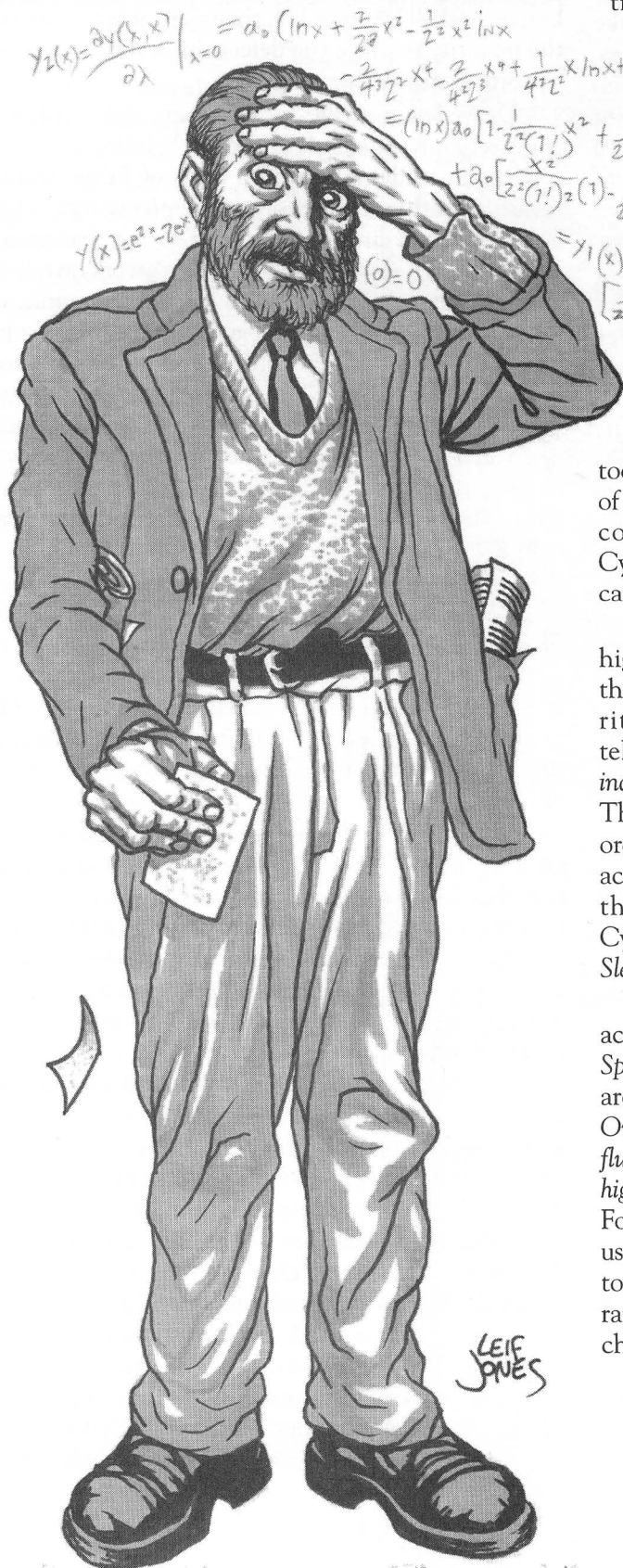
Opinions: It's not that information wants to be free; information wants to flow. Truly useful information is like a river, touching all of the places it needs to go. Completely unfettered information is like a flood,

overwhelming everyone, helping no one. Modern Cypherpunks control the proper flow of information to aid the Adept dream. They release information the Adepts need to know, and block information from their traditional enemies <usually the Technocracy — *payback's a bitch, ain't it?*>. A number of scandals were revealed in realspace because the Cypherpunks made sure the pertinent information was released at the proper time.

Style: Like their enemies in the New World Order, the Cypherpunks have always been good at Mind magics. Whereas the NWO is good at finding information and destroying it, the Cypherpunks are experts at recovering data or manipulating it. The NWO has only recently detected that someone as talented as them is working against them. E-mail and the telephone are the tools of the Cypherpunks. While advanced generations of computers help with encryption codes, it's really the communications of the world that make the Cypherpunks work. A rerouted Technocracy e-mail can cause more havoc than a dozen Cyberpunk assaults.

Getting In: Cypherpunks look for members among highly gifted Kibos or Unawakened cryptologists. Those they want to test get the "Wall," an encryption algorithm that prevents them from using any telecommunications or computing device <up to and including standard radio and calculators, poor bastards>. The target must figure out how to break the code in order to regain access to his technology. If this is accomplished within a set time limit (usually a month), then the target is offered membership in the Cypherpunks. <And yes, that means that occasionally even Sleeper cryptographers get to play with the big boys.>

Rules: The hierarchy of the Cypherpunks is set up according to a person's decoding skill <through talent or Sphere manipulation>. The "ranks" of the Cypherpunks are color-coded to the colors of the rainbow <Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet for those who flunked basic physics — Red is the lowest level, Violet the highest> and to the complexity of the code being used. For example, B-128 would be a Blue level Cypherpunk using a 128-character code. Advanced codes are utilized to handle chats between ranks. Advancement between ranks occurs when you crack the codes to higher-level chat rooms.



CHAOTICIANS

Names: Grey Men, Arithmeticians, Probability Engineers.

History: Numbers fascinate people. Cultures like the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Hebrews, Romans, Greeks, Chinese and Indians studied mathematics in depth, and a number of the predecessors of the Technocracy point to Pythagoras and Agrippa as inspirations for forming their paradigm. Some of the more dedicated members of what would later become the Virtual Adepts even studied the Hebrew Gematria, a way of mixing language and mathematics to find the true roots of creation.

The faction that calls itself the Chaoticians claims descent from these ancient mathematicians. They also claim, whether true or false, that their observation of the universality of mathematics began the debate that led to the Order of Reason. When the Order of Reason officially began in 1325, the mathematicians formed a sub-lodge of the order, the Arithmeticians. Though never strong enough to form a Convention, the Arithmeticians had members throughout the Technocratic Union.

The 1800s brought the creation of the computer, which Arithmeticians flocked to along with others to become the Difference Engineers. For the first time in the history of the Union, the Arithmeticians found their place, and they were proud of it. They fully believed that with the amazing mathematical power of the computer, they could accelerate the timetable for Ascension.

In their quest for Ascension, however, the Arithmeticians neglected two fundamental forces: the Technocracy's need for control, and an "X-factor" that seemed to frustrate their equations. At first, the Arithmeticians blamed their problems on the Traditions, especially the rogue Convention — the Sons of Ether — for subverting the dominant paradigm. But something seemed wrong with that premise; determined Arithmeticians began expanding into new mathematical fields, including non-Euclidean geometry and quantum mechanics. The Technocracy immediately warned them to stop their "deviance," and the Arithmeticians grew more sullen.

This came to a head during World War II, when the Arithmeticians saw Sleeper statisticians subvert their numbers to support the premise of the Nazi regime. Appeals to the Technocracy were in vain, since the Technocrats saw the benefits of a unified world under fascism. Horrified by this trend, the Arithmeticians helped the renamed Difference Engineers (now the

Virtual Adepts) make a break with the Technocracy. Teaming up with the Social Reconstructionists (later known as the Cyberpunks), they were able to convince the majority to make the defection, and the move was performed nearly flawlessly.

Upon leaving the Technocracy, the Arithmeticians renamed themselves the Probability Engineers, and began studying with the Sons of Ether and the Akashic Brotherhood. *<I'm fairly sure it was that "stuffed with probability" divination text, the I-Ching, that got them talking with the kung-fu guys.>* Einstein's work on relativity led to multiple breakthroughs within their ranks and they started to understand that the X-factor they had feared was actually a vital piece of reality itself. It took until 1960, with the work of Edward Lorenz, for the Probability Engineers to codify their beliefs into a new mathematical tradition. By the time the Sleepers were reading the works of geniuses like Mandelbrot and Gaston Julia, chaos mathematics was already a standard among the Adepts, and the Chaoticians were born.

Using chaos theory, the Chaoticians predicted both the Avatar Storm and the increasing apathy of the Sleepers. Now, at the end of the Ascension War, the Chaoticians have created a bold plan, a jolt to the system they hope will re-awaken the masses and bring them to the Adepts' side. All they need is a little luck, the Tradition they helped found, and the X-factor they once feared.

Opinions: On the surface, you could consider the Chaoticians the "hidden masters" of the Adept tradition, but that would grant them far more power than they want or deserve. Still, they are the best planners, and the ones with the most comprehensive overview of the Adept's paradigm. Their most potent sphere is Entropy, which they use to fuel their equations to predict things.

Despite their penchant for order, Chaoticians get along very well with the other alts. Most of this comes from their love of chaotic systems. To understand this, first recognize that chaotic systems aren't random, even though they might appear to be. Chaos systems work under three separate rules: (1) Something determines their behavior, (2) small changes in the beginning lead to massively different endings, and (3) while chaos systems appear disordered, underneath their behavior is a sense of order and pattern. Truly ordered systems *<like those the "beloved" Technocracy wants to impose>* are actually the exception, not the rule. The X-factor that the Chaoticians used to fear is just this simple fact; well-

run complex systems always appear unpredictable, allowing diversity and magic into the world.

Style: Fascinated with systems on both a macroscopic and microscopic level, Chaoticians use the Entropy Sphere to predict odds that amaze the other Adepts. On any given mission, it's always best to run your plans through a Chaotician first. Some Chaoticians also combine Entropy with Time, allowing them to predict events with some accuracy. Other alts joke that those Chaoticians are becoming "psycho-historians," characters from a science-fiction novel who were able to reliably predict and mold human interactions.

Getting In:

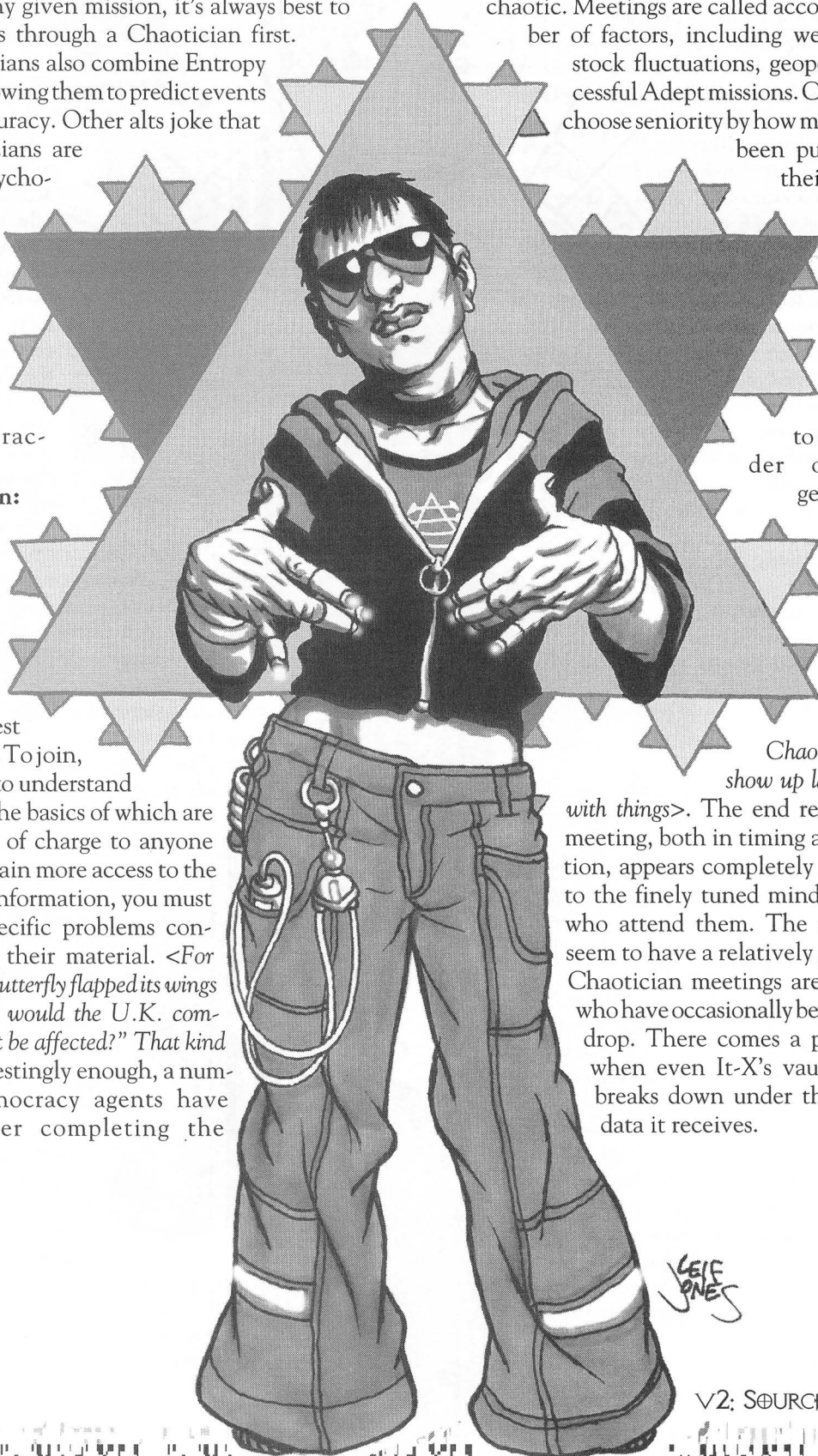
Chaoticians study mathematics in its purest form, and this attracts the Adept whose primary interest is in equations. To join, you first have to understand the material, the basics of which are presented free of charge to anyone who asks. To gain more access to the Chaoticians' information, you must then solve specific problems contained within their material. *<For example, "If a butterfly flapped its wings in Taipei, how would the U.K. commodities market be affected?" That kind of \$hit.>* Interestingly enough, a number of Technocracy agents have defected after completing the

Chaoticians' course, leading some to believe that the Chaoticians may be throwing in a little Mind magic when nobody's looking.

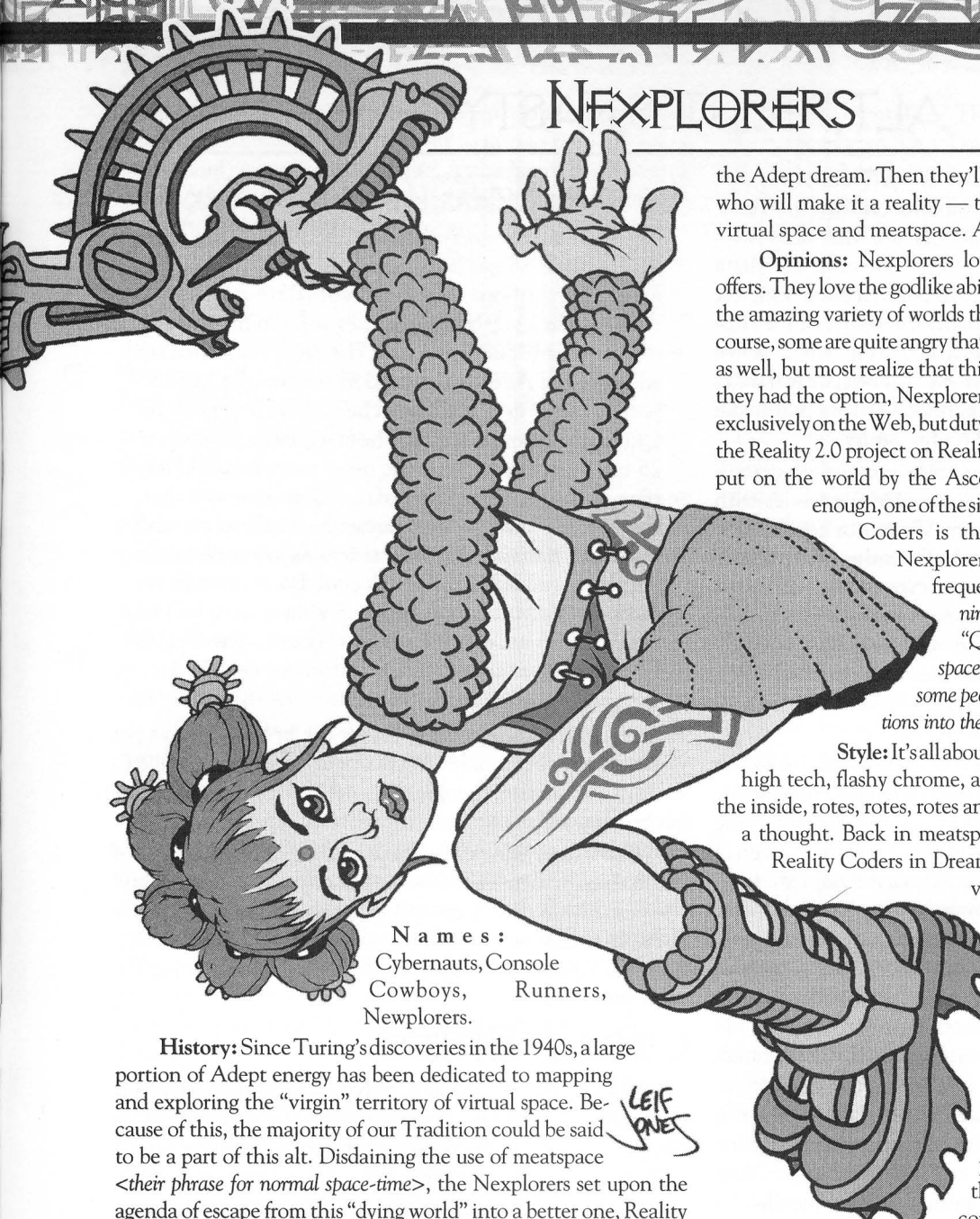
Rules: Chaoticians claim they are the most structured of the alts, but to outsiders, they seem the most chaotic. Meetings are called according to a number of factors, including weather patterns, stock fluctuations, geopolitics and successful Adept missions. Chaoticians then choose seniority by how many papers have been published among their alt for peer review.

The members who win the seniority seats set the agenda for the meeting, and then everyone gets to speak in the order of a fractal generated by the number of members present *<late-comers may change this fractal equation and the really serious*

*Chaotician politicians show up late just to ph*ck with things>*. The end result is that the meeting, both in timing and in presentation, appears completely random except to the finely tuned minds of the people who attend them. The only ones who seem to have a relatively good handle on Chaotician meetings are agents of It-X who have occasionally been able to eavesdrop. There comes a point, however, when even It-X's vaunted espionage breaks down under the chaos of the data it receives.



NEXPLORERS



Names:
Cybernauts, Console
Cowboys, Runners,
Newplorers.

History: Since Turing's discoveries in the 1940s, a large portion of Adept energy has been dedicated to mapping and exploring the "virgin" territory of virtual space. Because of this, the majority of our Tradition could be said to be a part of this alt. Disdaining the use of meatspace <their phrase for normal space-time>, the Nexplorers set upon the agenda of escape from this "dying world" into a better one, Reality 2.0, programmed, of course, by them. Into this grand scheme, they incorporated everyone, including the enemy, as long as they could ensure that virtual space itself remained free to adapt to anyone's dreams. They called this construct the Digital Web.

The White Out and temporary crash of the Digi-Web sent a wakeup call to this alt. They could no longer focus solely on things in their own private playground. Increasing Sleeper interference in virtual space led to growing bitterness among the Nexplorers as well, turning them against the very people they wanted to help.

The undoing of the Turing virus led to a serious re-ordering of Nexplorer priorities. Now, they understand that virtual space and realspace are codependent on each other. Working hand in hand with the Reality Coders, they embarked on the grandest project of all — the overhaul of the Tellurian source code. Those Nexplorers who remained in the alt now work on refining Reality 2.0 to mimic

the Adept dream. Then they'll download it to the Reality Coders who will make it a reality — there will be no difference between virtual space and meatspace. As within, so without.

Opinions: Nexplorers love the freedom that virtual space offers. They love the godlike ability to create their own environs and the amazing variety of worlds they can explore within the Web. Of course, some are quite angry that nightmares are allowed on the Web as well, but most realize that this is the price of recreating Reality. If they had the option, Nexplorers would spend the rest of their lives exclusively on the Web, but duty calls. They must be ready to unleash the Reality 2.0 project on Reality 1.0 soon; otherwise, the pressures put on the world by the Ascension War may end it. Strangely enough, one of the similarities they share with the Reality Coders is their difficulty with Paradox; the Nexplorers fall into significant Quiets more frequently than any other alt. <The running theory is that this tendency towards "Quiet" stems from the fluidity of virtual space; it's so easy to act like a god in there that some people retreat from their realspace frustrations into their own personal head space.>

Style: It's all about the computers, baby! In meatspace, high tech, flashy chrome, and the best rig money can buy. On the inside, rotes, rotes, rotes and hip Avatars that morph with just a thought. Back in meatspace, a number of Nexplorers train Reality Coders in Dream Hacking, since the landscapes of virtual space and the landscape of dreams are so similar. Correspondence is their key to power with Mind and Forces a nice backup in case you run into some juice you can't handle.

Getting In: The minute you log onto the Web, you're in Nexplorer territory and an honorary member to boot, but true Nexplorers have to prove themselves the hard way — through deeds, not words. Nexplorers constantly send reports back to our Tradition about the new things they've done and experienced. Kibos of all the alts download these for their members, and then send feedback along the Web. Those Nexplorers who get mentioned the most quickly achieve the title of Elite.

Rules: Nexplorers are, at heart, explorers. As such, the rules that govern their behavior are few. First, leave a clear trail — it helps you get back home if you get in trouble. Next, mark any dangers you find on your way. Finally, unblock anything preventing free access unless it's clearly marked as a danger. By the way, none of these rules apply to the enemy or its constructs, just for other Adepts. Because of the vastness of the Web, Nexplorers tend to be solitary, except for a biannual gathering where most of them meet online to brag about what they've seen and done. These gatherings are mandatory, so that they can keep track of their membership and ensure everyone is still safe.

ALT.POLITICS.NASTY



The dirty little secret of our Tradition is that we feel we're responsible for creating the Technocracy. Our founders are the ones who presented the idea of a universal paradigm based on math. At this point, it doesn't matter whether this is actually the reality of the situation; it's become a myth on which we've staked our pride. On many levels, we feel we're the "heirs" to the Technocracy's original dream — a safe and constructive world for humanity.

Such a belief, whether real or false, comes with certain consequences. We often feel isolated. We're enemies with our former allies, the Technocracy. We're not comfortable with our current allies in the Trads. Even the world, which sees computer usage increase sharply every year, uses Adept technology in ugly, frightening ways. Combine this justifiable paranoia with a group of highly individualistic people and you've got the recipe for some very nasty politics.

GETTING TOGETHER

When Adepts do get together *<about once or twice a year on average>*, we choose a couple of talents to run the chat, usually a Kibo and a Hacker. These can go by a number of names — the ones currently in vogue are "The Red King" and the "Queen of Hearts." Adepts choose these de facto leaders by straight vote; any Adept is allowed to vote as many times as they like in a set amount of time. This usually ensures that the more powerful Adepts, with their better understanding of Correspondence, produce the most votes. *<Yeah, but what H0usefly leaves out is that sometimes a whole bunch of junior Adepts gang up on an older Adept and take that advantage out.>* Any ties go to a sudden death runoff with a minute's worth of voting.

The Kibo who runs the gathering is the "Red King"; the Queen of Hearts, a Hacker, acts to eliminate any disruptive elements among the participants *<off with their heads!>*. Any hardcore arguments among the participants are handled by "Core Wars" overseen by the Queen. In a Core War, the "combatants" channel their Quintessence into a virtual battle that uses "reality" as weaponry. For example, one Adept may manifest a virtual snake to bite his opponent and his opponent may then conjure up a bird to eat that snake before it bites her. This keeps going until either (a) one of them runs out of Quintessence or (b) one of their "weapons" overpowers their opponent. The loser is then booted from the gathering.

Outside of Core Wars, all Adept functions last for a designated time limit or until a designated trigger event. *<Like the Technocracy raiding the meeting. That's my favorite one.>* At the end, everyone votes on the issues presented. The Red King then publishes the results along Cypherpunk-cleared channels.

People jockey for political support among their fellow Adepts through debate or bribery. Bribes come in the form of

CORE WARS: HOW THEY WORK

Here are the gritty details for those who like rules: The battling Adepts invest their Quintessence to set up a "server" partitioned out of the virtual realm. The two Adepts then set up battling viruses using an Intelligence + Computer (difficulty 8) roll. The successes gained are added to the Adept's Avatar dots to form the "attack" pool. The viruses are then charged with a point of Quintessence and set loose. The first contestant to score 25 total successes against the other mage wins. At any time, with the expenditure of one Quintessence point, the battling mages can rewrite the virus to try and "upgrade" their attacks. Any successes in excess of the original are added to the attack pool. Because mages tie their Avatars into the computer, they may take real damage from a Core War. A botch causes one Health Level's worth of non-aggravated damage.

future votes or logistical support for the bribed person's pet causes. Some of the older Adepts utilize Correspondence to bargain with multiple people at a time, figuring that one of the people they're bargaining with will win in the end.

Once the voting ends, the Red King and the Queen of Hearts have to figure out a way to enforce the new "laws," and they usually do this by co-opting cabals to deal with infractions. In exchange, the cabal gets the vote of the former Red King and Queen *<and hopefully all of their friends>* during the next gathering.

CODE OF ETHICS

The idea that the universe can be described mathematically is a simple one. Though the calculations that make up reality are complex, given enough computing power and time the Adepts will unravel the basic laws that make things function.

If it were only that simple with people....

The following is a list of guidelines that we Adepts have set up around our behavior. On any given occasion there are at least a dozen or more of these "laws" in effect, but the listed ones are the only ones that have stood the test of time. The other laws change from alt to alt, country to country, and sometimes even from mage to mage:

"Information will set you free." (*Common Internet phrase*)

Information itself has no desire to be free — in fact, it has no desires. Yet, the right information at the right time can literally change the world. This was seen with the development of language, the invention of tools, and the spread of the Technocracy. We're required under this code to make certain that the right people get the right information at the right

time. For friends and allies, this can be anything from the floor plans of the building they're about to raid to the location of money and resources ready for use. A number of Trads outside of the Adepts often receive unexpected telephone calls or e-mail just when they need it.

For our enemies, it means sending them a constant flow of why they are wrong, what they're doing wrong, and why they should defect to the Adepts and the Trads. This type of information gets flowed to places that embarrass and frustrate the enemy, like their communications networks *<earpieces for New World Order agents are the funniest>* and media outlets.

"Dream the dreams that have never been dreamt." (David Brower)

We're working towards a world that is understood and run by an enlightened humanity as a whole. To accomplish this *<and to educate those poor "unenlightened" Masses>*, we explore and create incessantly. With all of virtual space to map out and a chunk of the real world still under the Technocracy's thumb, there is a lot to do. Adepts gain the most prestige by accomplishing things that are unique and add to the distinctiveness of the Digital Web and the world.

"The greatest good for the greatest number." (Jeremy Bentham) and **"The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few... or the one."** (Spock)

Our Tradition is expected to work for the good of the world, especially for the Sleepers who make up the bulk of humanity. To do otherwise would lead to the same sense of "elite-ness" that lured the Technocracy to their inevitable march into global fascism. It's frustrating work and all too often Adepts abandon it to play in their own self-created digital playgrounds, but the Avatar Storm made this escape more difficult. In addition, a number of the older Adepts fear that too little contact with the outside world will lead us to individual — and permanent — Quiets. This would be devastating to a Tradition that doesn't have enough members as it is.

"The needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many." (Captain James Tiberius Kirk)

As much as our Tradition wants to work for the good of the many, we also need to pay attention to the needs of the individual. The only way our dream will succeed is if mankind gives up its standard means of control *<i.e. the ones set by the bad guys>* and recreates the world in its own image. We are expected to help individuals realize their dreams, even if it's as simple as providing a free trip to the Bahamas for a Sleeper clerk *<charged to the Technocracy, of course>* or obtaining an artifact for a frustrated Trad mage.

"Nobody gets left behind." (Experiment 626, Lilo & Stitch)

Since we're surrounded by enemies *<we like technology, so we keep running into the Technocracy — yuck>*, we often act

with a "siege mentality." This boils down to the simple law — protect your own. Our Tradition will go to great lengths to save fellow Adepts, even putting our own lives at risk. This includes Adept criminals or defectors; the "rescued" criminal is then dealt with in-house.

"He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster." (Friedrich Nietzsche)

We've got no specific provisions against killing; in fact some of our video-game inspired attitudes occasionally lead to a more callous outlook on human life. Still, an Adept who regularly murders people really upsets his fellow Adepts. They can be counted on to rein him in, usually by forcing him to practice "the good of the many" and "the good of the one" parts of the ethics code. *<And if the offender ignores that, you could always end the problem with a bullet to the head.>*

The same applies to perversity; we're more liberal because of our massive exposure to information *<hard to ignore that porn spam. Heh>*. Our concern is that this could lead to behavior that would make us rival the Nephandi. The truth is that Adepts continually have problems with mages slipping into Quiet or walking down a highly dangerous amoral path. We must always be on our guard, even around our friends, and watch out for signs of mental and spiritual decay.

ANARCHY AND THE "MAN"

With a loose code of ethics and our fierce sense of pride, there isn't much call for a "police force" in Adept society. Still, there are times when people overstep their bounds, harming a large number of Sleepers or divulging information that seriously endangers the Adepts. With that in mind, someone needs to do the punishing.

The main "investigators" for the Adepts come from the Chaotician alt. Complaints are brought to them and forwarded up the chain to a Chaotician who wants to play detective. This investigator then charges a price *<usually in info or resources>* for his services. Once the price is paid, the hunt is on.

The investigator relentlessly hunts down the facts on a case and then, best guess, determines what the truth really is. Once this is done, the investigator finds the offender and "Tags" him [see pp. 64-65 for the Tag rote]. A tagged target becomes free game for any cabal that wants to collect the bounty on him (the amount of the bounty is set by the investigator and deducted from his fee). The investigator then monitors the situation until the offender is brought to justice. *<What happens when the offender gets brought in? Um... afraid that depends on the person/people who got wronged. Let's just say that punishment is usually culturally (and dramatically) appropriate, from a slap on the wrist to lopped-off hands.>*

PARADIGM SHIFT



You've now heard bits and pieces of the Adept paradigm — here's where it all fits together.

The founders of the Difference Engineers and later the Virtual Adepts based their hopes upon the idea that everything can be described *<and thus manipulated>* with mathematics and numbers. For those of you ready to give up in disgust at that idea, look at all of your computers, televisions, telephones, and video games. They're all possible because of this simple premise. You can even see this premise reflected in other Trads *<like the Hermes House Fortuna, the Etherites, the Euthanatos, etc.>* — know where they got it? From us.

The founders' original dream became manifest in the Technocracy, which struggled to free the world from the horrors of supernatural domination and bring it into the enlightened age of reason. But something went horribly wrong, and the Technocracy proved to be as great an oppressor as those it once opposed. The Difference Engineers were forced to re-evaluate their dream and work for a different tomorrow than originally intended.

THE ADEPT DREAM

The world obviously has an origin, a "source code" or simple set of natural laws which form the basis for reality. Once those laws start to interact, they combine in wondrous and seemingly unpredictable ways. This makes up the diversity seen in the Tellurian sphere, a diversity that leads to a healthy and robust universe.

We want to find — and then teach — that source code so that everyone can shape reality to her own desires. In such a world, all things would be permitted save dominating someone else. In fact, if everyone knew the same laws, such enslavement would be impossible. We believe this tap into the universal paradigm would heal the wounds of the old reality and lead mankind to its final Ascension — the creation of a fully sentient universe.

To achieve this end, first we need to understand how the universe functions; that's become the focus of recreating reality in virtual space. If we can get it to work in there *<and we're damn close!>*, we can get it to work in real time. Then, we have to integrate what we've learned into the old reality. This requires a number of people digging up the download routes for Reality 2.0. Finally, we've got to have a lot of people on board with our ideals. The Technocracy pushes for stagnation and apathy, and for the most part the Sleepers now agree. We need Sleepers who want to change the world in order for our rewrite of reality to take hold and blossom.

THE ROLE OF COMPUTERS

The computer is the key to our dream's success. To our Tradition, it's obvious that everyone can have access to

magic. Everyone and everything is simply a Pattern, a mathematically precise string of energy that interrelates with other energies through the paradigm of space-time. Learn how to manipulate those energies and you can work miracles. On the other hand, it's painfully obvious that the majority of people are not as good at working magic as the Adepts. How do we resolve this fundamental difference between Adepts and Sleepers without becoming little tyrants in our own right?

Back in the late 1800s, one farsighted Adept described using magic by comparing it with sight. Some people have perfect vision, some don't, and a rare few are completely blind. Taking her cue, modern Adepts decided to revise the computer; instead of just being a calculating device, it could instead serve as a pair of mystical "glasses" for the magically impaired.

In this way, computers began shaping a new hope for mankind. People glimpsed alternate realities and different modes of thinking. Communication between people went from local to national to international in a blindingly short amount of time. The use of Correspondence became so prevalent that it was accepted as an ordinary fact of life. People even began calling their online personalities "Avatars" — just as we always intended.

AVATARS AND "AVATARS"

To avoid any confusion *<too late>*, Basic Mage 101 — all of us have capital-letter Avatars, that piece within us that allows us to work magic. What we've given to the Sleepers is lower-case "avatars": online, realtime representations of themselves that allow them to work magic in virtual space. When Reality 2.0 is triggered in realspace, the Sleepers' online "avatars" will merge with them and empower them to work magic in reality.

Now, despite the fact that there is so much work left to be done, our dream seems closer than ever. How many kids do you know who have a Playstation® at home? How many people use a laptop computer? How many have a cellular phone with the ability to link to the Web? It doesn't matter how much the technology will change. The people will clamor for more and more of it until all they can see is one great big dream.

Then we'll Wake them up and the world will become the dream.

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

THE TURING REVOLUTION: CORRESPONDENCE & THE REALITY HYPERSPHERE

The first Arithmeticians with the idea of mathematical reality phrased the beginning of time in the simplest possible manner. They believed a successful universe had to have three parts: the inside (the universe itself), the outside (whatever the universe sprang from), and the boundary (the

demarcation between what was outside and what was inside the universe).

Mages at the time came up with a number of ways to interpret it, but they always assumed that the inside was the core of the Tellurian <the Earth, the Near Umbra, and anything before you hit the Horizon>. Then, there was the Horizon, the “boundary” layer that divided the Near Umbra from the Deep Umbra and finally the Deep Umbra, which was everything else.

Simple, yes?

Well, it was simple until Turing turned it all on its ear. In the early stages of his amazing work on computers, he purported to have found a virtual reality that existed outside of the realms we already knew. The Technocracy found the idea repellent and murdered him for it, but in the end Turing had the last laugh. His final fight against his killers ripped a hole open in space-time to this new realm he had discovered, later named “The Digital Web” or virtual space.

Adepts rushed in to fill the gap and explore this strange new place. Though ultimately having to battle both the Technocracy and the Sleepers for control of it, as Turing’s disciples, we remained <and still are> the most powerful and most comfortable in virtual space. Only the White Out phenomenon, which occurred in concert with the Avatar Storm, threatened to dislodge us from our traditional place of power.

But what is virtual space? It took physicist Stephen Hawking to figure it out. Hawking used advanced mathematical theories to examine the fabric of space and time.

Believing them both to be manifestations of the Big Bang, he came up with a wonderful metaphor to describe how reality works — a metaphor we will now hijack.

The explosion of Quintessence that created the universe spread out in a very predictable pattern, first unevenly <which allowed things like Matter to emerge> and then finally spherically like a giant bubble. In the end, everything within space-time emerged simultaneously; that means that everything we know — the past, present, and future as well as everything within our universe and all its possibilities already exists in the “hypersphere” that makes up reality. Hawking’s model showed that everything we take for granted, from the Earth to the Umbra up to the Horizon and quite possibly beyond, exists on the boundary of the bubble. What lies outside is the Deep Umbra. What lies within the bubble? Turing’s virtual space!

Within the hypersphere <called the Hype by some unruly Adepts>, there is no space and time as we know it. Everything is relative to the center — the Correspondence Point where the Big Bang started — and everything on the boundary of the Hype (our reality) is equally reachable instantaneously from this center. Since space-time doesn’t exist inside the Hype, everything outside of the center must be described relative to one another — that is, mathematically. And when you’re talking about mathematics, you’re getting into the realm of the Adepts.

Much of our time is spent dropping our consciousness (or sometimes more) into virtual space and then pushing it out again somewhere else. Because our boundary reality is actually composed of space-time, we can even co-locate ourselves to multiple locations at the same time if we please <assuming the mage has the skill to pull it off>. A number of Adepts use technological foci to get this done (computers, telephones, etc.), but all you really need is the ability to juggle the mathematical equations in your head. Then all hell can break loose.

Correspondence proficiency has its benefits and drawbacks. While a Correspondence Adept has excellent spatial sense, his ability to co-exist in several locations <usually in realspace and virtual space> makes him seem clumsy and distracted. Adepts of Correspondence generally respond to things based on their relevance; if it doesn’t matter to a mage’s current agenda, it’s not worth reacting to. You’ve probably already met someone like this — the computer savant who is composing entire worlds in his head but can’t find the bathroom until he needs to pee.

Resonance Effects for Correspondence Adepts range from the mildly amusing to the obscene. Because of their affinity with space, the first things these Adepts notice is that distances seem to get shorter; you can reach that traffic light before it changes, or get the parking space before the other guy. Then, things that have the intent of finding you arrive more quickly; that check comes in the mail and a fellow Adept’s e-mail of a battle plan pops up instantly.

This would be a great boon if the mage existed in a vacuum, but beneficial distortions in space-time for him means someone else is suffering. In the case of the traffic

ADEPTS AND MOUNT QAF

COyOte commentary again. All right, so we keep hearing this rumor/not rumor about a group of mystics called the “Subtle Ones” (the Batini) who were all about Correspondence and got to our virtual space first. According to myth, they discovered “Mount Qaf,” some sort of Sufi magic mountain that would lead to ultimate Unity and Ascension once everybody was hooked up to it (via “the web of faith”). Then they got uppity and arrogant and the big, bad Technocracy came around and blew up their Mount Qaf. According to the arrogant SOB who let me look at the books, the remaining Batini think we’re just playing around in the ashes of their exploded mountain.

Hate to tell them this, but I personally think they’re crackers. One mind, one voice? I don’t know about you, but I’ve got no interest in going Borg. Yeesh. Besides, you can’t blow up virtual space. The ongoing theory among our senior Adepts (whatever you can call senior after the Avatar Storm) is that the Batini stumbled across a Horizon Realm that mirrored virtual space. You can learn a lot from looking in a mirror but you can’t learn everything. So, kudos to those Batini who really pushed the Correspondence envelope, but you belong to a different time, boys. Get over it.

lights, a number of accidents have been caused when people realized the distance between themselves and their destination had suddenly changed. And, while it's wonderful getting the info you need, it becomes really nasty when the thing seeking you out is an It-X in a hardsuit.

RACE THE LIGHTNING: FØRCES

We live in an electric age, with the pulse of the city beating through the heart of a million silicon chips. It is an age of wonders and it is the Age of the Computer! Beyond the sphere of Correspondence, the Adept's greatest understanding lies in the world of Forces. *<You'd think it would be Time with all that space-time mumbo-jumbo we've just been talking about, but no — we're good at Forces because every young pup wants to make those damned lightning bolts.>*

Ever put a ball on a flat rubber sheet? See how the rubber sheet bends in where the ball sits? That's gravity — a bending of space-time by matter. And anything that has to do with space-time has to do with us. Gravity can be a snap if you know the proper combination of Matter, Forces, and Correspondence.

And electricity? That's the flow of energy from place to place; again, Correspondence. Heat? Things far enough apart that they bounce off each other exchanging energy. Cold? Things close enough together that they can no longer move. Everything deals with the movement of Quintessence through patterns. Everything that deals with movement deals with

space and that makes it ours. Forces is Correspondence's greatest trick, a cool illusion that we've got great control over.

Adepts who use Forces usually use man-made energies rather than natural ones. For some reason, it's easier for us to pull a lightning bolt out of an electrical socket than to call it down from the heavens. Even gravitic manipulation takes some serious hardware, unless the Adept at hand really knows his Correspondence to the nth degree.

Control of Forces really shines though in virtual space, where command of vital energies can make the difference between a successful run on a Technocracy database and a brain fry on It-X defenses. Every Nexplorer out there has at least a functional understanding of this basic Sphere, and they use it for everything from defense to investigation to manipulation of data.

Dealing with an Adept who uses Forces can be intense. His constant manipulation of energy has an impact on the human nervous system, making him prone to irritability and emotionalism. More than that, a Forces mage becomes hyper-aware, sleeping less and doing more than most normal mages. The downside is that he also tends to burn out and enter Quiet more often as well.

The standard Resonance Effect witnessed with a Forces Adept is the surge; as they get around wiring, static charges build up, interfering with computer monitors, cell-phones, or other electronic devices. With delicate devices this can be lethal, but for most modern devices it simply means they wear



out faster and glitch more. Forces Adepts either build their rigs with redundant features or pre-conditioning to make the rig surge-tolerant *<and you will definitely need something more than just the classic thyristor>*. In virtual space, Forces Resonance manifests itself as a noticeable glow around the mage, something that has, on more than one occasion, led to a person being identified as an Adept.

FOUNDING FORCE: TIME

You might notice that in the Correspondence section, we referred to reality as a product of space-time. Yep, that's right — current thought links space and time together, neither actually existing without the other. You'd think, given that fact, Adepts would be the masters of space and time. The truth is we're pretty good at Time. It's probably our best one behind Space and Forces.

The only problem lies when you get into the higher realms of Time, when you start bending, twisting, and mutilating it. At that point, the Adept's love of orderly mathematics gets in the way. Ask any computer programmer if he likes to see glitches in his program appear before he programs them, and see what his response is. The same thing applies to Adepts.

Among the Adepts, the Chaoticians use Time the most, honing their predictions about future events. It's also almost a requirement for Hackers who use Time to work undisturbed in the relatively safe zone of virtual space.

Still, if you really want to learn some good \$hit about this Sphere, go spend some time (no pun intended) with the CoE. They'll turn your head around the block a few times *<and leave you with the memories of some great parties that may or may not have happened/will happen/are happening>*.

Time Adepts have the most annoying habit of paying attention to minute details and then warning you about what is to come — not the real important things, just the things your mum would warn you about. "Look out for that. You might burn yourself." or "Tie your shoes. You might trip." Still, when it comes to scheduling, they are the most amazing creatures, having intimate knowledge of how to organize one's time in a way that really works.

Resonance on a Time mage can be quite hard and appears in the form of "lost time." It can be a moment in time when a lot of things happen, or a stretch of time where nothing seems to get done at all. It affects the mage and everyone immediately around him, which has led to interesting complications, especially when trying to adhere to a time-sensitive plan.

PURE JUICE: PRIME

Prime is the stuff of creation, pure and simple. If you think about it, when everybody in the Trads talks about Forces, they're usually talking about Prime's interaction with space-time. Like most mages, Adepts picture Prime as a huge tapestry of energy. The really interesting parts are the knots. These are the bits that make up matter, life, variety, and that

skateboard in the closet. The smooth stuff that's in between those bits? More Prime. Outside the Universe? Still more Prime. Inside the Hypersphere? Yep — more Prime.

Relatively little of this immense energy is available to any given Adept but what they can do with it is impressive. Prime is used to mold reality inside virtual space, shaping sections into whatever we desire. It's also the quickest defense against anything an online It-X cyberkiller can throw at you.

With this in mind, Nexplorers love to play in Prime, followed closely by their Reality Coder "cousins." In the past, Nexplorers used Prime to format large chunks of virtual space to their ideals, but as time has gone on *<and the Nexplorers have grown up>*, they've been making more and more "open-source" sites, where each person experiences that realm in his own unique way. Sleepers may enter one of these Prime-laden zones and think it's the website of their dreams. Technocracy agents may enter the same zone and believe that they're going through a Construct, even as they pass by Adepts working on plans to stop them. It's all in the perception...

Reality Coders believe that Nodes on Earth may serve as anchors to the reality around them, much as Prime "formatting" does in virtual space. The Coders think that when Reality 2.0 is finished, these Nodes will be the points from which they will channel R2.0's information into the heart of the Tellurian.

The Adepts of Prime are a strange lot, treating everything as ephemeral. In truth, pretty much everything is to them; they tend to see the world in terms of its patterns *<think of the green coding at the end of the Matrix movie for a good visual>*. They tend to be very calm, acting emotionless as if everything was unreal.

Prime Resonance Effects for Adepts are strange ones. Color, for some reason, blends out around them, fading towards white. There's a joke going around Kibo circles that Prime Elites look more like members of the Choristers than proper Hackers. Prime mages in virtual space take on a much more solid appearance than normal Avatars. Experts in Prime look as if they had manifested an actual body in virtual space.

THE PLACE OF DREAMS: MIND

We'll admit it — Mind is a bit new to us. It only came into vogue after the Cypherpunks discovered the mind rape perpetrated by the New World Order. But now, it's taken on a life of its own. Reality Coders use it to explore people's dreams. Cypherpunks use it to design hacking rites for their neurolinguistics programs. Nexplorers use it to create computer viruses that affect targets in virtual and real space. And there's always some juicy gossip about the Chaoticians using Mind to mess with Technocrat spies.

The most interesting aspect about Mind, though, is its effect on information. It's a simple truth that perception flavors how we deal with reality. Your perceptions are shaped by what information reaches them. Thus, control the information and you control one's sense of reality. Right now, there are at least a dozen Technocracy agents curled up in

little balls, living out lives in illusory worlds while Adepts download the information they want. *<We call that place "The Menagerie," and it drives the Technocracy nuts when/if they end up rescuing their agents; the only memories we leave about the interrogation look like the pilot episode of "Star Trek.">*

Some Adepts run Mind-based programs that allow them to go on intense Seekings, searching the depths of their mindscapes to better understand their Avatars. And then there are Sleepers, their eyes opened by a **Decrypt** rote [see the **Encrypt** rote on pp. 65], finally seeing the sheer amount of propaganda being foisted on them by the Technocracy. Some Sleepers, a rare few, even Awaken in the process. All of that due to the power of a Mind Adept!

Mind Adepts often answer questions before you finish asking them, an issue that gets on a lot of people's nerves. They are also hypersensitive to other people's emotions and generally play the peacemaker in any cabal. *<It kind of sucks when they get stuck with the hyper-emotional Forces Adepts, but hey, that's the price we pay for Ascension, right?>*

Resonance Effects for a Mind Adept seem relatively small. A lot of Mind Adepts possess a "piercing gaze" that people say "can see right through them." Sometimes that unnerves people; sometime it's the recipe for a really hot date. A few poor Adepts get that wild-eyed "I know what you're thinking" stare that seriously creeps people out. Those unfortunate bastards spend most of their time out of the public limelight, usually in virtual space, where the only notable side effect of Mind is attracting random data *<like those annoying e-mails that promise to increase the size of a body part>*.

LAW OF NATURE: ENTROPY

Entropy is an interesting thing; it obviously falls under the rules of chaos, affecting things like probability and luck. It also causes the breakdown of ordered systems. Because of this, most Adepts avoid it like the plague. They hate the idea of their rigs breaking or programs glitching at inopportune moments. But Entropy has a very valuable place in our universe; from its "soil" everything else springs. Adepts who study it claim it is a manifestation of the primal forces from outside the universe. Whether they are right or not is still a matter of debate.

Regardless of what it actually is, those Adepts who follow the Chaotician alt follow it wholeheartedly. It is the foil against which they test all of their equations, and it is the tool from which they bend probability to their desires. Expert Chaotician Hackers use it to unravel the most complex Technocratic schemes and some brave Kibos risk their sanity breaking information down to its most basic level in their quest for the universal source code.

Practitioners of the Entropy Sphere all tend to be risk takers. This may manifest as an obsessive rolling of dice to something as dangerous as hacking into a factory full of It-X cyberkillers. This has stereotyped these Adepts as more like "rock stars" than mathematicians, as they gamble the night

away at poker or bet on obscure things like fluctuations over the daily amount of cooked hamburger.

Entropic Resonance among Adepts takes the form of improbable things occurring around them. A program may work better than expected (or a bug-free program may crash). A much-needed item may appear just when desired. Or that scaffolding you were worried about immediately collapses. Either way, living around an Entropic mage is highly interesting.

BUILDING BLOCKS: MATTER

You'd think that, given the Adepts' delving into physics, we'd have no problem comprehending the state of matter. *<It's just slowed down energy, after all.>* But there seems to be a mental block that accompanies such understanding. It's one thing to say that lead and gold are the same at the atomic level. It's another thing to grasp how to change one into the other.

Therefore, Matter remains one of our weaker Spheres (though not our weakest). Some of the more tech-minded Adepts, the ones who build computers from scratch, have a knack for it, but for the most part, if you want something done with Matter, go to the Sons of Ether. *<Then sit on them to make sure they make it to your specs and don't accidentally add any of the special doodads they're so famous for.>*

Adepts who practice Matter live like King Midas. They have the sleekest clothes, the coolest rigs, and über-cybernetics. Of course, they inevitably have to deal with poorer Adepts who want that touch-more tech to really be supreme. It can be dangerously oppressive at times, and there have been Matter Adepts who became estranged loners, only comfortable with Etherites who have the same problem.

Matter always goes wobbly around Matter Adepts, at least as far as Resonance goes. Their cigarette lighters get a golden sheen; their clothing looks better. This works even with possessions handed to them by others, but it never really lasts. While this sounds great in practice, it does have consequences. Cars are supposed to be made from ugly steel rather than pretty silver, because steel is strong and sturdy. When a Matter Adept's car starts looking all buff and shiny, you know it's only a matter of time before the pistons come shooting out of the hood.

CARBON-BASED COMPLEXITY: LIFE

Life is essentially matter with a little bit of juice in it. It can be subtle, and most Adepts — well, we're not known for being very subtle in meatspace. So, half the time, we leave this stuff up to the Verbena. The Verbena are good dancers, fun at parties, and when your cyber-limb gets blown off, they can zap it back on to the fleshy parts in minutes.

The only "experts" among the Adepts in Life are the Reality Coders, as part of their quest to learn everything they can about the Tellurian. The best among them have been known to "hack life," doing all sorts of wonderful things to other people's DNA. They make good plastic surgeons, too.

Knowing a Life Adept can be creepy since their appearance never seems to be quite real. They're always a bit bustier, a bit cleaner, a bit better built than the rest of us. It's not even a conscious thing; their Avatar simply takes the time to make little improvements here and there. Occasionally, it's even been known to spread, with cabal mates resembling more and more their Life Adept ally.

Resonance for Life Adepts can be a bitch. On the plus side, they resonate with the life around them. If they're dealing with basically healthy people, they stay healthy and sane. But if they do Life rites on someone who's infected with something, it's even odds that they'll contract the same disease. It's like hacking an infected computer in virtual space. Once in, the virus is just waiting for the right opportunity to take you out.

THE GREAT UNKNOWN: SPIRIT

We'll admit it. We're not too strong on the Spirit thing. For Kibo's sake, don't the Trads get that Spirit is just energy? Why isn't it lumped into Forces like practically every other power source? Or Prime? Unfortunately, that wouldn't suit the Trads that really like spirits so it probably just comes down to politics.

Some of us use Spirit to strengthen our online Avatar; most Adepts stay far away from it. The most common Adepts you see working with Spirit stuff are Reality Coders, and they end up looking more like their Dreamspeaker counterparts than real Hackers. Some of these Coders even call themselves "urban primitives," relying on things like the information on the street <which they call the "infranel"> and the "ghosts in the machines." Rumor has it there's even a group that works with a bunch of shapechangers doing gremlin runs on "bad" corporations.

You'll know a Spirit Adept when you see one; they're kind of hard to miss. They talk to things that aren't there, and treat the "spirits" around them just like you or me. I've seen a Spirit Adept carry on a 30-minute conversation with a light bulb. Whether that means they're getting good information or just acting crazy to impress the rest of us I can't say.

The only way I can describe Resonance with Spirit Adepts is "haunted." Lights turn on automatically when they're around, and there have been reports of Adepts letting spirits program for them. It isn't known if spirits can pop up in virtual space; frankly I wouldn't want to meet any of them if they did.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: PARADIGM

To the members of our Tradition, it's painfully obvious that everything in reality boils down to two things: energy and its position in space-time. Information is an exchange of energy that allows patterns to determine how they relate to each other. This doesn't mean information has to be simple. Pattern relationships can be described in such wonderfully complex and intricate ways that you could spend lifetimes studying them and never reach the end of their diversity. Most mages just take

a piece of that diversity and run with it. That's why you've got Trads, with their Hermetic sigils and Dreamspeaker rituals. That's why you've got the Technocracy with their scientific jargon and "Enlightened Sciences." The Adepts don't just want a piece of it. We want all of it.

We want to stand at the center of creation and select our reality based on a deliberate choice rather than the whims of fate. To get that unfettered viewpoint, you need to enter a place outside of normal space and time. You need to enter the Correspondence Point. From there, you realize that the only thing blocking you from a reality of your choosing is your state of mind, your paradigm. Once the limits of your own paradigm are shattered <much like when you originally Awakened> then complete control over your own Reality is only moments away.

At least, that's how it goes in theory. Information as reality is an easy concept to grasp but not an easy one to actualize. Trads, by not recognizing the possibility of a unifying Sphere, have limited themselves as much as the Technocracy has. To their credit, though, they've got good reason — the Pogrom has made them wary of uniformity.

Still, regardless of how they think, we know the truth — that behind it all, Reality is just a matter of perspective and the one who can shape that information shapes the world.

PERKS OF THE JOB

Life among the Adepts can be hard, but it comes with some perks. Here are a few benefits unique to our Tradition.

NEW KNOWLEDGE: VIRTUAL SPACE

The Green Man screamed as lightning arced through his body. "How can you do this?" he begged to the silver-skinned thing torturing him. "It was just a game..." Alicia 'Video Vixen' Sims watched the whole scene and sighed. The Green Man wasn't the first Sleeper to be trapped in this simulation, and he probably wouldn't be the last. She looked over to the wall next to her and sub-voiced a command to her deck. Codes danced along the wall as a program activated and a weapon emerged from the stone. Taking the flaming sword in hand, she stepped into the light and confronted the silver-skinned torturer. Time to save the day again....

Turing's sacrifice opened the way to a brand new realm; since then, everybody who can access it has been exploring it. A person with the Virtual Space Knowledge has explored more than most and can proudly point out the core rules of this new reality.

Knowledge of virtual space allows you to locate your position in this realm (relative to other sites) and uncover the "rules" to the realm you are in, and even in certain cases to access the "program" of that realm and modify it. In realspace, this skill is used when dealing with machines connected to virtual space, tracing phone numbers, navigating the Internet, or hacking into TV transmissions.

- Novice: You know how to get in to virtual space (then again, so do most Sleepers).

- Practiced: You're getting the hang of it and are even pretty good at getting to where you want to go.
- Competent: Need to know what makes a virtual world tick? No problem! Just give you a few minutes and you can figure out all the rules with ease.
- Expert: Virtual space is a walk in the park for you. It's like you've got all the cheat codes right in your hand.
- Master: You've seen Turing's work. He's good but you're going to be better.

Possessed by: Nexplorers, Cyberpunks, programmers, Hackers.

Specialties: Virtual worlds, data flow, search, retrieve data, block.

NEW MERITS & FLAWS

WELL CONNECTED (3-PT MERIT)

Your name is well known throughout virtual space, and you can expect some assistance from other people online. This can range from other Awakened mages to simple Sleepers who like the "cool guy" they've been talking to. Help can vary as well, but usually comes in the form of information.

PRONE TO QUIET (4-5-PT FLAW)

An Adept inflicted with this flaw falls into Quiet more easily than most mages. This is unfortunately common among Nexplorers and Reality Coders for different reasons. Nexplorers fall prey to it because they escape into digital fantasy to relieve frustrations. Reality Coders gain it because their work in realspace leads to quicker accumulation of Paradox. Storytellers may impose a "Quiet roll" on mages with this flaw in times of stress. The player must roll Intelligence + Enigmas against a target number set by the Storyteller based on the severity of the stress.

COMBAT ROTES

HERE KITTY, KITTY (CORRESPONDENCE •••, MIND •••, TIME •••)

Straight up — this is an insane rote and recommended only for the desperate. Basically, it's used in a firefight to bring in someone/something that hates your opponent. The catch is that the critter you call up may not like *you* either. The original creator of this rote, an Adept named Zer0 Effect, snagged a werewolf with it on his first try and ended up in a hospital for the better part of a year. Still, his opponent ended up in a very small pine box so the situation did have an upside. You can find this rote in the Adept data storage under a "Tweety Bird" icon. Zer0 said this cartoon, in which a "helpless little bird" lures a cat into worse and worse danger, inspired him. One day he pictured the cat as the big, bad Technocracy and knew he had to create this rote.

System: The Mind Sphere draws out something that the target fears (Occult Lore helps as well), while Correspondence and Time ensure that the object of that opponent's fear shows up. Please note that this is NOT a teleport rote (though some

Hacker geeks did devise something called "Summon Critter" that uses Life •••• or Matter •••• to port monsters in). To reduce Paradox and get around some anti-magic wards, Zer0 decided to draw critters in using coincidental means. Correspondence opens up a coincidental "path" for the creature to follow; Time makes sure it shows up before the combat ends. A safer variant on this rote uses Forces instead of Time to make a hologram appear instead of a real creature.

MET: Disciple Correspondence, Disciple Mind, Disciple Time. The caster must perform a statistical analysis on his target, which requires at least five uninterrupted minutes. This will determine what the target is afraid of, after which the Narrator is involved to bring the beastie in.

IFF (CORRESPONDENCE ••, FORCES ••)

According to some Cyberpunks, this is a surefire way to mess with It-X agents. IFF is a combat rote, designed to confuse enemies so that they cannot recognize friend from foe. It works by altering the stream of information entering a target's perception rather than the target itself. <Rumor has it the name "IFF" comes from a couple of sources. In mathematics, IFF is a Boolean expression meaning "if and only if." In this case, "If and only if you are outnumbered 10 to one, use this rote." Video game junkies probably recognize the other meaning — "Identify Friend or Foe," referring to technology used by jet fighters to mark them as "friendly" to their allies.>

System: The Adept uses Correspondence to locate and "copy" the image of a suitable enemy. Through Forces, the Adept and the person he copied now appear indistinguishable to the target's senses of sight and hearing. This works best in larger, chaotic combats and not in one-on-one battles. For each success on the casting, subtract one from the target's attack roll. Any previous targeting is also lost, and the target must choose who he wants to fire at (the Storyteller must decide in advance which one is the Adept and which one is the person he copied).

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Forces. After a successful casting, the Adept bids mental traits against the target. If the target succeeds in a Mental Challenge, he hits the mage, but his damage is reduced by one Health Level. If the target fails, he hits the false copy instead.

LEARN-IT (CORRESPONDENCE ••, ENTROPY ••, PRITIE •••, TIME ••)

Learn-It is a nasty rote that highlights evolution in action. Once activated, it attaches itself to the target's Essence and blends right in. Then, it starts calling up enemies and challenges appropriate to the target's current power level. It's like wearing a big, red Kick-Me sign with flashing neon lights and an alarm. Do or die, baby — that's the lesson of **Learn-It**. Some bitter graduates of the **Learn-It** program have claimed a better name would be "Cannon Fodder," but if we called it that, the Technocracy would stop downloading **Learn-It** to "discover Adept secrets."



System: For every success on the casting, the target becomes a magnet for one skill-appropriate challenge per session. This could mean anything from a pain-threatening situation (a piano dropping on your head, falling scaffolding, etc.) to enemies coincidentally showing up. The number of challenges can be modified by the original caster, assuming the original caster can be found (**Learn-It** is available in a number of Wonders, both on and off the Digi-Web). It can also be modified, but not negated, by those with Prime 2, to reduce the effect down to a minimum of one challenge per session. To negate the rote completely, you need an Elite with Prime 3 and Entropy 3, so once it's activated, you're usually stuck with it until you progress to that level.

MET: *Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Entropy, Adept Prime, Initiate Time.* The number of challenges caused by this rote is dictated by the number of Mental Traits placed in the Wonder or risked in the casting. The Traits are used to challenge the victim in a Simple Test. In the case of a tie, whatever Traits are left over determine the challenge level. If the casting is successful but the Simple Test is not, then the minimum challenges set on the victim are one per session. It takes someone with Adept Entropy and Adept Prime to undo a **Learn-it** rote.

SEARCH ENGINE (CORRESPONDENCE ••, ENTROPY •, PRIME •)

Also known as "Telephone," use this rote when you are looking for a Hacker or a Kibo to fit your needs. It either puts you in touch with someone who matches your request or someone who knows them. It should be noted that you can't find a specific person with this rote (though more advanced versions do exist to perform that function), just people who fit a general need.

System: Correspondence is used to cast a wide net to search for your target. Prime is used to locate the target via his or her Essence (see the section on *Names*, pp. 43-44, for more information on why this is important). Entropy makes sure that this person fits your needs. Each success gives you a 20% chance of locating the target or someone connected to that person. Be careful with this rote! There have been rare occasions when the best teacher for the situation turned out to be a member of the Technocracy — much to the Adept's (and the Technocrat's) surprise.

MET: *Initiate Correspondence, Apprentice Entropy, Apprentice Prime.* For this to work, the caster risks a number of Mental Traits (up to three) in a simple test against a Narrator. Each Mental Trait indicates how close the person is to what he wants. One Mental trait gives you 30% of what you want — either a person with significantly reduced skills, or someone who barely knows the person you want. Two Mental Traits give you a person with slightly below average skills or someone who knows someone who knows the mage in question. Three Mental Traits give you someone with the skills you want or someone who directly knows them. If the target, for some reason, does not want to be found, the number of Mental Traits needed to cast this rote can double or triple,

as per the Narrator's discretion. Alternatively, the Narrator can let the target know he's being sought, but not let the caster know who the target is.

HACKER ROTE

NICK OF TIME

(CORRESPONDENCE ●●●, ENTROPY ●●, TIME ●●)

This allows a Hacker to arrive in a timely fashion to a number of situations. For the most part, this is used to gain jobs. With the use of this rote, the Hacker just happens to be online at the same time, at an adjoining table, or any other coincidental means of connecting with a prospective client.

Other Hackers use this to be the proverbial "cavalry," arriving at a desperate situation with guns blazing. The problem with this is that the **Nick of Time** rote only ensures the mage arrives somewhere on time — it doesn't ensure survival. A number of Adepts using this rote's "cavalry" option have ended up facing enormous odds and receiving great kudos... posthumously.

System: Correspondence and Time are used to identify the location in question and make sure that the mage arrives there in time for the favorable event to occur. Entropy is used to ensure that the mage enters in the best way possible (usually appearing coincidentally and when just the right questions are asked). It does not ensure the success of the mission, only that the Hacker has the potential to maximize benefit from the situation. The Hacker casting the rote must first have some working knowledge of what's going on, even if it's vague ("There's a meeting at the docks tonight" would be enough for this rote). Once the Hacker casts this rote, on a single success, he or his virtual Avatar will arrive on the scene in time for the situation to unfold. If some sort of countermagic is involved (wards or sometimes even a magical battle), then it becomes a contested roll, even if the countering mage doesn't know what he's fighting against.

MET: *Disciple Correspondence, Initiate Entropy, Initiate Time.* After casting this rote, the Adept must inform a Narrator of his casting and then succeed in a Static Test for the rote to work. The Narrator will then bring the Adept to the meeting (or other event) when it happens and allow the Adept to enter play when it appears to be advantageous for the Adept (it is the Narrator's choice — as the representation of Entropy — when this is). The Narrator may also choose to "freeze" a meeting and bring the Adept in during it, but this can be disruptive to play and should be used sparingly. If the targets of this rote are Awakened (a very likely thing), then the Adept must enter into a test with them, as per the countermagic rules, even if the other mages are not actively resisting this rote. Please note that the mage will be brought in by coincidental means and will not be able to break through warded rooms, locked buildings or the like without the use of other magic.

KIBO ROTE

CORE DUMP (CORRESPONDENCE ●●, TIME ●● AND FORCES ●●● OR MIND ●●●)

This rote enables a load of useless data to be directly dumped to a computer (Forces) or a person (Mind). The Effect is intended to be overwhelming and normally prevents the target from acting while he tries to process the information.

System: For each success, the target is unable to initiate an action for three turns. If the number of successes equal the target's current Willpower, computers shut down and the target lapses into a temporary coma (from which he emerges after making a successful Willpower roll once a day). After a coma/shutdown, some general loss of memory is to be expected, though the victim may remember some of the contents of the core dump.

MET: *Initiate Correspondence, Disciple Forces or Disciple Mind, Initiate Time.* After babbling uninterrupted at the target for a full minute, the Adept casting this rote causes the person to be dazed for one minute per conflict with a successful Mental vs. Mental challenge. This rote can be immediately overcome with Willpower Traits but the attacking Adept can continue the rote by expending three Mental Traits to try again. If a person with no Willpower Traits is attacked with this rote, he falls into a temporary coma that will end either when his Willpower Traits replenish, or during the next game session (whichever comes first).

CHAOTICIAN ROTES

DON'T CROSS THE STREET

(CORRESPONDENCE ●●, TIME ●●)

This rote is used to warn mages of potential danger. Correspondence is used to scry in on a specific location and then Time gives an impression of what might go wrong. Sometimes the warnings are very specific ("Don't cross that power line with any Forces magics"), and sometimes they're cryptic ("The red may kill"). A mage may use this rote multiple times from different vantage points to further pinpoint where and what the danger may be.

System: On a simple success, the Storyteller provides a vague clue as to something that could go wrong. More successes should give more and more clues. Five or more successes will give the exact danger that the mage may have to face.

MET: *Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Time.* Upon a successful test, the caster must engage in a Static Test against the Narrator. Success will give the mage direct information about any dangers he might face. A tie will give him a clue about what he will face. A failure will give him only vague warnings. The Ability *Investigation* allows a retest.

TAG (CORRESPONDENCE ●●, PRITIE ●●●)

This rote is designed to alter the Essence of a person so that he is identifiable as a criminal to other Adepts. The marking is invisible to the one affected and has no effect

except for its stated purpose. Properly done tags include a "signature" of the tagging mage so that no one can mistake it for anything other than an official condemnation.

System: Each casting success subtracts one from the difficulty for other Adepts to notice the tag. This mark is invisible to other mages, but may be noticed by mages well versed in Prime.

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Adept Prime. The target must be physically touched and "drawn on" (with a possible Physical challenge), though this may be done at a distance using Correspondence. Narrators may ask the target to wear an identifying sticker to ensure that other Adepts notice the afflicted mage.

CYBERPUNK ROTES

ARC (CORRESPONDENCE ••, FORCES ••)

One of the most basic Cyberpunk rites, Arc allows an Adept to pull an electrical discharge from any nearby power source. This lightning bolt then arcs around the room hitting everything within a broad category set by the caster (for example, all machines in the room, all people, all plants, etc.).

System: The Adept uses Correspondence to target, and then unleashes an attack with Forces. She has a chance to hit every target within visual range, up to an amount equal to her Wits + Shoot rating, even if one or more targets are hidden or behind cover. Damage is based on the power source the Adept is drawing from, inflicting harm as per the electrocution rules (p. 248 of the *Mage* rulebook). The damage only lasts a single turn and will not affect grounded targets.

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Forces. For every Mental Trait expended, the caster can hit one thing in a broad category with a lightning bolt drawn from a nearby power source. A simple test against moving targets will cause a hit. Damage is based upon the power source, generally one to three levels of bashing damage.

ENCODE (CORRESPONDENCE ••, LIFE OR MATTER ••, PRIME ••)

This is a variant on the Apportation Effect (see the *Mage* rulebook, p. 159) and allows the mage to store something in virtual space to pull out later. There's nothing more frightening than seeing a giggling Cyberpunk use this rote to manifest a chunk of C-4 into her hand.

This rote is done only on very simple patterns (small plants, simple creatures, homogenous materials) until higher levels of the required Spheres are reached. Theoretically, a near infinite amount of items could be stored in virtual space, but realistically, the amount that is stored is limited to what the Adept can access using her *Virtual Space Knowledge Ability* (generally, two times the number of dots in items). Because it removes something completely from realspace, this rote is always considered Vulgar.

System: On a successful casting, an item is sent to or retrieved from virtual space. A botch means the item is permanently lost. The Prime Sphere is used to subtly channel

the target's pattern into virtual space or back to realspace. Please note that items in virtual space do not age or decay but may be found there by Adepts or other similar explorers at any time. Living creatures may not walk away (since space and time don't exist in virtual space) unless they are put into a specific digital realm by the caster.

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Prime. To claim an item from virtual space, the mage must successfully cast this rote and expend a Mental Trait. Apported items should be handed to the Narrator in exchange for a card that indicates that the item is "stored" on the mage's computer.

CYPHERPUNK ROTES

ENCRYPT (MIND •••, TIME •••)

This rote, also known as Babel, prevents information from being pried out of someone's head. Whenever coercion occurs, the person will speak solely in gibberish, composed of all the thoughts in their memory, randomly scrambled so that they make no sense. Telepathy or truth serums will not work, as this rote fundamentally changes the way people remember things. When the Mind component is swapped out for Forces, it makes an equally effective protection for digital information and has been used to hide vital Adept data by scrambling all of the coding on the computer so it becomes meaningless binary data. The reverse of this rote, **Decrypt**, will reveal text or thoughts obscured by magic, and is often used for exposing NWO propaganda for what it is.

System: For each success in the casting, the opponent's Interrogation or Investigation skills are reduced by one. **Decrypt** increases these same skills by one for every success.

MET: Disciple Mind, Disciple Time. For the duration of the rote, the Interrogation or Investigation skill may not be used for a retest. **Decrypt** removes this restriction from enchanted subjects.

WORTH

(MIND ••••, ENTROPY OR TIME •• (OPTIONAL))

This neurolinguistic rote is used to erase mental secrets and codes vital to the Adept Tradition's survival. It was originally adapted and upgraded from a New World Order rote known as the T-Virus. It does not change the Adept's personality or alter any of his knowledge of the Spheres or general skills.

System: Mind is used to locate and erase memories. Entropy and Time, which are both optional, ensure that the memories removed are only those relating to Adept secrets and not ones the ex-Adept will need later on. This is not necessary to the casting, but most Adepts use it out of respect for their fellow members. On a single success, most overt memories of Adept secrets will be erased. Multiple successes will erase more subtle memories. A critical success will erase all conscious and subconscious traces of the Adepts, leaving only an Awakened mage who is eager to embrace a new Tradition (whatever that may be).

MET: Adept Mind, Initiate Entropy or Initiate Time. The caster must use Willpower Traits to erase the memory of his target, challenging the target in a Simple Test (the target may

relent if desired) to see if the erasure is successful. To fully erase another's memories, the caster must expend more Willpower Traits than his opponent's current Willpower score.

NEXPLORER ROTES

WEBCRAWLERS

(CORRESPONDENCE ●●●, FORCES ●●●, PRIME ●●)

This rote enables Nexplorers to create small energy-based, arachnid-like creatures in virtual space that follow very simple commands. Generally, they search out information (or its location) for their creator or protect the mage by weaving a suffocating web of force around an enemy. Dreamspeakers who have seen this rote in action claim that the Nexplorers are luring spirit creatures from another plane into virtual space (there is an alternate version of this rote that uses Spirit instead of Prime, further blurring the question). The Nexplorers could care less as long as the rote works.

System: On a success, a Webcrawler is created with 3 Health and the ability to follow simple commands. Multiple successes create multiple webcrawlers. These last for about a scene and will perform one of two general tasks for their creator: find or protect. A find command will set them loose to locate one piece of information that they will retrieve if possible (this only applies if the information is unguarded and not warded). Otherwise, they will simply log the location and report it to the creator. A protect command will let them use the Correspondence part of the rote to bar an area from passage. Multiple webcrawlers can use this to "box" an enemy in with webbed strands of pure Correspondence. Victims of this attack can defeat the webcrawlers before they are trapped, use countermagic, or wait until the webcrawlers vanish at the end of the scene.

MET: Disciple Correspondence, Disciple Forces, Disciple Prime. Mental Traits may be spent to summon multiple webcrawlers with a successful casting. These are represented by cards that may be given to the Narrator (to find information) or used in an attack against an opponent.

REALITY CODER ROTES

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

(CORRESPONDENCE ●●, MIND ●●)

This is also known as the "Usher Syndrome," and has been used in the past as both a means for enlightenment and torture. The IOrote affects the target's mind, tuning his perception way up. Used positively, it can attune an Adept to her computer and virtual space, making VR experiences as intense as real ones. On the flip side, this rote can inflict horrible trauma on someone by stripping away the normal filters people use to deal with sensory input. Under the effect of this rote, a light shining into someone's eyes would seem as bright as the sun. A little sandpaper dragged lightly across his skin would feel to the victim as if his flesh were being ripped off.

System: As Mind magic opens the person's perception, Correspondence makes the target intimately aware of the

space around her. Each success on the cast grants plus one die to Perception. A critical success grants supernatural awareness as well (as per the Awareness Ability). A botch will rob the caster of all sensation until the end of the session. The rote only works for a scene (this may be extended for extra scenes with the expenditure of Quintessence).

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Initiate Mind. After a successful casting, the mage may use Mental Traits to retest in tests for Perception. His senses are also enhanced to near superhuman levels, allowing him to hear quiet conversations across the room, or track by scent. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade.

TWACI

(CORRESPONDENCE ●●●, FORCES ●●●, MIND ●●)

Pronounced "th-whacky," this is short for "The Walls Are Closing In," and it's a paranoid's nightmare. The caster warps gravity, manipulates space, and adds in a creeping sense of doom to slow down opponents and ultimately crush them.

System: Correspondence and Mind magics warp the target's perception, making it appear as if the walls (or other surrounding terrain) are closing in on the target. Then, minor manipulation of gravity causes cumulative damage (one die of bashing damage, increasing each turn up to 10 dice) as Mind magic keeps the target paralyzed with fear for a turn.

MET: Adept Correspondence, Disciple Forces, Initiate Mind. A successful Physical Challenge starts damage at a rate of one level of bashing per turn. A successful Mental Challenge paralyzes the victim in place for one turn as he reacts to the feeling of the world closing in on him. This may activate Derangements or Negative Traits.

ADEPT FOCI

Adept Foci fall into two different categories: tools and information. Tools are the means by which we manipulate the world. Information acts as a "mantra," a meditative way that we can focus our power.

ADEPT TOOLS

Computers: This is probably the best known of Adept foci, and the most commonly used. We use all sorts of computers, from out-of-the-box PCs to liquid software you inject into your body. The key to computer use is their ability to represent thoughts in material form. We use them to write music, create stunning visuals, or even, with the right equipment, produce tactile information that helps us conceptualize our rites and manipulate reality. The sole issue with computers is that it does take some uninterrupted time to properly use them. **MET Ability:** *Computers.*

Instruments: Few people realize how ordered music is. Whether it's half steps, quarter tones, classic chords, or the pentatonic scale, music reflects precise variances in sound that affect its listener emotionally. A number of the newer Adepts use music — made with their synthesizers and online

QUANTUM COMPUTING AND THE MODERN ADEPT

Computers have gone far beyond the warehouse-full-of-data processors they used to be. Now, powerful computers can be found in many homes, and incredible processors can even be found in such mundane items as phones.

The Adept Tradition, which runs generations ahead of the field, is already investigating quantum computers, which use fluctuations in quantum states instead of electrical impulses. What this means, in practical terms, is the manufacture of computers a thousand times more powerful than what we know now, fitting on a machine the size of a thumbnail. Past that, some Adepts claim to have made a breakthrough in molecular computing, which leads to amazingly small devices like nanites and injectable software. Soon, if everything goes according to plan, the sole difference between computers and real life will be that one life form is based on silicon and the other is based on carbon. Otherwise, the two forms, and their potential, will be infinite.

All Adept computers, regardless of their generation, work off of “fuzzy” logic: on, off, and flux (neither on nor off). This allows for a great deal more flexibility in computations and a more instinctive grasp of the true underpinnings of reality. Because of the use of fuzzy logic, Adept computers recognize emotional and perceptual concepts unique to life, like “happy,” “frustrated,” “warm,” and “cool.”

sound generators — as their primary way to express their magic. **MET Ability:** *Performance.*

PDAs: As far as trends go, the Personal Digital Assistants will probably go obsolete as their functions (as well as the computer’s) inevitably merge with newer phones. Until then, clever Adepts will store their data on them and use them as temporary holders for the simpler notes. **MET Ability:** None. Either you’ve got data stored on it or you don’t. Most of the complex stuff placed on a PDA comes from a computer download, where the real work is done. It just makes access easier than dragging around a laptop.

Phones: Virtually everyone has a phone and many in the more urban centers have cell or satellite phones as well. We use phones mainly for scrying or communication notes, though some have, in recent years, used them for teleportation or transport into the Digi-Web as well. **MET Ability:** None.

VOX & sub-VOX: These are voice recognition add-ons you can use with a computer or PDA. Vox attachments require a microphone that you speak into to transmit the information. Sub-vox are often implants but sometimes can come disguised as chokers or hearing aids. The sub-vox allows you to speak commands to the computer so softly you cannot be heard by people with unenhanced senses. **MET Ability:** None.

VR Rigs: These Virtual Reality rigs allow you to plug into virtual space. A full rig comes with a body suit (this includes forced feedback so you receive sensation from the Web), VR sensing units (which detect major movement), and headgear to allow you to hear and see in the Digi-Web. VR Rigs are the equipment of choice for beginning Nexplorers, and, for many, make up their first experience of virtual space. **MET Ability:** *Computers.*

Wetware: This covers a wide variety of cyber-implants that could be put in someone’s body. A lot of these are created in conjunction with the Sons of Ether and are favored by the Cyberpunk alt. **MET Ability:** *Technology.*

INFORMATION

Equations: The world of many Adepts is built around equations. Whether it’s the one-zero of binary or the complex mathematics that make up quantum physics, equations act as the “meditation” of the Adept world. **MET Ability:** *Science and/or Meditation.*

Infranet: The Infranet is the collection of graffiti, local papers, public bulletins, e-zines and gossip that stretch across a segment of virtual or real space. Experts on the Infranet use it to access the information of the city or, if they’re good enough, directly affect the city’s general mood. This is popular among some Chaoticians and so-called urban primitives among the Virtual Adepts. **MET Ability:** *Streetwise.*

Language: Nothing is more important to the followers of information than language. A number of talented Reality Coders have found that language may even be used to influence someone without their knowledge. What most people call propaganda, these Adepts call magic. **MET Ability:** *Linguistics.*

Programming: Practically every Adept in the modern age knows something about programming. A number of Adepts, even Reality Coders, use programming as a way to clear their thoughts and focus their intentions. The benefits of programming ahead of time is that you can also theoretically find any glitches (specifically, anything that will attract too much Paradox) before you actually have to use it. **MET Ability:** *Computers.*

WONDERS CLOCKERS

4-point Invention (Paradox Accruing, 20-pt storage)

Computers are cool toys, but even they have their limits. Push them too hard, and you’ll end up with Paradox-inflicted heat disabling or destroying your foci. For most Adepts, this is a clear message to slow down, but a few crazy bastards aren’t interested in stopping. For these lunatics there are “clockers.” Clockers are super-coolant systems designed to bleed off Paradox and increase the speed of Adept systems well past normal parameters. The hitch, of course, is that when Paradox does catch up with them, it is explosive. Seriously, dangerously explosive. In between uses, clockers must remain

immersed in Freon or liquid nitrogen, preferably imbued with Tass as well.

System: Clockers use Time 3 to increase the “computing power” of an Adept’s rig. The Adept can speed up or slow down time around herself, allowing more time to program, accelerated computing time, or even quicker casting of computer-based rites. Once the Paradox threshold is reached, the clocker chip will explode, doing 10 dice of damage to the mage and destroying the device it’s attached to.

ICOE

4-point Device (Arete 3, Quintessence 5)

ICOE stands for “In Case Of Emergency” and was created to assist mages who have slipped into Quiet. It is a piece of Tass-charged computer code readily available to those on the Net and allows a cabal to telepathically meld with an afflicted mage so that they can perceive his Quiet, helping him work through it. This does not give them access to any secrets; it just allows shared perceptions. The code also “tags” unreal perceptions by comparing them to what the others perceive at the same time. Despite this, there is always the danger that an entire cabal could be sucked into the Quiet.

System: The equivalent of Mind 3 links the cabal to their afflicted teammate but it offers them no further advantage to solving the Quiet. The Enigmas or Medicine (with the Psychology specialty) Abilities are recommended to unravel the delusions.

SUB-DERIVALS

8-point Device (Arete 3, Quintessence 5)

Sub-dermals are the battle armor of the Cyberpunk alt, consisting of a computer system implanted just underneath the skin of the user. An LCD screen and the computing system are usually implanted within the forearm, with the power system and touch sensitive triggers inside the armpit. This can also be combined with sub-vox foci for more versatility. Sub-dermals are quite versatile, armed with defensive, offensive and scouting capabilities. These pseudo-cybernetics are favored by the Cyberpunks and, in their view, differentiate them stylistically from the invasive It-X cyber-implants

System: First and foremost, sub-dermals are computers with the obvious ability to store a number of useful rites. Beyond that, sub-dermals come equipped with three Effects. The first, “Hard-up,” stiffens synthetic materials (like clothes) into a hyper-resilient polymer, effectively making the clothes impenetrable. This turns aggravated damage into lethal damage and lethal damage into bashing. The second, “Fry-‘em,” acts as a Prime 3 Effect, inflicting five dice of aggravated damage to the target. This normally manifests as taser wires or “shock gloves” for a coincidental Effect. Finally, Correspondence 2 Effects can be called forth to extend the user’s senses to the surrounding area, allowing +3 dice to Perception that ignores intervening barriers (except magical ones). Barring its magical Effects, the use of sub-dermal computer

technology is just coming of age in Sleeper society, and it is estimated that within five years the use of such technology will be considered coincidental.

FAMILIARS ASTROS (2 PTS)

The ultimate in home security, ASTROs (Artificially Sentient, Trinary-based ROBots) are trinary codes given form. They serve as home companions and guards for Virtual Adept domiciles. ASTROs are fluidic in form; they appear in a variety of mobile forms (bird, snake, dog, cat), and appear either realistic or robotic depending on their need to avoid Paradox. ASTROs work by being programmed with the “flow” of information that goes through a particular area. Disruptions to that flow are immediately reported to the Adept. This foils most stealth techniques, except for the most pervasive ones; a stealth suit that uses invisibility would be hampered by the change of “scent” in the area. It usually takes a year to properly program an ASTRO, and they aren’t very useful in constantly chaotic circumstances.

Advanced ASTROs are programmed with a “hyper-adaptation” feature that allows them to adapt to any lethal attack and reconstitute their form to cope with it. This adaptation feature is limited in scope to one Sphere and is reset after every sleep cycle to maintain unit cohesion. The one major drawback of the ASTRO is its inability to deal with multiple attacks of different natures; this attracts too much Paradox and shuts the ASTRO down.

When ASTROs are in their “sleep cycle” (needed to recharge their physical bodies), their coding is fed into the local Adept mainframe, where it serves as an active guardian against intrusion. More powerful ASTROs can actually perform this task while physically active, as well, but these constructs are the exception rather than the rule.

Type: Construct

Nature: Gallant

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 1

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2, Computer 3, Investigation 2

Willpower: 3

Essence: 3

Charms: Hide (1 pt), Claws/Teeth (2 pts), Resilience (3 pts), Soak Lethal (0 pts), Adaptation (7 pts): Choose one set from the following list of Charms: Soak Lethal and Aggravated Damage; Armor (+1 die aggravated) and Heat Object; Cyberpresence, Encryption Software and Jack In; Shapeshift. A new adaptation may be selected to replace an old adaptation one turn after a successful lethal or aggravated attack occurs.

Health Levels: Bruised (-0), Bruised (-0), Hurt (-1), Injured (-1), Wounded (-2), Mauled (-2), Crippled (-5), Incapacitated.



GREMLINS (2 PTS)

It's uncertain where these creatures came from, but they were first reported by Sleepers during World War II. Recently uncovered reports from Technocracy Constructs trace alleged Gremlin activity to at least 40 years before the Sleeper reports. Manifesting as nightmarish little monsters (the exact description varies depending on the viewer), these creatures were often associated with technological malfunctions. However, the Adepts have found that when properly entreated, these creatures can rewire and rebuild things as swiftly as they destroy them. They appear to enjoy dealing with Adepts, and have proven to be loyal, if fickle, companions (expect to find your coffee maker occasionally rewired).

Type: Bygone

Nature: Deviant

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 1

Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 1, Crafts 3, Drive 1, Stealth 2, Technology 3, Computers 3, Enigmas 1, Science 2.

Willpower: 3

Essence: 1

Charms: Bad Luck Curse (3 pts), Claws/Teeth (2 pts), Quintessence Grazing (0 pts), Soak Lethal (3 pts), Speed (2 pts), Swallow (4 pts)

END CODE



/msg C0y0te frm H0usefly "Bastard. U stole my lectures file!"

<That'll teach u to leave the backdoor open.>

/dcc C0yote Arc_rote+activate_it

<Ouch! Now that's not very nice.>

/dcc H0usefly

C0y0te_specialty_rote+kiss_my_ass_lamer

/kick C0y0te #lamerlecture

/kick lameholly #lamerlecture

/kick curious_others #lamerlecture

logged off of va.e3.2003 @ 00:00



CHAPTER 3.0 V.2: GURUS & GREITLINS

Until a man is twenty-five, he still thinks, every so often, that under the right circumstances he could be the baddest motherfucker in the world....

Hiro used to feel that way, too, but then he ran into Raven.
— Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*



The biggest, coolest badass in the world — that’s what every Adept aspires to be. And for all they know, that’s how they’ll end up. Or they find out that all they’ve got is a small piece of a much bigger puzzle. What follows now is a grab bag of things for the Storyteller: the heroes and

villains the Adepts talk about, the apocryphal legends whispered across the web, a handful of stereotypes — there’s even an example of an all-Adept chronicle and ready-to-play cabal.

So take it or leave it. Or modify it. Or trash it. It’s a free universe, after all.

At least, it will be once the Adepts win.

ELITE ⊕ THE ELITE



Adepts are all about hype and a full list of their heroes could go on for megabytes. The following is a sampling from across the Adept spectrum.

CATHERINE BLASS (“X-CEL”)

Background: Catherine is one of the old-timers of the Adept Tradition, well

talked about and well hyped. She’s been called everything from information broker, reality deviant, ontological terrorist, to stone cold bitch. Her trademark is an insanely mercurial personality and almost total disregard for any social boundaries. She’s also got a strong merciful streak, pulling strangers out of firefights and saving souls — even if those souls happen to be Technocrats.



Little is known about her origins. At the only Adept gathering she attended, she claimed that her Avatar had a dual nature — “Ix Chel” and “Ixtab” — life and death. In time, she said, she would give free rein to both. A recently liberated report from the New World Order gives at least three contradictory reports about her origins. Of course, they also report her death in each one, an event which many people believe was (a) not fatal (otherwise she wouldn’t be here, would she?) and (b) responsible for her Awakening.

N.W.O. File A: Born in Castelo, Portugal, under the name Catarina Branco, she distinguished herself as a young runway model in the tradition of modern icons like *Gia*. Her exuberance attracted the attention of a Syndicate-run prostitution ring. After being forced to work as a prostitute, her extremely public suicide exposed the entire ring and those who profited from it, shutting the operation down.

N.W.O. File B: Raised near the Mayan ruins of Palenque, “Catina Blas” served as a medium for “Lady Rainbow,” a Mayan goddess otherwise known as Ix Chel. One day, government-backed rebels came to raid her village and put a bullet in her head while she was protecting a child. Almost a week later, she stumbled into San Cristóbal, with the bullet still buried in her head, to report the crime. Her death came the minute the rebels were caught and brought to justice. The government rescinded its funding and the officials responsible were put to death.

N.W.O. File C: “Katalina Brass,” a Latina out of Los Angeles, blackmailed a professor with sexually explicit photos to get a scholarship to the National Institute of

Arts. There, she exposed a drug ring that, among other things, was selling a Progenitor-based experimental drug targeted at suppressing Avatars. Sleeper police broke up the ring after Katalina died of a horrific overdose during a party, and the program shut down rather than risk further exposure to the Unawakened.

Regardless of which of her origins is actually true, Catherine did emerge unharmed and very much alive in the early 1990s as a performance artist. She rapidly became known for her provocative and taboo-breaking shows, the most famous of which, “Rage on a Meathook,” was banned in Washington D.C. (the official charges were obscenity, sexual solicitation and slander). In the show, her body was wired for sound and flogged by an audience volunteer. She shattered video monitors with a four-octave scream, which the Sleepers interpreted as brilliant technological wizardry.

What are Catherine’s alleged goals? Beyond the satisfaction she seems to get in shocking people, Catherine has been using the energy generated in such performances to locate missing Nodes. Her performances are carefully designed Correspondence rote set to trace the flow of Prime and then “tag” it for fellow Reality Coders to exploit. Her bizarre methods, using artistic expression as a guide, allow her to find Nodes when normal Adept rote cannot.

Since she travels so often in so many interesting circles, Catherine also makes a living trading information. Adepts seeking her advice can contact her at any rave local to the town she is in. If they speak her name and their basic need (usually in combination with the **Search Engine** rote, pp. 63-64), she will appear within a couple of days to cut a deal. The deals are always simple — information for information. She’ll request certain things from the Adept who needs her. Once the Adept ponies up Catherine’s needs, she’ll retrieve the information the Adept wants.

Online, Catherine goes by two handles, X-Cel or X-Tab. Both are based on Mayan goddesses. X-Cel, the more moderate of her two avatars, follows the path of the Mayan Moon goddess. She can be gentle, protective and merciful, and appears on the net as a woman dressed as a traditional Mexican nun. When she is violent, X-Cel usually manifests it by flooding her opponent with information. As X-Tab, based on the Mayan goddess of suicides, Catherine gets as violent. Her most common X-Tab image is that of a beautiful hanged woman with blue-tinged skin and her tongue lolling out. Adepts don’t generally run into X-Tab. Catherine saves that one for people she is going to kill.

Because of her strange proclivities, Catherine gets along with several different Traditions, notably the

Cult of Ecstasy, the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena. It's also been rumored that she's quite close to Mark Hallward Gillan, an Order of Hermes mage, whom she allegedly once took as a lover.

Image: Catherine has a stunning appearance, bearing a combination of both Eastern European and Hispanic features that give her an exotic and unique beauty. In her late 30s, she's about 5'6" tall and around 135 lbs. If she is deeply into the X-Cel or X-Tab persona, she will dress like her online icons in realspace, appearing as a traditional Mexican nun for X-Cel and as a hanged woman for X-Tab.

Roleplaying Notes: At your baseline, you are aggressive, radically sexual, and anarchistic enough to put most other Adepts to shame. You also play freely with personality software, an invention that allows you to temporarily replace your own personality with another one (more information on personality software can be found in *Forged By Dragon's Fire*, pp. 22-23). You use it to change identities as often as the moon changes phases. You feel that a single "personality" may be a dead end for you, and are working on a way to naturally shift identities without the software, creating a controllable "multiple-personalities disorder" to free yourself from all normal boundaries.

Alt: Reality Coder

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Deviant

Demeanor: Rebel

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4 (Feline Grace), Stamina 3, Charisma 4 (Social Flexibility), Manipulation 3, Appearance 4 (Seductive), Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 4 (City), Athletics 3, Awareness 4 (Resonance), Dodge 5 (Sidestep), Expression 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 2, Firearms 3, Melee 4 (Improvised Weapons), Performance 5 (Singing, Acting), Stealth 5 (Crowds), Technology 5 (Technomagic)

Knowledges: Computer 2, Enigmas 3, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Spanish, Mayan) 2, Virtual Space 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 5, Contacts 2, Resources 2, Wonder 2 (Personality Software)

Arete: 5

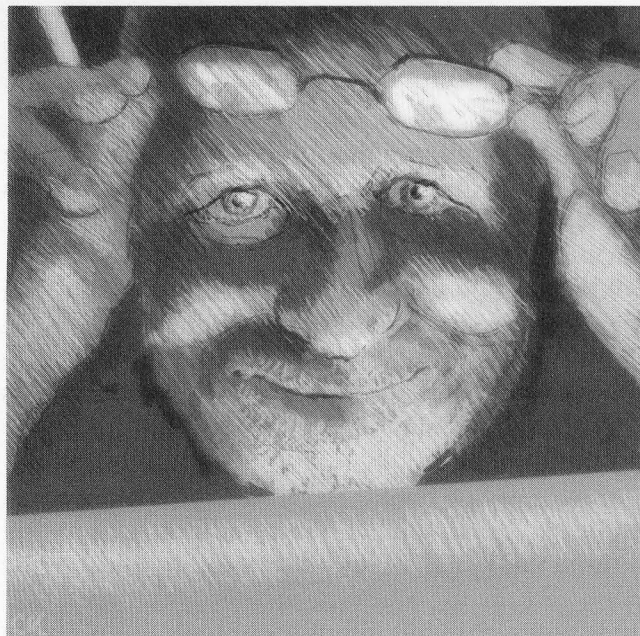
Spheres: Correspondence 5, Entropy 1, Forces 3, Matter 2, Mind 3, Time 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 1

Resonance: Dynamic (Liberating) 1, Entropic (Chaotic) 1



JACOB "HUNTER" BOURNELL

Background: Many Adepts consider Jacob Bournell to be the premiere cryptographer of this era, routinely hiding terabytes of information that reveal the workings of the Adept Tradition. His focus is the protection of Adept assets, gaining him a fearsome rep as the person to go to if you need to disappear.

Born in Colorado, Jacob Bournell was an average student. He graduated from a private high school, had an unspectacular time double-majoring in college, and dropped out of college one year before obtaining a degree. He then took a job as a computer playtester, and after a couple of years started producing games for a minor software company.

What most people don't know is that this entire history is a carefully designed façade. A third generation Adept, Hunter had already seen family and friends fall to the Technocracy. He deliberately avoided the spotlight to blend into society and begin his real work among the Adepts unnoticed. His Awakening two years after he left college gave him the indelible impression that he had a destiny to fulfill: to protect an up-and-coming Adept who would be vital to the success of the Adept's Dream.

He has yet to meet such a person, but he takes great pleasure from his job. He makes a living designing airtight identities for people on the run. Dozens of mages, both Tradition and Technocracy, are in his debt, and he has saved countless lives. He's been able to shift mages, Sleeper families, friends, even entire villages, off the Technocracy "radar" and into sequestered hiding.

Unknown to most, Hunter also works as a low-level functionary for the New World Order. Using their resources, he points their power at the worst reality offenders, like Nephandi or truly abusive Technocrats. To date, he has almost been exposed six times, usually when his NWO superiors want to promote him, and has faked his own death and reemerged later at a different Construct with a different identity.

Image: A short, well-muscled, heavysset man with a flat, pleasing face and curly hair. Hunter appears to be in his mid-30s and often has a cigarette in hand and a couple of days of beard growth. His lopsided grin is infamous and, some would say, diabolically clever. He rarely, if ever, sleeps.

Roleplaying Hints: You are always genial, even in the worst of situations, and always ready to make a deal to work things out. Meanwhile, inside, you calculate the ways to turn the situation to your advantage. Your obsession with hiding information is your way of killing time until the real challenge appears — the unknown Adept whose legacy will change the future.

Alt: Cryptogrammic (Cypherpunk)

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Conformist

Attributes: Strength 4 (Hidden Reserves), Dexterity 3, Stamina 5 (Tireless), Charisma 1, Manipulation 4 (Deceiver), Appearance 1, Perception 4 (Thorough), Intelligence 5 (Analytical), Wits 5 (Intuitive)

Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 5 (Effects, Resonance), Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 5 (Forged Documents), Streetwise 5 (Identity Theft), Subterfuge 4 (Impeccable Lies)

Skills: Crafts 3, Drive 4 (Losing Tails), Etiquette 4 (Street Culture), Firearms 3, Stealth 4 (Hiding), Survival 3, Technology 5 (Security)

Knowledges: Academics 5 (Sociology), Computer 5 (Encryptions), Enigmas 5 (Codes and Ciphers), Investigation 5 (Forensics), Law 5 (Police Procedure), Virtual Space 5 (Block Data)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 4, Contacts 2, Destiny 5, Influence 2

Arete: 7

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Entropy 3, Forces 3, Matter 2, Mind 5, Prime 3, Time 3

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 5

Resonance: Dynamic (Novel) 1, Entropic (Subtle) 3, Static (Patterned) 2

DARK VENGEANCE

Background: Every Tradition has its “bogyman,” its example of a mage gone horribly wrong. For the Adepts, that mage is Dark Vengeance. This Adept alone has been responsible for nearly half of the most destructive computer viruses on the planet. At one point, Sleeper behaviorists trying to track him down created a profile on him. They came to the disturbing conclusion that Dark Vengeance shared the same mindset as a prolific serial killer. Dark Vengeance has long been marked by both Technocracy and Sleeper society as a danger to be put down. The Adepts, who have more information on Dark Vengeance than his hunters, would tend to agree, if only they could locate him.

From what the Elite have been able to discover, the entity known as Dark Vengeance is not one person but two, a pair of twins sharing a single Avatar. Born in East Berlin, the twins were tagged early on as gifted. They were exposed to computers very young, and their Awakening followed soon after, manifesting itself as a “tongue of fire” that spoke to them from their monitors. Utilizing their newfound magical powers, the twins contacted the Adepts and located a mentor in Dusseldorf. Their response to early training was amazing, and their mentor reported astonishing leaps of development within both the twins. They were well on their way, in his belief, to mastering the Correspondence Sphere and becoming the cornerstone of the Adept future.

At the same time, though, one of the twins, Peter, began experiencing signs of instability. He embarked on a killing spree that resulted in the death of a number of innocents. When caught, he claimed temporary posses-



sion by a “dark spirit” with the same name as his, and the matter was dropped when some occult investigations indicated that the story might be true. Peter’s mentor covered up the murders, and watched Peter closely from then on. What the mentor didn’t know was that Peter’s twin had been killing as well, but she hadn’t been caught. She was also the one responsible for providing the “occult evidence” that had cleared Peter’s name. She teamed up with Peter to eliminate their “interfering mentor,” and the two vanished from sight.

In the early 1990s, the twins, using the handle Dark Vengeance, began pumping computer viruses out of Eastern Europe. Experts were amazed — and then frightened — over the effectiveness and destructiveness of the programs they were seeing. They didn’t know the half of it. In the Digi-Web, hunter-macros were being produced that could fry neurons or rewire DNA. Technocracy Constructs found themselves under attack by polymorphic data swarms that could exploit the tiniest holes in their firewalls and then tear their defenses apart. The New World Order, in conjunction with the Void Engineers, launched the European Anti-viral Detection and Response Directorate simply to cope with these hackers.

The sole thing that saved the twins from this decade-long manhunt was the Avatar Storm and the whiteout of the Digi-Web. This eliminated a number of subtle clues the Technocracy was following that would have led them to the twins. So far, several years into the millennium, very little of their handiwork has appeared, but few are holding out hope that this is actually the end of their reign of terror.

There is one final piece of disturbing information that has been recently uncovered. It is now believed that the reason behind the twins’ rampage was an allergic reaction to the T-Virus. Infected by their mentor in the pre-vaccine days, the twins’ shattered Avatar determined quickly that something was going on and reacted by lashing out. At first, the targets were normal people who the twins believed were “infected” (street people, prostitutes, etc.). Later on, they succumbed to the idea of becoming the “disease” itself and became active “plague” producers. If this is the case, it means there might be others like the twins out there, as yet undetected by the Adepts.

Image: The last known picture of the twins was taken in the late ‘80s. At that point, they were in their late teens, with crew-cut blonde hair and steel-gray eyes. Peter had a crooked nose (the result of some earlier fight). His twin had a small scar running across her chin. Their online avatars are usually death related: dark shadows (often cloaked) with scythes or other lethal

implements. Any online interaction with them virtually guarantees infection, which may translate to a realspace infection as well.

Roleplaying Hints: Information is a virus overwhelming people with its need to be free. The world is sickness, glutted with plague-filled information. You once aspired to be the cure to this rot, but now you’ve given in. You are the disease. You will lead the world, brimming over with decay, to the brink, and when they beg for mercy, you will put them out of their misery forever.

(Each of the twins shares identical traits)

Alt: Cyberpunk

Essence: Questing

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Deviant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4 (Lithe), Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4 (Conniver), Appearance 5 (Otherworldly), Perception 5 (Experienced), Intelligence 4 (Analytical), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 5 (Hidden Emotions)

Skills: Firearms 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 5 (Psychology), Computer 5 (Viruses), Enigmas 5 (Codes and Ciphers), Investigation 5 (Crime Scenes), Law 3, Science 2, Virtual Space 5 (Data Flow)

Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Avatar 5, Influence 2, Library 3, Resources 3, Wonder 4 (Clockers), Wonder 8 (Subdermal)

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 3, Forces 3, Life 3, Mind 3, Time 2

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 6

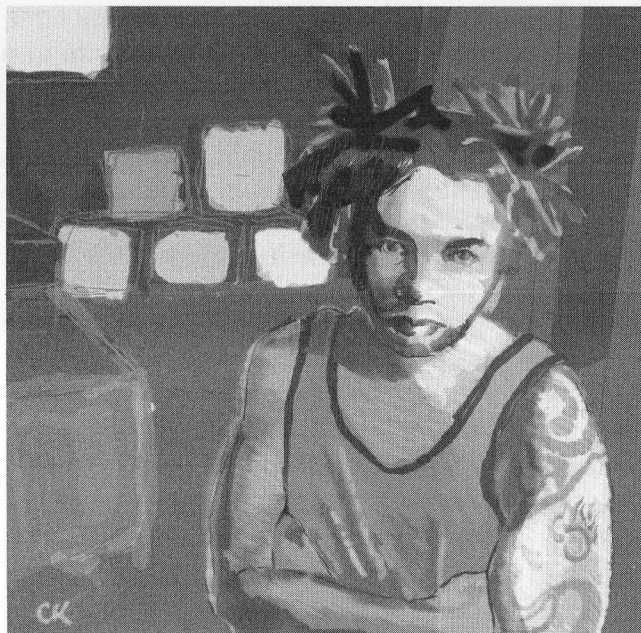
Paradox: 4

Resonance: Dynamic (Flashy) 1, Entropic (Destructive) 1

DAVIN “V⊕⊕D⊕⊕3.2” VASQUEZ

Background: Davin was in the forefront of the modern “Urban Primitive” movement, taking the information paradigm in new directions by culling sources of data from the infranet, overheard conversations and spiritual séances. He is living proof that not all information has to come from the virtual realm, and he challenges all Adepts to shake off the shackles of a single focus.

Nobody knows where Davin originally came from. It’s rumored he spent some time in New Orleans with a



Verbena houngan. He also claims to have hung out with a bunch of werewolves (which he calls “le loup garou”) and, for at least a couple of months, an Umbrood spirit known as “Simbi” who introduced him to computers.

Here is what is certain: Voodoo 3.2 has been a thorn in the side of the Technocracy and the Traditions for over two decades. He is the embodiment of a modern trickster and delights in exposing secrets. He is personally responsible for exposing over a hundred different scandals (in Sleeper society, among Technocrats, and even within the Traditions), revealing the crimes of seven different foreign regimes and unraveling the New World Order’s control over two U.S. Presidents. In fact, he has single-handedly uncovered more secrets than any other Adept in the history of the Tradition. These he distributes in a timely manner, always at the right place at the right time. The sole catch to getting Voodoo’s help is that any person he assists finds one of their secrets revealed soon after the favor is done; smart Adepts reveal one on their own before Davin beats them to the punch.

Davin can be found somewhere in the South, usually around New Orleans (but never during the overcrowded Mardi Gras). In any place that Davin lives, he has a “chat room.” This room is filled with monitors, only about half of them connected, painted with chicken blood symbols and strung with animal bones. From these monitors, he contacts the spirit world, letting them connect him to his next destination. Whether that is in virtual space or realspace doesn’t matter. He doesn’t consider his combination of old-world magics and new-world hype to be a throwback. He challenges all Traditions to “mix their

paradigms.” In his own words, “It’s time to move past the analog age, straight into the Chrome.”

Image: 32 years of age, Davin has been mistaken for Anglo, Cajun, mulatto, and Hispanic. He dresses conservatively when out in public, and for a good reason — most of his body is covered in tattoos from different Traditions (including, allegedly, some werewolf ones). He is not often seen without a cigarette or cell phone, but whether he uses the cell phone to talk to the dead or the living is unknown. Davin’s handle “Voodoo 3.2” matches his age. He has the handle from Voodoo 0.0 to Voodoo 100.0 already locked in on every server in the world so that he will have control over the name until his death.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the trickster, the one who shakes up the status quo. For those who think you belong with the Verbena or Dreamspeakers, stun them with your impressive knowledge of computers. For those who question your spiritual beliefs, scare them with your ghostly connections. Your real strength lies in your connection with the city. You are finely tuned to pick up its information in the papers, the graffiti, the advertisements and even the dead that litter its street. That’s the one big difference between you and members of other Traditions. You see the world as information, and you take it all in as a big puzzle to unravel one bit at a time.

Alt: Reality Coder

Essence: Primal

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Trickster

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Resilient), Charisma 2, Manipulation 4 (Persuasive), Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 5 (Witty Conversationalist)

Talents: Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Streetwise 4 (Rumors), Subterfuge 5 (Politics)

Skills: Melee 4 (Improvised Weapons), Stealth 3, Survival 4 (Urban)

Knowledges: Computer 5 (Programming, System Architecture), Cosmology 3, Enigmas 5 (Quick Solutions), Investigation 5 (Forensics), Occult 5 (Vodoun, Werewolves)

Backgrounds: Arcane 4, Avatar 2, Contacts 4, Dream 4, Resources 2

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 2, Forces 2, Life 2, Spirit 3, Mind 4, Time 2

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: Dynamic (Whirling) 1, Entropic (Chaotic) 2

ADVENTURES IN CYBERSPACE: ALL-ADEPT CHRONICLES



It is the sad truth that despite their progressive ideals, Adepts really work their best when they are either on their own or working with an all-Adept cabal. Such cabals usually start with online chats or the rare realspace gatherings and stay together until either they have accomplished their stated agenda, or they “burn out” (slang for one or more of the cabal members slipping

into Quiet or dying).

Since Adept cabals organize around a common agenda, they tend to be extremely passionate and stubborn about their goals. The following is a list of the most frequent themes around which most Adept cabals form.

BUG HUNTS

Bug Hunt cabals try to catch or kill threats that are disturbing the Sleepers. They usually form after a friend of one of the cabal-mates is hurt or otherwise affected by something unearthly. While this may sound like a Technocracy activity (it is), most of the Adept's efforts are concentrated using their greatest strength—online. If the threat is in realspace, they find ways to hedge it in: vampires may find their bank accounts closing and Nephandi discover the police hot on their trail through

QUIET CHRONICLES

Because of the pressures of the modern world and the escape provided by virtual space, a number of Adepts (more than the Tradition would like to admit) fall very easily into Quiet. An interesting session could be built around trying to get an ally out of one of these Quiets. Most Adepts who enter into Quiet while in virtual space build a digital version of what is going on before they slip away into madness, “clarity,” or jhor. This means the characters could visit this pseudo-realm for clues before helping their friend.

For cabals without the Mind 3 magic needed to enter a disturbed individual's Mindscape, there is always the ICOE Wonder (see p. 68), which comes in the form of a piece of Tass-charged computer code. ICOE was specifically designed by Cypherpunks and Reality Coders to allow a cabal into an afflicted member's mind to try and resolve a Quiet. It cannot be used for any other purpose.

anonymous phone tips. Sometimes the threat itself is online. Whether it's a rogue Malkavian who's somehow wandered into virtual space or a Deep Umbra nasty some crazy Marauder has loosed on the Web, the cabal on a Bug Hunt will work to roust the creature out and then banish it.

CAPES

Growing up on video games, a number of newer Adepts developed serious hero complexes. Cape chronicles take advantage of that in the most dramatic way possible. From stopping Technocracy evil to “liberating” money to feed the starving in Africa, Adepts can glom onto any number of causes for the “greater good.” A Cape campaign differs from other cabal storylines in its impact; Capes specifically go after causes that raise humanity's hopes. It could be changing a billionaire's will so that everything goes to charity or exposing someone's good work in the slums, but it will always be something uplifting. Through these actions, the Capes hope to bring a more positive breed of human to virtual space and Reality 2.0.

Another interesting facet of the Cape chronicle is the cover-up. A number of other cabals leave it to the Capes to clean up any nasty business they have done, so that humanity in general will not be affected. Abuse of this type of favor has led to some Cape cabals becoming so bitter they go hunting for the people they covered for.

DREAMCATCHERS

It may not sound as glamorous, but a number of Adepts work directly with Sleepers, driving Sleeper programming and technology advances faster than they would under the Technocracy. Adepts can be found online, handing out proprietary codes as open-source. They can also be found in various workplaces and conventions, urging Sleepers to push the technological envelope.

Dreamcatcher chronicles that deal with the more mundane aspects of being an Adept offer several interesting directions. First, Dreamcatchers are responsible for the funding (both in cash and in resources) that keeps the Adepts alive. They are usually inundated with requests from other cabals for anything from large sums of money to plane tickets out of a bad situation. Secondly, since the Dreamcatchers work intimately with the Sleepers, they sometimes see trends long before less-involved Adepts do. Chaoticians of a Dreamcatcher

cabal were the ones who warned of severe government crackdowns on Hackers, and even rescued a cabal from a Nephandi hobgoblin posing as a computer “worm.”

Finally, Dreamcatchers out on the frontline of the Adept Tradition attract a lot of attention. Factions like the Nephandi and Technocracy, hurt by other cabals like Gremlins or Bug Hunters, go looking for Adepts and they find the Dreamcatchers first. While still staying accessible to the Sleepers, Dreamcatchers must remain ever vigilant for trouble; otherwise they end up taking the heat for the rest of their Tradition.

GREMLINS

Let’s face it — there’s nothing more satisfying for an Adept than to go after the Technocracy. Here’s a group of people who are better funded than the Adepts, possess cutting edge technology, and, worse yet, understand the Adepts intimately enough to have crippled the Tradition for almost a century. There are serious bragging rights for the hacker who brings them down!

Most missions against the Technocracy end up being splashy ones. Even simple information runs go awry when outside Adepts start egging the cabal on, pushing them to do something spectacular while they’re “inside.”

Adepts in a Gremlin chronicle could also decide to infiltrate the Technocracy instead of just raiding it. In the past, Adepts have posed as New World Order agents, Syndicate members, and even, occasionally, as Void Engineers. Any number of conspiracy theories you might have heard regarding bizarre Men in Black or cracked government scientists may be the Adepts playing around with the Technocracy’s rep, much to the frustration of the people they are pretending to be.

SECURITAT

Perhaps it’s a holdover from their Technocratic past, but some Adepts believe that they are the “Tradition police.” They hunt down and destroy other Tradition members who have crossed the line by harming Sleepers or endangering the goals of the Council of Nine. It’s dangerous work, since their activities risk censure by their allies, but there are a number of Adept cabals out there willing to risk it to find these rogue or dangerous Tradition mages and finish them once and for all.

Chronicles of this sort are a delicate balance. Most of the cabal’s time should be spent gathering information on their targets. More often than not, a right word or a dropped clue in the right place can lead to the target’s end without the cabal getting directly involved. Only rarely should a Securitat cabal engage in direct

VIRTUAL SPACE AND THE ONGOING CHRONICLE

Running a story in virtual space can be difficult, especially if not all of the Adepts in the cabal are suited to that realm. Details as to what scenarios, and what powers, may be appropriate to virtual space can be found in the **Digital Web** sourcebook. The following, though, covers a few problems and what to do with them.

A TITAN ALONE

For whatever reason — whether from selfishness or a part of a mission — sooner or later, someone who is well versed in virtual space will want to go it alone. This leaves the Storyteller with the unenviable task of dealing with one character in virtual space and several in realspace. One suggestion for overcoming this limitation would be to allow the realspace players to play programs the console cowboy has on his deck. Most web-runners have a suite of scanning, guarding and attack programs running in the background in case of trouble. The best programmers even add “personalities” to these programs as well. There’s no reason why existing players can’t play these “personalities” (the “personalities” may even be similar to their existing characters!). Either way, it opens an opportunity for people to do something different than sitting around waiting for the Storyteller’s attention. It also adds a random element to the programs that makes them more than just tools.

DESCRIBING VIRTUAL SPACE

When a cabal, either in part or in whole, enters virtual space, the first one in usually sets the “paradigm” — the way that others view the world. This can be overridden by a stronger programmer in a contested Wits + Computer challenge with the person who set the paradigm.

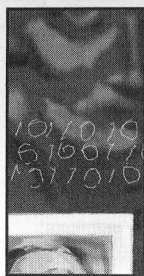
VIRTUAL DEATH

Death online, especially when engaged with other Awakened or magical entities, comes with a price. Hackers should expect feedback to drain them of Social or Mental traits (reflecting extreme stress and exhaustion). The worst attacks cause physical damage as well, though this kind of damage should be relatively rare unless inflicted by magic or Enlightened Sciences.

combat with its target since this risks exposure of a dire nature. Exposed Securitac cabals should expect to be declared “rogue Adepts” and be forced to disband.

Those that survive such expulsion are expected to return to duty under new handles.

CELL-V: A VIRTUAL ADEPT CABAL



Located in the warehouse district of San Jose are the offices of Parasite Moon Productions, a sleek software company that has produced several best-selling video games. Though Technocratic forces have investigated it, Parasite Moon Productions has managed to hide the fact that it is a front for Cell-V, an elite team of anarchists dedicated to helping others. A “Cape” cabal, Cell-V is determined to fix the world one problem at a time. They embody the Adepts’ dream for a better tomorrow; for Cell-V, virtual space, pop culture, and reality are one and the same.

HISTORY

Cell-V emerged in 1984 on a bet that a popular show at the time, the “A-Team,” would never work in real life. Amused by the concept, Emily “Tank Girl” Morris, her lover, Jacob “2XS,” and their mutual friend “Jumping Jax” took up the challenge and, like the characters in the show, advertised their services in the classified section of the paper: “If you have a problem, and no one else can help, call Cell-V.”

In the beginning, most of the calls they got were jokes, and Cell-V would playfully prank the caller back. Some came from desperately lonely people looking for someone to talk to. Cell-V was glad to oblige. A mere handful of calls were problems worth solving.

Over the next few years, as Cell-V’s reputation grew, more and more calls came from people in real trouble. The “quality” of Cell-V’s antagonists went up, as well as the number of clients. Most were people harassed by the supernatural community. (You can’t go to the cops if a vampire’s after you; after all, who would believe you?) Emily joked to the original makers of the bet that she would be collecting her winnings soon.

Then came the call. A terrified young woman called Cell-V and claimed she and her girlfriend were being hunted. Correspondence and Time magics confirmed her story, but Jax, the Chaotician of the group, felt uneasy about it. Despite his misgivings, they armed themselves to the teeth and left to save the day.

It was a trap. The entire cabal fell into the hands of a rogue New World Order agent out of San Francisco. Confined to separate cells, Jax and Emily watched as the

agent tortured and killed Jacob 2XS during interrogation. Jax slipped into a profound Quiet and promptly went mad. The agent brought Emily out last and began reconditioning her for work in the Technocracy.

How the two remaining members broke out is uncertain, but what is known is that the Technocrat’s overconfidence led to his downfall. His head appeared on top of the Trans America Pyramid soon after (much to the irritation of the Syndicate, which has offices there). Emily showed up at the doorstep of a local Tradition chantry with a comatose Jax in tow. She spent the next two years in the care of Cypherpunks to ensure that no taint of the NWO’s mind-meddling was left. Her last known action was to pay up on the bet; a sum of one dollar each deposited to the bank accounts of the now grieving “winners.” She then disappeared. A number of Adepts assumed she committed suicide. With Emily’s disappearance, that should have been the end of Cell-V.

In 1994, a small Adept group took over Cell-V’s chantry in San Jose and revamped it into a software design studio. Baesyl, the in-house musician for the studio, was the first to notice something wrong when she detected a background hiss on a number of her tracks. She cleaned it up and discovered that it was an old, barely distinguishable conversation between the members of Cell-V. After this, Monkey Boy thought he saw “Cell-V” written in blood on the mirror of his bathroom (the words vanished when he looked straight at them). Marx Rhume saw the same words appear in virtual space. Mildly freaked out, the cabal invited a Dreamspeaker in to exorcize the place, but the Dreamspeaker insisted that there were no spirits there to exorcize.

Then, the call came. A voice that couldn’t be distinguished as male or female asked for Cell-V. It stated that there was someone who needed their help immediately. The call could not be traced and a distinctive sphinx symbol was seen across the street — a mark of the Rogue Council. The disturbed cabal sat down and talked about it. After informing Adepts outside of the cabal of their decision, they checked the call out.

The cabal ran into an apprentice of the original Technocrat working at Treasure Island, just outside of San Francisco. They drove her off and freed people in

her custody, test subjects for some sort of advanced mental reconditioning. Emboldened by their success, the cabal discussed their future. When the next call came, they were ready. Cell-V had been born again.

Since then, they've gone on a number of missions, most of them not related to the voice on the phone. They are subtler than the previous incarnation of Cell-V, and prone to using their abilities in virtual space rather than in physical confrontations. This time, they're going to make it work. They're going to take a friendly bet, a wonderful dream, and make it a reality.

PRACTICES

Most of the members of Cell-V work at Parasite Moon Productions in California's Silicon Valley. The members also have separate residences in Napa Valley and the outskirts of San Francisco. Cell-V also has two alternate locations — an abandoned oilrig off the coast of Northern California and a motion-capture studio in Los Angeles.

Six of 1, a Chaotician, is the de facto leader of Cell-V. Six of 1 keeps an eye on trends in the underground papers, online bulletin boards, and the city infranet for the Bay Area. When he locates problem spots, he has Cell-V place an advertisement in the area with contact information included. The "hotline" usually stays open for a month before they move on. Other than these advertisements, Cell-V doesn't maintain any permanent ways by which to contact it.

Once a prospect contacts the group, Six of 1 dispatches various team members to investigate the situation. Because of the history of the group, much of Cell-V's activities are secretive. They may send a battered wife enough (untraceable) money for her to leave her husband. Or the police may get involved after their fingerprint identification system "tags" a person and connects him to a crime.

This caution does not prevent the occasional splashy adventure. Members of Cell-V have participated in bank robberies (to stop the unlawful razing of a ghetto), civil protests and dramatic hunts against supernatural creatures. Their one rule on any of these adventures is a basic one: Solve the problem and only the problem. As long as you keep it simple, you stay alive.

The phone calls that started this new incarnation of Cell-V have all but tapered off. Those few that they attempted to trace proved untraceable, as is common with Rogue Council transmissions. Not all of them were accompanied by the Sphinx symbol, though, so some of them might have been fakes. There is much speculation as to why the Rogue Council took such an interest in

their cabal. In their more paranoid times, the cabal worried that it might be some sort of twisted trap. But time usually expels such fears, and Cell-V went back to doing what it does best — saving lives and saving souls.

USING CELL-V

Cell-V is most commonly encountered on the West Coast, but they have been known to pop up in odd places if the mission requires it. As more businesses go worldwide, Cell-V has occasionally found that they have to hunt the problem "off-site." When they do, they enlist the help of other Adepts along the way. Cell-V's stories are also piped through Adept information channels as entertainment for the Tradition. This gives them a certain amount of notoriety, and they don't mind trading on this to get other cabals to help them.

A CELL-V TALE

Cell-V's resident Nexplorer, Marx Rhume, received a request for help in apprehending a Progenitor working out of Seattle. After aiding the local cabal, Nemo's Dragons, in flushing the Progenitor out, Cell-V was surprised when one of the Dragons attacked his own teammates and then fled the scene with the now-helpless Progenitor.

Baesyl and Monkey Boy traced the rogue Adept to a seaside resort where they sent in Anne R. Kist to find out what was going down. It turned into a pitched battle that ended with the Progenitor dead and the rogue Adept vanishing after claiming he worked for the "Hidden Masters."

Further investigation by D-Rez, Cell-V's Cypherpunk, identified the rogue Adept's online journal. When he cracked it open, he discovered that the rogue had found a link for an "ocean simulator" at an aquarium website in Monterey. While immersed in this simulation, the Dragon Adept discovered an underwater temple surrounded by a "river" of black viscous ooze. Curious, he entered the temple and was "contacted by ancient intelligences." He became their willing slave, and was in the process of bringing other Awakened members to their "service" as well when his first convert, the Progenitor, was exposed and caught. Cell-V turned the list of infected members in the journal over to Chaotician investigators and the mages were subsequently purged (i.e. killed) by Bug Hunter Cabals. Cell-V also tried to find the link that the rogue Adept had mentioned, but it had disappeared.

New Adepts may also be allowed into Cell-V on a temporary basis. Parasite Moon Productions is always subcontracting out “projects” to other computer firms, giving them an excuse to work closely with compatible cabals. Adepts who prove themselves useful to Cell-V may be asked to stay on as “full-time employees.”

Members: Anne R. Kist (Cyberpunk), Baesyl (Reality Coder), D-Rez (Cypherpunk), Monkey Boy (Reality Coder), Marx Rhume (Nexplorer), Six of 1 (Chaotician).

SIX OF I

Background: Six of 1 Woke up around the age of eight. His first magical act was to make small toys appear and disappear around the room. His fundamentalist parents, terrified of what he had become, beat him severely, shattering his personality. He ended up in state custody at age 13 and was institutionalized at 17. Diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder and mild schizophrenia, he was over-medicated and left to rot.

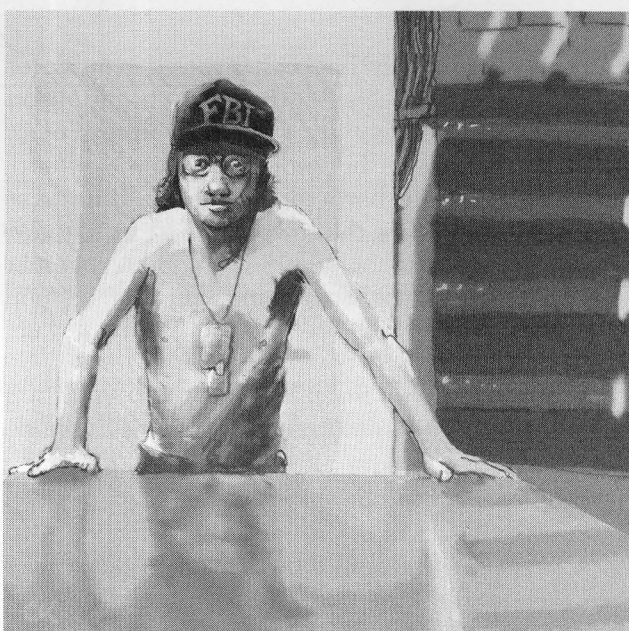
Some time later, a new therapist was testing out the use of computers on severely disturbed patients. As one of his first subjects, Six of 1 improved rapidly under this program. Soon, several of Six of 1’s personalities were working together to reorder his life, and Six of 1 was given limited access to standard, non-therapeutic computers. While online, Six of 1 felt as if his mind was racing down those electronic pathways, searching for something. He found it when he found the Virtual Adepts.

A few days later, a couple of Reality Coders arrived and got him out of the asylum. A Mind Adept stitched Six of 1’s personality back together, a process Six of 1 eagerly aided. He discovered a talent for mathematics, statistics and programming. Having experienced chaos first hand, he joined the Chaoticians.

Since then, Six of 1 has blossomed. He now runs his own company, and few would equate the once-deluded soul with the quirky, sometimes quixotic, genius who makes people smile. Cell-V is Six of 1’s way of connecting to society, and he hopes that through his efforts he may bring unity to a shattered world.

Image: A tall man of indeterminate age (varies from mid-20s to early 40s, depending on who you ask) with dark hair and skewed glasses. Six of 1 always wears loose-fitting clothing and has a wry smile on his face, even in the worst of times. Occasionally, he talks to himself, but it just seems a little eccentric rather than disturbing.

Roleplaying Hints: There is nothing greater than the taste of freedom. You spend every day smiling because you are no longer living in a cell, and you’ve



found your place in the world. Now it’s time to help everybody else out. Occasionally, some eccentric habits reemerge. You may argue with yourself or become obsessed with a numerical sequence, but inevitably you snap out of it. The only thing that truly scares you is going into Quiet; if you keep yourself grounded in the real world, you calculate that it won’t be a problem.

Alt: Chaotician

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Perfectionist

Demeanor: Architect

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4 (Thorough), Intelligence 4 (Creative), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Awareness 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 4 (Electronics), Firearms 2, Meditation 4 (Stress Management), Stealth 1, Technology 4 (Technomagic)

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 4 (Programming), Enigmas 3 (Quick Solutions), Law 2, Science 5 (Mathematics, Statistics), Virtual Space 2

Backgrounds: Avatar 1, Influence 3, Resources 3

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 3, Mind 4

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 5

Paradox: 1

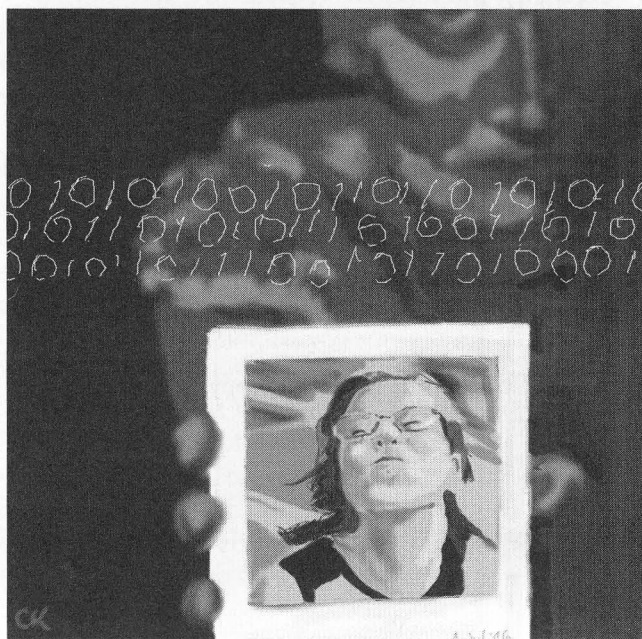
Resonance: Static (Accurate) 1, Entropic (Dissonant) 1

BAESYL

Background: Baesyl has been involved in music for as long as she remembers. Much to her chagrin, upon graduation her father got her a computer instead of an instrument. He insisted she needed to do something more practical with her life than a career in music. Irritated at first, Baesyl began using the computer as a tool to shape sound. Soon, she was composing again, selling her mix tapes at the local clubs. Some time after that, a group down at the clubs invited her to a rave. On the way up, they had Baesyl smoke a bowl of pot (her first) and pop some Ecstasy (also her first). She spent the night in a whirlwind of sensation and excitement, seeing the music as lines of force that flowed through everything.

She woke the next morning to a blinding headache and a call from her friends. They asked her to forgive them for the prank they had pulled on her. The "Ecstasy" had been baby aspirin. The "pot" had been herbs from the kitchen. Baesyl took in the information with some concern. If it hadn't been drugs, what had happened last night? She popped some aspirin to deal with her headache, sat down to compose some music, and found the same trip repeating itself again. Scared and a little breathless, she experimented with herself, the music, and the aspirin all week until she finally, completely Awoke.

She dropped a message online to see if anyone else had gone through similar experiences and was immediately contacted by the Virtual Adepts. After training with a few musically minded Adepts, she moved to California to work with Parasite Moon Productions as their resident composer.



Baesyl serves as the "scout" for Cell-V, using her sympathy with sound to deal with communication and surveillance. More than once, her attention to detail has kept the cabal from serious trouble. Baesyl believes it's her responsibility to make sure everyone gets out of a mission in one piece.

Image: Baesyl is a handsome woman in her mid-30s with a short, stocky body, reddish-brown hair and a piercing gaze. She dresses in whatever happens to be clean and available at the time, even if the clothes aren't hers or don't fit. While moving, Baesyl always seems to be half-dancing, reacting to some sort of internal beat only she can hear. She seems most at ease behind a keyboard, sculpting music and sound in unique and astonishing ways.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an anti-Goth, relentlessly cheerful and exuberant. In your world, rarely anything goes wrong. The worst of life you tend to miss ("You found a blood-soaked pile of corpses? Sorry I missed it. I was out in the car.") Some would say this is a little too much to be coincidental. What most people don't realize is that beneath your happy exterior is an almost maniacal trickster. You love finding secrets and revel in the fact that you know them as well. In fact, you are certain that at least some of the "Rogue Council" transmissions to your cabal actually trace back to a previous member of Cell-V, and you've been cleaning up traces of his or her identity for quite some time. So which one of them is really behind the transmissions? You'll never tell!≠

Alt: Reality Coder

Essence: Primal

Nature: Trickster

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5 (Conniver), Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4 (Intuitive)

Talents: Alertness 2, Expression 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Crafts 3 (Car Repair), Drive 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Performance 4 (Music), Stealth 3, Technology 4 (Electronics)

Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 4 (Hacking), Enigmas 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 3 (Spanish, English, American Sign Language), Medicine 2

Backgrounds: Avatar 2, Contacts 4, Destiny 2

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Forces 4, Mind 2

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 0

Resonance: Dynamic (Energetic) 1

RANTS



Brought to you fresh from the desk of COyOte...

All right — every Tradition has its own collection of little trivia bits, legends, apocrypha and the like that they prefer to draw on; the Adepts are no different. So, without further ado, here are the ghastly little stories that keep the Adept children awake at night.

DEMONSEED ELITE

Everybody knows the tale....

You're typing on your computer late one night, and you find this forgotten weblink — it looks like a cool site, but you just can't get in. Decryption algorithms don't work, hacking macros go awry. Finally, you curse the site's webmaster, Demonseed Elite, and shut off the computer.

Or maybe you've heard about this uberhacker that everybody wants to beat. You've dropped e-mails out there, bitched him out on IRC, sent out every challenge you can think of; you want to meet this Demonseed Elite. But nothing happens. In disgust, you shut the computer off.

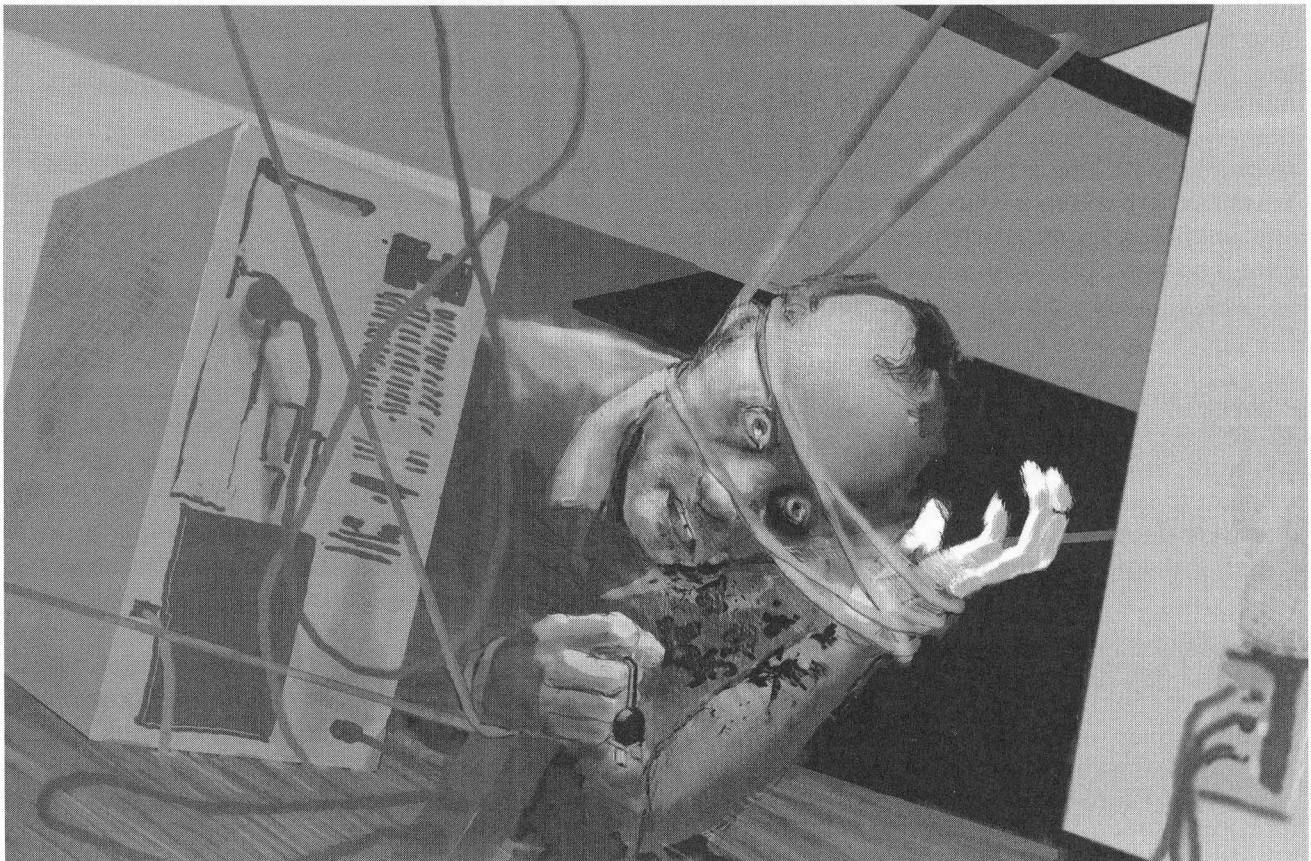
Or... you're doing it on a dare. Sit in front of the computer. Chant his name nine times. Turn the computer off and wait for the fireworks^o.

And then it happens.

Exactly what happens is a mystery; those rare victims who survive barely remember it. But the end result is the same: blood everywhere, broken bodies, broken technology, wires strewn out across the room like obscene tentacles. On the screen, the legend "Lamer" or "Lame Phuck," signed by "Demonseed Elite." Victims have been eviscerated, skewered by the tentacle wires, or even squashed flat. No one has been left untouched. At least that's how the stories go.

So who is Demonseed Elite?

Some say he's the son of a Virtual Adept and an It-X programmer. Some believe he's the product of an Adept and something that exists solely in virtual space. A quirky few think he might be the ghost of Turing, driven insane by his imprisonment in the Web. Others hypothesize he might not even be human, the first sentient A.I. wandering the Digi-Web.



The truth? Well, let's put one thing to rest real quick — there is no Adept called Demonseed Elite out there killing people.

The trouble is... something else is.

The Adepts have reports dating back to the 1800s regarding some sort of spirit/ghost/demon/thing that attacks people through mirrors. The names and phrases used to call it vary dramatically (“Bloody Bones,” “Mary Worth,” “Demonseed Elite”), but key elements always seem to be the same. You need to repeat a phrase multiple times. The phrase needs to include the entity's name. The phrase must be repeated into or near a mirrored surface. And finally, there must be some sort of dying light that inevitably goes out (in the 1800s, it was a candle. In the 2000s, it's the fade out of a video monitor).

A Chaotician working on this “legend” believed the phrase was linked numerologically to the creature's Essence. That's why the phrases could change so drastically; as long as their mathematical correspondence was correct, the creature would come. As far as to what that mathematical link was, the Chaotician never recorded it since a successful experiment left him dead at the hands of Demonseed Elite.

Whatever this thing is, it's gotten more and more malevolent as technology has set in. In the 1970s, it was just up to scratching little girls. Now, it's likely to rip off your face and shove ODN cables through your brainpan. It seems to target younger people, but make no mistake — it will go after adults if provoked. A final note — all of the attacks have occurred around reflective surfaces. As long as your monitor is on, it won't act as a mirror, so if you keep your computer running, you're safe. Just pray no power outages occur. The Demonseed Elite is notoriously patient.

BACKDOOR TO THE TELLURIAN

Okay — it's an issue that comes up with every mage. Why do mages get Paradox while those damned werewolves and vampires don't? It's not fair!

Yeah, well get over it. Seriously though, let's take a moment to look at the creatures known as hemovores and lycanthropes. One theory on our blood-sucking friends is that they're the reality equivalent of a computer virus, hard-coded into the Tellurian back when reality was a little softer. To put this in a little simpler English, back when magic was in full swing, some vampire uberlord wanted to have little baby vampire children. To do so, he hacked into reality and forced it to recognize something — his Essence — as a legitimate part of the Tellurian's program (even though it wasn't). Then, when he forced his Essence onto somebody else

(which he probably did by biting them), the Tellurian would ignore that person, too. Of course, copies do degrade, so his next generation of little vampire children wouldn't be as strong as he was, but at least the process worked. So, vampires can do all these neat things because there is this hidden hiccup in the program, a benign “virus” that allows them to sidestep the rules mages have to follow. On the negative side, it doesn't allow for much wiggle room on powers. Any vampire trying to come up with something new could potentially alert the Tellurian to its viral status and get booted. Hardcore. We're talking explosive bats, here.

Enough about vampires — what about ye old shapeshifters? Well, the theory runs about the same with these ones with a twist. The running theory is that the werewolves were originally mages, Dreamspeakers, who saw the writing on the wall and the death of their Tradition and so did the vampire bit by hardcoding their powers in, too. Apparently, they did it in a more elegant way since it looks like the Tellurian actually likes them more than it does vamps. Still, the same rules apply. A werewolf that gets too close to mage-like powers gets blown up by reality. At least, that's the theory.

Hmm. Thinking about it, it makes sense if the first vamp was a mage too, probably a Verbena-prototype. If that were true, he'd probably start out in the traditional Verbena vein (no pun intended) — a gardener, or possibly a farmer. It'd be an interesting myth to follow up on.

Now why don't the Adepts just hardcode Paradox-avoidance into their reality? Well, they're working on it. It's just taking some time.

ADEPTS AND THE ROGUE COUNCIL

Imagine a group who thinks the Ascension War has not ended, who thinks there is a chance to save mankind from the Technocracy — a group so good at encrypting, decrypting, and hiding in plain sight that they can't be traced. Who do you have? The Virtual Adepts, of course!

Oh wait, you were thinking about the Rogue Council? Interesting^{o≠}

The first time the Rogue Council transmissions started, it drove the Adepts nuts. They were used to breaking down puzzles, but this one just refused to be solved. So, in true Adept style, they began to take credit for it. Adepts claimed to be the source of the transmissions, its recipients, and even took to occasionally forging Rogue Council communications. This all added confusion to the original question: “Who is the Rogue Council?”

The answer is, unfortunately, that there is no answer and none immediately forthcoming. The mystery continues and the Adepts will still just have to deal with it.

V OICES IN THE V OID

A number of Nexplorers have reported odd phenomena in the Digi-Web, leading some to question whether virtual space is as “empty” as people believe. From the unformatted areas, strange beings have occasionally been seen and voices heard in the distance. Are these remnants from the White Out? Something from another time and space? Or are there creatures actually native to the virtual realm?

The most prevalent theory is that these are “ghost images” left over from the White Out. Proponents of this theory believe that the fluid nature of space-time in the Digi-Web allows glimpses back to certain areas before they were erased by the White Out. Several Time Adepts who hold to this idea have been frantically searching these sections to try and rescue their fallen comrades. They use the ghost image as an anchor to help them journey back in time before the White Out occurred. So far, no Time Adept who has attempted this journey has ever returned.

A number of Adepts claim that they have entered full-blown Digi-Web sites that have no connection to our normal space-time and possess reality rules completely different from our own. Nearly shattered by the experience, those Adepts who have recovered believe that these sites, which fade out and vanish after being visited, are remnants from a previous universe still in its death throes.

Finally, some among the Adept urban primitives believe that these “ghosts” aren’t ghosts at all but actual entities that have arisen from information sources “gestating” like eggs in virtual space. They believe that these entities ultimately emerge in space-time as new spirits that in turn fuel new technologies.

None of these theories have any corroborating evidence, outside of the people who support them. And one, all, or none of these theories could be true. The only other theory that is of interest came from a single Adept (which is why it’s relegated here, to the complete crackpot section). He claims that, during an especially intense Seeking, he stumbled across a razor thin “crack” in virtual space. Following it “up” towards space-time, he discovered himself in what the Euthanatos describe as the land of the dead. Terrified, the Adept zipped down the other direction and found himself above a mass of concentrated insanity in the “center” of the Digi-Web. According to him, virtual space is nothing

more than a prison for a mass of demons, now escaping into the world through cracks caused by the Whiteout/Avatar Storm and mankind’s abuse of the Digi-Web. Of course, he’s now a babbling, incoherent mess after a series of stress-related aneurysms, so we’ll never know the truth of the matter. No one, even after long searches, has found even a shred of proof to suggest that he’s right.

C OSMIC EGG

Since the whole “Voices in the Void” legend started, some of the Nexplorers have come up with another concept they call the “Cosmic Egg.” What if, they ask, virtual space is the medium within which some infinitely large entity is growing? Using this metaphor, they claim unformatted virtual space is like the egg white, protecting the embryonic entity. Information from spacetime, which makes up the sites on the Digi-Web, serves as the yolk feeding its growth. The entity, known variously as the World-Spider, God-In-the-Machine, or the Dream-Weaver, is expected to hatch once the Digi-Web is filled with information from our universe.

Where is their proof? The entire Cosmic Egg theory comes from one Elite Adept, “Run-Time Error,” known for his exploration of both the Digi-Web and an Umbral Realm known as the “CyberRealm.” He generated the theory after allegedly being contacted by the entity in question. According to his followers (about a dozen in total), he produced amazing feats of Correspondence to back up his claim. Unfortunately, he was lost in the White Out before others could verify or refute his philosophy. His followers still believe he lives, protected by the entity he discovered and worshiped.

M ETAVVERSE

The idea of the Hypersphere is a novel hypothesis for the way the universe works, but it’s not the only one. One of the more modern theories is that our universe is part of a meta-universe, which possesses a number of different realities that interact side by side. This would go a long way towards explaining the existence of Umbral and Horizon Realms — under the metaverse theory, these would actually be different universes co-existing beside our own. The Avatar Storm was the result of a collision between two universes.

Why is this important to the Adepts? The concept of a Metaverse disrupts their idea about the Correspondence Point. Rather than leading to some sort of enlightenment, mastery of the Correspondence Point would only lead to a perspective of this universe and not necessarily the metaverse at large. Under these circumstances, Ascension may not be possible for humanity as a whole or even for anyone at all.

Proponents of the Metaverse theory fall into two camps. The first camp believes that the quest for Ascension should be abandoned to make life more comfortable in the here and now. Humanity can go fuck itself; only the Awakened should remain. The second camp goes a step further and believes this universe should be abandoned entirely for a new one. They seek the escape routes that will let the Awakened leave for a better place.

Metaverse adherents generally keep to themselves, but have been known to sabotage Adept plans. For them, it's a way of showing people how futile their struggle is. For others, it is a source of never-ending frustration. Metaversers (slang for the metaverse believers) have also been known to look the other way on Technocratic evils, believing that it's no longer any of their business.

THE ENDGAMIE AGENDA

There are a few Adepts who think it's too late. The Tellurian source code has been so polluted with Technocracy meddling and Ascension War strain that the whole thing is breaking down. The Avatar Storm was just the beginning, showing the "cracks in the shell," so to speak. Soon, internal pressure created by the expansion of the Digi-Web will cause the whole thing to

fracture and — poof! — there goes reality. To survive, these Apocalypse worshipers work against expansion on the Digi-Web. This is usually accomplished by screwing with Sleepers (who can't fight back). A rare few of these Adepts also make deals with extra-dimensional entities, serving them in return for guaranteed survival after space-time crashes. If not already so, these bargaining Adepts come very close to anyone's definition of a Nephandi.

SHADØWMASTERS

After the discovery of mnemonoviruses, some Adepts came up with the frightening theory that the Turing Virus wasn't the only virus implanted in them. They believe that a deeper, more sinister virus is at work as well, a "Trojan Horse" that forces their Tradition to spread the disease of the Technocracy. To these conspiracy theorists, the Virtual Adepts will take control of reality and then turn on the Traditions, devastating them. Then, they will return to their true masters, the Technocracy. The creepy part about this conspiracy is that some of these conspiracy theorists have uncovered moles within the Adepts. It's debatable whether these were isolated incidents or part of a larger agenda.

End Coyote Rants File. Thank you for playing.

TØMMØRØW'S CHILDREN: TEMPLATES



Adepts believe themselves to be the next, best hope for mankind. The following section

provides characters as an inspiration for Storytellers or players.



THE CYBER-SAMURAI

Quote: *In strategy, you shouldn't act any different than normal. Both in fighting and in everyday life, let your spirit be determined and calm.*

Prelude: You've been working on computers all your life. When you were a kid, it was like solving a puzzle, and you took to it naturally. You could build them. You could tear them apart. You could program them almost before you could read. Your parents looked forward to having their prodigy child become the next Bill Gates.

Then came the teenage years. Computers became boring — at least when used in their standard way. You joined up with a bunch of phreaks on the net and set yourself up as the god of crackers. You shut down websites and sometimes credit systems, screwed up phone companies and overwhelmed online airline reservations just for fun. You even took a shot at the Pentagon.

Then someone online challenged you to break into the website of someone called the Demonseed Elite. As you failed time and again, you became angry and went out of your way to find out who this uberhacker was. Big mistake. Your online friends began disappearing. Then, one night, after you had shut the computer off in disgust, your screen abruptly turned back on and glowed with an ominous light. The word "Lamer" appeared. The explosion right after that almost took the roof off.

You survived, but your spine was partially severed, your hearing was gone, and you'd never see well again. In physical therapy, the doctors thought you'd never walk again either. Sobbing in bed one night, you Woke up. The awareness of the potential you had, all of the potential you wasted, flooded through you and you understood what you could do if only you got a second chance.

Soon after, a new physical therapist appeared and offered you that second chance with the Adepts. Now you've got a chip in your spine to let you walk and a combination eyeglasses/hearing aid rig to aid your senses. You've taken up the role of a protector. You work hard to aid the Adepts against those who would kill the Dream.

Concept: You're a "samurai," a coder who protects the data and avatars of others. In this case, it's the Adepts and the people they care about. While you wouldn't mind a rematch with Demonseed Elite, you focus on the doings of the New World Order and Iteration-X, preventing them from finding Adept



VIRTUAL DEPTS

NAME: _____		NATURE: Martyr	ALT: Cyberpunk
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Dynamic	CONCEPT: Cyber Samurai
CHRONICLE: _____		DETECTOR: Bravo	CABAL: _____

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength <small>Fats Like Andls</small> ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina <small>Pain Resistor</small> ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●●●●●	Crafts ●●●●●	Academics ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive ●●●●●	Computer Programming ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Cosmology ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Firearms ●●●●●	Engineering ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Meditation ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Melee ●●●●●	Law ●●●●●
Intimidation <small>Empire Threats</small> ●●●●●	Performance ●●●●●	Linguistics ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●	Stealth ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●	Survival ●●●●●	Occult ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●	Technology ●●●●●	Science ●●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence ●●●●●	Life ●●●●●	Prime ●●●●●
Entropy ●●●●●	Matter ●●●●●	Spirit ●●●●●
Forces ●●●●●	Mind ●●●●●	Time ●●●●●

BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Avatar ●●●●●	●●●●●○○○○○	Bruised -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wonder <small>Medified</small> ●●●●●	●●●●●○○○○○	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
sub-dermal rig: Quint 4000000	●●●●●○○○○○	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
single Effect — Hard-Up 0000000	●●●●●○○○○○	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>

OTHER TRAITS	WILLPOWER	RESONANCE
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Dynamic ●●●●●○○○○○
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Entropic ●●●●●○○○○○
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	Static Focused ●●●●●○○○○○
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	EXPERIENCE
●●●●●○○○○○	●●●●●○○○○○	

strongholds. You also try to undo the worst of the Technocracy's clumsy excesses in virtual space.

Roleplaying Tips: You act like a superhero, like the character Wolverine in the comics or Neo of the *Matrix* movies. You practice the codes of the ancient samurai and the ways of samurai characters presented by William Gibson in his cyberpunk books. You're even taking up swordplay in your spare time to try and toughen yourself up as a real warrior. You look at every situation as a strategic one, planning for the worst. You don't fear death — after all, you've faced it once before and survived!

Magic: Your magic is channeled primarily through your "deck" (your computer) and you spend as much time in virtual space as you do in reality. When in the real world, you channel Forces through your sword and use Correspondence to make sure your blow always lands in the right place. When on the web, Entropy and Correspondence Spheres are your friends in your war against the Mirrorshades and Black Hats.

Equipment: Black leather trench coat, hacking trinary "deck" with VR goggles and sub-VOX attachment, samurai sword that has an electrical discharge, ceramic breastplate.

CONSOLE COWBOY

Quote: *Meatspace? Boring! I've got an entire universe in here.*

Prelude: Okay, here's the story you like to tell: You were the child of a well-to-do family. They loved you and gave you everything you wanted. You got the best computer stuff and after breaking all records, you finally Awoke, joining up with the Adepts as the hottest thing out there.

Now the truth:

Your parents weren't bad folks; they just didn't care about you, about life, about anything. Because of this, you became a loner. One of your aunts took pity on you and bought you a computer, hoping you'd meet new friends. It changed your life.

When you went online, you found entire worlds of lonely people just like you. You learned about sex way earlier than anyone else in your class — well, technically not "real" sex, but who cares about that, right? And if you had enough time, you could answer any question or test the school gave you by looking up the answers on the Internet.

You started ordering stuff online, expensive stuff, using stolen credit cards you got from chat-room friends. Then, one night, you inadvertently stumbled into a place called Spy's Demise. The people there talked about "Traditions" and "Ascension Wars" and other goofy stuff. One guy introduced himself as a vampire and asked where you lived. You gave him a friend's address (you still wonder why that friend never calls anymore).

You got offline feeling woozy. For the next week you felt different and things looked sharper, like you were on LSD or some other drug — not that you'd ever taken any drugs, but you knew all about them from the Net.

Then a Fed-ex package came containing a sleek obsidian box. The box folded open like a flower, revealing elegant symbols on a touch sensitive pad. There seemed to be a built-in microphone, a built-in modem, a built-in everything. You spent the better part of a year working on it before you found the display (it was holographic, sent directly to your eyes) and managed to hook it online through your "old-fashioned" computer. That's when things went horribly wrong.

The damned thing immediately hacked into the FBI's database, and threatened to dump all the information on your old computer (from stolen credit cards to the purchases you made) right into the criminal database. It took every skill you had to prevent that from happening. Soon after, the FBI came to your house and arrested you — only it wasn't the FBI. It turns out that the Virtual Adepts had had an eye on you ever since you visited the Spy's Demise. And now, since you passed the test, you are one of them.

Concept: You are the stereotype of the computer geek, a loner, somewhat shy, except when you're online. Then, you're a living god who can do and say anything.

Roleplaying Tips: Be extreme! In meatspace, you follow other folks' lead, but you understand virtual space. That's where you can really be you. Take chances and never, ever, back down from a challenge.

Magic: Your Avatar never fully woke up — or perhaps it's just as shy as you are. Though you fully expect to be the greatest one day, right now you are only comfortable working your magic in virtual space. Correspondence and Forces are your forte, and you look forward to learning more about this brave new world.

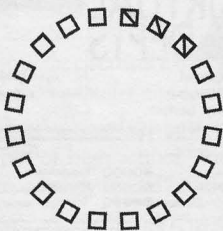
Equipment: The best computer equipment money can buy, bag of carrots, bag of chips, case of soda, disk of stolen credit card numbers.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS		
NAME: _____	NATURE: Child	ALT: Nexplorer
PLAYER: _____	ESSENCE: Questing	CONCEPT: Console Cowboy
CHRONICLE: _____	DEITY/ANGEL: Loner	CABAL: _____
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL		MENTAL
Strength ●○○○○	Charisma ●○○○○	Perception ●●●○○
Dexterity ●●●○○	Manipulation ●●●○○	Intelligence: Book-Smart: ●●●○○
Stamina ●●●○○	Appearance ●●●○○	Wits ●●●○○
ABILITIES		
TALENTS		KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●○○○○	Crafts: Home Repair ●○○○○	Academics ●●●○○
Athletics ●○○○○	Drive ●○○○○	Computer: Hacker ●●●○○
Awareness ●○○○○	Etiquette ●○○○○	Cosmology ●○○○○
Brawl ●○○○○	Firearms ●○○○○	Enigmas ●○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○	Meditation ●○○○○	Investigation ●○○○○
Expression ●○○○○	Melee ●○○○○	Law ●○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○	Performance ●○○○○	Linguistics ●○○○○
Leadership ●○○○○	Stealth ●○○○○	Medicine ●○○○○
Streetwise ●○○○○	Survival ●○○○○	Occult ●○○○○
Subterfuge: Untraceable Lie ●●●○○	Technology: Computer Repair ●●●○○	Science ●○○○○
SPHERES		
Correspondence ●●○○○	Life ●○○○○	Prime ●○○○○
Entropy ●○○○○	Matter ●○○○○	Spirit ●○○○○
Forces ●○○○○	Mind ●○○○○	Time ●○○○○
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Arcane ●○○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Library (All Online) ●●●○○		Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Resources ●○○○○		Injured -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○		Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○		Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○		Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○		Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER TRAITS	QUINTESSENCE	RESONANCE
Virtual Space (Search) ●●●○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Dynamic Quick ●○○○○
●○○○○		Entropy ●○○○○
●○○○○		Static ●○○○○
●○○○○		EXPERIENCE
●○○○○	PARADOX	



ARETE
WILLPOWER
QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX
DYNAMIC
ENTROPIC **Destructive**
STATIC

RESONANCE



QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

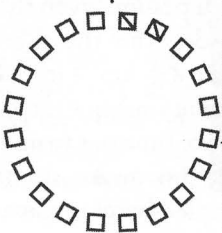
ARETE
WILLPOWER
QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: **Cybered Punk**
CHRONICLE: _____
ALT: **Cyberpunks**
ESSENCE: **Dynamic**
CABAL: _____
NATURE: **Rebel**
DETEANOR: **Deviant**

VIRTUAL INDEPTS

ARETE
WILLPOWER
QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX
DYNAMIC
ENTROPIC **Focused**
STATIC

RESONANCE



QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

ARETE
WILLPOWER
QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: **Adept Assassin**
CHRONICLE: _____
ALT: **Chaotician**
ESSENCE: **Pattern**
CABAL: _____
NATURE: **Penitent**
DETEANOR: **Perfectionist**

VIRTUAL INDEPTS

BACKGROUND
Allies x1
Arcane x2
Avatar x1
Contacts x3

SPHERES
Initiate of Correspondence
Disciple of Entropy
Apprentice of Mind

NOTES

PHYSICAL
Brutal x2
Enduring
Graceful x2
Quick
Ferocious
SOCIAL
Expressive x3

MENTAL

ABILITIES
Cunning
Flexible x2
Wily x2
Computer
Dodge x2
Firearms
Intimidation
Melee

BACKGROUND
Arcane x4
Avatar x2
Contacts x1

SPHERES
Initiate of Correspondence
Initiate of Entropy
Initiate of Life
Apprentice of Time

NOTES

PHYSICAL
Agile x2
Steady x3
SOCIAL
Dignified
Genial x2

MENTAL

ABILITIES
Attentive
Observant x2
Determined x2
Disciplined x2
Alertness
Firearms x2
Investigation x2
Melee

ADEPT ASSASSIN

Quote: *The good of the many outweighs the needs of the few. Or the one. Sorry. (Pulls the trigger.)*

Prelude: You were always good at math. Even when young, you juggled equations in your head and memorized every baseball player stat in the history of the sport. College found you splitting your time between computers and physics, not entirely sure where you wanted to go. Then you met *her*. It was in Sociology, one of those general education requirements you loathed. You thought, “there is no way she is looking at me,” but there it was — that look. One date at a coffee shop, and you were an inseparable pair.

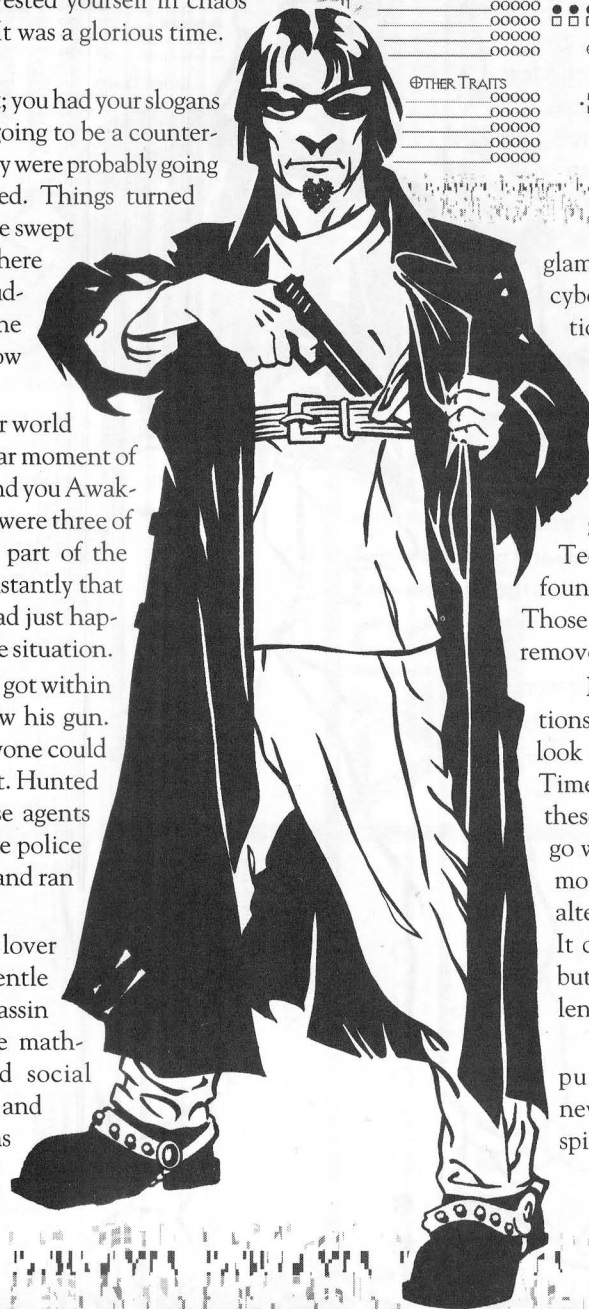
She showed you there was more out there than your equations. She got you interested in science fiction and sociology. You watched her loopy TV shows and argued whether the discipline of “psycho-history” was even feasible. She was an activist and dragged you out to demonstrations. Just for fun, you mapped out equations to predict the crowd’s reactions during events. You invested yourself in chaos theory and fractal mathematics. It was a glorious time. Unfortunately, it didn’t last.

The march started out perfect; you had your slogans figured out. You knew there was going to be a counter-protest and you predicted what they were probably going to do. Then something happened. Things turned swiftly, brutally violent. The police swept in to deal with the problem. There were shots fired. Your love was suddenly fallen, dying. Things had gone so far out of control, so quickly. How could this have happened?

As she died in your arms, your world suddenly clarified. In a crystal clear moment of pain, everything fell into place, and you Awakened. Then, you saw *them*. There were three of them, to all appearances just a part of the counter-protest. But you knew instantly that they were responsible for what had just happened. They were in control of the situation.

Somehow, as if by magic, you got within reach of a police officer and drew his gun. You shot all three men before anyone could react, and then fled into the night. Hunted by the New World Order, whose agents you had killed, and wanted by the police for murder, you kept running — and ran straight into the Adepts.

Concept: The death of your lover has left you cold inside. From a gentle scientist, you’ve become an assassin for the Virtual Adepts. You use mathematics, fractal equations and social dynamics to hunt down your prey and trap them. Your life may not be as



VIRTUAL ADEPTS™

NAME: Penitent	NATURE: Penitent	ALT: Chaotician
PLAYER: Pattern	ESSENCE: Pattern	CONCEPT: Adept Assassin
CHRONICLE:	DEFINER: Perfectionist	CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: Swift ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: Analytical ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: Combat Reflexes ●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: Ambushes ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●	Firearms: Sniping ●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: Profiling ●●●●
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Arcane: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 □
Avatar: ●●●●	WILLPOWER	Hurt: -1 □
Contacts: ●●●●	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	Injured: -1 □
●●●●	QUINTESSENCE	Wounded: -2 □
●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: -2 □
●●●●	PARADOX	Crippled: -5 □
●●●●	OTHER TRAITS	Incapacitated: -□ □
●●●●	●●●●	Dynamic: ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●	Entropic: ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●	Seris: Focused ●●●●
●●●●	●●●●	EXPERIENCE
●●●●	●●●●	□

glamorous as the console cowboys or cyber-jockeys, but you justify your actions by knowing that you protect the architects of a better world.

Roleplaying Tips: You’re a “Fox Mulder” who tracks down and destroys the enemy. Most of your time is spent piecing together elusive clues to locate your Technocratic prey, but once you’ve found them you are single-minded. Those that threaten the Dream will be removed from it.

Magic: You use mathematical equations to describe how things work and look for holes where things go wrong. Time and Correspondence shows you these events. Entropy shows when they go wrong and how — that’s when you move. You target those influences that altered the event and neutralize them. It doesn’t always have to be violent, but you’re surprised at how often violence is the easiest solution.

Equipment: TV, calculator, computer, weapons (lots of them), newspaper clippings of plots and conspiracies.

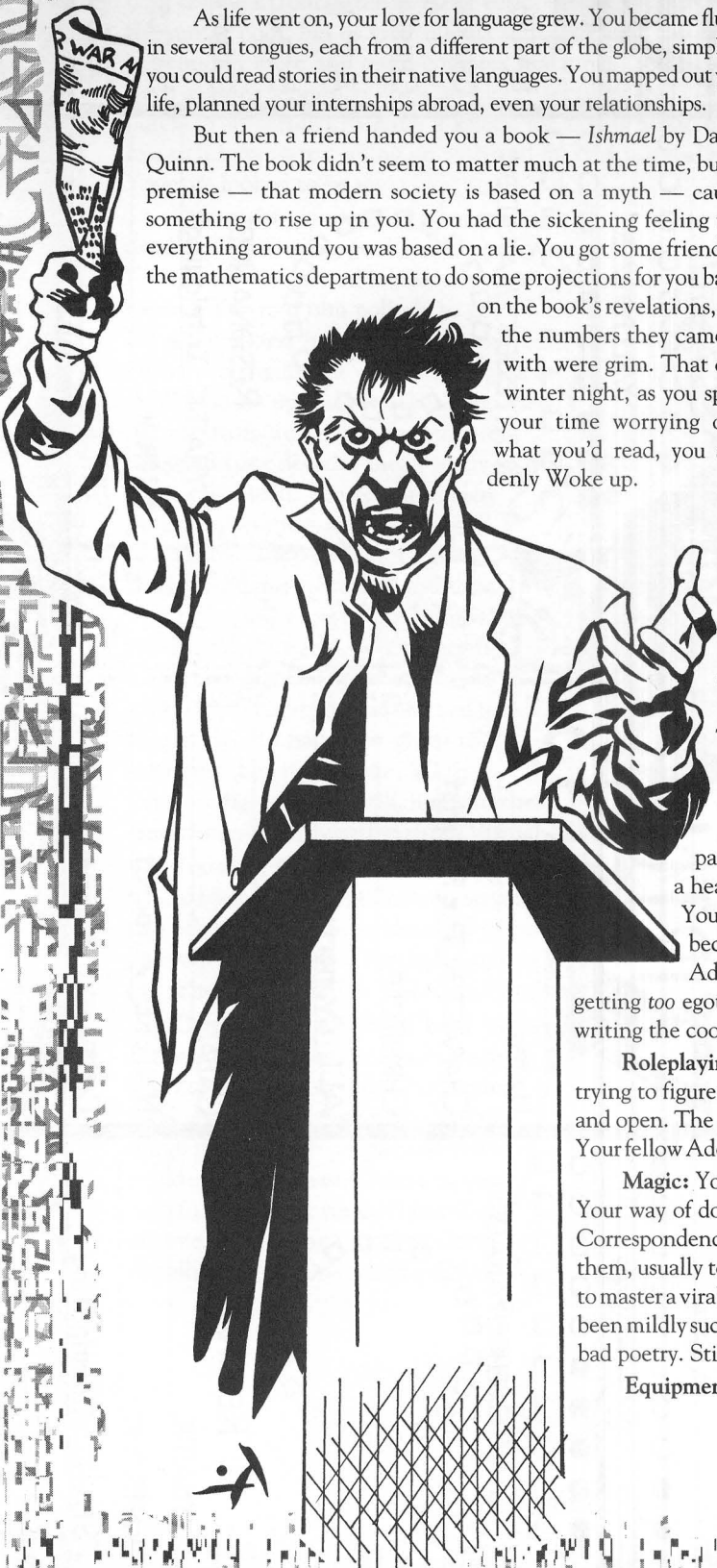
THE FUTURIST

Quote: *I understand your point. I used to be just like you. But there's another way to see things.* (Presents a manuscript.)

Prelude: You had a privileged childhood, nothing fancy, but comfortable all the same. Your teachers all thought you were going to become a writer. You were in the journalism and lit clubs and got top grades in English class. Out of school, you wrote poetry and short stories. You even ran a few fiction e-zines on the Web.

As life went on, your love for language grew. You became fluent in several tongues, each from a different part of the globe, simply so you could read stories in their native languages. You mapped out your life, planned your internships abroad, even your relationships.

But then a friend handed you a book — *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn. The book didn't seem to matter much at the time, but its premise — that modern society is based on a myth — caused something to rise up in you. You had the sickening feeling that everything around you was based on a lie. You got some friends in the mathematics department to do some projections for you based on the book's revelations, and the numbers they came up with were grim. That cold winter night, as you spent your time worrying over what you'd read, you suddenly Woke up.



VIRTUAL DEPTS™

NAME: _____ NATURE: **Autocrat** ALT: **Cypherpunk**
 PLAYER: _____ ESSENCE: **Pattern** CONCEIT: **The Futurist**
 CHRONICLE: _____ DEITY/ANGEL: **Survivor** CABAL: _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation/Repressive: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance/Expressive: ●●●●	Wits: Intuitive ●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ○○○○	Crafts: ○○○○	Academics: Literature ●●●●
Athletics: ○○○○	Drive: ○○○○	Computer: ●○○○
Awareness: ○○○○	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ○○○○
Brawl: ○○○○	Firearms: ○○○○	Enigmas: ●○○○
Dodge: ○○○○	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ○○○○
Expression: Prose ●●●●	Melee: ○○○○	Law: ○○○○
Intimidation: ○○○○	Performance: ○○○○	Linguistics: Spanish, German ●●●●
Leadership: ○○○○	Stealth: ○○○○	Medicine: ○○○○
Streetwise: ○○○○	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ○○○○
Subterfuge: ●○○○	Technology: ○○○○	Science: Psychology ●●●●

SPHERES

Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ○○○○	Prime: ○○○○
Entropy: ○○○○	Matter: ○○○○	Spirit: ○○○○
Forces: ○○○○	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Allies: ●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Avatar: ●○○○		Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Contacts: ●○○○	WILLPOWER	Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Destiny: ●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Library: ●○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER TRAITS	QUINTESSENCE	RESONANCE
○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Dynamic: ○○○○
○○○○		Entropic: ○○○○
○○○○		Static: illuminating ●○○○
○○○○	PARADOX	EXPERIENCE
○○○○		

The net result was a month of furious writing to people you knew, to schools, to businesses, to local and state governments. It got you kicked out of college and almost disowned by your parents. It also got the attention of the Virtual Adepts.

You had gotten a glimpse behind the curtain at the world the Technocracy had created. Now, it was time to strike back. You've dedicated your life to fighting the propaganda of the Union, and language is your weapon.

Concept: You're a writer who influences reality. Sometimes it's painful, as you feel like you're fighting the world (you are). Sometimes it's a head-trip, since you can actually mold Sleepers to your will if you wanted. You've often found yourself fighting the desire to go down the Dark Path and become a controlling shit like the Technocracy. But your buddies in the Adepts make you eat humble pie with their outrageous pranks when you start getting *too* egotistical. This shocks you out of it and you go back to what you do best: writing the coolest anti-propaganda out there.

Roleplaying Tips: Half of your time you've got your head stuck up in the clouds trying to figure out what you're going to write next. If shaken out of it, you are friendly and open. The other half of the time your passions take control and you go off on rants. Your fellow Adepts take that as a sign to take you down a peg or two in pure Adept fashion.

Magic: Your goal is to directly counter the mind magics of the New World Order. Your way of doing this is through language, either spoken or written. Your Mind and Correspondence Spheres work well to this effect, and you are constantly trying to sharpen them, usually to the detriment of everything else. You're currently working on a project to master a viral language that will make people who read NWO propaganda sick. It's only been mildly successful, and has the unfortunate side effect of making people ill if they read bad poetry. Still, you're certain you'll get it right in the end.

Equipment: Notepad, satellite cell phone, pen, pencil, PDA.

EPILOGUE: EDUCATION UNDER FIRE



BOOKsmart sat down at a vacant table outside of the café and sipped at his mocha latte. The warmth felt good against the chill spring evening breeze. It wouldn't be long before the humidity of an East Coast summer would arrive and nightly coffee would become a luxury too unbearable to endure. He cherished the next sip all the more.

A pager beep shifted his attention to the device attached to his hip. He didn't even have to open it to know who sent the text message. He guessed which of COy0te's three favorite VR sites he would pick to meet with him straight away before reading the message.

So predictable.

He confirmed the date and time, then shut the pager. He cupped the mocha in his hands and sighed contentedly. *A nice spring night, indeed.*

• • •

No sooner did BOOKsmart arrive in the e-Bookstore than COy0te accosted him. "What the fuck were you thinking?" he demanded in his typically churlish way. "The girl's not even an Adept yet!"

"Yes she is," he calmly replied. "Official word came down yesterday. I'm guessing she hasn't taken the time to tell you, though, on account of the Technocrat chasing her through v-space."

Anger turned into concern. "Is she all right?"

BOOKsmart nodded. "She's fine for now. If it gets rough, I'll step in and run some interference for her. You'll forgive me, though, if I seem a little preoccupied during our conversation."

"Oh. No worries." COy0te picked up a book on existentialism. "I still think it was a bit rough to cast the Learn-It rote on her, especially this early in her development."

BOOKsmart rendered himself a Slinky. "She's the one who tried to set me up, not the other way around. And don't blame me for catching her in the act, either. Besides," he added, oscillating the Slinky, "it's not like she hasn't been handling the pressure."

"True. And she is learning from it." He skimmed a few pages and turned to BOOKsmart. "How's she doing now?"

BOOKsmart smirked. "Fine, but if you'd like I can tell you where to Correspond to so you can watch for yourself."

COy0te gave him a short nod. "Thanks."

• • •

Holly ducked behind a dumpster. Bullets ricocheted off the brick wall where she'd been standing. Though she couldn't directly see where the Technocracy agent was hiding, she sensed his presence 20 yards away on the other end of the alley.

She fantasized about the many ways she would kill BOOKsmart for casting that fucking rote on her. Her favorite one was using the tassel on his Icon's robes as a garrote and squeezing every last byte of life out of him. She wondered if he would turn as blue in the Web as in realspace.

"It's a dead end!" called out her assailant. "Give yourself up to me and I might let you live!"

Holly looked around for options. The broken bottle wasn't her style; neither was the two-by-four. She picked up her cell phone. But who would she call? By the time 911 responded, she'd already be dead, and there was no guarantee that COy0te would even answer.

She clicked on the phone log. The first number was one she didn't recognize. Then it dawned on her. All this started with an intercepted phone call from the agent shooting at her. She dialed *69.

At the other end of the alley, his phone started ringing. "Pick it up!" she hollered out to him. "I'm not going to yell if I don't have to!" *Please be a rookie! Please be a rookie!*

The agent answered the phone. "Ready to turn yourself in?"

"Hardly." She peeked around the corner. Spotting the agent's head poking above a pile of crushed cardboard boxes, she

cast an Arc rote. Lightning erupted from his cell phone. The agent cried out in anguish as electricity surged through his twitching body. By the time the rote finished, she could smell the faint odor of ozone and burning flesh.

She quickly looked around to make sure no one had seen what happened, then held her breath and sprinted past the dead or dying agent. As she rounded the corner and headed for the main road, she caught movement on a rooftop above her. Two men were watching her. Though they were silhouetted, she could tell what they wore. One of them with flowing robes and the other a heavy duster much like the one COy0te donned when he first found her after she had Awakened.

Swallowing the urge to Arc them, she exited into the street and melded with the crowds. Revenge would have to come another day, but when it did, it would be oh, so sweet!

REFERENCES



If you want to know more about the Virtual Adepts, take a look at the world outside. The growing power of the Internet, the march of computers into people's lives — these are signs the Adept Dream is growing. Still, if you need a few reference sources, here's some we've found useful.

Books

Neuromancer — Any novel that falls into the sci-fi "cyberpunk" genre applies, but if you want the book that started it all, pick up William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. His description of a dark, nihilistic future coined a number of the computer terms people use today. Also worth reading are *Virtual Light* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

Mirrorshades — Bruce Sterling is associated with Gibson as a cofounder of the cyberpunk phenomenon. Besides collaborating with Gibson, he also edited a collection of cyberpunk short stories entitled *Mirrorshades*. Well worth reading for the prospective Adept.

Snow Crash — For a different change of pace, Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* provides a bizarre mix of dark future, virtual mayhem, and ancient Sumerian metaviruses. Chock full of impressive tech and ideas, *Snow Crash* serves as one of the best examples of the use of neurolinguistics. Besides, the hero is a world-class hacker named Hiro Protagonist. How cool is that!

Technopoly — This is part of a series of nonfiction books by Neil Postman that unravel some of the common myths the Technocracy holds over the world. An interesting read for the critical thinker.

A Brief History of Time — Stephen Hawking's first foray into explaining quantum physics isn't the simplest of reads, but it does offer insights into the Hypersphere and the nature of space-time for those interested in the details of Correspondence.

Films

Tron — Though a number of movies use virtual reality, few portray it in a way that exemplifies the Adept ideal. *Tron* was the first to put VR on the map, and planted the idea of a virtual realm into the minds of a young generation. In the film, a programmer

is digitized into his own hijacked program and must find a way to hack himself back out.

Virtuosity — This is a strange little film about what would happen if a psychotic serial-killer program escaped to the real world. It's great if you want to see how really nasty an ASTRO (see pp. 68) could be. It also has some interesting points on the dangers of people interacting with personality software.

The Matrix, *Matrix Reloaded*, *Matrix Revolutions* — No film list would be complete without these movies. If you are one of the rare few that haven't seen the first, it's about a hacker who discovers he's lived his entire life inside a virtual realm run by machines. He's broken out of it by a group of freedom fighters trying to save the world, and much mayhem ensues. The *Matrix Trilogy* far and away defines the Tradition better than any other.

Comic Books

The Invisibles — This is the mother of all conspiracy books, a series of graphic novels by Grant Morrison that take you through every occult secret you've ever heard of. From alphabets that control the human mind to nano-swarms that warp reality, this is the ultimate comic guide to being an Adept. Anarchy for the masses, baby!

Websites

This wouldn't be an authentic Adept reference list without a few websites to check out.

www.disinfo.com is the home of *Disinformation*, a website dedicated to bringing you all the news that the big media outlets refuse to show. A must-see for anyone looking for a few in-game conspiracies.

www.indymedia.com provides a beautiful example of how Adepts might communicate with one another on the Web. The *Independent Media Center* encourages people on the street to report what happened instead of using "real" reporters. The result is an amazing mix of fact, fiction, and propaganda that will open your eyes.

www.anarchy.org and www.anarchysindicalism outline some of the beliefs of the anarchy movement, including current trends and past achievements. A requirement for Elite cyberpunks who like to understand a little bit of their history.

VIRTUAL DEPTS™

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ALLIES

LIBRARY

CONTACTS

MENTOR

DESTINY

NODE

INFLUENCE

RESOURCES

POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

EQUIPMENT (OWNED)

FOCI

WONDERS

FAMILIAR

PAST INCARNATIONS

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HISTORY AWAKENING

GOALS/DESTINY

SEEKINGS:

QUIETS:

DESCRIPTION

Age: _____

Apparent Age: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Age of Awakening: _____

Hair: _____

Eyes: _____

Race: _____

Nationality: _____

Height: _____

Weight: _____

Sex: _____

Appearance/Nature of Avatar: _____

VISUALS

CABAL CHART

CHARACTER SKETCH



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