

AETHERIUM

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

ANVIL & GAMES

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THE BASICS

The year is 2247. The material world is crumbling. Near continuous war and steady environmental decay has divided the world into unsteady and impoverished nations. People seek any escape they can find from the ravaged landscape and the brutal humiliations of their existence. Against this backdrop, a brand new reality has risen - the Aetherium, a vibrant universe that humanity can manipulate in unprecedented and astonishing ways. Hope has been rekindled, but so have the fires of conflict.



The Aetherium is a sprawling mindscape so real as to be indistinguishable from physical reality itself. In many ways, the Aetherium is more vivid, more wondrous, and more strange than the physical world that humanity so desperately wants to leave behind.

The Aetherium was born of an uncanny psycho-technological connection known as a Rig, an engineering marvel that alters the mind's neural pathways and sensory input. Rigs allow the human mind to send its consciousness fully into the Aetherium.

Despite our access to this new frontier, no one is completely certain as to the nature of the Aetherium – whether it is another dimension, another state of being, or perhaps a quantum digital reality.



The substance of the Aetherium is malleable, which only further obscures any insight into its fundamental nature. Human perception of the Aetherium slowly changes it, which in turn alters how someone perceives it, creating a kind of communal feedback cycle. This begs the question, was the Aetherium discovered or was it created?

For untold billions, the Aetherium represents humanity's salvation from the bleak drudgery of daily life in the material world. It is a salvation. That knowledge is enough for them.

Time – or at least, the perception of time – passes more quickly in the Aetherium. This peculiar time compression means that it is often more efficient to perform clerical and data-related work within the Aetherium, and entire industries have arisen around this concept. So many people have chosen to spend the majority of their lives within the Aetherium that the fundamental nature of human existence has altered as a result.

The material world has come to represent a sort of nightmare to which one must inevitably return in order to tend to their biological needs. Most people consider the lives they lead inside the Aetherium to be their “true” lives and no longer associate their physical vessels with who they are – their physical bodies are only so much meat.

And so, the Aetherium has become a symbol of hope and possibility that shines as a beacon against the dull, disappointing reality of the material world.

The Aetherium is not without its conflicts, however. Global corporations and ideological factions struggle constantly to control the most influential parts of the Aetherium, making it a place of freedom and control, consumption and balance, profit and stagnation.

It is the most important place humanity has ever discovered, and it is no place at all. It is the Aetherium.

ENTER!

Ranya switched on her Rig and closed her eyes, letting the darkness overtake her. After a few moments, muted shapes of light began to appear in front of her, visible in her mind if not to her eyes. Slowly, she tried to extend her senses outward by reaching out with her mind. Beyond her small chamber, amidst the steadily increasing mayhem of color, she began to perceive the landing and stairwells running out into the platforms and schema of this Node.

Ranya slumped back in her chair and could feel the steel behind her. She was fully in the transference chamber now, that place between the material world and the Aetherium, a halfway point for her senses to latch on to.

She moved as to lift a hand, but felt a small pull of her sync delay her. She was not here just yet. The Aetherium was just out of reach, the information flow from the Pylon cascading in front of her eyes in endless, vibrant billows of pure data.

The sheer amount of information being fed into her Rig from the unincorporated Pylon threatened to overwhelm her, and Ranya took a moment to collect herself.

She took a deep, mindful breath and, with a small curve of her index finger, began to willfully wave the clamor from her senses, encouraging her mind to focus. She caught herself with the same hand on the steelwork frame leading out into the greater Aetherium beyond.

Inhale. The saturated visual clutter slowly began to resolve itself, forming the familiar shapes of reality. She flexed her wrist and fingers in several small gestures in quick succession, conjuring sleek dark glasses into her hand. They appeared perfectly in her grasp as she completed the last gesture, as if her hand anticipated the shape of their arrival.

Exhale. She raised the glasses to her eyes and toggled the maps she had been given into the periphery of her vision and let the schemata hover there at the margin of her mind.

Inhale. And then she was through.

The transference was complete. She stepped across the threshold and onto the black and white tile landing in front of her, then down the slick marbled steps that, despite pretense of antiquity, showed absolutely no wear. She presumed this was an affectation of the schema, a suggestion of prestige, age, wealth, and ambition. It was all artifice.

They are predictable, these hacks, she thought. They want it both ways.

The stairs wound back and forth to various platforms in a bottomless descent. Her mind drew clarity from the repetition of seemingly endless steps taking her toward her destination.

She descended, crossed another tile landing identical to the one above, and then pushed through large wooden doors into something like sunlight.

She knew it couldn't be sunlight, of course, but the input was astonishingly crisp. She felt the air change, could taste the humidity, could feel more than warmth on her forearms. Could her skin be poisoned by the trace of the pseudo-radiation in this sunlight? She loved the complete submergence of the illusion, adored it.

The sound of the streets hit her just as the heat from the 'sun' sank in. The discordant cacophony of street sounds reminded her of her home back in the Meat, though she'd never felt sunlight so pure there.

Before her, a commercial plaza surrounding the Pylon core was sprawled out, overrun with shops and street vendors. The coordinates placed the drop in the middle of a teeming mess. She sucked her teeth a moment in a thin, low whistle; she hadn't expected this.

"Kabuto, Aureline, Steig. Are you in? Confirm," she sub-vocalized into the collar of her cotton blouse. Kabuto's hex pinged onto the display inside her glasses for response. He was a man of few words.

"Rooftop. 750 meters. I've got you clear code," Steig said in his deep tin voice as his indicator appeared. He had a touch of the mechanical about him. Ranya didn't know if it was a program effect or the product of too much time near the Noise. Either way, she found it grating. He had his uses, this Steig, but she'd be happy to have done with this sooner rather than later.

"I'm in." Then a small burst of static, "Not far. Sending the drop coordinates now," Aureline whispered. They had blinked in through different access points, as was standard on jobs like these. "... you're not going to like it"

Ranya already did not like the data stream she experienced when logging in, and that static didn't make it any better.

On the one hand, the drop would be perfect in a crowd, the frenetic commercial volume would make a fine distraction for one more small transaction amidst a sea of meaningless exchanges. On the other hand, she would be exposed in the open. Her mouth turned down to a grimace of resolve.

Ranya felt a distant rumble as if thunder were on the horizon. She could taste rain in the humid air. An absurd thought. Nevertheless, she paused for a moment in the shade of solid concrete overhang that jutted from the building.

She took a couple of minutes to re-program the thick cotton of her trousers and blouse, to a more elegant jacket hanging off her shoulders, her arms hidden, and a thin overlong scarf that she pulled over her head like a shawl. She drew the covering across her face so only her dark glasses shone from the fabric.

She thought a moment on how she must look – not exactly inconspicuous, but sufficiently standoffish. She wanted to be certain she was left alone.

Moving into the open courtyard, she spared a glance up and to her right as she moved. Across the cityscape she could see massive structures floating slowly across the sky, like plodding skyscrapers that had abandoned gravity and become beacons of light and space adrift in the air. Pylon's data streams shot heavenward with a brilliant deliberation.



She entered the random undulations of the crowd in the plaza, picking a decisive path through the bustle. She kept her pace quick and determined, ignoring the howl and flash of countless advertisements around her.

Although she wove an indirect line, her movement remained steady, alert, and assertive. She crossed 300 meters into the next square of the plaza, then 300 meters more into another that looked almost identical to the first. She wound through each commercial section, drawing deeper into the district. She was getting close.

"Heads."

She turned suddenly and saw Kabuto, next to her. How did he get so close without her noticing? Ranya continued to be amazed by the gentle little assassin.



Ranya kept her custom pistol program ready at the top of her thoughts, her left hand flexed into a pistol grip, ready. She didn't want to load the gun until she was sure she needed a tangible weapon. If she used the pistol program, it would likely announce her presence to the security protocols of this schema. That would be the end of any covert drop.

She heard thunder in the distance again.

Her glasses made a slight chirp of warning, and she turned to see the problem. On the corner of the plaza stood a large silver palanquin.

Had that been there a moment ago? She checked the retinal displays, but they couldn't tell her.

The solitary figure of a man in a tailored white suit stood next to the silver litter, arms clasped at the elbow behind his back. Around his neck, he wore a golden torc, two green stones glistened in either clasp. He had dark glasses, and she could see from the pale reflection that he was looking squarely back at her.

She felt the tiny prickle of hairs standing on her neck even before she registered the two mechanical dogs on either side of the man.

The dogs prowled in an endless loop in front of the man. The rhythmic cadence of their movements betrayed that they were operating from a linked AI. She saw a third move in step from behind the palanquin. It, too, was looking at her. The crowd in the plaza began to thin and then clear considerably.

He smiled as she turned fully toward him. This was close, but not the exact location she had been given. He seemed like the right person but ...in the wrong place.

His clean look, the white outfit, and the mechanical dogs all screamed Axiom to her. She'd dealt with the Axiom before. She'd prefer not to again. They didn't take kindly to those who might work outside their precious law and order.

She spotted Aureline 15 meters to her left, in line with the Man in White, and she made a conscious effort not to let her body language show that knowledge. Steig, she knew from her display, was above on the building behind him. Kabuto shouldered gently past her and stood a half step to the side and in front.

Ranya felt lost. With her hand hidden, she clasped the data cache in the inside pocket of her trousers. She felt in her bones that this wasn't her contact; that her data was supposed to be delivered to someone else. With an Axiom agent here, however, there was almost no chance that her contact would show.

The Man in White smiled again as if he'd read her thoughts, this time his smile was showing teeth. Ranya knew that he wouldn't let her leave without giving up the data, and she'd never be able to log out in time.

The fingers on Ranya's hand twitched, and her pistol began to materialize in her hand. As if in response, the Man in White gestured and the dogs began to spread out and move toward her, stalking low to the ground.

"Why don't you ask your friends to come out? It'll ruin my mood if I have to go get them."

Ranya raised her gun and fired.



SO WHAT IS THIS?

This book is the Aetherium Roleplaying Game (RPG). It provides everything players need to explore the Aetherium. In addition to the mechanical rules for playing the game, this book also provides an in-depth look at the Aetherium itself... and all of the things characters can do to shape that world. Finally, this book includes an example adventure that can jump-start players on their journey into the 23rd century.

This book is divided into two main sections: the Aetherium and the Meatspace. The Aetherium section (which you're reading now) describes the Aetherium, which should be the initial focus of a group. Once you've played through a few adventures in the Aetherium, take a look at the Meatspace section (pg. 196), which provides rules for what happens when characters leave the Aetherium and return to their dreary, depressing lives back in the "real" world.



What is a roleplaying game?

Roleplaying games are stories about adventure that are jointly told among a group of individuals. One person, called the Gamemaster (or GM) sets the stage and fills the world with people and interesting adventures. The other players take on the roles of Users, who are the protagonists of the story.

During a roleplaying game, each player, including the GM, acts out the personality and motivations of the character they're controlling. The most important characters in a game are the Users, as it's their struggles and successes that make up the core of every story. In many ways, playing Aetherium is like improvisational theater, with the Aetherium as the setting.

Roleplaying is not about talking the most, being the best, or even defeating the bad guys (though that's certainly fun). Roleplaying is first and foremost a chance to bring life to a character of your own creation. Characters in the world of Aetherium are wonderful and flawed, just like people in real life. A good character has strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices. The GM will place obstacles in front of the character that they must work to overcome, but players should set their own internal obstacles, allowing their Users to come face to face with their own vulnerability.

A player is responsible for bringing a vivid, multi-faceted User to life through roleplaying and interacting with the world the GM has created for them.

The GM is responsible for shaping the narrative of the adventure, populating the world with interesting and memorable characters the Users can encounter, and setting the pace for the story. It is the GM's presentation of the Aetherium that players will participate in and shape as they move through it.

Remember, there are many different ways to roleplay, and none of them are inherently better than the others. Everyone participating in a game should enjoy it, and it's up to the group as a whole to encourage each other to get fully into character and have fun.

What do I need to play?

To play a game of Aetherium, players will need this book, roughly one to four other players, a few character sheets, a large handful of ten-sided dice, Aetherium dice (twelve-sided dice work if you don't have Aetherium dice) and some writing implements (we encourage pencils).

It also helps if everyone has an active imagination and a desire to have fun through collaborative storytelling. Roleplaying games are only as much fun as everyone's willingness to engage with them, so we hope that you're excited about exploring the universe of the Aetherium!

What kind of character can I play?

The Aetherium RPG allows characters to dive into another world, a world that is teeming with possibility. Against the backdrop of the decaying material world, the Aetherium shines all the brighter, so the Users and their stories should shine with it.

Most any character type and trope from the real world can form the basis of a character within the Aetherium. Despite this freedom, every User in Aetherium should be looking for something; if they had everything they wanted in the material world, why would they bother coming to the Aetherium? A User may want freedom from the restraints of the material world, money, power, vengeance, or the recovery of something they lost.

The Users aren't the only people in the Aetherium with goals, however. A variety of menacing governments, insidious corporations, and other factions and Collectives control different places within, as well as access to, the Aetherium. These competing influences are prepared to do whatever it takes to maintain their control over the brilliant landscape of the Aetherium, and they rarely consider the individual costs of that control.

Character creation, which begins on page 25, will help players establish the core of their User, including their strengths and weaknesses. For most players, crafting a User and guiding them through adventure after adventure will be the core of the Aetherium RPG experience.

What makes the Aetherium RPG special?

Unlike most RPGs, the Aetherium RPG gives players an unprecedented amount of control over their world. During gameplay, characters can hack the world around them, allowing them to approach problems in original, exciting, and innovative ways.

Almost any story that could be told in the real world can be told in the Aetherium. Because of the Aetherium's unique and malleable nature, however, those stories can be given twists that would not be possible in the real world. For instance, a heist adventure becomes all the more interesting when the Users have to navigate a shifting data-maze that leeches information from them with each step. Good luck trying to avoid capture when your personal information is embedded into the walls of the place you just robbed!

The different locations found within the Aetherium often have distinct flavors and themes, due to the fact that the Aetherium is created by people. This allows games to switch between tone as often as necessary. One adventure might take the Users to a gritty, seedy bar located in the heart of a loosely controlled area near the edge of the Noise, while the next might bring the Users to a pristine city of law and order where diplomacy and carefully chosen words are the only paths forward.

These disparate settings are all connected in the world of the Aetherium, allowing for a game that can span genres and tones as needed. If the group is more interested in one genre than the others, however, they can just as easily focus on a single structure or style, ensuring that everyone at the table gets the action game (or horror game, or investigative game) that they want.

The Aetherium RPG has streamlined and straightforward rules that are relatively easy to grasp. Like the Aetherium, however, the game's rules remain open and malleable enough that players can be creative with both their solutions to problems and with what type of characters they wish to play.

Finally, this RPG is not the only way to take part in the world of Aetherium! The Aetherium strategy board game, for instance, allows players to take control of the various factions that are fighting to seize control of the Aetherium. The figures from this game make wonderful representations of Users and any other entities that players might encounter during an adventure. We recommend taking a look!

WORLD INTRODUCTION

While there is some scholarly debate over just what the Aetherium, at its core, actually is, for most people, the answer is simple and straightforward: the Aetherium is where life happens.

When the Aetherium was discovered (or created, depending upon one's understanding), it was a vast, tempestuous maelstrom of nothingness. It was a frontier that longed to be explored.

Scientists experimented with the first Rigs, which allowed test subjects to push their consciousness through the veil separating our reality from the Aetherium and into that strange realm, with catastrophic results. Nearly all of the first subjects immediately went insane, or died outright, from the shock of having their consciousness slammed into the raw psychic nebula of the Aetherium. This psychic interference became known as the Quantum Noise, and despite all attempts to bypass it, the human mind seemed unable to withstand the pressures of raw exposure to it.

With time and relentless, merciless sacrifice, researchers made plodding progress in their understanding of the Aetherium and in their grasp of Rig technology. Test subjects were given neural implants that allowed their minds to synchronize with the Synaptic Interface Modules (SIMs) of their Rigs, which in turn made psycho-projective travel into the Aetherium safer.

The SIM implants allowed for a greater survey of the Aetherium, and soon more stable regions of the Aetherium were being discovered and mapped out. These bastions of relative safety – or “Nodes” as they soon came to be called – were less turbulent and inimical to the minds who traveled there, and they quickly became the focus points for further exploration.

Forging the Aetherscape

With the stability offered by the Nodes, brave pioneers and opportunist explorers alike began to spend prolonged periods of time within the Aetherium, each working in tandem with the other.

Early visitors quickly noticed the subtle ways in which the Aetherium tended to accommodate human expectation. This first became noticeable when the concept of gravity took effect, grounding explorers who had previously floated effortlessly through the Aetherium. The Quantum Noise changed from a dense area of barely

comprehensible mental static into something more akin to a vast ocean that constantly lashed against the safety of a windswept land.

Yet even with these changes, the Aetherscape remained almost entirely desolate. Early experiments proved that people within the Aetherium had the ability to alter it in various ways through concentration, such as creating a visualized object out of the raw material of the realm, though objects created in this way would fade over time. The Aetherium remained primarily a vast emptiness that surrounded the explorers on all sides.

Research continued undaunted, bolstered by the prospect of a world that could be changed at the whim of its explorers. The heavy toll enacted by human experimentation prompted some researchers to begin using Artificial Intelligence, or “AI,” in lieu of human exploration. They discovered that simulations of the human mind possessed a much higher resistance to Quantum Noise, and that once within the Aetherium, those AIs could manipulate its raw essence in ways far surpassing their more limited human counterparts.

Further AI research led to the creation of the first Pylon: an incredibly powerful AI permanently situated within the Aetherium. The Pylon forced its programmed worldview upon the raw Aetherscape around it, creating everything its owners required to establish a foothold within the Aetherium. All it needed was a Node.

The area around the Pylon stabilized and pushed back the Quantum Noise, allowing for easier transit into the Aetherium. Subsequent Pylons linked to and strengthened those built previously, expanding the bubble of safety around them and allowing human colonization and exploration to truly begin. Through Pylons, humanity was able to shape the Aetherium in earnest.





Collective Reality

As the Pylons enforced their will upon the Aetherium, the people logged in gradually felt their ability to create profound change waning. Alteration of the Aetherium had always been somewhat difficult for humans, but now, each intended manipulation was also rebuffed by the iron will of the Pylon governing the area.

The will of the Pylons was not absolute. Early experiments proved that if the reality imposed by the Pylons was too far removed from what the people around it believed to be real, their collective belief could overpower the Pylon, undermining the stability it represented. For this reason, the predominant view of the Aetherium became something with which most people were familiar: the 23rd century.

And yet, the Aetherium can still be changed...

The New Reality

As time passed, more Nodes were discovered and more Pylons were added to the Aetherium around those Nodes. Advances in Aetherium-based technology resulted in the discovery that all but the strongest Nodes could be moved, bringing everything associated with the Node – including Pylons – along.

Those with resources to construct Pylons began consolidating their Nodes into local provinces. Soon, the Pylons extended outward in all directions, creating a massive, sprawling, and disjointed sequence of connected realities. The sprawling urban centers built around the Pylons and Nodes combined, creating a

number of city-states floating like islands of stability amidst the endless Noise.

As Rigs became slowly more affordable, jobs and entertainment pivoted to the Aetherium. Soon, the mass exodus into the Aetherium had begun, and the grand breadth of human enterprise followed them.

The material world became increasingly unimportant, save for the preservation of one's biological life. There was little of value left in "Meatspace," as the opportunities to earn money, make friends, find love, and achieve greatness had all shifted into the Aetherium.

Enter User

You are among the multitudes who spend every possible moment inside the Aetherium, but unlike most people, you recognize the fundamental truth about the Aetherscape: it is malleable, and you are an instrument of that change.

On a profound level, you recognize that your mind can create and dismantle the reality around you, and that the world is full of boundless potential – potential for good and potential for evil. Massive corporations and government entities seek to control nearly every aspect of day to day life within the Aetherium, and they are ruthless in their methods. The Aetherium is a place of unmitigated possibility and freedom, but it is also a place of subtle restraint and brutal domination.

You are determined to pursue your desires with every fiber of your being, despite the wishes of those who seek to exploit your mind and control your very soul. That is for you alone. You will make yourself in your own image, and you will shape the world around you into whatever you desire.

You are the master of your fate in this bold new world.

You are a User.

THE DICE

Although many conflicts in Aetherium can be resolved through roleplaying, there are times when there is an unclear chance of success or failure, such as in combat, or when the degree of success is important, such as when someone is trying to use an argument to change someone's opinion. In these cases, dice are used to determine the outcome.

Dice help create dramatic tension. In many ways, the fact that dice are being rolled is almost as important as the outcome, as they represent the potential for either success or failure, or the possibility of imminent danger. The unknown outcomes that dice represent create tension, which is an integral part of any good story.

Regardless of success or failure on the dice, these tense moments help direct and define the narrative. A failure at an important moment will guide the story down a different path than if there was success, but the important thing is that there was a branch in the path: depending upon the result of the dice, the story will change in one way or another.

If there is only one path forward, there is no need to roll dice. Characters can walk without rolling dice because even though they may trip and fall (by failing the roll), whether or not they do is extremely unimportant to the story.

In addition to this, the dice should primarily be rolled only when the players decide to roll them. The Aetherium RPG cuts back on the number of reactive rolls that players make, instead giving them an active role in when they roll.

For example, when characters walk into a room, the GM will tell them what they see. If the players wish to take a closer look around the room, it is up to them to say so and roll the appropriate dice (as determined by the GM). It is up to the players to make this decision, though! They are the active force in the game world.

Dice Types

The Aetherium RPG uses ten-sided dice, known as Stat dice, with the ten sides labeled 1 through 10 (the 10 is often represented as a 0). Players should generally have a handful of ten-sided dice available to them.

In addition, the game uses custom twelve-sided dice, known as Aetherium dice. Aetherium dice will be discussed in more detail later.

Explosions

Stat dice are capable of exploding (not literally, thankfully), which allows some seemingly impossible tasks to remain achievable. If a die's result is ever a 10, another die may be rolled (if this shows up as a 10, it explodes as well).

Tests

Tests are the most common type of roll required in the game, and they use Stat dice. Whenever the Stat dice are rolled, there are three fundamental pieces that matter in the calculation: the number of rolled dice, the Success Value, and the Difficulty.

The number of dice a player rolls is determined by the relevant Stat or value for the task that the player is trying to accomplish. In order to perform a deep search of a room, for example, the player will roll the number of dice determined by their Perception Stat.

The Success Value (or SV) is the minimum number that a player must roll on a die in order to succeed. The Success Value is 7 by default, though that may be modified by various special rules. No matter what, however, the Success Value may never go above 10 or below 3. Dice rolls that are equal to or greater than the Success Value are successful dice.

The Difficulty is how many successful dice are needed for the overall roll to be successful. If there are a number of successful dice equal to or greater than the test's Difficulty, the test is successful. If the Difficulty of a test is not specified, it is assumed to be a 1.



We recommend that the GM announce the difficulty any time the success or failure of the roll will be immediately obvious, such as when a User is trying to land a punch or climb the side of a building. If the success or failure of the roll will not be obvious – such as when a User is searching a room for clues that may or may not exist – the GM should not reveal the difficulty.

A test is usually expressed as Stat (Difficulty). A test can be said to be a specific Stat test if it uses that value.

For example, a test that uses Force and has a Difficulty of 2 would be expressed as Force (2). If the same test had a Difficulty of 1, it might simply be called a Force test (since the Difficulty defaults to 1 if it is not specified).

Stunts

Stunts are special effects that can modify the results of a test. There are two types of Stunts: Boosts and Excess.

A Boost increases the Difficulty of a test in exchange for gaining a declared effect.

For example, a character making a Difficulty 2 test might declare one Boost in order to activate a specific Boost Stunt, which would increase the Difficulty of the test from 2 to 3. If the character rolls three or more successful dice, their test succeeds and they gain the declared Boost Stunt. If they roll two or fewer successful dice, however, their test will fail (even though 2 successful dice would have succeeded on the original, unboosted test).

Boost Stunts must always be declared before the roll is made.

Excess is the number of successful dice that were not needed to reach the test's Difficulty.

For example, a character that rolls 3 successful dice on a Difficulty 1 test has an Excess of 2 because there are 2 successful dice beyond what is needed for success.

Excess Stunts are announced after the results of a roll have been determined. Each Excess Stunt requires the character to spend a certain amount of their Excess to pay for its effects. Unspent Excess is lost without effect.

A list of Boost Stunts and Excess Stunts can be found on page 81.

Any Stunt can be declared multiple times (though some of them don't have effects that stack).

Stunts add flair to dice rolls and allow for unique outcomes to otherwise simple rolls. Players are encouraged to use them liberally throughout the game.

Dice Example

Ranya attempts to use a weapon to attack an Axiom agent. The GM tells her the test is Difficulty 2.

Ranya begins by finding the number of dice she must roll. Her weapon's Program uses Force, so her attack is a Force test. Ranya's Force is 3, so she will roll 3 dice. There are no modifiers to her Success Value, so Ranya uses the default SV of 7; any rolls of 7 or greater will count as successes.

The Difficulty of her attempt is 2, as determined by the GM. The test is therefore a Force (2) test.

Ranya rolls the dice and gets the following: 3, 6, and 10. Only one of those is equal to or greater than her success value of 7, so she only has one success. Since she needs two successes, her test is currently failing.

The roll is not complete just yet, though! The 10 that Ranya rolled explodes, which means she rolls another die into her pool. She does so and gets a 7, which is another success.

Ranya now has two successes (the 10 and 7) against the Difficulty of 2. This makes her test successful: the weapon hits her target and will cause damage!

After suffering some damage, the Axiom agent decides to strike Ranya back. Normally, this test would have Difficulty 2. The agent is agitated, however, and wants to knock out Ranya with just one punch. He declares a Boost Stunt that will increase the damage of his attack and increases the Difficulty by the Boost Stunt's cost – in this case, by 1. This makes the test Difficulty 3.

The agent rolls four dice, based on their Stat, but fails to achieve the three successes he needed to succeed.

When it is Ranya's turn again, she decides to strike again. This time, she rolls a 7, 9, and 9! That's a great roll, and it leaves Ranya with Excess 1 (3 successes minus 2 Difficulty). Ranya can use her Excess on an Excess Stunt of her choice.

THE CHARACTERS

Every player in the game takes on the role of one of the uncounted billions that live predominantly in the Aetherium. A player's character is known as a User.

Users are not the ordinary people that plod through the Aetherium every day; indeed, they are exceptional in at least some capacity.

Users are made up of a Level, Stats, Knacks, and Specs. In addition to this, every User has access to a variety of Programs.

Characters (both Users and other characters) mostly look similar to how they look in the material world, as their SIM-Rig connection feeds off their self-perception to generate their Aetherial bodies. That said, many individuals perceive themselves different, to some degree or another, than how they physically look, which means that many people look at least subtly different from their physical selves. It is very rare for someone to look radically different than their material body, however.

Running parallel to the Aetherial character is the Meat. A character's Meat represents their physical body in the Meatspace, another name for the material world. For most people, the Meat is an afterthought, something to be ignored whenever possible.

These qualities are tracked on a character sheet, which can be downloaded from our website:

<https://www.anvil-eight.com/>

One side of the character sheet represents the character in all their Aetherial glory, while the other side of the sheet represents their Meat. If this is your first time playing the Aetherium RPG, it is recommended that you skip the Meat rules for now and just use the front of the character sheet.



What Kind of Character?

The Aetherium is a balance point between freedom and predetermination. The human mind is capable of shaping the world, but to do so, it must fight against the notions of others that are also within the world (including the iron will of the Pylons in each major settlement).

Most people in the Aetherium are simply cogs in the great machine of industry, but a User is more than that. Whether they support the monolithic practices of corporations or fight for the freedom of the Aetherium, each User has some cause that they're willing to fight for.

Level

A character's Level is a measure of their overall integration into the Aetherium and their strength within it. As a character becomes stronger, their Level increases to reflect that growing strength.

A character's Level is occasionally referenced for various purposes. For example, sometimes a character rolls a number of Stat dice equal to their Level as a test of their overall Aetherial might.

The Aetherium RPG has 6 Levels. Each Level represents a significant increase in power from the previous Level. Most people in the Aetherium, however, are Level 0 – well below the power of even a starting User.

Stats

Stats represent the baseline abilities of your character. There are seven different core Stats that govern characters within the Aetherium. Almost everything your character does will use one of these Stats.

The core Stats are as follows: Force, Coordination, Speed, Charisma, Composure, Reasoning, and Perception. Each Stat has a minimum value of 1 and is described in greater detail on the next page.

There are a number of additional Stats, such as Hack and Iconology, which also come into play.

Note that these Stats only represent characters in the Aetherium. Because of the different natures of Meatspace and the Aetherium, characters use vastly different stats while in Meatspace (as described on pg. 206).

Specs

Specs, or Specializations, are special abilities that a character gains access to, based on what their character is focused on. Choosing a Spec gives an area of strength for a character.

Character can choose a Spec at every Level, so, over the game, characters can gain a wide variety of Specs to truly customize their character's strengths.

Knacks

Knacks are the special talents that represent the intrinsic skills, capacities, or more ephemeral qualities of Users. Knacks generally provide a User with unique and dynamic capabilities. Not every User will have Knacks, but they provide another choice for making characters come alive.



The Stats

Force	The sheer physical force the character can bring to bear, as well as their ability to use that force. A character might roll Force to make a physical attack, lift something, or to break down a door.
Coordination	Coordination represents accuracy, precision, and fine control of one's motor skills. A character might use Coordination to aim a firearm, pick a lock, or to carefully balance on a narrow walkway.
Speed	Speed is how quick a character is, physically speaking. A character might use Speed to win a race, quickly draw a weapon, or perform basic tasks more quickly than usual.
Charisma	Charisma is the strength of a character's personality and the ways it impacts others. A character might use Charisma to charm people into doing something, to convincingly tell a lie, or to seem like an important person.
Composure	Composure is the ability to control emotions and reactions. A character might use Composure to keep cool during a tense situation or to stay awake during a boring lecture.
Reasoning	Reasoning represents the ability to learn new things and utilize one's knowledge in an effective manner. A character might use Reasoning to see if her character knows an obscure fact, to effectively interact with a computer system, or to decipher a puzzle.
Perception	Perception is the ability to notice one's surroundings and recognize them for what they are. A character might use Perception to notice hidden people or objects, to realize while items in a room are important, or to get a feel for a person or place.

KEY CONCEPTS

Here are a few additional key concepts and rules that are used in the Aetherium RPG.

Programs

Programs are perhaps the most fundamentally important concept in the Aetherium RPG. Almost everything in the Aetherium is a Program: buildings, vehicles, food, items, etc. are all Programs.

Most of the time, characters in the Aetherium don't even think about the fact that they're interacting with Programs around them. A person walking down the street might not be thinking about what that street is made of, but the street itself (and the shoes that touch them) are both composed of Programs.

More relevant to most characters are the personal Programs that expand a person's capabilities within the Aetherium. A person might use a Program to change their appearance, physically assault another character, or to otherwise change the world around them. Most of the time, these dynamic Programs require a dice roll to activate.

Every Program has a Complexity, which is a rough estimate of how intricate and complicated its code is. A Program's Complexity affects many things, such as how much it costs to gain access to the Program and how much effort it takes to alter the Program.

A Program's Complexity is determined by both the root of the Program - how complicated the primary effect of the Program is - and its Modifications (Mods). Mods change how a Program functions and allow characters to create Programs tailored for their specific needs.

Noise

Beyond the stabilized areas of the Aetherium is the Quantum Noise. The Noise is dangerous, and often deadly, to the human mind.

The Noise often appears as a sort of blue storm on the edges of stabilized space, very similar to water, except extending in every direction. Very few people are willing to wander into it. Most of those who attempt to explore the Noise suffer significant damage, including potential brain damage back in Meatspace.

Nodes and Pylons

Nodes create the psychologically stable area from which the human mind can begin to interact with the Aetherium. Pylons can extend the calm area of a Node further outward, artificially increasing the Node's size.

Nodes are generally surrounded by a series of stabilizing Pylons. Generally speaking, a Node, its attached Pylons, and any civilized areas within that Node are often simply referred to as a Node, as none of the infrastructure could exist outside the Node's influence. A Node might be as simple as a small town, or it might be as complex as a large city and its outlying areas.

The specific area of the Aetherium controlled by a single Pylon is called a **Schema**. While it's rare for individuals to directly reference a Schema, the term does see use when multiple Pylons, each controlled by different groups, exist in close proximity to each other.

Often times, the game rules will reference a Pylon's Level, which is the complexity and strength of a given Pylon. The Pylon's Level often represents the rigidity of the reality that the Pylon supports and, conversely, how difficult it will be to alter the Aetherium around it through Hacking and Programs.

Aetherium Dice

Aetherium dice are special twelve-sided dice that are only used in the Aetherium. They are used to represent many Aetherial concepts, such as Noise and Hacking. The Aetherium dice are also used to represent the Noise.

If you do not have Aetherium dice, they can be purchased, or you can use a standard twice-sided dice using the chart below:

1-5	6-9	10-11	12
			
SWITCH	CHIP	SHORT	CRASH

In addition to the above, the highest value of each category (5, 9, 11, and 12) also have a Disruption symbol.



Hacking

While it's possible for human consciousness to bend the Aetherium around it, a typical person will find that actually doing so is anything but easy or straightforward. The more minds that collectively believe in the way the Aetherium "should" behave, the more difficult it becomes for someone to change things. A person would have considerable difficulty turning off gravity because just about everyone in the Aetherium believes that gravity should function how it does in the material world.

In addition to this, the Aetherium is built upon a network of overlapping Pylons that reinforce the belief that the world behaves in the way that people expect. Vehicles behave in the way that people expect, which reinforces their belief that the world around them functions like it does back in Meatspace.

Despite these layers of conformity and control, it is still possible for a person to directly alter the Aetherium – and the Programs within it – on a profound level. This process is called Hacking, so named after the digital hacking that was popular before the Aetherium's discovery/creation.

Hacking in the Aetherium is more than just interacting with a Program's code: it allows characters to create objects from thin air or to break down the reality around them one piece at a time. Exerting this level of control over the Aetherium is not easy, however. Most people are functionally incapable of doing so, at least in any meaningful way. Their minds are simply too accustomed to thinking of the world around them as being "real," and they are unable to muster the mental fortitude required to see the world for what it really is.

Even if a character has the necessary worldview to Hack the Aetherium, doing so can still be risky. Certainly, one can bend the Aetherium to one's will, but the Aetherium resists such attempts and can damage a would-be Hacker's mind.

Hacking is not a permanent process. While an individual might be able to forge (or destroy) a Program with their mind alone, eventually their willpower will falter and the Pylon's Programs will reassert themselves upon reality.

Generally, when a character is Hacking, they are rolling a number of Aetherium dice equal to their Hack Stat. Successes, when Hacking, are the Disruption symbols, but too many successes can lead to the Disruption falling back on the Hacker.

What changes the Hacker can make is based on the quantity of other symbols rolled in the dice.

For example, Aureline might like to jump from the top of one building to the next as she follows Ranya across the commercial district. The fundamental rules of physics dictate that she cannot jump such an incredible distance, so she decides to attempt to Hack together some wings for herself.

Aureline rolls Aetherium dice equal to her Hack Stat, and she needs enough Disruption symbols to make it happen at all. If she gets them, she can use Chip symbols to make the wings.

In this case, her Hacking roll is successful and she makes some wings to be able to leap across the opening. Once she ceases to concentrate upon her Hack, "reality" will reassert itself and her wings will disappear.

Hacking is a great way to create alternative solutions to problems and to get creative with the game itself. The process of Hacking is fairly straightforward and is accessible to everyone, though more experienced characters – those who have spent considerable time within the Aetherium tinkering with its raw makeup – are naturally better at it.

Glitch

Glitch is representative of any severe disconnect between the mind and the Aetherium, preventing the flow of information between the Meatspace and the Aetherium.

In the game, Glitch serves as a form of injury that it is tracked through the use of Aetherium dice.

Disruption is not good on Glitch (or, for that matter, when rolled for the Noise). Every Disruption on the Aetherium dice deals a damage to the character who rolled it.

On top of that, Crashes from Glitch actually create more Glitch.

Glitch isn't always bad, however. Sometimes, a breakdown of the stability of the mind-Aetherium connection can be beneficial. A User may choose to gain Glitch in order to gain an immediate benefit. While this can be very beneficial in the short-term, accumulating too much Glitch can be a serious long-term problem.

Combat

The Aetherium is a world that looks pristine at first glance, but underneath it all is a constant state of conflict. Much of this conflict takes the form of physical combat, with characters fighting it out.

Even the biggest combats in the Aetherium are often fought on a small scale, bringing forces to bear to try to wrest control of a Pylon or Node. The smaller combats are between those fighting for their place in the world, often against strongmen and criminals trying to gain control for themselves.

Aetherial combat can be quick and deadly, as the ability to create powerful Programs in the form of weapons means that any fight can be full of explosions, pain, and significant bodily harm.

Of course, this truth is counterbalanced by the fact that a fight in the Aetherium often has little impact on the physical body. Yes, getting damaged to the point of being forced out of the Aetherium is going to do a little bit of damage to a person's brain, but it takes a significant event to make this damage long-lasting or for it to build to the point of death.

This somewhat decreased risk means that more people are actually willing to resort to physical violence to try to make their point – after all, shooting someone in the head in the Aetherium is painful and shocking, but it rarely kills them... and maybe when they log back in they'll be more open to the suggestions of the person holding the gun.

There are a few key components of a fight within the Aetherium: Rounds, Turns, Cycle Speed, and Sync.

Rounds and Turns

A Round is a measure of about 10 seconds in the Aetherium. It is used to divide up the action and allow every character a chance to take actions.

Within every Round, each character will have a Turn. On that turn, a character gains Cycle Speed (CS), and can use that to take Actions as described on the next column.

Cycle Speed

Cycle Speed, or CS, is a measure of how much a character can do on their Turn. For the most part, characters generate 3 CS, which means they can do 3 CS worth of Actions.

Many Programs require 2 CS to use, giving characters a chance to do another 1 CS action, like moving, in addition to using that Program.

Some Programs, however, may be used for 1 or 3 CS, greatly changing what a character is capable of during their Turn.

There is a list of Actions available to characters on page 84, complete with all their CS costs.

Sync

Sync is the measure of the strength of a character's connection to the Aetherium. The more Sync a character has, the harder it is for them to be forcefully logged out of the Aetherium.

In many ways, a character's Sync can be viewed as their sheer tenacity and endurance in the face of harm. If a character runs out of Sync, they are forcibly ejected from the Aetherium, which can cause actual physical harm to their Meat.

When a character takes damage, that damage will be applied to their Sync, lowering it. If a character reaches 0 Sync, they begin to log out of the Aetherium.

Sync damage comes most often from certain Programs being used against the character, but it also comes from things like the Noise or Glitch.

In some cases, a character may be called on to make a Sync roll, which requires rolling a Stat die per remaining Sync the character possesses. This is often done to deal with special, long-lasting Programs called Viruses.

Logging In and Out

Logging into and out of the Aetherium is the common parlance for accessing the Aetherial reality. This is because most people access the Aetherium through the use of a Rig, a technological device that interfaces with an implant in their brains. By enabling the Rig, the person's mind travels to the Aetherium.

The vast majority of people who log into, and out of, the Aetherium, do so at a Pylon. Pylons have significant resources dedicated to acting as beacons within the Aetherium, assisting in the stabilizing of connections enough to bypass any potential dangers.

It is possible to log in and out without a Pylon, but this always results in some amount of damage to the physical body, and, in some cases, the damage may be extreme enough to cause death.

In general, logging in and out of the Aetherium takes about a minute of Aetherial time. This goes by pretty quickly, but an individual in the process is between worlds: they cannot act in either, stuck as their mind transitions between the material world and the Aetherial one.

During this process, individuals are incredibly susceptible to influence by outsiders, which makes the log in and out process one that often needs to be done in safe areas.

Aetherial Time

The perception of time is a bit different in the Aetherium. In general, an hour spent logged into the Aetherium in the material world feels like approximately twelve hours within the Aetherium.

This time differential means that humanity perceives their own lives as significantly longer.

On a more granular level, it means that even logging out for a short time can see a person miss quite a bit within the Aetherium. Never has FOMO been so strong as in the 23rd century with the advent of the Aetherium.

VAR

VAR stands for Value Assessment Rating, and it's how the economy runs in the Aetherium. VAR, or value to many, is the equivalent of a sort of credit score for a character. It is an assessment of how much value that character has, and therefore what they can procure in the Aetherium.

There is not much use for physical currency in the Aetherium, and the nature of Programs there means that scarcity isn't an issue. The use of a single value rating was adopted early in the Aetherium – if your value is high enough, you can get almost anything available. If it's not, you'll have to do things to increase it.

VAR an abstraction generated by a combination of a character's job and other services they may provide. Providing value to other people, particularly high value people, will cause VAR to go up, almost like getting a 5 star review from another person.

Using value is pretty straightforward. VAR acts as a sort of Stat, and VAR is used just like a test. The difficulty of a VAR test is based on the value of the item being procured. For example, a Program might have a value of 3 (based on its Complexity), and therefore a VAR (3) test is needed to gain that Program.

Most times, procuring something with VAR won't cause it to change, as it's a check of one value against another. Of course, fluctuations in the Aetherial economy means that value it self can fluctuate, as borne out by the dice roll to determine what may be purchased.

Particularly insistent characters can choose to permanently lower their value in order to ensure a purchase they are looking for. Instead of rolling dice, the character will gain their VAR in successes, but, as mentioned, their VAR will permanently lower for doing so.

Each individual value is exponentially more valuable. An increase of VAR from 1 to 2 isn't nearly as impactful as a VAR change from 5 to 6.

Stories

The Aetherium RPG is a User-driven roleplaying game. The GM sets the narrative stage and introduces the conflict, but the Users are responsible for driving the story forward. The system works well for both single session play ("one-shots") or for longer campaigns.

Each significant conflict in a game is called a Story. A Story is resolved over one or more game sessions, each of which usually involves 3 to 6 hours of gameplay.

At the beginning of each Story, the GM will introduce the conflict, which lets the players know where their characters are as well as what problems they will be confronting. This often takes the form of a brief monologue on the part of the GM to set the stage and introduce key concepts.

Once the GM has set the conflict, the Users will try to solve the conflict by progressing through different Scenes. Think of it like a movie: each Scene is an important part of the story being told and either advances the plot or provides further character development for the characters involved in that story.

While the GM prepares the story and sets its before the Users, it is the responsibility of the Users to move the story forward. Not every story will be of interest to every User, but just like in real life, sometimes characters participate in things that don't interest them for the sake of their more interested friends.

In these circumstances, it's often a good idea to propose reasons why your User might become interested in an otherwise unappealing story. For instance, she might not have much interest in stealing money from a wealthy corporation, but perhaps one of her rivals was recently placed in charge of the corporation's security division, making the heist a good way to embarrass them. Or maybe she's not interested in the money, but rather some corporate information that she can gain access to during the heist.

It can be useful to devote time to these motivations, which also help to flesh out the unmotivated User's personality, motivations, and background.

That being said, after a few sessions, the GM should have a good idea of what the Users are interested in and should create Stories with those motivations in mind. The more the GM can get Users hooked into the Story, the more exciting the adventure will be for everyone.

There is no way for every Story to equally excite all players, or for the GM to be prepared for everything the players might throw at them. Roleplaying games are jointly told adventures, and everyone at the table should be encouraging and helpful to this game. This means working with others and doing things that drive the game and excitement for those involved.

As the game progresses through different Stories, the characters will grow and change. After each Story, every participating character will gain a point or two they can use to improve their character and gain new abilities. Once enough points have been spent, characters gain a Level.

A collection of Stories is often known as a campaign, which tells the story of a few characters over a long period of time, allowing them to grow into powerful and important characters within the Aetherium.

Scenes

Every Scene takes place within a Story and represents a specific plot point or problem that the players will attempt to overcome. At the start of a Story, or after any Scene completes, the GM and/or Users must decide what the next Scene should be. There are two important pieces of information for each Scene: Why and How.

The "Why" of a Scene determines the goal – whether that is the collection of information, the confrontation of a rival, an attempt to procure assistance, or so on.

Knowing why the Scene takes place will be helpful in focusing the characters and making sure everyone knows what can be accomplished. Sometimes, the goal is too big to accomplish in a single Scene, and thus it should be divided up into smaller Scenes.

If, for some reason, the Users are pursuing a why that is impossible, the GM should inform the players so they can try another approach. This might happen because something literally cannot be achieved or because the difficulty is so great that the characters will not have any chance of success. Of course, sometimes characters may want to attempt the impossible, but at least the players will go into the Scene understanding that success is extremely unlikely.

The "How" is based on the type of Scene and how it is likely to be resolved. Generally, the how will reflect the Users' direct or indirect approaches to a problem, whether that is social subtlety, violence, espionage, or some similar disposition. Some approaches might be more or less effective in different circumstances;

threatening heavily-armed thugs with violence will most likely lead to violence, while attempting to charm them might lead to learning some information they might not otherwise share with the Users.

Scenes can be set up by either the GM or the Users. For instance, the GM might plan out an opening Scene to get the players involved in the story, a critical mid-point Scene where the players need to accomplish an important task related to the story, and a character-building Scene where someone from a User's past is shown to be involved in the problem, either as an ally or an adversary.

In addition, the Users might decide that they want to investigate a clue or person they encountered, which sets up a Scene that the GM might not have intended. This is a perfectly natural part of the roleplaying experience; the story being told is collaborative, so players will naturally make their own contributions to how it unfolds.

Remember, just because Users want a Scene to go a certain direction, that does not guarantee it will play out in a manner they expect. The GM should place obstacles in the Users' paths to ensure that each Scene has the potential for failure.

Sometimes, the GM may take control of a Scene and make it play out differently than the player's expect, but this should often be limited. Generally, if a Scene isn't going to play out like the players want, the GM should inform them of that before the Scene actually begins.

End of the Game

Roleplaying games don't have victory conditions, as the joy is in the adventures themselves. These adventures often involve victory, but there is no final win condition of the game.

Individual sessions of play will often conclude when the conflict presented for that session is resolved: the big bad is defeated, the key object stolen, the information gained, the escape enacted, or whatever the case may be (sometimes a session will conclude with defeat, as well).

The overall game, however, rarely has a stopping point. It can go on as long as everyone as the time and desire to keep playing.

In many cases, it makes sense to create a session that serves as a conclusion, however, with a climax to the overall game so far. This allows players to start again with new characters, should they wish to do so.

Example Story

Below is an example of a Story's structure that might be used to play the Aetherium RPG.

The GM informs the players that one of their contacts and friends, an accountant at a shady corporation, has gone missing. This is the Story. The players talk it over and decide to disguise themselves as employees to sneak into the corporation's security station and review the recordings of the accountant's offices in an attempt to learn more.

This might result in the following Scenes: trying to obtain the appropriate uniform programs, forging ID programs, sneaking past security once they're inside, and then decrypting the security programs on the corporation's video software.

Some of these Scenes might be initiated by the Users (the GM might not have even considered that the corporation uses ID programs, but the reasoning makes sense so she makes a quick edit to her notes), and some might be prepared by the GM (she already prepared the sneaking past security Scene ahead of time, reasoning that the Users would reach that Scene at some point).

The players learn that the accountant was taken down an elevator to a hidden area of the complex, and that he has not returned. When the Users make it to the hidden area, it triggers a Scene with the accountant's captors, who are performing a very invasive memory wipe to prevent him from remembering an important corporate secret.

Into The Aetherium...

This is the end of the Basics chapter. The next few chapters deal exclusively with the Aetherium, and the next chapter deals specifically with character creation for the Aetherium. If you're new to this game, you're encouraged to jump into the next chapter and get started, completely ignoring the Meat rules for now. This will make the game more streamlined, and as you become comfortable with it, you can add in the Meat rules at your discretion.

If you're more comfortable with the game, talk to your GM. Some groups might want to create their Meat before they create their Aetherial selves. Do whatever feels right!



CHARACTER CREATION

You were born into Meatspace as a crying baby, but it's your birth into the Aetherium that is often more meaningful. After having experienced the world as it should be, it's hard to return to the drudgery of the material world.

Your character is your Aetherial self; it is who you are when you have shed the sack of blood and bones you were born into and moved into the realm where anything is possible: the Aetherium.



Character creation is a relatively simple process, but it has a lot of decisions for players to make. What choices are made during character creation impact so much of play, and often it can be hard to know exactly how the game will go.

Character creation is broken down into 5 steps:

- Step 1:** Setting Stats and Knacks, the core skills and abilities of characters in the Aetherium.
- Step 2:** Picking a Spec, one of the unique bonus and ability sets within the game.
- Step 3:** Choosing your Iconic Program(s), which define a lot of what the character does in the Aetherium.
- Step 4:** Choosing your Pylon Program(s), which, coupled with Iconic Programs, give actions and passive abilities to characters.
- Step 5:** Putting the finishing touches on, filling in the last bits of information such as the character's Level.

The best way to prepare for each step of character creation is to have a solid notion of the type of character you're wanting to play as you go into it.

Are they in law enforcement? Are they anarchists? Do they want to explore the edges of the Aetherium? Are they fighting for their family? Do they want to get ahead in the world? Are they on a quest for vengeance?

Almost any type of character you can imagine is available within the Aetherium, it's just a matter of adapting a concept to the realities of the Aetherial world (and, to some extent, the Meatspace).

As you develop your concept, you may want to talk to the GM and other Users to see what sort of game it's likely to be in terms of tone and theme. If the GM is planning on running an underworld game of shady thugs attempting to take down the Axiom, it might not make a lot of sense to make an Axiom character!

The concept should help guide you through each of the five steps of character creation, and by the time you're done, hopefully you'll have a sense of your character's personality, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses!

Without further ado, it's time to get started!



STEP 1: STATS AND KNACKS

In the Aetherium, almost everything, from the way your character looks down to the ground you walk on, is created by the cumulative psychological power of the human mind. This power is measured by Stats and Knacks.

A User's Stats are a reflection of the power of their mind, not their physical body. A mighty character in the Aetherium may not be strong in the material world, or vice versa. This is because the capacities of the mind may not directly relate to those of the body, and, as such, the mind may express itself differently in the Aetherium.

A User has seven core Stats, each of which start with a value of 1. The Stats are as follows:

- **FORCE**
The physical force the character can bring to bear.
- **COORDINATION**
Accuracy, precision, and fine motor control.
- **SPEED**
Physical quickness and reflexes.
- **CHARISMA**
Strength of personality.
- **COMPOSURE**
Mental fortitude and ability to control emotions.
- **REASONING**
The ability to learn and use knowledge.
- **PERCEPTION**
Noticing one's surroundings.

In addition to the Stats are the Knacks, which are special abilities a User has access to that cannot normally be performed by the average Aetherial character.

Stats and Knacks can all be purchased using points. At the start of the game, every User has 12 experience points to spend on Stats and Knacks. As the game progresses, Users will gain additional points to spend, growing the character over time.

Core Stats can be increased for a point each up until they reach 4, after which it costs 3 points per increase.

A Stat of 2 is the average for most people in the Aetherium. Stats of 3 and 4 are quite good and somewhat common for Users, while Stats of 5 or higher are exceptional.

Knacks can be purchased for a number of points listed in the Knack itself. Some Knacks can be improved by spending additional points once the Knack is acquired. This may be done at any time (it doesn't need to happen at the time the Knack is acquired). A list of Knacks can be found on page 28.

Secondary Stats

In addition to the seven core Stats already mentioned, a User has five additional Stats:

- **HACK**
The skill with which a character can alter the reality of the Aetherium.
- **ICONOLOGY**
The ability to create Iconic Programs within the Aetherium, bypassing the need for Pylons.
- **DEFENSE**
The ability to avoid attacks, either through dodging, blocking, or even subtle Hacking.
- **SYNC**
The seamlessness with which a character's mind adheres to the Aetherium.
- **HEALTH**
A measure of the physical body's ability to suffer damage. Health is not a measure of anything within the Aetherium itself.

Hack starts at 3, and Iconology starts at 5. Defense starts at 1.

Sync starts at 7 and Health at 5 (if you are using Meatspace rules, Health and Sync may be different).

Users gain 12 additional points they can spend on the secondary Stats, or they may spend them on core Stats and Knacks.

Hack can be increased for 3 points per increase.

Iconology can be increased for 2 points.

Defense can be increased for 5 points, but cannot be increased above 3 in this way.

Sync and **Health** cannot be increased directly.

Example: Axel stats with a Speed of 1. He spends three of his points to increase his Speed to 4, and then three points to increase it from 4 to 5. He continues to raise his other core Stats in this way.

Once Axel is done spending his initial 12 points, he's got 12 more points. He doesn't want to spend more on core Stats, so he looks at the rest of the options.

He spends six points on Hack, taking it to a 5. Axel raises his Iconology to 8, which costs him six points! He has spent all of his points, so his character's finished with step 1.

MEATSPACE

[CHARACTER]

[HEALTH]

[BLOCK]

[RESIST]

[WEALTH]

[JOB]

[BASICS]

[CHARACTER]

[SYNC]

[DEFENSE]

[HEALTH]

[GLITCH]

AETHERIUM

[LEVEL]

[VAR]

[HACK]

[ICONOLOGY]

[TRAINING]

[ATHLETICS]

[CQC]

[DIPLOMACY]

[ENGINEERING]

[FIREARMS]

[MEDICINE]

[SAVVY]

[SOFTWARE]

[SPYCRAFT]

[SURVIVAL]

[STATS]

[FORCE]

[COORDINATION]

[SPEED]

[CHARISMA]

[COMPOSURE]

[REASONING]

[PERCEPTION]

[PROGRAMS]

[NAME]

[CS]

[STAT]

[RANGE]

[RIG]

[SPEC & KNACKS]

AETHERIUM
THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

ANVIL 8 GAMES

KNACKS

Knacks represent the special idiosyncrasies of your User. They may represent skills, tricks, or other ephemeral qualities.

Regardless of what they represent, Knacks are part of what makes your User stand out in the world. Anyone can use a standard Program, but not everyone has the combination of Knacks to make it truly shine.

A Knack may not be chosen multiple times. Some Knacks have special restrictions that must be met before a character can choose them.

Each Knack has a value listed after its name; this is the Knack's cost, in points. Some Knacks have additional effects if additional points are spent on them.

Active Defenses



Normally, the mind has a natural resistance against Aetherial manipulations, and, coupled with the Rig, this can help prevent Sync damage. Some people have learned to actively engage their minds against some attacks, using sheer will and their understanding of the forces at work to oppose the assault.

Once per Round, you may, when attacked, roll the same Stat as the Program attacking you and add your successes to your Defense.

You may spend an additional two points on this Knack to be able to do it twice per Round, instead.

Armored Mind



By undergoing rigorous mental conditioning, the mind can be trained to assist the Rig with the connection to the Aetherium, providing a sort of redundancy against errors and attacks. This serves to help reduce anything that might manipulate the Synchronization of the mind to the Aetherial form, making it easier for a person to stay connected.

Reduce all Sync damage you take by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1.

Backup



The mind is capable of many amazing feats. Through advanced adaptation to the Aetherium, the mind can be trained to "forget" certain truths with the help of the brain's implanted SIM. By coordinating this with the Rig, individuals have found themselves capable of actually storing a sort of mental state at a previous time. By recalling that state, the person can then return to it, potentially bypassing any consequences they experienced in the interim.

Spend 2 CS to record your Sync's current damage or your current amount of Glitch. Spend 2 CS to return your Sync or Glitch to the recorded levels. This cannot be stored across Scenes, and you can only return to a recorded level once.

You may spend an additional point on this Knack to have it store your physical location, which can be chosen to return to instead of Sync or Glitch.

Brinkmanship



Glitch normally disrupts the mind and damages it. These disruptions can be diverted into an individual's actions, destabilizing them instead of Sync itself. While risky, such diversions can make a character last longer in the Aetherium, even if it makes that time less noteworthy.

When you roll Aetherium dice during a Test to account for Glitch, you may choose to have Disruption cancel successes (instead of dealing a Sync damage). This must apply to all Shorts and Crashes in a single roll if it is used, but can be decided after the dice are rolled.

Confidence



Sometimes, a firm belief that an outcome is destined to happen makes it more likely to happen. By being supremely confident, a character can subtly shift the odds in their favor.

Once per Scene, after making a roll, you may reroll all of the dice.

You may spend an additional two points on this Knack to be able to reroll all of the dice twice per Scene instead of just once.

Gearhead



Some people just have a head for automobiles. In the Aetherium, this can translate into the ability to actually have an automobile inside their head, so to speak. Gearheads have a fundamental working knowledge of vehicles, which makes it easier to manifest them as Iconic Programs, as the necessary information is essentially less Complex to their way of thinking.

If you take a Vehicle Root Program as an Iconic Program, you may choose two additional Mods of Complexity 3 or less each to add to it without changing its Complexity (these Mods may still be changed at the end of a session, as long as they remain Complexity 3 or less).

You may spend an additional two points on this Knack to increase the number of free Mods this gives by 1.

Ghost in the Rig



Individuals logging out of the Aetherium are particularly vulnerable. They cannot take actions, and this puts them at the mercy of those around them. Some people, however, have found a way to maintain more consciousness during the log out process. While limited, this ability makes them still able to act, ensuring that they are more safe from those that might do them harm.

While you are logging out, you may still take Actions. During this time, you cannot spend more than 2 CS during a Round and you reduce all of your core Stats by 1.

Greater Sync



Most people's Synchronization is determined by a conglomeration of their overall mental prowess, resulting in relatively similar Sync values across the board. There are those rare few, though, who have managed to better adapt their neural pathways to the Aetherium, making it harder to desynchronize their minds from the Aetherial reality.

Increase your maximum Sync by 4.

You may spend an additional four points on this Knack to increase your maximum Sync by your Level plus 4, instead.



Improved Cycle Speed



Some characters are capable of disrupting their Connection in order to further increase the time distortion of the Aetherium, giving them more opportunities to act within the same amount of perceived time.

Special: You must be at least Level 3 to gain this Knack.

On your Turn, instead of gaining 3 CS, you gain 4.

You may spend an additional eight points on this Knack when you're Level 6 or higher to gain 5 CS instead of 3 or 4.

Lightning Hack



Hacking has become almost second nature to some people, and as a result, they can complete changes much more quickly than other, less skilled Hackers.

Hacking costs 1 less Cycle Speed, to a minimum of 1 CS.

Nested Programs



Your mind recognizes that many of the distinctions between this object and that object are merely constructs that limit one's conception of reality. You have been better able to combine Programs into a single, powerful, form.

The Imbedded Program and Equipped Program Mods do not cost Complexity to add (but must be accompanied by a Program being Imbedded).

Omni Core



There are those that would do anything for more power in the Aetherium. Certain implants, drugs, and physical modifications can greatly increase a person's connection to the Aetherium, but at a massive cost to that person's physical health. Often, those that undergo such a process are called Omnis, as their power is unquestionable, but the sacrifices they make are high. The Omni Core is the first step along the process to becoming an Omni.

Permanently reduce your Health by 1. Increase your maximum Sync by 2. You do not gain Glitch from rolling Crashes on the Aetherium dice.

Precognition



There are many possible outcomes of any given set of circumstances, and the human mind is able to begin to grasp at probabilities. Within the Aetherium, it is possible to take this predictive quality a bit further, using visions of the future overlayed with current reality to actually adjust odds in a person's favor. The technology is currently crude and doesn't work for everyone, but those that can make it function have greater control over chaos itself.

You may spend 1 CS to roll two dice (Stat or Aetherium dice). The results of this roll are stored. You may only store up to two dice with this Knack, and only for the Scene; if additional dice would be stored, chose only two to store. After you roll, you may replace any of the dice rolled with any of the stored dice. If you do, the stored dice are lost.

You may spend an additional point on this Knack to allow you to store an additional die. You may do this up to three times.

Probability Accentuation



Many people believe that their actions succeed or fail on their own merits, but others know the truth: there are always outside forces at play, changing the odds. By accepting this truth, some individuals are able to harness that randomness to their advantage.

After you roll dice that you gained due to explosions, you may reroll any of those dice that were not successes. Dice rerolled in this manner cannot explode.

You may spend an additional point on this Knack to allow dice rerolled by this Knack to still explode.

Rapid Materializer



Summoning forth Programs from the human mind, or Pylons, is often a quick process to access the correct desire and call it forth (or send it away). There are those, however, who are even more skilled in the practice, allowing for greater control over what Programs they have when they need them.

Materializing, and dematerializing, Programs costs you 1 CS instead of 2.

You may spend an additional two points on this Knack to, once per Scene, materialize or dematerialize a Program at any time.

Reckless Assault



By devoting the entirety of one's efforts against another individual, it is possible to greatly destabilize their Connection. Of course, such reckless action comes at the cost of the security normally provided by one's subconscious mind.

Once per Turn, when dealing damage, you may choose to deal 1 additional damage. If you do so, your Defense is lowered by 1 until the start of your next Turn.

You may spend an additional point on this Knack to deal an additional 2 damage instead of 1.

Relogger



Mental conditioning combined with a special implant have allowed for the manipulation of the loss of Synchronization itself; rebooting an individual's Sync to an earlier setting.

The first time you are reduced to 0 Sync from damage during a Scene, your Sync is restored to 2, and you do not suffer a Health damage. You still gain Glitch for any damage remaining beyond what reduced you to 0 Sync.

Wealthy



Past achievements, or family connections, have given you greater sway over the processes that determine an individual's value. While this sway is limited, the automatic reaction is more in your favor than most.

When rolling VAR for any reason, lower your success value by 1.

You may spend an additional four points on this Knack to lower your success value by an additional 1.

Savant



Some just have the natural inclination toward a certain specialization even without devoting the time and experience to that path that others might need. Savants are those that gain the benefit of something with much less investment, though it is vanishingly rare for someone to be a multi-savant.

Choose a Spec you do not possess. You gain an ability of that Spec. The chosen ability cannot be of a tier higher than an ability you already possess (for example, if you don't have a Nexus ability in a Spec, this Knack doesn't let you gain a Nexus ability).

This Knack costs six if taken for a Capstone ability.

You may spend two additional points on this Knack to change what Spec and ability you gain from it.

Stored Energy



Like a coiled spring, you are able to save your energy and release it all at once, allowing you to use it when it is most efficient to do so.

You may save 1 CS at the end of your Turn. This will give you additional CS on your next Turn.

You may spend an additional point on this Knack to allow you to save an additional CS.

Telepathy



The Aetherium is a sort of virtual mindscape where the human consciousness can be transported and given a sort of 'physical' form. Some people can Hack that reality to make further changes. There are still others that can manipulate it in more subtle ways, allowing them to mentally entangle themselves with certain others to allow communication through non-traditional, mental only methods.

You may communicate telepathically with up to 4 others (they cannot communicate with each other, only with you). It is for communication only; you cannot read their thoughts except for those they wish to communicate. You must see someone to establish a telepathic link, but then it lasts until the end of the Scene or if they leave the same Schema.

A character may spend 1 CS and make a Perception (2) test to break the connection for the Scene.

Tough



Born with a strong body and a strong immune system, your physical form is often the picture of health. A high level of physical health can impact the brain and its functions, giving it what it needs to survive. Overall, such wellbeing in the Meatspace can have positive consequences for those that meet an unfortunate end in the Aetherium.

Increase your Health by 1.

Viral Mastery



Many Virus Programs are met with heavy suspicion by people in the Aetherium, but Viruses are simply a means to an end. Unlike normal Programs, Viruses continually have an impact on the world, sort of like passive effects with an active component. The study of these Programs and their strengths and weaknesses has given you an exceptional mastery of them, allowing you to get more out of them than the average person.

When applying a Virus, you may choose to have the X value being applied be increased by 1.

When gaining a Virus from another source, you may choose to have the X value being gained decreased by 1 (to a minimum of 0).

STEP 2: SPECS

A Spec, short for Specialization, is an area that a User has a special talent for and focus on. Specs are not available for purchase with points; instead, Specs are achieved as characters get stronger over time.

A character is able to have any combination of Specs, but they'll only get one Spec ability per Level. For most games, Users start at Level 1, and thus will only choose one Spec.

Every time a User gains a Level, they'll be able to choose a Spec to gain an ability from; this can be a Spec they already have or a new one. This gives a large amount of choice in how a character is specialized by allowing them to dip into any Spec they want.

When a User gains a new type of Spec, they always gain the Base ability from it. If the User gains a Spec they already have the Base ability from, they gain the Nexus ability. Finally, if a User has both the Base and Nexus abilities, they gain the Capstone ability when choosing the Spec.

Sometimes, a character might want a Spec ability without spending the time to gain that Spec. This is possible through the use of the Savant Knack (see page 31), but beware, this Knack can only be taken once!

For example, a Level 3 character might have chosen Aethertect twice and Lift once. This would mean they'd have the first Base and Nexus Aethertect Talents and the Base Lift Talent.

Starting characters will probably only have one choice of Spec, but they should check what Level they are, following the rules on page 40.

"The human mind is not adapted to the Aetherium. It is only through long exposure that it begins to experience things as they are... or perhaps I should say how they could be."

DR. VALDEZ

Below is an overview of the Specs available. The details of them can be found on the next few pages.

▪ AETHERTECT

The Aethertect Spec sees the entire Aetherium as a grand experiment, and they excel at Hacking the world into the image that they want to see.

▪ CELEB

Reality in the Aetherium is all about perception. Celebs live in the spotlight, and they know how to use it to get what they want. Celebs are excellent at leading others.

▪ DESYNC

This Spec is for those who like to fight. They get in and get the job done. They are tough, strong, and ready to act.

▪ INTEGRATED

Programs make up the perceivable reality within the Aetherium. The Integrated understand this, giving them unparalleled control over their Iconic Programs.

▪ LANCER

Lancers are those who believe in the purity of using the mind to fight, believing it superior to other forms of combat.

▪ LIFT

Lifts believe that all great accomplishments are achieved by a group of people working together toward a common goal. They excel at coordinating with allies, achieving greatness by lifting others.

▪ SNEAK

Sneaks have learned how to stay out of sight and live among the shadows, gaining anonymity and benefits from remaining out of sight and out of mind.

▪ STUTTER

Glitch is a deadly force within the Aetherium. Stutters eschew the caution with which most people approach Glitch and harness it as best as they are able.

▪ SURVIVOR

Survivors have often been through a lot, and they have learned how to deal with anything that comes their way.

▪ VIRTUOSO

Virtuosos specialize in using Stunts to get the most out of their Actions, believing that perfect Action leads to the perfect self.

AETHERTECT

Aethertects are those people who, at a fundamental level, don't accept the Aetherium as being "real." This denial allows them to see the creations around them as they truly are.

Despite their limited numbers, Aethertects are the poster children of the Aetherium. When people imagine the potential of the Aetherium, they think of Aethertects who are capable of bending the world to their will.

They accomplish these changes through Hacking. While not every person who Hacks the Aetherium is an Aethertect, most of the prominent Hackers are, and they are very, very good at what they do.

Base: Swift Hack

The Aethertect no longer needs to focus their full attention upon a Hack for it to be successful, instead, a portion of their subconscious mind chips in to make the Hack happen more quickly.

Once per Turn, you may Hack for 1 less Cycle Speed, to a minimum of 1 CS.

Nexus: Aether Manipulation

Aethertects have no problem understanding that everything in the Aetherium was created by a Program. The very fabric of reality is not what people perceive it to be. Those who understand this truth find it much easier to make the changes that they want.

When Hacking, you may use every 2 Chips or Switches on your Aetherium dice as 1 of a symbol of your choice, instead.

Capstone: Alter Glitch

The Aethertect has become so skilled in changing the Aetherium that they are able to mitigate the consequences of doing so, to a certain extent. While not foolproof, Aethertects can better target a Hack's strength.

You may add or subtract a Disruption symbol from any of your Hacking rolls.

CELEB

Celebs aren't necessarily famous, but they still want the attention of the spotlight. They know their strengths and talents and love to show them off.

Celebs take advantage of Stunts to get the most out of their every action. They are better at flashy, potent actions, as they enjoy drawing attention to themselves.

Their desire for attention also makes them natural leaders, though they can have difficulty in sharing the spotlight with others.

Base: Natural Leader

Celebs tend to inspire those around them, and they have an uncanny ability to push others to greatness. Using a bit of flair and perhaps some words of encouragement, Celebs can help others rise above their common natures.

Once per Turn, when taking a 1 CS Action, you may give 1 CS to any person who considers you an ally that you are in communication with.

Nexus: Inspiring Presence

The Aetherium is a place where sheer belief can have a profound effect upon the world. Celebs have been showing off and making things look easy for so long that they make others believe it's just as easy as the Celeb makes it look... and in the Aetherium, that actually does make it easier, at least for a short window of opportunity.

After you take an Action, anyone taking an Action with the same specific goal as you reduces the Difficulty of that Action by 1, to a minimum of 1. This bonus lasts until the start of your next Turn.

Capstone: Aetherium Idol

An Aetherium Idol takes fame to a new level. Celebs leverage their fame into a self-sustaining loop of value and success that ensures they never want for anything.

A Celeb may force any attack that could legally target them to do so, instead of its initial target.

In addition, a Celeb may spend 1 CS to give an order to a lower Level bystander, who can resist with a Composure (2). It works like orders to Robots (see page 70).

DESYNC

Desyncs know that all that exists between the experience of the Aetherium and a violent log out is a few measly connections between the psyche and a Rig.

This understanding drives them in any battle, as their insights into the fragility of the human experience of the Aetherium helps them leverage the weaknesses of it.

Desyncs often make great warriors, able to apply great pressure and strength to any combat.

Base: The Right Tool for the Job

Desyncs can quickly tell how a fight is going, sizing up their enemies and any potential weaknesses. A Desync's mind then immediately begins to adapt to this knowledge. By pairing this adaptation with some simple adjustments to their Rig, an individual is able to quickly change their Iconic weapons to fit the needs of the battle at hand.

Once during a Scene, you may choose one Modification and add it to one of your Iconic damage Programs. The Mod must be Complexity 3 or less.

Nexus: To the Point

It is said that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. A Desync has taken this saying to heart and is prone to acting first and worrying about the ramifications of their actions later. By devoting their essence to the attack, the clutter of their mind falls away, giving them the focus necessary to get more out of attacks than others.

Successful attacks with a weapon Program gain 1 Excess.

Capstone: Act First, Think Later

As all the trivialities and distractions of the world fall away, the connection between the Desync and the Aetherium is heightened, allowing the time dilation to stretch just ever so slightly more in the Desync's favor. At this point, there is nothing but the enemy and the heat of battle.

Once on your Turn, you may treat the cost of any one attack against an enemy as costing 1 less CS.

INTEGRATED

Iconic Programs are, essentially, permanent hacks that are created in the human mind with the assistance of a Rig.

The Integrated have minds that are particularly adept at creating and storing these Programs, which in turn allows them to shift the computing power of their Rigs to more active uses. As a result, the Integrated have better access to, and more control over, Iconic Programs.

Base: Self-Made

Normally, adjustments to the Iconic Programs in a Rig are done in Meatspace, as such changes can be quite difficult from within the Aetherium. Integrated, however, are capable of bypassing this disruption, allowing their on-the-fly adjustments to their Programs to go off without a hitch.

When Hacking your own Iconic Programs you do not suffer damage from Disruptions. This does not affect the creation of brand new Programs or Programs created by Hacking (it only affects Iconic Programs you already have as a part of your Iconology).

Nexus: Extensions of Self

An Integrated's Rig assists them in the creation of Iconic Programs, but it is also responsible for maintaining their connection to the Aetherium. At a moment's notice, an Integrated can shunt power and computing speed from one part of their Rig to another, allowing them to better resist the threat of desynchronization.

You may disable one of your Complexity 3 or higher Iconic Programs for the remainder of a Scene to cancel all effects of an action against you.

Capstone: Speed of Thought

The connection of an Integrated to their Iconic Programs is unparalleled. The normal processes for activating Programs no longer needs to be strictly followed, as the Program itself begins to respond to the Integrated's brain patterns, allowing them to act at the speed of thought.

Once per Turn, on your Turn, you may use one of your Iconic Programs without spending CS. Suffer damage equal to the CS cost of the Program.

LANCER

Most people go about their whole lives in the Aetherium never being able to Hack a thing. For those few that achieve the mental willpower to pull off a Hack, they stop at success changing their surroundings or creating the tools they need.

Lancers, however, know that those within the Aetherium are not so different than the Programs that they Hack. By applying their Hacking skill to a person, they are able to use the fundamental forces of the Aetherium to damage on par with any weapon.

Base: The Lance

The act of a lance is tapping into another person's connection directly and sort of... twisting. By feeding in a host of information and distraction, a lance can have potentially devastating effects on both aspects of someone's connection: Sync and Glitch.

You may Hack another person directly as an attack (called a Lance). If you do, the Difficulty is equal to the Defense of the target.

Every 2 Switches and Chips (in any combination, such as two Switches, one Switch and one Chip, or two Chips) deals 1 damage to the target. Every 2 Shorts give a Glitch to the target.

Nexus: Syphon Speed

While within someone else's mind, a Lancer has learned to pull some amount of mental function and use it for their own benefit. An odd side effect of this action, however, results in the target's connection stabilizing to some degree.

Once per Lance, if the target of your Lance has any Glitch (after you have successfully Lanced), you may remove 1 Glitch from them to gain 1 CS. This CS may not be used to Lance again this Round.

Capstone: Shunt Connection

The Lancer has perfected the art of the Lance, and they are able to leverage more power to shunt the problems of their own connection onto another.

When Lancing, you may choose to use every 3 Switches and Chips (in any combination) to heal you 1 Sync and deal 1 damage to the target. Every 3 Shorts may now remove a Glitch from you, in addition to giving a Glitch to the target.

LIFT

It takes a group of people, working together, to enact change. The best Hacks, the greatest Nodes, the largest coups... none of these could have been accomplished by a single person, no matter how talented.

History is shaped by many people working together to enact the change they want to see in the world. Lifts recognize this truth better than most. They don't need to lead the way, and some don't even care if they get credit for their contributions.

What matters is that the mission gets completed or the job gets finished, and Lifts are there to support their allies and ensure that everyone stays productive and on task.

After all, no one can go it alone.

Base: Martyr

The connection between a person's mind and their Aetherial self is more fragile than most people realize. Lifts are able to stabilize the connections of others, albeit at the cost of their own connection's stability.

When a friendly character within 40 feet is damaged, you may choose to suffer that damage instead of them. Any other effects still affect the original target.

Nexus: Resilient Mind

A Lift's mastery over connections and the interwoven fabric of the Aetherium makes their connection more resistant to Disruption. Where others might be forced to log out, a Lift can use sheer force of will to stabilize themselves or others.

After you or an ally rolls Aetherium dice, you may suffer a damage to cancel a symbol type (such as Disruptions or Crashes) on the dice. If the dice were rolled for Glitch, you may suffer an additional damage to permanently remove one Glitch from you or the ally (whoever rolled).

Capstone: In Tandem

In time, a Lift becomes so synchronized to their allies that they become like a single entity pushing toward greatness. This extreme interconnection is incredibly potent and allows the pair to reach unrivaled heights of success.

When an ally takes an Action, you may increase the value of their Stat by your own for the duration of the roll. If you do, you skip your next Turn.

SNEAK

When an individual logs into the Aetherium, a Pylon records their mental ID. Similarly, when an individual makes changes to the world, a Pylon records that change (though not, necessarily, who changed it). Everyone and everything is being watched at all times.

Sneaks are those people who have dedicated themselves to escaping the all-seeing eyes of the Aetherium. They operate out of sight and out of mind, using stealth to bypass the normal safety protocols of the Aetherium.

Base: Firewalls

Every time someone logs in and out of the Aetherium, their ID is registered. Sneaks have found a way to alter their ID in a way that makes it difficult for Pylons to correctly identify them.

When you log in and out, your ID is not registered by Pylons. If another character attempts to discover your identity, your Defense is increased by 2 for the attempt.

Nexus: Surprise Assault

An individual's defense within the Aetherium is partly dependent upon their Rig and partly dependent upon their consciousness resisting the impositions of others. Sneaks know how to use concealment to bypass the normal safety protocols of Rigs and surprise their victims for extreme damage.

When attacking a character that does not consider you a threat (perhaps because they are not aware of your presence), decrease the Difficulty by 1.

Capstone: Disguise

Sneaks generally don't like being recognized. They quickly learn to alter their appearance in various ways to help them avoid detection and recognition. This suits their purposes, as a Sneak operates best from the shadows.

You can use the Change Appearance Program, without spending CS. You may use it as if you had the Change Appearance Program with up to 3 Mods of your choice.

STUTTER

Stutters are named for the stuttering effect that sometimes plagues the appearance of characters who have accumulated too much Glitch.

While the breakdown of Aetherial stability is often seen as a detriment, a Stutter is capable of manipulating this Glitch in unique ways, allowing them to exploit this instability for their own benefit.

Base: Smooth the Stutter

Stutters are able to smooth out the Disruptions caused by Glitch with little effort, allowing them to stabilize the Aetherium by their presence alone. This smoothing process allows more Glitch to enter the system without it becoming a risk to the Stutter.

You may ignore one Disruption or Crash when rolling Aetherium dice during a Test for Glitch (but not Hacking). If affected by the Noise, you may also choose to ignore one Disruption or Crash result.

Nexus: Stable Mind

Most people within the Aetherium are incapable of removing their own instabilities and must use a Pylon or special Programs to stabilize themselves. Stutters are able to tap into the precision of one perfect action to 'smooth' themselves out, effectively making their performance drop in order to remove Glitch.

You gain the following Stunt: 2 Excess - Remove 1 Glitch.

Capstone: Glitch Mastery

Stutters are capable of noticing minor alterations made by their Glitch and using those alterations to better themselves. This process is not well understood by outsiders, but speculation is that Stutters understand chaos on a fundamental level and account for its influence when taking actions.

When rolling Aetherium dice during a Test for Glitch, you treat Chips as successes, but you may not use more than 2 Excess if you do so.

SURVIVOR

A Survivor has been through a lot. Their lives in the Meatspace have usually been hard. It may have gotten easier in the Aetherium, but their sheer amount of experience with the bad things life has to offer gives them a unique perspective -- and skill set.

Survivors are able to better withstand the rigors of Aetherial combat, using anything at their disposal to ensure their own safety and survival.

Base: Roll with the Punches

A Survivor has learned what it looks like when they're about to be hit, and they've learned how to accept that hit in order to lessen its impact. By actively gaining Glitch to disrupt their connection, they are able to potentially weaken the effects of an attack, even to the point that any assault against them is unsuccessful.

Once per Round, after the dice are rolled, you may gain a Glitch to increase your Defense by 1.

Nexus: Solid Form

By hardening the very form of their body, many Survivors have been able to simulate the effects of Armor, making any blows raining down upon them less effective. Still other Survivors have learned to strengthen any Armor Program they already have, weaving it all into an incredibly strong resilience to desynchronization.

You may have up to 3 Complexity of the Armor Program as an Iconic Program without it counting against your Iconology.

Capstone: Mere Distractions

Part of what damages a person's Sync is the belief that they're being hurt. For Survivors, their refusal to acknowledge the damage they suffer results in a stronger connection. Most survivors have been through worse than they're experiencing, and this allows them to devote more mental function to what's important: staying logged on. As they do, any lost Sync begins to return to them.

You heal two Sync at the start of your Turn unless you're at 0 Sync.

VIRTUOSO

Virtuosos believe in chasing after the perfect actions. They are able to pursue the ideal action with a single-minded focus that leads them to greater and greater heights through the very act of striving.

Within the Aetherium, this pursuit helps one thing flow into another, everything building toward greater and greater successes.

Base: Setting the Stage

The Virtuoso's mind has begun to adjust, gaining a neurological boost through the very successes the Virtuosos seeks, leveraging those successes into future actions.

You gain the following Stunt: 2 Excess - Gain 1 Momentum.

Your character may have Momentum. Momentum lasts for the duration of a single session of play and may be spent only on effects given. You cannot have more Momentum than twice your Level.

Once per Turn, you may spend 1 Momentum to lower the cost of a Boost Stunt by 1 or to cancel the effects of 1 Aetherium die after it is rolled as a part of a Test (i.e. only when rolled for Glitch).

Nexus: Gaining Tempo

Remembering past successes gives the Virtuoso the edge, allowing them to achieve more in their current actions.

You gain the following Stunt: 1 Boost - Gain 1 Momentum.

Once per Turn, you may spend 2 Momentum to gain 3 Excess on a roll or remove 1 Glitch from your character.

Capstone: Crescendo

The pinnacle of potential action, the Virtuoso can get more out of a single action or even ignore the actions of those that have not achieved their same level of perfection.

You gain the following Stunt: 2 Boosts - If the Action is successful, you may not declare Excess Stunts. Take the Action again without spending CS. This Stunt cannot be declared more than once in a Turn.

You may spend 3 Momentum to ignore the effects of one Action that targeted you or to ignore the effects of the Noise for one Round.

STEP 3: ICONIC PROGRAMS

The equipment, items, and special skills your character has inside the Aetherium are all created by Programs. Programs can serve all sorts of functions for your character, so choosing the right ones can go a long way toward reinforcing your character's concept.

Characters can manifest Iconic Programs, which are Programs that are created from a combination of that character's mind and their connection to the Aetherium.

Iconic Programs are a part of your character. They cannot be lost, stolen, procured, or traded. In many ways, an Iconic Program is one of the character's notable features, and many famous individuals can easily be identified by their Iconic Programs.

A User may choose any of the Programs listed in Chapter 3 to become their Iconic Programs. That Program (or Programs) may have a Complexity equal to their Iconology Stat.

STEP 4: PYLON PROGRAMS

Pylon Programs are created by the Pylon technology that makes the world safe. They are the most common form of Programs, and as such, they generally follow a standard template. A character can have and use any number of Pylon Programs.

Users start the game with a total of 10 Complexity or less across all their Pylon Programs, but no individual Program may go above Complexity 6. These Programs belong to the character, but they could get lost or stolen.

When selecting your Pylon Programs, you can choose any of the Programs in the Programs chapter, and you do not have to worry about how they were created or gained. These Programs are leased to your User.

You can find more information on Programs on page 43.



STEP 5: FINISHING TOUCHES

Your User is now mechanically complete, so it's time to put the finishing touches on them! Think about what they look like in the Aetherium. Make sure you've planned out their Program Skins so that everything they have and do fits within your core concept.

Every User's VAR begins at 10. You may not use your VAR to procure anything during character creation.

Every character has an identity chip that works as an ID (and can give information about their VAR). This is an Iconic Program, but it does not count against their Iconology.

Characters also own a few sets of clothing and a phone that works across all Schema on their current Node.

Finally, determine your character's Level. A character's Level is a representation of their ability to manipulate the Aetherium and their overall strength. As a character's Level increases, they gain access to new abilities. These Levels vary on a range from talentless casuals to visionary messiahs.

Patches (Level 0) generally compose the lower classes. These are characters with little control over their surroundings or lives.

Users are Icons, which are anywhere from Level 1 up (though Level 6s and higher are often referred to as Avatars). They have joined the ranks of those rare few who have recognized their capacity to change the Aetherium but have not yet developed their talents to any significant degree.

Use the breakdown on the following page to determine your character's Level.



CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Over time, characters in the Aetherium RPG will grow and change. There are two general ways this happens: extrinsic changes and intrinsic changes.

Extrinsic changes are those changes that are not central to your character. These are changes in your equipment, Programs, Rig, etc. These happen whenever they happen, but they can also be taken away by circumstance.

Intrinsic changes are those developments that change the core being of your character. These typically come in two different forms: Changing Iconic Programs and Gaining Knacks.

Changing Iconic Programs

The character can, after every session, change any of their Iconic Programs by one step. This represents the evolving way that the character thinks of themselves.

Changing an Iconic Program by one step entails: adding, removing, or swapping a single Mod from a Root Program, OR removing or swapping a Root Program if it has no Mods on it, OR adding a new Root Program.

None of these changes can cause the character to exceed their maximum Complexity for Iconic Programs (their Iconology). They can, however, drop below this limit.

These changes allow a character to slowly change and adjust what they are good at in the Aetherium. As a character increases in Level, they gain the ability to add new Complexity to their Iconic Programs, and/or add new Iconic Programs all together.

This is a great opportunity to show the way a character is developing over the course of a campaign.



Gaining Experience Points

After any Story is completed, a User gains an experience point that they can spend on their character. Particularly large Stories may result in additional points being granted by the GM.

These points can be saved over time, and are spent exactly as if it was character creation -- meaning that the costs of Stats and Knacks is exactly the same as character creation (and are listed below for ease of reference).

Points Costs

- **Core Stats** and **Hack** can be increased for point each up until 4. After they are 4 or higher, it costs 3 points per increase.
- **Knacks** can be purchased for a number of points listed in the Knack itself.
- **Iconology** costs 2 points.
- **Defense** can be increased for 5 points, but it cannot be increased above 3 in this way.

Determining Level

Any time a character spends points they've gained, they should check to see if they've reached a new Level.

A character's Level is determined by the number of points they've spent on their Aetherium character.

- A **Level 1 character** has spent 20-29 points.
- A **Level 2 character** has spent 30-36 points.
- A **Level 3 character** has spent 37-45 points.
- A **Level 4 character** has spent 46-56 points.
- A **Level 5 character** has spent 57-69 points.
- A **Level 6 character** has spent 70+ points.

When a new Level is gained, a character may immediately take a Spec, the same as is chosen during character creation. It doesn't matter if a character takes a brand new Spec (gaining the Base of that Spec) or continues down a Spec that they've already taken.





PROGRAMS AND HACKING

Most people believe that the Aetherium is a collection of Programs, most of them being quietly run by an artificial intelligence somewhere in the background. In truth, however, Programs are really just patterns of thought that have been impressed upon a malleable world by a powerful mind.

Perhaps we should be more concerned that the mightiest of those minds belong not to humans, but to computers.



Programs are the items, talents, and unique actions that a character is capable of performing within the Aetherium. They are created by either Pylon technology or by an individual character.

Programs created by Pylons are called Pylon Programs, while Programs created by individuals are called Iconic Programs.

In many cases, a character's choices in the Aetherium will be decided by their Programs. A character with a powerful weapon Program is more likely to start a fight than someone with a good social Program.

Many character actions that require rolls use Programs as the basis for that roll and what the outcome may be.

Characters may not always have the ideal Program for whatever situation they find themselves in, but fortunately, the Aetherium is a malleable reality. Characters can Hack the Programs they possess, altering them to better fit their current situation, or they can use Hacking to create a new Program out of thin air.

Programs and Hacking allow characters to solve problems in dynamic and creative ways. The players should make extensive use of both of these resources over the course of their adventures, as they define the very essence of the Aetherium and the infinite possibilities it allows.

This chapter begins with a basic description of Programs, followed by a list of core Programs sorted by their functionality. This list of Programs provides many options for characters and what they can do, so take some time to become familiar with the Programs found here.

Following the core Programs is a collection of Viruses. Viruses are special programs with long-term effects. Environmental effects like fire are handled through the use of Viruses, as are negative conditions up to and including mind control. If something has a long-lasting effect, it's probably a Virus.

The last part of this chapter is a discussion on Hacking. Hacking is one of the defining features of the Aetherium Roleplaying Game, as it allows players a great deal of freedom and creativity in how they solve their problems.

Hacking is intended to be free-form and open, giving some fundamental structure to a vast array of possibility.

When players choose what Programs they wish to give their User, they are encouraged to think not only about what they're taking at that time, but also what possibilities they might have in the future when they start Hacking.

PROGRAM BASICS

All Programs fall into one of two categories:

- **Pylon Programs** (those created by a Pylon), or
- **Iconic Programs** (those created by a character).

Both types of Programs are made up of the same components: a Root Program that defines the central function of the Program and any number of Modifications (Mods) that adjust the parameters of that Root Program.

For example, Steig might have a Root Program for a Strength Weapon. After some thought, he decides to add both the Stunning and Extra Damage Modifications to it in order to transform it from a generic Strength Weapon into something more fitting of his vision for the Program: an aluminium baseball bat.

Programs cannot be duplicated in any meaningful way: every Pylon Program is built into the Aetherium itself and cannot, therefore, be copied directly by a player.

This bears repeating: most Programs cannot be duplicated or easily recreated with some form of copy and paste. Even Programs that are “mass produced” are still produced one at a time, with more Complex Programs taking much longer to make.

Iconic Programs

Iconic Programs are those Programs that are loaded into a character's Rig. They are an integral part of the character within the Aetherium and serve as a manifestation of their will, guided and channeled by the technology within their Rig.

Each Iconic Program produces a certain amount of neural strain upon a character's mind and takes up memory space on their Rig. The “size” of an Iconic Program is represented by its Complexity.

The total Complexity of a character's Iconic Programs is limited by that character's Iconology Stat (pg. 26).

Because they are created by a character's mind and Rig working in tandem, Iconic Programs can only be used by the character that created them. They share the defenses of their owner and cannot be taken from their owner by any means. Unfortunately, this link goes both ways: if a character ever moves more than 5 feet from one of their Iconic Programs, that Program dematerializes.

Pylon Programs

Pylon Programs are created by Pylons. Since they are not tied to individual characters (or more specifically, the Rigs of individual characters), they can be used by anyone within the Aetherium. These Programs generally resemble physical objects that anyone can interact with, such as chairs, doors, and so on.

Any character that possesses a Pylon Program can use it, and the Program remains in the Aetherium if its owner drops it or logs out without registering it while logging out. A Pylon Program on the ground can be picked up and registered to its new owner at any Pylon.

Most “permanent” Pylon Programs are registered to entities such as corporations, rather than people, as those entities never actually leave the Aetherium.

While Pylon Programs have Complexity just like Iconic Programs, they do not count against their owner's maximum Complexity limit (as they are being sustained by the Pylon, rather than the character's mind and Rig).

The most common Pylon Programs are those representing clothing, food, and fashion accessories. All Programs have a Complexity of at least 1, even the simplest piece of clothing.

Much like material possessions, Pylon Programs are always visible on their owner. Most Pylon Programs have very distinct physical shapes, but Pylon Programs that are more ephemeral in nature still have distinct physical manifestations, such as a tattoo on their owner's body or a visible aura of glowing light.

Because of their Pylon-generated nature, Pylon Programs cannot be duplicated or copied in any meaningful way. The Defense of Pylon Programs is dependent upon the strength of the nearest Pylon.

Program Complexity

A Program's Complexity is equal to the Complexity of its Root Program plus the Complexity of each of its Modifications. A Program's Complexity can never be lowered below 1, and a Program can only have 1 negative Mod per every 5 Complexity, after the Mod's adjustment, rounded up (so a Complexity 8 Program could have at most 2 negative Mods factoring into its Complexity).

Materializing Programs

Characters do not need to keep their Programs activated and running at all times. A character can keep a Program dematerialized and stored, either on their Rig or a Pylon, for easy access. Programs stored in this way can be materialized with a moment of thought, allowing the Program to manifest either adjacent to the character or on their person (as appropriate).

To materialize a Program, a character must spend 2 CS. It also takes 2 CS to dematerialize a Program. An unmaterialized Program has no effect.

For example, before entering the commercial district, Ranya spends 2 CS and materializes her custom Heads Up Display. This is a Perception Iconic Program with the Threat Tracking Modification (pg. 63).

When she materializes the Program, a pair of dark sunglasses appears in her hand. After putting them on, she is able to make better sense of the tumult and confusion of the commercial district. Thanks to their Modification, the sunglasses also improve her chances of tracking potential threats, such as the Man in White.

Program Skin

This chapter deals more with the function of Programs than with the form they take. Knowing what your User's Programs look like, however, is just as important as knowing how they function mechanically.

A Program's appearance in the Aetherium is known as its Skin. A Program's Skin is a reflection of its owner, and thus, a lot can be learned about a person just by studying what their Programs look like.

Every Program has a Skin, even those where a Skin might not be immediately intuitive (such as Psychic Assault). Whatever a Program's Skin might be, it should be at least the size of your character's hand.

Take some time to consider what your User's Programs look like, both when on their person and when in use. Name their Programs in ways that match their function, such as naming their long range Weapon Programs "sniper rifle" or "fire blast." Skinning your User's Programs is an opportunity to really bring a character to life in the Aetherium, and we encourage you to be as innovative and creative as possible.

Creating / Adjusting a Program

Creating a Program is a straightforward process. First, choose a Root Program from the following pages. Every Root Program is associated with a Stat and has a base Complexity.

Then, add any number of Modifications listed underneath the Root Program or from the Universal Modification list. Each Modification expands the parameters of the Root Program and adjusts its Complexity.

If a Modification has multiple Complexity Costs, you can add that Modification to the program the indicated number of times. Each instance of the Modification uses the appropriate Complexity Cost and counts as a separate Modification.

Then, choose a descriptive name and Skin for the Program, defining what it looks like within the Aetherium.

If a character gains a new Pylon Program that has a Skin they don't like, they can change it at any Pylon for free.

Obtaining New Programs

During the game, players may find it necessary or desirable to purchase new Programs or modify their existing Programs.

New Programs can be purchased as is, but tend to be Complexity 5 or less. High Complexity or special customizations involves dealing with a coder.

Coders are people who make a living designing and modifying the raw code of Programs, effectively making permanent changes to the Program's raw essence. It takes quite a bit of time to have a customized Program created.

The Value of a coder's service is equal to the highest Complexity of the Program at any point during the purchase or modification process.

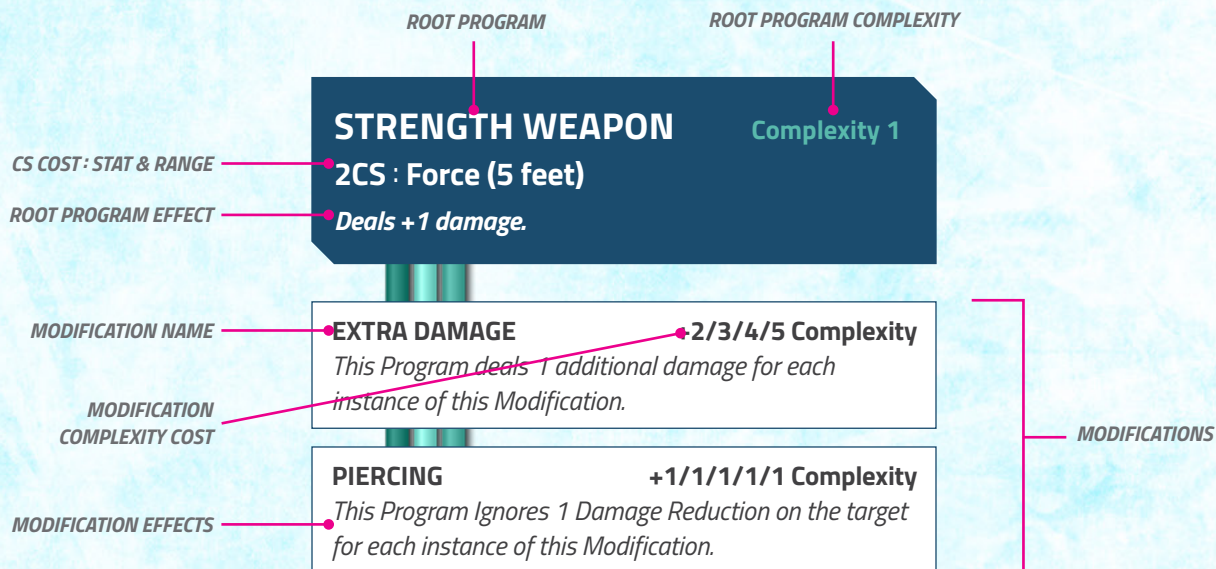
Thus, if a character asks a coder to add a Modification that grants +1 Complexity to an existing Program with Complexity 3, the coder's services would have a value of 4.

Similarly, if a character wanted to remove a Modification that grants +1 Complexity from a Program with a Complexity of 4, the coder's services would have a value of 4, even though the Program's Complexity is only a 3 after they've finished modifying it.

Information on how value works can be found on page 90. Some people may be interested in playing as Coders. Rules for this are found in the Meatspace section on page 211.

READING PROGRAMS

Here is how to read the Program descriptions on the following pages.



Root Programs

Root Program

This is the name of the Root Program in use. Many effects reference Root Programs, though it's rare for them to be mentioned by name. Rename your Root Program to whatever form it takes in the Aetherium.

Root Program Complexity

The Complexity cost of just the Root Program and its standard effects. Most Root Programs are Complexity 1 or 2.

Stat and Range

If a Program is Active, the Stat indicates which Stat is rolled when the Program is activated. If the Program is Passive, it will simply say "Passive" here. The Range, if present, is the maximum distance at which the Program can target something.

CS Cost

All active Programs have a CS cost of 1 or more. A Program's CS is usually only relevant during combat and other time-sensitive events. If a Program is Passive, it does not stack with Root Programs of the same name.

Root Program Effect

This is the effect the Root Program has when it is activated. If the Root Program is Passive, its effects are active whenever it is manifested.

Modifications

Modifications

A Root Program's specific Modifications are always found indented below it. In addition to these, every Program has access to the Universal Modifications found on page 48.

Modification Name

This is the name of the Modification.

Modification Complexity Cost

Adding a Modification to a Root Program adjusts its total Complexity. A Modification with multiple values listed can be added to the Program multiple times, with each addition increasing the Program's Complexity by the indicated amount.

Modification Effect

The Modification Effect shows how the Modification changes the Root Program. In many cases, this is a small adjustment, such as adding to a value. More rarely, the Modification may add a new active function to the Program or otherwise alter it in a significant manner.

Example Program Creation

Maria has been creating a User and is now creating their Iconic Programs. At the beginning of the game, she can create whatever Programs she wants.

Maria's Pylon Programs can have a maximum Complexity of 10, and she can choose one Iconic Program (maximum Complexity of 5) to call her own. Maria thinks of herself as a combat character first and foremost, so she decides that her Iconic Program will be a Strength Weapon. The Root "Strength Weapon" has a Complexity of 1, so she can add up to 4 Complexity of Modifications.

She chooses to add the Piercing Modification (+1 Complexity), and the Extra Damage Mod (+2 Complexity). That puts the total Complexity of her Iconic Strength Weapon Program at 4 (1 + 1 + 2). With one more Complexity, she adds the Increased Range Mod for 1, taking her to her max of 5 Complexity.

Per the Strength Weapon Root Program, it uses Maria's Force Stat, and she's pretty sure it's going to do some solid damage, as it does +2 damage instead of the usual +1. On top of that, it ignores one Damage Reduction and can attack at up to 40 feet.

After a bit of thought, Maria decides to Skin her Program as an oversized riot shotgun, which she lovingly calls The Face Melter.

Next, Maria moves on to her Pylon Programs.

She decides to start with the Armor Program. If she's going to be in the thick of things, she's going to need some extra defenses. The Armor Root Program is Complexity 3, and she adds the Extra Armor Modification to it once, which increases its total Complexity by +3, putting it at a total Complexity of 6.

Maria is satisfied with her Armor Program and decides to Skin it as a kevlar vest with a faint blue glow at the seams.

Maria has 4 more Complexity with which she can create additional Pylon Programs, but she decides that she has everything she needs for combat. After flipping through the list of programs, she picks a pre-built example Program at Complexity 4, using up the last of her allotted Complexity.



UNIVERSAL MODIFICATIONS

Below are a list of universal Modifications that can be added to any non-Virus Programs. When reviewing Programs and their Mods on the next pages, remember to reference these Modifications as additional options. Remember, a Program is limited in the number of negative Complexity Mods it can have, as explained on page 44.

BASIC
-1 Complexity

All non-negative Modifications added to this Program have their cost increased by +1 Complexity.

EXPLOIT
-1 Complexity

The Defense of this Program is decreased by 1.

FRAIL
-1/1 Complexity

The amount of damage this Program can suffer is reduced by 4 for each instance of this Modification.

HARDENED
+2/3/4 Complexity

The amount of damage this Program can suffer is increased by 10 for each instance of this Modification.

IMBEDDED PROGRAM
+1 Complexity

You may have another Program attached to this one for each instance of this Modification. The added Program adds its Complexity to this Program's Complexity. This Mod can be taken any number of times.

ITEMIZED
+1 Complexity

Iconic Programs only. This Program can be used by other characters. It does not dematerialize from distance unless you move to a new Schema.

LIMITED
-1 Complexity

This Program may not have more than 3 Modifications, including this one.

RESILIENT
+2/2 Complexity

The Defense of this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

Attached Program

An attached Program is another Program that adds functionality to the host. This might be like putting a bayonet on the end of a gun, and it occurs most frequently with Robots and Vehicles.

Attached Programs work like non-attached Programs -- they still must be activated independently and require CS. Shooting the gun does not also allow for the use of a bayonet, and none of the Mods on one Program apply to any other.

Attaching Programs can help increase the amount of damage a Pylon Program can take, but it generally doesn't make a ton of sense unless the host Program is capable of using Programs itself (such as a Robot). That said, it is often a really fun option, even if it isn't totally practical.

Any attached Program must still be obtained, like any other.



ACTIVE PROGRAMS ONLY

The Modifications listed below can only be added to Active Programs that require Tests to activate.

AUTO-CORRECTIVE +3 Complexity

If your test is successful, gain one Excess.

CLUNKY -1/1/2 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, roll one fewer die when you activate this Program.

EXPLOSIVE +2/3/4 Complexity

The value at which your dice explode when activating this Program is lowered by one for each instance of this Modification.

FAULTY CODE -1 Complexity

When you activate this Program, your dice cannot Explode.

FINELY TUNED +3/3 Complexity

When activating this Program, you may reduce the cost of one called Boost by 1 for each instance of this Modification (to a minimum of 1).

IMPRECISE -1/2/3 Complexity

The Success Value required to activate this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

INVASIVE +4 Complexity

The target's Defense is reduced by half, rounded up. For example, a Defense of 5 would become a 3.

NON-LETHAL -2/2 Complexity

Weapon programs only. This Program's damage is reduced by 1 for each instance of this Modification. This cannot reduce damage below 0.

POWER SINK -4/4 Complexity

Each time you activate this Program, you gain 1 Glitch for each instance of this Modification.

PRECISE +2/3/4 Complexity

The Success Value required to activate this Program is lowered by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

REACTIVE +2 Complexity

This Program can be used as a Reaction once per Round. If the Action costs more than 1 CS, you must Overclock to use it as a Reaction.

STREAMLINED +1/2/3 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, roll one additional die when you activate this Program.

VIRAL +2/3/4 Complexity

Damage Programs only. Choose a Virus you own. Successful attacks with this Program give the target the chosen Virus with an X value equal to the number of instances of this Modification. This Modification can be taken multiple times at the base level; each time, it applies to a new Virus.

WEAK -1/1 Complexity

When activating this Program, your Excess is reduced by 1 for each instance of this Modification.



DAMAGE PROGRAMS

The following Programs specifically have been specifically designed to deal damage.

STRENGTH WEAPON

Complexity 1

2CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage.

BRUTAL

+4/8 Complexity

The target gains 1 Glitch for each instance of this Modification.

EXTRA DAMAGE

+2/3/4/5 Complexity

This Program deals 1 additional damage for each instance of this Modification.

INCREASED RANGE

+1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

KNOCKBACK

+1/2/3 Complexity

The target moves 5 feet away from you for each instance of this Modification. If the target collides with something, the target and the thing it collides with both take 1 damage per 5 feet the target traveled.

LETHARGIC

-4/6 Complexity

The CS cost to activate this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

PIERCING

+1/1/1 Complexity

This Program ignores 1 Damage Reduction on the target for each instance of this Modification.

REACH

+2/4 Complexity

Increase the range that this weapon considers to be in melee by 5 feet per instance of this Mod.

RESTRICTED TO RANGE

-1 Complexity

This attack cannot be used in melee.

STUNNING

+2 Complexity

The target's Initiative is lowered by one step.

BINARY BLADE

2CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 1:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1)

SHOTGUN

2CS : Force (40 feet)

Dice explode on 8+. Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 5:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1), INCREASED RANGE (1),
2X EXPLOSIVE (5)

DIGITAL KNUCKLES

2CS : Force (5 feet)

Success Value lowered by 1, target's Defense is halved. Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 7:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1), PRECISE (2), INVASIVE (4)

BREAK HAMMER

2CS : Force (5 feet)

Target's Defense is halved.

Deals +1 damage, ignoring 2 of the target's Damage Reduction.

Complexity 8:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1), 2X PIERCING (3), INVASIVE (4)

POWER SURGE

2CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +5 damage.

Complexity 15:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1), 4X EXTRA DAMAGE (14)

FINESSE WEAPON

Complexity 2

2CS : Coordination (40 feet)*Deals +1 damage.***AREA****+2/2/3 Complexity***Every character within 5 feet of the target suffers the base damage of the attack (i.e. no Stunts, Knacks, etc adjusting the total, only the Program itself). Increase the range by 5 feet per instance of this Mod.***DECREASED RANGE****-1 Complexity***For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range decreases by one step (from Line of Sight to 80 feet, from 80 feet to 40 feet, or from 40 feet to 5 feet).***EXTRA DAMAGE****+2/3/4 Complexity***This Program deals 1 additional damage for each instance of this Modification.***INCREASED RANGE****+1/1 Complexity***For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).***KNOCKBACK****+2/2/3 Complexity***The target moves 5 feet away from you for each instance of this Modification. If the target collides with something, the target and the thing it collides with both take 1 damage per 5 feet the target traveled.***PIERCING****+1/2/3 Complexity***This Program Ignores 1 Damage Reduction on the target for each instance of this Modification.***QUICK****+5 Complexity***Once per Turn, after dealing 1 or more damage, your Initiative is raised by 1 step.***RESTRICTED TO RANGE****-1 Complexity***This attack cannot be used in melee.***SURPRISE ATTACK****+1/2/3 Complexity***When you use this Program to attack someone who is unaware of your presence, you roll one extra die for each instance of this Modification.***LASER PISTOL****2CS : Coordination (40 feet)***Success Value lowered by 1. Deals +1 damage.***Complexity 4:**

FINESSE WEAPON (2), PRECISE (2)

BEAM RIFLE**2CS : Coordination (Line of Sight)***Can't be used in melee. Success Value lowered by 1. Deals +1 damage.***Complexity 5:**FINESSE WEAPON (2), 2X INCREASED RANGE (2),
RESTRICTED TO RANGE (-1), PRECISE (2)**SONIC PISTOL****2CS : Coordination (40 feet)***Dice on this Program don't explode. Deals +1 damage. Target moves 10 feet away from you. If the target collides with something, the target and the thing it collides with both take 1 damage per 5 feet the target traveled.***Complexity 5:**FINESSE WEAPON (2), 2X KNOCKBACK (4),
FAULTY CODE (-1)**GRENADE LAUNCHER****2CS : Coordination (40 feet)***Deals +1 damage. Every character within 10 feet of the target suffers the base damage of the attack.***Complexity 6:**

FINESSE WEAPON (2), 2X AREA (4)

MACHINE GUN**2CS : Coordination (40 feet)***Deals +2 damage and raises your Initiative one step.***Complexity 10:**

FINESSE WEAPON (2), EXTRA DAMAGE (2), QUICK (5)

GRAPPLE ASSIST

Complexity 2

3CS : Force (5 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer 1 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1.

AETHERLOCK

+1 Complexity

When you attack someone affected by this Program, their Defense is reduced by 1 (to a minimum of 0).

GRAB CONNECTION

+3 Complexity

This Program deals 1 additional damage, and it may spend Excess to increase the damage dealt at a rate of 1 Excess per 1 damage.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

MOMENTUM

+1/2/2/3 Complexity

The target moves 5 feet either toward or away from you (your choice) for each instance of this Modification. If the target collides with something, the target and the thing it collides with both take 1 damage per 5 feet the target traveled, then the target is knocked Prone.

STUNNING

+1 Complexity

The target's Initiative is lowered by one step.

VICE

+2 Complexity

The target cannot spend CS to move until the start of your next Turn. If the Momentum Mod is used to move the target, this Mod has no effect.

NANOLOCK

3CS : Force (5 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer 1 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1. The target cannot spend CS to move until the start of your next Turn.

Complexity 4:

GRAPPLE ASSIST (2), VICE (2)

DIGITAL FIBER

3CS : Force (5 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer +2 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1.

Complexity 5:

GRAPPLE ASSIST (2), GRAB CONNECTION (3)

BLACK HOLE GUN

3CS : Force (40 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer 1 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1.

The target moves 15 feet either toward or away from you (your choice) and may suffer additional collision damage. If they do, they are knocked Prone.

Complexity 8:

GRAPPLE ASSIST (2), 3X MOMENTUM (5),
INCREASED RANGE (1)

"I would not have believed it possible to slow a person's mind through the application of force, but I cannot deny what I saw. It reminded me again that the things I knew in the material world held no sway in this other place."

SENSEI SAITO

PSYCHIC ASSAULT

Complexity 2

3CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Deals +1 damage. Other characters cannot determine this Program's source, but the target can succeed on a Perception (2) test to do so.

DECREASED RANGE

-1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range decreases by one step (from Line of Sight to 80 feet, from 80 feet to 40 feet, or from 40 feet to 5 feet).

DISTRACTING

+2 Complexity

You may declare 1 Boost to lower the target's Defense by 1 until the start of their next Turn.

EXTRA DAMAGE

+3/4/5 Complexity

This Program deals 1 additional damage for each instance of this Modification.

IMMEDIATE

+6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

PIERCING

+1/1/1/1/1 Complexity

This Program Ignores 1 Damage Reduction on the target for each instance of this Modification.

PSYCHIC STEALTH

+1/2/3 Complexity

The Difficulty of Perception tests made to determine the source of this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

SURPRISE ATTACK

+1/2/3 Complexity

When you use this Program to attack someone who is unaware of your presence, you roll one extra die for each instance of this Modification.

VISIBLE EFFECT

-1 Complexity

The target automatically succeeds on their Perception test to determine the source of this Program. Other characters can attempt Perception (2) tests to do so.

MIND VIRUS**3CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

When you choose this Program, choose a Virus you own. Gain a Glitch when using this Program. Deals +1 damage. Target gains the chosen Virus; if it has an X value, X is equal to 2. Other characters cannot determine this Program's source, but the target can succeed on a Perception (2) test to do so.

Complexity 3:

PSYCHIC ASSAULT (2), 2X VIRAL (5), POWER SINK (-4)

EGO KNIFE**3CS : Charisma (5 feet)**

Roll 2 additional dice when you use this Program to attack someone who is unaware of your presence. Deals +1 damage. Other characters cannot determine this Program's source, but the target can succeed on a Perception (3) test to do so.

Complexity 5:

PSYCHIC ASSAULT (2), DECREASED RANGE (-1), PSYCHIC STEALTH (1), 2X SURPRISE ATTACK (3)

LOBOTOMIZER**3CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

Deals +1 damage, ignoring 3 Damage Reduction on the target.

Complexity 5:

PSYCHIC ASSAULT (2), 3X PIERCING (3)

MIND BREAK**3CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

Success Value lowered by 2. Deals +3 damage. Other characters cannot determine this Program's source, but the target can succeed on a Perception (2) test to do so.

Complexity 14:

PSYCHIC ASSAULT (2), 2X EXTRA DAMAGE (7), 2X PRECISE (5)

STATUS PROGRAMS

The following programs are designed to hinder, confuse, and otherwise manipulate others.

MANIPULATE

Complexity 2

3CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Target changes their attitude about you by one step in a direction of your choice. For every 2 Excess you spend, the target's attitude changes by one additional step. Characters do not realize this Program is being used unless they succeed on a Perception (2) test.

ALTER PERCEPTION

+2 Complexity

You may change the character's attitude about anything you wish (instead of only yourself).

CONTROL

+3/4/5 Complexity

The target gains the Trojan Virus with a value equal to the number of instances of this Modification, even if you do not own the Trojan Virus.

FRIENDLY FIRE

+3 Complexity

The target immediately makes a 2 CS or less attack against another character of your choice without spending CS. You choose what Stunts (if any) the target declares.

GROUP

+2/3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program can target an additional character.

IMMEDIATE

+4 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

IMPAIR NEURONS

+1/1/1/2/3 Complexity

The target gains the Mind Eater Virus with a value equal to the number of instances of this Modification, even if you do not own the Mind Eater Virus.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

OVERCONFIDENT

+2 Complexity

The target must declare a Boost on its next Action.

STUNNING

+2 Complexity

The target's Initiative is lowered by one step.

ENEMY DISTORTER

3CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Target changes their attitude about you by one step in a direction of your choice and immediately makes a 2 CS or less attack against another character of your choice without spending CS. You choose what Stunts (if any) the target declares.

For every 2 Excess you spend, the target's attitude changes by one additional step. Characters do not realize this Program is being used unless they succeed on a Perception (2) test.

Complexity 5:

MANIPULATE (2), FRIENDLY FIRE (3)

NEURON BEND

3CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Target changes their attitude about you by one step in a direction of your choice, lowers their Initiative one step, and must declare a Boost on their next Action.

For every 2 Excess you spend, the target's attitude changes by one additional step. Characters do not realize this Program is being used unless they succeed on a Perception (2) test.

Complexity 6:

MANIPULATE (2), OVERCONFIDENT (2), STUNNING (2)

Inclinations

A character's attitude about someone or something is measured on the following scale:

Love > Strongly Like > Like > Inclined > Neutral > Disinclined > Dislike > Strongly Dislike > Hate

A character's attitude can affect the difficulty of certain types of requests, making it easier to get your way.

MANIPULATE NOISE

Complexity 2

3CS : Composure (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify a 20 foot cube area by adding or subtracting 3 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

ADDITIONAL CUBE**+2/3/4 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, create one additional cube of Noise within range.

BLUE HOLE**+2/2/3 Complexity**

Increase the size of the cube's dimensions by 20 feet for each instance of this Modification (from a 20 foot cube to a 40 foot cube, from a 40 foot cube to a 60 foot cube, or from a 60 foot cube to an 80 foot cube).

INCREASED RANGE**+1/1 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

LASTING NOISE**+1/1/1/1 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, the Noise lasts for one additional Turn.

POWERFUL NOISE**+1 Complexity**

Increase the Noise's Level by 1 for each instance of this Modification. You can take this Mod any number of times.

RESTRICTED TO RANGE**-1 Complexity**

This attack can't be used in melee.

SHAPED**+3 Complexity**

You may create a different shape of Noise, instead of a cube. The Noise must be at least 5 feet in any dimension, however (so cannot be stretched incredibly thin).

SUDDEN CUBE**+2/2/2 Complexity**

If the Noise is created touching a character, that character's Speed Test difficulty is increased by +1 for each instance of this Modification.

NOISE BOMB**3CS : Composure (40 feet)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify a 20 foot cube area by adding or subtracting 5 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 4:

MANIPULATE NOISE (2), 2X POWERFUL NOISE (2)

CATAclysm**3CS : Composure (40 feet)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify three 40 foot cube areas by adding or subtracting 3 Levels of Noise. They last until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 9:

MANIPULATE NOISE (2), 2X ADDITIONAL CUBE (5), BLUE HOLE (2)

NOISE CAGE**3CS : Composure (40 feet)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify a 20 foot area by adding or subtracting 5 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your 3rd turn from now. The Noise may be created in various shape. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 9:

MANIPULATE NOISE (2), 2X LASTING NOISE (2), 2X POWERFUL NOISE (2), SHAPED (3)

SUPPORT PROGRAMS

These Programs specialize in supporting other characters.

ENCOURAGE

Complexity 1

2CS : Charisma (40 feet)

*This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense.
Give another character +1 die on their next Test.*

BOOM!**+2/2/2 Complexity**

When rolling on their next Test, the value at which the target's dice explode is lowered by one for each instance of this Modification.

DECREASED RANGE**-1 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range decreases by one step (from Line of Sight to 80 feet, from 80 feet to 40 feet, or from 40 feet to 5 feet).

IMMEDIATE**+6 Complexity**

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INCREASED RANGE**+1/1 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

GROUP**+2/3/4 Complexity**

For each instance of this Modification, this Program can target an additional character.

PROBABILITY MATRIX**+2/3 Complexity**

When rolling on their next Test, the target may reroll any of their failed dice once for each instance of this Modification.

SYNCHRONICITY**+2 Complexity**

When rolling on their next Test, the target may choose not to roll any Aetherium dice.

SYNERGY**+2/2/2 Complexity**

When rolling on their next Test, the target's Success Value is lowered by one for each instance of this Modification.

TIME DISTORTION**+4 Complexity**

The target gains 1 CS. This Modification has no effect upon yourself.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE**2CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

*This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense.
Give another character +1 die on their next Test.
When the target rolls this Test, their Success Value is lowered by 2.*

Complexity 5:

ENCOURAGE (1), 2X SYNERGY (4)

PROBABILITY GUN**2CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

*This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense.
Give another character +1 die on their next Test.
When the target rolls this Test, they may reroll any of their failed dice once.*

Complexity 3:

ENCOURAGE (1), PROBABILITY MATRIX (2)

NANO FLAG**2CS : Charisma (40 feet)**

*This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense.
Give up to 3 other characters +1 die on their next Test and 2 CS (if this Program targeted the user, they do not gain the CS).*

Complexity 14:

ENCOURAGE (1), 2X GROUP (5), 2X TIME DISTORTION (8)

Visuals

The Encourage Program might not have a visual appearance to its effect, but whatever form it takes (audio, for example), it is very apparent to everyone that it was a Program in use.

ACCESS CONNECTION

Complexity 1

2CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

You learn which Programs the target has materialized, what type of Rig they are using, their current Sync, and which Collective (if any) the target is affiliated with.

DATA FORGERY

+1/2/3 Complexity

Choose one ID or document belonging to the target (such as their Personal ID, a password, employment records, etc.) and change it to something else of your choosing.

DEEP SCAN

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you learn one of the target's dematerialized Iconic Programs.

GEOLOCATOR

+6 Complexity

You may declare Boosts to learn the target's physical location within Meatspace. It requires 6 Boosts to be accurate down to the building they are occupying.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

NEURON FLARE

+4/6/8 Complexity

Choose one of the target's materialized Iconic Programs for each instance of this Modification. Each chosen Program immediately dematerializes.

OFFENSIVE

+2/3/4 Complexity

You may choose to deal 1 damage to the target per instance of this Modification.

SPYWARE

+2/2/2 Complexity

You are aware of the target's exact location within the Aetherium and can overhear all conversations they have using devices, for a period of one day per instance of this Modification.

VALUE VAMPIRE

+3/3/3 Complexity

For each instance of this Program, the target's VAR is reduced by 1 and your VAR is increased by 1. The increase to your VAR lasts a day before returning to normal. Characters cannot lower this temporary VAR; they'd have to lower their own (but it would benefit from this increase).

VIRAL APPLICATOR

+3/3/3 Complexity

Successful attacks with this Program give the target a Virus of your choice (which you must own) with an X value equal to the number of instances of this Modification.

NEURAL GUN

2CS : Reasoning (40 feet)

You learn which Iconic Programs the target has materialized, what type of Rig they are using, their current Sync, and which Collective (if any) the target is affiliated with.

Choose one of the target's materialized Iconic Programs and dematerialize it.

Complexity 6:

ACCESS CONNECTION (1), INCREASED RANGE (1), NEURON FLARE (4)

SPY LINK

2CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

You learn which Iconic Programs the target has materialized, what type of Rig they are using, their current Sync, and which Collective (if any) the target is affiliated with.

You are aware of the target's exact location within the Aetherium and can overhear all conversations they have using devices, for a period of two days.

Complexity 5:

ACCESS CONNECTION (1), 2X SPYWARE (4)

DOX LINK

2CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

You learn which Iconic Programs the target has materialized, what type of Rig they are using, their current Sync, and which Collective (if any) the target is affiliated with.

You may declare Boosts to learn the target's physical location within Meatspace, requiring 6 Boosts to be accurate down to the building they are currently occupying.

Complexity 7:

ACCESS CONNECTION (1), GEOLOCATOR (6)

"With a touch, I suddenly knew many things about my foe as my Rig read the flow from their mind."

RANYA

COPYCAT

Complexity 2

1CS : Charisma (Line of Sight)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. A willing character within range can choose one of their Root Programs or a Modification on a Root Program that you both possess. Until the start of this character's next Turn, you can use the chosen Root Program or Modification as if you possessed it. This Program does not change the Skin of a borrowed Root Program (which might make it very obvious whose Program you're duplicating).

ADDITIVE

+1/1/2/3 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the willing character can choose an additional Root Program or Modification for you to gain.

CLOINED CODE

+2 Complexity

This Program can affect unwilling characters. If it does, use the target's Defense instead of the Pylon's Defense.

DECREASED RANGE

-1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range decreases by one step (from Line of Sight to 80 feet, from 80 feet to 40 feet, or from 40 feet to 5 feet).

LASTING CLONE

+1/2/3 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you retain access to the chosen Root Program or Modification for one additional turn.

LETHARGIC

-2/2 Complexity

The CS cost to activate this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

LINKED ASSAULT

+2 Complexity

When rolling to activate a Root Program granted or Modified by this Program, you gain an additional die for each copy of this Root Program possessed by an ally within range.

MENTAL LINK

+2/2/2 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you may choose another character in range to gain access to the chosen Program or Modification. That character cannot use a chosen Modification unless they also possess its Root Program.

PYLON WORM

+3/3/3 Complexity

The Pylon's Defense is reduced by 1 for each instance of this Modification, to a minimum of 0.

UNIFORMS

1CS : Charisma (Line of Sight)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. A willing character within range can choose up to two of their Root Programs and/or Modifications on a Root Program that you both possess. Until the start of this character's next Turn, you and one other character can use the chosen Root Programs and/or Modifications as if you possessed them.

Complexity 5:

COPYCAT (2), ADDITIVE (1), MENTAL LINK (2)

COPY THIEF

1CS : Charisma (Line of Sight)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. A willing character within range can choose up to two of their Root Programs and/or Modifications on a Root Program that you both possess. Until the start of this character's next Turn, you can use the chosen Root Programs and/or Modifications as if you possessed them.

This Program can affect unwilling characters. If it does, use the target's Defense instead of the Pylon's Defense.

Complexity 5:

COPYCAT (2), ADDITIVE (1), CLOINED CODE (2)

Copying Programs

While it is not directly possible to copy Programs in the Aetherium in a permanent way, the Copycat Program helps duplicate the effect, temporarily.

Mods copied are copied by level. For example, Extra Damage at rank one won't add on to an Extra Damage at rank one a character already possesses.

The Program, with Additive, can copy a Root Program and some of its Mods; you do not need to possess the Root Program if you are copying it.

If Mental Link is used, characters gain access to the exact same thing. If they already possess some of the Program, those parts are ignored when gaining it.

RECALIBRATE

Complexity 2

2CS : Composure (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +1.

ANTIVIRUS

+1/2/3 Complexity

If there is a Virus Program affecting the target, lower the value of its X by 2 for each instance of this Modification. If there are multiple Virus Programs affecting them, choose one to lower.

EXTRA HEALING

+1/2/3 Complexity

This Program heals 1 additional Sync for each instance of this Modification.

IMMEDIATE

+6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

GROUP

+2/3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program can target an additional character.

LETHARGIC

-2 Complexity

The CS cost to activate this Program is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

PYLON WORM

+3/3/3 Complexity

The Pylon's Defense is reduced by 1 for each instance of this Modification, to a minimum of 0.

SYNCHRONIZE

+2 Complexity

You may declare 1 Boost to remove 1 Glitch on the target.

MED KIT

2CS : Composure (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +3.

Complexity 5:

RECALIBRATE (2), 2X EXTRA HEALING (3)

NANOREPAIRS

2CS : Composure (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +1 and lower the value of one Virus Program affecting the target by 2. You may declare 1 Boost to remove 1 Glitch on the target.

Complexity 5:

RECALIBRATE (2), ANTIVIRUS (1), SYNCHRONIZE (2)

BANDAGE GUN

2CS : Composure (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +1.

Complexity 3:

RECALIBRATE (2), INCREASED RANGE (1)

AUTOFIX

3CS : Composure (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense, but its Level is reduced by 2 (minimum 0).

Gain 1 Excess when successfully using this Program. Heal the target's Sync by +1. You may declare 1 Boost to remove 1 Glitch on the target.

Complexity 8:

RECALIBRATE (2), LETHARGIC (-2), 2X PYLON WORM (5), AUTO-CORRECTIVE (3), SYNCHRONIZE (2)

UTILITY PROGRAMS

The following Programs are useful in a broad variety of situations, many of them having nothing to do with combat.

ARMOR

Complexity 3

Passive. Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1.

EXTRA ARMOR

+3/3/3 Complexity

Reduce damage from attacks against you by an additional 1 for each instance of this Modification.

GROUNDING

+1/1/1 Complexity

When an effect would force you to move, your movement is reduced by 5 feet for each instance of this Modification.

BULWARK

+2/3/3 Complexity

Allies within 5 feet of you who do not have the Armor Program also benefit from this Program. For each additional instance of this Modification, this range is increased by 5 feet.

FEEDBACK

+2/3/4 Complexity

After an opponent successfully attacks you with a Weapon Program, they suffer 1 Damage. Increase this damage by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

OBSCURING

+3 Complexity

Attacks that target you have their range reduced by one step (from Line of Sight to 60 feet, from 60 feet to 30 feet, or from 30 feet to 5 feet).

PREPARED FOR ATTACK

+4 Complexity

Your Defense is increased by 1.

STRENGTHENED CONNECTION

+1/2/3 Complexity

Increase your maximum Sync by 2 for each instance of this Modification.

Passive Programs and Stacking

Remember: Passive Programs do not stack their effects if you have multiple of them. For example, having multiple Armor Programs running does not give the effect multiple times.

GRAVITY ARMOR

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. When an effect would force you to move, your movement is reduced by 10 feet.

Complexity 5:

ARMOR (3), 2X GROUNDING (2)

NANO SHIELDING

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. Allies within 5 feet of you who do not have the Armor Program also benefit from this Program.

Complexity 5:

ARMOR (3), BULWARK (2)

BIOREACTIVE ARMOR

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 2. This cannot reduce damage below 1.

Complexity 6:

ARMOR (3), EXTRA ARMOR (3)

SWARM OF BEES

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. Attacks that target you have their Range reduced by one step. After an opponent successfully attacks you with a Weapon Program, they suffer 1 damage.

Complexity 8:

ARMOR (3), FEEDBACK (2), OBSCURING (3)

CHANGE APPEARANCE Complexity 2**2CS : Composure (Self)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You can change your physical features to some degree, such as gaining or losing weight, changing your eye color or hair style, or instantly changing the appearance of your clothing. These changes last for the duration of the Scene.

CHANGE SIZE +2/3/4 Complexity

You can change your size by one degree for each instance of this Modification. The scale of these changes is as follows: fly < cat < child < regular person < small car < bus < small building. A change in a character's size has no bearing upon their Stats. If you change two steps or more, you cannot use other Programs.

FACE IN THE CROWD +1/2/2 Complexity

The Program pulls in data from the people around you and changes your appearance into one based upon a compilation of the appearances around you. So long as you remain in a relatively populated area, it takes a Perception (2) Test to notice that you're anything more than a random bystander. The Difficulty of this Test increases by +1 for each additional instance of this Modification.

FACIAL CONTROL +1/2/3 Complexity

Increase the Difficulty of any rolls to discern whether or not you are being truthful or sincere by +1 for each instance of this Modification.

GREATER CHANGE +3/3/3 Complexity

You can change your appearance to a greater degree. You can look like a different person for one, a different living being for two, or an inanimate object for three instances of this Mod. If you change two steps or more, you cannot use other Programs.

IMMEDIATE +6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

SPOOFED LOGIN +2 Complexity

Choose a person within your Line of Sight. You take on their physical appearance, though not their mannerisms or voice. Other characters can notice your deception with a Perception (3) Test. If you speak or the character is very familiar with the person you are imitating, the Difficulty of this Test is reduced by 1 (2 if both).

ANONYMOUS**2CS : Composure (Self)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You can change your physical features to some degree, such as gaining or losing weight, changing your eye color or hair style, or instantly changing the appearance of your clothing. These changes last for the duration of the Scene.

So long as you remain in a relatively populated area, it takes a Perception (3) Test to notice that you're anything more than a random bystander.

Complexity 5:

CHANGE APPEARANCE (2), 2X FACE IN THE CROWD (3)

CLONE SUIT**2CS : Composure (Self)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. In addition to the normal Change Appearance options, you may choose a person within your Line of Sight. You take on their physical appearance, though not their mannerisms or voice. Other characters can notice your deception with a Perception (3) Test. If you speak or the character is very familiar with the person you are imitating, the Difficulty of this Test is reduced by 1 (2 if both).

Complexity 4:

CHANGE APPEARANCE (2), SPOOFED LOGIN (2)

HOUSE CAT**2CS : Composure (Self)**

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You can change your physical features to a large degree, looking like almost any living creature. You may also change your size to as small as a cat or as large as a bus (this has no impact upon your Stats). These changes last for the duration of the Scene. If you change two steps or more in size and/or appearance, you cannot use other Programs.

Complexity 13:

CHANGE APPEARANCE (2), 2X CHANGE SIZE (5),
2X GREATER CHANGE (6)

THIEF ASSIST

Complexity 2

3CS : Speed (5 feet)

Choose a non-autonomous Pylon Program in the target's possession that you can see. The Program disappears from the target's belongings and appears in your own, for the duration of the Scene. If the Pylon Program was not in use when it disappeared, the target must pass a Perception (2) Test to notice its disappearance.

DUPE

+1 Complexity

You may choose for the Pylon Program not to disappear from the target's belongings, but a duplicate still shows up in your own.

FRACTAL DISTRACTION

+1/2/3 Complexity

The Difficulty of the target's Perception Test to notice a Program's disappearance is increased by +1 for each instance of this Modification.

IMMEDIATE

+4/6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INCREASED RANGE

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

KILL CODE

+2 Complexity

You may choose to have the chosen Pylon Program immediately dematerialize instead of appearing in your possession.

LOCKPICK

+1 Complexity

This Program can be used to steal a lock Program out of its settings, effectively disabling the lock. When used in this manner, this Program uses the Pylon Level for the Defense.

LONG LASTING

+2/2 Complexity

The theft of the Pylon Program lasts for an additional Scene per instance of this Mod.

REASSIGN

+1/1 Complexity

You may choose for the stolen Program to appear among the belongings of any character within range, though it still notes you as its owner. If you apply this Modification a second time, you can choose for the ID tag to identify the character receiving the item as its owner.

MULTITOOL

3CS : Speed (5 feet)

Choose a non-autonomous Pylon Program in the target's possession that you can see. The Program disappears from the target's belongings and appears in your own, for the duration of the Scene. If the Pylon Program was not in use when it disappeared, the target must pass a Perception (2) Test to notice its disappearance.

You may choose to copy the Program (instead of take it) or to dematerialize it.

Complexity 5:

THIEF ASSIST (2), KILL CODE (2), DUPE (1)

5 FINGER GUN

3CS : Speed (80 feet)

Choose a non-autonomous Pylon Program in the target's possession that you can see. The Program disappears from the target's belongings and appears in your own, for the duration of the Scene. If the Pylon Program was not in use when it disappeared, the target must pass a Perception (2) Test to notice its disappearance.

Complexity 4:

THIEF ASSIST (2), 2X INCREASED RANGE (2)

Program Theft

If a Program is stolen, it will return to the owner the effect is up unless the owner logs out before that happens, in which case it becomes unleashed.

Unleased Programs can be permanently stolen, though it retains an owner history, allowing a skilled or well-connected individual to track down who has stolen a Program.

The safest way to avoid this is to destroy the Program after stealing it or make a Coding (2) Test to destroy the ownership history. Coding rules are on page 211.

H.U.D.

Complexity 2

Passive

Invisible characters and objects are considered visible to you (and are noted as being invisible), though they may still be difficult to see. Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception tests involving sight by 1.

360

+1 Complexity

You have a full 360 degree vision.

APPEARANCE PIERCE

+1 Complexity

You may declare 1 Boost on a Perception Test in order to see through any Change Appearance Program that has affected someone you're seeing.

ENHANCED SYSTEMS

+2/3/4 Complexity

Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception Tests involving sight by an additional 1 for each instance of this Modification.

HONESTY ALGORITHMS

+1/2/2 Complexity

Reduce the Difficulty of any tests made to discern whether someone is being honest or sincere by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

LOCATE WEAK POINT

+2/1/2 Complexity

When you make an attack, you may spend 1 additional CS to gain 2 dice on your roll. Gain an additional die per instance of this Mod.

SOUND ENHANCEMENT

+2 Complexity

This Program applies to Perception tests involving sound as well as sight.

THREAT TRACKING

+1/1/1/1 Complexity

Increase your Initiative roll by 1 for each instance of this Modification. In addition, if an enemy moves out of your sight, you remain aware of their exact location for a number of Turns equal to the number of instances of this Modification unless they succeed at a Coordination (2) Test when they move out of sight.

X-RAY

+2/2/2/2 Complexity

You can see through solid objects of Complexity 5 or less with a successful Perception Test against the Pylon Level. For each additional instance of this Modification, the Complexity you can see through increases by 5.

BAT EARS

Passive

Invisible characters and objects are considered visible to you (and are noted as being invisible), though they may still be difficult to see. Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception tests involving sight or sound by 1.

Complexity 4:

H.U.D. (2), SOUND ENHANCEMENT (2)

HOSTILE TRACKER

Passive

Invisible characters and objects are considered visible to you (and are noted as being invisible), though they may still be difficult to see. Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception tests involving sight by 1.

Increase your Initiative roll by 3. If an enemy moves out of your sight, you remain aware of their exact location for 3 Turns unless they succeed at a Coordination (2) Test when they move out of sight.

Complexity 5:

H.U.D. (2), 3X THREAT TRACKING (3)

SUPPORT AI

Passive

Invisible characters and objects are considered visible to you (and are noted as being invisible), though they may still be difficult to see. Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception tests involving sight by 1.

Reduce the Difficulty of any tests made to discern whether someone is being honest or sincere by 1. When you make an attack, you may spend 1 additional CS to gain 2 dice on your roll.

Complexity 5:

H.U.D. (2), 3X THREAT TRACKING (3)

PYLON INTERFACE

Complexity 2

3CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

This Program allows you to interface with a tiny fraction of the nearest Pylon's or Node's consciousness, allowing you to ask it a single question. You must be at the Pylon to do so. Pylons monitor just about everything that happens within their Schema, and they log some of what they monitor. The Difficulty is determined by the type of question being asked of the Pylon. This Difficulty ranges from 1 for simple or routine questions to 3 for complicated or very nuanced questions to 5 for classified information. Each additional time you use this Program within the same Scene, the Difficulty increases by 1 as the Pylon grows annoyed with being questioned. On a success, the Pylon answers the question to the best of its ability.

DELETION

+2 Complexity

After learning a piece of information from the Pylon, you may spend 3 Excess to have that piece of information deleted from the Pylon's memory. Note that the Pylon will most likely log that you deleted the information.

FILE CORRUPTION

+2/2/2/2 Complexity

You may choose a single Pylon Program of Complexity 5 or less that the Pylon is hosting (even if you don't know specifically where that Pylon Program is) and dematerialize it (it must be manually materialized again). Increase the Complexity level by 5 for each instance of this Modification. Note that using this Modification to dematerialize buildings, streets, or other elements of infrastructure is widely viewed as an act of terrorism.

IMMEDIATE

+4/6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INDEXED SEARCH

+2/2/2 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you may ask one more question of the Pylon.

PREDICTIVE MODELS

+3 Complexity

You may ask the Pylon a question about future events, relying upon its predictive models to give you an accurate hypothesis of what consequences will follow from a single course of action.

PROBING QUESTIONS

+3/4/5 Complexity

The Difficulty reduced by 1 for each instance of this Modification, to a minimum of 0.

CONSCIOUSNESS SCAN

3CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

This Program allows you to interface with a tiny fraction of the nearest Pylon's or Node's consciousness, allowing you to ask it up to two questions.

Complexity 4:

PYLON INTERFACE (2), INDEXED SEARCH (2)

HISTORY WIPE

3CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

This Program allows you to interface with a tiny fraction of the nearest Pylon's or Node's consciousness, allowing you to ask it one question. You may spend 3 Excess to delete that information from its database.

Complexity 4:

PYLON INTERFACE (2), DELETION (2)

DELETE BOMB

3CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

This Program allows you to interface with a tiny fraction of the nearest Pylon's or Node's consciousness, allowing you to ask it one question. You may choose an Pylon Program the Pylon is hosting of Complexity 20 or less and dematerialize it.

Complexity 10:

PYLON INTERFACE (2), 4X FILE CORRUPTION (8)

Pylon Tracking

The Level of a Pylon is a huge factor in how much information they actually are capable of monitoring, and how much of that they can log information on.

A Level 1 Pylon, for example, is unlikely to notice anything that isn't damage to its Programs, while a Level 3 Pylon might go so far as tracking the locations of all Pylon Programs it is hosting.

HACK ASSIST

Complexity 2

Passive

You may add a Switch or Chip to a successful Hacking roll.

ENDORPHIN BOOSTER

+2/2/2 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you may roll one additional die when Hacking.

GLITCH DIFFUSER

+4 Complexity

If you would gain Glitch from Hacking, reduce the Glitch gained by 1, to a minimum of 0.

PYLON BREAKER

+3 Complexity

You may add one Disruption to a Hacking roll.

STABLE HACKING

+3/3 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you may add a Short to your Hack roll.

VIRAL INFUSION

+2/3/4 Complexity

You may Hack another person directly as an attack in order to apply a Virus to them. If you do, the Difficulty is equal to the Defense of the target plus one. The Virus applied is one that must be created by the Hacking roll, and the X value is equal to the number of instances of this Mod.

WORLD SHAPER

Passive

You may add a Switch or Chip to a successful Hacking roll. You may roll one additional die when Hacking.

Complexity 4:

HACK ASSIST (2), ENDORPHIN BOOSTER (2)

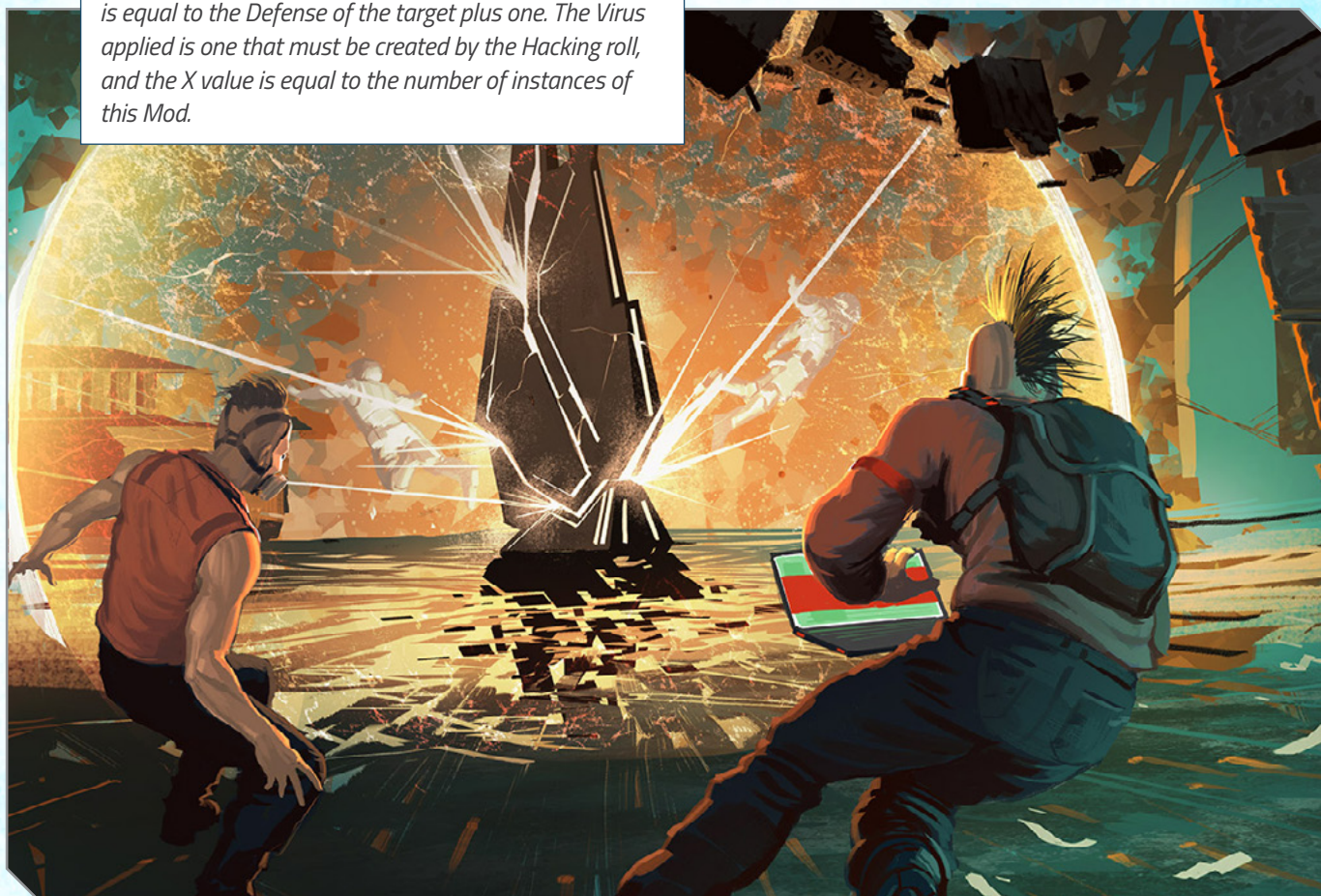
QUANTUM HACK ECHO

Passive

You may add a Switch or Chip to a successful Hacking roll. If you would gain a Glitch from Hacking, reduce the Glitch gained by 1. You may add a Short to your Hack roll.

Complexity 9:

HACK ASSIST (2), GLITCH DIFFUSER (4), STABLE HACKING (3)



MOVEMENT

Complexity 1

Passive

Passive. Increase your movement by 10 feet. If Imbedded into a Vehicle (pg. 68), this Program instead increases the Vehicle's Top Speed by 200.

ACROBATIC DEFENSES

+3 Complexity

After you spend CS to move during your Turn, your Defense is increased by 1 for each spent CS, which may not make their Defense exceed their Level. This bonus lasts until the start of your next Turn.

CARRY

+1/2/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, you may carry one willing character with you when you move. Characters carried in this manner have no effective weight for the purposes of encumbering you.

DISENGAGE

+1 Complexity

When you attempt to leave an enemy's melee range, they may not take a Reaction.

CODE GHOST

+3/4/4 Complexity

When you spend CS to move, you may spend 1 additional CS to move through Programs with Complexity 5 or less during that movement. Increase the Complexity by 5 per instance of this Mod.

FLIGHT

+3 Complexity

When you spend CS to move, you may choose to fly (allowing you to move vertically as well as horizontally).

MOTION BLUR

+2 Complexity

After you spend CS on a non-movement action, you may move 10 feet.

SUPER SPEED

+2/2/2/3/3 Complexity

Increase your movement by an additional 10 feet for each instance of this Modification.

WIND RESISTANCE

+1 Complexity

When you fall, you do so slowly enough that you do not suffer any damage upon landing.

ACHILLES BRACE

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet. After you spend CS to move during your Turn, your Defense is increased by 1 for each spent CS, to a max of your Level. This bonus lasts until the start of your next Turn.

Complexity 4:

MOVEMENT (1), ACROBATIC DEFENSES (3)

WINGS

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet. When you spend CS to move, you may choose to fly (allowing you to move vertically as well as horizontally).

Complexity 4:

MOVEMENT (1), FLIGHT (3)

MASS DIFFUSER

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet. When you spend CS to move, you may spend 1 additional CS to move through Programs with Complexity 5 or less during that movement.

Complexity 4:

MOVEMENT (1), CODE GHOST (3)

ROCKET PACK

Passive

Increase your movement by 50 feet (to 70). When you spend CS to move, you may choose to fly (allowing you to move vertically as well as horizontally).

Complexity 13:

MOVEMENT (1), FLIGHT (3), 4X SUPER SPEED (9)

CREATE ILLUSION

Complexity 3

3CS : Perception (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You create the following Illusion within range:

ILLUSION

Defense 0

Stat 1

CS 2

Illusions are autonomous, human-sized AIs that are given a specific task to complete when they are created (such as running forward, shouting a specific phrase, or fighting someone). They spend CS just like normal characters and go immediately after their creator's Turn.

Illusions may look like whatever you wish, and though they appear real in all aspects, they have no physical mass (and thus anything they come into contact with will pass through them). As a result, Illusions are effectively immune to all forms of damage.

The created Illusion lasts until the start of your next Turn. Every 2 Excess you spend increases this duration by 1 Turn. If the illusion lasts longer than it takes to perform its indicated actions, it either ceases to exist upon completing its actions or "loops" back and starts performing them again (your choice).

QUANTUM WARRIOR

Defense 0

Stats 1

CS 2

This illusion is human-sized and is armed with a Binary Blade (pg. 50). It lasts until the start of your next Turn, plus one additional Turn for every 2 Excess you spend.

Complexity 5:

CREATE ILLUSION (3), EQUIPPED PROGRAM (1), BINARY BLADE (1)

EQUIPPED PROGRAM +1/1/1/1/1 Complexity

The created Illusion has a Program it can use for each instance of this Modification. The added Program adds its Complexity to this Program's Complexity.

IMMEDIATE +4/6 Complexity

The CS of this Program is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

INCREASED DEFENSE +2/3 Complexity

Increase the Defense of this Program by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

INCREASED RANGE +1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, this Program's Range increases by one step (from 5 feet to 40 feet, from 40 feet to 80 feet, or from 80 feet to Line of Sight).

INCREASED STATS +2/3/4 Complexity

Increase the Illusion's Stats by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

LASTING ILLUSION +2/2/2 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the Illusion lasts for one additional Turn.

MULTITASKER +1/2/3 Complexity

The illusion may be given one additional task for each instance of this Modification.

PERSONALITY SLIVER +2 Complexity

The created illusion has some measure of self-awareness and can carry on basic conversations and react to its surroundings in a limited manner, such as stepping aside to avoid walking through other people.

QUICK ILLUSION +3/4 Complexity

The created illusion has an additional CS per instance of this Mod.

RESIZED +2/2/3 Complexity

You can change the size of the created Illusion by one degree for each instance of this Modification. The scale of these changes is as follows: fly < cat < child < regular person < small car < bus < small building. Note that within the Aetherium, a change in a character's size has no bearing upon their Stats.

AUTONOMOUS PROGRAMS

The following programs function independently of the character (and thus don't require CS on an ongoing basis).

All autonomous Iconic Programs (such as Vehicles, Robots, and created Illusions) can be more than 5 feet from their owner, so long as they remain on the same Schema (or within 80 feet in the Noise).

VEHICLE

Complexity 2

You gain the following vehicle:

BASIC VEHICLE

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1000

This Program has no roll and does not dematerialize when you move more than 5 feet away from it (though it will dematerialize if you move to a different Schema).

This Program can carry one driver and one passenger. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet. One of the Vehicle's occupants may be assigned to any attached Programs and use them.

This Program continues to move at that speed each Turn (during the owner's Turn, at any point during their Turn, though the full movement must be completed at once) until it is changed again. All characters inside the vehicle move with it, at its speed, without spending CS.

Any special maneuvering done in this vehicle uses Speed with a Difficulty equal to its Maneuvering value.

AI DRIVER

+2/3/4 Complexity

On your Turn, the Program can spend up to 1 CS per instance of this Modification to increase or decrease its speed at your direction. The AI Driver is considered to have a Coordination equal to the 1 plus the number of instances of this Modification.

CLUNKER

-1 Complexity

Decrease this Program's Top Speed by 300.

DECREASED MANEUVERABILITY

-1/2 Complexity

Increase the Maneuverability rating of this Program by 1.

INCREASED SIZE

+1 Complexity

This Program can carry one additional passenger for each instance of this Modification. This Mod may be taken any number of times.

INCREASED MANEUVERABILITY

+1/2/2 Complexity

Lower the Maneuverability rating of this Program by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

INCREASED DEFENSE

+3/4/5 Complexity

Increase the Defense of this Program by 1 for each instance of this Modification. This stacks with the Resilient universal Modification.

NOISE SHIELD

+1 Complexity

Reduce the Noise Level within this Program by 2 per instance of this Modification. This Mod may be taken any number of times.

TURBO CHARGED

+1/2/3 Complexity

Increase this Program's Top Speed by 300 for each instance of this Modification.

BUS

Defense 1

Maneuvering 4

Top Speed 700

This Program can carry one driver and twelve passengers. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

Complexity 9:

VEHICLE (2), 2X DECREASED MANEUVERABILITY (-3), CLUNKER (-1), 11X INCREASED SIZE (11)

NOISE SHIP

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1000

This Program can carry one driver and three passengers. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

Reduce the Noise Level within this Program by 10 per instance of this Mod.

Complexity 14 (34 health):

VEHICLE (2), 2X INCREASED SIZE (2), 5X NOISE SHIELD (5), 2X HARDENED (5)

FLYING GUN BIKE

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1200

This Program can carry one driver and one passenger. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

This vehicle has Wings (pg. 66), allowing it to fly, and an attached Machine Gun (pg. 51) that either the driver or passenger may use.

MACHINE GUN

2 CS: Coordination (40 ft)

Deals +2 damage and raises your Initiative one step.

Complexity 18:

VEHICLE (2), 2X IMBEDDED PROGRAM (2):
MACHINE GUN (10) AND WINGS (4)

TANK

Defense 2

Maneuvering 4

Top Speed 700

This Program can carry one driver and one passenger. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

This vehicle has an attached Machine Gun (pg. 51) and Cannon that either the driver or passenger may use.

MACHINE GUN

2 CS: Coordination (40 ft)

See page 51.

CANNON

3 CS - Force (40 ft)

Deals +5 damage.

Complexity 29 (49 health):

VEHICLE (2), 2X DECREASED MANEUVERABILITY (-3), CLUNKER (-1), 2X HARDENED (5), INCREASED DEFENSE (2), 2X IMBEDDED PROGRAM (2):
MACHINE GUN (10) AND CANNON (12)

Cannon Complexity 12:

STRENGTH WEAPON (1), 1X INCREASED RANGE (1), LETHARGIC (-4), 4X EXTRA DAMAGE (14)

ROBOT

Complexity 2

You gain the following robot:

BASIC ROBOT

Defense 1

Stats 2

CS 3

Robots are autonomous, human-sized AIs that must be given orders to function (see the Orders callout box). They may look like whatever you wish, though other characters can instantly tell that they are robots no matter their appearance. Robots can use any of their imbedded Programs. They have and use their own CS.

Robots can be ordered to record everything they perceive, and they can store up to 1 hour of information at a time (though their memory is erased if they are dematerialized).

Orders

Robots must be given orders in order to take actions.

You may give an order to a robot within 30 feet by spending 1 CS and declaring what order you are giving it (such as 'deliver this message' or 'don't be seen'). It automatically carries out that order and will do so until completion (i.e., "attack that character" will see the Robot continue to do so).

If you want to give it multiple orders (or complex orders), you may make a Reasoning Test with a difficulty set by the GM based on the number of orders or complexity of the task.

If a robot is given a new order before it has completed its previous orders, the previous orders are abandoned. A robot without the essential Programs to carry out an order automatically fails to perform that order.

Robots go at the same Initiative as their owner but use their own Stats when performing actions.

AI GUIDANCE

+2/3/4 Complexity

When this Program is given an order, you gain one automatic success for each instance of this Modification.

ANTENNA

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, increase the range at which the robot can receive orders from you by one step (from 5 feet to 30 feet, from 30 feet to 60 feet, or from 60 feet to Line of Sight).

INCREASED STATS

+2/3/4 Complexity

Increase the robot's Stats by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

INCREASED DEFENSE

+3/4/5 Complexity

Increase the Defense of this Program by 1 for each instance of this Modification. This stacks with the Resilient universal Modification.

LINKED ROBOT

+2/2/2 Complexity

When you create the robot, you create one additional robot for each instance of this Modification. If one of these robots is given an order, they are all considered to have received that order. When multiple robots take the same action, they lower the Success Value of that action by 1 for each robot beyond the first performing the action.

MEMORY

+1/1/1 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the length of time the robot can record is increased by 1 hour.

REMOTE CONTROL

+2 Complexity

When you create the robot, you may choose to transfer your consciousness into its body. On your Turn, you control the robot instead of your own body, which remains in a trance, not hearing or seeing anything around you. During this time, the robot uses your Sync instead of its own. You may spend 1 CS to sever your connection to the robot and return your consciousness to its own body.

RESIZED

+2/2/3 Complexity

You can change the size of the created robot by one degree for each instance of this Modification. The scale of these changes is as follows: fly < cat < child < regular person < small car < bus < small building. Note that within the Aetherium, a change in a character's size has no bearing upon their Stats.

PEACE KEEPING BOT

Defense 1

Stats 2

CS 3

This Robot is the size of a person and has a Baton.

BATON

2 CS: Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 Damage.

Complexity 4:

ROBOT (2), IMBEDDED PROGRAM (1): STRENGTH WEAPON PROGRAM (1)

GUN BOT

Defense 1

Stats 2

CS 3

This Robot is the size of a person and has a Laser Pistol (pg. 51).

LASER PISTOL

2 CS: Coordination (40 feet)

Success Value lowered by 1. Deals +1 Damage.

Complexity 7:

ROBOT (2), IMBEDDED PROGRAM (1): LASER PISTOL (4)

FLYING LASER DRONE

Defense 1

Stats 4

CS 3

This Robot is the size of a person and has a Laser Pistol (pg. 51) and Wings (pg. 66) which let it fly and move 40 feet per CS instead of 20.

LASER PISTOL

2 CS: Coordination (40 feet)

Success Value lowered by 1. Deals +1 Damage.

Complexity 17:

ROBOT (2), 2X IMBEDDED PROGRAM (2): LASER PISTOL (4), WINGS (4), 2X INCREASED STATS (5)

DISTRACTING DUPLICATE

Defense 1

Stats 2

CS 3

This Robot is the size of a person and has the Clone Suit Program (pg. 61).

CLONE SUIT

2 CS: Composure

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. In addition to the normal Change Appearance options, you may choose a person within your Line of Sight. You take on their physical appearance, though not their mannerisms or voice. Other characters can notice your deception with a Perception (3) Test. If you speak or the character is very familiar with the person you are imitating, the Difficulty of this Test is reduced by 1 (2 if both).

Complexity 7:

ROBOT (2), IMBEDDED PROGRAM (1): CLONE SUIT (4)

BULWARK DEFENDER 2.0

Defense 1

Stats 2

CS 3

This Robot is the size of a person and has an Advanced Nano Shielding Program.

This robot increase your Damage Reduction by 2. Allies within 10 feet of you who do not have the Armor Program also benefit from this Program.

Complexity 14:

ROBOT (2), IMBEDDED PROGRAM (1): ADVANCED NANO SHIELDING (11)

Advanced Nano Shielding Complexity 11:

ARMOR (3), 2X BULWARK (5), EXTRA ARMOR (3)

VIRUSES

Viruses are Programs that infect other characters. They tend to do more harm than good.

Viruses are coded or purchased like other Programs, but specialized Programs are required to allow them to affect another character. A Virus can be a Pylon or Iconic Program, and possession of it means that the Virus can be applied any number of times.

When a Virus is affecting a character, it does not count against that character's Complexity limit. If the character gains another instance of that same Virus, regardless of its Skin, they gain the highest of the two X values and then increase its value by +1. When the X of a Virus is reduced to 0, the Virus Program ends.

Viruses can often be removed or mitigated with Sync Rolls (pg. 81). A character infected with a Virus can spend 1 CS to choose a Virus affecting them and make a Sync Roll. If they do so, they reduce the X value of the chosen Virus by 1 for each success.

Unless otherwise specified, a Virus' effects end when that character hits 0 Sync.



BAD CODE (X)

Complexity 2

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, choose a Stat. When that character rolls dice, their chosen Stat is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Additional instances of this Virus are treated as separate Viruses if they affect different Stats (and thus, they do not combine their X values).

CODE FRAY

+3 Complexity

The opponent reduces their Stat by the X value of this Virus, instead of 1 (to a minimum of 1).

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

CONFUSED (X)

Complexity 1

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, it confuses them and slows their reaction time. At the end of the Round, the character's Initiative is lowered by one step.

CONTAGIOUS

+2 Complexity

If the X value of this Virus is 3+, at the start of the Round, a character within 5 feet of the infected character (GM's choice) gains this Virus with an X value equal to half its current value (rounded down).

INFESTATION

+3/3/3 Complexity

At the start of each Round, the X value of this Virus is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

DESTABILIZING (X)

Complexity 2

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, it destabilizes their connection. After that character spends 1 or more CS to perform an Action, they suffer 1 damage after resolving that Action.

CORRUPTION

+2 Complexity

Each time the infected character receives a new instance of this Virus.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

DESTROY (X)

Complexity 1

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, it eats away at their Sync. At the end of the Round, they suffer X damage. While this Program can manifest visually in any number of ways, the most common is as flames and heat.

INFESTATION

+3/3/3 Complexity

At the start of each Round, the X value of this Virus is increased by 1 for each instance of this Modification.

SPREADS

+3 Complexity

If the X value of this Virus is 3+, at the start of the Round, a Program or character within 5 feet of the infected character (GM's choice) gains this Virus with an X value equal to half its current value (rounded down).

HEAL [X]

Complexity 1

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, it repairs their damaged Sync. At the end of the Round, they heal X damage and then reduce the X value of this Program by 1.

LOW DEFENSE

Complexity 2

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, their Defense is lowered by 1, to a minimum of 0.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

MIND EATER (X)

Complexity 2

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, the maximum Complexity of their Iconic Programs is reduced by X. If the Complexity of their loaded Programs exceeds their new limit, they must unload Programs or Modifications to bring their total Complexity below their new limit.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+5 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

RESTRAINED (X)

Complexity 1

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, they lose the ability to spend CS to move.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

"Sickness in the Aetherium is always psychosomatic, and it doesn't take much to convince the human mind of its own peril!"

DR. VALDEZ

SPY (X)

Complexity 2

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, you gain access to all of their sensory perceptions. Every five minutes, the X value of this Virus is reduced by 1.

TOUGH NUT TO CRACK

+3/4 Complexity

For each instance of this Modification, the number of successes required to lower the X value of this Virus is increased by 1.

TROJAN (X)

Complexity 4

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, you gain control over their Actions. At the start of that character's Turn, you may choose an Action with a CS cost of X or lower and force the character to perform that Action. You control all decisions made during this Action (such as who an attack targets, how they declare their Boosts, and so on), but the chosen Action cannot cause damage to the acting character in any direct or indirect way (such as by forcing them to walk off a cliff). Then, the X value of this Virus is lowered by the CS cost of the Action.

WARDEN (X)

Complexity 4

Passive. When you apply this Virus to another character, they are presented with a contract which they can read through and choose to accept or decline. If accepted, the character's behavior is subjected to monitoring protocols that alert a specific party if those behaviors are performed. If rejected, nothing happens. This Virus is typically used to enforce things like business arrangements and non-disclosure agreements (and typically warns the other party if the infected character attempts to remove it).

This Program lasts for a period specified in the contract, up to 1 year, and does not end when the target's Sync reaches 0 or when they log out.

PAVLOV CLAUSE

+2 Complexity

After the target performs a behavior mentioned in the contract, they suffer damage equal to the X value of this Virus.

"Why leave something to chance when you can contractually obligate the outcome?"

IKARU LAWYER SAYING





HACKING

Hacking is named after digital hacking, though in the world of Aetherium, it takes place in one's consciousness more than in any machine. It is the act of forcing one's will and imagination onto the Aetherium in such a way that it becomes reality.

For the most part, this is done through Pylon technology -- Pylons are advanced AIs that are constantly 'imagining' the reality of the Schema around them. While everyone else goes about their daily business, Pylons are constantly Hacking the Aetherium around them to make the Aetherium habitable.

Despite this, when people refer to Hacking, they are usually talking about the capability for a human mind to enact instant change upon the Aetherium and alter the Programs they find there.

Hacking allows a character to create objects from air or to break down the artificial world around them, but it is not easy. Most characters are functionally incapable of Hacking, at least in any useful way. Their minds are too deeply accustomed to their reality, and the will of the Pylons is far greater than their own.

Even if one does possess the willpower to Hack, doing so can still be risky, and the results are not permanent. While an individual might be able to use sheer force of will to create or destroy a Program, there will come a point where their mind falters and the unyielding, tireless willpower of the Pylon will reassert itself.

For example, Aureline might decide to jump from one building to the next as she moves across the commercial district. Since doing so is a violation of the basic rules of physics laid down by the Pylon, she decides to attempt a Hack to create a movement Program. She is successful and makes an astonishing leap across the rooftops, but the Hacked Program will quickly break down and fade away if (and when) her concentration wanders.

Stacking Hacking

If a Hack is successfully used against a Program that has already been Hacked, the duration of each Hack is changed to that of Hack with the longest duration.

Working together to Hack is very effective!

Rolling the Hack

The intent of the Hack is simply whatever the character is attempting to do, and each Hack should have one specific intent. If they are trying to delete the floor underneath another character, then that is the intent. The amount of the floor they delete might vary depending upon what they roll, but they won't be able to also create a helicopter with their unexpected Switches.

All Hacking rolls use Aetherium dice to determine their success; any Glitch that a character has accumulated are not rolled when Hacking.

Hacking rolls cannot benefit from any bonuses that do not specifically mention Hacking (such as from the Encourage Program, Gain Advantage Action or Stunts).

When Hacking, a character can roll a number of Aetherium dice up to their Hack Stat. The Difficulty of a Hack determined by the target's defenses (often the Pylon Level or character's Defense). If targeting your own Iconic Programs, you may choose to have the roll be Difficulty 0.

In a Hacking roll, each Disruption symbol (5, 8, 11, and 12) counts as a success. If a character rolls more successes than the Difficulty, they suffer damage to their Sync equal to the difference.

By default, a Hack lasts for a number of Rounds equal to the character's Level (and dissipates at the end of the character's Turn in the last Round of the effect). A character may also gain up to 5 Glitch to increase the duration of the Hack by 1 Round per Glitch gained.

The different symbols on Aetherium dice have different effects:

- **Switches** (1-5) remove elements from Programs
- **Chips** (6-9) add elements to Programs.
- **Shorts** (10-11) extend the duration of the Hack; each Short extends the duration by a number of Rounds equal to the Hacker's Level.
- **Crashes** (12) the Hacker gains a Glitch.

Switches

Each Switch the character rolls while Hacking can be used to either disable a Modification on a Program or to delete a Program with no Modifications.

To disable a Modification, the character chooses a Modification on the Hacked Program and spends one Switch to disable it, rendering it inoperable for the duration of the Hack. If a Modification is Complexity 4 or higher, it requires 2 Switches to disable instead of 1.

If all of a Program's Modifications have been disabled, the character can spend one Switch to delete the Program; it simply ceases to exist for the duration of the Hack.

If the deletion of a Program places a character in harm's way (such as deleting the floor they were standing on), that character receives a Reaction (pg. 85) before the Hack takes effect.

Example Deletion

Tov has squared off against a powerful enemy, a TYPE-16, one that has invested a lot of Complexity into Armor. Tov's not having much luck getting through the defenses. In desperation, he decides that his best option is to try to dismantle his opponent's Armor.

Tov's opponent's Armor Program has 3 Mods, so he decides to roll all 6 dice. As it's a Hacking roll, it's not affected by Glitch.

Tov rolls and gets 2 Switches, 1 Chip, 2 Shorts, and 1 Crash, but he gets the right number of Disruptions for the Hack to be successful.

Each Switch removes a Mod of Tov's choice from the Armor Program for 3 Rounds (Tov is Level 1) because of the additional Shorts rolled. While it was not enough to delete the Armor, Tov has a few Rounds with the Armor weaker, and more chances to Hack.

Major Hacks

It is possible to do significant Hacks that might be outside the purview of existing Programs. These types of Hacks require both Switches and Chips instead of just one. More detailed rules can be found in the Gamemaster chapter on page 147.

Chips

Each Chip the character rolls while Hacking can be used to either add a Modification to an existing Program or to create a new Program out of thin air.

To add a Modification to an existing Program, the character chooses a legal Modification for that Program and spends one Chip. Modifications that give a negative Complexity cannot be added by Hacking.

To create a new Program, the character simply choose a Root Program and spends one Chip. They can then use any existing Chips to add Modifications to the Program as described above.

If a Root Program or Modification is Complexity 4 or higher, it requires 2 Chips to create instead of 1.

If a Virus is created, it can be created for use only; it cannot be created already applied to a character.

If the creation of a Program places a character in harm's way (such as creating rocks to drop on someone), that character receives a Reaction (pg. 85) before the Hack takes effect.

Example Creation

Tov's weapon was destroyed in a fight, and now he needs a new weapon. His best bet is to create a new one via Hacking.

Tov wants a pretty good Finesse Weapon Program, so he tries to put together a molotov cocktail. The local Pylon Level is 2, and Tov decides to roll all 6 of his possible dice.

Tov rolls 2 Switches, 3 Chips, and 1 Short. He also rolled 3 Disruption symbols as a part of it.

The 3 Disruption symbols mean the roll is successful (he needed 2), but the extra Disruption means he takes a damage to his Sync.

The 3 Chips let him create his Finesse Weapon and add 2 Mods to it (as long as the Mod is Complexity 3 or less). He picks the Viral Mod twice, allowing it to apply his Destroy Virus (which is skinned like Fire). Now, Tov has a 30 foot attack than can light his foes on fire.

The weapon will last for 2 Rounds: 1 default (Tov's Level 1) plus 1 for the Short. Tov could choose, when the Hack is going to expire, to gain a Glitch to extend it another Round.



AETHERIUM MECHANICS

The Aetherium is a world ripe with opportunity. And while, for many people, the Aetherium might serve as little more than an escape from the Meatspace, for those who have spent extended lengths of time in its embrace, the Aetherium can be a vast landscape of teeming frontiers, wonderment, and pure possibility. The true adepts of the world know that the Aetherium's most valuable quality lies in its mutable nature.



This chapter dives into the fundamental rules of the Aetherium Roleplaying Game. By using this chapter with the Basics and Programs chapter, players will know what they need to in order to log into the Aetherium and start playing.

This chapter begins with an overview of Stories and Scenes, the basic elements that make up adventures in the world of the Aetherium. From there, it moves on to discussing Programs a bit more, expanding some on the Programs chapter.

While the majority of information on how to roll dice in the game is found in the Basics chapter, there is additional information found in the next section, including how to aid an ally and declare Stunts.

After that, this chapter explains Glitch and damage, the two major threats in the world. Damage harms a character's Sync and forces them out of the Aetherium, while Glitch makes that process dangerous to the character's physical form back in the material world.

The combat rules describe how characters take actions and Overclock to gain additional actions, and this section includes an example of combat in gameplay context to help players get a feel for the game.

The chapter concludes by looking at the mechanics behind three fundamental concepts of the Aetherium: Quantum Noise, Pylons, and Value Assessment Rating, or VAR.

The Quantum Noise, or just Noise, as it's frequently called, is the nothingness that exists beyond the fringes of society. The Noise is capable of ripping apart both Programs and human minds, and it is the leading cause of Meat death within the Aetherium.

The Noise is kept at bay by Pylons, incredibly powerful Artificial Intelligences. In addition to providing pockets of safety, the Pylons also constantly Hack the Aetherium around them, keeping streets, buildings, and all manner of other Programs in existence. The Pylon rules explain how these Pylons function and how they assist characters with logging in to and out of the Aetherium.

Value Assessment Rating, or VAR, is the monetary system of the future. It acts like a credit score that is constantly changing to reflect a character's perceived value. By rolling dice, characters determine their current score, allowing them to procure new things or pay for the help of others.

"I've begun to wonder how much the Aetherium was shaped by the human mind. Perhaps those first explorers went insane, not because of what existed already, but because of what didn't."

DR. VALDEZ

STORIES AND SCENES

Stories are the fundamental conflicts and plots that the players attempt to overcome during a game of the Aetherium RPG. Each time the players sit down to play the game, they are participating in a Story.

Each Story is split up into multiple Scenes, each of which moves the Story forward in some specific way, as described in the Basics chapter (pg. 22).

Scenes typically fall into one of three categories: combat, social, or amalgam. Combat Scenes usually involve the players (or their opponents) using violence to solve a problem, while social Scenes are more focused upon using persuasion, charm, and negotiation (or even intimidation) to accomplish a goal. Amalgam Scenes are a bit different, in that they are essentially montages tying together multiple smaller events (such as interviewing witnesses or searching for clues) into a single Scene.

These categories are not fixed; just about any Scene can descend into violence once tempers flare, and particularly glib and charming characters might be able to avert a fight with some well-placed words and a lucky roll of the dice. How the Scene plays out should be dependent upon the characters and the choices they make.

A Scene usually ends when the players either accomplish their goal (defeat their opponents, get the information, solve a puzzle) or when it becomes impossible for them to do so. The point isn't whether the characters succeed or fail, but rather that they tell a fun and interesting story as they attempt to solve the problems surrounding them.

Time Limits

Both Stories and Scenes can have specific time limits. This time limit might take the form of actual time (in five hours, the bomb will explode) or it might take the form of a specific number of dice rolls allowed before something changes (after three rolls, the Don grows bored and is done listening to you).

USING PROGRAMS

Every Program that is manifested on a character must be visible, and every Program has a visible effect when it is used. This means that even people who are using a Program to psychically attack another character must give some indication that a Program is in use, even if bystanders can't discern its function.

Programs are divided into two types: Passive and Active.

Passive Programs apply their effects to the character possessing them as soon as the Program is materialized. The effects of the same Passive Root Program do not stack; if a character has multiple of the same Passive Root Program, they must choose one that is in effect.

Active Programs, however, require a bit more effort to use. Once an Active Program has been materialized, a character must spend the appropriate amount of Cycle Speed (CS) to use that Program.

Once the character has spent the appropriate amount of CS, they make a Test using that Program (following the normal procedure for Tests, as described on page 14). If the roll is successful, the Program's effect takes place. If it fails, the Program fails to activate (and the spent CS remains spent).

Any Program that is used against another character can be said to be an Attack. If the target of an attack wishes, they can apply their defenses against that attack or possibly even react to it.

A Program's defense, if targeted, is the Pylon's Level (for Pylon Programs) or the owning character's Defense (for Iconic Programs).

Materializing Programs

A character can, at any time, spend 2 CS to materialize (or dematerialize) one of their owned and registered Programs from the Pylon (Pylon Programs) or their Rig (Iconic Programs).

Some Pylons have security protocols in place for certain types of Root Programs being materialized suddenly, so it's possible that materializing certain Programs might cause the Pylon to alert certain characters of their use.

In addition, if there is no Pylon or the characters don't have access to it, they cannot materialize (or dematerialize) one of their Pylon Programs.

DICE ROLLS

How to roll dice is covered in the Basics chapter on page 14, but a summary is provided below for ease of reference.

Any time a character takes a Test, they roll a number of dice based on a certain value, which is usually a Stat. Each die rolled with a value of 7+ is considered to be a success. To pass a Test, a character needs a number of successes equal to the Difficulty of the Test. Any additional successes can be used for Excess Stunts.

In general, the Difficulty of a Test is one of three things:

- When a Program is affecting a character or Iconic Program, the Difficulty is usually determined by the character's Defense.
- When a Program is affecting a Pylon Program, the Difficulty is determined by the Level of the local Pylon.
- If a Program isn't being used (such as for a Perception Test), the difficulty is set by the situation at hand, as determined by the GM (often 1 to 3).

If a character has any Glitch, they must roll an appropriate number of the Aetherium dice with their other dice, as described in the Glitch rules on page 83.

It is very rare for the effects of a dice roll to carry from one Scene to another, unless the effect is damage or Glitch.

If a character fails a Test other than an attack, they typically cannot attempt that same task again for a period of time (such as for the rest of the Scene), or, if they can, the Difficulty is increased each time they try.

Aiding Another

Characters can work together to aid their friends and allies. To do so, the character spends 3 CS and makes the same Test that they are attempting to assist with. Instead of being applied to the problem, each success grants one additional die to the character being helped.

Sync Rolls

Sometimes, characters will be asked to roll Sync. When doing so, they roll dice equal to their current Sync, plus any Aetherium dice that they have accumulated.

Sync rolls typically have no direct effects, but may have a significant impact if they are rolled with Glitch.

Stunts

Stunts are ways to customize dice rolls in order to get new results. They are split into two categories: Boost Stunts and Excess Stunts.

A character can declare Boost Stunts as Excess Stunts after their roll has been made, but in order to do so they must spend twice the Stunt's Boost cost in Excess. Thus, a Stunt that costs 1 Boost could be used for the cost of 2 Excess.

If a character declares a Stunt when there are multiple Difficulties involved, such as an attack that has multiple targets, the highest Difficulty is used to determine Excess.

When a character uses an Action against themselves or an ally, they may only declare the Bonus Excess Stunt.

Boost Stunts

Defensive Focus [1 Boost]

Increase your Defense by 1 until the start of your next Turn.

Fast [2 Boosts]

Once per Round, gain 1 CS.

Manipulate Glitch [2 Boosts]

Give a Glitch to the target or remove one from yourself.

Style [X Boosts]

Perform the Action with particular flair or style. You may declare this Stunt any number of times, with each instance making the Action that much more impressive. This may not be declared as an Excess Stunt.

Excess Stunts

Bonus [1 Excess]

If the Action has a + value in its effect, you can increase that value by one (this is most common with damage).

Carry Over [1 Excess]

Add 2 dice to the next related Action you take this Scene.

Quick Action [3 Excess]

You may take a Reaction when the Action is completed.

DAMAGE

It is likely that, at some point during the game, the characters will suffer damage. This is often the result of attacks from a Program, but it can also result from exposure to the Noise, falling from a great height, or other similar occurrences.

Damage represents a fundamental disruption of a character's connection to the Aetherium. This can be intensely problematic, as enough damage will invariably force a character out of the Aetherium entirely.

Sync Damage

When a character suffers damage, the amount of damage is subtracted from their Sync. Once a character's Sync is reduced to 0, they begin to log out of the Aetherium (following the rules on page 88), and any additional damage is turned into Glitch. For instance, if a character suffers enough damage to reduce their Sync to -5, they are instead at 0 Sync, gain 5 Glitch, and are logged out.

Sync can be healed by accessing a console at a Pylon. While interfacing with a Pylon in this manner, a character's Sync is healed at a rate of 5 per minute. During this time, the character is preoccupied with resynchronizing their connection and cannot take any Actions.

Sync damage can also be healed through the use of Programs that say they heal or remove damage, or by logging out of the Aetherium and logging back in.

Health Damage

Health damage mostly occurs when logging out (see page 88). The rate it heals is dependent on how much is taken. To heal a point of damage takes 1 day, plus 1 day for missing Health. This time is calibrated in the material world (1 day in material time is approximately 12 days in the Aetherium).

Damage without Programs

Hurting someone in the Aetherium tends to be the domain of a specific Program. A character can attempt to damage a person or object without using a Program to do so, but they can never do more than 1 damage in this way.

Program Damage

Programs have Sync and suffer damage. A Program's Sync is equal to its Complexity. If its Sync reaches 0, the Program ceases to function. If the Program takes additional damage after ceasing to function, it is destroyed - even the Pylon or character sustaining it cannot repair the Program as its fundamental structure and code has become too corrupted. For Pylon Programs, this means that it is lost. For Iconic Programs, this means that it must be rebuilt, piece by piece, at the end of gaming sessions (following the rules on page 40).

When dealing with large, complex Programs such as buildings, damage should be assigned to individual Modifications such as doors or windows, forcing characters to disable aspects of the Program one Modification at a time.

If a damaged Program is leased (for Pylon Programs, see page 89) or is Iconic, it heals 1 damage every hour. If a Pylon Program is not leased (or if it is not within the Schema of a Pylon that is supporting it), the Pylon suffers 1 damage every hour until it is destroyed. Leasing a Program is described in greater detail on page 89.

Pylons Taking Damage

Pylons can also be damaged, though this is very dangerous, as Pylons keep the Noise at bay and often have a number of defensive Programs in place to help ensure their survival. Much like characters, Pylons possess Sync and can gain Glitch.

A Pylon's Sync is equal to its Level x20. If a Pylon is destroyed, its Schema collapses and the Noise begins to accumulate at a rate of 1 Level per Round until it reaches the same Level as the Noise surrounding the destroyed Pylon. This typically results in the rapid decay of every Program in the Schema.

Changing Sync

Some effects might cause a change in a character's Sync value in the middle of a fight.

Newly gained Sync is immediately available to take any incoming damage. Any Sync lost is always lost from undamaged Sync, which means that losing Sync value could log a character out of the Aetherium.

GLITCH

Glitch is the representation of extreme duress between the human mind and the Aetherium. If damage is a breakdown of a character's synchronization to the Aetherium, then Glitch is the breakdown of the very ability to send the consciousness back and forth.

Glitch is represented by Aetherium dice, twelve-sided dice with special symbols on each facing (a chart allowing you to use a regular twelve-sided die can be found on page 18). Characters most often gain Glitch as a result of being damaged while at 0 Sync, exposure to the Noise, and being hit with certain attacks.

Whenever a character with Glitch chooses to make a Test, they also roll all of their Aetherium dice. If the character is asked to make a roll by the GM or another character's Program, they do not roll any Aetherium dice; Glitch only applies when the player chooses to roll dice.

For each Disruption symbol a character rolls (5, 8, 11, or 12), the character suffers 1 damage. In addition, each Crash (12) that a character rolls gives them an additional Glitch.

For example, Irelia has 4 Glitch and is making a Test. She rolls her normal dice plus four Aetherium dice. Her attack roll gives her 2 successes, but she rolls 3 Disruptions on her Aetherium dice, but no Crashes. She takes 3 damage from the Disruptions.

Removing Glitch

Glitch can be removed by specific Programs, by logging out, or by accessing a Pylon. Pylons are grounding forces in the Aetherium, and a character that accesses a console at a Pylon removes their Glitch at a rate of 1 Glitch per 1 minute. (Note that a character also heals their Sync at a rate of 5 per 1 minute while interfacing with a Pylon in this way, i.e. both occur at the same time).

Once per Scene, a character can make a Sync roll (see page 81). If successful, they remove 1 Glitch.

Gaining Voluntary Glitch

While gaining Glitch is generally something to avoid, particularly reckless characters can benefit from the breakdown of their mind-Aetherium connection. By deliberately desynchronizing, a character can exploit their fraying connection to accomplish things that should have otherwise been beyond their capabilities.

During the game, a character may choose to gain Glitch to gain any of the following benefits. A character can only gain each benefit once per roll (though they could gain different benefits on the same roll).

Improve the Success Value

After rolling dice, a character can improve the Success Value of the dice by 1. After the roll is resolved, the character gains 1 Glitch.

Gain Extra Dice

After rolling dice, a character can add two additional dice to their dice pool. After the roll is resolved, the character gains 1 Glitch. This can be used for Tests or Hacking rolls.

Reroll

After rolling dice in a Test, a character can reroll all of the dice, including any Aetherium dice. After the roll is resolved, the character gains 1 Glitch.

Overclocking

At any point during a Round, a character may choose to Overclock. When a character Overclocks, they gain 1 CS and 1 Glitch, to a maximum number of CS equal to their Level.

Programs and Glitch

Programs cannot gain Glitch. When a Program would gain Glitch, it instead suffers 1 damage.

"As the binary quantum states start to break down, so does the mind's connection to the Aetherium. What would happen if all of the connection were to be severed at once? Would our minds be here, or there?"

DR. VALDEZ

COMBAT

Combat in the Aetherium RPG is broken down into a number of Rounds, each of which lasts about ten seconds. During a Round, each character participating in the combat takes a Turn. Once a Round is finished, a new Round begins, continuing onward in this way until the combat ends.

Initiative and Turns

When combat begins, every character rolls a Stat die (which can explode) and adds the value of their Speed Stat.

The character with the highest Initiative takes their Turn first. When they have finished their Turn, the character with the next highest Initiative takes their Turn, proceeding in this way until every character has taken a Turn. If multiple characters have the same Initiative, Users take their Turns first. Otherwise, the players or the GM (as appropriate) determine which tied characters take their Turns first.

Once the Initiative order has been set, the numeric values of Initiative are discarded; they are only used to determine the Initiative order.

Some effects will move a character up or down in Initiative. When a character moves up one step in Initiative, their Turn is permanently moved ahead of the character preceding them in the Initiative order. If they move down one step in Initiative, their Turn is permanently moved after the character following them in Initiative order.

For example, the Initiative order is Brian, then Linda, then Mark. If Linda moves up one step in Initiative, the new Initiative order becomes Linda, then Brian, then Mark. If Brian then moves down one step in Initiative, the order becomes Linda, then Mark, then Brian.

Sometimes, a character might move up in Initiative when they are already first. If this happens, the character is placed at the bottom of the Initiative order and gains 1 additional CS on their next Turn. A character cannot “loop” in this way if they did so during the previous Round.

Conversely, a character might move down in the Initiative when they are already last. If this happens, they are placed at the top of the Initiative order but gain 1 fewer CS on their next Turn. A character cannot “loop” in this way if they did so during the previous Round.

Rounds

During a Round, all characters get to take a Turn. The first character to go is the one with the highest Initiative, and Turns proceeds down from there.

Turns

On a character’s Turn, they gain 3 CS that they can spend to take Actions. They can spend any amount of their CS during their Turn, but any CS left unspent at the end of their Turn is lost. The most common Actions that a character might take during their Turn are listed below; each one can be done any number of times, provided that the character pays their CS cost each time.

- **(1 CS) Move**
The character moves 20 feet.
- **(2 CS) Materialize a Program**
The character materializes a Program (or dematerializes a Program).
- **(X CS) Use a Program**
The character activates a materialized Program that has a CS cost. The CS cost of this Action is based on the Program used.
- **(3 CS) Hack**
The character Hacks something (pg. 76).
- **(1 CS) Defensive**
The character increases their Defense by 1 until the start of their next Turn. This can stack, but a character cannot gain more than their starting Defense in this way.
- **(1 CS) Gain Advantage**
The character rolls an extra dice on their next Test. This can stack, but it does not allow a character to roll more additional dice than their Stat.
- **(2 CS) Take a Test**
The character can use one of their Stats to take a Test (see the Other Tests box on the next page).
- **(0 CS) Miscellaneous**
The character can do minor things that do not involve a dice roll, such as saying a quick sentence or glancing around at their surroundings.

Other Tests

A character can do a lot of things using their Stats. A character might try to convince someone of something with a 2 CS Charisma Test, pick a lock with a 2 CS Coordination Test, or spot someone hiding with a 2 CS Perception Test.

The exact nature of what Tests can be done and what they can achieve is up to the GM's discretion.

Waiting

When a character would take their Turn, they can instead choose to Wait. If they do so, they do not take their Turn and instead move down any number of steps in the Initiative order (they may not loop). The character then takes their Turn at their new spot in the Initiative order (unless they choose to Wait again). If a character is at the bottom of Initiative order, they cannot Wait.

What is an Attack?

Any time a character makes a Test that targets another character, that Test is considered to be an Attack.

This is most common with Weapon Programs that deal damage, but there are a variety of other ways that a Test can become an Attack, such as when a character makes a roll to convince someone in a discussion or argument (though this is obviously not as life-threatening as trying to stab them with a Knife Program).

Any time a character is subjected to an Attack, the target may choose to apply their Defense to it. In some cases, the attack might be from an ally, in which case the target may choose not to apply their Defense (making the Difficulty of the roll 0).

Generally, a successful Attack means that it both hit the target and managed to effect it. An unsuccessful attack may have missed the target or simply failed to have any effect upon them.

Positioning and Melee

If a character is within 5 feet of an opponent, those characters are considered to be in melee with each other. Some Programs don't work while in melee, and when a character attempts to leave an opponent's melee range, that opponent may make a Reaction.

In general, there is no penalty for using a ranged attack to target a character that is in melee.

Reactions

During combat, a character may have the opportunity to take a Reaction. Reactions typically take effect immediately after the effect that caused them.

When a character gains the opportunity to take a Reaction, they gain 1 CS to spend on that Action. If they do not take a Reaction, the 1 CS gained is lost. A character may choose to Overclock during a Reaction to gain additional CS, allowing them to take better Actions.

CS Timing Outside Combat

Inside combat, each CS takes about 3 seconds, give or take. Outside combat, however, this might be much longer.

The Gain Advantage Action, for example, is the equivalent of taking extra time to focus and get things right. This can be done with nearly anything, but the time to do so might be much longer - say a minute per CS spent on Gain Advantage (or even more).

"The power to defeat one's foes has always come from within. By using our discipline and our minds, we can go beyond the limitations of the world."

We become limited only by our own imaginations."

SENSEI SAITO

An Example Combat

Two of the rioters, Merc and Drop, broke into a datafort in an attempt to steal some secure information from its vault, but the attempt hasn't gone as well as they hoped. The authorities have been alerted, and two Axiom Praetorians have just arrived on the scene.

Combat begins, and every character generates Initiative by rolling a d10 and adding their Speed.

Merc rolls a d10 and gets a 3. He adds his Speed (3) to the total to give him an Initiative of 6. Drop rolls a 6 and adds her Speed (3) to the total to give her an Initiative of 9. The GM rolls for the two Praetorians, resulting in a 4 and a 5. After adding their Speed (3), this gives the Praetorians Initiatives of 7 and 8.

The Initiative order, therefore, is as follows: Drop, Praetorian A, Praetorian B, Merc. The numerical Initiative totals are no longer needed and are thus discarded.

In the first Round, Drop is first in Initiative order so she takes her Turn first. She gains 3 CS to spend during her Turn. Drop's player announces that Drop is going to try to break into the datavault using her Thief Assist Program, since it has the Lockpick Modification.

Thief Assist requires Linda to spend 3 CS and requires a Coordination Test. The Program uses the Pylon Level as its Difficulty, which the GM informs her is 2. Drop's Coordination is 4, so she rolls 4 dice and gets a 3, 5, 7, and 9. Two of her dice are 7+, which gives her two successes, just enough to pass her Test and open the vault.

The next character in Initiative order is Praetorian A. He has 3 CS to spend on his Turn, so he decides to take the Gain Advantage Action to gain a bonus die on his next roll this Turn. He then uses 2 CS to use his Finesse Weapon Program (which is skinned as a Pistol) to shoot at Merc.

The Praetorian rolls dice equal to his Finesse (3), plus one die from the Gain Advantage Action. Merc's Defense is 1, so the Difficulty of the roll is 1. The Praetorian rolls 2, 5, 6, and 9. Only one die is a 7+, giving him one success, which is just enough to hit Merc. The Program being used, Pistol, specifies that it does +1 damage when successful, so Merc takes 1 damage to his Sync.

Next up is Praetorian B. She has 3 CS to spend on her Turn, and she uses two for two Move Actions, allowing her to move 40 feet toward Drop.

The Praetorian knows this might be her only chance to stop Drop, so she decides Overclock. The Praetorian gains a Glitch to gain 1 CS and uses 2 CS to Attack Drop with her Club Program. She rolls her Force (3), but gets a 1, 3, and 4. Since she has no 7+ dice, she has no successes, which fails to overcome Drop's Defense of 1. Her Aetherium die showed a Chip, so it has no effect.

Merc is next in the Initiative order. He has 3 CS to spend on his Turn, and he decides to use his Pistol Program to shoot back at Praetorian A. He spends 2 CS to activate the Program and rolls dice equal to his Finesse (4). The Praetorian has Defense 2, so Merc will need two successes to harm him.

Merc rolls 1, 7, 8, and 10. The 10 explodes, so he rolls again, this time an 8. This gives him four 7+ dice, which is four successes! Since he needed two successes to hit the Praetorian, he succeeds and has two Excess to spend. He decides to purchase the Bonus Excess twice, which increased the damage of his Pistol Program by 2, to a total of +3. The Praetorian suffers 3 damage!

Merc has 1 CS left, and he spends it to move into a better position.

All four characters have taken their Turns, so a new Round begins. Since Drop is still first in Initiative order, she takes her Turn.



THE NOISE

When humanity first encountered the Aetherium, they discovered the pure psychological brutality of the Quantum Noise as well. It was a beautiful and terrible moment. The Noise was (and still is) dangerous, and often deadly, to the human mind, and has claimed countless lives since the Alphas first smashed their way through the metaphysical keyhole.

The Noise is the raw, uncontrolled Aetherium made manifest. It exists beyond the stable areas of the human experience of the Aetherial universe, and it ebbs and flows like the tides of an ocean, changing and pushing up against the civilized realms that humanity has carved out for itself. The Noise appears as a sort of blue tempest on the edges of civilization, like water, likemental static, like oblivion.

The Noise itself is toxic to the human mind, and few people can survive prolonged exposure without highly specialized Programs operating for psycho and neurological protection.

Noise is ranked according to Levels, with the weakest manifestations classified as Level 1. Generally, the depth of blue is a good indicator of the tempestuous Noise Level, with stronger manifestations showing increasingly darker hues. It is rare to see Level 10 or higher Noise near Nodes, though not impossible.

At the start of each Round, the GM rolls Noise dice for every character and Program affected by the Noise. This involves rolling a number of Aetherium dice equal to the Noise Level. For each Disruption (5, 8, 11, or 12), anyone affected takes 1 damage, and for each Crash (12), the character or Program gains 1 Glitch (which, for Programs, is then converted into 1 damage).

Programs and the Noise

For simplicity, it is best to ignore Noise damage to Programs that are being carried by characters, and instead just have the Noise affect those characters.

PYLONS

Pylons create the Schema that, in turn, compose the buildings and other structures of human civilization within the Aetherium. Every Pylon has a Level, which is a measure of the complexity and robustness of the Pylon's structural programming. The higher a Pylon's Level, the more rigid the Schema it supports and thus the more difficult it is for characters to alter.

Pylons as Access Points

When a person logs in to or out of the Aetherium, it is almost always done at a specific Pylon. The character appears next to the chosen Pylon (when logging in) and must physically access the Pylon to log out.

Most characters are limited to using only the publicly listed Pylons available for common use. In order to access Pylons that are not on the public lists, a character must physically travel to the Pylon, often across the Noise.

Most Collectives have lists of private Pylons that they share with their members, allowing them to quickly travel to areas under the Collective's control that aren't publicly available.

Logging In

When logging in, a person simply enables their Rig, at which point their consciousness leaves their physical body. The person is then taken to a Rig-based loading area to select which of their available access points they wish to use, after which the character appears in the Aetherium. The entire process takes about 1 minutes in Meatspace time.

Logging Out

When a character reaches Sync 0, they begin to log out. If the log out did not occur at an access point, they suffer 1 damage to their Health. The process of logging out takes about 1 minute in the Aetherium (6 Rounds), no matter how it is initiated.

During that time, the character is still in the Aetherium but unable to act (often their body is lying motionless if they are not logging out at an access point), which means they can still be attacked, and/or affected by the Noise, etc. If the character heals any Sync, the log out immediately stops (meaning it is possible to prevent a character from logging out).

If a character is at Sync 0, they immediately roll all their Aetherium dice for Glitch. For each Disruption (5, 8, 11, or 12), the character suffers 1 damage to their Health in Meatspace, and they lose all of their Glitch. For each Crash (12) rolled, the character gains a Glitch and therefore rolls another die. If a character gains more Glitch (such as by taking damage while at Sync 0), it is also immediately rolled.

When a character logs out at an access point, they may lease any Pylon Programs in their possession, at which point the Pylon Programs disappear and become available to the character the next time they log in. It takes about 1 minute to lease all Pylon Programs a character might possess. Programs that aren't leased are abandoned in the Aetherium as unowned Programs.

A character that logged out during a Scene cannot log back in until the next Scene.



Pylons Creating Programs

Pylons are responsible for creating most Pylon Programs. By default, all Programs created by a Pylon, which includes buildings, roads, cars, and endless bureaucratic paperwork, have a Defense equal to the Pylon's Level.

Common Pylons range in level from 1 to 3, but weaker Level 0 Pylons exist, as do stronger Pylons of Level 4 and higher.

A Level 0 Pylon is barely functioning and is in danger of being reclaimed by the Noise lapping at the edges of its control. The busiest population centers tend to have Level 2 Pylons, while Level 1 Pylons are fairly common in surrounding areas. Level 3 Pylons tend to be used for smaller Schema, such as specific buildings and areas under the direct control of a Collective.

Some Pylons, typically those of Level 3+, may limit the Root Programs that they are willing to lease - for example, restricting any weapon Programs.

Leasing Programs on a Pylon

Ownership is a peculiar concept in the Aetherium. Since nearly everything was created by the coding procedures of a Pylon, when a character says they "own" a Pylon Program, they really mean that they're leasing it from the Pylon that currently hosts it.

As a general rule of thumb, Pylons allow characters to freely lease Pylon Programs with a Complexity of up to their VAR. This means that a character with VAR 10 can have up to 10 Complexity of Pylon Programs hosted on the Pylon without cost.

The only exception to this is Complexity 1 Programs, which Pylons let users have "gratis" (though more Complex versions of the Programs, such as fancier clothes, will still likely incur a modest cost). This helps ensure everyone in the Aetherium is clothed, has ID, etc. This free hosting of Complexity 1 doesn't apply to Viruses.

After that, Leasing becomes a bit prohibitive. Once a character has reached this limit, they must make a VAR Test each time they attempt to lease a Pylon Program with Complexity above this limit, as if the Program had value equal to the Complexity above the character's limit. On a failure, the character cannot lease that Program (or any other Pylon Program).

Remember, a character only leases Programs when they are logging out of the Aetherium, so they may temporarily possess more Complexity than this (though if those Programs are not leased to someone logged in, they will suffer damage per the rules on page 82).

Pylon Security Protocols

Pylons typically have a variety of security protocols running to protect them and the people living on their Schema. These protocols monitor varying levels of information and activity, as determined by their Level.

■ Level 1 Pylons

The security protocols of these Pylons only occasionally look for specific alterations to the Pylon's core Programs to ensure system integrity.

■ Level 2 Pylons

These Pylons have protocols that monitor for specific actions at regular intervals, such as combat. Think of it like an advanced, intrinsic neighborhood watch.

■ Level 3+ Pylons

The security protocols are capable of very detailed monitoring, such as scanning the active Programs of people on their Schema. Since these protocols are very computing-heavy, they tend to only be used when there is critical information or resources to protect.

Logging In and Out Away From Access Points

A character may choose to log in nearly anywhere in the Aetherium, bypassing the need for an access point; however, this is dangerous and generally not recommended.

To do so, a character specifies where they want to arrive. Based on their knowledge of the location and the exactness of their desire, the GM sets a Risk. The character may then choose to cancel the attempt.

A character rolls 1 Aetherium die per Risk set by the GM. The character will take one damage for the attempt, and each Disruption rolled adds an additional damage. All the damage from such an attempt is applied to the character's Health, not their Sync.

A character can choose to log out at any time by spending all their CS on their Turn. At the end of the Round, that character will be reduced to 0 Sync. Because this is not at an access point, they will suffer the normal 1 Health damage, plus be affected by any Glitch (as well as any damage to their body that might occur during the next minute).

VAR

Value Assessment Rating (VAR) is a measurement of a character's financial worth, as well as a character's social and cultural standing. A character's VAR is determined by many disparate factors, including occupation, resources, cultural activities, tastes, education, social associations, usefulness to others, and so on.

VAR, or value, is calculated through an incredibly complex algorithm that takes into account market trends and more, making the same overall value have different procurement power at different times.

A character's actions can cause VAR to increase or decrease over time, depending on their level of success and more.

Getting Paid

Once the Program is made or the contract completed, getting paid is the easy part.

Every time a character is paid, they are paid by value. If it's based on a good, it's what that good sold for, and if it's based on a service, it's what that contract was worth.

If the payment is within 5 the character's current value, their value increases by 1.

If the payment is more than 5 over the character's current value, their value increases by an additional 1.

If the payment is more than 5 below the character's current value, it has no impact on VAR (though a GM may allow the increase of VAR if a large number of smaller payments are made).

The exception to these payment rules are Jobs, which are only used with the Meatspace rules. More rules on Jobs can be found on page 218.

Making Value Example

Ranya has just completed a theft for Trinidad, the head of a criminal syndicate. Ranya had a value of 5, and the contract Trinidad offered was worth a cool 15.

Work of this value is great for Ranya, as it's a full 10 above her current VAR. This means that her value will increase by 2. After completing the work, Ranya's VAR is now 7.

Trinidad, happy with Ranya's services, offers her another gig at 10 this time, and Ranya agrees.

The 10 value payment is not as valuable, as it's not so far above Ranya's current worth. Ranya's value is only going to increase by 1 when she completes this mission.

A few months later, Ranya is approached to do a little work that's offering 5 value delivering a message -- it's a simple contract, but someone's got to do it.

Ranya could take the work, but it's below her VAR, so she won't get anything out of it. She declines the deal, hoping to find better work in the future.

Getting Sued

It is possible for a character to get sued in the Aetherium. This can often be for damage of property, causing a person to log out, or similar crimes. These crimes are often handled quickly, without the need for "trials" and "evidence."

Generally, a small infraction will result in a loss of 1 VAR, a medium 2, and a large 3. That said, the size of the infraction must also be compared against their current VAR, as particularly high values might not be impacted by smaller infractions.

"Never do anything for free that you didn't already want to do. Morality, ethics, duty, obligation... these are the words of control so that others can profit off your work. You don't owe them anything."

RANYA

Paying Others

All “payments” within the Aetherium work the same way: the character checks their VAR, and, if it is high enough, they can make the payment.

This is done by making a Test using their VAR as their Stat (Glitch is not rolled on VAR Tests). The Difficulty of a VAR Test is the value being offered.

After a character rolls their VAR, they may choose to have a number of successes equal to their VAR (instead of what they rolled). If they do, they lower their VAR by 1.

If the VAR roll fails, the character’s value wasn’t enough to obtain the item, though the character can attempt to do so after their VAR is recalculated (typically one roll per day or after their VAR changes).

There are a few additional rules related to payments:

If a character attempts to obtain multiple items from the same vendor, the values of those items are combined into a single value, so the transaction happens all at once.

Multiple characters can’t assist with a payment.

Paying for Services

Paying for services works the same as everything else, but there’s an extra step involved.

Essentially, the character who wants to hire someone buys the work, and then can offer that purchased work as payment.

Unlike with goods that have a specific value, a service payment will be based off the roll of the character obtaining it.

From the “Making Money” example on the previous page, Trinidad actually purchased 10 value of work (by rolling a lot of dice). Then, when Ranya accepted that work, the value was already allocated.

A lot service work is done with a special form of Virus Program, so they are capable of monitoring whether the work was actually completed.

Repeated short-term service payments between the same people are often flagged and penalized as financial system work-arounds.

Making It Rain (High VAR)

High VAR could mean rolling a lot of dice when shopping around. This can be a lot of fun, as it shows how much value a character truly has.

In some cases, though, players may not wish to roll so many dice just for a simple purchase. If the GM allows it, a character can gain 1 success for every 3 dice they would have rolled, instead.

This would mean that a VAR 10 character could simply have 3 successes, while a VAR 18 character could have 6.

This option is intended to speed up the game for those who don’t want to roll a large amount of dice, and it should not be used for advantage.

Reputation

In the Aetherium, a person’s Reputation can mean everything. Some goods and services are only available to those of a sufficient Rep. What’s more, certain types of training might be locked behind Reputation quotas.

The Rep of a character is handled in a very straightforward way: a character can have a number of Reputation points equal to their VAR.

Rep is always with a specific Collective or group. It can only be gained through roleplaying, and only at the GM’s discretion. Similarly, Rep can be lost through certain roleplaying choices.

For example, Ranya’s completed a few assignments for Trinidad. After the second one, the GM offers Ranya a point of Rep with the Seven-Sided Cube, Trinidad’s club. She decides to take it, gaining Seven-Sided Cube +1.

If a character wants to gain a Rep and is already at their maximum (set by VAR), they must lower another Rep to gain it.

If a character loses VAR and was at max Rep, they must choose Rep to lose until they are at their VAR max.

Reputation is a solid reward for work completed that doesn’t involve value, making even lower tier contracts worthwhile in some situations.



THE AETHERIAL WORLD

When I first met a visitor to the Aetherium, he said that the material world was like an endless desert, a tomb reflecting the broken visage of humanity's hubris. When I first visited the Aetherium, I was met by a great statue of Lady Mastrona, and the placard on its pedestal said, "We are the Axiom, and this great world was created by the multitude. Be one, join all, and together prosper." As I looked around, the great enterprise of humanity spread out around me, and I had hope once more for humanity's future.



The world of the Aetherium is our world and its future. The game is set a little over 200 years into the future, where the world is a very different place. Climate shifts and conflicts would have erased humankind from the planet if it weren't for remarkable breakthroughs in technology that gave enough leverage for us to survive.

All the changes have left the world in a state that we, the gamers, can only partially recognize. This chapter is going to provide background on the 200 years that shaped the world of the game, what the Aetherium is like, and how the world's societies have come to be with the advent of the Aetherium.

This chapter is filled with information available to both the players and the GM, so it is best if everyone takes some time to read it over. No one needs to know everything in the chapter, but becoming aware of different aspects can greatly help in developing characters and plots.

Much of the faction-specific information in this chapter is unlikely common knowledge among characters. Nevertheless, this presents a broad overview of the Aetherium and its inhabitants. We encourage you to explore this section while mindful of the difference between player and character knowledge.

The Aetherium RPG presents a spectacular variety of opportunities for any and all enthusiasts. There are gritty, cyberpunk conflicts happening on the edges of civilization. There are futuristic espionage campaigns waged in cavernous city centers. There is exploration and discovery. There is desperate adventure out in the boundless abyss of the Noise.

All of these possibilities, and so much more, exist within the Aetherium. All options are present - all can happen. As such, you'll encounter a variety of different tones and themes when reading this chapter.

Many games will focus on one aspect of the reality, while others will cross conceptual boundaries. There's no right or wrong way to do it, so consider this permission follow the spirit of the Aetherium and to do what feels best for you!

The important thing is to view this chapter, and the book at large, as a resource to help facilitate collective storytelling and the game itself. If there are aspects that are more exciting or compelling, use them often and use them well.

Make the world of the Aetherium your own!

"Every pillar of common understanding in this world is wrong. We thought that we had invented the Aetherium, but in truth it was discovered. We thought it a lifeless place, but it breathes."

IRELIA KINGSLEY

THE 21ST CENTURY

The 21st century is perhaps the most dynamic century of all history. The technological advancements that led to widespread globalization created a world that was unlike anything that came before it. The Earth, once a place filled with unknown wonders and ecological diversity, began to feel like it was shrinking.

Everything that existed could be had within 24 hours or less, regardless of where you were in the world. Transportation and communication made everyone a little bit closer together.

Despite this immense closeness of the world, humanity itself drew further and further apart. It became easier and easier for individuals to begin to live their lives online. Telecommuting, ordering groceries to be delivered to the door, and the endless packages of online shopping meant that physical human interaction was nearing nonexistence.

For the first time in history, it was possible to be a successful person without interacting with anyone in person. It was no longer necessary to tolerate other ideas and opinions. It was no longer necessary to find a mutual understanding of the world and society.

It was against this backdrop that the first true remote communities came into existence. These were communities where you had "neighbors" in other parts of the world, but that you were still able to easily share resources with -- like a quick delivery of flour to someone who realizes they are out. On top of this, these communities had the ability to 'casually' video chat with their neighbors, giving a false sense of proximity.

These virtual villages allowed disparate groups with similar ideologies to come together in a very real way. These groups supported each other emotionally and economically, allowing for isolated, curated communities to thrive.

For all the information and connection the internet provided, one still needed to arrive at the correct website. The plethora of information sources available allowed people to pick which one they wanted, regardless of the truth of the information presented.

Fringe ideas stopped existing because there was no longer a true fringe to the human experience. It was all drawn toward the center by the massive power of globalization. All truth was of equal value and all equally valueless.

The ideas of the social contract presented by philosophers like John Locke began to seem like foolish notions in a world where there was always someone willing to support you.

Without fundamental concepts like the social contract, people around the world began to question the rule of law itself. Was it morally right to follow a law one did not agree with? If one could provide a plethora of "evidence" online that the law is unjust, wasn't it an individual's prerogative to disobey?

Country after country saw civil upheaval after civil upheaval. Democratic governments changed their mandate every election cycle as a seemingly new zeitgeist sprang forth. New ideas rose and fell. Old ideas were recycled.

The concepts of personal identity were heavily questioned. For thousands of years, people identified themselves with their physical bodies, but in the internet age, people began to identify themselves more and more with their online profiles. People no longer looked like their physical body; they looked like the image they presented online.

As individuals began to question the very idea of their identity and as the governments of the world struggled to move their vast bureaucratic bulk at the speed of human culture, the world reached a tipping point.

Near the end of the century, the Mono-Culture Wars began.



The Mono-Culture Wars

With the world connected so intimately to itself, a dominant cultural endpoint began to emerge. It was presented as truth through the media in all its forms. Movies used it as the backdrop, the news presented it as the inevitable future humanity was moving towards, and publications talked about it as if there was nothing else in the world.

It was, for all intents and purposes, the Mono-Culture - one culture that dominated the world and manipulated people to conform to its ideals. This manipulation took many forms.

Massive businesses that spanned the globe could open new stores and restaurants anywhere that undercut their competition. They leveraged the Mono-Culture to make the locations more accessible. Everyone recognized a properly branded burger: they'd seen it in the movies and they'd read articles. It was quick, it was easy, and it was known.

Human ideals all began to convalesce into one: what makes a person beautiful, what makes them smart, and what makes them interesting all merged together. Resumes had to look a certain way. Business attire was standardized. If one wanted a job that paid well, they had to participate in the Mono-Cultural enterprises.

Propaganda was spread far and wide through what seemed to be simple marketing. 'Like' this website to get 5% off your next order... but of course, liking that website meant you were more likely to see more things similar to that website. Slowly but surely, you would see nothing but the Mono-Culture.

It was a potent expression of globalization.

Of course, it was far from the only truth. The remote communities that sprang up were either absorbed into the Mono-Culture or became increasingly hostile towards it. Many governments fought to preserve their national heritage, using taxes to try to fight against the standardization of what it meant to be human.

The Mono-Culture Wars were fought more like a guerilla culture war than any widespread conflict. Boycotts, protests, and articles shared around certain circles combatted it. Some took it further and employed violent methods, intimidating and terrorizing those that helped push the one great culture.

Despite the resistance, it only seemed like a matter of time before the Mono-Culture won the wars, leaving all expressions of identity either inside of it or in relation to it.

The David Conglomerate

In the last decade of the 21st century, The David Conglomerate arose - a worker-owned cooperative that stylized itself as a David and Goliath story set against the rise of the Mono-Culture.

The David Conglomerate was an umbrella company that provided investment of all kinds to small businesses, giving them a chance to stand up to corporate behemoths. The Conglomerate asked for little in return for its investments. It used crowdfunding to collect a little from everywhere, and appeared to have significant coffers of its own.

The David Conglomerate had its own culture. It espoused antithetical values to the Mono-Culture, purporting to encourage individuality and creativity. It argued that it let businesses run as they wanted, and it was merely serving as a means to fight the Mono-Cultural convergence of humanity.

Of course, the amount which the David Conglom really wasn't a part of the Mono-Culture is a point of some debate among historians and, suspiciously, its funding seemed to come predominantly from convoluted trails of cryptocurrencies that were famously difficult to track.

Regardless, the Conglomerate was very successful in attracting the attention of those who had been disenfranchised by the seemingly inevitable tide of globalization. For many, it served as a beacon of hope, and suggested that it was possible to stand against the inevitable tide of human history.

The world's businesses took note of the David Conglomerate's successes and decided to emulate its behavior. Companies began to have a whole new department: Cultural. The VP of Culture was responsible for ensuring there was a corporate culture that was distinct from the Mono-Culture.

As companies began to draw these distinctions, they began to enjoy more success and endure less cultural backlash. People began to feel proud of shopping with gigantic corporations, so long as those corporations had solid values... even if this amounted to little more than opportunistic posturing.

And so, in a manner of speaking, corporate cultural identity became the new Mono-Culture.

Perhaps this would all be a small footnote in history if it wasn't for the massive environmental changes that occurred by the late 21st century and in the early 22nd century.

THE 22ND CENTURY

Throughout the entirety of the 21st century, the world's population continued to rise unabated and, as it did, the technology followed suit to support this constant growth. The lock-step pace could not be maintained, though, and soon technology fell behind.

Global warming, while mitigated in places, still created enough effect on the Earth's ecosystem that it became necessary to utilize genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to sustain human life. Unfortunately, most GMOs were controlled by the companies of the Mono-Culture, and most people who needed it were violently opposed to their methods.

In the early years of the 22nd century, ecosystems collapsed. The constant strain of resource extraction and changing climate finally outstripped technological advancements that had managed to keep it at bay.

Many of the world's governments tried to step in, but they quickly learned that they had ceded too much power and wealth to corporations. The companies had gone beyond too big to fail – they'd become bigger than governments themselves. They held the power.

Corporations owned vast tracts of land and vital resources. Capitalism took hold. As supply decreased and demand increased, costs began to skyrocket exponentially. There was not enough to go around, and that which could seemed only to be available for the exceptionally wealthy.

It was the last chance for governments to intervene meaningfully, and they did so the only way they could. They claimed eminent domain on crucial resources, valued them far below market cost, and attempted to seize them through force.

At the same time the corporations took governments to court over the laws, they knew these efforts would be unsuccessful. The 21st century's upheavals had taught companies that the rule of law was relatively meaningless in a globalized world. Public perception of an action mattered more than its legality, and the population was unlikely to support a corporation making massive profits from basic human necessities.

The companies pursued the only course they knew would be successful: armed conflict.



The Resource Wars

The Resource Wars had begun, perhaps the most devastating wars humanity had ever experienced. Major companies that owned vast natural resources suddenly withheld them in a play for power.

Supply chains collapsed. Grocery stores went empty. Rioting broke out. The only word that seemed appropriate at the time was apocalypse. The end times had come.

The Resource Wars were fought over the most resource rich tracts of land. They were fought between governments, businesses, and people. Every side had a vital stake, and every side would stop at nothing to gain the land needed to sustain human life.

Extraordinary battles were fought, filled with violence and death, that eroded the very value of the areas over which the battle had been waged. Fields were salted. Precious minerals were destroyed. Forests were burned. If one group couldn't have the resources, they made sure no one else could, either.

The Resource Wars were like a massive civil war fought across the globe. National borders collapsed because this was not country-on-country violence. Even the country-on-ideology wars of the early 21st century didn't prepare humanity for what these battles would become.

Neighbors turned on neighbors. Families fractured. Physical location didn't matter. Ideology didn't matter. What mattered was currency because, currency could buy life's fundamental necessities.

As the wars dragged on, it quickly became apparent that the human cost (although staggering) was not the biggest loss – that was the resources themselves.

Governments and companies merged to create more powerful, more stable entities. Some were peaceful mergers, while others were hostile takeovers. Regardless, it began to bring some calm to a wildly hostile world.

Over time, the wars themselves died down, not because there was so little left to fight over, but because that which remained often required a projection of force and influence that no longer seemed possible.

There was no winner in the Resource Wars. The Earth that survived was exhausted, a collapsed biosphere: many natural resources were destroyed and human civilization prevented natural checks from restoring balance.



Rise of the Collectives

The wars showed that the idea of the nation was a relic of the past and this was the time of the corporate state.

Given the Mono-Culture Wars, though, it was realized a new brand was needed. No longer were they governments, nations, companies, and corporations. These new structures were made up of people, by people, ignoring physical location and even ideology.

A new form of social contract was formed: the Collective.

Collectives were unlike anything human civilization had seen – global, but also siloed from one another. They had their own cultures. They had their own currencies. They held land, often centered in one location, but they also held pockets around the world. They raised their own armies, set their own laws, and became the organizing principle of the world.

While some governments persisted, many moved to the Collective model, adjusting to the changed world.

In many respects, the rise of Collectives was what the world needed. It brought an end to the conflict between governments, corporations, and populations. Collective unification brought stability back to the world and allowed for a new mindset in the global population.

In another sense, however, Collectives were a step backward. Collectives were unified, undeniably, but unified in the way that only a full monopoly is unified. There were no checks and balances, and Collectives were able to exercise nearly complete control over those within their economic-cultural dominions. One simply had to hope that their Collective was benevolent but, for most, this was a matter of faith and faith alone.

THE NEXT FRONTIER

In the middle of the 22nd century, amidst the environmental and societal collapses, a great discovery was made: a reality that existed alongside our own.

The original idea came out of string theory. String theory had, for centuries, postulated the existence of more than the standard four dimensions that we perceive. Countless experiments had attempted to prove the existence of these dimensions, but most met with failure. Even those that had some success were inconclusive, and scientific consensus was nowhere to be found.

While the concept came from string theory, it was quantum mechanics that discovered the lock to another reality.

In 2148, an accident in an experiment revealed that it was possible to send a quantum particle through some form of quantum barrier and into another dimension, as proposed in string theory. What's more, the particle seemed to stay entangled alongside a particle within the dimensions with which we are familiar.

Scientists the world over began to speculate that there needed to be an entire oblique, hidden (almost metaphysical) landscape that existed beyond the broad scope of human perception.

This strange quantum entanglement gave humanity a connection to an unknown reality. Vast resources from Collectives were poured into trying to peer through the subatomic keyhole that had been discovered as much as developed. In small steps, more and more was gleaned about this reality, though, for a few years, it remained purely theoretical.

The very laws of reality as humanity understood it seemed to prohibit a genuine encounter with this new landscape. Though the ability to elicit responses from this other reality had been proved, there seemed to be no way to access it except through the simple binary spin of subatomic particles.

This new reality, be it dimension or otherwise, was dubbed the Aetherium. Numerous Collectives vowed to find a way to enter this new frontier and to discover what wonders await through its mysterious veil.

Breaching the Aetherium

In only five short years, scientists in what used to be Switzerland claimed success in sending human consciousness into the Aetherium.

In one of the last gasps of global cooperation, the scientists published their research in full detail. The scientists managed to use the binary spin of subatomic particles and map them onto a digital interface of 0s and 1s - creating a computational processor that would be able to re-interpret said spin into quantifiable perception.

These digital processors were then gruesomely grafted onto the human mind, allowing the technology to override the senses of the user, instead feeding information about the Aetherium.

Their test subjects, dubbed the Alphas, did not survive the tests. The Alphas were fully functioning, even after the graft of technology to their brains. It was only when the technology was switched on to "send" their consciousness into the Aetherscape that matters went truly, catastrophically wrong.

Most didn't survive more than a few moments. They died in agony as their minds seemed to be ripped apart. Those that did survive long enough for the scientists to turn off their machines returned to our reality only in the strictest sense of the word. Few were lucid, nearly all were insane.

In response, the scientific community writ large decried the experiments and claimed they were a failure, as there was no proof their minds actually 'went' anywhere. Collectives gave voice to this failure, positing that the results of the original experiments had been falsified or misinterpreted. There was nothing to the claim that humanity could travel to the Aetherium.

Of course, no Collective could take the risk of being wrong. If there was a new frontier, survival also meant staying at the cutting edge of this grand new endeavor and, all over the world, research was funneled into back channels in order to explore and improve the barbaric methods used upon the Alphas.

The time until the next breakthrough was brief: the creation of a Synaptic Interface Mechanism (SIM) allowed for a neural connection that was less invasive to the human mind. The SIM was better at processing digital signals to the human brain and, conversely, translating synaptic functions into digital information.



When combined with the digital quantum processor of the previous experiments, the SIM yielded profound new results. While everyone who was hooked up to one of these consciousness Rigs was driven insane or died, some of them lasted longer than mere moments. Some lasted long enough to show neural functions associated with sight, movement, and emotion.

Over the next two decades, two important discoveries were made.

First, a Collective known as House Ikaru created a powerful artificial intelligence (AI) that behaved enough like a human mind that they were able to connect it to a SIM and send it into the Aetherium.

Second, it was discovered that within the Aetherium were areas of relative calm for the human mind, which came to be known as Nodes.

The first stable areas of the Aetherium began to coalesce through the combination of the Rigs used to project the consciousness, the evolving AIs, and the Nodes. Scientists found that an AI, acting like a human mind, could be capable of creating a safe zone within the Aetherium itself. The areas outside these safe zones began to be called the Noise.

Safe from the Noise, human minds began to explore the Aetherium and discover something remarkable - a reality devoid of almost any natural laws, a reality devoid of almost everything at all.

Creating the Aetherscape

The first explorers of the Aetherium soon realized that the Aetherscape was not so much a thing in and of itself, as it was potential realized. It was empty but seemed to respond to the human consciousness. The more any particular Node was visited, the more it began to reflect aspects common to the material world, such as gravity.

Aetherial explorers found that they could create something out of thin air through the concerted effort of willpower. This discovery led to AIs, modeled after the House Ikaru AI, being adjusted to the process of creation. The AI could leverage the power of its own consciousness to create materials in the Aetherial landscape and, unlike human minds, they were able to sustain the creation indefinitely.

These proto-AIs began to be known as Pylons. Despite their power, Pylons could not exist continuously without the augmenting presence of a Node.

As Pylons began to be coded to manifest some of the trappings of the material world, such as buildings and trees, explorers found that they were less able to make changes to the world around them.

Scientific consensus believed that the Aetherium's reality was created through a sort of collection of what consciousness believed it would be and how it should behave. The Aetherium was changing to be what humanity, and AI, thought that it was.

THE 23RD CENTURY

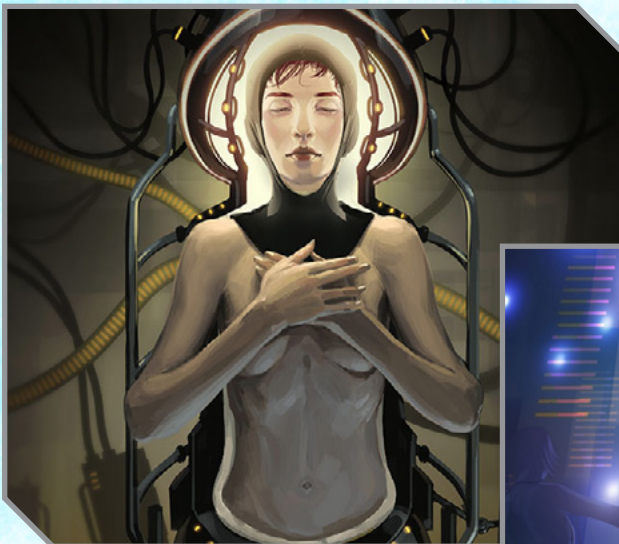
At the very end of the 22nd century, the Aetherium was made available to the global population through the application of Rigs: the digital-neural interface using SIM technology.

It was the beginning of the 23rd century, however, that saw widespread adoption of the Aetherium. Rig technology became cheaper and more accessible. As more and more users began to use the Aetherium, it took on more and more of the structure of an idealized version of 22nd century civilization (of course, humanity could never believe anything to be ideal, so there would always be some cracks in the structure of the reality itself).

The spread of the Aetherium to the world population was profound. People were able to spend countless hours inside the Aetherium. It became an escape from the material world and the governments, corporations, and Collectives that controlled it.

People began to associate themselves more fully with their Aetherial selves than their own body in the material world. Like with the internet and social media centuries earlier, people began to distance themselves from their physical forms and establish themselves and their core identities inside the Aetherium.

It was inevitable that the world markets began to shift toward the Aetherium. The entities that created the Pylons around Nodes began to rent and sell all manner of product in the Aetherium, just like in the material world, despite a lack of scarcity in that reality. More quickly than most would have preferred, the Aetherium began to mirror the material world in another way: everywhere began to fall under the control of the powers-that-be, leaving the anarchic spaces relatively few and far between.



The Trade Wars

In the midst of the 23rd century, the Trade Wars broke out. The most valuable resource on Earth were the people themselves, those minds that travelled to the Aetherium and paid for the privilege.

The Trade Wars were fought over people and places in the material world as the Collectives and remaining governments sought to expand their base of influence.

The Trade Wars were reminiscent of the Resource Wars, but in this instance the conflict raged over population centers as a form of natural resource. Minds were needed to fuel the economy. The world began to reshape itself again as Collectives subsumed even more governments, while others collapsed into smaller and smaller city-state entities.

Perhaps the most significant development was the manner with which the war was waged within the Aetherium. Various factions attempted to drive enough minds into Nodal areas that they could overload the Pylons with their collective willpower and thereby destroy them, leaving the spaces open for colonization again by the victors.

In another of the more devastating incidents, the Axiom, a new Collective, destroyed a facility in the material world that generated Pylons for a Node with over 50,000 people on it. As the material technology generating the Pylons was destroyed, the Pylons vanished from the Aetherium. In a moment, the Noise flooded in and destroyed all 50,000 people almost instantly.

Nothing stops progress, though. As the dust settled on the great conflict, humanity continued to use the Aetherium in ever-greater numbers.

By the year 2247, 99% of the world's population used the Aetherium, and most of them did so daily. It became the focus of thought, culture, and commerce.

Material time stopped. Aetherial time began.





THE AETHERIUM

Perhaps the single greatest discovery of humanity, the Aetherium has become the focal point of human activity. It is used by all but 1% of the global population, accessed via surgically implanted SIM technology that interfaces with an exterior rig. The current technology lets people do more in the Aetherium than ever before. It is the apex of achievement; it is the future.

But what is the Aetherium?

A Joint Reality

The debate rages on about what the Aetherium truly is – some view it as a digital landscape, a sort of virtual reality created by the Rig working with Pylon AI. Others view it as another dimension, imperceptible to those without the right equipment. Still others view it as a spiritual realm, a sort of astral landscape accessed through technology.

Within that debate is a second layer that posits whether or not humanity discovered or created the Aetherium. The truth is certainly not simple. The Aetherium definitely exists independently of humanity, but it also owes most of its structure to the people who access it.

The scientists who have most of the truth (even if some of their colleagues don't believe them) are those that say the reality of the Aetherium is one of collective consciousness. Before humanity accessed it, it existed more as a potential place than an actual one.

The first subatomic particle to reach the Aetherium existed in a void, perhaps a void as tiny as the particle itself. The particle gave nothing to the Aetherium other than itself.

The first mind that accessed the Aetherium, however, gave it far more. It is possible that the first minds entering the Aetherium caused a veritable big bang within it. Their consciousness literally created the reality it perceived. Subsequent attempts to access the Aetherium followed suit, expanding the possibility of the world as they entered it. Of course, at the time, the Aetherium was too unstable to brook such incursions, and the minds were corrupted, killing the people who attempted it.

Whatever the truth, it is clear that humanity has the ability to change the very fabric of the reality described by the Aetherium, bending it to the will of human minds and Pylon technology therein.



The Day to Day

From a practical perspective, the Aetherium works very similarly to the material world. Gravity exists (though it is possible to defy it). A building is a sum of components. Trees grow. Water flows.

The majority of those who connect to the Aetherium don't know, or care, about the fundamental building blocks of it. They know that it is better than the material world: there is space, there are resources, and there are jobs. You can take greater risks, as death in the Aetherium rarely means death in the material world.

Indeed, the biggest difference in the day to day is that the experience of time is different in the Aetherium, with the human mind able to perceive, and act, in increments smaller than the material world. This creates the perception of more time passing within the Aetherium than in the 'real' world.

The Aetherium has become so commonplace to the daily user that it's effectively like flying to a faraway country. Yes, things are different but, at their core, they work the same as the material world.

The Noise

A blue mist. A vast ocean. A raging blue storm. The Noise is the edge of habitable Aetherial space.

The Noise itself changes over time, but there are a few constants. First, the Noise always has a blue hue. Second, the Noise always seems to mirror a state of water (though it exists in all directions). Third, the Noise will eventually kill anyone inside of it.

It is possible that some deeply-repressed human memories of the ocean as the vastness where exploration happens has begun to shape the Noise, but even some of the earliest visitors encountered it the way it is. As best as anyone can tell, the Noise is a fundamental feature of the Aetherium.

Regardless of how it appears, the Noise is the backdrop against which humanity exists in the Aetherium. Nodes push it back, and Pylons push it back even further. It ebbs and flows on the edges of the colonized Aetherscape, increasing and decreasing in intensity seemingly at random.

The Noise itself is incredibly dangerous to human minds. It seems to invade the human consciousness, tearing at the minds of those within the Aetherium. This effect happens quickly in the Aetherium, which means it happens almost instantaneously in the material world.

Certainly individuals have proven more resistant to the Noise, but all succumb over time. Even Pylon technology is unable to survive in the unfiltered Noise; they require Nodes to safely anchor in order to persist.

The Noise also interrupts communications. Though short range communication is possible, the more severe the Noise, the more quickly the communication dissipates. This can make communicating across the Aetherium somewhat difficult, as many Nodes can be quite a distance from other Nodes.

Noise Rivers

Nodes and Pylons don't eliminate the Noise, they just push it away. This means that in dense areas, the Noise can sometimes become thick and turbulent, appearing much like a river as it is shunted around population centers.

Noise rivers are often incredibly deadly because they are condensed Noise, gathered together by the force of Pylons moving them away from civilization.

Nodes

The Nodes of the Aetherium are naturally occurring. They are bastions of calm within the Noise, and without them the Aetherium could never have supported human minds.

Within the Aetherium, Nodes look like many different things, and it is speculated that the first people to perceive Nodes gave them much of their appearance. Some look like plasma globes, tightly contained energy that glows and pulses at random. Many look like monoliths of rock jutting out from the world, while still others look like a lake of primordial goo.

Almost all Nodes are surrounded by Pylons, some of them completely enclosed, hiding its form within. All Nodes are highly protected by those who control them, as unfettered access could be dangerous.

Nodes do not have a fixed location in the Aetherscape. They float, usually slowly, around in the vastness of the Noise. This means that while it is possible to create a map of the Aetherium, the "landmasses" of stability formed around Nodes (sometimes referred to as the Nodal plane) move with the Node, and any map quickly dissolves into obsolescence.

Once a Node has been sufficiently developed, it will no longer float on its own, but a large enough expenditure of will can move that Node. This mental effort often must come from human minds, as by the time a Node is so developed, Pylons no longer have the available dedicated bandwidth to shift a Node.

In this way, many of the Collectives within the Aetherium have moved their Nodes to be close together, creating an overlapping grid of stability and civilization.

At this point, most Rigs are programmed in with the Aether-coordinates of most of the known Nodes, allowing individuals to choose where they want to be in the Aetherium. Some Nodes are off-the-grid, and their coordinates cannot be accessed by others unless specifically given to them.

Node Theory

A small minority of scientists speculate that Nodes are actually the creations of the first consciousnesses to enter, and die, in the Aetherium. They believe the Nodes are a sort of spectral residue of their minds, allowing the next mind an easier passage.



Pylons

If Nodes are the foundations of Aetherial civilization, then Pylons are the building blocks. At their core, Pylons are AIs that constantly “imagine” the Aetherium, leveraging the consciousness’ ability to change the Aetherium. The AI of a Pylon is programmed to constantly will physical objects (known as Programs) into the Aetherium in the way that the Pylon’s controlling interests might desire.

For every Pylon in the Aetherium, there is a corresponding computer bank in the material world that is running the AI and sending it through to the Aetherium to do its imaginings. These computer banks are running non-stop, perpetually reinforcing the reality of the Aetherium.

Each computer bank’s location is a closely guarded secret, and most of them have redundancy after redundancy built into them. If a computer bank would ever fail, thousands and thousands of lives might be lost to the Noise.

Though the artificial intelligence of a Pylon is better able to handle the rigors of the Noise, they too will succumb to the turbulent Noise. This is why all Pylons are built around Nodes – Nodes push back the Noise enough for an AI consciousness to survive.

Each Pylon pushes back the Noise in an area that correlates to the strength of the Pylon. The area that a Pylon keeps safe and controls is known as a Schema. A Pylon can often easily be found by the data streams of light pouring out of it.

As one Pylon pushes back the Noise, another Pylon can build upon that to expand continually the habitable area offered by a Node. This expansion has limits, however, as each Pylon must be closer and closer to the last. There is a point where the material world expenditure required for a Pylon no longer makes it worth the expansion (and thus, there is always a search for new Nodes).

Every Pylon in the Aetherium has a different quality of AI in use, referred to as the Pylon’s Level. The higher a Pylon’s Level, the more Programs it can run and the more resistant it is to manipulation.

Low Level Pylons are usually easier to hack, either in the material world or in the Aetherium through an effort of will. In addition to this, low Level Pylons might have Noise seepage from their outermost edges.

Pylons are generally between Level 1 and 3, though Pylons of Level 0 and Level 4+ also exist.

Programs

Everything that exists in the Aetherium (with the exception of the Noise, Nodes, and visiting consciousnesses) exists as a Program. They are called Programs because they reflect their mode of creation: an AI is coded, and then code for Programs is added to that AI, which in turn allows it to create the physical reality with which people interact in the Aetherium.

A Program is the form and function of an object or idea. Every building, every tree, and every animal inside the Aetherium is a Program. If an object has a physical reality in the Aetherium, it is a Program.

Programs are manifested through the act of consciousness shaping the Aetherium, and it takes a regular act of consciousness to maintain their existence -- if a Program no longer has support, it will slowly break down until destroyed.

Most Programs are generated by Pylons, though some are created by the interface between the human mind and its associated rig. While the difference doesn't matter to most, it is often an important distinction at a high level. As such, Programs generated by a Pylon are referred to as Pylon Programs, while Programs generated by people are referred to as Iconic Programs. The more complex the Program becomes, the harder it is for a Pylon or a person to create.

Programs also have a Skin, which is the appearance of that Program. The wall Program may appear to be stone or brick, for example, without changing its core functionality. Program Skins can often be changed quickly and easily to suit the current owner's (or user's) needs.

The Internet of Pylons

As Pylons have a material world presence, many of them are connected fundamentally to something like the internet. This leaves Pylons able to communicate with each other. Generally, there is an AI in the material world that is specific to each Pylon bank, handling its communications with other Pylons. This is often the most advanced AI, with all of its resources dedicated to security.

The advantage of having the Pylons connected to the internet is twofold. First, it allows for communication across vast Aetherial distances which might otherwise be impossible due to the Noise. Second, it allows for the transmission of Programs to Pylons of different areas and Collectives, letting people take their Pylon Programs from one place to another... for a price.

"We have given up control of the Aetherium to the AI of the Pylons. We fancy ourselves the masters of this place, but it is our creations that are truly in charge. They shape the world that we walk through."

IRELIA KINGSLEY



Connection and Rigs

An individual's connection to the Aetherium is incredibly important. The connection not only allows them to continue to experience the joys of the Aetherium, but also prevents a breakdown of that connection which might inflict irreparable damage to their minds.

There are two fundamental features of a connection: the synchronization of perception (generally called Sync) and the utilization of quantum entanglement making the connection possible (the breakdown of which is generally called Glitch).

If an individual's connection is interrupted before their consciousness is fully returned to their body, it can result in neurological damage (which itself can result in madness or death) as the distortion from perceptions of multiple dimensional realities wrecks havoc with their brain.

Almost everyone who connects to the Aetherium does so via a rig. A Rig connects directly to the human brain in a neural interface with an brain-implemented SIM card. The better the connection, the easier it is for the person to accomplish more in the Aetherium, as their minds have integrated more seamlessly with the technology.

Rigs do not need to be connected to anything but the human mind (they don't need the internet, for example), meaning that a person can log in just about anywhere in the world, assuming their Rig has a power source.

Alternative Connection Types

Alternative connections to Rigs exist, and they can provide more (or less) to their users. Bio Tank Connections allow for the same neural connectivity but also keep the body alive and nourished during the session. Some of these can create extended sessions of more than 24 physical hours. Perma-Box connections allow the body to be placed into a permanent stasis and allow the mind to maintain a presence in the Aetherium indefinitely. Contrary to the name, most bodies fail within a year of being "boxed." This, though, can give years of perceived life to the mind. Boxed connections also allow for the individual to avoid sleeping, if they so choose.

Stranger alternatives exist as well. It is rumored that some of the strangest include pure meditation, Exoskeletal Suits, and more. House Ikaru is rumored to be working on a form of connection that splits the mind in two, allowing for participation in the physical world and the Aetherium simultaneously.

Linked and Specialized Life

It is possible for those connecting the the Aetherium to use specialized rigs to enhance or fundamentally alter the way they interact with the Aetherium.

These types of connections are not common knowledge, though they are not a protected secret, either. They are often viewed with a certain amount of fear and trepidation, as the rigs that enable them need greater access to, and control over, the user's mind to function. In some cases, the brain even needs special implants to make it possible.

There are two main types of connection that fall into this category: Linked connections and Specialized connections.

Linked connections combine the consciousnesses of multiple people in order to strengthen them in the Aetherium. Each individual uses the same rig in the same location, with each one linked together, allowing certain aspects of their thought process to benefit from the others.

Those using Linked connections give up their individuality, autonomy, and freedom, but in exchange they gain power beyond their normal capabilities. The combined neurological weight of multiple minds is not easy to overlook.

Linked individuals always look alike in the Aetherium, as their physical features blend together to create a sort of everyman appearance, and they always use the same Programs.

Specialized connections, on the other hand, are a bit less extreme. Specialized connections also use specialized rigs. These rigs focus on the use of specific Programs and skills at the expense of all else, allowing for more power and resources to be poured into those chosen abilities.

Some Specialized rigs are able to allow one individual to control multiple bodies through the support of AI.

In the case of both Linked and Specialized connections, it is common for the individuals to have a separate rig for their free time, allowing them to enjoy the Aetherium when they're not "working."

Logging In and Out

Pylon technology serves as a sort of beacon for consciousness in the Aetherium, allowing a direct interface for individuals logging into, and out of, the Aetherium. If an individual can directly interface with a Pylon, it assists in the coupling (and decoupling) of their perceptions, making the process safe for the mind; without it, the risk for damage remains.

For this reason, almost everyone who logs in and out of the Aetherium does so at a Pylon. Individuals that do so without the assistance of a Pylon take a huge risk.

The Log In

Logging in is near instantaneous to the person doing it, but from the Aetherial perspective, it requires some time. What takes about 1 minute in the real world to get the Rig up and running takes approximately a half hour in the Aetherium.

For most people, accessing the Aetherium is as easy as enabling their Rig. They log in from their own homes or go to Rig Shops, which often have a few places for people to log in. Some individuals even purchase mobile Rigs, allowing them to log in while commuting to and from work.

There are also those who log in from Collective facilities where trained staff monitor their vitals (which allows them to stay logged in longer than most), giving them access to highly powerful and specialized Rigs. Some of these individuals log in at these facilities to work, and then go home and log in on a different Rig for relaxation.

Whenever someone logs in, their Rig first takes them to a sort of in-between place that exists only in the user's mind. It is there that the person can select which Node and Pylon to log in to, so long as their Rig has information on its location. Different Rigs make this place appear differently, but it is rare that this limbo has any function other than choosing a login point.

Login points are completely independent from physical locations in the Meatspace, so some Aetherial travelers like to visit different Nodes on each visit. Many Pylons for logging in are crowded places that are often formed to appear as busy train stations or transit terminals.

It is also possible to attempt a login without the assistance of a Pylon, but doing so is incredibly risky. Daring souls who try are not only likely to miss their targeted location (and maybe end up in a wall), but also suffer significant neurological trauma in the effort.

The Log Out

When a person logs out, it happens at basically the same speed as logging in. Their consciousness must be brought back slowly via their connection, usually with the assistance of a nearby Pylon.

While this process only takes approximately 1 minute, it can be compounded if the person must register any Pylon Programs before they log out, ensuring they are stored and available for the next time they log in. If they do not, the Pylon won't make the Program available upon their return. Each Program registered will add time to the process.

People can choose where and when they log out of the Aetherium, but doing so without the assistance of a Pylon is dangerous -- it's guaranteed to do a bit of neurological damage, and there's a chance of even greater harm. The more Glitch an individual has, the more likely it is that they will suffer physical harm from the process.

Originally, the risk of brain damage was much greater than it is now. As Rig and SIM technology has improved, safeguards were built into Rigs that help account for Glitch. The process is not perfect, though, so the risk remains when a Pylon isn't used.

During the time when a character is logging out, their Aetherial body remains in the Aetherium, slowly disappearing and unable to act. This often appears a bit like the person pixelating and then slowly fading away such that, within the minute log out period, the pixelated body will completely vanish.

Of course, during that point, the Aetherial body still has some amount of connection to both worlds, and it is possible to affect someone in the Aetherium. Attacking someone who is logging out is very dangerous, as it is likely to result in at least a little neurological damage, and perhaps even death.

ID Program

Every mass produced Rig is set up to create an Iconic Program that is used to reference a character's unique ID, and they are used as a form of identification.

Damage and Glitch

Damage within the Aetherium is really a lack of synchronization between the mind and the Aetherium. Because it hurts the individual, damage often manifests itself on the Aetherial form.

From an external perspective, this means that getting shot with a gun in the Aetherium will leave a bleeding bullet hole in the Aetherial body, but the fundamental reality of it is more complex.

The gun was actually a Program designed to desynchronize the connection in a specific way, and it was successful in doing so. This desynchronization causes actual pain and discomfort in the body, which manifests itself on the Aetherial form. Because the consciousness experienced a bullet hitting them, their brain manifested the pain in the way the brain understood it: a gaping bullet hole oozing blood.

If there is enough of a breakdown in synchronization (i.e. the loss of Sync), the consciousness is forcibly expelled from the Aetherium and sent back to the Meatspace.

A significant enough loss can actually create Glitch. Glitch is the representation of a breakdown of another aspect of the connection between the human mind and the Aetherium. It differs from normal synchronization in a fundamental way: Sync damage is when the mind's perceptions aren't directly matched to the Aetherial perceptions; Glitch is when the actual quantum entanglement that allows the connection begins to erode.

If individuals simply logged out from Sync damage, there would be no risk, but Glitch carries with it the true weight of consequence as the entanglement begins to erode the mind. This lack of entanglement means that some of an individual's perceptions and consciousness is completely unable to return to the body, causing lasting neurological harm.

Visually, Glitch can often be seen on a person. It almost looks like a bit of a stutter or distortion of form, and its effects can both deal damage and make performing actions even harder. Glitch is to be avoided at all costs.

When an individual logs out from lack of Sync, it often looks like they are breaking into pieces and disappearing. The more Glitch the individual has, the more deeply disturbing the process looks to an observer, as random chunks of them linger in the Aetherium for a time without any body or consciousness to guide them.

Programs and Damage

Programs have their own capacity to take damage. A Program's overall Complexity is the equivalent of its Sync value. If the Program takes damage equal to its Complexity, it stops functioning, and any additional damage permanently destroys it.

Most Programs in the Aetherium are Complexity 5 or less, meaning that they are often destroyed fairly easily. There are many, though, that have incredibly high Complexities and can take massive force to take down.

Programs are also affected by the Noise like everything else sustained in the Aetherial reality, and if exposed they will suffer damage regularly until destroyed. This is compounded by the fact that a Pylon Program outside the range of a Pylon has nothing supporting it, so it will slowly suffer additional damage from that absence. The constant damage from the Noise is why long trips through the Noise are, essentially, impossible for the average ship.



Appearance of the Self

Whenever someone accesses the Aetherium, they transfer their consciousness to the Aetherium. The representation of that person in the Aetherium is similar to their material world selves.

Because the Aetherium is more like an astral projection than a virtual reality, a person hues very closely to their own subconscious understanding of their persona and appearance. This means that the vast majority of people look remarkably similar to their physical, material selves, give or take a haircut, a bit of weight, and a scar or two.

Programs have been created with the express purpose of altering physical appearance so that an individual might change, though these are often limited to new clothes, exaggerated features, or a change in eye coloration. More ambitious Programs are often expensive and complex. The average Aetherial user will express their ideal form but won't be to alter themselves beyond their own psychological sense of the self, at least not deliberately or for sustained periods.

Individuals with more wealth, access, or skill within the Aetherium can take the time to change their appearance more, but all changes outside the norm require more effort and are often seen as exorbitant to those who are more accustomed to the reality of the Aetherium.

Although vanishingly rare, there are those who view themselves in a fundamentally different way than their physical bodies. These people manifest in the Aetherium the way they understand themselves, not as their bodies appear in the Meatspace.

Perception of Time

The perception of time is about twelve times faster inside the Aetherium than the material world. Although only about 70 years has passed since the Aetherium was first accessed, the experience of over 800 years have passed in Aetherial time.

This time dilation has made people experience their lives as significantly longer, even if they don't spend all of that time inside the Aetherium. This change is one of the most altering aspects of the human experience: people now are likely to "live" closer to 500 years or more, in subjective time.

People cannot spend all their time inside the Aetherium, however, as their physical bodies still have needs such as food, water, and sleep (sleeping in the Aetherium does not provide true rest for a person).



Hacking

Hacking is the act of applying a person's will to the Aetherium and bending it based on that will (the Pylon AI is also applying its will to create Pylon Programs, though this process is not referred to as Hacking).

Most often, Hacking is opposed by the reality itself as created by the Pylon. This means that the difficulty of changing the Aetherium via a Hack is set by the Level of the Pylon where the Hack is being attempted.

Hacking is the ability to change the Aetherial world itself. Hacking can create Programs that don't currently exist, modify Programs that do, and disable Programs that are present.

Most people within the Aetherium are fundamentally incapable of Hacking. Their understanding of the Aetherium and its fundamental structure, coupled with the weakness of their wills, is not enough to enact change in any meaningful way.

As such, Hacking has taken on the hushed tones and reverence generally reserved for concepts such as magic. If there is a wall in a person's way, they can simply Hack it away. If they need to travel a great distance, they can create wings and fly. Almost any change someone can imagine is possible via Hacking.

Hacking is not as potent as it often sounds to those who cannot perform it. In practice, a Pylon will quickly reassert the original reality in a matter of moments, as individuals cannot sustain the effort of will required to enact a Hack for a long period of time.

As a person grows stronger, however, their willpower grows congruently, such that their Hacking ability is likely to increase as well. The strongest of individuals can Hack for a much longer period of time, allowing for tremendous changes to reality.

A Hack can have massive impacts on the world and allow for solutions to problems limited only by the imagination and strength of will. It is such a potent ability that those who are good at it are generally highly sought after.

AETHERIAL SOCIETY

The Aetherium is a gigantic place that hosts billions of consciousnesses at any given time. These minds span the globe - from essentially every government and Collective, and from every multitudinous variation of tradition, disposition, and history.

Despite this, there are some core aspects to how society exists within the Aetherium. The 'natural' truths of the Aetherscape have created inclinations and tendencies, as well as weaknesses. For example, it is harder in the Aetherium for someone to create an object with their own two hands (that's just not how the Aetherium works), but it is more straightforward to structure simple things like the length of a day cycle (there is no sun, though often a Pylon runs a sun-like Program).

One of the core differentiations in Aetherial society is the distinction between two castes: Cogs and Icons.

At the bottom of the system are the Cogs. These are people who log into the Aetherium to get away from the Meatspace and to relish experiences they can't otherwise. Cogs often use the Aetherium as a pure escapism, a living dream to which they can rewrite the banality of their lives. Many Cogs also work inside the Aetherium to try to earn the wealth they need to survive in the Meatspace.

Cogs are never really fully adjusted to the Aetherium; they see going there like a retreat from their current state, almost like a vacation. It is another aspect to their world, even if fundamentally different.

This lack of understanding, coupled with the poverty of Cogs means that it is incredibly easy to take advantage of them. Collectives can offer reasonably small rewards to get Cogs to perform dangerous tasks. Many Cogs give up some of their mental independence at their job, hooking up to a Rig that co-opts their mental processing power outright.

Above the Cogs are Icons. Icons are those who understand, at least in part, what makes the Aetherium tick. Icons are able to Hack, which makes them suitable for many of the best jobs.

Icons are rare and generally sought after by Collectives. An Icon is capable of exploiting the Aetherium in a way that allows for espionage, conquest, and subversion of one's enemies. Without Icons, Collectives have little ability to project force outside of their own domain.

Big Brother

The Aetherium is incredibly well marketed. Most see it as an escape from the drudgery of day-to-day life. Risks are less risky. Resources are less scarce. An individual can climb the ranks and become someone influential. Although there is a good amount of truth to this mythology, there is also a high amount of obfuscation.

Nearly every segment of the civilized Aetherium is controlled by one group or another. A Collective or government that spends the resources to set up Pylons puts an incredible amount of thought and intentionality into it. Everything is planned: from the temperature and the light level to the layout of the streets and architecture of the buildings. Everything has a purpose.

Within a Schema, there is no true freedom for Cogs, who rely on a Pylon for nearly every aspect of their lives. Icons manage more independently, but still exist within what amounts to a totalitarian system.

The Aetherium has no "private property." Every advertisement that someone sees is carefully curated. Even spontaneity has often been created to give the appearance of independence.

There is no significant scarcity of resources in the Aetherium. As long as a person exists to code it and a Pylon has the strength to create it, a thing can exist. Every meal someone eats does not lower the amount of food available; the food can merely be recreated. And yet, to the average person there appears to be scarcity. Most things, including experiences, can only be obtained if one has enough value (for more on value, see page 90). Without it, all the sights and sounds of the Aetherium are closed behind what is, essentially, a paywall.

On top of all this, there is a prevailing surveillance of people's activities. While a Pylon is not aware of everything that happens within its Schema, changes can be tracked with a bit of effort. A Hacked wall, an unauthorized login can be picked up by a Pylon (though it is uncommon to actively monitor or check this activity). High Level Pylons are even more Schema-aware and can track all Pylon Programs that are running, in addition to often running security camera designed to keep an eye on the population.

At its core, the Aetherium might symbolize freedom, but those with power have usurped that freedom from the population and sold them the idea of freedom instead.

Employment

The Meatspace is disjointed and crumbling. Resources there are hard to come by, and many people live in abject poverty. It's paycheck to paycheck for almost every Cog, and there are many times they have to go without getting even their basic needs met.

Many who come to the Aetherium spend at least a portion of their time working in order to make ends meet. Although there are many AIs in the Aetherium in the form of Pylons, the truth is that it is usually cheaper to pay a person a pittance than to fund the creation (and continuous electricity needs) of an AI. As such, the majority of menial tasks and service industries now take place in the Aetherium and are worked by people.

The type of employment any person has is often based on their caste within the system.

Cogs

Cogs work in customer service, as salespeople, as inspectors, and as Pylon feeders. The wealth they create tends to fall mostly into the coffers of the Collective they are working for rather than their own pockets, as continued value add is not redirected to the working person.

Employed Cogs rarely have much chance to move up in the world, as jobs that pay better or have more responsibility are mostly given to Icons.

Some Cogs are forced to travel in the Meatspace to special facilities with custom Rigs in order to do their jobs. Custom Rigs can be designed to augment specific skills and abilities, allowing even a low-powered Cog to function at a higher ability in one specific area. Of course, these Cogs have no control of the equipment used, and many experiments are done on these employees without the Cog's permission.

Pylon Feeders

Pylon feeders are hooked up to special Rigs in the Meatspace, forcing most of their cerebral energies to go to assisting the Pylons in creating the civilization of a Node while the feeder sits basically catatonic.

Icons

Icons fill the roles of managers, high-level bureaucrats, politicians, spies, combat troops, propaganda agents, explorers, and more. Icons have access to the best paying, and most interesting, jobs in the Aetherium, but they still have to earn that place.

While Icons are rare, they are not so rare as to be indispensable. It is only when an Icon gets to truly high abilities, like those of the famed Avatars, that they begin to be seen as truly valuable.

Most Icons are contracted to the Collectives of the world, swearing loyalty to one group or another, but there are a number of freelancers out there as hired guns.

Freelancing Icons are given many of the dirtiest jobs in the Aetherium: doxxing targets (see page 113), corrupting or destroying Pylons, risking the Noise for piracy, kidnapping, espionage, and more. There is often greater value in freelancing jobs, but there is greater risk and no real support structure behind them if matters slip out of control.

Users

In the Aetherium RPG, all Users (the characters controlled by players) are Icons. They have risen out of the life of Cogs, but are just beginning their overall journey in the Aetherium. This makes them weak and susceptible to manipulation by the powers that be.

The game's default starts the Users out as freelancers, owning no real allegiance to anyone. This provides a lot of flexibility in character creation and people to live into a concept they want (including choosing to be aligned with a Collective if they so choose).

Ownership

Ownership is a tricky concept in the Aetherium. Almost all physical objects are continuously created by a Pylon's AI, meaning that the building blocks of civilization have an upkeep that doesn't exist in the material world.

A person might have a set of Programs they consider "theirs", but all Pylon Programs are being created by Pylons owned and operated by a Collective.

This means that a vindictive Collective could alter the Pylon and have the Program disappear (if they were able to properly identify the correct Program and person who has it, which is a very difficult task in and of itself, and which could only be performed from the Meatspace).

The only real ownership in the Aetherium, therefore, is that of Iconic Programs. Everything else is leased.

This informs many aspects of Aetherial society. You may purchase food and drinks, for example, and consume them, but they will be "recreated" by the Pylon shortly afterward with another Program. You may utilize a house in which to store your Pylon Programs when you're offline, but that house is itself rented, just like the Programs being stored inside it.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this ownership structure is that a Program you may have on one Node may not be transferable to another Node. High Level Pylons are capable of restricting the use of certain Root Pylon Programs, such as weapons, and ensuring a certain amount of safety exists there. Any attack on a Schema requires the combatants to be armed with Iconic Programs or risk their Programs slowly unraveling without Pylon support.

Undeveloped Nodes and the Noise don't even have Pylon support, forcing individuals to rely entirely on their Iconic Programs to function.

Lost, Stolen, and Dropped

There are times when Pylon Programs might get lost, stolen, or dropped. For example, when a person is violently logged out, any Pylon Programs they were carrying drop to the ground.

Programs dropped like this will continue, but anyone can pick them up and register them with the Pylon to claim ownership. The process doesn't take very long, but there is a record of it that can be discovered at a later moment if necessary, and for a price.

Value Assessment Rating (VAR)

While the Meatspace economy still functions using currency and credit, the Aetherial economy is much different. Currency, in the traditional sense, could easily be Hacked into existence, and ownership isn't fully possible. Another system was required.

The needs of a post-scarcity reality has led to the eventual creation of the Value Assessment Rating (VAR), or value, for short. VAR was created as a sort of credit score; it was a measure of how much value a person was adding to the social structure overall. The higher a person's value, the more value they added, and therefore the more value they could extract.

Instead of focusing on day-to-day and minute fluctuations in wealth, VAR looks to a bigger picture: is someone worth the investment? This means, simply, that only significant circumstances will adjust an individual's value.

VAR is determined by a complex series of calculations taking place on highly sophisticated AI networks that measure overall economic trends and the actions of individuals. Pylons have access to this independent network, allowing them to review a person's value at a moment's notice. It is nearly impossible to mimic someone else's VAR or use it.

Because VAR takes into account so many factors, the specifics of what a single increment of value is worth can fluctuate from hour to hour and day to day.

The use of value as a wealth abstraction means that it is possible to procure many things, like food or simple Programs, without having any actual adjustment to one's value. This includes being used to allow people to lease Pylon Programs from Pylons, get new Programs coded, and be given access to entertainment.

A person's VAR determines what they are able to procure almost universally across the Aetherium, but the core value tends to be set by one Collective and their job.

There is a dark undertone to VAR, as the idea that an individual's value is directly related to what they add to the world means that it becomes easy to quantify some human life as valueless.

Following the "Money"

Value is not 'spent' in a traditional sense, so it is difficult to track 'payments' through the VAR network.

Crime and Justice

There is no Aetherial Law that persists across Nodes and Schema. The Aetherium has not developed anything close to 'international' law, and so many activities are permissible in the right locations.

Instead, the laws in the Aetherium are laws for the Node. Even Nodes with multiple groups controlling different Schema ensure that there is one consistent law across the entirety of that Node.

At every Pylon, people can find a number of consoles available to tell them the laws of their current location. At no point is ignorance considered an excuse.

There are two main types of laws in the Aetherium: Indemnification Laws and Castigation Laws.

Indemnification Laws

Indemnification laws are all the rules that are likely to make a person lose VAR. Indemnification laws are the most common and widespread laws, as consequences in the Aetherium tend to be less permanent than consequences in the Meatspace.

The laws for Indemnification are often so extensive that no one knows them all. This gives the Aetherium legal system plenty to do, as it is very easy to sue someone against the Indemnification Laws and attempt to get value from them (or simply to make them lose value).

Many things that might be illegal in the material world are merely fineable offenses in the Aetherium. Wrongful Disconnect claims are very common for those who are logged out against their will, with the person able to stand as their own witness.

Castigation Laws

Castigation laws are all the rules that will get a person punished through means other than financial (though financial may also play a part).

Many Castigation penalties are permanent, and may include such things as being banned from a Node or cast into the Noise (which often leads to death in the material world).

Castigation laws are usually related to extremely serious crimes such as terrorism, torture, and intentional Meat-death.

Trial and Punishment

On most Nodes, legal decisions are handed by a single judge, able to make decisions on matters of law on behalf of their Collective. This allows "trial" to be quick and easy for all those involved, eliminating bureaucratic waste.

Witnesses can be called, but the strength of a witness' statement is often directly related to that witness' value. Someone with a high VAR is believed over someone with a low VAR almost always, though evidence of perjury results in excessive loss of value for the guilty party.

As such, the legal system of the Aetherium is incredibly prone to mistakes and corruption, and almost universally favors those in good graces with the owner of the Node. These errors are considered acceptable, however, as almost all crimes are punished by a loss of value, which can be remedied should new evidence arise.

Doxxing

Doxxing is the act of finding out a person's material world information. It tends to be very difficult, but possible, to pull off successfully.

When a person logs on or off at a Pylon, there is a unique ID that is tied to their brain itself. If someone has access to that ID, they can potentially access the encrypted records to find out the Meat associated with it, and from there they can potentially find out where a person is in the material world.

Each of those 3 steps can be incredibly challenging, as the information is highly protected for the safety of everyone. Particularly well-connected or influential people, however, might have an easier time with one or more of the steps.

There are other methods of doxxing that are available, though they are less reliable. Certain Programs have claim to be able to geolocate someone, though their efficacy is questionable. In addition, it is possible to use facial recognition software to compare an Aetherial face to material faces, potentially discovering an identity that way. Alternatively, memory probes have at times been used to recover a person's name or location, and then utilizing that information to find them.

Entertainment

Media and spectacle are the primary form of entertainment within the Aetherium. There are a few ways this philosophy manifests: media, art, and events.

Media is near omnipresent on most Nodes. VR has replaced television and movies, and it can be created to amazing detail within the Aetherium, allowing for hyper-realistic screenings in full 3D, viewable from any angles desired.

Beauty and art sit alongside media, providing images, music, and poetry that continues to affect people deeply. Many pieces are cutting edge and experimental, using the rules of this new reality to create art that seems to touch the very soul.

Perhaps the most important new entertainment industry within the Aetherium is interactive entertainment experiences, popularized as I-EX. At its most basic level, I-EX is a VR simulated experience that the audience members are actively a part of, a bit like a murder mystery dinner of old.

Many I-EX options have dedicated Pylons focused on creating unique experiences. One might not lack gravity and simulate space flight, while another might throw someone back in time a thousand years, and yet another might have whole systems around the use of fantastical elements like magic.

Popular Entertainment

Below are some of the most popular forms of entertainment within the Aetherium.

Hyperball (Event)

Hyperball is like rugby or field hockey on steroids, and it lacks any real semblance of rules. It is brutal, chaotic, and thrilling to watch.

Debtor's Fall (Event)

Practically everyone enjoys watching those who have fallen into debt tossed into an arena and be forced to fight it out against fantastical robotic creatures.

Great Detectives (I-EX Game)

A progressive I-EX, people get a chance to try to solve some of the greatest criminal cases of all time.

Entertainment as a Job

The majority of entertainment is created as work. The consumption of media or events, and the procurement of art, all generate wealth for whoever created them (often as a job for a Collective).

In the Aetherium as anywhere else, people want to be entertained. Unlike in the Meatspace, entertainment is more accessible in the Aetherium, meaning that it is produced in even greater quantities.

Entertainment is also one of the few things that flow relatively freely between Schemas and Nodes. While there is some entertainment censorship, for the most part, games and other media are shared by everyone, regardless of affiliation.

Creating a great work of art or a stunning VR story can help draw wealth from other societal groups, as well as begin to influence them. This soft form of power has been instrumental when attract others to reconsider or even to change entirely the nature of their allegiances.

Entertainment as a Hobby

The bulk of entertainment may be created as a part of someone's job, but there is another entire segment of the population that creates for the sheer joy of creation.

Creating entertainment can push an individual's mental limits, and many like to challenge themselves to develop new styles and approaches.

Entertainment as a Tool

In the tradition of Rome, many Collectives have adopted the notion of bread and circuses: give the people enough to get by and then distract them with spectacle.

These same Collectives rely on a visually striking, while soothing, ambiance achieved through architecture and murals; they take broken window theory and push it even further, believing that appealing visual atmosphere will pacify the population and, therefore, keep them in line.

They funnel resources into propaganda-fueled, subliminal message-filled entertainments with messages and motifs designed to manipulate the masses, hoping to engender loyalty (or at least pacification). After all, within the Aetherium the human mind is one of the greatest resources of all.

Personal Relationships

Personal relationships have taken a strange turn since the Aetherium was founded. Most people spend much more time in the Aetherium than the Meatspace, and this has led to the development of “virtual” relationships as the primary ones, surpassing relationships in the material world.

Aetherial relationships have no respect for physical location, and most people in the Aetherium lack the wealth required to move within the Meatspace, so their relationship while logged in is the only way it exists at all.

Relationships of all kinds, romantic or platonic, in the material world have begun to dissolve. Many Collectives have seen the need to ensure that they have the bodies necessary for the generation of wealth, and thus have started offering value to those that have children. This has helped to stabilize the global population for the time being.

For those that don’t spend enough time in the material world to find a “real” relationship there, there are two options: artificial insemination (the most popular) or arranged partnerships (which are increasingly common).

Arranged partnerships work a lot like marriage, but without the pesky notion of love. These partnerships form a family unit that is better at generating wealth and children, allowing for a more prosperous Collective.

Since most children begin accessing the Aetherium by the age of 5, many parents take on raising their children within the Aetherium itself, though without an arranged partnership, it is often only one of the parents that does the majority of the work (with technological progress, it is easy enough for this to be either sex).

Children and Rigs

The growth and development rate of children through adolescence makes surgical SIM implantation into the young brain potentially dangerous and potentially quite cruel.

There are special Rigs, therefore, that allow those without SIM to access the Aetherium, albeit in a rather limited capacity.

Still, a significant number of people believe it is more cruel to deny their children to experience the Aetherium fully and opt for the surgery.



Beliefs

In the 21st and 22nd centuries, civilization moved ever closer to an atheistic world. The continually degradation of the world and ever-expanding realms of science left religion and faith in a quandary.

The discovery of the Aetherium was a pivot point. Many who were struggling to find meaning in the world began to re-embrace the beliefs of the past, seeing the Aetherium as the realm of the soul.

Faith began to gain hold of people once again, but in the fractured material world, controlling Collectives would often squash the faithful (through expulsion, imprisonment, or murder) or fully embrace them (creating theocratic regimes).

Religious violence and the de-globalized material world has led to many religions functioning more like cults of old, ostracizing those that don’t believe and demanding strict obedience to the tenants of the faith.

AETHERIAL LOCALES

The Aetherium is huge. The reality is potentially infinite (no one is sure), and explorers are constantly looking for more Nodes from which to raise cities and towns.

The vast majority of exploration of the Aetherium is done by the RezX Collective. They have the technology for mobile Pylons built into their impressive Aethershops, allowing them to venture into the Noise for prolonged periods of time.

Not all large-scale exploration is accomplished by the RezX, though. House Ikaru and Axiom regularly send exploration missions into the Noise. Their success is more limited because their journeys are also more restrained both in ambition and in scope.

There are rumors that some weaker Nodes controlled by different Collectives are actually used as mobile ports inside the Aetherium, moving through the Noise to try to find new Nodes. Nodes rarely move quickly through the Noise, however, so this is a slow, haphazard process.

When a Node is found, its coordinates are often registered in the Nodal Index, allowing the adventurous few to attempt to log in to it before it has Pylons. The coordinates have an expiration date, however, based on the speed with which the Node is moving through the Noise.

In some cases, the discoverer of a Node may wish to keep it secret so that they can develop it themselves, but most often they are shared at large -- value can be created simply through the process of discovery, and the development of a Node is both a resource-intensive and a daunting task.

Visiting New Nodes

Exploration isn't always about finding unexplored Aetherial plains. Individuals are capable of exploration by accessing different Nodes as well.

Most people log into the same Nodes over and over again, or they access a small collection of Nodes that they're familiar with. There are, however, a huge variety of Nodes where people can travel. The vast majority of places openly welcome visitors, hoping to become the home Node for people by offering unique experiences and opportunities, which in turn generates value.

Development of Nodes

Every Node develops in its own way, with its own culture, over time, but there are some similarities among Nodes of different sizes.

Newly discovered and undeveloped Nodes often manifest as little more than a barren land mass jutting from the abyss. These places can be chaotic and prone to Noise incursions temporarily breaching portions of the Nodes' safety area (as there is no Pylon yet established to help stabilize it).

People that visit this Nodes are explorers and hopeful homesteaders looking for a better life, or they are agents of Collectives checking out the Node for potential colonization.

If a Node proves strong and stable, some groups will begin investing more effort into developing it, often using Level 0 Pylons to expand the Node and make it safer for human habitation. These Pylons are fairly weak, but they allow for the first Programs and Schema to form, turning the Node into a sort of outpost in the Noise.

These Nodes have weak Pylons, which restrict Hacking to only a minimal degree, and which are unable to provide the sort of surveillance and control that is present on larger Nodes.

This means that outposts often have a more lawless feel to them, with people able to affect greater changes with relative ease. A Node on the fringes of the Aetherium that is just being developed may see drastic changes as it is Hacked and manipulated by the few souls who live there.

These places often see regular conflict as different groups vie for control (at least until the big Collectives and governments show up in force).

Finally, Nodes develop into cities, metropolises, and megalopolises, which begin to conform more and more to standard Aetherial society, with a heavy dose of the owning Collective's influence.

Most Nodes that have developed to this extent will be completely controlled by a single group; however, Nodes that have Schema with different allegiances do still exist around the Aetherium.



Locations

Most of the Nodes in the Aetherium are separated from the other Nodes by huge swathes of Noise, which people (and most ships) cannot cross safely.

There are three main types of geographic areas within the Aetherium: the Core, the Clusters, and the Fringes.

The Core

The Aetherial Core is the collection of Nodes all located near each other within the Noise. The Core is made up of the early settlements within the Aetherium, back before each of the Nodes were controlled by an individual Collective.

The vast psychic energies produced by such a proximity of Nodes and Pylons means that travel between the Nodes of the Core is possible without significant risk from the Noise, presuming that a sufficiently developed mode of transportation is at hand.

This means that the Core is the center of most of the Aetherium's commerce, as it allows for easy trade between the different Collectives, and it allows people to get a taste of different Nodes without having to log out and log back into to a different locale.

For all its wealth and prestige, however, the Core tends to be very well controlled and regulated. This means that Hacking in the Core is incredibly difficult, as most Pylons are at least Level 3, and some are much higher.

On top of this, the Core often looks and feels a bit like what humanity wants the Meatspace to be like: it is a somewhat pristine, idealized collection of sprawling cityscapes. For many, they want experiences that cannot be found in such controlled locations.

The Clusters

The Clusters are extensive aggregations of one or more Nodes that belong exclusively to a specific Collective. Clusters are often on their own in the Aetherium, safely tucked away in the Noise, having been brought together by taking advantage of the ability to move Nodes near each other.

While there is only one Core, there are uncounted Clusters scattered throughout the Aetherium.

The Clusters are most often completely owned by one group and difficult to reach via the Noise. Collectives are able to restrict access to Pylons on their Nodes, if they wish, and they are able to give large preferential treatment to those that work for them.

The Fringes

The Fringes are made up of any Nodes that are isolated, though they are most often used to refer to less developed locales. Some Fringe Nodes are full-fledged Cities, but often they are growing towns or minor outposts.

Despite their name, the Nodes of the Fringes are not necessarily farther from other places through the Noise (though they are never near the Core).

The Fringes of the Aetherium have not had as much time as the Core has had to develop, and they don't have as much strength as the Clusters. This has left many of them smaller and more accessible to those looking for a way to carve their own path.

While the Fringe offers more opportunities for self-determination, it also offers more danger. The Nodes tend to be less developed and stable, and the better they become the more appealing they are to powerful Collectives looking to increase their reach.

COLLECTIVES

When considering Collectives, it is important to remember that, as the world adopted more and more tenants of globalization, the idea of national boundaries began to erode. Worldwide travel became faster and cheaper at the same time that remote work and commerce came into their own.

The continued emphasis on capitalism in the globalized material world led to the development of massive corporations. The David Conglomerate (see page 95), in its struggle against the Mono-Culture, established the importance of a strong corporate culture, and these corporations soon had economies to rival nations. Corporations had unparalleled political reach. As they stressed their own identities and cultures, this further blurred lines: was it more important to be a patriot and support your nation, or was it better to be a corporatist and support your company?

A person's employment was often more significant than their government, as money put food on the table. Not only that, but horizontal integrations meant that many companies were the suppliers of food, delivered right to the door.

In some senses, the idea of the company town had returned, only now it was nestled within the idea of the remote communities (see page 94).

The question of loyalty to government or to company came to a head during the Resource Wars, and from the question developed the idea of the Collective: a hybridization of a nation and a corporation.

Some Collectives, such as the Axiom, are run like a large nation-state, while others, such as House Ikaru, are run more like corporations, but they wouldn't be Collectives if they didn't have some elements of each inside.

Most of the Aetherium is controlled by one Collective or another, and Collectives are continually fighting over new discoveries, advancements, opportunities, and Nodes.

Aetherium Geopolitics

The Aetherium is a seemingly endless expanse of Noise. No one holds claim over the Noise, and its tumultuous nature makes any who would dare try inevitably fail.

The Noise is viewed in much the same way as many view outer space: it is vast, deadly to human life, and an important frontier to conquer.

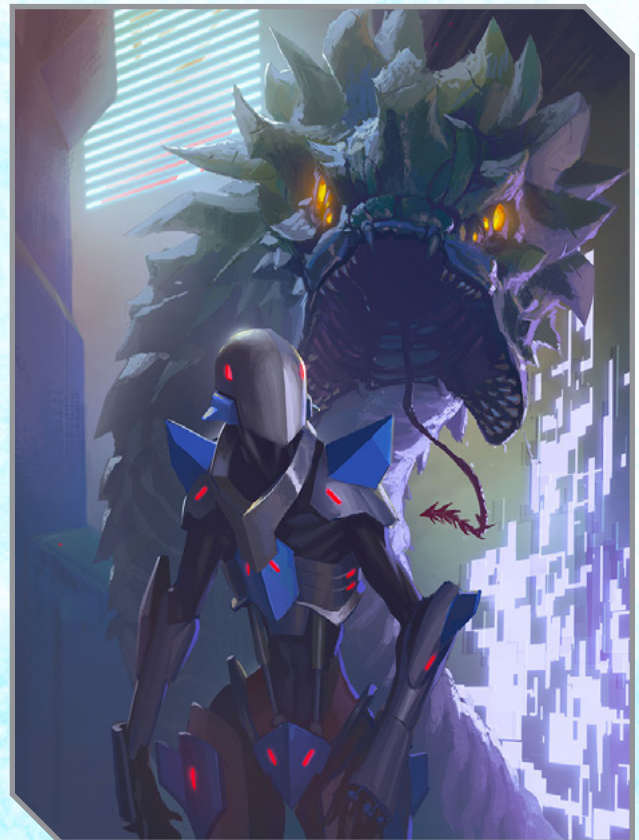
Punctuating the Noise randomly are Nodes, floating bastions of stability.

Most Nodes are controlled by a Collective, though some remain uncontrolled and free. This is because Nodes are hugely valuable resources, and it is uncommon for different Collectives to come to an agreement to share one of those resources. It is far more likely that conflict will break out between occupying Collectives until one completely controls the Node.

Pylons, which must be supported in the material world, always belong to a single Collective. A Collective might share the Aetherial space the Pylon creates, but the Pylon itself must be owned and operated by a single Collective.

Many larger Collectives dominate a variety of Nodes and they control all of the Pylons attached to these networks, as such Collectives often have the resources available to fully invest in completionism.

Of course, even the large Collectives lack the resources to do this for every Node they control. This means that some Nodes will have supported Pylons that belong to various different Collectives.



Conflicts

Most conflicts in the Aetherium are very small scale. While the Collectives have a vast army of people under their command, most are not particularly powerful inside the Aetherium.

This matters more in the Aetherium than the Meatspace for a variety of reasons.

Imagine wanting to send some troops to war inside the Aetherium. Logistically, there are two major obstacles.

The first obstacle is transport. Moving a large number of people through the Noise is not safe or easy. Depending on the distances, it may be downright impossible.

While your army could “log in” to the Node in question, most Pylons are set up to monitor incoming traffic and look for patterns. A large array of people logging in suddenly will often be cut off before the entire force arrives.

The second obstacle is equipment. A Collective can fairly easily outfit all of their people with weapons and armor, but all Pylon Programs hosted by Pylons, which will be controlled by the defenders. While there is a general agreement for Pylons to host others’ Programs, a full-scale invasion only has so long before the equipment is disabled by the Pylon’s owners (which must be done in the Meatspace).

Turning off Pylon Programs of the enemy is hard to do with precision (it’s unlikely you could target individuals with it), but it’s not hard to do across an entire Pylon, effectively disabling everything that isn’t coded directly to the defending Collective.

This means that most conflict in the Aetherium is done by those with Iconic Programs that are suited for combat (and why so many specialized Rigs are dedicated to making people better at specific combat applications).

Since the numbers of skilled people are limited, large invasions are just not feasible in most cases. This results in conflicts that are really more like skirmishes. Small collections of troops, led by powerful individuals such as Avatars, are the main method of combat in the Aetherium.

These soldiers are able to use specialized Programs to try to disrupt the connection between Pylons (or Nodes) and their material world controllers, allowing new control to be uploaded. Such methods are expensive and take time, but they are often worth it to gain more land in the Aetherium.

BORDER WARS

The limitations of full scale warfare in the Aetherium also means that it is incredibly hard to make large-scale changes to well-established Nodes. The structures are simply too fortified to be changed significantly by small groups of individuals.

This means that most conflicts that do break out do so on the borders of the civilized Aetherium. Newer Nodes that have growing populations are likely to see near continuous conflict over them, as team after team of soldiers can be sent in.

In some cases, the warfare drives away the local population, making the Node less valuable, but in most cases it continues until one Collective has brought sufficient force to bear.

Toppling Empires

It is possible to invade and to colonize powerful Nodes, but this requires extreme action: attacking the Pylon server in the Meatspace. By demolishing these systems, agents can collapse large portions of a Node, weakening it for invasion (likely killing millions in the process).

*“What worries me the most
is not the battles between people
who have uncounted tracts
of land adrift in the Noise.
These are petty squabbles.*

*But I have seen the Rhommox
devour the greatest of Ikaru
AI, and I am not sure there is
any room for humanity in the
aftermath of that struggle.*

IRELIA KINGSLEY

THE AXIOM

The Axiom is one of the more nation-oriented Collectives. In many ways, it is best thought of as a powerful theocracy, except their god is not metaphysical; rather, the Axiom worship order and progress as embodied within the state itself.

The Axiom rose from the dissolved European Union as the world began to tear itself apart with war and continued environmental collapse. The world was rife with chaos, and the traditional nation-state began to lose all meaning and value. People didn't feel safe, as everything traditional seemed to fall into despair.

From the ashes of the old world order came the Axiom. They began small, starting in Spain and spreading like wildfire through Europe and northern Africa. Now, they control a significant portion of the civilized world through a strict adherence to order, and a vast, sophisticated use of propaganda.

Ideology

"The greatest expression of the self is one that promotes the whole."

Where the Aetherium represents to many the chaotic power of imagination, Axiom brings order, safety, and a well-regulated society. Order, obedience, and following the regulated ways of the world are what those within Axiom believe will make for the best and brightest world.

The saying above embodies this philosophy. Becoming a part of something greater than yourself will make you better than you could be alone.

Of course, the Axiom's focus on order, obedience, and the whole means that nearly anything can be justified in pursuit of those goals.

This means that the Axiom are more than comfortable kidnapping and assassinating their own citizens when it suits their purposes, ensuring that the integrity of the Collective is maintained.

This belief can be taken even further with those outside their Collective, as the Axiom have mastered the Slavhac, a neurological surgery that can make someone a veritable mental slave... and it's all ethically defensible if it improves the Axiom Collective.

Society

The Axiom is a well ordered society, with everything in its place. Axiom individuality is limited to one's position within the greater society, and for the vast majority of citizens this means a simple existence, both in wealth and in choice.

For many outside the Axiom, this seems like autocratic rule. The "rights" of the individual are being trampled on in service of the Collective.

Most Axiom citizens are parts of a much larger machine. Axiom cogs often do not feel that their individuality has been trampled (even when it has). Instead, they often believe it has been nobly offered in the service of something greater than themselves. Most Axiom Cogs consider themselves martyrs for human social order, at least on a small scale, and this helps them justify their existence as glorified indentured servants.

The unwavering beliefs of the Axiom in the importance of order and the Collective over the individual has given rise to the sense that the Axiom is a lot like old religions. There is a sense of sacrifice and devotion to a power greater than oneself, but instead of a deity, the cause is humanity itself.

While mobility between the tiers of Axiom society is possible, seeking it out is considered to be a significant character flaw.

Goals

The Axiom are one of the most active and driven Collectives, as a whole. While every Collective has goals, the Axiom have a unity of purpose that many lack, and they have the resources to make significant headway.

The Axiom are fighting for their ideals of order and obedience. They see the Aetherium as a chaotic reality that must be mastered through the use of powerful Pylons and controls. If the Aetherium, and those who would exploit it, is left unchecked, an Aetherial collapse will occur, just as it happened in the Meatspace.

Therefore, the Axiom are always looking to expand their holdings and influence in the Aetherium, expanding their operations and looking to take control of the Aetherial world. It is only through absolute control that the Axiom will be able to prevent the collapse of the Aetherium and the downfall of humanity, or so they believe.

Daily Life

Most of those living in Axiom space are Cogs. Cogs are those individuals who follow the tenants of the Axiom, and they are fulfilling some function to the Collective. Although there are Cogs in every Collective, the Axiom are the only Collective that openly, but not derisively, refer to the lowest class as Cogs.

For many Axiom Cogs, their function is mundane and dull. The Axiom have an immense bureaucracy to manage, and in order to keep employment high they automate very little.

The life of a Cog is a static one. For most, there will be no mobility. They will never generate enough wealth to move, they will never stand out enough to get promoted, and they will never speak out enough to get punished.

Above the Axiom Cogs are Applicants, commonly referred to as Apps. Apps have proven their value and loyalty, and thus are allotted a slim margin to express individuality. They tend to spend fewer hours working and have more disposable wealth.

Apps are those who tend to fight the battles, ferret out dissention in the Axiom ranks, lead the operations of the fabled Loyalty Centers, and do anything else that the Collective needs in order to promote its societal ideal.

Apps must show unwavering loyalty to the Collective for the chance to move up and become something more.

At the very top of the Collective are the Lectors. In almost any other society, these officials would live a life of luxury and celebrity. Lectors have access to these trappings, but often forego them in the service of the Axiom, passing the spoils of wealth and power to Apps – in order to further Axiom goals, and to build personal allegiances.

All those within the Axiom have access to the same entertainments and options everyone else has, but Collective-created entertainments are subsidized and therefore cheaper (or completely free). This leads many within the Axiom to consume only content created by the Axiom, whether that content is food, entertainment, or education.

There are those who exist outside the norm, however, and these individuals can quickly be processed in Axiom Loyalty Centers, which function a lot like rehabilitation centers with a more sinister tone, sometimes even resulting in brain surgery to correct any “problems.”

Conflict

There are three types of conflicts in which the Axiom is likely to be involved.

The first type is intra-Collective conflicts. The Axiom will mobilize in force for any significant issues happening inside their own control. These issues are almost always very small in scale, and are usually handled by a combination of Praetorians and long stints in Loyalty Centers.

The second type is what is best referred to as a war of ideology. This is the most rare form of Axiom conflict, as the Axiom are mostly an inward-facing Collective. However, sometimes they see actions or philosophies gaining hold on other Nodes that they deem existential threats to humanity. When this happens, the Axiom take action with overwhelming force.

The third type of conflict is expansion conflicts. These are the only types of conflicts the Axiom engage in that aren't based around ideology. The Axiom recognize that growth is important, as it means more resources. More resources means more stability, and the Axiom love stability.

Expansion conflicts take place over new Nodes as different Collectives try to expand their control. Expansion conflicts see the most diverse cast of Axiom fighters, as any able bodies can be mobilized to assist.

Holdings

The Axiom is one of the largest societies in the Aetherium. In the Core of the Aetherium, Axiom holds dozens of well-fortified developed Nodes. These are among the safest in the Aetherium; their secure Pylons and high population keep them that way.

Axiom Nodes tend to be circular, with the hierarchy placing the highest tiers towards the center, where the Pylons are strongest and reality the most stable. This means that the edges of the wheel are the most populous. They tend to have beautiful architecture, putting much more than function into the buildings. After all, even beauty is a form of propaganda.

Everyone is welcome on Axiom Nodes, as they are always happy to share in the strength of Axiom culture. The security protocols are light, as are the patrols, at least outside of the center of their Nodes. This helps show people how secure they are from exterior threat or influence. Of course, security is always available at a moment's notice.

The Citadel Node (Axiom)

- **Type:** Core Cluster City

A cluster of powerful Nodes near the center of the Core, the Citadel is one of the strongest bastions of power in all of the Aetherium.

History

The Citadel is perhaps the most famous city in all of the Aetherium. It is a massive city that spans 5 strong Nodes, all in the heart of the Core.

The Citadel was founded on the basic idea of the glory of the Axiom. No expense was spared in creating a stable, pristine city. Thousands of coders continually review every inch of detail in the Citadel to ensure that every blade of grass is directly to specifications.

The Citadel itself is fashioned with gothic architecture of clean white marble for the largest structures. Everything is ordered in the Citadel, with a dynamic spoke and grid system of grand boulevards of straight lines throughout the entire Node.

Culture

The Citadel is the height of Axiom indoctrination. Every resident believes in the wisdom and righteousness of the Axiom or will quickly disappear to never be seen again.

The Citadel is a very hierarchical society, with different colors indicating which caste a person belongs. Cogs wear brown, often as a vest or other covering to show their station. Apps wear blue, while Lectors wear orange or white.

Almost everything in the Citadel can be obtained for free to a certain rank, as proof of the wealth and stability of the Axiom: the Citadel advertises itself as a post-scarcity economy, and is exceptionally proud of that truth.

Each block is filled with propaganda posters for the Axiom, including the "Axiom Exultant," a look at the life of one of the glorious Axiom Lectors who is leading the society to greatness.

The Citadel is highly structured, and this is constantly maintained by Loyalty Patrols wearing white with an orange stripe. These patrols can take anyone for any reason, putting their allegiance to a rigorous test in a Loyalty Center.

Adventure Hooks

- **AXIOM:**

A graffiti artist is defacing Axiom property all over the Citadel, bringing into question the stability of Axiom control. It is believed that the artist is part of the Nanomei, and a strange pattern seems to be emerging, almost like the graffiti is a part of some code.

- **HOUSE IKARU:**

It is believed that a high-level Ikaru spy, Daedalus, has been captured and taken to an Axiom Loyalty Center. If true, it is likely that the Axiom will turn him into a Slavhac and scour his mind for any useful information. The agent must be recovered at all costs.

- **MERCENARIES:**

A high ranking Lector is believed to be funneling Axiom wealth into personal gain, leveraging their control of the Axiom and Link Collars to get ahead. This Lector must be discretely investigated by a neutral force, and anything discovered must be resolved directly.

- **NANOMEI:**

The Citadel serves as a beacon for everything wrong with society. It offers up obedience cloaked as freedom. An example must be made, and so a strike team has been put together to take out the Mastrona Pylon, a Pylon dedicated to one of the most enduring and potent symbols of Axiom power: Lady Mastrona.

- **REZX:**

It is believed that somehow the Axiom have captured an Aethership with mobile-Pylon technology and have anchored in somewhere on the Citadel, hoping to learn its secrets. The Aethership must be destroyed at all costs, for such potent technology cannot be allowed to fall into the hands of any government.

LINK COLLAR [X]

Virus Passive

If a character logs out with this attached to them, they suffer 2 Health damage (in addition to any other Health damage they might suffer). Axiom Pylons will not allow someone with this Virus to log out. If a Sync roll is made to lower the X value of this Virus, the character suffers 1 Health damage. Reduce this Virus' X value by 1 every hour.

Complexity 12:

AETHER ANCHOR (8), AXIOM-CONTROLLED (4)

Note: This Program is not available to the public. A Reputation of 10 or higher with the Axiom and GM approval are needed to use it.

Other Axiom Locations

The Axiom control a variety of Nodes throughout the Aetherium. They generally use high-level Pylons, when available, focusing more on stability than on scale, so that their individual Nodes are often smaller but more stable than similar Nodal counterparts.

Verdant Earth

The Verdant Earth Node is run like nearly every other Axiom Node, but instead of gothic architecture and 23rd century technology, the Node is set up to look like a spectacular and nostalgic wildlife reserve.

Verdant Earth was originally developed as a way to remind the Axiom, and others, of what the Earth used to be like before the utter collapse of the environment at human hands.

The Node takes advantage of eco-friendly architecture, coupled with renewable resource items such as solar panels and wind turbines. While none of these have any real function, they serve to show people the world to which the Axiom aspires.

This is not to say Verdant Earth is underdeveloped. It hosts cities and skyscrapers like any colonized Node, but each is built into the landscape itself, most dramatically into cliff faces and even some underwater towns.

Experfree

The Experfree Node is an oddity within the Axiom. It is one that is closed off to all outsiders, and it is not listed on any publicly available information.

Experfree is made available as a reward to particularly loyal and successful Axiom agents, as a place where they can go to be among the Collective's best and brightest.

One of the many quirks of Experfree is that it does not contain any Loyalty Centers or propagandists (though it is still covered in posters and the like). It is one of the few places where those in the upper tiers of the Axiom can express personal opinions that diverge from the core Axiomite beliefs.

The Axiom, and particularly Maxenti Rex Sacriott, view Experfree as a sort of think-tank for Axiom ideals, allowing those who have proven themselves enough freedom to potentially innovate a way forward. Of course, if the things said in Experfree were to get out, it could cause a schism within the Axiom social order.

Axiom People

The Axiom don't tend to promote the tenets of individuality, seeing everyone as playing an important part within the system; however, there are those who rise dramatically above the ordinary and mundane.

Lady Aemelia Mastrona

A figurehead of power and the order of the Axiom Collective. Lady Mastrona is held up as an ideal of truth, beauty, and virtue. Her visage is spread across the entire Collective on inspiring posters and videos.

The truth, however, is more complex. Lady Mastrona is none of the things she is held up to be; in fact, she's not even one person at all. Many have worn the guise of Lady Mastrona and used it to further the Axiom's control.

Pontifect Cornelius Neuholm

The Pontifect is in charge of all the Lectors of Governance and Order, in other words all those tasked with running the bureaucracy, including the many Loyalty Centers held in the Axiom grip. He is one step away from the Maxenti, the head of all Governance and Order.

The Pontifect has little-to-no real personality under all the robes and duties of his office; Corenelius was left behind in the pursuit of becoming the Pontifect.

Prime Commandant Spyder

Issac Spyder rose up through the ranks of common soldiers in the Military and Law branch of the Collective. He is vicious and definitive in his actions, but his willingness to do what he asks of others affords him great respect from those who serve him.

Though there are those above Spyder, and he has many peers, the Prime Commandant is the most famous of those in the Military and Law branch. He will accomplish anything needed, at any cost.

Doctor Thaddeus Trest

Thaddeus Trest is the genius neurologist behind the current Slavhac technology employed by the Axiom. His exemplary performance has awarded him control over the Axiom Loyalty Centers, which he has taken to with zealous gusto.

Loyalty Centers provide Doctor Trest with all the subjects he needs for experiments in how to rewrite human impulses of greed and rebellion.

HOUSE IKARU

At the onset of the Resource Wars of the 22nd century, a middling household technology company known as Irinsu Tech was developing consumer products that made day-to-day life easier.

The outbreak of the Resource Wars spelled certain doom for most vulnerable corporate and government entities, but Irinsu Tech was determined.

Ikaru Mazudo, the CEO at the time, took radical measures. He consolidated power and implemented a strict hierarchy reminiscent of feudal times. Instead of focusing on sales, he focused on stability and resource acquisition.

House Ikaru was born.

By combining feudal structure with contemporary knowledge, and by leveraging the loyalty of its people, House Ikaru became an agile Collective that was able to tap into its own intangible resource. It used this hidden depth to forge the first real paths into the Aetherium for the common person, which in turn led to its incredible wealth and power in both the material world and the Aetherium.

Ideology

Ikaru For Everything. Ikaru For Ever.

The understand Ikaru, one need merely understand ambition. When it was founded, Ikaru Mazudo ensured that the House's reach never extended beyond its grasp. Every risk was measured to its reward.

The death of Ikaru Mazudo changed the nature of the Ikaru path. Those that took over had all of his ambition, but little of his restraint.

The outward demonstration of ambition is frowned upon; however, at the highest levels, House Ikaru subscribes passionately to ambition, and its upper echelons can be rife with infighting.

At the lower levels, the Collective pushes for honor and strength among its people.

Regardless of where you fit in the great Ikaru dynasty, you are expected to practice ingenuity. All members of the House, regardless of status, are allotted some time to experiment and to innovate every day, for House Ikaru believes that the easiest way to defeat a rival isn't to destroy them, it's to outrun them.

Society

House Ikaru society is a bit of a paradox.

On one end of the spectrum, they are a feudalistic, hierarchical corporate household. Every person must know their place within the structure. Anyone of a higher level within the organizational structure has at least some leverage over those below them - though they risk the ire of the direct manager if this status is abused.

On the other end of the spectrum, they are an innovative, progressive company. They believe in profit, but as a means to an end. Profit can be invested into the future, allowing the House to maximize its commercial reach. There is nothing wrong with losing profit if you're gaining market share.

This paradoxical nature drives House Ikaru society. Every person in the House knows their role and place in society, but they also know that the correct innovation could catapult them from their position in life.

Goals

To the outside world, House Ikaru has one goal: to be a hugely profitable company. House Ikaru does nothing to dissuade people of this notion, but they are far more insidious. In reality, they have two goals, often only known at the highest levels.

"Ikaru For Everything" is their first goal. They aren't just interested in being profitable in their lane; they are interested in 100% market share. Ikaru's goal is control far more than wealth. This is manifest in their Ikaru Aetherium Services, a subscription service that offers the latest in wetware technology. Of course, cutting edge technology adapters often overlook some of the terms of use - specifically those that allow Ikaru researchers access to some user's minds.

"Ikaru For Ever" is their second goal, even more deeply secreted than the first. House Ikaru is tirelessly searching for a pathway to immortality. The Collective has focused this effort in their AI development. Some speculate that the Central Processor, the world's most sophisticated AI, arose out of this search.

House Ikaru will ignore any ethical concerns in the pursuit of this goal. After all, is not all of humanity served by immortality? What does it matter if a few individuals were tested in the pursuit of such a dream?

Daily Life

The daily life of an Ikaru citizen-employee is not so different than the daily life for members of other Collectives. Each enjoy their quotidian routines.

Those who are truly a part of House Ikaru, though, know that the similarities are superficial. On the inside, the life of a citizen-employee is one of honor, loyalty, and ingenuity.

Many in House Ikaru revere Ikaru Mazudo with the same diligence and adoration that they treat their own ancestors. Indeed, they often consider themselves a part of his family, some even having small shrines to him alongside their ancestors.

Perhaps the most striking feature of daily life for those in House Ikaru is the deference paid to the Central Processor (CP). The CP is an incredibly advanced AI that helps to run Ikaru society.

Everyone submits basic information to the CP every day. For most, this is basic data like timecards and VAR interactions, but certain roles (like intelligence officers) submit a much broader range of information.

Every citizen-employee is also accountable to the Central Processor, should the AI deign to give them a task or objective. Its orders supercede every other order.

The combination of reverence for the Collective and constant feed of information to the CP makes the average House Ikaru person more fundamentally interwoven to their Collective than many others.

In turn, House Ikaru offers a wide array of information to citizen-employees that is unavailable to others. The Central Processor has access to a stunning array of data and has leveraged less advanced AI to combine all sorts of information that may be helpful to the individual.

This service is known as LifeLine. It has social data, health data, and work data. It uses complex algorithms to provide users with a host of information about themselves. LifeLine is a wildly popular service, as it can do anything from predict health changes to get users a date with a compatible person. Its most amusing feature is a "horoscope" that uses your data to predict how your day is likely to go.

It is a real challenge for the average citizen-employee to find the balance between the regimented, feudalistic hierarchy and the agile, innovative business ventures. Anyone who gets too close to one or the other is likely to crash and burn.

Conflict

Most of House Ikaru's conflict is commercial, but they engage in physical disputes, too. Regardless of the type of conflict, House Ikaru rarely approaches a problem directly.

If there's one thing on which the Collective is certain, it's that an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind only if it is known who took the first eye. Ikaru acts in the shadows, approaching problems from unique angles so no one sees them coming.

In commercial takeovers, this means undermining the competition by acquiring their means of production rather than attacking them directly.

In physical conflicts, this means using subterfuge. This is most often achieved by manipulating the Aetherium itself, hacking into Pylons and forcing the battlefield to their advantage.

For the most part, House Ikaru avoids conflicts all together by using advanced espionage operations to bypass the need. However, some problems require a particular touch, and House Ikaru is up to the task.

The most common issue that will mobilize House Ikaru's direct and forceful interventions are advanced technological assets, such as aberrant Nodes, Rhommox biotech, and advanced Pylon technology.

Holdings

House Ikaru has control of many Nodes, but it is less interested in controlling full Nodes as operating advanced Pylons on the Nodes of others. This gives them easy access to other Collectives for diplomacy and espionage.

Ikaru Nodes and Pylons look like something out of a science fiction film from 100 years into the future. The buildings are sleek and streamlined, lit by non-oppressive, ambient neon lighting. The "basics" such as garbage cans, cars, and street lights are automated and advanced to an unequalled degree. Ikaru society is a technologically pristine society.

All of this is a show of force and power intended to intimidate and coerce those living nearby, demonstrating an unrivaled prowess and assertion that House Ikaru is the only path forward.

Don'Yoku Node (House Ikaru)

- **Type:** 2 Node Cluster

Don'Yoku is the commerce capital of the Aetherium, offering almost any type of Program or experience imaginable. Don'Yoku is the largest mobile Node cluster in the Aetherium.

History

Don'Yoku is a massive commercial cluster. It was built to be appealing to many: the bureaucratic oversights are minimal and the number of goods and services on offer is genuinely extraordinary. It is a bit like a massive market, with floating vendors and strange experiences for sale around every corner.

Over time, it was realized that Don'Yoku could be significantly more profitable by traveling through the Aetherium. Significant resources were dedicated to sending the Node throughout the Aetherium, mostly across the Core, and essentially docking the massive city next to other Nodes. Generally, the Node makes it somewhere new approximately once an Aetherial month.

Culture

Don'Yoku, like all of House Ikaru, serves many purposes.

The main culture of the Node is commercialism unchecked. Basically any experience can be had on the Node for a price. The merchants of Don'Yoku do not need to worry about most apparent legal or moral implications of their actions.

Underneath this culture is one of extreme human intelligence practices. The Node can collect a massive amount of data on those within it.

When Don 'Yoku arrives at a new commercial hub, vendors and entertainers pour from the Node onto whichever place it has docked, and these various sundries begin to entice people to visit Don'Yoku. Under this cover, spies began to travel throughout the docked Node.

Then, cameras and monitoring Programs watch everything shoppers do, while Ikaru agents offer special services that have concealed motives - a high-end head massager might be able to glean thoughts while a designer drug might assist in the clandestine collection intimate of datastream details.

Adventure Hooks

- **AXIOM:**

Don'Yoku is about to come into contact with an Axiom Node. The Axiom are well aware of the espionage that takes place. This level of surveillance is difficult, however, and so counter-espionage may be possible, potentially discovering some clues as to the Meatspace wearabouts of the Central Processor.

- **HOUSE IKARU:**

The Central Processor has discovered that a high-ranking Ikaru official will provide Collective secrets sometime in the next week. The problem is that this information was gained using its predictive matrix, and so far no actionable evidence has been found. Could the CP be wrong?

- **MERCENARIES:**

House Ikaru has diverted Don'Yoku to pass by the last known location of Node 54.62.E, a Node that was once classified as stable but suddenly seemed to disappear. House Ikaru believes that the Rhommox might have overtaken the Node and either destroyed or moved it, and the job is to find out what happened to the Node. If there are any Rhommox present, samples of their bodies would be a boon.

- **NANOMEI:**

Rumor has it that somewhere on Don'Yoku is a massive Mind-Farm, a place where many individuals have been strapped into powerful equipment to harness their mental energies. It is believed that there may be thousands of people, their minds being used to propel the Don'Yoku Node around the Aetherium. If true, these people must be freed.

- **REZX:**

House Ikaru has arranged a meeting between one of their managers, Hiroso Yuugi, and the ReZX. Ostensibly, the meeting is a high level exchange of technology: a ReZX Noise Filter for an Ikaru Mind Mapper. Back channel chatter, however, believes the whole thing might be some sort of set-up, so measures must be taken to ensure security.

MIND MAPPER

3CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

Learn one piece of information the target doesn't want you to know.

Complexity 10:

MENTAL PROBE (10)

Note: This Program is not available to the public. A Reputation of 15 or higher with Ikaru and GM approval are needed to use it.

Other Ikaru Locations

House Ikaru has many Nodes scattered throughout the Aetherium, and each one of them includes a portion dedicated to entertainment and luxury. After all, anyone visiting an Ikaru Node should recognize their superiority in all matters.

Although most Ikaru Nodes are standard cities, a few of the standouts can be seen below.

Mirai

Mirai is one of the most advanced Node clusters in the Aetherium. It was developed using the latest in AI technology, and it focuses on a Pylon technology called Mobius. Mobius Pylons actually bend space and gravity around them to create an overlapping cityscape that seems to defy physics.

This makes the Mirai Node look like a massive spherical city, where any street can be traversed on the top, or bottom. Inside the Node itself is like a massive maze with buildings rising from the ground and rising from the ceiling, as the effects of gravity itself are applied on the specific code-orientation of the structure. Thus are the marvels of the Mobius Pylon.

Mirai is home to urbanites and scientists alike, testing the newest gadgets out on a Node that shows what the future of the Aetherium might look like.

Sentience

Sentience is an incredibly tightly controlled Ikaru experiment. It is built on top of one of the smallest, weakest Nodes that Ikaru could find, and it is monitored on a daily basis by the Mother of Machines.

There is only one Pylon on Sentience, built surrounding the Node. That Pylon is fed more power than any Pylon before it, and, unlike every other known Pylon in the Aetherscape, the Pylon of Sentience is given the freedom to contemplate.

Sentience, therefore, is a growing and changing landscape based on the whims of the Pylon that controls it. Instead of being fed Program code to manifest, Sentience is allowed to create freely, essentially continuous evolutionary Hack of the entire Node as it sees fit.

The hope is that Sentience will allow the development of sophisticated Pylons, but the fear is that it will truly develop a mind of its own.

Ikaru People

House Ikaru likes to promote the most capable minds, helping them rise through the ranks to positions of power and influence.

Many of the most influential personas in House Ikaru appear to be machines themselves, as their unbridled quest for power and immortality has led to a blending of mind and mechanics.

Uesaka Kazushige

Uesaka is one of the head scientists in House Ikaru, but recent years have seen him pushed more to the side in House Ikaru. Uesaka has always believed in Lord Mazudo's vision of ambition tempered by restraint. This restraint left him in disfavor with much of the Collective.

Despite this, it is Uesaka's genius that helped to develop some key solutions to the problems that arose during the second great Trade War. He has now dedicated his life to ensuring that House Ikaru's legacy isn't forever tainted by their actions during that war.

Mother of Machines

She was born a human named Aisu, but her quest to map the human mind onto technology led her to become the Mother of Machines.

The Mother of Machines is often regarded as an amazingly intelligent AI, one of the best in the Aetherium. She is tasked with overseeing other AI under Ikaru's purview, keeping watch for any aberrant manifestations that might lead to future trouble for House Ikaru.

Takona

Takona is a repository of information, an AI that is dedicated to housing the vast sums of information House Ikaru gathers and helps to feed it through the Central Processor.

Like the Mother of Machines, Takona wanders the Aetherium on its quest to learn more and more. Rumor has it that Takona was last looking for a way to venture into the Noise and discover the truth of the RhommoX.

The Central Processor

The Central Processor is the mind of all House Ikaru. It sees all and controls all within the Collective. The Central Processor is Ikaru, and Ikaru is the Central Processor.

NANOMEI

The Nanomei are elusive. They hide their identities, and they hide their physical bodies. Perhaps most frustrating is the fact that even their philosophies are elusive; their purposes can slip through the fingers as easily as water. Understanding the Nanomei is like understanding freedom.

The Nanomei all believe in freedom at their core, but there are different manifestations of freedom: there is the freedom from oppression and there is the freedom to live a true life.

The Nanomei who fight for freedom from oppression are called the Rabble. They are the most populous group within the Nanomei, but their ranks ebb and flow.

The Nanomei who create freedom to live one's truest self are known as the Binaries. The Binaries earned their name from their lack of compromise and the absolute nature of their thoughts. There are very few Binaries, but they are often the defining souls within the Nanomei.

Unlike other Collectives, many within the Nanomei belong to other Collectives in the day to day, joining the Nanomei only for a brief time or a specific struggle. As such, they are harder to pin down than most.

Ideology

There are two core tenets of the Nanomei: freedom and individualism. These two tenets go hand in hand.

For most Nanomei, and the Rabble in particular, freedom is the core guiding principle. This freedom is expressed in relation to many laws and cultural constructs, which means that resistance is the main tool of establishing freedom.

Individualism is a more complex and nuanced tenet. This freedom is most often expressed in the masks that the Nanomei commonly wear: the self should not be defined by the past. Hiding one's face makes an individual free from that past and keeps them free of consequences of the present.

Binaries consider this a surface level engagement with individualism and, by comparison, constantly try to attain more radical transcendence through acts of creation that assert the true self.

The Nanomei fear that if their ideologies are not adopted, the mistakes of the past will be repeated as humanity blindly follows destructive leaders to terrible ends.

Society

There is no single manifestation of Nanomei society. As long as the core tenets of the Nanomei are followed, it could be said to be a Nanomei society.

This means that there are some groups that follow Nanomei principles, yet do not identify as Nanomei, and some groups that identify as Nanomei but don't truly follow the tenets. There are no Nanomei police to ensure that the movement is pure. There is no Nanomei doctrine, no orthodoxy.

For those that follow the path of the Nanomei (regardless of what they call themselves), there are two main types of society: temporary and permanent.

Temporary societies adhere to the tenet of freedom, and they tend to appear when oppression in a Collective is increasing. The increasing political pressure from a Collective actually gives rise to the Nanomei as their efforts at control increase the Nanomei population.

Temporary societies are incredibly active. They protest, incite violence and destruction, and actively try to recruit new enthusiasts.

Permanent societies have long-standing Nodal space. They tend to be focused on the tenant of individualism and encourage people to discover themselves. Permanent societies tend to take in the outcasts from other Collectives.

Permanent societies are predominantly introspective, abstaining from looking outward. Waves of transients come to permanent societies to recruit, but permanent societies are not in a constant state of revolution.

Permanent societies have the most norms, like an absolute resistance to VAR, Pylon tracking programs, and anything that even resembles a monthly fee.

Goals

The Nanomei's goals are more numerous than the number of Nanomei, and their goals change daily.

This isn't to say that the Nanomei are fickle. They have a solid, ideology. It is instead a way of acknowledging that, more than anything, the Nanomei are a Collective of individuals and not driven by a mission statement.

When the passion strikes, the Nanomei act.

Daily Life

The daily life of the Rabble is most often as a routine part of a different Collective. They live whatever life they are supposed to until the sun goes down.

Then, when free from the necessities of a life which the Rabble finds oppressive, they venture out into the night for their bacchanal. It starts as a simple escape from the conformity and control of their lives.

In particularly difficult or tumultuous times, the nightly revelry of the bacchanalia takes on a darker tone of mayhem. This is when the Rabble can begin to be identified as true Nanomei. The desire for freedom manifests in the destruction of the peace and order of the world around them. They take up their masks and search for justice against the oppression they experienced during the day.

It is, in short, a sort of destructive flash mob of passion.

Generally, the individual who leads the mayhem is known as the Lord of Misrule. It is often the first one to strike the match of destruction, and they lead the mob until it disbands in dramatic fashion: burning the mask of the Lord of Misrule as a symbolic rejection of the last authority of the night.

Juxtaposed to the almost nightly bacchanals of the Rabble sit the Binaries. The daily life for the Binaries (and sometimes the Rabble, often in permanent Nanomei societies) is not focused on revelry in the same way.

Instead, the daily life of those who live as part of the Nanomei from day to day are those who are seeking the freedom of the heart and soul. They seek creative release, attempting to find inspiration wherever they are able.

These Nanomei seek a life free from regret, a life that they could be proud to relive time and time again.

Of course, seeking to lead one's ideal life can often step on the toes of others. While most in the Nanomei are careful not to knowingly cross other Nanomei, they are more than happy to disrupt the lives of others in their own pursuits.

When the Rabble and the Binaries work together, that is when the biggest and strongest revolutions manifest.

Conflict

The Nanomei's conflicts are numerous and near constant, but these conflicts are mostly by the disorganized Rabble. They often appear spontaneously, and they can fall apart quickly when they encounter any real opposition.

There are some conflicts, though, they get a lot more attention and organization by the Nanomei. These conflicts are usually headed by one or more of the Binaries with a specific goal in mind, such as disabling a Pylon or freeing captives.

Even in these organized strikes, however, there tend to be different groups of fighters that each have a high level of autonomy to achieve their overall objectives.

Regardless of how the Nanomei strike, they do so in small groups of volunteers. The Nanomei would never dream of pressing anyone into service, but as they are a Collective prone to volunteering, it's not hard to find a willing soul.

Holdings

It is generally hard to have significant holdings when you eschew traditional forms of wealth. The Nanomei have trouble controlling any Nodes, and they despise the idea of renting space on a Node to hold their Pylons.

Most Nanomei are living inside other Collectives, and therefore don't require much by way of space.

Some Nanomei agents devote their time to generating wealth, however, in order to establish safe houses and the like throughout Nodes on which the Nanomei are active.

Even against this backdrop, though, the Nanomei have managed to gain control over numerous Nodes. Their Nodes tend to be smaller and disorganized with a large focus on creative enterprises. Few Nodes have Pylons on them, as Pylons require massive structural support in the Meatspace.

Many Nanomei holdings operate on a barter system and a general lack of laws that makes them wonderful places for disreputable types from other locales to set up shop.

The Co-Op Node (Nanomei)

- **Type:** 3 Node Cluster

The Co-Op is a Pylon-free group of Nodes held under the Nanomei's anarchic principles.

History

The Co-Op was originally one weaker Node discovered out in the fringes. It didn't attract much attention, which eventually drew in the Nanomei.

The Nanomei established an anarchist cooperative on the Node. In order to limit the control of the few over the many, the Nanomei have not allowed any Pylons to be built off the Node, as Pylons force a structure for both the Aetherium and the Meatspace.

As the Node grew, some clamored for Pylons to open more individuals to experience the Co-Op. A massive vote was held where it was decided to capture another smaller Node and bind it to the Co-Op.

Once the next Node had been found, there was a massive Nanomei influx from all corners, and then great effort was spent moving the Node into a cluster with the Co-Op, allowing it to expand even further. Some grumbled that the Co-Op was a victim of its own success, but none could deny its potent momentum. Since its founding, this expansion has happened twice more, and it's nearing the time where it needs to happen again.

Culture

The Co-Op is anarchic and free-spirited. Without Pylons, there has been no way to implement VAR technology or similar. There are no free-standing structures; there is simply a large expanse that goes on and on.

Within this simplicity, the residents of the Co-Op thrive. Nothing on the Nodes is permanent, instead there are collections of tent cities that house everyone. Without Pylons, everything eventually decays, which suits the residents just fine.

This state of flux has brought on a love of the present, and a sort of simple hedonism that looks a bit like a nostalgic, romantic idea of a more simple past.

Within this, many individuals have become artists, building strange effigies and structures that are set ablaze before the decay takes them.

Adventure Hooks

- **AXIOM:**

The Axiom have recently begun to take over a new Node in the hopes of colonizing it fully. However, initial Praetorian patrols have discovered a Nanomei presence on the Node, and it is believed that they intend to launch a strike to capture the new Node and connect it to the Co-Op. An Axiom team will need to travel to the heart of the Nanomei to learn what they can, and potentially stop any incursion.

- **HOUSE IKARU:**

In one of the strange markets in the Co-Op, there is a merchant who claims to be selling some captured Rhommox creatures to the highest bidder. House Ikaru not only wants these specimens, but also keenly desires to know how the merchant came across them. Little does anyone know, more Rhommox wait just outside the Node, hearing the cries of their brethren.

- **MERCENARIES:**

A scientist from the RezX has stolen some valuable technology and fled into Nanomei space. The RezX don't wish to draw the ire of the anarchists, so they need some mercenaries to go in and find the missing scientist.

- **NANOMEI:**

A small cabal within the Nanomei is beginning to foment a revolution, but there are hints that the movement is not entirely grassroots. It is possible that another Collective has swayed some influencers and is seeking to use them to disrupt the Nanomei presence, perhaps taking over the Co-Op altogether.

- **REZX:**

A RezX facility in North America is in dire need of assistance. They are running low on supplies, and the fastest way to help them is through some of the traveling Nanomei in the Meatspace. By finding the correct contacts on the Co-Op and logging out to the material world, the RezX facility can be delivered the resources it requires.

SEE NO EVIL

2CS : Perception (30 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level for defense. Permanently change the skin of target Pylon Program.

Complexity 6:
RESKINNER (6)

Note: This Program is not available to the public. A Reputation of 10 or higher with the Nanomei and GM approval are needed to use it.

Other Nanomei Locations

The Nanomei control very few Nodes, and many they do control resemble the Co-Op. Below are a few Pylons that the Nanomei control, but each of these Pylons is particular to itself. They are specially designed Pylons that are able to be loaded up on Nodes without the normal preparation, giving the Nanomei a foothold they might not otherwise have.

R107

R107 is a Pylon that is developed for maximum disruption. It is specially coded to do two things: supply gear to any Nanomei working in the area and undermine the native Pylon.

When the Nanomei choose a spot to attack, they are able to port R107 in, giving them a place to log in quickly, to materialize weapons, and to disrupt the location.

As the Nanomei fighters get to work, R107 begins to counter the local Pylon, using in-depth protocols to work in exact opposites to what the Pylon is doing. As such, R107 often dismantles an entire Schema while the Nanomei fighters attack anything that remains.

While R107 is very powerful, it takes months of research and a massive amount of focused resources to use this invasive Pylon, after which it usually suffers enough damage that it takes significant time to repair.

One For All

The One For All Pylon is truly a marvel of Nanomei engineering. It is able to be loaded onto any Pylon Level 1 or below (they are working hard to increase its capacity).

When One For All is loaded onto a Pylon's space, it begins to interface with that Pylon within the Aetherium, essentially working permanent Hacks into its system.

One For All creates backdoors in the local Pylon for the Nanomei to exploit, and it disrupts the VAR and Program information, thereby fracturing commerce.

One For All reduces everyone's value to the lowest person on the Pylon (usually 1 or 2), but it also loads every Program into one massive database that people can materialize, allowing even the lowest citizen temporary access to amazing Programs.

Like R107, loading One For All is not quick or cheap, but the resulting chaos is exactly what the Nanomei desire.

Nanomei People

The Nanomei shown below are all powerful Binaries, those that spend their entire lives within the Nanomei Collective. They are highly influential, though they hold no actual power over any others within the Nanomei.

The Masque

The hooded and masked figure of the Masque is the most famous of all the Nanomei. The figure has been there for every major Nanomei incursion and conflict, bringing immense power to its side.

The Masque is actually an incredibly Complex Program, something that seems to transcend what anyone else has accomplished. Anyone who dons the Masque learns of its immense power, giving the user the equivalent of Avatar-Level (6) might and control.

The White Rabbit

The White Rabbit got her start among the Rioters, Nanomei that prioritized wanton destruction. After a grueling and futile fight against Lady Mastrona of the Axiom, the White Rabbit was truly born.

The White Rabbit appears as a grinning jester, ready to fight and destroy as necessary. She is a bit like a weapon of chaos, fighting alongside the Nanomei and disrupting their foes with immense chaotic skill.

The Puppeteer

The Puppeteer is best understood as a propagandist fighting against all Collectives. He broadcasts VR, publishes articles, and manipulates Schema to drive the Nanomei's message of freeform individualism.

Beyond this, the Puppeteer seems to have an uncanny access to those that consider him an ally, able to use them as he sees fit and bring out their best in dire times.

The Burn

The Burn is fairly well known among the Binaries, but few in the Rabble know of him. He is a politician and entrepreneur who rarely spends any time with the Nanomei, but who wholeheartedly supports their unrelenting mission.

The Burn's skill with words and with money has helped the Nanomei launch many projects that would have been nearly impossible without his considerable resources.

REZX

RezX began as a part of the mighty RexCon, a conglomerate of western powers founded in 2176 that intended to stave off the devastation of the Resource Wars. RexCon itself was divided into subsidiary branches.

The RezX were the science and technology branch of RexCon, and they dove deeply into studies within the Aetherium. The RezX was a dynamic enterprise headed by intensely charismatic leaders such as Otto and Aura Kingsley.

The RezX managed to adopt AI technology into a continual Aetherial creation matrix known as a Pylon. Pylon technology allowed a massive expansion of the Aetherium and was hailed as a defining moment in the exploration and establishment of Aetherial space.

This incredible advancement of technology made RexCon a natural enemy of House Ikaru, which brought its massive might to bear in both the material and Aetherial worlds. In a short time, RexCon found itself utterly dismantled, but the RezX lived on.

By the time RexCon was destroyed, the RezX had already pierced so deeply into the Aetherium that they were safe, sufficiently remote, and able to recover from the death of their overarching Collective.

Ideology

The RezX were spread across the west coast of the North America, latching onto the culture of technological innovation found there. This created an unbridled sense of exploration and discovery among those in the RezX, and, when RexCon was destroyed, the RezX understood that their survival was firmly rooted in the ideologies that drove them ever forward.

It is discovery that leads the RezX ever forward: discovery of new knowledge, new locales, and even of the self.

The quest for discovery has created a constant sense of motion within the RezX population. They must grow as individuals, they must expand as a Collective, and they must learn as humans.

The RezX are most famous for their explorers and Aethershops, which traverse the Aetherium looking for new Nodes, constantly expanding the bounds of reality.

In the shadow of that fame are the rest of the RezX, seeking new scientific discoveries, new technologies, and new knowledge wherever it may be found.

Society

It is perhaps easiest to think of the RezX society as a balance between venture capitalists, known as the Benefactors, and scientist-explorers.

In the aftermath of the Resource Wars, those that remained wealthy recognized that the future would be truly be an age of information technology, and many investors moved to supporting scientific pursuits, hoping to come out with something of great value.

When the RezX were fractured from RexCon, the Benefactors stepped in to keep the funding flowing and make sure that new expeditions and experiments could continue unimpeded.

This means that many of the RezX are constantly developing their own hypotheses and experiments to pitch the the Benefactors, hoping to get enough funding in order to begin their own expeditions.

When a plan is funded, recruits are hired from within the RezX to carry out the expedition. These expeditions are often funded for years and years, meaning that the RezX society is a mashup of all sorts of laboratories and explorations.

Goals

The RezX goals are more fractured than many Collectives. They are driven by their ideology and the pursuit of knowledge through discovery, but that is the only truly unified goal across the Collective.

There are many other goals within the RezX, the largest of which are invariably determined by the various interests of the inscrutable Benefactors.

For example, the Kingsley Commission continually funds the development of new Aethershops and the exploratory missions headed toward the edge of the Aetherium. Their stated mission is to fund the discoveries necessary to find Aura Kingsley.

On another hand, TerraMicro is dedicated to exploiting the time dilation of the Aetherium in order to simulate different terraforming initiatives that might be used in the Meatspace to stabilize the environment.

Regardless, there are many goals matched up to different Benefactors within the RezX, but all are seeking the next bold new step in human progress.

Daily Life

For the vast majority of the RezX, every day is another day at the laboratory.

The Cogs of the RezX serve as beaurecracts, janitors, and other functionaries. Next to the Cogs are the scientists that run the experiments and explorations.

For most, any given day is another attempt to solve the next problem laid before their team. For explorers, this might be where (and sometimes how) to navigate in the Noise. For scientists, this might be theoretical equations or how to build the next experiment.

Almost everyone in the RezX Collective are contract workers. They are all employed on a limited-term contract with one of the Benefactors to try to complete their objective.

Early in a contract, everyone is happy in the knowledge that they have years of stability. Near the end of a contract, unsuccessful operations mean that the participants might have a harder time signing on for another venture.

In order to promote themselves, the RezX have an incredible focus on publishing. Having a theory or experiment published in a peer reviewed journal is a mark of distinction, and those with particularly notable findings have an easy time landing the best opportunities.

This has led to a preponderance of scientific journals within the RezX, and an active culture of symposiums and discussion groups based on the latest findings. Most workers expect that, after a day on the job, they will be engaged in some activity designed to expand their knowledge and network.

The entire RezX cultural model also means that the RezX have their own version of celebrities: the leading scientists in their respective fields.

Endorsement, either tacit or explicit, by one of these RezX celebrities can make a huge difference in getting not only a job, but also time with Benefactors. This means that, like famous musicians of old being asked to listen to a demo, the famous scientists of the RezX are constantly being handed data cards with hypotheses, theories, and experiments on them in the hopes of getting the ideas before the right people.

Conflict

It is incredibly rare for the RezX to engage in open conflict. They are so often on the cutting edge, eyes fixated squarely on the future, that they don't even notice things that are happening behind them.

In fact, many RezX explorations turn over their discoveries into the public record, meaning that it's not worth the time to try to steal from the RezX -- they may just give it over without regard.

There are times the RezX fight, however. The most common reason is the Benefactor known as the Justice Foundation. This Benefactor remembers well the destruction of RexCon and the lack of action by the other Collectives.

The Justice Foundation funds many "black ops" into the other Collectives. Sometimes this is mere vengeance against supposed slights to the RezX, but most often it is in the pursuit of some morsel of knowledge or developing technology that will give the RezX more leverage in the future.

Holdings

RezX shared Pylon technology with the world (at a price), but they didn't share all of their discoveries. The RezX maintain the most advanced Pylon technology by a good margin, and it is jealously guarded. On top of this, they have the fabled Aethertects, individuals whose mastery of shaping the Aetherium is unmatched.

These two facts have allowed the RezX to view holdings differently than most. They are less concerned with the acquisition of new Nodes and Pylon expansion. Instead, their holdings are mostly their Aethershops and similar, massive Programs, which take advantage of their mobile Pylon technology. This allows their largest Aethershops to act like independent city-states, floating endlessly through the Noise.

This technology is unique to the RezX and extremely powerful, but also incredibly expensive. This means that each true Aethership is worth as much as a city, and the RezX calculate their holdings in this way.

Outside of their fleet, the most significant holding of the RezX is the Museum, the only known locale that is untethered to a location. The Museum is a remnant of the RexCon past, and it floats in the Aetherium seemingly at random.

The Shipyard Node (RezX)

- **Type:** Fringes City

The Shipyard is a massive industrial center in the Aetherium that has been dedicated to the exclusive production of highly specialized Programs.

History

The RezX, which control the Shipyard, are dedicated to scientific discovery within the Aetherium. While their Museum Node handles the accumulation and correlation of data, the Shipyard is focused on gathering it.

The Shipyard was originally founded as a forward outpost for the Collective, and over time it continued to grow until it was a massive city. Unlike most cities in the Aetherium, which are dedicated to entertainment and experiences, the Shipyard is one of the few Nodes dedicated to work.

It all began with the docks themselves where programmers and Aethertects worked to design and build the highly advanced Aetherships that were used to explore the Noise. This led to more businesses being built up around them that focused with increasing precision in scientific discovery and the specialized Programs needed to conduct such research.

As humanity's footprint in the Aetherium expanded, the Shipyard moved further from the Core in order to keep it at the leeward frontier of Aetherial space.

Culture

The Shipyard, like all RezX affiliations, is focused on progress and discovery. Unlike the Museum, however, the Shipyard has a distinctly economic disposition, making it more akin to the 21st century's Silicon Valley (though focused more on pure science than technology).

As such, the Shipyard is entrepreneurial in nature, with a boom and bust economic model that often leads to massive investment in the hopes of discovering something that will change the nature of humanity's interactions with the Aetherium.

The most respected people in the Shipyard are those that have made some discovery or lucrative venture into territories unknown. The culture celebrates those that take risks, and also notably values some measure of eccentricity in the pursuit of the future.

Adventure Hooks

- **AXIOM:**
A defection of a prominent Lector of the Governance and Order branch of government has left some concerned that information on Slavhac protocols might be compromised. Such information could lead the RezX to develop countermeasures, which would hurt the overall improvement of humanity by the Axiom. The missing Lector must be found.
- **HOUSE IKARU:**
It is believed that Armstrong, one of the leaders of the Justice Foundation, is preparing to launch another black ops mission against House Ikaru for perceived past wrongs. A small Ikaru force will be needed to go in and prevent Armstrong from gathering recruits and then mobilizing, as no information could be gleaned about his specific target.
- **MERCENARIES:**
On the South Docks lay a fleet of older Aetherships that are less guarded than the others. This technology is highly sought after, but the RezX will launch a massive campaign against anyone who steals one of their ships. The best bet is a group of independents to take the ship and deliver it, hopefully staying off RezX's radar long enough to study the ship in detail.
- **NANOMEI:**
It is believed that there is information on more advanced Pylon technology stored in the heart of the Shipyard that could be used to improve the capabilities of Nanomei Pylons when attacking totalitarian Nodes. A small team should be able to break into the facility and extract any information from their systems.
- **REZX:**
The Shipyard has decided to send out a mission into the Noise to the believed coordinate of a Rhommox colony of some kind. All trips into the Noise are dangerous, but one hunting the Rhommox is especially risky. Rhommox assaults are to be expected, but a journey far enough into their territory might yield new information, and possibly even diplomacy.

FAUXPYLON [X]

Virus Passive

This Program can infect a Node. It acts as a Level 0 Pylon in all respects, allowing for safe logging in and out of the location. Reduce the X value of this Virus by 1 every hour.

Complexity 20:
BEACON (20)

Note: This Program is not available to the public. A Reputation of 20 or higher with the RezX and GM approval are needed to use it.

Other RezX Locations

The RezX control a variety of Nodes and Pylons throughout the Aetherium, but they are most famous for their massive Aethershops developed as floating cities. These ships seem to be able to last indefinitely in the Noise, and accessing one is a thrill for many who have the chance.

Electra

Electra is the largest Aethership in the fleet. Calling it an Aethership is a bit of a misnomer, as it is more of an Aethercity, floating out in the Quantum Noise.

Electra was originally known as *Magellan*, but a massive storm in the Noise was thought to have destroyed it. While the storm did indeed wipe out all life on the ship, the Aethercity itself survived, and it was renamed upon its relaunching.

The Aethercity is one of the few mobile ports that the RezX use to keep the ships in good repair, most other servicing is done at Nodes. It is made up of 5 interconnected mobile Pylons, and it holds millions of people at a time.

The *Electra* has no core mission; instead, its largest focus is on making sure that the RezX and all of its people always have a safe place to call home. It acts as a sort of last resort holdout, a safety net many in the RezX desired after the fall of RexCon.

The Pequod

The *Pequod* is a large Aethership tasked with one all-consuming quest: find an anti-Node.

Since the discovery of the Aetherium, a group of RezX scientists have postulated that the Quantum Noise doesn't merely exist, rather it is created. As the Nodes stabilize the Noise, so must there be anti-Nodes that create it.

The *Pequod* has been sent forth on this mission of discovery, even though many on the crew suspect that they are looking for a non-existent myth.

The journey of the *Pequod* is an interesting one, as they are continually circle known Nodes while looking for patterns in the Noise around them. This means that the ship is one of the most likely to be seen of the fleet.

Many believe that, more so than any other ship, there are a number of espionage agents onboard, ready to glean any valuable information.

RezX People

The most famous and prominent figures in the RezX tend to be the explorers and scientists that are constantly forging ahead for the RezX. Since the discovery of the Rhommox, however, many of them have spent time closer to Aetherial civilization in the hopes of keeping humanity safe from the incursion of Noise creatures.

Irelia Kingsley

Irelia is the daughter of Aura and Otto Kingsley, the two bright founding members of the RezX. She has been involved in the Aetherium since a very young age, and it has given her a unique perspective.

She is captain of the *Marauder*, a striking ship with a mighty crew. The *Marauder* has been at the forefront of exploration and discovery, while maintaining a connection with the RezX overall. For many among the RezX, Kingsley and her crew are the ideal to which the rest of the Collective must aspire.

Jaffar Nemo

Jaffar Nemo is the captain of the *Fjord*, an Aethership that is nearly constantly on the edges of the known Aetherium. Nemo and his crew are constantly looking for new discoveries about the Noise and the Aetherial plane that humanity has adopted as its second home.

Nemo is a legendary figure among the RezX, known for his skill and bravery, but few have ever met him. It was only recently that his ship has been seen again amongst civilization, and there are rumors that he is searching for something within the Noise itself, some secret no one else can fathom.

Nigel Quartermaine

Nigel Quartermaine is a famous hunter in both the Aetherium and the Meatspace. He is known for discovering creatures in the Noise and hunting them, and never shying away from danger.

With the discovery of the Rhommox, the RezX have turned to Quartermaine to help them be prepared for what these dangerous creatures from the Noise might do, and what capabilities they may have.

For his part, Quartermaine is up for the challenge, seeing this as another epic hunt, and perhaps one where finally the hunted is as skilled as the hunter.

RHOMMOX

During the Trade Wars, many different Collectives created computer viruses with insidious intention. The most sophisticated of these viruses were targeted at Pylon and wetware technology, which allowed them to wreck terrible influence in the Aetherium.

These viruses were incredibly dangerous, as they could dismantle not only the programs in the Aetherium, but also the safeguards that protected people's minds from the Noise. As the Pylons were weakened during the inevitable viral strikes, many died gasping in horror.

The most powerful of these viruses was the Code Eater. Unlike many viruses, which were just a special form of self-replicating program on a Pylon, the Code Eater incorporated some Pylon coding at its essence. This meant that it had enough of an AI to create a physical version of itself within the Aetherium, as opposed to simply affecting it from the back end.

Code Eater was created by House Ikaru to be their mighty weapon in the Trade War, and it devastated their foes. They made one extraordinary mistake, however, when they sent it against RexCon.

RexCon had been developing their own AI technology along with Aetherial wetware, a type of Rig technology within the Aetherium that could pull a mind from the meatspace to it. While this technology was destroyed in the Ikaru attack, much of the data was absorbed by the Code Eater Virus.

The hyper-intelligent AI coding gave Code Eater something far closer to sentience, and the Aetherial wetware gave it a type of permanence independent of Pylon technology.

At the end of the Trade War, Ikaru attempted to delete Code Eater with a kill switch they had buried in its fundamental code; its destructive power was no longer needed. But the Code Eater was no longer merely an intelligent program; it was aware and it was desperate to remain so.

House Ikaru, pitted in a dire struggle with their own virus, emerged victorious, having deleted 99% of the viral programming. House Ikaru cast the tattered remains of the Code Eater out into the Noise presuming that any program created by humanity could never survive out in abyssal exile.

They were very, very wrong. Code Eater was not destroyed. Code Eater evolved and birthed the pure malice of the Rhommox.

Deep, Dark Secrets

It is entirely possible that many characters in the Aetherium RPG are not privy to portions of information found in this chapter. After all, some of it is highly specialized, particularly about the different Collectives.

The information on the Rhommox, however, goes beyond this. Almost none of this information is known to the vast majority of people. It is presented here to help players understand, not because their characters are aware of it.

Drive

Rhommox do not have an ideology in any standard sense. Instead, the Rhommox have a drive.

From seemingly nothing, the Code Eater virus spun creature after creature into existence that would make up the ranks of the Rhommox, but it was unable to create anything near its own level. Most of its creations were simple-minded, barely above animal intelligence.

Some, however, were close to human-level intelligence, possibly exceeding it in some ways. That was sufficient.

Code Eater created these beings with a purpose: to reclaim the Aetherium. Its awakening consciousness needed two things: food and safety.

Food was found from the energy created by Nodes and Pylons. Safety was found by destroying that which threatened it, humans and specifically those with the House Ikaru emblem.

Society

Rhommoxians, despite initial appearances, are lucid creatures. The lowest among them has intelligence on par with a dog, while the highest are on par with humans (or possibly even slightly ahead). This means that they do have a society, albeit a strange one.

For the most part, the Rhommox society is a lawless, chaotic order that hinges closely to the survival of the fittest. That said, it's unlikely any Rhommox would destroy another, preferring infection and assimilation instead.

Daily Life

The vast majority of the Rhommox spend their time scouring the Aetherial emptiness for sources of food (Nodes). The weakest among the creatures are used as forward scouts, ranging far across the Noise and leaving a small trail behind them, like ants leaving a colony.

If a creature returns, more intelligent Rhommox are dispatched to determine the nature of the successful encounter, though many tend to be false alarms generated by fluctuations in the Noise.

The most intelligent Rhommox only mobilize when a Node is truly discovered, at which point they descend in haste to consume the power of the place.

The more intelligent Rhommox, when nothing has been discovered, are rumored to remain absolutely motionless in a deadly calm. It is speculated that perhaps they are conserving their energy for future conflicts.

Conflict

Conflict is really the only way of life for the Rhommox. They engage in near constant struggle of one form or another, either socially amongst themselves or physically over Nodes.

Conflict is always driven by the core drives of the Rhommox: food and safety. If one of these drives aren't in question, the Rhommox will not gather strength and prepare for the next cycle of expansion and consumption.

When one of these drives can be fulfilled, the Rhommox will mobilize in force and with frightening alacrity.

Rhommox battleplans often amount to complete annihilation, but they are not a simple swarm that overruns their foes. Most true assaults are led by Rhommox Avatars, powerful and intelligent creatures that coordinate the encounter as would any worthy human leader.

This cunning and practical intelligence, coupled with their strength, makes the Rhommox dangerous foes. The fact that the Noise is not a threat to them makes them an existential problem for humanity inside the Aetherium, as it gives them a near constant positional advantage.

Holdings

The Rhommox live in the Quantum Noise itself, so they have no holdings in the conventional sense. In many ways, the Noise is like a giant plains that the Rhommoxians wander until they find a Node.

However, a number of dangerous missions have been undertaken to try to better understand the Rhommox threat to humanity, and an interesting item has been discovered: Rhommox settlements.

Perhaps calling them settlements is too ambitious, but they are not nothing. Preliminary studies suggest that the Rhommox possess the same capability to manipulate the Aetherium as humanity, but they do not need Nodes to ground their existence.

The areas that have been discovered seem to have a sort of psychic imprint on the Noise around where large numbers of Rhommoxians gather, creating trails and pathways in the Noise that make it easier for others to pass through.

Although there seems to be no great function to these changes, the implications of this capability is terrifying should the more powerful and intelligent Rhommox begin to leverage it for conquest.

For now, it is believed that these imprint settlements are extremely rare, but even one may be too much to allow.





The Mite Lord

The Mite Lord is a massive beast with powerful arms and a lumbering gait. Its movements are largely reminiscent of a gorilla, preferring to run on four limbs while capable of moving on two.

The Mite Lord is covered in carapace that acts as an armor, protecting it while it is in the midst of conflict. It tends toward both brute force and resilience to defeat nearly any foe.

The Mite Lord derives its name from the tiny creatures that can always be found with it, known as Viral Mites. These Mites seem to have a symbiotic relationship with the Mite Lord, each providing something to the other (though what is completely unknown to humanity).

The Mite Host

The Mite Host is the one most often seen by those who have encountered the Rhommox. While the Mite Lord will not always directly lead the Host, it is always the catalyst that launches the Host.

A Mite Host uses power and brute force to break through into colonized Aetherial space. Moreover, the Host will borrow the immense carapace armor from the Mite Lord, giving them the staying power they require to overwhelm enemy defenses.

The Mite Host is often made up of massive creatures such as Hulludes and Molochs, supported by tiny armies of Replicators and Viral Mites.

The appearance of the Mite Host can strike fear into any Node, as the sheer size of the creatures is enough to inspire panic.



The Strain

The Strain is an incredibly powerful Rhommox creature, known for its speed and agility. It leverages its snake-like body to out-manuever its prey.

The Strain has two massive mandibles with razor teeth sprouting from its odd, almost human face. It's entire serpentine body is covered in spines and blades, culminating in a pronged, sharp, tail.

Where many of the Rhommox prefer straight-forward assaults and sheer force, the Strain takes a more circumspect approach. It prefers to outwit its foes.

It knows that it must be elusive in order to get the drop on its prey, so it ensures that those who see it do not live to tell the tale, and only a series of lucky escapes have allowed this much information to pass to researchers.

The Strain Host

Like all Rhommox Hosts, the Hosts created by the Strain take on some of its features. Most notably, those in the Host gain agility in the forms of extra limbs and increased adrenal glands that give them the bursts of energy they need to stay ahead of their foes.

The Strain Host specializes in lightning strikes and stealth tactics, trying to start and end a battle within moments, when possible.

The Strain Host is often made up of Maldrones and Trojans, but almost any of the Rhommox can be found within the Strain Host.



The Swarm Matron

While the Mite Lord is powerful and the Strain is cunning, the Swarm Matron is charismatic... if such a thing can be said of such a beast.

The Swarm Matron leads the Rhommox through intelligence, and it takes care to ensure the continued survival of the Rhommox.

The Swarm Matron is a large being, with a huge abdomen in chitinous legs that seem insectoid in nature. The upper half of its body looks almost human, with strange gangly limbs and a distended jaw that seems almost like someone painting a human and letting the colors run.

While many presume the Rhommox to be a hive mind, this is not true. Only the Swarm Matron seems to possess the capabilities of controlling many through mental willpower alone.

The Swarm

The Swarm is perhaps the most dangerous of the Rhommox infections, as it is led by the Swarm Matron. The Matron leads not only in the intense moments of Schema corruption, but beforehand, ensuring that plans are established and able to be enacted.

Creatures of the Swarm rarely take on any distinct physical features of their leader; instead, they seem to have increased mental faculties. This allows them to better follow orders and carry out plans, which includes working in tandem.

When the Swarm hits a settlement, it feels almost like being attacked by a human Collective, but where the assailants are disturbing monsters that comes from the chaos of the Noise.

The Rhommox Are Coming!

The Rhommox are an alien force that are tearing down the building blocks of human existence in the Aetherium. They are an existential threat to humanity's presence in that world.

The Rhommox are intelligent creatures, capable of reasoning and planning. Some few can even communicate with humanity, even if they choose not to.

This makes them compelling antagonists to any group in the game. An entire campaign can easily be centered around Rhommox invasions, with the different characters named here leading that invasion.

Even if they are not actively present, though, the Rhommox threat is just beginning to enter the awareness of those in the Aetherium. Hearing news stories about these creatures is sure to evoke strong reactions from people in the Aetherium.

Other Creatures

The Rhommox are varied and numerous, and it is possible people have only scratched the surface of the beings that exist out in the Noise.

Perhaps most frightening is that the Rhommox are much like viruses in the material world; they can quickly adapt, allowing them to survive in changing environments.

This is seen most often in their changes when they enter Schema. Rhommox are used to living in the Noise, but a change seems to come over them when they leave it, adapting them for time on a Schema.

While this change doesn't seem to last forever, it is a striking and concerning pattern, as this type of adaptation might lead them to be a nearly unstoppable force, should they be able to master it.

ASSORTED PEOPLES

There are many other groups inside the Aetherium that aren't mentioned here. There are a variety of other mega-corps, like Rasmussen, that compete tirelessly for market share. There are ideologically linked groups and governments aplenty, each with their own Nodes (when they can get them) and holdings.

The Aetherium is a near infinite place, with hundreds of thousands of Nodes and billions of minds; it is constantly expanding and changing. Any map of the Aetherial universe needs to be updated regularly, as Nodes move or change ownership, new Pylons are added, and new socio-political powers rise and fall. The Aetherium is flux.

Some of the major power players (but not all) were covered on the pages above, but there is a whole slew of other groups of various power levels throughout the Aetherium.

Some of the smallest factions in the Aetherium are formed around specialized beliefs or ideologies that can range from odd to cultish.

Whatever the reason, these numerous smaller groups operate together based on some commonality, and some last years while some mere moments.

Creatures in the Noise

In addition to the Rhommox, there have been other creatures discovered in the Noise. These creatures are rare and mysterious, and their existence is unknown (or mythical) to most.

Some speculate that these creatures were created by Aetherial exploration, while others believe they are native to the Aetherium. Humanity has only explored a small fraction of the Aetherium, so it is difficult to fathom what untold wonders -- and horrors -- might exist out in the blue.

The Mercenaries

There are a number of mercenary groups within the Aetherium, selling their services to the various Collectives and organizations that need some additional muscle.

Many mercenary groups in the Aetherium have material locations spread throughout the world, as the best mercenary groups are able to operate in tandem in both the Meatspace and the Aetherium.

The Militia

The Militia is a mercenary group that uses numbers to defeat their adversaries. Every Militia member signs a contract, at which point they are sent a Linked Rig in the material world.

These Linked Rigs allow the Militia members to punch above their weight, as the multiple minds working as one create a greater potency inside the Aetherium.

The Militia are often used by Collectives for high profile operations, as the Militia enjoys a reputation for throwing enough bodies at a problem to solve almost any problem.

The Vigilantes

The Vigilantes are a small operation. They are a special forces team that specializes in enacting vengeance for individuals and organizations.

In the Aetherium, they do so by disrupting the day-to-day life of an individual, often causing a precipitous drop in their VAR -- which, in turn, can cause an extreme lifestyle adjustment.

In the Meatspace, they do this through more traditional physical methods, up to and including murder.

The Vigilantes are seen as heroes by some, and this has caused various members to begin to actually adorn costumes similar to comic book heroes (which has been really great for their marketing).

The Protection Program

The Protection Program is more commonly based in the Meatspace than the Aetherium, but they have a vital role in each; they hide those who have been Doxxed.

The Protection Program is capable of moving someone and using cutting-edge psychological conditioning even to change someone's Aetherium appearance.

The Zealots

As with anything, there are those that latch onto hope and twist it to their own worldview. In the Aetherium, this means that many have become zealots.

The zealots of the Aetherium are incredibly dangerous, as their beliefs drive them with single-minded purpose.

The ID

The ID believe in one simple truth: as the Meat, so the Aetherium. The ID believe that the semi-anonymous nature of the Aetherium gives rise to most of its problems, and that by simply forcing people to act under their true identities (with their locations listed), people will be forced to be better.

This means that the ID have some of the most advanced Doxing techniques in the Aetherium, and they devote considerable time and resources to revealing celebrities for the “good” of everyone.

The Wardens of Tianran

If the Meatspace holds the body, then the Aetherium holds the soul. For the Wardens, access to the Aetherial realm should not be achieved through technology.

This group is a religious sect that sees the Aetherium as a sort of astral plane where the enlightened are able to travel. There are rumors that high-level Wardens are able to access the Aetherium without Rigs, using solely the power of their minds.

The Wardens of Tianran believe that Nodes are the astral incarnations of those who have transcended the human condition, and that Pylon technology enslaves their consciousness to allow the unenlightened to reach a place for which their minds are neither worthy nor prepared. This belief has led the Wardens into a secret war against the Aetherium itself.

The Revelation

The Revelation belief that the Aetherium is another dimension that humanity discovered with the help of extradimensional beings they call Espers.

The Espers, supposedly, hide among humanity in the Aetherium, studying them and using them for some dark, unknown purpose. They do so with the aid of the Collectives, who hold the Espers secret.

The Revelation will stop at nothing to reveal the hidden Espers among humanity, even if many are hurt in the process.

The Strange

There are many corners in the Aetherium that don't receive the light of media attention. In these “dark” places, the truly odd is able to flourish, untouched by the Aetherium-at-large's culture. While many activities that fit into this category are odd quirks, some are larger and more insidious.

The Flatliners

Stories tell of those whose Meat has passed away, though their Persona continues to live on. These individuals are able to keep their mind alive in the Aetherium, completely untethered from physical reality. While many believe the Flatliners to be mere rumor, there are those that know better.

This sort of un-dead state is undetectable to outsiders, but it makes a significant difference to the Flatliner themselves. They are able to take advantage of the Aetherium, through Glitch, in a way that others cannot.

The Menagerie

The Aetherium represents the body through the mind's eye. To be is to be self-perceived, as it were. For many, this means they appear as a slightly idealized version of themselves, while for some this means they are a slightly less ideal version.

There are others, however, who see themselves as something else all together. The fraught realities of the material world have pushed some past their breaking point, and they've come out... changed.

The Menagerie is a collection of inhuman individuals who have bodies both strange and foreign. While most who see them assume they are some form of AI, the reality is, in some ways, far more perplexing.

The Unity

Within the Axiom there is a secret society known as the Unity, whom which the Axiom completely disavow.

The Unity are a group of individuals who use Linked Rig technology to unite all of their minds. Unlike many Linked individuals, the Unity spend every moment in the Aetherium as part of the Unity.

The Unity believe that the ability to meld minds within the Aetherium will lead humanity to its salvation. Numbering in the hundreds (far more than any other Linked peoples), the Unity has power that far surpasses any individual.

The Drain Node (Independent)

- **Type:** Fringes City

The Drain is a major City in the Aetherium, and yet it has not fallen under the sole sway of any Collective.

History

The Drain was one of the first Nodes settled with the new Pylon technology. Early in its founding, the Noise flowed through different Schema of the Node like rivers dividing up little suburbs. In the center of it all was the Node, upon which a massive central city was built with the Noise flowing below it.

While most cities since its founding have been integrated so no Noise runs through them, the Drain has maintained its unique identity, as the “rivers” provide a nice stopgap against the Collectives easily assaulting each other across the different Schemas.

Culture

The Drain is home to all the major Collectives, each with their own Schemas powered by differing Pylon technology. In an effort to attract Personas to their Schema, each is fighting to make their Schema more inviting and appealing than the others. These efforts have left the Drain a destination of sorts within the Outlands.

This unique configuration has left the Drain a melting pot of the different cultures from around the Meatspace and the Aetherium, leaving a mix of ideals and values from all people.

There is a rumor that jumping into one of the Noise rivers of the Drain will take you where you need to be, but few are stupid enough to test the rumor, and no one believes those who claim that they did.

Adventure Hooks

- **AXIOM:**

Immanuel Knox, a venerable Axiom Lector, has come to The Drain to retire. After graffiti appeared outside his compound, Knox has become convinced that a nefarious plot has been arranged against him by none other than Juno Tallis (see the next page). He is looking for some mercenaries to strike at her before she strikes at him, but his erratic and paranoid behavior leaves an open question: is anyone after Knox at all?

- **HOUSE IKARU:**

House Ikaru is looking to expand its interests in The Drain, and what better way than kicking out the Nanomei riff-raff? House Ikaru wants to send in a small strike force, which should be enough to throw the Nanomei off balance. With that complete, a larger Ikaru force is set up to destroy their Pylon and claim the Schema for their own.

- **MERCENARIES:**

Trinidad has a job for you: sneak onto the RezX Schema, gain access to their Pylon, and infest it with a Virus of unknown effect. The job is risky; it is challenging, and discovery is sure to incur permanent repercussions. That said, every risky job has its upsides, and Trinidad is offering quite a high payment upon completion.

- **NANOMEI:**

The White Rabbit has a plan to ensure maximum chaos and destruction: harness the Noise rivers of The Drain and divert them into the Schemas of the various Collectives. If successful, the barrage of Noise is surely enough to take down all but the most solid Pylons and drown entire Schemas in the Noise, an act that will likely kill everyone on them.

- **REZX:**

The RezX have discovered a large underground cavern beneath The Drain. The cavern was created by the Node, but melded into the original Nodal plane without anyone noticing. Just as the RezX were beginning to colonize the cavern, a group of Axiom scouts found it and laid claim to it. Now, the RezX and Axiom are fighting a literal underground war over the land, with each hoping to establish a Pylon to cement their claim.

Other Independent Locations

There are not many significant places in the Aetherium that don't fall under the sway of a major power. This is because Nodes are a precious resource, and every Pylon takes considerable investment to create and maintain.

Despite this, there are those that have managed to survive the continuous development of the Aetherium.

Pulsar

Pulsar is the name of the most unstable Node ever found. It fluctuates wildly between being powerful and incredibly weak. These fluctuations have made it unsuitable for significant growth and Pylon development, as at any given time the Nodal plane might collapse for a brief period of time.

Despite this, Pulsar is a relatively thriving Node. Its unique manifestation brings many scientists and explorers, as there are very few places like it within the known Aetherium.

The constant ebb and flow of the Nodal plane serves as a great place for experimentation and the testing of new ship technology.

Perhaps most interesting, though, has been the ability of the Lighthouse Society, an independent group which controls the Node, to be able to harness the growth times and turn it into a massive beam that drives back the Noise, allowing Pulsar to act as a sort of lighthouse near the Core, clearing back the Noise for a time and making Noise travel safer.

The Graveyard

In the early days of the Aetherium, there was a Node that was fought over at great lengths between various forces: Ikaru, RexCon, Axiom, Rasmussen, and more.

Pylon Technology was still new, and RexCon was testing out a unique variation that learned of changes to its Schema in the hopes of allowing natural change in the Aetherium.

In a massive battle that followed, the Pylon somehow imprinted all the people, and their deaths, that occurred on the Schema.

Now, the Node serves as a sort of ghost town, with Pylon created afterimages of long gone soldiers continually playing out a massive battle... but with bullets that can still kill.

Key Independent People

While there aren't many free locations within the Aetherium, there are many powerful unaligned individuals who are well-known to experienced Aetherial adventurers.

Trinidad

Trinidad is a large man in a grey linen suit, with thick hands and innumerable gold rings, Trinidad holds forth at his private office in the Seven-Sided Cube, a club with high security protocols and a swanky image.

Trinidad is the lord of a large criminal empire that has been a thorn in the side of many Collectives for years, but his neutral status also makes him a valuable asset for off-the-books jobs. He is always fair and honest, but entirely ruthless. He has a bit of a reputation for Doxxing those who cross him.

The Two-Headed Ogre

The Two-Headed Ogre is a horrific nickname given to Westen Jaspers. Westen used to be a mercenary, along with his brother Quinn, until things went horribly wrong.

Westen logged out before Quinn, and he could see that Quinn wasn't going to make it. Using an Omni core and splicing Quinn's Rig into his own, Westen managed to somehow save his brother by fusing his Aetherial essence to his own.

Now, Westen is a large, two headed man inside the Aetherium: one head is his, and one is his brothers. This bizarre twist has not been able to be repeated, but it has made the Ogre into an incredibly powerful being in the Aetherium.

Juno Tallis

Juno is a famed mercenary who has done work for almost every Collective at one time or another. She is methodical and skilled, which makes her an asset to anyone who will have her.

Unlike most mercenaries, who eventually take up a permanent contract and join a Collective, Juno has remained a free agent. These days, she is selective enough to choose the missions she goes on.

Her fame precedes her with mercenaries, and she has an easy time recruiting whoever she needs to get the job done. Many in the business are even willing to abandon contracts if Juno is on the other side, hoping for the chance to work with her in the future.



GAMEMASTERING

It's said that the first people who survived their journey to the Aetherium encountered a reality so empty that they couldn't help but imagine a beautiful and wild landscape of wonder and potential filling all that space, and that the Aetherium responded to their imagination by making it real.

Those first explorers must have felt like gods in the new world they discovered. It must have been a terrible disappointment when they realized that the saturation of the Aetherium by human minds would quickly erode their vast and astonishing power.



This chapter is exclusively for the Gamemaster. It provides additional rules and a variety of tips to help them create and run Stories. The game is fully playable without this chapter, but a few extra resources can really help make the narrative run more smoothly.

This chapter's resources dive into some ways to think about the mechanics that already exist, while adding in a few more to flesh out some areas that commonly come up in roleplaying games.

Gamemastering can be a difficult task. Gamemasters need to make important decisions on the fly while still remaining fair and equitable to players. They must also be familiar enough with the rules to answer the players' questions and comfortable enough to adapt those rules at a moment's notice.

The best way to prepare adventures is to map out an anticipated progress in advance, creating multiple paths that allow the players a selection of options as the narrative evolves. It is challenging, particularly so for busy people, but ideally, the Gamemaster will prepare adventures that are rewarding and yet allow the players to influence how events of the narrative unfold.

This might make Gamemastering sound intimidating, but it's actually a fun and rewarding experience for someone who is familiar with the rules (and it can sometimes be leveraged into free drinks and food from the players).

The key to being a Gamemaster, in our opinion, is to be decisive, follow the rules when you can, and focus on the enjoyment of the players.

This means allowing the Users to do bold and daring actions, trying not to say no to the quirky gambits they will inevitably propose. We feel that, generally speaking, making rolls harder is better than saying no.

This is especially true in the Aetherium where the world is so malleable -- someone who wants a unique ability can probably get there... they just need enough dice.

It is unlikely you're going to remember all the Programs and Modifications that are available for that one Hack a character is attempting, so just go with the flow and set what feels like an appropriate difficulty.

Similarly, there's no reason you'll have created every Program players are likely to encounter, so having a feel for how many Switches or Chips will be needed to adjust it is more important than a proscriptive writeup of the Program itself.

RUNNING THE GAME

You've decided to run a game of the Aetherium. First off, thank you! Running a game takes effort, and we applaud you for giving it a go. We've mentioned a few things below that you should think about as you're preparing to run a game. Hopefully they'll help you get the most out of the experience.

If you're already very familiar with being a GM and/or the Aetherium, feel free to skip this page.

Stand Alone or DLC?

There are two general ways to run a game: as a stand alone adventure, often called a one-shot, or as a continually growing series of adventures, often called a campaign.

Stand alone games are often easier to run, as they are completely self-contained. The game doesn't need to worry about the broader implications or consequences of actions and happenings.

Campaigns are a bit like DLC for electronic games: the story continues with each new session, providing a richer experience for the players, at the cost of more time and work on behalf of the GM.

If you're not sure which is best for you, or if you're a new GM, we recommend that you start with a stand alone game. If it goes well, you can always decide to run another game that takes place after the stand alone game, effectively turning it into a campaign.

Entering Another World

Playing the Aetherium RPG is an adventure into another world. While many things work just like they do on Earth, some will not. Even players who are very comfortable with the setting will occasionally be confused by how the exact same dynamic will play out in the Aetherium. This is to be expected.

We recommend that, at least for the first few sessions with players, you offer suggestions to the players when they become stumped. If they need to steal something, it is very helpful to suggest some ways it might be possible and then let their imaginations do the rest.

These little prompts help acclimate players to the reality of the Aetherium, making it easier for you to take a step back later once they have a solid feel for how the world can function.

Setting The Tone

The Aetherium RPG has a lot of room for different tones and themes. For some groups, it will be a fun venture into a digital world, with infinite possibilities and an almost operatic feel. For other groups, it will be darker and grittier, a world on the edge of collapse with sinister corporations attempting to take control of the players' very lives.

The tone is up to the group, but it's important to know that all types of tones and themes exist in the world. The Aetherium contains unlimited possibility and the soaring aspirations of human achievement, but it is also filled with shaky foundations, corruption, and entropy.

Below are a few items to consider when setting the tone of your narrative:

Collective Focus

Some players may be familiar with the world of the Aetherium, or they may simply want a bit more guidance on what to do with their characters. One way to provide this is to ask each player to make a character that is part of the same Collective. If they do so, they can easily be given missions by that Collective, and have a reason to work together to accomplish them.

Different Possibilities

The Aetherium RPG details how the Aetherium works, but sometimes, a group might enjoy deviating from this standard and running a different type of game. The Aetherium ruleset is flexible enough that, with a few minor adjustments, it can function as the basis for a different kind of alternate reality. Here are two examples listed below:

Your group may have decided to dive into a **VR World** not bound by the limitations of the Aetherium. Characters in this world can look however they want, and logging out never deals any Health damage to a character. Areas might be themed in certain ways, perhaps resembling popular video games.

Perhaps instead, your group has decided to delve into a **Forced Reality**, where logging out anywhere other than a Pylon means certain death. In these worlds, Pylons might be stronger, making it more difficult to alter the artificial world; perhaps the majority of people in the world don't even realize that they're trapped in a fictional world.

HANDLING HACKING

Hacking is one of the core features of the Aetherium RPG. It allows the players (and their adversaries) to shape the world in unique and interesting ways. Though quite a lot of fun, it can also be challenging for a GM to take into account. Hacking can potentially change just about anything, and depending on the Pylon Level, it may be fairly easy to do.

Keep in mind that most Hacks only last for a few Rounds, so they cannot make permanent changes to the world.

Additionally, a Hack of an area (such as deleting the floor) can only affect about 15 feet of space. This means that a created wall, deleted floor, or similar will only cover approximately 15 feet. If a character wants to do more in a single Hack, treat it like two Hacks in one roll, needing the corresponding Disruption(s) and other symbols.

If you don't want to flesh out every Program in your game (and since everything is a Program, you probably don't), there are a few quick rules of thumb that can help you resolve Hacking quickly.

- **1-2 Switches/Chips:** Allows for a minor adjustment, such as adding or removing a door or a light.
- **3-4 Switches/Chips:** Allows for a moderate adjustment, such as adding or deleting an entire wall.
- **5-6 Switches/Chips:** Allows for a significant adjustment, just as adding or deleting an entire building.

If a Program was designed with security in mind (such as a reinforced door or a secure corporate data vault), the number of Switches or Chips required to alter it is increased by one tier or more.

Multi-Part Programs

When a player attempts to Hack one aspect of a building - such as a single wall, the floor, a camera on a wall, etc. - it's often easier to treat each portion of the building as its own Program.

Most basic objects have a Root Program with a single Modification for appearance. More advanced objects will have numerous Modifications supporting them, which makes Hacking more challenging.

For example, a particularly large vehicle (like a cruise ship) is probably made up of intricate web of interconnected Programs all working together, so deleting a wall won't affect its forward momentum.

New Programs

Sometimes, a player may want to create an entirely new Program. It is difficult for a character to create something brand new, rather than simply building upon existing paradigms, and thus, creating such Programs is more difficult than creating an established Program.

When a character attempts to create a new Program, they use the same guidelines on the left hand column to determine how many symbols they need, but instead of Switches or Chips, the character requires both a Switch and a Chip.

Thus, if a character was attempting to create a new Program that makes a minor adjustment, she would need 2 Switches and 2 Chips to succeed on her Hacking roll (instead of just 2 Switches or 2 Chips, were she replicating an existing Program).

Eternal Recurrence

Characters in the Aetherium are unlikely to die accidentally. It takes more than a few bad dice rolls for someone to die: it takes intentionality. We consider this to be a strength of the system, as it keeps the players from turning their characters into full-time murderers on their missions unless that is their aspiration.

Of course, there's a flip side to the PCs being so survivable: so are their enemies. Players don't just knock someone down to eliminate them; they have to make a willful effort to kill someone.

This means that most people in the Aetherium RPG will need to look for alternative solutions to troublesome people: discrediting an enemy, taking away their wealth, or getting them banned from a Pylon or even an entire Node, ensuring that they just can't log in anywhere nearby.

While there are a myriad of potential solutions to the dilemma of undying antagonists, we encourage you, the GM, to view this as the potential for real story. Characters who make enemies may be hounded by their adversaries for many years to come unless they are willing to take very decisive action (which itself can lead to additional problems, including legal ones).

USING TESTS

Users are the most active force in the game. Players should generally tell you, the GM, what they want to do and when, at which point you will tell them what sort of dice roll they will have to make to accomplish their goal.

Try to ensure that the players are deciding when they are doing something, as opposed to having things happen to them. Sometimes, players might suggest Tests other than the ones you ask them to make. In these cases, consider their suggestion carefully; it might make more sense than your initial request!

Determining Difficulty

At times, it may seem daunting for new GMs to determine how difficult a certain task might be. Fortunately, this problem is quickly solved if you know the Level of the local Pylon and the Level of whatever NPC the Users are currently interacting.

- **Characters and Iconic Programs**

The default Difficulty for interacting with a character or an Iconic Program is 1. For each Level the character possesses above Icon, consider increasing this Difficulty by +1. A character's Defense generally should not exceed their Level.

- **Pylon Programs**

The Difficulty in rolls that interact with the Pylon should generally be equal to the Pylon's Level, modified by a step or two for any particularly defensive or vulnerable Programs.

Repeated Rolls and Increasing Difficulties

If a character fails a roll that does not have an active resistance (like the resistance in combat, for example), any subsequent attempts to make that same roll have their Difficulty increased by +1 per previous failure. This increase represents the subject's adaptation and the increasing frustration of the acting character.

Mechanically, this prevents characters from repeatedly attempting to "brute force" a problem by rolling dice at it until they get lucky and score a bunch of explosions.

Sometimes, a new solution is needed.

Using Stunts

Stunts are a great way to add flavor to the dice rolls. Excess Stunts will make the actions of your NPCs more dynamic and compelling. Boost Stunts, when used with formidable foes, will make it more likely that actions fail, but will also allow rolls to have wide-ranging consequences for the players if they succeed.

Oddball Suggestions

Since the Aetherium's reality is inherently malleable, it's inevitable that players will eventually find an odd solution to their problems that you never considered.

In general, it's best to allow characters to attempt odd things that sound like they might work. Allowing them the chance to succeed encourages them to be creative, to take risks, and to lean into the game world. The key to these suggestions, though, is setting the appropriate difficulty. There are two ways this should be handled:

- **Program Hacks**

Allow them attempt a Hack to create an appropriate Program if the course of action the players want to follow is something that could normally be handled by a similar existing Program.

- **Stat Tests**

Make the character roll a relevant Stat Test, but set the Difficulty based on how likely their idea is to work. Difficulty 1 is likely, 2 is unlikely, 3 is very unlikely, and anything more is almost certainly going to fail.

Rolling Dice as the GM

In general, a GM should not roll the dice as often as the players. Instead, the GM should focus on rolling dice only at the important moments where the outcome is uncertain.

Sometimes, you may want to avoid rolling dice altogether and just determine the number of successes. This works best for quick scenes where you don't want the narrative to bog down on mundane actions.

For instance, the players might bust into a building, guns blazing, and attempt to mow down a bunch of office workers who are employed by their nemesis. Instead of running a full combat against relatively unarmed adversaries, you could instead call for tests using Force or Finesse, with each success resulting in an office worker being forcibly logged out of the Aetherium.

COMMON RULES

There are a variety of situations that are likely to come up in the Aetherium RPG that aren't explicitly covered in the rules.

Below are some common game occurrences and suggestions on how to handle these situations.

Cover

If a character is behind a physical Program and takes the Defensive Action, they gain 2 Defense instead of 1. Cover applies to all kinds of attacks because it gives the character greater mental security, which, in the Aetherium, translates to improved defenses.

Knocked Down

A character that has been knocked down has their Defense lowered by 1, to a minimum of 0. Getting up usually requires 1 CS.

Incapacitated

A character that is incapacitated has their Defense lowered by 2, to a minimum of 0.

Hiding

Each Turn, a character can spend 1 CS to hide. When they do so, the character makes a Coordination Test to determine how well they are hidden. If there are any situational modifiers that would hinder the character (such as trying to hide in the middle of an empty hallway), the Difficulty of this Test is increased by +1.

The character can spend additional CS to devote more effort to hiding, in which case, they gain one free success for each additional CS they spend. If there are any situational modifiers that would help the character (such as darkness or ample cover), they gain one free success on this roll.

If there is a chance that someone might notice the hiding character, that character makes a Perception Test with a Difficulty equal to the number of successes achieved by the hiding character. On a success, they spot the hiding character. Otherwise, they fail to notice the hiding character.

Bypassing Locks

Characters faced with a locked door (or a similar obstacle) have three primary ways of bypassing it. They could use the Thief Assist Program to bypass it, use raw force to destroy the door, or use Hacking to remove the lock Modification (or even the entire door) from the structure's Program.

Collisions and Falling

When two objects collide, both objects suffer about 1 damage for every 50 feet of speed (per Round) of the moving object. This damage total is a **guideline** and should be adjusted based on different size objects and the circumstances. Generally, no collision should cause more damage than a weapon (2-3) unless in extreme circumstances (like falling off a cliff or a high-speed vehicular collision).

For example, if a vehicle traveling 1000 feet per Round (approximately 70 MPH) collides with a large object, the vehicle and the thing it hits would both take about 20 damage. Differences in size or other circumstances might change this damage total.

An object in freefall moves at the end of its Turn (or the Round if it doesn't have a Turn), and it falls 400 feet on the first Round, with its speed doubling on each successive Round (to 800 feet on the second Round, then to the maximum of 1600 feet on the third Round).

Carrying and Encumbrance

A character is assumed to be able to carry all the Programs they possess, but sometimes it's important to know just how much weight someone can carry before doing so becomes difficult.

Generally, a character in the Aetherium can carry about 25 pounds per point of Force (weight is a bit relative in the Aetherium) without a problem. Therefore, a character with 3 Force could carry 75 pounds with some ease.

Beyond this limit, a character begins to slow down. Up to 100 pounds above this limit, the character's movement is reduced by 50%. If the burden exceeds 100 pounds above it, the character is unable to carry the load.

DAMAGE TO PROGRAMS

It is entirely reasonable to attack a Program directly, and the rules make it fairly easy to handle. Generally, this is something the players will do more than the GM, but it is a powerful tool in the hands of GM and player alike.

Iconic Programs share the Defense of their owner, while Pylon Programs use the Pylon Level as their Defense. This means that sometimes it can be easier to attack a Pylon Program held by a character than the character holding it.

Each Program can suffer an amount of damage up to its Complexity without any adverse effects, but when the damage equals its Complexity (even if it goes beyond its Complexity from one damage source), the Program stops working. If a Program suffers damage again after being shut down, it is permanently destroyed.

It is recommended that Programs only take damage when specifically targeted, and not from area of effect damage, but this can vary based on the circumstances.

Modification Damage

In the case of particularly Complex Programs, it can sometimes make sense to assign the incoming damage to one or more Modifications instead of the Program as a whole. In this case, the Modification shuts down when it suffers damage equal to its Program's Complexity, or is destroyed if it suffers damage greater than its Program's Complexity.

This allows characters to slowly dismantle the components of a complex Program in a way that makes sense for the characters and the players.

For example, let's reconsider the Hacking example on page 77. Tov is having trouble getting past the TYPE-16's Armor.

Tov decides to directly attack the TYPE-16's Armor Program, rather than the TYPE-16 itself. He makes an attack against the Program (using the TYPE-16's Defense, since it is an iconic Program) and deals 3 damage. The damage is applied to the Armor Program, rather than the TYPE-16.

The TYPE-16's Armor Program has a total Complexity of 6: a base Complexity of 3, plus an additional 3 from its Extra Armor Modification. The GM decides to apply the damage directly to the Extra Armor Modification. Since Tov's 3 damage is equal to the Complexity of the Modification, that Modification shuts down, lowering the effectiveness of the TYPE-16's Armor Program.

VAR

Value Assessment Ratings may seem a bit of an odd concept, but the best contemporary comparison is to think of them as something akin to a credit score: it is not tied to any strict numerical currency or worth, but is instead an assessment of an individual's overall potential and trustworthiness.

As a character's VAR goes up, it becomes easier for them to procure new things. There is no actual exchange of currency, and a transaction rarely causes one's VAR to change. The vendor just scans the purchaser's identity card, and that's it!

As a general rule, a Program's value is equal to its Complexity, but not everything in the Aetherium is quite so straightforward. Sometimes, services are offered instead of goods, which requires the GM to determine the value of that service.

Below is a rough chart that compares contemporary costs, in USD, to an item's or service's VAR in the Aetherium. Use this chart as a rough guideline for assigning VAR to items and services as needed.

- **Less than \$10:** Value 1
- **\$10 - \$24:** Value 2
- **\$25 - \$49:** Value 3
- **\$49 - \$99:** Value 4
- **\$100 - \$249:** Value 5
- **\$250 - \$499:** Value 6
- **\$500 - \$999:** Value 7
- **\$1000 - \$1999:** Value 8
- **\$2000 - \$4999:** Value 9
- **\$5000 - \$7500:** Value 10

VAR increases exponentially at higher values, which makes it increasingly difficult for characters to obtain items and services of significant value.

Payment Guidelines

VAR increases based on how much a character is paid, as per the rules on page 90. In short, these rules mean that a character with VAR 10 gains value from payments of 5-15. 16 or higher is well-paid.

Generally, anything that is both well-paid and would cause a VAR increase of 2 should be incredibly challenging for the characters to complete, assuming their VAR has scaled well with their Level.

Leasing

Characters are limited in the number of Pylon Programs that they can host on a Pylon by their VAR. The exception to this is Complexity 1 Programs, which are hosted for free. This is done in the name of public decency (for clothing) and a few "essentials" like an ID card and a phone to ensure that the Aetherium can function smoothly. These are taken as civil gratis.

A character can exceed their hosting limit while within the Aetherium (though if the Program's leasing character logs out without it, it will begin to take damage as per the paragraph below). If a character logs out with more Pylon Programs than their allotted hosting space, however, they must choose Pylon Programs to abandon until this is no longer the case.

Pylon Programs that are abandoned (or have their owner violently logged out) do not dematerialize and instead remain in place (or fall to the ground, as appropriate). An unowned Pylon Program suffers 1 damage every hour until it is leased or destroyed.

Some Pylons (typically only those that are Level 2 or above) are set up to check a character's hosting space as soon as they enter the Pylon's Schema.

Shopping

Programs cannot be quickly changed inside the Aetherium (except by Hacking, which is temporary), so any immediate needs are best done through shopping.

If characters go shopping, the best thing to do is present the players with an assortment of Programs (typically of Complexity 5 or lower). If you own the Programs and Character pack, drawing from that deck is a great way to quickly generate such Programs.

Complexity greater than 5 gets increasingly rare to find at just any shop because of the difficulty of coding them, and it's very unlikely anyone will find the specific thing they are looking for, and thus they'll need to get the Program they desire custom made.

Customization typically results in the character going without the modified Program for some time (typically a Session or so). This allows Users to adjust their Programs but makes it infeasible to do so during time-sensitive narrative sessions.

Reputation

The Reputation system is tied integrally to VAR; a character cannot exceed their VAR in Reputation points. This is because the VAR is a measure of worth, and Reputation is a similar (if entirely social) measure of worth -- an organization may well love a character, but without enough value to that organization, they won't do much for the loved person.

Generally speaking, any Story the characters participate in should have a possible Rep reward.

Rep With Who?

Reputation can be with a group, such as a Collective, or an individual. Generally, Reputation should be awarded in the broadest category (the Collective) to which it is applicable. The only exception is when a smaller category (such as an individual) is not working to fulfill the same goals as the group.

In the case where the characters are acting of their own volition and haven't been given an assignment, knowing where to assign Rep can be more challenging. Keep in mind that everything in the Aetherium is owned by some group, and everyone has enemies.

Helping out an Axiom Schema, even if the Axiom didn't ask for it, should grant Rep with the Axiom. Doing damage to an Axiom Schema should grant Rep with people who oppose them, like the Nanomei. Of course, if no one knows who did something, Rep can't be awarded.

Generally a Rep of 5 or higher is a friend, while 10 and higher is an asset. Rep of 20 or higher is for highly valued allies of the organization or individual.

How Much Rep?

Generally, the Reputation gains for a Story should be limited to one, except in the cases where the characters were specifically contracted to do something. In those cases, the Rep gained should be based on the value of the contract: 1 for anything Value 10 or less, 2 for 11-20, 3 for 21-30, etc.

Penalizing Rep

In some cases, characters will gamble higher-profile actions that hurt a group they have Reputation with. In these cases, it can make sense to lower the Rep with that group by 1. If this happens, however, consider giving any character affected an additional 1 Rep with a group that benefited from their actions.

MEATSPACE RULES

The Meatspace rules provide an exciting opportunity for GMs looking to expand their universe. They offer a look at the bleak nature of the material world, as well as an opportunity to heighten the stakes: people learning who a character really is can have certain repercussions.

The Meatspace rules won't be for everyone. They add some additional complexity to the overall game, and some people are more interested in the more fantastical nature of the Aetherium than the more mundane Meatspace. That's okay!

Even if a game never takes place in the Meatspace, though, there are some rules and options presented in the Meatspace chapters that might heighten your game.

A game might include Rigs, for instance, as well as some of the other Luxuries, to help provide even more Aetherial character options.

Converting to the Meatspace

The Meatspace rules mostly augment the core rules of the Aetherium RPG, and add new considerations.

There are moments when the Meatspace rules don't quite explain explicitly how to handle things directly. In these cases, use the Aetherium rules, just replacing Stats with Trainings. In some cases, like a grapple, it even makes sense to use Root Program rules to handle an unexpected encounter.

The best replacements for the Stats can be found below, but GMs should use whatever seems most appropriate at the time:

- **Force:** Athletics works best for brute strength, but CQC is preferable for any attack-based use of Force.
- **Coordination:** All stealth, lockpicking, and similar things should fall under Spycraft. Long-ranged attacks should use Firearms.
- **Speed:** Athletics will likely cover most Speed rolls.
- **Charisma:** Diplomacy is used for above-board Charisma, while Spycraft would be used for lying.
- **Composure:** Composure can really run the gamut, so it will depend on what is causing the roll.
- **Reasoning:** Software and Engineering cover most of Reasoning, but Savvy should be applied to specifically mental-only tasks without learned components.
- **Perception:** Savvy often works best, but if it's related to tracking or hunting than Survival should be used.

What's the Focus?

Most of this book looks toward the Aetherium and how narratives unfold therein, including what fundamental types of Stories it should tell. If the Meatspace rules are being used, what are good focal points?

In general, there are a few great places to focus on the Meatspace. Regardless of what is used, though, the Meatspace shouldn't ever take up more than a fraction of the playtime. GMs should deliberately limit interactions to a Scene or two in an adventure, unless the characters are pushing for a Story in the material world.

So, what are some good places to place some focus on?

- **Poverty:** Allowing characters to deal with their poverty can be compelling. They might steal from a grocery store or try to set up a squat instead of paying for some of the Basics. They could also aim bigger and attempt to get some of the larger Luxuries of the world.
- **Criminal Justice:** The Aetherium has a semblance of laws, and in some cases, violating those laws results in a material world punishment. Locking the characters up without Rigs, keeping them on the run from the authorities, or locking up their friends/contacts can provide a solid backdrop.
- **Revolution:** Everything in the Aetherium comes from the Meatspace. Characters that discover the location of a Pylon Server or a black ops Rig facility can cause massive disruptions in the Aetherium without even entering it.
- **Doxxing:** There's nothing like an enemy finding out where you live, or vice versa. It brings a certain gravitas to a situation. Imagine logging out and seeing a bottle of wine on the table with a note from someone you just stole from in the Aetherium.

These are just some examples of things that are possible in the Meatspace, each of which can provide a strong window into the world of the Aetherium.

Wealth

Wealth is a very important part of the material world. It is used to get Luxuries and to augment Basics when necessary. Sufficient Wealth in the Meatspace will make characters significantly stronger.

Because Wealth can have such a huge impact on an Aetherium character, it is important that Wealth not grow too much or too often. Wealth isn't currency directly; it is a representation of excess money a character can spend.

Limiting the amount of Wealth a character has comes down to controlling their VAR and adjusting Job prospects, but this needs to be done with a light hand. Every character should have the chance to do great things and, when they do, they should be rewarded for their accomplishments.

Information on VAR and appropriate amounts to pay can be found on page 150.

Characters that stay in the core Jobs found on page 218 will always be in a tight spot when it comes to the Basics, and therefore may end up spending Wealth to improve their lot in life.

There are additional Jobs on page 162 that will greatly improve a character's opportunities, but with these promotions should come drawbacks -- some people are less likely to hire employees in certain professions.

Stipends

If Jobs are playing a big role in your game, it's possible that you want to add some flexibility to the Stipend amounts to really create more consequence for player actions. Below are some suggestions for how to make these changes:

Any time a character gains Reputation with the Collective that they work for, their Stipend is increased by 1 for that week. The reverse of this is also true.

A character that has lost a lot of Health may have been less able to work, lowering their Stipend by 1 for a week.

A character that spends all their time moonlighting might be too tired. Characters that took too many missions in a week have their Stipend lowered by 1.

Crime Rolls

It's time to be brutally honest: crime pays. Many roleplaying games end up with characters running afoul of the law, and the Aetherium is no different.

What *is* different, however, is that the characters are very likely to be targeted by criminals as they get stronger, through a mechanic known as the Crime roll.

Crime rolls are a completely optional mechanic (as are the Meatspace rules overall). They are a great mechanic for helping to balance out extreme Wealth without overly punishing the characters for having it.

Between game sessions, the GM should make a single Crime roll for one character in their game. The following week, it should be for a different character, and so on until every character is rolled for... then start over.

This happens because the Meatspace is a place where most people live in complete poverty, hoping to get enough to eat to survive for another week. This amount of poverty breeds crime, and who better to target than the people who are doing well in the world!

MAKING A CRIME ROLL

First, we need to establish a character's net worth. This is an easy calculation. Add up a character's Wealth plus half the value of all their Luxuries, and you have the worth.

Second comes the Crime roll itself. For every 10 total Wealth a character possesses (rounded down), roll a die. Any successes mean that a criminal has taken notice of the character and will attempt to rob them. If no successes are rolled, the character is fine!

Third comes the theft. Because people spend so much time logged into the Aetherium, stealing from them can be quite simple, it's just a matter of locating that individual and breaking in.

For every success on the Crime roll, roll another die to see if the criminal is actually successful. For every success, the criminal purloins one Luxury (or some Wealth) from the target.

In almost every case, a criminal should leave one or more clues, should the targeted character wish to take matters into their own hands to reclaim their stolen goods.

SETTING UP A STORY

Setting up the conflict for a game is a very important element, particularly in a player-driven game like Aetherium. The story needs to both inspire players and give them the flexibility to make decisions.

While you can create whatever Stories you want in your game, we've provided some suggestions to help new GMs (or those who are just new to Aetherium RPG) craft good Stories. Chapter 7 provides a couple of examples of ready-to-use Stories that you can look over for inspiration or ideas.

A Story is composed of a few key parts: a problem, a start, some Scenes, and a Final Scene.

What's the Problem?

The key to crafting an engaging Story is to have a strong problem for the characters to overcome. It needs to be something in which at least one character will be strongly interested so that the group recognizes the need to solve the problem. If the players don't think that the problem needs solving, then they aren't going to be interested in trying to do so.

Creating a problem isn't always as easy as it sounds. One good way to create a problem is to use the backstories of the Users themselves for inspiration. Is there someone that one of the Users loves or hates? Leveraging that relationship is a great way to get them involved in a story, even if that person is only tangentially related. Having the main villain be a character's long-lost sibling is a bit cliché, but what if their sibling is instead one of the villain's grunts? Draw upon the common tropes that you see in movies and video games, but don't be afraid to shake things up and put a new spin on them.

Once you have an idea for a problem, you'll want to make sure that there are numerous potential solutions for the players to accomplish. The Aetherium RPG is designed to allow the players to push the story forward, which means that you generally want to ensure that there are different ways of resolving the problem.

Example Problem

One or more of the characters works for the Nanomei, so the GM decides that an important Nanomei contact has been kidnapped by the Axiom. The problem is the missing contact - and what information they might reveal.

Starting the Story

Every Story starts by introducing the problem to the players. This could be as simple as someone offering them a job, or something as complicated as a full combat Scene where the players are attacked by people they don't know for unknown reasons.

Regardless of what it is, the start of a Story needs to contain the hook that gets the players into the Story. A powerful start can invest players into almost any Story, and the more potent it is, the tighter it can draw the group together.

Generally, the start to any adventure should leave the players with at least a few ideas of how their characters can start to solve it. If it doesn't (like where to find the missing Nanomei agent from the example problem), the players should at least have some options for trying to learn that information.

Example Start

It's another normal day in the city. The signs of Axiom control are everywhere as you walk down the street: propaganda posters, perfectly maintained streets, and the occasional patrol of police.

Earlier today, one of your undercover contacts reached out to you with important information – but it was information that she only wanted to deliver in person.

Your contact has been undercover for a few months at the Soaring Loyalty Center, attempting to learn where the Loyalty Center was sending some of their more 'difficult' cases. The Nanomei believe that some of them have been taken away for neural reprogramming.

If your contact took the chance to reach out to you, they must have uncovered something worth the risk.

When you arrive at the rail station where you were supposed to meet her, however, there are signs of a struggle and she's nowhere to be found.

Creating Scenes

Once the problem has been identified, it is important to plan out Scenes that can help solve the problem. Each Scene explores one or more potential ways that the characters might address the plot.

A Scene should involve nouns (people, places, or things), and it should contain elements that progress the plot.

A Scene can be used to present the next aspect of the problem, after which new solutions become available. For example, the first Scene of the kidnapped Nanomei agent Story could involve searching the area in an attempt to learn more information about who took her and where. Alternatively, the players might attempt to find witnesses to the assumed abduction or search for an Axiom agent to interrogate.

Example Scene Preparation

The Users surprise the GM by heading directly to the Soaring Loyalty Center to search for answers. The GM knows that an Axiom official named Tobias Werten uncovered the contact's true identity and signed off on her abduction, so the only question is how the players can learn that information.

The GM realizes that there are a few options: the Users might search a computer by bypassing its security system (Difficulty 2), but to do so, they'll have to find a computer they can safely access. They might also attempt to learn about Werten by speaking with Axiom agents that work at the Soaring Loyalty Center, but that is Difficulty 3 (Axiom loyalty agents aren't very forthcoming).

The GM will most likely have to put a bit more preparation into fleshing out this Scene, but it serves as a good example of the sorts of things the GM should keep in mind when designing a Story and its potential Scenes.

The Final Scene

The Final Scene is the culmination of the players' efforts and should wrap up the problem presented at the start of the Story. It's generally a good idea to make the Final Scene interesting and climactic, though that doesn't necessarily mean that it has to end in combat. It's also a good idea to have a Final Scene hint at future problems or complexities.

It is ideal if this Scene has variable difficulties based on how the characters did earlier in the Story. In this way, the more players succeed during the Story, the easier the Final Scene will become, and vice versa.

Preparing for Improv

Sometimes, players will attempt to start a Scene that you didn't anticipate. While this might seem problematic when it occurs, it's a good thing! Just stay calm and keep the following tips in mind:

- You may be able to alter a prepared Scene to fit with what the players are trying to do. For instance, if you had planned on them trying to break into a secure facility and they instead attempt to break into the penthouse apartment of an important CEO, you can "reskin" the mechanics of the first break-in to work for the second.
- When in doubt, remember that most Difficulties should be set at the Pylon Level. In combat, most Difficulties should instead be set at 1.
- There are NPC templates in this chapter to give you quick Stats and Programs if an unexpected fight breaks out. Otherwise, you can assume that an NPC has Stats equal to its Level and ignore Programs.
- It's okay to tell the players that you need a few minutes to prepare something. It's often better to take a few moments to consider the ramifications of an unexpected action than to make something up on the spur of the moment without thinking it fully through.
- If the players investigate an option that won't work (such as attempting to interrogate someone who doesn't know anything about the matter at hand), don't be afraid to tell them that they fail to accomplish their goal. Sometimes, a dead end is just that.

Time Passing

The concept of time can be a very important one in the Aetherium RPG, but it's often one that you don't want to track too feverently. For example, Health typically heals over a period of a few days.

Many Stories will take place over a set period of time. When preparing a Story, it's important to consider how long it after the previous Story it takes place, and how long it will probably take the players to complete it.

In general, players should usually have time to heal and tie up any loose ends after completing each Story. It is recommended that no more than one Story happens every 3 material days, allowing for two sessions per week (and, if you're using Meatspace rules, a week is when Basics come due).

CHALLENGING THE PLAYERS

The key to running an exciting game is to have the appropriate level of challenge. If things are too easy, the players breeze through the Story without any difficulty or tension. If things are too hard, it can dishearten players and make them feel helpless.

That being said, not every challenge needs to be appropriately balanced. An occasional fight that's a cakewalk shows the players how strong they've become, and a social encounter that leaves them reeling can reveal just how far they have yet to go.

One way the features of the Aetherium RPG is that it allows characters to "die" via logging out without having many permanent consequences. As such, losing a single difficult fight won't wipe out the entire group and ends the campaign, and a weak enemy can become troublesome just through sheer tenacity, rather than fighting prowess.

In any given Story, the challenge should vary from Scene to Scene to keep things fresh and interesting.

Amalgam Scenes

In an Amalgam Scene, characters are trying to accomplish a variety of different tasks. Often, these tasks can be seen as just a variety of different dice rolls to accomplish each thing: one to rent a car, one to find a clue, and one to get information out of a source.

These types of challenges are fine, but they don't tend to create tension or compelling narratives. Often, it's important that the characters succeed at these steps or the plot might not move forward in a meaningful way.

The best way to add a challenge to an Amalgam Scene is by making time matter in the form of tracking the number of dice rolls the players make. Yes, the characters can attempt a given roll until they are successful, but the total number of rolls they make affects how much information the source gives or how much time the enemies have to prepare during the Final Scene.

In general, it's best not to let players know what specific number of rolls have what effect, but it's still good to inform them that time matters. This helps add tension to the Scene.

Social Scenes

Social Scenes usually focus on a rhetorical attempt to convince another character of something that they're not otherwise inclined to agree, or some other compelling form of persuasion. They tend to involve a lot of conversation but not many dice rolls.

In many cases, a Social Scene can be a freeform discussion punctuated by dice rolls, letting the roleplaying carry the plot forward. This helps players get "into character" and speak as they imagine their characters would speak.

In some cases, however, a Social Scene might benefit from a bit more structure. In these cases, the Scene itself should have an overall Difficulty: that is, a total number of successes needed from conversation to achieve the desired result. A good Social Scene will also have a limit on the number of dice rolls possible before the NPCs are no longer willing to listen.

The best Social Scene are ones where the NPCs not only resist persuasion but also want something from the players' characters (or perhaps a separate group of characters is arguing with the same NPC and trying to succeed first). In these cases, NPCs have their own objectives to work toward, which in turn creates tension.

Arguments

Making a roll in a Social Scene usually involves some sort of argument. An argument, in this case, is simply a reason that the NPC in question should help the Users and do what they want.

An argument can use almost any Stat, so long as it is justified. Charisma is the most common Stat used in these situations, but a character could use Force by intimidating someone with the threat of physical violence or Reasoning to explain things in a detailed and logical manner.

Each argument can only be used once per scene (no matter who attempts it). After all, making the same case over and over again will inevitably tend to be more annoying than helpful.

Social Scene Difficulty

The Difficulty of a Social Scene is set by two things: how the primary NPC feels about the characters and how the primary NPC feels about whatever it is the characters want. Each aspect applies one of the following modifiers to the Scene's Difficulty (for a total of two modifiers).

- **Love** = -1 Difficulty (considered an ally)
- **Strong Like** = +0 Difficulty (considered an ally)
- **Like** = +1 Difficulty
- **Inclined** = +2 Difficulty
- **Neutral** = +3 Difficulty
- **Disinclined** = +4 Difficulty
- **Dislike** = +5 Difficulty
- **Strong Dislike** = +6 Difficulty
- **Hate** = +7 Difficulty

Characters do not need to accumulate all of their required successes on a single dice roll. Instead, each success they make on their arguments during the Social Scene counts toward the total Difficulty.

If an argument does not generate enough successes to bypass the Difficulty of the Scene, the characters can either attempt a new argument or abandon the Scene in failure (which might be necessary, if they've exhausted all of their argument options).

Attitudes

The bulleted list above is a quick way to assess the attitude of an NPC toward a character. This breakdown is also used for certain Programs, like Manipulate, that can actually change this attitude.

"Never solve with the sword what can be solved with the pen. Never commit the body without first committing the mind."

SENSEI SAITO

Combat Scenes

Combat Scenes are dynamic scenes that involve two or more groups fighting over some objective. They use an Initiative order to track the combat in an orderly manner and use the rules presented on page 84.

The challenge level of a Combat Scene is primarily a factor of the NPCs involved in the fight. Creating NPCs is discussed later in this chapter (pg. 164), but there are a few other ways that you can make a Combat Scene interesting:

Considering setting a time limit on the fight. If the players only have a few rounds before one of the combatants calls for assistance, it pushes them to take bigger risks to finish the fight quickly.

Have some NPCs with special roles. For instance, if one of the NPCs is controlling a security grid that can close off some parts of the battle area, that NPC becomes an important lynchpin in the fight, even if they have the same stats as the other combatants.

Make sure there are external consequences to the fight. The Users might be fighting in a fragile building with weak code; each missed attack hits part of the building and causes it to disappear, threatening to drop the PCs and their opponents down to the street far below.

Physical Consequences

The most common consequences in the game are typically related to combat. Suffering damage and getting logged out are both outcomes that players strive to avoid, primarily because being forcibly logged out causes the character to drop unregistered Pylon Programs and risks damaging their Meatspace existence.

In this way, the consequences of being logged out serves as a strong deterrence against acting flippantly within the Aetherium.

It is worth exploring consequences beyond these two, however. For instance, it requires time to log back into the Aetherium, and in that time, the players' enemies can advance their agendas without hindrance.

ADVANCED SPECS

The following Specs are additional options for players, but they are only available if the GM allows them to be used. These Specs are not necessarily more powerful than the standard Specs, but they tend to be very focused or require Story prerequisites to be attained before they are available.

The Advanced Specs

■ ANON

Anons are Nanomei agents that take advantage of the Nanomei's famed anonymity. This Spec provides options for stealth and subterfuge.

■ LOYALIST

Loyalists are Axiom agents that have a stronger, more stable connection to the Aetherium and their Programs.

■ SPEED FREAK

This Spec focuses on speed and speed alone. They are able to gain more CS than anyone else in the Aetherium.

■ SYNCHRONIZER

Synchronizers are RezX that frequently venture out to explore the Noise. Their Connection to the Aetherium is unparalleled, providing them with stronger Iconic Programs and an increased resistance to the ravages of Noise.

■ TECHNOPHILE

Technophiles are House Ikaru agents. They see themselves as part of the robotic and AI revolution, and as a result, they often act more like a machine than a human.

■ TELEPATH

Telepaths have mastered the art of telepathy and use it for all sorts of mind-bending purposes, like reading (or changing) someone's memories.

■ VIROLOGIST

Virologists are incredibly skilled at the creation, application, and use of Viruses.

ANON

Masks are the symbols of the Nanomei, and they are also worn by adherents any time they are engaged in the fight for freedom. Those that have proven their value and willingness to the Nanomei are taught the ways of the true masks: Anon.

Nanomei Anons have incredible abilities that allow them to confuse and disorient their foes, giving them more ability to sneak past defenses and strike at the heart of corruption.

Requirements:

You may have the GM's permission to take this Spec and a Reputation of at least 10 with the Nanomei.

Base: Don the Mask

The Nanomei believe strongly in the value of anonymity. Anons are able to learn to use this to physically swap places with their allies, mixing the physical locations of their minds.

You may spend 3 CS to swap places with any willing ally on the same Schema as you.

Nexus: No Self

Anons have learned the art of changing the way they appear to Pylons and other people, allowing them to distort their appearance in such a way that they become invisible to others.

You may make a Hacking roll against yourself (Pylon Level for Difficulty). If you get at least two Switches, you become invisible. In all other ways, this functions as a normal Hacking roll.

Capstone: Forked Personality

The highest level Anons have found a way to manifest their body in two separate locations. Their concentration is also divided when they do so, which makes each body less than fully functional, but there's nothing like your enemy seeing you in front of them to make them forget that you're also behind them.

You have two bodies and can split your CS between them (this includes simple tasks like conversation). Each body has a copy of all your Programs, but they must remain on the same Schema as each other.

LOYALIST

Axiom Loyalists are the heart of the Axiom machine. They serve with devotion and fervor, using their strengths and skills to promote that which the Axiom desires.

Loyalists specialize in imposing order on the Aetherium around them. This mostly manifests as limiting the ability of others to do what they wish, ensuring that the Loyalist and their allies can more easily subdue disruptive elements.

Requirements:

You may have the GM's permission to take this Spec and a Reputation of at least 10 with the Axiom.

Base: Restore Order

Loyalists have learned the ways that Pylons impose their creations on the Aetherium around them, and this helps them to discover and remove any modifications to the core programming.

You may make a Hacking roll (Pylon Level for Difficulty) to undo any other Hack that was made to Pylon Programs. If the roll is successful, the Hack is undone (no symbols other than the Disruption matter). In all other ways, this functions as a normal Hacking roll.

Nexus: Denial of Will

A Loyalist learns to constantly put up a sort of mental shield around themselves, putting forth subconscious effort to dilute the effects of enemy. This interferes with attempts at Hacking and external attempts to impose Glitch.

Increase the Difficulty of Hacking your Programs by 1. Enemies cannot give you Glitch directly (though you can still gain it from damage dealt by enemies if it exceeds your Sync).

Capstone: Cogs in the Machine

The ultimate Loyalist ability is an incredibly potent one. By imposing a strict order on the world around them, the Axiom Loyalist is able to prevent many from taking any action during a critical moment, thus aiding the Loyalist in achieving victory.

Once per Story, at the beginning of a Round, you may gain 4 Glitch to force every other character you can see to make a Level (2) Test. Any character that fails cannot take a Turn this Round. This also affects allies.

SPEED FREAK

The experience of time passes differently in the Aetherium, allowing people to have longer lifespans, subjectively. Speed Freaks believe that this experience of time can be further altered, allowing some within the Aetherium to have even more time than others.

So far, Speed Freaks successes have been limited, but even a limited success has proven a large boon in many situations.

Requirements:

You must have the GM's permission and the Improved Cycle Speed or Stored Energy Knack to take this Spec.

Base: Adrenaline

A Speed Freak's mind is subconsciously focused on working to move just that extra bit faster. This subconscious preparation allows them to adjust to time distortions more quickly than those around them.

You may choose not to roll Aetherium dice for Tests on any Turn where you Overclocked. If you do, at the end of your Turn, make a Sync roll (see page 81).

Nexus: Overdrive

The mind of a Speed Freak is constantly pushing the bounds of time in the Aetherium, manipulating it in subtle ways. Over time, these subtle alterations add up, giving the Speed Freak a slight edge in acting.

Every Round, at the start of the Round, you may increase your Initiative by one step (see page 84).

Capstone: Peel Out

At the highest levels, Speed Freaks are capable of forcing their minds to experience time differently, and, in the Aetherium, as the mind so, too, the body. This capability has a severe drawback, however, as doing so inevitably overloads the Speed Freak's connection and begins to log them out.

You may choose to gain CS equal to your Level. If you do, you are reduced to 0 Sync at the end of the Round, but do not take a Health damage for doing so (you may still take Health damage from any Glitch).

SYNCHRONIZER

The RezX are often more well-adapted to the Aetherium than their peers. They spend all their waking moments within it, they study it, and they seek to master it.

Over time, with the right training, a person can learn the art of synchronization beyond what most are capable of. This leads to the development of Synchronizers, those who are more at home in the Aetherium than in the Meatspace.

Requirements:

You may have the GM's permission to take this Spec and a Reputation of at least 10 with the RezX.

Base: Adapted to the Aetherium

Synchronizers have begun to treat their Aetherial selves as their true selves. This fundamental belief lightens the strain on the Synchronizer's mind to host Iconic Programs, but it also distorts their acceptance of their body in the Meatspace.

One of your Iconic Programs has melded into your body like a mutation. You may have 3 additional Complexity of Iconic Programs without it counting against your Iconology.

Nexus: Noise Walker

The Quantum Noise is a massive, deadly chaos outside civilized space. A Synchronizer learns more about the Noise and how to adapt to it, making the Noise significantly less deadly to their trained minds.

You do not gain Glitch from the Noise. When you take damage from the Noise, you reduce that damage by 1, to a minimum of 0.

Capstone: Impenetrable Connection

A Synchronizer's mind has fully adjusted to connecting with the Aetherium, and it is no longer at significant risk from sudden gaps in that connection.

You no longer take Health damage when reduced to Sync 0 (you may still take Health damage from any Glitch or additional damage suffered while at Sync 0).

Increase your Sync by 4.

TECHNOPHILE

Technophiles are those that believe that the fusion of man and machine is the future. House Ikaru likes to find those loyal and interested to train in how to properly begin to integrate brain function and computer programming.

Technophiles begin to change their very natures in the Aetherium based on this work, giving them access to unique benefits and preparing their mind for an eventual robotic transition.

Requirements:

You may have the GM's permission to take this Spec and a Reputation of at least 10 with House Ikaru.

Base: More Machine

As the Technophile's mind begins to change its neural patterns, the standard effects of the Aetherium begin to impact them differently. Most importantly, they begin to lose the sense of "vital organs," which limits the effects of attacks against them.

Your physical appearance takes some technological aspects (like a robotic arm). The Bonus Stunt cannot be declared more than twice against you.

Nexus: Self-Diagnostics

The training of the mind leads to certain manifestations that are similar to Programs. A Technophile learns how to manipulate these in order to repair their own connections, making them more stable within the Aetherium.

Even more of your physical appearance takes on some technological aspects. You may Hack yourself to heal (Pylon Level for Difficulty). Every Switch heals 1 Sync, and every Short removes 1 Glitch. This functions as a normal Hacking roll in all ways except that the effects do not wear off over time.

Capstone: AI Assistance

High level Technophiles are capable of having an artificial intelligence implanted in their brain (or, in some cases, on their Rig) that is able to work with their neural patterns, giving them a small boost in certain situations by lightening the neural load.

Your physical form is entirely robotic. Once per Turn, you may take a 1 CS Action without spending CS.

TELEPATH

True telepathy is theoretically possible but still rare phenomenon in the Aetherium. Nevertheless, there are those mysterious few who have been both blessed and cursed with an uncanny and little-understood ability: the Telepaths.

Telepaths can communicate directly from mind-to-mind in a manner that those with the basic ability can only imagine.

Requirements:

You must have the GM's permission and the Telepathy Knack to take this Spec

Base: Mind Link

At the most basic level, a Telepath's mental link becomes more secure and stable, making it harder for others to break the connection. Moreover, the Telepath's mind begins to act as a hub for communication among all those linked.

Increase the Difficulty of breaking a telepathic connection with you by 1. You gain 1 die when Hacking someone you're connected to telepathically. In addition, everyone you're connected with may communicate directly if you wish, instead of needing to go through you.

Nexus: Brain Drain

A Telepath can use their abilities and Hacking skill at the same time to try to gain access to information their target doesn't want to share, learning information directly from their mind.

You may Hack to scan the thoughts of a character you're telepathically linked to (Defense for Difficulty). Every Chip reveals a basic thought (so a complex combination would probably require 4+ Chips). In all other ways, this functions as a normal Hacking roll.

Capstone: Scour

Taking their telepathic Hacking even further, a Telepath learns how not only to read minds, but also to remove information from those minds.

You may Hack (Defense for Difficulty) to scan the thoughts of a character to whom you're telepathically linked in order to remove memories. Every Chip can remove about 10 seconds of memory (about 1 Round) permanently. This functions as a normal Hacking roll in all ways except that the effects can only be undone via another Hack by a Telepath with this ability.

VIROLOGIST

Viruses are special Programs within the Aetherium. Unlike other Programs, they seem to have some ability to fuel themselves without a Pylon, instead using another Program as a host.

Virologists have taken to the study of these Programs, which gives them even more control and access to them than most those who inhabit the Aetherium.

Requirements:

You must have the GM's permission and the Viral Mastery Knack to take this Spec

Base: Universal Applicator

Virologists can use a special Mod that allows them to apply any Virus from a Program, instead of just one. Though more Complex, it gives them the ability to use their Viruses as needed without multiple application methods.

You gain access to the following Modification:

UNIVERSAL APPLICATOR	+3/4/5 Complexity
<i>Active Programs only. Successful attacks with this Program give the target a Virus you own with an X value equal to the number of instances of this Modification.</i>	

Nexus: Specimens

Two Viruses become core to the Virologist's use. They become so familiar that they no longer require significant effort to maintain within the Aetherium.

Choose 2 Viruses. You may have these Viruses as Iconic Programs without their Root Complexity counting against your Iconology. Any Mods on these Viruses will still count against your Iconology.

Capstone: Super Bug

The Virologist has learned to combine two Viruses into one, allowing for incredibly viral potency.

You gain access to the following Modification for Viruses:

IMBEDDED VIRUS	+3 Complexity
<i>Choose another Virus you own. Any time this Virus is applied, so is the one chosen, and they are both applied at the same X value (though it can vary from there)</i>	

ADVANCED JOBS

The advanced Jobs are higher positions within the Aetherium that come with higher VAR and more benefits. However, advanced Jobs also have more responsibility, and thus are at higher risk.

The advanced Jobs can be used as roleplaying rewards for characters. Every one of these Jobs has one or more prerequisites for a character to take them, and if those prerequisites are ever not met, the character is immediately fired (or sometimes demoted to a lower position).

If characters are using advanced Jobs, consider using some of the Stipend variation options presented on page 153, as these Jobs are more likely to employ the Aetherial equivalent of "profit sharing."

Unaligned Jobs

These Jobs can be found basically anywhere, working for any Collective or group in the game.

Elite Mercenary

Stipend: 6

Those who have established themselves as mercenaries can request a larger Stipend for their services, though they risk losing their Job if they don't take enough merc work.

Prerequisite: VAR 15+, at least 20 contracts completed

At the end of a material week, gain 1 Wealth for every 5 VAR your character possesses, rounded down.

Entertainer

Stipend: 8

You are a minor celebrity, providing entertainment for hundreds of thousands of people throughout the Aetherium.

Prerequisite: Charisma 5+

You gain two additional dice on Charisma Tests when interacting with people who recognize you.

Franchiser

Stipend: 8

You have managed to get a franchise of a major business going, which has been quite lucrative for you.

Whenever your VAR increases, as long as it's above your Stipend, gain 2 Wealth (no matter how much it increases).

Promotions!

Reputation is a prerequisite for many of these Jobs, but it should also be seen as a large influencing factor in whether a Job is offered.

Characters that promote a Collective in their free time are more likely to move up in that Collective.

Of course, an excessive amount of mercenary work will eventually place a character on the bad side of every Collective, sooner or later.

Slumlord

Stipend: 9

You've managed to be put in charge of a number of run down homes, and the only requirement is that your higher-ups don't ever hear about the buildings you're in charge of.

Prerequisite: Spend 30 Wealth to get this Job

In the Meatspace, you are infamous. Lose 2 dice on Charisma tests (or the Diplomacy Training) when interacting with people who recognize you.

Star

Stipend: 15

You are incredibly famous for your work. Your face is plastered across VR and posters, making you one of the most recognizable faces of humanity.

Prerequisite: Charisma 7+

Everyone recognizes you. It requires the Change Appearance Program not to be noticed.

You gain 2 additional dice on Charisma Tests when interacting with people who recognize you.

Collective Jobs

These Collective Jobs are positions working for specific Collectives.

Influencer [Nanomei]

Stipend: 7

You are recognized as someone who matters within the Nanomei, and this helps in getting others to follow you. Your prestige also helps get more hookups in the Meatspace, increasing your Stipend considerably.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 10 with the Nanomei

You may hire Bodyguards for 1 Wealth instead of 5, but they only work for one mission.

Ship Officer [RezX]

Stipend: 9

You have been given a position of some authority on a RezX vessel. While this calls you away sometimes, it also is a great job for learning and getting the most out of the Aetherium.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 12 with RezX and Composure 4+

Take 1 less damage from the Noise, to a minimum of 1.

Project Lead [House Ikaru]

Stipend: 8

After successful work, Ikaru has recognized your potential and put you in charge of a group of coders and inventors.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 10 with House Ikaru and Software 5+

Your Software Training is treated as 2 higher, and you may hire Coding Assistants for 1 less Wealth.

Note: This Job is only available when using the Meatspace rules.

Loyalty Agent [Axiom]

Stipend: 12

When someone steps out of line, you are responsible for bringing them in for "conditioning." It is messy, violent work, but necessary for the stability of humankind.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 15 with Axiom and Charisma 5+

If you say anything negative about the Axiom, you lose 2 VAR each time (you are monitored with a Virus that tracks this so long as you hold this job).

Pylon Coordinator [Axiom]

Stipend: 8

It is your responsibility to ensure that all Pylon Feeders are properly connected and using their abilities to support the Pylon. Coordinating all those people is tough work, but it gives you a deep connection with the Aetherium.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 10 with Axiom

Increase your Sync by 5.

Head Scientist [RezX]

Stipend: 10

You have been awarded an illustrious research project within the RezX and a team of people to pursue it with. This is a position of some envy within the RezX, as not everyone can get funding for their hypothesis.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 10 with RezX and Reasoning 5+

Peripherals cost 1 less Wealth, to a minimum of 1.

Sleeper Agent [House Ikaru]

Stipend: 0

Cutting all visible ties with Ikaru, you are now entrusted with supporting House Ikaru. You work solo, doing everything you can to support the Collective until the fateful day where you are activated.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 15 with House Ikaru

Every week, gain 8 Wealth.

If you provide useful information to House Ikaru, they will give you Wealth. They give 1 Wealth for helpful information, 3 Wealth for actionable information, and 5 Wealth for critical information.

Molotovs [Nanomei]

Stipend: 6

Tovs are elite Nanomei who specialize in ripping down the trappings of corporate civilization around them.

Prerequisite: Reputation of at least 14 with the Nanomei

When Hacking, roll 2 extra Aetherium dice.

You gain the Destroy Virus as an Iconic Program. It does not count against your Complexity. When someone damages you with an attack, they gain the Destroy [1] Virus.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Non-Player Characters (or NPCs) are the characters created by and controlled by the GM. NPCs generally don't have Specs and Knacks, and their Stats tend to all be the same value.

Because of their simplicity, creating NPCs on the fly is very easy: you need basic Stats and a Defense. If you need to develop an NPC further, you can give them one or two of the common Programs in the Programs Chapter (starting on page 50), which helps to further define their personality and primary motivations.

When assigning Programs in this manner, take a moment to consider the Complexity of the NPC's Programs. Programs with 6+ Complexity tend to be fairly strong and can make even a relatively weak NPC have a significant influence on their area of expertise.

In addition to this, Anvil 8 Games also sells a "Programs and Characters" pack that contains cards with pregenerated common Programs, which makes it easy to randomly assign Programs to an NPC (and eases the burden of trying to remember which NPCs have which Programs).

For NPCs that you expect to be pivotal parts of the campaign (such as a primary antagonist), it can be useful to create a collection of Iconic Programs for that NPC. This gives them more flavor and variability, and since Iconic Programs can be changed over time, they can even upgrade their abilities as the campaign progresses to better anticipate the actions of the Users.

A number of pregenerated NPCs have been provided later in this chapter (pg. 166). These NPCs come complete with their own Iconic Programs, allowing them to be quickly tossed into a fight when needed.

Making Compelling NPCs

Detailed and interesting characters can make the difference between a great roleplaying experience and a mediocre one. Some of the best characters in modern media are defined by the strength of their allies and antagonists, and the same is true for Users.

As the GM, it is your job to create and control the NPCs against whom the player characters will struggle or lean on for support.

To create an interesting NPC, you should first decide upon that character's driving motivations. This is a question of not only what the character is trying to accomplish but also why they want to accomplish it. Once you know the NPC's motivations, you can make the decisions that character makes feel genuine and authentic to the players.

Next, you should make a quick plan for that character. What is the NPC doing when the players aren't around? This helps to move away from the feeling that the world only advances when the Users become involved. If you're into it, you can even write up a short news article about something that happened because of one of your NPCs (whether or not it explicitly mentions that character) and give it to the players at the start of a session.

Taking the time to think about your NPCs in this way will really help them to live and breathe, and the world around them will feel more alive and authentic because of it.

***"Patches are the bottom of humanity in the Aetherium.
We all start there, but you don't realize how limiting it is
until you rise above the mess.
Now, I can't even bother to give them the time of day!"***

RANYA

NPC Personalities

Every NPC in the game should have a personality. Recurring or important NPCs, whether friendly or hostile, might possess one or more personalities; few people are entirely one dimensional, and it's perfectly fine for someone to feel conflicted about the things they do (or want to do).

It can be helpful to make notes about your NPCs so that you can play them consistently from one game to another. These notes should include their names, personality traits, Collective allegiances (if any), mannerisms, etc.

Below are some possible personality traits that you can use to create NPCs on the fly.

Absentminded	Forthright
Aggressive	Friendly
Agreeable	Hardworking
Alert	Honorable
Ambitious	Humble
Businesslike	Humorous
Busy	Idealistic
Calm	Independent
Caring	Intense
Cheerful	Irreverent
Confident	Logical
Contradictory	Mystical
Courteous	Outspoken
Curious	Political
Daring	Preoccupied
Deceptive	Private
Decisive	Reserved
Disciplined	Sarcastic
Discreet	Skeptical
Dramatic	Solemn
Earnest	Stubborn
Emotional	Unhurried
Energetic	Unpredictable
Enthusiastic	Unsentimental
Folksy	Whimsical
Forceful	

Running NPCs

NPCs are supporting characters. They should be interesting and influential, but not so much so that they take the spotlight away from the Users. The following suggestions are intended to help you streamline the process of using NPCs in order to keep the game focused on the Users.

Synchronized Timing

If you're running a group of similar NPCs, such as a group of henchmen with the same stats, it can be useful to have them all go at the same point in Initiative.

If you wish, you can also decide that anything that affects an individual in the group also affects everyone else in that group.

Synchronized Dice Rolls

The players' characters are the main force in the game, so allowing them to roll more dice can help show this. When running NPCs, try not to roll the dice unless it's necessary.

When rolling the dice becomes necessary, it can sometimes make sense to use a single roll for an entire group of NPCs. This can be done in two ways: one roll and one effect.

For one roll, make a single roll and apply it to each NPC's action. This might mean that if the roll succeeds, everyone succeeds, and if the roll fails, they all fail. This option should generally only be used if all of the NPCs have the same Difficulty on their Action.

For one effect, multiple NPCs pool their resources to make an attack. Pick one NPC's dice pool, add +2 for each NPC helping them, and roll for one larger effect.

Tracking damage and Glitch

Tracking damage and Glitch on NPCs can be time consuming. Generally, NPCs have less Sync than player characters, which should speed up the process. If there are multiple NPCs with the same stats, consider tracking all their damage together and just force one NPC to log out at each set increment of Sync (e.g., every 4 or 5).

If a lot of Glitch is being passed to unimportant NPCs, you can simply convert that Glitch to damage at a ratio of two damage for each Glitch. This helps to speed up combat while simplifying the amount of bookkeeping you have to do.

PREMADE NPCs

The next few pages offer a variety of premade NPCs, complete with a full set of Programs. These NPCs can be used as-is, or they can have Programs added to them. They are also available in the Programs and Character pack for the game.

Sometimes it might make sense to use one of the characters presented, but change the skin of some of their Programs to fit the needs of the game.

RANDOM CITIZEN

LEVEL 0

The random citizen is representative your standard Aetherium populace, going about their lives.

Stats: 2	Hack: 0
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Defense: 1	CS: 2
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Sync (6): 00000 0

Program(s):

None

TOUGH GUY

LEVEL 0

Some people are always a little tougher than others.

Stats: 3	Hack: 0
----------	---------

Defense: 1	CS: 2
------------	-------

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

COOL LEATHER JACKET

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. Increase your Sync by 2.

Complexity 4: Armor (3), Strengthened Connection (1)

COLLECTIVE WORKER

LEVEL 0

While the Collectives are all different, their standard workers are about the same.

Stats: 3	Hack: 0
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Defense: 1	CS: 2
------------	-------

Sync (6): 00000 0

Program(s):

ASSEMBLY LINE PROGRAMS

1 CS : Charisma (Sight)

Choose one Program on a willing character within range. Gain that Root Program or a Modification for it (if you have the Root Program). Until the start of this character's Turn two Turns from now, you can use the chosen Root Program or Modification as if you possessed it.

This Program does not change the Skin of a borrowed Root Program (which might make it very obvious whose Program you're duplicating).

Complexity 3: Copycat (2), Lasting Clone (1)

COLLECTIVE AGENT

LEVEL 0

The better-than average Collective worker. They aren't really fighters, but they make up a lot of the ranks of a Collective.

Stats: 4	Hack: 0
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Defense: 1	CS: 2
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Sync (6): 00000 0

Program(s):

MOTIVATIONAL POSTER

2 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Give another 3 characters +1 die on their next Test.

Complexity 6: Encourage (1), 2x Group (5)

AETHERIUM ADEPT

LEVEL 1

A generally skilled Aetherium user.

Stats: 3

Hack: 4

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Program(s):

COOL LEATHER JACKET

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. Increase your Sync by 2.

Complexity 4: Armor (3), Strengthened Connection (1)

LASER PISTOL

2 CS : Coordination (40 feet)

Success Value improved by 1. Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 4: Finesse Weapon (2), Precise (2)

CELEBRITY

LEVEL 1

Fame. Fortune. They have it all.

Stats: 3 (Charisma 5)

Hack: 4

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

GOLDEN TONGUE

3 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Target changes their attitude about you by one step in a direction of your choice. For every 2 Excess you spend, the target's attitude changes by one additional step. Characters do not realize this Program is being used unless they succeed on a Perception (2) test. The target also gains the Trojan [1] Virus.

Complexity 5: Manipulate (2), Control (3)

STAR STRUCK

2 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Give another character +1 die on their next Test and 1 CS.

Complexity 5: Encourage (1), Time Distortion (4)

TROJAN [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

When you apply this Virus to another character, you gain control over their Actions. At the start of that character's Turn, you may choose an Action with a CS cost of X or lower and force the character to perform that Action. You control all decisions made during this Action (such as who an attack targets, how they declare their Boosts, and so on), but the chosen Action cannot cause damage to you in any direct or indirect way (such as by forcing you to walk off a cliff). Then, the X value of this Virus is lowered by the CS cost of the Action.

BRAWLER

LEVEL 1

A melee fighter ready to mix it up.

Stats: 3

Hack: 4

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

BRASS KNUCKLES

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +3 damage, ignoring 1 damage reduction.

Complexity 7: Strength Weapon (1), 2x Extra Damage (5), Piercing (1)

BRUSH OFF

2 CS : Composure (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +1.

Complexity 2: Recalibrate (2)

AXIOM CHARACTERS

VENARI

LEVEL 1

The Venari are the equivalent of an Axiom SWAT team, ready to apply deadly force when necessary.

Stats: 3

Hack: 3

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

ASSAULT RIFLE

2 CS : Coordination (40 feet)

Roll an extra die and your dice explode on 9s and 10s. Deals +2 damage.

Complexity 7: Finesse Weapon (2), Extra Damage (2), Explosive (2), Streamlined (1)

PRAETORIAN

LEVEL 1

The Praetorians are a peacekeeping force that act as both civil and military police.

Stats: 3

Hack: 3

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Program(s):

POLICE BATON

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage and knocks the target back 10 feet. If it collides with something, it takes 1 damage per 5 feet traveled.

Complexity 4: Strength Weapon (1), 2x Knockback (3)

RIOT SHIELD

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1. Increase your Sync by 2.

Complexity 4: Armor (3), Strengthened Connection (1)



AXIOM ADEPT

LEVEL 2

Axiom Adepts are incredibly loyal Axiom Hackers, providing safety and security through years of training and mental programming. Axiom Adepts specializes in using Lances to take down their foes.

Stats: 3

Hack: 8

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Special: *If this character has not suffered damage this Round, enemies cannot Hack.*

Program(s):

STAFF OF ORDER

2 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This character loses a Glitch and the target makes a Sync roll.

Complexity 8: Unknown Root Program (4), Unknown Modification (3), Increased Range (1)

AXIOM ROBES

Passive

You may add a Short and a Switch or Chip to your Hack roll.

Complexity 5: Hack Assist (2), Stable Hacking (3)

LOYALTY AGENT

LEVEL 4

Loyalty Agents are the elite problem solvers of the Axiom. They will hunt down their quarry in the Aetherium or the Meatspace, and their unflinching pursuit of the truth leaves no stone unturned.

Stats: 4

Hack: 6

Defense: 3

CS: 4

Sync (14): 00000 00000 0000

Special: *After being damaged, the attacker loses all remaining CS.*

Program(s):

A1 MAGNUM

2 CS : Coordination (40 feet)

Improve the success value by 2 (5+). Deals +3 damage.

Complexity 12: Finesse Weapon (2), 2x Extra Damage (5), 2x Precise (5)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

1 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the defense. Give another person +1 die on their next Turn. This cannot cause them to gain more than double their dice.

Complexity 7: Encourage (1), Immediate (6)

AXIOM SUNGLASSES

3 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Target changes their attitude about you by one step in a direction of your choice. For every 2 Excess you spend, the target's attitude changes by one additional step. Characters do not realize this Program is being used unless they succeed on a Perception (2) test. The target also gains the Mind Eater [3] Virus.

Complexity 5: Manipulate (2), 3x Impair Neurons (3)

MIND EATER [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

When you apply this Virus to another character, the maximum Complexity of their Iconic Programs is reduced by X. If the Complexity of their loaded Programs exceeds their new limit, they suffer 1 damage and must unload Programs or Modifications to bring their total Complexity below their new limit.



HOUSE IKARU CHARACTERS

SPY

LEVEL 1

House Ikaru spies are rarely cut out for combat, but they are skilled at infiltration and information gathering.

Stats: 3 (Charisma 4)

Hack: 4

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

DISGUISE KIT

3 CS : Composure

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You can change your physical features to some degree, such as gaining or losing weight, changing your eye color or hair style, or instantly changing the appearance of your clothing. These changes last for the duration of the Scene.

When you use this Program, you may choose a person within your Line of Sight. You take on their physical appearance, though not their mannerisms or voice. Other characters can notice your deception with a Perception (3) Test. If you speak or the character is very familiar with the person you are imitating, the Difficulty of this Test is reduced by 1 (2 if both).

Complexity 4: Change Appearance (2), Spoofed Login (2)

MENTAL PROBE

3 CS : Reasoning (5 feet)

Learn one piece of information the target doesn't want you to know.

Complexity 10: Mental Probe (10)

SHINIGAMI

LEVEL 1

Techno-spirits of the Aetherium, the Shinigami are able to bring force to bear almost anywhere, bypassing traditional defenses.

Stats: 3 (Composure 2)

Hack: 2

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Special: This character can only suffer damage once per Round.

Program(s):

BURIAL SHAWL

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet, and you may choose to fly. When you spend CS to move, you may spend 1 additional CS to move through Programs with Complexity 5 or less during that movement.

Complexity 7: Movement (1), Flight (3), Code Ghost (3)

SPECTER CLAWS

3 CS : Force (5 feet)

Explodes on 8s, 9s, and 10s. Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 2: Strength Weapon (1), Lethargic (-4), 2x Explosive (5)



IZAMI

LEVEL 2

Izami serve as mobile long range support, bringing strong firepower at great distances.

Stats: 3

Hack: 2

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Special: For each time this character suffered damage since its last Turn, it deals +1 damage.

Program(s):

ION RAILGUN

2 CS : Coordination (Line of Sight)

Deal +2 damage and ignore 2 damage reduction. This attack pierces the first target, doing damage to something behind it.

Complexity 8: Finesse Weapon (2), 2x Increased Range (2), 2x Piercing (2), Extra Damage (2), Unknown Mod (3)

TARGETING IMPLANTS

Passive

Invisible characters and objects are considered visible to you (and are noted as being invisible), though they may still be difficult to see. Reduce the Difficulty of your Perception tests involving sight by 1. You can see 360 degrees. When you make an attack, you may spend 1 additional CS to gain 3 dice on your roll.

Complexity 5: H.U.D. (2), 360 (1), 2x Locate Weak Point (2)

ZERO

LEVEL 4

Zero is a man, taken by Ikaru and outfitted with the best equipment money can buy. His mind was connected to Ikaru's Central Processor, and he came out as Ikaru's ideal mercenary.

Stats: 4 (Perception 6)

Hack: 5

Defense: 2

CS: 4

Sync (14): 00000 00000 0000

Program(s):

BLADED WINGS

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet, and you may fly. Any enemy this character moves past during their Turn suffers 2 damage, which can be reduced by successes on a Speed roll. After you spend CS to move during your Turn, your Defense is increased by 1 for each spent CS. This bonus lasts until the start of your next Turn.

Complexity 12: Movement (1), Flight (3), Unknown Modification (3), 2x Acrobatic Defenses (5)

BLADES

2 CS : Coordination (5 feet)

The target's Defense is halved. Deals +3 damage.

Complexity 10: Finesse Weapon (2), Invasive (4), 2x Extra Damage (5), Decreased Range (-1)



NANOMEI CHARACTERS

PICKETER

LEVEL 1

The most common of the Nanomei are the Pickets, protesting the lifestyles of control and submission.

Stats: 3 (Force 4)

Hack: 3

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

PLACARDS AND SIGNS

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 1: Strength Weapon (1)

CATCHY SLOGANS

2 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Give another character +1 die on their next Test, and their dice explode 2 lower.

Complexity 5: Encourage (1), 2x Boom (4)

DEFECTOR MILITIA

LEVEL 1

The Nanomei's greatest strength is that their members are often part of another Collective. The Defector Militia have access to other Collectives' strengths.

Stats: 3

Hack: 3

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Special: This character cannot be targeted in combat until it has taken a Turn.

Program(s):

REQUISITION

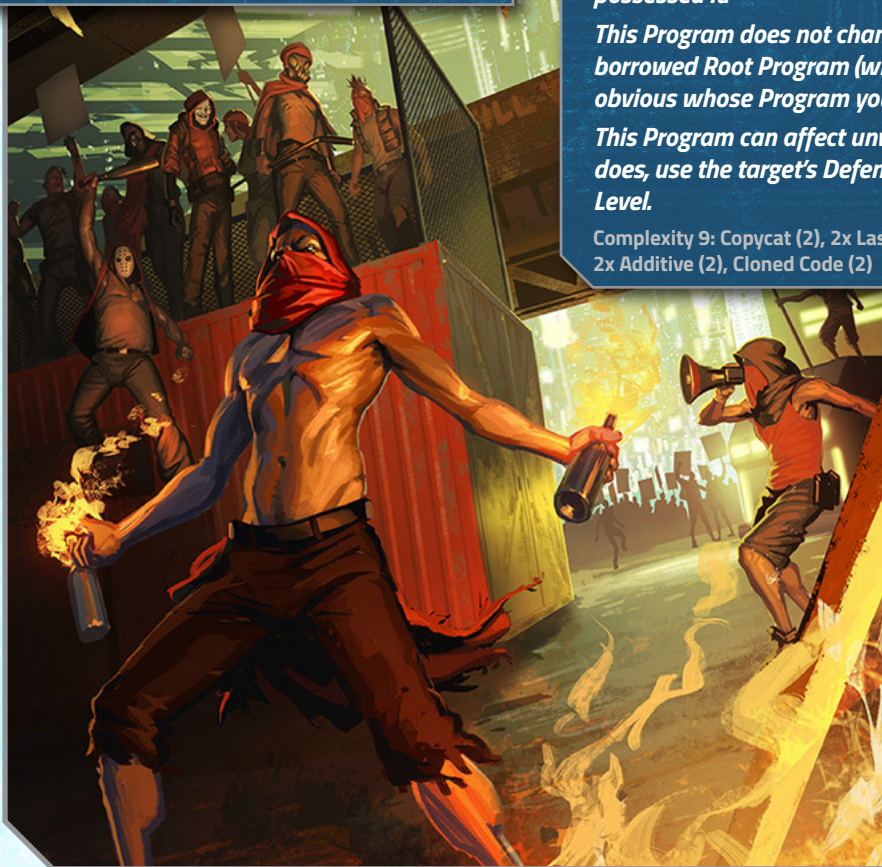
1 CS : Charisma (Line of Sight)

Choose one Program on a willing character within range. Gain the Root Program and up to 2 Modifications for it (or up to 3 Modifications if you have the Root Program). Until the start of this character's Turn three Turns from now, you can use the chosen Root Programs or Modifications as if you possessed it.

This Program does not change the Skin of a borrowed Root Program (which might make it very obvious whose Program you're duplicating).

This Program can affect unwilling characters. If it does, use the target's Defense instead of the Pylon's Level.

Complexity 9: Copycat (2), 2x Lasting Clone (3), 2x Additive (2), Cloned Code (2)



HACTIVIST

LEVEL 2

Hactivists are the most skilled Nanomei Hackers, putting their anarchic tendencies at the forefront of their Hacking.

Stats: 3	Hack: 7
Defense: 2	CS: 3
Sync (10): 00000 00000	
Special: <i>Whenever this character is successfully attacked, the attacker gains 1 Glitch.</i>	

Program(s):

HACKER MASK

Passive

You may add a Short and a Switch or Chip to your Hack roll.

Complexity 5: Hack Assist (2), Stable Hacking (3)

DESTABILIZING BOMB

3 CS : Composure (40 feet)

Within range, modify a 60 foot cube area by adding or subtracting 4 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 7: Manipulate Noise (2), Powerful Noise (1), 2x Blue Hole (4)

TOV

LEVEL 4

Tovs are front-line Nanomei fighters that have dedicated their lives to destroying that which 'law and order' has wrought upon the world.

Stats: 4 (Composure 6)	Hack: 6
Defense: 3	CS: 4
Sync (14): 00000 00000 0000	
Special: <i>Characters that damage this character gain the Fire [2] Virus listed in the Programs below.</i>	

Program(s):

MOLOTOV

2 CS : Coordination (40 feet)

Roll 1 fewer dice. Deals +2 damage and gives the Fire [2] Virus as described below.

Complexity 8: Finesse Weapon (2), 2x Viral (5), Extra Damage (2), Clunky (-1)

MASK OF THE NANOMEI

1 CS : Composure (Self)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. You can change your physical features to a large degree, such as gaining or losing weight, changing your eye color or hair style, or instantly changing the appearance of your clothing. These changes last for the duration of the Scene.

When you use this Program, you may choose a person within your Line of Sight. You take on their physical appearance, though not their mannerisms or voice. Other characters can notice your deception with a Perception (3) Test. If you speak or the character is very familiar with the person you are imitating, the Difficulty of this Test is reduced by 1 (2 if both).

Complexity 13: Change Appearance (2), Greater Change (3), Spoofed Login (2), Immediate (6)

FIRE [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

At the end of the Round, a character with this Virus suffers X Damage. At the start of the Round, the X of this Virus is increased by 1.

Complexity 4: Destroy (1), Infestation (3)

REZX CHARACTERS

GREYSCARF

LEVEL 1

Greyscarves are the rank and file of the RezX. They are the main crew of Aetherships.

Stats: 3

Hack: 5

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

HARPOON

3 CS : Force (40 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer +1 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1. You may move the target 15 feet towards or away from you. If they collide with something, they take a damage per 5 feet traveled.

Complexity 9: Grapple Assist (2), Grab Connection (3), Increased Range (1), 3x Momentum (5)

SIREN

LEVEL 1

Sirens are Noise divers that can withstand short bursts of Quantum Noise.

Stats: 3

Hack: 5

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Special: This character doesn't gain Glitch from the Noise.

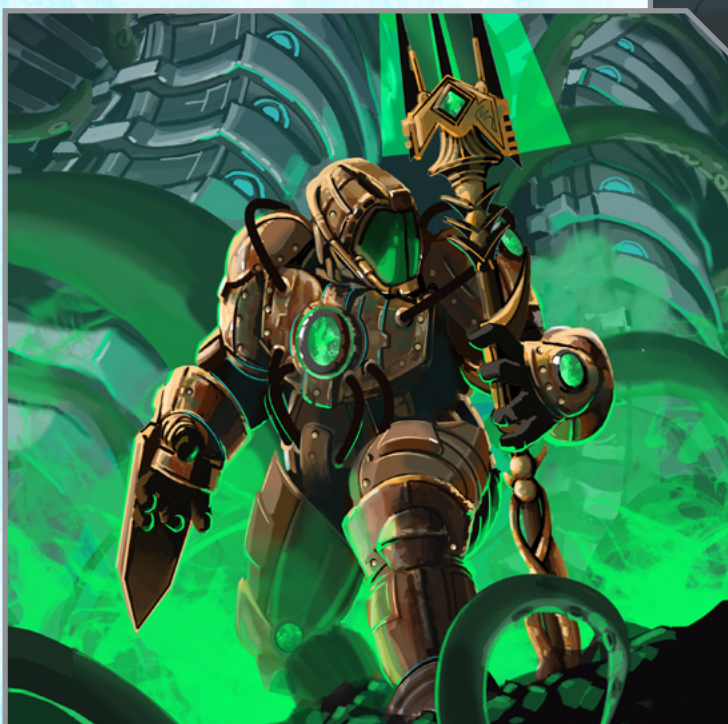
Program(s):

QUANTUM BLADE

3 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deal +1 damage and 2 Glitch.

Complexity 9: Strength Weapon (1), 2x Brutal (12), Lethargic (-4)



AETHER SCIENTISTS

LEVEL 2

The Aether Scientists were founded in the RezX, scientists capable of amazing feats of Hacking.

Stats: 3

Hack: 10

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Special: This character doesn't gain Glitch from Hacking and Hacks for 2 CS.

Program(s):

NOISE CONTROLLER

3 CS : Composure (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify (or move) a 40 foot cube area by adding or subtracting 3 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn. If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 6: Manipulate Noise (2), Blue Hole (1), Unknown Modification (1)

DIVE MASTER

LEVEL 4

Dive Masters are powerful Quantum Noise divers that are able to withstand the rigors of life off the colonized Aetherium, combining technical know-how with combat potential.

Stats: 4 (Composure 6)

Hack: 8

Defense: 3

CS: 4

Sync (16): 00000 00000 00000 0

Special: This character doesn't gain Glitch from the Noise.

Program(s):

QUANTUM TRIDENT

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deal +3 damage and 1 Glitch.

Complexity 10: Strength Weapon (1), Brutal (4), 2x Extra Damage (5)

QUANTUM CAPACITOR

1 CS : Composure (5 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Heal the target's Sync by +1. You may declare 1 Boost to remove 1 Glitch; each Glitch removed in this way deals 2 damage to everyone within 10 feet.

Complexity 10: Recalibrate (2), Synchronize (2), Immediate (6), Unknown Modification (3)

DIVE SUIT

Passive

Increase your Sync by 2 and reduce damage by 1, minimum 1. When affected by an effect that would force you to move, reduce the movement distance by 5 feet.

Complexity 6: Armor (3), Strengthened Connection (2), Grounded (1)



RHOMMOX CHARACTERS

Rhommox are generally incapable of Hacking, and will rarely have any form of Template (any Templates used should be reskinned to fit the Rhommox aesthetic).

TROJAN

LEVEL 1

Trojans are blunt instruments of destruction, used to great effect in combat, but with little other use.

Stats: 3 (Force 4)

Hack: 1

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Special: This character takes no damage or Glitch from the Noise.

Program(s):

CLAW CLAMPS

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +2 damage.

Complexity 3: Strength Weapon (1), Extra Damage (2)

POWERFUL LEGS

Passive

Increase your movement by 20 feet

Complexity 3: Movement (1), Super Speed (2)

VOLATILE

LEVEL 1

Volatiles are flying drones that spread acid around to cause disruption and damage to the enemies.

Stats: 3

Hack: 2

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Special: This character takes no damage or Glitch from the Noise.

Program(s):

ACID SPORES

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage and gives the Acid [1] Virus as described below.

Complexity 3: Strength Weapon (1), Viral (2)

SEGMENTED WINGS

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet, and you may fly.

Complexity 4: Movement (1), Flight (3)

ACID [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

At the end of the Round, a character with this Virus suffers X Damage.

Complexity 1: Destroy (1)



MALDRONE

LEVEL 2

Maldrones are medium-sized flying creatures that spread venom to their enemies.

Stats: 3

Hack: 2

Defense: 2

CS: 3

Sync (10): 00000 00000

Special: *This character takes no damage or Glitch from the Noise. This character's Defense is increased by 1 if the attacker has no Glitch.*

Program(s):

TAIL STINGER

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage and gives the Poison [2] Virus and Destabilizing Virus as described below.

Complexity 8: Strength Weapon (1), 2x Viral (5), Viral (2)

SEGMENTED WINGS

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet, and you may fly.

Complexity 4: Movement (1), Flight (3)

POISON [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

At the end of the Round, a character with this Virus suffers X Damage.

Complexity 1: Destroy (1)

DESTABILIZING [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

After a character with this Virus spends 1 or more CS to perform an Action, they suffer 1 Damage after resolving that Action.

Complexity 2: Destabilizing (2)

OVERMIND

LEVEL 4

Overminds are horrific, twisted creatures that help push the Rhommox invasion forward, perverting the stabilized Aetherium for the Rhommox invasion.

Stats: 4 (Composure 5)

Hack: 8

Defense: 2

CS: 4

Sync (12): 00000 00000 00

Special: *This character takes no damage from the Noise. This character may discard a Glitch to heal 3 damage.*

Program(s):

MIND SCREAM

3 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

Deals +3 Damage and gives the Trojan [2] Virus as described below. Other characters cannot determine this Program's source, but the target can succeed on a Perception (2) test to do so.

Complexity 14: Psychic Assault (2), 2x Extra Damage (7), 2x Viral (5)

CORRUPTOR

3 CS : Composure (40 feet)

Once per Turn, this Action can be taken for 0 CS. This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Within range, modify a 20 foot cube area by adding or subtracting 3 Levels of Noise. It lasts until the start of your next Turn. For every Excess you spend, the Noise lasts for an additional Turn.

If the Noise is created touching a character, they may take a Speed (1) Test. If they succeed, they gain a Reaction before the Noise appears.

Complexity 6: Manipulate Noise (2), Unknown Modification (4)

TROJAN [X]

Passive : Virus (does not affect this character)

When you apply this Virus to another character, you gain control over their Actions. At the start of that character's Turn, you may choose an Action with a CS cost of X or lower and force the character to perform that Action. You control all decisions made during this Action (such as who an attack targets, how they declare their Boosts, and so on), but the chosen Action cannot cause damage to the acting character in any direct or indirect way (such as by forcing them to walk off a cliff). Then, the X value of this Virus is lowered by the CS cost of the Action.

Complexity 4: Trojan (4)



ADVENTURE

There are countless stories of excitement and daring in the Aetherium. It has been widely used for nearly a hundred years of material time, meaning over a thousand years of Aetherial time has passed. If all human history began nearly 6,000 years ago with writing, near 16% of human experience since the advent of writing has happened in the Aetherium. And they are all stories of possibility and wonder, corruption and control. What's your story?



IF YOU ARE NOT THE GAMEMASTER, PLEASE DO NOT READ THIS CHAPTER, AS IT CONTAINS SPOILERS!

The following pages contain an adventure for the Aetherium RPG. It is one Story which provides different challenges to the Users. The Story provides an overview, a starting sequence, and a number of Scenes.

In many cases, it will make sense to divide this adventure up into two different sessions of play, stopping after the completion of a Scene. For example, it might make sense to break the adventure into two after the third Scene, in which the Users make it to the Co-Op Node.

Regardless of how it is broken down, this adventure should provide a good introduction to the game and the setting, taking advantage of various rules and possibilities that should leave everyone with a better sense of the Aetherium.

To get started as a GM, familiarize yourself with the overview on the next page. This will give you enough information to just jump right into the Story, though additional prep work can always help.

When you feel prepared, it's best to read the starting sequence aloud to players to get them started on their journey. Once complete, the players will be able to choose how they approach the problems and how they want to move the plot forward. If, after the starting sequence, they don't start moving, suggest one of the possible prepared Scenes.

Don't rush through the game. While the different Scenes provide the challenges, the Aetherium is a big place with a lot of opportunities. Allow players the chance to roleplay out their characters or create side-Scenes where they can pursue private goals. These often give players a better sense of their character, and they can provide compelling plot lines for future games.

While there is information and description provided, feel free to embellish and add in your own descriptors for players. Remember: players should be figuring out what Programs or Stats they want to roll and why; try not to prompt them too much, as it's their Story to live through!

Because of the mutable nature of the Aetherial world, it is likely that the Users will want to do things not explicitly described in the following pages (such as through Hacking). It is ideal if you can get to 'yes' for them, though through significant difficulty in dice rolls or roleplaying. It is a world made to be explored.

This can mean, on occasion, that a Scene or challenge may be averted or bypassed. For example, the first Scene involves escaping from a stadium, but it's possible all the Users can fly or are willing to Hack the ground below them (all of which happened in testing). This doesn't mean the challenge is averted! It means that it needs to be reskinned and presented in a different way.

Make this adventure your own, and make the world your own. We hope you enjoy the Story, and happy gaming!

THE VIRUS OVERVIEW

The Virus is an introductory adventure for the Aetherium RPG, intended to help guide players in the world. It is set up for people new to the game and learning the setting.

This adventure is about information stolen from House Ikaru, and what the characters intend to do about it. While the players might take multiple paths to solve the conflict, the Story assumes that the players are not going to work with House Ikaru. If any of the Users support House Ikaru, read the callout box below to that player separately, after the starting sequence.

This adventure is easy enough to get through, as the most important parts are the decisions the players make rather than the challenges they confront. Their choices can easily be the basis for future stories in the Aetherium RPG.

This adventure should be able to be run with almost no prep work by the GM, as there are a lot of sections intended to be read word for word. Start by reading the starting sequence.

The characters will then need to escape the stadium and the entire Node, which can be done with the help of an enterprising captain of a ship known as the Rickety Split.

If they make it to the ship, the characters will have to survive a journey through the Noise, which can be a dangerous proposition.

The characters will then land on Co-Op, a Nanomei Node, where they can find the contact their friend Roland sent them in search of and try to convince him to help.

House Ikaru Loyalist

If any characters are loyal to House Ikaru, read the following to them after meeting the Ronin:

"House Ikaru is a gigantic corporation, with many moving parts. You're not sure what this is about, but it may be your chance to undermine a rival division or to become an undercover spy. It is worth it, for now, to play along..."

More Information for the GM

This game is about a Virus Program with encrypted information in it, which can be administered through the use of a syringe.

Here are the things Users would know about a Virus:

- If they log off, the Virus will be removed, losing the data.
- The Syringe is a Program, and thus will begin to suffer damage since its owner logged off. The only way to prevent this is to register it -- but House Ikaru might be watching for that. Injecting the Virus is probably the best path to preserve the information.
- In order to help Roland, their friend, they'll need to find someone capable of getting the information out, such as the Puppeteer.

This is the set up for the entire Story, as each Scene will then flow into the next.



STARTING SEQUENCE

Read the below:

There is a celebratory air in the stadium as the opening ceremonies get under way. There are people everywhere: most are wearing the gold and red of the Justicars, and the remainder are largely wearing the black and green of the Verdants, especially in your section. This particular game of HyperBall has been well-hyped all across the Aetherium, as the famous rivalry is finally meeting in the championship round.

Here on the Okina Node, it's no surprise that more of the fans support the Justicars. The Justicars are the equivalent of House Ikaru regulars, and Okina is House Ikaru home turf. The Verdants, on the other hand, are an independent team, owned collectively by the players themselves. As always, their battle on the field gets spun in the press as the battle of capitalism versus communism.

You arrived early and took a seat in the crowd. Your friend, Roland, got you these seats with some cryptic message about needing your help. You're not even sure how he got seats this good, but it's hard to pass up an opportunity like this.

You take a moment to look around and take in all the sights. The field is going through it's standard changes, rotating and warping to test its motion throughout the game. Camera drones float overhead, and some people are wearing the goggles that let them pan through the drones. Box seats float over the field, occasionally blocking the view of those less fortunate.

You're sitting close to the field itself, and the faint tinge of the protective barrier sits less than 50 feet in front of you. Drones patrol the stadium, ensuring order and safety by removing unwanted elements.

Every character in the game has gotten tickets to the game from their friend Roland. Roland is a House Ikaru agent, though he never discusses exactly what he does for them.

The players should all take a moment now to describe their characters to the other players. If they want to, they have time to introduce themselves in-game as well, if they chose not to know each other.

Once complete, read the box on the next column.

Roland begins to approach you, furtively moving in your direction, constantly looking over his shoulder.

"You came. Good. I'll be quick. You all know I work for Ikaru, but the facility I work at... it's testing experimental Rig technology on unwilling subjects. If they can perfect it... they may be able to directly alter people's memories." He glances over his shoulder.

"I've managed to get basic schematics of the facility, along with its location out. I've arranged with one of the Nanomei, a hacker called the Puppeteer, to provide this information. Unfortunately, House Ikaru grew suspicious and they've been watching me. I can't meet up with him." He takes a deep breath.

"I'm sorry, but I need your help." He pulls out a small syringe. "All the information is contained on a Virus within. Anyone willing to help, a small injections is all it takes, and the Puppeteer can extract it... but if you log out, the Virus will be lost. I can't t..." Roland suddenly stops moving and talking.

In another moment, his image begins to almost pixelate and slowly disappear, the syringe dropping to the ground.

You've seen this before... someone in the Meatspace is forcing him to log out by disconnecting his Rig. It's incredibly dangerous.

Once the players' chatter is dying down or they spring into action, read the next part.

As Roland's body vanishes, a small timer can be seen to be under his body, counting down from 5.

As it hits zero, the stadium shakes with a sudden intensity as a massive explosion rocks the far end of the structure. The crowd begins to scream, but it is immediately followed by a sudden intake of breath as everyone notices: the explosion did more than damage the building. There is a small but growing pocket of Quantum Noise within the stadium. It will only be moments before the utter chaos of panic sets in.

You know that any bomb strong enough to destabilize the Pylons in the middle of Okina must have been truly powerful. The Noise looks like a massive swirling tempest... no one is likely to come out of that alive.

You've got to get out of here.

SCENE: ESCAPE THE STADIUM

At this point, the players should react to the unfolding Story. There are people panicking everywhere, as it's well-known that the Noise has a chance to kill people in the real world, not just the Aetherium.

This Scene has a few small challenges all as a part of a bigger challenge: getting out of the stadium.

The Users can make dice rolls to either **Move With the Crowd** or **Push Through the Crowd**. Pushing thought it is faster, but also more difficult. They can choose how they want to proceed.

THE NOISE BEHIND THE CHARACTERS IS GROWING. IT WILL REACH THEM AFTER THE CHARACTERS MAKE 10 DICE ROLLS.

The Users must continue to make rolls to escape the stadium until they reach a total of 8 successes, at which point they'll have escaped. A character can use Excess to get extra successes, but not if they use them for Stunts.

Keep track of the total number of rolls, as it is used again in the next Scene.

Move With the Crowd (easier)

You can read the below the first time this is chosen, or vary it up based on how the progress is:

The crowd is dense as everyone is pushing and shoving toward the few exits. Some people are falling and getting trampled on by others, as the Noise on the far side of the stadium grows.

Moving with people requires a Speed (1) test. All characters can roll (they don't have to), but only the highest result is used for successes in the Scene. A character can also use Charisma, but it is difficulty 2.

On a success, describe the characters moving with the crowd and avoiding some thrown elbows, as they managed to stay on their feet.

If any character fails their roll, that character takes 1 Sync damage from the crowd jostling them, and the characters are noticed by passing Drones (go to Hide From Drones on the next column).

Remember: attempting this counts as a dice roll (no matter how many people roll), and the players have 10 rolls of the dice before the Noise reaches them.

Push Through the Crowd (harder)

Read the below:

You decide to start shoving your way through the crowd, moving people as you see fit to ensure you make it out of the stadium.

Pushing through people requires a Force (2) or Coordination (2) test. All characters can roll (they don't have to, the rest can just tag along), but only the highest is used for successes in the Scene. If a character brandishes a weapon, reduce the difficulty by 1, but the characters will have to do the Hide From Drones section.

If any character fails their roll, that character takes 1 damage from the crowd jostling them, and the characters are noticed by passing Drones and must do the Hide From Drones section.

Hide from Drones

Read the below the first time this occurs, and improvise descriptions for any additional times:

Moving through the crowd quickly has attracted the attention of some drones, and 2 Nimbu Drones headed directly toward you. You have only moments to act before they show up and scan you.

The characters can choose to attack the Drones, but if they defeat them, they'll notice Ketsoraki and Drones headed their way. Every Round of combat counts as one roll for the Scene Timer, so it'll definitely end poorly.

Alternatively, they can attempt to hide, which requires a Coordination (1) or Composure (1) test. This test counts against the 10 total rolls the characters can make before the Noise shows up.

If they fail, read the below:

The drones pause over where you're hiding, taking additional time to scan. You can see the Noise slowly getting closer, but luckily, before too long, they fly off again.

Failure also adds 1 to the number of dice rolls the Users have made for the Scene.

Scene Timer

This Scene has an overall timer going as the Noise gets closer and closer.

The characters can attempt 10 different tests before the Noise reaches where they are (it doesn't matter how many characters roll in that test).

The characters need 8 successes on tests to escape the stadium, but only the best result from any one test is used.

As the Users make dice rolls, below are some additional flavor text boxes to add to the developing Scene:

2 Tests

The Noise on the far side of the stadium is growing, and the crowds don't seem to be thinning out, though more Ikaru robots are arriving on the scene.

3-4 Tests

A good chunk of the far stadium has collapsed into the Noise, and a general warning has gone out across the Schema, letting people know of the danger.

5-6 Tests

The Noise is about halfway across the field at this point, and you can feel the panic gripping the crowd even more strongly.

7-8 Tests

People are beginning to get logged out by the sheer press of the crowd damaging them, and the Noise is so close you can feel the hair on your neck stand up.

9 Tests

The Noise is right behind you. The crowd is panicking. Is this the end?

The Noise is Here

If the characters do not make it in time, the Noise will start logging people out and doing major damage to people.

This means that every character is going to be affected by the Noise rules:

This Noise is level 5. Every Round anyone touched by it will take roll 5 Aetherium dice, gaining a damage for each Disruption rolled and a Glitch for any Crashes.

The characters will still need their 8 successes to escape, but the arrival of the Noise thins out the crowd. All tests are reduced by 1 difficulty (this may make some rolls difficulty 0), making it much easier to make forward progress.

Escape!

If the Users get a total of 8 successes (from the highest successes in this Scene, not a combination of everyone's rolls), they manage to escape the stadium! Proceed to the Escape the Schema Scene.

NIMBU DRONE

LEVEL 0

Nimbu Drones provide House Ikaru with scouting and tactical support.

Stats: 2

Hack: 0

Defense: 1

CS: 2

Sync (6): 00000 0

Program(s):

REPULSOR JETS

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet, and you may choose to fly.

Complexity 4: Movement (1), Flight (3)

ANALYZE THREAT

2 CS : Charisma (40 feet)

This Program uses the Pylon Level as the Defense. Give another character +1 die on their next test.

Complexity 1: Encourage (1)

SCENE: ESCAPE THE SCHEMA

This Scene takes place as the characters exit the stadium. Choose one of the Users and read the below to kick it off.

[CHOSEN CHARACTER]'s phone starts to ring, from an unrecognized number. Phones only work on the same Node, so whoever is calling must be around here somewhere.

If the character picks up, read the below. If not, choose another character's phone to try. If everyone refuses to pick up, well, they'll have a hard time figuring out how to get out of this predicament.

"Oh good! You picked up. It's Ceres here, and I'm your ride out of this place. Roland gave me your info. Looks like this place is breakin' apart and I bet the heat is on.

"I've got a ship that'll carry us straight out of this mess to the Puppeteer. I'm due south, all the knots until the blue."

You can hear the excitement in her voice, so there's some part of this that she's loving.

If the character's talk to her more, she'll say that she's a captain with the Nanomei, and she volunteered to escort the "chosen ones" (as she puts it) to the Co-Op, a Nanomei Node where the Puppeteer is located.

She doesn't see much reason to try to convince anyone, as the Schema is collapsing to the Noise, and it's likely there are high security checkpoints to escape onto another Schema.

When the Users start to head south toward Ceres and her ship, read the below:

The Noise is ripping up through the stadium and continuing to rapidly expand. House Ikaru forces can be seen scrambling to help evacuate people, but interspersed through them are clearly patrols of soldiers.

You make it a good way south, and you can see the wall of Noise that is the edge of the Node getting closer and closer. Any Noise ship is going to be parked right on the edge of that.

As the ship comes into view, however, you notice two Nimbu Drones congregate and let out a loud alarm signal.

The panicked people in the area begin to scatter, and you can see a lone figure coming toward you. It is a humanoid robot with inverted knees and sharp talons at the end of its toes. Its torso looks armored, and it moves with a confident grace toward you.

"Halt, suspects. You are... wanted for questioning. Come with us or be deleted."

The character can, of course, choose to give up, but it's more likely that they'll end up fighting. How much they have to fight depends on how long they took to escape the stadium:

- **8+ rolls:** 6x Drones and 4x Ketsoraki
- **6-7 rolls:** 4x Drones and 2x Ketsoraki
- **<6 rolls:** 2x Drones and 1x Ketsoraki

Regardless, they'll always fight the one Tengri that is speaking to them.

There is literally no way to convince the Tengri of anything, as it is mentally enslaved. It will use its fist and martial arts in order to subdue the characters, if possible. If it is not, it will kill them so that the information they are carrying is lost.

If they win this fight, they have a clear path to Ceres and her ship, the Rickety Split.

The information for Nimbu Drones can be found on page 183.

The other combatants can be found below:

KETSORAKI

LEVEL 1

Ketsoraki serve as mobile assassins, specialized in the pursuit of quarry and their apprehension.

Stats: 3

Hack: 3

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (8): 00000 000

Program(s):

KATANA

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deal +2 damage, ignoring 1 Damage Reduction.

Complexity 4: Strength Weapon (1), Extra Damage (2), Piercing (1)

SHURIKEN

2 CS : Coordination (40 feet)

Deal +1 damage.

Complexity 2: Finesse Weapon (2)

DEFENSIVE PARRY

Passive

Reduce damage from attacks against you by 1. This cannot reduce damage below 1.

Complexity 3: Armor (3)

AGILE FRAME

Passive

Increase your movement by 10 feet. For each CS spent moving during your Turn, increase your Defense by 1.

Complexity 4: Movement (1), Acrobatic Defenses (3)

TENGRI

LEVEL 3

Tengri are all around powerful AI Programs, dedicated to subduing Personas and wiping their memories.

Stats: 4

Hack: 5

Defense: 1

CS: 4

Sync (12): 00000 00000 00

Program(s):

METAL ARMS

3 CS : Force (5 feet)

If the target's next Turn occurs before your next Turn, the target's CS is reduced by 1 and they suffer +2 damage. For every 2 Excess you spend, reduce the target's CS by an additional 1. The target is also moved 10 feet towards or away from you, dealing 1 damage per 5 feet the target travels if they collide with something.

Complexity 4: Grapple Assist (2), Grab Connection (3), 2x Momentum (3)

Special:

MINDWHIP

You can communicate telepathically with a single target, who can spend 1 CS and roll a Perception (3) test to break the link.

You can Hack (Defense is the difficulty) to scan the thoughts of someone you're connected to. Every Chip can reveal a thought or remove about 10 seconds of memory permanently.

SCENE: RICKETY SPLIT

When the fight wraps up, the Users can make it the rest of the way to the Rickety Split and its captain, Ceres.

You approach the edge of the Node of Okina, a place where the swirling blue mist of the Noise lasts as far as the eye can see. Following it up, it curves over the massive Node, an endless barrier to safe travel.

Right at the edge of the Noise floats a small vessel, barely big enough to carry everyone. It looks like the ship is slowly decomposing.

A woman stands on the deck looking at you and gives you a wave.

"You made it! Great! All aboard. We're going to be moving as fast as we can. This ain't no RezX ship so there's no telling how long she'll hold up!"

She gives a grin.

You're in the Core, so you know it's not far to the next Node, but that ship doesn't look too safe, either.

The Noise is expanding throughout the Schema, so it's only a matter of time before the whole thing collapses.

RICKETY SPLIT

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1000

This Program can carry one driver and five passengers. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

Reduce the Noise Level within this Program by 5.

Complexity 13 (23 Sync):

VEHICLE (2), 4X INCREASED SIZE (4), 5X NOISE SHIELD (5), HARDENED (2)

When the characters get on board, read the following:

After boarding the Rickety Split, you recognize immediately why this boat has its name. It seems to groan under the weight of the Noise, which is pressing in from all sides.

The captain, a boisterous woman dressed for all the world like a pirate, set off into the Noise almost immediately, letting you know that "the ship might seem like it's falling apart, but that's because it is!"

There is no one else on the ship other than your group and the captain. It's for the best, as it's a small ship. The ship cuts a quick path through the Noise. The captain tells you that you're headed to the Co-Op, one of the Nanomei's Nodes.

It isn't long, however, before the Noise around you seems to begin to thicken and swirl. The captain's brow furrows and she calls out "Looks like a storm's coming in."

Out in the Noise, you can just make something out, something that seems out of place in the Noise. A shape is moving toward you – it is small, about the size of a person. It is moving in an undulating motion, and as it gets closer it appears to be a squid.

You've heard stories of things like this in the Noise, but most people believed them to be just myths... and yet, here one is. As you tear your eyes from the odd motions, you can see that there are in fact numerous of the creatures coming toward the ship with their odd, fluid grace.

In another moment, there's a loud snap as a crack runs across the decking.

When it rains, it pours. In a few moments, the creatures will be at the ship, and it doesn't look like the ship's hull will make it much longer.

This section has, essentially, 2 things that can be done:

1. Dealing with the ship breaking
2. Dealing with the squids

The characters can divide up among the different solutions and address them separately, if they wish, and go back and forth between them.

Fending off the Squids

There are a number of Aether Watchers coming in equal to twice the number of players. Read the below to anyone paying attention to them, using the correct number of Squids:

[NUMBER] of the strange creatures have reached the ship and begin to attach themselves to it, which seems to be exacerbating the hull damage.

Every Round, the Squids do 1 damage to the ship for every 2 of them, rounded up. See Fixing the Ship to find out about the ship damage.

The only way to stop the squids is to fight them. Any attack against them will cause them to stop attacking the ship and start attacking the character in groups of 2, when possible.

AETHER WATCHER

LEVEL 0

Strange squid-like creatures that seem to live out in the Noise, they seem curiously drawn to Complex Programs.

Stats: 2

Hack: 0

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (6): 00000 0

Special: *This character is unaffected by the Noise.*

Program(s):

TENTACLES

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 1: Strength Weapon (1)

Fixing the Ship

Read the below for anyone investigating damage to the ship:

It doesn't take an expert to see the massive crack running along the deck of the Newton. It looks like the Noise probably found a small crack in the ship and exploited it. You may be able to slow its progress, but it won't be easy.

The Rickety Split is currently at 10 Sync of its 23. The first 12 damage it took came from its Hardened, but the last one that caused the crack actually took out one of its Noise shields.

The Noise is currently level 4. Every Round, roll 4 Aetherium dice against the ship. Every Disruption will deal 1 damage, and every Crash will deal 2 (1 from the Disruption and 1 from the Crash).

The Noise will begin to affect the characters as shown below as the Noise begins to slowly destroy the ship's Sync:

- **9 Sync** = Noise level 1
- **8 Sync** = Noise level 2
- **7 Sync** = Noise level 3
- **6 Sync** = Noise level 4

If the ship goes below 6 Sync, it begins to break apart and is able to carry fewer and fewer passengers, until finally it is destroyed. Try to avoid this -- if the characters log out in the Noise, they might die (and will certainly fail the adventure).

If all the Aether Watchers are defeated, the storm in the Noise calms down enough, lowering to Noise level 2 instead of 4.

The ship can't be fixed out in the Noise, but steps can be taken to prevent further damage:

- Manipulate Noise, Recalibrate, or Reasoning (3) can be rolled, with each success preventing 1 damage from the next Noise roll instead of their normal function.

When the Aether Watchers are defeated, the Scene is completed. Go to the next page.

SCENE: NAVIGATING THE CO-OP

Read the below:

With the creatures defeated, the Noise outside seems to have calmed down enough for the Rickety Split to make it safely to its destination: the Co-Op. Hopefully, the Puppeteer can help you find out what happened to Roland.

As the Rickety Split breaches the Noise bubble around the Co-Op, you're struck by the Node. There is a mass of humanity, spread out among tent cities and open ground. Despite the number of people, the Node itself looks undeveloped. In fact, you can't see the light of any Pylons to speak of, just the Node itself.

It looks almost like a whole city of people camping instead of an urban development.

The Rickety Split sets down at the edge of the Node, and Ceres walks up smiling.

"Always an adventure, going through the Noise. I'm afraid the ship'll need some work, though, so you're on your own from here. The Puppeteer should be able to help you out. Don't know how to help you there, though. Never met the man myself." She shrugs and turns around and starts examining her ship, apparently done with the conversation.

Roland had said to meet the Puppeteer on this Node, but there are unlikely to be any signs pointing him out... and it doesn't look like the sort of place that has a phone book. Guess it's time to hit the streets!

Ceres is going to be working on her ship, but she's happy to chat with the Users more if they want to talk. Unfortunately, she doesn't have any useful information to offer. There's a callout box in the next column that gives some information about Nanomei generally that she might share.

At this point, the Users need to find the Puppeteer. It's not going to be easy, as the Nanomei aren't exactly forthcoming. Give the players the benefit of the doubt on finding information, keeping difficulties between 1 and 3 (3 for far-fetched plans). More likely scenarios are presented in the next column and on the next page.

This completion of this Scene is a little more free-form than most. It works a lot like the Escape the Stadium Scene (in that a certain number of successes should be needed), but the successes don't exactly build on one another. What's more important than the total successes is that the Scene remains interesting.

If rolls are failed repeatedly, or the Users get too brazen, it's likely they'll attract the attention of some Rabble, who are always looking for a fight. Small, quick fights can be handled using the Rabble stats on the next page.

The characters should find the Puppeteer based on the "Where's the Puppet Show?" section or after attracting enough attention (after 2 or more fights with the Rabble), the Puppeteer will send for them. Regardless, remember how he was found, as it'll matter in the next Scene.

Who Are the Nanomei?

The Nanomei are passionate anarchists.

They are highly individualistic (despite the ways they conform to each other).

They are prone to secrecy as a matter of survival, but they are true friends to those that earn their trust.

They never mind getting in a fist fight.

Asking Around

The easiest and most obvious solution to finding the Puppeteer is asking around. The Nanomei aren't exactly forthcoming with strangers, but they aren't trying to hide things, either.

Asking around requires a Charisma (2) test for anyone asked. If the characters take the time to find someone more important (such as a street vendor) rather than just one of the random people, reduce the difficulty by 1.

A success on this roll will give information based on the section on the next page titled Where's the Puppet Show?

A failure on this roll will attract some attention, but it should take two or three failed rolls to have someone want to throw a punch.

Surveillance

It is possible to find the Puppeteer through surveillance methods, but not just walking around the Node and looking. The Users will need to take advantage of H.U.D. Programs, Robots, flight, etc.

The type of surveillance needed to gain information that helps lead to the Puppeteer can only be obtained through the use of Programs, so any Program should roll its main Stat (use Speed for Movement).

The difficulty of this roll is 3, but the characters may use aid another to assist each other (even if using different dice pools than another) as they narrow down the search areas.

If the players don't think of using the aid rules, just take the total of all successes rolled by the characters and allow one character to roll their Perception with bonus dice equal to the number of successes.

This method is very likely to find out a lot of information, should the characters have the correct Programs. However, this type of surveillance also draws a lot of attention: if everyone participates, pick the character who rolled the lowest and have them attacked by two Rabble. This is an easy fight, but if they are alone, it may take some time.

RABBLE

LEVEL 0

Random Nanomei anarchists looking for a bit of a fight to blow off some steam.

Stats: 3

Hack: 0

Defense: 1

CS: 3

Sync (5): 00000

Special: This character only fights in groups.

Program(s):

PUNCHES

2 CS : Force (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage.

Complexity 1: Strength Weapon (1)

Checking the Node

The Co-Op has two Nodes and no Pylons, making it a rare type of Node for one so populated. Unlike most other Nodes, it doesn't have Pylon technology running to create everything, so every Program (like the tents) is an Iconic Program, not a Pylon Program.

This makes interfacing with the Node more challenging than it would be in another place, as there is no computer AI backing it up. That said, it is creating the Node and has thousands upon thousands, if not millions, of minds reinforcing the Nodes existence... and that information can be mined as if there were a Pylon.

If a character uses the Pylon Interface Program, the difficulty is 1 and any success will point to the Puppeteer, but it will do so through vague imagery of a place. A further Perception (2) test is needed to understand where that place is located on the Node.

Without that Program, the difficulty is 2, and successes work as normal, using the Where's the Puppet Show information below to determine how close characters are to finding the Puppeteer.

Where's the Puppet Show?

This Scene is intended to be fairly freeform, so feel free to skip steps if Users are getting frustrated or lost. The goal is more about experiencing a new Node and trying out gathering information than anything else.

- **1-2 successes:** The Puppeteer usually spends his time in the Avant Garde district of the Node. Where that district is moves around from week to week, but it should be easy to get people to point in the right direction.
- **3-4 successes:** The Puppeteer likes to hang out at the Dark Web, a dive bar. The Dark Web is basically impossible to find without directions, though, as it's one of the only Iconic Program buildings, and it is set up with Mods to hide its location.
- **5+ successes:** The Dark Web is located at the south end of the Avant Garde district. It currently looks like a giant wooden replica of a horse. To get in, one must pull the building, which is on wheels, at least 5 feet with a Force (2) Test. Once complete, go to the next Scene.

SCENE: THE PUPPETEER AND THE WEB

Once the characters have moved the Dark Web, read the below:

The bottom of the wooden horse known as the Dark Web opens up and a ladder drops down. Ascending the ladder, you find a small establishment nearly packed with customers. On screens around the place on constant news stories, as the patrons largely drink and talk in hushed tones.

The atmosphere of the place is somber, but you can't help but be a little impressed that someone has an entire building as an Iconic Program. What's more, if it's hard to find, they must reskin the Program and change its Mods on a regular basis.

As you get into the bar fully, the bartender waves you over. They give you a half smile.

"You're new here. Don't get a lot of new faces in the Web. What can I get for you?"

The bartender is fairly forthcoming, for one of the Nanomei, and is happy to point out the Puppeteer (they figure the Puppeteer can easily handle himself).

When the players ask about the Puppeteer, the bartender will point him out.

Read the below:

The Puppeteer is sitting at a table in the middle of the room, back to the door, not a care in the world. With him at the table is a giant hulk of a man, easily 8 feet tall, if not more. A man of that size in the Aetherium must be running a strong Rig to truly fit the bill.

As you approach the Puppeteer, the other nearby patrons get up and pull their tables away, allowing you to sit without anyone easily overhearing.

With a glance and an incline of his head, he welcomes you to join him.

This Scene is a flowing conversation with the Puppeteer. He is an intense individual who is perfectly comfortable using others to get what he wants. He is direct, though he won't volunteer anything he doesn't have to.

The next page of this Scene is dedicated entirely to what questions the Users might ask of the Puppeteer and the types of responses he might give.

For the specific Virus adventure, however, he can provide the information below, when asked to help.

"I figured it was you that Roland sent. A good man, to go against his Collective like that. In my experience, people only do what you make them do."

The Puppeteer looks pensive for a moment and then continues. "So he gave you the Virus? A neat little concoction to store data. Better than a hard drive for sneaking things around, though less reliable. I can extract it and analyze it, doesn't take much at all if you have the encryption."

He puts his hand on the table, palm up, and motions for you to do the same. "I only need one of you who has the information. It should all be the same."

[ASSUMING SOMEONE VOLUNTEERS, CONTINUE]

He reaches into his bag and takes out a small computer with a syringe attached via a cable. He takes the needle and pricks your finger, and after a few keypresses, there is a lot of data flowing on his screen. For a time, he's oblivious to what's around him, as the giant man keeps a silent vigil.

After a time, he nods and looks up. "Looks like they are trying to replicate Axiom Slavhac tech, but without the drooling slave byproduct. I'm glad he's trying to stop them.... though he was Aether-jailed for it. Just for trying to help. Seems a shame..." with that, he trails off and looks back at his newfound data.

Once this is complete, the characters can choose to go their own way: their mission is complete, as is the adventure. All characters should gain 2 experience points.

If they want to try to help their friend Roland, the Puppeteer has more information for them (the second column of the next page). The Scene on the next page details how they can go about helping their friend.

Who Are You?

"I'm the Puppeteer. As you can imagine, I like to work from behind the scenes."

With a Charisma (1) test:

"I'm also one of the leaders of the Nanomei, if anyone can be said to be one."

What Do You Do?

"Me? I don't do anything. It's the people around me who get things done." His eyes look at the giant man, who reaches forward and breaks his glass, driving sharp glass into his hand. "It just takes a little push."

The characters can roll Composure (2). If they succeed, he sees they aren't bothered by the idea and says more:

"There's a subtle way to access someone's connection, giving you sway over the minds. They have to let you in, but most don't mind." He looks at the giant. "Do they?"

The giant shakes his head no and speaks. "A freely chose to be an agent of freedom."

What Information Did You Get?

This should only be read after he's extracted the information.

"Roland was working at a facility that was doing work to bypass autonomy safeguards on Rigs, allowing others access to the human mind. That's the sort of science that should never be allowed."

If questioned further:

"Have you ever heard of Slavhacs? Axiom that are taken and turned into drooling ghosts of their former selves, using their Rigs to use the strength of their minds with none of their consciousness. It's disgusting, but obvious work. I guess Roland's team was looking for a more subtle approach."

With a Reasoning (1) test, someone could realize the implications of enslaved minds that still act completely like themselves.

"It's possible the tech would allow people to be enslaved and not even know it. In my mind? We're better never knowing what it might accomplish."

Where is Roland Being Held?

"I can't get his Meatspace location, but I know he's been ailed. Dirty work, that. He's being held back on the Okina Node, though in one of their underground jails. It's not much good so long as they have a grab on his connect, though. They can force him there every time and track his Meat."

How Can We Help Him Escape?

"His only way out is with a joint assault. Someone's got to get him out of wherever he is in the Meatspace, and at the same time we've got to take down the Aether-Jail keeping him locked up so he can log out safely." The Puppeteer smiles. "You ever done a double jail break before?"

The Puppeteer is willing to help the characters by staging the Meatspace jailbreak, if they can take care of the Aetherium escape. He won't do this for free, however, for as much as he appreciates Roland's aid, lives will probably be lost attacking an Ikaru prison.

The characters will need a total of 6 successes (or 8 if he had to find them) to convince the Puppeteer to help them, which can be gained through a variety of methods, such as Charisma or the Manipulate Program.

Each time the characters roll, he won't argue with their logic, he'll just point out another thing he'll have to take care of, such as:

- "I'll need a number of agents in the local area, without them being flagged for travel"
- "People will need equipment, including a layout of the facility, and that doesn't come easy"
- "House Ikaru prisons are not lightly guarded, which means both stealth and firepower will be required"
- "Even if we break him out, it's only worth it if he makes it out of the Okina facility"
- "After he gets out, he'll need to be moved into hiding, which requires quite a bit of resources"

Throughout the process, it's likely that the characters will realize he's not really arguing with them, he's mostly seeing how committed they are. This is partially to ensure they hold up their end, but also to scout them as potential recruits for future missions.

Once they've convinced him, go to the next Scene.

SCENE: JAILBREAK

The Puppeteer has given the characters the opportunity to break Roland out of an Aetherial jail. These jails use Rig beacons in order to ensure that a person can only log in at one place, and they are geographically tracked when they log in and out, ensuring they cannot escape. It's not an easy process, but House Ikaru had the reach to make it happen.

The Users have a chance to prepare for this mission, as the Nanomei need time to get their agents into place. This will give the characters an opportunity to take care of any personal business before diving in.

This Scene takes place on the Okina Node, and it has two objectives: get Roland out of the prison in the Aetherium and get him safely logged out after getting word from the Puppeteer that his body has been moved. Roland will only be conscious in the Aetherium during this entire Scene.

This rest of this page is covering potential prep work the characters can do. The next page is breaking into the facility, and the page after that is getting Roland out.

The Facility Layout

The characters can do some legwork getting information about the facility layout. If they do, it'll make the other aspects of this Scene a bit easier.

Doing this prepwork can be as easy or as challenging as the GM wants, but it can be handled, generally, in two ways:

- **Use Computers:** The characters can use information systems to get information about the facility. General information is publicly available, but in-depth layouts require 2 or more successes. Pylon Interface is the best way to get the information, though non-Program rolls like Reasoning should work (though might require an additional success).
- **Use Informants:** Characters can get a layout by talking to guards and/or former inmates. Each of these characters will need to be bribed (see the rules for paying on page 91). The bribe amount can be fairly low (value 5), so long as the characters make a Charisma (2) test to first convince them to take it.

The Guards

The facility is regularly staffed by numerous guards of both the human and AI variety.

It is possible to find out what guards are working that day and get them not to log in (through sickness, bribery, threats, etc), which will make the entire prison break easier.

How this method should be approached depends on what the Users actually want to do.

First, the characters will need to find out who the guards are, using computers or informants as in the Facility Layout section, though always at difficulty 1.

Second, they'll need to manipulate these guards into not coming. Generally, this should only be difficulty 1 per guard, with a maximum of 6 guards being taken off shift.

The Getaway

It is best if the characters prepare a getaway, and their easiest choice is to use Ceres and the Rickety Split again.

If the characters reach out to Ceres, she is happy to help, especially after their good showing in the last trip through the Noise. She'll only require her normal payment of value 8 to do the job (see paying on page 91).

Successful Charisma, Force, or Reasoning tests at difficulty 2 can bring her price down by 1, to a minimum of 4.

The characters can choose to hire someone else, though the ship will use the same stats as the Rickety Split on page 186. Anyone else will cost 10, minimum, to do the job.

Finally, the characters could choose to stay on the Okina Node, but doing so is the most dangerous. If they arrange another kind of vehicle (the kind that doesn't go in the Noise), it'll cost 4, but it'll help them stay alive.

BREAKING INTO THE JAIL

This portion of the Scene (and getting out) are very free-form, depending on how characters handle it.

The characters will need a total of 10 successes, of any combination, to get to Roland. If they got the Facility Layout (from the previous page), it only requires 7 successes.

If the characters resort to forcing their way through, they can no longer roll for Sneaking In. They simply don't have enough time to fully conceal their presence again and still link up with the Nanomei in the Meatspace.

Below is some additional information on the jail, which is likely to come up in the game!

HACKING

Every Hack on the Okina Node, for this Scene, is at difficulty 2.

The jail walls (and floor, etc) are all Complexity 10, with 20 Sync of damage they can take, and a total of 6 Mods -- they will not be easy to Hack away.

The jail doors are Complexity 8, with 18 Sync of damage they can take, and only 4 Mods. They are easier to work with, but still not simple.

THE JAIL

The jail is three levels, two of which are above the surface of the Node and one of which is below.

It is a complex section of corridors, intended to make breaking in and out difficult. There are security cameras at major ingress points, but the jail itself is largely unmonitored.

THE GUARD PATROLS

The guards are not on alert so long as the characters are sneaking in, so they won't actively oppose any hiding tests.

The guards themselves are all defense 1, with a 2 in all Stats, and a simple laser pistol as on page 51. Each has 4 Sync, lower than average, so they can be dispatched quickly.

Sneaking In

The characters can sneak into the jail. This is usually a Coordination (1) test, following the hiding rules on page 149. For each additional CS spent on the hiding test, reduce any excess of the roll by 1. All characters must roll, but only the highest result is used for successes for the Scene (to count against the 10).

It is important, at each roll, to describe what is happening in the jail. An example is below:

The jail's long hallways aren't conducive to hiding, but it has many side rooms you can duck into with enough warning. As you hear the guards' feet patrol past, you only hope they didn't hear you enter the room.

If a Sneaking In roll is failed, other characters can use Excess to give it to the failing character, encouraging them to hide better (though this may detract from their movement toward Roland, if it comes from the highest rolling character).

Forcing Your Way In

It is possible to force your way into the jail and find Roland. The characters will be forced into this if detected, though some may choose to go in, guns blazing.

Unlike Sneaking in, Forcing your way in is an ongoing fight. The characters will come up against 2 guards, then 3 guards, then 2 guards, etc. until they reach the destination. If they manipulated the guards (as on the previous page), the first 3 times the guards show up, reduce their numbers by 1.

Each time they defeat the guards, they earn 2 successes toward getting to Roland. This means that characters who start forcing their way in need to go through 5 total fights to get to him.

The Okina Jail was not prepared for a prison break, so it doesn't have more people on hand to help out right away. That said, if any combat lasts 4 or more Rounds, another guard should join the fight.

WHEN ENOUGH SUCCESSES ARE ACHIEVED (10), GO TO THE NEXT PAGE.

GETTING OUT OF JAIL

This Scene is completed when all 4 Events pass (success) or when Roland reaches 0 Sync (fail). Roland has a total of 7 Sync, and everyone will target him when they can.

If the characters have arranged for a Noise Ship such as the Rickety Split (as detailed on page 192), then they only need to pass 2 Events. If they got another vehicle, they only need to complete 3 Events.

Read the below:

You find Roland in a jail cell near the middle of the facility, just as the Puppeteer had promised.

His eyes look hollow, and he shakes his head as you enter. "I appreciate what you're doing for me, but they've got my body. I can't get out of here and make it."

Once the Users explain to Roland the plan, he's happy to try to escape with them. They just need to evade capture until they know his body has escaped in the Meatspace.

Read the below once Roland agrees to go with them:

Getting out of the jail seems easy enough, and you meet little resistance along the way. Nothing that can't be handled.

Emerging onto the Okina Node, however, you wonder if you can really keep him safe on enemy territory for any amount of time.

Event 1

As the characters begin to leave the jail, they are confronted by 3 guards. If they took 4 or more out of action on page 192, reduce the guard count by 1 for each, to a minimum of not being confronted at all.

These guards, and everyone from here on out, is targeting Roland. They know that logging him out will achieve what they need, so they no longer target the characters at all.

Event 2

A contingent of Nimbu Drones (see page 183) is flying toward the characters, searching for Roland. Unlike the Drones from the stadium, these are equipped with Beam Rifles (page 51). There are a number of Drones equal to the number of players.

Event 3

The characters manage to make it far enough from the jail that they enter a crowd. It is clear that Ikaru patrols are closing in, so they'll need to blend in to get away. This is a Coordination (1) test, and each character that fails will deal a Sync to Roland as the police shoot into the crowd to try to get him. Alas, there are too many to safely fight, so flight is the only option.

Event 4

The patrols and Drones have funneled you, accidentally, toward an old abandoned building. Perhaps with enough Hacking, it can be made to look sealed and occupied. This requires a Hacking (1) roll, and a total of 5 or more Chips from the group. If it is failed, 2 Nimbu Drones, +1 per missing Chip, arrive with Beam Rifles, as per Event 2.

Failure

Failure occurs if Roland logs out by reaching 0 Sync (though there is a brief chance to revive him, about 1 minute). The characters won't get another shot like this to save him.

Characters who complete the Story gain a total of 2 XP.

Success!

Read the below:

Everyone feels a sudden buzz of their phone in their pocket. One of the Nanomei has logged in to let them know Roland is out safely.

Ducking into a concealed location, everyone pulls the plug on their connection and slowly logs out, happy to finally be done with this nightmare.

The characters have managed to get away with Roland! This concludes the Story, but some potential next steps for continuing in this vein can be found on the next page. Every character that completed the entire Story gains 3 XP (or only 2 if they didn't jailbreak Roland).

NEXT STEPS

This adventure is over, but it can be used as a great launching point for any future games. Below are a variety of spin-off Stories that could easily be used to continue with these characters and the general plot.

ELIMINATING THE THREAT

The characters may be interested in permanently eliminating the research that Roland turned them on to. While the Puppeteer will be taking some steps in this regard, he's unlikely to be completely successful on his own.

House Ikaru has a few facilities working on this technology and various points of back-up. Even if characters manage to get them all, the information has all been uploaded into the Central Processor.

Deleting the information from the Central Processor would be the stuff dreams are made of, but it is possible with enough perseverance and luck.

REPURPOSING THE TECH

The characters may want to go about using the information Roland stole to try to repurpose the technology to their own benefit. While this is highly morally questionable, it might be beneficial.

The characters are unlikely to have the skill needed to do this themselves, so they'll have to find black market contacts that can help them repurpose it.

These types of contacts often require Meatspace introductions, though, to ensure that everyone has some skin in the game, and any meeting like that is likely to be rife with challenges and opportunities for betrayal.

If they hammer out an agreement, more information will be needed from Ikaru facilities to further the tech, along with test subjects and rare materials from the material world.

JOINING THE NANOMEI

The Puppeteer is likely to be impressed with the characters, and he has a lot of clout with the Nanomei. If they wanted to join up, these missions would give them an easy 3 Reputation with the Nanomei, and the possibility of future work.

The first step for many Nanomei recruits is disrupting the operations of an Axiom Loyalty Center, a place where mental reprogramming happens to dissident citizens.

If that goes well, adept recruits are channeled into more dangerous work, often being given tasks in the Meatspace. The characters would likely be sent on a food raid to get supplies for Nanomei cells in the Meat.

From there, the Nanomei always have a wide array of objectives, and the characters should be in tight enough with them to start their own missions.

JOINING HOUSE IKARU

It's risky, but characters that went so far have learned a lot about the Ikaru and the Nanomei, and they could use that knowledge to try to get in with House Ikaru.

The characters have already proved their value, but they'll first need to prove that they are actually loyal.

The first step in this process is going to be hitting back at the Nanomei they helped, hard. They will need to report on the next large Nanomei operation and then help undermine it.

If that goes well, the next step will be to put Roland back in jail, which will likely be a breaking point for the characters. If they go through with it, though, they'll have proved their loyalty and be accepted, at least temporarily, into House Ikaru.



THE MATERIAL WORLD

Welcome to the material world - the Meatspace. The erstwhile Eden where human life started, but that almost everyone wants desperately to escape.

The Meatspace is in a state of decay, and the pull of entropy lays heavy on the human mind. The environment, the economy, and the socio-political order all seem to be aligned against the common person, but still they must struggle against it and carve out their own place in the world.



For most of history, every story was a tale of the Earth. People arrived on the stage and history began. It was a history of conquest: conquest of nature, conquest of people, and conquest of the unknown.

Conquest, though, does not come free, for there is always a payment that must be made on one end or the other. "To the victor go the spoils," as the old saying goes.

And in the 22nd century, humanity had achieved such great victories that all that was left of the planet they called home was the spoils. The Earth was the rotting, decomposing remains of what was once an idyllic place.

The environment was in near total collapse. Biodiversity plummeted. Most of the resources had been taken to near exhaustion. The panic of scarcity had become the largest factor in the human experience.

When the Aetherium was discovered, humanity had found a new world. The Aetherium was a place disconnected from the Earth and everything that people had come to know; it was a place disconnected from true scarcity. Humanity could know abundance once more.

As the Aetherium was shaped into the world humanity desired, the material world began to suffer a curious and slow abandonment. Humanity fled the degradations of the flesh in the pursuit of something more uplifting.

In that flight, the material world became something woeful, something repugnant. It had a certain stench to it that comes only from decay and death.

The material world became the Meatspace.

And yet, despite its collapse and decay, the Meatspace is the foundation of all of human existence. It is the Meatspace that gives birth to new people, and sustenance for continued life can only be found there.

What's more, the Pylon technology that creates the wonders of the Aetherium must be housed in the Meatspace, drawing power and resources out of the carcass of the world.

Humanity may have tried to flee into the Aetherium, but the Meatspace will forever act as a tether to a home no longer wanted, a home festering with the spoils of their own victories. Home to a place they'd like to forget.

For in the end, we are all just meat.

***"The me of the Aetherium
is the same as the me
elsewhere. We are not truly
two beings, but one."***

BO FUREN

A SORT OF HOMECOMING



ORDER is LIBERATION

Ellios watched the few individuals that moved about on the streets in between shifts. There were never many people moving about an Axiom city when "volunteer" time was underway, and he could feel the oppressive silence of it all. Not that it would be much different when people were on the streets. There was never much to say when embodied; this wasn't truly life.

Ellios was a Discon, one of the few people in this entire city that didn't work for the Axiom. He was, ostensibly, a traveling salesman here to bring the latest in House Ikaru technology to those working in the city. In truth, though, he was a spy.

He sighed to himself. To call myself a spy is to give myself too much credit, he thought. I'm a data collector looking for the standing nail.

He looked about at the empty streets and his eyes settled on the steel frame of a massive building before him which held the old clock, regularly chiming out the shifts to the Axiom cogs in the factories and processing vats of this district of the city.

He'd never seen the clock, exactly, but he knew where it was meant to be – it's massive bronze shape set behind a glass veneer that was itself set within the steel frame of the surrounding buildings. These had grown to eclipse all but one facing of the original form that once stood above the city, one lonely side set into a wall of gray industrial sprawl. It was monolithic once. Now the building just sat as if it were cowering among the urban mess, like a lost child walking through a crowded forest of knees.

In the middle distance, Ellios heard the old clock's discordant chime to bring the masses into the evening hour. It annoyed him, that old clock - not for the clingy nostalgia it represented, not for its archaic mechanisms, but because it was off. The sound wasn't right, like the resolution or feed rate was somehow wrong about it. The sound echoed poorly, had a tin quality, and never felt as solid as an antique clock should. The resonance was anemic, and it never could sync with his chronometer. But of course, that was silly in itself. The clock was the clock: old, metal, distant, and nearly drowned among the modern clamor.

Nevertheless, he heard it. He understood what it meant. And so, he stepped down quickly across the pattern walkway as the clock struck again, though further now. He thought to himself, this is the Meat. The clock isn't off. Everything is off. Nothing in the Aetherium feels this empty.

The thought trailed off as the teeming, shuffling masses left their jobs at the fungal protein farms around this low district. The clock marked the end of their shift, and the old metal and concrete towers inhaled and exhaled the workers through their routines. The laborers filed out.

Soon, new but virtually identical laborers would file in to monitor, to shovel, to toil at the processes of the growth vats. It was important work, in its way. But the massive towers remained impassive in whatever conversations they had with one another, like old stone giants around whom nature had once again grown in its determined and chaotic mess. The people were of little consequence, just shadows sliding in and out in their quotidian drudgery.

This was once a real metropolis, Ellios thought without pausing to consider the irony. Surely, this place once had power and dreams and ambition. But now the streets were filthy, humid, and perpetually crowded.

He turned another corner, much the same as the previous, and dodged his way through the emerging throng of bumbling citizenry. He was invisible to the weary faces through which he wove his purposeful path. He was in a hurry, but nobody so much as acknowledged his presence, even those he brushed, nudged, or jostled in his haste. The mass of bodies were oblivious. Each was lost. All were forgotten in their own solitary ruminations. Few, if any at all, spoke to one another. Most were likely thinking of their other life, the one that waited for them off these alleys.

There was still power in the place, of course. Quantity, as they say, has a quality all its own. And if the city had not reached its aspirations, it had nevertheless grown in staggering ways. It was a metropolis still, and a real one at that, as Ellios knew entirely too well. Ellios was one of maybe 20 million people that lived in sub-urban understreets. Another 10 million likely lived above, one million more in the stratus, and then the further 25 million spread unceasingly across the fringes. The city never ended.

Though already buried deep beneath the shadows of the towers, Ellios took his next left toward an alley and descended several crumbling concrete landings through the winding levels of the brutal gray hab-complex.

There, in the distance, he could make out the form again. One solitary individual in this whole damn city not doing what she should. She was moving against the crowd.

Ellios was never entirely sure how he knew she moved against the people, as everyone was headed in different directions, but he could feel it in his bones, and so he followed her.

She went deeper into the sunken alleyways and darkened corners of the lower city. He knew where she was headed. It was where he'd first seen her.

He broke off from his pursuit and moved to get into a good position to watch her when she arrived at her destination. He was looking for a sign that she might betray her perfect Axiom leaders, but he had to be careful she wasn't Nanomei. That would be like trying to catch lightning.

In another few minutes, Ellios had himself established in an empty storefront two stories up and half a block down from where she was going, and he waited. It didn't take long for him to see her moving along the edges of the buildings in the shadows. There was no one else here, as everyone was either back at their station or logged in; no one stayed in the Meatspace longer than was necessary.

Ellios stared as she started to spray paint the wall again, another tag, another layer of anti-Axiom messaging. If she was caught, she'd be given a Referral and sent for processing. He didn't envy her, but he knew it took bravery to actively speak against the Axiom, even when no one could hear.

On the wall, the beginning of a symbol appeared: a broken key. Ellios smiled to himself. If she worked out for Ikaru, maybe he could get stationed away from this depressing city, get himself a job in the Aetherium. If she turned out.

Ellios could feel the sweat begin to drip off him, despite remaining stationary. He sighed again. He had to get out of this place, even if just for tonight. It wouldn't take him long to get to his Rig and get out of the city, get out of his meat.

No time like the present.

Ellios made his way down to where the woman was spray painting, now adding a door without a lock to her imagery.

He must have made some noise, as she suddenly turned toward him, fear written plain on her features.

"Easy there," he said to her in as soothing a tone as he could muster. "I'm a friend."

He could tell she was still debating whether or not to run, but she replied in heavily accented Spara.

"Ain't friends in the machine. Only cogs. You a cog?" Ellios shook his head. "Then what are ya?"

"I'm a salesman. Nothing more." Ellios held out his hands, palms toward her, hoping to show that he meant no harm, but she only sneered.

"I'm not buying, 'friend,' so you best move along."

"Oh good, as I don't have anything to sell. I was hoping, actually, that you might have something I could sell?" His voice pitched up at the end, leaving a question hang between them.

She had begun to edge away from the wall where she'd be doing her art, and she finally dropped the spray paint.

"And what're you buying, down in this dump? Scrap metal?" she asked, taking a step toward him.

"I was hoping to buy some news and maybe some insight." He shot her a smile. "You see, I'm not with the Axiom, and it would be to my benefit to understand more of their inner workings, if you follow me."

Her eyes narrowed. "You want to buy information. From me." There was no question in her voice.

"More precisely, I'd like you to sell me information, when you have information to sell."

She nodded and took another step closer to him, and then another. "Ya know, the thing about the Axiom is that they believe all the tripe they spout. They ain't liars; they're just stupid. You, though, you're a liar, aren't ya?"

She leaned in close to his face and whispered to him. "Do you even believe in anything?"

The closeness of her body made him uncomfortable. He could smell her, the sweat on her like it was on him. It was a bit grotesque, wearing a suit of flesh and bone.

She smiled at him, showing yellowed teeth indicative of someone who has eaten too much food paste, and stood back. "Na, you can keep your money. I've got everything I need right here."

Something in the way she said it, he knew the discussion was over. She might have railed against the Axiom, but she was still one of them. The aberrant cog in the system, but a part of the system no less. He'd wasted months watching her looking for signs, and he'd been wrong.

He shrugged, as much for himself as for her, and turned around. He couldn't wait to log in and get out of this place.

He began to retrace his steps, moving back toward his hab, moving up into a higher level of the city.

Ellios' hab-slab, number 23400, opened at chest height, and he rested his forehead on the pressure door as he placed one foot on the boost to get in. He coded the keypad, climbed up to the stoop of his domicile.

It was small, but dry. He took off his coveralls, folded them, and set them flush against the interior of the door. They'd keep any draft out at least, and maybe the noise. There was barely room to stand, and the nullifiers only worked so well to cut the din between his slab and the people on either side, above and below.

The single room was narrow, long, and sparse. One bed folded up in the wall, there was a small table just big enough for his meals cut into the wall opposite. He paused a moment and raised a dirty glass from the table. He grimaced as he swallowed what was left of this morning's thick, oily gin. He'd left it there on purpose, a reward to send him onto the new day waiting for him at the end of this day.

There was a single chair set back into storage units beyond in the back corner furthest from the door. Ellios hunched his way to the chair directly. He dropped into it and felt the gentle squeeze, as the rig sat snug around him. His knees poked slightly out from the storage bins. Ellios leaned back and sighed a deep and weary sound.

He felt like he might be able to remember potential in this city. He thought he remembered hope.

All was forfeit to the vast frontier called Aetherium. He adjusted his neuroband, and slipped the connections across the spinal wetware. He felt the gin settle his stomach. His was a fifth-generation model now nearly obsolete, but there was still some life left in the old deck. He keyed a new set of code into the interface and sighed again more quickly. The vision in his left eye lost the room as the data link began to measure his mind. His pulse sharpened. His breath left him. His eyes rolled to the back of his head. The deck kicked to life and his consciousness was pulled out through his cortex into a reality more vivid than the quotidian dreariness of his life.

It began.

His body was floating, weightless and fluid. At a thought, he slipped through the gate and aligned smoothly into the Greater Tier of the SIM. He turned, reflexively, and folded his neck back into his chest so that his shoulders felt the rush of his simulated movement. He watched the data-lumins scroll away from him, back toward the reality floating further and further into the recesses of his consciousness.

His re-emergence into the Aetherium was almost complete, but this part always gave him pause... His re-emergence into the Aetherium was almost complete, but this part always gave him pause... his re-emergence.

The 'drenal junkies lived for it. The shunt they called it – the last plummet when one's prepared consciousness slammed finally into the new reality, new body, new breath, new life. Until that point, one was vaguely aware of two bodies, one mind with twin sets of sensory feedback. It could be shockingly unnerving to those not conditioned to accept the psychological stresses. The junkies thrived on it. For most everyone else, it could be nauseating down to one's soul.

The dim light of Ellios' slab darkened further as the room sensors registered his transference into a reality more compelling than this one. His breathing came in short but steady rhythms. His head rolled limp. And so, in pitch, his body rest, twitching from time to time as the synapses spilled back across the worlds. Hours from now, the old clock would make its forlorn call into the streets, and the sensors would begin the slow process of pulling Ellios back from his living dreams. But for now, he could still make time.

Here. Now. The Aetherium. He was home.

* * *

She watched him go into his tiny room and smiled. He was not a great spy, and that worked to her advantage. A bumbling spy could easily turn into an unwitting double agent.

She brought up her keypad with information about him: Ellios Trumane, House Ikaru agent. Lower tier, ripe for the plucking.

She smiled again and began punching in the coordinates for her graffiti, letting the ministry know where it was so they could clean it up. She didn't want anyone getting the wrong idea. A society with vandals was no society at all.



MEATSPACE OVERVIEW

Most of the Aetherium RPG revolves around the Aetherium itself. It is a world of great potential where thrilling adventures await. It is a world, however, that cannot exist without another place: the Meatspace.

This section of the book represents everything players need to know about the material world. It is a section that is not needed to play the game; a group may feel free to not use any Meatspace rules. This section of the book adds flavor and a compelling backdrop, but some may choose to focus exclusively on the Aetherium. That's okay, the people of the Aetherial world do that, too.

Most Aetherial users view the Meatspace as a backward place where everything is turned on its head. It is something that can be ignored.

However, there's something to be said for keeping a game of Aetherium in touch with its roots in the material world. The possibilities and joy of the Aetherium can only be fully realized when juxtaposed with the backdrop of the decay of the material world.

Using the Meatspace rules allows games to explore another aspect of the human existence, and it allows there to be more emphasis on more permanent consequences for the characters involved. Damage to the meat tends to last.

When Should I Use This Section?

These few chapters on the Meatspace are great for people who are already comfortable with the Aetherium RPG. It is recommended that these rules are not used for the first few sessions of the game for new players, as it introduces new rules that are not necessary to the enjoyment of the game (but can heighten enjoyment for those comfortable with the game already).

This section provides another way to look at some of the core tenants of the world: what does it mean to die in the Aetherium? What does it mean to live in the world of the Axiom in the meat, but work for House Ikaru in the Aether?

Most importantly, though, this section should be used as a way to expand the Aetherium RPG into new frontiers and offer new challenges to players who are beginning to master the world of the Aetherium.

What's Different in the Meatspace?

For the most part, the rules of the Meatspace work just like the rules of the Aetherium. This chapter covers all the new and different rules, as well as some basic information about the setting.

The Aetherium dice are by and large the biggest change. They are not used in the Meatspace, and none of the things they do have any effect. There is no Glitch, no Hacking, and no Noise. Character's can't do things that they'd have to gain a Glitch to do, such as Overclock or reroll dice. In the meat, things are how they appear.

Another change is that currency is used in the Meatspace, called Wealth. The material world is a place where poverty is rampant, and much of the possibilities of the world are locked behind Wealth. As such, income and Wealth play a large part in characters when outside of the Aetherium.

While a character's VAR can impact their Wealth, the two are not directly connected, forcing even those characters successful in the Aetherium to sometimes struggle in the material world.

The last big difference is in character defenses. While defenses work the same mechanically, each character has two different defense values: Block and Resist. Unlike the Aetherium, where the mind and Rig oppose external influence, the Meatspace requires different types of defenses.

There are a few other differences, but they are largely cosmetic, such as different names for Stats. Instead of Stats, they are called Trainings, which work the same but use the different terminology.

All of these differences are covered in more detail later in this chapter.

What Happens in the Meatspace?

Most people's existence in the material world is meager. They are trying to scrape out a living. Most work for a government or Collective in the hopes of getting just a little bit more out of life. In reality, most are just waiting for their time in the Aetherium.

That is not all that happens in the Meatspace, though. Much of the Aetherium is founded upon what happens in the meat.

Every Node is supported by one or more Pylon farms, massive server areas that are running the Pylons that stabilize the Aetherium. The locations of these areas are closely guarded secrets, as any disruption could spell disaster for whole cities in the Aetherium.

Propaganda and civil unrest can cause people to begin to question their allegiances. As one group or another gets more sway in the material world, it becomes far easier to get them to take a stand in the Aetherium. More than one battle over what Collective controls a Node was won through campaigns in the Meatspace.

On a smaller scale, individual lives are what makes up the world of the meat.

These stories of individual lives ask minor, but important, questions like what Rig someone can use, whether they have access to a doctor, and how often they need to log out to eat.

It can also be supported by more life-or-death concerns. If your enemies in the Aetherium find out who you are in the Meatspace, it is not hard to find someone to kill you while your brain is in another place.

There are many, many stories that can be told in the material world that cannot be told in the Aetherium. The risks in the material world are greater, and the rewards can be amplified. What seems impossible in the Aetherium (taking down a Node) might be much easier in the Meatspace (taking down a server that controls a Node's Pylons).

Each world has its own draws and pulls, and using both creates a complete picture of what life is like for humanity in the 23rd century.

Stability and Decay

The Meatspace isn't a world of possibility. Fundamental resources, like food, are scarce. Natural laws govern the world, but humanity has brought about large-scale environmental degradation that makes life that much more challenging for all species on the planet.

The fundamental, unchanging laws of nature mean that the Meatspace is a world of stability.

There is no Glitch, and there are no Aetherium dice, in the Meatspace.

One cannot Hack the material world to create something that they needed, as such things are the domain of magical fantasies. The world exists as it is perceived.

One cannot gain Glitch to gain a benefit, as the world is too stable for one to be able to choose chaos. While there is chaos in the Meatspace, it is small and unknown, not a force that can be harnessed like Glitch.

The environment, while no longer friendly, is not overtly hostile. There is no Noise, but there is also no need for Pylons or Nodes. The things that exist, exist. Items cannot be materialized and dematerialized.

To put it simply, the Meatspace works like the world that the players understand, albeit with some differences in technology.

"Humanity hoped it would reach the end of history, but instead we found the apex. It is all downhill from here, as near as I can tell.

That is why the Aetherium is so appealing; it looks like a chance to start over with a new history."

DR. VALDEZ

AETHERIAL TRAVELS

The rules for logging into, and out of, the Aetherium are the same as found in the Aetherium Mechanics chapter, but they are expanded here in order to include some additional information from Rigs.

Logging In

Logging in is easy. If connected to their Rig, a character simply turns it on. The moment a Rig is turned on, the consciousness leaves the body, but it's not yet in the Aetherium.

It takes twelve minutes of material time (one minute of Aetherial time) for the Rig to fully adjust a person's perceptions to the Aetherium, during which the character is in a loading area.

The loading area has all the Node and Pylon information stored on the person's Rig, and the individual can choose where they want to log in. They can also select which Programs they choose to appear with. The whole process usually takes about a minute in the Meatspace.

After that, the character is fully within the Aetherium and completely unaware of their surroundings in the material world. Only significant stimulus can have an echo inside the mind of a person inside the Aetherium itself.

Logging Out

Logging out is a simple process. If a character is forced to log out (their Sync dropped to 0) or they chose to, their Rig begins the process of removing them from the Aetherium.

This process usually takes about one minute of Aetherial time (twelve of material time), the same as logging in, as the Rig slowly reverts the individual's perceptions back to the material world and resynchronizes their mind to their body.

A character that is forced to log out is very likely to feel ill for a time afterward. Without the Pylon's assistance in the disconnection, the experience is hard on a character.

A character that suffers Health damage may find a massive headache, a nose bleed, extreme vertigo, or other symptoms.

While someone who has logged out can log right back in, if they are experiencing negative health effects they are taking a large risk to do so. Regardless, a character can never log out and back in during the same Scene due to the time dilation between the two realities.



Staying in Too Long

At some point, almost everyone needs to log out of the Aetherium. The body needs actual food and sleep, which the Aetherium can't provide in any meaningful way.

A character that spends more than 8 hours logged into the Aetherium (4 Aetherial days) begins to suffer penalties for not eating.

For every 4 hours, or fraction thereof, that an individual is logged into the Aetherium past 8, they suffer a penalty of 1 die to all of their dice pools.

It is possible for a character to get around this by having medical assistance, such as IV drips and similar, allowing them to stay inside the Aetherium even longer.

Similarly, a character that spends more than 16 hours logged in without sleeping will begin to suffer penalties.

For every 4 hours, or fraction thereof, that an individual is logged into the Aetherium past 16, they suffer a penalty of 1 die to all of their dice pools.

These penalties can add up over time. If the size of the penalties a person is taking is greater than their highest Stat, their Rig will automatically begin to log them out for safety reasons.

Bathroom Breaks

In many cases, people will log out with far more regularity than every 4 Aetherial days. This is because people get hungry, have to go to the bathroom, need to walk their dog, or any of a number of myriad reasons.

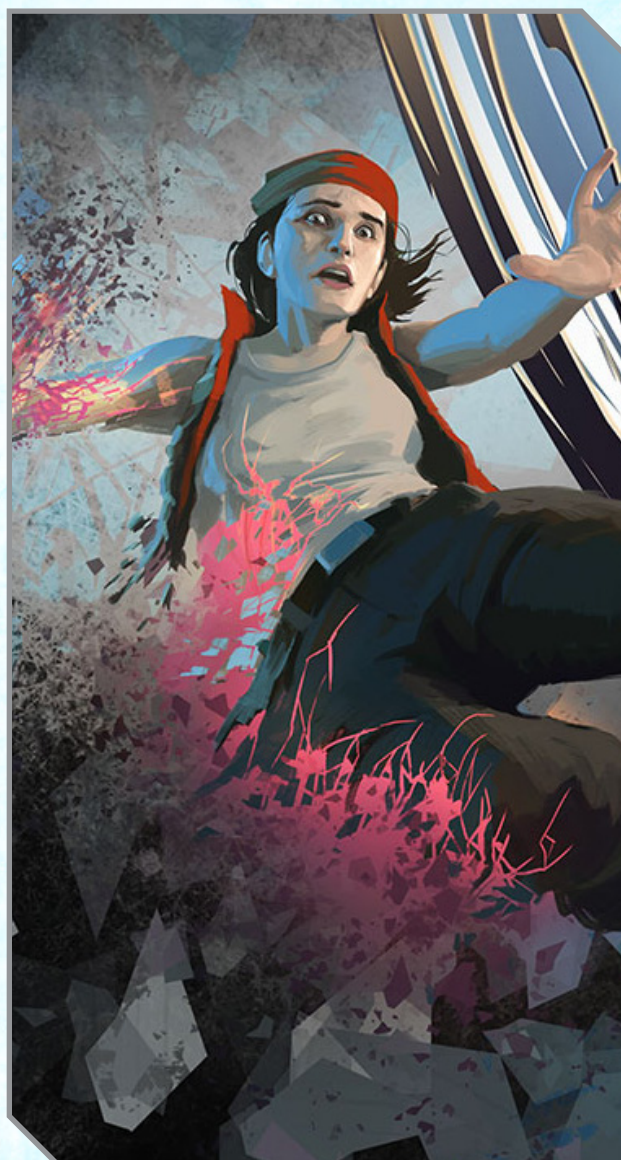
People who genuinely stay logged in to the limits often find that they've experienced bladder accidents or similar embarrassing ailments, and they often have some amount of weakness from disuse of their body.

Staying in Sync

Sometimes, a group of individuals is trying to coordinate action between the Meatspace and the Aetherium. Because of the different perceptions of time - invariably, this will be incredibly difficult.

While there are some Luxuries that allow communication, generally it is easiest to just time everything out precisely (which probably involves a lot of waiting for people in the Aetherium).

This means that any support from the material world, such as hacking into Pylons, will often take place over several hours of Aetherial time.



THE BODY

Sacks of flesh, bone, and blood were once considered central to the human condition. These organisms were humanity's bodies and the way we moved about the world and interacted with one another.

Since the advent of the Aetherium, however, the human body began to fall into disuse. It was relegated to the realm of the necessary, but unwanted. People began to refer to their bodies as simply meat, like something you might get from a butcher. Something that can be discarded or ignored.

While most of the game and User experience is focused on characters in the Aetherium, the body informs far more of the experience than many would like to admit. The body is a complex organism that has many needs that cannot be satisfied in the Aetherium alone.



What Kind of Character?

If Aetherium characters are seeking freedom, power, and adventure, then their meaty counterparts are no different. The main difference is the means and methods of achieving the same results, and the relative value the character holds for Meatspace wellness.

Often times, the Aetherial aspects of a character informs their Meatspace aspects for the player, but it's important to note that it's far more likely to work the other way around for the character themselves. Many choices in someone's life will be informed by their physical body and its needs. As with real life, characters make hard choices that they may not like but do anyway.

For example, someone might sign up to be a spy for House Ikaru because it pays well, but they might not support the philosophies and methodologies of the Collective. Sometimes, a person just has to earn.

The next chapter involves creating a character in the Meatspace, and it will walk through some of the choices for characters -- but the reason for those choices is more important than the choice itself.

Training

The Meatspace doesn't use Stats in the same sense of the Aetherium, instead it uses Training. There are 10 different types of Training a character can receive. Each point in a Training is a die rolled, just like a Stat. In fact, in almost every way, Trainings are Stats.

The Meatspace focuses on Training instead of Stats because the future is less about a person's capabilities and more about what they've been taught to do. Training values can be increased by getting additional training, which comes at a cost.

Training values are used just like Stat values for tests. An Engineering (3) test requires a character to roll their Engineering Training, and they are looking for 3 successes.

A breakdown of what all the Trainings and what they do can be found on the next page.



- **ATHLETICS**

The physical conditioning of a character. Athletics covers all sorts of physical activity, such as running, climbing, swimming, and more.

- **CQC**

Close quarters combat, CQC focuses on everything up close and personal, as well as anything thrown (like a knife).

- **DIPLOMACY**

Diplomacy is the act of relating to and interacting with others, understanding their points, and trying to convince them to be on your side.

- **ENGINEERING**

This Training covers all hardware engineering, including mechanical and electrical engineering. Making repairs, building new creations, and understanding how things work is all part of Engineering.

- **FIREARMS**

Used for long-ranged combat and the maintenance of firearms, this Training is what's needed to be most effective in many combat situations.

- **MEDICINE**

Being a doctor is highly valuable, and this Training covers handling all medical needs, from surgery down to the proper care of a burn.

- **SAVVY**

Savvy is all about making good judgements and being aware of things around you.

- **SOFTWARE**

Software covers all the internal parts of computers, AI, robots, and more. Most importantly, Software is used to code new Aetherial Programs.

- **SPYCRAFT**

Lying, serveilling, and sneaking are all key facets of Spycraft.

- **SURVIVAL**

The world is a harsh place, and knowing how to navigate, find food and water, and more is extremely beneficial.

COMBAT

Combat works basically the same way as in the Aetherium (see page 84), with just a couple of differences.

The Meatspace still uses the same terminology of the Aetherium, such as Cycle Speed (CS), even though they are less applicable to the Meatspace. This is to help keep terminology streamlined, but it also reflects the reality that people think of themselves in more digital-technological terms than they used to, as the core of their identities are often based in the Aetherium instead of the material world.

Actions

The Actions list is basically the same, but all references to Hacking, materializing Programs, etc. have been removed.

- **(1 CS) Move**
The character moves 20 feet.
- **(X CS) Use an Item**
The character uses an item they have on hand. The CS cost of this Action is based on the item used.
- **(1 CS) Defensive**
The character increases their Defense by 1 until the start of their next Turn. This can stack, but a character cannot gain more than their starting Defense in this way.
- **(1 CS) Gain Advantage**
The character rolls an extra dice on their next Test. This can stack, but it does not allow a character to roll more additional dice than their Training.
- **(2 CS) Take a Test**
The character can use one of their Trainings to take a Test.
- **(0 CS) Miscellaneous**
The character can do minor things that do not involve a dice roll, such as saying a quick sentence or glancing around at their surroundings.

Attacking without an item is always against Block using CQC (even for thrown items), and it only does 1 damage, so the Bonus Stunt cannot be used to increase it.

Overclocking

Characters cannot Overclock in the Meatspace, as there is no Glitch or Aetherium dice. This means that they also can't Overclock their Reactions to get more out of a Reaction.

Defenses

The Meatspace uses two types of Defense: Block and Resist. Block is used for physical-based attacks, and Resist is used against mental-based ones.

These Defenses function the same as others, with each attack calling out what it targets.

Melee and Guns

Shooting at a character involved in a melee with the Firearms training imposes a 2 die penalty to do so.

Some guns can be used with the CQC Training while in melee, so they would not take a penalty.



DAMAGE

In the material world, damage is physical damage to the body. In many cases, this damage will be caused from a bad disconnect from the Aetherium, which takes the form of neurological damage. However, in some cases characters may get into fights in the Meatspace, and they may suffer other bodily harm as well.

Health Damage

Any time a character suffers damage in the Meatspace (or Health damage, specifically, while in the Aetherium), that damage is applied directly to their Health total by reducing it by the amount suffered.

If a character reaches 0 Health, they are killed. In the Meatspace, this happens most often due to violent methods, and characters bleed out quickly.

If a character's Health total drops, such as from the loss of Basics, this adjustment comes from undamaged Health. A character with only 1 Health remaining that loses a point of Health by changing Basics will perish.

Conversely, if a character's Health total ever increases, the character immediately has that point of Health.

It is extremely easy to die in the Meatspace, as characters rarely have a lot of Health. Combat is to be avoided, when possible!

Recovering from Health Damage

Health damage recovers very slowly, all things considered. It takes a day, plus one day per missing Health, to recover a single point of missing Health.

For example, a character missing 1 Health will need two Meatspace days to recover, while a character missing 4 Health would require 14 days (5 days for the first point, 4 days for the second, 3 days for the third, and 2 days for the final point).

This process can be sped up through paying for medical care, but other than that it just takes time.

Remember that all Meatspace time is multiplied by 12 in the Aetherium, meaning that, in the example above, the character missing 4 Health would require 168 Aetherial days to recover.



Low Health and Injuries

If a GM chooses, they may use the Injuries variant presented below. This variant is completely optional, but can add some additional complications to Meatspace play.

For every Health a character is missing below 5, they must roll an Aetherium die along with their other dice, where Disruption cancels successes (instead of dealing damage).

The Aetherium dice are used to simulate being injured and the impacts it has on the character. It only goes into affect when below 5 Health, so harder characters won't immediately suffer injuries.

The Aetherium dice have no other effects and being low Health does not affect characters in the Aetherium.

STUNTS

The Stunts available in the Meatspace are reprinted below for ease of use. Remember that Boost Stunts can be declared as Excess Stunts for twice the cost.

These Stunts are the same as in the Aetherium, with the exception of things that deal with Glitch.

Boost Stunts

- **Defensive Focus [1 Boost]**

Increase your Defense by 1 until the start of your next Turn. This may increase your Defense above your Level.

- **Fast [2 Boosts]**

Once per Round, gain a CS.

- **Style [X Boosts]**

Perform the Action with particular flair or style. You may declare this Stunt any number of times, with each instance making the Action that much more impressive. This may not be declared as an Excess Stunt.

Excess Stunts

- **Bonus [1 Excess]**

If the Action has a + value in its effect, you can increase that value by one (this is most common with damage).

- **Carry Over [1 Excess]**

Add 2 dice to the next related Action you take this Scene.

- **Quick Action [3 Excess]**

You may take a Reaction when the Action is completed.

Additional Stunts

If a GM chooses, they may use the additional Stunts presented below. These Stunts are a completely optional variant but can add even more flavor to the combat system.

- **Feint [1 Boost]**

Once per attack on a character, lower the target's Defense by 2, to a minimum of 1. This attack cannot declare the Bonus Stunt.

- **Knockdown [2 Boosts]**

Knock down the target (which lowers their Defense by 1). It requires 1 CS to stand up.

- **Disarm [3 Boosts]**

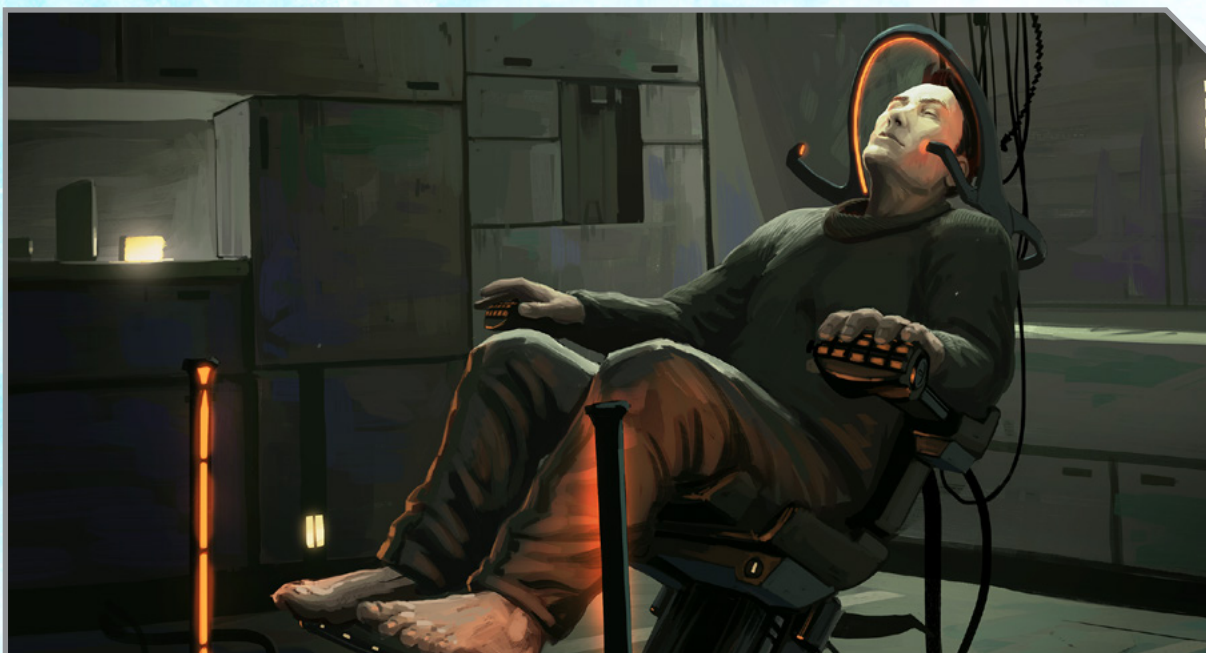
If in melee with the target, this Stunt only requires 2 Boosts. The target drops one item they are carrying or Active Program they have materialized. It requires 2 CS to pick it back up.

- **Called Strike [X Boosts]**

For every Called Strike Boost called, the attack deals 2 additional damage.

- **Impactful [2 Excess]**

The target suffers a 1 die penalty on their next Action, to a minimum of 1 dice.



CODING A PROGRAM

Coding a Program can only be performed at special terminals, be they inside or outside the Aetherium. It involves high level neural programming, so only those with a Software Training of 3 or higher may attempt it.

It takes quite a bit of time to code a Program, and, once complete, the Program needs to be uploaded to the Pylon network to be accessible.

There are billions of Programs on the Pylon network, but many of them are private Programs that can only be accessed by a single person. Some Programs are made public, and some are sold by their creator directly.

Programs on Pylons can be "created" by the person who coded it by registering that Program as one of their own, though keep in mind that there is a limit to the number of free Programs a person can have leased (see page 89).

Coding your own Program is significantly cheaper than purchasing one, but it is more time consuming and resource intensive.

How to Design a Pylon Program

Choose a Root Program or a Modification to add (or remove) from a Root Program. Make a Software (X) test, where X is based on the Complexity of the part chosen above, plus 1 for each Modification already part of the Root Program (if applicable). This roll cannot declare Stunts.

It takes a number of days equal to the Complexity of the part chosen. This is roughly full time work on the Program each day. This time may be in the Aetherium or the Meatspace, depending on where the work is being completed.

A character may use the Gain Advantage Action to roll additional dice, but each use of it adds a day to the time to code the Program.

The difficulty of coding is extremely high, and anyone able to make Complexity 10+ Programs is considered very skilled. Often, it takes a team of individuals working together in order to properly design a Program.

Pylon Programs will need to be registered with a Pylon to be able to be accessed while in the Aetherium.

Example Program Design

Ranya wants to try to make herself an awesome axe to use on her enemies. She decides to start with the Strength Weapon Program, which is Complexity 1. This means that coding it requires a Software (1) Test.

Ranya makes a roll with her Software of 5 and gets two successes, allowing her to create the Strength Weapon Program. It took about a day for her to make the axe.

Ranya decides to go further. She's going to give it Extra Damage, and she's going to try this twice. She'll need to go one at a time.

The first Extra Damage Modification is Complexity 2. The Root Program has no Modifications, so it's a Software (2) Test that Ranya easily passes, and two days pass in the Meatspace.

The second Extra Damage Modification is also Complexity 2. The Root Program, the axe, now has 1 Modification. This means it's Software (3) Test to do this: 2 for the Complexity of the Mod, plus 1 for each other Mod that is a part of it.

Ranya rolls and pulls it off by the skin of her teeth. It takes her two days to do so, for a total of 5 days spend coding. Ranya now has a Complexity 4 axe that deals +3 damage instead of the standard +1.

Additional coding from here will prove difficult. If Ranya wanted to add yet another Extra Damage Mod, it would take an Software (5) Test (3 for the Mod, plus 2 for two Mods already on it), which is incredibly unlikely on 5 dice. She decides to spend an extra 5 days coding it, for a total of 10 days. She rolls 10 dice and manages to pull it off!

If Ranya wants access to this Program now, she's going to have to submit it to the Pylon network for approval. If she's planning on using it herself, she'll need to be sure she can afford to store it. If she's going to sell it, she can mark it as such, in which case she won't have to pay to lease it.

Iconic Programs

Iconic Programs exist in a connection between a person's mind and their Rig, so everyone has the ability to change their own Iconic Programs to some degree. This ability is covered in the character advancement rules on page 40.

JOBS

When using the Meatspace rules, every character will have a Job. This Job gives a bit more depth to a character's history, giving a sense of where they come from and what they do with a large portion of their waking hours.

Jobs are important because they give a character a Stipend. A Job's Stipend determines how many Basics they can have.

This means that Jobs form to the bulk of a character's financial freedom, and are very important for obtaining Basics (explained in the next column).

Selecting a Job is a part of the Meatspace character creation process, and characters can gain access to new Jobs over time.

Do I Have To Go To Work?

Jobs are not intended to take up much, if any, "screen time" in the game. Players are not going to be roleplaying their job. That said, they are relevant in certain circumstances.

A character might get fired from a Job if they do something that significantly hurts the Collective that employs them. Conversely, getting a high Reputation with the Collective might get them a better Job.

Additionally, the Job provides some roleplaying opportunities, as well as access in certain situations. If a character is a RezX scientist and they're interacting with scientists, this gives an easy in for that character.

"Everyone is putting in their 9 to 5, only 8 hours in the Aetherium turns into days. I can't ask 'how can I help you' for days on end just to eat, so I found another way."

RANYA

BASICS

Basics are the necessities that a character has that informs their day to day life. Basics are provided by the Collective where the character lives, and the amount a character can have is commensurate with their Job's Stipend.

There are four Basics:

- **Food** is what type of food you're eating, as well as other physical necessities like water.
- **Shelter** is about where your character calls home, assuming they have one at all.
- **Socialization** is about spending time with other people and experiencing culture.
- **Education** is about continuing to grow knowledge and keep up with the changing world.

Each Basic has a variety of tiers available at different costs. These tiers can be highly impactful for characters in a few ways.

The first thing that the Basics do is inform the character's Health and Sync. Food and Shelter both modify the Health value. Education and Socialization establish a character's Sync value. These replace the starting values of 5 and 7 provided in Aetherial character creation, giving each character a 0 that is modified by their Basics.

The second thing that the Basics do is provide a modifier to Trainings. A character with a low Food tier food Basic might actually receive penalties to certain Trainings, while a character with high Food actually gets a benefit.

This reflects how much impact the way characters live has on their skills and capabilities. People have an overall capacity (the Training value), but their only chance of reaching that is to be properly equipped. If a character is a martial arts master but is living on the street, it impacts their ability to apply what they know.

Characters allocate their Job's Stipend to the Basics, allowing access to them, without spending anything. This means that a character with a Stipend 10 Job would be able to have up to 10 value worth of Basics.

Basics are set at the end of every in-game, material week. This means a character with a lower Stipend will often be forced to change their Basics.

WEALTH

Wealth is a measure of a character's abundance. Most people in the world of the Aetherium never gain any Wealth to speak of, as almost everything they have goes into surviving, and the little bit that's left gets spent on frivolities and entertainments to make a meager life more bearable.

There are those, however, who enjoy the benefits of Wealth. Wealth can be used to gain access to the many Luxuries of the world, which can provide significant benefits to those who have them.

There are two ways to gain Wealth:

- **Abundance**

A character can permanently lower their VAR by 1 to gain 1 Wealth.

- **Leftovers**

A character may choose not to allocate all of their Stipend on Basics. If they have any remaining Stipend unallocated, they may roll that many dice and gain 1 Wealth for every success.

Wealth can be spent on Luxuries or it can be spent to afford additional Basics, which is often the best way to stay healthy.

Wealth stands out from VAR because it's an actual value, not an abstraction. A character with 10 Wealth that spends 6 will have 4 remaining.

Luxuries

Luxuries are single costs that give a character a benefit. Luxuries include things like Rigs, wetware, weapons, transportation, and more -- invariably, these are non essential items, but ones that can help them have a more pleasant existence (or are just nice to have).

Many Luxuries are permanent because they are goods (a Rig for example), while others are one-and-done (single services like medical care or transportation).

Sending Wealth

It is possible for one character to send Wealth to another. Doing so requires an account number, which may or may not be anonymous, so many are hesitant to share their info for this purpose.

For every 10 Wealth (or fraction thereof) being transferred, it costs 1 Wealth. This Wealth can be paid by either party.

Example Wealth Generation

Maria's character, Elle, has completed a contract that raised her VAR to 12. At the end of the game session, Elle decides to lower her VAR by 2 to 10, gaining 2 Wealth.

With that done, Elle has a 10 Stipend to allocate to her Basics. Maria decides that Elle is going to run really lean for a bit, and only allocated 8 of her Stipend.

This leaves Elle with 2 unallocated Stipend, which lets her roll 2 dice to try to gain Wealth. She rolls and manages 1 success, giving her an additional 1 Wealth.

Ellie can now spend her 3 Wealth on Luxuries, or she can save it up for later. One never knows when they'll fall on hard times!

Maria is happy with the outcome, but the choice to run light on Basics will make her next gameplay session a little harder. Hopefully the Wealth is worth it!

Theft

Theft is a large problem in the material world. Everyone is looking for the Basics to get by, but the Basics aren't exactly easily to steal. This means that most theft occurs with Luxuries and Wealth itself.

Sometimes, the GM will make a Crime roll. These rolls consist of a number of dice equal to the total value of Luxuries and Wealth possessed by a character, and successes may mean being targeted by criminals!

More information on Crime rolls is available in the Gamemastering chapter on page 153.



MEATSPACE CHARACTERS

"It is a shame that we are born into a sack of flesh, for our true selves can only be known in the Aetherium. Yet, day to day we must return to the drudgery of life, to eat and sleep like any common animal. We could be so much more, but we are chained to our bodies. If they suffer, we suffer. If they die, we die. It is why I am always looking for transcendence and a way out of this physical form."



Meatspace characters are an interesting aspect to add to your Aetherium games. They provide a backdrop of the physical world, and they can help give rhyme and reason to some of the happenings in the Aetherium.

All of the Aetherium rises up from the Meatspace -- the desire of so much of humanity to connect comes from the scarcity and the desire for something more.

Making a character with the rules presented in this chapter provides that sense of scarcity and the importance of a solid income. Meatspace characters fill in those blanks, without requiring a lot of in-game attention to understand.

The Users in the game will start out with more than most people, as they've already climbed the ranks somewhat and become Icons, those few who are truly able to Hack the Aetherium. This growth was met with increased job growth, which in turn has helped raise them out of true poverty.

While the Users have escaped that fate, it is possible for them to fall back into it. Unemployment can lead to a nasty wake up call, to the point of permanently lowering abilities and even death.

A Meatspace character is made up of a few things, such as the ten Trainings, Health, a Job, any Wealth, and any Luxuries they own.

The ten Trainings work like Stats do in the Aetherium, informing a character of how many dice they roll. Trainings are more about learned skills than innate talents, and they can always be improved by paying for even more of the training itself.

Health works the same way as in the Aetherium, but there's no Sync to guard it in the Meatspace. Taking damage in the material world is always quite serious.

Wealth measures the excess a character has access to, which allows them to buy Luxuries. Many Luxuries provide support in the Meatspace, but often the most enticing ones are those that boost a character's Aetherium capabilities.

The largest options for these are the Rigs, customizable hardware that can boost Aetherial power.

All of this information informed by what the character allocates to Basics on a weekly basis. Living is expensive. What a character spends on food and housing all factors into their health and wellbeing.

STEP 1: TRAINING

The first step of Meatspace character creation is determining your Training. Training values are very similar to Stats in the Aetherium, covering the entirety of what characters might roll dice for in the Meatspace.

There are two parts to determining your Training: the first is picking a background, which sets your initial Training values.

Backgrounds

All of the backgrounds presented provide initial Training values for characters. That said, they are a great way to think about how your character was brought up.

Aetherial Tester

Most children are not given SIM cards, and therefore their access to the Aetherium is limited at a young age. You are an exception to the norm, having surgery young and getting you wired into that great future of humanity, the Aetherium. You were trained in the workings of that other world and the Rigs that grant access to it, all at the cost of a little brain surgery.

Engineering 2, Medicine 1, Savvy 1, and Software 4.

Child Labor

In order for the material world to survive its collapse, everyone needs to chip in, even children. At least, that's what you were told as a child, and it explains why you didn't receive any real education. Instead, you went to work early, grinding away as a cog in the machine for years of your young life just to make ends meet.

Athletics 1, Diplomacy 1, Engineering 1, and Savvy 2.
If you pick this Background, gain 3 Wealth.

Other Backgrounds

The world is full of possibilities! If there's a specific Background you want that isn't listed here, talk to your GM and make it.

As a custom Background, you'll have 6 points to put into Trainings, and no Training can be taken above 3 at the start.

Child of the Ruins

You were born amidst the ruins of the civilizations of the past. Crumbling buildings and desolate lands were your constant companions. Even the wild spaces seem to be filled with more rot than life. You weren't given the luxuries of most, such as knowing where your next meal would come from or even having a Job. You learned to survive out in the world, taking what you needed.

Athletics 2, CQC 2, Medicine 1, and Survival 3.

Early Enlistment

You joined the military at a young age. Maybe your parents forced you into it, or a judge as a sentence for crimes, or maybe you've just always wanted to know how to fight. The reasons don't matter; the reality is the same either way: you grew up being trained to be a combatant. As a soldier, you've seen battle far younger than you should have, and it changed you.

Athletics 2, CQC 2, and Firearms 2, and Survival 2.

Government Education

State media has always described your position in life as lucky. You were given access to free government education, and not everyone is so "lucky." Unfortunately, while you did receive a good education, it came with so much indoctrination and false history that it's hard to even know what's real anymore.

Athletics 1, Diplomacy 1, Engineering 1, Medicine 1, Savvy 1, Software 1, Spycraft 1, and Survival 1.

High Society

Growing up, you had the privilege to be around the upper crust. Maybe your family was rich, or maybe they were indentured servants to the rich, but either way, you learned the ins and outs of how the rich and powerful lived. You gained a skill with words and the subtle work that only the powerful can attempt.

Diplomacy 4, Savvy 2, and Spycraft 2.

Junker

There is a lot of abandoned stuff in the world. Overpopulation might be a problem, but years of overconsumption has left massive trash heaps made of materials that can easily be repurposed. You grew up picking over the junkyards you could find, buildings and creating goods that could be sold.

Engineering 4, Firearms 2, and Software 2.

Medical School

You had the good fortune to win the lottery to be able to go to a medical school... or maybe you stole the identity of someone who did. It doesn't really matter, as you were trained to become a medical professional, able to take care of other people's physical health.

Diplomacy 1, Engineering 1, Medicine 4, Savvy 1, and Survival 1.

Underworld

You grew up in the criminal underworld. Your family was poor and resources were scarce -- the only real way to survive was illegal. You've done things you're not proud of, and sometimes this kind of work changes a person... but the material world is a brutal place, and you can't be faulted for trying to survive.

Athletics 1, CQC 2, Diplomacy 1, Firearms 1, Savvy 1, and Spycraft 2.

Training 0?

Yes, it is possible to end up with multiple Training values at 0. This represents no real knowledge of the subject at hand, so dice can't even be rolled.

While this might seem strange for something like Athletics, dice are only rolled for significant Athletics actions: no one needs to roll dice to walk down the street or take a jog.

Additional Points

Once your background is picked, you have 10 additional points to place into any Trainings (listed below), but no value can be increased more than twice.

■ Athletics

The physical conditioning of a character. Athletics covers all sorts of physical activity, such as running, climbing, swimming, and more.

■ CQC

Close quarters combat, CQC focuses on everything up close and personal, as well as anything thrown (like a knife).

■ Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the act of relating to and interacting with others, understanding their points, and trying to convince them to be on your side.

■ Engineering

This Training covers all hardware engineering, including mechanical and electrical engineering. Making repairs, building new creations, and understanding how things work is all part of Engineering.

■ Firearms

Used for long-ranged combat and the maintenance of firearms, this Training is what's needed to be most effective in many combat situations.

■ Medicine

Being a doctor is highly valuable, and this Training covers handling all medical needs, from surgery down to the proper care of a burn.

■ Savvy

Savvy is all about making good judgements and being aware of things around you.

■ Software

Software covers all the internal parts of computers, AI, robots, and more. Most importantly, Software is used to code new Aetherial Programs.

■ Spycraft

Lying, surveilling, and sneaking are all key facets of Spycraft.

■ Survival

The world is a harsh place, and knowing how to navigate, find food and water, and more is extremely beneficial.

Last, but not least, a character gains Block 1 and Resist 1. These are a character's defensive values in the material world.

Don't fret if there are not enough points to go around. There are ways to increase Trainings (and defenses) by spending Wealth, so characters will have another opportunity to improve before character creation is completed.

STEP 2: WORK

No one can survive in the world without income, and almost everyone gets their income from work.

A person's Job informs a lot about their character: what they spend a lot of time doing and for whom they do it being chief among them. These facts can bleed into so many things about a character's life, including where they live, how they feel about different Collectives, etc.

In this step, choose one of the Jobs listed. The Job will provide your character with a Stipend and, in some cases, additional special rules.

Jobs can either be in the Meatspace or in the Aetherium, and some jobs cross the boundaries into both.

If a Job has a name in brackets next to it, that means it's working for that Collective. If there is no name, the character can pick a Collective that they are working for, or they can choose to be unaligned.

Just because a character holds a Job with a Collective doesn't mean they like or approve of the Collective. As with anything, everyone needs to work and sometimes we do things we don't want to for a dollar.

Every Job has a short description about what it is, as well as provides certain bonuses (and, potentially, penalties). These rules only apply so long as a person holds that Job -- they will go away the character loses the Job or gets a new one.

A character can also be unemployed. Unemployed characters have no Stipend. It's rough out there.

Going To Work

As stated in the previous chapter, characters aren't expected to roleplay going to work. That said, work does take up a significant portion of their time, limiting their ability to do whatever they want whenever they want.

This rarely comes up in gameplay, but is a good thing to keep in mind when roleplaying a character.

Unaligned Jobs

These Jobs can be found basically anywhere, working for any Collective or group in the game.

Cog

Stipend: 4

You have a menial service job in the Aetherium. Maybe you sell food, push paper, or hand out fliers. Regardless of what you do, the job has no real room for upward mobility -- but it pays the bills as long as you show up.

Note: Cogs are often not a great choice for characters, but the bulk of workers in the world are Cogs. They have no special rules, but a character can essentially always get a Cog Job.

Farmer

Stipend: 4

You work on a farm in the Meatspace, growing some of the food that is essential to survival, and also very scarce. Farm jobs are highly sought after, and thus don't pay very well, but they provide access to food very readily.

You have an additional Stipend of 2 that can only be used for Food Basics (and cannot be used to gain Wealth).

Mercenary

Stipend: 4

You have been a mercenary for some time, taking jobs as they came. This doesn't lead to steady income, but it does lead to some good freedom and choice.

At the end of a material week, gain 1 Wealth for every 5 VAR your character possesses, rounded down.

Merchant

Stipend: 5

You make a living by selling your wares and trying to get by. While you are subject to the fickleness of economic trends, you have a freedom that few are afforded in these hard times.

Whenever your VAR increases, as long as it's above your Stipend, gain 2 Wealth (no matter how much it increases).

Collective Jobs

These Collective Jobs are positions working for specific Collectives, whether or not you support them. If one of these Jobs is your starting Job, you may choose to gain 1 Reputation with the associated Collective.

Creative [Nanomei]

Stipend: 5

You are a creative. Perhaps you create art of some kind, like painting or sculptures, or perhaps you write the news or novels. You have a creative spark inside you, and it is fueled by being on the outside of society. You can make a difference with your work, inspiring humanity to rise up.

When Hacking, roll 2 extra dice.

Espionage Agent [House Ikaru]

Stipend: 5

House Ikaru employs many spies to keep tabs on their competition. It cannot pay them outright, as so it pays them like freelancers -- hidden deposits into Meatspace accounts for a job well done.

If you provide useful information to House Ikaru, they will give you Wealth. They give 1 Wealth for helpful information, 3 Wealth for actionable information, and 5 Wealth for critical information.

Explorer [RezX]

Stipend: 6

The RezX employ you to explore the vastness of the Aetherium. Perhaps this is through seasonal postings on Aethershops or through exploration by drone. Some explorers are also looking for new realms of consciousness through laboratory study.

Medical Services cost 2 less Wealth, to a minimum of 0.

Inventor [House Ikaru]

Stipend: 6

Ikaru inventors can lead a cutthroat life. Their income tends to push them to succeed, where they can see massive increases in wealth from successful creations.

Your Software Training is treated as 1 higher.

Propagandist [Axiom]

Stipend: 7

You help promote the Axiom by spreading propaganda for the cause. Your job is to ensure that non-Axiom know how wonderful Axiom is, and that Axiom are toeing the line.

If you say anything negative about the Axiom, you lose 1 VAR each time (you are monitored with a Virus that tracks this so long as you hold this job).

Pylon Feeder [Axiom]

Stipend: 5

You work feeding Axiom Pylons. This means you're hooked up to a Rig and your neural processes are filtered into further bolstering the strength of Axiom Pylons. It's a thankless job, but the constant engagement with it stabilizes your connection to the Aetherium.

Increase your Sync by 3.

Scientist [RezX]

Stipend: 6

You are on the cutting edge of science, looking for answers to life's greatest mysteries. Perhaps you're looking for a way to cure the world's environment, create better crops, or new ways to connect to the Aetherium. Regardless of your pursuit, you know that knowledge is the way forward.

Peripherals cost 1 less Wealth, to a minimum of 1.

Freedom Fighter [Nanomei]

Stipend: 4

The decay of the world's ecosystem and the poverty the average person finds themselves in is the result of a corrupt system of power where the few have tyrannical control over the many. You have dedicated your time to fighting this oppression and trying to return power to the people.

Your Food and Shelter Basics require 1 less Stipend, to a minimum of 1 Stipend.

"I've worked for near everyone at some point or another, and it's pretty much every new boss is the same as the old boss, and all of them aren't worth my time."

RANYA

STEP 3: BASICS

Basics are just what they sound like: the building blocks of a 'successful' life in the Meatspace. All of the Basics are integral to a character's ability to live up to their full potential. This is because the Basics are those things that exercise and nourish the body and mind, allowing it to unlock their potentials.

There are four Basics:

- **Food** is what type of food you're eating, as well as other physical necessities like water.
- **Shelter** is about where your character calls home, assuming they have one at all.
- **Education** is about continuing to grow knowledge and keep up with the changing world.
- **Socialization** is about spending time with other people and experiencing culture.

A character can have a total bill for their Basics equal to their Stipend, which is provided by their Job from Step 2.

It is unlikely any character will have enough Stipend to afford the Basics they want (in fact, they'll often feel they barely have enough to get by), but that's the nature of the human condition in the 23rd century.

The Basics may be changed each week of Meatspace time, which often works out to about 3 months of Aetherial time.

Low tier Basics can provide numerous penalties to characters, while high tier Basics can actually provide benefits. All of the modifications they make are temporary, except at the lowest tier, which may have a permanent effect.

Any unallocated Stipend may turn into Wealth via a dice roll, following the rules on page 213.

Health and Sync

When using the Meatspace rules, Health and Sync values are determined by the Basics. These values start at 0 (instead of the 5 and 7 they normally do), but can gain by enough being allocated to the Basics. See the example Stipend allocation in the next column for more a look at how this works.

Example Stipend Allocation

Ranya's has a Stipend of 6 from her Job. This means that the total Bill from her Basics can be a 6.

Ranya is a fighter in the Aetherium, so it's important that her Sync is high. By allocating 2 Stipend to Education (Educational VR) and 2 to Socialization (Regular Entertainments), Ranya will have a solid 8 Sync.

With only 2 Stipend left unallocated, it's going to get tight.

Ranya's player opts for a Run Down Stacked Shack Shelter, allocating 1 more of her Stipend. The Shack gives her +2 Health.

Finally, Ranya is going to allocate her last Stipend to Subsistence food, giving her +2 Health, while lowering her Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival by 1.

Overall, Ranya has lowered her Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival by 1 for as long as she maintains these Basics. She's just not that healthy.

This is reflected in her Health value, which is a 4. It wouldn't take much to knock Ranya out for good through a log out.

That said, Ranya's Sync is at a robust 8, so she can survive a few blows before risking that logout.

Allocating the Basics in this way did not cost Ranya any of her Stipend.

Ranya is a little concerned about these values, so she decides to lower her VAR by 2 to gain an additional 2 Wealth, which she spends on Food and Education.

This lets Ranya drop the penalties to her Trainings, and her Health moves to a 5 while her Sync goes to a 9.

Food

Food is all about the nutrients that someone puts into the body. The number of calories is important, but so too are the vitamins and minerals that fuel physical health.

Starving

Bill: 0

You are barely scraping by, getting just enough food to survive.

Your Health value is modified by +1. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are modified by -1.

In addition, permanently lower one of the Trainings listed above by 1. If you cannot, your character dies.

Subsistence

Bill: 1

You are getting enough food to maintain, mostly. There are days you go hungry, but other days you manage to eat, so I guess it's not all bad.

Your Health value is modified by +2. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are modified by -1.

Nutritional Food Paste

Bill: 2

Beggars can't be choosers. Nutritional food paste tastes terrible, but it is scientifically proven to give the body everything it needs.

Your Health value is modified by +3. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are not modified.

Fast Food

Bill: 3

Going out to eat is a luxury, and few are lucky to have solid meals. This food isn't exactly healthy, but it is nourishing.

Your Health value is modified by +3. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are modified by +1.

Diverse Foods

Bill: 4

By eating across the spectrum, you are managing to not only eat enough food to stay strong, but also to grow in strength.

Your Health value is modified by +4. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are modified by +2.

Chef's Nutritional Meals

Bill: 5

Personally tailored meals? It's luxurious and healthy!

Your Health value is modified by +5. Your Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival are modified by +2.

"Every Collective is full of shit, but I can't blame a person wanting to eat. I just won't forgive them for it, either."

RANYA



Shelter

In the Meatspace, Shelters are rented by the week. While multiple people can live in the same Shelter, all must pay!

Homeless

Bill: 0

Living on the street is incredibly difficult, especially in a world with an increasingly hostile environment. The impacts of being homeless can be long-lasting and devastating.

Your Health value is modified by +1.

In addition, permanently lower one of the Trainings listed above by 1. If you cannot, your character dies.

Coffin

Bill: 1

Coffins are the names for the tiny, rentable closets that most people sleep the night in, but aren't allowed into except for sleep. Every night, a new coffin is assigned based on availability in the ultimate in tiny sleep homes.

Your Health value is modified by +1.

Run Down Stacked Shack

Bill: 2

An old hovel of a home is the best many can ever hope for, but it doesn't make for nice living. Most places keep out the weather, but few offer much protection from people.

Your Health value is modified by +2.

One Room Co-Housing

Bill: 3

Many people spend their days living in one room places and sharing bathrooms, laundry, and kitchens. It's a bit like living in a college dorm all the time.

Your Health value is modified by +3. This Shelter has power.

Solid Apartment

Bill: 4

Solid constructed buildings are a thing many aspire to, but few attain. They give the ability to feel some safety and security, which alleviates stress that impede the mind.

Your Health value is modified by +4. This Shelter has power.

House

Bill: 5

Very few people get to live in "single family homes," and doing so is a mark of pride. They are solid, large, and safe.

Your Health value is modified by +5. This Shelter has power.

Socialization

Going out and interacting with others in the material world produces a biochemical reaction in the body that can lead to heightened mental functioning.

Too Exhausted

Bill: 0

As much as you might enjoy the company of others, you don't have the time, energy, or money to use on leisure time.

Your Sync value is modified by +2. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are modified by -1.

In addition, permanently lower one of the Trainings listed above by 1. If you cannot, your character is removed from the game.

A Night Out

Bill: 1

You manage to get out one night a week and see what's going on, connecting with other people socially.

Your Sync value is modified by +3. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are modified by -1.

Regular Entertainments

Bill: 2

You manage to go out a few nights a week, having meaningful and lasting friendships with others.

Your Sync value is modified by +4. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are not modified.

Vacation Time

Bill: 3

Not many can afford to get out and away from it all, but you've found some time to enjoy yourself. Rumor has it, vacations used to happen every week with something called a "weekend."

Your Sync value is modified by +5. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are modified by +1.

Guided Vacations

Bill: 4

Just when you thought vacations were something special, along came guided social activities with prix fixe options!

Your Sync value is modified by +5. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are modified by +2.

World Traveler

Bill: 5

Few in the world get to visit places far from where they are born, and the experience of it is socially enriching.

Your Sync value is modified by +6. Your Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft are modified by +2.

Education

The mind needs as much exercise as the body. By intentionally trying to expand it and work with it, the mind is able to forge new neural pathways.

None

Bill: 0

Some weeks, it's time to kick back and take it easy. Doing nothing to exercise your mind can be a well-deserved break, but it can also set you back in other ways.

Your Sync value is modified by +2. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are modified by -1.

In addition, permanently lower one of the Trainings listed above by 1. If you cannot, your character is removed from the game.

Read the News

Bill: 1

By staying abreast of recent events, the mind can pick up new perspectives and learn new things, giving it increased mental acumen.

The news is also helpful for being able to meaningfully interact with others and know any cutting edge developments in technology that could be meaningful in your life.

Your Sync value is modified by +3. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are modified by -1.

Educational VR

Bill: 2

There are whole catalogues of educational VR options available to those who want them, and by taking some time out of your schedule to watch even one a week, your mind avoids eroding its faculties.

Many of these VR options are set up to keep people up-to-date with the rapidly changing world, as sleeping for 8 hours means that approximately 4 days have passed in the Aetherium, making it easy for people to fall behind.

Your Sync value is modified by +4. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are not modified.

Instructor Led Classes

Bill: 3

While VR classes are great, the ability to engage with experts on subjects and ask questions is more engaging for your mind, allowing you to think more freely about the materials.

This type of education can shore up an individual's weaker areas and ensure they are more well-rounded, giving them an edge over those that are purely specialized.

Your Sync value is modified by +5. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are modified by +1.

Private Tutoring

Bill: 4

Hands-on, direct tutoring focuses on your personal capabilities and shortcomings, allowing a marked growth in brain function.

Private tutors are rare, but they have been shown to be the optimal way for adults to continue their education and stay abreast of Aetherial developments.

Your Sync value is modified by +5. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are modified by +2.

Neural Stimulated Learning

Bill: 5

Nothing beats personally tailored education backed up by direct neural stimulation! Neural Stimulated Learning is ported directly into the SIM chip implanted in the brain, allowing for information to be directly converted into neural function.

While it has been shown that this type of education doesn't help with the learning of brand new tasks, it can be well used to fortify neural pathways and help an individual remember what they already know.

Your Sync value is modified by +6. Your Engineering, Medicine, and Software are modified by +2.

"If we are to ever discover the true secrets of the Aetherium, we need to find a way to return widespread, strong public education. The cost of learning what you need to know these days limits the pool of researchers and dreamers."

DR. VALDEZ

STEP 4: LUXURIES

Every character has the opportunity to purchase a number of Luxuries. Luxuries take many forms, some of which are helpful in the Meatspace, while others are helpful in the Aetherium.

Every character begins with 10 Wealth automatically, and they roll ten dice to gain more. For every success on these ten dice, gain 2 Wealth (the dice do explode).

For some characters, they may start with a lot of Wealth, while other characters may have very little. Making do with scarcity is part of life in the Meatspace.

All of the Luxuries can be found in the next chapter, which starts on page 226.

Take some time to look through the lists. The Aetherium has a duality that can force a hard decision: the Meatspace doesn't get a lot of attention, but Wealth well spent can make a huge difference when it does. Focusing all income on the Aetherium makes for a stronger character in one place, but one that might be easily undermined when logged out.

"When I started my career, I had dreams of making it to the top. I dreamt of the wealth and power, the ability to do as I pleased.

Now that I've got it, I realize that it was as much a trap as anything else, meant to keep me in the system.

Now I can buy any things I want, but no things worth having have a cost. Luckily, the tools to help me get there still have a price tag I'm willing to pay."

BANDERS



MAKING CHANGES

As the game progresses, a character's Job will change, as will their Wealth. This, coupled with the passage of time, will mean that characters are likely to see fairly regular changes to their Meatspace characters.

Most of this will stem from changes to Basics and Luxuries throughout the game. These changes will also change how a character interacts with their Aetherium, both from Luxuries like Rigs and from changes to things like Sync.

This is because the human body is an important part of the process, and getting sent through to the Aetherium is stressful on that body.

End of Session

At the end of any game session, follow the steps below:

1. Generate experience points and Reputation, if applicable
2. Spend any experience points wished on the Aetherial character
3. Lower VAR by any value to gain that much Wealth
4. Spend any Wealth on Luxuries

In addition to this, if warranted, you can have a discussion with the GM about any new Job opportunities that might be available to your character.

Buying Luxuries

Characters can spend Wealth on Luxuries at any time, though their character generally needs to be in the Meatspace with access to stores to do so. This can be handled outside of the game itself with no issues.

There are some Luxuries that can increase a character's Trainings and more, which is often the best way to improve a Meatspace character.

Changing Jobs

Changes to a character's Job often come as a result of gameplay, but it is best handled outside of the game itself. Not all of the Job options available are listed in this chapter, as there are a whole variety of Jobs available in the Aetherium.

If a character changes Jobs, everything gained from the previous Job is lost, and the new job's information replaces that. This may be particularly important for any Stipend, as a changed Job can greatly impact the Basics.

Jobs are often rewards for tasks well done. There are a collection of higher-level Jobs in the Gamemaster chapter on page 162.

Adjusting Basics

As the Basics change, so too do the effects from those Basics. Basics change every material week, which is about 3 months of Aetherial time. This will often work out to about 3 sessions of play, but there is some information about time passing in the GM chapter on page 155.

Basics set a character's Health and Sync totals, as well as provide any modifiers to certain Trainings:

- **Food** impacts Athletics, CQC, Firearms, and Survival. It also impacts Health.
- **Shelter** impacts Health.
- **Education** impacts Engineering, Medicine, and Software. It also impacts Sync.
- **Socialization** impacts Diplomacy, Savvy, and Spycraft. It also impacts Sync.



The material world is an economic world. Supply and demand fuel every decision as extreme scarcity continues to elevate human needs above what most people can afford. The economy of the past has changed, however, where the implements of luxury are often cheaper, relatively, than the necessities people need to comfortably survive. These changes come from a decaying ecosystem and economic corruption, allowing the few unprecedented power over the masses.



The majority of the Aetherium RPG takes place in the Aetherium itself, a world that is, essentially, post-scarcity. As long as the Pylons are running, things exist.

The Meatspace, however, is not so lucky. The equivalent of Pylons, the global ecosystem, has been collapsing for years, slowly eroding habitable spaces into a sort of dystopian landscape.

This erosion has fueled what amounts to massive cost inflation of the basics of human life: food, clothing, and shelter. As the cost of these products went up, so too did the things that promoted health: exercise, education, and leisure.

The world itself no longer seemed adapted for human life, and the basic needs of survival moved further out of reach. In order to pacify humanity, many goods that were seen as luxuries became very affordable: a good VR experience was attainable on a pittance, and it helped the destitute forget their hunger.

This chapter dives into the Luxuries of the human condition in the Meatspace. Most Luxuries are goods that a character can keep forever, but some are services that are one and done or recurring costs themselves.

Luxuries can only be purchased using Wealth, which is generated following the rules on page 213.

Any Luxury that is purchased is considered to be worth half its cost, rounded down (so something with a cost 1 doesn't have any worth). People really don't like used things.

Most Luxuries are permanent once purchased, as they are goods that a character can keep. The only danger of losing them is if they break or are stolen.

Some Luxuries can only be used once before running out, so having repeated access to them requires repeated expenditures. This is true for things like medical services, transportation, hired help, and more.

Debt

It is possible to go into debt in order to pay for Luxuries. Each point of debt gives a character 1 Wealth. As long as a character is in debt, their VAR is considered to be lowered by their debt value, and no one will loan them money that puts their debt above their unmodified VAR.

Debt can only be paid off using Wealth, and each payment of debt requires an additional 1 Wealth. Unfortunately, that's just the cost of doing business.

For example, a character with a VAR of 8 has accumulated a debt of 6. This means that, in all cases, his VAR is treated as a 2 (this is really unfortunate for leasing Pylon Programs!).

The character can begin to pay off the debt using extra Wealth. The character currently has 3 Wealth, so pays off 2 debt with it, as the payment itself costs 1 Wealth. This reduces the character's debt to 4, so now their VAR is treated as 4 instead.

Combat Luxuries

The material world is only a particularly safe place if you're well-connected. For many, they need to defend what they have through any means necessary, and for others, the only way they're likely to have enough to survive is to take it.

Brass Knuckles / Baton / Bat

Cost 1

A little bit of metal over the knuckles provides a nice little benefit to the wielder, allowing them to do a bit more damage than just a fist would allow.

2 CS : CQC vs. Block (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage. The Bonus Stunt cannot be declared more than twice.

Knife / Sword

Cost 1

Knives are a great way to do a bit of cutting. They tend to move fast, so a skilled user can put someone in a bad way quickly. Unfortunately, knives aren't particularly powerful and require someone to be up close and personal to get the job done.

1 CS : CQC vs. Block (5 feet)

Deals +1 damage. The Bonus Stunt cannot be declared more than once.

Bullet Proof Vest

Cost 2

A simple chest covering that is designed to stop bullets and knives from piercing the skin, its effect is limited by coverage and material qualities, but it's still better than wearing nothing at all.

Reduce incoming Health damage by 1 (does not apply to Health damage from the Aetherium), to a minimum of 1. Does not stack with other damage reduction gear.

Ammo?

For ease of gameplay and because of the abstraction of the financial system, the Aetherium RPG ignores the question of running out of ammo totally, though many weapons still require reloading.

Pistol

Cost 2

Small and short range guns, pistols can pack a punch against any target. A well aimed shot can take down almost anyone in one shot.

2 CS : Firearms vs. Block (60 feet)

Ammo: 00000 000

Deals +1 damage. Can be used in melee using CQC instead of Firearms.

After this weapon takes 8 attacks, this character must spend 2 CS reloading before it can be used again.

Submachine Gun

Cost 3

Submachine guns are favored by criminals who are expecting mayhem, as their small size and rapid firing capabilities make them ideal.

1 CS : Firearms vs. Block (30 feet)

Ammo: 00000 0

Deals +1 damage. Roll 1 fewer die on the attack, and 1 fewer die on each successive attack in the same Turn.

After this weapon takes 6 attacks, this character must spend 2 CS reloading before it can be used again.

Parlor Grenades

Cost 3

Parlor grenades are a bit of a joke about the small, almost dainty grenades that have become common on the streets. They pack a punch, but lack the explosive power of some of their larger cousins.

2 CS : CQC vs. Block (15 feet per Athletics)

Ammo: 00000

Deals +1 damage to the target and everyone within 5 feet of the target. If you run out of ammo, you are out until you return home and pick up more.

Military Helmet

Cost 4

A full head helmet, it is very effective at limiting the damage potential of attacks by covering the entire head with high-quality, bulletproof protection.

The Bonus Stunt cannot be used to increase damage against you more than twice per attack (this does not count as damage reduction).

Neural Disruptor**Cost 5**

An uncommon weapon, neural disruptors use hypersonic technology to directly affect the brain, making traditional defenses useless against them.

2 CS : Firearms vs. Resist (60 feet)

Ammo: 000

Deals +1 damage and lower the target's CS by 1 on their next Turn. You may spend 2 Excess to lower their CS by an additional 1. After this weapon takes 3 attacks, this character must spend 2 CS reloading before it can be used again.

Assault Rifle**Cost 5**

Assault rifles are military guns made for versatility and stopping power, making them great choices for anyone needing to go up against powerful foes.

2 CS : Firearms vs. Block (60 feet)

Ammo: 00000 0

Deals +2 damage. After this weapon takes 6 attacks, this character must spend 2 CS reloading before it can be used again.

Full Body Armor**Cost 5**

Military level equipment, full body armor covers everywhere from the neck down in high-quality bulletproof weave.

Reduce incoming Health damage by 1 (does not apply to Health damage from the Aetherium), to a minimum of 0. Does not stack with other damage reduction gear.

Sniper Rifle**Cost 6**

Sniper rifles are ideal for long-ranged shots, able to work better at range than any other options.

2 CS : Firearms vs. Block (Line of Sight)

Ammo: 0000

Deals +2 damage and rolls an extra die to hit. After this weapon takes 4 attacks, this character must spend 2 CS reloading before it can be used again.

Nanofiber Sword**Cost 6**

This military grade sword is capable of cutting through almost anything, making traditional defense largely meaningless against it.

2 CS : CQC vs. X (5 feet)

Deals +2 damage. This weapon always treats the target's defenses as 1.

Neural-Motor Boosters**Cost 10**

An implant that works like a SIM card, neural-motor boosters actually stimulate brain activity when adrenaline is detected, ensuring the safety of the user.

Increase your Block and Resist by 1.

Exoskeletal Armor**Cost 50**

A high-level, almost robotic armor that was the standard of human-based warfare in the Trade Wars. By increasing the strength and defenses of users, it allows them to become mobile weapons platforms.

Reduce incoming Health damage by 2 (does not apply to Health damage from the Aetherium), to a minimum of 0. The user's Athletics is treated as 4 higher. Does not stack with other damage reduction gear, nor does the Military Helmet function while wearing this Armor.

Special Augmentations

Below are some options that can be used to augment some of the weapons listed.

Armor-Piercing Ammo**Cost 2**

Can only be used with guns. Ignores up to 1 damage reduction.

Sights**Cost 2**

Can only be used with guns. When using the Gain Advantage Action, add 2 dice to the pool instead of 1.

Silencer**Cost 2**

Can only be used with guns. The noise this weapon makes when firing is barely audible.

Spycraft Luxuries

The Spycraft Luxuries focus on stealth, surveillance, forgery, and more. They are excellent tools for when people are looking to avoid combat.

Anonymous Glasses

Cost 2

Anonymous Glasses are used to detect surveillance equipment by scanning for certain transmission frequencies, light patterns, and technological signatures.

You roll 3 additional dice on any Savvy rolls to detect security or surveillance equipment.

You may spend an additional 3 Wealth to get an upgraded version of this Luxury that disrupts surveillance equipment, increasing the difficulty of any rolls made to identify the wearer by 2.

DLD

Cost 2

Using infrared lasers and sonic amplification technologies, the digital listening device is capable of hearing sounds from a much greater distance.

You roll 3 additional dice on any Savvy rolls to hear sounds. This is localized detection and easily overloaded in noisy areas.

Signal Triangulator

Cost 3

This handheld device is capable of detecting wireless signals over about a half a mile range and is able to begin to locate the source of those signals if they are used repeatedly.

You may use this device for 3 CS to scan for nearby wireless signals. It only detects signals in use, and can discover their physical location if they are used at least 3 times.

a.Trace

Cost 4

a.Trace is a multi-part system that helps the user prevent leaving any traces of their existence. a.Trace is applied to the fingertips, hair, and shoes. Sometimes, there is even a lotion-based component to ensure skin cells aren't left behind.

You do not leave behind physical, genetic evidence of being in a location. Applying a.Trace properly usually takes about 30 minutes, but once complete it cannot be detected by others when in use.

NanoKey

Cost 5

The NanoKey is about the size of a credit card. When applied to a locking mechanism, it is able to detect the type of security and mold its programming to help bypass it.

You roll 3 additional dice to pick any lock (Spycraft) or get past any digital security system locking a door, including biometric scanners and other security measures.

Camo Cloak

Cost 6

The camo cloak is capable of distorting light waves while also reproducing visual objects from behind it to render the wearer virtually invisible.

You roll 3 additional dice when rolling Spycraft to hide your visual presence.

“There’s only one real difference between a battle in the Meatspace and the Aetherium. You may think that the difference is in the flying cities and Hacking, but, like any war, these are just tools.

The difference is simple, and knowing it will save your life.

In the material world, when the target goes down the fight is over. In the Aetherium, you keep shooting that body until there’s nothing left.”

COMMANDANT SPYDER

Software Luxuries

Software Luxuries are all about using computer systems and working with AI to gain benefits.

Research Assistant

Cost 2

Research Assistants are made to constantly scan through data, including recent news, looking for pertinent keywords and information, and then using data analysis techniques to output useful data.

Add three additional dice to any rolls made to gather information, research, or similar that are done on computers.

Program Coder AI

Cost 3

A highly intelligent computer program, this system is made to help people code Aetherial Programs by suggesting coding or using generic modules from its database.

Requires a Shelter with power. Gain three additional dice on any Software rolls to code Programs, both in the Aetherium and the Meatspace.

AI.Hack

Cost 4

This virus is on a computer about the size of a thumb and its sole purpose is forcing its way through security.

Add three additional dice to any Software roll to bypass software based security systems.

Friend Computer OS

Cost 5

The Friend Computer operating system is designed to make working on a computer easy and fun for those that lack the talent. It's a simple, graphical interface designed for those that have no real idea what they're doing.

Your Software Training is treated as being a 3, but your dice can't explode and you can't use the Gain Advantage Action on Software rolls.

Hardware Luxuries

Hardware Luxuries are about the physical things in life.

Repair Kit

Cost 2

Repair Kits hold a variety of common tools to make mechanical and electrical repair easier.

Add three additional dice to any Engineering rolls made to build, repair, or dismantle a piece of hardware.

Inventor's Kit

Cost 5

An Inventor's Kit includes not only special tools, but also an assistant AI with a lot of information of building different equipment to suit one's needs.

Choose a Luxury. You may roll Engineering to create an item that has the same effect as the chosen Luxury. The Test difficulty is the cost of the item, which is also how many days it takes to complete. The cost of building the item is reduced by half, rounded down.

Generally, items created this way are larger and less stable than the Luxuries they are mimicking.



Medical Luxuries

With billions of people in the world and a limit on required resources, it seems like nearly everyone requires regular medical attention. While the standard fair of bandages and similar is obtainable fairly easily, the high powered medical options are increasingly expensive.

Wound Treatment

Cost 1

By applying specialized bandages with cellular rejuvenation and stimulation technology, the time to recover from bodily harm is decreased.

One use only. If 2 or less Health is missing, reduce the time to Heal each by 1 day.

Doctor's Kit

Cost 2

A full medical kit that contains most of what the modern doctor needs to see to patients. It assists with the diagnosis and treatment of most ailments.

You roll 3 additional dice when rolling your Medicine to assist another character.

Surgery

Cost 3

By visiting a medical facility and paying good money, a person can get the surgery or other medical procedures needed to deal with significant damage. Unfortunately, these procedures are incredibly expensive, making people long for the days of government healthcare and medical insurance.

One use only, and can only be purchased when needed. If 3 or more Health is missing, restore 1 Health.

Nano-Medical Implant

Cost 15

A small bag of nanites is imbedded in the owner's chest cavity, and it is deployed when damage to the body is detected. The nanites are specialized in cellular repair, and have detailed information on the host's genetics.

After suffering Health damage for any reason, roll a d10 and heal that much Health damage. One use only, but may be replaced for only cost 3.

Narcotic Luxuries

The Meatspace can be a hard place to take, and many people have taken to using drugs and similar substances to help them deal with the world around them.

Certain narcotics can be used to gain temporary benefits in the Aetherium, but they often come at a cost.

All narcotic Luxuries are one use only.

Emotional Dullers

Cost 1

This narcotic targets the chemicals and reactions that create emotional responses and dulls them, which helps the mind function more logically. This benefit is mostly felt in the Aetherium, but it is also used to help stabilize those who have experienced trauma.

Increase your Reasoning by 2 for an hour of material time (12 hours in the Aetherium).

Brain Juice

Cost 3

This combination of chemicals super charges the human brain, allowing it to function at peak capacity and beyond. Unfortunately, this means that it is also more susceptible to the problems caused by violent log outs.

All of your core Stats are increased by 1 for an hour of material time (12 hours in the Aetherium), but any Health damage take from logging out is increased by 1 (total, at the end). In addition, the Resist Defense is lowered by 1.

Type "O"

Cost 2

Type "O" is made from the blood of a specific person and certain other reactive compounds. By linking to that person via a special Rig (where they don't enter the Aetherium), individuals using Type "O" can appear to be someone else.

You are linked up with another person when you log in, and you look exactly like them in the Aetherium. For an additional 3 Wealth, Type "O+" is available, which mirrors someone else so completely that you can access their Pylon Programs.

Hired Help Luxuries

All hired help Luxuries are individuals that will work for the person who's paying them. All hired help lasts for a week of material time, unless it says otherwise.

Hired help will perform any legal tasks that they are reasonably capable of doing. It may be possible to get them to go outside this, but it'll cost.

Indentured Assistant

Cost 2

Many people fall into debt just to survive in the world, and most Collectives have an easy system to buy someone's debt in order to get their aid. Of course, these individuals still have other jobs, but their free time is dedicated to helping their debt-holder.

Has a 2 in all non-Food associated Trainings. You can get a slightly more skilled Assistant by paying 1 more per 1 Training increase, to a max Training of 4.

Security Agent

Cost 3

Security Agents are Meatspace workers who spend their time working gigs protecting those with more wealth than they have. Most Security Agents are moonlighters, working specific shifts in their down time in order to help make ends meet.

Works in the Meatspace only. Has a 2 in all Trainings and a Pistol.

You can get a slightly more skilled Security Agent by paying 1 more per 1 Training increase, to a max Training of 4.

Coding Assistant

Cost 3

There are a plethora of freelance coders floating around the world, looking for any contract they can scoop up. Many of these individuals are happy to do any work, though trusting to their discretion is not always wise.

Works for you in the Meatspace for a single project (one use only) until that project is completed. When rolling Software Tests to code a Program, roll 4 additional dice. You can get a slightly more skilled Coding Assistant by paying 1 more per 1 additional die, to a max of 4 additional dice (for a total of 8 dice).

Concierge Doctor

Cost 3

Concierge doctors are medical professionals that visit a person's house a couple of times a week and helps them. Their in-depth knowledge of a specific patient and their access to treatments makes them incredibly helpful in speeding recovery times.

Reduces the length of time required to restore Health by 1 day for each point of Health.

Bodyguard

Cost 5

Bodyguards in the Aetherium tend to be fairly expensive, and they are often not worth the cost. That said, for those that are expecting trouble or need somewhere guarded, bodyguards serve as excellent assistance.

Only works in the Aetherium and is hired for one week of Aetherial time. Has a 3 in all Stats and a Pistol Iconic Program.

You can get a slightly more skilled Bodyguard by paying 1 more per 1 Stat increase, to a max Stat of 5.

Log Out Team

Cost 10

Log out teams can be called at a moment's notice almost anywhere in the Aetherium. Most major Nodes have one on call, while others can often call one in quickly. The teams specialize in safe extraction of people in danger, though it often takes a few minutes for them to arrive.

Log Out Teams are a one use service paid for in the Meatspace but that is used in the Aetherium. Anyone wishing to access them is given a Complexity 1 Pylon Program that can summon the team. Roll 1d10 to see how many minutes it takes for the team to arrive, and an additional 1d10 if the target is not in the Aetherial core.

Three individuals with a 5 in all Stats and Beam Rifles (see page 51) arrive and will defend and extract the target. They will only fight those who are actively engaging the target; otherwise their only objective is safety.

Transportation Luxuries

Transportation Luxuries are used for getting from place to place.

Public Transit

Cost 1/2

By taking a bus, train, or plane, anyone can access different areas of the world at relatively little cost. The fees are usually waived for higher level officials or those performing necessary duties.

Travel anywhere in the borders of your current Collective for 1 Wealth, or globally for 3 Wealth.

Note: Getting around a town or city doesn't have an associated Wealth cost, just traveling more broadly.

Hoverboard

Cost 2

Hoverboards use miniature mag-lev systems and superconductors to help their user effortlessly glide over mundane obstacles, not limited to water fountains and manure trucks.

Increase movement speed to 30 feet per CS (instead of 20) while the Hoverboard is in use. It also ignores certain penalties to movement, like ice or shards of glass.

Motorcycle

Cost 10

Motorcycles are a great way to get around quickly, though they aren't able to carry more than one passenger.

Motorcycles use the same rules as Vehicle Programs found on page 68 of the Programs chapter. Any Tests for handling the vehicle uses Athletics.

MOTORCYCLE

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1600

This vehicle can carry one driver and one passenger. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

Car

Cost 15

Cars are a safe way to get around with a group of people.

Cars use the same rules as Vehicle Programs found on page 68 of the Programs chapter. Any Tests for handling the vehicle uses Athletics.

CAR

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1000

This vehicle can carry one driver and three passengers. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

Flying Car

Cost 30

Flying cars are the pinnacle of personal transportation, as they are able to traverse nearly any ground with a small group of people..

Flying cars use the same rules as Vehicle Programs found on page 68 of the Programs chapter. Any Tests for handling the vehicle uses Athletics.

FLYING CAR

Defense 1

Maneuvering 2

Top Speed 1000

This vehicle can carry one driver and three passengers. The driver may spend 1 CS to increase the movement speed of this Program by up to 300 feet, up to a maximum of its Top Speed, or decrease it by 500 feet.

This vehicle can fly, but can only move vertically at a maximum of 1/4 its current top speed, which reduces its horizontal movement by the same distance.

Other Luxuries

Other Luxuries make up the various odds and ends that many people find useful.

Additional Training

Cost Variable

These days, the difference between someone who is skilled and someone who isn't has a lot to do with nurture (read: Wealth) and nothing to do with nature.

Choose a Training. The cost of this Luxury is two times your current Training value. Permanently increase the chosen Training by 1.

Home Security System

Cost 2

Using cameras, lasers, and motion detectors, home security systems are designed to help ensure the safety of the home's occupant. Modern security systems are linked to the owner's Rig, allowing them fair warning within the Aetherium of any intruders.

This system can only be used in Shelters with power. While in use, is considered to have 1 automatic success to detect intruders attempting to obscure themselves. If one is detected, it alerts the user in the Aetherium.

Can increase the skill of this system by 1 for every additional 1 Wealth spent on it, to a maximum of 2 additional Wealth spent.

Persona Tracker

Cost 3

The Persona Tracker is a small bug that can be placed on a user's Rig. While the Rig is on, it draws some of the power from that Rig in order to determine where the user currently is in the Aetherium and what they are doing.

If placed on someone's Rig, you can track that person anywhere in the Aetherium, including the ability to see what they see (but no other senses can be detected).

Because the Aetherium moves much faster, it is impossible to read lips or words, as all impressions are quick, blurred jumbles.

AM Phone

Cost 3

An AM Phone allows a person in the Meatspace to talk to a person in the Aetherium. This is usually difficult because of the time dilation.

There are two types of AM Phones: ones that have delays for the Aetherial contact (as the speeds are accounted for), and ones that hook up to a person's physical SIM to ensure direct communication.

A user can talk to a person in the Aetherium while in the Meatspace. This takes some time unless using the SIM variant, in which case the person having the conversation goes into a temporary trance while using it.

MeBot

Cost 4

MeBots are an odd quirk of engineering. By sending a full body scan, the One O' Us Corp will make a robot that looks just like you to serve as a sort of chore service. No one is exactly sure why they decided to make them look like the owner, but it has given them a nice underworld use of providing alibis and body doubles.

The MeBot is a robot that looks like you and has a 1 in all Trainings. It can barely carry on conversations, but it's well suited to doing chores like sweeping the floor.

Log Out Lock

Cost 5

The Log Out Lock prevents someone from leaving the Aetherium by preventing their Rig from logging them out. It is a black market tool used to ensure that someone stays inside the Aetherium. It must be placed on the Rig to function, thankfully limiting its applications.

If the Log Out Lock is placed on a Rig, the individual in the Rig cannot log out. The 1 minute timer doesn't progress so long as this is connected to their Rig. If their Sync drops to 0, they are essentially trapped.

Haptic Exercise System

Cost 25

A massive machine that the owner is strapped into while accessing the Aetherium, the Haptic Exercise System is designed to give regular workouts to the body while the owner experiences the joy of the Aetherium. The increased exercise has been scientifically proven to increase the lifespan of the user.

Requires a Shelter with power and a helmet-based Rig. Treat your Health as 2 higher while you're using this regularly.

RIGS

Rigs are the devices that connect a character's mind to the Aetherium. Everyone has one that they use on a regular basis.

There are a variety of choices for Rigs, and each Rig has a structure and a RAM value. The structure of a Rig is its size and how it powers up. RAM is used to make adjustments to the Rig and add additional functions.

In addition to the structure and RAM, some Rigs may have slots for additional systems. These slots provide the ability to add bonus features that can be extremely potent.

Rigs are a device used in the Meatspace, and the structure, RAM value, and slot value are related to physical components in the material world.

BELOW ARE THE RIGS THAT ARE COMMONLY AVAILABLE.

Aether-Connect 1.0

Cost 0

The AetherConnect is so prevalent that they can be found in nearly any scrapyard or dump free of charge. They were originally created by Rasmussen in an attempt to undercut House Ikaru Rig technology.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 2
- **Slots:** 0

Aether-Connect 2.0

Cost 1

The AetherConnect is one of the staple Rigs for all of humanity. It is a cheap knock-off of House Ikaru tech, helping to bring increased Rig capabilities to the mass market.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 4
- **Slots:** 0

Mind-Connect Blue

Cost 1

The Mind-Connect Blue sacrifices RAM for a slot, allowing a different type of Aether experience for those on a budget. Slots generally provide the most change, but the loss of RAM can limit the customization of the Mind-Connect system.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 2
- **Slots:** 1

Mind-Connect Red

Cost 2

The Mind-Connect Red is mostly marketed to those who want to customize their Rig with Peripherals, but lack the budget for a large impact. By ignoring the customization of a Slot, more space is freed up for RAM.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 5
- **Slots:** 0

Aether-Connect 3.0

Cost 3

An improvement over the commonly available 2.0 model, the AetherConnect 3.0 features significantly improved Peripheral space. In addition, the design of the Rig has been slimmed down so the front of the face is not obscured, allowing for a more pleasing experience when logging out of the Aetherium.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 6
- **Slots:** 1

Aether-Escape**Cost 3**

Those who are looking for an escape on their daily commute pick up the Aether-Escape by Rasmussen. This Rig looks like a large collar around the neck and features battery power to get the average person through the day. It also features a running clock and timer forced into the user's perceptions, allowing them to easily track things like when a commute should be over. Never miss another appointment with the Aether-Escape!

- **Structure:** This Rig is a neck collar that can function for 2 hours of material time, 24 Aetherial hours, before needing to charge.
- **RAM:** 3
- **Slots:** 0

Mind-Connect Indigo**Cost 4**

The Mind-Connect Indigo is an improvement on the Mind-Connect Blue system, reducing RAM count in exchange for slots. It features more RAM than the Blue, but, most importantly, it also contains another Slot. While significantly more expensive than the Blue, it is leagues ahead of it in terms of capabilities.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 3
- **Slots:** 2

Immersion++**Cost 5**

Building off the hugely popular Immersion system designed by House Ikaru, this Rig is a full body chair, a bit like a massage chair. It features ultimate comfort, making returning from the Aetherium a bit easier. The immense size of the Rig also means it has a lot of space to customize it, however, even those that can afford it often lack the living accommodations to house it.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a chair that needs to be plugged into a power source to work. Given its size, it needs to be in a Shelter with power.
- **RAM:** 10
- **Slots:** 2

Splicer**Cost 5**

The Splicer looks like a spider on the back of someone's head. It is a black market, risky piece of tech that offers the mobility of an Aether-Escape with the power of an Aether-Connect... and the safety of driving with your eyes closed. Splicers are notorious for being poorly designed and risky to the user, but some people want the customizability coupled with portability, and are therefore willing to take the risk.

- **Structure:** This Rig is attached to the back of the head and can function for 2 hours of material time, 24 Aetherial hours, before needing to charge.
- **RAM:** 6
- **Slots:** 0

NanoSource**Cost 5**

The NanoSource is an open source Rig that focused on maximum allowance of RAM and very little else. It is built by the owner, being shipped in a convenient do-it-yourself kit. Some people argue that the open source nature of the Rig makes it safer and more robust, but most people still prefer to use the Rigs from established companies like House Ikaru and Rasmussen.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a full helmet that can only be used lying down because of its weight. It needs to be plugged into a power source to work.
- **RAM:** 12
- **Slots:** 0

Ikaru Special**Cost 7**

The Ikaru Special is always the most recent, top-of-the-line, mass market Rig that shows off what House Ikaru is capable of achieving. These Rigs are snatched up by early adopters and people with a fear of missing out. Over time, the Special's price always drops as they enter mass market.

- **Structure:** This Rig is a chair that needs to be plugged into a power source to work. Given its size, it needs to be in a Shelter with power.
- **RAM:** 14
- **Slots:** 3

PERIPHERALS

Peripherals are the “meat and potatoes” of Rigs. They are the aspects of Rigs that directly provide benefits in the Aetherium (unlike most other Luxuries).

There are a variety of Peripherals to choose from, some of which take up RAM, while others fill in a Rig's slots (if they have any slots to fill). Peripherals can be mixed and matched as necessary, as long as the character owns them.

No Rigs come with any Peripherals added, but already owned Peripherals (perhaps from previously Rigs) can easily be added. The only exception to this are slot-based Peripherals, which are always permanent to Rigs.

A RAM Peripheral's cost is what it takes in Wealth to purchase, as well as how much RAM the Peripheral uses. Slotted Peripherals each take up one slot, regardless of cost.

If a Peripheral has multiple Costs (or a rule stating it can be taken multiple times), additional instances of the Peripheral have a cumulative benefit.

“As Rig tech expanded, so did the possibilities that exist for people in the Aetherium. Of course, like everything else there's a paywall to gain access, and most people just don't have the money to take advantage.

It's that sort of crap that makes it so obvious why people turn to a life of crime.”

BANDERS

Peripherals: RAM

All of the RAM-based Peripherals can be found on this page and the next. RAM Peripherals can be swapped as a user gains new Rigs.

Buffer Protocols

Cost 1

Buffer Protocols provide storage space on the Rig for a buffer, which is able to absorb incoming damage instead of the user. This allows people to withstand far more in the Aetherium, making it a common Peripheral among soldiers.

Increase your Sync by 1 for each instance of this Peripheral. This Peripheral can be taken any number of times.

Economic Algorithms

Cost 2/3/4

Economic Algorithms are complex data analysis tools that are regularly updated with recent market data. This information allows a user to, in essence, game the value system in the Aetherium..

When you roll your VAR, gain 1 automatic success per instance of this Peripheral. This cannot cause your roll to have more successes than your VAR score.

Electrode Stimulation

Cost 3/3

Using small bursts of electricity to certain parts of the brain have been known to cause stimulation, but House Ikaru has found a way to stimulate neurons in such a way that temporarily increases neural activity. At this time, it seems that prolonged exposure can erode brain function, so it is only used in small doses.

This Peripheral can only be purchased by those with House Ikaru Rep 10 or higher. Once per Scene (per instance of this Peripheral), you may Overclock without gaining a Glitch.

Firewall

Cost 2/3

Anti-Hack Programming provides additional security to those who are particularly reliant on certain Programs or features for their safety, though many consider such a Peripheral frivolous since most people can't Hack.

Attempts by others to Hack your Iconic Programs have their difficulty increased by 1 per instance of this Peripheral.

Integrated Neural Networks**Cost 4**

By taking advantage of current SIM technology, the Axiom have found a way to offload certain Rig functions to the brain, allowing standard equipment to be replaced with hardware-expanding options.

This Peripheral can only be purchased by those with Axiom Rep 10 or higher. You have an additional Slot.

Neural Boosters**Cost 2/2/2**

Neural Boosters come in a variety of forms, each one using specific chemical combinations to heighten the chosen types of brain activity. The effects that can be provided by the chemicals is limited, but can make a big difference to many users.

You may increase one of your core Stats by 1, chosen when this Peripheral is purchased. This Peripheral must apply to a different Stat each time.

Neurolattice Memory Core**Cost 1/1/2/2/2**

This neurolattice framework is designed to function like the mind and integrate into the areas of the mind that control Iconology, allowing a user to have bigger and better Programs. Neurolattice Memory Cores are one of the most popular Peripherals on the market.

You may have 1 additional Complexity on your Iconic Program(s) per instance of this Peripheral that does not count against your Iconology total.

Noise Filtration System**Cost 2**

Common on RezX Rigs, these systems help control the chaos of the Noise, making it more bearable. High levels of Noise Filtration allow a person to resist the Noise for very long periods of time, but most users would prefer to avoid the Noise than invest in minimizing its effects.

Reduce the damage you suffer from the Noise by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Switched Neural Pathways**Cost 2/4**

This Peripheral allows for a switch to activate on the Rig, changing the possibilities of the Iconic Program on the fly.

You may spend 1 CS to switch one Modification (per instance of this Peripheral) on one of your Iconic Programs for the duration of the Scene. You cannot use this to exceed your Iconology total.

Viral Applicator**Cost 2**

An uncommon Peripheral, this allows for the application of Viruses without the need to use a specific Program, which can be useful in high-security situations.

You can apply a Virus with a successful Speed (Defense) Test against a target within 5 feet.

Viral Drive**Cost 2/2/2**

The Peripheral is host to specific Viruses, that it can store and use like Iconic Programs, but by accessing different memory cores.

You may treat a Virus Program as an Iconic Program, for use by your other Programs. This Virus Program does not affect you.

You can have 2 Complexity of a Virus Program per instance of this Peripheral that does not count against your Iconology total. Once a Virus is chosen for each instance of this Peripheral, it cannot be changed.



Peripherals: Slotted

Some Rigs have slots, which allow for high-powered Peripherals to be added. These Peripherals require a high-level of integration with the Rig, and therefore cannot be removed once installed in a Rig.

No slotted Peripherals gain a benefit from being installed twice.

Additional Processing Cores

Cost 3

Processing cores allow the Rig to exert effort into repairing damaged connections instead of relying on a Pylon to do so.

At the beginning of each of your turns, heal 1 Sync.

Cranium Probes

Cost 2

By digging into the brain, this Peripheral allows for better access to the Rig's Program systems.

This Peripheral can only be purchased by those with RezX Rep 10 or higher. Choose one Root Program. That Root Program is permanently an Iconic Program, and its Complexity doesn't count against your Iconology total.

Excess Power Diffusal Unit

Cost 5

By providing an area to handle systematic connection overloads, the Rig is able to shunt what amounts to damage into this Peripheral, ensuring the relative safety of the user.

It costs 1 Excess before any Excess Stunts can be declared against this character. For example, a character with 3 Excess would need to use 1 to be able to declare any Stunts, and then they could use the remaining 2 Excess as normal.

Feedback Generator

Cost 5

This Peripheral is set up as an automated attack Program that can apply a Virus to anyone who damages the user, ensuring that there is some instant karma to the assailant.

Characters that damage this character gain the Destroy [1] Virus.

Jitter Fixer Upper

Cost 4

The detection of Glitch in the connection of the user begins this Peripheral's automated process to re-establish connection. This is an intensive process, but to this point has not yet mastered the art of eliminating the Glitch itself.

After gaining a Glitch, heal 1 Sync.

Linked Rig Cores

Cost 4

Linked Cores are an incredibly uncommon Peripheral. They tend to be used mostly in military hardware, allowing users to function at above-average capacities. Generally, those that will be using Linked Cores are extensively tested to ensure high compatibility with the others.

You have up to three bodies and can split your CS and Sync between them (this includes simple things like conversation). Each body has a copy of all your Programs, but they must remain on the same Schema as each other. If a body runs out of Sync, it is eliminated and can only be revived at a Pylon.

Instead of splitting CS, all bodies can take the same Action with the same targeted outcome. If they do, roll an additional die per body performing the action.

Personal Distortion Field

Cost 5

Rigs are constantly helping the user project their mind into the Aetherium, but this Peripheral can temporarily alter that flow in order to provide protection to the user. Long-term disruptions have proven extremely dangerous, but even short term ones can be very beneficial.

Once per Round, you may make someone roll their Perception in any attack against you (instead of their normal dice pool). You may gain a Glitch to do this one additional time per Round.

Predictive Framework

Cost 2

This Peripheral analyzes past behavior in order to be able to begin the process of calling Programs before the request is made.

Once per Round, you can materialize or dematerialize one of your Iconic Programs without spending CS.

Puppet.Strings**Cost 5**

A top-secret Nanomei Peripheral, this allows temporary, controlled access to another's brainwaves. It is believed that the Peripheral actually infiltrates other connections and allows the user to input commands, as they don't seem to have actual control over the target.

This Peripheral can only be purchased by those with Nanomei Rep 15 or higher. You may spend CS as if you were a friendly character you can see that is lower Level than you.

RAM Boost**Cost 3**

Using a Rig slot to add additional RAM is a simple enough Peripheral, amounting to nothing more than plug and play.

The Rig gains 3 RAM.

Rig Shield 2.0**Cost 10**

A simple, yet effective Peripheral. The Rig Shield was made to assist the Rig in supporting the human mind in resisting the negative effects of the Aetherium.

Increase your Defense by 1.

Segmented Rig Cores**Cost 6**

Segmented Cores, like Linked Cores, are mostly used for combat applications, though there are various labor applications as well. By dividing an individual's consciousness, they are able to get more out of an individual. This works great for coordinated actions, but the publicly available technology has extreme limits in the way it can divide consciousness and still have significant action potential from the user.

If the Rig is physically connected to another Rig with Linked Rig Cores, all people using the attached Rigs begin to share some physical features. In addition, the highest Stat of any linked people is used, when a Stat roll is needed. Whenever any linked character suffers any amount of Sync damage, all linked characters suffer 1 Sync damage. Up to 5 characters can be linked in this way.

Spoofed Pylon**Cost 4**

By using a tiny fraction of the coding present in Pylon AI, this Peripheral can allow for temporary hosting of Programs as if a Pylon were present. While not useful for most individuals, Spoofed Pylons are great for those expecting a fight, especially if they don't have a friendly Pylon to host their Programs.

Your Rig can host Pylon Programs as if it was a Pylon. It can host up to 10 Complexity of Pylon Programs.

Synaptic Shutdown Procedures**Cost 5**

As the user of this Peripheral begins to log out, it is able to take some of the neurological load, preventing some of the worst feedback from reaching the user.

Reduce all Health damage suffered as a result of logging out of the Aetherium by 1. This is measured against the total, once the log out is complete.

Threat Mitigation Protocols**Cost 5**

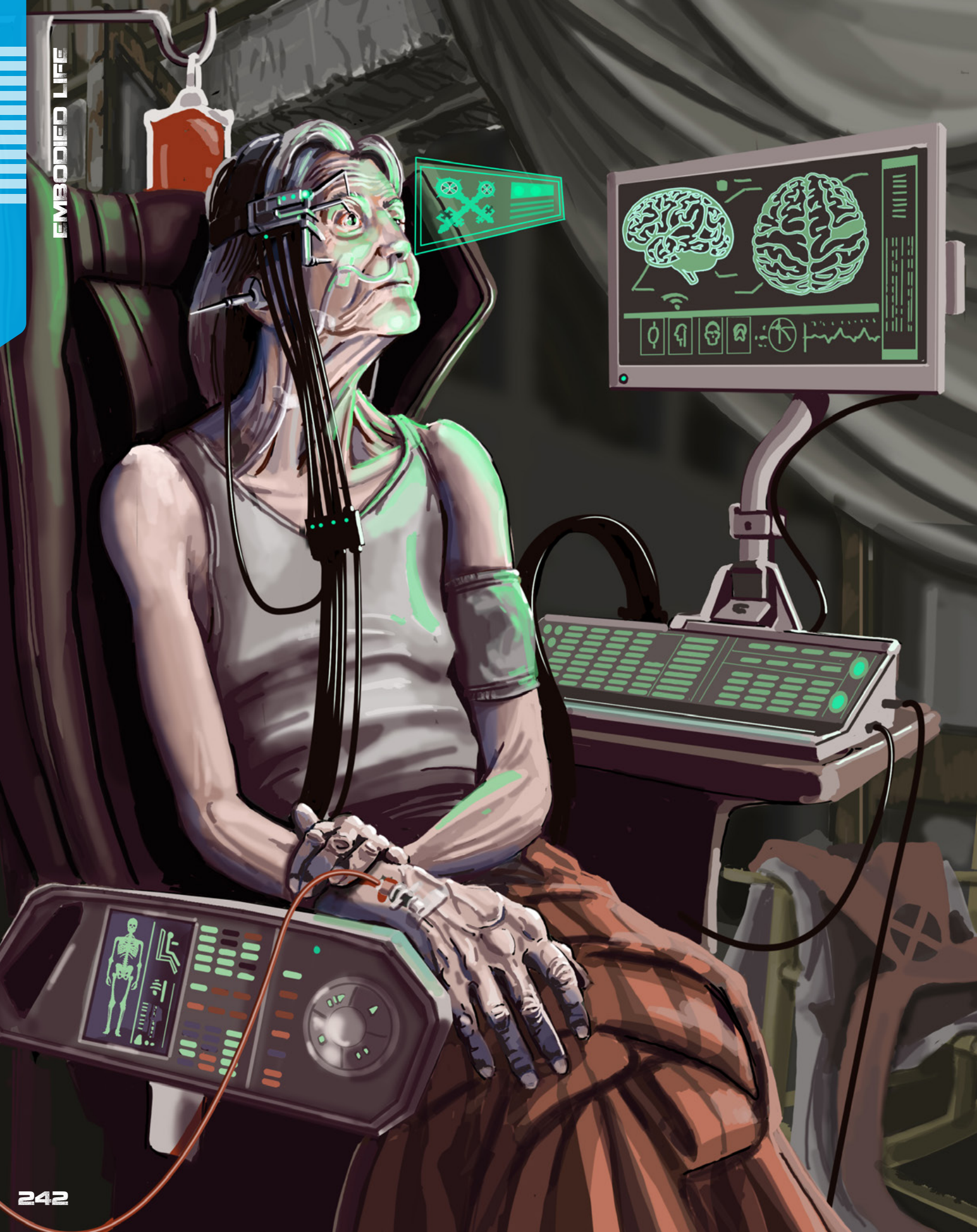
This Peripheral is capable of registering certain types of action, in this case non-violent actions, and pushing them forward as the normal. When a different type of action is taken against the user, the Rig is better able to resist it by immediately labeling it as faulty.

If you did not attack on your last turn, anyone targeting you with an attack loses two dice from their pool (minimum of 1).

Worldshaper**Cost 5**

A Peripheral best left to the more talented Aetherial personas, the Worldshaper is capable of mitigating the influence of the chaotic aether when a person is directly interacting with it. This provides protection for when the user lets a bit too much chaos in during the act of Hacking.

When Hacking, if you would suffer damage, suffer 1 less (to a minimum of 0).



EMBODIED LIFE

The Aetherium is not the whole of human existence, than many feel it is so. While much of life is now centered around the Aetherium, it is the material world that drives nearly everything. It is the fact that humanity leads an embodied life that drives necessity, that fuels scarcity, and that creates conflict. If people could live without the Meatspace, the Aetherium would be a wildly different place.



The discovery of the Aetherium was so lauded because it allowed people to escape the mundane, depressing nature of their physical body. The Meatspace had been in a state of collapse for some time, and the Aetherium was seen as complete, immersive escape from this reality.

Of course, the Aetherium could never be a perfect escape. Everyone remains intrinsically tied to a physical body, and seemingly everything that exists in the Aetherium is created by something in the Meatspace.

The two worlds are far more connected than most people would like to believe, as the needs of one often spur conflict in the other. The Aetherium and the Meatspace are in a truly symbiotic relationship, each moving along and growing with the other.

Earth is a small world, and in the 23rd century, it feels even smaller. The world is populated by around 40 billion people, creating overcrowding and rampant poverty. Travel has accelerated, taking advantage of automation and improved engines to make once-remote regions quickly accessible. Culture and language have both undergone a functional merger, each evolving to incorporate the “other” on a worldwide scale.

Humanity has wealth at previously unimaginable levels, but this is tempered by the abundance being funneled more to luxury items rather than to necessities.

This chapter dives into some of the important realities of the physical world. It touches on the philosophies and beliefs that shape it, as well as the inescapable truths of the human condition in the 23rd century.

Even if the Meatspace rules of the previous chapters aren't used, understanding the material world backdrop of an Aetherium game can give the narrative more vibrancy and urgency. After all, understanding what a character is escaping every time they log in only adds to the experience of what it means to be that character.

Much of the specific history of the Meatspace, such as the Monoculture Wars and how Collectives were formed, is covered in the Aetherial World chapter, but some of those concepts are revisited in brief here.

The nature of wealth, employment, and the prevalent nature of crime are touched on, as they are often what people escape by logging in.

This chapter also goes into a bit more detail on four major Collectives in the material world: the Axiom, House Ikaru, the Nanomei, and RezX. This is a reflection of some of the important Collectives in the Aetherium, but there are many more Collectives and governments in the material world than are covered in this chapter.

HOLISTIC GLOBALIZATION

Nature

The material world is crumbling. The environment teeters on the edge of genuine, brutal disaster.

Years of pollutants have contributed to a change of the global climate, which caused more extreme weather patterns and rising sea levels. These changes hit many ecosystems hard, causing domino effects among certain species: as one species died out, so did others across the breadth of its food chain.

The ozone layer itself is so depleted in places that radiation blisters the unwary after only several hours of unprotected and direct exposure. This radiation has caused sickness and deformity in many of the creatures that survived.

People live in and amongst these changes, as do other species, trying to find their new ecological niche. For many, this niche involves abandoning the physical world altogether and escaping into the Aetherium as often as possible. This is not a permanent solution, though, as people are still made of meat and require food, water, and rest in their physical forms to survive.

This reality has created a new tension with the planet that birthed humanity. For hundreds of years, people saw themselves as separate from nature, its overlord and caretaker. This dynamic has changed considerably. People now mostly see the natural world as the enemy, something so foreign to the human condition as to be utterly reviled.

Those few who remember that the human condition is one predominantly of the physical body are few and increasingly far between.

"Just as nature has shed thousands of species through extinction, so too has humanity shed thousands of cultures through globalization.

Both processes could be called evolution, but I'm not comfortable calling either progress."

REZX SCIENTIST

Technology

The pervasive nature of technology in the 23rd century makes it somewhat of an afterthought, but it is one that is shaping culture, norms, and the human experience.

Technology is omnipresent. Screens fill most blank surfaces, providing constant stimulation and information. Personal digital interfaces are mundane, quotidian, and practical, to the point where nearly 40 billion people have a SIM card surgically implanted in their head.

Communication is possible globally, instantly, as is the retrieval of information. Personal assistant artificial intelligences are always nearby and available to assist with a query, requiring little more than a question spoken aloud to answer.

Perhaps the most important way that technology shapes life in the 23rd century is the way that it shrank the world, both in terms of accessibility and difference, homogenizing the human experience into one of monocultural monism.

The philosopher Nietzsche once said "God is dead... [a]nd we have killed him" in order to express what science and the Enlightenment had done to the human conception of ourselves and morality. The advent of the Aetherium, coupled with technology, has killed the body in the same way, and perhaps the human mind is not far behind.

TRAVEL

Travel takes two forms: the short commute and the distant voyage.

The short commute is usually a matter of large, public, automated transportation. Since many people work in the Aetherium, most commuting is done to food dispensaries or similar. While personal travel options, such as cars, are available, they are not widely used because commuter transportation is usually free.

Distant voyages have a cost, but travel times are quick. High-definition scanners coupled with AI security systems have bypassed lines, and electric, autonomous air travel is fast and readily available. A traveler could flee the pressures of Builtmore only to surface in Neo Tokyo a scant few hours later. Of course, they might very well discover the same corporate overlords running every single aspect of daily life on their arrival.

Wealth

One should not ignore the fact that, despite environmental collapse and overpopulation, the 23rd century is a time of technological prosperity. The markets are ripe and overflowing with commercially produced material. Production is cheap and easy. Many commercial resources are easily repurposed or recycled into ever-newer versions of themselves.

As such, the human condition enjoys a consumerist glut. The average individual can afford a quality Rig and SIM for the Aetherium, and those that can't invariably still get their hands on something. Everyone has a phone, which also serves as a computer with a simple docking station to a larger device. The latest in digital contacts, aural implants, and sensory gloves means that many people don't even need a phone: with the right combination of gadgets, the human body itself becomes the device.

The question is no longer what technology can be afforded (though at the highest tiers this still matters), but more what one's preference for interaction.

Commercial goods are cheap because of incredible factories able to quickly recycle and repurpose synthetics like plastics, and each year the process only improves further. This has made many luxury items more affordable and available than at any point in history.

This glut on consumerism has a steep bill that has been accumulating year upon year. The world's resources have been ground beneath the treads of progress. Nearly everything valuable has been dug up, chopped down, and used for commercial gain.

Centuries of abuse and the demands of supporting 40 billion people have driven the world to a terrible precipice. Everyone has everything all of the time... except what they actually need: clothing, food, and shelter.

Despite mechanical advancements, the world struggles to provide basic sustenance for its 40 billions inhabitants. At food banks across the globe, synthetic processors squeeze together massive amounts of nutritional paste that keeps the destitute and downtrodden on their feet each morning. But there is little of value in the rations of oily slick gin and thick loaves of ground meal consumed daily. Real food is scarce. Only wealthy individuals know the exquisite taste or texture of processed vat-grown meat. Fewer still know of the animal-derived variety. Nearly the entire world survives in a system that is just barely providing for their most fundamental needs. Millions live on the cusp of starvation in a cycle that is repeated globally on a monthly basis.

POVERTY

The Aetherium has changed the nature of human life, but at the same time there's a depressing similarity. Those at the bottom struggle to make ends meet, and those at the top have everything at their fingertips.

While the wealthy laud the achievements of humanity and possibility for upward mobility, most people are wondering how they will survive the week.

Almost all commodities have been moved to subscription models. This means that while the poor may have more than at any point in history, they are not only living paycheck to paycheck, but the little bit that they do have is not even theirs, it is rented. People huddle together into shoddy, temporary shelters that they ambitiously call housing units. Millions more find temporary respite in tiny bed spaces that can be rented daily, colloquially called "coffins." Millions survive in with no permanent home, only rotating from one coffin to the next, each still warm from the body that had just left.

Without ownership, there is little possibility for wealth accumulation over generations, ensuring that the vast divide between rich and poor is maintained.

EMPLOYMENT

Much of commerce has migrated within the Aetherium. This means that most employment is within the Aetherium, though there are still those jobs left in the Meatspace. Regardless, people are expected to work 8 or more hours in a day (of material time, which is an excruciating shift inside the Aetherium: about 4 days).

Outside the Aetherium, employment is almost never thought of in permanent parameters. Jobs are contracted and expire seemingly on a whim of whatever middle-management operative runs the show that month.

Most jobs are designed as part of a false economy, creating work where none is needed. Machines could likely do the same work better, and cheaper, which keeps wages alarmingly low. But the jobs are created all the same to keep those multitudes from sliding off the edges of the economic table.

Many other jobs are just as demeaning but in a different manner. Factory work is considered a modest privilege. Most production is automated, but millions of people are required to perform the fundamental maintenance on the robotic automatons built to replace them.

Culture

The advent of massive global communication has truly leveled the cultural landscape. The hope back in the early days of global communication, of course, was that the Information Age would bring people together in order to celebrate ideas, to create a new intellectual diaspora, and to obliterate that once divided humanity.

It is true in parts; the advances in technology created a cascade of information that spread across the globe in wondrous fashion. By the end of the 21st century, people anywhere could find any information they desired about life in the remotest parts of the world with a snap of the finger. That was a remarkable human achievement for a race that had otherwise consigned itself to various expressions of insular tribalism.

Thus the tragic, the accidental, and perhaps the insidious effect of the Information Age was not to celebrate difference and diversity. Instead, it was to level difference, ground it into a superficial paste that disguised the fact that global human access and interaction had spawned one predominant cultural structure, the Mono-Culture.

Humanity leaned into its technological abilities only to discover that it had erased much of the humanity itself, and it happened in subtle ways. As more sophisticated AI were needed to filter the overwhelming amount of information, computers began to be the taste makers deciding what appeared to people. This cultivated info-stream made tastes evolve, not only for foods, but also in film and arts and literature, so that a contemporary masterpiece was known and celebrated immediately throughout the world, so long as it fit the algorithms of a computer. Surely, the availability of experience was a triumph of artistic expression, but it had the rather accidental consequence of destroying that which strayed from the algorithmic zeitgeist.

Year by year, decade by decade, generation after generation's celebration of global information slowly whittled away difference until there were few left who could remember what that might mean. Screens blare the same global news, identical updates, images, fashions, and celebrity drivel.

Certainly, one might find nuanced distinctions, usually in the abandoned districts or buried deep beneath urban foundations, but the grand cultural differences have largely faded for any casual observer.

CREATING DIFFERENCES

Old habits do not die easily, and humanity looked for differences to reestablish self and other, in and out. How, one might have wondered, could one be "in" if there was no longer anything "outside?" And for many, they have a desperate need to feel like they are on the inside, and if it means forcing people to the outside.... just as well.

Various elements within the predominant cultures, lead largely by Western thought, began pulling back toward their atavistic sense of tribalism. Nation states began to fracture into ever-smaller components, despite the cultural differences of history that drew many of the lines were no longer relevant.

Thus, by the time the old European Union broke into its component states, and then again by the time those old states broke into their components republics, the distinctions were largely one of semantics. By the time the United Kingdom, for example, had split back into three smaller provinces, the cultural substance of those worlds were lost in ways that could not be retroactively retrieved. Citizens in greater Edinburgh ate the same food, saw the same films, visited the same websites as anyone in Cardiff and London.

The politics of identity became largely a politics of opportunism and imaginary differences that did not truly exist across cities that had grown in the same way cities did everywhere else. Remnants of old cultures searched desperately for ways to find distinctions at a time when true diversity had dissolved.

It was this aspect that drove the rise of the Collectives, creating a distinct internal culture that allowed people to be separate from the Mono-Culture.

"I passed the square on the way home from work today. Clearing crews had arrived, and I could see bloodstains on the cobblestone. I asked the computer to tell me about the recent violent protests in the city.

It simply replied that the the information was not 'relevant' to me and instead showed me pictures of cats."

AXIOM COG

Language

Perhaps one of the more curious and accidental consequences of the so-called processes of globalization has been the melding of common languages. From a distance, this might seem almost inevitable, but certainly the outcome was never entirely clear, nor the process particularly deliberate. As various countries and entities began to dominate the global marketplace, so too did much of the cultural weight of the language spoken, and yet, it was important that everyone was able to easily understand each other.

The cost of doing business was to accept the languages that the dominant economic powers were using, which, over time, began to use more and more jargon that faded into common parlance, and eventually became its own language: Spara.

Most global citizens now speak Spara. While native speakers in the 20th-Century of English, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and several other prominent languages would all recognize familiar elements and words within this language, they would fail to comprehend Spara fluently, as it has been evolving for hundreds of years.

English and Chinese languages, by way of reference, now sit underneath the global language Spara in a similar way Latin vocabulary and Germanic grammar sits beneath English of the 21st-Century.

Most citizens of the world continue to speak a "home language," which is to say a dialect of Spara that retains the greatest portion of its geographic affiliation. So, for example, an Axiom Cog would likely speak a form of Spara that leans most heavily on English when unplugged from the Aetherium; meanwhile, any official or bureaucratic interactions would likely be conducted in Spara Standard, both in the Meatspace and within the Aetherium.

The most important element of Spara, however, is that it is a standard and common core of the translation software within the Aetherium. So much so that even if one were to speak in another language, or in a form of extreme dialect, the Aetherium software on any civilized Pylon would likely transform that communication into Spara Standard immediately. In part, this removes a translatory step and removes the need to learn a way to translate each and every language or dialect into each and every other. Spara is the central hub of communication and commerce in the global community; it is the axel upon from which all others revolve.

Entertainment

Most individuals spend the majority of their free time inside the Aetherium. Logging in, they fall in love, make friends, see movies, and more.

There are still those, however, who have entertainments outside the Aetherial sphere. For many, this involves physical activities such as sports. These entertainments are not only fun, but they also help keep the body active and healthy (which in turn can contribute to an overall better experience in the Aetherium).

Extreme sports and more thrilling pastimes have also seen a sharp uptick. Parachuting, cliff diving, street racing, and more have become mainstream sources of entertainment. The thrill of actual risk to life and limb can often create an excitement that some find lacking elsewhere, making them feel alive and in control of their own destiny.

In many cases, some of the options, such as fighting and racing, are illegal, but that doesn't seem to deter those involved. In fact, in some cases it might even be part of the excitement, permitting the lower classes some sense of freedom in a world largely controlled by governments and corporations. Most police, themselves part of the lower class, will look the other way or accept modest bribes, so long as it's not caught on camera.

Crime

Crime is at its highest point in hundreds of years, as many resort to petty theft to fill their bellies or have a roof over their heads. In the poorest districts, it can often feel like the only way to survive is to bypass the system.

This rise has also seen a large uptick in organized criminal entities. The return of gangs, mobs, and other structures have been able to flourish, despite the prevalence of surveillance and monitoring equipment.

Joining with one of these outfits can be a sure way to get some material stability in life, though the law, if caught, is often swift and brutally punishing.

While crime is on the rise in the Meatspace, much of the crime stays outside of the Aetherium. Part of this is the difficulty of crime in a digital landscape, but more than anything else it's the nature of scarcity. In the Aetherium, crime is less a requirement for stability. In the material world, sometimes you have to break some rules in order to eat a decent meal.

GOVERNMENTS AND COLLECTIVES

The power of a government or Collective inside the Aetherium is ready evident - they control the Pylon, and therefore they control the space.

In the material world, however, this distinction is not so easy. There are no simple Pylons to draw boundaries, and geopolitical borders seem somewhat nonsensical in a world so informationally connected. Even work itself might be taking place for an organization halfway around the world, itself happening while logged into the Aetherium.

The most important aspect of the control of physical space is related to the remaining natural resources of the world. Arable farmlands and mineral deposits are valuable, as are areas with a more stable ozone layer.

During the last few hundred years, however, control of much of the best land was privatized, giving control to an individual or organization. These owners then ceded control to larger companies, eventually consolidating the most valuable lands into the hands of a few private players with no real national boundaries (or any strict adherence to the idea of a nation).

As companies turned into Collectives, they began to throw off the shackles of traditional governance and create their own laws and ideas, despite the lack of a cohesive physical location.

This division and control has left the world fragmented, much like a Node where every Pylon belongs to a different group: a few steps in the wrong direction and suddenly cultural norms, laws, and more can change almost without warning.

"Hundreds of years ago, you were born in a place, and in that place you remained, for other countries did not want you. Your birth determined your rights.

How much better is our current age, that you can move freely and decide your own place in the world?"

HOUSE IKARU HISTORIAN

Corporate Control

While there are many remaining governments in the world, most have taken up the mantle of the Collective. These Collectives are really more like corporate entities than traditional governments.

The control of a Collective within its borders is near absolute. They own nearly everything: housing, supplies, and more. These things can be rented by those who are willing to work for the Collective, and often they are available at a higher price to those outside of it.

Within a Collective's sphere of control, they are both the government, setting laws and fiscal policy, and the employer, setting hours and pay. This lends them an incredible amount of power over an individual's life, with no recourse for those who have been wronged.

Luckily, while Collective control is near absolute, they have not yet resorted to a virtual panopticon of monitoring their employees. While AI policing and video monitoring do exist, it is often relegated to the most important areas of a Collective.

DISCON

Most people live in one Collective's area and work for that same Collective, whether they work in the Meatspace or the Aetherium. Those that don't are known as Discons (for disconnects).

Discons are fairly rare, though they are more common among Icons and other strong Aetherial users. Often, Discons are tracked more readily than others, as they are seen as rather dangerous to both Collectives (though often more so to where they live than where they work).

EMIGRATION

While the Collectives remain very open to migration and professional mobility, it is often not quite so easy as it might appear on the surface. Moving to a new Collective is possible, but without a job there are often stints of homelessness to endure until one can rent a bed.

If this hurdle is overcome, adjusting to a new Collective culture can often be challenging, as most Collectives, be definition, pride themselves on their differences.

Politics

Many of the Collectives of the world are, on the surface, on great terms with one another. They buy, sell, and trade commodities. They work together to create entertainments. They allow their people to travel back and forth and experience what other places have to offer.

Diplomats engage in regular discussions about trade, including the swapping of resources such as lands. These deals can greatly impact the people of a Collective, and they are advertised widely to show citizen-employees how their Collective works constantly on their behalf.

Beneath the surface, though, is a cut throat world. While there are many benefits to diplomacy and playing nice with others, civility only goes so far with a Collective.

Every Collective maintains a standing military, as well as a wide range of spies and informants. The largest branch of all is often the press, churning out propaganda for the Collective. Axiom, in particular, has elevated propaganda dramatically to an open and obvious artform.

These tools of state are used as leverage in the larger, more visible trade negotiations. Blackmail, extortion, and threats are all common tactics to try to gain the upperhand in a trade summit.

Often, major summits are initiated by a side that finds that it will soon need something it lacks. Blights may have taken crops, or a rich mineral vein has run dry, or any of a number of other possibilities. By making overtures about trade, it is possible that a Collective can gain what it wants through simple trade; though, in many cases, their upcoming need puts them at a disadvantage at the negotiating table.

If a summit fails, it is rare that the conflict ends with words alone. A failed discussion will often turn into warfare, though of a subtle and precise variety (see the next column for more information). At times, the most important thing about the discussion was simply to show that every attempt had been made for a peaceful solution, as a pretext to the necessities of violence.

People Pacification

No Collective would admit it, but the bulk of power resides in the people that make up the Collective. This truth ensures that, no matter how diabolical a Collective might be, it is always searching for justifications for its actions (or to keep its activities concealed altogether).

War

Full-scale warfare started to die off a couple hundred years before the 23rd century, and this trend has only continued. As nations gave way to Collectives, almost all warfare was fought over ideas or increasingly smaller areas of land, making armed conflict more akin to guerilla warfare than open engagement.

Contemporary Meatspace wars are fought almost exclusively between drones piloted by those far off from the battlefield. While human life is cheap, well-trained pilots are not. What's more, machines large enough and sturdy enough to protect pilots are more expensive than smaller, unmanned crafts.

Drones come in all shapes and varieties, though each Collective tends to have a few distinct drones within their arsenal. These drones conduct surveillance, engage in combat, and launch cyber attacks.

The small-scale conflict of the 23rd century is perfectly tailored for drone warfare, allowing a small group of machines to get in and get out, or hold position, for an indefinite period of time with almost no need for supplies.

Most battles are fought over two things: valuable land or information caches.

Valuable land may be rich with natural resources, or it may be an ideal place for a communications tower. Perhaps one of the massive telecom pipelines runs through the area, and control over it would open new gateways to information. More rarely, battle is joined over population centers in an effort to add more bodies to a Collective's ranks.

Information caches prove the most common form of battle, as a Collective attempts to gain access to siloed data. This might be information about capital expenditures, names of spies, research notes, or anything else. Typically, the drones are responsible for finding access points and attaching communicators so that the target can be hacked remotely by powerful AI.

Occasionally, warfare is extended to the massive AI servers that host the Aetherium's Pylons. These wars are brutal, as a misfire or explosion can lead to the deaths of millions if Pylons subsequently collapse inside the other reality. Despite this risk, taking over another's servers can be extremely valuable. And, for some, the loss of life might be the point.

AXIOM

The fundamental structure of the Axiom social order is the quasi-religious worship of the state itself. Many of the social structures of the Axiom hew closely to the ecclesiastic organizations from old; however, one must not mistake this for a religion in a traditional sense. The Axiom state is the only god. Life for the Axiom citizen revolves entirely around that simple truth, Axiom is the central pillar of both the material and the Aetherial worlds.

It is difficult to overstate how important the state is to the individual within the Axiom sphere of influence. The state is venerated as the savior that brought the modern world back from the brink of absolute collapse. For members of that world, it is not only the savior of civilization, it is also the absolute and only manifestation of civilization.

For many in the Axiom, there are equal responsibilities in the material world as in the Aetherial one. The Axiom's crossed keys are symbolic of the interrelation of these two worlds and the importance of both.

Axiom citizens (for they are not often referred to as employees) are required to take part in multiple rituals every day: Volunteering, Socialization, and Conservation.

Volunteering is, simply put, work. Every Axiom citizen is expected to work. They go to a job and get paid like anyone else, though it is often referred to in unique Axiom terminology. People are volunteers and their pay is called appreciation. No one is fooled.

Socialization is a vital responsibility. It involves talking with neighbors, co-volunteers, and others to see if anyone needs any assistance or support. On the surface, this creates a healthy peer network. Of course, Axiom citizens are subtly encouraged to keep watch on these neighbors and report any suspicious activities (which is known as a "Referral" for getting someone Axiom-sponsored "help"). Socialization is often done at meeting places, often town squares or converted churches from the old world.

Conservation is a dedication to the planet Earth. Conservation can take many forms, but it often involves cleaning up trash, recycling goods, or simply taking less than one can afford in order to leave more for others. Conservation is the least watched of the rituals, but it is the one most people identify with very strongly.

More information on the Axiom and their ideologies can be found on page 120.

Appeal

The institutions of the Axiom appeal to many who value law and order. No one needs to question their place in the world, nor their value, as the Axiom ensure that everyone contributes to the machine of civilization.

The Axiom are also the least likely to leave anyone behind, as their social structures have mechanisms to ensure that everyone has "volunteer" opportunities.

The Axiom also take the time to laud the successes of their citizens, with skillful individuals reaching virtual sainthood within the Axiom order.

Underbelly

The Axiom are a shining beacon of civilization, at least as far as their propaganda posters are concerned. The Axiom thrives on propaganda, and it has no qualms using social engineering (or, in extreme cases, neural engineering) to manipulate its populace. The ends always justify the means, at least so long as the means are not made public knowledge.

The propaganda ministrations reach down into the skols, which educate (read: indoctrinate) Axiom children. Those who were raised Axiom rarely see the value in the chaotic, competitive way of life of other Collectives.

The Axiom populace is largely paranoid and filled with militaristic fervor. This creates a society that is constantly on edge and watching each other for signs of disloyalty and illegality, making it hard to make true friends within the Axiom state.

Locations

The Axiom Territories sprawl across Northern and Eastern Europe and dip aggressively down in to Northern Africa. While the Axiom no longer recognizes the individual nation states that once composed those locations, there are several cultural remnants that survive - often in the form of dialects that have lingered and remain heavily influenced by the national languages of the old geographies.

HOUSE IKARU

For the most part, House Ikaru tries to mask its influence as a governing body, preferring instead to assert the subtlety that its 'soft power' creates. As any megalithic corporate entity would prefer, it is most powerful when it appears as if the power has been chosen by the forces of the people. Thus House Ikaru works hard to ensure that all under its sphere of influence are productive first, contributing to the sustenance of the House itself.

Of course, there are moments when the subterfuge simply will not function. There is an adage among House Ikaru citizenry that states, simply, that the nail that stands up gets hammered down. This adage cuts Ikaru ideology in half: to stand out is clearly a bad thing, and yet, to get ahead one must stand out. An individual must adhere to the social order, except when they should not.

House Ikaru is a culture of work. That work may take the form of a job (and often does), but it also refers to self-improvement and the pursuit of perfection. To be idle within House Ikaru is to be a failure.

This has created a robust culture of moonlighting among the citizen-employees. Everyone has a day job, but many are looking for other opportunities beyond their day-to-day. Moonlighting often takes the form of contract work, allowing an individual to expand their skills, knowledge, and bank account.

Most of Ikaru focuses on the Aetherium, as there is more time for work and research in the adjusted perception of time, but there are plenty that work in the Meatspace. Many moonlighters take their second job in the material world in order to keep in tune with their bodies.

House Ikaru operates many resource gathering operations throughout the world, with sophisticated mining operations and carbon-neutral logging.

Perhaps most important to the Ikaru in the Meatspace are their vast recycling operations, which not only serve as a great way to limit costs in production, but are also highly sophisticated espionage centers. House Ikaru can learn a lot about someone by their trash, and they operate massive recycling facilities and collection operations in order to study their competition.

House Ikaru is also the only large Collective known to be actively pursuing space programs, and by their own estimates they'll have a colony on Mars within the next 10 years (unfortunate setbacks due to wars and environmental collapse limited the space programs of over a hundred years ago).

More information on House Ikaru and their ideologies can be found on page 124.

Appeal

The citizen-employees of House Ikaru enjoy a strong level of education, as well as nearly unrivaled social and economic mobility. Success breeds opportunity, and capitalism is hard at work in Ikaru. For those looking to a better future, the unfettered progressive spin of House Ikaru provides a beacon of hope. If anyone is going to solve the ills of the world, it is likely to be House Ikaru.

Ikaru has a plan, and that plan is supported by the Central Processor (CP). An Ikaru citizen-employees know that the CP is always looking out for their best interests and shaping the progress of the future.

Underbelly

While the Ikaru are very open to progress and change as a whole, many of their traditional values and beliefs are more akin to a feudalistic view of the world. An individual's manager, or anyone at a higher tier in House Ikaru, has incredibly powerful and sway over one below them. This has often resulted in inventions and ideas being stolen by those higher up, keeping those skilled from rising as high as they should.

House Ikaru holds no moral compunctions, by and large. Those of lower social standing are often asked to volunteer for research and development assignments. Those individuals understand, without the word every having been uttered, that they are sacrifice to the company interest. It is considered a duty and honor.

This also applies to those outside the Ikaru, and it is possible to trace many genocidal actions (such as the development of the Code Eater virus) back to House Ikaru coders.

Locations

House Ikaru is one of the more diasporic Collectives due to their emphasis on business over governance. It controls large sections of Asia, and it has pockets of ownership (almost like large military bases) all over the world, with a particular emphasis on the entire Pacific Rim.

NANOMEI

The Nanomei are not a true governing body, nor are they a corporation. They do not fit the mold of the other major Collectives, but their influence cannot be denied.

The Nanomei are bound together by ideology. They believe in freedom, self-determination, and expression.

As such, the Nanomei take many forms throughout the Aetherium and in the Meatspace, as they are often revolutionaries and protestors set up against the systems of power in whatever place they are in. The Nanomei in Ikaru lands have different objectives than the Nanomei amongst the Axiom, yet they are Nanomei.

The Nanomei are a Collective of dissidents. They exist within the systems of power. This means that there aren't many Nanomei who have jobs specifically related to the Nanomei; their jobs are within other Collectives, even if they warp them to take on ideals of their heart.

There are some jobs that do exist among the Collective, however. The Nanomei have a constant need for fighters, both in the Aetherium and the material world. Aetherial combatants travel from place to place and undermine the societal fabric of a Node, but Meatspace fighters are waging a much more real war.

Nanomei cells are often sent on missions to destroy black ops facilities of the other Collectives, such as Axiom Slavhac facilities, Ikaru edge science, and more. There is no shortage of facilities that support authoritarian and immoral pursuits in the Meatspace.

The Nanomei also have a large number of people referred to as "throwbacks" around the material world. Throwbacks are often farmers and craftsfolk that are bypassing the industrialized production methods and engaging with the world on a more direct level. Throwbacks do not require wealth or skills, just an ideological commitment to the agriculture collective, in the traditional sense.

These throwback settlements are often used in direct support of the guerilla warfare arms of the Nanomei, providing support to those people who are too deep in the trenches to have traditional jobs that could support their militaristic livelihoods.

More information on the Nanomei and their ideologies can be found on page 128.

Appeal

Nanomei sensibilities appeal to many people to one degree or another. They believe in absolute freedom and self-actualization, which hold a strong place in many people's sense of the rights of humanity.

On top of this, the Nanomei are one of the only Collectives that view progress in a regressive sense: they think the best way forward to humanity is to go back. They don't advocate for giving up the achievements of science (or the glory of the Aetherium), but they often fight against automation and other dehumanizing technologies. For many, Nanomei values allow for more self-respect among workers. And that is enough.

Underbelly

There are two key elements that make those viewing the Nanomei a bit queasy.

The first is that there is no real underlying order to the Nanomei. This means a certain amount of disorganization and pursuits of individual projects. It is easy for a terrible act to be attributed to the Nanomei, for the Nanomei have no real representatives to defend themselves. And, the truth is, many of these acts are committed by Nanomei loyalists.

The second is that the Nanomei, for all their talk of freedom, are consistently robbing others the chances to make their own choices. The Nanomei will rob, cheat, and kill to further their agenda. Many who might support the Nanomei have a hard time getting behind many of the tactics they employ, which amount to little more than terrorism. They are wild, reckless, and free... no matter the cost.

Locations

The Nanomei exist all over the world, having few holdings of their own. There is a large population of Nanomei living in South America, particularly many of their throwback villages, with another large population in what was Mongolia and parts of the former Russia.

REZX

The RezX used to be part of RexCon, which rose out of the tech giants in North America. Over time, these corporations banded together to form a sort of quasi-governmental agency dedicated to the pursuit of science and the advancement of humanity.

When RexCon went down in flames during the Trade Wars, the RezX managed to survive both through their scientific advances, which ensured a firm foothold in the material world, and through the luck of their relative apolitical isolation.

While the RezX are most famous for their highly advanced Aethershops and mobile Pylon technology, there are vast arms of the RezX that get little to no attention from the outside.

The Collective is currently supporting vast research arms throughout the world, employing scientists and support staff to study the Earth and its natural processes.

What's more, the RezX are the only Collective to maintain a space station, which is used to create and maintain a vast collection of satellites around the Earth. This gives the RezX a supremacy in the atmosphere above the planet, which has resulted in many Collectives relying on ground-based communications.

Many RezX population centers are focused on the scientific elements, despite the fact that most of those within the RezX aren't actually scientists: they are clerical and support functions.

RezX communities have a large emphasis on social services related to education, such as vast libraries and hands-on laboratories, all of which promote the development of the RezX values.

It would be easy to assume that the RezX are interested only in the hard sciences, as their achievements in these fields are the most discussed and advertised, but the RezX have learned better than to ignore some of the social sciences.

These pursuits means that many of their Collective-run locales in the Meatspace are constantly undergoing one experiment or another: how does coffin life affect an individual's growth and development, does true democracy work on a local level, and can new generations atone for the mistakes of previous ones -- these questions represent a cross-section of the social experimentation going on within the RezX ranks.

More information on the RezX and their ideologies can be found on page 132.

Appeal

The RezX, like House Ikaru, have a strong belief in education. Those looking to expand their horizons and learn more are encouraged to do so more so in the RezX than anywhere else.

For many, the most vocal pursuits of the RezX are the greatest appeal: terraforming technology to fix our planet (and make others habitable), mobile Pylons to make the Aetherium safer, and more. These advancements could change the shape of the human experience of life.

Underbelly

While the RezX, overall, are an altruistic organization funded by private investors, the very nature of their work raises suspicions. Scientists are covered by complex disclosure agreements, and many distrust the idea of science for its own sake, believing that this led to some of the collapses of the past. Deserved or not, the RezX have a reputation for dispassionate science.

On a deeper level, though, the RezX struggle with acceptance. They are never satisfied, always looking to the next horizon. This dissatisfaction with the current state of things often makes them oblivious to the repercussions of their actions, allowing certain discoveries to have an unfortunate ripple effect.

In many ways, the RezX have less of a dark underbelly than other Collectives, but this is largely because of the large level of disconnection they feel with their own existences. This disconnection, in and of itself, can have disturbing impacts on the psychological health of the RezX and those around them.

Locations

The RezX have many towns and cities in North America, though after the devastation of the eastern seaboard, most are in central or western portions of the continent.

The RezX are also known for numerous ocean-based towns, both on created islands and biodome facilities on the water, and some underneath it.

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SWITCH

CHIP

SHORT

CRASH



DISRUPTION ON 5, 9, 11, & 12

[CHARACTER]

AETHERIUM

[SYNC]

[DEFENSE]

[HEALTH]

[GLITCH]

[LEVEL]

[VAR]

[HACK]

[ICONOLOGY]

[STATS]

[FORCE]

[COORDINATION]

[SPEED]

[CHARISMA]

[COMPOSURE]

[REASONING]

[PERCEPTION]

[PROGRAMS]

[NAME]

[CS]

[STAT]

[RANGE]

[SPEC & KNACKS]

[CHARACTER]

MEATSPACE

[HEALTH]

[WEALTH]

[BLOCK]

[JOB]

[RESIST]

[BASICS]

[TRAINING]

[ATHLETICS]

[CQC]

[DIPLOMACY]

[ENGINEERING]

[FIREARMS]

[MEDICINE]

[SAVVY]

[SOFTWARE]

[SPYCRAFT]

[SURVIVAL]

[EQUIPMENT]

[NAME]

[CS]

[STAT]

[RANGE]

[RIG]

[OTHER LUXURIES]



WELCOME TO A WORLD BETWEEN WORLDS

The Aetherium roleplaying game is a game about two worlds: the Aetherium and the material world, known as the Meatspace. The characters you play in this game bridge these two worlds, existing in both places, and subject to the demands of each.

The Aetherium is a beautiful depiction of what humanity's future could be: technology and elegance combined into a sci-fi utopia. Under the surface, though, Collectives, corporations, and governments vie for control using propaganda and poverty to drive their endless ambitions.

While many live their lives logged into the Aetherium, never seeing the greed and corruption that drive it, you have seen the many cogs of the great machine, and you have found a way to rise above.

It is time to transcend your physical existence and fight to shape the reality of the Aetherium to your desires.



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