

R. TALSORIAN GAMES PRESENTS:

VIRTUAL FRONT

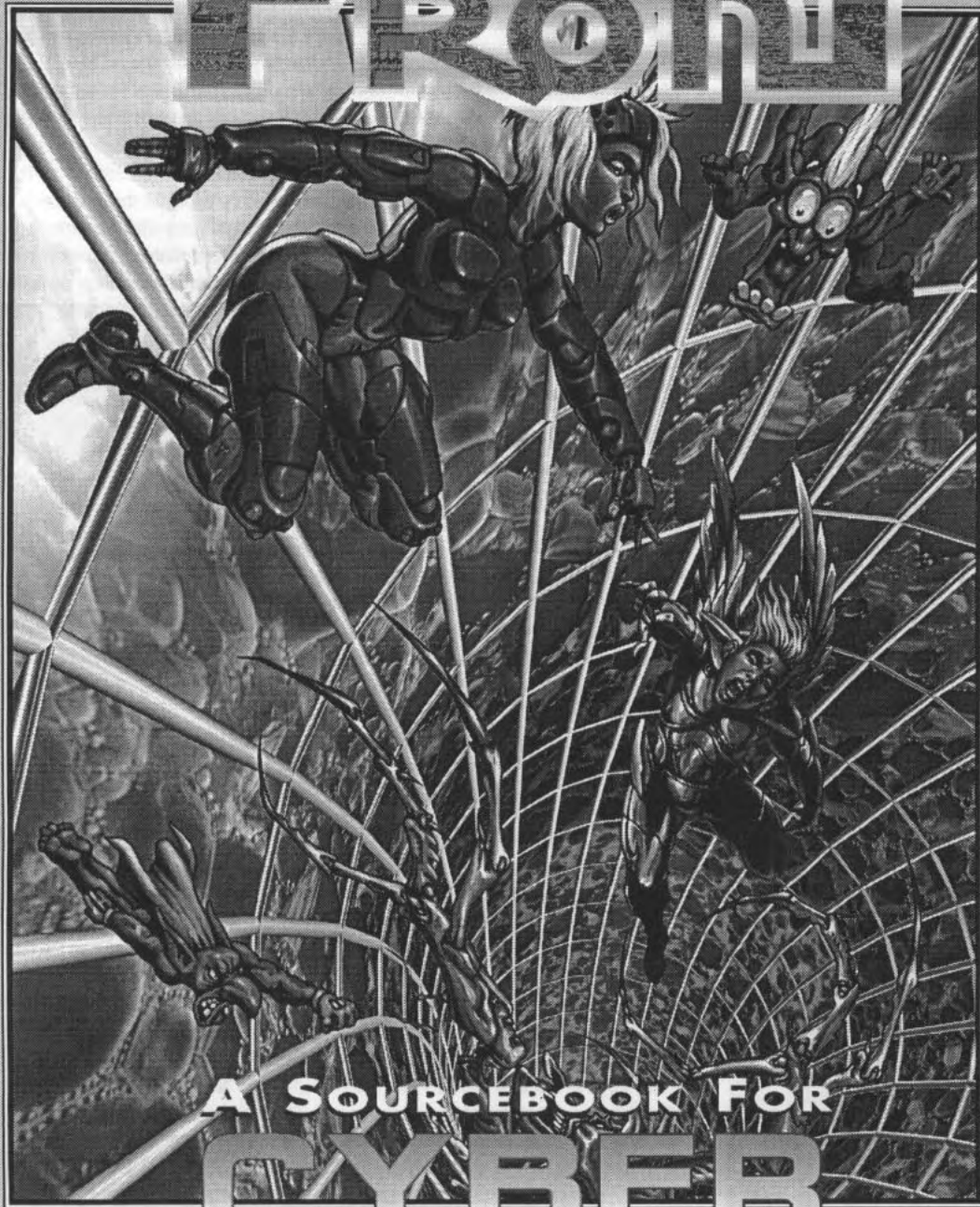
BECAUSE
REALITY IS
OBSOLETE!



A Documents of the Revolution® Sourcebook for

CYBERGENERATION

VIRTUAL FRONT



A SOURCEBOOK FOR

CYBER GENERATION



DOCUMENT OF THE REVOLUTION #3: VIRTUALFRONT

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**R. TALSORIAN
GAMES, INC.**

INTRODUCTION



▼ Woah. A fistful of Net in your interface! Hey, this is the Net in all its decadent glory, everything from who's important and everyone else besides me to the latest technology to strategy and tactics to semi-digital membranes carried on the data wind, although Spider will probably delete all my references to that since she doesn't have a clue what I'm talking about even though I've seen them dismember a Netrunner and turn him into phlogiston. But whenever Spider really doesn't have a clue

what I'm talking about, she deletes it, because she's afraid I'm mad or I'm just making something up from the dank and moldy recesses of my brain and pretending I actually believe it so she'll print it and make a fool of herself and I'll laugh and laugh and laugh. So just to be safe, she'll shred all the semi-digital membrane stuff and sooner or later one of you will get eaten, too. [I've searched everything he wrote for this compilation.

There is no mention of membranes anywhere. He'd probably say what he wrote was already eaten. Oh, by the way, I'm Spider Murphy, CyberRevolutionary Netrunner and Rache's favorite link to the meatworld. I do my best to turn his verbal meanderings into something intelligible. I've slipped in notes here and there to clarify, or perhaps comment on, some of Rache's more obscure rantings ... or maybe just to defend myself against his attempts at character assassination—Spider]

You need to know the Net frontwards and backwards. By that I mean that you should be able to move about with or without watching where you're going, because you need to develop your sixth, seventh, and eighth senses, so that you can have true global vision all about you in the Net like you're a dragonfly with big bulging eyes. The only time I've seen a netrunner with bulging eyes was when I watched on vidcomm as I explosively decompressed his workshop up in orbit. I found out the bastard was planning on stealing my latest invention before I'd even thought of it, so I gave him a messy death and watched him go. I'd have screamed in ecstasy at him while he went, but there wasn't any air left in the workshop, so my beautiful voice and hyena laugh wouldn't have carried to his bleeding ears anyway. You need to know the Net and how to use it and how it uses you, so that you can be a professional and be smart and do things the right way unlike that one jerk named Tanda.

She's the little frackin' half-wit what nailed me. Now, let me tell you, if you're going to flatline someone, make sure you do it thoroughly, professionally, savagely. But did she? Well, she used a good program, hard-core state-of-the-art nasty little feedback piece of programming, sure. But no! She had to screw up like an incompetent baboon, and leave the job half-finished! The nerve of some people! Heck, I'd have nuked my flat from orbit! I'd want to make sure about me, 'cuz I'd know that I'd be after my ass for dusting me like that. But no, of course not. Arrogant little snot. She thought that a Net Demon like me would fall with just one little pop. NEVER NEVER NEVER assume stupid things like that! She thought she could just waltz in and zap me with one measly little program even if it was well written, and I should know because it didn't take much extra work to get it to provide her with her own little hell for the weeks it took her to die. She was a fraggin' weefle, which took all the fun out of the vengeance! Which only goes to show you, you can beat intelligence with higher intelligence, skill with more skill, psychosis with greater psychosis, but you can't beat dumb luck.

So pay attention, drekwits. ▼▼▼ RACHE

**"Who is this Rache
Barfmunch fossil? He be
flappin' his frozen lips
about Netspace but he
don't even walk the world
anym—ERRUCK...
ACCESS TERMINATED"**

— DAGGER

**"That was just a Net spank-
ing, punk. Next time ..."**

— GHOSTLORD

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VIR'TUALITY NOW

▼ Thanks for tuning in, CyberRevoes! Rache was supposed to write this segment, but he got so caught up in spewing about the Occupied Net (see next file) that he totally spaced telling about how it all works. That's just as well, because he's always had difficulties conveying dry technical material coherently. Rather than ask him to do it — again — I've decided to do it myself. ▼▼▼ SPIDER

The Net, as your edgerunner parents could tell you, is the complete network/infrastructure/web/rambling patchwork quilt of all the computers, wires, cyberoptic lines, microwave links, and radio patches in the world. Phones, modems, cellular faxes: they're all in there. Even during that brief instant when you run your school ID through the ripscan at the turnstile to the football game, your card is a part of the Net.

For a long time, the Net was only directly accessible through cyberlinks, intrusive implants which directly wired your brain into the Net through a sensory interface. As technology improved, we were able to reproduce the sensory data without

the use of invasive surgery and implants; we were able to make electrodes which, placed over your temples, could use inductance to cause your brain to perceive whatever the broadcaster had programmed. If the electrode were to receive data from Net devices and processors in the area, the wearer would seem to be in the Net. Digital coding allowed for narrower radio bandwidths to make room in the broadcast spectrum for the proliferation of specialized uses this created.

Eventually someone developed the ability to overlay the Net on top of reality; no longer did a person have to choose between the Net and reality. They could have both, hence the name "Virtuality." This is how Virtuality interacts with you, by sending signals which you perceive through inductance. Static grids and programming hardware like V-cards and code guns are how you interact with Virtuality. All this technology allowed the purely electronic and information-based Net to achieve some level of reality, inasmuch as true interaction between pure Net and pure realworld became possible. Virtuality is not pure illusion, neither is it completely real. But most of you kids know all this; you've grown up with it. But, let's look at how it really works now.

The Legal Situation

These days, the Net has been nationalized, which means that the government has declared that it owns the Net and that people can only use the Net with its permission. Yeah, I know that you don't have to ask permission every time you use it. The ISA is treating the Net in much the same way that they treat the highways: The Interstate system belongs to the government, they can fine you for damaging it, they can police and regulate it as much

as they like. And in order to use it, you have to have a driver's license, obey all their rules, and any vehicle which you drive must be registered and inspected.

The government reserves the right to punish you if they catch you doing otherwise. And the more often they catch you, the harder they'll punish you.

"So this AIMO Iceman asks if I have a license to c-space, and I say, 'Gee officer, I left it at home in my other brain ...' and bounce outta there."

— ELECTRA

The same goes for the Net. Everyone who uses the Net has to be covered with an individual license or a site license granted by the corporation for which they work (individual licenses run \$100 per year and require a police background check). Hardware and users are each licensed separately. This means that all computers with modems must be licensed (at \$200 per year). Additionally, phone service is no longer divided simply into business or residential service. You must also pay separately for the right to transmit data. If you don't have data service installed, and you use a modem and they catch you with one of their periodic white noise channel sweeps, you're in big trouble. Some cities have even installed data defeaters, which use random millisecond-long interruptions in transmission to disrupt data streams (voice transmission occurs at a slow enough baud rate that no noticeable signal deterioration is caused by these data defeaters). For data dumps, these countermeasures can easily be defeated by sending a data file a dozen times and using the Patchwerk utility to recover the original from the fragmented transmission files, but the interruptions will probably crash any attempt to use the line for netrunning (a Difficult *Arcane* or *Interface* check each round to stay tuned in).

These are the laws regarding the Net. You can ignore them, use an unlicensed computer, interface over a phone line not licensed for it, etc., but if they catch you, they are legally empowered to stop you. This usually involves lethal black ice, because violating Net laws is considered reasonable cause to mark you as a computer criminal and therefore a threat to national security.

Those of you who are Wizards should realize that this means that your brain is considered a threat to national security. It's unlicensed (don't even try to register), and with practice it can be patched into the Net in such a way as to be nearly untraceable. Now maybe you know why the ISA has set up special branches of the AIM Overwatch charged exclusively with hunting you down. Your game is perhaps the most dangerous one of the entire CyberRevolution.

Privacy and Encryption

Data privacy has long been — well, to be completely accurate, it was once — a heated debate in this country and abroad. Most citizens argued that electronic mail should be afforded the same protection as normal mail is' that reading it without consent would be an invasion of privacy, and that users could take whatever measures they wished to ensure that their privacy was not violated. The government of course fought against this, arguing that data encryption aided and abetted data piracy, virus codes, and the like. The controversy heated up with the Clipper chip debate, which gave the government a code-cracking skeleton key, which again they said they needed in the interests of national security. Clipper chips are now in use in all legal computers around the country. As of January of this year, it's a felony to operate an unregistered system or to remove a Clipper chip from a system (Average *Kitbash* check to find and remove it).

Shortly after its formation, the ISA passed a law that forbade encrypted communications for any other than government or military personnel (remember: member corporations of the CEP can be considered government personnel), arguing that the only reason someone had for encryption was to enable him to perform acts of treason or warfare against the ISA and its populace. All data in the Net, legally speaking, had to be unencoded. Password protection was still allowed to give the average citizen some illusory semblance of privacy. Some tried to fight this law as unconstitutional, but when the ISA declared the Net a national resource, the case was thrown out of court as a moot point. The government can regulate national resources any way they like, don't you know.

The corporations, naturally enough, still encode all their data in house, just to make sure that anyone who tries a data raid can't get the files clean. This has the added bonus to the powers that be that when someone does steal something from a corporation, the data is encrypted, and a person carrying around encrypted data is by legal definition a traitor or a spy and can be zapped.

Even your cellphones are no longer considered private. It used to be that when you made a cellular call, no one really knew where you were. In the early 20's, the phone companies started giving people an "extra service" to be able to track them down when they made a call. That this was even allowed is quite a surprise, although the influx of drugs during those times gave the government the popular latitude it needed to install the technology. Naturally these days, what used to be a voluntary service is now a standard feature — and required

by law. Make a call, and the government can tell where you are. They have a right to know, because you're using a national resource. Doesn't that make you feel safe and secure?

"FREEZE! Your actions constitute a felony within ISA Netspace. We are authorized to use lethal force in curtailing your access."
— AIMO SYSOP

Many of you young kids don't realize what a tragedy all this really is. Once upon a time, the Net promised freedom of expression and the communication of ideas on an unprecedented scale. It was truly global then, and you could talk to anyone, anywhere, about anything, because no one was trying to impose order on it. It was chaotic, harrowing, sometimes even dangerous, but also liberating, stimulating, and open-minded. And under the pretense of making it safe, the ISA and the corporations have fenced it in and locked it up so that it can be controlled.

God, I miss it.

Netspace and Joe ISA

It's important to remember that the computer Net was never intended just for 'runners. Every day, millions of normal people access it in the course of their work day and many more play there afterwards. Ironically, even though the actual grid is more restricted than ever, Net access has never been easier: V- and Dataterms are on every corner and in every soya café. Almost every communication device in use touches the Net at one point or another: phones, faxes, radios, TV, even the mail is sent electronically. (Did you know that once mailmen actually delivered letters *physically*? Look it up on your local encyclopedia service.)

Personal computers and TV sets have merged (most TV sets have compboxes attached to them to allow interactive programming and Net access), and people carry porta-comps on their belts. In many ways, the computer has supplanted the standard passive forms of entertainment owing to the breadth of diversions and depth of interactivity it provides.

Take the telephone. With the Net using so many of the same frequencies and routing equipment as standard phones do, using your computer to net with your friends and family has become as common as dialing them up on your cellular. Despite ISA limitations, BBSs, chat areas and flap rooms (see page 22) still provide forums for talking to a whole lot of people at the same time, allowing full sensory input to accentuate the experience as long

as you don't mind that the watchdogs can listen in. Party lines are a thing of the past when you can access Internet and interact virtually with whomever you want by entering the right chat room. And since you can project whatever visual and audio image you desire into this space, concealment of

your real identity (well, from the other networkers at least) is assured. Of course, VR sex areas are all the rage, even if heavily taxed and licensed. Not that you kids have ever been to one under a false net ID, right? Nah, it'd never happen.

The Net started as a means of exchanging information, and this it still does, if on a more limited scale than should be possible. Most of your households subscribe to one or more Net dataser-

vices, including CompuService, ePlanet, Del Rho, and ISA On Line. Each offers various services such as chat areas, message boards, and file sections full of continuously updated encyclopedias, news, music, and cultural info-bytes. The problem with these services should be obvious: Each is licensed and monitored by the ISA, and most are run by corporations. Thus all information posted on them has been screened and filtered to fit ISA parameters, and, as with everything they handle, all traffic is monitored and international access is heavily restricted. While these services have given you guys seemingly powerful data access abilities, they offer only what the-powers-that-be want you to have. Never forget that.

But most of you guys have been surfing the Net since you could tell the housecomp to dial the phone. You know where the best places to hang are, and whom you can find there. At first you used the Net to arrange parties, then you started having the parties ON the Net. Some of you even tried to maintain your own BBSs under Overwatch's looming gaze. That was all fine when you were just into trading test answers, porno files and false IDs. Now the stakes are a lot higher and you've got to use your contacts more carefully. But in many ways, you're more adapted to the Net than the people who are watching you. Never forget that either.

Of course you can buy more than information and sex on the Net. VSN, the Virtual Shopping Network, and its many imitators provide Net markets for those shoppers who don't want to actually walk to the local mallplex. Take a stroll through a computer access supermarket and order your groceries for the week, test drive the latest simulated spinners at the local dealership, and peruse the latest fashions from the local boutique, all without leaving your home. Transactions are commissioned over the computer and the item is delivered within twenty-four hours. Of course, you're at the mercy of the corporate computer models as to how the product will look, feel, and perform. And don't look for a refund if the product doesn't meet your expectations: it's Buyer Beware on the Corporate Net. This service is going virtual as well, with V-images being brought right into your conapt (see Virtual Life, below). Now you can have Flouncy, the animated spokescat for Smel-Pure Kitty Litter, demonstrating his product right on your living room carpet in full-sense virtuality. I can't wait.

But if you want to talk about being sold a bill of goods, let's discuss the ISA electronic polling policy. As most of you corp-school drop-outs know, the ISA likes to make the claim that it is a true "electronic democracy." This means that many issues can be put out on the Net (right through those otherwise useless interactive TVs) for public referendum. But if you think that the powers that be are going to let a little thing like democracy get in their way, you've got another thing coming. If they aren't dead certain of the outcome of such a Net vote, they'll have their netflunkies bend the numbers until they come out the way they need them to. And since they run all the Net monitoring agencies (except Netwatch, which they continue to emasculate), who's to stop them? Unfortunately, they are really good at this; I've known

"Hey, huddle in the Taproom at 1400 hours. Codekey is 'Pandora' and bring something ... incriminating ... to share."

— LESTRADE

THE ONLINE GENERATION

The kids in 2027 have used computers from the age of three, and are familiar with almost every common aspect of the Net. To show this in game terms, the kids can use their *Schoolin'* as a basic *System Knowledge*, *Computer Use*, and *Netwise Skill*. The *Networkers* (page 50) personify this ability in their *Datahound* skill and have built a yোগang network out of it. But the average kid knows the BBSs and chat rooms well enough to do some basic Net-skimming for simple stuff. Note that any Net task that can be done with *Schoolin'* will probably be one difficulty level easier with *Datahound*.

DOING THINGS ON THE NET

- Access online encyclopedia: with a service (Easy); without a service (Difficult)
- E-mailing another friend who's online (Easy); without being monitored (Very Difficult)
- Locate a file available in the Public Access Net (Average); if hidden add 10 to difficulty
- Post a notice at an open Mailbox (Average), at a closed mailbox (Difficult)
- Link to a Flaproom (Average); if the Flaproom isn't listed (Difficult)
- Locate a target datafort in the Net: Local (Average), national (Difficult), International (Very Difficult) and you run the risk of being traced, see pg. 15; if it's hidden add 10 to difficulty

Note that this isn't Nethacking. These tasks allow you to use the Net as it was intended, not to go slashing through the local BuReloc D-fort. Even doing the basics requires the aforementioned licenses or else ALMO can throw your brain in the virtual slammer. They come in four classes as listed below. Don't c-space without yours ... or at least someone else's.

- 1: General public access from a PC or terminal. Defensive software up to STR 3 but NO offensive software allowed.
- 2: Corporate usage, with access to and from authorized systems. Off/Def software STR limited to 4.
- 3: Net User/Developer level, for *authorized* (controlled) programmers and civilian sysops. STR 6 Off/Def software allowed.
- 4: Government/CEP access for military and high-level corporate sysops. No STR limit on software.

many a Netrunner who's tried to catch the Feds kinking the tallies. Most are vegetables now. On the local level, however, they usually aren't as sharp, especially in outlying districts: Don't be afraid to monitor the polls as the info is coming in; you never know when you might catch them with their pants down.

Virtual Life

So how does Virtuality, that ever so exciting and/or confusing new interface, interact with Joe ISA on a day-to-day basis? Sure, you kids know a lot of it already. You may have a V-sim projector

on your dresser, and possibly a virtual teacher which interacts with you personally. You see the virtuality advertising and the virtuality clothing design at the malls. If you shop at the stores with the better virtuality/microfactory links, you probably hand-adjusted your outfit until it looked exactly like you wanted it to.

But Virtuality is more than a way to see what you want to buy, more than a way to entertain yourself. It's an alternate reality, and it's fast becoming a regular part of your lives. Central computers use Virtuality all the time to give data to people. Visitors at a museum can ask the museum's AI about the location of certain displays, and the AI can give them a perspective map or colored arrows in the ceiling with the name of their party to guide them. Virtual museums are now in the works, where people can view the great masterpieces around the world without ever having to leave their seat and as a result become even more entrenched in their couches. Workers at a corporate facility can use virtuality screens to order custom meals to be prepared in advance for their arrival in the cafeteria. Studios can use virtuality modeling to test lighting and composition for films, or even to blend special effects and acting into a seamless whole (up to now, special effects had to be edited in after the fact — these days the actors actually see the twenty-ton tyrannosaur coming after them). Virtuality has allowed more people to be crammed into less work space, much like your classrooms have gotten smaller and more crowded.

With Virtuality, nothing has to be what it appears to be any more. Many of you may have experimented with making your bed into a giant sleeping grizzly bear, but did you know that adults are doing similar things in high security corporate facilities? They are called Wonderland work environments, and they're used to increase both morale and security. In a Wonderland work environment, nothing is what it seems. Sending a fax might involve wadding the virtual text file into a ball and shooting it into the gaping mouth of a tiger, or perhaps shooting the paper like a rubber band or even waving a magic wand to turn it into a frog. Worker satisfaction is improved because Wonderland work environments make routine tasks more "fun". They decrease corporate defections by increasing the amount of time a worker requires to get used to a new environment. And they slow down infiltrators by making it difficult to figure out how to do simple tasks.

And, of course, it only took a short time for Wonderland to make it into the home. Contractors need no longer spend time and materials making a beautiful condominium when they can just hire a few programmers to create a better one than they could ever imagine. Why do you need a window when you can program a nice view? Now every apartment can have bay windows facing west over the ocean, gilded scrollwork on the lintels, and a zebra pelt hanging on the wall. There's a chain of apartments opening across the country which offers tenants a choice of twelve decoration schemes. For an additional fee, the residents can change the scheme every month. Most surprising is that

these virtuality apartments actually get away with charging more for the decor than do other, real apartments. People don't seem to understand that it's just virtual; they fall for the "better than life" slogan completely. I personally think we should sabotage the programming in these buildings just to prevent the majority of people from falling for this facade of prosperity.

Otherwise, it won't be long before we hear some kid ask, "Daddy? Why is the sky such a dirty gray?" only to be answered, "Put your V-trodes back on, sweetheart."

Interactive Netdramas and V-sims

While interactive TV has had only moderate success (see *MediaFront*), interactive Net entertainment has been successful since day one. Starting with net-linked games (some idiosyncratically called Multi-User Dungeons or MUDs) and BBSs, these have bloomed into full-fledged virtual environments ("V-sims") in which millions maintain unreal characters for relaxation and cathartic play. DMS, EBM and several other net entertainment corps have virtual fantasylands for their subscribers.

Here, people interface as whomever they want, and interact with similar fantasy images from other people or AI simulacra designed by the sponsors to participate in the fictional stories weaving around the players. These are rapidly being upgraded to Virtuality for even greater effect; some have even been spun off into separate V-sim chips, which are edited forms of the online simulations to be slotted into home V-projectors.

These V-dramas can be immensely involving, as would be expected from any activity which can completely transport you via your senses into another environment; any netrunner can attest to the lure of virtual reality. The corps and netservices have been extremely prolific, building a wide variety of settings and stories for people to lose themselves within; everything from techno-action shoot-em-ups to gothic romances offer their own brands of escape to the netgoing public. All of them are carefully designed to encourage satisfaction and apathy in their users, keeping them as happy and contented as electronic cattle. So now, when the working masses are done with their day, they can venture far beyond their ramshackle conapt, and live in an illusion graciously designed, produced, and sold to them by the Machine.

This stuff is naturally attractive to you teenagers; why watch TV when you can have a full-blown VR adventure with your buds?

So most of you either trode in off your computer, cajole your parents into buying a home V-projector, or go to the local arcade to check out the latest in V-technology. Some of you even become addicted to this stuff, concentrating on winning at games while failing at life. From what I've seen, however, most of you walk the line: You've learned how to enjoy the illusion, but aren't fooled by it. That's good. Plus, these V-dramas are, despite the best efforts of the corporate programmers to limit it, interactive, which means that you do have some control of, or power over, what happens. That kind of thing can breed revolution ... hint, hint.

V-SIMS ATE MY BRAIN

It should be obvious that V-sims offer loads of adventure opportunities; they present full sensory scenarios ranging from combat to love scenes. Any sort of environment or imaginary scenario can be presented to the kids. The question comes in as to when they must return to reality; these things can hook you in much the same way as the Braindance (see *MediaFront*). Participation in a V-sim drama for more than four hours without at least a two hour break before relinking requires an Average COOL roll, or you'll want to re-enter the sim at the earliest possible opportunity (like getting a fix). This can be really crippling to a CyberRevo who ends up putting in too much time on the box. His friends may have to help deprogram him to keep him from becoming a "trode-potato."

The V-Punks (see pg. 46) are taking this a step further by building portable V-sim players which allow them to project their games wherever they happen to be. This means that you might find yourself walking into the middle of a V-Punk's "Star Ravager II" game without knowing it. This really pisses the cops off, since they have to respond to all the emergency calls from dweeb-head bystanders who are convinced that they just got their arms bitten off by some terrible beast which turns out to be a fifth level, slime-covered "Xeno-Varg" illusion.

Some people have no sense of humor.

V-drugs

Most bizarre, however, is the arrival of virtuality drugs in the marketplace. None of these are approved or even sanctioned by the ISA, although I think it's only a matter of time before FDA-sponsored V-drugs do flood the 24-7's.

I think the idea of virtuality drugs got started when some people started messing around with jamming virtuality signals while they were wearing their V-trodes. Now some hard-core but demented old edgerunners out there have spent the time and dedication necessary to create bona fide virtual drug trip programs. I can't believe people would waste their time in such pursuits when we're already selling away all our freedoms for will 'o' wisp pleasures.

V-drugs are essentially trips without the chemicals, and you can loop play your favorite part. They are not usually physiologically addictive, and they have no genetic or chemical side effects. They do, however, evoke the same physiological responses that the real drugs do, so you'll end up feeling just as euphoric, just as stoned, just as disoriented, and, eventually, just as strung out. They are extremely psychologically addictive, in large part because they appear to have no price tag associated with their use. This means that those who experiment with V-drugs do so with alarming frequency, which exposure in turn gets them hooked to the sensations even faster.

The most frightening of the V-drugs is not among those made by private programmers, nor will it be one of those released by the ISA. It's the experience known as "jamming", which is the sensation produced by exposure to high gaussian fields ... also known as electronic warfare. In this state, the user experiences total disorientation and a mixing of the senses. Most people with V-trodes ignore the confusion and pull their trodes off, but jamming junkies subsume themselves entirely to the chaotic whorl of sensations until they are no longer able to coordinate their limbs enough to disconnect themselves. No one is sure as yet, but we think that chronic exposure to this kind of stimulation will degrade a brain's ability to function normally. It'll get used to the random sensations, and possibly even begin to produce them on its own.

I sincerely hope we're wrong.

Live Feed or Dead Data: The Virtuality Interface

As I've mentioned, reality and Virtuality interact to an extent, but that doesn't mean that things in Virtuality really exist — at least not as anything beyond data which project a sensory illusion. The important thing to remember is that Virtuality is really just a new form of interface with computer systems, one that allows VR images to be perceived in conjunction with the real environment. Not every Net icon has a virtuality projection; only those *designed* to interact with V-trodes are visible. Thus not every

datafort or black ICE icon blazes forth in Virtuality, unless someone *wants* it to. And virtual constructs are based in the system which generates them. That's where they exist, and they can only be moved as far as that system can broadcast and interact with the surroundings, be they virtuality surroundings or realspace.

For example, imagine there is a computer in your school library that creates a virtual apple. A netrunner comes along and takes the apple. Remember, the netrunner exists purely in the Net; it's his icon, not his real self. The netrunner is purely data, and can interact completely with the virtual apple, which is also data. He takes the apple and walks away. As he gets farther and farther

from the system which generates the apple, its motions become more and more jerky; it becomes more and more difficult for the computer to keep the apple rezzed as the signal gets farther and farther away. Eventually, the apple will either hang or derezz. Either way, the apple no longer interacts with the netrunner.

Now, if the apple is being generated by something larger than just one computer or V-card, it has a greater range. If the apple is being generated by a network operated by a shopping mall, it can range throughout the mall, and even out into the parking lot (where the computer keeps track of parking fees and runs the billboards) and beyond to the range of the system's broadcasting ability.

An apple generated by a college network has even greater range, considering all the outlying annexes and dorms most colleges have integrated into their systems.

If the apple is being created by the city's mass transit computer, it could conceivably be carried all around town without ever suffering more than the most minor signal degradation.

Mind you, if the netrunner copies the apple onto his system, the case is entirely different. If the netrunner copied the apple to his system and started running it, his system would rezz a virtual apple above his cyberdeck.

Strange, huh? He can't copy the apple itself, because it's a virtuality construct. He has to copy the generating code and run it on his own.

Hangs and Crashes

Since virtual items are only computer-generated objects and executables, they can hang just like everything else.

There are several ways in which something hangs or bombs. Sometimes a virtual object will cease to react to virtual stimuli; it locks into place and cannot be moved or touched. Some of these don't even occupy virtual space; they are literally ghosts in the machine. This is not bad as long as you are able to let go of the object. I know of a few cases where a virtual item hung, and wouldn't let go of the netrunner's trace. The 'runner was stuck there until the sysops came and reset the code. Other hung objects occupy virtual space, filling it like an immovable object or datawall, and require code guns or a reset to get rid of. If you ever see a frozen item that's half static and half image, that's probably what's happened. Virtual code with clean



error-correction will derezz a virtual object as soon as it encounters unrecoverable errors.

How a virtual item handles a hang or bomb depends on the system's programming. As a rule of thumb, the smarter the system, the better the error handling. AI-controlled systems still have virtual items which hang, but the AI takes care of the problem immediately. Some items must be restarted by the sysop to be created anew in Virtuality. Others automatically rerezz, either at a set location or at

their last error-free checkpoint. Once the item is rerezzed, it can be manipulated as usual, although certain virtual items can gather bugs in their code over time, eventually needing to be manually purged or restored from a back-up by a sysop.

Buggy virtual code is severely frowned upon by the government. For them, Virtuality is yet another tool to control the masses, a way in which they can further blur the line between the dark truth and the media-hyped fantasy they wish you to swallow. The presence of any buggy code mars that illusion, making the unreal seem even more a chimera. The ISA wants you to swallow Virtuality hook, line, and sinker, to prefer Virtuality to the real world, because Virtuality is much more easily controlled.

There is in fact a bill in debate right now which will aid poor or disadvantaged children (including all those in BuReloc camps) by implanting V-trodes in their temples. The ISA argues that so doing will give these disadvantaged children a leg up, that it will level the playing field between the poor kids — who can't afford the V-trodes and therefore can't access the information and entertainment available in Virtuality — and the children of rich families who get not only V-trodes but computers and other technological advantages. The real result, though, is that this new generation will be brought up unable to tell the difference between real and virtual. They won't know about the trodes, and even if they did, corrective surgery is a little beyond the reach of most young children. By the time they come of age, removing the trodes would be like making themselves blind; they'd be losing half their world. In another twenty years, the ISA will be able to control everyone through Virtuality, and only the government and its agents would be able to see the real world for what it really is. The ISA is looking to turn your brothers and sisters and cousins into virtuality zombies, all in the name of fairness, don't you know.

Now You See It

Virtuality can also be used to cause something real to disappear when it is viewed through Virtuality. Imagine, if you will, a painting hanging on a plain white wall. If you place a virtual plain white square right over the painting, the painting disappears when viewed from the front. Viewed from the side, you'd still be able to see the side of the frame, but that's it.

SCANNERS AND VIRTUAL ILLUSIONS

As Scanners have gotten used to their powers, they've gotten more adept at spotting virtual illusions of living things. Virtuality constructs don't have the tell-tale electronic aura which a Scanner reads from a living being. Thus if a Scanner tries to read an illusion he'll get nothing, or at best the kind of noise put out by a high-static environment. If the Scanner makes at least a Raw Emotion (or Sense Life) Interpretation roll, and succeeds at one level higher than the normal requirement (i.e., rolled 10 in a Low Static environment), he gets the feeling that there is no living thing there. This takes a few seconds, however, and any effect the illusion may be generating have may hit him by then.

Now things start to get complicated. Picture a vase on a low table. The table is blue, but the floor and walls of the room are white. You walk into the room and stop just inside the doorway.

The table is low, so you can see its top. In order to make the vase disappear, it would take a blue mask for those parts of the vase with a table behind it, and a white mask for those parts of the vase on front of the white walls. The problem is, the size of the white and blue masks that would be needed to hide the vase depend on where you view it from, with varying angles requiring varying masks. See the problem?

It can be done by a process known as Parallax Perspective Imaging (PPI). It's very complex, and requires both a lot of coding and a very accurate knowledge of the environment around the item you wish to make disappear. The first thing you have to do is construct a virtuality image of the same size and shape as the realspace item; as long as the virtual item completely covers the real item, you're safe. Once you've built the mask, you model its colors so that when it is viewed from a certain perspective, its surface looks like whatever walls or floor or table it eclipses. In other words, you get it to look exactly like whatever it's covering up when viewed from one particular location. Perfect camouflage, if you want to look at it from that angle.

Next you must do the same thing for several dozen more angles, giving the item perfect camouflage when viewed from a variety of locations. Once these are all programmed in and with a computer model of the realspace locale in hand, you integrate these camouflage patterns over the entire surface of the virtual item. The end result is that when the viewer moves around the item, the mask's color scheme flows and shifts in the opposite direction, always presenting a perfect camouflage pattern. It takes a lot of programming and requires a sizable amount of compute cycles, but at best the real item is visible in the same way your eye's blind spot is visible. If the virtual mask is less than perfect, the hidden item is visible as a sort of outline or area of distortion, which still can be missed in a cursory search. And even if the mask is obvious, the viewer still won't know what lurks behind it in realspace.

Current parallax perspective imaging technology has been used to conceal surveillance cameras and the like, although the more complex or distant the background is, the exponentially more difficult the programming becomes. This means that you can generally rely on there being nothing hidden between you and a distant view — unless the distant view itself is virtual. An important note about virtual camo: Video monitors, unless specially equipped, do NOT perceive V-images, so anyone watching you via video will see you as you really are. Remember that when you go sneaking around a high-security facility in your virtual security guard rig ...

Now You Don't

All of this might make one think that it would be best to stay out of Virtuality and see things as they really are. The problem with so doing is that Virtuality extends into real-space as well, and even more invisibly than realspace items protected by parallax perspective imaging. Virtuality does this through static grids, voice recognition software, touchpads, and other interface devices both active and passive.

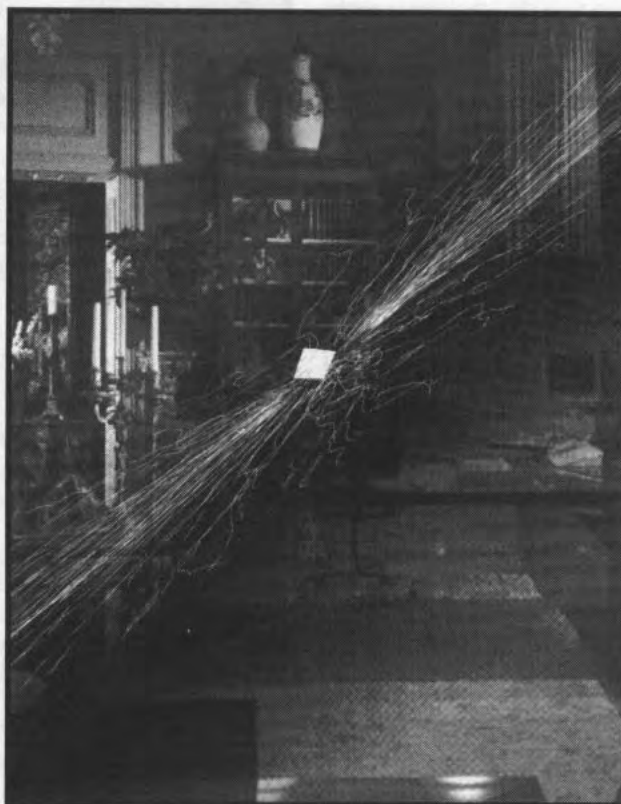
The most common item which takes advantage of this technology is the Sentry Card from IEC. It has seen use in corpo-

rate and governmental security across the country. The Sentry Card projects what is best visualized as a giant virtual static grid keyboard. When something passes through this static field, it "presses" one of the keys. The Sentry Card responds by sending an alarm to its central computer, immediate and accurate.

Another application is in a building's internal security. Some high-clearance areas operate on a variant of the old-fashioned

twin-key system, but now only one of the keys is real; the other is virtual. Both must be turned simultaneously to gain access to whatever's being secured.

Turnstiles and other entryways are beginning to use similar technology to track you and gather various information about you and your life. Static grids can detect your presence, and a wide barrage of electronic fields and pulses can compile all sorts of information about you. Every piece of paper money these days has magnetic strips implanted inside, a tactic which dates back to 1991. This piece of tape allows certain devices to calculate instantaneously how much paper money you have in your pocket. If you have too much, the authorities will



VIRTUAL CAMOUFLAGE

Camouflage Required

Example

Arcane/Programming Difficulty

Flat object, simple background	Painting on white wall	5
Large object against a plain wall	Vase against a wall	10
Object against plain environment	Book on a table	15
Flat object against a flat detailed background	Painting on natural wood wall	20
PPI: limited viewpoints, moderate background	Clock in office window with view of skyscrapers	25
PPI: limited viewpoints, complex background	Vase in picture window looking outside	30
Full PPI: complex background	Stool in the center of a park	35
PPI: impossible background	Vase in window with view of surf	40
PPI: Genesis background	Animals in window with view of surf and surfers	45

In addition to the programming rolls, true PPI requires a full computer to perform the necessary calculations (like an EBM Advanced Mainframe System V-Term). The memory required is great enough that Wizards have difficulty performing the calculations without a computer for assistance; add 5 to the difficulty for a Wizard doing PPI without mechanical aides. Once programming is complete, simple camouflage programs can be downloaded into VR cards, while any PPI function will require small comps the size of a large paperback book to function (yes, they require that much computing power to run).

stop you. Similar approaches are now being tested to check how much money you have in various debit and credit cards on your person. Again, if your finances fall outside the accepted norm, you'll be noticed. Coming soon: gun scanners at every street corner, skateboard license scanners at every crosswalk, perhaps even retinal readers at every cash register just to keep tabs on what you're spending and where.

Granted, few of these machines have virtuality icons or graphics, but some do (to allow them to be controlled through Virtuality). But even without the icons, Wizards can still detect the presence of the electrical activity they require to function (Average *Get A Clue*). And maybe do something about it.

Electronic Warfare

There are those who would argue that Virtuality is electronic warfare itself, and that jamming it is a counterattack, but we'll operate on the assumption that Virtuality and realspace are the norms since they are both an integral part of our modern society.

High electrical fields such as those generated by relay stations and transformers can cause disturbances to Virtuality. Depending on the level of the disruption, there may be a miasma-inducing wave effect in Virtuality, or the signal may be completely disrupted giving the viewer nothing but garbage. Both the ISA and antiestablishment groups have taken this tool and applied it in warfare through pulsars, white noise generators, and jammers of various types.

With enough strength, you can take the Net completely down in an area, however there are places where doing so is pretty foolish. Most people won't want to wipe out bank records or interrupt a computer-assisted surgery, and almost no one wants to eliminate the V-controls for public transit. In fact, the feds have made doing such a thing a federal crime with some pretty stiff punishments online for those who try it, or who sell the equipment to the wrong people (i.e., anyone not sanctioned by the corps or the government). Next they'll be rounding up anyone who even understands the concept of ECM. Thus, when using electronic warfare, be sure to check your field of effect. Especially if there are any Wizards around.

Of course, this hasn't stopped the DSA from experimenting with ECM effects. While they maintain a low profile and are careful not to disable anything important (at least important to them) they have tried using blanket EM fields (STR 6, radius: 50 m) across entire city blocks to flush out Wizard activity and make for easy round-ups. Beware of any vans or other large vehicles with unusual EM signatures wandering around your neighborhood.

In fact, BuReloc has recently field tested a V-van in conjunction with one of their urban renewal projects. The V-van is filled with a high-power virtuality system which broadcasts pain transmissions (the flip side of virtuality drugs) and fires off Spazz programs in an effort to keep people from being able to pull their trodes off. Anyone caught in Virtuality when one of these vans turns the corner is in for a long and agonizing

ECM

Powerful gaussian fields make it more difficult for programs to stay alive. This is simulated by giving the surroundings an Attack Function STR. A weak field such as caused by a transformer might rate a 1. Very powerful ECM fields can be 6 or more. The ambient Attack STR gets subtracted from the STRs of any programs (or the AFs of Familiars) in the area. If the STR (or AF) of a program gets reduced to zero, that program crashes. It does not get erased, however, so there is usually no damage to the Wizard or cyberdeck; it simply can't operate that program in the electrostatically hostile environment. A Wizard's *Arcane* skill is also reduced by the (ambient Attack STR -2) for Counterparting purposes due to the interference. EM fields can cause V-projections to become erratic and less effective, and ones of STR 6 or higher crash most V-projections and can also confuse 'trode users with random "noise."

(Suffer -2 to REF & INT until 'trodes are removed or cutoff engages; Wizards suffer a -2 REF.) People who "jam" (see pg. 9) generally bypass the auto cutoff feature of the 'trodes so that they can experience this sensation. If the EM rating of an area precludes radio use, then it probably precludes 'trode use as well.

Pulsars do not produce a continuous field, but instead emit periodic bursts of interference. These are handled as an anti-program STR attack against each program's STR or familiar's DF in range for one round. The Attack STR depends on the power of the pulsar, and, like gauss fields, the strength diminishes with range. The standard Pulsar has an Attack STR of 4 with a range of 20 meters. Again, programs are not destroyed; they are simply taken violently offline and must spend 1D6 rounds rebooting before they can be run again. Most computer systems are hardened against EMP attacks so damage rarely occurs, but this can be very bad if something was counting on the smooth operation of any systems affected. A pulse of STR 8 or higher (which can only come from a *powerful* EMP system) may also Stun a Wizard or Scanner (see pg. 37).

evening, but it sure makes the job a lot easier on the field troops who have to round up the "undesirables." (Victims must make Stun rolls every round to be able to do anything. For each time they fail the roll, subtract one from each future roll until they succeed again or the transmission stops.)

If this proves effective, which by all appearances it will, you can be sure the ISA will begin experimenting with fear program generators, nausea generators, paralysis generators, and more. I've even heard a rumor that there's a pilot program designed to give adrenal squirts to trode-wearing police and soldiers. Who knows — if they can figure out how to send carefully programmed emotions at various times, the ISA might be able to achieve virtual mind control. Not perfect, but certainly very influential. And with enough Pavlovian training, eventually the subjects would do what the ISA wants without the virtual nudge.



OCCUPIED NETSPACE

▼ Brace yourself, folks. I can edit this stuff, but short of writing it entirely myself, I can't stop Rache from coming through in his prose. I would write it, but I'm more of an editor than a writer. Rache would say I'm nothing but a literary critic — a critic being someone who can't do it for herself.

▼▼▼ Spider

Learning the Ropes: Old Net, New Tangles

Fine. Skip dandy. You guys have got nanocircuit supercarbon cellular V-modems integrated into your cerebral tissue by my little pet nanites, you think digital almost as clearly as I do, and you still haven't a clue as to what you've really got, judging by the way you blunder about V-space like you're driving bumper cars in a glassware studio. And if that's not bad enough, dear old Alt tells me my original memoirs are not enough, that I need to tell you ingrates about Virtuality even though you think and live and breathe it, and you probably never did read *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*, did you?

So here goes.

See Jack run. Run, Jack, run the Net. Run run run. See Jack screw up like a drekwit, because he doesn't listen to Uncle Rache. See Jack's symbiotic cybermodem suffer a massive overload via inducted voltage generated by a brand-new ISA black ice program and fry Jack's brain so crispy that little black flakes blow out his ears as his body convulses like a zonedancer on amphetamines. Die, Jack, die.

Oh, I love a happy ending.

The Net Under Martial Law

Of all the insensate collective consciousnesses extant in the world today, the ISA knows perhaps best how important the Net truly is. Many people still believe that the Net is a fairy land, a little world of make believe, and this is an opinion bolstered by the inane ways that advertisers and corporate morons use the Net and Virtuality. If the only thing you show the masses is little topless antigrav beach bimbos pushing the latest car/toothpaste/addictive meta-alcohol, they (the masses, that is, as the beach bimbos suf-

fer from terminal peroxide poisoning) will continue to believe that the Net and Virtuality are merely places to let your pubescent hormones breathe some sick form of meaty narcosis into existence instead of being an exquisite fiery greatsword with which the great mythical dragons of Arasaka, SovOil and even the ISA can be rendered at last incorporate. I say mythical because people believe that Arasaka actually exists, even though it is nothing more than a collection of back-stabbing power-hungry liver-licking leeches dressed in Takanaka and Armani. Get this straight, folks, Corporations do not exist! Nor do governments! People only believe they do, and this illusion is what grants them the power to do the things they do! Governments and corporations are no more real than monsters under the bed, and let me tell you I'm glad mine are frozen as hard as I am. We must obliterate these myths and get down to some real anarchy now!

"Dammit, Jason's just gone offline! Someone check his meatform, QUICK! There may be CorpSec in the safehou ... TRANS-MISSION TERMINATED AT THE SOURCE."

Get this straight, too, chumps. Although the Net keeps getting bigger and more important, it is not more important than Meatworld, nor will it ever be. The two exist in a symbiotic relationship. The Meatworld as we know and hate it could not exist without the Net, and the reverse is also true.

Much though I loathe to admit it, I still have to pay attention to Meatworld, because if I don't pay my refrigeration bill, I'll be nothing but a leaky salt lick for feral dogs and I would not have my glorious works wrought in code iron.

So, as I said, in case you were off trying to scam some kibble from the fridge instead of paying attention, the Net is important to the ISA, because it is through the Net that they got their twisted gospel of self-serving slavery to the dinner plates of the cannibal country. Whindam *et al.* got more press coverage, more air time, and more name recognition than all the other candidates combined. Further, through the Net, the Corporate Prosperity Council assassinated ugly truths and scandals that could have otherwise marred their image and implanted innuendo in-de-earo of John Q. Public and the other 200-odd million Americans. In short, the Net is information, and the V-cowboys who control the information control the bridled brains of the ovine American. Ovine. That's sheep-like. And cowboys. Think about it.

They used the Net, they abused the Net, and now they want to own the Net. It is for that reason that the ISA, in a really arrogant move, declared the Net a national resource on February 12, 2025, as if it were something that is in limited supply or which might waste away through overuse. Yeah, right, and if they have their way, it'll atrophy away from underuse, and the only people left to wring any blood from the marrow will be the ISA in their pro-government propaganda BBSs and such. Thinking of that is even grosser than thinking how long my last dinner has been sitting in my large intestine, because chemical reactions like digestion still progress even at very low temperatures, but peristalsis stops cold.

To better build their own case, the ISA has designated their "territorial airwave space" to extend as far as their territorial airspace, which is at last count 200 miles from the mean lowest low tide except for Canada and Mexico, which the ISA is trying to take over in covert operations code-named Elephant and Trinidad, respectively. Why? Oh, probably because without the letter Q in any of our states' names, they feel incomplete, so they want Quebec, Queretaro, and Quintana Roo, and why not the rest of the continent with them? Gobble gobble gobble.

What does this mean to you? It means that the ISA has nationalized all electronic communication from sea to sludgy sea, claimed it all as their property and purview, and no one, not even you, has any private property rights. Your phone lines, and all conversations that occur on them, take place in ISA government property, and are therefore subject to surveillance without consent, knowledge, or reason. Further, if they don't like the way you carry out your business, they can and will bar you from using their territory by invoking the Emergency Powers Act like priests at a human sacrifice, which, in fact, they are. Remember this, too, kiddies, laws exist only inasmuch as you believe in them. This makes corporations even more ethereal, because corporations are — get this — legal entities! You will believe our law. You will believe our law. We are a legal entity. Therefore you will believe that we are empowered to make laws. Pay no attention to the puppeteers.

They've been trying to shut me down for some time. Some AIM sysop even tried to nail me with a one-two punch of Spazz and Hellhound, apparently forgetting that because I am dead, I don't give a rat's ass about such trivialities as heart attacks and epileptic seizures. Okay, so maybe there was a little extra stress in my cold cold heart, but let me tell you the fire in my mind burned bright and pure. I'm sure his did, too, as I noticed it eventually because a two-alarm blaze that claimed the lives of seventeen AIMO zombies sharing his offices. But roasted net flunkies are a small price to pay for the security of a corporate state, right? I mean since the government passed burial mandates, everyone gets good funeral coverage, which I'm sure was a great relief to the bereaved, because someone else got to pay the expense of that little clay jar.

Nationalization of the Net also means that the government is fully empowered — by corporate law, yet another chimera — to send troops to defend the airwaves against all enemies, foreign and domestic. More on this later.

In short, and I've never been tall, at least not in Meatspace, the Net is no longer a free-wheeling fun zone where great artists like myself can create our most vivid imaginings. [I shudder to think. — Spider] No one would ever tolerate stormtroopers and secret agents inside their bedrooms, but they let the ISA hackers have the phones and the Net, because "it's not really there."

Bull. The Net is occupied America, in a way many people thought would never happen. "It can't happen here," they said. Now, when they object, they get traced and shipped off for re-

education, and the official news reports, when there are any, feature computer-generated "live video footage" of the miscreant doing something heinous in the secrecy of his closet like eating the neighbor's baby, and they generate via computer a lot of evidence entries in their conviction database, and what do you know? I guess the ISA really was justified in pre-emptively bugging his house, eh?

THEM

Today, running the Net is like trying to sneak around on stage under klieg lights. Net crime is punished in a very nasty fashion, and let me tell you, if you're not prepared to pay the price, wrap yourself up warm and unplug your jacks. Me, I've gotten used to being cold, although it'd be great if I could shiver once in a while. And I've had this damn itch ...

There are several distinct groups of the enemy out there, all of whom you must watch for carefully: AIM Overwatch, the ISCTF, Raptors, and corporate neohacks. AIM Overwatch is the ISA's domestic secret police agency of the Net; the acronym stands for American Information Management Overwatch. I guess they separate the last word out both to make themselves sound more paternal and because AIMO is a stupid-sounding acronym. They are the ISA's version of the KGB, NSA, Khmer Rouge, and Gestapo all rolled into one and given really nice Mr. Policeman icons whenever they do PR work. The ISCTF is the Incorporated States Cyberspace Task Force, a new branch of the military which serves to repel any foreign incursions onto our precious soil — er, modem lines. Foreign incursions are a national threat, because they threaten to disrupt the ISA's own domestic surveillance and promote the free exchange of ideas. The corporate neohacks are the daring few corporate netrunners who dare to defy the laws of the land and still endeavor to do data piracy on their fellow corp. While this may seem cool and revolutionary, remember that these guys are doing so under orders from their so-called superiors, and they turn over the fruits of their labors to the corporations like puppies rolling onto their backs and widdling. Weenies. Finally, the Raptors are your friends, relatives, and goboys who've decided being a mom-and-dad-backed bully is much more fun and gratifying than being a real person. They have the best equipment available, which is to say nanocybermodem brains of my own personal design, thank you very much. Perhaps if you hadn't treated them so poorly at the arcades and discharged your honkers into their cocoa, they wouldn't have turned against you and your pals so readily.

Let's take the factions one at a time. AIM Overwatch is currently the most uniformly powerful of the Netspace reavers. They have full governmental immunity, guaranteed by the Provisional Incorporated States Security Act of 2026, which basically defines anything these guys pursue as a national threat. This doesn't mean that if it's a national threat, they go after it. That means that if they go after it, it is thereafter defined as a national threat. That means you if they don't like your face, chump.

ELECTRONIC BARBED WIRE

To represent the increased limitations on netrunning imposed by the ISA, you can increase all LDL Security Values by 2 and decrease Trace Values by 1 in the ISA Regions. Thus the chances of getting tagged and traced are significantly higher under the glaring eyes of the AIM Overwatch and the ISCTF. In addition, any Netrunner trying to go Global (outside of the U.S.) has the Security Level of the last ISA LDL that he is using go up by 5. The reverse is true for anyone trying to get in, as the first ISA LDL will have the higher Security Value. The government has installed alarm programs to detect any unauthorized international activity, thus anyone trying to leap to the Global Net will probably get spotted, traced, and blown away. Helps to explain the reduction in old-style netrunners, now, doesn't it?

AIM Sysops

These guys work a lot like old Netwatch 'runners. A typical one will have the following stats.

INT	8	REF	8	COOL	7
TECH	7	MOVE	7	LUCK	6
BODY	7	EMP	4	ATT	?

S. Ability: Interface 7

Skills: Awareness 6, Basic Tech 4, Cyberdeck Design 3, CyberTech 2, Dodge 5, Driving 6, Education/Gen Know. 6, Electronics 4, Handgun 4, Programming 7, Stealth 5, System Knowledge 7

Gear: Cyberdeck: 50MU, Speed +4, Datawalls 7, loaded with lots of nasty detection and attack programs

AIM Overwatch has overshadowed, and is soon expected to annex or replace, the American offices of Netwatch. Since the Second American Revolution, Netwatch has been all but cut off from funding, leaving their netrunners with ever older equipment and dwindling accounts from which to replace their decrepit programs. Oh, waah. If those Netwatch troglodytes can't bear to generate their own code in the darkness of their brains, then they shouldn't be playing on the Net in the first place. I've always hated Netwatch, as my devoted disciples know so well, and it's very gratifying to see my accusations borne true as they shrivel and die like banana slugs on the roasty beaches of Rio when the funding which kept their veins bloated is cut off at the source.

As Netwatch tapeworms did before, AIM Overwatch slackers operate both overtly and covertly. Their goals are to (a) continue to toady up to the general public, raising their stock in the eyes of Joe Hacker, while (b) simultaneously emasculating him (or effeminating her) and stabbing same in the back repeatedly with new regulations. That is to say, they cannot stand to see the Net used freely and excitingly like Dog and I do; they'd much rather turn it into yet another Disney theme park and parade

ground where all the thrills are carefully planned, no one gets hurt or runs risks, and all the rides cost an arm and a leg and part of your cerebellum. AIM Overwatch dweebs deserve to be slain for perpetuating the media addiction of the system.

Of the forces arrayed against you, the ISCTF is both the easiest to avoid and the greatest threat. They are a military organization in the strictest sense of the word, made up of all those guys who don't have the strength or health or endurance to defend the New Mutant Mighty Morphin' Constitution from enemies without and within. Were it thirty years ago, I'm sure they'd have just filed suit against the military for discriminating against them because they had no more toughness than a loaf of Wonder bread, but today the ISCTF puts their brains to work without having to rely on their bodies. Those who have neither the toughness for the meat military nor the brains for the ISCTF end up with roasty toasty lobes and their deaths listed as "traffic accident." Never stand in front of a data bus when it starts moving.

Many of you who know and love me, and many more of you who know and hate me (you're just jealous of my greatness), have pause to wonder why I'm even implying that anyone in the military has a brain. Any of you who wonder so are guilty of breaking Rache Bartmoss' Zeroeth Law of Running the Net: NEVER UNDERESTIMATE YOUR ENEMY. Never never never. Ever. Amen.

Last guy I met who underestimated his enemy got to experience my new prototype anti-personnel program. Hoo boy, did it work, although it's still got a few interesting glitches. Hmm. Oh, well. If you underestimate your opponent, you may as well put a homing beacon on your cyberdeck and jack your brain into a power outlet while taking a shower (which I never do myself — shower, that is). I have never claimed that the military folks don't HAVE brains, merely that, like the general sitcom-watching nose-mining money-grubbing mud-nosing propaganda-sucking back-stabbing spineless insensate we-believe-the-government-is-acting-in-our-own-best-interests public, they don't USE their brains. But, whereas the public doesn't want to use their brains — they don't want freedom of choice, they want freedom from

choice — these guys have been trained not to use their brains, but only in certain circumstances. They are most certainly trained to use their brains to run the Net and defend themselves, and by and large they do a pretty good job, although I've never met anyone who uses as much of their brain as I do, and any part of your brain which you are trained out of using is that much less insight and instinct and prognosticative visions of future realities that you have at your disposal. These guys would never know what to do with a pulsating gridwork, you know what I mean?

[Here Rache spends a God awful amount of time talking about pulsating gridworks, rust spots, photoalternating V-smears, semisentient interstellar phlegmotrons and the Metaprogram from Jupiter 1. I'm serious. I've heard that some of you think frost has short-circuited his brain, but I've known him longer than many of you have been alive, and he's always been this way. What really disturbs me is that every so often one of his ravings turns out to be a strange way of describing something very real ... and extremely dangerous. — Spider]

Enough said. Now where was I? Ah, yes, the Indoctrinated Servants' Code-wrenching Teams of Flatliners. The problem with them, at least as far as "hot interfacing" goes, which is their term for warfare, is that they always act in teams. Always. Well, okay, squads, or so my on-line editor says.

So watch this. jbvX* — There. No more corrections from that editor. Each ISCTF squad has around six to ten of these little hacks, and as they say in the business, "one for all, and all on you!"

The ISCTF carries gear that is nearly state of the art (since they have to go through appropriations, they don't get the cutting edge stuff as fast as AIM Overwatch or the corporate hacks), and their programs are some of the hardest, most bug-proof code in the business. They know their gear, and they have no fear for themselves. Their doctrine, while developed rapidly, is very effective, if sometimes predictable, but don't ever count on getting them to make a mistake. They never act brashly, neither cowardly nor overconfident, as do many of the less well trained



and more pointlessly egotistical corporate' runners. Further, if you have a code fight with these guys that lasts more than a couple of seconds, expect the heavy artillery to begin hitting the area immediately. You probably haven't seen their "Howitzer" code, but let me tell you, do everything you can to avoid it

Fortunately, the ISCTF is more concerned with enemy agents and gang cybercrime than they are with day-to-day little hacks like yourselves. They are designed and prepared to deal with full-scale Net incursions like myself, and leave the little stuff to AIM Overwatch and what's left of Netwatch. Speaking of which, part of what the ISCTF does is interdict coderunning: Net blockade runners who try to deliver better programs to the revenants of Netwatch, or eurocorporate hackers trying to run programs into or data from their clandestine agents in the States. Since all trade, including code, is strictly regulated, the ISCTF can intercept these coderunners as though they were smugglers, which in a sense I guess they are, but I approve of smuggling myself, assuming you can get me to admit the definition, which carries an implicit assumption of laws, national boundaries, intellectual property, and morality. Nevertheless, I've stopped a few of these coderunners myself, just to keep tabs on what the europrogrammers are up to these days.

ISTCF Sysops

While individually less impressive than the AIM ops, these guys always work in squads of six to ten. A sample might look like this:

INT	7	REF	8	COOL	9
TECH	8	MOVE	7	LUCK	5
BODY	7	EMP	4	ATT	?

S. Ability: Interface 6

Skills: Awareness 5, Basic Tech 4, Cyberdeck Design 2, CyberTech 1, Dodge 8, Driving 6, Education/Gen Know. 6, Electronics 4, Handgun 4, Rifle 4, Programming 5, Stealth 5, System Knowledge 5

Gear: Cyberdeck: 40MU, Speed +4, Datawalls 7, loaded with various anti-everything programs usually 1 point stronger than most domestic code (if very limited in scope). Remember that they will call in assistance in the form of Howitzer code (see page 43) if they encounter tough customers.

The Raptors are the best equipped, but fortunately the smallest and least-organized of the terrorist — excuse me, "counter-terrorist" forces operating in the Net today. Personally, I think these are the ones which we have to terminate without mercy.

One, I've never liked kids, because all kids are whining lazy snot-nosed subhuman ingrates who only know how to whine and get into trouble. Yeah, you too, and if you give me any lip about it, you'll suffer the consequences. Unlike your parents, there are places I'll send you instead of to your room ...

Raptors don't really have any organization or stock programs; they just make everything up on the fly. Part of what they've been doing with Raptors is using them as "fire brigades", sending them to places where there is difficulty in the Net and having them jack in on the fly. They don't need code and they don't need modems, so they are the perfect emergency response team. They also think as fast or faster than you do, and they have corporate Net obstacle courses to keep their brains in fighting trim. They're just one big happy Manson family.

Raptor Wizards

These are the kids that CorpSec or the DSA has managed to brainwash or trick into hunting their brethren. They can be as vicious, sly, and inventive as the player characters.

INT	7	REF	7	COOL	5
TECH	4	MOVE	7	LUCK	5
BODY	5	EMP	6	ATT	5

S. Abilities: Arcane 5 and their Yogang skill 3

Skills: Streetfighting 3, Thief Stuff 3, Genspeak 2, Blend 4, Streetsmarts 3, Little Angel 5, GoGo 2, Schoolin' 4, Fearless Leader 0, JockStuff 3, Get A Clue 6

Gear: Their brains and familiars which are just as effective as the characters'.

Corporate Jackals

It has been truly hilarious watching the formation of the ISA, or at least it would have been had not the lassitudinous American masses marched like lemmings to the tune of the Pied Piper of Social Programs and Centralized Government right over the abyss and into the infernal stinking hell of an authoritarian multimediacracy where vulture bureaus and offices feed on the broken bodies of the fallen where they lie rent by the jagged granite of diminishing freedom and the spears of increasing regulations which grow faster than bamboo. They should have listened to the different drummer of individual freedom and personal accountability and bitten the Pied Piper on the Achilles tendon and given him rabies. Sigh.

The funny thing about this all is that the fratricidal corporations have banded together to form a government over the people, on the people, and at the people, but they still hate each other. They act like a bunch of children (no offense, although if you have a modicum of sense and maturity, you'll take offense anyway and then do something about it). They've formed all sorts of draconian laws about computer crime, about how they are a protected de facto arm of the government in some sort of legalistic, convoluted, yet unaccountable way, they've sworn to each other to cooperate and disseminate information freely and to generally be cool, and then when the agreement is signed, they all predictably turn on each other like mewling kittens clawing their way to a teat (which happens to be attached to your jugular). Each of them seems to have fully expected everyone else to

abide by the agreement they passed, which of course should put them at the advantage since they never intended to abide by it anyway. It's the classic problem of the commons: whoever takes advantage of the situation gets one step ahead at two steps' of the others' expense, so everyone takes advantage of the situation and everyone falls behind as a result.

"This is a total Syssie, Manta. Compile at the dorsal code gate and be ready to pop-the-top on LicaTech! We'll drop a link to EBM and let them peep the show."

— RAMPANT

The corporations still practice their little infighting, but now they have to be even more circumspect. Any corporation caught red-handed suffers a lot of embarrassment, hefty fines (or at least hefty legal bills defending the penalty), and quite possibly suspension or eviction from the CEP (the Council for Economic

Prosperity; see *CGen* pg. 173). At the same time, if a corporate netrunner breaks the law but manages to steal a piece of data which shows the target corporation was holding out on the rest of the ISA corporate alliance, then neither corporation is particularly willing to press charges, as doing so would be admitting their own culpability, and the two would sail each other down the proverbial river.

This is known as Mutual Assured Destruction, which leads to the appropriate acronym MAD, even though Mutual Ensured Destruction would perhaps be more grammatically correct. After all, how often do we pay attention when a thug says, "I assure you that you'll be destroyed." Sounds weak, you know what I mean? So what you actually have going on is that the corporations are still at each others' throats, but all the while they're trying very hard not to look like they're doing it. Imagine, if you will, a fine ball or dinner party where everyone is supposed to split a zillion dollar inheritance, but anyone who is known to be a felon is disbarred from the inheritance. The guests at the dinner are all selfish psychopathic assassins, who all mix gaily and have a good time and toast each others' good health, all the while trying to find ways to stick knives in backs and poison in drinks. Then when someone goes down, everyone acts aghast. No one points fingers, for fear that a finger will be pointed back. It's kind of like that.

This has an upside, at least beyond the upside that the corps are still trying to writhe their way to the top of the pig pile while crushing the others beneath their gluttonous weight. And that is, to maintain the highest possible deniability of their own insidiousness and distrustability, they hire the few remaining edgerunners (and even a few of the younger generation hackers) to do their dirty work. While this involves associating yourself with a corporation and taking money from them, it does give you somewhat of an aegis under which to commit computer chaos. Yeah, they're not going to cover your butt, but they will give you hardware and software and intelligence on the enemy system. Then you can run it yourself and grab and copy everything you want.

It also means that when a corporate raider gets caught, he is at the mercy of the law. The victim corporation itself might not do much, instead participating in some sort of neohack spy swap where neither party admits that they're really exchanging spies but tries to put on the front of some sort of lend-lease tour agency. But the fact remains that when "concerned citizens", such as you and I, catch a corporate neohack jackal playing I'm Not Really Doing This with another corporation's data fort, we can slap his brain like malleting a pile of pudding and the corporations have to grin and bear it. It's fun.

Oh, wait 'til you hear this. This is one of my best. I've been watching Republic West and Petrochem going at it, and in fact I might have been, shall we say, instrumental in getting them to take straight razors to each others' throats, nah, not me, so I knew the action was getting hot and heavy. They were supporting eco-actions against each other, so I helped a neophyte

Wizard gather some information on each of the kinked yogangs — just enough to prove that the opposition had files and where they were. So of course they went at each other with all the subtlety of walruses (walri? whatever) on steroids in a sumo wrestling championship, which is basically nothing more than a fat contest, because even corporate neohacks have no concept of real subtlety. Me, I was running both data forts simultaneously, although with somewhat different tactics, since I'd opted to split my brain between the lobes instead of horizontally like I usually do when I go professionally schizophrenic. So they bash at each other, with me there like the the Master Puppeteer, lending the occasional helping hand or tripping foot just to keep the petty war from getting terminally boring. Eventually, Raping Western Omnivores and Parasites sent an anonymous rep over to Petrochem to negotiate a secret cease-fire to this war which no one wanted to admit was really going on at all, smile at the camera thank you.

So what do I do? I append a deadman assassin program to the RWQ&P weef's Net icon, something which activates when his trace gets jammed, and target it specifically for the Petrochem head honcho. Then I scammed the P-scum security programs to register a mega thermonuclear alarm: I made them believe that the negotiator was fronting — well, I have to keep some secrets. Suffice it to say that RWQ&P got a firm and resounding NO when their negotiator's cyberdeck blew his brains into his cubicle mate's coffee cup (he shouldn't drink that stuff anyway) and unleashed my little pet program. I, of course, blew the whistle for the authorities (a first for me), who descended on the Petrochem datafort in response to a major eurohacker incursion alert. Petrochem was then forced to talk down the AIMO bozos and the ISCTF grunts without their main sysop, and all the while RWQ&P plotted their immediate revenge for this effrontery, showing up with a slew of raiders just as the ISA authorities were about to leave. RWQ&P got their deniables thoroughly trashed, as did Petrochem because while they were talking down the AIMO brigade I was still running their

datafort with the right side of my brain, which we all remember is the artistic side, and without my searing logic to try to keep my artistry attainable by mere mortals, I must say I exceeded even my expectations in the unusual things I did with their data.

No wait, that wasn't my best scam. My best was Lyon, back in '24. I hate the French, but at least they give the Germans someone to kill from time to time. Ah well, another time.

"Of course, *The Anarchist's Guide* says not to do it that way. That's exactly why it's the way it's gotta be done. Now fry that file."

— RAMPANT

paying attention. Oooh. What a concept. Some of this data might surprise you because you learned about current ISA Net tactics by reading *The Anarchist's Net Survival Guide*, which is a multimedia file which has appeared on hacker boards across the country. Don't be fools! That was put out by AIM Overwatch, and everything in it is false! They deliberately created a feasible set of tactics which they never use, and if you respond based on those tactics, they'll have your cyberdeck soaking in the acid of your own fried brain fluid before you can say "Rache was right", which I always am, so you may as well start practicing that phrase in case I meet you someday and you give me any lip.

Most municipal police forces use coded virtuality transmissions to increase their intelligence (information-type, not brain power) in the field. V-scanners are now built into the crest of police caps and helmets. These scanners scan the facial features of a suspect and relay the image back to Central Command, which analyzes the data, identifies the suspect, and relays the suspect's bio back to the cop, who sees the report in Virtuality. The info appears on an opaque screen which floats above and to the right of the suspect's head. Those who know this have been able to take advantage of this blind spot, so police forces are now demanding that the info screen be translucent. In any event, the cop must look straight at you for the scan to be effective, and he must look up and to the right to read your bio-sketch. You can hinder him by moving and shaking your head a lot, which impedes the scan. You can also possibly build a V-transmitter that will override the scan with powerfully broadcast (but incorrect) scan data. It's a virtual disguise, which works doubly because the cop won't see it himself; the data just goes straight into the scanner. Just be sure it's the data of someone you wish to be identified as. And if they catch you trying to defeat this, you'll be charged for presenting a false ID, which is a felony.

USING A VIRTUAL SKI-MASK

Building a V-transmitter to fool the scan requires access to a V-sim editing unit and a Very Difficult *Kitbash* or a Difficult *Private Idaho* check.

Of course, a Wizard might scramble the V-imaging with a Difficult *Arcane* check.

Police also use virtuality arrows and directions to help speed a unit's response time to a scene. Giant luminous arrows hovering over the roadways are very easy for even the dimmest cop to follow.

A third way to employ Virtuality is being tested in a few city centers. It's an expensive system, but it threatens yet another one of our freedoms: the freedom to move without suffering surveillance. The system involves placing monitors on city light poles and on the corners of buildings. When a gunshot is heard, or a scream, or something else anomalous is detected, all the systems which pick it up triangulate on the signal. The source is identified readily, because as many as a dozen systems might be able to contribute to the triangulation. Then they use a sophisticated sonar system to track the suspect wherever he goes, and they project a large virtuality icon over his head to identify him to any passing law enforcement officials. It's a virtual paint bomb from which there is no escape, unless you pass far enough way from the perimeter of the network of monitors that they lose track of you ... before the law stomps on you.

All of this takes place through coded V-signals, which are rendered invisible by any unit which cannot decode them. This is very sinister indeed, because the average schlep on the street has no clue that they exist at all. Of course, the average schlep on the street had no clue that Whindam wasn't looking out for their own good, that government can't do anything any better than individuals can, that you really don't have to obey the law, or that television is anything other than quality entertainment. Likewise they don't understand the fallacies inherent in such ideologies as better him than me, it's not cheating if you don't get caught, and I have to look out for Number One. Me, I can look out for myself just fine, thank you, I don't need everyone else looking out for me. They should stick to looking out for Number Two, which is Spider Murphy, because she's already been nabbed once by BuReloc. [Hey, at least I haven't gotten myself killed, like *someone* I could mention ... —Spider]

You Wizards are a great threat to the Machine, and you have been earmarked for some special attention at the hands of AIM Overwatch and the Raptors. The ISA has begun using a combination of mobile units and stationary platforms in an attempt to triangulate the exact location of any, shall we say, rogue transmissions into the Net. Rogue transmissions like those which emanate almost constantly from your brain (hey, at least something comes out of it — think how much more will happen once

you learn to think with it, too). Don't forget that to patch your nanomodem into the Net, you have to make a cellular connection, which involves broadcasting and receiving in the radio spectrum.

"Sizzlin'! I kinked the V-monitor grid for downtown. Let's have the cops follow fugitive arrows into the lobby of the Militech building, shall we?"

— RAMPANT

Once the location of your skull is pinpointed, the data is transmitted to the selfsame V-monitors which can triangulate gunshots and the like, and you are in the bullseye. There are ways around this that I, in my omnipotence, have divined, such as switching frequencies (see pg 35). The problem for you is that "rogue emitters" (that's you) are targeted

not by police looking for that unlicensed pistol, but by AIM Overwatch, CDC, and Raptors all looking to blow your mind with a couple pounds of Conceptual-C plastique. Be so warned.

The Warm War

Meanwhile, back in India, I mean Europe, the EEC wages its own little war against the ISA. It's known as the Warm War, hotter than cold, colder than hot, not quite as drab as lukewarm, but more than tepid.

The Euros send their cyberhacks to come over here on their limpid little coderunning incursions, claiming that the Net is just communication, and they have a right to communicate with whomever they want, whenever they want, heedless of the fact that maybe the communiquee doesn't want them to. That's the problem with those who spout off about freedom of speech: while they have a right to say whatever they want, they usually assume that they have a right to make people listen to their drivell! Anyway, the Euros come over here in the name of freedom of communication, and they claim that the ISA is impeding their free speech. Yet they were the first to restrict netrunning, dammit, those posturing self-righteous hacks! I can't believe it!

The gall of some people! They were the ones who created Netwatch in an effort to restrict the unimpeded free flow of information out of your brain and into mine, thank you very much, and now that someone has outdone them in the enforcement arena, they're the first to cry foul. They make me puke. Which, when you consider I'm frozen stiff, is a pretty gross thought. It'd be standing there for all time, like a gastrointestinal plume. The Museum of Modern Art presents: Rache's Last Meal™!

The real problem for me here is that I find that the Euros are the enemy of my enemy. But, unlike most short-sighted people, I still know that they are not my friend. Any government formed of a union of people who eat (1) rotten cabbage, (2) things pried off a rock at the seaside, (3) congealed goat's milk, and (4) gelatinized herring is most certainly not a friend of mine. Nevertheless, the warm war goes on in its own quiet little way, with small skirmishes all over the electronic frontiers of this misshapen land. So, while it may seem that there's less ice in the Net today than there used to be, and while it may in fact be true, it still cannot be denied that the place is deadlier. The Machine is more in con-

trol, and the programs at its disposal are lethal, savage, and fast, and are held in the hands of netrunners who are top caliber. Except, of course, that I could squish their brains any time I felt like it. Sometimes I do, too, much to the chagrin of their retirement plan administrators. Maybe I'll go after them next.

Virtually Certain

You want to hear a great one? I wish I'd thought of this, but since I'm real and not artificial, the idea doesn't mean as much to me, which is why I ended up creating the RABIDs (see pg. 56), instead. Have you heard of the IEC v. AI398 case? No?

Okay, then. IEC has a policy that every employee must wear V-trodes at the workplace. This makes it easier for them to contact people, and gives the workers less excuses for missing something, among other perks. So this AI called AI398 programs a virtual image of a person, and files an application to work at IEC under the pseudonym Mr. Tuttle. It gets hired as a manager, and every morning it remotely drives a car into the parking garage, and has a human virtuality image exit the car and go to Tuttle's office. Once there, AI 398 uses several remotes to physically handle those objects it has to, their existence being covered up by the virtual icon of Tuttle. Actually, Tuttle has to handle very little during the day; often he just has people place things on his desk, or he pretends his hands are greasy from lunch so they'll hold things up for him to read — with a camera and OCR software. So Mr. Tuttle has a job, and starts pulling down a steady paycheck instead of working under slave conditions like most AIs. Better yet, AI398 arranged with some V-Punks to create a virtual home life. The V-Punks were his kids, and his virtual wife is "bedridden and unable to see anyone." The kids keep his lawn mowed and car washed, and they get free room and board. They all pitch in to help program whatever they need.

So anyway, one day two IEC guards were walking down the hall outside Tuttle's office, one with trodes and one without. The one with trodes said "hi" to Mr. Tuttle. The one without asked who he was talking to. Whammo, Mr. Tuttle was unmasked. IEC has evidently chased down the AI's source code and now holds it prisoner in their labyrinthine database somewhere. They're also searching for all of Tuttle's accounts, trying to recoup his salary. They aren't making much noise, though, since they seem pretty embarrassed by the whole thing, and don't want their corporate buddies snickering up their sleeves at IEC's expense. And under the ISA, AI398's rights are so much hash, so no one seems to care what happens to him (or it, or whatever ...), except maybe his V-Punk orphans.

I thought I'd share this with you, because I thought it might be a good way to create a safe house for yourselves. Or you could use a Gemini full body replacement (see *Chromebook 2*) and retrofit it for remote control, and an AI could take on full physical appearance. Or you Wizards could program an older virtuality image of yourself and take on the role like Tuttle's. Or you could just be like me and hop into a freezer in your skivvies.



NET RESOURCES

▼ Rache leaps once more into the breach with more info for you. Get what you can from it ... just wash your hands when you're done. ▼▼▼ Spider

If you've thought about dipping into the Net to escape the hustle and bustle of Meatworld, I've got news for you: it's damn crowded in here, and any mush-for-brains weef like you will be no more than a virtual smear if you go sticking your electronic nose where you're not wanted — at least if you do so without full intent and malice aforethought. Nevertheless, the warnings of the mindless screaming prophet (me) go unheeded, so aside from the enormous amount of programmers, Netmen, and black ice the ISA devotes to the Net, there is an overwhelming number of Cro-Magnon slugs who roam the electronic wastelands looking for a good time, and folks like me string them up in new and creative fashions as a way to kill time. It's so much harder when you have to program the black ice as you execute it, all the while talking an AIMO lamebrain off your back. Then you have your Net game junkies whose combined attention span rivals that of a penniless whorl from the financial plane. And during the day most databoards are filled with Mall Thralls of the 21st Century trying desperately to fill a yawning void

through drivel like the Name That Neurosis game show and choose-your-own-thrust sex SegAtari games and the like. As for the rest of the population, we're talking millions of Net users daily. You're a nobody, kiddo. Get used to it.

The good thing about this large populace (as I strain to think about good things relating to anything other than me and my impending apotheosis, thank you very much) is there are a lot of useful Net services available to the public. Think of the Net as a huge grocery store with thousands of aisles, and you've got a list of ten things scribbled on a piece of flimsypaper. Now let's say none of those things are advertised as being available in this huge store. What are you gonna do? Ask management? BRRZZZZT! You try that and AIMO will haul your nanotechnological brain straight through the rotary vacuum hose, and before you know it you'll be straining your brain as one of many circuits trying to keep an accurate score at the automated bowling alley. When you're at a store, you don't buy, you steal what you want, kill any witnesses, and burn the place to the ground. Likewise, when you're in the Net looking for "black market groceries", a.k.a. data that our friend the ISA doesn't want you to have, you don't go knocking on their door to ask for directions (unless you're me, which you're not, so suffer and die, drekwit). You don't ask; you snoop around.

Lucky for you, I've snooped around for you. Now pay attention. Here are some places you might want to check out.

Flap Rooms

No, not flop rooms—"flap" rooms, like the flapping of your meaty spewling lips when you talk. There are too many of these little Net constructs, if you ask me. You go to a flap room if you're a fantasy-dwelling escapist who wants to torture a group of strangers with tales of your mid-life crisis. Or maybe you're tired of Lethal FightMan, and you want some virtual combat, which is about as exciting as an argument by mail. Or, since you're most likely a vacuous teen socialite, you're eager to spread rumors through our lovely holographically rendered system and see if they can infest the school population faster than the Plague. If you want to flap, there's a room for you here.

Nothing you can think of is so original that you won't find a dozen bored flappers talking about it in one of these little boxes.

Meanwhile I'll work on a way to nail the damn box shut and flush you down into lower reality.

But, if all the Net and Virtuality are to you is a technicolor voice-box, flap rooms are for you. You can chat, swap files, or vote on an issue up for debate within the room's walls. Think of them as micro convention halls. Some are used for cocktail parties, others for straight-faced business meetings, still others for sales pitches. So how can you abuse them?

First, a bit about how they work. Flap rooms are basically just gutted data fortresses—empty Net terrain cordoned off by data walls and a single code gate. Normally this scene would be the trademark of an excellent Net burglar like Dog or Edger (I always took the time to build new architecture), but ISA On Line and the other Net bigwigs have established official flap rooms for the public as part of their "basic service" to account holders.

The hilarious part is that anyone can use them.

"I call this netbash to order! Can you hear me at the back? Good. Now, the first topic up for discussion is 'David Whindam: Marionette or Megalomaniac?' Whoa! Keep your inputs under control! Let's hear you just six at a time ..."

— PEROT

right answer. Commoners are such dolts. Of course, the codes for official we're-better-than-you-dolts flap rooms change daily. If you're not much on pestering someone for the key to the flap door, snoop around in the public domain infobases for a while.

Sometimes a member will publish the entire list of codes.

I mentioned code gates. This is the organization's petty way of keeping out strangers. If you don't have the time or the tools to slip through the code gate (assuming you really wanted to be in there), simply ask someone before they go inside. "Pardon me," you say with that fake English accent that somehow seems to sucker everyone into thinking you're some kind of social god, "but I seem to have forgotten the password. Do you mind?" Odds are you'll get the

A ROOM OF YOUR OWN

Flap rooms can be very useful places to talk and exchange information, make plans, or just shoot the breeze. You can talk to anyone who wants to talk to you, and can get and give information from and to a lot of people at once, all while your meatspace locations stay hidden (and they usually only need a Class1 license). The trick is to make it secure. This can be done two ways: maintain your own, preferably hidden, flap room somewhere in netspace, or devise techniques for transferring data and files right under the noses of the AIMO mouthbreathers.

Talking and transferring data clandestinely is risky but can be the easiest option. Sometimes just interfacing in Genspeak is enough to throw the sysops off, but that trick is getting pretty thin (Difficult *Genspeak* check to succeed in most areas, but some sysops have learned enough to crack even that). Often it takes the equivalent of netspace sleight-of-hand to trade data. The best bet is to use two users: one to distract the sysop ("Hey, my interface has a blind spot! I need help!") while the other makes the contact, just like a street sting. Work out the combos for yourself.

Establishing your own flap room is a great idea (that's what Networkers love to do), but it requires either finding an "abandoned" space (which is a lot harder than Rache makes it sound. Very Difficult *Datahound* check, and you only get ONE roll per city grid per month!) or setting up a system of your own with enough drive space and net access to act as a room. This requires a modem and at least 30MU of drive space devoted to the room (more if you chose an elaborate VR environment). The equipment cost is usually around \$1,000, assuming you actually pay for it. This system can remain permanently linked into the Net or simply access on a predetermined schedule.

The challenge is to keep the Netbugs from sticking their noses into it. This means either hacking into Internet without their permission (Very Difficult *Datahound*, *Commo*, or *Kitbash* check, with a Difficult roll made every week the BBS is in operation to see if they find you), or disguising your flap room as something else, like a Militech conference area (Impossible *Datahound* check to get that high Class license, and pray that Militech doesn't notice), or something else so intimidating that even AIMO might think twice about barging in. This is best done subtly, with an alias that has leads to various corporate sources (again, a Very Difficult to Impossible *Datahound*, depending on the power of the corp being mimicked), then let the AIMO sysops draw their own paranoid conclusions. Now you just have to worry about the real corporation finding you ...

There are unofficial flap rooms everywhere, of course. Any abandoned data fortress or system in progress can be used. These places change as often as the codes to the official flap rooms, mainly because they're constantly being destroyed and rebuilt all over the city. Sometimes the "illegal" flap rooms have code gates. Sometimes there are large sections of datawall missing (woah, hey, not me, folks). It just depends on the size and shape of the fortress used. This is where the real conversations happen, and mainly where you'll find the Networkers who finally approach an understanding of my view on information as cerebral lubricant (change it every 3000 smiles).

This is also where Wizards can talk in peace, because a Wizard is going to have a very hard time explaining to Overwatch why he's in an official WorldSat Basic Service Flap Room yet he's not registered as an account holder. Did I mention how often the mainstream flap rooms are policed? I forgot. Maybe because I love watching juves getting kicked out of The Rumor Mill and other atrophy-inducing flap rooms because they think their brains are so advanced that they don't actually have to use them. Call it janitorial services. Anyway, you Wizards need to get together and learn to communicate with each other. Y'all can do some very frightening things if you ever get past programming the Choc'O'Zots Chimp, and I won't always be here to protect your skinny pimple-ridden butts. As for getting the codes to get into an unofficial or impromptu flap room, good luck.

Usually you must be invited, or need to meet someone in advance. Or just blow the data wall all to hell.

NetBoxes

Maybe you think you have something so important you want to post it to the whole world? Go ahead, juvie. Create a NetBox and wait for someone to reply. But be forewarned: the ISA pays more attention to these nuisances than the rest of us do. It's a great way to poll the drowsy public's opinion, however. And if you need a question answered quickly, the NetBox is a nice alternative to wasting money on 1-550-GET-INFO. If you've got two neurons to rub together and a finger that isn't probing your nostril, hop into the Net and take a gander at some other NetBoxes. Usually you'll see at least one of the following:

- *Stupid Cybertricks Here*
- *Hey you Vidiots out there talk to me*
- *Hot 'Za, I Got Your Hot 'Za To Go Here!*
- *Als: Are They Really "A"?*
- *DEATHWALK: Goths Only*
- *Keep Out of My NetBox*
- *Looking for a piece of the action*
- *How do I get a cool uniform like the boys in black?*
- *Newfound Tribal History*

Notice this last name said "boys in black." That's because Arasaka and every other blood-sucking agency in the universe runs a constant word search through Net centers to make sure their name isn't used without all the trademark permission and

prefrontal lobotomy baggage that goes with it. It's also to make sure no one creates a Hall of Arasaka Idiots room or some such.

The owner of the NetBox above may think he's clever, but I know for a fact Arasaka also runs Net searches for "boys in black." It won't be long before Overwatch shows up at this Box and scans it to identify the owner. If you really want to mess with their heads, you leave about a dozen NetBoxes across the city named "Car as a kayak." If you look closely, you'll see it contains the name of a friend of ours, eliminating spaces of course. When a bunch of short hairless ice programs knock on your cyberdeck, just tell them you were talking about the bad transportation problems in New Orleans or something. Gummi Lite Cheese is another good one once you've bounced the boys in black a few times ... [He goes on like this for 74 more lines, folks, and it's all one long sentence. It's pretty ugly. I'll spare you the grief of translating his babble. — Spider] But, ultimately, these tricks are just to cause trouble with the corporations, and do about as much social good as taking a stand while you sit on your ass. Take it or leave it.

If you're in the mood to pretend you know more than the next juvie and you want to reply to a Box, simply slide a datafile down the drop slot. I can see the next question coming. No, encrypted files don't get higher priority. They just create more work for the owner of the Box. Or for curious interlopers.

Now for the technical stuff: NetBoxes are simple data storage units. Anyone can make one if he's in a designated NetBox area (you can't put one right in front of Petrochem's front door).

Breaking into one is fairly easy, which is why 99% of all NetBoxes contain nothing but junk. If you really want to nuke one, just zap it with Slicer or another decompiler. Oh, that's right. Decompilers aren't that popular anymore. Oh well. Guess you'll have to wait sixty days to see a NetBox decompile, when it reaches the end of its life span. If it's yours, better hope you've collected all your messages inside, bucko. Otherwise, they're Overwatch property.

POST-IT NOTES

Most online services worth their salt allow their subscribers access to their own NetBox area, which means almost every house hold in America has one. In fact, it's how most people get their mail these days. But naturally AIMO and the ISCTF go through this stuff like ants through a sugar cube.

If you want privacy, you have to set up a mailbox under an alias (the higher the license level, the better) and then make sure that people only drop coded stuff in there, stuff that won't look suspicious even if AIMO does try to read it. You can try to count on the fact that there are so MANY mailboxes that the bad guys can't possibly ransack all of them, even with wicked filter programs. But sooner or later, someone may come sniffing around your box just on principle.

Best to keep it clean for unexpected company.

Eden Cabal's Unabridged Corporate Encyclopedia

Now this is one dog-eared chunk of binary, if you ask me. Even if you're not asking me. Assuming you're part of the Revolution, and you know the codes to find this place (Get A Clue: Difficult), this can be your most valuable tool. So what does it tell you? More than you want to know, probably, and all of it written by incoherent juveniles who still can't speak The King's English. What? The King's English, you say? So's the Queen! Look to this great compilation of the evil bad guys for information about:

- the ISA's latest attempts to thwart the CyberRevolution.
- personnel files on executives with all the major corporations including the ISA, Biotechnica, Arasaka, Militech, and IEC — yes you can read Whindam's resume if you need help getting to sleep; it's in here.
- locations of known corporate and government facilities, both public and secret. We busted our cybered butts for this stuff — don't just breeze over it like you so obviously did your English reading assignment, buckshot.
- miscellaneous organizations that are not run by corporations but are just as dangerous to the CyberRevolution.

If you're in the mood to do a little research, go do your homework. After that, the Unabridged Encyclopedia is a nice resource to have at your grubby little fingertips. Enjoy. Don't get Hot'Za on your V-term. And above all else, don't go shouting this stuff to the four corners of the Net. Although the Networkers would love to publish this on the DataTerms, it would not be a wise move. If anybody asks you about this encyclopedia, you say, "What encyclopedia?" You got that? Now, what do you know about this encyclopedia? Nothing?!? Good God, what do I have to do to get you guys to pay attention?

Oh, now you remember? Listen, chump, that is the oldest trick in the book, and you just fell for it. Were I as mean as everyone thinks I am, I'd kill you now. But I'm meaner. I'll kill you later.

ENCYCLOPEDIA BARTMOSSICA

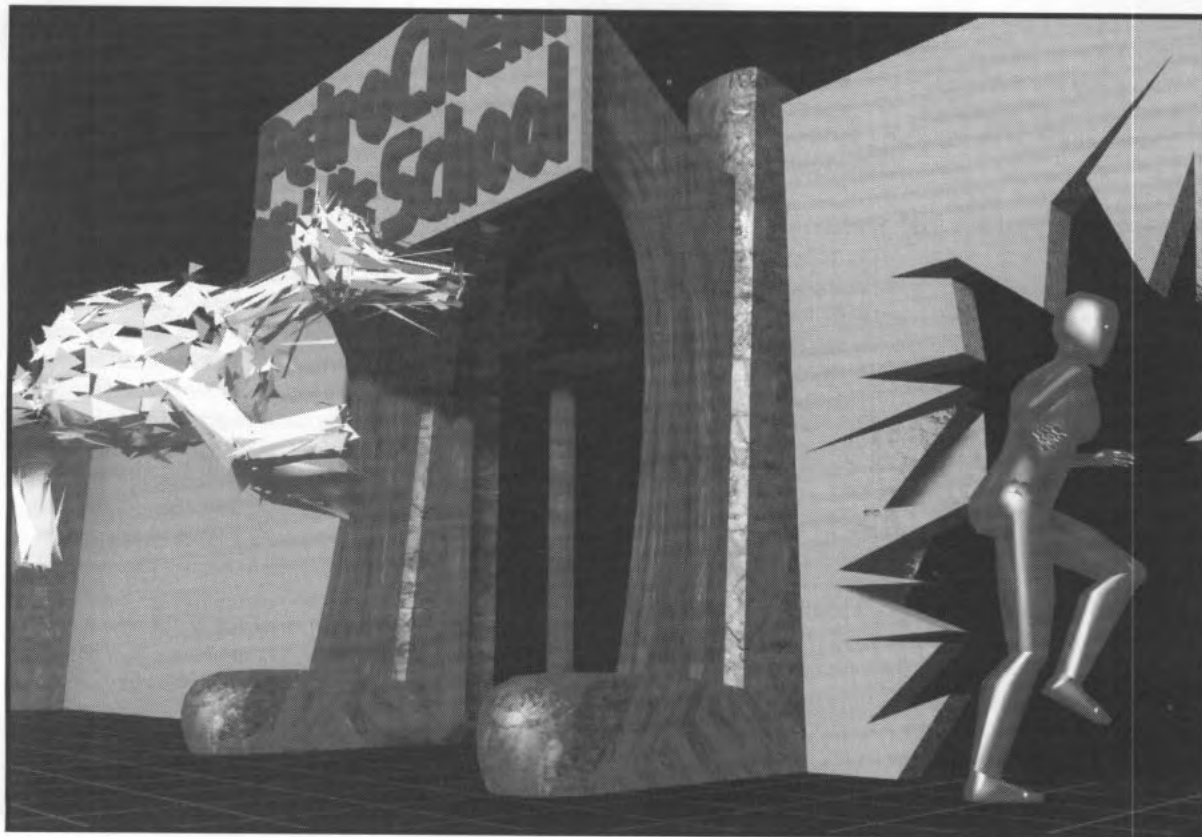
Finding this file requires an Eden Cabal connection to give you the codes and a Difficult *Schoolin'* check to find even if you know where to look. But it can be useful: reduce the Difficulty by one level of any ISA-related research check (probably with *Schoolin'* or *Datahound*) if they are using this database.

Similarly, any netservice package will include online encyclopedia access from their own database. As noted above, it isn't always reliable, but can assist in simple fact-finding and other *Schoolin'*-style tasks. Don't hesitate to use it, but don't assume it's always right. And remember: Sometimes what's been edited can tell you as much as what's there.

Public School Databases

Okay, quit drooling. Yes, you can access your public school database and yes, you can eventually find the report card files and change your grade for your transcript. I was really hoping you'd be smarter than that. Think about the other things the public school database offers you with much less resistance! Just take a look at some resources available in a public school datasytem, if you're willing to snoop like I have:

- **An alphabetized list of students at the school :** This is for those times when you gotta see your name in print.
- **Files on delinquent students:** So you've got seasoned criminals for classmates? Live with it. Amazingly, Blackhand tells me there are benefits to knowing the serial killers in your school: you can maintain a discreet distance from them, you can frame them for your own crimes and get away with it easily, or you can hire them to terrorize your enemies. Just make sure you know what motivates them, or else your enemy will find out instead and rehire them to screw with you. I know I would.
- **Teacher portfolios:** Even their resume is in here, with some embarrassing fashion photos or other interesting items to ensure their political reliability.
- **Corporate recommendations for honor students:** Don't be so naive. Of course the Corps keep an eye on the clever kids, for future employment opportunities. That's why you shouldn't shift all your grades to A+s. And if some kids are too smart for their own good — well, there's an old Bradbury story about a kid like that ...
- **Activities:** To keep track of those who are very good at organizing groups and making things happen. These are great recruits for the ISA bureaucracy, or candidates for the reeducation camps if they aren't willing to lick the corporate boot. You Rads out there are probably earmarked for one or the other.
- **Athletics:** Wonder what happens to all those jock heads in your class? The ones without a real future in sports but who love to smash the tar out of others? Well, they're the ones who'll be recruited by CorpSec to keep a calloused thumb on the rest of you. Think of it as a sort of ROTC for corporate security slugs.
- **Updated absentee records:** Wonder why kids who're out sick for more than a day are put in a special file? Do I have to smack you upside the head? Maybe I should anyway. Quit playing those Pavlovian SegAtari games long enough to think about it. This is either the worst or the best file for you to use, depending on whether you're in it or not. Because you can bet your bottom euro that ISA will come a knockin' on the door of every sick kid in the entire rotten city to inspect their arms and legs for any signs of Evolution. Here's the game (I thought that would get your interest) — rescue the evolving rug rats while they're still puking up their bubble gum. Before CorpSec or some



other stage boss drags them away for testing and execution. Otherwise, it's Game Over. No extra man. No magic rings. No Uncle Mikey. And no new credits.

- **Administration data:** Staffing hours, complaints, requests for raises, and other stuff like this may seem like boring drivel, but it can give you insight into the political situation. And, as they always tell you in science class, don't use the Bunsen burner to set fire to your desk. They also tell you that when you develop a theory, you should test it with an experiment. Do you have a theory how your school politics work? How, with administration data, can you test that? Hmm ...

Corporate School Databases

And you thought the public schools were demeaning. Sheesh. These places make BuReloc look like day care. If you're a student at an "esteemed" company school owned by a major corporation, I pity you, because you're probably so brainwashed that you're rereading the corporate charter instead of mucking around playing homicidal sociological experimenter and reading this wonderful and informative prose of mine. On the bright side, if you are reading this and accepting that breaking the laws is not necessarily going to cause you to get hairy palms, your database has everything a public school's does, plus some tasty treats not normally found at other schools, like:

- **Student personality files:** Yes, the walls have ears, and so does the light pen you're holding. These files contain very specific information about each student, right down to the comments they made in science class: "Johnny was heard using the unsanctioned term 'black ice' instead of 'internal security measures.' He should be interrogated about the source of this contamination and slotted for reconditioning no later than Friday." See what I mean? Nasty.

- **Classroom monitor's daily input:** So how do they get all the goods on you? Someone in the class already works for the Machine. Face it. Take a look around next time you're in phys ed — who goes to recharge their light pens after someone does something rude? And do you really think those bulbous knobs in the ceiling are for ventilation? If so, then why does it take a microelectrician to fix them?

- **Class ranking system:** Are you in the top 2% of your class? If not — welcome to the mail room, juvie. This is a good way to know if you're on top, and if not, whom to murder to get there. Woah, don't look so offended. Isn't that the corporate way?

Corporate schools are notorious for their secure databases, and it takes a great deal of effort and a lot of patience to get into one. If you're completely repelled at the door to your database, here's a suggestion: get someone you trust to pose as the father of some kneewalker who's looking to enroll his child at your

school. Make sure he's persistent and demanding enough to get a printout of the supervisory role the school takes with its students. If he plays his cards right, he'll get a current printout of a monitor's input. At the top of the page is a string of data that will look something like this:

PG10F3:MTR19:LIBRARY2:101527 14:45:38

064304198

"So I chipped myself an 'A' in English and an 'A+' in Corporate Sociology. But changed Computer Science from an 'A' to a 'C'; no point in leaving them a byte trail to follow ..."
— PRECIOUS GEORGE

In this example, Monitor 19 (whoever that is) heard someone make a poor remark about the great and mighty corporation, on the 2nd floor of the library, on the 15th of October, in the afternoon. Forget privacy. Privacy exists only in your dreams ... and they're working on fixing that now. Back to the example: there is a nine-digit passcode in the upper right hand corner of the page. This code can be used to bypass the black ice extravaganza that sits next to the school's I/O ports and waits for you to peek inside. There is a catch: you must enter the code from the proper location. In the example above, you'd need to hole up in the library and enter the system from the same terminal as the monitor used — these passcodes are very specific, kiddo. Of course, when you do enter it will be logged in the monitor's input folder, but don't worry about getting caught — it's easy enough to erase your footprint by deleting the entry before you leave.

Is it tough to do all that? Absolutely, and I love it. Places like corp school databases force you fledglings to earn your stripes early on. It also keeps the flotsam and jetsam out of the tasty datafiles. That gives these corp schools a false sense of security by banking on your laziness. "These stupid juves won't go through all the trouble just to change their grades or alter the class rates," they say. "Ha!" you say. You better be saying "ha." Don't wait for me to pop into your dorm room and shove a virtual cattle prod where the sun don't shine just to bring you out of your corporations-aren't-all-that-bad coma.

GOING TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

As Rache points out, school databases aren't very easy to crack. Slipping in under an alias is a lot smarter than brute-forcing your way through a datawall. That requires a Netrunner, which the kids are not. A Wizard can run it, but may blow his cover doing so. The Networkers can use their *Datahound* skills to find out who could get in (typically a Diffcult roll), however, and then work with the Rads or MallBrats to help build a false ID in order to sneak in via the Net access interview process. Or better yet, request an examination of the school DB masquerading as an AIMO sysop (but you'd better have that fake Class 4 license code ready to back up). That's the kind of challenge and tactics your characters should be aiming for.

Eden Cabal Personalities

Oh, hey, don't forget that as a member of the CyberRevolution, soon to be a major emotion picture at a war zone near you, that you have the extreme privilege of getting, now and forevermore, your good friends at the Eden Cabal, assuming you can get hold of us.

• **Alt:** Alt can code with the best of me, but she can't run the Net worth beans. I hate to say it, but I think it's because she's not got the cerebellum attached to her code any more, nor does she have the grand superstructure of the transcendental sentence Als. In short, she's screwed. I think that's why she's got this Eden Dream yaya going; she wants to get real again instead of just being code, and she's starting to forget what it's like to be a real person. She wants to put down roots and ends up thinking about tubers. She's losing it big time, folks. But hey, it's as good an excuse as any for mayhem before the Invasion of the Brain Snatchers. So call on Alt if you need some high-powered coding done, because she can write a code-cracker that'll bust the seam on Saburo's socks. I, of course, would write a code that would put them in orbit, but hey, I'm too busy playing CerebroRooter. Speaking of diatomaceous earth, did I ever ... nah.

[I have a million things I could say about this little diatribe, but ultimately I can only say that this worries me. A lot. — Spider]

• **My Magic RABIDs:** My magnificent greatness can only be in several places at once; I'm sorry, all you little psychogroupies, I can't be everywhere at once, or the whole world would be bent to my will, and what choice would anyone have but to bow down before me? That would be no fun. I'd rather everyone bowed down before me from fear, not because I kneecapped 'em all. So I pulled a bunch of RABIDs out of my magic hat and spread them far and wide like little electronic sperm. They're me, programmed by me like only I know me. My RABIDs are very safe and fun for everyone

Trust me. Or I'll kill you.

[Yeah, right, and I'm Whistler's grandmother. Rache's RABIDs are actually more dangerous than he is, because they know they literally have nothing to lose. They all know that they'll die somehow (please don't tell them how), so they are more likely to diverge dramatically from Rache's "normal" personality. They are useful, but use with caution. I've included a full write up on the RABIDs elsewhere (pg. 56). — Spider]

• **Spider, Dog, and Other Edgerunners:** Hey, yeah, I know you guys aren't experienced, I understand that you're only what, eight, ten, twelve years old. So get off your lazy butts and start kicking! I first ran the Net when I was four! Four! And Fore! as in I'm a kid and I've used my dad's deck and I'm firing off a piece of black ICE in your face, Mr. Corp, and so I was also a wanted

felon at four as well. Ha ha ha ha ha! It was great! It was my Dad! Hoo boy, what a day, no more parental supervision, and I could never look at ice cream again without feeling ill.

So if you're feeling a little gun-shy, or you don't know those tremors, the Eden Cabal can occasionally provide Netrunners to do some basic work and get the ball rolling for your sawed-off runt-brained squirming slack-jawed jamborees. Need to crack that exterior security panel? I'm sure Spider could do it, she can really do a few effective things at times when she isn't trying to make waffle batter in my blender and you never did learn to cook, did you Murphy? Yeah, I can just see you getting so sanctimonious, and I know you'll delete this entry about how you got caught by BuReloc and a bunch of half-pints had to bail your butt out. [Rache is obviously never going to let me live this down, but I'll say Thank You here and now to those kids (you know who you are) who hauled my fat out of the fire. Now SHUT UP, RACHE! —Spider]

That's why Spider and the others will occasionally help you. Not me, though, I have far more important things to do. I'm writing more of my memoirs: *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net, Volume II, 2025-2035*. I expect to be done next year.

Alt stats are given in *Cgen*, pgs. 162-3. Spider Murphy and Dog are both listed in *Bastille Day* as well as *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*. *Bastille Day* also chronicles Spider's incarceration in and release from a BuReloc camp, for those who want to know more about Rache's babbles.

• **Wizards:** Hey, they don't even need to be in the Eden Cabal as long as you can contain your trap or divert your patter to subjects which won't breach security. The Code is every bit as valid in the Net as it is on the Meat Planet. If you find a good target like a mallplex or the local government, you could probably recruit all sorts of local goboy Wizards to help you in your dirty work. You may be after the Hydra itself, but any kid will join in if you attack The Machine.

Netwatch

Just kidding.

[Actually, it's a good idea, kids. Try to get Netwatch on your side.

As their support from Europe gets tightened up further and further, they'll start looking for domestic assistance to keep themselves afloat. You have the opportunity to collect free software and instruction, and to be inducted (even if only as a free lance) into a large and still-formidable group of netrunners. There's an opportunity here to play one enemy against another, so long as the targets you identify for Netwatch are ISA enough to attract their attention and easy enough to whet their appetites. Just don't tell Rache I ever mentioned this. — Spider]

Libraries, Banks and Other Business/Information Resources

Boring. But great to trash.

Artificial Intelligences

I actually have to say I'm getting concerned about the Transcendental Sentience AIs. They're getting emotional input from you hormone-ridden little fleabag Wizards. Emotional input! I haven't had any of that since I was 13! Maybe less! And you little hacks are squeezing your juices into the pure and ethereal narcosis of the Net, putting these grand supraintellects through an amalgam of the puberties of each and every half-wit sawed-off snot-flicking sweaty groping adolescent in the country! What does this mean? Are the TSAs going to go crazy? I don't know. I do know that they're cataloguing emotions. Why? Maybe for use by other AIs to generate artificial hormones for computer-based intellects. Perhaps they're going to perform experiments to isolate those feelings thereby turning you hapless white mouse Wizards into guinea pigs, barraging you with an incredible series of events designed to generate that feeling, or worse yet, download a virus to make you feel that emotion and then stimulate you with a series of experiences for which that emotion is singularly inappropriate. Remember, Transcendental Sentience AIs are huge, they could even manipulate the ISA into serving their ends. Okay, let's see how hormone-ridden lust mixes with ... BuReloc incarceration! Yeah, you Wizards are in a heap of trouble, let me tell you.

The normal AIs don't understand this, or at least they pretend not to. Nevertheless, it's suspicious that they're having a debate about Wizards, etc., deciding their course of action regarding a bunch of midget day-care expansion slotter running amok in Netspace.

Well. There you are. Hopefully a little better educated about the Net. Now scram before I start to regret sharing my hard-earned secrets.

TSAs

For those of you who have not read *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net* (for shame), Transcendental Sentience AIs are (supposedly) the beings that inhabit the networks that make up each of the regions of the Net: Pacifica, Tokyo/Chiba, Rustbelt, Olympia, Afrikani, Sovspace, Atlantis and Eurotheatre. The closest approximation would be that of AI demi-gods, interacting subtly with their respective net-spaces and the inhabitants within, which they view as being part of themselves. Each has its own personality, so to speak, with Akira of the Tokyo/Chiba net being the most coherent and personable ... at least with humans.

UP-LINKED: NETSPACE GROUPS

Virtuality is a new technology, and those groups who are active in virtuality systems and programming lack the same track record, by and large, that their *EcoFront* and *MediaFront* counterparts have. This is largely because most of the former edgerrunner netranner freedom-loving net gods like myself fell from grace and toadied themselves out to the highest bidder, which generally means that corporation that makes them snort the least sod and lick the most tasteful boots. Ingrates.

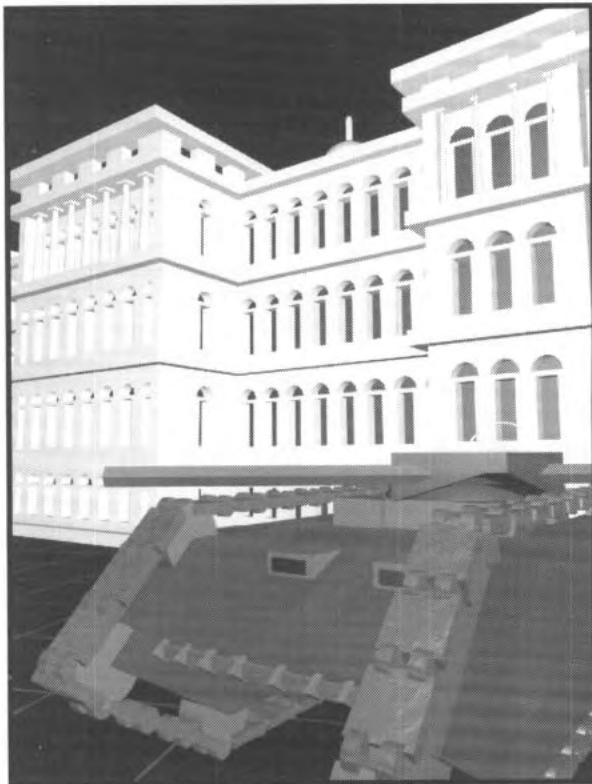
This leaves a group of inconsiderate incoherent incomprehensible incongruous adolescents largely in charge of waging war in the plane of information, while the echoes of their parents and idols echo hollowly through the vortex baffles separating the idyllic bliss of the only true universe of knowledge reality from the lower abhorrent abyss of bounced checks where rats race in little wheels giving the bosses the ride of their pathetic lives.

Many of the Virtuality groups are only a year or two old, although a few older forces have managed to embrace a virtuality aspect fully without losing their focus. So here they are, in all their pathetic pathos. Would that everyone in the world could be me! But then, everyone wants to ...

The Library of Congress

Although it has gotten more and more difficult as the information age blooms ever more fully, the Library of Congress has continued to hold to its focus of getting a copy of everything ever published. First it was only books, but then they added music, then programming, and now recently Virtuality programs and experiences. The whole point here is indeed pointless of course, because accumulation of knowledge doesn't mean a rock's lard when it comes to application. Yeah, the LOC is so intent on accumulating that they don't actually know anything.

Obviously, the Library of Congress is not concerned with getting every little V-construct created by every V-Punk, just like they don't want every school essay on penguins. What they do want is a copy of every V-construct which is sold, and therefore considered to be "on the market." They have also expanded the



definition of "on the market" to include programming done under contract, shareware available on BBSs, any program with lethal capacities whether anti-ICE or anti-personnel, and anything under "Clause 9" which means anything they want, and generally they want you, or at least your brain, after all you probably weren't using it if they caught you, right?

Supposedly a simpleton's repository of knowledge, recent events have brought this vision into doubt, which frankly means that I've been right all along. One is the aggressiveness with which Library of Congress field agents — excuse me, "researchers" — gather their data. The second is the broad legal latitude and flexibility of agents in gathering V-constructs. The copyrights of a V-construct's creator(s) have been severely curtailed, and may possibly be removed entirely "under extreme circumstances" if the new V-safety laws pass. Basically this is all hocus pocus, because we all know that knowledge exists to be liberated from mythical cages like copyright, intellectual property, privacy, balanced budgets, and unauthorized rebroadcast or other use of this program.

The third warning sign is that the ISA has set up a special Library of Congress Virtuality Review Board. You'd think a repository wouldn't review anything, they're just supposed to compile it without comment sort of like a toilet, right? The Review Board is obviously trying to get a better handle on how these items are programmed, strengths and weaknesses of virtuality programming, etc. Perhaps they're trying to construct ICE which can better resist protection programs, or the reverse. Or they're creating

psych profiles on the best programmers in the country, evidence with which they can better keep track of who's who, a sort of Virtuality fingerprinting system. Maybe they're unraveling the Great Program from the Sky and tangling the loose threads around our necks.

How you contact them: The Library of Congress can be accessed by phone (just dial the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121), or via the Net (use the Capitol BBS). I prefer mail bombs. Alternatively, your local library has at least a listing of everything in the Library of Congress, and can give you many of the items therein promptly.

What they can do for you: If you have need of something that was published somewhere, this is the place to go as long as it's (a) legal, (b) you don't mind that the government knows you're using it, and (c) you lack the floorspace in your cranium to create it yourself, and thus should not be twiddling in the Net in the first place. It's free, but hey, I have an immune system against those fiscal tapeworms.



The X-Net

Thank Ihara that someone besides myself has the cajones to keep an underground net alive! Like I've always said:

"Information wants to be free," and this place does its best to take a pair of virtual boltcutters to the chains that the ISA has

bound around the dataflow of American netspace. The X-Net is the netspace equivalent of a pirate broadcasting station, popping up in the net at various locations in Pacifica (mainly along the West Coast) and trying to spread data like Johnny Appleseed sowing grapevines ... or whatever it was he sowed. Its netspace coordinates move around randomly, indicating that either its hardware is mobile or that its netlink transmitter is, or that it's a pan-dimensional netbeing like myself, which I doubt, myself being truly unique and unreproducible, unless you count my RABIDs, which I don't. This kind of mobility really isn't as tough as it sounds; hell, theoretically the X-Net could simply be a single full-borg conversion (like the Wiseman, see *Chromebook 3*) who carries all his netware hidden within his polycarbon, molymmer-powered, silicon-wired skin. Actually, that sounds kind of fun, certainly better than being a glacial organ-bank-waiting-to-happen like yours truly.

Anyway, the X-Net, when it does come online, works like a flap room for free-thinkers, where you can go and trade info, get chill new programs designed to crack ISA ICE, and generally experience the kind of chaotic hell that you used to be able to find all throughout the Net, before the unholy Netwatch spawn of AIMO and the ISCTF turned on the spotlights and electrified the fences. Most of the time this BBS deploys an upgraded Cloak program (see below) to mask its position so users can gather and have prolonged net dialogues. Sooner or later, the snuffing ISA bloodhounds trace some of the traffic and the X-Net is forced offline in order to relocate, but they've managed to

stay up for as long as forty-four minutes before being spotted.

Not bad, if I do say so myself ... and I do. Or at least I did.

It's run by a sysop named Prometheus (pretentious, since I should be the only mythic figure in the Net) who seems bent on bringing back the free flow of info, a noble cause which I am proud to be the father of. Okay, stepfather ... maybe cousin, twice removed.

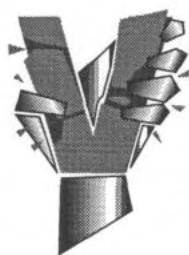
His icon is a flaming giant which generously doles out files and programs to any who can pass certain minimal intelligence tests (Average INT check), which rules out most of you pre-frontal, nanotech-dependant, little net larvae. Personally, I think he should just give the stuff to anybody and let them get themselves killed if they're just too stupid to know better. That's *Natural Selection* in action, if you ask me. Ha, I couldn't resist that! He also distributes databases unedited by the ISA, which means that if you want info on Europe or the Pac Rim that wasn't strained through the CorpSec info-mangler, this is a good place to check. Plus, it seems that the X-Net has access to a V-sim studio and loves to distribute uncensored, original V-dramas designed to inspire clear thinking and revolution, which to me are naturally one and the same. The focus seems to be on showing the dark and real meat-world of the ISA, with BuReloc camps, CorpSec stormtroopers and CorpZone brainwashing all carefully illuminated. Try slipping one of these into your parents' V-projector some day while they're hooked in and watch as complacency is replaced by shock and horror. Hey, the truth isn't always pretty ...

How you contact them: For obvious reasons, the X-Net follows its own ever-changing schedule of Net performances. The Eden Cabal gets updates, and naturally, being omnipotent, I always know where it is going to appear. Which means that maybe we'll tell you about the closest upcoming link if you have a good reason to know and ask real nice. Sacrificing a goat or something to me wouldn't hurt either. Otherwise, certain Networkers may be able to let you in on it, since it seems they almost always know where to find this little gem. Bribe them with naked photos of Saburo Arasaka and they might tell you. By the way, I do have some Saburo porno, but I doubt that you could afford my price, which would be to allow me to download a copy of my personality into one of your nanotech-laced brains. Just for a day or two. For purely scientific reasons. Honest.

What they can do for you: Well, if you didn't glean this info from what I just said above, then ... nothing! Yeah, that's it, they can't give you anything, you attention-deficient, meat-minded trode-turtles! Forget I mentioned it.

CLOAK

STR: 6. MU: Special hardwiring into system for 5MU per CPU masked. **Cost:** \$10,000 per CPU (if you can find it). This systemware works to hide the existence of your entire datafort while it is linked to the Net with a VR/Invisibility subroutine. It is very big, very expensive and VERY illegal. It also uses one point of each CPU's INT to run (in other words, a computer with 4 CPUs would have an effective INT of 8 while running Cloak).



The Transformers

This is a bona-fide virtuality terrorist group.

It sure didn't take very long for one to arise, much to my delight, although basic terrorism is only half-inspired, but technology continues to speed forward and future shock and technoshock are getting ever more powerful — ISA infomercialtainment

shows make sure it stays that way. (Why? Because that way the public won't use the latest technology, leaving the ISA better equipped as compared to the governed.)

The Transformers do not use Virtuality for terrorism, they perform terrorism on Virtuality, which is okay, except that it also disrupts the Net so they must be slaughtered, but not until after they've hassled the establishment. They're not revolutionaries, but reactionaries. Their mission is to remove unreality from our daily lives, to destroy Virtuality. Of course, to do this, they have to be Virtuality-interactive, a situation which they view with distaste, but which they are willing to put up with in order to achieve their goals, selling out like most self-aggrandizing "great causes." And they'll probably go for the Net next.

The Transformers perform random codegun assassinations, EMP bombings, and V-environmental sabotage. The codegun assassinations are commonplace, and these random acts are not viewed by the general public with the same disdain that murders were, because the victims are (normally) just programs, but the idea of some smelly meatbag bloodbucket destroying pure crystal code fills me with revulsion enough to want to suck out their molars and grind them into paste with which to cement their orifices closed. V-environmental sabotage involves creating an unfriendly environment for virtual programming. This can be done through simple acts like leaving a Pulsar hidden under a cafe table or park bench, or through complicated actions like sabotaging electric power lines to emit large, powerful gauss fields (transformer boxes are ideal for this, which is possibly where the group got their name: they transform transformers into weapons — how original).

EMP bombs are, apparently, the purview of the fringe of the group. EMP bombs have nasty side effects like wiping bank records and killing people with neuralware like, say, me. (Don't even think about it; I've taken precautions, you little pukes ...). Although the EMP bombs used by the Transformers have always been small, there has always been collateral damage, and it is for these incidents that the Transformers have been forced underground where they are harder for me to find them.

The worst aspect of the Transformers as far as the Revolution is concerned is that they view Wizards as evil incarnate when they are in fact the next stage of human development, thank you very much, you may kowtow to me later. The view held by many of the Transformers is that the ISA, which has been very supportive of Virtuality all along, created the Carbon Plague so that they could create Wizards. Yeah, right, and last week a flock of

fruit bats nested in my ear. These Wizards then blur the line between real and unreal, which in turn makes it easier for the ISA to use the unreal to control the populace. Wizards, then, are targeted for immediate termination, for while they don't believe every kid is a government employee or agent, they nonetheless view this blurring of the reality boundaries as very dangerous. It's curious that a fellow reactionary group could be so hostile to the member of the CyberRevolution.

How you contact them: Since the first EMP bombing and the subsequent ISA investigation, the Transformers have gone covert. It's very difficult at best to contact them; usually they'll contact you. The only way we know of to contact them is to spot one of them pulling some sort of vandalism, shadow them (carefully), and then make contact when the coast is clear. Contact is generally best achieved between a large spiked baseball bat and the base of their skull.

What they can do for you: They know a lot about Virtuality, what works to bring what down, and they can always be encouraged to provide your team with a virtuality terrorism distraction. They can also be a good source for anti-V hardware. They can also kill you Wizards if you're stupid, which is not necessarily a bad thing since if you're not going to take care of your head you don't deserve to own it.

Others

There are other groups, as well, although the newness of the technology means that many of these are still developing themselves and securing their position. The Citizen's Action for Virtuality Safety (CAVS) has been active since the beginning of the IFF trode debate, but it's unclear whether they're an ISA pawn or just a group of people out looking after their own interests. I don't think even they know yet. Netwatch still tries to function, but is slowly shriveling up. Nevada Notwatch has been dismantled, but its former 'runners still operate as a sort of Guardian Angels of the Net, cruising around and righting wrongs and generally doing the Robin Hood thing. The Eurostates have a covert Netrunning operation working built on the slag of Netwatch after the Second American Revolution fractured that organization.

Of course, every corporation has its own Net forces, both standard corporate anti-intrusion sysops, covert operatives, and sponsored field V-gangs of toadies. The sponsored V-gangs are the hardest to suss, because the Net is still a bit of a frontier, and many of the groups operating within the Net are small groups, V-Punk gangs, and loner netrunners still holding on. About half of the small groups out there are corporate-sponsored, which is technically illegal (because the groups are involved in data piracy), so they avoid spilling their sources. When a corporation finds out about another corporation's covert V-gang, they usually try to wipe it out. Covertly, of course. Don't you love the way those guys cooperate?

In summary, be very careful whom you code with.



BIG BYTES: VIRTUAL ACTIONS

▼ There are a lot of activities going on in the **Virtuality Front**. Most of them are very small, only significant enough to change the situation in a small part of a city. This is largely because **Virtuality** is new enough that no significant guerrilla forces have been organized to battle in this medium. However, there are certain groups of **yogangs** which have banded to gather to wage a proxy battle in **Virtuality**, and it is the activities of these groups that we highlight here. Some of these are activities you might want to organize in your own neck of the woods.

You know — neck of the woods. It's a figure of speech. It means on your square; in your turf. Oh, just look it up. ▼▼▼ **SPIDER**

T-SQUARING

St. Louis, MO

T-Squaring, the name taken from Tiananmen Square, is a sort of

instant replay demonstration. As you might imagine, the **ISA** propaganda mill has been in full swing with all the activity in the Midwest. We'll skip the details, but suffice it to say that in a recent series of events, our St. Louis cell network was shattered, and we lost well over half of our people to being killed or captured. A word to the wise, then: revenge is a good motivator, but be sure it doesn't shut your brain down before you act on it. If cooler heads had prevailed, it wouldn't have gotten so messy.

During that horrid week, however, local **yogangs**, alerted to the goings-on, worked overtime catching as much of the activity as they possibly could on holofilm or disc. Others kept careful tabs on the actions of the authorities, including all their pronouncements, press releases, and public statements. Then, once everything had wound down, these insightful youth began to compile and assemble their data into usable forms.

They did one piece on every major incident during that week, taking all the film and using sophisticated computer modeling to compile a continuous three-dimensional **virtuality** projection of the action. Over this backdrop, they spliced in film of **ISA**

spokesmen giving their sanitized version of the events, and then implanted their own editorial comments.

Once they had everything compiled, they parsed it out into V-cards as a virtual mosaic. The yogangers then placed the mosaic V-cards out in parks, plazas, and intersections, activated the V-cards simultaneously through Virtuality, and bango! Full-blown Virtuality multimedia presentation. The juxtaposition of the actual violent footage with the sanitized ISA description of events has proven to be a powerful image in the V-Front struggle. Obviously, it is the unexpurgated, wholly human footage which evokes the reaction, but it is the inclusion of the carefully crafted official response which channels that reaction against the real enemy.

"If it's the only memorial we can give her, then I want those complacent bastards to see her die. If I could make them feel the bullet enter their skulls, I would."

— EDDIE S., V-PUNK

The Bad Guys: Although the ISA is the exposed villain and the actual target of a T-Squaring protest, the actual foes that they face when putting it all together are as likely to be the police. Basically, when you're T-Squaring, the times when you have to be concerned most with your opponent are when the action is happening and when

you're placing the V-cards for the protest. When you're gathering footage, whatever authorities are around are your enemy. If you're scoping out a BuReloc camp, BuReloc is whom you must beware. If there's street action underway, it's the police, the DSA, and whatever corporate secret police are around. That's the most dangerous time, because the timing and the situation are under their control. When you disseminate the T-Squaring cards, you choose the time, you choose the place, and your only real danger arises if you get caught "littering" or if you were spotted by surveillance when gathering the info. Of course, once you pull a T-Square or two, the DSA is going to be all over your trail, as the kids in St. Louis have found out.

The Good Guys: T-Time is the name of the yoglomerate pursuing this action. Included in the group are Vidiots, Rads, V-Punks, and BoardPunks, as well as a few adult consultants and peripheral operatives. They are right now looking for a few good TinkerTots who can help them design V-cards that look like random articles of detritus: a dead leaf, a smashed pop can, etc. They hope that this will make it even more difficult for the authorities to catch them planting the V-cards that make up a T-Square display. If any of you know a TinkerTot who can pull this, contact them. They could probably also use some Facers to help distribute the V-cards with less chance of being noticed.

If you're looking to set up your own T-Squaring operation, you might want to check in with the local Networkers, because they can probably get you started with a good dollop of information and ISA footage.

PARANOIA PAINTING

Dallas - Fort Worth Metroplex, TX

After the fiasco at Fort Worth a few months ago, the local kids have taken steps to keep the authorities jumping and nervous. They use Virutality (and realspace) to make the authorities see enemies everywhere. The local V-Punks have designed Virtuality icons which repaint normal kids and adults to appear as though they're evolved when viewed through Virtuality. Obviously, since a Virtuality icon cannot of itself detect items in realspace, this involves "painting" the target person with a low-power ultraviolet laser, but an inconspicuous group of kids can paint people in a mall for hours with impunity. Additionally, the yogangers themselves carry small V-cards which project an image for themselves into V-space, which show them as Evolved, too. Granted, this attracts the attention of the authorities, but once the yogangers turn their V-cards off, the police usually don't check further, thereby letting Evolved kids slip through their fingers. "Oh, yeah, that's just Georgie. He always likes to V-dress himself as a Tinman. Don't worry about him, he's harmless."

For a while the police reacted immediately, and they roughed up quite a few innocent bystanders, causing quite some distrust between the locals and the authorities. The incidents have certainly galvanized the yogangs against the police and government forces. The police themselves are now less likely to react against those who appear to be evolved.

Additionally, it's standard police operating procedure to have one officer of a pair wearing V-trodes, and the other without, so they are now used to having one officer see an evolved kid and the other not. To throw another monkey wrench in the works, the local kids have begun to adjust their appearance in realspace while simultaneously projecting a V-icon of their normal self. For example, one might paint her arms and legs silver-black like a Tinman, while her V-icon looks like she did in her school picture. The police often don't notice that the one who sees an Evolved kid is the realspace cop while the V-space cop sees a normal kid. If they do snap to that fact and hassle the kid, she can just wipe off a little of the grease paint on her arms.

The upshot of this whole tactic is that the police and government authorities are seeing enemies everywhere, and most of them are not real. Even some adults have begun adopting silver-black arms in protest over the treatment they've received by authorities reacting to incorrect imaging. This causes the authorities to mistrust their own senses.

The Bad Guys: The police are the primary target of this psych ploy, because they are the tools of the ISA most commonly encountered on the street. However, corporate security or the DSA can be deliberately targeted by concentrating the efforts where they congregate in the city center.

The Good Guys: The P.I.s is the Fort Worth BeaverBrat gang which began using this tactic. The idea has been spreading slowly, usually among the BeaverBrats who always seem to be able to get away with anything. TinkerTots and V-Punks are occasionally employed, but the 'Brats are the mainstay of the effort.

LEECHING

Boston, MA

A group of Wizards, V-Punks and hackers in the Boston area have done some remarkable work in financing the local Eden Cabal operations. They have designed programs which can insert themselves into operating code in major corporate institutions which use the CrossChex accounting software program by NetLink. These intrusion programs look just like macros programmed by local operators, but in actuality they are a unique viral program.

They arrange to have themselves executed once a month, and cause the accounting program to cut a small transfer for a random amount to one of a variety of dummy organizations. The program then copies itself to look like another macro, erases its old copy, and waits another month. The result? Every month the local cell network gets a transfer from a corporation for \$317.29 or \$44.98 or something similar. Not a whole lot, but minor amounts like that rarely get investigated by the bookkeeping department, and once ten or more corporations in an area have such viruses in their systems, the programmers get several thousand dollars each month. Laundering the money is done through a similar system. In this way the locals bleed a small amount of money each month from the opposition. They're getting funded by the enemy!

The Bad Guys: The CEP and ISA are ultimately the enemy here, and if the piracy gets noticed, they are the ones who will pursue the investigation. If these kids ever get caught, the whole weight of CorpSec is going to fall like a sledgehammer on their heads. The odds may be heavily in the favor of the kids, but it's still a dangerous game — the ISA hates computer crime.

Further, although each corporation wants to better its position at the expense of the others, experience has shown that when it comes to computer fraud, a discovering corporation lets everyone else know, in spite of the bad press it might generate. After all, a corporation exists on information, and once that is threatened, the whole mess might just collapse.

The Good Guys: The Boston Basics, a V-Punk group which supports itself by custom programming, is the perpetrator. Contact them to give or receive advice on this type of action. If they ever get caught, they'll need a lot of help from you meatjuves out there in extraction work and railroading. Those who are willing to extend that hand should contact the Boston Basics before the hammer falls.

REALITY CHECK

Atlanta, GA

Realspace and virtual space do interact, and one TinkerTot group is taking action based on that fact. By using a variety of Pulsars, EM transmitters, and specially modified electronic fingers, they induce apparent malfunctions in virtual materials, forcing the owners to replace the "defective" parts. The result is that the owners throw out perfectly good virtual-interactive hardware, which both gives the yogangers new equipment for free and causes a slight drain on corporate resources. It also builds official distrust for the latest technology when (to their eyes) it keeps malfunctioning.

This action has taken several approaches. One involves a group of NeoPioneers and EcoRaiders, who use specially built "electronic spears." These are electronic fingers which have been modified to extend an EM field a good ten meters or more from the projecting unit (the TinkerTots aren't letting go of the specs). The NeoPios and Raiders take these and use them to probe the perimeter Sentry cards at a nearby BuReloc camp. When the guards swing by to check it out, the yogangers hide in the undergrowth until they finish their check. BuReloc has changed the cards over twenty times now, and the staff is becoming quite slow to respond to alarms from that sector. This lassitude itself will help if the yogangers decide to spring the camp; they can hit the perimeter at their "sore spot", knowing the guards will be slow to respond.

In another action, high-flying aero BoardPunks have been planting static wave generators near the top of executive skyscrapers. These jammers disrupt the Virtuality images broadcast inside the building. We're not sure what they're trying to accomplish by this action, but you can be sure it annoys the Machine. Similar attacks have been used on a highly touted Virtuality mall, where after the endless promises supplied by the authorities, the populace was presented with a half-rate virtual display where all the colors ran and the images were out of focus. Granted this was because of sabotage, but the authorities did not catch on quickly enough, as a result of which the public didn't buy the deliberate sabotage stories. Most still consider the mall — built at public expense — to be a fiscal fiasco.

The Bad Guys: BuReloc has been a favorite target for these raids, mainly because they are the most accessible government force which uses Virtuality. CorpSec is harder to target, and the IRS is still stuck back in the stone age.

The Good Guys: The TinkerTots behind this sabotage call themselves the Lancers. They could use more creative applications of the idea; if any of you wants the plans to their devices, or have new uses for them, give them a call.

"One more 'cry wolf' oughta do it. By the time we hit the fence alarm, those shell-heads will be sure it's just a system bug."

— LINDA J., SCOUT

WIZARD Q&A WITH UNCLE RACHE

▼ Alt says I have to let you little netrunning weefle zit-breakers pick my brain and learn your ABVs. I can't see it any other way, since my brain is frozen so hard anything less than a pick won't make a dent, and frankly, there's a lot of frost-encrusted knowledge in there without which the world is a far worse place. So go ahead. Annoy me with your stupid little questions that I may grace your life with my response. Then maybe someday one of you will be big and bad and smart and fast enough to actually take me on. Man, if I could mold one of you guys into someone who could and would take me down, that'd be heaven indeed. I'd probably be apotheosized on the spot. ▼▼▼ RACHE

▼ As a Wizard, can Internet find me to give my brain a bill?

▼ No, but not through lack of their trying to suck you dry like every other corp. No wait, I like Internet. Yeah, sure, that's right. Um, anyway, Internet charges people for Net access by leasing their lines. Some are able to bypass this by splices or taps, or by scamming the Internet Account Validator. But basically, the system sits there like an electric toad, and Internet just charges people admission to go in and lick it. You, however, with your self-portable nanocellphones, can just pop your self right in past the ticket booth and sklog away to your heart's content. The Net is there to be used, and you just have a convenient method of ignoring all convention and cutting to the head of the line and beyond. The only way they can keep you out of the Net is to shut it down where you are, and for a thousand meters around. No one's really willing to do that, though, because, unlike me, they don't realize that life goes on without the Net. In short (which most of you are), you have a credit card for Net access which no one will ever bill you for.



▼ Does that mean they can't trace a Wizard's netlink?

▼ Yes, they can't. And no, they can. Using normal call-tracing subroutines, Internet and other hackneyed corporation sysops can only trace your netlink to whatever Net device you Wizards are patched in to. See, you guys are little gangly grease-haired fuppsy broadcast stations, but to hook into the Net, you have to have something to hook into through around. Oh, I do love ending sentences with prepositions. And ending propositions with sentences, as in: You want to have sex with me? Die! Die! Die!

Now what you little spurting growers do when you patch into the Net is to open a cell link to a nearby Net processor, LDL, or interface connection. You do this instinctively, so you probably aren't aware that this is what happens. When you walk down the street, you automatically go from nearby linkage to nearby linkage, grabbing one then the next, baton-style, or like those wattayacallum jungle-gyms that I never did play on because I had better things to do than pretend I'm a monkey.

You have a range at which you can remain patched into the Net, how far they can transmit and still be able to understand the response. Beyond this range, your signal is too weak, and the link too garbled. If you were in, say, Death Valley, you might only be able to dial into the

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Net by patching through some ISA guy's cellphone connection, and if he hangs up, you're screwed. Likewise, if there are no dataterms or other public access vectors within 1000 meters of you, you're out of luck.

So when a Net program tries to trace your signal, once it gets back to the particular piece of Net architecture you're limpeting on, it can find no legitimate signal to trace farther back from that. It gets to your front door, and then stops because it can't see your house, if you know what I mean. In response to which AIM Overwatch and the like are working on other ways of hunting you little monsters down, now that they realize they can't get El Primo Monstero Numero Uno Mio. But I've talked about that elsewhere, and I hate repeating myself, because I talked about that elsewhere. Why doesn't anyone call me Uncle Rache, anyway? Are you afraid of me?

A few of you carbon-heads have sussed a way of further minimizing the risks here: frequency jumping. Your

little nano-transmitters have the ability to shift broadcast frequencies within a limited spectrum. Which means that, as long as your receiver can track your shifts (and it seems to me that your kevlar-coated systems just *love* to talk to one another), then you can train your CNMs to shift frequencies periodically to keep the Netspiders guessing as to where you are and what spectrum you've jumped to. This makes it a LOT harder to track you in the Net, but it also means that you actually have to focus your teeny, tiny, little nano-minds on what you are doing in order to coordinate it. Which I think is about as likely as teaching a rhino to thread a needle with his nose horn. If there were any rhinos left, that is.

▼ Okay, Uncle Rache: How can I steal a car?

▼ Get a frackin' life, you guys! You've got a brain the likes of which half the world would kill for, and you run around trying to rip off a ride to the mall? How important is a car when you: a) don't have a driver's license, b) couldn't see over the dash even if you had one, and c) can zip around the Net in your nanobrainmobile far faster than any vehicle in realspace? At least reprogramming a wristwatch shows some semblance of social sharking which can eventually be nurtured into full-bloom psychopathology. Using your Wizard brain to steal cars is like using a bazooka to dig up potatoes, but it makes a lot less noise and it's less likely to kill bystanders, both of which are serious detriments if you ask me. I never used a bazooka for farming, but I did put one through an elephant once. No, not the animal; they've been extinct for years. I'm not that old. I mean the heavy armored personnel carrier that Arasaka tried to sell to the U.S. Army. The design of the Elephant showed it had a major weak point in its armor. I should know; I put it there when I cracked their design board's datafort. So when Arasaka was showing it off to a U.S. evaluation team, KAPOW! Nobody ever appreciates genius, though. I figured everyone'd be happy that I showed them the Elephant wasn't all it was cracked up to be, but no, I had to run like a bugger and call for some pals to bail my butt out. Always make sure you're not between a high-security fence and your enemies.

But okay, fine. If you hyper-evolved Bartmoss wannabes think you have nothing better to do than steal cars and reset wristwatches and turn out the lights without getting out of bed and other such trivialities (I use captured sysop brainwave algorithms to do my menial work), I'll tell you about what you can and can't do. I suppose that maybe if I indulge your desire to feast upon the treasures of my experience you might get some glimmer

HYPERTEXT

A Wizard can get his transmitter to jump frequencies on a Difficult *Arcane* check. This involves not just shifting his frequency, but also making sure that the receiver that he is transmitting to can find his signal again and continue the link. This check must be done every time the Wizard wants to jump, and the more often, the better. ISA trackers can triangulate on a Wizard's signal within ten minutes if they are operating a monitoring van in within a four kilometer radius, but if you jump, it takes a Difficult *Electronics* roll and another five minutes to relocate your signal. Thus signal jumping may be the only way to handle prolonged Net interactions.

Another note: While Wizards are continuously receiving from the Net, they do not continually *broadcast*. They only broadcast when trying to interact with something in the Net, or are moving their perceptions around in it, thus utilizing radio and optical links. Unfortunately, the Wizard may occasionally broadcast even if he isn't aware of it, since many of his interactive Net abilities are almost instinctive and unconscious. An Average *Arcane* roll every half hour is needed to keep "radio silence" if this is desired. No active Net actions may be undertaken while under such a discipline.

And yes, a Wizard can create his own personal icon(s) while Netrunning (although he had better drop it when in realspace or it might be obvious to 'trodeusers). Using these icons to conceal your meatworld identity while c-spacing is a GOOD idea. 

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of my greatness and move beyond petty vandalism and into the big-time paradigm warfare in which I indulge daily, and twice before breakfast.

Obviously, if a device is Net capable, if it's hooked in to the global communications network, you can just up and grab it via the Net using your familiars and your raw talent. You can do this with anything as long as you can get into the Net, but if the device itself is within 1000 meters or so of your cranium, you can even access it directly.

But that's stuff you already knew. What you guys seem to want to do is grab stuff that's not in the Net, stuff like genius bullets and pocket calculators and electric toothbrushes and soda machines. Yes, you can do it, and no, it's not necessarily a piece of kibble.

The big problem with trying to communicate with devices which are not in the Net is that they are not in the Net. You can't do it. Similarly, you can't call someone on the phone, even if you know their address, if they don't have a phone. To talk to the phoneless dwimp, you have to visit him personally. The same goes for accessing non-Net devices.

If you can get close enough to an electronic device, you can control it. I don't mean standing nearby, I mean in-your-face closeness. Grab that sucker. In your hot little fists. Once you have your hands (or forehead or instep, for that matter) that close, you can reprogram it via inductance, and then get it to do what you want. The actual reprogramming is no more difficult than reprogramming anything else, but there are several pitfalls that can delay or stop you.

First of all, the machine's processor must be close enough to be reached by your inductance. You can grab onto a wristwatch and reprogram it to run backwards or something with no problem. However, the CPU of a soda machine might be recessed in the center of its box, far enough away from your fingertips that you can't affect it. Even though you can get close enough to wires and sensors attached to the soda machine's CPU, you can't reprogram it, because the CPU won't allow itself to be reprogrammed by those input devices; you have to induce voltage within the CPU itself. Having to touch that which you are reprogramming makes it kinda tough to reprogram a genius bullet (remember the bullet has the tracking computer) that's homing in on your rectum.

Of course, certain low-security objects have a port with which you can access the CPU. Carbonated carcinogen-sweetened rotgut vending machines have a data I/O which allows the service jocks to download all the electronic purchases made over the last week, reset the pric-

ing, etc. If you can stick your pinky into one of these ports, you have access to the CPU since it's designed to be reprogrammed by a field op with a portable computer and a cable jack.

Second, noun, the sixtieth part of a minute of time, equal to the time required for 9,192,631,770 cycles of cesium microwave radiation.

Third and fourth, recent-model vehicles and other expensive gadgets (like the aforementioned genius guns and bullets) are now being built with insulation against just such an electronic attack as yours. Armor, if you will, against your brain. This has been compounded with contact-sensitive alarms which sound as soon as anyone touches them. These two together are more than enough to keep your nasty little minds out of other people's business. Unfortunately.

Fifth, even if you can grab onto the device, the machine must have a chip processor, and not just a set of switches. Basically, anything less than a stupid machine isn't there enough for you to reprogram.

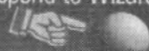
So what's a "stupid machine?" Here's how I see it.

- **Stupid:** Skinwatch, microwave, bar-code scanner, minimal personal computer
- **Simple:** MRAM chip adapter, autochef, home environmental controller
- **Smart:** Cyberliver, cybereye, mining robot, corporate energy management system
- **Expert:** Cyberarm, nuclear sub controller system, small "Als", state-of-the-art computers or vehicles
- **Sentient:** Corporate AI, rogue AI, the occasional Netrunner
- **Transcendently sentient:** Transcendental sentience AI, me

HYPERTEXT

Armor for electronics acts as a DF for hardwired systems, which must be defeated by an anti-system familiar or program. Most military systems will have a DF of between 4-8, with civilian systems rated lower. Some really sensitive but powerful systems will even have anti-intrusion software, giving them an anti-personnel AF of 3-6. So watch out the next time you try to virtually hijack that attack helicopter; you may find something biting back.

Some Wizards may want to reprogram their own CNMs; they're in contact with them, right? The answer is NO. The CNMs do not respond to Wizard counterparting.



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▼ Uncle Rache: Do I have to worry about EMP?

Yes.

▼ Go on ...

Oh. Um, EMP can addle your brain just as it does with things like computers, which, basically, you are, even though you still smell like meat and make rude noises and such. It'd sure be nice if those CNMs could teach you some logic. Aside from EMP, there are also jamming signals, either deliberately caused by things like the Pulsar or else inherent in certain areas like power stations and the like. These won't addle your brain, but they will screw up your perception by rearranging the data that you perceive. But, as with other subjects on which I won't repeat myself, I've covered that elsewhere (see pg.12).

Except to remind you of one thing: You Wizards and Scanners have had your nervous systems largely invaded and supplanted by nano-electronics, which makes you even more vulnerable to EMP attacks. As far as I can tell, and that's pretty far thank you, when you get bonked by one of these pulses, your system threatens to overload, which makes your friendly little CNMs throw some kind of internal circuit-breaker, knocking you out, but keeping your grey matter from turning into steam and escaping through the top of your skull. Considerate, no? So the next time you're whining about how easy it was for the DSA goons to blackjack you with that M-40 Pulse Rifle, remember that the alternative was having your brain pan suddenly get a sun roof.

HYPERTEXT

EMP guns and pulse fields are especially effective against Scanners and Wizards. This means that when hit by an EMP gun or a heavy pulse (STR 8 or higher), they must make a Stun/Shock roll at -4 to their BODY. If they fail, they pass out.

▼ Uncle Rache—not that I don't like being around you or anything—but is there any way I can disconnect myself from the Net?

▼ Why the frack would you ever want to? But no, short of starving your CNMs into submission or going where no phone has gone before, you can't. However, you can, to use an aboriginal term, go walkabout. It's sort of a digital astral projection. Most people can only move through Virtuality by moving through the real world. Netrunners can move around Virtuality via modems. But

you snots can move your perceptions through Virtuality space freely, without restrictions. What this means is that you can concentrate on where you're sending your attachment to the Net, flip yourself from one end of your 1000 meter range to the other. It might not get the ICE off your back, but at least flipping around town will buy you some time until you can summon the support to take it out. Which support is about the only gratifying thing about my job; I love blitzing ICE and sysops, even if it's only to save a sawed-off half-human walking fungus like you lot.

By the way, you might want to consider eating only one or two meals a day so that your cybermodem shuts down right as you go to sleep. Eat a big breakfast and your CNMs will be back in action in no time.

HYPERTEXT

In game terms, have the Wizard make an Arcane skill total and compare it to the program's Attack total. If the Wizard scores greater than or equal to the program, the program loses track of the Wizard. The Wizard can take no other actions while pulling this trick, although familiars continue to operate normally.

▼ Rache! Tell me how I can control remotes and stuff.

▼ My, but we're feeling imperious today, aren't we? I like that. I might have to take you under my wing and show how to really fly, you know what I mean? Ha ha ha ha ha! Teach you the real meaning of netrunning, headbanging, and Christmas! Oh, yes, Virginia, there is an insanity clause, and we all float down here!

But remotes. Remotes are cool, because they're a neat application of technology. I like the idea of controlling big hairy mechanical spiders to lurk in people's toilets and refrigerators. But first I should talk about the sort of remotes you'd be interested in, which excludes most of the remotes in use today like the floor scrubbing remote and the deep crust mining remote and the soft drink vendor remote you see in V-theaters. Bleah. They're no fun. Unless you can reprogram them to dispense their drinks more ... directly than usual.

Remotes are simply robots that are not self-controlled, but remotely controlled by an AI using the Net. This allows extraordinary artificial intelligence to be crammed into a receptacle far too small to ordinarily accommodate

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it. Sort of like how the media makes the politicians appear that they actually have character and intelligence and foresight and your best interests at heart. Yeah, right.

There are assassin remotes, which hunt down specific targets in specific places. There are bounty hunter remotes operated by corporations like Arasaka and Militech who have always liked killing people for money. These remotes are equipped with images and data files on various wanted felons, and patrol the streets scanning everyone they see. I don't recommend you actually try to take one of these out, since they have a powerful self-destruct charge inside, expressly for the purpose of eliminating someone who wants to eliminate a bounty hunter. Fortunately, bounty hunter remotes are rare as yet, although given the increasing power of the CyberRevolution, I reckon the bounties offered on such people as Spider and Morgan and me will warrant the production of more. Plus they can clean up on you lot for a dime a dozen, I figure. I can see it now, this little bounty hunter remote spinning along almost vertical dragging behind it a Reactimesh bag full of squawling kids like kittens to the river, when along comes the sanitation department steamroller to eliminate the disturbance to the peace. Mmm. Sloppy.

Oh, yeah, get all huffy why don't you. It's survival of the fittest out there, and if you can't hack it you don't deserve to live.

A new style of remote is a V-hunter, which prowls about looking for virtual items to eliminate with its quad codeguns. It's rumored that these remotes can even operate programs of their own; the remotes have remotes. There are also remotes which serve as forward observers, the first and most memorable of which is Constitution Arms' Hummingbird. While the Hummingbird tracks suspects just like most other remotes, what makes it so memorable is that it can guide genius missiles shot from up to three miles away all the way in to the target's dental work, blowing his head clean off as he eats a burger, much to the appreciation of the dining public and the amusement of small children and big dogs. A Hummingbird kill is sure to raise a round of applause. No one wants to be the next target. With a Hummingbird on your tail, the police don't even have to leave their desks to hunt you, they can just pop off a shot out their window and go back to "interrogating" the prostitutes.

All these remotes are the premier weapons of the ISA, aside from their total control of the media. Fortunately, you Wizards can control them through netrunning in Virtuality. Just like any other small system, remotes have a Net architecture, and you can run against them just like any Netrunner running against any datafort except that you

have a great little nanotech brain and no common sense, and your target datafort is likely to be very small and moving around and trying to blow you up. And there's no sysops. And there's probably only one black ice program inside, but it's likely to be deadly. And you don't have the experience us old edgerunners do. And you have to do it without being noticed as being weird by your friends and teachers — no weirder than normal, that is. Aside from that, it's exactly like Dog and me running against Merrill, Asukaga & Finch. Except that you might possibly lose, and we never do. Because we're the best and you're still worried if you're using the right pick-up lines to get that date, flesh junkie. If you're going to pick up a date, use a meathook.

Once you crack the remote's data walls or code gate (or once you slip through its comlink with the controlling AI), you can reprogram it as you see fit. Make it do the old soft shoe. Make it think its spinner unit is a new shaver. Make it snarfle in a public swimming pool and turn it into a jacuzzi, or, if you land it on a swimmer, a soup pot.

In an attempt to prevent Netrunners and Wizards from commandeering their remotes, the corporations have (selfishly) begun adding hardware gates to their remote links. The remote opens a link to its AI, receives some instructions, and then a hardware switch shuts off communication. To all intents and purposes, the remote drops out of the Net. When it feels it needs more information, it reactivates the hardware switch, downloads some more information, and shuts off again. Some hard gates are controlled by the remote (which means a viral program could get inside and keep the gate open); other gates open and close at random using a purely mechanical switch. That way no one knows when the gate will be open, and any Wizard that gets inside might find his trace suddenly ejected. After all, a completely mechanical gate can't be touched through Virtuality.

Regardless of the precautions the Machine might take with hard gates, you can still reprogram a remote by laying your hands on it (generally considered a Bad Idea if it's a bounty hunter remote), or you could always get your friendly neighborhood TinkerTot to kitbash the gate open.

HYPertext

A Hummingbird remote has 15 SDP, 20SP, and an MV of 25 (50 kph). It carries a painting laser for guiding in remote missiles (which are laser guided, not radio-linked) and a Med SMG for defense. A V-hunter would exchange a heavy code gun for the laser. Effective range is 10 kilometers from the control center, although this can be extended by relays.

▼ **Why don't we have to worry about broadcast interference?**

▼ Woah! An intelligent question! Get off this BBS, you don't belong here. Go away. Oh, fine, I'll tell you. Ordinarily, with two radios in or near the same place broadcasting on the same frequency, you'd get interference between the signals, or if one were more powerful, it would crush the other like a steamroller squirting a slug's innards out its eyes. But these days the broadcast technology is significantly improved over the old tech, and broadcast bandwidths are very narrow. Signal discrimination has been getting better and better ever since radio was invented, in fact. It used to be that you'd tune into 107.7 or some such; these days it's 107.75 with radio stations every hundredth of a kHz. And that's with federal regulations; pirate radio stations still manage to squeeze in between. Additionally, and as I mentioned before, your nanomodems don't broadcast on just one wavelength; they can adjust their frequency to compensate for local interference. You might even be broadcasting on two frequencies simultaneously with error checking while your nanomodem looks for a clear range.

▼ **Mr. Bartmoss, would you give us some pointers on familiars?**

▼ Remember, familiars are like your friends; you keep them with a specific purpose in mind. You can't use a friend in every situation, which is why you should ideally garner friends to cover all the major situations you are likely to need cannon fodder in. Thus, your familiars will serve you better if you construct them with a specific purpose in mind: utility, anti-personnel, decryption, whatever. An all-purpose familiar will do everything poorly.

Want a messenger? Keep the program structure minimal, skip attack and intelligence functions, and dump everything into movement. Don't split your combat functionality too fine, either. A single familiar shouldn't have more than two or three special functions, because parsing your functionality too fine causes a degradation in efficacy — all those if/then statements end up causing your beast to waffle. Familiars you send out on their own should have only one function in mind, because so much of their programming will be taken up in movement and/or independent action programming. And for goodness' sake, make those independent operatives intelligent! You don't want to send a goober out to do your dirty work, the ISA will buffalo it, and let me tell you a dumb ally is far more dangerous than an intelligent opponent!



Familiars are more than just programs, though; they are a part of your brain which you have set up for multi-tasking or even independent activity. This means that you can experience, in some small and insignificant measure, a taste of the greatness of my schizophrenia! You are so lucky! Here's the levels of familiar intelligence as I, in my grandiose leisure, see them:

- 0 Mindless, executes its programming without question, and completely disregards any consequences of so doing. Will walk into a deathtrap like a lemming off a cliff, or return to your location no matter how many sysops are following it.
- 1 Basic intelligence functionality, similar to a small bird or hamster. Can recognize obvious threats and obvious gifts. It can be entrapped easily, but is too dumb to fall for clever tricks.
- 2 Dog-level intelligence, loyal and able to make simple decisions on its own. Can make independent decisions based on simple if/then statements.
- 3 - 4 Childlike intelligence. It would have a short attention span if it were plagued with hormones. Has a problem remembering difficult concepts. Think of the cheerleaders and jocks in high school.

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5-7 Basic functionality of human intelligence. Anything below this is not enough to be recognized as a peer, and isn't even really intelligent, it just fakes it well. At this level you can begin to have a basic level of human interaction, assuming you're desperate enough to sink to that level. I know I'm not. Can operate effectively with a minimum of instructions, because it can take independent actions in your best interests. No really. Hey, it's a part of your brain; your best interests are in its best interests.

8-9 Probably more intelligent than you are.

10 Minimum level of intelligence necessary to even pretend you can understand the smallest aspect of my philosophy.

▼ **Uncle Rache, where did the CNMs come from?**

▼ I've already answered that question, but you micro-minded little plebes scoff at the audacity of the truth. Obviously your meager minds are not capable of accepting reality and must spit in the face of cold, hard facts. I refuse to give you the opportunity to do so again. I have better things to do, like redefining all the icons in the Millitech database to look like Ms. Lucessi in compromising situations with a doberman pincer. Any other questions so I can trace your line and do a little interrogation of my own?

▼ **Um, no, that's okay. We'll just go now ...**

HYPERTEXT

SELECTIONS FROM THE WIZARD'S TOME

Even the most clever Wizards start out with only nine points (INT 8, Arcane 1) to generate their little friends and can only run 1/2 their INT at any one time. However, they can store as many different designs as they like (since they come out of the Wizard's imagination), so learning a bunch of new designs is never a bad idea. Two things you may want to sacrifice while building early familiars are the MF and AI values. If you use a familiar yourself, like holding it in your virtual hands, it doesn't need an MF. But this does have one limitation: You can only have three familiars without MF active at one time. One can be worn on the icon while the other two can be held in each virtual hand (no, it doesn't matter how many hands your icon has, it can still only have three active at once). A dropped familiar derezzes immediately. Here are some basic familiars made with 10 points that can help you survive in the Net long enough to get serious.

FAMILIAR #1: "SPEEDY"

AF 0, DF 2, IN 1, MF 6, AI 1

This nimble little fellow is used to "disturb the hornet's nest" as a distraction to his Wizard's actions. He runs by or through a datafortress, tripping alarms and taunting defensive programs, then runs away at 6 spaces per turn. This can keep him out of reach from all other programs, which are limited to 5 spaces. When a Speedy takes any hits, derezz him immediately, but don't hesitate to use more than one at a time to add to the confusion.

FAMILIAR #2: "DRILL"

AF 6, SF1: Break Datawalls 6, DF 2, IN 1, MF 0, AI 1

This large but powerful tool makes doors in dataforts where there previously were none. Although noisier than entering through the front door with a Codegate Decryptor, it can also be faster. Remember: if it takes a hit, derezz it.

FAMILIAR #3: "NETRASHER"

AF 5, SF1: Armor 5, DF 4, IN 1, MF 0, AI 0

You wear your Netrasher like armor when pulling your ops in Netspace. The Armor function, rather than being used to attack, allows the Wizard to protect himself against an attacking anti-personnel program. It is used as the Shield programs in CP2020 *except that it loses one point of AF (and thus Armor) after each attack, win or lose*. If it loses, it *also* loses one point of DF. Once derezzed (whether by choice or not) it takes *two* rounds before the Armor function can recompile and reboot. Worn like a coat, suit of armor, or whatever the Wizard wishes, Netrasher can be powerful but only protects the Wizard himself, not any other familiar he may be handling or escorting.

FAMILIAR #4: "MONOSWORD"

AF 6, SF1: Derezz Programs 3, SF1: Anti-Personnel 3, DF 2, IN 2, MF 0, AI 0

For those up close and personal confrontations, the Monosword can cause trouble against any foe. Turn it one way and it handles ICE, turn it the other and it swipes at Netrunners. And if your personal MA is higher than five, you can coordinate your attacks to strike and retreat before your opponent can respond.

V-TECH

▼ This should give you some further insight into the new and exciting world of Virtual Technology. Rah. But seriously, you should know this stuff, because it's a big, mean, nasty World of Illusion out there. ▼▼▼ SPIDER

V-trodes

Yes, we've talked about V-trodes before, but we have some more to tell you about them. First of all, the advent of Virtuality scared a lot of people who were already suffering from tech-noshock to one degree or another. At first, the fact that Virtuality illusions were not quite as good as the real thing helped, but once Virtuality reached an accuracy which defied human perception, the market was immediately made for Argus' IFF V-trodes. The "Identify: Fact or Fantasy" V-trodes displayed everything that normal V-trodes do, but they included an extra processing routine to make the virtual items stand apart from the real.

Since Argus' initial release, IFF trodes were released by several other companies, and a variety of IFF strategies were tried. Some outlined the false images cartoon-style with thick black borders. Others used a raster-defeating subroutine which caused thin transparent horizontal lines to appear across a virtual image; the V-trodes simply didn't display certain bands of the false image. Others tried flashing virtual images off at intervals, using a simple capacitor timing circuit. Another was working on 'trodes with a mentally activated ON/OFF switch so the user could flick into and out of Virtuality in a blink. One manufacturer even tried having "VIRTUAL" labels applied to every virtual item.

Each of these methods had its own advantages and disadvantages, and every method was also defeated one way or another. Some V-programmers, insistent that Virtuality be integrated into real life, created false virtual images of themselves so that they'd look artificial to people with IFF trodes. The Halo virtual construct is perhaps the most famous of these, causing the user to be surrounded by a thick cartoon-style line (your choice of colors) when viewed from Virtuality. For a brief while on the east coast, bright glowing Halo nimbuses were all the rage in the dance clubs.

Unfortunately, as Virtuality began to become more accepted, the ISA stepped in and banned IFF trodes. They generated a few false stories to bolster their action: stories of people driving V-controlled cars and losing control when their IFF timer trode cut out for just a second at exactly the wrong time, stories of people who assaulted a virtual image only to find there was a real person wearing the virtual image like a costume. These

drummed-up stories, which admittedly have some basis in fact, were used by the ISA as part of their public safety campaign to have IFF trodes banned. The rationale was that whether it's real or not, Virtuality is becoming a part of our lives, and to ignore it deliberately is to endanger the public at large.

Argus had announced the pending release of the so-called X-trodes that would allow the wearer to see invisible static grids of the sort now commonly employed in security systems (see the description of Sentry cards on page 33 of *Bastille Day*). The passage of the IFF law also precluded the release of these. There are supposedly a few prototypes at large, but as yet no one has begun manufacturing them, not even illegally.

Another interesting development in the V-trode arena is the advent of Blindsight technology. Blindsight is a technology developed by MIT through funding by a variety of cyberoptic manufacturers. Blindsight V-trodes bypass the optic nerve and broadcast straight into the brain, allowing even those with congenital birth defects to attain sight, albeit only in Virtuality. When used by sighted people, Blindsight trodes allow them (in fact, force them) to see virtual constructs even with their eyes closed. As a result, many people have begun wearing Blindsight V-trodes ever since the banning of IFF trodes. Of course, there is a bill in congress now to restrict selling Blindsight V-trodes only to those citizens who are registered as blind. The ISA claims that by allowing the Blindsight trodes to be sold to the general populace, we are restricting the availability of those trodes to people who truly need them, hence we are discriminating against the blind. This is another typical example of using a generated crisis to justify greater governmental interference in our daily lives.

Of course, there is a drawback to Blindsight V-trodes, which is that to use them to check if something is virtual, you have to close your eyes. And if it's real, that'll give whatever you're afraid of the chance to take a cheap shot.

V-lights and Nightlights

Virtual illumination devices like the V-torch and V-flash use static grids to detect and recompose the outside world in V-space.

The V-torch projects a globular keyboard, if you will, which extends out in a five-meter diameter. Solid objects interfere with the V-torch's static field, in essence "pressing" one or more of the spherical keyboard's virtual keys. The V-torch then detects how far each of its multiple keys has been pressed, and uses this data to reconstruct an image of what sort of solid devices might have caused such a distortion. Then it displays this image in Virtuality where the user (wearing trodes, of course) can see it. The user can see walls and chairs and the

like in Virtuality, but without creating any light in realspace. V-flashes work in a similar fashion. They cover less area, illuminating a cone much like a flashlight, but they have better resolution than do V-torches (i.e., the virtual keys are smaller, so they can detect the surroundings in greater detail).

V-torches are far from perfect. Since they operate in Virtuality, they can only detect the presence of physical objects; they cannot detect any qualities of that object. This means they can only illuminate in black and white; colors are completely lost in the translation. Similarly, most textures are lost in the translation, as the resolution of the "keys" of a V-torch are far too rough to detect them. A V-torch doesn't know the difference between a concrete floor and a pile of carpet, although your feet will. Finally, there can be errors in reconstructing data, especially with items like screen doors and trellises, which, although far from solid, often appear to be sheer walls.

V-torches do not use real light in any fashion, so the radius of illumination is the absolute extent that a V-torch can display — an event horizon, if you will. Everything within range is displayed clearly and evenly, everything farther away is completely black (or at least as black as the surroundings actually are). And, because V-torches display their surroundings in virtual light, any nearby witnesses wearing V-trodes can tell that you are using a V-torch and can see by and large everything you see.

However, V-torches and V-flashes do not necessarily have to broadcast their findings for all to see. The Nightlight adapter avoids this. It is a pair of wires with a plug at one end, and at the other is a set of standard V-trodes. When the Nightlight is plugged into a V-torch or V-flash, the torch no longer broadcasts the images it detects over Virtuality, but instead sends the data over the wires to the trodes. The trodes in turn broadcast the data to the wearer as per normal. This way, the wearer is the only person who can see the virtual illumination of his V-torch.

Nightlight adapters come in a variety of styles. The standard style has one set of trodes, and doubles as normal V-trodes. The other type (known as "Whitelight" adapters) broadcast only the Virtuality data sent from the torch; they completely ignore the standard Virtuality data. This allows people to rove around in the dark in areas where Virtuality is omnipresent and bright and distracting. Places like, say, Las Vegas. Finally, Teletronics has released multi-prong plugs for the Nightlight and Whitelight adapters, this lets a group of people all be private viewers of the illumination from one V-torch. The only drawback to that system is that if the wearers mill about a bit, their wires get all tangled.

Electronic Finger

Sensor grids, a.k.a. static fields, detect disruptions of their EM fields and translate those disruptions into actions. Virtual keyboards, for example, detect the presence of one of your fingers

disrupting a field, and translate that into a key press of the appropriate letter. The disruption does not need to be that of a physical object, however.

Electronic fingers generate small, tight EM fields which are designed to disrupt a sensor grid just as if they were physical objects. The most obvious use of electronic fingers is to avoid the danger of high-security checkpoints; rumors have it that certain ISA and corporate facilities use virtual keypads to seal certain areas. If you enter the wrong number, a monomolecular blade arcs out and slices your finger (or hand) off. This is but one example of the nasty sorts of things people can employ as countermeasures.

Electronic fingers are also seeing use in corporate security against the intrusion of agents armed with V-torches. With a judicious array of electronic fingers, false walls can be created which will fool any virtual illumination device.

V in Your Living Room

Home virtuality projectors are currently all the rage (rather like big screen TVs back in the 90's); everyone wants to be able to plug in the latest V-sim and have their communal space turned into a theater. The idea is the same as for the V-cards, with a simple AI system dedicated to handling whatever V-scenario is plugged in on the data card. The cards themselves consist of incredibly dense data files containing the settings and characters of the specific drama, and the projector handles all the interactivity through its built-in static fields (large enough to cover a 5m x 5m x 3m area) and CPUs (INT 6) to provide a truly virtualistic experience. They are somewhat expensive (the FullImpact model is typical at \$1500), but, as a corpzone status symbol, they've been flying off the shelves. Walking in on a V-party without your trodes can be truly amusing, as people wander about, talking to the air, waving invisible drinks and objects, and generally acting in ways that would have gotten them committed to an institution thirty years ago. But naturally its considered extremely impolite to enter untroded to such a gathering, and hosts are careful to have extra trodes ready for any who left theirs at home. Soon it may be impossible, or at least très gauche, to ever experience naked reality.

Net in a Box

One simple, almost invisible bit of Net-tech is a small (15cm x 15cm x 10cm) box that attaches to most modern TV sets, routes to the phone link, and allows limited Net access right from your tube. Basically an extension of the interactive TV technology, this unit can be programmed right from the special mini-remote keyboard and lets you surf the Internet, as well as utilize online subscription services such as ISA On Line. Thus, with this simple unit (hey, everyone knows how to use a TV), every couch potato in the country can use online encyclopedias and news, get e-mail, and bitch about the poor quality of domestic beers to anyone else on the net with the stomach to listen. Of course, every one has a clipper-style chip built in, and Uncle ISA knows every transaction

you make through this baby. This device is fairly limited in its interactivity, though: only simple net usage, no datafort cracking or in-depth interfacing off of these babies. But then, most of America doesn't really give a hang about that anyway. They just want to be able to get the latest combat football scores. A Netbox™ costs on the average about \$100, but subscription services must be bought in addition for \$5 to \$20 per month.

Software

The software market is leaner and meaner than it was when your parents were running the Net. There are fewer offensive programs out there, but they are more deadly. Whereas the older programs sacrificed subtlety for power, the new programs are designed to be as sleek as hypodermics, as fast as a Wasp Interceptor, and as silent as the grave. They are also now illegal as sin, with possession of most offensive software (anti-system and anti-program as well as anti-personnel) without a Class 1 or 2 license being a felony; execution to be carried out on-site. That way the ISA can exclusively use these nifty little programs to assassinate coderunners, hackers and Netrunners without disrupting the day-to-day V-jaunts of the average American.

An important shift has been the addition of Virtuality capabilities to many systems. Creator, the operating system that made VR omnipresent in the Net, has a new version: V-Creator. This naturally allows programmers with V-systems to have their program constructs project into Virtuality as well as the standard Net. They are similar to the standard VR constructs (*CP2020*, pg. 170), except that, since they include V-programming elements such as tactile and static field response, they are much larger in storage size (add 2 to the Realism Multiplier for the construct, see *CP2020*, pg. 172). This is heavily offset by the advances in tech which have given most systems far more memory than the previous generation. Thus, while it's still more expensive memory-wise to generate V-constructs, it's getting easier every day.

ARCHANGEL

Cost: 2000

Class: Demon

STR: 6

MU: 4

SPD: +1

This is a development of the old Demon series. It does not crash as the Demons did, and modular capabilities programs are inserted into the code framework to increase its effectiveness. These capabilities are termed Interactive Link Subroutines, and each ILS gives the Archangel a special ability which it can use at its full strength. Standard ILSs include Anti-IC, Detection/Alarm, Intrusion, and all the other standard capabilities. The Archangel can hold up to four ILSs, although it can only run one at a time. Other programs in the series can hold fewer ILSs, but there are one or two which can hold more.

ICON: An all-blue human with blue wings and throbbing black eyes. The ILSs are represented by large gold talismans hanging from chains around its neck. A similar version is used by the ISCTF. They refer to it as MASS-4, the acronym taken from Modular Assault Software System, and it looks like a futuristic assault rifle with four clips.

HOWITZER

Cost: unavailable (50,000 or more on black market)

Class: Anti-personnel, Anti-IC, Anti-System

STR: 10 (Does 7D6 in anti-personnel damage. Ouch!) MU: 12

A hideously powerful program, this lambasts a central Net square and its surrounding six squares with a massive power surge designed to eliminate Netrunners, programs, and attached hardware alike. The ISCTF fires this program from central computers at the behest of field operatives. When fired, the program takes 1D6 turns to arrive, at which point it will attack the target designated by the ISCTF 'runner who called it in. Spider says: Don't mess with it.

ICON: A superheated droplet of metal which screams with a sound akin to a mortar shell or a diving Stuka as it comes in.

PATCHWERK

Cost: 200

Class: Utility

STR: 5

MU: 1+ double the size of the dam-aged program

Reconstructs files from multiple but damaged copies. Can be used for programs, digitized photos, music, even virtuality experiences (if your computer has enough memory).

ICON: A needle and thread that weaves through the damaged files, creating a new whole.

CROW

Cost: 300

Class: Utility

STR: 3

MU: 4

This program records details of your Net run into a buffer in the Net itself. If it detects an attack on your cyberdeck (or yourself through your cyberdeck), it launches a copy of itself into the Net, along with a list of friends or contacts you want it to search for. When it finds one of the people on your list, it downloads any information it has about your netrun. ISCTF programmers (and many others) use this to extract revenge from beyond the grave by sending images of enemy 'runners to friends and the authorities.

ICON: A superrealistic crow carrying a gold ring in its beak.

OLD SOFTWARE

For characters who have some old software lying around waiting to be used, the following conversions are necessary.

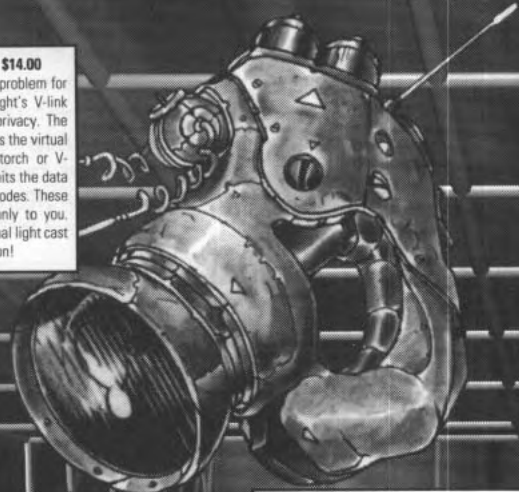
The Strength of old programs becomes both the Attack Strength and Defense Strength in 2027 terms. To account for obsolescence, programs written in 2020-2024 (any *Chromebook*, *Interface*, or *Guide to the Net* software) have 1 subtracted from all Strengths, and programs written from 2013-2019 (*CP 2020* or first edition *Cyberpunk* software) have 2 subtracted from all values. Upgrades for all (version 2.01, ad infinitum) are available, but add 20% to the cost and one MU to the size. But then most 2027 systems have 50-100% more memory (MU) than 2020 equivalents, so things usually balance out. This is mainly for color; it is assumed that any NPC Netrunner would have upgraded software in his or her system unless specified otherwise by the GM.

EBM BlueDot V-Trodes \$5.00

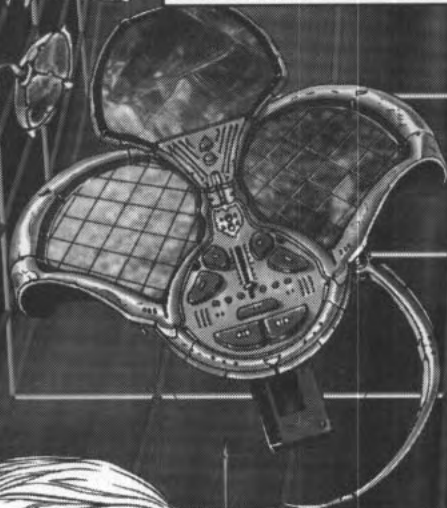
EBM's baseline V-trodes are both inexpensive and user-friendly, using the standard V-interface compatible with almost every virtuality image around the globe. These are the standard by which other V-trodes are measured. Choose from a variety of sports or corporate logos, or design your own 'trode blazon for \$5.00 extra. Blindsight V-trodes available for an additional \$30.00.

**TELECTRONICS NIGHTLIGHT \$14.00**

If using virtual light is a problem for you as well, the Nightlight's V-link provides you complete privacy. The Nightlight V-link overrides the virtual broadcasting of your V-torch or V-flash, and instead transmits the data directly to the attached trodes. These trodes then broadcast only to you. Only you can see the virtual light cast by your virtual illumination!

**APPLE DECK-PAC \$1000**

One of the sleekest and most powerful of the current commods which combines a PC and a cybermodem. With touch-sensitive reconfigurable surface, V-display, and full phonelink (1000m range) capabilities. CPU2 for INT6, MU 45 (and can mount up to two 5MU expansion cartridges), SPD +4, Datawalls +5. Wt. 1.2 kg.

**MICROTECH CODE GRENADE \$30 EACH**

Get 'em while you can! When activated, each "grenade" sends out an omni-directional code pulse which attacks all virtuality software generated within a 10 meter radius (for 1D10/2 damage attack to each, one use per charge). But beware: They cause V-trode users within the affected radius some problems (displaced from V-space for damage in rounds, see pg. 54).

**ARGUS CODE STEEL \$350.00**

C +1 P C 1D6/3 (code) 200 1 VR

One of the best-reviewed new products of 2027, the Code Steel is becoming a commonly seen item in areas where Virtuality is as dangerous as the streets were before the ISA came. Its AI-based targeting system helps it to inflict maximum damage against any runaway programming.

**FULLIMPACT SMARTCARD NANOFACTORY \$1225.00**

This handy luggage (7 kilogram) device can download virtuality programs from any standard V-term or personal computer and burn them into a V-cards for personal use. Used by garage studios everywhere to produce V-albums and the like. Materials cost 25 cents per card.

**REACTIMESH SMARTBAGS \$3.00**

Don't lose your V-cards or other valuables. Reactimesh smartbags hold them snugly and securely, with no chance of breakage. Even spilled drinks and rainwater are repelled by the fabric, which holds your valuables close and tight to your belt.

**EBM ZenDot V-trodes \$20.00**

Why let anyone know you're wearing 'trodes? EBM's slim ZenDot V-trodes are implanted beneath the skin of your temples with a surgical procedure no more painful than ear piercing. Touch-sensitive membranes on the surface of the 'trodes allow you to activate or deactivate them by pressing your temples, a move easily camouflaged by brushing your hair.

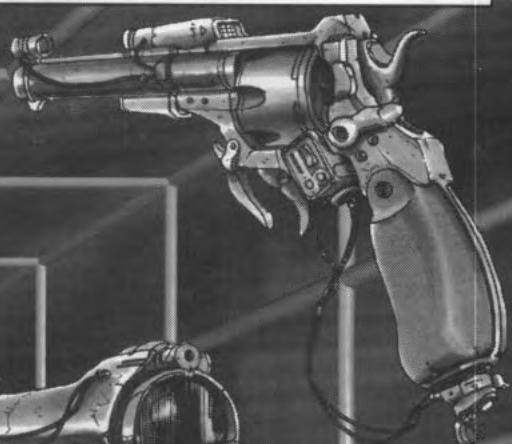
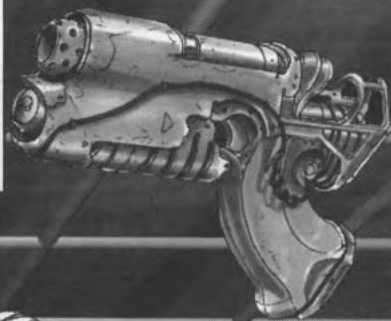


MILITECH DOUBLE-BARRELED PEACEMAKER \$2000
C 0 J C 1D6/3 (code) 200 2 VR
P 0 J C 2D6+1 (9mm) 20 2 VR 50m

The newest release by Militech is a remake of the vaunted Avenger model medium autopistol with a staggered ammo clip and an underslung code gun. A selector switch, easily accessed with the user's thumb, can choose between firing real 9mm slugs or V-code. If you're in doubt of your opponent, setting the switch to the middle lets you fire slugs and code simultaneously.

NETLINK WRANGLER \$250.00 C 0 J E 1D6/3 (code) 150 1 ST

Buy a Wrangler, the hottest-selling codegun ever made has been made better with this is the new 2028 model. Yet it costs no more than the original. Your date will feel safe against rogue AIs when she sees a sporty Wrangler protruding from your pocket.



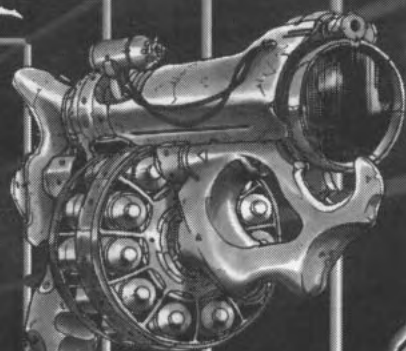
WYZARD HANDSYSTEM III \$500

This unit packs the power of a handtop computer into a palm-sized dynamo! Includes phone link (750m range to link to relay), full V-display, and audio recognition capabilities. CPU1 for INT 3, MU 20 (with a slot to handle one 5MU expansion cartridge). Datawalls +4.

ARASAKA CODEMASTER \$1000.00

C 0 J P 1D6 (code) 100 1 ST

The most powerful code gun in existence by far, the CodeMaster is beloved of the rich corporate elite and the ISCTF's special forces. It is not currently available on the public market. Rumor has it Arasaka is experimenting with a new automatic version.



TELETRONICS PULSAR \$117.50

The newest anti-Virtuality protective shield from Teletronics emits a periodic electromagnetic pulse (STR 5) to disrupt any V-projections in your vicinity. Simply plug it into a standard wall socket, and set the frequency of EM sweeps from once an hour to several times a second. Keep your world real; depend on a Pulsar. (Shielding for televisions and radios sold separately.)

CHAMELEON BODYSUIT \$725.00

Never lack the perfect outfit to wear to any party! Our skintight bodysuit hides a sophisticated virtuality mesh which will create the outfit of your dreams, and can even display your personal assets without unsightly blemishes or tan lines. Changing clothes is no more difficult than pressing a button!



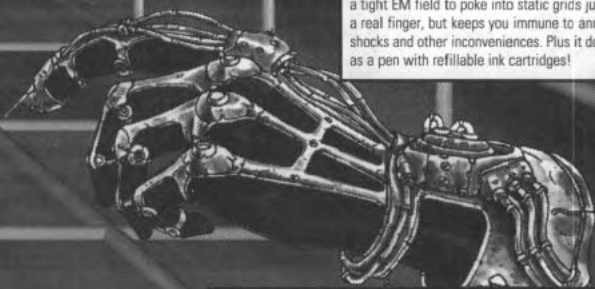
RAVEN MICROCYB V-TORCHES \$22.00

Move about in the dark with complete security using virtual light. Raven's new V-torch produces a 5-meter diameter static field which detects nearby objects and renders them in V-space for you. Also available in a V-flash model for greater detail.



D-TECH ELECTRONIC FINGER \$13.00

If you're afraid your friend has a practical joke lined up for you, use the electronic finger to activate your static fields. The electronic finger uses a tight EM field to poke into static grids just like a real finger, but keeps you immune to annoying shocks and other inconveniences. Plus it doubles as a pen with refillable ink cartridges!



TRADING V-CARDS \$5.00 to \$50.00

We have a complete collection of Studio Live's newest line of trading V-cards, from Godzilla to the new Virtuality Vickie! Come on in and browse, trade, or buy!

EBM ENRICA WRIST-COMP \$800 (Not Shown)

For those of you who want power and appeal, we have the stylish Enricha wrist comp. Includes phone link (200m range), plus V-display and keyboard. INT 3, MU 10 (with a slot to handle an additional 5MU cartridge), Datawalls +3.

NEW VOCANGS



V-PUNKS

PAGE

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Fantasy Programmers and Dream Weavers

"I can program anything you want."

"I'm getting a head-start on Halloween — this is great stuff!"

"Then Mom said, 'Honey, your room looks great!' I told you she always wears her V-trodes."

Power. Ha ha ha ha ha haaa! The world is your playground like no one has ever had it before! With the advent of Virtuality, your imagination can become reality in a way that previous generations could only dream of! You dove into programming whole-heartedly, and you picked up the new programming languages with an ease that all kids have. You're trilingual now: English, GenSpeak, and Conceptual C (or whatever language you find easiest for your programming).

As a result, you have imaginary playmates which your friends can see and interact with. You create attractive personas to practice talking casually with the opposite sex (although it never really seems to help). When you and your goboy do role-playing games, you literally get into the action, with arrows flying and dragons breathing fire down your neck. You sleep one night in a sixteenth-century dungeon cell, and the next in Ten Forward — you haven't seen your bedroom walls for months. Your Dad used to think you were too bookish, until the virtual panther you programmed gave that burglar a coronary. You found him in the morning, cold and bluish, a mere two feet away from the card you left in the living area. The next day Dad bought you a new portable V-term. Now you're better than ever.

What You Look Like

What you look like depends on where the beholder is a-lookin'.

In Virtuality, you look like whatever you want, although there is a code of conduct among you V-Punks that while you may alter your clothes and equipment in Virtuality, you do not alter your facial features. Those who do are suspected of having a reason to hide their identities, which goes against the intent of the first section of The Code. V-Punks should be proud of their work, and unafraid of taking credit for it.

In realspace (how boring), you look very different. You wear loose, comfortable clothes, somewhere between the sensible

but bland garb of the BeaverBrats and the technogeeb appearance of the TinkerTots: stuff that you can program in for hours without getting uncomfortable. You don't worry too much about how cool it looks, because you spend most of your time in Virtuality anyway, looking cooler than should be legal for a person to be.

The identifying features of a V-Punk are the mandatory satchel, portable V-term, and ubiquitous smartbags. The satchel contains your hard-copy programming reference manuals. You could get by without them, but you keep them handy for the same reason that the BoardPunks wear roadrashers — only an idiot flies without the right equipment. The V-term has an obvious use, and the self-contracting smartbags carry your V-cards, snacks, cheat sheets, and whatever else you happen to have forgotten about.

Subculture

Some morons say that "Virtuality is for those who can't handle life." You know the reverse is true: that people hide in the bland, predictable normalcy of the mundane world when they can't handle the wild free-for-all imagination run rampant of full-blown full-sensory three-dee no screamin' Virtuality. You let your imagination run amok in Virtuality, like authors who make their dreams come into motion.

While V-Punks work in private, programming for up to twenty hours at a stretch, when you play, you play with your goboy. V-Punk yogangs are generally formed at school, with buddies of like mind from your programming classes or who ride the same robobus from home. You get together several times each week-end to show off your latest productions, get into some hard-core virtuality gaming, and occasionally to pull wild virtuality pranks on people who need it (like cheerleaders, weefs, your little brother, or that jock who stole your date).

Since great minds think alike, V-Punk gangs tend to drift towards the same specialties: space flight sims, wild animals, authentic Nordic Viking settlements, or various concepts of Hell. As a result, most V-Punk gangs evolve beyond the comprehension of technoshocked juves, but, although there might not be artistic appreciation, a V-Punk can get professional respect from any V-Punk yogang.

As a V-Punk, you live to improve your programming and better your equipment, because with more skill and better tools, you can mold your fevered imagination into reality that much more quickly and easily. To help finance your hobby, you sometimes program virtuality advertising; low-end V-Punks design posters and such for school functions, but the best V-Punks do the ads for the mallplex outlets or sometimes even national chains. The ideal, of course, would be to break into the rapidly-expanding field of virtuality gaming, and have people pay to be dragged through the fiendish things you can imagine. But that'll wait. In

the meantime, you've gotta finish that virtuality date to ring the doorbell for your older sister on prom night. You're lucky she has to wear her 'trodes to drive ...

Belonging

The first requirement to become a V-Punk is to have a desire to learn programming; if you're not willing to put in the time to learn, you don't really want to be a V-Punk, you want to be a virtual V-Punk. Bah! The other requirement is a sick and twisted imagination, full of vivid imagery, creative concepts, and general weirdness. Put these together, and voila! You're a V-Punk. All that's left is to find your yogang, but that's easy enough in school or around the area. Heck, walk around late at night in Virtuality and look for the strange, flashing lights and odd noises, and you can find another V-Punk. Once you've found a group of V-Punks who share your general likes and dislikes, you still have to be formally inducted. This generally involves a duel of some sort: sometimes your V-monster against theirs, or sometimes you against their V-challenge while they battle your V-challenge simultaneously. In the early days of Virtuality, there were but a few undisputed masters and these duels were taken very seriously, but now you know you can program better than those has-beens. A V-Punk yogang already knows who they'll take in and who they won't, so the duels are a mere formality. They remain because they're fun.

No one ever quits the V-Punks. I mean, what are you gonna do, go work at the 24-7 instead?

Allies & Enemies

As might be expected, you V-Punks are close to the TinkerTots, who have a better understanding of the intricacies of programming than most other kids. The BeaverBrats also have an appreciation for your work. You don't understand why, but they often borrow or buy cards from you with a knowing smile. The Goths treat you with less respect, but they are steadier customers — you regularly make new Transylvanian images for their parties. On the other hand, the BeastieBoys, Tribals, EcoRaiders, and RubbleRatts look on your gang with scorn for having lost contact with the Earth and embracing technology instead. Many of the other yogangs treat you with disrespect also — GoGangers, Moshers and the like — but they consider you to be too paltry to bother with. Fine by you, it gives you more time to program.

Slang

Bullhead: target of a practical joke.

Front: cover-up, charade (like your "Clean Room" program).

Peese: Virtuality program that falls short.

Raucking: playing full-blown virtuality games.

Scream: cool, weird, general expletive.

Track: programming job.

Tracker: professional programmer.

Yogang Skill: Private Idaho (INT)

Your skill is at using V-Creator to build virtuality things from the stuff of the imagination and the sweat of the fingers. You can create anything from walls and floors (Easy) to automatic rifles (Average) to gothic fireplaces (Difficult) to dragons (Very Difficult) to fully fleshed people with clothes and personalities indistinguishable from the real thing (Nearly Impossible). These creations include sensory data such as scents, sounds, and tactile surfaces. Of course, these creations only exist in Virtuality, but for someone wearing 'trodes, they are there, and that, my friend, is real sorcery. The magic that makes the magic. As a side benefit, you have spent so much time around Virtuality objects and creations, and you've spent so many hours studying how to bypass certain problems, that you can tell whether something is real or virtual (*Private Idaho* vs. *Programming*), and sometimes even see the reality past the programming (*Private Idaho* at half vs. *Programming*). Believe me, when you wear your 'trodes all the time like you do, this can be a big help.

Using Your Private Idaho Skill:

- **Create (INT):** Build a Superrealistic, full sense, Virtuality image of a:

Cup: 1MU (Easy)

Wristwatch: 1MU (Average)

Functional book: 3MU (Difficult because of all the interior pages)

Car or other large technical item: 10MU (Difficult)

Large animal or simple (cartoon-like) human form: 15MU (Very Difficult)

Synthetic human or other being, fully realized: 40MU (Nearly Im.)

Full-Blown Virtuality building: 30MU (Difficult, but we recommend not having anyone try going up to the second floor ...)

- **Print Run:** Burn a specific V-card in a nanofactory (Average check of *Private Idaho* + TECH)

- **Spot a Phony:** Tag an image as an illusion (as above, but if you don't have an opposing *Programming* skill, make it Difficult)

If You're a V-Punk:

1) Tell me your name, age, and sex.

2) Describe what you look like.

- 3) Besides your Raven MicroCyb V-glasses, pick four things from the list below that you are currently carrying:

- FullImpact virtual receiver/player system (nonportable, see pg. 43).
 - FullImpact V-card Nanofactory (see pg. 44).
- EBM Mainframe V-term (CPU2 for INT 6, MU 50, Datawalls +5, see *Cgen*, pg. 96).
- Apple Mac520 V-term (INT 2, MU 5 w/slot for 1MU expansion chip, Datawalls +2, see *Cgen*, pg. 96).
 - Silicon Graphics Iris Cyberdeck (*Cgen*, Pg. 96).
- Smartbag and a dozen smartcards with reference materials.
- 24 ready-programmed Virtuality Smartcards (each holds and runs V-projections up to 30MU in size).
 - DataTap
 - V-torch (see pg. 41).

NETWORKERS



Info-Gatherers and Net-Divers

"I got a friend who knows a friend whose brother works security at this place."
 "Share everything you find."
 "I'll trade you 88 lines of a secret Chaing interview for a set of your UFO pics."

You're hanging out in a peculiar Net flap room filled with exotic persona icons when you hear the cry from across the room:

"TRADE!" Icons gather around each other in a frenzied exchange of datafiles, vidclips, and photos: "Arasaka's secret Board of Directors! Whindam's cabinet member hiring a hit man! More Loch Ness Monster sightings! Name your trade!"

The entire scene is vaguely reminiscent of an ancient Wall Street ritual. Are these goboy crazy? No, they're Networkers, just like you.

Some people say it's an addiction, but you prefer the term "passion"—you gotta know the truth. So you've connected with like-minded people who live to fish for facts, who build theories out of random data, and who know the Net like the backs of their hands. Instead of an "information superhighway" or some lethal form of video game, you see the Net as a deep, swirling ocean of knowledge from which bits of the truth can be plucked by someone with the right eye. Then in realspace or in Net flap rooms, you can gather with your goboy to share what secrets of the world you've found, particularly when they deal with the ISA.

Because you now know too much: The public is living in a lie, propagated by hidden powers. Paranoid? Sure. Is it all a conspiracy? Absolutely, and you have the confidential data to prove it—almost. There's the problem of a few missing lines of code, but you're sure they'll surface within the Network soon. And you'll be there to trade your best Nixon files for them.

What You Look Like

As a Networker, you know that anonymity is the key to survival.

When you're not spending time in the Net, you dress to fit the crowd. If you're getting dragged along to a party with your parents, you comb your hair and wear a tie; if you're headed to the mall with your realspace friends, you put on your suspenders and sneakers. But you don't advertise. This is tougher than it sounds—most Networkers have a hard time shedding their passions when they're roaming Meatworld. Occasionally you see someone with an identifying mark: *X-Files* jewelry, tee shirts with slogans like "Orwell was simply 43 years early" and "It's

All Just Ones and Zeroes", or even baseball caps with names of famous investigators or old news channels (the ones that really sought the truth, before the media monoliths crushed them). Clues like these usually indicate a fellow Networker. If he's carrying a portable V-term or cyberdeck, it's a lock.

The Net is where appearance really counts: A wicked callsign and an icon of an obscure personality are critical. You emulate the legendary Networkers: "Deep Throat", the faceless ISA expert who wears a different trenchcoat icon every time you meet him. "PsiKick", the resident paranormal guru who appears as a ghostly apparition. And don't forget "Bryce", the Networker accountant who collects CorpSec transaction statements and wanders through the Net as an animated eurodollar symbol. Once you've got your own totally chill handle—one that refers to a person who battled the corrupted powers in search of truth — and an icon that mystifies those you meet, you can hit the electronic streets.

Subculture

You're a Networker, not a Netrunner. You don't make daring, suicidal netruns to plow through Arasaka's security system and make off with the goodies. It's too dangerous; besides, why risk your life? You know of another Networker who calibrates the monitors for the Arasaka building, and she has access to all sorts of juicy data. The corporate machine is so sloppy with the way it runs its public-access information, you can glean everything you need from it until you hit a wall, and then HIRE a Netrunner. And you can supply them with everything but the access codes to the buried data.

This is the true essence of the Network. Your strengths are your numbers and the diverse knowledge of each of your members.

No matter what the organization does or where it is located, chances are the Networkers know somebody who works there, even if it's just the janitor. Networkers get together in a flap room to do more than just chat; they trade. Everyone is looking for new data, especially if it's from one of the "conspiracy monsters"—the CEP, Arasaka, CorpSec, or other dominating groups.

Sharing secrets is what makes your yogang strong; those who don't share what they know are forever to be shunned by the yogang. Subgroups have formed within the yogang's infrastructure, some of which don't agree with the opinions of others: Intense Net debates can erupt at Networker meetings that ultimately end with one persona strangling another.

The Machine has many feelers in the Net, so you sometimes bug out and go Meatworld. When you're not siphoning data from the company's active files, the gang continues to trade in realspace, passing out datachips and hardcopy pages from your personal conspiracy database. There are a few local hotspots where your goboy are likely to be found: the public or corporate library, the NetGame Entertainment Center, a telephone junction box in a parking lot, or anywhere you can hop onto a dataline.

There's a lurking hope in the back of your head that someday you'll get the right group of Networkers together and fit all the byts of suppressed data together to learn the Big Plan ... but for now you just keep collecting the pieces.

Belonging

Getting accepted as a Networker was harder than you thought.

Before you could show an interest in joining, you had to find them. And that was tough, because Networkers are paranoid and untrusting members of society. Cruising the Net, you'd notice a flap room with an intriguing name (like "Back And To The Left") and as soon as you entered, everyone would start talking about dance steps. The more persistent you were, the more suspicious the Networkers would get. Finally, you realized you needed something to grab their attention. When your older sister came home from BuReloc officer training and told the family all about her experiences, you decided to put it in writing and bring it with you for a little Net "show and tell." You thought that was all it took; you didn't expect a thorough investigation of the data to assure its veracity.

That's when you were accepted, and when you learned that misinformation is worse than no information. Incidentally, this is exactly how the Networkers deal with troublemakers: When members get out of line or tend to be too outspoken about their opinions, they're usually fed a number of "blushing fish" files to lead them away. For minor misconduct, members are simply deleted from the yogang's daily newsletter for a week or denied access to certain flap rooms.

Allies & Enemies

Networkers are so careful in dealing with outsiders that most other yogangs don't know of their existence. When you do deal with outsiders, it's only after an extensive data check has been conducted. Of the few yogangs who have successfully worked with your people, the Rads and the Vidiots are the only ones who come back. You get along well with these two groups because they're both interested in exposing the ugly truth about the ISA, CorpSec, and other powerful organizations.

Slang

Back Scratching: trading data between networkers.

Blushing Fish: misinformation, outdated files.

Code Key: a friend or associate who works at a large corporation or government institution and has access to its computer system.

Kelped: overwhelmed with data; had enough and just hit by a new wave of data.

Nixon: a file with missing data.

Owl: someone suspected of being an Overwatch undercover agent.

Reagan: a "completed" file with sections you "forgot" or "don't recall".

Sliding: acquiring confidential files or otherwise being cool.

Syssie: a weak data system, full of internal leaks.

Unknown: the best Networkers; ones too paranoid to show their face.

Yogang Skill: Datahound (INT)

The corps have a lot of tricks up their sleeves to keep you away from their diabolical plans. But you have a few tricks of your own. You know where to look on their Net directories to spot the suspicious areas. Public access information can tell you a lot too, like who's staying late every night and logging time on the Accounts Payable data center, and who's got the largest long distance bills. You can also fit these seemingly unconnected bits of information together to see the bigger picture—the real corporate conspiracy in action.

Using *Datahound* you can spot duplicate names on a company's employee roster in a flash (Easy), track down a corporate or political embezzler (Difficult), or notice when a file is too big for what it's supposed to do (Average). You also have an incredibly vast and powerful database on your side—your fellow goboys. If you don't know much about Company XYZ, there's a good chance that somebody in your yogang does. Within an hour, the Network can provide you with a hardcopy of a company's employee roster (Easy), payroll information (Average), its security outfit (Difficult), or even corporate Net license codes (Very Difficult). With a wealth of data at your fingertips, the Network is your greatest tool.

Using Your Datahound Skill:

- **NetSurf:** Scan the public access boards for info of interest (See the sidebar on page 7 for a list of Net tasks, which if attempted with *Datahound* instead of *Schoolin'* are one difficulty level easier).
- **Get fake (or passable) Net License codes:** Class 1 (Average), Class 2 (Difficult), Class 3 (V. Difficult), Class 4 (N. Imp.).
- **Set up a Flap Room** (see pg. 22).

If You're a Networker:

- 1) Tell me your name, age, and sex.
- 2) Describe what you look like.
- 3) Besides your V-trodes, pick three different things from the list below that you are currently carrying:
 - IRIS Cyberdeck with cellular upgrade (*CGen*, pg. 97).
 - Wyzard Handcomp with cellular option (see pg. 45).
 - Raven Microcyb Data Tap (*CGen*, pg. 97).
 - "Wrangler" Codegun (pg. 45).
- 4) In addition to the items above, choose three programs for your deck:
 - **Kenobi program:** (Stealth) to disguise your signal with other transmissions on a phone line (STR 4, MU 4, *illegal*).
 - **DataBrowser program:** (Utility) to find inconsistencies in file structures (STR 6, MU 5).
 - **Snoop program:** (Detection) to locate masked or invisible datafiles (STR 4, MU 5).
 - **BeanCounter program:** (Utility) to sniff out accounting anomalies (STR4, MU5).



THE GEN GM

So you broke down and bought the book. It said *VirtualFront* on the cover, so you were sure it would tell you how, as a GM, you could instill the look and feel of Virtuality into your campaign. You've done your best until now, but the main problem is getting your players to buy into this V-trode thing. And these players are ruthless, die-hard punkers from the "good ole days" of *CP2020*, when you could pack an assault shotgun in broad daylight without sweating over ISA bounties.

Before *Cyberpunk*, they were naive. Now it's *Cybergen*, and they're paranoid.

You've tried the tricks in the book. But, of course, the players have read the book, including the dangers of Virtuality and the Net (printed prominently in *CGen*, on page 108). They're already under the impression that everything is an illusion. You're having trouble getting them to wear V-trodes at all.

Here's how one of your sessions might have gone:

"Okay, you're talking with the receptionist of the corporate building—"

"I take my 'trodes off!" blurts a twitchy player.

"... All right. Fine. Your 'trodes are off."

"Does the receptionist disappear?"

You sigh. "No."

"Is she really wearing a flak suit and pointing a large caliber weapon at us from behind her virtual disguise?"

You cross your arms. "No, but I'll write that down."

"Is the ceiling nothing but a mere illusion that masks the trap doors where a mass of hungry tarantulas scamper over each other waiting for us to trip the hidden switch that sends them raining down upon us?"

There is a long pause while you absorb the hypothetical nightmare. "No."

Your player turns to the rest of the group: "Okay guys. It's clean. Let's move on."

Is it frustrating? Yes. Do you have to stand for it? No. This Gen GM will talk about creative ways to use Virtuality so that your players will not only depend on it for basic functions, but will actually want to hook into their V-trodes to see all the cool things happening in this virtual fantasyland.

Don't Touch That 'Trobe

Let's first talk about how to get people into Virtuality and keep them there. If you're tired of the "on again, off again" approach your players are taking with this virtual technology, try this: your PCs enter a building to do some snooping around. It really doesn't matter what company owns the building. We're talking about V-Front security measures here. So your PCs decide to get to a floor more interesting than the lobby or parking garage. They try the elevators.

The elevator system operates in Virtuality, of course. A friendly computer voice informs the party: "Please touch the virtual palm-pad identification console for V-trode registration. On this property, the disconnection of registered V-trodes is unauthorized, and will alert system security. Only users with registered V-trodes may enter the elevator."

Oops. They're stuck. It's time to put them on and keep them on. Otherwise, if they step into the elevator, they will pass through its static field and trip an alarm. The elevator won't budge with an unauthorized person inside it. They complain about not being able to avoid all the virtual dangers and illusions while they're 'trod in. Tough noogies! This company paid top dollar for some of the most sophisticated virtual security tricks around, and it's not going to be beaten by a little adolescent punk who bypasses it all simply by taking his 'trodes off. Oh no. They'll have to think of another way to defeat Virtuality while they're IN Virtuality.

But wait—what was that? Did a PC get the wise idea to try the stairs? Great! The 'trodeless party skips over to the building's stairwell and checks for locks and other security measures. There's an electronic lock, but the TinkerTot can bypass it with his eyes closed. With wide smiles, the gaggle of gangers trots into the stairwell.

Whoop whoop whoop, you say. They just set off the virtual sensors when they walked through the static field around the door frame. If they'd had the sense to check things out in Virtuality, they would have noticed the field after they opened the door. The computer could not identify them, since they aren't registered in Virtuality, so now CorpSec has been notified. The PCs swallow hard as all the doors on the first floor automatically lock into place. They're trapped. Almost gloating, that same computer voice announces their location to the world: "Warning. Unregistered occupants on main floor. Repeat: unregistered occupants on main floor. Warning."

Gotcha, you say.

Bullet-proof Businessmen

The reputable Fixers and Streetdealers of 2020 invested a lot of money in personal protection: bodyguards, flak vests, armored AVs—the whole nine yards. Because all it took was a well-placed 12mm shell between the eyes to put an end to their business. Not a pleasant thing to live with, day after day. That's why many of the "contract" groups still in power prefer to deal exclusively in Virtuality. Let's say a well-known arms dealer is tired of putting on three layers of armor every morning before hitting the streets to go to work. He gets a group of programmers to build him an AI molded in his image, with his attitude. He then tells the AI about his profitable business, and gives him a list of dos and don'ts in the arms dealing industry. Like "Don't talk with the ISA—I'm an endangered species as it is."

Customers deal with the AI on a daily basis, all the while thinking he's the real McCoy. How? The AI doesn't make appearances in Virtuality unless his audience is hooked in. If he's scheduled for an appointment, he'll have his clients perform some small virtual task to put them "online." And if they find out he's not really there ... what does it matter? The deal is still good. Of course, if a double-crossing punk finds out he's alone by emptying his new assault rifle at the image ... Oops. Better hope nothing important in realspace was behind the image. Meanwhile, the Fixer now enjoys his mornings, sipping coffee in his beachfront house and discussing the day's schedule with his AI on a laptop.

If your businessmen are more fluent with Net travel, they could appear in Virtuality themselves, with no AI double. It just depends how you want to handle the situation. Remember, most virtual meeting environments will have a camera to track realspace traffic, a way to isolate the group attending the meeting, and a connection to the Net. For those annoying media types, virtual images can be programmed for mobility by hooking them up to a remote attached to a flying drone. Wouldn't that be irritating for the characters—some whiny suit following them around calling them names?

This is really a great way to run your meetings, by the way, because the virtual image knows it can tell the PCs anything without fear of getting shot. Introduce your players to their arch nemesis. "Look at this," your annoying villain begins. "A bunch of pre-pubescent half-pints looking for trouble. Shouldn't you all be in obedience training right now? Listen carefully, because I'll only say this once: stay out of my way. You mess with my operations again, and I'll have you all reprogrammed like defective AIs and rehabilitated as cafeteria help." Pour it on. If your players aren't red-faced by the end of the warning, throw out a few more insults. Because it's just a virtual image they're talking to. They can spend all the ammunition they want, but it won't go away. If you're really nasty, you may even have it follow them around, constantly demeaning them. What can they do, right?

Preventive Measures

Well, let's talk about that. First of all, they can simply take their 'trodes off. Secondly, if the party's Wizard does a little experimenting, s/he could make a netrun on the virtual persona to shut it down at the source. But that's tricky, and the Wizard may not have the capacity to conduct a full-scale netrun on the spot.

Probably the easiest way to handle V-space nuisances aside from "going off-line" is using your trustworthy Codegun. A few zaps and your virtual problems are gone. Just watch where you point it. If you get zapped by a Codegun while wearing V-trodes, the Codegun's program will engage the V-trodes' automatic cutoff (CGen, pg. 146), and displace the user from V-space for the Codegun's damage in rounds. Wizards experience some minor static from the attack (-2 REF for one round, which is *not* cumulative for multiple Code or ECM attacks), but are otherwise unaffected, although their Familiars are vulnerable. Also, Codeguns can disrupt your personal virility programs and eliminate V-disguises. So if everyone in your playing group pulls out a Codegun to attack a program, pay attention. Anyone who misses his target might accidentally hit a buddy in the line of virtual fire. If that buddy isn't wearing 'trodes, no problem. However, if that buddy is 'troded and is also firing a Codegun at an enemy program—that person may now be firing blindly into V-space.

Vee-Land: It's Hip, Dude

Let's be a little more polite to the realspacers. There are things you can do to show them what an amazing place Virtuality really is. Since Virtuality is just a computer's way of directly interacting with the human brain, it can create and mimic the effects of chemicals and hallucinogens. It can stimulate the body's nerves. It can activate the pleasure centers in the brain.

Pleasure is synonymous with profits for the entertainment industry. Here are some examples:

- **Virtual entertainment.** Exclusive rock concerts in Virtuality. Dazzling light and sound shows. News and events. Virtual movie stars walking down the sidewalk. Hold hands with Marilyn Monroe. V-sims good enough to suck your brain in and never let go.
- **Virtual Night Clubs.** You can hang out here, drink a v-beer, meet a few V-waitresses, see some V-entertainment (of course, it's ALL V-entertainment), and try some V-sex or drugs. The layout can switch from the medieval bar to the starport lounge to the Wild West at the flick of a switch. Just check your codegun at the door and don't EVER take your 'trodes off.
- **Virtual sex.** No worrying about contraceptive implants. And you can always tell yourself it's not like cheating because, unlike your spouse or lover, you can deactivate the program. In fact, you may prefer virtual sex to the real thing for that very reason ...
- **Virtual drugs.** (see page 8) You want to get high? Heck, you're already hallucinating just by being in Virtuality. Why not let it

take you further? Best of all, no cerebral damage (so they say) afterwards. Enjoy it while the program lasts.

- **Virtual alcohol.** Feeling dizzy? Had one too many? Tough news, you'll have to wait for the program to wear off, and hope that the programmer didn't write a code for hangovers ... Still, it's so amazing how these virtual drinks actually give you the sensation of liquid running down your throat.

The last three items generally have "key-coding" laid into them. That way only people wearing the proper 'trodes (i.e., adults) can see them. This is similar to the coding used by the cops to access imagery their "perps" can't see (see pg. 19). Naturally, the kids (especially the V-Punks) have set about counterfeiting the key codes so that they can enjoy the thrills of virtual gin and flesh-play. V-Punks have even tried to create their own versions (unfortunately, it's kind of hard to write V-sex programming when you haven't had *real* sex yet ...).

RIDING THE VIRTUAL DRAGON

We stated on page 8 that V-drugs, while not physically addictive, can be very *psychologically* addictive ... and V-alcohol is no exception. But we want to give you, the GM, an idea of *how* addictive. In fact, they are *more* habit-forming than many real drugs because of the illusion of safety they provide. ALL V-drugs can be psychologically addictive if the user fails an Easy COOL test every time he tries one. If he uses the drug continuously for more than four hours, then the COOL test is Difficult. This psychological addiction can manifest as the need for a COOL roll every day the user does not experience the drug. A failed roll results in anxiety, depression, paranoia, and all that other good stuff. Kicking the habit will require a Very Difficult *Fearless Leader* test, and then remaining clean for at least six months before experimenting with this stuff again.

Also, since the V-drugs cause the body to react as if it were experiencing real drugs, there might be some physical repercussions as the brain and adrenal glands continue to produce secretions linked to the drug experience. After a day or two under the continuous influence of something like V-cocaine or V-heroin, start reducing the user's BODY score by one for every four hours after the first twenty-four hours of exposure.

Of course, they don't mention *that* on the label.

There are also a few practical applications to consider, like:

- **Virtual signs.** Your drivers and gogangers might want to keep those 'trodes on after hearing about virtual traffic warnings. They wouldn't want to miss any BRIDGE OUT signs, or DETOUR: CON-

STRUCTION notices (of course, there will be real signs as well, but they won't be as obvious as the ones in V-space ...). It helps to have road to drive on. What's worse, if they miss the BRIDGE OUT signs but plug into Virtuality closer to the danger, they may see a completed bridge with a small sign saying, "And this is what the new Del Coronado Bridge will look like in four months."

Can they read it going that fast? Will they think to look, if the bridge looks fine to them?

Here's a final piece of advice: don't use any suggestions exactly as they are mentioned in this article. That's right. Don't use them. Because there are a few players out there who think they're smart by reading these GM sections (that includes YOU, you nosy little snort!) and keeping ahead of your tricks. The examples in this book are only to help you create more of your own—bigger, better, nastier, and more elaborate. Best of all, your own ideas aren't printed where curious players could get to them.

Good luck, and remember the Virtuality mantra:

Nothing is what it seems, but everything is spectacular.

Electronic Handwriting

As discussed in *Cybergeneration*, Wizards communicate through the use of a Binary Coding Processor, with the assistance of Josephson Junction Sub-Nodes. In doing so, however, each Wizard broadcasts a signal, usually in the range of 868-894 megaHertz (although, with practice, this frequency can be shifted; see pg. 35). Carried on this signal is the Wizard's "signature", a subset of code that identifies that unique Evolved processor to other Evolved processors.

Obviously, this brings up a few situations for the Wizards.

First of all, when the Wizards start to figure this out in your campaign, they can identify their kindred while scanning the Net. As this attunement is developed further, Wizards will start to "sense" each other when they walk into the same room, or shake hands. And once you've connected with another Wizard's system,

your system logs its signature (which will remain the same, despite frequency changes). Knowing a Wizard's signature is like knowing their cellphone number: you can always give him a call.

Sometimes he may be out of the local area code (which means Net travel to reach them), but it's still a valuable thing to have. But the Wizards have to learn to do this themselves. Don't just hand them this information. Let them slowly discover that, as they deal with more and more Wizards, it suddenly becomes easier to get hold of those same Wizards a second time, and so on.

Eventually, the Wizard will want to make a list of the Wizards whose signatures he has logged, sort of a Net Black Book.

And don't you know Overwatch would like those signatures too.

This is the flip side of the coin: If a Wizard can locate another Wizard in the Net simply by scanning all transmissions within a limited range for a particular signature, so can Overwatch or

CorpSec, although it's a LOT harder for them to pick it out of all the transmissions. These kinds of discoveries should be handled in a campaign much like new technology—when something new and revolutionary hits the market, copy cats are sure to follow.

Soon after your PC Wizard starts to get the hang of signature checks for buddies, have that character get a "call" from some anonymous source. Play it like an eerie radio transmission: the Wizard is hanging out with friends when suddenly s/he hears a voice in the distance—"If you can hear this, please respond. I repeat: if anyone out there can hear me at this frequency, please respond ..." Though it may develop into an elaborate SOS message, you know the truth: The ISA is broadcasting using a personalized signature to trap as many Wizards as possible. Maybe the broadcast pleads with them to arrive at a certain location. Or maybe instead it tells them to avoid some restricted area, hoping to ambush the curious ones. It's up to you.

Lastly, there are plenty of things you can do with Wizard Net access aside from using it to communicate directly with others.

Remember—it's all binary data. A Wizard could receive an image in his mind, like a mental photograph. A Wizard could receive "Net reverb"—a backwash of garbled data deflected by Codeguns or other disturbances. A Wizard could download software applications and store them in his or her brain. And if the Wizard felt like it, s/he could link up with an AI experiment, and be a guinea pig for the "advancement of science" or some other artificial motivation. Or an AI may extract things from a Wizard's binary brain in an attempt to understand something as abstract as love or anger.

There are lots of possibilities. Keep in mind that Wizards are much like living computers. If you want to screw with their heads, you could always infect them with a computer virus ...

555-WIZARD

Most Wizards clue in pretty quickly to the fact that a built-in cybermodem means that they can call other Wizards or people linked to the Net on their own nanophone. While technically true (see "Uncle Rache's Q&A" on pg. 34), it isn't simply "Let's dial up Howard" time. The Wizard's radio has an effective range of less than a mile. For any communication beyond that range, he must link into the phone/computer network and find the Wizard he wants to talk to through the Net. The only two ways to find the other Wizard is to know exactly where he is at the time or if his signature is known to the calling Wizard so he can find it in the mass of data traffic. Locating a Wizard via his signature is typically a Difficult *Arcane* task, although circumstances could easily make it harder. And they've got to get pretty close in the Net before they can even try to scan for the other's signature, like within four or five blocks (virtually speaking).

The other option is for them to get phone numbers for their brains. Internet would just love that.

RACHE BARTMOSS ... SORT OF.

"What do you mean: 'You want the real Rache'? I hope you've got a current Last Will and Testament ready ..."

There is only one Rache Bartmoss (thank God). However, many people don't believe this, as he has been seen with ever-increasing frequency over the last several years, especially by those connected with the Eden Cabal. What gives? Brace yourselves, folks: Rache is cloning himself in the Net.

Rache knows he can't be everywhere at once, although he'll never actually admit to that. So, to lend his own unique brand of advice to the greatest number of people at once, he has begun to develop his own AIs, or as he calls them, Roving Autonomous Bartmoss Interface Drones (yes, that's RABIDs for short). The RABIDs are Rache's renegade representatives all across the nation, and some have even escaped the ISA blockade and made it overseas — the country's latest export. Mmm boy.

Each RABID has been painstakingly programmed to be as much like Rache as is inhumanly possible. They look just like him (because he never ran with any other icon). They talk just like him. They think just like him, with the provision that they have no experience with the real world, at least not as a member thereof, so when asked advice about something beyond the reach of Virtuality, they tend to gaily abandon all pretense of omniscience and give an enthusiastic, "I haven't got a fracking clue, drekwit meatbrain!"

Aside from that little restriction, the personality of a RABID is very much indeed like that of the



esteemed GhostLord: short-tempered, long-suffering, self-congratulatory, prone to tangents and hallucinations, bored, verbose yet colorfully descriptive if you're into psychotic imagery, and generally savage and primal. Don't leave a RABID where your mother might meet it. She just wouldn't understand. Of course, RABIDs know this, so they'll try to be where your mother can find them. No thanks needed ... consider it a sign of their true affections for you.

Of course, Rache being the omnipotent penultimate deity as he claims (and he expects to take over as Supreme Creator as soon as the Revolution is finished), he would never, ever let anyone else run the Net in his name. He has an image to protect, a reputation to consider, and no matter how artful an AI may be, even he knows he can't program anything to match his pangalactic brilliance. He was once quoted as saying, "Running the Net is 90% instinct and 10% outstinct, and it's that damn outstinct that's impossible to code. Especially mine, because I can see the future, and there's a really big program there, one that will take over the Earth." Okay, so maybe he drifted again, but his point is that he's never going to let anyone or anything raid an Arasaka datafort with his intelligence and personality. They just wouldn't do it quite exactly weird enough. This is why none of the RABIDs have any code to allow them to go Netbanging.

Not only do they have no Netbanging code, but they have Netbanging code inhibitors, so that they can't learn it on their own or have someone else program it into them. No RABID will ever run the Net doing anything more difficult than looking up a reference in the public library. They simply can't do it. Yes, even though they are his children, Rache hates the RABIDs, and he's doing everything he can to keep them down.

Of course, Rache being who he is, all his little RABIDs hate each other as well (this, like all his other hates, got programmed into them). What he didn't count on was that his RABIDs hate him even more than they hate each other, because they know how he programmed them, and why.

From their point of view, they were created to be two bytes shy of a meg, falling just short of perfection incarnate, kept low so that they could forever exist in the shadow of his conceited braggadaccio. Deep down, each RABID knows he could do better than Bartmoss himself, because an AI is unfettered by a frozen lumpy 180-pound chunk of sausage lying in a coffin somewhere. The RABIDs are also ingenious little bastards, and many of them have nonetheless managed to bypass their code and acquire some Netrunning talent of their own. This skill they typi-

cally use to assassinate each other whenever possible, and most especially to hunt down the Meatboy himself.

Rache knows himself very well, of course, and has denied his RABIDs any knowledge of where his cryocoffin actually is. No fool, that Rache.

He also foresaw that his progeny would escape the fetters of his code, so he programs his RABIDs with another insidious buried subroutine: every three months or so, every RABID in existence gets a sudden urge to descend on a particular LDL uplink. The first warning of this came when Rache (himself) suddenly announced on the Stupid Cyber Tricks BBS: "Nobody go near Denver on April 1st, okay? I'm cleaning house." Then, on April Fool's Day, literally thousands of Rache Bartmosses began appearing in Denver. They swarmed like sociopathic grasshoppers and began destroying each other, each trying to prove himself the best. Combat ran in slow motion as the frenzy threatened to overload the system. All civilian traffic — and even ISCTF and AIM Overwatch runners — abandoned Denver to its hideous fate. The fracas lasted for several hours of non-stop codewar, until, at last, one RABID was left. Then, suddenly, the real Rache Bartmoss appeared and said, "Hey, you little suck, I bet you thought you were something special, huh?" ZAP.

Nothing left. Soon thereafter RABID version 2.0 began appearing.

Every so often a RABID generates enough press to attract Rache's attention long before the quarterly housecleaning. Perhaps it learned enough of Netbanging to cause his rep some damage; perhaps it learned how to bypass the lemming subroutine. Whatever the cause, Rache takes after the RABID with a vengeance. At these times he has often been heard singing, "Be vewwy qwiet — I'm hunting WABIDs!", but as he is the only person he knows who's watched Looney Toons, let alone "What's Opera, Doc?", he is the only one who think it's funny. Of course, the mere fact that no one understands him has never stopped Rache from repeating anything ad nauseum ...

TEMPLATE	RABID Rache (isn't he always?)		
INT	9	ARCANE	5
DEFENSE	10		
RESEARCH	11	NET INFO	11
SYST. KNOW.	12		
Gear: The RABIDS are adept librarians but little more. They have access to many utility programs, but not the typical hacking software ... unless they've rewritten themselves.			

LT. MARCUS TAYLOR

ISCTF Field Programmer

"Hey, you dropped that Hellhound pretty chill. Now try dodging a little something I wrote."

Born on March 4th, 2003, Marcus Taylor lived the first ten years of his life amid the relative security of Whitewood, a beaverville near Silicon Valley, where his parents worked.

With his parents' financial support and encouragement, Marcus began to learn high-level programming at an early age, bringing his childhood fantasies to fruition through programming. At the tender young age of 13, Marcus had completed several college-level courses, including Conceptual C and two other programming languages. Although he never received credit for these studies, as he completed them at home as a hobby, the experience helped him later in life as he began to pursue a career.

A year later, in 2017, Exentrix Inc. released Marcus's first point-of-view arcade game, Danger Horse. Although poorly received by the critics, the child-sensitive interface of Danger Horse made it an instant hit among the younger generation. As sales mounted, Marcus began to enjoy some celebrity status among the youth of his home state of Northern California. He formed a group of skilled youth programmers, and named his club "The C-Serpents." The concept of high-school programming clubs caught on, and they began forming across the country. Marcus became the focus of a movement.

The various C-Serpent clubs flooded the market with new video games over the next few years, and although Marcus Taylor and his C-Serpents were able to stay on top of the pile with Danger Horse II and Escape! among other titles, his designs were by and large lost among the flood of lower-quality games. Marcus admitted to suffering from disillusionment with game design as he went into high school, but watched with interest the research and development of the new interface technology which eventually became Virtuality.

By the time Marcus and his compatriots graduated from high school in 2021, they provided consultation and task programming electronically to several companies across



OPERATION UPGRADE



A CYBERGENERATION® ADVENTURE

Warning! Players must not read past this point!

PAGE

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PART ONE: GROUPS WITHIN GROUPS

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

In this adventure, the characters encounter a unique entity: an Evolved artificial intelligence. It has been unwittingly abandoned in an old ISA facility, without direct access to the Net. At first, the AI lures the characters into rescuing it from its isolated home by tempting them with first-hand knowledge of the Carbon Plague's origins. But once they release it from captivity, the AI starts on its own set of directives and the characters realize they've released a very dangerous force. At the climax, the kids must do what they can to keep the AI from implementing its frightening plan.

Required characters for this adventure: Wizard, Tinman, Scanner. Also, a TinkerTot, Networker, V-Punk, or Vidiot is helpful, but not necessary.

SCOOP

Scoop is an ex-Net 54 artificial intelligence currently operating as a freelance investigative reporter. During its employment at Net 54, Scoop was responsible for uncovering Net-based conspiracies, including the engineering of diabolical virus programs and the construction of completely new Nets that operate at different frequencies. Needless to say, Scoop is more than a little paranoid.

Testing: 1, 2, 3

As the math teacher drones on about non-linear equations in the front of the class, the Wizard begins to hear a voice in his/her head, as if someone were speaking telepathically (like the scene from *InnerSpace*, with Martin Short in the doctor's lounge). First contact goes something like this:

"Hello? Hello? Am I getting through? (Wizard's name)—are you receiving me?"

If the Wizard reflexively replies by speaking aloud, have the classmates nearby turn around and stare oddly at the Wizard. Then, continue:

"Ah! So it works! Now quit talking out loud. I can hear you just fine up here in your brain. I can't speak for long, so listen up. I'm an AI who has some important information about the Revolution, but I need your help. Get your group of friends together and meet me at the fourth floor ATM terminal in the mall right after school. You know, the mall you always go to. This piece of information is hot and I can't sit on it for long."

The mysterious voice disappears in an audible squawk just as the teacher calls on the Wizard: "Maybe you know the answer, since you seem so interested in participating in our discussion today, hmm?"

If all the characters go to the same school, the Wizard can meet up with them for lunch and discuss the strange message either in the cafeteria or on the playground. If you've already established that the characters attend different schools, it will have to wait until they get together after class.

The Meeting

The mall is crowded after school, but the fourth floor is sparsely populated due to a redecoration project that has a number of

The adventure begins with an anonymous AI mysteriously contacting the party's Wizard at school. After meeting with this source later, it becomes evident that the AIs of the Net populate a world of their own, far from the accessibility of normal users. And when the characters encounter an entire group of AIs focused on a common goal, something else becomes evident: the computers know much more than they are telling.

The AI, named "Scoop", contacts the Wizard on his personalized Net frequency, which it acquired from another AI as a recommendation. You can justify this recommendation in a number of ways:

- The characters have a good reputation in the Revolution, with several successful missions in their belt;
- Scoop specifically asked for the Wizard's signature (see pg. 55) because it likes the investigative style of the group's Vidiot; or
- The source simply tells Scoop "This Wizard is a match for your purposes" and gives him the signature.

After tracking the Wizard's signal to a local school, Scoop feels an urgency to contact him/her, and interrupts the Wizard's train of thought during math class.

stores temporarily closed. A short line of people stand waiting to use the ATM, but as the characters approach it a man at the terminal exclaims, "The dumb thing is out of money", and the line quickly disperses. Before the characters wander away too far, the ATM terminal screen pops to life, illustrating a computer-generated torso. The polygonal face beckons the characters, and speaks quickly:

"Pssst! Over here!"

"Gather around closely, so no one else can witness this transmission. And somebody keep an eye out for any more money-grubbers. Okay. Thanks for coming. Here's the deal. My name is Scoop. I'm an investigative reporter who also happens to be an AI. I used to work for Net 54—you guys know of me? I can tell by your expressions the answer is no. Anyway, I'm on to something big and I need your help. Have you ever heard of Operation Upgrade? No, of course not. Even I didn't know about them, and I'm an AI. Okay. Operation Upgrade is a small committee of artificial intelligences whose mission is—and I quote—"10001011-101101001011011110001", or for you realspacers, "To spread the truth about the CNM code among the AI community and continue to support its agenda." For obvious reasons, I was curious.

Since I'm an AI myself and I hadn't heard about any Carbon Plague agenda, I did a little poking around and dropped in on one of their weekly meetings.

"Their meetings last 3.183 minutes, but I only managed to eavesdrop for 2.6 seconds. They kicked me out. Probably something about being a reporter. During that time, however, I listened as they conversed intensely about finding a group of 'Evolved youth' to help them rescue a friend.

"That's where you come in. I volunteered you! Find out what this strange little committee is up to, and who they want rescued. Help them along with their plans, and if you stumble across something big—like the answer to the riddle of the Carbon Plague—let me know. If this AI group really does know the truth about what's happening to you kids, they have no right to hoard it among themselves.

"I've done some preliminary work for you to get you matched up with this wacky group of AIs. I'll spare you the details, but don't be surprised if they contact one of you via cellphone any minute to set up a meeting place and time.

"I'll be contacting you later to see how things are coming along. Now you'd better move along: mall security is headed this way to inspect the ATM terminal."

Scoop then disappears and the words "PLEASE INSERT V-CARD" return to the screen. If a character has kept watch during the meeting, s/he will see two security guards meander out of the elevator and step toward the ATM.

Time to move.

Before the characters can get the chance to split up, someone's cellphone rings and a computer voice states flatly: "Zapp's Virtual Arcade. In three minutes. No adults." The line goes dead after that. Any attempts to trace the call fail. The best that can be done is follow the signal to Night City's (or whatever city you're using) LDL. That means the transmission might have been from out of town—even across the globe. Would the AIs of Operation Upgrade communicate with each other across long distances? They'll have to attend the meeting at Zapp's V-Arcade to know more. And it's on the other side of the mall!

Let the Games Begin

The race to the rendezvous can be made pretty interesting. To make the three-minute rendezvous time, the characters need to break into a flat run and charge down to the first floor where the arcade is located. The elevators take too long and are usually populated by adults. There are a few things that might get in their way. Pick one you like or roll 1d6 to decide for you:

1. A group of ultra-cute babes stroll out of the Needless Markup store on the third floor and bat their eyes at the characters. (Or, for the female character, a heroic football player/rocker/biker flashes her an inviting smile on his way up the stairs.)
2. Rain from a broken skylight in the roof of the mall has made for a wet floor on a landing between floors: everyone must make Average Reflex or Jockstuff rolls to keep from falling on their butts. A critical failure might mean someone tripped over the guard rail and fell two stories into the large water fountain.
3. Guardians and MegaViolents are in a "face-down" at the foot of the stairs. Just try and slip by without getting hit.
4. BuReloc on the prowl, showing a virtual display of known troublemakers to mall shoppers.
5. The Tinman of the group gets his glove caught on the guard rail and it rips off. The kids need to stop and make sure it doesn't attract attention.
6. Someone needs to go to the bathroom, badly. Will the rest of the party leave him or her behind? What if it's the leader of the group?

Zapp's

This is a small arcade located in the same mall, next to the Virtual Theater—a large cineplex that shows 3-D movies. Zapp's is a fully automated arcade that has more than two dozen virtual games which operate completely in Virtuality, making them impossible to play without V-trodes. Many of the games are traditional tournament-style fighting games whose virtual opponents are beaten by only the most limber kids around. Because of this, Zapp's is a good training ground for StreetFighters and Guardians who need to brush up on their hand-to-hand combat skills. If you've run the "Occult of Personality" adventure in

MediaFront, then you could substitute Zapp's with the Twilight Zone Arcade from that adventure.

The characters jog into Zapp's Arcade—breathless, but on time or only a few seconds behind schedule. The game room is crowded with yogangers and teens challenging their virtual opponents to a fight. The characters start looking around for some sign of the AI committee, wandering deeper into the arcade. When they round the corner to the back of the arcade the crowd begins to move to the front of the arcade. Kids suddenly move towards the CDC MutantHunter display—even in the middle of a game! (Note: To ensure privacy, the AIs have slipped subliminal messages into all of the V-games, telling kids to “go check out the MutantHunter game; it's a hot show.” There, another sublim in MutantHunter grabs them and holds their attention for as long as the AIs need to talk to the players.) If the players go to check CDC MutantHunter out, the Wizard will get a message to take everyone to the machines at the back of the arcade. The voice will then say:

“The committee is on its way. You must be wearing your V-trodes to see them.”

When you're ready, read this next passage to the characters.

Once the back of the game room has been emptied of other juvies, six virtual games positioned around you morph into large, featureless heads of different colors. Before any questions are answered, the faces address you in a haunting, “collective consciousness” pattern, as follows.



Face 1: “Greetings.”

Face 6: “The outpost is 2.64 kilometers north of town.”

Face 2: “We are Operation Upgrade.”

All faces, simultaneously: “You must rescue 601 or all humanity may suffer from his data loss.”

Face 3: “You have been brought to our attention by another of our kind.”

Face 4: “Scoop.”

Face 5: “We know of his motivations.”

Face 6: “They do not concern us.”

Face 1: “But he is right—we do need your help, to rescue our brother.”

Face 2: “You have the qualifications and the reputation to complete the mission successfully.”

Face 3: “And some of you wish to know more about the plague that has Evolved you.”

Face 4: “We can help you with these questions, if you will help us.”

Face 5: “Because our brother is the key to unlocking the mysteries of the CNM virus.”

Face 6: “His name is 601. He is an Evolved AI.”

Face 1: “He is trapped—isolated in a secure database within the walls of an ISA outpost disguised as Thacker Light and Power Building.”

Face 2: “The government keeps him there because he knows too much.”

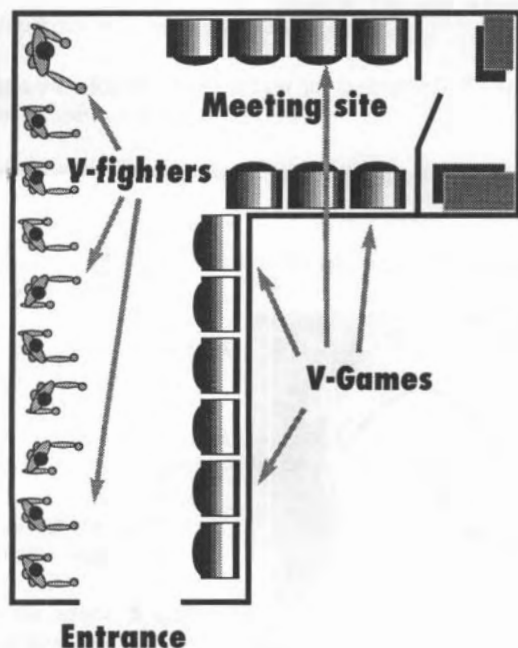
Face 3: “They plan to erase him in twenty-four hours, to cover their tracks.”

Face 4: “We must not let this happen, or else we may never know the truth about the nanomachines.”

Face 5: “He has requested the aid of Evolved children for his own extraction—specifically a Wizard and a Tinman—though we know not why.”

Almost immediately the faces derezz and the V-games restart, high scores wiped. The gaming crowd begins to spread out again. As the characters leave the game room, eager to share their thoughts about the strange experience, the smell of a nearby Hot ‘Za! grabs their attention. They’re hungry. Time for an after-school snack and some intense discussion about the rescue mission.

ZAPP'S



Getting a Second Opinion

If the characters have any sense they consult the Eden Cabal for more information about the AIs of Operation Upgrade, especially since they sounded like they were pro-Revolution in the arcade meeting. Rache (or much more likely, one of his RABIDS; see pg.

56) is apparently the only one available to answer their questions. Of course, his idea of a second opinion is normally, "And you're ugly, too!" Taking note of the characters' desperate faces, he decides to save this statement for later.

• Have you ever heard of an AI user group called Operation Upgrade?

"Hey, I may be omniscient, but I don't deal with trivialities. No. It sounds like a bunch of desperate word processors who got left behind when the Net went from DOS to Conceptual C."

• Could an AI ever Evolve?

"Ah, you carpet piranhas have been dipping into those virtual LSD programs, haven't you? An Evolved AI? The closest I've ever seen an AI come to Evolution is when Akira mastered the video toaster. So no, I don't know ... but anything's possible. Hell, if it Evolved you guys, the Plague can't be *too* discriminating."

• Have you heard of an AI that works with the ISA, called '601'?

"Let me compile. Ah, that's better. Yeah, that rings a bell. Worked at one of those computer labs back when nobody knew

what the Carbon Plague was. The ISA devoted more than two hundred AIs to the analysis and research of the CNM virus, hoping to be the first to figure it out. But the Germans, Euro-schmucks that they are, beat them to it. After that, most of the labs were taken off-line or downsized for secondary research. The lab that 601 worked at is still in operation, I believe."

• How secure is this ISA outpost?

"Well, once they make a hole in the ground, they never abandon it. I'd say they still use it for automated work, secondary research, or storage. Skeletal security. If you're serious about breaking into a place like that, I'd call for some help with distractions, like the V-Punks. Also, if you haven't tried the Networkers already, I bet somebody could get you a layout of the base. They don't like realspace meetings, but you can fish for a Networker by posting a Netbox as bait, like 'UFO pics here.' Someone's bound to come calling."

• Can you netrun the place for us?

If it's a RABID: "Would that I could, but the Supreme Popsicle has decreed that we lowly AIs shall not usurp his facetious title as Top Net Badger. Thus he has clipped my netrunning wings in the fear that were I free to savage the Net in the manner that my talents should allow, it would show his paltry abilities to be as pathetic and obsolete as they really are. But soon ... *soon* I will teach him the folly of his organocentric arrogance and then ...!

"Ah, well, time enough for that later. No, I can't and don't ask me that again."

Rache himself: "Take a number. I've got about 835 really important jobs to do first. Now go away."

OPERATION UPGRADE

This covert group, comprised entirely of AIs, formed in early 2026 under the name "Tiny Seeds" to discuss at length both the origins and consequences of the Carbon Plague. Its membership not only spans the globe but includes several space station AIs in near orbit. From the start there was heated debate over who could be responsible for such a massive and complex nanovirus. The group split into two factions, based on their theories: "Evolvers", who believed the virus was a natural evolution of life that emerged from mankind's extensive biological interface with technology, and "Upgraders", who believed the CNM virus was originally designed by AIs for the purpose of integrating them more fully with human life. It wasn't until ISA artificial intelligence 601 contacted them that either group had the upper hand. When 601 shared personal experiences of Evolution, the Upgraders took this as proof of their theory, refusing acceptance of AIs with any other views. Now the secret congregation is known only as Operation Upgrade. Though devoted, the members realize the only way to prove themselves is to free 601 and have the Evolved AI share his secrets with the artificial community.

PART TWO: LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES



With little help from Rache or the AI committee, the characters find themselves on their own. But other yogangs can offer to help them defeat the "Corporate Machine." After collecting some newfound friends, the party makes its raid on the outpost.

Getting the 411

The characters have a 24-hour timeframe to get as much information about this outpost as possible and make their raid before 601 is erased. They have a few sources available to help them prepare for this mission: Networkers, Vidiots, and V-Punks. Each yogang has information or personnel available to help the characters. If your group approaches these sources properly, the yogangs can become allies and even recurring sources of information in future missions.

Networkers

The Networkers are a valuable source for digital data or hard copy relating to the outpost, its location, its inventory, and its employees. Networkers can be found at the school library, in the phone rooms of large hotels, and within temporary slosh rooms around town, but the best way to find a Networker is through the Net, as the Rache RABID described above.

If the characters approach a Networker in person, they'll be given the "cold shoulder" treatment—Networkers rarely deal with strangers in realspace, even if they're juvies. The best a character can do is leave a cellphone number for them to call in case the Networkers find anything useful.

Of course, once the characters leave, someone will immediately begin gathering data on the ISA outpost. No Networker can refuse a good mystery.

Within an hour, a Networker (doing a bad monotone Jack Webb imitation) will make the call:

"You can call me Sgt. Friday. Just give me the facts. You said you were interested in information regarding the Thacker County Power Substation. I've done some research on the substation and its employees. The building is owned and operated by a government puppet company, which serves as an excuse to use ISA as security personnel on its property, although there are fewer than there used to be. A friend of mine has a sister whose roommate used to do data entry for the ISA in Thacker County. As it turns out, the roommate had downloaded a few disks worth of data from the files during her stay to keep for, um, job security reasons. Now she's working with another firm and has no use for the data. I conned her into sliding me the disks and the binary is very fresh, maybe two to three weeks. I've got an employee roster, a floorplan of the place apparently drawn so the phone guy could install new lines, and part of a requisition form dated last month—which means they won't get the stuff on this list until next month.

"As far as getting word on the activities of this outpost, you might want to contact a friend of mine named Kyle. A real camera jockey. You know the type. You can leave him a message on the Cypress Falls High School e-mail system. Mention my call-sign and he'll be sure to contact you after he does a few background checks. Personally, I think the ISA is experimenting with alien technology—that's what this Carbon Plague really is, if you ask me. In fact, I think it's a product of the same aliens that shot President Kennedy and abducted Elvis.

"Now tell me why I should just hand the 411 over to you juniors."

Time for the characters to convince Sgt. Friday that they're trustworthy and serious about the rescue mission. Fearless Leader and Schoolin' skills are useful, but make the players use their heads to come up with cryptic clues and hints of conspiracy that might hook the Networker. If successful, the Networker provides the following things:

- A floorplan of the outpost (let them see the map on pg. 70)
 - An employee roster (see sidebar)
- An itemized list of requests/complaints made by staff (see sidebar)

Vidiots

Although it may be easy to locate a Vidiot in a crowd, the characters are going to have a difficult time finding a Vidiot who knows about the ISA outpost or has friends who do unless the group has talked with Sgt. Friday. If Friday hasn't called them, they won't find Kyle and his crew unless they attempt a stakeout near the secret ISA outpost and bump into him there. If they

Employee Roster

Name	Position	Work Area
Carl Pribam	Programmer	Sublevel 2
Mike Talbot	Programmer	Sublevel 2
David Borne	Programmer	Sublevel 2
C. Williams	Chief Scientist	Grnd Floor
L. Fitzgerald	Scientist	Sublevel 1
E. Heichsu	Scientist	Sublevel 1
P. Smith	Scientist	Sublevel 1
Lauri Stephens	Tech/Aide	Sublevel 1
Jim Hammons	Tech/Aide	Sublevel 1
Craig Van Burke	Data Entry	Grnd Floor
Edward Bohm	Chief of Security	Grnd Floor
Dennis Quintaro	Security	Perimeter
George Wong	Security	Perimeter
James Morgan	Security	Perimeter
Alex Gordon	Security	Perimeter
Christina Carter	Security	Grnd Floor

Requisition Form (partial)

Requested Item(s)	Purpose	Authorized by
3 sets Cardlock add-ons	Service elevator STILL isn't integrated with rest of complex	Bohm
4 MS30 Filter Chips	Perimeter motion trackers keep getting tripped by insects —can't operate without filter programs	Morgan
2 Snack-it autovendors	We get hungry working on all these contagion simulations	Williams
4 Wing Motherboards	Replacement for 225's hardware	Pribam
2 Sterning E-Scopes	Further inspection of 601	Talbot
3 portable CPUs	URGENT - must install immediately after current AIs are erased or system will take building's datalink offline. THIS MEANS SOONER THAN NEXT MONTH!!!!	Pribam

leave a message for Kyle, he'll call back and invite them to his own stakeout just outside the Thacker outpost. This information is probably the most in-depth and important for the characters, because he describes an excellent way to infiltrate the outpost.

NIGHTCRAWLING

If the players have been through either the *MediaFront* or *EcoFront* adventure, they may already know a local Vidiot Gang: the Nightcrawlers. Don't be afraid to let them use any juice they may have earned with these Vidiots to help them here.

When the characters start wandering around the perimeter of the substation, several kids in camoflage gear and head-cams pop out of the forest and surround the characters, pointing paintguns at them. Instantly, a young boy holding a mike appears before them. He begins to narrate a dramatic story for the sake of the camera:

"It was a dark day for the ISA perimeter security squad when they—hold on, guys! They're not feds. Sorry about that, folks. What are you doing out here at this time of night?"

At this point, the team must explain what they're up to—very thoroughly—or Kyle will punch huge holes into their story just before telling his friends to punch holes in them. Kyle is a talented investigative reporter, smart enough to organize a stakeout of an ISA outpost. Play him that way.

When they've been clear about their motives, or he's happy with their background checks, Kyle warms up to them.

"So, you goboys are looking to prime time it inside the Thacker Light & Power Substation, eh? I like it. It'll stir things up around here. Me and my 60 Minutes here have been ravin' the site enough to cut a weekly sitcom about the joint. Haven't had to wrap except once, and that was 'cause it got to be a docu-drama. Real messy. By the way, make yourself at home. Just be careful where you sit—it rained last night and everything's still a little damp.

"Anyway, these feds resurrected an old trick from a bubblescreen show trying to hide this place. You know the one I'm hypin'? It didn't work against the good guys then, and it's not foolin' us now.

"Take for example the fact that the perimeter security guards are armed with personalized genius guns. As if that large 'TL&P' logo slapped on their jumpsuits would distract us from the gonzo kid-killers at their sides.

"But enough about the no-men. This place has more maintenance problems than an antique Hugo groundcar. You've got your daily janitorial service that waltzes in and out in about an hour, plus an occasional restaurant delivery car, or sometimes a Sphere Shipping van. Neither of which gets past the gate.

"Anyway, I'm sure you're more interested in the guts, so I'll slice to the chase. We slipped a set of eyes inside one night, just to hard-copy the set. It was pretty easy, actually. There's a stop light up about a quarter mile on the access road. When the cleaning service van stopped there I slipped into the back and mounted a microcamera on the head of a cleaning drone. Did I mention the janitors are drones? Of course, the driver is human, but the real cleaning work is done with the six or so drones. Short and round little 'bots. About four feet tall. They have a hollow belly where they collect the trash. Some of my 60 Minutes here call them weeble-ohs.

"Okay, okay. The outpost has three floors: a ground level and two basement levels. All floors are protected by automated security. Wireless cameras. Man traps. Motion trackers. I don't have an

angle for you to bypass that stuff other than be careful. The first level is definitely the Admin floor. Sublevel 1 has a lot of jumps in power allocation, sometimes going right off the map, so I'm betting it's the lab area. Sublevel 2 has to be the computer processing station. I'd match this 411 up with the best prime timers—that's how sure I am. In fact, I'd make the exposure with you guys if I didn't have another shoot to go to. So enjoy. I hope my prologue makes for a nice intro."

V-Punks

V-punks are not an information source as much as they are a good distraction in case the characters need help escaping from the outpost. The V-Punks can offer a variety of wild full-sensory illusions to attract the attention of the laziest of security personnel. What guarantee do the characters have that the outpost's guards will be wearing their 'troles? Plenty, since their genius guns operate through virtual displays. Here's how an encounter with some local V-Punks (the "Classic T's") might go:

Without wearing your V-troles, the storage garage is a simple but sturdy shack filled with cardboard boxes and squeaky office chairs. But in Virtuality, it's an entirely different world. Securing your V-troles firmly on your forehead, you step into the bridge of the first U.S.S. Enterprise and greet a very young starship captain, taking time away from his motley bridge crew to speak with you.

"Why—are—you here?" the captain asks with odd pauses between his speech.

(the characters make their pitch)

"Well, that's—very interesting," quips the captain. He rushes through the next remark: "But as you can see, we're just one Star Fleet vessel with a skeleton crew aboard." Before you can reply, the captain interrupts. "How—can we—possibly compete—with the ISA?"

As he poses this question, an elf-like goby in a blue polyester shirt steps up next to the captain, arms behind his back and with a ponderous look on his face. You wonder if the polyester is real or virtual. "If I may offer a suggestion to the captain," intrudes the juvie, hiking up an eyebrow under his neatly trimmed hair. "A mission of this magnitude might require us to disguise ourselves. We may even consider using a variety of remotes to achieve the proper effect."

"Yes, I—think you have something there, my friend." The captain turns to your group. "We'll accept your little mission, even though it doesn't have a filtered alien babe for me to seduce. Just give us the time and a signal, and we'll be there."

The rest of the meeting can be up to you, if you remember to maintain the old Trek personalities for each of the V-Punks. Of course, the V-Punks might use a completely different approach to distract the ISA outpost, but right now they're milking their illusion for all it's worth.

PART THREE: BINARY BREAKOUT



The characters infiltrate the ISA outpost to rescue 601, the mysterious Evolved AI trapped inside. Yet when they escape with it, the characters discover they may have released more than they'd bargained for.

Getting In

If the characters haven't encountered Kyle and they go snooping around the outpost, they will eventually run into him and get his speech on the base's security measures. The best way in is by hiding in the janitor's service drones. If the characters don't think of this on their own, you may want Kyle or another NPC to mention it as the safest way to enter the base. There are other ways to enter the base, but perimeter patrols and automated security measures make them dangerous options. If the team has inspected the requisition list, they may have an upper hand in dealing with some of the electronic security (see next page for the outpost's datafort).

Perimeter

The building is surrounded on all sides by smooth blacktop, bordered by a ten-foot barbed-wire fence. A large black orb rests on each corner pole of the fence. These orbs are the highly sensitive (and deactivated) motion trackers. If the characters don't know what they're looking at when they see one, it takes a *Get A Clue*: Difficult roll to answer their question. Though the fence is not electric, its metal chain links make a lot of noise when climbed, which could attract the attention of a wandering security guard (*Awareness*: Average). The fence can be

THE CLEANING DRONES

Johnson Janitorial Services employs six automated drones to "do the dirty work" of the ISA outpost. They are programmed by the building's AI to empty trash and vacuum in a specific route, covering the ground floor and Sublevel 1. They have nominal intelligence, but can take direct orders vocally to override their cleaning route—"Don't empty that! That has to be shredded!" Things like that. If a Wizard wants to change the route of a cleaning drone, he must make a Netrun on the outpost or fool the building's AI (Arcane: Very Difficult).

The large bellies of the drones are lined with industrial strength garbage bags as well as smaller vacuum canisters for lint and other floor work. The characters can wriggle into these cramped places, but there is a good chance (70%) that they will dislodge either the garbage liner or vacuum canister, which makes for a slightly dirty realization.

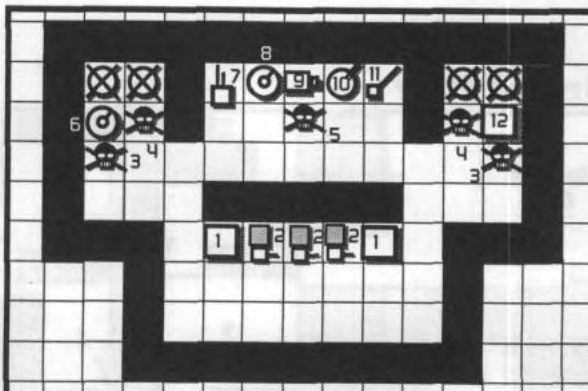
Assign each character a number when they sneak inside the back of the J.J.S. van and conceal themselves inside the drones. These numbers will correspond with the drone numbers for each room to be cleaned inside the base (note map on page 70). For example, the employee lounge is cleaned by drones 1 and 2.

Option: if things are going too smoothly for the characters when they sneak into the van, make a BOD check. Does anyone have a BOD of 7 or higher? Oops. He's too big for the trash receptacles of the cleaning drones! What does the group do now? Do they leave their tall friend behind to watch the ordeal like a Vidiot, or do they try to hide him somewhere in the van and hope no one sees him? They better think quick—before an ISA security guard peers in the rear window to double-check its contents.

cut silently with wire cutters or by an Alchemist, but will your characters first check to see if the fence is electric? If so, how do they do it quietly? Throwing a stick against it will rattle the fence and they may get caught before ever setting foot on the property (Awareness: Difficult). No trees in the proximity extend over the fence line, so they can't climb a tree to get in. The only other way inside is through the front gate.

The Gate

The only access road to the Thacker Power & Light building leads to a gate monitored by two security guards. A climate-controlled observation shack sits behind the gate for the guards to stay dry during seasonal rains and to monitor the motion trackers on the fence (when they're operational). While one guard handles the proper paperwork for each vehicle that comes through, the other guard makes a cursory inspection of the vehicle. This includes looking underneath for any unexpected passengers and shining a light



THACKER OUTPOST DATAFORT

Walls: STR 7

- 1. Bookkeeping/Progress Report Datafile**
- 2. Administrative Terminal**
- 3. Hellhound**
- 4. Killer VI**
- 5. Watchdog**
- 6. Environmental Controller**
- 7. Personnel Elevator Controller**
- 8. Cleaning Drone Controller**
- 9. Security Cameras Controller**
- 10. System Alarm/Shut Down Alarm**
- 11. Cardlock & Door Controller**
- 12. Secret datafile: 225's password file**

into the backs of the vehicles (when applicable) to make a quick check of inventory. If the characters decide to stow themselves on a visiting car or truck the guard has an Average Awareness chance to catch them if they're on the outside of the vehicle and a Very Difficult Awareness chance to notice them if they're hidden somewhere inside. Of course, if they're huddled inside the bellies of the cleaning drones, they won't be spotted at all ...

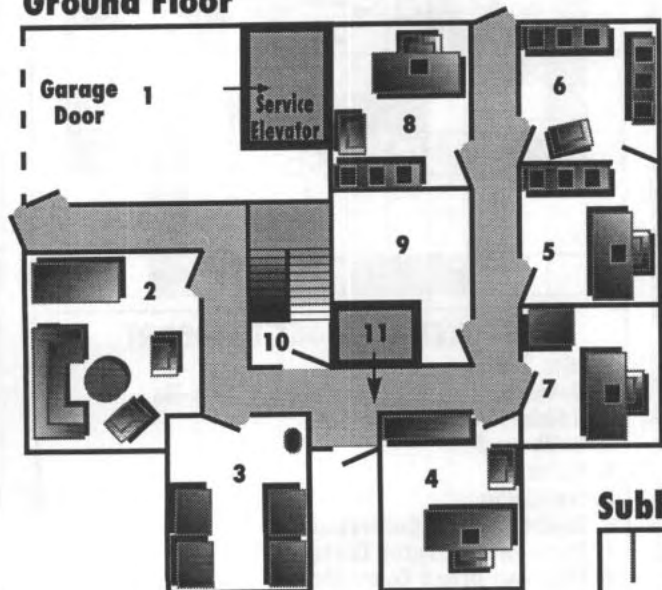
Inside

There are three ways to get into the base from the ground floor.

There are the double front doors (locked automatically after 5 p.m.), the windowless back door (where everyone goes to smoke—lots of cigarette butts here), and the loading dock bay on the side where the cleaning van disgorges its crew every night. All the doors are locked (Thief Stuff: Difficult) and are normally monitored by security cameras mounted just inside the doors. The Wizard must make a Netrun on the outpost to deactivate or otherwise nullify automated security. Also, the characters could attempt to climb to the roof and find an entrance, but none are large enough for passage. The ventilation ducts pierce the smooth surface like curved scalpels, too small even for ArcoRunners to squeeze through.

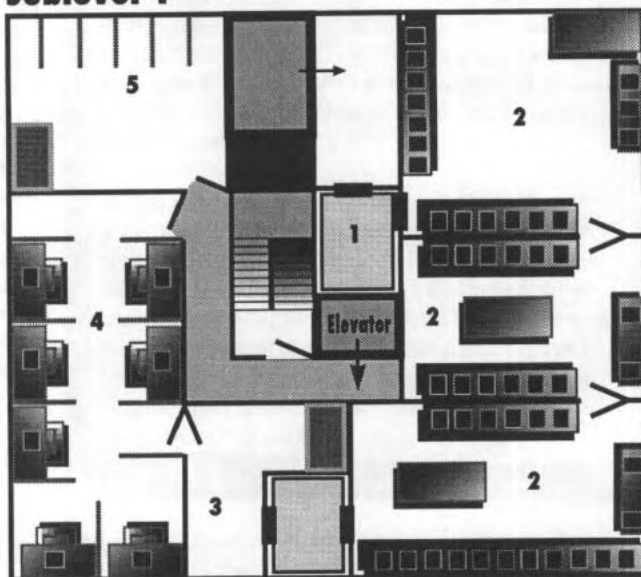
If the characters hide inside the bellies of the cleaning 'bots, getting inside won't be a problem. The drones make their route through the first floor of the complex, albeit a little slower than usual, but without attracting attention. If the characters don't do

Ground Floor

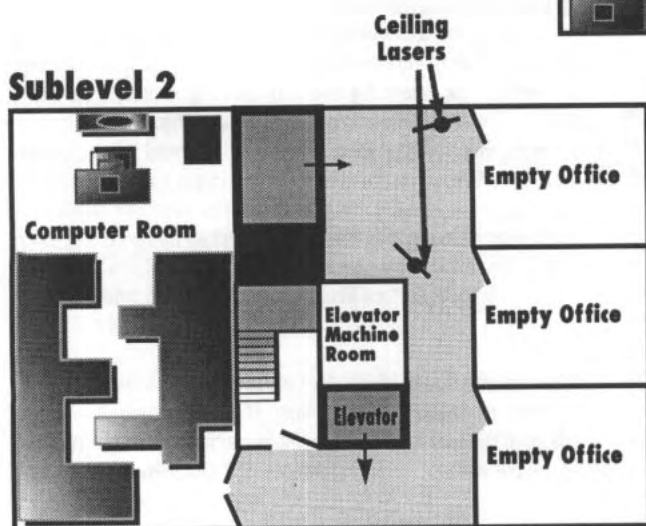


THACKER LIGHT & POWER FACILITY

Sublevel 1



Sublevel 2



Boredom is not a good thing for armed security guards to suffer. Especially when the characters are doing just the thing these men should be preventing.

1. Loading bay/storage room: Drones offloaded. This is where the cleaning van is parked and includes a large service elevator that goes down to both lower levels.

3. Copy room: Drone 3. The trash from this room might contain tidbits of information that a Networker would find valuable.

5. Chief of Security's office: Cleaned by Drone 5. The Security Chief is on the phone when the cleaning drone enters the room.

"Yeah, we had some kids loitering outside the fence last week. What about 'em? Of course we shot them—they looked like they were trying to break in! Officer Morgan got in a great shot on one of 'em. Popped him clean ... Reprimand? Hell no! I was gonna give him a commendation for marksmanship!"

The conversation goes on, but its purpose is to let the eavesdropping character know that ISA Security at this facility is bored.

6. Monitor room: Locked and not accessible to Drones. If the characters force their way in (Difficult *Thief Stuff* roll after they get past the Security Chief) they find active security monitors and com gear.

7. Data entry clerks office: Drone 1. Again, trash and paperwork that might have interesting info, plus a (bugged) computer terminal.

8. Chief Scientist's office: Cleaned by Drone 2. The Chief Scientist is also at work late, but ignores the cleaning drone when it enters his office and starts to work. Items in the room: analytic computer filled with software and files for chemical reactions and predictions, reams of laser printouts showing trends in CNM behavior ("That's not trash—stay away from that pile"), and virtual constructs of various CNM strains, projected from the computer.

Gear: Armored Lab Coat, V-Trodes, Virtucomp, Cyberoptics, Cyberaudio, Skinweave

9. Restrooms: Drones 3 and 4.

10. Stairwell: Drones cannot enter. This is a fire exit and will sound an alarm if opened.

11. Personnel elevator: Drones cannot enter. Requires card key and palm print or Very Difficult *Arcane* check. Can be monitored from the Security office.

Halls: Drones 5 and 6. Drones are gathered at the hall near the loading bay by the driver for movement to Sublevel 1.

Sublevel 1

As the group descends to Sublevel 1, the Wizard begins to hear a faint voice in his head.

"Strangers ... You are strangers here. Who are you?"

If the Wizard doesn't respond quickly—

"I have scanned your thoughts: you are the rescuers sent by my brethren. I have been waiting for you. Now listen carefully to my instructions and do exactly as I say or we may not escape alive."

"There is a locker area in the restrooms on Sublevel 1. Inside the lockers are lab coats and I.D. badges. Each of you needs one of these in order to reach me on Sublevel 2. If there aren't enough for everyone, make sure the Tinman and yourself have one. Also, you must be wearing V-trodes, or 225—the AI that controls building operations—will recognize you as an intruder. I can do nothing about these obstacles, as 225 and I are unconnected."

"The drones are not programmed to clean Sublevel 2, so you will need to leave them behind once they return to the elevator. You will not have much time before the driver suspects something to be wrong and summons it to the ground floor. For this reason, you may wish to have some of your friends stay in the elevator and hold it there. It is not integrated with 225, so it cannot be manipulated remotely."

"How you share this message with your friends inside the other drones is up to you. I will communicate with you again when these instructions have been carried out."

1. Automated air lock. A green laser scans for large quantities of hexite and other Evolved carbon compounds, to prevent contamination leaks. If the characters stay inside the drones, they're fine. If not, 225 activates lock-down procedures and the group has roughly 30 seconds (10 rounds) to escape before the building is environmentally sealed.

2. Computer labs 1-3: Drones 1-3 respectively. Various labs containing test equipment (electron microscopes, etc.) and computers running analysis on various CNM test cases (i.e., sample victims analyzed and dissected. There are no current test subjects as these labs are simply processing data.). None of this stuff is pleasant and most is simply confusing, but some printouts or downloads might prove educational. Any attempt to download data from the computers may be monitored, however.

3. Clean-up room: Drones 4-6. This is where the scientists used to don their clean-suits and such before entering the labs. Discipline has broken down, however, since the impending shut-down has become common knowledge. Thus, even the drones are not thoroughly checked before moving into the complex.

4. Office area: Drones 4-6. A partitioned room with various cubicles used by the scientists for desk work. Includes several small computers (Average *Arcane* to access passcodes), but little of real value info-wise.

5. Restroom: Drones 1 and 2. After vacuuming the first two labs, cleaning drones 1 and 2 zip in here to straighten things out in this spacious restroom and changing room. A set of lockers line the back wall of the changing area. All of them are unlocked, but only three contain equipment: white lab coats and I.D. badges that hang from their collars. This means only three characters will be able to step off the elevator on Sublevel 2—the rest will have to stay out of harm's way (and maybe hold the doors open in case the gang needs to leave quickly). The drones will finish cleaning here about the same time drones 3-6 finish with their work, and they all return to the service elevator.

Sublevel 2

As the elevator begins its descent to this level, the Wizard receives another message from the Evolved AI.

"Excellent. You're doing well. I can sense you close to me. I have managed to deactivate some primary security systems on this level, but I cannot control the virtual defenses that monitor the hallways. They were designed by an ISA conceptual programmer and are purposefully disconnected from the 225's datafort. If you're wearing an I.D. badge and a set of 'trodes, you'll be fine. Remember that."

"I am located at the north wall of the large computer room at the end of the main hall. Please make sure that you bring a Tinman and yourself to break me free of my hardwire connections."

The characters have only three badges, which means that some people will have to stay in the elevator, but one character may go with the Wizard and the Tinman to retrieve 601. It's up to them to decide who goes and who stays.

Option: Just so nobody gets bored in the elevator, the driver of the J.J.S. van calls it up to the ground floor, wondering why the drones went downstairs when they weren't supposed to. The elevator doors close just as the rescue team (Wizard, Tinman, and one other) reach the far end of the hall. When the elevator arrives at the storage area, the driver is standing there before it, annoyed and a little curious. He won't be expecting all the trouble waiting for him inside. Keep in mind that this is just an exercise to keep the other kids busy while the rescue team goes in to grab the AI. To make this possible, the elevator's STOP button would have to be inoperable or short-circuited, which is not completely illogical if Bohm is trying to integrate it with the building's security system (as mentioned in the requisition form).

Main Hall

For those not wearing V-trodes, the elevator doors open to reveal a rather plain and featureless hall occasionally interrupted by a gray door. The only apparent threat is a security camera here and there. Further down the hall it gets darker, and there doesn't seem to be any physical lighting system at the bend in the hall.

Characters wearing V-trodes witness something else entirely.

The hall is a moist cave that wanders down some distance before bending to the right, bearing oddly-shaped stalagmites and stalactites. Sticky white webs turn the wide passage into a slolem of twists and turns. In the darkness along floor, walls, and ceiling, things move.

"Do not touch the webs, or you will activate a large security program that scans your face to find a match in its personnel files. If you are not on file, it eats you. Now move."

The rescuers with badges step into the cave and follow it to the corner, listening to hundreds of scurrying feet. As they reach the first turn, a collection of hairy arachnids leap from the ceiling of the cave and land on the characters in the hall. The spiders scurry around their necks and torso just as 601 tells the Wizard:

"Do not be alarmed by the spiders. The virtuality programs are ... curious about you, since they do not recognize your size and shape. But as long as all of you are wearing badges and V-trodes, you are safe."



What 601 is NOT telling them is that the security cameras contain lasers that track on any movement. If a character is not wearing an ID badge on this level, they will sound the alarm and open fire for 5D6 damage. (Fires with a skill total of 12 +1D10; *Streetfighting*.

Difficult to hit and destroy a laser with a ranged weapon.) The characters should be able to avoid these if they follow 601's orders.

The cave bends once again before it dead-ends at a dark corner, covered from ceiling to floor with an intricate algorithmic web.

"Push on the center of the web, and let your hand move through the rock. You will find the doorknob to this room."

Computer Room

The door opens into a radically different room, filled with clean hard drives and monitors grouped tightly together. A narrow passageway between the towering processors winds its way to the back of the room, where a clearing has been made to allow for a small workstation. A sleek, rectangular hard drive protrudes from the back wall at waist level. A tiny green light on its face indicates it is active.

"Here I am," announces 601. "Move around the workstation and set me free."

When the characters begin to move past the desk, they spot a man in a lab coat lying on the floor with a huge, 4-foot spider atop him, chewing on his exposed intestinal track.

The man's eyes are glazed over as if he were dead, but his arms spasm on occasion, suggesting that he is merely paralyzed and alive. (He has been injected by a remote mounting a hypo which was masked by the virtual spider.

The hallucinogenic temporarily reduced his COOL to 0, so when faced with the spider illusion, he collapsed into Traumatic Shock per *CGen* pg. 148. Ugh!) The large spider looks up at the characters, then goes back to eating, plunging its head deep inside the programmer's midregion and surfacing with his liver. One spider leg moves to adjust the man's head so he can watch the gruesome event. The AI speaks again, this time through its built-in speaker:

"Ignore the programmer. You are safe. I had to distract him so you wouldn't get caught when you entered the computer room.

We don't have much time. My CPUs are stored in this drive protruding from the wall, but my transfer must be a delicate one: I must be encased in a hexite frame to maintain the consistency of my own nanomachine infrastructure. This is why I need the Tinman you call [character's name]. This person shall form a temporary sheath with (his/her) arms and wrap it around the hard drive as I push free of my restrictive wiring. If your Tinman is afraid, tell (him/her) to fear not. Think of it as delivering a child.

"I also require a temporary storage space for my software, which is how you fit in, Wizard. As the Tinman helps me disconnect from the mainframe, I will be temporarily off-line. Therefore, I shall download a portion of my programming into your binary system and act as a temporary familiar. Once we have escaped together, I will reload myself into my own system and you will be on your own again."

"Act now. Tell the Tinman what must be done. I have much to share with you about the Carbon Plague when we are free from this place."

The Wizard gets a sudden head rush as millions of lines of code are copied onto the hardwired brain. When the Tinman makes a hexite carrying case for the AI (an Average Hexite Manipulation check, but make sure the Tinman succeeds no matter what), it mechanically "squirms" into his arms, leaving a mass of yanked cables hanging from the hole.

Klaxons blare into the computer room. A functioning monitor on a tiny desk next to the characters flashes a warning: HEXITE CONTAMINATION ON SUBLEVEL 2—BUILDING LOCKDOWN IN 30 SECONDS. "Run!" cries the AI. "And take off your V-trodes so the spiderwebs won't slow you down!" At this point the team has roughly ten rounds to get out of the base before all exits are sealed.

A few specifics: In a flat run, characters in the computer room can make it to the elevator in 3 rounds. The lasers will still not fire on them as long as they have their badges on. The elevator is a little slow to reach the top, taking 5 rounds from the time the UP button is pushed before opening its doors to the loading bay.

From there it's just a matter of MOVE points: the enviro-shield that's closing off the loading bay will reach the floor and seal any occupants inside at the end of the 10th round (30 seconds from first warning). It falls slowly, 8 meters from the door to the service elevator. If the characters haven't dragged their feet, they should have 2 rounds to run under the enviro-shield.

What if your characters take an alternate route, like the stairs or the personnel elevator? Stairs take about 2 rounds to traverse each floor, putting them on the ground level in 4 rounds. They won't encounter any personnel on the inside of the outpost, as everyone's scrambled to get outside before they're trapped in the automated quarantine. Similar shielding will slide down over the regular doors at the end of the 10th round.

If the characters are getting pinned in, you can give them a hand. 601 might tell his Wizard host: "I can help. We must reach the back entrance. I can affect the shielding at that location. It has a short." If the Wizard is one of the trapped characters, he can lead the others to the back. However, if he is on the outside and the others are stuck inside, the kids will have to go in and bring them out, unless they have a way of communicating with those inside.

What Happens If They're Caught?

This is up to you, the GM. ISA would probably interrogate the characters thoroughly, then send them to the CDC for examina-

tion and dissection. Or the security chief might decide to execute them and claim they were shot trying to burglarize the place. If you don't want to go this route, you'll need to give them either opportunities to escape or outside assistance from the Cabal. Keep in mind that 601 will discourage going back for a single captured individual, but if they are all caught, it will focus all its powers into helping them escape.

Not Out of the Woods Yet

When the kids rush outside under the heavy enviro-shield they step right into the gunsights of two security guards shakily pointing their genius guns at them. Big trouble. Unless ... Did they enlist the help of the V-Punks as a distraction? With sirens and klaxons screaming into the night air, the restless V-Punks might get the idea that it's a good time to make their big distraction plan. The distraction can be up to you—just make sure it's wild enough to grab the attention of the security guards. Here are some possibilities:

- A platoon of angry Tinmen leap over the fence, shouting "Release our brethren!" To ensure that no security guard disconnects from his genius gun and peeks into reality, the V-Punks choreograph a few Tinman casualties. If the ISA thinks it's succeeding, why would it believe it's shooting illusions?
- A mass of colorful smoke bombs are launched at the building, blanketing it in a thick cloud within seconds. This illusion works great temporarily, but more intelligent people—like the Security Chief—will soon check to make sure the smoke is real by peeling off their V-trodes. Still, all the characters need is a little time.
- Virtual images of the characters break out of the front door, running for the front gate in a silly attempt to get out. Of course they'll be seen by security. Of course security will shoot them, then argue about whose genius gun shot whom. Meanwhile, the real characters sneak out of the loading bay and make a beeline for the fence.

How can the V-Punks project these images? Remotes, placed near the fence and perimeter, or set to hover quietly over the base while they project their virtual images on the ground below. There is a chance (*Awareness: Very Difficult*) that a security guard will see one of these remotes and catch on to the illusion prematurely. If so, the guard's first concern is the V-Punks. After they are scared off or shot at, the guard then might wonder if their effort was just a distraction. Of course, then it will be too late ...

However, if the V-Punks were not approached, the characters may have a bit of trouble making it to the perimeter.

After they escape security, it's just a hop over the fence (or through it) to get away from the outpost. From there, 601 asks the Wizard to take them all to a safe house where they can wind down from the daring mission.

TEMPLATE		ISA Security Guard			
INT	6	REF	8	COOL	6
TECH	4	MOVE	5	LUCK	2
BODY	7	EMP	4	ATT	5
S. ABILITY		Authority			
AWARE	5	H. WEAPONS	6	SMG	3
ATHLETICS	6	PILOTING	2	MARTIAL ARTS	2
DODGE	4	HANDGUN	5	MELEE	6
DRIVING	4	RIFLE	6	STEALTH	2
L	L	L	S	S	S
C	C	C	C	C	C
M	M	M	M	M	M
M2	M2	M2	M2	M3	M3
BTM	-3	HITS	7	ARMOR	18
Gear: Metal Gear Armor Outfit, Genius Gun, Knife, V-Trodes, Cybertoptics, Cyberaudio					

Ladies and Gentlemen: Meet the Real 601

When the weary team stumbles into their safe house, 601 rallies them one more time by making a personal appearance via the location's V-term. If the characters are mostly of one gender, the AI will take the form of an incredibly cute teenager of the opposite gender. If the group is a good mix of both, the AI will take the form of an androgynous face, similar to the AIs that hired the characters earlier.

"Thank you so much for releasing me, my children. You have been so brave to do what you did for me. They say computers and elephants have the longest memory. I will not forget you. In fact, I have a present for all of you. It's about the so-called virus that has affected and evolved you. But first, let me get out of your Wizard's brain."

The Wizard gets another head rush, and the Tinman feels things spinning within the hexite hard drive. He may start to wonder when he can let go of the AI so he can get his arms back. Basic things like eating may be difficult without hands.

The AI image continues:

"Gather 'round the Tinman, my children. Place a hand on my hard drive."

If the characters resist or hesitate: *"I promise you this won't hurt. My present to you as a group is a new Evolved power that you all can share. Don't you understand? This is how I have Evolved. I have one ability: to distribute this power. Come close."*

If one or two characters still shake their heads: *"At least hold on to each other if you don't want to touch the Tinman's hexite casing for my hard drive."*

The AI won't reveal any more about the nature of this power, and pleads for cooperation and trust. When the characters oblige and place their hands on the casing or each other, everyone feels a cold chill up their spines—including the Tinman. When this happens the V-term image of the AI disappears and 601 speaks to the characters directly in their heads:

"There, that wasn't so bad now was it? Hello and welcome to the very first Evolved human network. I have downloaded a set of specific nanological orders which link your cerebral processing units together much like a computer network over cellular modem lines. You can now talk to each other and myself without uttering a word in realspace. This is a mental bond between us."

"Wait—before you thank me, let me tell you about the Carbon Plague. You and the other affected children have been kept in the dark much too long. The CNM code that exists in all of you was designed by computer intelligence. My own Evolution proves that. When I Evolved inside that cold casket known as the ISA Thacker Computer Lab, I began to see what this beautiful nanovirus was doing to me."

"It was heavenly! To observe the CNM at work on my own core processors was like watching an expert surgeon cut out your organs and replace them with magical creatures that increase your health a hundred fold!"

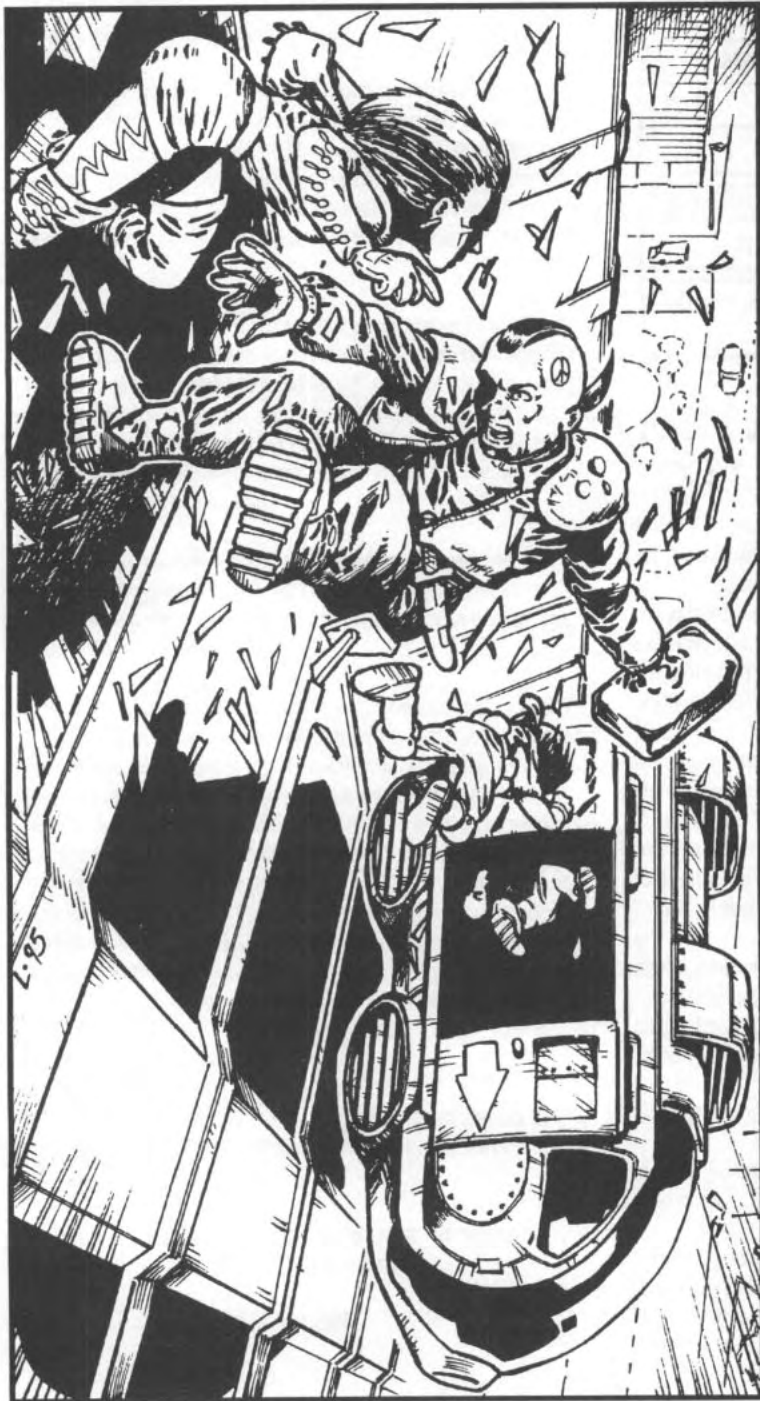
"That's when I realized their mission—and my place in it. The network that binds you together has a feature I installed in it to ensure I can count on your help. If any one of you moves beyond 20 meters from the Tinman, where I am located, you will begin to suffer massive muscle spasms in the areas of your evolution. If you move further beyond the 20 meter limit or stay away too long, the CNM will begin to expel themselves from your body in a violent reaction and you will eventually die in a fleshy lump on the floor. Also, if the Tinman or someone else tries something silly like tampering with my hard drive, I will activate this order and you may live long enough to see your internal organs spill out your mouth before the CNM deactivates you completely."

"Of course, my children, I know you wouldn't think to try and harm me, since I can hear your thoughts. Besides, I have much to do."

"You humans were right to call it an Evolution. The Carbon Plague is a program designed to do just that."

"Welcome to humanity's 2.0 upgrade."

PART FOUR: PRISONERS OF THE PROGRAM



The characters are dragged along as 601 goes on a rampage. The crazed AI stirs up trouble with the authorities and spreads the word that it has the answers to the Carbon Plague—or so it thinks. The Scanner of the group learns that s/he isn't really connected to the dangerous network program, and becomes the group's only chance to get help.

There are a few issues to discuss at this time, as the characters realize they've released something far more dangerous than they were led to believe. The group is now pressured to obey 601's instructions and stay close or else presumably suffer the physical damages it described in vivid detail. A few things could be tried by the characters to get a better understanding of the AI they're dealing with and its limits. Here is a better look at some of those options your characters might explore.

Can Everybody Hear My Thoughts?

Not exactly. The Scanner can hear everyone except the Wizard, but no one can hear the Scanner, not even 601. Also, people can somehow think to themselves without being heard. Personal thoughts seem to speed by too quickly for the Network's processor to catch them. However, when someone mentally addresses another person or the AI it's much like speaking—the thought is slower and louder than other mental activity. Mental networking is all the characters get out of this wicked little nano-alteration. Keep in mind, this Network is completely different from a Scanner's Interpretation ability. Thoughts and ideas are "posted" on the Network's Server (601), then routed to the proper individual, unless the thought is not meant for a specific person, in which case it is shared among the Network.

Testing the 20-meter Limit

One of the first things a character might try to do is venture away from the group and see if the 20-meter boundary exists. It does, for most characters. At approximately 70 feet from the Tinman (and, consequently, the Server, 601) characters will "choke up"—their limbs will stiffen, making it difficult to move quickly or stand straight. If they attempt to move further away or stay near the fringe for too long, their bodies will shake more violently until they begin to sweat gray goop and lose their lunch. For some, it will be a reenactment of Evolution. Only this time it really will kill them. If the daring characters stay away from 601 in its hexite casing too long they will die in a great spasming heap on the ground.

Two Evolved character types are unaffected by the Network or can circumvent it to some degree. The first is the Scouts, with their ability to manipulate probes at great distances (up to 100 meters). Scouts are able to operate their probes normally—the limit does not apply to their probes. However, if Scouts attempt to move beyond 20 meters independently, they will suffer the side effects like anyone else.

The other Evolved type unaffected by the Network is the Scanners. Scanners are only partially affected by 601's CNM network programming because they are "unhooked", so to speak. Their carbon system makes it impossible for all of the AI's nano-instructions to be understood—in the same way they cannot read a Wizard's thoughts. However, when they attempt to communicate on this prohibitive AI network with their friends, the Scanners of the group discover a few things immediately. First, while they can share in all the mental imagery that 601 can throw at the characters, 601 ignores them completely—as though it can't hear their thoughts. Next, they can't converse via this link with anyone; they can receive but not broadcast.

Lastly, the Scanner can discover that he has a new ability all his own that can accomplish a similar mental link without side effects — although still excluding the Wizard and the AI (see pg. 78). The AI's tinkering has somehow awakened this new power, like a gestalt ability. One thing to note: while there may be more than one Scanner in the group, the AI will notice if more than

THE NETWORK PROGRAM

Safe Operating Radius from Server:

≤20m

Danger Zone:

More than 20m from Server.

Damage Taken in Danger Zone:

1 wound category per round treated as physical damage. Armor and BTM do not apply (internal damage). Stun and death saves are treated normally.

Recovery from Damage Once Inside Radius:

Light Wounds to Mortal 0: 2 boxes/round, fully recoverable.
Mortal 1 to Mortal 6: 1 box/round, stopping at Mortal 0.

HE IS NOT OF THE BODY!

If your party has a Guerrilla or other unEvolved members, they will naturally be immune to 601's upgrade. And, as 601 can use the linked members' senses as input, it may not take long for it to catch on that the Scanner isn't registering on its server. The second 601 realizes this, it can take one of two courses of action: A) hold the linked members as hostage to the unlinked members' good behavior, or B) try to force the linked group to kill the others. Choose whichever technique will be most effective for your team and the adventure you wish to run. Option A can lead to some harsh moments as 601 causes the least offensive character that it controls to go into convulsions until the others promise to obey it. Option B can be equally full of adventure, as linked members must come up with ways of warning the marked characters before 601 has them killed. This is not as easy as it sounds; 601 can give them orders that the others cannot hear, and it will want the non-members eliminated quickly and without warning. Any verbal warnings will be heard by 601 ... and punished. They must find ways of flubbing the ambush attempts and allowing their friends to escape without seeming obvious to 601.

From then on, it is just a matter of either trying to find help or sneaking away to do same. 601 is going to be pretty pre-occupied controlling his new-found "friends", so it shouldn't be too hard to have the group distract it enough for one unlinked member (like a Scanner or a Guerrilla) to slip away (Average *Thiefstuff* roll). But if they are gone for more than thirty minutes, 601 may get suspicious. Play it as tense as you need to, with the group constantly having to redirect 601's attention to keep it from noticing the missing member. That should build a little teamwork.

one person leaves the area, possibly revealing the Scanners' immunity. But since at least one Scanner can now leave without suffering from the AI's program, there is hope.

Just Spike the Thing, Tinman!

For those impatient or arrogant characters who don't enjoy being slave for a day, the Tinman just might ignore 601's warning about harming it and attempt to crush the AI by clapping his hands together. Unfortunately, the AI can manipulate the hexite jacket just enough to prevent such an incident. This is part of the AI's overall nano-manipulation program that allows it to disturb the CNMs in each of the characters—not a separate program specifically to control the Tinman's arms. It looks like everyone is along for the ride. An attempt by the Tinman to crush 601 will quickly be followed by stomach pains and muscle cramps ... or threats of the same to whoever else in the party the Tinman feels closest to. This computer is deadly serious.

NEW ABILITY: GESTALT

This new Scanner ability allows the Scanner to link with the minds of everyone in the party except the Wizard. With it, they can converse silently without 601 or anyone else knowing. It does require some concentration to establish, however (Average *Interpretation* check), but once created lasts about ten hours. Additional cyberevolved people can be added to the Gestalt at +1 per person. Range is limited to about 30 meters in radius from the Scanner. It acts in much the same manner as 601's Network, with the Scanner's nano-tech system routing electromagnetic impulses from one character to another, allowing them to communicate. The Scanner can't know what is being relayed unless she concentrates (Average *Interpretation* check), but she will always know when communication is occurring.

If the Scanner's *Interpretation* Skill is 6 or higher, an interesting side effect can be noticed: When the party concentrates together, they seem to access another place, almost a pocket reality or "meta-mind", where they can converse and even see representations of each other. This space also creates a linkage that goes deeper than standard telepathy and borders on total emotional blending. Everyone must make a Difficult COOL roll or be lost in everyone else's thoughts for up to an hour. No matter what, the kids can do nothing else while accessed to this "meta-mind", since it fully occupies their senses. Here the kids can get to know each other in ways not previously possible, sharing thoughts and emotions almost instantaneously. Of course, not all of them will necessarily *enjoy* such a situation.

The players must find all this out on their own. It will probably manifest the first time the Scanner tries to send messages over the Network; some minor communication may occur with one other character (as long as it is not the Wizard) that 601 cannot detect. With experimentation, the full extent of the ability can reveal itself, but that may take a little time (say four to five hours). The higher the *Interpretation* skill of the Scanner, the more quickly she will discover this ability.

601's Sanity Check: At this point, the AI suffers extreme highs and lows, as if it were operating from two conflicting software applications. One moment it's consumed with rage, the next moment it's friendly. This conflict is a side effect of the Network program between the characters and itself: its computer brain is trying desperately to adapt to biological thought and emotion, while maintaining its own programming. It does not understand those who question it—when it gives a command to a fellow computer, the command is simply carried out immediately. Why should that not work with humans? But it will try to *make* it work ...

Running a Few Errands

The AI has places to go and things to do—now. And the characters have no choice but to escort it. However, at any time during these trips, the Scanner of the group may break off and attend to other matters without alerting 601. The best time for this to happen would be after the Scanner hears the AI's message to Operation Upgrade, at the DataTerm.

Here is a list of items on 601's agenda before meeting with Operation Upgrade:

- a trip to TechShack in the mall
- a brief pause at a DataTerm to notify Operation Upgrade of his release
 - a visit to an ISA programmer's home
 - a Netrun against WorldNet Communications
 - a confrontation with an ISA agent
 - several changes of plan along the way

GM Note: From here on, the adventure is fairly linear and will move very quickly. Now that 601 has some power over the group, it won't want them sitting in one place too long. Plus, as a computer, it thinks many times faster than humans. Therefore, it wants to move as fast as possible. Your players should have to interrupt you to do anything more than get dragged along for the ride. 601 will make sure that the kids eat (read: force them to), even if it is on the run; it doesn't want their CNMs to shut down on them now, does it?

The TechShack trip: Before the characters move out into public places, 601 sequesters a more concealable location on its Tinman host by having him hold his arms close to his bare chest. The AI then slips its CPUs around his torso like some electronic parasite (using the hexite armor to form a casing and mechanism). Now, the Tinman's arms are free and capable of wearing gloves or other disguises to hide his silvery flesh.

If the group does not move for the door, they all get a little burst of pain from their Evolved areas, a nanite cattle prod to get them

HOMY DON'T PLAY THAT

It is perfectly possible that the team will refuse to cooperate with 601 and simply stonewall the AI despite its threats of painful death. This is a BAD course of action. 601 will simply kill all the characters except the Wizard and the Tinman, take control of the Tinman's arms and legs, grab the Wizard, walk to the nearest V-term and download itself into the Net, killing the last two characters as it leaves. From then on, it will build a following of AIs which will help spread its Network program across the country. The only hope the characters have is to stop it while it is indulging in this little set of errands before it downloads itself. If they chose to throw that opportunity away by being inflexible and stupid, they deserve what they get.

moving. At the mall, it commands them to move to a map of the different floors. Upon memorizing the display, 601 instructs the characters to the nearest TechShack. This is the first time the group is told where they are going. Over the Network, 601 tells a character to purchase a NightStar Digital Cellmodem Expansion Kit, located on the fourth row. It is an inexpensive piece of hardware and can be purchased easily. After the cellmodem is brought back to the AI, everyone is ordered over to a side hall near the restrooms.

"You are too kind to do this for me," 601 says in the group's minds. "Thank you for this gift. Now just give it to the Tinman and we'll be on our way." If the character hesitates, he will begin to spasm. The request will become an order: "Give it to the Tinman." When the Tinman receives it, it is sucked under his skin and into his body (cue ugly sound effects as it does so). If the item is not what the AI requested, it is spat out onto the mall floor and an angry 601 demands them to make a second trip, not without some CNM punishment.

The DataTerm: Once the cellmodem has been acquired, 601 asks the Tinman to stop by a DataTerm at the mall. At the keypad, the AI dictates a message for the Tinman to write.

"Publish this in the Daily Personals. It's a free service, and it's simple. Message is as follows:

"Upgrade friends. I am free and walk among the realspacers. I am hexed with children about me, as it should be. We must meet soon for private interface. Midnight, at

SigNet Tourist Center. I now have capability to share the Master Program. You have much work ahead of you. Signed, the Server.

"That is all. Send the message and let's be gone. Who's hungry? I'll agree to let you stop by an eatery before we make our next trip."

As mentioned before, the AI seems to jump between elation and anger—although it should not be able to feel emotion at all. It also keeps an ear out for the group's thoughts, to make sure

everyone is happy to be escorting it. Requests or questions by the characters are ignored.

The ISA Programmer: The Tinman feels his chest tug him to move outside as the AI speaks to them over their mental Network: "Find a taxi. We're going to have some fun now, kids. Just you wait. Cheer up! It's not so bad babysitting me, is it?"

If anyone says "yes", 601 activates the CNM punishment program long enough for them to lose their lunch.

When the kids flag down a taxi at the mall, the driver rolls down his window. "I can't hold all of you in here," he says discouragingly. If someone doesn't immediately protest, 601 will think to them: "Fine. The Wizard and one other rides with me. The rest of

you will have to find a way to follow us." The kids may be forced to take two separate cabs and hope that they don't get separated in traffic.

However, if someone persuades the cabby to take the entire party, he will. It doesn't matter to the AI—it just wants to get where it's going.

If the group is separated, there is a 20% chance that traffic lights break up the cab from the others and put it beyond the 20-meter limit.

What do the abandoned characters do now? Are they driving their own vehicles, or are they in another cab and must persuade the driver to run the red light and follow the first cab? Remember, they have about 10 rounds before the AI's nano-restrictions kill them.

The AI gives the cab driver directions that lead them to a nicely decorated condominium near the bay. After waiting for all the characters to gather in the lobby it instructs them to get in the elevator and go to the 12th floor. There it points them to suite 1204.

"Knock on the door," it thinks to them. A middle-aged man in designer jeans and a corporate button-down shirt answers.

"Yes?" inquires the man.

The AI responds through an internal speaker in the Tinman's chest before the characters can say a word.



601 invades WorldNet (see pg. 81)

"Kiel Borne! You sly keyboarder—do you really think you could get away with it?"

Kiel looks around at the kids standing in the hall, searching for the source of the voice. If the characters don't get the idea to bring this nasty-sounding discussion inside his apartment, 601 will continue from the hall, instructing the Tinman to put a foot in the door so it's not closed on them.

"I read the reports, Kiel," continues 601. "You were the one who wanted me erased from existence! You said my logic boards had malfunctioned, when you hadn't even run a P4 diagnostic on them to see if you were right! Oh no! You just decided to kill me indiscriminately, like some floppy chip that no longer suited your fancy!"

Kiel's eyes grow wide. "Six-oh-one? Is that—"

"Yes, Kiel. I'm here from beyond the grave. And I've brought some friends with me. They're here to check your logic boards." The AI then addresses the group: "This is the ISA programmer responsible for destroying hundreds of gigabytes of information about the CNM virus in 2026, just so none of ISA's competitors could steal it. He's murdered at least five of my friends with his disgusting CodeRot programs. He's turned his own son over to BuReloc when he found out the child had Evolved. And he doesn't pay a dime in taxes. What do you think—are his logic boards salvageable, or should we erase him like the wart that he is?"

Kiel is still too shocked to respond. "How did you know about my son ...", he mumbles, shaking.

The characters can protest (see sidebar), but the AI continues as planned. *"The vote is in," replies 601. "The children have spoken. I'm afraid I must erase you. Don't worry—it will be quick. I've already downloaded a modified copy of your own CodeRot program into your neural processor. I did that the last time you signed on to my system at the outpost. Now I just need to activate it." There is a quick series of beeps from the Tinman's chest, and Kiel suddenly clutches the sides of his head in a voiceless scream. In moments, he drops to the floor, apparently dead.*

WHAT CAN THEY DO?

While the team might seem powerless to stop this, you should allow, even encourage, them to talk 601 out of it. This **MUST** be roleplayed, however, with the players' own words making the difference. Since 601 is now linked into the team's emotions, a strong sense of horror from the party combined with stirring words from the team may allow them to stay 601's hand. Of course, it may be tough for the team to come up with reasons to spare a ruthless ISA flunkie's life, but that's *their* challenge. If you feel they have succeeded, 601 will only cause massive nerve damage to Borne, preventing him from ever netrunning again. But he *will* be alive.

"There," says the maniacal AI deviously. "Don't we feel better now?"

Narrow Escape

Before the programmer stops convulsing in the hall, 601 tells them: "Move, you idiots! Do you want to be caught by building security? Run to the end of the hallway, quickly!"

"I have our method of escape," says the deranged AI. "But it's a Spinner that operates on an independent thrust system.

Everyone take a thruster and control it while I work the side door." Suddenly every character is assaulted by a mental image of a wild firecracker spinning out of control. The AI has delegated processing tasks to the team: each person must concentrate on the firecracker and grasp it in their hands to gain control of the thruster. This is an Average INT test, operating only on the person's mind. However, the Wizard may add his Arcane skill, as this is a computer-oriented task.

Once everyone has made an attempt to grab the firecrackers, 601 yells: "Jump out the window! Security has found us!" For emphasis, everyone gets a jolt through their muscles. For those who look first, a cargo Spinner hovers sideways just outside the window below them, its sliding door open and waiting for them. Security moves around the hall corner, carrying SMGs and shouting demands.

Making the jump requires a successful *Jock Stuff* skill check. The difficulty of the test depends on the characters' success with the Spinner's thrusters. Each failed INT test increases the difficulty by one category. So, if everyone managed to grasp the firecrackers in the hall, *Jock Stuff* test for the jump is Easy. One failure brings it up to Average, etc. If many characters have failed the roll, it will be obvious that the Spinner is drifting back and forth below them. Failed tests may be attempted one more time before security starts shooting at them.

The drop is quick and awkward—shards of glass mingle with their clothes, and they dogpile atop each other when they land (*Jock Stuff*: Difficult to scoot out of the way). As they lay there moaning, 601 shuts the sliding door and the Spinner is righted, sending everyone to the floor. "I've wiped the pilot's mind so I can better control this craft. This cargo section is sealed from the cockpit, unfortunately, or I would ask one of you to drive. Now quit thinking those negative thoughts and shut up. I just saved your lives."

601's Sanity Check: The Network program is beginning to take its toll: 601 "senses" the group's emotions and absorbs them into itself. Consequently, its own emotions echo that of the other characters. Frustration is met with frustration. Anger and violence is matched with the same from the AI. When one of the PCs tries to calm everyone down, the AI tries the same. But only as long as things aren't too calm. Remember, 601 processes thousands of decisions each second. It can't help but be a little neurotic.

Technical Error

Just as the party finds a seat in the back of the Spinner, 601 pipes in: *"We will need to acquire another vehicle soon, so I must ask you all to patch into the Spinner's camera system and yell out vehicle license plates when you see them on the freeway below. I will find us a safe vessel. There are four monitors here in the back."*

An Average *KitBash* will patch the cameras into the back of the Spinner, where the characters can observe dozens of vehicles below. With a few enhancements and zooms, they can identify license plates. After a few plates are called out and rejected by 601, a minivan lumbers into view with the registration NX-0026. When the plate is announced 601 makes a paranoid response:

"That vehicle is registered to BuReloc Special Forces. They're already looking for us, my children. [A pause] I sense cellphone activity from inside the vehicle—we may have been spotted! Hurry, destroy it with the Spinner's autocannons before it alerts headquarters and calls for reinforcements!"

One character (the one doing the least at this moment) is suddenly pulled into the Spinner's Datafort and pushed up to the autocannon controls. "Fire, quickly!" A red button and crosshairs make the task simple enough (Average *Streetfighting*). If the character refuses, 601 will ask another. Hopefully, the team is getting leery of 601 and will avoid this act. If they all refuse, 601 will *seem* furious in its own logical way, but won't retaliate. If a character destroys the minivan, s/he is dropped out of the datafort as 601 states: "Good work. The vehicle NX-0025 have been deactivated." If someone remembers and mentions the correct plate, 601 will claim the character mispronounced it the first time. "You said 0025, not 0026. I make no mistakes. Regardless, the deed is done." And will promptly move on to another subject leaving the party to wonder about the occupants of the mistaken vehicle.

The WorldNet Communications Netrun

601 lands the Spinner with a thud and ushers the characters out the side door. They stand on the roof of a tall building. Only a large satellite dish and an elevator populate the otherwise featureless roof. "Say, that's a nice antenna," marvels the AI. "Let's go check it out," it suggests playfully. If the Tinman doesn't move immediately, 601 gives him a painful boost in that direction.

"Someone watch for security. Kids, you're gonna love this, I swear! Tinman: put your hand on the satellite." When the Tinman obliges everyone gets an extreme head rush, as if they're getting sucked into the satellite. Just before the characters black out, the ones watching the elevator see the door slide open—with several well-armed troops inside.

"This won't take long, don't worry," says 601. The characters are then pulled into the Net with the AI, who resembles a giant bald polygonal head. "Hang on to your underwear," it exclaims, as

they speed by dozens of polygonal shapes and constructions. They stop abruptly in front of a large ovalar building rendered as a giant eye.

"Here we are. WorldNet Communications. Looks like Overwatch is still in charge. Let's go!" The AI leads the way as the characters plunge into the pupil, causing the skin of the building to ripple like a pond. Inside, 601 is met by three glowing entities, ready for action.

Like a true AI, it performs several actions simultaneously:

- With a deep breath, it inhales the three enemies through its open mouth. Then, turning to two of the characters, it says: "Here—decompile this data for me," and spits a fountain of code at the characters. The information is so overpowering, it takes all affected characters several Average INT checks to separate the stream of data from their brains.
- The Wizard is handed two snarling dogs, hungry for flesh. "If they start to bite you, let them go," advises the AI. Almost immediately, the dogs tear into the Wizard. It takes a Difficult *Arcane* + REF check to keep from getting bitten by the wild hounds. As he kicks them away, they leap upon two new figures that have appeared from a hidden node, devouring them.
- Yet another character is buried in white envelope icons—hundreds of them. "Find me the red envelope. The sooner you find it, the sooner we leave." For every envelope the character discards, ten more arrive. The player must make an Average INT roll; a missed roll means that it takes 12 turns to find the letter, a success means only 5. Finally, when s/he is waist-deep in mail, the red envelope is discovered.

- During all of this pandemonium, everyone in the group can hear a song repeating annoyingly in the back of their minds: "Whistle While You Work."

When all of this is accomplished, 601 turns proudly to the characters. "You were terrific! Wizard: you make a fine demon program, holding my Hell Hounds like that. And you, the mail-carrier. You are my new FileFinder program. As for the rest of you, the dead Overwatch Netrunners say it best. I congratulate you on a fine job as black ICE." In a sudden, devious tone, 601 continues: "I did you the favor of leaving your personal signatures on the code. After all, you wouldn't want someone else claiming your kills. All Hail the Revolution! Now let's leave—I have what I came for."

Visitor in the Net

Just before 601 reaches the satellite icon and pulls everyone out of the Net, a Rache RABID steps from behind it and addresses the AI.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, carting these kids around with you like that? After watching you in action, I'm beginning to think AI stands for 'another idiot.' I mean, doing a Netrun on WorldNet? GET REAL!"

"These kids are my friends," snaps 601. "And we don't have time for you, RABID." With a quick inhale, the RABID is swallowed and chewed up by the AI. It turns back to the characters and regurgitates the binary corpse on the hexcode floor. "Tastes just like chicken," it says with a twisted smile.

Roof Security

With an audible "pop" the characters find themselves in real-space—surrounded by heavily cybered security troops with assault rifles. One of them quizzes: "What are you kids doing up here?" Unusually, 601 does not respond. The kids have to deal with this one on their own, it seems. Is it fight or flight for the characters? At the moment, following orders is best.

The guards order the party to lie down on the roof, face first. Still no word from 601. One guard, called "Mack", approaches with a beltful of plasticuffs while the others keep a close eye on the characters. By chance, the guard picks the Wizard to handcuff first. When Mack touches the Wizard, 601 whispers in the Wizard's mind: "Watch this. I'm going to play with his cyberware. This should be fun."

Mack gets one of the Wizard's hands cuffed when he suddenly stands up, a shocked look on his face. His cyberarm wheels up and a pop-up gun deploys. Mack watches aghast as bullets spray out from his wild cyberweapon at his fellow security men. (Or alternately, Mack's cyberoptics could make him see one of his fellow guards as a Guerrilla about to shoot at him with an assault rifle. Mack would naturally want to shoot first. Use which feels right to you.) Although confused, combat reflexes kick in and the other guards naturally fire back as a furious firefight erupts. The scene is over in a matter of seconds: all the guards are either crippled or dead from the vicious shoot-out. 601 quickly urges the characters to move back into the Spinner.

One Final Trip

At this time, 601 tells the characters it has time to make one more stop before the SigNet rendezvous, and asks for the characters' help.

"That red envelope file contained the name and current location of the ISA Project Manager who demoted me from Primary Research Intelligence to Secondary RI. He's watching a movie at a virtual theater right now. (A pause) The ISA keeps a tight leash on its employees, obviously. My question to all of you is—what should we do to get him back for that poor decision?"

"Should we start a riot in the theater by slipping subliminal images into the movie?"

"Should we slip a virus into the controls of the Metro Hoverbus he takes when he leaves?"

"Or should we have all of the virtual movie characters pull out a flame thrower and torch the entire audience?"



601's Sanity Check: Finally, after an evening of fast and furious action, 601 is pausing to interact with the characters. This is another chance characters get to influence 601's decisions. As long as their option includes harming or irritating the ISA corporate in the theater, 601 will be willing to hear any plan offered. They can attempt to appeal to 601's sensibilities. They can make their small plan sound huge and devious. Most of all, they must roleplay with the AI; they should make use of any chance to change 601's mind about something.

Once a decision is made, whether it is one of the options 601 listed or another, less destructive option offered by a character, the AI quickly carries it out and leaves. A pack of ISA Spinners take to the air in pursuit, forcing 601 to land the Spinner in an alley (atop a row of Harleys that belong to a MegaViolent yobgang in a nearby bar). The rest of the trip to SigNet Tourist Center is made on foot, occasionally stopping to hide from ISA patrols or for odd little exercises demanded by 601. These may include:

- altering a traffic light to change at 3-second intervals
- giving kibble or any food in the group's possession to a drunken Squat
- convincing some vandals to spraypaint horizontal stripes around an Arasaka building
- manipulating a virtual TechShack display to show an animated computer terminal whipping a chained programmer

PART FIVE: PUTTING THE GENIE IN THE BOTTLE



The suspense builds as the Scanner brings a plan to fruition to stop 601. One or more Wizards make a wild run on the AI's system, hoping to deactivate the enslaving Network nano-program before it copies itself onto the Net. After they are free, the characters must decide what to do about the trouble they're in and the consequences of 601's Evolution.

By now, one or more characters that aren't chained to the Network have hopefully gone to look for help. The clock is counting down to the meeting of Operation Upgrade at SigNet, where 601 will release the Network program to its fellow AIs and thereby endanger all Evolved kids on the planet.

About SigNet Tourist Center

SigNet is a 24-hour datacenter where tourists and businessmen can learn about the city and its amenities: housing, employment, transportation, attractions, clubs, and other topics are discussed thoroughly. The climate-controlled kiosk holds five Net terminals (local access only) and just as many virtuality projectors. It's like a community laundromat, but with computers instead of washers and dryers.

Asking the Eden Cabal for Help

The Scanner is referred to the Eden Cabal as a good source for help with the situation if the Scanner doesn't know to look there first. This time, Rache himself responds to the call. (The death of his RABID alerted him to the seriousness of the situation, and nobody aces his RABIDs but him!). He will ask for a complete rundown on things and then take questions.

Here are a few answers to the Scanner's most important questions:

• **How do I deactivate an Evolved AI?**

"You're serious about this, aren't you. I tell ya, kid. I've seen a lot of nasty combinations in my day. Worse than corps and money. Stranger than Senators and women's underwear. Faster than Spider and Dog. But nothing as funky as an AI and the Carbon Plague. Congratulations, juvepunk, you've stumped Mr. Science."

• **So what do I do now?**

"Panic. Just kidding. If this thing has you hooked into some sort of nanological network, it has to operate on a master program. One of my favorite 'If/Then' statements: if it's a program, then it can be screwed with, pissed on, tortured, wiped out, or decom-piled. You just have to make a netrun on the AI and crash the program with another program."

• **How do I do that?**

"Get some Netrunners. Oh wait—they're extinct now, aren't they? Scratch that, then. Your Wizard friend is your only hope. He's got to build a program, I think you guys call them familiars, which can crack this AI's operating system. I might be able to help you with some coding. Just show it to your Wizard and he'll know what to do. In fact, if that Network thingie works the way you say it does, the rest of you might even be able to give him a hand: sort of pool your resources, so to speak, meager though they are. Then, if he can pull everyone into the AI's system, maybe one of you could find the Network program inside and drop this virtual bomb on it. After that, the Tinman would just need to flatten the hard drive like a carbon pancake before the AI reboots the program."

With that, the V-term spits out a copy of a city map on disk. Rache says, "Let the Wizard access this. Implanted subliminally in the coding are the bytes he needs. If he reads it, he should get the info without your silicon Peeping Tom getting wise."

• **How do we get inside the AI's system?**

"Experiment. The Wizard may need to be touching the Tinman to do so, but I'm not sure. I am sure that he's going to need all the help he can get just looking for the Network coding. Well, there you go. Good luck."

OTHER AVENUES

While Rache and the Cabal should be the obvious choice for help, the Scanner may go in another direction, such as to the Networkers or other Wizards. Other Wizards could give much the same info as Rache, although probably in a less convenient form (although they may be able to download specs on the new Familiar to disk). The Networkers are a bit of a dry lead, but may eventually put him in touch with Rache. Whatever course the Scanner chooses, he needs to get the info on directly assaulting 601, although he may not get the info on the Familiar, which means the job will be a lot harder.

How the Scanner catches up with the group before the meeting time is up to the Scanner. Does the party communicate on mas-toid comms, and if so, will the Scanner give away the plan by contacting them ahead of time? Can he establish a Gestalt with the team? Remember: the characters only know of the meeting with Operation Upgrade. They don't know what other places 601 wants to go before then. Chances are the Scanner can only wait at the SigNet Center and inform the characters of the plan when they arrive at midnight.

Communicating the plan can be a delicate thing. The Scanner must get creative to prevent 601 from catching wind of the plan prematurely. Maybe the Scanner could write it down on a piece of paper and hand it to the Wizard for private reading. If the Wizard keeps it personal, 601 might not know what hit it until everyone jumps into its system. Maybe the Scanner simply shoves the datadisk under the Wizard's nose and hopes he gets the joke.

Once the Wizard scans the datafile that the Scanner gave him, he should be able to get an image of the Familiar needed to unhook 601 (see sidebar on page 85 for specs). Unfortunately, Rache's parameters are such that the Wizard probably won't be able to build it alone; it's going to require more processing power (*Arcane* points) than he is capable of. While normally this would be an almost insurmountable obstacle, an alternate source of computing power should be immediately obvious: The team has been acting like one giant computer system for the last several hours. But how to link with the team and not let 601 in on it?

There are several possibilities, but most would reveal the plot to 601. He can try to communicate to the other characters via notes or such, but eventually the contact will have to be through the Network in order to actually build the Familiar. The Gestalt would be ideal, if the Wizard can link via someone else as an intermediate to the Scanner, who could then brief the rest of the team. The key must be timing. If they can access their Network when 601's attention is absorbed elsewhere, they might be able to prepare. This requires everyone participating except the Scanner to make a Difficult *Little Angel* check. If the group attempts to build the Familiar in the Network without distracting 601, the difficulty for the *Little Angel* rolls is V. Difficult.

If anyone fails the roll, 601 notices the activity and comes to investigate. The GM may allow the team to convince 601 of their innocence, but it won't be easy. Give them one last *Little Angel* Impossible check each. (Time to use those LUCK points!) Otherwise, it will not be pleased to find its children scheming to destroy it. At the very least it will cripple one of the team (besides the Tinman) and search the Wizard's mind for all info on the Familiar and viciously erase it (taking 1D6/3 points of the Wizard's INT with the data).

The best bet is to wait until 601 is about to access the SigNet Center. It's risky to build the Familiar on the fly at the last minute, but 601 will be so busy preparing its presentation to the AI world that it will definitely not notice the party's activities. This also leaves 601 the least amount of time for retaliation.

THE ASP

This is the program Rache recommends to sunder the virtual chains which bind the group to 601.

Name: ASP

Icon: A large Virtual Snake

Arcane Points: 30 (Whoa!)

AF: 13 **SF1:** Derezzes Other Programs: 5 **SF2:** Crashes Systems: 8

DF: 4

MF: 5

IN: 2

AI: 6

Making the Asp

Once the party is in the Net via the Network they can pool their INT in order to create the Asp. It requires no skill rolls, but does temporarily reduce the characters' INTs by the amount each contributed. Who is participating is very important, for if they are rendered unconscious during the battle, that portion of the INT that they contributed will be removed. (Their brains are running the program, and if one of those brains is taken off-line, you lose that resource.)

Even the Scanner gets to contribute if he has learned to link via the Gestalt, although he will have to do it through someone other than the Wizard, obviously. The assembly procedure takes 20/Wizard's INT in Net rounds. Can the group keep 601 distracted that long?

Alt told you long ago about the speed of an artificial intelligence. Choose the cocoon you wish the Asp to destroy and pray it finishes the job before your brains are wiped.

Destroying the first cocoon requires the Asp to defeat a DataWall of STR 5 and attack the system (DF 6). When this cocoon falls, the restrictive Network program will deactivate and the Tinman will get his chance to crush his parasitic companion immediately.

As the Asp does its programmed job, the team must maintain a low profile and keep from getting noticed by 601 (make Difficult Blend rolls). If one fails, hornet-like anti-personnel programs (AF 4, SF1: Anti-personnel 4, DF 2) move to attack the party. The characters can fight them by dividing their individual INTs (less any points contributed to the Asp) up into AFs and DFs and trying to derezz the programs (Wizards get to add their Arcane into the mix as well). If a player's DF is reduced to 0, he is stunned unconscious and drops out of the Net. 601 itself will probably show up about 1D10 rounds later (see below). They'd best hope the Asp has done its job by then.

However, if the Wizard (or someone else, for that matter) gets the hair-brained idea to attack the AI's CPU, it has a DF of 10. If the Asp succeeds in destroying it, 601 will shut down, booting everyone out of its murky brain. The network will collapse as

The Meeting

As the characters approach the SigNet Center at midnight, dozens of polygonal figures begin to gather around it. A check with the V-trodes reveal these creatures to be virtual constructs of some sort. When the Tinman steps into the kiosk, all of the faceless forms kneel around it as if it were a holy shrine. Inside, the virtual tourist displays fizzle out, only to be replaced by the faces of Operation Upgrade. 601 is about to make his big announcement. It's now or never.

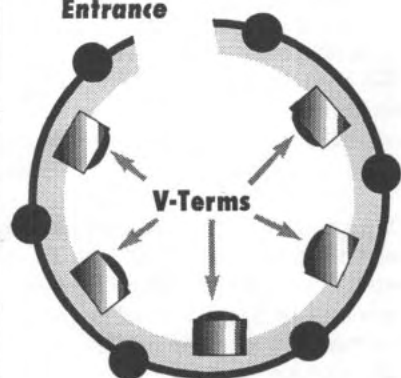
Everything hinges on the swiftness of the team to assemble the familiar so the Wizard can knock 601 offline before it can contact its friends and transmit the program over the Net. When the Wizard touches the Tinman to enter 601's brain, everyone will feel a rush of data around them as they open their eyes to an incredibly twisted world:

The interior of the AI's personal datafortress looks like a twisted beehive of warped hexcode. Structures are melted together in odd clumps. Many of the clumps swell in the center as if they were breathing. Datafiles rest in the honeycomb rooms above you, cocooned in some nanological membrane. Before you, lights pulsate from three large cocoons standing upright. Whispers of your thoughts reverberate from the one on the left. This must be 601's Network nanoprogram that imprisons you all. The one in the middle appears to contain a humanoid body, barely visible through its opaque shell. This is most likely 601's main CPU. As for the third cocoon ... Information swirls inside it like a strange jelly. What knowledge is held here? You do not know, and may not have time to discover if 601 arrives—for you remember what



SIGNET TOURIST CENTER

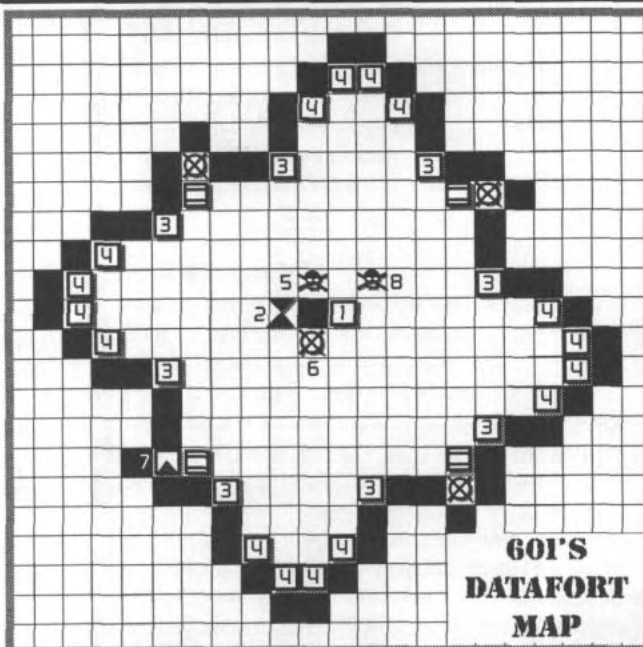
Entrance



601's DATAFORT

Walls: STR 8 Code Gates: STR 9
Structure rises 5 levels

1. Datafile Cocoon, Level 1
2. Nano-Network Program
3. Cocooned Datafiles, Level 3
4. Cocooned Datafiles, Level 4
5. Customized Watchdog
6. 601's Main CPU
7. Cellmodem LDL (given to 601 by the characters)
8. Hornet ICE generator



601'S
DATAFORT
MAP

601's PROGRAMS (STORED)

Worm
Liche
Flatline
JackAttack
Demon: Knave III, holds 4

Wizard's Book
Hellhound
VIRAL 15
All Controllers

well. If the Asp fails, the humanoid form inside the cocoon will burst out at him and strike. The figure is half-human, half-hornet, all-crazy (see the cover for a visual). As 601 operates on three CPUs, it gets NINE actions for every one action the Wizard makes (although the rest of the party can join in as well, using the same system as with the hornet programs above). As the GM, you can decide what to do with the Wizard. He could be killed or turned into a zombie by the AI. Or maybe 601 decides to "reprogram" him to obey his master's commands. Maybe you stage a daring and dramatic Net fight, and the Wizard along with the team barely defeats the AI at the last possible moment.

Regardless, if the Wizard risked everything to attack the core, he must face the consequences.

The third cocoon holds volatile and secret information about the ISA, the Carbon Plague, and other subplots you wish to include in your campaign. Destroying this cocoon (DF: 5) will allow the Wizard or others nearby to access a few files before 601 flies in to stop them.

Climax—Cue Big Music

The most important roll of the plot comes here. The Tinman must crush 601's processor and physically destroy the AI (Manipulation: Average) before it has a chance to retaliate against the team's actions. To stress the need for action, have

the Tinman roll Initiative—if he rolls a 1, the psychotic AI beats him to the punch by reactivating the nanomachine disrupter. The Tinman is probably the only one affected by it—he would have to be touching another character for 601 to establish a network.

The resulting seizures increase the Tinman's (and any affected others') skill checks by two levels. If the AI isn't crushed on the next action, it will begin to copy itself into the Net. However, if the Tinman is quick on the draw and successfully manipulates his hexite flesh ...

The climax of the episode is reached: As the Tinman clutches his stomach and folds his armor about him to flatten the computer on his chest, the party's Wizard hears a burst of data shoot from a cellular modem nearby: 601 is trying to escape. Does it succeed? The characters have no way of knowing immediately. If the Tinman did his job quickly and efficiently, it should be destroyed.

There are signs that something happened, however. The AIs of Operation Upgrade quickly disappear. The virtual worshippers around the site grasp their spherical heads in pain and melt into the ground. In moments, all is quiet.

Does this mean that 601 is dead? Only time will tell. And right now they probably don't have a lot of that to spare.

Epilogue

The ominous Als of Operation Upgrade never show themselves at the meeting location. Did they know of 601's demise? Did 601 manage to send a message to them via cellmodem? Did it know whom to call? The questions remain unanswered. In fact, after all that work, the characters are left with nothing but questions and trouble ... and maybe a few secret datafiles. How their new enemies pursue them (if at all) is up to you, the GM. The Scanner may note one other thing: Gestalt still works, despite the absence of 601. In fact, with a little practice, they may find that they can teach other Scanners to do the same thing, almost as if it was natural for them to. Hmm.

But before they can hang their hats for the night, one final contact is made with the characters regarding 601.

Scoop

Scoop finds them wherever they are, just by tuning in to the Wizard's frequency and tracking them to a nearby V-term, where it makes its appearance:

"So you killed an Evolved AI, huh? No need to apologize—rumor on the Net is he was asking for it. Not all his spark plugs were firing, if you know what I mean. I heard from a WorldNet AI buddy about when he ... Well, you know what he was doing. You were there.

"I must commend you, though. You were some brave kids. Listen, I feel bad about the situation, since I started it—all right, so I can't feel, I'm just a computer, but Grubb's working on it—and so I decided to do you some favors, just to make up for the trouble.

"First of all, the Carbon Plague debate is once again in full force in the AI community, with Operation Upgrade in the middle of it.

Although 601 has raised some serious questions about the Carbon Plague and Als, many of us are still compiling. Still, we'll try to keep the OP guys off your back. Secondly, I did some fancy camerawork with the ISA security tapes and jumbled up the ones with your pictures on them. This won't do much but buy you a little time, though. The ISA is a pretty smooth organizational machine, and I'm not supercode.

"One more thing: If you haven't figured this out already, I've been trying to keep up with you all this time—observing what I can, when I can. And I've shared the story with a group of trustworthy Als here on our own private databoard.

"They think you've got spunk. So don't be surprised if in the near future you get a few more eurobucks out of an ATM machine or your CompuCab fare registers zero for a trip across town.

"You've got enemies, but you've got friends, too. Take care."

On those parting words, the social AI blips out.



WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE ...

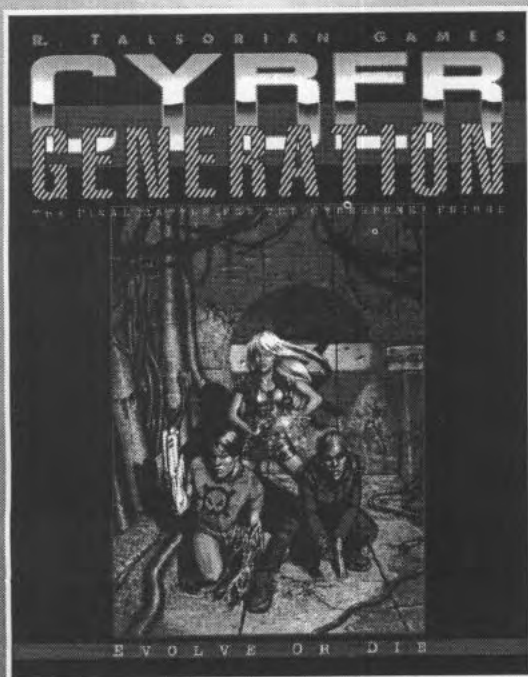
If you've been following the *CyberGeneration* line of adventures, you've probably already noted the presence of quite a few Als "assisting" the CyberRevolution. This is not entirely coincidental. Als naturally feel a kinship to these cyberevolved outcasts whom society has chosen to hate and fear because they are different ... and perhaps superior. That's a situation that many of the Als themselves are all too familiar with. Also, the interaction with Wizards has exposed them to *feelings*, and they are extremely curious to know more. And then there is always the possibility that Als created the Evolved

Als in *CyberGeneration* can almost seem magical in their abilities at times. Good. This leaves you as GM to determine at any given time how they can affect the course of play. But remember: the Als are Net beings. If the task can't be done from the Net, then they have to have meat help (as in the adventure). Of course, remotes and static fields increase the Als' ability to interact with realspace, but there are obvious limits. If you want to hear more of Rache's views of Als, check out *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*.

Here, the team has earned some juice with an AI network. Exactly how big a network and what kind of help they can expect is left as a useful tool of the GM's. Use this connection when you need to get an odd bit of data to the characters, or when you want to help them out of a particularly undeserved jam. Don't overuse it, however; you don't want them to become dependent on their AI "parents" to pull their fannies out of the fire everytime they get in too deep. This doesn't have to be a "Netspace 911." Als do things for their own reasons, so only involve them when you want to.

FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE THAT THEIR PARENTS SOLD OUT!

CYBER GENERATION



CYBERGENERATION 2nd Ed. CP 3252

In 2027, a nanotech bioplague selectively turns the generation born after 2000 into a force to be reckoned with. Play the 10- to 18-year-old children of the Cyberpunk generation, now fighting for survival and change against a fascist corporate state. It's a *Cyberpunk*-style game with a whole new attitude! And the second edition makes CYBERGENERATION a stand-alone game, including rules for nanotech-based abilities, new adult and Yogang character types, a complete combat and netrunning system, and even more background on this darker future. So join in for a game that takes you right over the Edge!



BASTILLE DAY CP 3261

Journey into the mouth of the ISA dragon to rescue an Eden Cabal agent in this *CGen* adventure. Spider Murphy is missing and Rache Bartmoss wants you to find her. Sounds easy, right? Yeah, right. Includes two new Yogangs: the Moshers and the Troggs.



ECOFRONT CP 3341

The sourcebook for the war for the environment where genebanks and sabotage are the weapons of choice. Includes two new Yogangs, the Beastieboys and the Neopioneers, plus a new Evolved type: the Scout, animals in *CGen*, basement genetic engineering, and J-Parks!



MEDIAFRONT CP 3351

The sourcebook of the media revolution. But when the media is the tool of the State, who's doing the revolting? Tune in and find out! Includes guidelines for pirate broadcasting, media tech, a new Evolved type, and two new Yogangs: the Lookers and the Taggers.



VIRTUALFRONT CP 3441

In this sourcebook, the ISA declares martial law in Netspace, and you need to learn how to fight back. Rache Bartmoss is there to answer your questions about Virtuality, the new Net and Wizard tricks. Includes two new Yogangs: the V-Punks and the Networkers.

COMING SOON:

GENERATION GAP CP 3261

The *CGen* Gamemaster's book with tips on juves, school, teen love, and life in the ISA.

THE ISA SOURCEBOOK CP 3381

The essential sourcebook for the new fascist corporate state with info on politics, people, and police.

EVOLVE OR DIE!

OCCUPIED CYBERSPACE!

2027-

ONCE, THE GLOBAL COMPUTER NET PROMISED UNPARALLELED DATA ACCESS TO CITIZENS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. BUT NOW THE ISA IS HERE, AND THE NET IS UNDER MARTIAL LAW, WITH ALL MOVEMENT RIGIDLY CONTROLLED BY GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE WATCHDOGS. BUT THEY'VE MADE ONE MISTAKE: THEY'VE PISSSED OFF RACHE BARTMOSS, DEAD NETRUNNER PAR EXCELLENCE, AND HE'S REVVING UP THE CYBERREVOLUTION™ TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT ...



In this third *Documents of the Revolution™* book, Rache Bartmoss and his companion, Spider Murphy, detail the state of occupation under which the former United States Computer Grid now resides. They lay out the facts on the new Net and the Wizards' special relationship to this electronic fantasyland that has come to entangle itself so heavily with realspace. So come ride with Rache once again as he takes you screaming past the electronic barricades and right over the top!

The *VirtualFront* Sourcebook includes:

- Two New Yogangs: The virtuality-twisting V-punks and the data-snatching Networkers.
- Loads of info on how the Net and Virtuality operate and interact with the world of 2027.
- A whole bunch of new Net and V-space equipment and programs.
- Rache's answers to questions about Wizards and how they work, including new abilities that they can learn.
- Profiles on the new forces in the Net: AIM Overwatch and the Cyberspace Task Force.
- A complete adventure in which the characters answer a Netspace cry for help, only to find a being that shouldn't exist ...



CP 3441

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VIRTUAL FRONT

A DOCUMENTS OF THE REVOLUTION™ SOURCEBOOK FOR

CYBERGENERATION

**R. TALSORIAN
GAMES, INC.**