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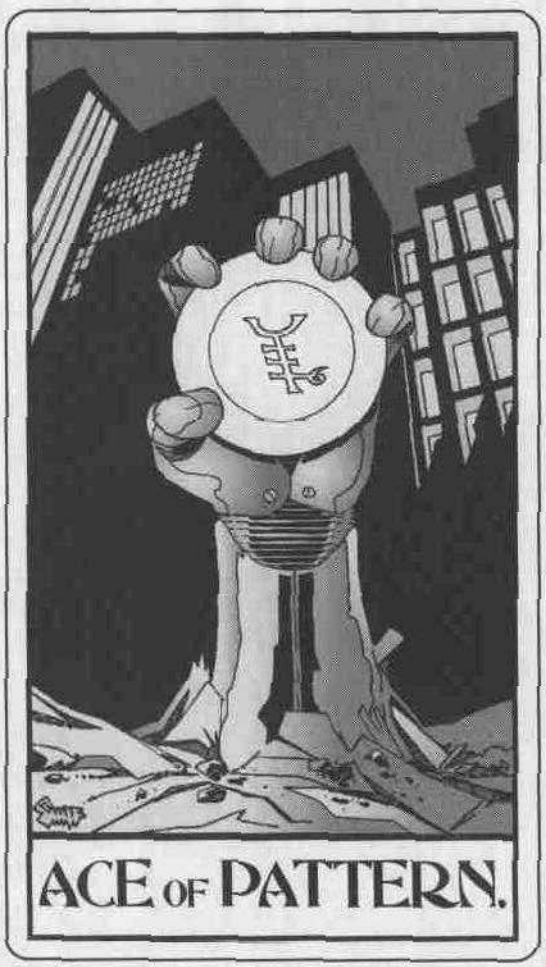
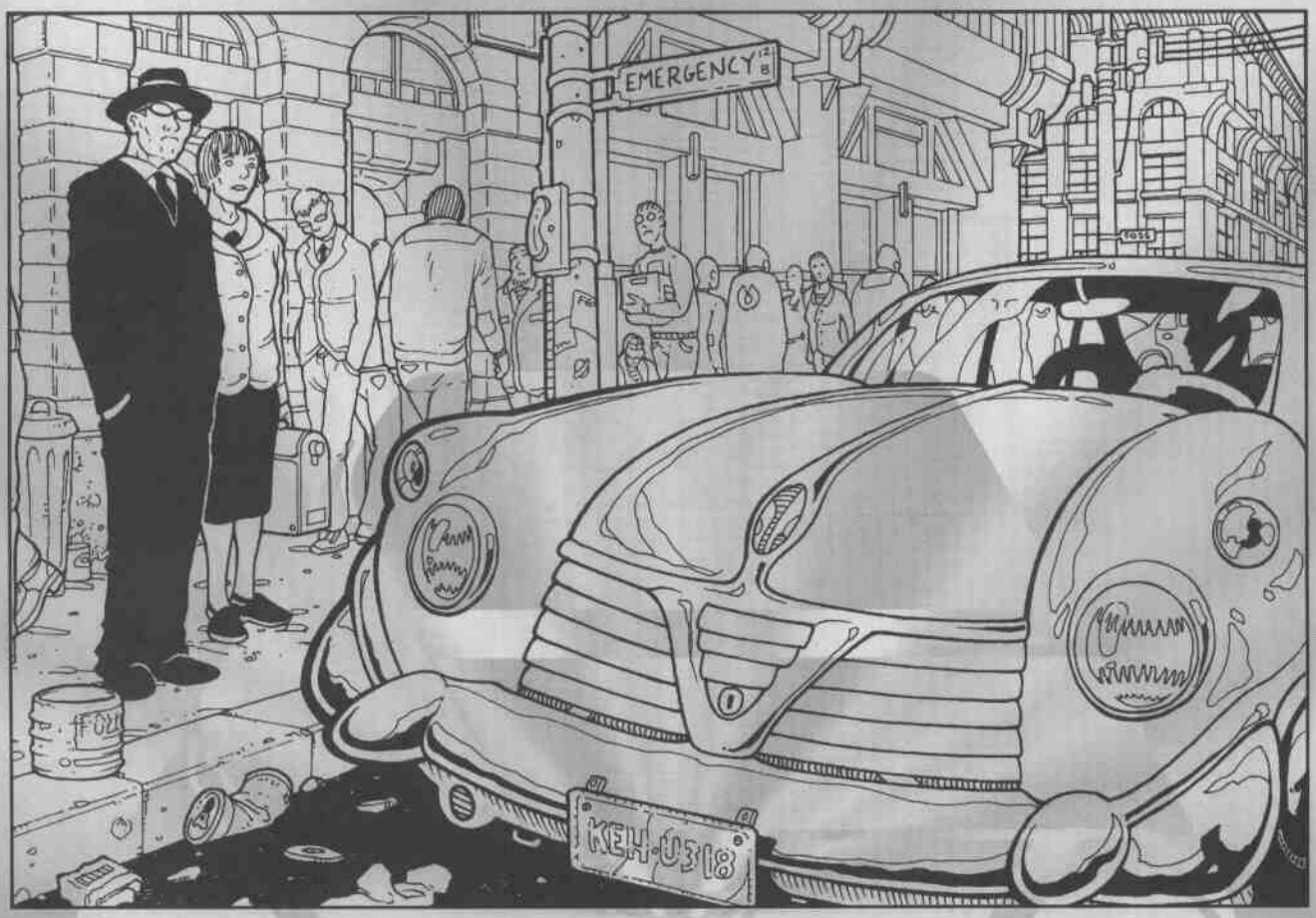


Prologue: The Machine Inside

I had just finished my grapefruit and wheat crackers when I got the call. Since my schedule was pretty mundane, with just the same paperwork as always, it looked like the job wouldn't be a problem. Besides, my contact knew that I could get some extra time, and he had already made arrangements to contract me with a generous bonus through my regular office. The contact gave me an address and e-mailed me the appropriate personnel profile. I read through the profile as quickly as I could then got in my car, heading out to meet up with the investigator who was leading the case.

The investigator was, not surprisingly, a spook: A government official, complete with the requisite black suit and tie. He simply stood outside the business complex, ignored by passersby. There were no signs of a car or any other agents, except for a single dapper woman with a severe haircut who waited just behind and to one side of him, carrying a computer case. They looked like they could've sprung from the very ground. I pulled up next to the building, and the agent (whom my contact had called James) got into the passenger side without a word, while the woman got into the back.

I would have thought that the spook would have more sense than to bring along an Armature — the shock troops always have some problematic quirk, be it a total lack of humanity or a cybernetic device that winds up a dead giveaway — but apparently he'd gotten it on good authority that we'd need computational assistance at the site. Doubtless, he had no idea why I'd been assigned to this case though. After all, an insurance agent without a government agency to back him is hardly the sort you'd want poking around at the site of a break-in. Thankfully, though, the matter was still in crunch time, so we could probably get in and out before any bothersome police got involved or any troublesome questions got asked.



As far as the investigation went, word had just come down from on high that a few disguised individuals had walked into the Unicom facility downtown. Normally such a thing would not be a big issue, but these individuals had managed to slide past the security unnoticed, hack through the elevator and the containment systems, then slip into the temporary lab space. How they'd tracked the projects, we didn't know — could've been a security leak bought out, or just something like watching the reefer trucks dropping off an unusual load. Whatever the case, the sneaks had managed to escape with a "test sample" (the kind that the docs never really want to tell you about) and go to ground. James had been called in, he explained, to find out what clues they might have left behind. The whole thing stunk like the mess in New York a few months back.

"... trouble, then you just default to me." I was driving, so I had missed part of the conversation going on. James had just finished his once-over with Irene, the Armature. In the rear-view mirror, I saw her nodding as she looked over the temporary pass he'd issued her. She had the look of someone constantly distracted. I'd heard tell that the Iterators are like that because they have a constant datastream from their cybernetics, but who knows the truth? I spared a glance over at James, who was already wearing his shades.

James looked in my direction briefly, then tapped a manila envelope on his lap. "Same goes for you. I have the government credentials, so you'll have to follow my lead. Your cover's a little stronger, since you can justify this as an insurance evaluation, but defer to my authority."

I just nodded and kept driving. All of the Black Hats are like that — they assume authority like it's part of their suits. In this case, though, I didn't mind. James actually knew how to track down criminals and deviants. At least, that's what his profile said; his credit record listed his profession as a "criminal psychologist," though given the circumstances, I knew that each of us was quite a bit more involved in back-room dealings than our otherwise mundane professions might indicate. Irene, for instance, was just a computer science instructor at the University of Washington, but she sure got the research grants when it counted. And, of course, my multinational trading partners and Syndicate business allies kept me in a lot more dealings than one would expect of a mere corporate insurance analyst.

As we pulled into the Unicom parking garage, I hit the button to roll down the window. An underpaid and

overweight security guard waddled from his tiny box, holding out a hand as he stopped us in the entryway.

"Can't go in. Security. Park around front and go up to the front desk." The guard looked bored by the whole proceeding.

James leaned across the seat, looking up at the guard over his sunglasses. "We're here at the request of the Unicom executive board. I'm agent Keeler and these are my assistants." With that, he flipped up his government ID badge. How he'd gotten it out of his pocket while leaning over like that, I don't know. Then, with a practiced motion, he removed his mirrorshades, holding them carefully in his left hand as he added, "I'm sure that your employers would agree that any and all assistance in this matter would be appreciated." Finally, he leaned back, blithely flipping his wallet closed and slipping it into a coat pocket.

Taken briefly aback, the security guard's puffy face contorted like his thoughts were limping through molasses. Finally, he just waved at us, motioning us into the garage. I glanced once at James, but he'd already put his shades back on. I pulled inside, turning left (since most people will turn right at a T-intersection — a by-product of a society that reads from left to right), then took one of the empty parking spaces that I knew I'd find there.

Once out of the car, I removed my briefcase from the trunk and waited for Irene to do the same. James just smoothed his suit and put on his black hat. As I understand it, he ranks pretty high among the government operatives that he works with, but when he wants to "dress down" he still goes for the black suit, hat and shades.

We set a quick pace into the building as I set the alarm on my car. Irene chanced a glance at a small pager-like box that she wore, then murmured in her deceptively soft voice, "Twenty-six minutes. The subjects can't have gotten far; with luck, any clues we pick up should coordinate with the efforts of local search teams and aiding citizens." She rubbed the back of her neck absently, and I wondered if she had been brought along just to facilitate communications coordination with some gadgetry.

Once we reached the parking garage elevator, I pulled out my executive passcard and swiped it in the security lock. Being a ranking member of the Syndicate has its advantages — including executive privileges in thousands of corporations. We got into the bland, beige car, and James handed my information package to me.

Opening the yellow envelope, I pulled out the badge with my picture and attached it to my lapel. Then I removed and scanned the other documents — mostly legalese, government authority papers and briefing material. It looked to be more for James' benefit than for mine, so I just put it away. James stood at ease, hands clasped in front of him with only a couple of tapping fingers giving away any impatience. Irene lacked even that sort of defining characteristic, just standing completely still in her long skirt and academic coat. I wondered absently how often she actually worked with people who thought of themselves as people, but decided not to ask.

The elevator obligingly disgorged us in the lab area. James stepped out first, followed by me, then Irene. We took in the scene with the usual care that one would apply to a "special job."

One thing I have to say for the other Conventions — they know how to buy the best toys. The lab itself was a sterile environment behind a plastic wall and security airlock. Bright white lighting filled every crevice, and the tile's polished silvery surface gleamed. Beyond the securely locked portal, machinery too complex for my limited background kept an unsleeping vigil, small metallic cocoons connected by a series of dull steel-like pipes and monitored by a curving computer station at an ergonomic desk. No lights flashed, no engines hummed; the room was silent, static and clean, except for the single doctor moving around within, checking the instrumentation.

The guard standing just outside the elevator in the security foyer was a far cry from the security man downstairs. Though he looked to be just another hired agent, he scanned each of us as we entered, his hand hovering at the ready near his baton. He nodded perfunctorily at James's badge, but that didn't stop him from reading mine and Irene's as well. Finally, he seemed satisfied by the examination, and touched an intercom button on the wall.

"The special team is here, doctor," the guard intoned matter-of-factly. His eyes never left us.

Inside the room, we could see the doctor move to the computer desk. He pressed a button there, and his deep, mellow voice rolled out, "I'll be out in a moment. Please wait there, gentlemen." With that, he strode confidently to the airlock, the sounds of his bag-swathed shoes deadened behind the plastic barrier. I shifted for a moment, then looked over at James. The ubiquitous Man in Black showed no expression whatsoever — probably considering everyone involved a possible suspect.

The airlock itself had been built with much of the same transparent plastic as the other wall pieces in the lab, though of course, some of the fittings were metallic. The doctor nonchalantly removed his gloves, helmet and shoe bags, and then wormed his way out of the oversuit. Underneath, he was a thin man with short, ragged hair, a perfectly sculpted nose and deep-set eyes. He sniffed momentarily and the red rims about his eyes showed that he hadn't gotten much sleep. Doubtless a night owl, brought in during the day because of the unusual break-in.

Once the airlock finished its cycle and the doctor had stowed his gear, he stepped out to greet us. A quick flick of his eyes across our faces showed that he recognized our

roles, and he spoke up, his voice high-pitched but firm, saying, "I'll keep this brief, since we don't have time to stand around. You'll want to investigate the lab yourselves, so come with me and I'll show you how to use the containment suits properly."

The doctor led us into the airlock, where we took down containment suits from the storage cabinets and reversed his process, suiting up. During the clean-room work, he explained, "Our visitors appear to have made up a small group of deviants or fanatics, possibly affiliated with a fringe organization. They managed to break into the room — the guard that was supposed to be on duty was found unconscious in the kitchen downstairs — and bypassed our computer security with a laptop, of all things. They stole several specimens and vacated the premises in a hurry. Curiously, we have no record of them on camera — it seems that we had an inconvenient brown-out, though not enough of one to shift the building to its independent power supply. Thus, no pictures. The receptionist provided descriptions; they bluffed their way past her. You can talk to her...."

James shook his head. "We've already got her descriptions in the files. What we need now is evidence, *modus operandi* and a direction, Dr. Agstrom." With that, he finished tightening his gloves and motioned for the doctor to trigger the airlock. Showing off his information by dropping the doctor's name.... He was trying to make an impression, but what kind? Well, he knew that sort of game better than I.

Inside the room, I wondered at the various equipment. I'd seen the financial reports for Unicom, of course; they'd been sent to me the instant we got the report of this problem — before I ever got James' profile. I could track every piece's budgeting and where it all got manufactured. Of course, the bottom line meant that I had to; there were pieces stolen. The doctor would itemize everything, but in the meantime I just went down a mental list, looking for anything conspicuously damaged while James and Irene made a closer inspection of the equipment. Nothing had been obviously broken open or smashed. Whoever our intruders were, they knew what they wanted and they had enough professionalism not to break up anything else in the process.

I turned to see James bent over one of the machines. In a couple of strides, I was next to him. Irene stood behind him, her eyebrows compressed in concentration. "What've we got?" I asked finally, as James looked over the area with some sort of pocket ultraviolet lamp.

James straightened. "These tanks were suspension tanks, of course, but our intruders didn't bother with the contamination suits. Looks like one of them jammed a fingernail against this. There's a bit of organic matter, and if my hunch is right, it'll be from one of the deviants."

Irene nodded absently. "There' a good chance of that. Clearly, they bypassed the normal interlocks on the chambers, so none of the cycling was engaged. That means they had to remove the subjects from suspension manually. Since the suspension fluid is a synthetic, it doesn't show up as organic matter — therefore, your sample is most likely from an intruder or the subject."

I paused, then turned to look toward the door. Dr. Agstrom followed my gaze, then finally said, "What?" uncomfortably.

"If they had to pull these... subjects... out of suspension fluid by hand, how come we don't have a bunch of puddles of the stuff all over the floor? Did they bring hand towels or something?" I pointed to the immaculate tile.

James shook his head. Without his mirrorshades or hat, under the contaminant hood he looked like a freckled kid. However, his response was immediate and confident. "Obviously, our intruders did not want to risk leaving such a trail. From the absolutely clean nature of the surroundings, I presume that they took special measures to avoid doing so." He paused, considering, then moved back to the airlock. Checking the supply of contaminant suits, he nodded to himself, then turned back to us. Then, he unlocked his hood and removed it.

"What are you doing?" shouted Dr. Agstrom. "This is a secure space! You'll—"

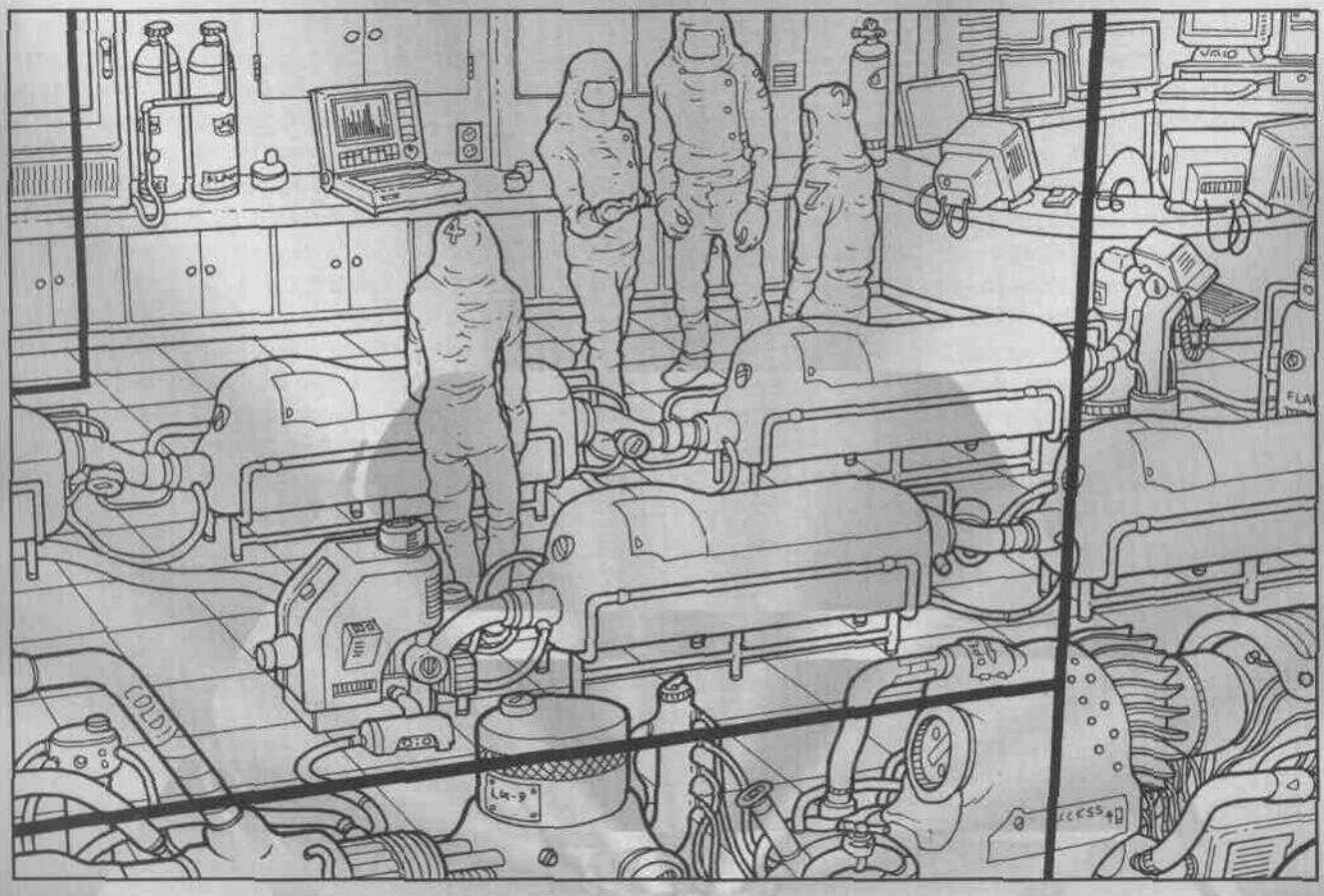
James cut him off with a withering glare. "I'll get more evidence when I'm not hindered by this suit. Clearly, the location has already been violated. There is no evidence that our unexpected 'guests' used any protective suits." Dr. Agstrom gave way, troubled. For his part, James simply took out a tiny notepad and pen and waited as Irene dabbed up the sample with a sterile pad.

And with that, we were off. Irene opened up her briefcase-cum-computer-cum-crime lab and did a quick rundown of the sample. We didn't have a full fingerprint, but there was enough organic matter to make an analysis with our technological marvels. Irene's system hummed as it crunched through the data, sorting the various components of the finger oils with remarkable precision. At length, the system spat forth its analysis, the thin-backed screen listing a breakdown of chemicals, proteins and particles. Irene scanned through the output idly but said nothing.

After a few moments' wait, I grew impatient. Each passing second was another second that these deviants could be getting away with a potentially dangerous sample, after all. "Well?" I finally asked. "What is it?"

Irene frowned slightly, her brow furrowing. "There are other elements in here. Some sort of contaminant is present. I can't get a clean biological signature with this equipment."

Dr. Agstrom leaned forward, looking over Irene's shoulder. He only glanced at the screen before a tiny smile



played at his face. Accustomed to such subtleties, James and I simultaneously demanded, "And?"

Agstrom rolled back on his heels, turning to face us. "I recognize those proteins. Happens to dovetail nicely to a project I did a few years back. I worked with samples of lower animal tissue, trying to see if I could get the proteins to construct more efficiently in fetal development. Not that difficult, but it did require a great deal of supervision, and some of the chemicals were harmful to other processes."

James adjusted his mirrorshades.

Looking slightly abashed, Agstrom cleared his throat. "Uh, anyway, I did samples with a lot of domestic farm animals. Pork. Some of the chains there are signatures from cooked pork."

I suppressed a chuckle. *Looks like our quarry* had stopped for lunch before coming here.

James folded up his tiny notepad and replaced it in his coat. "I know where they're going. Come on!"

Dr. Agstrom was completely baffled. "You do? Where? How? What are they doing?" He rushed to follow James as the Man in Black walked back to the airlock. Irene never questioned his lead, instead repacking her computer with an efficient *click-click* and stowing it in her shoulder bag.

The airlock cycled through, and the outer door opened with a grinding *thunk*. James explained as we stepped out, dropping our contamination garments on the floor. "Cooked pork is a staple of Chinese food. *It shows up in* some sandwich meats, but the only sandwiches around here are in the cafeteria downstairs, and the quarry never went there. However, there's a small Chinese restaurant tucked into a corner building at the end of a strip two blocks from here. It's the only restaurant within walking distance. You wouldn't even notice it as you drive past — except that I did."

"But they could've brought their own food, or come from any other *restaurant in the city*," objected Dr. Agstrom.

"Unlikely," replied James as he waited for me to swipe my security card through the elevator lock. "First off, we know they didn't come by car. The interview files say that the parking garage hadn't taken in a car in 20 minutes, and we know that the counter's purely mechanical. It would've taken too long for them to tamper with it, not to mention attracting the attention of the guard. They'd've had to incapacitate him, like they did the other guard; since he was never attacked, that rules out that entrance. They could've taken visitor parking out front, but they didn't — those spaces are visible to the receptionist, who didn't see them get in a car as they left with their bags. The very fact that they had to attack and incapacitate *a guard shows insufficient* preparation

for security — and they only would've deliberately parked far away as part of a plan. That tells me we're looking for a group who did this on the spur of the moment, possibly after suddenly getting a 'hot tip,' and who walked to this site, most likely from the meeting with their informant. At that Chinese restaurant."

Ding. The elevator door slid open.

As we waited in the elevator, James called for backup on his cellular phone. No sense getting to a restaurant to confront some terrorists, when we could have a group of men with guns doing it for us.

By the time we got back to the car, James was about ready to break into a run. He had checked his pistol and asked Irene to keep her laptop handy in case he needed "tactical updates on the fly," for whatever reason. I decided that it would be worthwhile to look at any other possible snags. "Assuming that they did in fact meet at this Chinese restaurant, and that they stupidly *walked* here, what's to say they're going back there?"

James simply looked at me like I was some kind of idiot. "One of them had a computer. He hacked into the system. They left their car there."

Puzzled, I got in the car, hit the button for the locks and started it up as I waited for everyone to get inside. "Why would they leave behind their car?" I asked James as he fastened his seatbelt.

"I'm not sure," he said, looking off in the distance. "I haven't figured that part out yet."

By the time we reached the restaurant, there was already a small team of helpful citizens — police officers — waiting to assist. James started giving them instructions to cover the building and to watch out for tricks from the terrorists; we knew that they sometimes used rather unorthodox tactics. I pointed out a green two-seater car in the parking lot with a *Babylon 5* bumper sticker, and Irene nodded: likely the suspects' vehicle.

"No wonder they walked. It's only two blocks, and if there were more than two of them, they wouldn't fit in the car," I mentioned.

Irene didn't say anything, but she did place a smooth, half-inch long strip of some sort of laminate on the hood surreptitiously. I didn't recognize it right off, so I asked her what it was.

"Marker circuitry," she explained in a flat voice. "If they happen to escape in the car — which I doubt — it will let us pinpoint them. Essentially, a tracking device, transparent enough to go unnoticed in plain sight."

I nodded my understanding, then re-checked the pistol that I'd gotten from the glove box of my car earlier. It wasn't one of those fancy military blaster weapons or experimental plasma guns like the ones used in the space program — just a standard-issue police pistol. I trusted its proven reliability.

Since we had the area nicely secured, we sent a few of the police around back, and James waved for us to proceed to the front after the other half of the local enforcement group. James himself had that calm, confident look of someone who's about to get what he wants without having to work for it; Irene was deadpan, computer tucked under her arm, coolly watching the citizens scurry about. Since large groups of armed police were a dead give-away, we didn't waste any time busting in.

They sure were surprised, I'll say that much. As the police came pouring through the door, people shouted, dropped their lunches and even fainted. I quickly scanned the room, looking for our quarry; James did a little side-to-side with his head, then pushed past several of the cops, gun in hand, and charged into the kitchen doors hot on the heels of one of the officers.

I'm not sure exactly what went on in the kitchen. All I saw was that the police officer came tumbling back out the door about two seconds after entering, and right after James ducked into the back, I heard the sounds of gunfire. Then, the lights went out.

I switched on the tiny lights on the sides of my sunglasses. It's funny putting lights on something designed to shade your eyes, but it helped. I swept the room with the tiny pinpoints, jumping from the face of a terrified, blubbering fat man (*middle income, worn shoes, spending too much on his car*) to a woman who'd fainted (*late forties, concerned about image, corporate professional, unmarried*) to a shoeless teenager (*C-average, marginal delinquent, low-income family*). Nobody here was a threat, so I let the police lock the area down, then looked to Irene as I charged toward the kitchen.

Irene had already unsnapped the case on her computer and pulled off a small hand-held device — a broad-spectrum active sensor. Without looking up, she intoned, "Power interruption in this building... block... possible failure at the junction for this block. They've hacked the site. Working." A moment later, the lights flickered back on as our boys at the light and power company got the grid back up. Irene continued to look at the display, occasionally subvocalizing something with a minor movement of her lips, her fingers twitching on the tactile response pad. "They are in the building. I suggest that you aid Operative Keeler."

I busted through the doors and nearly had my head taken off by a curved blade singing through the air. James was slammed up against one of the kitchen tables; his suit wasn't even mussed but his mirrorshades had fallen slightly askew. A fellow of Asian extraction (*upper middle-class income, restaurant chain owner, third-generation Chinese immigrant, DEVIANT*) spun across a countertop on his knees, the broadsword arcing back and attempting to make another cut, one that would intersect with my midsection. I threw myself to the side, the pistol in my

hand barking as I fired at him; he arched his back, throwing himself off the table into a flip in the air. The bullets spattered against the back wall, making small black holes in the plaster as the blade came down, closing in on my left shoulder.

Making it look easy, James grabbed a random pot from the sink behind him, flinging it at the martial artist. It *clanged* off the side of the sword, knocking it just off-kilter enough to miss me by a hair's breadth. The man *finished* his leap and landed on his feet; I skidded across the greasy floor, gun trained at him while James raised his gun with his other hand. Everything stood frozen, like a crystal tableau, for a single moment as the man exhaled deeply, raising an eyebrow when he realized that he'd missed.

"Freeze!" One of the cops charged through the door again, gun in front of him. I saw his finger twitch as he started to pull the trigger, but the Asian man was faster — his feet came up in a blur; his upper body barely seemed to move. The gun flew out of the officer's hand, and the cop himself spun back out the door, victim of a kick whose target point I couldn't even determine. The Asian man started to spin back toward us, leveling his sword to make a nasty cut. A single *Bang!* rang out as James shot him in the back.

He really hadn't been expecting to get hit. As the fellow dropped to the floor, a hole punched through his torso, I could see the concerned look on his wide face as he realized that his body wasn't doing what he told it to do. His short black hair settled about his head like some sort of reverse halo while he lay on the floor, twitching slightly. Thick blood pumped out of the wound, spreading rapidly in an irregular stain across the floor. Finally, his hand relaxed on the sword, and his eyes closed as if he'd gone to sleep.

Without pausing to inspect the body, James made a quick set of short, combat-ready steps toward the back door. I pushed myself up from the floor, brushing my suit once and following on the other side of the room. James glanced back at me, then pushed open the door.

Outside, half a dozen cops had already stopped a young woman (*lower income family, exceptional college student, liberal, revolutionary tendencies, DEVIANT*) with a computer. I started as I realized that, for all the world, she looked like a younger and more vibrant version of Irene — long brown hair in a severe style, narrow face, introspective eyes. The cops looked up but recognized us and pulled back to let James interrogate the suspect. She looked tired, though whether from actual lack of sleep or from the failure of her goals, I couldn't say.

Still, there'd been no sign of any other terrorists, and we hadn't found the stolen samples.

The woman said nothing as I relieved her of her computer. James roughly cuffed her with a set of large, cumbersome metal orbs that completely enclosed her hands — I wonder where he hid those bulky things? He pushed her over against the wall, there to ask a few preliminary questions. I stepped in to listen, just as Irene made it out the back door. Irene looked the woman up and down; the woman did the same right back. Then both of them gave the other a contemptuous frown and looked away.

"I've got this one under control, officers. Thank you for your assistance." With that simple phrase, James relieved the police of any responsibility for the captive woman, and we trundled her into the car. She avoided our gazes sullenly, as if in some act of final defiance.

James leaned in toward the woman, ready to begin his preliminary interrogation. He glanced up at me briefly, nodding toward Irene, who had already started working on the woman's computer. I nodded and headed back to see what Irene had discovered.

The deviant's laptop was a thing of wonder, a smooth black rectangle with swirling oily patterns that moved about just under the surface. Its interface ports were simple contact pads; Irene looked over the entire thing with a cool detachment. Her hand passed smoothly along the surface, and then across the back, almost like caressing a lover.

I cleared my throat. "Thoughts, if any?"

Still holding the closed-up box carefully, Irene didn't even bother to look up at me as she gave her analysis. "It's a curious device. A lot of it was apparently custom-burned. There are a few hints here and there of more mundane technology, but it uses the ubiquitous trinary processors that we've come to expect among this sort of wild bunch. It's slow, at least by my standards, but the tactile interfaces here can be used to attach to any mundane systems with the right ports. Storage systems are detachable, though. My guess is that her cohorts — the ones who obviously fled — have, if not the only copies of her data, at least a copy."

I swore. Looked like there'd be some tracking to do, to get the missing information back out of dangerous hands. That wouldn't be my job, though, thankfully.

Irene looked momentarily annoyed at my outburst, but continued in her analysis, adding, "I presume, by the nature of this construct, that our little 'hacker' was responsible for breaking through our computerized security. She's talented, if she can be convinced to see the proper way of doing things."

I watched a bit longer, as Irene finally snapped open the case's display and started feeling around its edges. There was something unnerving about the way that she seemed to analyze by touch as well as sight. Finally, I nodded and left Irene to her technological toys. Heading back toward James, I watched with some alarm as he took off his hat and brushed a hand across his scalp.

I sauntered up and pulled James to one side, speaking in hushed whispers so that we wouldn't be overheard. "What gives?" I asked pointedly. "Looks like the lady has you a bit shaken. Never thought I'd see that in a Black Hat." I glanced down at the fedora in his hand, for emphasis.

James replaced the fedora and adopted a businesslike tone. *Uh-oh*, I thought. *He's gone on the defensive. Very bad sign.* As soon as he opened his mouth I knew that he was going to be trouble. His profile had indicated that such a problem might arise.

"I've been asking some cursory questions. She's in *no position to resist, and I have every reason to believe* she's telling the truth so far." He turned away to face the car, watching the young woman as she looked dejected and resigned.

"So?" I prodded. "Did she tell you where to find her friends? Try to cut a deal?" I knew that it wouldn't be either, but I needed to keep him talking. He'd obviously been quite shaken by what he'd heard, and that's not *easy with a well-trained Man in Black.* If I were lucky, though, he'd be distracted by what he was considering and wouldn't be paying enough attention to keep me from leading the conversation.

"No..." James mused for a moment. "She's got information about the project. Got it from a contact. I'm sure we can get more about him during interrogation. But her cohorts, a couple of other radical Traditionalists, took off *with the lab samples and copies of the information.*"

I just waited. My contact in Psych Ops had warned me not to lead James too much.

"The samples — they're not just *samples*. They were *kids*. Children. It was some sort of experiment on children."

He clearly believed what she'd been saying, and besides, I already knew about the operation. Hell, the Syndicate had been funding it. "Yes, I know," I admitted.

Even that admission didn't phase him enough to turn. He simply looked somewhat distracted as he continued to watch the woman. "Why? Why are we condoning experiments on children? I can see tracking down stolen goods, looking for people breaking into our labs, arresting terrorists — but kids? I don't get it."

"They were dying," I said. "We were working on a way to cure them, a way to repair nervous damage with im-

plants. A reliable technique that could be introduced to the Masses. We still had to work out the problems. They would've died anyway, but we were getting close to a cure. A technique to let others with their problems live normal lives!" I eased slightly back and behind James.

The man simply shuddered. "Guinea pigs. Our own people were using kids as guinea pigs. They could've been treated more conventionally. We could've done other tests — but we were paying for this? These people, they wanted to give the kids a shot at life, not at being locked, conscious, pained and unable to move, in some tank."

"We're fighting terrorists here, James. How are they going to help? Give these kids a year of pain and then death? No cure? We were trying to change that. A few people made sacrifices, James. It was the VPO's idea. We'd change things for the better. We'd have a cure and we'd even turn a profit. You knew when you got into the service that we have to make sacrifices. We each sacrifice our lives, our Enlightenment, for the betterment of society. These kids were giving the only thing they had — their illness — for a better tomorrow. I'm sorry you couldn't understand that."

"I understand," James said, still staring at the woman in the car. "I just don't see how someone can live with that. I don't know if I can."

I had chambered my trusty pistol earlier, so I didn't need to do so now.

"Your profile indicated as much," I said. "Unfortunately, Control agrees with you."

"What—"

The woman in the car jumped at the muffled *bang*, then turned away from the window. James sat down hard on the curb and slumped. I opened the cellular phone I always carry and dialed my contact. He picked up on the second ring, and I gave him the news.

"Mission accomplished."

Credits

Writing: Phil Brucato, Brian "Mister Technocracy" Campbell, Steve Long, Tom deMayo and Scott Taylor

Additional Writing: Christine Gregory

Development: Phil Brucato and Jess Heinig

Editing: Carl Bowen

Art Direction: Aileen E. Miles

Art: Scott Baxa, Mike Chaney, Joe Corroney, Steve Ellis, Langdon Foss, Jeff Holt, Leif Jones, Jeff Laubenstein, Sean Murray, Steve Prescott, Jeff Rebner, Christopher Shy

Cover Art: Scott Baxa

Front and Back Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles

Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

Playtesting: Award for Meritorious Service to Gainesville, FL Amalgam: Hans "Operative Sims Bracker" Belanger; David "Security Agent Jack Dosin" Huston; Alex "Operative Craig Willmore" Rhyme; Beth "Operative Constance Williams" Taylor; Joshua "Doctor Aidan Quinn" Teitelham; Donny "Armature Shinji Nakamura" Hummel and Chris "Gray Man Devon" Whitney.

Award for Exceptional Service to the the Tucson Templars: Mike "Incendiary Ammunition" Berg, Sean "Fortean Event" McLachlan, and Brian "Laibach Karaoke" Campbell

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GAME STUDIO

735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

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TECHNOCRACY™

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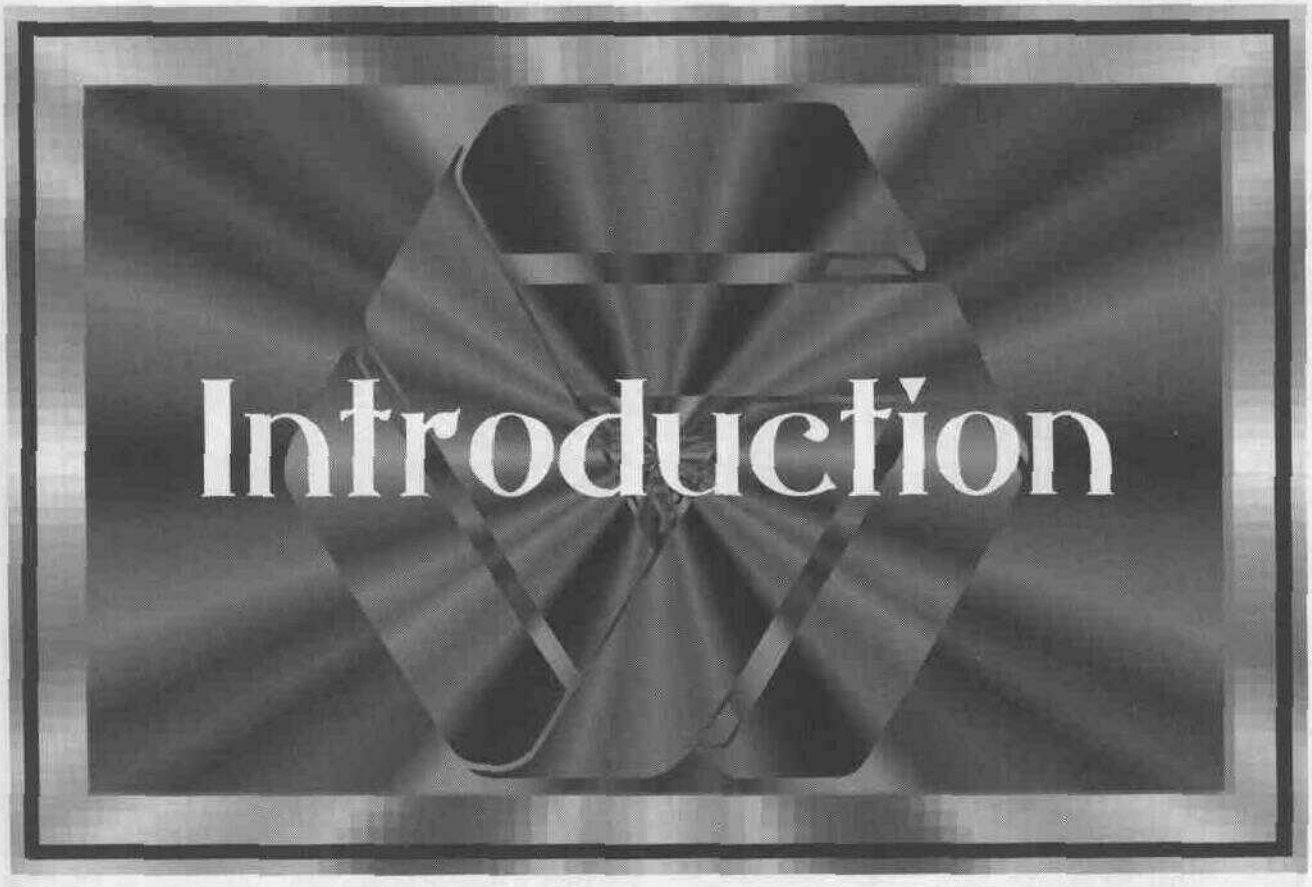


Introduction

If we save ourselves from the scourge of mass violence, it will be through the efforts of millions of minds, networked together in the collaborative processes of science, philosophy, and movements for social change. In short, only a group effort can save us from the sporadic insanities of the group.

— Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle*

Are You Prepared?

Reality is fragile.

A simple thing — a terrorist bomb, a power outage, a cancer shadow on an X-ray — can throw all surety out the window. You know what I mean: that sudden tilt you feel when something you just *knew* was solid comes apart in your hands. That dropped-stomach sensation when your preconceptions crack? That moment of clarity when something that wasn't *supposed* to happen does so anyway? Reality is never as sure as we think.

Some people think chaos is fun, but think about it: No electricity. No phone calls. No cops waiting just around the corner. No family. No gravity.

Still think chaos is entertaining?

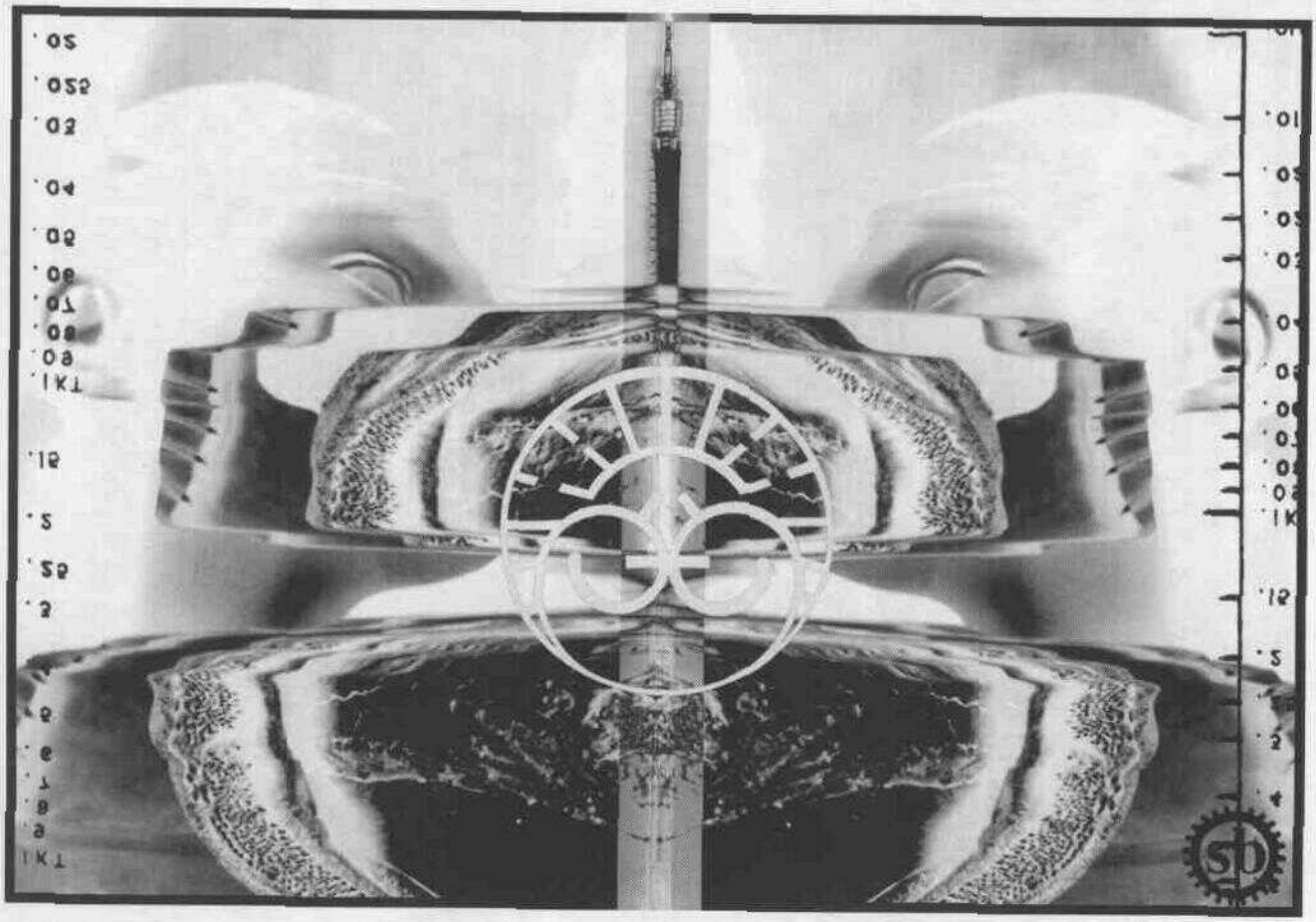
No one wants our fragile shared reality to break like an egg on a hardwood floor. And in the night, someone is working hard to make sure that it doesn't. If, as some say, reality is on the brink, then the Technocracy *exists to keep it* from going over the edge.

Wow. What a thought. We've all been told about those "soulless Technocrats," haven't we? All that stuff about mind-slavery and static reality? All those stories of mindless killer drones and men in mirrorshades, of bankruptcies and broken bodies and diseases manufactured to kill the enemies of the Union?

Lies. All of them.

Well, maybe not *all* of them, but you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. When your mission is the salvation of humanity, let alone the elevation of the same, you can't always be a nice guy.

Your enemies certainly aren't.



Haven't you heard? The world is full of Reality Deviants — immortal monsters, genetic mutations, walking nightmares and wild-eyed sorcerers — who would just as soon gut you as look at you. Those gunshots in the middle of the night? You'd *like* to believe those were just sparring crack-dealers and lone gunmen. Those strange power failures and ruptured gas mains? No coincidence, believe me. Those weird screams you sometimes hear just before the sirens start? If you knew what really caused them, you'd be on your knees begging God to spare your sorry ass.

You haven't heard? Well, there were reasons for that. Can you imagine the panic that would ensue if everybody knew how bad things *really* were?

But we're more than just an army. Everything you use, everything you dream, everything that keeps you a few steps above the beasts, can be traced to us. We are the innovators, the imaginers, the technicians and the toilers. That ATM? Convenient, isn't it? Thank us. That car you drive? We designed it. Thank us. That ever-present power surge that fuels your TV, your VCR, your air-conditioning, your lights? It wasn't cheap. You're welcome.

But there *is* a price, you know. There always is. Order requires sacrifices. Of a few conveniences. Or a few freedoms. Or a few lives. We, of course, would prefer that the lives and freedoms lost belonged to other people — people far away, people who have supposedly done something to deserve their lot — *but it doesn't always work out that way, trust me.* Sometimes those sacrifices must be made up close and personal. Sometimes the blood on the ground is yours. Worse yet, it might have been shed by someone else's body, but by your hand. Those who think killing someone is easy have never done it. If you have even half a soul, the killing haunts you, even if you can justify it every night of your life.

Some of our opponents have no souls at all. They're the barbarians within the city walls, the flaws in the pattern that is rapidly fracturing. We might wish they would go away quietly, but they won't. Unless we stand firm against them — with diplomacy when possible, with force of arms if needs be — our precious little world will crumble into chaos. Into anarchy. *Real* anarchy, not the playtime diversion of bored teenagers. And that crumbling is a lot closer than you think it is.

The time for sacrifice is here.

The barbarians are outside your door. The blood they shed may be your own.

How far will you go to save reality?

Join the Winning Side

The world of the so-called "mage" is incredibly diverse. There are plenty of freakish willworkers wandering around in the World of Darkness: demented mad scientists, New Age mystic warriors, tantric sex magicians, primitive shamans — anything you can dream, you can do. Nonetheless, you may have noticed a certain bias in most of the books written about mages so far. Call it "propaganda," if you will. We prefer to call it "slander." Now it's time to correct those misconceptions. It's time for you to step into the other side of the looking glass.

This time, for a change, you'll have a chance to play the *heroes* of this game. You heard us — the heroes. The winning side. The good guys. Too many Men in Black have been taken out by gunfire. Too many HIT Marks have been shorted out by lightning bolts and "coincidental" fireballs. No more. Are you up for a challenge? Set aside everything you think you know about the world of the mage.

The Nine Traditions have told you enough lies; now it's time for the truth. Despite what you've heard, the Technocratic Union is not "the one conspiracy that created static reality." It's not a hive-mind of faceless drones. It's not an alliance of soulless minions in dark fedoras and reflective sunglasses. Behind the mask of technology, the Technocracy is a collective of enlightened humans. More importantly, it's the last chance humanity has to save itself from destruction.

Of course, if you sign up with the Union, you'll need to leave a few ideas behind. Abandon all New Age delusions, all ye who enter here. *No more sky-clad mystic rites in thunderstorms.* No more bad drug trips disguised as mystic visions. It's time to give up on your Hacker Manifesto, your angsty wraith friends and all your fireball-castin', tarot-readin', dolphin-lovin', *crystal-gazin' dragon-huggin'*, mystic-path-walkin', patchouli-scented, incense-burnin' mage traditions. For the rest of us, the 21st century is waiting.

We are the Technocracy, the ghost in the machine. What do we have to offer? *Mirrorshades and limousines.* Vast expense accounts. Secret agents and hypertech gadgets. Cyborg violence. Bioengineered brilliance. Black helicopters. Covert spacecraft. Endless mind games. Shadow-conspiracies. And, of course, betrayal, *bloodlust and raw,* naked power. The world is yours, but only if you have the ammunition to take it.

You are the elite. A new life awaits you in the Technocratic Union. You'll know the joy of busting into a Chantry house at 3:00 A.M., the thrill of deprogramming a demented cultist in the safety of your own living room and the rush of opening up with chain-gun fire on the latest pack of 15th-century rejects. It's time to take back the world.

All we need is a few hours to mess with your head. To shake loose the slanders and see reality from the side of its defenders.

Put on your mirrorshades, straighten that black tie and get your BFG ready.

It's time to go to work.

A Guide to the Good Guys

It does not take much strength to lift a hair, it does not take sharp eyes to see the sun and moon, it does not take sharp ears to hear a thunderclap.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Despite the outsider's view of the Technocrats as soulless, humorless drones, these dudes are cool. Cool as ice. Cool as freon. Cool as the deadly machines at their fingertips. They have to be cool. The future of humanity rests in their hands.

You'll see many things in this book that seem wildly *inconsistent* with what you've been told. You'll read truths that fly in the face of everything the mystics claim. You'll grasp feats of technology that everyone says are impossible. Don't believe what you have heard. The truth is here. You have it in your hands.

But truth is not a pretty thing. It bites like a snake. Sometimes it even bites its own tail, shooting venom through its own system. Such is the Technocracy's current status. You may have heard that the Five Conventions form some monolithic Union. As usual, you have heard wrong.

Mood: The Cracking Monolith

The Technocratic Union, some say, is a monolith, a towering slab of implacable menace throwing its shadow across the world. Others claim that it's a pillar of stability holding the weight of the world, keeping the sky from falling with its raw strength and intricate craftsmanship.

But the monolith is cracked, honeycombed with microscopic fractures that weaken its apparent stability. If hit too hard, it may shatter, showering the world with jagged pieces. Until then, water, worms and weather continue to spread the fissures.

This book is about life in the cracks and repairing the monolith from within. And it must be repaired, for, if the rock shatters, everything on Earth will suffer. In short, the Technocratic character is a hero, straining to hold a crumbling world together through teamwork, technology, skill and sheer will.

Good luck. You'll need it.

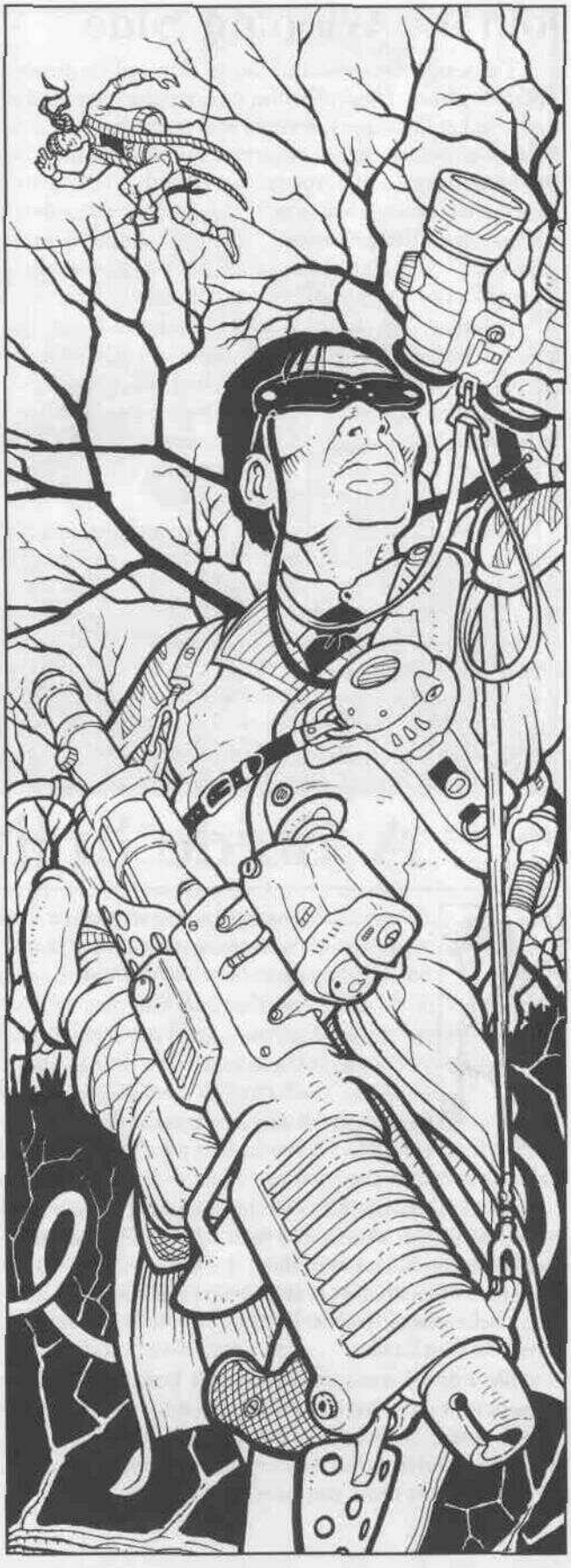
Theme: Act Now!

To outsiders and Reality Deviants, the Technocracy's agents are faceless, emotionless and suicidally devoted to their cause. Brainwashed into awareness, they say, an operative walks a cold, dark path of stainless steel and sharp edges. One misstep, and the Union grinds him into pulp and spits him into a cloning tank for another try. While there's a certain degree of truth to that assessment, the Technocracy is far more sophisticated, resourceful, organized and enlightened than that. The stereotypical Technocrat is a man without imagination, vision or humanity. However, though agents of that variety do exist, the Technocracy considers *them dispensable liabilities, not* desirable personnel. Such rigid conditioning, so essential to a vital machine, breaks people with little will or insight. The best and brightest make it through that conditioning as sharp as razor blades, and they provide the Union with the forethought, skill and intuition that have allowed it to survive nearly a millennia in a world gone mad.

Order and discipline are essential; without them, the Machine breaks down and reality follows. But excessive calculation causes stagnation, and a stagnant organization cannot react. Hence, a certain amount of "give," invisible to the inexperienced eye, is built into the Technocratic system. Without it, the Union would have snapped like brittle steel long ago. The ideal agent can see this "give" and use it to further the Union's ideals. A good Technocrat knows when to break the rules, understands which rules to break and calculates the risks and rewards of breaking them.

In the early days, good, idealistic agents were common. To belong to the original Order of Reason, a man or woman had to be dedicated, visionary, courageous and smart. In the last several centuries, a certain lassitude has crept into the Union; by the 1800s, success, complacency and corruption had undermined the group so badly that a dedicated Daedalean was almost certainly killed as a threat to the "greater good." Although a strict reorganization in the 1800s rooted out the worst excesses and whittled the decadent Order into a smoothly functioning Union, some elements of the old decadence remain. Worse still, several large and growing cancers have invaded the body politic:

- Reality Deviants, epitomized by the corrupt Special Projects Division (see **Technocracy: Syndicate**), have set up beachheads within the Union. Spreading between the cracks like ice in granite, these infiltrators distribute flawed equipment, distorted protocols and paranoia across the Union.
- Even without such instigators, modern technology breeds complacency. With devices that cater to their every whim, many Technocrats sit back and let routine, subordinates and special technology take over for imagination and discipline. This complacency, in turn, has slackened the



chains of command and progress. The Union is growing flabby, and many operatives don't care.

• The "Apocalypse Forecast," a disastrous but controversial projection based on intelligence gathered from media trends and Reality Deviant sources, calculates a 75.367% chance that the next five years will bring on some form of global catastrophe. A handful of operatives have begun to work against the Forecast, but many others dismiss it as millennial doomsaying.

• Inter-Convention rivalry (which is always a problem to some degree) has blossomed into a poisonous garden. According to intelligence sources, many ranking members of the Void Engineers, Progenitors and Syndicate have had dealings with Reality Deviants and rival factions. Projections favor some form of internal war within the next five years.

• A great Schism exists between the Front-Line ops and the theoreticians who experiment in hidden labs and remote Horizon Constructs. The "dogs" feel abandoned by their colleagues, who cannot comprehend the way things *really* work, and the "lab rats" wave away their panicky brethren, convinced that a better solution will emerge from the chaos on Earth. Both sides have begun to feel contempt for the other, and neither truly understands that both divisions are essential to the Union's continued success.

• Despite the destruction of two major Tradition strongholds — Doissetep and the Digital Web (the Techs don't know about the Concordia War yet) — that rival faction has rallied in the past 30 years. Its ranks are greater, stronger and more organized than ever, and its agents have made several major strikes against the Union. Two other rivals, the Nephandi and Marauders, have grown even more powerful. Constant Marauder attacks finally brought down the fortress of Null-B, a Nephandic assault team corrupted a small armada of Void Engineers and a Fallen plot undermined a recent special project, resulting in the loss of three Horizon Constructs. (See the novels **The Ascension Warrior** and **The Road to Hell**, as well as the supplements **Digital Web 2.0** and **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures** for details.) On three sides, enemies gather. Despite its superior firepower and paradigm advantage, the Union cannot stand long against them all.

• The Masses, in their ignorance, have embraced technology to a frightening extent. Although such dependence is often desirable, several vocal critics within the Union have proclaimed that the human spirit itself is stagnating, with disastrous consequences for humanity. As a backlash, many Sleepers have embraced mysticism, the occult and raw rebellion as antidotes for this spiritual decay. While the resulting skirmishes have been invigorating to national governments (and the Technocrats, as well), such conflicts play into the hands of the enemies.

• Heightened technology has become so complex that it's sometimes difficult even for Technocrats to understand and maintain. In the last year, freakish accidents, unplanned quirks and outright failures have plagued many of the Union's most ambitious projects. Even long-standing, well-established technological feats have started to fail. Though many Technocrats blame these failures on the growing complexities of modern science, a few wonder at the difficulties that make space travel difficult, massive technological projects flaw-ridden and former proofs invalid. Some doomsayers believe that the Union may be reaching the pinnacle of humanity, that the science practiced by the Technocracy is so complex that humans cannot comprehend any more difficult bodies of knowledge. Others argue that some unforeseen "chaos principle" is at work, ushering in the entropic death of the Earth itself.

• An eerie "messiah effect" is spreading through the Masses. In the last year or so, a small but growing number of "hunters" have manifested paranormal talents and declared war on the supernatural. Some of these renegades claim to be possessed by angels; others simply seem confused and angry, lashing out at the night with uncanny ferocity. At present, the Union considers such aberrations to be allies; they share the Union's vision of an Earth purged of supernatural taint. But when will these fanatics turn on the Union, convinced that the Technocracy's agents are just one more symptom of supernatural malaise? That time might come sooner than we think.

• And then there's the specter of accidental destruction from the mortal side — the so-called "Pandora Effect." While expert Technocrats monitor many aspects of high technology on a global level, the probabilities remain high for some sort of catastrophe — nuclear terrorism, economic depression, environmental corrosion, overpopulation, pandemic or large-scale war — to undermine all the Union's efforts. Despite the formation of special committees, researchers and strike teams, many analysts predict that the ultimate extinction of humanity will come not from Reality Deviants, but from the Masses themselves. And it will probably feature the technology the Union has always endorsed.

With such challenges at hand, the Union has two choices: subvert its own order to save its principles, or fall to Earth in a rapidly-decaying orbit. New blood is needed. New orders are required. New agents are necessary.

This is where you come in. Although this **Guide** includes important information about all aspects of the Technocracy, it favors new and vital operatives; operatives who may have to go against the Union's own strictures in order to save the Technocracy from itself — and to rescue humanity from the eve of destruction.

Let's get to work.

How to Use This Book

Fifteen hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the world was flat and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that people were alone on this planet. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.

— Agent K, *Men in Black*

Welcome back to reality. You now own a different game.

Long ago, in the original version of **Mage: The Ascension**, your Storyteller would hand out the rulebook and let everyone in your group dream up the most bizarre mystics they could imagine. One player might request a necromancer, another would want his mad scientist to build a rocket ship in a secret laboratory and the third one would brag about his mage's proficiency with psychedelic drugs and heavy weaponry. For some reason, they'd all live in the same house (just like on MTV!) hiding from the reality police. Fortunately, each of them had exotic ideas about Ascension and escape. Of course, if the members of this kind of gaming group weren't careful, they'd head off in so many directions at once that the game itself would self-destruct. So much for reality!

Mage has changed since then. In a Technocracy chronicle, you have been recruited to serve the Union. Your goals are defined up front, and you assemble a team that can fulfill them. Your missions include investigating the paranormal, abducting and conditioning Reality Deviants, expanding the influence of your secret society, advancing research, exploring the unknown and defending the planet. You've got a Supervisor advising you, agendas to fulfill, and a local Symposium of Technocrats critiquing you.

And if you're especially resourceful, you'll discover the flaws within the Union, the infestations and infiltrations your hidden masters don't understand or won't reveal. Fortunately, you're not short-sighted enough to try to destroy the Technocracy. Instead, you're going to fix it. You're a Technocrat who has the idealism and ingenuity to solve the problems your Supervisors can't. Heroes don't try to escape from reality. They take the initiative to save it.

Welcome to the other side of the looking glass. Here are the tools we're placing at your disposal:

• **Chapter 1: Indoctrination** offers an overview of the Technocratic viewpoint — an essential tool for the beginning agent — and a detailed Lexicon of essential terminology and vulgar scuttalk.

• **Chapter 2: Enlightened Science** details your most powerful weapon — Enlightened Science, what others would call "magic" — and shows you how you can improvise Procedures to expand your influence. Smoke and mirrorshades hide technological brilliance.

• **Chapter 3: *History Lessons*** *summarizes the* Union's background, condensing the evolution of the paradigm of reason into one chapter. We'll cram your head with facts and make you question every one of them.

• **Chapter 4: Protocols** describes the Technocracy's operations, showing how the Union takes care of business and eliminates its competition.

• **Chapter 5: The Conventions** details the five Conventions that make up the Union's core structure, as well as the Methodologies that work within them.

• **Chapter 6: Character Recruitment** presents the systems of character creation. Assume nothing, and assimilate all data as if it were new.

• **Chapter 7: Storytelling** offers your Storyteller advice for exciting chronicles and missions that go beyond the obvious "gun down the deviants."

• **Chapter 8: The Arsenal** presents a host of Procedures, vehicles, cybertech and devices — enough to fill up your Technocratic toybox.

• Finally, the **Appendix** offers a mass of modern cultural references that both inspired the creation of this book and serve as a wealth of information from which to create your own chronicles.

Let's be careful out there.

Chapter One: Indoctrination

A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything.
— Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*

I am surrounded by white light, anchored to a metal chair by straps and bindings. Somewhere a choice was made, but I did not make it. I have been deceived, abducted and suborned by someone or something. I don't know who or why. My name is Richard Drake, and I am a man — a man robbed of his free will and dignity.

I have time to review my surroundings and contemplate my situation. I know, above all else, that I must remain calm, remain rational, as I always have. If I give in to fear or panic, for just one moment, all is lost. They will have control.

With that thought, a voice (a thought? a presence?) echoes throughout the circular chamber: WE HAVE CONTROL.

"Who are you?" I demand.

The answer is brief: WE ARE CONTROL.

There is one door leading out of the room; one door leading in. I focus my anger, maintaining my hatred as an aegis of defense. My rage is boundless; I try to direct it outward, attempting to blister the white paint on the door with the intensity of my emotion.

Something smashes my rage back down, forcing thoughts of resistance from my mind. The pain is too great. If only I could track the source, find one person to oppose, I could focus my will. Within moments, my thought is seemingly answered. The door is opened. A woman walks in.

She's clearly done this before. She's efficient. Professional. Inhuman. I slowly examine her, starting with her feet and working my way up. She stands perfectly still, as if in acceptance. Long legs. Tailored slacks. Business suit. Silky black hair. Thin, but standing with the poise of a dancer. Oriental features; no emotion. One person to focus my hatred on... unless that's what they want me to do.

"Beginnings are such difficult times," she intones. She's got a look of confidence as she speaks, demanding respect; I cannot help but focus on her words. She's rehearsed every one. "This is the beginning. This is Room 101."

"And why have you brought me here?"

"Because, sir, you are dead. To the outside world, you are dead and buried. You may think of me your guardian angel."

My anger wells up again, asserting my will. The response is quick — overwhelming pain — and one word echoes in my mind: CONTROL.

I... must... maintain... control.

"You think you do not have a choice, but you do. You did. You chose death, remember? Sleeping pills, 1000 milligrams. A deca-liter of Scotch. To the outside world, you are dead. Now, we will offer you life.

"If you accept, then your life will begin again... now. Every moment of your existence will be watched. Every thought will be monitored. Every act will be recorded. Your name, your will, your identity — everything becomes ours."

I scream, but it is because I have chosen to scream.

Reassessing Perspective

We are parts of a larger organism and occasionally find ourselves expendable in its interests.

— Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle*

That's what it is, isn't it? That's how it always begins. A captive in a room, forced to give up his freedom by some ice-cold agent of the Technocratic will.

Wouldn't it be nice if everything were so simple, so clear-cut, so black-and-white. Traditions good, Technocrats bad.

You wish.

We need to adjust your perceptions; to show you why the Union's way is the correct one. And in the process, we'll show you the problems that you'll discover soon enough.

No, the Technocracy is not perfect, but it may be the best option humanity has.

And you always have a choice. It's just not always an easy one to make.

Reality on the Brink

Let's begin be re-examining the foundation of the whole game. We can sum up all the mystic mage philosophy presented so far in four words: Reality is a mess.

Some people believe that reality is guided by consensus. If that's true, then this reality, as we experience it, is defined by the combined will of billions of humans. Collectively, the human race creates a dominant paradigm for the world, one based on simple, reasonable ideas: gravity works, truth is proved through logic, two plus two always equals four and so on. A few isolated groups rebel against these notions, but the general consensus still creates what we see and experience. For the most part, our world is the one humanity has chosen.

There's one complication, though: Although humans form the most populous society in the world, they're not the only one present. If reality is a tapestry woven by mankind, then someone or something is starting to snap the threads. Fringe groups, occult societies, monstrous creatures — all of these terrors hide within the warp, woof, and weave of the world, straining against the accepted fabric of reality. The insanity of the supernatural world is tearing reality apart.

Monsters lurk in the night. Countless thousands of vampires prey on the innocent, leaching blood from carefully cultivated herds of human kine. Primitive shapeshifters indulge freely in their rage, slaughtering anything that doesn't fit their conception of spiritual purity. Even darker spirits possess and control the living from beyond the grave. No human is entirely safe. In fact, each faction of the occult world believes that it controls human society and the course of human history.

Some creatures are even more dangerous. They drastically alter reality itself to fulfill their own desires. By their will, so is it done. Call them whatever you like — willworkers, magi, mystics, shamans, Reality Deviants — in a word, they're mages. They do not share the reality of the Masses. Instead, they place themselves above and beyond it, pursuing their own dangerous dreams. Through their power, any madness can be made manifest.

Think, for a moment, of the horrifying reality of that statement. Through the mind of a mage, all things are possible. Any dream, any nightmare, any lust or desire can be realized. Any base urge can be fulfilled through sheer force of will. The darkness in a wizard's soul calls out for meaning to define the mysteries of his existence. Offer him a mythos of primitive gods, and he'll summon them into reality. Tell him lies of death and resurrection, and he'll tear the veil between life and death asunder. Speak to him to him of spirits and the unseen, and he'll release them into the world. Such is the madness of primitive magi.

The so-called "Nine Traditions" of magic are far from unified — there is no one belief to hold them together. Instead, each mage has his own personal vision of Ascension. Divided, they isolate themselves from humanity, working secretly within their Chantries and sanctums as reality unravels. While forces of order work to restore the world, a thousand dangerous magical visions tear it apart.

The result of this tortured mess is our World of Darkness, an endless series of conspiracies built on the proposition that the human race is the most populous and least powerful society on Earth. Humanity's world is out of balance. Many supernatural cults already proclaim that the end of the world is at hand.

Students of the occult can't agree on how it will end (an Apocalypse? Gehenna? an Endless Winter?), but they firmly believe that the Final Days are approaching. Or have already begun. It's no wonder reality is being ripped to shreds. Unseen forces continue to strain against the pattern, pushing the limits of their power until the world is destroyed... unless the consensual belief of five billion humans reacts in its own defense.

Some reasonable individuals believe that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The force of chaos is strong, but there has to be some force of order to oppose it. If the world cannot protect itself, someone must bring order to the world. Humans can uphold their own mundane laws, but a few heroic souls *must fight the evils* that average society can't detect or recognize. Someone must work to drive back the darkness. Of all the hidden societies in this dark, forbidding world, only one upholds order and reason. Only one works to strengthen the consensual reality of the Masses.

We call it the Technocracy.

Every Light Casts a Shadow

Does that sound biased? Damn straight it is. This secret society (yes, you *could* call it a conspiracy) is far from perfect. The Technocratic vision of reality has its own share of problems. The Technocracy has diverse societies of its own, and even the word "technocracy" has several different meanings. Take a closer look, and you'll see a secret society that could save the world... or destroy it.

When spelled with a lower-case "t," the word "technocracy" refers to the subtle effect technology has on culture. Humans invent machines, but each of these inventions also has an effect on human society. It's easy to state these effects in simplistic terms: When travel and communication improve, distance becomes meaningless. Advances in medical technology change our attitudes toward life and death. Mass media spreads divergent philosophies far and wide. High-tech industrialized nations war with the low-tech "Third World." We can lose privacy, identity or even humanity if we're not careful... or we can create lives that are better than those of any generation before us. Any new invention (or any philosophy dependent on that invention) has the potential to alter the world, for better or worse.

The word "technocracy" might also refer to a ruling class empowered by that same technology. When a technological change takes place, there will always be winners and losers — those who use the change to their advantage, and those who have no choice but to submit. From this stratification, we get the term "technocrats": technological experts

who use their expertise to command or control those who don't possess the same knowledge. For some, technological supremacy implies moral superiority. *Technology grants* power, but there's always a chance to misuse it. All rhetoric aside, not everyone who works to change the world acts in the interests of idealism, especially when power and privilege lie ripe for the taking.

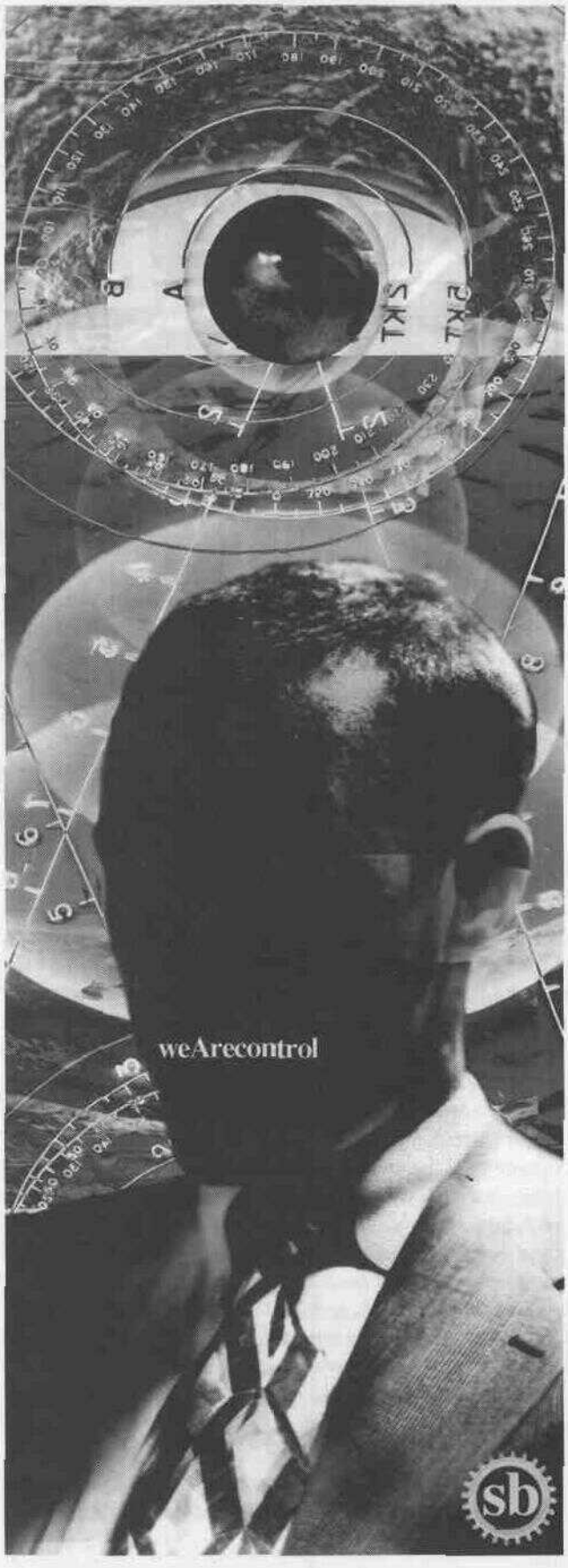
When justified by the Enlightened Scientists of the Technocratic Union, technocracy is, *quite simply, the strongest paradigm in the world.* It's the one closest to the consensus reached by billions of humans: technology works, authority protects us and the supernatural does not exist. The Technocracy did not create this reality, but it does support it, reinforce it and advance it.

Sometimes this support creates outright war. *Every act of* "magic" outside the scientific paradigm acts against the reality humanity wants. Superstitionist mages deviate from the norm, thus committing acts of sabotage against reality as we know it. The worst of them commit outright terrorism, lashing out at anything that asks for a slight degree of conformity. *Anything is justifiable in defending billions of* human lives against this madness. The greater good demands a few sacrifices, and when everything is at stake, the ends often justify the means... *any* means.

Let's return to our initial idea: Mages live in a world where consensus controls reality. Technology is a major *factor in shaping that consensus.* A willworker who works alone to change the reality around himself has a heady amount of power, but consider an entire collective of willworkers, an entire conspiracy of Enlightened mages working to reinforce reality to support this vision.

Now give them the power of technology. Watch as they *use it to seize even more power.* Observe as they develop the disciplines of hypertech and Enlightened Science — magic with technology as its focus. Allow them a few centuries to build a conspiracy of collectivist mages within a rapidly advancing technological world. Then give them just enough power to feel the temptation of corruption.

This, too, is the Technocracy.



The Dream and the Nightmare

No system ever existed which did not in some form involve the exploitation of some human beings for the advantage of others.

— John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*

A textbook definition of the Technocratic Union would read: A gathering of scientific and philosophical societies. Only the Enlightened — visionary scientists who can alter reality through technology — can advance within the Union. These "Technomancers" gain authority and prestige through a network of technological Conventions; each group sponsors several specialized Methodologies. Agents, scientists,

soldiers and academicians each have their own theories about how their respective groups should work. Theoretically, they all work toward the same goal. In practice, however, they don't always agree on the details.

The Union's power is not as far-reaching as some would claim. A few fearful Tradition mages believe that the Technocracy has created the reality of the 20th century, but that assertion is not quite true. The Technocratic Union does not *create* reality — it *reinforces* and *reflects* it. Because the Masses define the world, they empower the Technocracy. To strengthen this power, the Union strives to improve its collectivist society and better the lot of humanity as a whole. In a world of consensual reality, a collective philosophy is a powerful force indeed.

Imagine, if you will, hundreds of minds sharing the same vision of truth, each existing for the benefit of the whole. If the Technocracy could realize this goal of "One World, One Truth, One Order," it would have a significant influence on reality itself. Tradition mages often think of the Technocracy as a vast, monolithic society, a faceless bureaucracy without individual freedom or initiative. Just for the record, that's a lie. The truth is far more frightening.

Politics, Warfare, and the Schism

Where you see targets and security risks, I see flesh and blood. Someone's son. Someone's friend.

— Nikita to Madeleine, *La Femme Nikita: The Series*

Internal struggles are tearing the Technocracy apart. Political struggles inside the Union are almost as diverse as the occult factions outside it — almost, but not quite. In fact, some academicians profess that the war for reality may be the only unifying force that holds the Technocracy together. Certainly, no technocratic vision is as threatening as the beliefs held outside of it, but inside, each alliance is ruthless in its attempts to promote its philosophy above all others. If it wasn't for this continual conflict, winning the Ascension War would be a far simpler task.

Yet there's an even greater Schism in the Union: Theory and practice don't always sync up. Most of the Ascension War occurs in a battleground known as the Front Lines, a realm we euphemistically refer to as the "real world." Higher-ranking Technocrats, who work farther up the chain of command, have official theories about how to win the Ascension War. Unfortunately, they're farther from danger than their mission teams are. Too many Technocrats command their amalgams from a distance. Isolated in shelters, bunkers and offices, the managers and experts of the Technocracy see reality second-hand.

While high-ranking Technocrats deal in theory — establishing policies and protocol — amalgams, field ops and mission teams have to use them. The rulers of the Technocracy have a great deal of idealistic propaganda about how to "save the world," but amalgams must put these theories to the test. Experts speak of "acceptable casualties" and "collateral damage," but Enlightened agents are the ones who have to sort through the bodies. Lectures are easy; winning a war one skirmish at a time is far more difficult.

Front-Line agents also work closely with other operatives to achieve their goals. Mission teams draw from a wide array of Enlightened agents, and each one advances his or her own scientific paradigm. Just because you belong to the same conspiracy as someone else doesn't mean you'll automatically agree with him! Yet while the Conventions have the luxury to engage in heated political debates over broad political and philosophical issues, amalgams of agents don't. If they can't find a way to work together, then the greatest terrors of the supernatural world will destroy them one by one.

Far away from this endless war, in meeting rooms and Horizon Constructs, idealists and pragmatists vie for control of the Technocracy itself. Idealistic experts and managers justify their actions with pure reason, believing they act for the good of all humanity. The temptation to misuse that power always exists, though, and many Supervisors do so without realizing how self-destructive their activities truly are. Other (read: more pragmatic) Technocrats believe that they must seize more power and wealth before they can implement the Union's lofty ideals. This philosophy raises a difficult question: Is this power a means to an end, or is power itself the ultimate goal? Does power lead the Union to Unity, or is Unity merely the acquisition of power? The internal debates still rage.

Enough theory. More practice. There are more pressing issues at hand, and the world may be running out of time....

Paranoia Within

Cynics lecture that the Ascension War isn't just fought outside the Technocracy. Fierce battles rage within it as well. From a distance, the Union looks like a towering fortress. Righteously indignant Traditionalists assault its base, not realizing what would happen if it should topple and fall. The operatives within see the Technocracy as a massive pyramid, complete with a surveillance eye watching from the apex. By either interpretation, there are cracks in the stone, flaws that are not easily detected. Some are hammered by outside forces, but the rock also shifts within, reacting to the stresses of unseen assaults.

Five Conventions define the Technocracy's structure. Each works openly with the others to achieve its goal, but each also struggles covertly to enact its own agenda. Thus, each political faction has its own weakness. Consider them time bombs, if you will, explosive charges buried under thousands of tons of rock. Unseen forces prey on the Syndicate's greed. Cyborgs in Iteration X dream of the realm of Autochthonia, waiting for the Computer to answer their fears with unassailable reason. Void Engineers lost in the Great Deep respond to faint whispers in their minds... voices from beyond. Factions of the New World Order watch each

other carefully for secret treason within their ranks. Progenitors hide secret projects, carefully cloning their elite masters and crafting monstrosities in the name of progress. Enter the deepest recesses of the pyramid and you'll hear the tons of rock beginning to give way.

For Technocratic citizens, the dangers within are as fascinating as the terrors outside. Some ruthless power-brokers want to use these flaws to their own advantages, weakening rival Conventions while strengthening their own groups. Staunch pragmatists desire personal power — wealth and influence that only the Technocracy can bring. Fortunately, a few idealists, terrified by the possibility that the Union may collapse, search for flaws in the pyramid's design and repair them. After all, if even one fragment of that massive rock shatters, Earth suffers from the fallout. Chaos would grow stronger in a world left to the terror of thousands of deviant visions.

Paranoia Without

Fearing dangers within and without, agents of the Technocracy soon adopt paranoia as a way of life. Outside the Union's walls, the very fabric of reality is unraveling. The greatest dangers to that ordered pattern are the anachronistic, hedonistic and mystical beliefs of the so-called "Traditions." The demented Nephandi and Marauders are right behind them, threatening Traditionalists and Technocrats alike. The squabbling Traditions present no obstacle at all to these deviant souls. To keep the world from Hell's doorway, the Union must prevail.

That's just the beginning. Look farther. There are forces even the Technocrats cannot fully oppose — largely because they're not even sure they *exist*. Restless Dead, Changing Breeds, Cainites, Heretics, Hierarchs — just keeping the names straight requires an epic amount of research. Supernatural forces of all varieties prey on humanity. Should any one of them gain enough control over the beliefs of the Masses, the whole world would suffer.

Ask a Void Engineer about the dangers beyond our sight, and he'll point to the dark heavens above him. The limits of reality don't stop at the physical world. Mankind's fear of the unknown has erected a Gauntlet of disbelief around the Earth, but unknowable terrors exist beyond — spirits, horrors, lost dimensions and nightmares too extreme for humankind's sanity. Some visionaries have even had glimpses other races dwelling in the void: the Ka Luon, the Zigg'raugglurr, and other, far stranger things. Are they real, or merely products of our own fears? Amalgams set off into the Deep Universe to investigate, but many never return... or return forever changed.

The Underground Resistance

We must not overlook the role that extremists play. They are the gadflies that keep society from being too complacent....

— Abraham Flexner, *Universities*

So what's a good Technocrat to do? Between the corrupt Supervisors, hard-core fanatics and Reality Deviants scattered all over the Union, it would seem that a dedicated agent is out on his own.

Untrue.

The cells of resistance are few and far between, but they *are* there. Amid the various amalgams, Symposiums, projects and Research Collectives, a few small but determined bands are trying to save the Technocracy from suicide. For obvious reasons, these efforts remain *extremely covert*. In the Technocracy, paranoia is not a neurosis, it's a lifestyle. So groups of idealists keep very low profiles, passing their deeds off as rumors and hiding behind huge screens of misdirection. Every so often, though, a bit of data or assistance finds its way to those who need it — to agents who have proven that they fight the good fight. If a beneficiary of such aid tries to find her hidden benefactors, she might discover that one of these groups does indeed exist.

These hidden agencies include:

"The Cassandra Complex"

Actually, this consortium of Statisticians, Ivory Tower agents and PDC ops goes by the awkward moniker "the Strategic Prognostications and Data Dispersal Unit (SPDDU)." For obvious reasons, most Technocrats who discuss this legendary covert intelligence clique call it "the Cassandra Complex" or "the angels." Scholars with a sense of history know it as the remnants of the House of Selene, a sect of the old Celestial Masters. (See **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, pages 148-149.) Then, as now, the "Cassandras" performed arcane calculations and observations in an effort to foresee crises. In the modern age, their descendants uncover hidden data and calculate future events, then forward their findings to agents who might benefit from them.

Unlike the militant ops of Invictus and Avalon, these hidden masters simply collect information, find parties that might be able to put it to good use and drop it off in untraceable packages. People who know about the hidden agenda of the Syndicate's SPD wonder if the Cassandras discovered the Division's corruption. Regardless, these covert ops maintain a loose network of field agents, mechanical spies and un-Enlightened errand boys. Many a "good Technocrat" has received a helpful tip from these reclusive prophets... or has received aid from an unknown (but well-informed) benefactor.

The Harbingers of Avalon

You've heard of Good King Arthur? Ruler of Camelot, he wielded the mighty sword Excalibur in the service of right and order. When his kingdom finally fell to treachery, Arthur was taken to the mystic island of Avalon, where he supposedly waits for the hour of Britain's greatest need. It's all a myth, of course, but that myth provides the backbone of one of the Union's most dedicated covert societies.

Based in England, the Harbingers of Avalon (a.k.a. the Round Table or "The Sword in the Stone") support the British Empire and keep the Order of Reason's ideals alive. Although small (10 men and two women), this secret society wields tremendous financial and political influence. When bloodshed is necessary, the "Sword" has a sharp blade — Zero Division, an amalgam of top-level field ops renowned for their class and discretion. Most of the time, though, the Harbingers prefer to uphold their codes of honor and dignity through example... and through secret politicking, favors and influence. King Arthur may have been a myth, but he fought the good fight. For over 300 years, the Harbingers have done the same.

(Also see the "Avalon" sidebar in this book on page 61.)

The "Friends of Courage"

Heroes are inconvenient. Although they serve a worthwhile purpose, heroes have a tendency to attract cults of personality. In this case, the renegade known as "Secret Agent John Courage" has acquired a base of support within the Union, despite the fact that he was marked for termination long ago. Following his example, these "secret friends" work around the rules, bending protocol *just* far enough to avoid complete exposure and censure.

Like Courage himself, the "friends" work alone. Anyone who claims to be a "cell chief of the Friends of Courage" is probably laying a trap. Also like their idol, these agents oppose the Traditions, Nephandi and Marauders. In their estimation, the Union is a perfectly good idea that has gone a bit off-track. When a "friend" notices a problem within the Technocracy, however, he dedicates his full resources to exposing it... or destroying it. Unlike the flamboyant Secret Agent, most "friends" keep their heads down. Perhaps the renegade Man in Black is clever and talented enough to avoid detection, but most of his "friends" know they aren't so lucky.

Project Invictus

The most recent "secret society" within the Technocracy is not a society at all, but a mission to expose and eradicate the Special Projects Division and the Reality Deviants who sponsor it. Scattered throughout the Union's ranks, a conspiracy of patrons and field ops has begun the biggest and most dangerous house-cleaning task in recent history: To purge the SPD without touching off a civil war, triggering an economic crash or alerting other RDs to the cancer within the Union.

It's a delicate mission, one with unknown directors and unwritten rules. Where did it begin? No one knows. Perhaps some field ops discovered the SPD's secrets and lived to tell someone about them; or maybe the "Cassandras" ferreted the information out, then distributed it among their closest colleagues. It may even be a ploy by outside agents (Virtual Adepts? possibly...) who knew something the Technocracy did not. Either way, the Project is still in its infancy. More rumor than reality, it plies a secret trade of surgical strikes and covert data retrieval.

The administrators behind Invictus — if there *are* any, that is — remain hidden. They select small cells of field ops, then give them special assignments with secret objectives. Very, very, *very* few Technocrats have even heard of Invictus, and fewer still have been entrusted with the names, details or goals of the operation. The Project's architects select their operatives based on talent, imagination, dedication to the Union's cause and an ability to work behind the lines, yet even so, most of the "honored" agents work in the dark. Like pawns in a greater game, these ops move around in a haze of orders, clues and misdirection, never told what they're actually doing. Although their cause is just, the heads of Invictus have only one objective: to save the Union. In the end, all agents are expendable.

But in a world of mind-control, magical scrying and extreme torture, nothing remains *totally* secret for long. Invictus' founders know this, and they've prepared for the worst in advance. Being masters of deception, the Invictus ops and admins have already leaked misinformation about the Project and fed it to their allies... and to each other, as well. Now the instigators and objectives of the Project have been cloaked in secrecy. Within the Technocracy, hundreds of operatives are working for Invictus. But only two dozen or so know for certain that it exists, and they're not talking. The stakes are far too high.

Your Mission

One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man.

— Elbert Hubbard

With all the forces arrayed against the Technocracy, do our citizens have any choice but to ally with their protectors? Even if we form strong alliances, we must watch each other closely. Some operatives have contemplated alliances with these terrifying powers, and Reality Deviants have begun to infiltrate the Unions' ranks. And so, the Methodologies of the Technocracy watch each other warily.

This is the fate of our Union: danger within, danger without and a world in need of heroes who will defend it.

What does that mean? It means it's time to save the damn planet. Some idealists want to hide inside their laboratories and ivory towers, but you're different. You'll stand and fight. You've got the skills, you've got the tech and you've got the will. You supply the imagination, vision and cold reason; we supply the hypertech and support network. There's no better person for the job.

You're a Technocrat, kid, and *you've just signed up* for the roughest assignment in existence.

Good luck. Stay strong, be light on your feet and watch your back. It's a jungle out there, and you're at the top of the menu.

Important Invictus Notes

Storytellers! Players! The following data is vital to the success of Project Invictus in your chronicle:

- Invictus is a SECRET!!! A triple-blind, ultra-Classified, *bona fide secret. Invictus ops will not* be running around telling people about the Project. Administrators will not be spilling all the mission details to their ops. The local vampires will not be discussing it in the nightclubs and the local RDs will not be joining sweep-'n'-sack teams except as dupes. Outside parties will not be brimming with details about this totally clandestine operation — chances are, they won't have any idea it exists. As far as anyone outside the cell knows, there is no Project Invictus. At best, it's a rumor, at worst a paranoid fantasy conceived by the masters of paranoia.
- Ops or admins who talk about the Project will be disciplined in the harshest conceivable ways, unless they can prove they have been instructed to leak disinformation. Such penalties may include (but are not limited to) demotion, physical torture, mind-wiping, clone-replacement and assignment to suicide posts and missions. The fate of the world is literally in your hands, soldier! Keep your frickin' mouth *SHUT*!
- Invictus provides an excellent opportunity for crossover stories, paranoid fantasies, suicide missions and counter-espionage. As a super-covert venture, the Project features secret benefactors, mysterious errands, dangerous intrigues and triple-blind mind games. Like *The X-Files* and the internecine politics of *La Femme Nikita*, Invictus lets a Storyteller keep her audience — the players — guessing. Nothing is ever what it seems to be, and every action serves a greater agenda... or so it seems.
- In this atmosphere of misdirection, players may well feel like the pawns they are. There's a difference, though — these "pawns" are perceptive enough to realize they're part of a game. They might not be considered important enough to know the rules or the players, but given opportunities and incentives, they could learn both. Like Agents Mulder or Nikita, such "pawns" are free enough to become wild cards, changing the rules — or even the players — by playing the game too well.

For more data about Project Invictus and the potential stories it creates, see **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures** (pages 63-65) and **Technocracy: Syndicate** (pages 36-40 and 54-55).

What the Hell is Going On?

You may have noticed two very different views of the Technocracy by now. On the one hand, everything in **Mage** tells you that these guys kill your friends, take your money, burn down your house and shoot your pets. Now we're telling you that they're all-fired heroes trying to protect reality against a bunch of deviant terrorists. Sounds like we need to make up our friggin' minds!

The fact is, the Technocracy has both good and bad elements. This book is told from a Technocratic viewpoint, so of *course* these guys are the heroes. Most of the other **Mage** books are told from a Tradition viewpoint, so of *course* they tell about all the bad things they've suffered at the hands of the Technocracy.

Ultimately, the Technocracy exists in dichotomy: There are many individual agents who could be considered "good guys." A lot of dedicated people use all of their talents to make the world a better, safer place — hopefully including the Technocrats that you play. On the other hand, there are many Technocratic masters pulling the strings who have their own petty agendas, who have lost sight of the everyday world and who follow the centuries-old protocols and procedures that have been handed down, all without questioning whether such actions are right or just. That's the bad side of the Union: *the gigantic bureaucratic organization that steamrollers* individuals in its quest for a homogenous, orderly, least-common-denominator reality.

Your portrayal of the Technocracy is up to you and your style of play. Before pigeon-holing a group of mages as "good guys" or "bad guys," remember that individual *mages are just guys. It's possible for a lot of well-meaning* people to wind up serving an oppressive agenda.

Just think what would happen if the Traditions really won, and you had to deal with a reality rife with magic, spirits, demons, unpredictable vagaries of nature, blood rituals and no technological comforts at all.

Technocratic Lexicon

Words are our greatest legacy. Without language, all forms of science, commerce and progress would be impossible. Thus, it's important to speak the language if you want to understand the Technocracy. Too many Enlightened folks use the bastard parlance of the superstitionists — "rotes," "arete," "magick" and so forth — when discussing paranormal mysteries. But if you want to join the Union, you've got to put those silly terms to bed and get with the program. Our program.

Accepted Terminology

If you're going to accept the challenge, you've got a lot to learn. To start with, you'll need to be careful about what you say, and who's around when you say it. Some terms are commonly accepted as standard rhetoric; using them demonstrates your loyalty to the Union. That's not propaganda. It's truth.

Amalgam: A group of Technomancers, organized to perform a mission or series of missions in the field; also known as a mission team. In mystic terminology, a "cabal."

Anomaly: Any physical or dimensionally transient manifestation that does not behave according to the accepted laws *of science.*

Apparatus: A technological device or process used to focus advanced Procedures. In mystic terminology, a "focus."

Cell: An especially close-knit amalgam, chosen for compatibility and assigned to delicate operations. Common in Project Invictus.

Colony: An isolated realm within the Deep Universe where technocrats control the workings of local reality, manipulating it for the common good. Some agents are raised and trained within these realms. Also called a Horizon Collective.

Citizen: An un-Enlightened employee of the Technocracy. *Arrogant or disgruntled agents call them proles.*

Consensus: Reality as defined by the majority of un-Enlightened humans on Earth; Reality Deviants act in defiance of consensual reality.

Construct: 1) A base of operations used by the Technocracy; 2) A bioengineered or genegineered humanoid created by artificial (non-sexual) means.

Convention: One of five alliances that serve the overall goals of the Technocracy (i.e., the Progenitors, the Syndicate, Iteration X, the NWO and the Void Engineers).

Data-Recovery Specialist: A spy.

Deviance: Obvious, blatant willworking that may be identified as "magic" by outside observers; a punishable offense.

Deviant: A willworker or parasitic beast who strays from or rejects the accepted paradigms of the Technocratic Union.

Device: A hypertech apparatus of truly superior technology, usable only by agents of sufficient Enlightenment.

Dimensional Science: A special discipline of the Void Engineers; it allows operatives to travel into realms of non-standard reality (subdimensions) and defend our own from alien attack.

Deep Universe: The realms beyond Earth's Horizon; the depths of space and hyperspace, attainable through Dimensional Science.

Dispatch Center: A mundane front for Technocratic operations.

Eidolon: The dream-symbol of the inner Genius, which inspires a Technocrat to greater things. In mystic terms, the "Essence."

Empowerment: The realization that the truly Enlightened mind has the power to effect change and to alter the course of reality itself. In mystic terms, "Awakening."

Enhancement: A biological modification, either with cybernetic technology or genetic engineering. An operative with such alterations is Enhanced.

Enlightenment: (1) Self-awareness, knowledge that technology is power and the capacity for Inspired Science and hypertech; the greater your Enlightenment, the greater your value to the Technocratic Union; (2) the ability to translate reason into reality. An un-Enlightened person cannot do any of these things. See Genius.

Extraordinary Citizen: A citizen or employee who, though lacking true Enlightenment, is still capable of comprehending a measure of Inspired Science and can use certain devices and Procedures.

Front Lines: Term used to define a specific world inhabited by four billion humans and countless Reality Deviants, patrolled by amalgams, surrounded by the Horizon and defended against the threats of the Great Deep (i.e., Earth).

Genegineering: Advanced genetic manipulation, often used to improve organisms or adapt them to new environments.

Genius: The undefinable flash of inspiration that allows a Technocrat to understand hyper-advanced concepts and science. In mystic terms, the "Avatar."

Horizon: A barrier of disbelief surrounding the world, dividing the Real World from the terrors of the Deep Universe.

HIT Mark: 1) A specific type of Iteration X enforcer that can deploy overpowering internal weaponry, usually dispatched as a method of last resort; 2) A lumbering killing machine lacking in subtlety or restraint.

Influence: Manipulation of one of the nine standardized realms of Inspired Science. (e.g., Mind influence, Dimensional Science influence, Primal influence, etc.). Also, social power. (e.g., influence within Scotland Yard.)

Inspirational Science: The ability to understand and master advanced metaphysics and utilize hypertech theories. In mystic parlance, "technomagic." Also called Inspired or Enlightened Science.

The Ivory Tower: 1) An alliance of academics, bureaucrats and servants within the NWO; 2) The predecessor to the NWO, established during the Victorian era.

Masses, the: The body of un-Enlightened humans who collectively define reality.

Methodology: 1) An alliance of Technocrats, established within a Convention to pursue specialized skills, sciences and tasks; 2) A paradigm accepted by members of a group and perfected within that group.

Newlife: Life after recruitment, usually involving a new identity, a new name and a lifetime of devotion to the Technocratic Union; contact with oldlife is often considered deviant.

Operative: Capitalized: an Enlightened representative of the New World Order who works in espionage. Uncapitalized: a generic term for any employee of the Union.

Order of Reason, the: A secret society of philosopher-scientists, founded in 1325 and established to uphold science and reason while eliminating chaos, disease and superstition.

Paradox Effect, the: Reality fluctuation caused by extreme changes in the metaphysical tapestry or the psychic shock of the Masses. Once triggered, the Paradox Effect can wreak vast amounts of personal and collateral harm.

Precepts of Damian, the: The six primary goals of the Technocracy, as established in the late 19th century.

Primal Force: The "building block" element that lies at the core of worldly reality; shifted by metaphysical currents, it fuels advanced sciences, despite being abused and corrupted by superstitionist cults. Also called Primal Essence or Primal Energy.

Primium: A secret alloy of hyperadvanced metal created for cybertech devices; also used to defend against deviant willworking.

Procedure: A common application of Inspired Science, usually standardized for Enlightened agents by their Methodology. In mystic terms, a "rote."

Process: A series of technological procedures used to focus will.

Processed: Conditioned to accept the Collective Will of the Technocracy.

Quintessence: *An anachronistic term that describes the* Primal Forces of unseen energy.

Reality Crimes: Paranormal activities that victimize the Masses and undermine consensual reality.

Reality Deviant (also RD): A practitioner of deviant and counterprogressive "magics"; a "mage" operating outside the Technocratic Union; *also, a "supernatural" organism that* indulges in parasitic terrorism (a vampire, werebeast, faerie, alien, etc.). In short, a perpetrator of reality crimes.

Rogue: 1) An individual who must act secretly outside the parameters of a mission in order to fulfill it; 2) A deviant agent who disobeys the mandate of his superiors and betrays his amalgam, thus *sabotaging a mission.*

Sleepteacher: A device used to program an agent's mind with information rapidly.

Social Conditioning: 1) A method of mind influence used to ensure an agent's loyalty; 2) A system of conditioning that guarantees that a prole *will carry out a mission within* accepted parameters; 3) A form of punishment used to modify the behavior of a Reality Deviant.

Subtle Influence: Hypertech or Procedures used in ways that do not violate common belief.

Supervisor: A representative of a Symposium responsible for briefing amalgams on missions in the field. A team's Supervisor may change from mission to mission.

Symposium: An assembly that dictates the Union's activities in a city or other contained geographic area.

technocracy (lower-case): 1) Any society ruled by the technologically elite; 2) The subtle influence of technology on human culture.

Technocracy (capitalized): The Technocratic Union; the modern form of the Order of Reason; an alliance of Enlightened scientists and operatives and un-Enlightened citizens dedicated to protecting the world from Reality Deviants and other hazards.

Technocrat: 1) a high-ranking individual within a technocracy; 2) an agent of the Technocracy.

Time Table, the: A grand vision set by the Inner Circle, expressing the Technocracy's goals over the next half-century. Usually internally documented and defined every 15 years.

Un-Enlightened, the: Humanity, the Masses; humans without the capacity for willworking or Inspired Science.

UID: Universal Identification Designation, usually consisting of either two letters and a string of numbers (e.g., AT311), a binary code (e.g., 1001001) or, in more extreme circumstances, a fragment of genetic code.

Scuttalk

Many of these terms are simply shortspeak for esoteric or jaw-breaking terminology, or descriptions of items or places outside the usual Technocratic vernacular. Some of them, however, are insults or other unmutual neologisms. Be careful when using the latter around your Supervisors or fellow Technocrats. Watch yourself, or others will watch you! Morale is everyone's responsibility.

Adjustment: Syndicate term for "magic."

Agent: 1) A term of distinction, used to designate a Technocrat who works with his amalgam selflessly to carry out missions; 2) A designation of subservience, used to describe a low-ranking Technocrat who executes the plans of his superiors.

Autochthonia: 1) The secret stronghold of Iteration X; 2) A mass delusion corrupting Iteration X, usually involving a perfect extra-dimensional "machine realm" and a "God of the Machine."

Avalon: Symbol of the ideal of the Technocracy; in Arthurian myth, the island of Avalon is the resting-place of King

Arthur and the forging-place of the sword Excalibur. Despite its superstitionist overtones, the ideal of Avalon inspires many Technocrats to honorable and compassionate activities.

"Be seeing you.": Watchwords stated to remind a fellow agent that he will always serve the Technocratic Union. (Derived from a classic British television program. Considered sarcastic.)

Beyond: The realms of the Deep Universe.

"Black Hat and Mirrorshades": 1) A term used to criticize a plan that is unrealistic or unfeasible; 2) Blatant use of hypertechnology.

BFG: Any hand-held weaponry device capable of unleashing incredible force — in other words, a "Big Fucking Gun."

The Bottom Line: The Syndicate Paradigm of reality, usually oversimplified by non-Syndicate agents as "maximum profit, minimum risk."

Boys in Black: Pejorative term used to describe the NWO, suggesting unrealistic and anachronistic fascist ideals.

Cash Basket: A hard-working Syndicate op with the connections, talents and drive to generate tremendous amounts of profit.

Clockwork Convention: Iteration X; often considered an insult.

Cyborg: An agent possessing advanced technological devices within his body; usually, though not always, a representative of Iteration X.

Defaulted: Marked for termination by the Syndicate.

Dogs: Pejorative term used to describe Front Line operatives; typically, a dog is so obsessed with his immediate concerns that he cannot see his master's overriding needs.

Drycleaning: Handling a problem without resorting to violence.

Erg Cola: A high-energy beverage and food substitute.

Erg Junkie: 1) A person strung out on hypermeds or high-energy foods; 2) A Technocrat who relies on procedure and devices to do his work for him.

Exo: Insulting term for an obvious cyborg; also ExoJock and Go-Bot.

Fortean Anomaly: A manifestation of Paradox that defies the accepted laws of science (many examples were cataloged by Charles Fort in the early 20th century). A "Fortean event" is a sure sign that Paradox has been at work nearby!

Fortune: Syndicate term for reality, reflecting the more capricious and unpredictable elements that must be "adjusted."

Frankenstinian: A scientist, usually Progenitor or Void Engineer, whose theories and work are too bizarre for his colleagues' comfort. Also called a Mad Doctor or Star-Eater. Sometimes used as an adjective. ("That's very Frankenstinian of you.")

Great Deep: The realms beyond Earth's Horizon containing untold threats to humanity's continued existence; the Void.

Hypermeds: General term for advanced drugs and medicines.

Hypertech: General term for advanced equipment ("devices") and procedures that exceed the limitations of conventional Sleeper technology.

Ice-Pack: A cold killer, usually from the NWO.

Jump, the: The decision to abandon one's oldlife and live completely within the Technocratic Union. (Not always a voluntary choice!)

Lab Rats: Pejorative term used to describe a theorist who has little contact with the Front Lines or similar realms; a lab rat does not understand the harsh realities of life outside his sanctuary, and does not care to.

LERMU: Living Entity Reality Modulator Unit. An agent genegineered to perform better in the realms beyond Earth's Horizon; often mistakenly described as a "gray alien."

Massesspeak: Words and terms that a Sleeper would understand; the way "mundanes" speak.

Mordred: A traitor to Avalon — that is, a Technocrat who has sold out the Union's ideals in favor of power, rage or greed.

Morganna: A female traitor to Avalon (see Mordred); also, a pagan witch, whose wiles endanger the common good.

"Mutant Chihuahua": Pejorative Progenitor term for a genegineered organism that is amusing, but too blatantly manufactured to survive in the field.

Mystic: A deviant mage who uses his delusions of false gods and communication with extra-dimensional anomalies as a focus for his "magic." (See superstitionist and Reality Deviant.)

Natural: A human born and raised in the Front Lines before his conversion to the Technocratic Union.

Nik: An agent's code-name; short for "nickname."

1984: Term used to describe tactics that are outmoded, outdated or obviously anachronistic. ("Get with it. That is so 1984!")

Oldlife: The sum of a Technocrat's life and activities before joining the Technocratic Union. Contact with elements of one's oldlife is forbidden.

Op: Shorthand for "operative"; in other words, a Technocratic agent.

Polishing: Using subliminal Mind Procedures.

Prole: Pejorative term used to insult loyal citizens and employees.

Pulling a Scotty: Despite its *Star Trek*ish ring, this phrase refers to replacing someone with a clone. Inspired by the Scottish sheep experiments, which, while primitive, captured the public imagination and paved the way for open cloning. Also called Dressing up Dolly.

Pushing: Also called "the push"; pushing allows a Technocrat to reach into her inner resources and channel them toward her procedures. In mystic terms, "spending Quintessence."

Rat Race: The seedier realms of the Front Lines.

Room 101: A room specially equipped to facilitate interrogation, Social Conditioning and occasional torture.

The Shadow Crusades: A historical conspiracy theory explaining how the Order of Reason infiltrated governments over a period of 500 years, destroying much of its own documentation in the process.

Six Degrees of Separation: A colloquial term referring to the six stages of loyalty within the Technocratic Union. All loyal Technocrats are within six degrees of separation of the Inner Circle. (Giving someone the "first degree" ensures loyalty; attaining the "seventh degree" results in immediate termination.)

Sanitize: To purify corrupted Primal Force into pure energy.

Sheep Shanking: Falling in love or lust with a clone. Also known as bangin' a baa (for obvious reasons).

Standard White Jesus: A mocking term for a Christian Technocrat or his religion. Some ops call Buddhists tummy-polishers for the same reasons.

Sterilize: To eliminate all physical evidence of an anomaly, thereby eliminating all belief in the manifestation that created it.

Steelhead: 1) *A cyborg;* 2) stubbornly "orthodox" Technocrat.

Steelskin: A cyborg or other noticeably Enhanced agent.

Suit: 1) A garment worn by professionals of distinction, such as Syndicate managers and NWO Supervisors; 2) A professional who maintains objectivity, ensures profitability and maintains acceptable losses. 3) A Supervisor or manager who's willing to sacrifice anyone or anything, including his own identity and ideals, for the sake of his personal advancement and profit.

Superstitionist: A so-called "Tradition" mage.

Sweep-'n'-Sack: *Busting into a place, killing everyone* there, taking all data into possession and either replacing it with false data or wiping the site clean. A few agents call this "raiding SJ" for reasons that remain obscure to the rest of the Union.

Templar Theory, the: An archetypal, mytho-historical conspiracy about an Enlightened Methodology that was allegedly created by an alliance of 33 escaped prisoners in 1308. (Note: This theory is a controversial topic in the Ivory Tower.)

Tin Men: Pejorative term used to describe agents of Iteration X, suggesting that they're incapable of understanding human ideas and motives.

Unionist: *A loyal member of the* Technocratic Union.

Void: 1) Historical term for the realms beyond Earth's Horizon, first used in the Victorian Era; 2) Pejorative term used to describe the Void Engineers, suggesting they're "devoid" of lives or "avoiding" the rest of the Union.

Chapter Two: Enlightened Science

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
— Arthur C. Clarke

If the Technocracy just used the principles of mundane science, it'd never get anywhere — we'd still be stuck in the Dark Ages. Though agents carry out many duties, one of the most powerful tools and pertinent functions of an agent is Enlightened Science. Any MiB can just use his specialized sociology training to play with peoples' heads. The real visionaries that move the Union forward take that *Enlightened step and* turn it into a new and recognizable form of progress. Whether exploring new avenues of knowledge or just pulling a MacGuyver, it's Enlightened Science that keeps the Technocracy from stagnating, as well as giving you the skills you need to protect humanity, advance the Precepts and draw a really fat paycheck.

What Enlightened Science is All About

The very name of the Technocratic Union speaks to its powers: "Techno-," the use of tools and rational plans; "-cratic," a meritocracy based on such command of science; and "Union," an all-inclusive group. Every man and woman on Earth (or off it!) holds a position in this Union, a position defined by a command of the science and technology that the Union makes available to everyone. Those with greater understanding naturally lead and protect those who can only use or barely comprehend the fruits of science. It's this dissemination of science to *everybody* that ensures the Technocracy's strength. That's also why only those who can really get into the scientific mind set and tweak the rules to their advantage can oversee the Union and carry out its most important goals. Truly Inspirational Science, the ability to go beyond the bounds of factual knowledge and to deduce new principles or new applications of known principles, is what sets the meritorious Technocrat apart from the Masses.

Observers might say that Enlightened Science has been around since the dawn of man. The first man (or woman, perhaps) who made fire intentionally was using tools; the man who came up with tribal societies formed social groups; the man who looked to the horizon for a new home and answers undertook the heart of exploration. These were all the earliest scientists.

Well, not really.

Although the process of Inspiration can be traced back all the way to the first things that mankind did with awareness of his actions, such feats were hardly science. Science implies a rational worldview, an understanding of cause and effect, a repeatable experimental process that turns theory into a working model of reality. That sort of thinking probably never occurred to the earliest pioneers of tools and techniques; they just wanted to eat, survive or find a better home! Those ancients tied up their understanding and belief in all sorts of mythical nonsense, calling out to spirits for aid, relying on dreams to guide them and casting muttered prayers over their tools. Such actions are not science, which is why the Technocratic Union is a distinctly modern phenomenon.

True Enlightened Science requires primarily an understanding of real science! *That* sort of reasoning didn't come about until the Renaissance, that age when men started "thinking about thinking." Sure, a few societies embraced some limited techniques earlier; the Chinese made some impressive tools, the Greeks and Romans had powerful social structures and the Arabs had a good understanding of medicine and chemistry. However, nobody really took the next step of looking into the underpinnings of such thought, until the philosophers of the Renaissance.

Once philosopher-scientists set about categorizing different phenomena, they couldn't stop. Logic, induction, experimentation and observation proved it possible to understand the world without the intervention of gods or mysticism. A philosopher-scientist could take the principles of one thing and see how those principles applied to other things, even things that hadn't been made yet. When those innovators started putting principles together, their brains boiled with ideas for new ways to use that understanding. That was the birth of real Enlightened Science: the idea that something new and different could be done based on the understanding of older, established models. People had been operating under this paradigm with tools and techniques for a long time, but it was only when the Order of Reason was founded by groups of these visionaries that the idea of *universal principles* came to pass.

The formation of the Order of Reason was really the use of some of the earliest true Enlightened Science. Some Craftmasons — workers and laborers who built things up according to principles of geometry and Enlightenment — saw the idea of a labor in building not a thing, but an institution. This institution could preserve and promote new ideas, better ways of doing things and advancements for all of humanity. Calling on other like-minded innovators who understood

Dispelling your Illusions

Here's a few terms you might've heard, most likely from the scribblings of some deviant Traditionalist "mages": Technomancer. Technomagic. Mage science.

Excise them. The Technocracy doesn't do "magic." We agents of the Union use science. Those deviant Ether-freaks and Virtually Inept may call themselves "Technomancers," and in doing so, they label themselves superstitionists. They use science without principles, individually chaotic notions that have no place in an orderly world.

You know better. You're a Technocrat. You use inspiration to perform Effects of Enlightened Science. Your tools are devices and your routines Procedures. Get *with the Pogrom*. There's no such thing as magic: It's just a principle that's not yet understood and defined. And we *certainly* aren't doing some sort of Technomagic; we're extending the principles of knowledge to new and unique situations.

Willworking? Crap. Science works because it's tested and proven, not because someone *believes* it into working. Foci? Romanticized notions of useless tools. Rotes? Petty attempts to "prove" that a certain way of calling on superstition is as valid and repeatable as true science.

Science is the key. Learn it. Love it. Live it.

tools, trade, politics and mapping, they founded the Order as a way to channel Enlightened Science to worthy pursuits.

Think for a moment about Enlightened Science without the Technocracy. Can you imagine a bunch of scientists, each espousing his own theories, each twisting the laws of physics in strange shapes, all without sharing his knowledge or keeping a common goal of protecting humanity? Terrifying, isn't it? That's why the Sons of Ether are renegades, and why their brand of science isn't suited to the modern world. They may use some of the principles of science, but they refuse to acknowledge that science needs a solid foundation and a universal application if it's going to be useful.

Enough historical digression. Since the tools of science were founded on universal principles — principles that could be applied to all things — they were useful even to normal people. You don't have to be a master geometer to use a better plow. As Enlightened scientists spread their craft across the world, they worked out kinks, improved their models, developed their understanding and advanced their techniques. Flawed or faulty devices were repaired and made reliable. The continued blossom of science spread to everyone, raising the world to a higher standard. At the forefront of progress, the truly Enlightened continued their Inspirational work, pushing the boundaries of knowledge. *That's* what Enlightened Science is all about: moving the edge of knowledge forward, turning the unknown into the known, doing what's never been done before and hammering it all down into forms that work. Repeatedly. Reliably. Universally.

Basic Science

Science itself runs on the assumption that the universe can be understood and modeled by proper procedures. You can come up with an idea of how or why something works — a theory — and then try it out in a limited fashion. Your theory explains a particular model, a simplified version of reality. If you can get it to work, then maybe your theory explains a particular bit of reality. However, you have to be able to repeat it in order to prove it! Remember, too, that no matter how many times something works, it only has to fail *once* to show that there's a loophole in your theory. This persistent frustration plagued a lot of early scientists. Without the incredible precision and accuracy of modern technology, they were forced to deal with flawed works that couldn't test theories with precision.

Scientific theories and tests can be applied to anything — you can try to figure out why objects fall, why people react to certain offers differently from others or what's on the other side of the hill. Formulate a hypothesis, a particular belief in how something works, then test it. Test the *hell* out of it. Modern scientists record everything they do so that other people can

test it, too, looking for flaws, loopholes or details that may have been missed. Once it works reliably and repeatedly, you can use it as a model to come up with a new theory.

Thus science proceeds in steps. An explorer might hypothesize "There's bound to be a plentiful field on the other side of that hill." He travels there and maps out what he finds. Once he's explored it, he hypothesizes "Maybe there's a river further along," and he continues, mapping as he goes. Others follow along and find that his maps are accurate. Or, if they find mistakes, they correct them. Everybody benefits from the knowledge gained.

Once science gets a little more abstract, it becomes a more useful tool, though it takes more rigorous testing. The explorer mentioned above might start hypothesizing "There are rivers at the bottom south end of most hills." As he explores more places, he might find out that he's right, or he may discover that his hypothesis is wrong. Either way, he tries to refine it, figuring out why it's true or false. From there, he can build new hypotheses, and continue the work of figuring out the order of the world. The more that's categorized, the more that knowledge can be disseminated.

The Technocracy spreads proven, studied knowledge to everyone. People learn math, astronomy, chemistry and social science in school. Technical journals and books are available in libraries, through subscriptions and at job sites. The power of the Internet and the web lets people access information on a wide variety of topics, instantly, from anywhere in the world. This truly is mankind's golden age, where everybody can benefit from the advances of centuries.

The Cutting Edge

The Enlightened Science used by the Technocracy lies beyond the normal science used by the Masses, of course. People are making advances all the time, developing new ways of understanding the universe, but the researchers of the Union really have an exclusive hold on "cutting edge." Occasionally, some un-Enlightened scientist comes up with a weird or useful invention, but for the most part, it's in the labs of the Union's top minds that the next century is dreamed up.

Right now, the Technocracy is sitting on advances a century ahead of the present day. Faster computers, better medical techniques, space colonies, macro-stabilized economies and psychodynamic math are everyday practices.

If the Union is concerned for all of humanity, why aren't these advances disseminated to the public? The simple answer is that this secrecy exists out of a real concern for the safety of humanity.

Ever heard of technoshock? How about cultural dissociation? Beta testing? Most of the advances of the Union are still unreliable. A cure for every bacterial infection sounds great, but it's substantially less useful if it's released to six billion people just in time to figure out that one in a thousand have a fatal allergic reaction to it. New tools, weapons and computational aids are great, but societies can become too dependent on them, and when they have accidental mistakes or failures like the "Y2K bug" — since they were, after all, designed and built by fallible humans — they can wreak a great deal of havoc. Worse still, an unprepared society may reject a new advance out of hand. Cloning has great medical applications, but religious zealots *still* oppose it. Everything the Technocracy uses on the cutting edge has to be tested scrupulously, redesigned thoroughly and introduced slowly if it's going to work for the betterment of mankind. In the meantime, such experimental technologies have to stay in the hands of the Enlightened scientists who can tinker with them, improve them and use them safely. We *don't* need the Masses taking viable but buggy technology, screwing it up and then throwing it away!

The Paradox Effect

The most common problems that show up in hypertech are sometimes dubbed the "Paradox Effect." This term refers to the fact that such devices and Procedures *should* work according to scientific principles, but sometimes they just don't. Often, they fail in spectacular fashions, or they even have results the opposite of what was intended — paradoxically.

Mundane science is generally safe from the Paradox Effect; sure, things break, screw up or go wrong all the time, but they usually do so in predictable ways. Send in a janitor to clean up and a technician to fix it. You can just pull out your handy reference manual and repair it, even if you don't know anything about it.

Enlightened Science suffers from deeper flaws, though. Sometimes, things blow up or fail in ways that aren't predicted by current thinking. In such cases, a new theory has to be made to account for the phenomenon, if it's to be understood and eliminated, or else the device or Procedure has to be scrapped, redesigned or developed to work from a different angle. Because of the intensely detailed equations and theories used, most Enlightened Science can only really be debugged and understood by the experts who made it in the first place. When the Paradox Effect rears its ugly head, therefore, just about anything's possible, and you'd better have a competent Enlightened technician on hand to take care of it.

The process of disseminating Enlightened Science among the Masses gets rid of the Paradox Effect, incidentally. The

Union safeguards such Procedures and devices until they're understood and developed well enough to be mostly bug-free. Then they're spread among some of the higher levels of scientists. As they become better-known among the Masses, people manage to build them with greater efficiency and operate them with less error. Eventually, the cutting-edge Procedure becomes the norm, and it's so well defined and hammered out that it no longer suffers from such annoying and unidentifiable failures. If it screws up, it does so in a traceable, understandable and (usually) repairable way.

The worst manifestations of the Paradox Effect are saved for the most potent and complex uses of Enlightened Science. If you're just shoving around a few atoms with a magnetic field, your experiment may melt down or fail to jostle the atoms into a microscopic "IBM." On the other hand, when you're messing with a huge, computer assisted, reaction-massless, heavily armed space ship, there are about eight and a half billion things that can go wrong. Any one screw up, and the whole thing could blow apart like some sort of nuclear weapon. The lesson: Keep your unstable, Inspirational Procedures and devices small.

Paradox in the Lab

The most useful Enlightened Science takes place in laboratories where various researchers develop new tools and theories. You can perform feats of Inspirational Science in the field, but doing so is generally a one-shot matter of getting your ass out of the line of fire.

Laboratories are the preferred place for Enlightened Science because, among other things, devices and Procedures are less prone to the Paradox Effect there. Think about it: If you're building a plasma caster in a scummy basement with homemade tools, with no reference manuals to speak of and a wooden bench covered in empty beer cans, how well is it really going to work? Sterile environments, high-tech tools, computer aided designs and assistants all reduce the chance of introducing a weird and unforeseen bug into your design. Space is even better: Without contaminants or gravity, you can really get down to the basics of building. Unfortunately, that also means that Procedures and devices perfected in space or in the lab have a tendency to show off new flaws when first used in the field; that keen plasma caster from Q Division may work fine on the test range, but once it's dirty and banged-up on a mission, all bets are off. Stick to the colonies, space stations and other remote labs when testing something really dangerous; it's less likely to blow up in your face.

Major Backlash

As noted previously, really big and blatant projects tend to result in the Paradox Effect more readily than subtle, simple experiments. Sometimes, though, this effect shows up in ways that aren't readily apparent. Most operatives expect that an experimental device or Procedure will blow up, burn

down or sink into the swamp when the Paradox Effect manifests. They're usually unprepared for the more subtle, long-term manifestations.

Here's a little example. A few centuries back, the New World Order got together and nudged a few political visionaries(or so it claims). See, this revolutionary colony had decided to try a radical form of self-government, one without any noble class and with privileges of citizenship extended to everyone. It sounded like an interesting experiment, so the Order pushed in a few places, made sure that another world power got involved, and after a short little skirmish the United States had formed a democratic government.

Unfortunately, the New World Order pushed a little too hard, and it didn't work out all the kinks. The systems could be misused by people in power. Corrupt officials made money as career politicians without really serving the system. Don't get it wrong, the Masses had a lot to do with their own screw ups and corrupt politicians; however, the Paradox Effect ensured that, just as the untested and experimental forms of this huge government were implemented, entirely new and unforeseen flaws cropped up.

What this explanation boils down to is that large Effects, even if they're subtle or based on well-known principles, are more likely to have some sort of Paradox Effect. A giant spaceship may go up like a nuclear fireball, but tinkering with world economies can lead to stock crashes and currency devaluation. Just because it's not an immediate, visible problem doesn't mean that it's not a result of the Paradox Effect.

The Paradox of Humanity

Under the Ivory Tower's Empowerment theory, it may well be that there isn't really a Paradox Effect for large happenings like "democratic government" and "paper money economies." Normal humans — the Masses — can and do shift things in unknown ways. Democracy could've just sheltered corruption due to clever politicians finding new ways to exploit the system. The Challenger could've just blown up because of some faulty piece manufactured by a normal machinist. Never underestimate the power of human stupidity.

Whether the Masses bring such pains on themselves, though, is ultimately moot. Any sufficiently large change brings with it equally large side effects. The Technocracy didn't make Adolf Hitler, and World War II sure wasn't a Paradox Effect, so what does and doesn't constitute Paradox on that scale is up to interpretation. Push, and the cosmos pushes back — but the more revolutionary the Procedure, the more likely it is to have unforeseen consequences. The Masses are just as capable of misery or change as the Union is. In a world that science still can't adequately explain, who's really to blame?

Science and the Supernatural World

If you've spent any time on the Front Lines, you've seen some freaky shit. Men hurling bolts of lightning. Women shapeshifting into animals. Ghosts. Vampires. Doors into other planes of existence. Deviants against reality itself, who make a crack-junkie's nightmares look like a bedtime story.

So how do you explain scientific reality when you've got all of this bizarre, completely irrational madness leaking out of the cracks of the world?

First, remember that science is based on underlying principles. Scientific theories merely observe the world, and models try to explain it. This reality is an objective, clearly definable one. If it's not explained, it's just not part of a current model. If you see it happen, there's an explanation.

Second, recall that we're expanding the horizons of knowledge constantly. Just because something looks like it shouldn't work doesn't mean that it can't. Quite a bit of Enlightened Science looks unfeasible to the untrained observer. This other sort of weirdness is just what the Union was made to defend humanity against. Much of it is explainable, as long as you take the time to figure it out. Some events are harder to explain than others, but with enough time, effort and Enlightenment, anything can be understood.

Third, *some things are beyond your understanding.* You didn't understand algebra when you were in first grade, and you may not understand what the deviants are doing in their free time. In many cases, you don't want to — that sort of "insight" is dangerous; that way lies madness. Just remember, the Union has highly trained professionals to figure this out. If you're on the Front Lines, you only need to worry about stopping it. Every time you knock a spirit out of a haunting, you make a place safer for people. When you take down the radical cultist who deals with extradimensional entities, you save the lives of his potential victims.

Metaphysics

For those field agents who are running afoul of the nastier manifestations of deviant reality constantly, the study of metaphysics can come in handy. Including subjects like paraphysics, parapsychology and subdimensional cosmology, this field offers a look at how scientific principles apply to supernatural phenomena.

Be warned, though: Studying this sort of science is not the way to get rapid promotions in the Union. Sure, we need to understand and explain incidences of deviant reality, but do we really need to delve into those nightmares, when it's best just to figure out how to deal with them? Metaphysics is

a good basis for figuring out how normal physical laws interact with unusual situations, but frankly, there are better ways to deal with them — eliminate them. What does it really matter that a ghost can somehow exert kinetic energy without mass? All you need to know is how to deal with the threat.

Avatars

Some superstitionist mages refer to their "magical powers" as stemming from Avatars, or god-forms. These deviants believe that they house souls of great power, and that they tap magical energies from such sources. A few even talk to or claim to interact with these Avatars.

This "theory" is obvious nonsense. Anyone who believes in "magic" is probably unhinged in the first place, and a little personality disorder is to be expected.

Technocrats do not have Avatars. Nobody claims to talk to dead gods or strange spirits before working on a scientific project. True Genius comes from within: The driving thoughts, the ideas that whisper tantalizingly, the dreams that form new directions. The benzene ring was realized in dreams; what's to say that the subconscious mind is without an understanding locked away from everyday thought? The idea of talking to a god or spirit for knowledge is an anachronism from shamanistic history. Modern scientists know that Genius comes from within, that Inspiration is a product of Enlightenment and that no device or Procedure needs any sort of "magic" to function.

If you find yourself talking to spirits, gods or manifestations of your dead friends and family, report to Psych Ops.

Seekings

In the process of study and development, all Technocrats learn new ways of doing things and develop new skills. It's a fact of life: As the saying goes, that which does not kill you makes you stronger. The most difficult advancement, though, is true Enlightenment. Any agent can hone his mundane skills to an incredible degree or work with the devices and Procedures that he knows how to use. It requires real effort to make the breakthrough that leads to greater Enlightenment.

The fact is, there doesn't seem to be any real way to trigger greater Enlightenment. Agents who use specific branches of science may get better at them or learn more underlying principles. Inspiration itself is harder to come by. To put it another way, you can always understand certain hypertech principles, as long as you're Enlightened enough to figure out their underpinnings. Developing the Enlightenment necessary to make Inspiration easier, faster and surer — that's hard.

However, Psych Ops has developed some ways to determine an agent's scientific Enlightenment. Some hypertech principles are simply so esoteric that no normal mind can grasp them. As an agent becomes more Enlightened, these principles become clearer, and the agent becomes capable of using them. Different grades of development are traceable in

these Spheres of science, and an agent's skill can be measured, to some degree, by his greatest level of understanding.

More common, though are moments of clarity — instances of perfect vision, wherein everything becomes, well, *clear*. Every Enlightened operative goes through such a moment when he first realizes his true understanding and ability to effect change, the moment of Empowerment. As an agent progresses in his studies, he finds that disparate elements of life may become clear suddenly. A dream of a puzzle, solved in a moment of incredible insight, unlocks the door to greater Enlightenment. Many agents speak of wrestling with great conundrums, seeking answers to cosmic puzzles, grappling with nightmares and even fighting with the insanity of waking delirium. Some agents break under such pressures, and they are confined to psychological evaluation until a cure can be discovered. Others remain puzzled, trapped by their inability to solve such troubles. For many, though, a flash of sudden insight lights the way. Once the solution presents itself, the puzzle fades back into obscurity, and its fitted pieces reveal a beauteous order.

The most Enlightened and high-ranking Technocrats speak occasionally of cryptic tests that come in series, even of quests to other dimensions to seek out the knowledge hidden in other parts of the universe. These heroic undertakings mirror the grail-quests of Avalon stories: The Technocrat must seek to purge from himself the failings and fears that keep him from achieving the greatest understanding. You have to move outside your "comfort zone," flying from the safe nest and into the pit of despair, in order to win the prize of Enlightenment. All new science springs from inquiry!

The Highest Lesson

So, regardless of your position in the Union, you're advancing the cause of Enlightened Science. You help to comprehend the patterns of an objective reality, quashing the deviants that threaten humanity. You use principles that have been established for centuries even as you improvise to deal with the terrible threats to the Union's stability and security.

Among the highest echelons, though, there's a curious divergence from the scientific principles that founded the Union. Ever wondered why vampires, mages and the like are called "reality deviants"? Sure, they do things that shouldn't be possible. Obviously, though, they're calling on some not-yet-understood principle, or using smoke and mirrors. Aren't they?

If you dig deep enough into quantum mechanics, you run into the so-called "observer effect": No quantum-level probability resolves until someone actually witnesses it. Among other things, this theory implies that reality is defined by what people see and what they believe! The top-ranking Technocrats believe that the Consensus — the collective beliefs of the Masses — may be just as important as the laws of objective science. (After all, the NWO asserts, if enough people believe something, it might as well be true.)

The Metaphysics of Technology

We clever **Mage** players know that what the Technocracy does is functionally magic. A trained Technocrat's Procedures are just magical workings using a scientific focus. Enlightenment is just a fancy word for Arete.

However, 90 percent of the Technocrats don't know that! To the average agent on the street, it's all about science and training.

Remember, the whole idea of "influencing reality" and "willworking" is really only understood by the upper echelons of the Union, and they aren't talking. What would happen if they suddenly told their minions that all of these supernatural creatures *were* real and really *did* fit? Instead, the Reality Deviants are just classified as enemies according to the Union's precepts. The Dogs don't have to worry about politics, they just enforce policy. So the Great Schism continues to take its toll....

This sort of philosophizing isn't common among the lower ranks, though. Dogs on the Front Line don't have time to worry about that sort of metaphysical esoterica, and the lab rats are too busy working with established principles. If any such subjective definition of reality is really at work, it's a matter for the Union as a whole, not for individual agents.

The Fifth Essence

You may have studied a bit of Primal Essence, and perhaps you've dealt with manipulations of such energy. If you have, then you're familiar with this cosmological building block. If not — well, it's always a good time to learn.

Back in the Middle Ages, the predecessors of the Union studied primal elements, using alchemy and astrology to delve into the natures of things. Sure, many alchemists found the process of transformation more useful as a metaphor for transmuting consciousness. Still, quite a few strides were made in early chemistry, material science and the like. It's from those studies of the underpinnings of material that the Fifth Essence came.

The Primal Essence is the resonance left over from creation. However everything started — Big Bang, Genesis, sputum of a god, what have you — it left an indelible mark on all things. Science tells us that everything is ultimately made up of energy. People, objects, even conscious thoughts stem from changes in energy states. The particular constants of this energy, though, such as its rate of flow, state forms and the like, all stem from the way that the universe itself began. It's a rather complex topic, but suffice to say that everything in the universe holds that signature of creation in the energy that makes it up.

This energy that bears the mark of the cosmos is the Primal Essence. Manipulating Primal Essence makes it possible to channel creation itself in a raw form. This energy is unfettered by material states or kinetic laws; it's the potential of further creation. Naturally, this sort of energy is highly useful and very valuable.

Nodes and Places of Power

Many old strongholds for the Order of Reason were built in special places according to the principles of geometry or the meditations of various masters. Though such old beliefs have long since been left behind, the places of power often remain. superstitionists refer to such places as "Nodes," where they gather the power of the "Quinte Essence." Regardless of designation, the fact remains that some sites house an unusual store of such Primal Energy.

It's a simple matter to track down sites of Primal Essence. A little bit of knowledge in the fields of Primal Energy can be used to calibrate field equipment, and then it's just a matter of tracking the emanations. The Union hunts down and uses such sites studiously, harnessing the excess Primal Energy and storing it in batteries or in gel form for later use in important projects.

Disturbingly, Primal Essence seems to collect in places that house deviant events. "Haunted" houses, natural glens and faerie rings all gather Primal Essence. Whenever possible, the Union makes sure to sterilize such locations, harnessing the Primal Energy for more productive pursuits than superstition. If the area can't be captured, it must be destroyed — nobody needs a bunch of ghosts flitting around with Primal power!

In rare cases, Primal Essence distills naturally into objects at places of power. These objects are valuable because the essence can be distilled from them by trained operatives and then stored for later use.

Using Primal Essence with Enlightened Science

Superstitionist mages claim that they can use Primal Essence to shape their "spells," to make their magic more effective. Whether or not this trick actually works, superstitionists have an annoying tendency to congregate at places of power, drawing out the Primal Essence. Since this Essence can be used more effectively by the agents of the Union, the deviant mages have to be removed. This process started more than a few of the conflicts between deviants and the Union — a conflict for resources, if you will. Thankfully, the Union's well-trained troops and Procedures have the upper hand here; it's even become possible recently to mark the Essence that flows from a particular site, tracking down deviant users later.

When augmenting Enlightened Science, though, Primal Essence is more valuable than Primium. (Well, maybe.) Almost all devices are designed to convert Primal Essence into a more usable form; the Essence, since it's the very

cornerstone of the cosmos, holds energy more efficiently than any other material. When stored in batteries or biogel, the Essence can be used to fuel many of the normal apparatuses used with typical Procedures. Even an Inspirational Procedure can benefit from Primal Essence; the agent need only use the Essence to charge the appropriate tools. When the resonance of the Essence is altered by a knowledgeable operative, it can be used to alter chance, augment normal technologies and provide a stabilizing effect on normal fields.

Needless to say, control of Primal Essence is paramount in the war for reality.

Tools, Devices, Styles and Theorems

The tools make the Technocrat. Every agent in the Union calls on particular tools in order to perform his duties. Whether these tools are particular ways of doing things, specially constructed objects or built-in biological enhancements, the tools give the agent extraordinary abilities and define the operative's limits.

When you first train an operative, you need to determine that agent's apparatuses. These apparatuses are the tools that the agent uses to perform Inspirational Effects.

Remember, too, that though most agents can use just about any Technocratic Procedure, most operatives have particularly favored skills. Also, certain Conventions train their agents more extensively in certain types of Procedures.

Methodologies

The word "Methodology," with a capital "M," refers to an alliance within a Convention. If you're trained and conditioned by one of these 15 groups, it only makes sense that you'd be more proficient with its particular types of Inspiration. As an optional rule, then, many of the Procedures listed here are associated with specific Methodologies. If your character has been declared as an agent of one of these groups, then you'll get a little perk when using one of their accepted Procedures: You get to re-roll any 10s, keeping the 10 as a success and continuing to check for extra successes (even to the point of rolling additional 10s again!). Here's a summary of the types of Procedures different Methodologies specialize in.

BioMechanic: cybernetic Procedures, mechanical manipulation

Defender*: heavy weaponry, tracking deviants, detecting extradimensional anomalies

Enforcer: tracking deviants, weaponry

Executor*: *gadgeteering*

Explorer*: Dimensional Science, cartography

FACADE Engineer: cloning Procedures

Financier: money manipulation

Genegineer: genetic engineering

Media Control: media manipulation, advertising

Operative: espionage Procedures, tracking deviants, weaponry

Pharmacopoeist: chemical creation (synthetic rituals)

Statistician: prediction, calculation

Time-Motion Manager: engineering, energy and matter manipulation, surveillance, weaponry

Watcher: surveillance Procedures, tracking devices, media manipulation

*Defenders include Void Engineers from the PDC and BDC; Explorers include Void Engineer Squids and so forth; Executors include Void Engineers from R&E.

Primary Apparatuses

Declaring an apparatus during character creation can be rough. In fact, having to limit all your Inspiration within a given Sphere of influence to just one technological device might be enough to discourage you from playing a Technocrat at all. ("What? I've got to use a vial of bacterial culture every time I use Prime?") To remedy this situation, we offer an optional rule.

The apparatus that you declare for each Sphere during character creation is really your primary apparatus. You are an expert in this type of technology, and as such, you get a -1 difficulty whenever you use it in Inspiration with its declared Sphere. (For instance, a Man in Black who declares "handgun" as his primary apparatus for Forces gains a –1 difficulty on all Forces Effects that incorporate it.) Don't despair, though. *Under this rule, you can declare other technological items as apparatuses* — you just won't get the –1 difficulty for them.

To facilitate matters, we've listed some recommended apparatuses for some of these Procedures. This effort makes our lives easier, too; you can use many of these Procedures without having to match a specific apparatus to a specific Sphere. For instance, the **Mirrorshades** Procedure allows you to spot paranormal creatures when you're using a pair of sunglasses and the Spirit Sphere. If the Storyteller allows this rote, then anyone with at least one dot in Spirit can learn to don some shades and seek out evil... but only the agent with *sunglasses as his primary apparatus* for Spirit gets a -1 difficulty modifier with the Effect.

If you think up an apparatus we haven't listed for a Procedure, by all means, pitch the idea to your Storyteller. If you can justify it as your primary apparatus, you would still get the die modifier. For instance, *if your NWO Watcher specialized* in Kirlian lenses for the Spirit Procedure: **Mirrorshades** — and we forgot to list it — then you could still qualify for the same -1 difficulty any other mage would get for using a focus. This optional rule should be used for inspiring brainstorms, not creating limited shopping lists.

This mechanic allows Technocrats to dream up apparatuses for their Procedures on the spur of the moment. Our Man in Black from the first example kicks ass with a handgun. Later, he could dream up other apparatuses for his improvised Forces Effects, like a car battery, a blowtorch, a fire extinguisher, *or even* "incendiary ammunition." As long as he can hide his Effects behind the guise of technology, he's got a wide repertoire of options. He's just better with big-ass guns than anything else.

Remember, though, that both the Storyteller *and the* player have to agree that the apparatus is suitably technological, and that it's used properly. For instance, a Progenitor might declare a scalpel as his primary apparatus for Correspondence, but that doesn't mean he can cut the internal organs out of a mage standing 10 feet away! A subtle use of influence allows you to disguise Inspiration as technological mastery; it doesn't let you become a deviant mage wearing a black hat and mirrorshades.

Finally, you may recall that some of the old **Technocracy** books listed recommended apparatuses for the various Conventions. We've repeated some of these lists throughout the chapter, offering new players plenty of ideas for their foci. If you've got the tech, then you've got the power.

Iteration X: Cybernetic implants, weapons, computers, programs, hand-held sensors

New World Order: Badges, weapons, suits, vehicles, televisions, printed media, personnel records, psychological techniques, Room 101

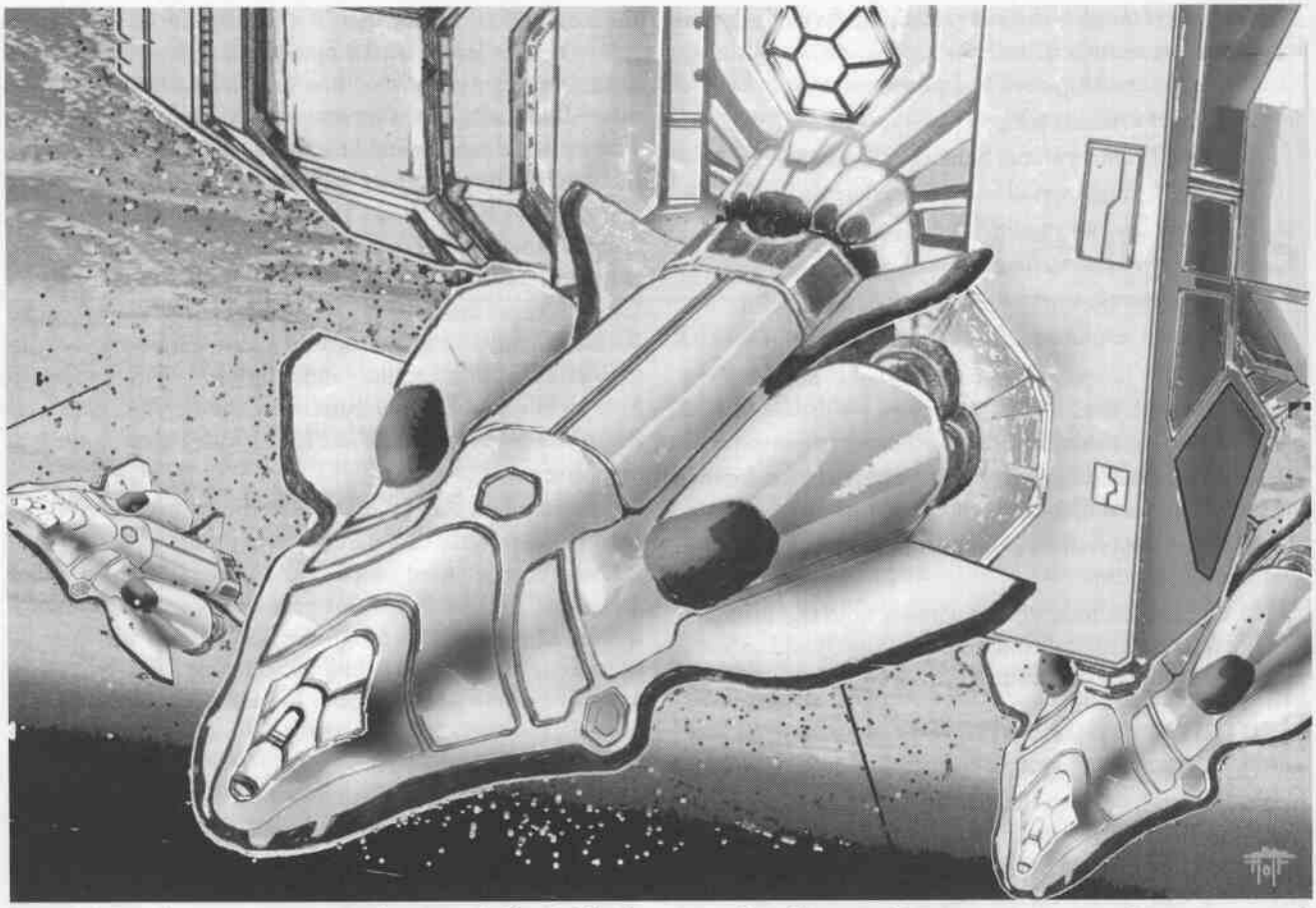
Progenitors: Biomods, psionics, retrovirus cultures, surgical augmentation, enhancement drugs

Syndicate: Money, credit cards, financial data, social *skills, personal assistants*

Void Engineers: Weapons, enhancement armor, tracking devices, sensors, dimensional gates, transponders

These examples are just a few ideas to get you started. In particular, think about what your character did before joining the Union. Examine your agent's motives and areas of study. It makes no sense for a character without Medicine to rely on surgical techniques for an apparatus, after all! On the other hand, some interesting conflicts can come from a character who uses apparatuses outside the Convention's norms. If a Syndicate agent uses psionic powers, or a New World Order agent relies on cybernetics, that discrepancy will certainly draw some raised eyebrows from the upper echelons of the Convention.

Remember, an agent believes that the power of the apparatus is what enables her to use her scientific knowledge. An op *without an apparatus is sitting on* all sorts of useless



knowledge without any way to implement it ("If only I had a trans-state phase coupler..."). When using a particular apparatus, the Effects in question need to be tailored to that apparatus. If the Technocrat in question can't find a way to perform the Effect, then it's just beyond the bounds of known science!

Psionics

The practice of psionics is worth mentioning as a specialized form of device and Procedure. In earlier days, people would talk about "psychic powers," engrams, mental projections and astral forms. As usual, the Union is a century beyond that nonsense.

A rare few Progenitors (and we do mean *rare* — no more than half a dozen) continue to experiment with psionic manifestations. Although intuition and empathy are accepted widely by the Union, really spectacular Effects like pyrokinesis and biomorphing are completely beyond the scope of normal science. Progenitors can and do stimulate unusual brain development to enhance such powers, coupled with special neural implants from Iteration X, but the Union tends to frown on such activities. Psionic power is difficult to quantify or control, so it often falls outside the realm of "acceptable science."

The few agents who do use psionic powers are watched carefully by the Union, and they are often forced to undergo special evaluations. Psionic mutations tend to cause mental instability (the Paradox Effect again), and they always result in long-term problems. Still, there's nothing quite so terrifying as an agent who simply looks at you and causes you to burst into flames....

(We recommend that no agent be allowed to have more than two Spheres declared as "psionic" Spheres. These Spheres can be used with just a turn of concentration and maybe a gesture or a withering stare. On the downside, Paradox manifestations tend to backlash in nasty neurological fashion; the Progenitors have a lab wing full of comatose, vegetative drooling subjects who overreached their psionic limits. Psionics is a barely understood or accepted science even within the Union, and its use *will* be monitored.)

Speed Science

There comes a time when the manure has hit the rotary oscillator, and the agent is caught without a suitable Technocratic apparatus for a defense. If your apparatus, say, for Life is some sort of surgical work, you may be hard-pressed to invoke an appropriate Effect in the midst of heated combat. You can't exactly cut open your allies and change them on the fly!

Most simply, this drawback is one of the flaws of the Technocratic paradigm. Without the time and the means to conduct something according to the "immutable laws of

science," an op is stuck having to improvise. If the agent doesn't believe that she can perform a certain feat of Inspiration with just the tools at hand, then she can't.

On the other hand, it's no fun to play a group of Technocrats only to discover that half of your science doesn't work just because you don't have the right tools.

As noted previously, though, a *Technocrat is well-trained* in many disciplines. An agent can almost always find an appropriate apparatus; even without the appropriate *primary apparatus*, something can be improvised, jury-rigged or tweaked into a semblance of utility. See the Ability Jury-Rig in Chapter Four, and watch a few episodes of *MacGuyver*!

In extremis, a Technocrat can do a spontaneous Effect — the creation of a new rule or theory of Inspired Science that takes hold on the spur of the moment. Doing so is pretty damn close to doing "magic," though, so watch your back.

To perform a spontaneous Effect, you need *only come up* with some application of scientific knowledge, however far-fetched, and justify it to the current circumstances. Instead of *your apparatus* causing the Effect, you simply use your apparatus to recognize the Effect. You're not making something happen; you're just looking for a way out and, lo and behold, you find it at the last minute!

As an example of spontaneous casting, Devon is caught dead to rights in the *sights of a deviant mage* who's hurling a column of flame while fleeing out the door. Without his gun or his suit (since he was undercover), Devon has no easy way to stop the fire or the mage. He decides to wing it, coming up with a spontaneous explanation for his Effect. Whipping out his mirrorshades (which he uses as a non-specialized apparatus), he looks up at the ceiling and realizes that the roof is damaged. Throwing himself backwards, he just manages *to avoid injury* as a large slab of roofing collapses, intercepting the jet of flame. Good thing he recognized that it was about to fall!

Spontaneous casting of this nature is usually coincidental; your Technocrat has to come up with something that fits his view of science before he can recognize it as just what he needs right then. In most cases, the agent isn't even aware that he's performing an Effect — he just chalks it up to fortunate coincidence. When you're trained with the best, you just happen to have the knowledge and the luck to save you!

The Nine Spheres

Like the Traditions, the Conventions of the Union divide the different aspects of study and Inspiration into nine Spheres of influence. Each one is essentially a category of Enlightened Science, studied by the brightest *of humanity*.

Correspondence

All of space bends according to gravity and mass. Perceptually, space appears in certain patterns because of the limits of the human mind. After being properly trained to understand how space really works, though, it's possible to understand space as *it really is: as a single point*, an overlapping geometry of mathematics that simply seems to bend or stretch according to the forms of matter in it.

Once a person is properly attuned to space, it's possible to see or chart anomalies like singularities and point masses. Gravity wells, wormholes and curved geometry are second nature. Remember how your math classes told you that a triangle always adds up to 180 degrees? Take a triangle and lay it on top of a globe, with two points along the equator and one at a pole — suddenly, it's a triangle with three right angles! *That's just the least trick of* Correspondence.

Students of Correspondence come to realize that space only has meaning because of the matter in it and the minds that observe it. Before the universe exploded into being, there was nothing; once it ends there'll be nothing. If there's nothing, there's no way to compare distances or directions. It's only the mind that gives these illusions form.

Working with Correspondence requires measuring tools, gravity generators, mass detectors and a grasp of mathematics *second to none*. Topology, hypermathematics and Einsteinian physics all have their roots in Correspondence.

Dimensional Science

The forbidden fruits of the Void Engineers lead to insights in other realities. According to some quantum theories, every choice and every action can move in multiple ways, and every result actually does happen *in some alternate* universe. Each universe is unique in part due to the quantum signature of its components — the quantum-level strata vibrate at a specific, recognizable frequency. Change that frequency, and you push the quantum level into a different dimension.

By toying with Dimensional Science, Technocrats can deal with aliens, entities from beyond human understanding and other realms of existence. The Void Engineers *manipulate* this science to step into other layers of reality, trying to map them and understand their laws. Other Technocrats *rarely study DimSci* — let those crazy Engineers risk their lives and their sanity dealing with things that don't follow the rules of rational thought!

Typical apparatuses for Dimensional Science include special quantum field generators, barrier fields, neurostimulators and psionic powers.

Entropy

Chance, change and fortune are primarily the province of the Syndicate, and that Convention steers markets and

fate equally well. With its firm grasp of economics and associated mathematics, the Syndicate holds a tight grip on so-called "chaos theory," the idea of controlling permutations and determining outcomes from changing variant inputs.

Chaos theory is useful in just about any field of Technocratic endeavor—the Statisticians rely on it for their predictions, the Operatives use it to determine likely contingencies and the Genegineers model and minimize genetic drift. As long as it's possible, an application of chaos theory can determine the steps necessary to make it probable. As with other cerebral sciences, using chaos theory relies on some superb mathematical insight generally, but a rare few Technocrats rely on hunches, gut instincts and "off-the-cuff" calculation.

Thermodynamics also plays a large part in Technocratic study. The universe moves slowly toward heat death as all things degrade to their entropic states. With a grounding in thermodynamics, it's possible to predict or affect decay. Things fall apart, after all. Double-slit electron theory and similar state-changing Procedures even make it possible for a Technocrat to affect probability itself!

Common apparatuses for Entropy include calculators, quantum probability resolution devices, thermodynamic models and energy field disruptors.

Forces

Isaac Newton pioneered Forces when he put graceful numbers to the laws of physics. Followed by such minds as Leibniz, von Braun, Pauli, Feynman, Fermi and Teller, the science of physics blossomed from nothingness to full-fledged discipline in the course of a few centuries. Once motion and energy were understood, it became a simple matter to alter them. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, according to thermodynamics — but with the science of Forces, it can be constructed from existing elements, transformed into something else or returned to Primal Essence.

The Technocracy makes great use of Forces in almost all of its projects. Warfare is not the least of these endeavors. Commanding Forces allows the Technocrat to understand and channel lasers, plasma, heat, light, sound and any other form of ambient energy. These potent weapons and shields form the bulk of the Union's arms. However, Forces sees other uses as well: Propulsion, energy generation and communication are all possibilities. With the common mathematics of energy physics, the Union can control all forms of energy, recognizing them as springing from the same essential sources. Whether kinetic or potential, all such energy can be manifested in any of the states desired.

Forces apparatuses often include energy weapons, engines, generators, power regulators and special sensors.

Life

The Progenitors are the undisputed masters of Life science, Enlightened biology and Inspired medicine. Through their efforts, the human body has been improved, diseases have been recognized and conquered, even mortality itself has seen its end. Cloning, viral re-engineering, surgical alteration — understanding the building blocks of DNA, cellular anatomy, mitochondrial evolution and biochemistry leads to the ability to take apart (and put together) the most base forms of the body.

Nor do the students of Life limit themselves to mutating living subjects. With the proper components, it's possible to engineer life where there was none before. Entirely new evolutions can be forced. Drugs and chemicals that alter living creatures fall under this purview, and combined with Matter, the study of Life gives rise to cybernetics and bionics. Though Life is one of the more uncertain sciences, its results are clear and godlike. There's no mystery in Life that the living mind cannot uncover.

Life apparatuses include retroviruses, surgical alteration, cloned materials, bioimplants, specialized pharmaceuticals and even regimens of food, exercise and meditation.

Matter

Inert objects, by themselves worthless, can be turned into infinite tools by the student of Matter. Material science and chemistry explains the fundamental building blocks of inert substances. Armed with such knowledge, the material scientist can change their properties, build new alloys, reduce objects to their components, even suspend or alter the standards of an object's characteristics. The alloy Primium is only one such example of work. Studies of Matter brought about steel alloys, high-tension plastics, heat-resistant tile, superconductors and memory metals.

Exercising material science is, perhaps, one of the most straightforward areas of endeavor. Inert objects always respond to the same treatments in the same ways, after all, and there are nigh-infinite amounts of stuff on which to experiment! The study of Matter gives the Technocracy armor, new weapons, cybernetic components and vehicular fuels. Obviously, this science is a high priority among the weaponsmiths of Iteration X.

Matter apparatuses take many forms; chemistry can be altered with complex lab equipment, metallic properties altered with magnetic fields, alloys created with smelting tools, gases excised or changed with catalysts and so on. Any Matter scientist probably carries a virtual utility belt of common tools and elements to affect inert substances.

Mind

The study of human consciousness really got the Union started; it wasn't until scientists decided to delve into how and why man thought in particular ways that science itself could evolve. From the underpinnings of early philosophy, the science of psychodynamics — the Mind — has grown.

Mind studies start with the individual. Through regimens of memory enhancement and calculation, the human mind is disciplined into new order and exercised to its

greatest capabilities. Though human consciousness cannot truly be reduced to numbers and formulae (yet), it's possible to simulate thought with the right programs, or to alter thinking patterns through simple words and actions. Enlightened psychology is still a soft science, yet it is no less powerful. By relying on subtle cues and carefully chosen phrases, it's easy to tell what someone's thinking or to change the subject's mind. The more advanced students of Mind learn to interpret patterns of brain activity and delve into esoteric philosophy, studying Platonic ideals, Jungian archetypes and constructs of pure thought. Mechanical telepathy and psionic discipline, though unusual, are still accepted as useful tools. At the most sublime reaches of experience, the student of Mind learns finally that the sensory impressions of reality are totally subjective, and he learns to divorce consciousness from physical feeling. Such a process lets the Masters of Mind send their thoughts on spiraling journeys to the heart of creation, experiencing hallucinations that bring Enlightenment — or madness.

Common Mind apparatuses include psionic training, cerebral enhancers, computer implants, psycho-social techniques and brainwave stimulators.

Prime

What more can be said of the Primal Essence, the pattern of all reality? All things are made from the same building blocks, the simple pieces of the cosmos. To understand this esoteric discipline, the Primal Field Theory, requires rigorous mathematical discipline, scientific flexibility and a great deal of (dare we say it) faith.

The Primal Essence is still not well understood by the Technocracy. Individual agents use the Primal Essence in their devices and Procedures by rote. Few are really able to manipulate it with skill. Even those who can alter or use Primal Essence are at a loss to explain how it really works, or why. Suffice to say that it just is: Primal Essence is, essentially, the basis of all things, so it's impossible to try to explain it in terms other than *itself. Circular logic*, perhaps, but the only real explanation worth a damn.

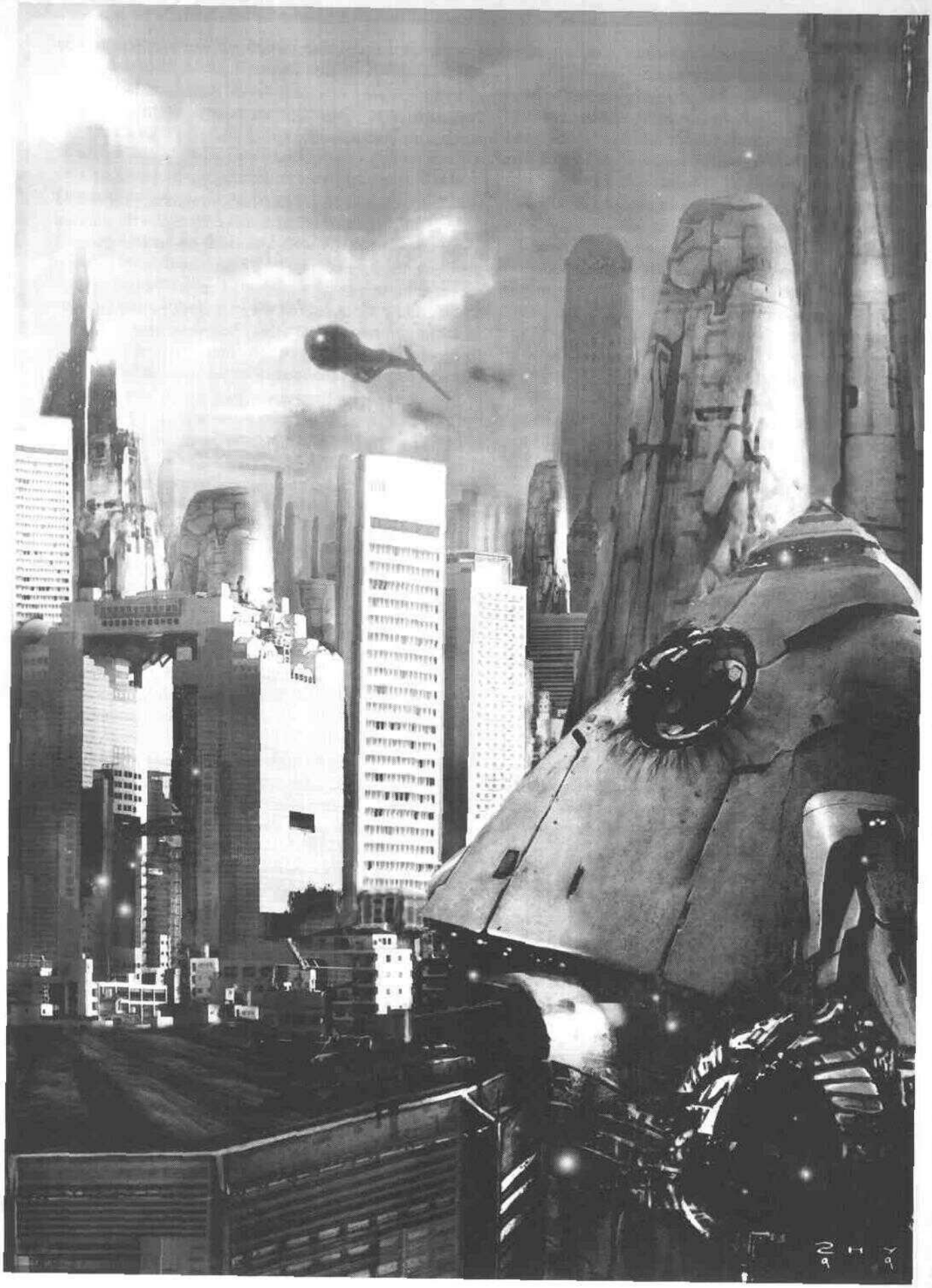
Apparatuses for focusing Primal Essence include biogel, Prime batteries, Primal field modulators, reality stabilizers and subuniversal sensors.

Time

Temporal science is riskier than just about any other field except Dimensional Science, and if you compare the number of Chrononauts MIA with the fatalities in Dimensional explorers, the statistics may well come out even. Time waits for no man, it is said, and even when you've delved into Planck time and figured out the very clock of the universe, you're hard-pressed to make that clock move in anything but its appointed rounds.

The Technocracy finds a frustrating yet comforting stability in temporal science. Time moves in an orderly fashion; though the right tools can make it appear to compress, expand, warp or loop, it's an open question whether Time itself is actually altered instead of just the human perception of Time. Chrononauts have to start with an understanding of Time's base elements and a means to track it impeccably, since everything else builds on absolute precision. Consider that a Chrononaut whose molecules vanish from the present only to appear in vibration out of synch with the air around him could suddenly burst into flame from the transferred energy (and Paradox Effect), and it's no wonder that temporal science remains a risky, yet intriguing, undertaking. The most advanced explorers can use their tools to manipulate time with huge energy surges, or to change their own mental perceptions of time; special Void Engineer facilities even project agents into the future, or halt areas outside of the flow of time completely.

Apparatuses for Time include special chonoscopic sensors and generators, energy field generators (to warp space and, thus, time), perceptual enhancers, Planck resonance regulators and relativistic spinning compression points.



Chapter Three: History Lessons

"We'll control whatever we have to... to prevent the Dark Ages from descending on the human race again."
— Operations, *La Femme Nikita: The Series*

The Paradigm of Reason

"More light!"
— Goethe's last words

From the earliest days of human history, mankind has been surrounded by darkness. For just as long, the practitioners of Enlightened technology have struggled to bring light into the world. They have opposed madness through reason; they have forced back superstition through courage; they have brought order and reason to the world through science. Although the Technocracy is a relatively young organization — one that was formally established in the late 19th century — the ideals it enforces today, for better or worse, are built on thousands of years of precedent, inspiration and illumination.

Unfortunately, that bright light has been reduced and reflected. The Union's current conception of its own history is the result of endless interpretation and debate. Each Convention seems to have its own interpretation of history — its own reflection of Enlightened *illumination*. Cautious scholars have tried to piece together a definitive history of the Technocracy, the Order of Reason that came before it and the millennia of study that came before that. However, because history is based on theories, they can't agree on all the details.

Three Interpretations of History

He who controls the past, controls the future.
— Orwell, *1984*

Within the academic gatherings of the Union, there are three types of theories explaining the role the Enlightened play in human history: elitist theories, conspiratorial theories and empowerment theories. There is no single definitive history of the Union, only points of view, theses and endless

academic politics. Whenever a Technocratic agent is presented with another model of history, she should ask herself one simple question: Whose idea is it? Simply put, history is always written from a specific point of view, and often with an agenda in mind.

Professor Tanaka of Iteration X, for instance, is well-known as a proponent of elitist theories of history. Her approach is based on the idea that history is made by individuals. A handful of visionaries and leaders sets in motion a few key achievements, meetings and gatherings. For instance, her statement that "Leonardo da Vinci was an Enlightened Artificer" depends upon an elitist theory. Though many of these great men and women were Enlightened theorists, doubtless, proving such a theory can be difficult. Tanaka has gone to great lengths to prove which major historical figures were Enlightened, but since true inspiration is a subtle craft, sorting myth from truth is a difficult game.

The infamous Professor Richardson is the best example of a conspiratorial historian. Through his reasoning, whenever a significant person performs an event important to history, it is because there is a cabal or conspiracy of people behind her setting events in motion. Richardson's claim that "Queen Victoria was controlled by a secret cabal of the Enlightened that descended from the Knights Templar" requires an elaborate conspiracy theory to prove it. Although a few notable examples of such theories are accepted by the Union's mainstream history, this approach remains controversial, and it is often speculative.

A third approach, one that is rapidly gaining strength, is Terrence Whyte's empowerment theory. There has been a growing movement in the Collegium of History to attribute most of human history directly to the Masses. By this approach, when trends of human history advance science or reason, mankind collectively shows its support for the world the Union defends. The Technocracy is empowered by the Masses; the history of its society is influenced by the history of mankind. When Terrence Whyte states that "Victorian Imperialism inspired the early ideals of a New World Order," it is an example of an empowerment theory. By this approach, the Technocracy does not control all of history; it merely adapts to its outcome.

This variety of theories raises two simple questions: Which approach is correct? Which version is true? If you're looking for a simple answer, it's this: *They all are*. That is to say, each interpretation is a reflection of the truth. Any Technocratic agent who hopes to pass Technocracy 101 has to survive a massive application of doublethink, learning to give the right answer to the right instructor. If he can survive this academic nightmare, however, all of history will be at his command.

From the Files of Agent Roland Cassault

"If you want to clear out a Chantry with overwhelming firepower, call for Iteration X. If you want someone to talk them to death, call in the Ivory Tower."

— Agent Bill "Lucky Strike" Smith, Amalgam 224

Agents,

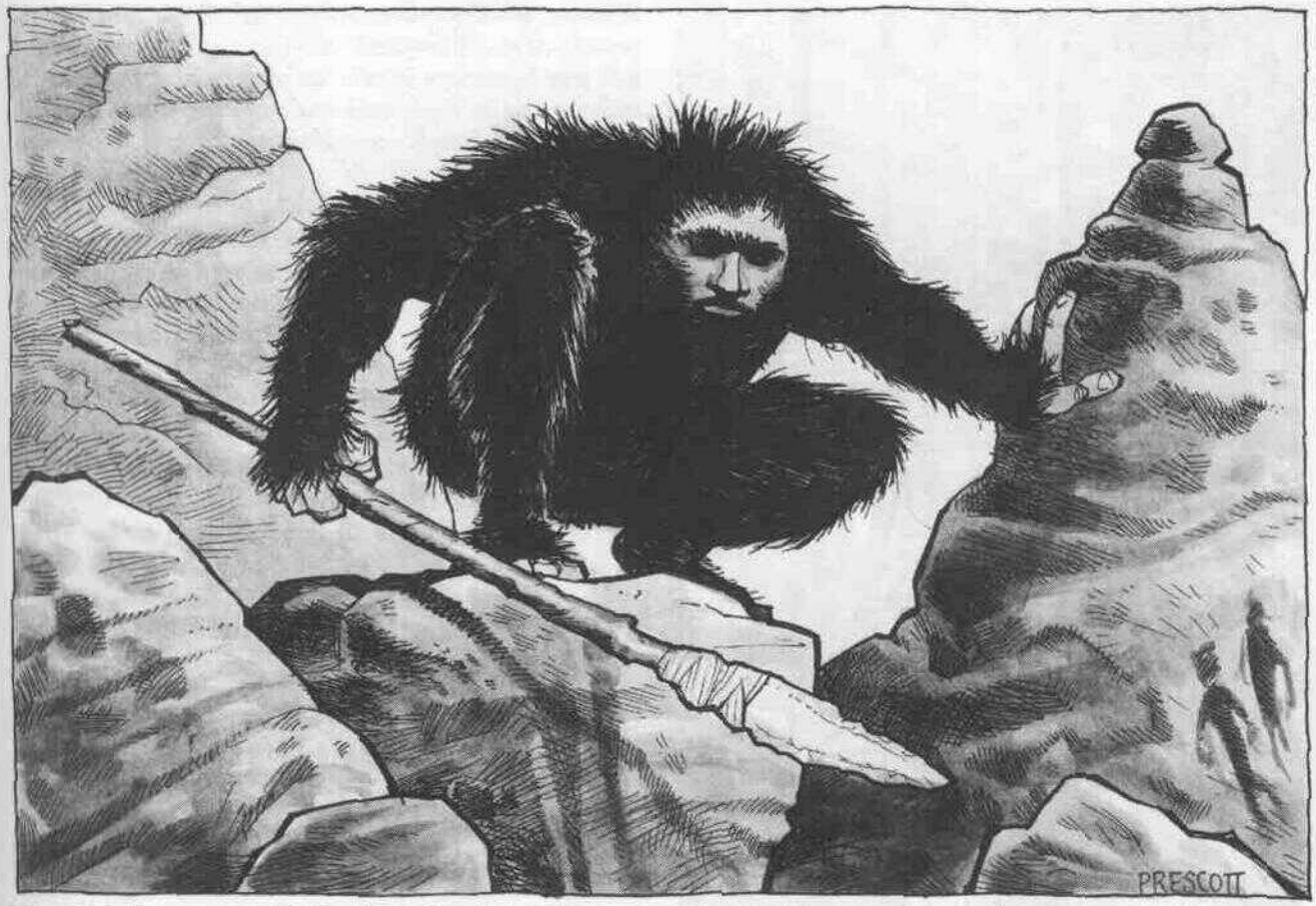
For the past five years, I have worked closely with several amalgams in San Francisco to continue our campaign against the darkness there. The last few years have forced me to question what I have been taught, but fortunately, I have found solace in scholarly research. Though I've since been promoted to the rank of Supervisor, I've continued to keep up on treatises released by our academics in the Ivory Tower. I've also noticed a lack of cohesion in these datafiles. Too often, the members of different Conventions work separately, trying to undermine each others' work in an attempt to justify their own political agendas.

Agents, what I've assembled here is an overview of what I've read over the last five years. Orwell once stated that "he who controls the past controls the future," and while I don't care for his dystopian vision, I do agree with him on this one point. If you are to understand why we have dedicated our life to our cause, you must understand the centuries of precedent that our order is built upon.

In addition to your mission briefings, I'll be appending some academic reading for your downtime. No, there won't be a quiz later, but if you're considering petitioning for promotion in our glorious order, I'd highly suggest keeping up to date. I'm sure you'll thank me later.

Yours in Victory,

Supervisor Roland Cassault



Prehistory and Early Civilizations

Know this: The light of reason is the greatest force in human history. The first time a person constructed a hand-held tool, she did so by the power of reason. When primitive tribes first domesticated their animals, or when they first looked to the horizon and wondered what lay beyond it, they abandoned their animal instincts and became human.

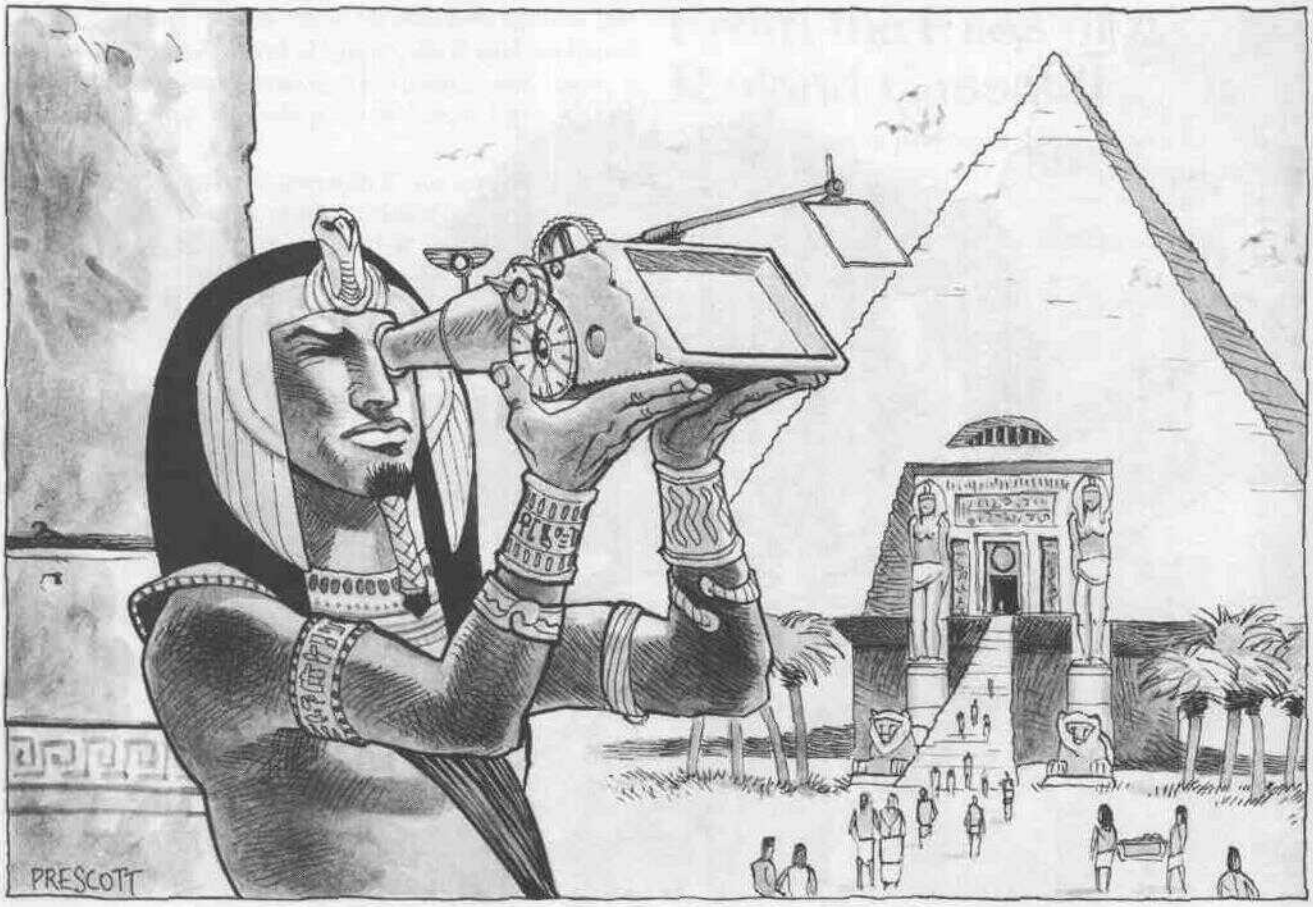
Each Convention naturally tries to trace its origins as far back as possible to justify its actions; thus, prehistoric Enlightenment remains a highly speculative subject. Elitist Technocrats claim that Enlightened primitives invented the earliest weapons. Iteration X, for instance, commonly claims that these earliest inventors were, *in a sense, their ancestors.* Therefore, Iterators claim that theirs is the oldest of the Conventions.

According to Professor Richardson and the Progenitors, civilization depended on far more than simple tool use. The light that held back darkness was the blaze of a campfire, where men and women gathered together. Richardson believes that the Enlightened organized the Masses into agricultural communes. From this point of view, the Progenitors' forefathers were essential to our ancestors' survival.

The earliest Enlightened techniques — agriculture, domesticating animals and animal husbandry — all related to *survival skills. Over generations,* a tribal collective could consolidate its resources, share its food and domesticate its animals with the guidance of its visionaries. Secret knowledge would influence their crafts. Since the un-Enlightened would not share this insight, the result would be conspiracies of the Enlightened in the midst of the strongest tribes.

Void Engineers, on the other hand, define the beginning of civilization as the original impulse to explore the unknown. Enlightened explorers didn't fear the darkness beyond their campfires — *they dreamt of conquering it.* By Professor Whyte's empowerment theory, the process always began with un-Enlightened men and women who scouted out the areas surrounding their tribes. When enough Sleepers believed that leaving a particular stretch of land was essential to their survival, one of the Enlightened would receive a vision of a land beyond the horizon. Thus, a visionary act of exploration would become more reasonable once the rest of the tribe supported it.

Regardless of which of these theories is correct, we know that the first human settlements typified as "urban life" evolved around 3000 B.C.. During this period, the Masses and the Enlightened workers who protected them developed extensive villages and towns, and the development of agriculture kept them in place. Because of trading between tribes, early man developed mathematics as well. Agriculture, mathematics, exploration and trade routes — wherever mankind depended on these sciences, Enlightened theorists were there. *Each luminary shone in the darkness, gathering Sleepers* around him for alliance and protection.



Richardson's "Myth of Thothmes"

By some theories, the Enlightened ruled many of humanity's earliest cities, acting as their priests, rulers, governors and philosopher-kings. According to Richardson, many also formed secret societies or cults to share their knowledge. One of the most extreme examples of this tendency is the legend of Thothmes, an Egyptian king who ruled around 1500 B.C.. This sovereign recruited the greatest visionaries of his kingdom as his advisors, creating a legendary temple of reason as a testament to their wisdom. Many conspiracy theories can be traced back to this myth.

According to legend, Thothmes established a guild of Sacred Artisans to promote a caste of priests and visionaries in his kingdom. Philosophers and scientists organized and catalogued many of the major beliefs of their time. Behind religious fronts, Sacred Ones also constructed elaborate rituals and secret practices. Within these systems of belief, they adopted secret signs and rituals only the Enlightened could truly understand. Richardson's theory still lacks enough evidence to prove its far-reaching claims, however. One of his most notorious papers includes a story of the legendary "Scrolls of Thothmes" — documentation that would allow modern scholars to deconstruct these secret societies. The scrolls are an elusive Holy Grail still sought by academicians.

Sacred Artisans also constructed temples and refuges for their mystery cults. We know Enlightened scholars made pilgrimages to many of these sites to meditate before them. Nonetheless, Richardson's idea that the Egyptian pyramids were among them is still highly controversial. Did the Enlightened Ones really engineer their design so that mystics could meditate on their "geometrical purity"? Professor Tanaka refutes the idea, stating that the dimensions of these constructs have no cosmic significance. One cannot calculate the distance between the Earth and the Sun by multiplying the ratios of the various sides, nor do any permutations of these numbers result in the number "pi," 8th century algorithms or Fibonnaci sequences. Despite this hard evidence, Richardson's theories remain.

Allegedly, disagreements over the true meanings of sacred wisdom, as well as resistance to Thothmes' increasing egotism, tore apart the many societies of the Cults of Thothmes. One conspiracy theory states that these cults divided into the thousands of conventions and traditions that followed. Second-hand accounts insist that scholars and mystics derived the Sacred Artisans' diverse occult symbols and metaphors from their early Egyptian rituals and documents.

Surviving fragments of these second-hand sources do indeed possess a few repeated motifs, including the metaphors of the sun (the light of all wisdom), the rose (as the symbol of

life) and the cross. Richardson uses evidence of this pattern as further proof, and he establishes these writings as the distant origin of the Rosicrucians and similar societies. Using this codex, we might theorize which later secret societies or cults derived from the Cults of Thothmes... if we were so inclined.

The Seekers

Though we may not believe that sacred knowledge was passed throughout the world by cults of primitive philosopher-scientists, we do know that early explorers carried light into the darkness of the early world. Each time they found another culture with a different perception of reality, they tested their own beliefs. Whether for trade routes, commerce or simple curiosity, such grand ideals as exploration and discovery always drew visionaries.

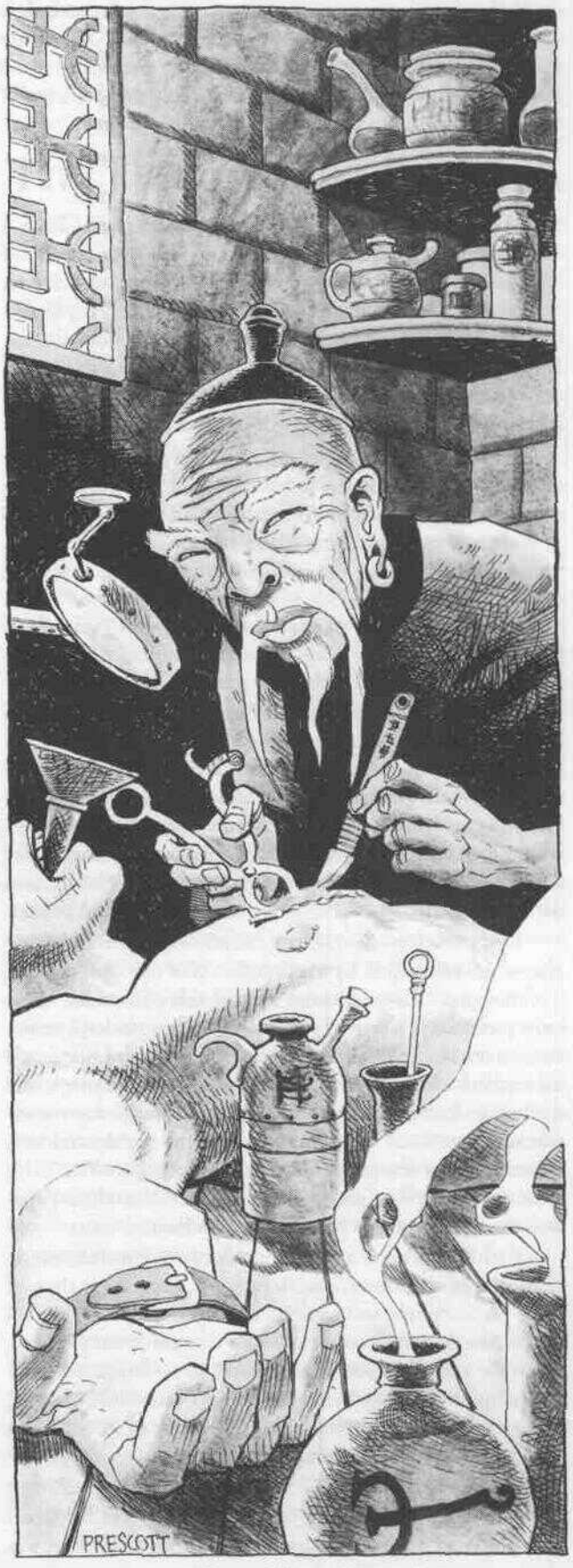
We collectively refer to Enlightened explorers who used their visionary insight to lead such expeditions as "Seekers," whether they acted on behalf of the Phoenicians, Polynesians, Greeks or Cathayans. As their curiosity grew, they also began to document their journeys through crude maps. The rituals of science allowed them to reproduce their knowledge using elementary astronomy, cartography and navigation. As one would expect, these documents were essential in the earliest applications of Connection rituals. Enlightened practices allowed them to use this science in methods that the Masses could not duplicate.

Early China

We use the simplified date of 1000 B.C. to mark the beginning of the Iron Age, the next stage in mankind's development. While many historians use this era as an opportunity to write about the Egyptian empires, Professor *Tanaka of Iteration X* has extensively documented the evolution of another culture: the Zhou Dynasty in Ancient China, which flourished between 1000 and 256 B.C.. Professor Tanaka formally claims that the consolidation of power in the region led Enlightened researchers and their contemporaries to exchange their insights into technology. This intellectual commerce established a social framework that led to another variety of Sacred Artisan: the Artificers.

As Chinese philosophy advanced, belief in the power of reason grew as well. Even a cursory glance at the philosophers of this time supports this theory. In the *Tao Te Ching*, for instance, Lao Tzu advocated moderation, self-control and balance. Confucius would later look back on Lao Tzu's time as a golden age, using it to illustrate other Enlightened qualities. In his *Analects*, he would extol the pursuit of perfection through purity, convention and loyalty. Today, *Ciphers of Iteration X review these same teachings.*

One of Confucius' contemporaries, Sun Tzu, proposed similar virtues in the *Art of War*. From this book, Chinese generals learned the need for reasoned, ordered battle tactics. Enlightened ones in the Chinese military evolved rituals for



carefully planning major campaigns, stating precise orders and systematically organizing troops. By 256 B.C., when the Chin Empire succeeded the Zhou dynasty, the Enlightened had thoroughly infiltrated the bureaucracy and military of China... using them to their own advantage.

Ancient Greece

As the Enlightened expanded their influence in China, a similar philosophical movement began on the opposite side of the globe. The philosophies of Ancient Greece provided an environment where Enlightened theorists could openly discuss their ordered vision of the world. As early as 680 B.C., the Milesian school of philosophy attempted to define reality through pure reason. Learned sages attempted to define the limits of reality by intellect alone, not by blind faith or mysticism.

Of course, deducing which philosophers were Enlightened from modern records is difficult. Take, for instance, the example of Pythagoras. Iteration X is quick to claim him as one of their own, claiming his system of mathematics as a victory for their Convention. What Pythagoras accomplished thousands of years ago, any Statistician could do today. Professor Whyte contests this idea, stating that Pythagoras, by spreading his ideas, made the subtle application of calculation in Enlightened work more practical.

Plato is another controversial figure of the period. There is no direct way we can prove or disprove his status as an Enlightened philosopher-scientist. Whyte attests that his views on "reality defined by pure reason" are essential to the Union's current ideology. Richardson disagrees strongly, asserting that several cults of superstitionist mages contested for control of him, using him as a mouthpiece for their own dangerous ideas.

Despite such petty arguments, we know that Greek philosopher-scientists helped lay the foundation of our Union today. Technologies evolved because local philosophies made them more probable. In the third century B.C., Archimedes, a master mathematician, built legendary war engines and documented his methods carefully. Aristotle gave us the lever principle and a primitive interpretation of physics. Moreover, we have overwhelming evidence of the insight of Hero of Alexandria, a master engineer who perfected the science of pneumatics. In his spare time, he devised gadgets to amuse the Alexandrian populace, including a puppet theater with mechanical doors.

Richardson takes a somewhat more extreme interpretation of these craftsmen's achievements, suggesting that all these philosophers and artisans worked together in hidden lodges, sharing their secrets. Under this conspiracy theory, Aristotle worked as part of a hidden cult to document their ideas. His allies worked vast communal Procedures, creating data and devising rationales for the basics of Aristotelian physics. Whyte does not share this theory.

Greek culture also provides us with a far more relevant myth, one that illustrates the danger of hubris in Enlightened craft: the story of Daedalus and Icarus. Though Daedalus was known for his scientific acumen, he still acknowledged his limits as a scientist. When he devised a method for man to fly, he eventually rejected the idea, considering it too dangerous. His son and student, Icarus, volunteered to test the device. By flying too close to the sun (the light of all wisdom, as Richardson would say), he melted the wax of his great wings and plummeted to the ground. In open acknowledgment of this lesson, Enlightened Artisans began to refer to themselves as Daedaleans, visionaries who were ultimately conscious of their own limits. The lesson (though apocryphal) still applies today.

Greek Medicine

In Ancient Greece, brilliant men like Socrates, Hypocrites and Aristotle laid the foundations for yet another tradition. Cabals of Enlightened healers gathered to exchange the secrets of their craft, forming what we know today as the first Hippocratic Circles. They set forth the basic tenets of the life sciences, including the concept of "like breeding like," the ways in which two substances could combine to form other substances, early Greek concepts of heredity and methods of selectively breeding animals. Socrates contributed the idea that men and women contributed equally to the creation of offspring; Aristotle opposed this, saying that men supplied the essence, while women only supplied matter. Debates raged over the true nature of all living things.

By attempting to document and demonstrate these principles, they reinforced them. If a scholar could duplicate acts of Enlightened work in public, the applications gradually became more plausible. When early Greek medicine contradicted local beliefs, Hippocratic Circles were forced to practice their craft in seclusion. As a result, these luminaries began to demonstrate their most advanced principles only in the secrecy of their hidden laboratories.

The advancement of Enlightened craft often depended on a reasoner's ability to carry information from one region to another. Scholars carried documentation of their procedures from one laboratory to the other, often with subtle Mind Procedures contained within. This transmission of information led to the use of early craft tomes, treatises used to carry hidden knowledge. Information was encrypted in analogies and cryptograms only an Enlightened mind could deduce.

While Enlightened healers carefully documented their approaches to the life sciences, other researchers went out into the populace to gather myths and legends of more traditional, superstitious cures. Passing this knowledge by word of mouth, they would often base their practices upon the invented beliefs of the local populace. Some of their cures worked because of the chemical properties of local herbs and plants, but witnesses still foolishly placed their trust in the mystics, not their medicines. Primitives formed rituals requiring many of these substances, from crushed amaranth leaves to the carefully prepared verbena, in conjunction with local folklore. Thus, two approaches toward healing evolved, one dependent on legend and superstition, the other on vision and inspiration.

The Roman Empire

Isolated villages bred a vast array of primitive beliefs, but great empires still supported visionary scholars. The Roman Empire became a haven for science and reason. It protected its citizens, expanded its trade routes, and triumphed over barbarism through the development of art and technology. *Gatherings of Daedaleans who could develop this technology*, instead of attempting to emulate superstition and myth, gained support within the Empire. Teachers in the Ivory Tower still use the triumphs and failures of Ancient Rome as classroom examples.

One of the most significant types of secret societies during this time were the tignarii, a type of trade guild or builders' association. In 715 B.C., Emperor Pompilius of Rome patronized the largest recorded gathering of tignarii. Craftsmen originally founded their secret societies to further public construction, especially sites for the public good. Of course, Enlightened conspirators at the inner circles of such societies often devised the plans and ideals for major public works, often for their own benefit.

Thousands of years later, scientific analysis reveals that many such sites still contain residual "primal forces," suggesting that they were used as centers of meditation and rituals. According to current theory, *the tignarii meditated on the* architectural perfection of the sites they constructed. Later, these "refuges" allegedly became gathering places for many societies derived from the original Egyptian lodges.

To protect their citizens from barbarian raids, Roman soldiers and statesmen expanded the frontiers of their empire, placing Rome at the center of the world. Seeker cartographers confirmed this philosophy by showing the Roman capital in the center of their most elaborate maps. Some modern technocrats use this empire as an example of what our Union could become again: a society that enforced justice through military strength.

If such is true, then we would be wise to study to the fall of the empire and learn from its mistakes. According to Professor Richardson, there were hidden motivators behind the fall of Rome. Specialists in occult history have defined this time as one of the most dangerous ones in history for the Masses. Allegedly, various supernatural factions struggled for control of the Roman populace, eventually tearing it apart with their incessant conflicts. By Terrence Whyte's interpretation, however, the Roman Empire did not require any hidden faction to tear it down. Military assaults by barbarian hordes and corruption in the Roman government were sufficient.

In Professor Tanaka's version of history, certain societies of "magi" resisted the Roman expansion. Many pagan traditions allied with these barbarians, rejecting the spread of technology and order. In desperation, some resorted to pacts with "infernal forces" as a way to justify their actions. *Infernalists attempted to infiltrate* both pagan covens and Enlightened societies, corrupting more souls for their shadowy masters. Of course, Tanaka also stresses that the Artificers were the least corrupted of the early conventions. Many allegedly fled to other countries, seeking out other practitioners of their craft.

The Dark Ages

When the Roman Empire fell in A.D. 476, the carefully reasoned structure of society collapsed. Without the empire to protect the Masses from barbarian tribes, Europe plunged into the Dark Ages. In the resulting chaos, lords who amassed wealth and privilege created a system of feudalism to defend the Masses. Three pillars upheld this medieval society — those who fought, those who prayed and those who toiled. Over 90 percent of the Masses fell into this last category, existing mainly for the benefit of a few wealthy lords.

The "fourth pillar" of medieval society consisted of so-called "Traditional" magi. Establishing a series of sanctums throughout Europe, *cabals of mages entered covenants with* the local peasantry. Unlike the visionary scientists of our earliest orders, these mystics hid behind superstition. Open dealings with the common folk reinforced delusional beliefs, magnifying fear and making it reality. Some cabals even exaggerated the dangers outside their Chantries to impress the need for covenants. By dealing with the occult openly, they gave it strength. Darkness returned to the world.

Without the support of the Roman Empire, academics, artisans and scholars fled to find safety. As a result, the surviving Enlightened orders lost much of the Romans' scientific knowledge, allowing superstition to spread further and faster than ever before. Chaos destroyed many of the greatest monuments to reason. One of the greatest such crimes was the destruction of the Library of Alexandria. Thousands of scientific treaties and craft tomes perished in the flames.

Fortunately, the church served as another refuge from barbarity. Scholarly monks kept, *preserved and transcribed* the few remaining documents, including books on science and philosophy. The Church, however, did not fully realize the knowledge it possessed. To shepherd the flock of humanity, it advanced the paradigm of Faith. In this system of belief, workers for the Church detailed a carefully constructed mythos to explain the power of their "god" on Earth. Mankind has evolved since then, outgrowing this simple need for religious superstition.

Medieval Arabia

European Enlightened societies retreated, hoping to isolate themselves from the dangers of the medieval world. Scholars passed secret knowledge from lodge to lodge, but recovering what had been lost since the fall of the empire took centuries. Away from the darkness of Europe, other cultures did not have this same disadvantage. Medieval Arabia was a haven for the Enlightened, *a shining beacon in the darkness.*

Mathematics thrived. In A.D. 771, the Arabic statistician Algorithmi devised the earliest "algorithms," one of the most useful innovations of the time. The predecessors of the modern Statisticians could also perform amazing calculations using the abacus, an early apparatus of their craft. Widespread use of detailed mathematics made visionary works of artifice easier. Artisans in the Middle East performed feats of engineering not seen since the days of Greece and Rome. One salient example of such an Artisan is Ismaeel al-Jarari, who transcribed his *Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* in 1206.

The Enlightened also renewed themselves by meditating upon the intricacies of order. Philosopher-scientists contemplated at temples of reason to find inspiration, losing themselves in mathematical and logical reveries. The greatest of these Enlightened found methods of communicating over great distances, using primitive viasilicos, perfect geometrical solids used as foci for their meditations.

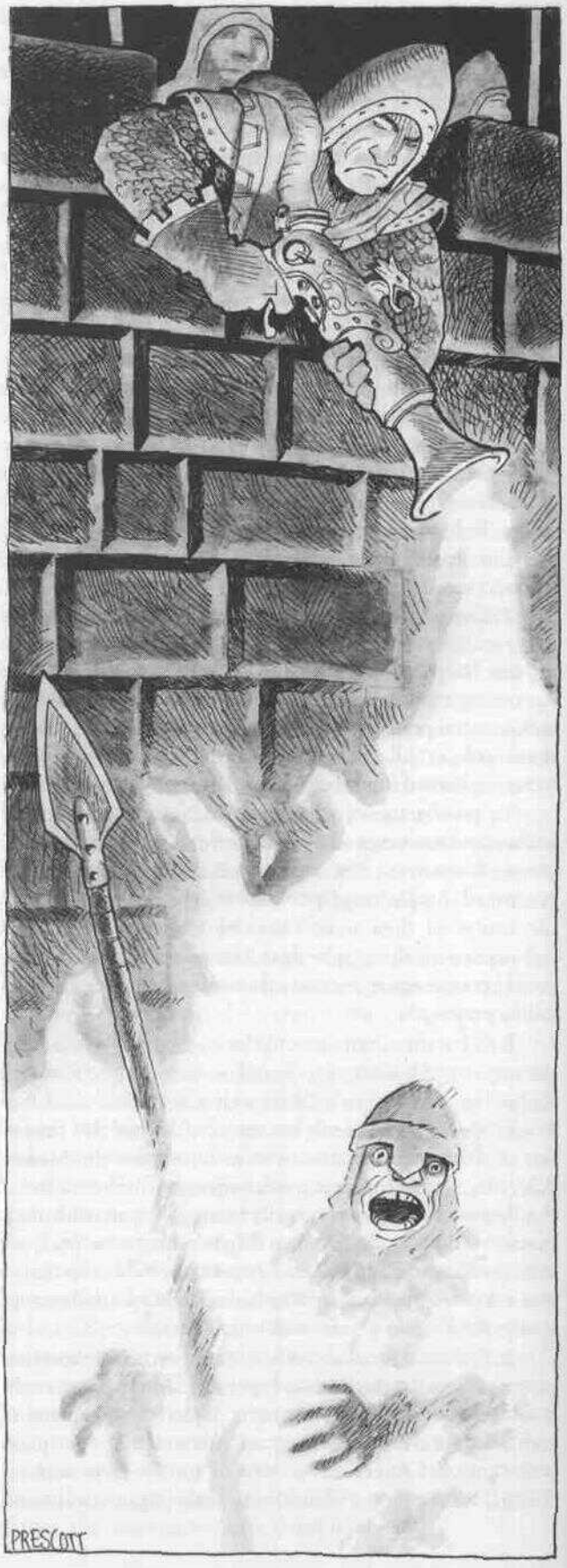
As trade between Europe and the Middle East developed, the surviving networks of the European Enlightened realized the great wealth of knowledge held in Arabia. The wealthiest patronized expeditions to retrieve Arabian artifice. Of course, mathematics in Europe was not as advanced as in Arabia; thus, many of these visionary machines could not be duplicated adequately. European craftsmen had to work in seclusion, manufacturing technology decades ahead of existing science. Secretive alliances between European and Arabian brotherhoods took hold.

Von Reismann and the Early High Guild

During the Dark Ages, men of noble lineage who were fortunate enough to awaken into Enlightenment could amass great wealth by using their insight. While idealistic scribes within the Catholic Church transcribed craft tomes faithfully in seclusion, Enlightened merchants wanted to capitalize on their talents. A few of the Enlightened realized that if their secret societies were to thrive, they would need to raise enough money to further their goals. Wolfgang von Reismann was one of the most successful conspirators.

As an accomplished noble and merchant, von Reismann amassed a family fortune that allowed him to indulge in esoteric interests. As a learned scholar, he also spent a small fortune sponsoring cabals that could recover the lost knowledge of the ages, including craft tomes and the mythical lost Scrolls of Thothmes. Piecing together fragments of knowledge, he began to reconstruct the knowledge of the Sacred Artisans. Working with other occult scholars who shared his enthusiasm, he developed a secret society known as the Campagnari in 997. They then sought out other hidden orders, diverse cabals now collectively referred to as Craftmasons.

Von Reismann had a few singular passions that his wealth could not quite sate. The fear of death consumed him — as a result, he studied numerous legends of alchemical methods of prolonging life. As his scholarly connections diversified, his



Avalon

When one thinks of Camelot, he often muses about shining white towers, a Round Table carved to celebrate the honor of friends, swords raised for the common good and the treachery and tragedy that brought it all down. One does not think of technology. Nevertheless, this ancient myth provides a grand example for agents of the Union. In the image of Avalon, of the court of good King Arthur, many Technocrats see their ideal incarnated.

The whole thing is a fairy tale, of course. There was no "real" King Arthur; his closest ancestor was a rude mud-prince who enjoyed a short but bloody prosperity in Dark Ages England. It is the *myth* of Avalon, the chivalrous epic in which brave knights dispelled darkness and brought forth light, that thrills a Technocrat's heart. When you strip away the romantic glitter and mystic mumbo-jumbo, you have a tale of civilization, of a powerful, Enlightened king who united warring tribes and brought order out of madness. True, he was slain by others' lust and his own weaknesses, but he perished a hero. Camelot may have fallen, but the dream of Avalon never truly died.

When Sir Thomas Malory compiled *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the 15th century, he unwittingly (or intentionally?) gave Daedaleans a banner for their ideals. The popular epic circulated through the Order's ranks, copied hundreds of times over on the new printing presses. Early Technocrats like the monster-slayer Rivallion de Corbie (who defeated the Traditions' First Cabal) used the book like a bible, exhorting their troops with tales of Arthur and his knights. Many a Daedalean imagined himself as Galahad or Lancelot as he battled his way through infernal hordes. The legend gave them strength.

In a similar vein, the villains of the piece offered vivid symbols for the Order's opposition. Who could ask for a better image of the defiant Verbena than Morganna Le Fay? What better symbol for infernal treachery than Mordred? Even the wise Merlin (a personification of the Hermetic Order, perhaps) was eventually undone by his own blindness and lust, and imprisoned by his pupil, Nimue (a symbol of occult seduction). Arthur's epic was more than a rousing tale. In time, it became a metaphor for the Ascension Conflict itself.

Technology is inspirational, but myth is more so. Anyone who understands psychology (and few know it better than agents of the White Tower!) knows that myths can drive a man much farther than hard rationality. So long as that man doesn't forget where mythology ends and science begins, the legend can be a powerful tool. Thus, Avalon has come to symbolize the ideals of the Technocracy — an incentive for the leaders, and a paragon for their "knights."

(One secret Technocratic sect, the Harbingers of Avalon, takes the Round Table very seriously indeed. For details, see the **Changeling: The Dreaming** supplement **Isle of the Mighty**, pages 24-25.)

Although the fairy-tale overtones of the work — especially the sympathetic wizard Merlin — soon took it out of favor, many Technocrats preserved the example of Arthur and his knights. To this day, the legend offers a higher goal than simple domination: a Holy Grail filled with peace, strength, prosperity and honor.

funding of alchemical research intensified. Overtly, Reismann spoke of gathering the Craftmasons for the sake of the common good, citing the achievements of the ancient brotherhoods and tignarii. Secretly, however, a great deal of his accumulated resources went to furthering this research.

By the age of 70, he found the Solificati, a cult of practitioners who could fulfill his dream of immortality. Their order of medieval alchemists completed the chemical rituals that could prolong his life. Today, we should remember that the idea of a wise man living for centuries had mythical precedents. After all, the biblical figure Methuselah lived for over 900 years.

Reismann achieved this goal after a lifetime of occult studies, but he possessed an almost daily need for the "vital essences" that sustained him. His rituals became so esoteric and complex that he needed to remain isolated from the outside world. With a lifetime of knowledge and wealth, the father of the Campagnari falsified his own death and faded into the shadows in 1063. However, he remained in contact with several European secret societies, while in seclusion.

Once his alchemical vision was achieved, the Enlightened were convinced that reason could bring other dreams to life. One similar quest involved the legendary philosopher's stone. Though unstable, this substance led to the discovery of metals resistant to Enlightened transmutation. Three centuries later, the earliest forms of Titan's Armor offered protection from mystical magics. Stories of Daedaleans wearing black suits of armor have helped form the earliest legends of the mysterious "Men in Black." The modern substance known as Primium has since replaced the primitive alchemical essence used to make Titan's Armor.

With sufficient Enlightenment and occult connections, von Reismann became one of the first Masters (or "Honori") in the Order of Reason. Since that time, only a handful of Enlightened theorists have attained his status and power. He was able to maintain his life through alchemical means until the late 19th century. Only a few other Masters have attained such great age — Tychoides of the Celestial Masters and Kepler of Iteration X are two notable examples. Using the Craftmasons' network of refuges, the Honori began to form an inner circle of allies, a group of Old Masters to watch over Europe.

Stephen Trevanus

Von Reismann's legend has become so magnified that modern scholars debate how much of it is mythical. This skepticism has been increased by other stories of Enlightened Craftmasons acting for the common good, tales that have been exaggerated to Promethean proportions. Professor Richardson has written several treatises on Stephen Trevanus, an Enlightened noble who fell into poverty during the reign of King Richard the Lionhearted.

After losing his lands, Trevanus worked with a cabal of allies, defending the rights of the common men of his kingdom during the absence of his sovereign. When King Richard returned, he rewarded Trevanus and restored his lands. Richardson claims that this heroic defender was the inspiration for the legend of Robin Hood. Terrence Whyte disagrees vehemently, stating that Robin Hood was little more than a legend that reflected the spirit of a particular age in England. He concedes, however, that Trevanus' greatest accomplishment was the establishment of the Hanseatic League.

Regardless of the real story behind Trevanus' cabal in England, some of the lodges of Craftmasons throughout Europe began to debate the purpose of their existence. Some claimed that their mission was to establish brotherhoods and lodges for potential Empowerment, actively attempting to recruit more Enlightened brethren into their order. Others offered the promise of "secret wisdom" to the wealthiest members of society, hinting at initiations and secret rituals to those who could afford it. This was an early version of the Schism that plagues the Union to this day.

During this period, many lodges created false systems of mystic knowledge for their brethren, keeping them occupied with rote memorization and heavily distorted (or fabricated) versions of mystical tracts. Only a truly visionary scholar could penetrate the mysteries of a torturous document like the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreuz* and decipher the true meaning behind it. While many lodges were able to shepherd a visionary few to Enlightenment in this manner, others fleeced the sheep they led. Nonetheless, by allowing wealthy businessmen and nobles into these brotherhoods and lodges, they raised money to further their expansion.

Lodges that placed the acquisition of wealth as their first priority organized to consolidate their power. For instance, Stephen Trevanus used his visionary insight and connections in the Hanseatic League to gain an edge over his business competitors. Under the political statesmanship of men like von Reismann and Trevanus, a High Guild of Enlightened theorists encouraged trade and commerce throughout Europe.

Unfortunately, like many great ideas, it was ahead of its time. In 1189, the Council of Rouen formally banned most trade guilds, teaching the early High Guild the value of secrecy. The wealth they amassed had useful applications, however; the funds they gathered allowed them to patronize further expeditions of Seekers, the workshops of Artificers and the scholarship of Craftmasons. The Enlightened worked assiduously to put the ignorance of the Dark Ages behind them.

Mankind's Response: Mistridge

While the High Guild learned the lesson of subtlety, other societies still spoke openly about the threat of the supernatural world. Establishing themselves as an intellectual elite, they tried to both isolate themselves in study and understand the plight of the common man. The covenant that existed between peasants and magi was based on trust. Unfortunately, the superstitionists betrayed it. Though they claimed to be able to defend the innocent from the supernatural, they failed. In too many cases, they tried to co-exist with evil, allowing the menace of the unseen to spread.

One of the most severe examples of this brewing conflict was the covenant of Mistridge. As we have been told repeatedly, the people living near this region of France grew increasingly dissatisfied with their protectors. Attacks by supernatural creatures, the loss of a few magi to insanity and the betrayal of the Tremere magus Grimgroth all weakened the once-respected covenant.

Tiring of taxation and the presence of the supernatural in their midst, the peasants began to organize against their overlords. Violence broke out between the peasants laboring in the fields and the magi sheltering themselves in their fortified Chantry. Before long, the magi could no longer leave their sanctum without facing the angry mobs outside. The light of reason sparked a firestorm of revolution when a society of Craftmasons traveled to Mistridge to side with the peasantry. Their secret society believed that the Masses should be able to defend their own world, one free from the menace of the occult; thus, they tore down the Chantry that had perpetuated the Masses' fears.

The assault that resulted is a classic study in medieval warfare. First, a cabal of mages subtly raised the unseen Spirit Gauntlet around the Chantry. Shock troops of peasants and soldiers surrounded the building, trapping the enemy inside. Once the threat was contained, Artificers unleashed their instruments of justice: barrages of cannon-fire. Upholding the will of the people, the Craftmasons destroyed the covenant, allowing the Masses to build another society in its place.

To help rebuild, a local lodge used its connections to improve the local standard of life. Craftmasons began the construction of a nearby school. Artificers introduced simple technological innovations to the nearest town, including a better waterwheel for the local mill and a clock in the town square. The citizens set up a night watch, breaking the covenant's treaties with unseen monsters. The Masses took back Mistridge, shattering the fourth pillar of medieval society. As news of the revolution in Mistridge spread, other towns and villages began to break their covenants as well. They rejected dealings with the supernatural and broke covenants with superstitious magi who operated openly in their towns and villages. Subtle reason replaced overt magic.

The Thirteenth Century: Pushing the Limits of Reality

Not far away from Mistridge, in Southern France, another cabal of Craftmasons undertook a similar experiment. In the Languedoc region, the Masses had established their own religion separate from the mystical traditions of the Catholic Church. Based on many of the beliefs of the Bogomil Heresy in Eastern Europe, the Manichean (or Catharist) Heresy was a system of belief that rejected the authority of the Church. As part of this belief, the Catharists of Languedoc believed in two worlds: the physical realm, ruled by Infernal powers, and the spiritual realm, where God's power resided.

Since the Catholic Church held power in this world, the citizens of Languedoc saw it as a tool of Rex Mundi, the Satanic king of the world. When the Catholic Church uncovered this heresy, it instituted a crusade against the heretics. The Catharist Crusade devastated Languedoc. Afterward, the Craftmasons worked with the survivors to rebuild the societies of Southern France, trying to maintain the citizens' spiritual independence. This conflict laid the foundation for another great skirmish over a century later.

Despite the ideals of Mistridge, a few cabals of researchers began to meddle directly in mortal politics. The Celestial Masters are one such example. As experts in the science of astronomy, many found patronage in the courts of the nobility. Sadly, the times forced some of these visionaries to demonstrate their knowledge in a form that the nobility could understand: astrology. The Masters used their interpretation of stellar phenomena to predict events within local kingdoms. Of course, these reports were sometimes the result of "inside information" from a local lodge. Wherever the Celestial Masters could find a patron, they found at least enough support to continue their studies of the heavens. But more importantly, they found a means of political influence.

Artificers used a similar approach, establishing forges where they could work their Enlightened craft secretly while supporting local inventors and mechanics openly. Professor Tanaka describes the secretive work of these Enlightened inventors as "visionary artifice": crafting devices that were so advanced that they worked only for Enlightened craftsmen. By using this visionary craft repeatedly (much as we use documented Procedures today), the Artificer would overcome design flaws and inadequacies, introducing the perfected and acceptable version to the Masses slowly. Often, a local inventor the Artificers supported would create this "existing artifice."

Marco Polo is another example of a man who attempted to explore the limits of the known world... with the secret assistance of Enlightened allies. Giacoma de Barba, a member of the Venetian High Guild, wanted to share more information with foreign Artificers, particularly inventors in Cathay. This instance was the first of many where a secret lodge would finance a Seeker-aided expedition to the Orient. While Polo openly operated the expedition, Seekers employed on the ship used the opportunity to develop contacts of their own. Marco Polo got the credit, of course, but the High Guild got the connections it needed to do further business with Cathayan Artificers.

Secret societies during this time became increasingly bold. What was originally intended as an altruistic society for the betterment of mankind was slowly becoming a method of releasing ideas to the Masses. By patronizing un-Enlightened scientists whose goals mirrored their own, lodges could make visionary ideas more acceptable. Many times, un-Enlightened inventors would surprise them by creating something these guilds could not predict, but often enough, guilds could control the release of information.

Tanaka cites the example of Roger Bacon. Arabic Artificers had already demonstrated the possibilities of gunpowder, but Bacon was given the opportunity to replicate these experiments in his own laboratories. Thus, in the history of the Masses, he is credited with adapting this science, and rightly so. Sadly, many of the other visions he entertained were far too early for his time, but his masters helped establish the policy of manipulating talented inventors.

Richardson describes similar campaigns in others part of the world. In Central and South America, Seeker explorers discovered the Incan and Nazca cultures. Realizing opportunity when they saw it, they tried to advance their ideas far more drastically than the Craftmasons did at Mistridge or Languedoc. He points to such evidence as the Incan pyramids, the Nazca lines and religious illustrations of "alien astronauts." Curiously, though, the rest of the Collegium of History does not share his views on this subject.

As the covenants fell, Empowered craftsmen became more ambitious about using their Enlightenment to further mankind's evolution. The limits of reality were advanced as quickly as these early Daedaleans could redefine them. There was a price for tempting fate in this manner. A force known as the Scourge, a backlash against those who dared to dream too much, complicated super-science and magic alike. Philosopher-scientists began to document instances of this phenomenon, realizing the threat of a chaotic force that was almost impossible to contain.

Debate over what caused the first instance of the Scourge continues to this day. Superstitionists have their own theories about the origins of this paradoxical force; scholars have tried to use a similar excuse to rationalize the tragedy known as the Black Plague; others point to the vast variety of deviant mages exploring the limits of chaos at this time. Regardless, it was increasingly evident that if the Enlightened were to expand their influence, they would need to organize themselves. The philosopher-scientists of the 13th century upheld the ideals of Daedalus, but if they were not careful, it was obvious they would repeat the folly of Icarus instead.

The Convention of the Ivory Tower

As the routes of communication between distant lodges improved, scholars exchanged secrets of the many facets of reasoned Enlightenment. The Craftmasons had suspected for decades that if someone could bring together enough of these conventions into one order for the advancement of mankind, reason could prevail in the world, and the chaotic threat of the Scourge could be contained. Light would once again drive back darkness.

A cabal of Craftmasons chose a powerful refuge as the meeting place for the historic gathering: the Ivory Tower of Yossamy. A tale involving the site led to its selection. The Tower of Yossamy was once defended by a solitary shapechanger, but a failed experiment in the innermost sanctum corrupted the building and killed its occupant. In a symbolic effort, Enlightened soldiers assaulted the fortress, driving back the Infernal taint within. Sages then dedicated the Ivory Tower with rituals preserved since the days of the Roman Brotherhoods, establishing a meditation chamber at the apex of the edifice.

The forces of reason then carved the nine symbols of the Elemental Keystones upon the base of the tower. Gathering together representatives from disparate orders devoted to the illumination of reason, they began to posit an order exceeding even the mythical cults of Thothmes. Through their courage, they would give man the power to drive back the terror of superstition and the supernatural. By their efforts, the powers of magi would be invested in men.

The result was the Convention of the Ivory Tower in 1325. By Enlightened meditation, the "Honori" of their order (including von Reismann and Trevanus) established methods of communicating and coordinating across vast distances. An alliance was made between nine factions, each representing one of the Keystones of Reality. We have learned from their triumphs... and their failures. Though much of our information is sketchy at best, and many records have been destroyed, theories of their true nature abound.

Unfortunately, great ideals often lead to bitter rivalries. Several political movements within the early Order of Reason tore its society apart. We can only speculate on the details. Whyte's theory involves an earlier form of the Schism: Some Daedaleans spoke of a communal society, while other Enlightened Ones spoke of a meritocracy led by the wealthy. Richardson speaks of a "shadow war" involving several factions, one that ultimately resulted in the destruction of their order. Tanaka's theory simplifies the entirety of the Schism to the political rivalries of a few individuals, making von Reismann out to be a villain of the worst variety.

Regardless, we do know that as political strife began to develop between the Craftmasons and the High Guild. Other records reveal that the Artificers decided to take the initiative and organize their own convention more thoroughly away from the rest of the Order. On the first day of the 15th century, they gathered at a forge in Greece near Mt. Olympus. Inspired by Sun Tzu's idea that any campaign requires extensive planning, they devised their own master plan for the evolution of their Convention.

Admittedly, some of their goals were quite extreme. Many, such as the invention of perpetual motion machines, were overly idealistic and never realized. The Artificers, like the Clockwork Convention of today, have always had idealistic goals, as the Time Tables of the last five centuries confirm. Tanaka claims that the Artificers also advanced the idea of a "heliocentric universe," invoking the retribution of the Seekers. There is no evidence to support this bold claim; it may be nothing more than the propaganda of Iteration X.

As for the Seekers of the Void, they obviously tried to remain aloof from a great deal of the turmoil in Europe, placing their hope in discoveries in the New World. Unfortunately, since they could act abroad without the advice of their fellow reasoners, not all of their decisions were good ones. Their involvement in the *Reconquista*, for instance, was an utter disaster.

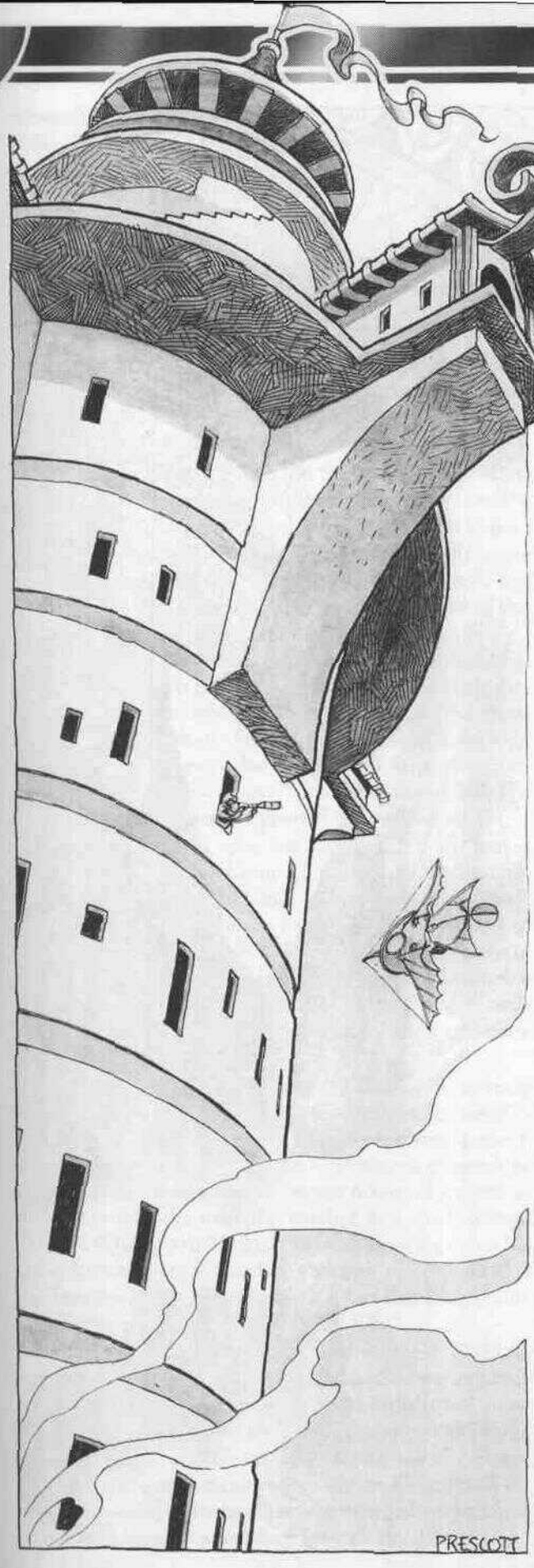
The Renaissance

While the fall of Constantinople in 1453 is often used as the simplest dividing line between the Dark Ages and the beginning of the European Renaissance, two other events in the same year are actually more important to our history. The first of these is the birth of Gutenberg. His invention of the printing press years later sparked religious and philosophical changes even the Order of Reason could not anticipate. The second involves one of the most controversial figures in our history: Copernicus.

In 1453, Copernicus proved his theory of the heliocentric universe, demonstrating that the Earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around. This proof showed that Earth — and by extension, man — was no longer the center of creation. Modern historians have thoroughly destroyed Tanaka's original theory involving this discovery. No supernatural agency assisted Copernicus in this discovery. No cabal of mages or scientists performed communal rotes to alter the relative position of the Earth and the Sun. Copernicus simply made a discovery that the Celestial Masters did not anticipate.

Though some accounts claim that Copernicus was Enlightened, this claim, like many in such cases, is difficult to prove. Terrence Whyte has said that Copernicus, by meditation and observation of the heavens, could have made his breakthrough with or without Enlightened thought. Admittedly, every secret society in existence, from the Prieuré de Scion and the Merovingeans to the Bavarian Illuminati, claims the major figures of history as its co-conspirators. In this sense, such references to figures like Galileo, Newton and Copernicus should always be considered with caution.

Gutenberg is also described as a Daedalean in most histories, not because of his invention of the printing press



(which had its real origins elsewhere), but because of the obvious applications of Mind influence that it made possible. Craftmasons had hidden messages and metaphors within treatises, paintings and architectural refuges for years. The ability to mass-produce and distribute their works with the printing press as an apparatus advanced their revolution more than any other event in their long (and ultimately tragic) history.

Of course, the impact on the Masses was even greater. The printing press allowed anyone who could afford a publication to study it independently. This development meant that Biblical exegesis wasn't a scholarly art limited to the monasteries; anyone could study and critique religious writings in the privacy of his or her home. Many of the Enlightened capitalized on this sudden exodus of writing, composing learned treaties that could educate, Enlighten or incite the Masses.

Of course, the art of inflaming public opinion was not limited to the Daedaleans. In 1484, two common men wrote a tome that almost literally consumed Europe in flames. In response to Pope Innocent IV's Witch-Bull of 1484, Kramer and Sprengel composed the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise warning of the presence of witches in European society. Exploiting the fear of the supernatural, they set off a wave of retribution throughout Europe.

Traditionalist propaganda states that the Order of Reason started the Inquisition, however, no conspiracy was required to set the Masses against deviant superstitionists who lacked restraint. Mankind itself rose up against these monsters. The resulting destruction purged Europe of the most dangerous threats of the occult world, embodying the Masses' desire for a world that rejected fear and superstition. Inquisitorial flame, illuminated man's support for a world based on reason and order. Centuries later, the Technocracy echoes that heroism.

After the Inquisition

The 15th and 16th centuries saw the rise of a new type of scholar: the artist-engineer. Cellini, Duhrer, Ghiberti, Alberti and of course, da Vinci all combined vision and artistry with science. Scholars continue to argue over which were Enlightened and which were not, but this debate remains a moot point. Even if all of them were un-Enlightened, these visions showed a trend: the dawn of an Age of Reason, an Age of Enlightenment. Knowledge was not meant to be hoarded by an elite few. Instead, anyone who could apply reason and logic would be able to approach the mastery of a magus.

Such vision brilliantly illuminated the life sciences. Scientists had defined the experimental method thoroughly enough to prove the orderly nature of reality. Progenitors now recite their names with reverence: Harvey, who proved that all living creatures come from eggs; Francesco, who disproved the myth of spontaneous generation; Anton von Leeuwonhoek, who proved the existence of sperm cells and

bacteria. Hippocratic Circles, composed of Cosian researchers, did not have to confine their everyday work to their laboratories. Man wanted to drive back the darkness of superstition and pursue true illumination.

Physics further defined a system of laws for the physical world. Johannes Kepler's *Harmony of the World* mathematically defined a structured reality. Within a century, Sir Isaac Newton would distill this reality to its component laws in his *Principia*. Each act of inspiration that acknowledged these truths reinforced the reality desired by mankind, just as today, each deviant act of superstition undermines it, attempting to return us to the terror of the Dark Ages.

In inspired science, the Enlightened continued to document their rituals and methods, along with the consequences of failure. With the growing power of the Scourge, it was obvious that subtlety was essential to survival. The result was another methodology of science, the craft of a secret society called the Parmenideans. The name began as something of a joke, since Parmenides believed in constant chaos, but it also served as a distraction from the Parmenideans' true activities. Any who would have encountered them would have thought them crackpots, especially upon seeing their list of "impossible occurrences." Their real goal, however, was to perfect Procedures that could be carried out in the presence of the un-Enlightened without invoking the wrath of the Scourge, the problems of unrepeatable and unreliable workings.

As the definition of "subtlety" varied greatly from one region of Europe to another, the original Parmenideans compiled definitions of which Procedures typically invoked the Scourge and which did not. By some interpretations, the phenomenon was the result of a logical paradox, a contradiction between the creation of the scientist and the beliefs of witnesses around it. Through these writings, the term "paradox" came into common use, adapted by even the most recalcitrant anachronists.

Some extreme practices remained hidden. For instance, life extension was still the most demanded of the Cosians' Procedures. Only those who attained mastery of the highest degrees of Enlightened craft (such as masters and Honori) could even attempt to undergo this ordeal. As time and science progressed, duplicating the longevity of the Old Masters became increasingly difficult. Such wise old sages typically had to isolate themselves from the outside world for years at a time, dwelling in contemplation and meditation more often than directly interacting with the Masses they studied. Thus, the Schism widened.

The Seekers of the Void contributed their first Old Master to the ranks of the Honori during this time. Under the name "Tychoides," a former Celestial Master devoted his lifetime to studying the barrier of disbelief that surrounded the world of reason, documenting phenomena visible in the Void and compiling charts of most of North America. After attaining the greater degrees of Enlightenment, Tychoides

retreated to a sanctum in Florence, joining the Inner Circle of the Order around the end of the century.

The Destruction of the Craftmasons

Although the Order of Reason advanced medical science and physics, both in the realm of the Masses and the hidden laboratories of the Order, defining political beliefs within their society became even more difficult. By this time, the Schism between idealism and pragmatism was greater than ever before. Open disputes between the Craftmasons and the High Guild in council chambers hinted at a power struggle between the two factions.

On one side was the so-called "proto-socialism" of the Craftmasons, the vision of a communal society monitored by a hidden meritocracy. On the other, the High Guild insisted that the stimulation of free trade and commerce would create an ideal society, allowing their cabal to make a profit and finance further operations. All that was needed to set off this powder keg was the right spark.

The Diggers Rebellion lit the fuse. In 1649, a socialistic commune of English farmers began to occupy and cultivate the fields of their neighbors. William Trevaine (the great-grandson of Stephen Trevanus) organized cabals of Craftmasons to support the Diggers and sent mercenary Enforcers to defend the farmers with whom they allied. The Guild, on the other hand, supported the landowners.

The result was an open war for over 20 years, lasting throughout the regime of Cromwellian England, the Restoration and the Great Fire of London. The Guild immediately stirred up political influence in the Order of Reason to support its side of this conflict. By 1670, the Craftmasons of England were routed; the year immediately brought the few who recanted their political beliefs into the Guild. Shortly thereafter, the Order of Reason disbanded the Craftmason Convention formally.

Richardson has gained many enemies by disagreeing with this story. According to his latest theories, the destruction of the Craftmasons might have been a staged event, performed for the benefit of the Craftmasons themselves. Could it be that they wanted to escape historical scrutiny so thoroughly that the used the conflict as a smokescreen? Terrence Whyte has debunked this legend, stating that it has as much credence as Richardson's alleged "reappearance" of the Templars at this time, despite the fact that King Phillip IV of France destroyed their order in 1308.

After the Craftmasons disappeared, the High Guild secured further financial influence and expanded the influence of their order. Reginald Proctor, a wealthy Enlightened financier, established a series of financial institutions throughout Europe. The first, curiously enough, was established in France in 1704. Acting with significance only an Enlightened co-conspirator would understand, he constructed a banking house on the exact location were Mistridge once stood.

Not surprisingly, just as Roman refuges had become sites of meditation for Sacred Artisans in the Dark Ages, the first Proctor House also became a "social club" for members of the High Guild. Profits defied all existing laws of economics, thus starting a remarkable trend. The Proctor House of London was established in 1709, and the Proctor House of Boston became the first American branch in 1710. As a result, Reginald joined the ranks of the Old Masters in 1715, gaining enough Enlightened wisdom to extend his life. He continued to advise the Inner Circle until his tragic suicide in 1914.

Economic Prosperity

The shadowy crusaders of the Order of Reason were replaced with a secretive guild devised to raise money for the conspiracies of the Enlightened. All pretense of an alliance of nine unified Conventions was scattered to the winds. The Craftmasons and their agents were gone, leaving the Guild to patronize the remaining five Conventions. Through prediction, careful investment and Adjustment of Fortune, the Guild became the biggest power-broker in the remaining alliance. Before long, most of the former Order's operations were coordinated and funded by a series of financial masters, or Grand Financiers.

Cults of Traditionalists reacted by organizing resistance. After the Guild's alleged "desecration" of Mistridge, they began to coordinate actions against the oldest and most traditional refuges of the Order of Reason. Their most elaborate operation was an open assault on the White Tower of Languedoc, a refuge still used as a gathering for intellectuals. In 1745, the tower was shattered. Established as a symbol of the Order's altruistic ideals for mankind, it was destroyed ultimately by a petty act of revenge.

The future was not to be defined by open warfare, however. The events of the next 50 years showed that mankind wanted a world where prosperity could be had be all, not hoarded by cabals of superstitionists and nobles. The vision for the future was best represented in 1776, when Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* proposed the basics of modern economics. The power of the Guild grew, just as its wealth multiplied. As for the Craftmasons, they became little more than myth, a fallen ideal of the Enlightened empowering the Masses to defend themselves against the supernatural.

Nonetheless, some members of the Guild theorized that their order still existed, in some form. Professor Richardson supports this view, though with obviously ludicrous theories that only the Collegium of History would tolerate. These views are considered among his most extreme, entertained by only a minor faction within our Union. Despite the fears of the High Guild, we know that the Craftmasons did not play an active role in the American Revolution, the French Revolution or the formation of the Bavarian Illuminati. Nothing supports the idea that a secret society of the Enlightened supported these movements without the support of the Guild, or that the few societies that existed were anything more than fringe groups.

Scientific Discovery

While the High Guild continued its political excesses, the more academic Conventions continued research. Science and reason became the order of the day, further documenting the knowledge we anticipated. Progenitors still learn of Herwig's discovery, when he observed the fertilization of a mammalian egg by a single spermatozoa. Once the basis of life was understood thoroughly, the next step involved learning methods of influencing it more directly.

Then, in 1865, Gregor Mendel formally announced a method in which a scientist could predict genetic traits... and thereby, possibly influence them by selective breeding. In his private garden, he discovered what would be later the science of genetics, supporting the Cosian practice of creating and engineering life in the laboratory. In the meantime, within their hidden sanctums, Cosian healers had begun to experiment with "artificial insemination" for the creation of "homunculi," attempting to create life conceived not by nature, but by intellect.

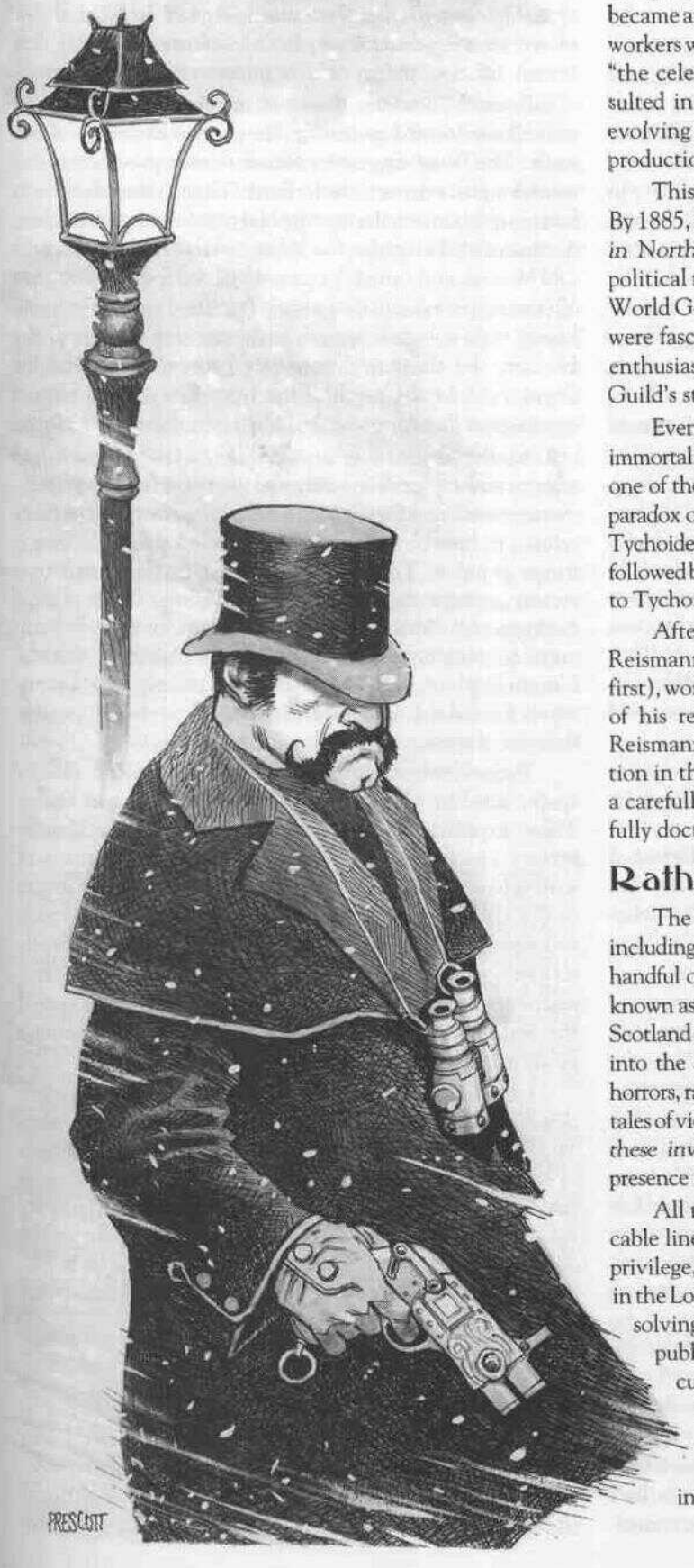
A different form of life also had its origins in the 19th century, when the scientist Charles Babbage invented the first difference engine, a discovery that took the Artificers completely by surprise. While many members of their revered order had been preparing for a revolution in industrial technology, a few immediately began work on studying this primitive machine. The implications were intriguing enough that it eventually led to the birth of a new Convention: the Electrodyne Engineers.

With Enlightened insight, "difference engineers" perfected this device by leaps and bounds. Just as the Cosians spoke boldly of "engineered homunculi," the Engineers set another typically ambitious goal: a self-aware difference engine, the first artificial intelligence. By their schedule, each iteration of their device would be more intelligent than the last, until at last, true self-consciousness would evolve. Scientists patronized by the guild once again attempted to create something far beyond the capabilities of man.

The Industrial Revolution

The metaphors and mysteries of the old Order of Reason were no longer relevant. Science now held the possibility of creating life itself. With Enlightened insight, the Old Masters realized that the world was at the threshold of a bold new age. From their secluded sanctums, they prepared an even more ambitious Time Table. In this new era, technology would revolutionize the world... possibly exceeding humanity's ability to control it.

In the next stage of man's evolution, widespread technologies advanced the Masses' capacity for manufacturing



and production drastically. The so called "Industrial Age" became an era of assembly lines and massive factories. Trained workers were prepared to work with a speed that would match "the celerity of the machine." Though industrialization resulted in lower wages and longer working hours, a rapidly evolving managerial caste found a system to increase both production and employment in the lower classes.

This era was also one of great enthusiasm for the Guild. By 1885, Reginald Proctor had established 13 Proctor Houses in North America, Africa and Europe. He then began a political movement within the Guild to support the idea of a World Government. The 13 Old Masters of the Inner Circle were fascinated by the idea, but unfortunately, this spirit of enthusiasm was crushed by a telling blow: the death of the Guild's strongest supporter, von Reismann.

Even through the advanced science of the Cosians, true immortality was still impossible. Seven centuries of isolation in one of the Proctor Houses had worn away at his mind, and the paradox of a man living unseen for so long caught up with him. Tychoides then became the oldest member of the Old Masters, followed by Kepler. Visions of "world politics," then, came second to Tychoides' own agenda: further exploration of the world.

After a brief investigation proved that the cause of von Reismann's death was not assassination (as some thought at first), work began on creating an artificial son from a fragment of his remaining tissue, as he had requested. Jacob von Reismann was born in 1887, and from the day of his conception in the laboratory, his education began. His identity was a carefully constructed facade, engineered to fit with a carefully doctored social status.

Rathbone's Skeleton Keys

The Guild had plenty of other mysteries to investigate, including the problem of an unusual Victorian secret society. A handful of policemen and private investigators formed a cabal known as the Skeleton Keys then led by Inspector Rathbone of Scotland Yard. Possession of a Skeleton Key allowed admission into the society's lodge meetings, where gentlemen spoke of horrors, railed against obscene cults and regaled each other with tales of victories against darkness. Outside of their regular duties, these investigators also conducted formal inquiries into the presence of the occult in London.

All members of the society were known for their impeccable lineage and extensive education. With this wealth and privilege, they had the freedom to pursue investigations freely in the London area. Their triumphs were legion. In addition to solving the mystery of Jack the Ripper discreetly, away from public mania, and destroying a network of Hindu death cults, they purged many alleged "haunts" throughout London of their evil taint. Whether visiting the scenes of supernatural crimes with formality and gentility, or perusing the rare bookshops of occultists in their immaculately tailored black suits, these gentle-

man adventurers took the practice of opposing the unseen as a sport, an amusement and a private crusade.

Because of his need to remain isolated, Reginald Proctor could not gain the political connections Inspector Rathbone obtained. In fact, Rathbone's reputation attracted the attention of Queen Victoria herself. In a historic meeting, Proctor and Rathbone joined forces. After allying with the Guild and bestowing what they had learned of supernatural activity in the London area, Rathbone's Skeleton Keys adapted a new name, one based on their impressive educational background and legends they had heard from the Guild of the old Order of Reason. They called their organization the Ivory Tower.

Empire, Union and Alliance

London became a world capitol for the Guild's efforts, making it the focal point of the late 19th century. Reginald Proctor's idea of a world government mutated into another political movement, one embraced by the English populace. British expansionism promised an empire that would rival even that of Ancient Rome. Richardson speaks of Queen Victoria's elaborate schemes; Tanaka attributes the Old Masters' enthusiasm to Reginald Proctor and Lord Alfred Craven's skillful politics; Whyte merely says that the idea was one whose time had come. Regardless, the end of the 19th century saw the beginning of a new union reborn from the rubble of the White Tower of Languedoc: our visionary and meritorious Technocracy.

Victorian England set the stage for a new society, an elite composed of the bankers of the Guild, the investigators of the Ivory Tower and the five scientific Conventions that survived Order of Reason. The expertise of the Cosians led to the formal organization of the Progenitors, masters of producing and manipulating artificial life. Tychoides reorganized the Celestial Masters and Seekers immediately, forming the Void Engineers. He unified his society under an ambitious goal: traveling beyond the Horizon to define the greatest mystery of all, the depths of the Void beyond. As for the Artificers, they renamed themselves after their greatest ideal: Iteration X, the stage at which their difference engines attained self-awareness.

Together, these remaining societies would be an elite gathering of the educated and privileged, an order established for the advancement and education of mankind: the Technocratic Union. As a society of the Enlightened designed to advance technological and scientific competence, they adopted the formal title of "Technocrats" for the first time. Each Convention then contributed ideas to a document known as the Precepts of Damian, a first declaration of the Technocracy's ideals. An ambitious Time Table was established fr the next 50 years of the Union's crusade.

Early Defections

For the newly formed Technocratic Union, one of the most significant discoveries was Michaelson and Morley's solution to a scientific dilemma of the age: the etheric controversy. Victorian science held that space had to contain some type of medium to allow the transmission of light. With the aid of an "interferometer," two British scientists publicly confirmed that this "phlogiston," or unseen ether, did not exist.

Privately, however, these two men had made discoveries that allowed for the earliest applications of Dimensional Science. The Void Engineers found contrary evidence that something *did* exist outside the Earth. Though the ether theory had been debunked, the mystery had to resolved, classified and documented. Tychoides, the oldest and most influential of the Old Masters, authorized the secretive development of the first Victorian spaceship to investigate. Primitive scout ships, numbering only a half dozen, began secret exploration of the Horizon, the theoretical boundary between Earth and the Great Void. Lord Craven of the Ivory Tower then began a campaign of disinformation to hide the truth from the Masses.

At the same time, another organization devoted to science and exploration contested the results of "interferometer experiment." Despite all evidence to the contrary, they refused to believe that space was merely a vacuum. Thus, a fringe group of Technocrats defected to form their own society, appropriately called the Sons of Ether. Many of these madmen entertained theories too extreme for their Technocratic contemporaries. Most were firebrands banned from the Union. Explorer societies of this crackpot organization privately funded their own expeditions, developing alternative theories of space travel in the process.

Tychoides himself masterminded the Union's race for space, aided by what was left of the man known as Kepler. These expeditions exceeded the fantasies of the greatest literary visionaries of the age. Inspired by the dreams of writers like Verne and Wells, explorers set out for the depths of the space, uniting Technocratic vision with Victorian technology. Unknown to the rest of mankind, Kepler finally set foot upon the moon in 1892, and Tychoides left on an epic journey around the sun in 1893. Along the way, he discovered the realm of Autochthonia, a realm circling the sun in a position opposite our own Earth.

Like the demented Sons of Ether, other crackpot scientists disagreed with various aspects of the Precepts of Damian. The Electrodyne Engineers began to exaggerate the dangers of Iteration X. Stories of Autochthonia, a fantastic realm ruled by a race of machine minds, terrified them even more. As such, they decided to pervert the applications of the difference engine for a wide variety of deviant agenda. Defecting from the Technocracy in 1900, they established what would later become the Virtual Adepts.

The Modern Prometheus

The Technocracy continued its patronage of science on the ground as well. The first assembly lines, such as the auto plants of Henry Ford, increased the pace of life, offering widespread, if low-paying, employment. Many traditional craftsmen, who could not match the speed or quality of

industrial production (and refused to learn new skills), became obsolete. The facts were obvious: if mankind was to truly evolve, it would be through technology, not politics. Those who could not adapt would die out.

In 1895, a scientist named Ploeye set forth an idea as revolutionary as the assembly plant, and fittingly so. In his treatise *Rassenhygeine*, he explored the concept of controlling the breeding of human beings to increase the occurrence of desired traits. Widespread debates over this controversial treaty inspired the Progenitors to reapply Ploeye's ideas for the good of the Technocracy.

Away from mainstream science, the Progenitors attempted to repair their differences with several exiled Sons of Ether. The result was a Symposium in Oxford. It ended in disaster when the Progenitor Dr. N realized that an Etherite named Dr. Frankenstein had stolen his research notes. Frankenstein attempted to finish the research before the end of the gathering. The monster he created wreaked havoc at the conference, eventually escaping to the city docks and crashing aboard a ship headed for Antarctica.

This modern Prometheus became the symbol for a new age, a realm where science could advance beyond humanity's capacity to deal with the consequences. The Enlightened, however, possessed the vision to look beyond the limitations of the common man. With the sage advice of the Old Masters and the Computer — once it had achieved Iteration X — the Inner Circle of elite technocrats would advance the fate of all mankind. The Technocratic Age had only just begun.

The Modern Age

Each Convention began to focus on different aspects of the original Precepts of Damian, and with brilliant success. Tychoides' campaign of Void exploration required his Convention to launch its first Horizon Constructs at the dawn of the 20th century. Little more than isolated stations from which to observe the Earth below, they served as refueling stations for further expeditions. Kepler began his ambitious plans for the Dark Side Construct, an entire city to be constructed on the far side of the moon.

The remnants of the High Guild continued to pose the idea of a world government, where mankind could be united under common rule... and common currency. This goal was crushed in the early 20th century, not by the meddling of anachronistic magi, but by the Masses themselves. An assassination in Eastern Europe led to the Great War, defining in the public consciousness that the ideal of utopia was, as yet, unattainable. However, in the aftermath of the war, there would be a need to rebuild... and under the Guild's patronage, a syndicate of businesses would be there to assist humanity with this Herculean task.

Of course, some individuals had less altruistic reasons for uniting the world. History has forgotten the epic failure of the Lord Vargo, the Zeppelin Emperor, a Son of Ether who attempted to hold the world hostage in 1914. The Operative Methodology — formed during World War I by the Ivory Tower — performed its first major campaign of reality enforcement by circumventing the nefarious schemes of this demented scientist. In the wake of this victory, the need for a campaign against further reality criminals became obvious. As a result, the New World Order was born. By the end of the Great War, the Cloak and Dagger Convention began hunting other dangerous Reality Deviants as part of an elaborate campaign to protect humanity.

As this shadow war advanced, the Progenitors capitalized on the public discoveries of Hardy and Weinberg, two un-Enlightened scientists who further defined the role of dominant and recessive genes. This discovery made eugenics an even brighter possibility. Nonetheless, some foolish and anachronistic deviants opposed the Progenitors' vision with violence and unreason. In 1930, an unknown conspiracy (sometimes attributed to a collective of vampires) destroyed one of the Progenitor's largest factories in the Soviet Union. The Caduceus Convention originally considered itself to be neutral in the war against Reality Deviants; the assault on their greatest Construct changed this policy quickly.

World War II presented a far more chilling scenario than Lord Vargo's crazed schemes: a single un-Enlightened man began his own crusade for world domination. Without the benefit of supernatural aid, Adolf Hitler led Germany from the despair of the Weimar Republic to the fascism of the Third Reich. Again, no paranormal agency was required to prop up such madness. Although Hitler suspected the existence of the occult and even began to research its existence, his nightmare of genocide and reign of terror required no supernatural component. Men like Joseph Mengele, Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler represented qualities far worse than anything the occult world could devise.

The bloodshed of World War II was severe enough to cease all conflict between the Technocracy and the Nine Traditions. Both sides had more serious concerns. In the shadow of the Second World War, hidden cults sought to exploit the turmoil and suffering. Open warfare between werewolves in Germany, Hierarchies of ghosts recruiting souls and (worst of all) Infernalist magi gathering power from the chaos made this time one of their most active in the shadow history of the world. By 1944, when the Masses discovered a weapon of destruction neither side of the Ascension War anticipated, the two sides seized the initiative to focus their resources on driving the largest cults of Nephandi from the world.

Rebuilding the World

By the late 1940s, the world had only just started to heal from the devastation of World War II. The Technocracy gained strength in the industrialized nations, expanding its infrastructure by helping the world rebuild. Technocracy syndicates invested heavily, developing fronts and Dispatch Centers throughout the

Technocracy or Technology?

The Technocracy alternately claims and denies credit for many modern inventions. Foremost among the hotly debated claims is the development of nuclear weapons.

Certainly, the Void Engineers' research into particle physics propelled the development of atomic power and devices. Without a doubt, Iteration X's mandate to develop newer and more powerful weapons led naturally to the use of established science for more efficient devices of destruction. Did the two correspond to form the weapon that ushered in the Atomic Age?

Perhaps. Certainly, many incredible devices had apparently been invented before by people who were not verifiably Enlightened. Inspired Science and theory did contribute to the final development of the device. The hand tightening the last bolt may have been Enlightened.

Even if all of the workers on the phenomenal project were un-Enlightened, the matter remains that Technocratic Procedure had so infiltrated the design process that its influence was inescapable. The idea of a hidden conglomerate of researchers, the only ones able to understand their field, supported secretly by a government and tremendous funding, had existed in the form of the Union for centuries. If a group of un-Enlightened researchers took Technocratic research forms, used Technocratic theories and unleashed a device that astounded even the Enlightened members of the Union — they simply did what the Technocracy itself had been doing all along. They introduced a new and terrible device to the Masses.

Ultimately, the Technocracy claims that the development of the nuclear weapon was an unforeseen and unplanned development, a "random occurrence" from the chaos of the Second World War. Of course, cynics note that the Technocracy was quick to adopt and improve the device immediately thereafter....

major cities of the Western world. At the same time, the Void Engineers focused the majority of their resources on developing the Dark Side Construct and the world's network of Horizon Constructs.

As the Void Engineers continued to explore the unknown, they soon learned of danger beyond the Horizon. Mankind was not alone in the universe. For the first time, Void scoutships faced opposition, reporting back on their first tentative encounters with the Zigg'raugglurr, the Ka Luon, and other alien races. Fearing possible conflict based on this limited data, the Jumpsuits intensified their efforts to build a network of Horizon Constructs around the world.

The Union soon began a shadow campaign to protect humanity from this danger. As Void Engineers increased the number of scout ships in their fleet, their attention to security waned. By the late 1950s, the Masses began to suspect their activity. This failure increased public belief in an alien invasion. To correct this mass delusion, the Union mobilized agents to erase all testimony of sightings of covert spacecraft. Despite this attention to security, a disastrous crash landing in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947 compromised the Union's secrecy. In the years that followed, the Union could not keep up with the need to cover up belief in alien visitation, abduction and invasion.

As a result, the New World Order worked with the Progenitors to clone even more agents to carry out this campaign of misinformation. Modeling their artificial agents after Rathbone's Skeleton Keys, they created a legion of genetically engineered "Black Suits" to carry out their agenda. These Men in Black, as part of their genetic programming, were designed to self-destruct into a few trace chemicals after death. Sadly, these early attempts at genetic engineering also carried a host of physical and mental flaws. For every amalgam of Men in Black, the NWO had to assign one or two of its talented human agents to watch over them. The practice continues to this day.

The pace of technological revolution raced on. Within a few years, the Masses developed their own true computers, allowing both Iteration X and their rivals in the Virtual Adepts to capitalize on public fears and ideals of what these modern wonders could achieve. In 1947, a visionary computer programmer named Alan Turing, then a conspirator of the Virtual Adepts, circumvented all this planning. His vision was of a virtual reality, a mirror of our own world accessible through computer networks.

The New World Order dispatched an investigative team promptly to uncover Turing's progress. Even as a team of highly touted Men in Black moved into position, the final subroutines were up and running. The Adept had opened the gateway to a new world. Tragically, however, the Black Suits sent to interrogate Turing bungled their attempt. Turing committed suicide to avoid capture. In payment for their failure, the names of these three agents have been erased from history.

During this time, the Ivory Tower increased its analyses of world politics. With the threat of a nuclear Armageddon at hand, a cold war set in between the United States and Russia. The Operative Methodology became more important to monitoring mortal politics than upholding the academic theories of the Ivory Tower. Anticipating radical changes in world politics, the worldwide conspiracies of the New World Order suborned the academic idealism of the old Ivory Tower. Within a few scant decades, they established the framework of the World Advisory Council, furthering their infiltration of the major governments of the planet.

By the early 1950s, the Progenitors also diversified, splitting into three Methodologies, assisting them in infiltrating chemical plants and pharmaceutical factories throughout the world. The "one gene, one enzyme" discovery, the definition of the helix spiral and Watson and Crick's documentation on DNA allowed scientists to define the science of genetics and the possibilities of eugenics more than ever before.

Victory is Ours

The advance of technology has been more pronounced in the last century than in the rest of mankind's history. The Old Masters' Victorian vision has become reality: Technology advanced through reason is now the most powerful force in the world. While the Masses struggle to keep up with our discoveries, we have helped them create a world far better than any they have ever known before. The Conventions have already achieved their original goals, and they have since established even more ambitious ones. Illumined by reason, the future is brighter than ever.

By the late 1950s, the Clockwork Convention achieved Iteration X. An entire generation of scientists learned to find unity in the vision of the Computer. Building upon the discoveries of the original Electrodyne Engineers, they have made artificial intelligence a theoretically attainable mathematical formula. AI philosophers instruct recruited Ciphers, VR programs predict the behavior of the un-Enlightened and countless minds are trained and conditioned to think "with the celerity of the machine." By thoroughly integrating with artificial intelligence and cybertechnology, they are becoming the machine, attaining perfection through mathematical purity.

The Progenitors routinely achieve wonders far beyond the grandest dreams of the ancient Hippocratic Circles. The Pharmacopoeists have furthered the evolution of countless vaccines and antibiotics; since then, working with Syndicate Media Control, they have promoted the idea of a cure for every illness. As early as the 1970's, many research firms could compete directly with Pharmacopoeist fronts. The FACADE Engineers have become the most advanced Methodology, and the goal of the "replicant homunculus" is now reality. Today, even the Masses can duplicate simple cloning techniques. Soon, the Progenitors will control every aspect of life itself.

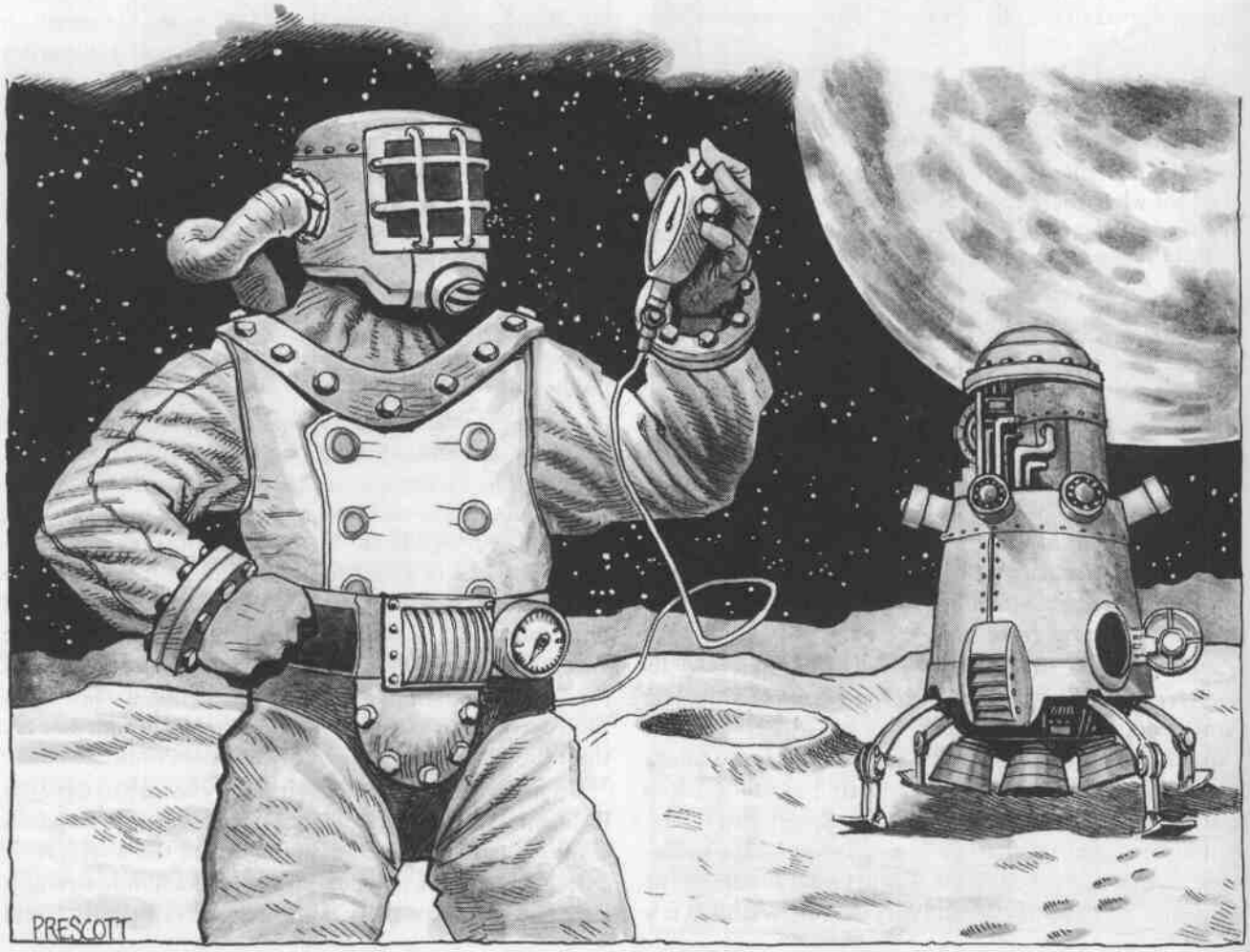
The Syndicate has had almost a century to develop its businesses throughout the world. There are dispatch centers and fronts in every major city of the world. Now corporations have political clout and economic strength that the Getrys and Rockerfellers of years past could

only dream of. If the Syndicate's Time Table is fulfilled, governments will eventually be completely superfluous. Corporations will drive the fate of the world, not politicians... and those corporations will be infiltrated thoroughly by the Corporate Convention. The days of Chantries, covenants and feudalism are gone; our world now enjoys the highest standard of living in human history.

Media has gained so much influence over our world that the NWO is everywhere. Specialists can gather information worldwide almost instantaneously. A World Wide Web of data, a saturating field of radio transmissions and television sets around the globe allow Technocrats to use their subtle influence whether these devices are present. The Industrial Age has given way to the Information Age, creating a true technocracy where information is power.

And finally, the Void Engineers have mapped and catalogued every region of the planet. Nonetheless, centuries of further exploration and await mankind. Even selected citizens of the Masses can travel to the Horizon and beyond. The first moon landings captured the enthusiasm of mankind, as another giant leap in the paradigm of reason allowed men to set foot on another world. Centuries ago, ancient maps bore a simple legend: *Here there be monsters*. Now we have driven those monsters from the world.

Five thousand years of human evolution have led us to where we are today. With technology at our command, we can realize ideals the ancient Enlightened secret societies could never achieve. While others may look to the past, or look away into their own delusions, we have built our Union while looking to the future, reinforcing the collective vision of mankind. The world of tomorrow is ours to discover, and with vision and imagination, we will further the evolution of the human race. By basking in the light of reason, victory will be ours.



The War Dance

Never forget the pecking order's surprises. Today's superpower is tomorrow's conquered state. Yesterday's overlooked mob is often the ruler of tomorrow. Never be complacent about barbarians.

— Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle*

Despite what many people (Technocrats included) think, the Union does not "own" the mass media or the governments of world powers. It does, however, exert an overwhelming influence over both. Those who think they know about the Technocracy assume that the Union craves absolute "soulless" dominion over all humanity. The organization's actual goal is a bit more complex: The Union wants to save humanity from itself.

First and foremost, the Technocracy's agenda remains simple: Keep the barbarians from the gates; better yet, eliminate them altogether. Organisms — whether they be protozoa, rats, humans or societies — strive to conquer one another, to create a pecking order where one group establishes a hierarchy, and all others abide by it. The Technocracy wants to be that group. By history's example, societies dominate each other through war, genocide, slavery and economic devastation. The Inner Circle sees a better way: a world in which Enlightened souls provide (and sometimes enforce) peace, prosperity and cooperation. Carnage horrifies most Technocrats — it's the essence of barbarism. Since the Union was formed to elevate humanity away from barbarism, the Technocracy's agenda is to avoid war whenever possible.

Sadly, war is sometimes necessary. Whether it's the covert crusade against Reality Deviants, the punishment of renegade nations or the subtle domination of world markets and paradigms, the Inner Circle remains ready to wage war when other options fail. The Union's massive arsenals and draconian Pogrom are the obvious tools of this war, but subtle diplomacy, economic cooperation and media propaganda are far more useful than guns. The Union's agents are ready to use force when necessary, but the Technocracy's real weapons are plowshares, not swords.

If you want to get people to stop slaughtering each other, you've got to make them *want* to stop. But some people just don't. Like hungry wolves, they cluster at the gates of the Technocracy's Utopia: anarchists who refuse any form of authority, countercultures that subvert societies from within (often with help from RDs), jealous nations that would topple the "First World" nations and replace them with superstitionist theocracies and, of course, the vicious Reality Deviants who state themselves on blood and slaughter. Like the Huns, Vandals, Nazis and other hordes, these barbarians must be stopped before they drown the world in blood. One of the Union's deepest shames is its early support of Nazi Germany. Many Technocrats — especially the architects of Project Invictus — are watching to make sure nothing like that happens again. Stopping such uprisings before they gain momentum, however, is preferable to huge wars.

To that end, Union agents have infiltrated governments, marketplaces and the media. Now they use those tools to prevent future barbarians from taking control. Negotiation and economic incentives (and punishments) encourage governments to resolve their problems with minimal violence, agricultural and technological miracles stave off famine and disease, information-monitoring systems keep track of deviant activity and help government agents neutralize it before it spreads. Best of all, the mass media informs the Masses. It teaches them about science and diversity, encourages them to want more and better things (things a technocratic lifestyle provides), disseminates propaganda for or against certain parties (often Reality Deviants of some sort) and keeps the Masses primed for war in case it becomes necessary (with "shoot 'em ups" and video games).

Even with widespread prosperity, it's no secret that the "Third World" harbors many people with an understandable grudge against the hyperindustrial "First World." To prevent widespread carnage, some Technocrats employ "protective coloration" to scare off would-be predators. Using the principle that an animal that seems dangerous is often left alone, these media experts encourage "fantasy" violence through TV, movies and video games. Such violence has a triple purpose: It makes the "First World" seem like a war-zone of homicidal maniacs, too dangerous to attack, it diffuses the homicidal impulses that arise when a predator (man) is restrained by his culture and it encourages just enough of those impulses to turn certain people into war machines. Every once in a while, such machines serve a purpose. The agents of the Technocracy would rather have those people with them than against them.

This war dance has some tricky steps. As Progenitors can attest, the more you shape an organism's form and behavior, the more unpredictable its mutations become. If societies are organisms (as many Technocrats believe they are), those mutations can provoke the very things they were meant to prevent. Still, the unholy messes called World Wars I and II convinced the Union's thinkers that an endless series of brushfire conflicts, technological glitches and countercultures was preferable to a global pressure-cooker. Now the Union's operatives exert a subtle but powerful influence over humanity. Those unfortunates who wind up on their hit list (or who get a glimpse of it, at any rate) can't and won't see the delicate dance the Technocracy performs. If the Union were to falter or fall, modern civilization might falter or fall with it.

These are the true stakes of the Ascension War and Project Invictus: the elevation — perhaps even survival — of the human race, or a sudden, brutal slide into barbarism. Every agent of the Union knows those stakes all too well. And that knowledge makes them great benefactors — and implacable enemies — to the rest of humanity. The war dance never ends.

Cracks in the Wall

Despite the incredible progress of reason and the influence of the Union in world events, there remain problems to resolve before claiming total victory. Deviant factions still ply their "magical" trades, thumbing their collective noses at the advances of technology while indulging in dangerous rites left over from the Dark Ages. Supernatural creatures continue to hide themselves among the rank and file of the Masses. Even the modern practices of inspired science falter under renewed problems, while the Horizon Constructs fall under the sieges of outer entities that seek to devour and enslave mankind.

Many plans have already come into focus to deal with threats both new and old. Though the Union has fulfilled the Time Table goals of eradicating the strength of the so-called "Traditionalist mages," isolated groups of such deviants still challenge the Technocracy's strength. Only by a combination of elimination, indoctrination and education of the Masses can these subversives be destroyed completely. New techniques in tracing Primal Energy have proven effective in tracking many of the deviants. Their power falls daily, but a few always manage to rattle our model of a static, safe reality.

Beyond even the Enlightened deviants are the semi- and non-human creatures that survive from bygone ages. Though the "monsters" of olden days are gone, some semblance of the human spirit left in these creatures preserves their presence. Vampires, werewolves and ghosts present a very real threat to humanity, a threat that must be eliminated wherever it is encountered. The Union recently faced down one of humanity's greatest potential threats in the form of a vampiric creature holding a nexus of incredible energy. Only through the call of "Operation Ragnarok," a doomsday procedure calling on all the weapons and agents of the Technocracy, could the creature be defeated. Should further instances of powerful deviants arise, the Union must be equipped to sacrifice everything in order to destroy them.

The worst blow to recent Union procedure, though, comes from troubles with inspired science itself. Many projects require more effort and attention to complete. Tiny errors magnify into tremendous failures. Chaos theory postulates that even the smallest mishaps in procedure can produce catastrophe. The highly detailed procedures of modern science are too complex to be tracked accurately with complete precision, leading to difficulty in implementation of newer and more advanced devices. Worst of all, the very barriers of dimensional transit seem to shift in quanta over time; formerly reliable Procedures for communication and travel beyond the Horizon or into other dimensions have proven faulty or difficult to implement, leaving many Masters stranded

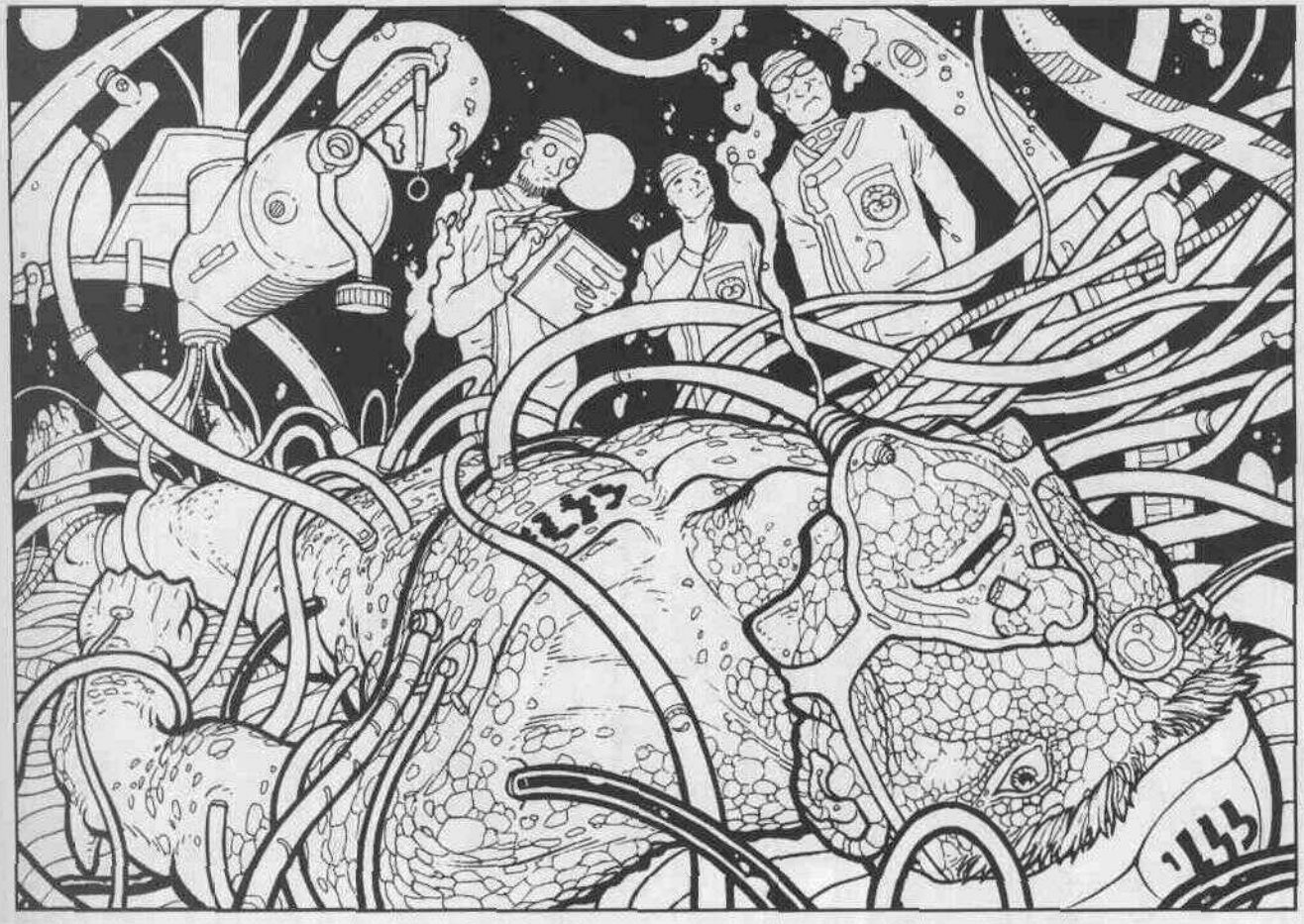
Red Star Rising

One of the minor, but troubling, events afflicting the Technocracy recently is the appearance of new red star within a nearby area of dimensional space. Though most Technocrats simply wave it off — new stars are discovered every night — this one has elicited some concerns, and not just among the Void Engineers.

The red star appears as a large, dully vibrant spot in the night sky, when you're looking through the right dimensional filter. To dimensional explorers and astronauts, it's hard to miss. The Void Engineers claim that no star that visible could possibly have been overlooked in their previous subdimensional stellar mapping. It's as if the star simply arrived one night, taking up a place of prominence.

Worse still, the Void Engineers have been unable to explore the true significance of the star itself. Normally, such an unusual occurrence would immediately elicit an exploratory team to catalog and examine the new (and apparently close) object. The recent troubles in space travel and dimensional science have prevented any such expedition, though. At best, the Engineers can only hope to launch an unmanned probe to gather data.

Perhaps the strangest warnings of all, though, come (surprisingly) from the Statisticians of Iteration X. The few interested in stellar phenomenon state with certainty that the red star's sudden and dramatic appearance presaged several events of significance — the rising vampire lord, the recent technological troubles of the Union and the collapse of most of the Traditionalist infrastructure. Many smaller but paranormally significant events have followed in the wake of such disasters. Tying the appearance of the red star to these events smacks of superstitionist astrology, of course, yet some theorists insist that the star exhibits unusual characteristics. In addition to giving off light and heat, broader spectral analyses confirm that the star has some sort of vibrational effect on quarks and superstrings, influencing the fundamental structures of the cosmos. Dimensional analysis confirms that the star is moving closer in phase-shift to our own realspace, as if trying to enter the night sky of the physical world. The true meaning of this message is still unclear, but in the wake of current events, it is almost certainly not good.



beyond the Horizon and outside the reach of the Union. Doubtless, the detonation of two nuclear devices within a strata of "spiritual" space, *was at least partially responsible for* such a backlash.

Creeping inside the Union itself lurks the insidious cancer of hidden deviance. Though dissident opinions are *permitted* to some degree, recent investigations have shown serious breaks from Convention among certain groups. Losses among Void Engineer scouts have risen to nearly unacceptable levels. Each Convention follows its own procedures, isolated from Union goals as a whole. Newly recruited agents have shown a rising and untraceable tendency to slide into rogue status, working against their defined mission parameters.

The Technocracy has finally established its unassailable control over Earth. To defend mankind, the Union must now fight to preserve both itself and the world, so that there is something left to defend and someone left to defend it.

Chapter Four: Protocols

You are rumor, recognizable only as deja vu and dismissed just as quickly. You don't exist; you were never born. Anonymity is your name, silence your native tongue. You are no longer part of the system — you are above the system, over it, beyond it. We're them. We're they. We are...The Men in Black.

— Agent Zed, *Men in Black*

Enforcing the Limits of Reality

"We are your best, last and only line of defense. We work in secret. We exist in shadow..."

"And we dress in black."

— Agent J and Agent K, *Men in Black* music video

The world needs rules; the alternative is chaos. Centuries ago, the Order of Reason attempted to foster a world where "men could be their own masters." Today, the Technocracy lives with the results, struggling to protect a world where the common man can be safe. Yet although the Masses have learned to enforce their own mundane laws, the Technocracy still has to step in to deal with threats those laws can't... or won't... recognize.

The Union has learned from centuries of precedent. In the Dark Ages, superstitionist magi openly warned their "subjects" about the dangers of the supernatural world. Although the magi benefited greatly from their covenants with the Masses, a vicious circle began. By reinforcing the idea that the occult world existed — and that it posed an active threat — magi only made those threats stronger. In our modern world, agents *must* conspire and work in the shadows. In the gray area between light and darkness, the Technocracy reigns.

Protocol dictates what a Technocratic amalgam can and cannot do in the field. All agents should remember that the Technocracy is not a recognized legal enforcement agency. Although there are cells of citizens in the FBI, the CIA and other similar societies, most Technocrats don't flash badges, acquire search warrants or enforce mundane law. Any Technocrat who

ignores his team's limitations can threaten the Union's vast conspiracy almost as much as a deviant mage can. To maintain security, the Technocracy must uphold its own internal laws.

Finally, over the last century, the Union has evolved a vast pyramidal structure to monitor all of reality, both within and without. Structure and systems hold everyone in place. At the pinnacle, centuries-old Grand Masters watch over the world. At the base, thousands of amalgams support the Technocracy, surrounded by centuries of precedent, policy and protocol.

Our Enlightened Meritocracy

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world: the High, the Middle, and the Low.

— The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism, Emmanuel Goldstein (in *1984*)

The Technocratic Union is a conspiracy conceived to further a common goal: One World, One Truth, One Reality. To outsiders, it towers like a vast monolith, casting its shadow across all who survey it. To insiders, it is a secret society created over centuries to expand the influence of a technological elite. Instead of a monolith, most agents regard the Union as a pyramid, one that is supervised by the surveillance eye at its apex. Every agent must know her position within this edifice, from the base to the pinnacle.

Structure

The Union's greatest strength lies at the base of the pyramid, where un-Enlightened citizens support the entire Union. Countless minds are conditioned to bear this overwhelming burden. Their loyalty is reinforced through Social Conditioning, and most are processed so that they may witness acts of Inspired Science without bringing down the threat of Paradox. The vast majority of citizens are kept isolated from the rest of the Union, organized into cells of four or five loyal supporters who wait patiently for activation or even left as individuals in everyday businesses and governments, there to unknowingly work on behalf of the Union. Every one of them is vital to the war effort.

If a citizen becomes empowered or shows promise as an extraordinary citizen, she is promoted to the ranks of a permanent employee. Loyal allies are assigned to front operations on a full time basis. While employees are only capable of minor acts of Inspired Science, they form a vital support staff at many Front-Line Constructs. Most are only capable of minor feats of Technocratic science (that is, Effects requiring an Enlightenment 1 or 2). Despite this handicap, they make

excellent managers for cells of citizens. They typically love to show off their dedication when working with higher-ranking agents. Unfortunately, overeager citizens and employees are often vilified by their fellow agents as "proles."

After years of service, employees may advance to the ranks of the Enlightened, joining Technocrats from a vast array of backgrounds. Some are processed Reality Deviants, heavily conditioned criminals who were saved from madness. Others are voluntary recruits, lost souls eager to help defend humanity against the insanity of the occult world. A Technocrat who can perform more than a few simple minor Procedures is a valuable ally: a prospective agent.

Every team of agents has a Supervisor who sends it into the field to act on the Union's behalf. A Supervisor can come from any one of the five Conventions, but one is usually chosen for his expertise in a specific field. NWO reps coordinate espionage, Progenitors supervise missions in which dangerous life forms threaten the world, Void Engineers dominate missions involving the Gauntlet, Syndicate reps manage the most profitable front operations and Iteration X officers excel at planning surgical strikes. Each amalgam may also enlist a coordinator, an agent who uses advanced Correspondence Procedures to maintain surveillance and communication within the team.

The Supervisor is also responsible for reporting to the local Symposium, a group of experts who make plans for an assigned geographic area. This governing board is advised by representatives from each of the five Conventions. When an agent — or an amalgam — is called before the board to explain what happened on a mission, something has gone very wrong, and someone's about to get slammed down... hard. These managers make their decisions based on years of expertise; thus, we refer to them collectively as experts.

The Symposium's Masters, on the other hand, are so distant from the Front Lines that they sometimes have trouble dealing with agents directly. In any specific area, there will be a handful of high-ranking Technocrats who expect regular reports on the progress of local amalgams. On the Horizon, Masters sort through vast amounts of data and information. For them, there are no isolated problems, only dangerous trends and poorly designed policies.

The real power in Horizon Constructs is far more intimidating: It is known as Control, the ghost in the machine, the collective that maintains order. Control represents the ranks of the Technocracy above amalgams and Symposiums. The individuals linked to it constantly change; so does its collective personality. It can see through the eyes of Watchers, observe through televisions and cameras on the Front Lines, speak and act as a collective through the walls of Room 101, dissect any report before a Symposium or manipulate any tech within its realm of influence. At any time, anywhere, Control can intervene.

Far removed from the Front Lines, dwelling in perfect contemplation within the Deep Universe, the Inner Circle of the Technocracy processes data gathered by Control and the masters. Vast amounts of information influence the Time Table, the Inner Circle's master plan for the Union. Every 15 years, a new Time Table is created based on data from previous operations and analyses. Such decisions are influenced by the Precepts of Damian, a document detailing the Technocracy's grandest ideals. Simplified versions of this body of work are distributed within Horizon Constructs. Fortunately, Front Line agents only have to deal with a few of these agendas at any given time.

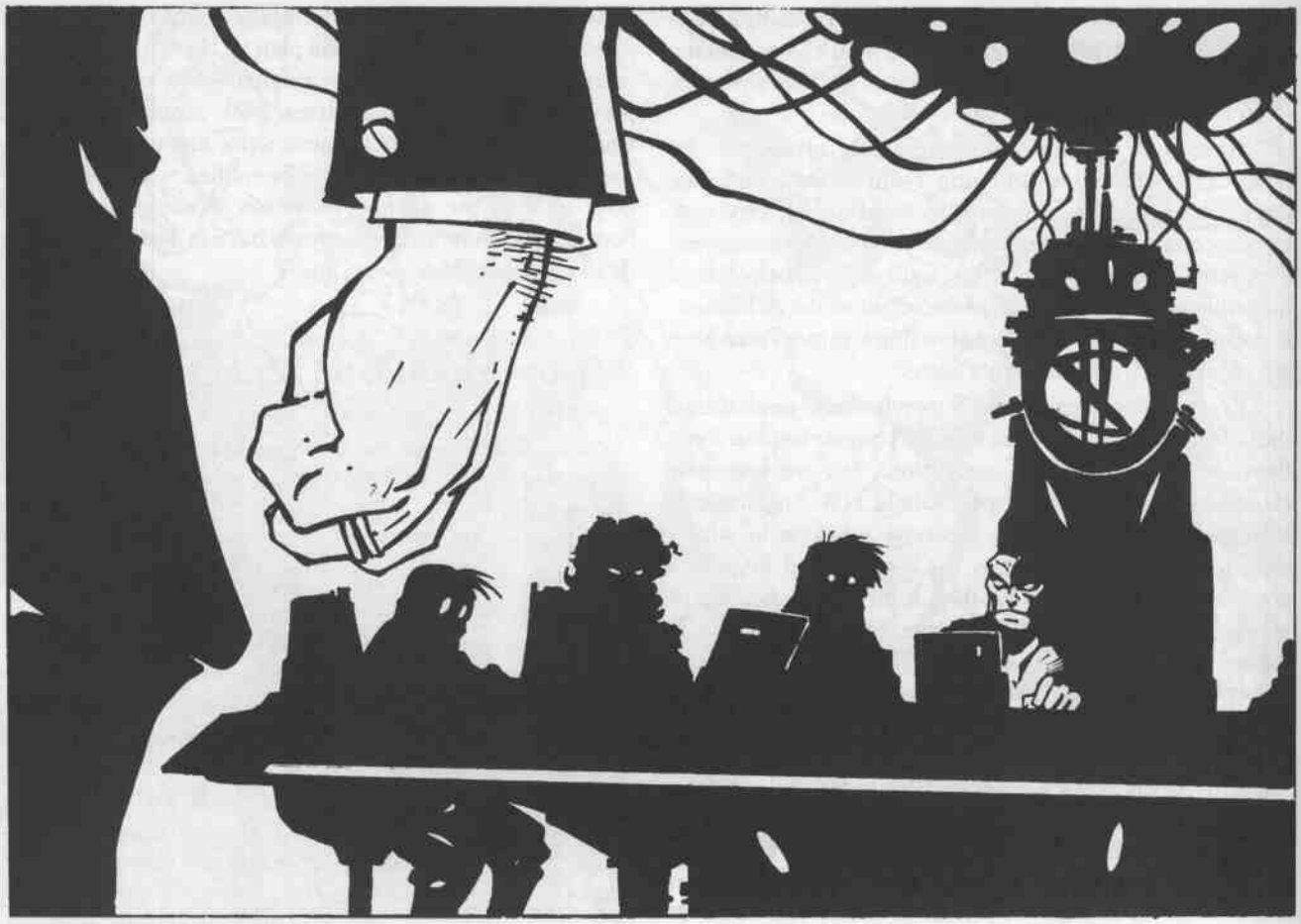
How Much Do I *Really* Know?

It's easy to categorize all Technocrats according to a neat table of ranks, pigeonholing Enlightened and un-Enlightened agents, discerning levels of mastery and showering the game with terms like "Technomagic" and "vulgar processes."

Like most other mages, though, the Technocrats aren't necessarily clued in to the workings of Enlightenment and the metaphysic of magic. Most low- and mid-ranking Technocrats firmly believe that they simply have an insight into the workings of science that other humans just don't match. Sure, there are other brilliant scientists out there... but if you're one of the few who can do *this*, then you've gotta be at the top!

Such being the case, most Technocrats can't really tell the difference between an Enlightened agent and an un-Enlightened one, except by drawing the distinction of who does Inspirational Science. Even some un-Enlightened agents use a few Technocratic devices and Procedures (see "Extraordinary Citizens," p. 131), blurring the lines further. Thus, Enlightenment is not a prerequisite for advancement in the Union; some Enlightened agents remain at low levels all their lives, while a few extraordinary citizens reach positions of minor administrative importance. Enlightenment is a requirement only for the upper ranks.

Only the highest levels of the Technocracy, those most involved in ephemeral research, even begin to realize the underlying metaphysic: that the Technocrats shape reality with their actions rather than simply acting in accord with an objective reality. It's from these august leaders that distinctions between Enlightened and un-Enlightened come and that recognition of the Paradox Effect stems. To everyone else in the Union, they are just a secret grouping of the best and brightest minds of humanity, acting in defense of the world and using technology that's so far ahead of its time that it occasionally breaks, malfunctions or gets quirky. As for those "Reality Deviants"... well, science will find a way to classify and deal with them!



Rank

Within the Union, rank has its privileges. Broadly speaking, there are five major degrees of Enlightenment recognized throughout the Union. Some Conventions and Methodologies have additional systems for denoting rank, but five levels of authority are more than enough, from the viewpoint of Front-Line amalgams. The terminology can be a little overwhelming, but fortunately, the Ivory Tower provides plenty of datafiles....

Internal Structure of the Technocracy

To distinguish between the various ranks within our Union, we have adopted a series of standardized terms denoting rank. Agents are encouraged to use these "five degrees of Enlightenment" model when referring to agencies within our society.

• Citizens

The foundation of our order depends on the diligence of our un-Enlightened brethren. The term "citizen" is an honorific reserved for these personnel; the term "prole" is unmutual and demoralizing. Classes of citizens include:

— Progenitor *technicians*
— Iteration X *Kamrads*
— NWO *sympathizers*
— Syndicate *providers*
— Void Engineer *marines* and *technicians*

•• Minor Agents (or "employees")

Once a citizen gains the capacity for Inspired Science or the use of certain devices, he may be recruited as a minor agent and assigned to work as part of a local Construct. Typically, the most advanced agents of this rank are only familiar with minor Procedures. To facilitate the illusion that they are full-time paid Sleepers at local fronts, we are careful to use the word "employee."

— The Progenitors enlist *Street Ops* and *Recruiters*.
— Iteration X conditions *Ciphers*.
— The NWO relies on the *Men in Black* (or "Black Suits")
— The Syndicate hires *associates* (or "Magic Men")
— The Void Engineers further the education of their *students*.

••• The Enlightened ("agents" or "operatives")

Highly proficient Enlightened operatives become our agents after a few months (or years) of training. An employee who has demonstrated his loyalty in serving a Construct, or who shows exceptional promise, may later be assigned to the same mission team or amalgam.

— The Progenitors contribute highly-educated *students*.
— Iteration X operates through its *Armatures*.

— The NWO commands *Operatives*, *Reporters* and *Gray Men* (or "Gray Suits")

— Syndicate representatives assume the roles of *InSpectors* and *Managers*.

— The Void Engineers provide *Investigators*, *Scientists* and *Security*.

•••• Experts (or "Supervisors")

Experts either supervise amalgams directly, supervise Constructs or serve as representatives to a Symposium.

— Progenitors work as *Research Associates* and *Primary Investigators*.

— Iteration X dispatches *Programmers*.

— The NWO relies on *Intelligence Analysts*.

— *Chairmen* supervise Syndicate corporations.

— *Commanders* lead the Void Engineers.

An amalgam composed of agents from several different Conventions may have to answer to any one of these types of Supervisors. The Supervisor chosen usually corresponds to the type of mission involved.

••••• Masters

An amalgamation of masters may choose to supervise a particularly dangerous geographic area directly. Masters may also directly observe us through Control, a group mind accessible to any Technocrat of this rank. Some of the most powerful authorities in our Union include:

— Progenitor *Research Directors*

— Iteration X *Comptrollers*

— NWO *Gatekeepers* and *Men in White* (or "White Suits")

— Syndicate *Vice Presidents of Operations* (or "VPOs")

— The august members of the *Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee* of the Void Engineers (or "DSEATC")

The highest-ranking masters form the Inner Circle, a conspiracy that exists above and beyond this system of rank. Among them are the Old Masters, visionaries who have had, in some cases, centuries to perfect their pure reason. In a distant realm in the Deep Universe, they contemplate our most visionary goals.

The Precepts of Damian

At every level of our vast society, one set of goals aligns all the factions within. The most important system of protocols within the Technocracy is a set of six "mission statements" known as the Precepts of Damian. Technocrats established this document in the late 19th century, when the Union evolved from an Enlightened secret society to a conspiracy of the technological elite. The Six Articles of the Precepts are still cited at forums and Symposiums throughout the world. From the most austere meetings of the Inner Circle to the pettiest squabbles of Front-Line Safe Houses, Technocrats invoke them regularly.

Damian, the Enlightened bureaucrat who proposed this document, spent five years negotiating within the Symposiums of the Ivory Tower to arrive at a final wording all five factions of the Union could support. Paper-pushers now jokingly refer to him as "St. Damian." Few Technocrats have been able to get all five Conventions to agree on any one issue since then, let alone six. The wording of this proposal evolves from year to year, but not without heated political debates. No other Technocrat has done so much to bring order to the Union... and created so much political chaos in the process.

Like any set of core principles, the Precepts of Damian get abused on a regular basis. Anyone who's lived in a corporate environment knows that it's easier to circumvent a company's rules than to formally change them. No matter what "clear vision" or "dominant paradigm" the highest-ranking leaders might espouse, the people working below them typically deconstruct such dictums into sets of situational ethics. Likewise, if a Symposium wants to crush a disobedient amalgam, it will also interpret the Precepts however it likes. Thus, on either side of the Schism, learning the Six Articles and rationalizing them is a survival skill.

Article One

Bring stasis and order to the universe. Predictability brings safety. Once all is discovered and all is known, Unity will be won.

Safety and order are the watchwords of the Technocracy. Theoretically, when everything in the known world has been cataloged and processed, the Ascension Conflict will be over. In addition, each new discovery made beyond the world we know extends that authority. Practically, of course, patterning all of reality is an epic undertaking, so the Union must pursue it by degrees. All missions must be prioritized; currently, projects that support Article One are given top priority.

The Technocracy cannot subjugate, suborn and classify everything, so each Convention follows its own interpretation of the words "bring stasis and order." Four simple words invoke a wide variety of interpretations. Beyond the Horizon, the Technocracy attempts to define every extraterrestrial phenomenon they encounter — there, order comes from understanding. On the Horizon, order is a highly theoretical concept. Statisticians try to predict the future with absolute certainty, while academicians try to gain a perfect understanding of the universe — perfect order is a result of perfect theories.

For Front-Line amalgams, either of these approaches is worthless. Such ideas are solid in theory, but they are pointless in practice. If cults of deviant willworkers are thriving in your city, no one really cares about abstract mathematical concepts. Reality must be defined, contained and enforced. High-ranking Technocrats don't see paranormal threats on a day-to-day basis, so they don't always realize the danger they present. Thus, agents sometimes need to follow their own initiative in protecting local turf. When they get caught, they start to argue Article One all over again.

For a beginning amalgam, Article One justifies every attempt to destroy a Chantry, every conspiracy to establish more Technocratic fronts and every expedition to gather information on the occult, the unknown or the unseen. By contrast, for a Technocrat on the Horizon, order is defined by an amalgam's Supervisor and the local Symposium... widening the Schism between theory and practice even further.

Article Two

Convince the Masses of the benevolence of science, commerce and politics, and of the power of rationality. Conflict and suffering will be eliminated in our Utopia.

The first sentence of Article Two hasn't taken a great deal of effort to implement. Science has become the religion of the 20th century. Academicians and other experts have become its high priests; labcoats are just another type of regalia. Technocracy is the way of the world.

Need evidence? In the so-called "real world" of the Technocracy, statistics are taken as fact. All news is considered objective. Corporate employees justify their actions with graphs and profit margins instead of human factors. Most hospital patients prefer test results over a doctor's interpretation. "Smart bombs and surgical strikes" from First-World nations assault the Third World, inflicting acceptable "collateral damage." Most citizens regard computers as though they operate independently of the people who program them. No vast conspiracy was needed to put any of this in place; it is the world humanity desires.

Achieving the second half of Article Two is not as simple. Once the Technocracy wins the Ascension War, they presume their utopia will lack conflict and suffering, but which utopia are they trying to create? The Conventions have individual perceptions of what utopia is, but they often work at cross-purposes. In response to this inner struggle, the Union has been establishing more colonies in the Deep Universe over the last 10 years. The goal is to create a working model of a perfect society. If the Masters of the Technocracy can create a clear model of a perfect society, the argument goes, the chances of duplicating it in the real world increases. Unfortunately, conflict and suffering are common in failed colonies. When agents are sent into a colony for a quick campaign of "reality enforcement," they curse Article Two along the way.

Article Three

Preserve the Gauntlet and the Horizon. Chaotic individuals who open gateways with impunity threaten the stability of our world. Uncontrolled portals also allow outside forces, such as Nephandi, access to our world. This must never happen.

Protecting the Earth is a serious undertaking. The Union monitors as much of the world as it can in order to track down

extraterrestrial and extradimensional threats. While some factions in the Union study (or eliminate) anything they do not understand, new threats infiltrate the Front Lines continually. Since agents cannot be everywhere, strengthening the Gauntlet is the surest way to keep reality contained, which is what humanity desires. After all, the Gauntlet and the Horizon were never "invented" by the Technocracy. Humanity's consensus created them; the Union merely enforces that belief.

Anyone aiding and abetting threats from beyond the Horizon is a menace to mankind. The phrase "chaotic individuals who open gateways" describes the most dangerous type of Reality Deviants. Unauthorized contact between this world and other realms is forbidden... and punished. By Article Three, any Euthanatos who contacts the dead, any Dreamspeaker who summons spirits or any cultist who worships a false god is considered a criminal against reality. Interventions against these deviants take priority over all others. A coordinator citing Article Three ("Our dimension has been breached! Extradimentional invasion imminent!") can inspire any amalgam to fight like they've never fought before.

Both the Technocracy and the Traditions have seen the alternative to this protocol. The skirmishes of the 40's and 50's forced the Union to elaborate this Article considerably. The Nine Traditions and Five Conventions worked together to oppose the Nephandic Invasions of World War II, but the "dimensional clause" ensures that this type of alliance will never be necessary again.

Article Four

Define the nature of the universe. Knowledge must be absolute or chaos will envelop all. The elemental forces of the universe must not be left to the caprices of the unknown.

Article Four was written largely for the benefit of the more academic and research-oriented Conventions. The Ascension War isn't just fought with black helicopters and cyborg agents. The Technocracy can't control what it can't understand. From the academic institutions of the NWO to the isolated laboratories of the Progenitors, Technocrats try to develop scientific models that fully describe the real world. Every Convention contributes to this goal. AES philosophers of Iteration X debate the structure of the world just as fervently as Syndicate managers and Void Engineer explorers.

If these models can't be fixed to represent the world, then the world must be altered to fit the Technocracy's abstractions. Another interpretation of this Article relies on destroying that which cannot be classified. Subjective truth allows anything to enter our world. Every effort to pare down reality down to its essentials ensures the survival of mankind. Unfortunately, conflict within the Union prevents any one Convention's interpretation from overpowering all others. In fact, Technocrats often define the world outside their Union rigidly to quell the political battles within it. As a result, a research-oriented article is reinterpreted as a call to arms.

Many Technocrats also use this dictum to carry on a tradition that goes back to the 15th century. One rationale for the establishment of the original Order of Reason was to contain the threat of the Scourge, what we now know as the Paradox Effect. Documenting and simplifying science, technology and society was supposed to reduce the threat of chaos. After all, "anomalous manifestations" and vulgar creations often come into existence when the supernatural or occult world draws strength from humanity's fear or worship. By one theory, if the world is defined, knowable and acceptable by the standards of the Masses, Paradox will no longer threaten the world. It's a nice idea... too bad it doesn't work.

Article Five

Destroy Reality Deviants. Their recklessness threatens our security and our progress toward Unity.

The phrase "Reality Deviants" contains the two most controversial words in the Precepts of Damian. There is no one set of protocols to define this term; Supervisors must evaluate such threats on a case-by-case basis. The greatest dangers come from mages who serve pure chaos or destruction: Marauders and Nephandi. The second greatest type of threat is any mage who employs vulgar magic too frequently. Beyond that, trying to kill all the supernatural creatures in the world is impossible... for now. Until then, the Technocracy must prioritize its campaigns of reality enforcement.

Of course, something of a double-standard exists here. Any truly visionary Technocrat — one who tries to use technology too advanced for the Real World — is also deviating from reality. She just goes about it in a more acceptable way. Any sufficiently advanced technology risks Paradox as much as any other magic. To protect against this backlash preemptively, Symposiums have little tolerance for amalgams of agents who can't act discreetly. Amalgams that "threaten the Union's security" are almost as deserving of punishment as the deviants they punish.

Proponents of the Pogrom take the verb "destroy" very seriously, equating it with the word "kill." Political tension, however, usually prevents that traditional interpretation from staying dominant for long. The NWO argues that Reality Deviants can be "destroyed" by conversion, imprisonment or annihilation of their resources. Ruthless Technocrats considers this opinion weak, arguing that it sabotages the War for Reality. Others bow out of the argument entirely, stating that the first four articles are far more important.

Article Six

Shepherd the Masses; protect them from themselves and others.

Article Six is a catch-all, allowing anyone who rationalizes altruism to justify any self-serving activity. The first half of Article Six has come under fire recently, especially in the Ivory Tower. Terrence Whyte's "empowerment theory" (see Chapter Three) has led academics down some dangerous

The Pogrom

For over a century, one political movement has sought to exploit Article Five for all it's worth. It's called the Pogrom, the idea that any mage not actively working for the Technocracy must be destroyed. Not every Technocrat believes in its necessity, but when the presence of the supernatural becomes too overt, the chance of this policy being reinstated increases.

Of course, many Tradition mages are blissfully unaware of this policy. The Ascension War is far more than "evil Technocrats" trying to kill anything they don't understand... until the Technocracy changes its collective mind. Ironically enough, the only event that would bring this genocidal idea back into fashion would be a major victory for the Nine Traditions in the Ascension War. Back in '97, one foolish cabal of mages tried to bring a Horizon Construct down from the heavens. The result was a bloodbath on the Front Lines that lasted for days.

Each time a cabal of Orphans assaults a Safe House, or every time some foolish Chantry makes a major strike against a Technocratic front, support for the Pogrom increases. Some of the more militant amalgams place their troops on stand-by in times of trouble, just waiting for the Traditionalists to get hostile again. Terrorism must be answered with justice. The choice, then, is really up to the Traditions. It's a simple decision: submission or suicide. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and skirmishes in the war for reality are no exception.

paths of debate. If the Technocracy is empowered by the consensus of five billion humans, are the sheep starting to lead the shepherds? Who controls whom?

Regardless of this academic debate, if mankind cannot protect itself from the growing force of the occult, then the Union must step in when the rules of reality break down. Despite the idealism and ideology, amalgams protect the Masses by any means their masters think is reasonable. Of course, the phrase "protect them from themselves" somewhat circumvents the original goals of the Order of Reason, but Constructs that benefit from this policy rarely take the time to file complaints against it.

Time Tables

A vision isn't much good if you can't break it down into smaller, measurable goals. The Ascension War won't be won tomorrow. The ideals of the Precepts of Damian have been clarified over time, but deciding how to attain them remains another point of dispute. Since the Convention of the Ivory Tower in 1325, the Technocracy and its predecessors have met regularly to discuss exactly what these lesser goals should be. The result is a series of agendas known as the Time Tables.

Though these goals change, assemblies formed to discuss Time Tables are as regular as clockwork. Convention representatives meet every 15 years to assemble another framework for the Time Tables; the resulting arguments can last for years. The Inner Circle then collates its input into larger mission statements. Anyone who's sat in a corporate boardroom knows the folly of setting far-reaching goals. Even centuries-old Enlightened operatives have trouble following a meeting's agendas. As a result, most Front Line agents remain focused on campaigns of reality enforcement, leaving ideological nonsense to the suits above them.

Propaganda: The Old Masters

The Technocracy depends on a unified vision and bold idealism... along with the strength to back it up. Unfortunately, the Union can be as ruthless inside its boardrooms as it is outside them. If the Technocracy is a vast pyramid, the highest ranking technocrats are its eyes, surveying all reality from the apex. If the Eyes of the Pyramid lack vision, the Union is blind to the problems surrounding it. Thus, the Old Masters are always watching.

According to Technocracy 101, there is no single document containing the wording of the Old Masters' Time Table. Allegedly, the "core values" of the Union are all virtual. Legends tell of a vast room in another dimension, with a multidimensional polyhedron at the center of it. The Eyes of the Pyramid gather around it. As they discuss philosophical arguments, agreement adds structure to the form; dissent tears it apart. For an order built on the definable, this practice may sound heretical. Nonetheless, agents on the Front Lines have no choice but to believe this convenient story.

Newly indoctrinated agents are told that the Old Masters reflect on this perfect vision in their isolated dimension. If nothing else, this story makes for excellent propaganda. Supposedly, the ideas they dream up (in "pure form") are further disassembled into five-year plans, regional goals, statistical models and so on. From that point, Symposiums deconstruct these directives into their own local agendas, and Supervisors set up missions to further specific goals. No individual actually witnesses this sleight of hand, but the orders keep coming down from on high. No wonder so many impatient agents just want to kill....

Conventional Goals

Each Convention also needs to look to the horizon, prioritizing its most important ideals and detailing its most ambitious goals. Obviously, since Front Line agents can't converse with the Old Masters regularly, the idealism of the Inner Circle is far removed from the reality of the Front Lines. To remedy this problem, each Convention also develops its own internal Time Tables, which are somewhat easier to document. A local Symposium may cite any one of these goals as a priority in your area, though your reality may vary.

Iteration X: Iteration X has historically had many of the most ambitious goals of all five Conventions. Some, such as the invention of the "perpetual motion machine," have never been attained. Many amalgams have no real practical use for the Clockwork Convention's latest holy grail, the Grand Field Theory. Iteration X scientists are attempting to categorize and classify all matter and energy, including unseen energies, paranormal manifestations and all other forces that affect our world. For this reason, amalgams are asked to report any sightings of events that don't fit in with this model meticulously. Theoretically, any energy force the Technocracy can't understand (or control) will be eliminated.

While this first goal is overly theoretical, the elimination of deviant mages is another matter. There is a strong movement within the low ranking troops and high ranking masters of the Clockwork Convention to reinstate the Pogrom. Certainly, not every cyborg is an advocate of genocide, but this political movement is strongest within their Convention. The grunts have little purpose other than war, while the masters (far removed from everyday concerns) can categorize all deviant mages as enemies abstractly. When espionage and investigation fail, Iteration X strongly voices the need to punish reality crimes with deadly force. It-X also has more subtle philosophical goals (like the evolution of human consciousness), but this one agenda is easily the most visible.

The NWO: The most idealistic goal of the Boys in Black doesn't relate to the present, but the past. Oddly enough, defining history can be just as difficult as controlling the real world. The Ivory Tower has struggled for decades to form one definitive history of the Technocracy, but no one has been able to do so yet. This goal not only requires academicians to play politics with the mastery of a Machiavelli, but to alter and amend historical records as necessary. Thousands of historical records of Earth's shadow history have been lost to time... although some professors have an amazing facility for rediscovering them (or rewriting them) periodically.

Amalgams are more directly concerned with goals involving today's world, especially the conversion of deviant mages. The Cloak and Dagger Convention has an old motto: "Never destroy what you can suborn." Every abducted mage who can be duly processed is a major victory in the War for Reality. Of course, this objective is at odds with the goals of Iteration X, leading to some fierce arguments in the Safe Houses of the industrialized world.

The Progenitors: The Human Genome Project is a long-term project that's been in action for over 30 years. The Progenitors have used a great deal of grunt work trying to gather genetic samples from the citizens of the industrialized world. This agenda falls under the precept of "understanding all reality." Aside from studying just the human genome, though, the Progenitors hope to isolate the biological factors that lead to Enlightenment, unlocking the reasons why the human genome forms consciousness and awareness.

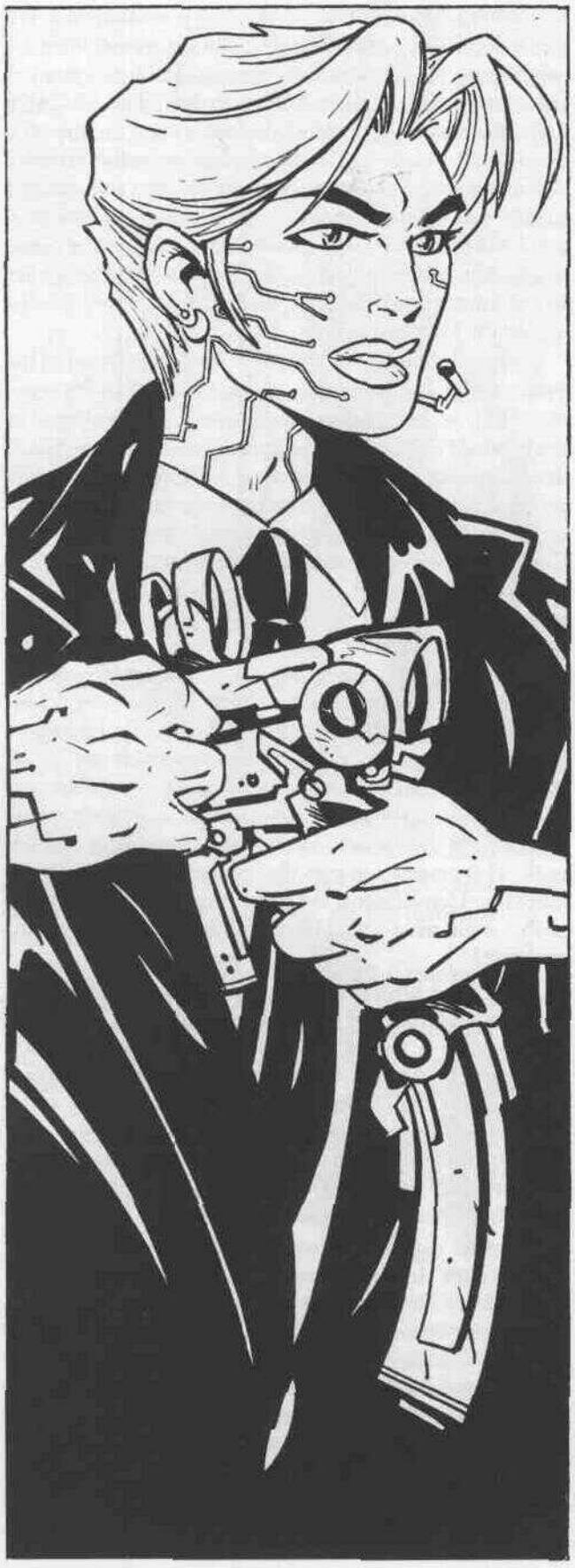
What to do with this information is another issue entirely. Security-conscious scientists declare its usefulness for genetic tracking, allowing the overlords of reality to monitor the Masses through their "gattaca codes." The FACADE Engineers have begun to flaunt the idea of using this information to perfect cloning. They can replace any reality criminal within a week, if necessary. Some argue the value of using genetic data in prediction, not only creating psychological profiles of potential criminals, but also assisting in the calculation of further Time Tables. Collectively, these ideas have led to another popular goal: cloning and genetic testing among the Masses.

The Syndicate: One of the most far-reaching goals of the Syndicate is the concept of a cashless society. In many ways, this idea is as theoretical as the Human Genome Project or the Unified Field Theory. The agenda does have some immediate applications, such as tracking and monitoring Sleeper activity, but which economic utopia should the Syndicate create? By most theories, this goal would allow the Corporate Convention absolute control over the world's finance, placing the Technocracy in a position of unassailable supremacy. In simpler theories, it would allow the Syndicate to observe or control any financial transaction.

While the NWO is known for its idealism, the Syndicate is a very pragmatic organization. Thus, the Corporate Convention also sets a profit margin for all of the Technocracy's operations. Granted, their accounting methods rely on insights more esoteric than a stack of Hermetic tomes, but each Syndicate rep on a Symposium will use the amount of revenue generated in their area to justify a wide assortment of lesser goals. This pragmatism puts the Syndicate at odds with the other four Conventions, but if the suits didn't pursue these goals... well, what would happen if the Technocracy went bankrupt?

The Void Engineers: Let the academicians and politicians dispute the fate of the so-called "real world." The Void Engineers have always remained distant from such petty concerns. The Ascension War is a waste of time if the Voids can't preserve and strengthen the Gauntlet of the real world. Their Time Table contains a series of measurable goals for the steady increase of this world-wide barrier. Of course, if these goals are met, only the Engineers will be able to use the "backdoors" out of this security system.

Beyond the physical world, the Void Engineers have goals for more Horizon Constructs, more colonies and further exploration. One of the most important "space races" doesn't involve star systems or the Deep Universe. Sectoring the Digital Web is essential to defending the Technocracy. Once all users can be tracked, monitored and controlled (if necessary) the Web will become mankind's greatest resource... either that, or the Technocracy's most dangerous dystopia.



Enforcing YOUR Reality

These ideas are the most commonly cited goals of the Time Table, but don't think for a moment that they're the only ones. Storytellers should exercise their freedom to create other far-reaching goals. By all means, use the listed goals as examples, but adapt them to your vision of the world. Don't let us tell you what the most threatening technologies in the world are. Use the Technocracy as your own metaphor for the technologies you consider most dangerous. That'll be far more useful to your gaming group than citing a game supplement as a model for reality.

Protocol

High-ranking Technocrats love setting far reaching goals, but most amalgams don't really give a damn. Although they're aware of high-powered political battles, they've got more important things to worry about... like staying alive. Protocols define the methods a team can use during a mission. Many agents don't give a damn about politics, but local amalgams follow changes in local protocol very closely.

The Six Degrees of Separation

Regardless of whatever training methods a Convention prefers, all students and recruits learn of a higher standard of grading: the Six Degrees of Separation. Agents of all five Conventions know that there are six degrees between absolute loyalty and near ostracism. All agents fall within this spectrum, from the legendary Old Masters of the Inner Circle to the expendable Front-Line proles.

New agents start out with the "third degree," a stage where their loyalty must be maintained meticulously. If they deviate from protocol, their loyalty drops. After the first three strikes, sixth degree agents are watched carefully for any sign of deviance. Unless they do something stellar to prove their loyalty, they're canceled soon thereafter. Supervisors write extensive reports about the performance of their agents and amalgams, making a virtual "paper trail" to show every disgruntled agent's descent.

When an amalgam really messes up, the local Symposium can call the agents in for a formal hearing in front of an oversight committee. The regional Convention reps convene in a special committee to review the mission team's performance. (Scully and Mulder have gone through this a few times; so have the agents of *La Femme Nikita*.) The committee can reorganize the amalgam, reassign agents to other areas or even call for the immediate termination of key members (in extreme cases). Of course, if committee members feel generous, they give the members of the team 48 hours to gather contrary evidence and convince them otherwise... launching another tense mission in the field.

Psych Ops

Since Front Line agents and amalgams find themselves exposed to deviant behavior on a regular basis, they often find themselves doubting the truths of their science or even their sanity. Confronted with vampires, werewolves and people who call down lightning and hurl balls of flame, who wouldn't be a little leery of this orderly and logical world that has been promoted since the first years of education?

To deal with agents who risk cracking or defecting due to their own doubts, the Union employs Psych Ops, doctors and psychologists trained specifically to deal with these contingencies. Although many Psych Ops come from the ranks of the New World Order, just about every Convention contributes some sort of counselor — it would be a shame to ignore the Iterators' insight into human consciousness or the Syndicate's ability to manipulate emotions and discern motives, after all. Each Psych Op is trained in psychological techniques, neurology and pharmacology, specifically to treat disorders and personality problems.

Most of the time, Psych Ops perform routine evaluations and adjustments. With a few recommended exercises and daily routines, a Psych Op can help to restore an agent's sense of balance. An evaluation of sanity and loyalty goes a long way on an agent's regular report. Plus, regular checks can ensure that agents aren't harboring divisive thoughts or deviant ideas.

On rare occasions, a Psych Op (or team) can be called in when an agent breaks. Most Enlightened agents are too mentally resilient to break easily, which makes such circumstances all the more dangerous. A preliminary evaluation determines whether the agent can be salvaged at all (or even caught, if the operative defects or flees correction). The Psych Ops then have to bring the agent down, convince him of the errant nature of his thoughts, recondition his loyalty and, in some cases, rebuild his very sanity. Furthermore, the Psych Ops have to make sure that the rest of the amalgam and Symposium hasn't been corrupted. Emergencies like this may draw an entire team, an amalgam composed completely of Psych Ops who do internal security.

Aside from "regular check-ups of mental health," Psych Operatives often engage in conditioning and interrogation work. After all, why bother with mundane means like drugs and torture when you can dissect someone's motives, fears and desires, then rebuild the person to believe what you want? A Psych Op is almost always the one to train a Technocrat with Social Conditioning — most other ops lack the skill or the authority to do so.

The thankless task of "thought policing" means that many operatives hold little warmth for the Psych Ops, whom they see as controlling, meddlesome and threatening. After all, if *you* had to report to someone who could change your motives, declare your beliefs unmutual or even throw you into Room 101, wouldn't *you* be a bit annoyed and just a touch frightened? Still, these ops are a necessary part of the Union. As long as *they* aren't corrupted. Who watches the Watchers...?

Social Conditioning

With all that they are subjected to, it's a wonder that more agents don't go rogue. To prevent such an occurrence, the Psych Ops and Room 101 work together to condition Technocrats and their employees with specific beliefs and mores. Though this conditioning can take a long time, it pays off: Heavily conditioned recruits find themselves working more fervently for the Union's goals, putting their other concerns aside.

If you decide to invoke Social Conditioning on your characters, each one needs to track a Conditioning score. Each character begins with a Conditioning score, reflecting the degree of his indoctrination. The actual number is between 1 and 10, depending on the agent's original training. Higher ratings in Conditioning instill a greater degree of loyalty in the agent, making it difficult to go against Technocracy policy.

— A character who was recruited from the Front Lines starts out with a 3.

— An agent Enhanced in a Horizon laboratory has been brainwashed into a 5.

— A Technocrat raised in a Deep Universal colony begins with a 7.

In most stories, conditioning can be supervised by the local Supervisor and Control. Depending on an agent's level of Conditioning, either one can implant code words, erase memories or alter the emotional relationship between one agent and another permanently.

Processing: Any Technocrat who can abduct and isolate a mage for at least a week can attempt to instill the first stage of Social Conditioning. If the first attempt succeeds, the mage in Room 101 begins with a rating of 1. Through a week of isolation and "polishing," a Technocratic authority with enough Mind influence can increase the rating further. A Tradition mage who has reached Stage Seven has been Processed; his real training can then begin.

Breaking Conditioning: An agent can also attempt to circumvent his own conditioning. Doing so requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower, followed by either a temporary Willpower roll or a proper Mind Procedure. If the number of successes exceeds the agent's Conditioning score, the agent is free to disobey his commands for a full scene.

It is also possible for another Technocratic authority to condition an agent more thoroughly than Control has! The Void Engineers, for instance, have a secret group that reverses this indoctrination. If this secondary conditioning occurs during the course of a chronicle, substitute the phrase "Technocratic authority" for "Control" on the table here. As a side note, a Technocrat cannot Socially Condition another character who has a higher Arete or a higher rank in the Technocracy.

Here's the way the degrees of Conditioning break down:

- **Stage One: Indoctrination**

This level of Conditioning instills a mild fanaticism. An agent will forego food and sleep, if necessary, to carry out his

mission, and he ignores minor grievances or inconveniences. Simple phrases can be instilled by rote memory.

— A mage at this level of Conditioning will experience a Visionary Seeking, to show what the deviant's personal view of Ascension will become if he joins the Technocracy. Oddly enough, many find this nightmare disturbing.

Example: *Citizens learn basic morality by sleepteaching in* Brave New World. *They soon cite slogans to justify their actions.*

•• Stage Two: Submission

The subject submits to most minor Technocratic Procedures without resistance if they are administered by Control. (A Procedure requiring more than two dots in a Sphere is considered major.) Mind Procedures, however, can still be resisted with Willpower.

Example: *In the* Illuminatus Trilogy, *the protagonist gets dozens of motorists to get out of their cars during a traffic jam by formally organizing a "Bavarian Fire Drill."*

••• Stage Three: Suspicion

Control can designate another individual as an ally or enemy. Allies are watched closely for signs of disloyalty or disobedience; enemies are monitored even more closely.

— A mage at this level of Conditioning will also refuse to perform minor Traditionalist Procedures if they require a non-technological focus.

Example: *Children are taught to spy on their parents in* 1984.

•••• Stage Four: Ostracism

Control can instill a code word that prompts social rejection of a chosen individual, declaring him "unmutual." On activation, the subject will shun and avoid the unmutual outcast.

Example: *Number Six is declared unmutual in "Piece of Mind."* (The Prisoner)

Revolutionaries are displayed as exiles at the Chestnut Tree Cafe in 1984.

••••• Stage Five: Pacifism

Control can instill a code word that renders the subject docile and pacifistic. Only the individual who implanted this command can use it.

— A mage at this level of Conditioning can learn to use one Technocratic focus for one of his Spheres.

Example: *Little Alex in no longer violent after the Ludovico technique in* A Clockwork Orange.

Number Six is made incapable of reacting with violence in "Piece of Mind." (The Prisoner)

••••• • Stage Six: Conspiracy

Control can implant a code word that instills the idea that a chosen individual is an enemy. On activation, the subject will enact an elaborately detailed series of actions against him.

Example: *Half of the shill set up to inconvenience Number Six in* The Prisoner *are suborned into elaborate plots.*

••••• •• Stage Seven: Alliance

Control can instill the idea that a group of individuals (a Convention, a Methodology, an amalgam) is a staunch ally, and that it must be trusted implicitly; the subject will work secretly with them, if necessary. The subject may also be *conditioned to loathe another group of people* absolutely; the subject will work against them secretly, if necessary.

— A mage with this level of Conditioning has been Processed. Substitute a technological focus for each of his Spheres. He is now a Technocrat.

— A prole with this level of Conditioning is thoroughly indoctrinated, and he no longer acts as a vulgar witness when faced with Inspired Science.

Example: *During the "Two Minute's Hate," all citizens are conditioned to despise Goldstein and his allies.* (1984)

••••• ••• Stage Eight: Rejection

The subject can be conditioned to forget ever having met a close friend or family member.

Example: *Benton Frasier, The mountie in* Due South, *leaves on an extended manhunt, returning to discover that someone new claims to be the person who's always been his partner — and the entire police station supports the claim. Did Benton "misremember" his long-time friend?*

••••• •••• Stage Nine: Devotion

The subject will betray an object of his love or adoration, if necessary. Loyalty to Control overrides such complications.

Example: *Winston ultimately betrays Julia in* 1984.

••••• ••••• Stage Ten: Reverence

The subject can be taught to treat a specific individual with reverence or religious devotion. Loyalty is absolute and unwavering. No order is questioned. Resistance is futile; the agent's spirit has been broken.

Example: *"He had learned to love Big Brother."* (1984)

Mission Protocols

When a team violates protocol, the amalgam gets called in to report to its Supervisor. Unless they can justify their actions, each of the agents gets a permanent black mark on his or her record. Though practices in your local city or state may vary, the Technocracy maintains a few standing policies any amalgam must obey. This set of policies is the baseline, the expectations for control groups. Any Symposium that wants to alter the protocols in its area can do so, but only after a prolonged legal dispute with its own masters. (In other words, Storytellers may feel free to alter these protocols to fit their local amalgam.)

1.0. *Do not openly acknowledge the presence of the occult to anyone outside the Technocracy.*

You know the drill by now. If the Masses learn of the existence of the supernatural, then the occult world gains strength. Belief in the supernatural reinforces deviant visions of reality. If humanity is to be kept safe, it must be kept asleep. Thus, anyone witnessing a paranormal event must be conditioned to forget what he or she has seen. As a side note, any amalgam that operates too openly can create just as much

Storytelling Social Conditioning

Using this Procedure in a story relies on two time-honored and widely beloved storytelling techniques: secret notes and private conferences. The Storyteller (in the guise of Control) reveals the details of his conditioning to each player secretly, either through a brief write-up, or (if time allows) during a discussion outside the game. Implant code words. Define hatreds and loyalties. Describe hidden commands.

This technique can work wonders with advanced roleplayers. Instead of placing limitations on what a player's agent can and can't do, it often inspires more ideas, allowing a player to betray colleagues, undergo emotional trauma and indulge in the sort of angst that only a White Wolf gamer can understand fully.

In a more complicated game, another authority may implant its own conditioning. The character is not conscious of this brainwashing; the player, however, is. A word of caution, though: No more than one or two players in a group should have this degree of complication. If this system is used too much, it becomes unwieldy. Proceed with caution.

damage as a pack of Reality Deviants. Cover your tracks... or your masters will.

2.0. *Do not employ blatant Inspirational Science unless authorized. The use of vulgar displays cannot be tolerated, either inside or outside the Union.*

Paradox is a punishable offense. When the Technocracy has to decide which Tradition mages to abduct or eliminate first, they start with the ones who have used vulgar magic the most. Each act of deviance that summons Paradox is an act of terrorism against reality. Supervisors have a low tolerance for agents who employ similar acts of Enlightened Science. Any agent might invoke a little backlash once in a while, but those who get caught doing it too often tend to slip down to the seventh degree of loyalty.

Sometimes a Supervisor will authorize an agent to use Procedures that can't help but summon Paradox. For instance, a cyborg assigned to make an assault on a major Tradition outpost is going to have to act rather blatantly to carry out his mission — there's no subtle way to use 50 millimeter chain guns. At the beginning of a mission, the members of a team might request authorization for a few types of vulgar Procedures. If that authorization isn't granted, then the amalgam has to make sure it doesn't get caught using force that tears apart the same reality they're attempting to defend.

3.0. *Do not communicate with deviant mages unless authorized to do so as part of a mission.*

Contact with the Traditions has to be limited and controlled. Some young and idealistic Technocrats think they can negotiate with their enemies, or that they might understand them better if they just talk to them. One overly enthusiastic agent can sabotage years of effort easily by talking to the wrong Reality Deviant.

When investigating an alleged crime against humanity, a mission team is usually authorized to ask questions or gather information of suspects in a method that does not jeopardize the mission in progress. This guideline is sometimes kept vague intentionally: When a team screws up, the Supervisor wants to shift the blame! As a result, your Supervisor and coordinator will watch all such contact carefully, evaluating you on your choice of technique. Handle each discussion with extreme care.

4.0. *Do not cross the Gauntlet or Horizon without authorization.*

Never underestimate the threat of the spirit world. Untold legions of unidentifiable monsters lurk just beyond the fringes of human perception. Tampering with reality's strongest defense against these threats — the Gauntlet — can create more problems than it solves; so can a Supervisor citing Article Three at you. Void Engineers should receive precise instructions on when they can alter the local Gauntlet and when they can cross it.

5.0. *An amalgam may program its own assigned employees and citizens. The members of an amalgam may not affect the programming of other agents.*

Before a team goes out into the field, the amalgam's Supervisor will make sure the team has all the employees it needs to carry out its assigned tasks. Programming "proles" is standard procedure at the beginning of a mission. This allowance also means that an amalgam is responsible for the results. Note that under the rules for the Programming Procedure and Social Conditioning (in Chapter Eight), no Technocrat can program someone of a higher rank. Trapping another agent in a basement for a week for a little "attitude adjustment" is possible under the rules... but getting caught is a very serious offense!

6.0. *Any protocol may be subject to change with authorization of the local Symposium.*

Storytellers should feel free to customize this set of protocols as they see fit. Thus, any write-up for a Technocracy setting should include a modified list of amendments to local protocols. In a long-term Technocracy game, these dictums will be tested time and time again, requiring the team's Supervisor to clarify them and adapt them to the situations in her area. You enforce reality; amend it as necessary.

Standard Protocols Regarding Supernatural Groups

The Technocracy also has standing protocols for dealing with other supernatural threats in its dark world. As one would expect, the most dangerous contingencies are reserved for mages. The reason for this being that most occult factions don't violate reality by their very existence. Once the threats of the worst deviants are contained in a given area, a local Symposium may authorize investigations of other threats.

The dictums listed here are the "default values" in most major cities. Unless something really changes the threat level of these groups (that is, the Storyteller blatantly tries to stir up a cross-over chronicle), these policies are usually maintained as the standard. If an amalgam is informed of a change in policy, the players should suspect a skirmish is coming up. Nonetheless, between the Marauders, the Nephandi, the Nine Traditions and who knows how many independent Crafts, a Technocratic amalgam should have enough major threats to deal with for a long, long time.

Marauders: *Kill on sight. Terminate by any means necessary.*

Nephandi: *Notify superiors, investigate and destroy on receiving authorization.*

The two greatest threats on the planet are Marauders and Nephandi. Sightings of a Marauder gang or Nephandi cult within a major city changes the agenda of the local Symposium with all haste. No subtlety is required here. Any amalgam in the field has standing orders to "shoot on sight" any suspected Reality Deviant of this magnitude. Supervisors insist that agents should verify the threat of these individuals before killing them, but when a Marauder is extreme enough, confirmation doesn't take much evidence. When madmen are around, Paradox is not subtle. Nephandi, on the other hand, are far more insidious. Uncovering a Nephandus usually necessitates a lengthy investigation... requiring a talented and dedicated amalgam. Of course, this investigation can get tricky if a Nephandus has corrupted one of your superiors....

Tradition Mages: *Notify superiors on contact. Await evaluation, and carry out specific contingency assigned.*

If the Technocracy had the resources to track, tag and nuke from orbit every Tradition mage on the planet, life would be so much simpler (and **Mage** wouldn't be much of a game). Unfortunately, amalgams are under standing orders to monitor and evaluate these deviants on a case-by-case basis. Killing a mage is often too indiscreet; other Chantries and law enforcement agencies start to take notice. Instead, maintaining surveillance on a mage allows you to uncover the other mages he consorts with regularly.

Once the deviant has been evaluated, an amalgam's Supervisor must make the call on what to do with it. There are five "contingencies" for what to do with a verified mage:

— *Contingency One* is outright assassination: An amalgam is sent in to immediately kill the lone magus. In other words, the deviant simply disappears, excised from the body of the Masses like a cancerous cell before it infects anyone.

— *Contingency Two* is long-term surveillance: A local amalgam sets some of its Watcher employees to work. This tactic hopefully involves "tracking the roach to its breeding place," that is, trying to find its lab, sanctum or Chantry. The goal here is to not just incriminate one mage, but to unmask an entire cult of them.

— *Contingency Three* requires the amalgam to infiltrate said Chantry to gain more information on it. The NWO excels at this type of operation. An investigation amalgam might hand off its mission to an infiltration amalgam under this contingency. This contingency usually involves "tagging" the Primal Energy of a particular node (see the appropriate Procedure in Chapter Eight), so that all mages coming in contact with the area can be tracked later.

— *Contingency Four* includes abduction and possible processing. Once enough information has been gathered, the Supervisor can justify altering, amending, inculcating or processing the mage. Strap him down in Room 101, interrogate him, tell him of his crimes and then... fix... him. The information gathered can lead to a list of other suspected criminals... and a few more investigations... and another set of contingencies....

— *Contingency Five* is also known as the "Shockwave Contingency." If all else fails, violence prevails. It involves raiding the mage's Chantry and killing guilty deviants one by one. Of course, such action always invites retribution. This fifth option remains in reserve for when a Chantry is a major threat to the area. Iteration X maintains an entire department for Contingency Five. When a coordinator gives authorization for this radical, indiscreet action, cyborgs deploy chain guns, and black helicopters move into position.

Protocols Regarding the Supernatural

Vampires: *Observe, but do not engage. Threat level minimal.*

Let's not mince words here: It's pretty damn obvious that vampires exist. Every city on the planet is choked with bloodsuckers, and most aren't as subtle as they think they are. In the largest cities, they've reproduced and spread indiscriminately — Andrew Eldritch clones and Lestat wanna-be's are as common as black T-shirts and bad fashion sense. No matter how many witnesses the "Kindred" intimidate, coerce or manipulate into silence, tracking the vampires in a city with high technology is child's play. Video surveillance - heat signatures = presence of vampires. *You* do the math.

Shockwave Clauses

Operations: Mission maintained.

Nikita: What do you mean?

Operations: I mean we're sending you a cleaner...

— from the original *La Femme Nikita*

Sometimes a mission profile includes a "shockwave clause." The initial objective may not require deadly force, but if something goes wrong, there's going to be blood on the walls. Any Supervisor should set a fail-safe. When the mission exceeds that set of parameters, subtlety is abandoned, and the killing begins. Defining a shockwave clause can be difficult, however. In some circumstances, agents can only use deadly force in self-defense... or if they're cut off from their coordinator for more than two minutes... or if they witness a violation of Article Three first-hand... or... you get the idea.

Despite the ease in tracking them, the Technocracy has grossly underestimated the role of vampires in the real world. Technocrats do not consider most of these "blood cults" to be threats. More importantly, they have no reason to know about millennia-old Ancient Ones waiting to emerge. In the World of Darkness, the *Book of Nod* is not available in paperback form. On the other hand, Watchers have seen evidence of the Masquerade in action. Vampires usually police their own kind, and sects that don't believe in the Masquerade are set upon by their brethren. Thus, the Technocracy can afford to regard vampires with ridicule. If the techies knew the truth, they'd mobilize their troops a bit quicker....

With the number of deviant mages in the world, the Union does not have enough resources to declare war on the undead. The only thing the Technocracy really requires concerning these creatures of the night is information. Just as any good police department wants to be informed of the largest gangs in town, the Union surveys and monitors local blood cults. Lacking the firepower to take them all down, the Technocrats merely watch and wait.

The Union attitude toward vampires may change, though, with the recent awakening of a beast of incredible power in the badlands of India. The Technocracy was forced to apply "Operation Ragnarok," the approval of any level of resource allocation and losses, in order to stem the advance of a single vampire! If others of this power level rise from their age-long slumber, new measures may be necessary to defend humanity against these fiends.

Werewolves: *Do not initiate deadly force unless absolutely necessary. Call for back-up, plan exfiltration. Monitor and evaluate if possible. Caution advised.*

The last thing the Technocracy needs is an open, city-wide war with a group of primitive, violent, enraged

shapeshifting beasts. For some reason, the werewolves seem to be rather active at destroying many of the most dangerous anomalous manifestations (or spirits) within a city. Werewolves are only a threat when they specifically take action against a technocratic front. A handful seem to have an unnatural command of technology; some of these are known as monkeywrenchers, and they should be watched closely. Unless local shapeshifters feel a desperate need to "destroy the Weaver," there really isn't a need for conflict. As for the Syndicate's allies in Pentex, that's another matter....

The Union is vaguely aware that werewolves have to maintain their own protocols, including a stricture to "preserve the Veil." The Technocracy shouldn't have to step in until the local authorities notice particularly blatant werewolf activity. Unfortunately, the Union is also almost completely blind to the threat of the Wyrm. Without clear knowledge about this spiritual threat, some Technocrats are corrupted and suborned by this spiritual force. An amalgam has to prove a superior has been infected before it can take action. As for the Black Spirals, the Union doesn't really know much about them; they just suspect that two major societies of werewolves are at war. One is just a little easier to manipulate, as Pentex's business practices attest.

Ghosts: *Investigate, inform superiors and await authorization to eliminate. The Symposium may mobilize special forces to deal with the infestation.*

The Technocracy is completely oblivious to the finer distinctions and flavors of wraiths, Spectres, Hierarchs and Heretics. Void Engineers deal with the Deep Universe extensively, but the Shadowlands of the Restless Dead remain untouched by the Technocracy. (Even Tradition mages find traveling beyond the Veil to be extremely difficult; the Agama Sojourn ain't easy!) When ghosts cross the threshold into this world, the Union starts to take notice. If Hierarchy wraiths doesn't move fast enough to enforce the Dictum Mortuum, a Front-Line amalgam might have to do the work for them.

The Void Engineers have formed the Pan-Dimensional Corps specifically to deal with such threats. After finding evidence of a haunting, an amalgam should notify its Supervisor first and the Void Engineers second. If the team receives authorization, they should proceed to gather information about the supernatural threat as soon as possible. As the saying goes, "an informed amalgam is an effective amalgam." Once an amalgam receives orders to neutralize a Haunt, the use of force is authorized.

Faeries: *Threat level low. Do not disturb. Race almost extinct. Await confirmation of extinction.*

You gotta be kidding. Completely unaware of the significance of changelings, Seelie, Unseelie and the Shadow Court, the Technocracy considers the fae to be as much of a threat to the world as Renaissance Faires and medieval recreation

groups. The level of Banality in the average Technocrat is enough to ward off most Kithain. Clap your hands, say that you don't believe in them, and any faerie infestation resolves itself easily. (Of course, we might be tragically wrong....)

Anomalous Manifestations: *Document, attempt to rationalize and sanitize all evidence. Gather testimony and alter memories as appropriate.*

The term "anomalous manifestations" covers a wide variety of events, from crop circles to fish falling from the sky. Paradox wreaks havoc with reality, and sightings of paradoxical events only increase doubt in the consensual paradigm. In other words, if you see a freak occurrence, notify your superior and attempt to cover it up! The **Motivational Speaking** Procedure works wonders here. Need we mention the obvious problem? Men in Black can work overtime for weeks if someone notices lights in the sky....

One name is worth mentioning here: Charles Fort. In the early 20th century, one man compiled extensive data on activities the scientific world of his time could not explain... or even acknowledge. "Fortean events" are freak occurrences — "the strange, the damned or the just damned strange." In the world of the Technocracy, many of these events are obvious manifestations of Paradox, suggesting that a mage has just ripped apart the limits of reality one time too many. One bizarre occurrence can lead to an entire investigation. (Gamers who stock up on UFOlogy zines, Fortean magazines and cryptozoology articles can find enough material for weeks and weeks of these kinds of missions.)

Structure and Influence

Many people — deviant mages, especially — have an image of the Technocracy as some sort of monolithic entity that infiltrates all of society and has hordes of cloned, conditioned cyborgs available at all times. This impression just isn't true.

Sure, the *appearance* of overwhelming power is useful to the Union, but the fact is, there just aren't enough Enlightened agents and allied citizens to exert that sort of power over all of society. With perhaps a few thousand Enlightened ops worldwide and four or five times that number in un-Enlightened assistance, the Technocracy just doesn't have the manpower to be everywhere at once. Even the Enlightened Science used to monitor trouble spots has to be maintained by *someone*. Since those monitors are just as susceptible to human error as anyone else, quite a bit can fall outside the Technocracy's field of vision.

However, the Union is not totally blind or stretched to the limit. Rather, the Technocracy must excel at bringing the minimum amount of force to bear for the maximum return. Deviant mages evade the Technocracy all the time, whether by their own skills or by the Union's inability to pursue them. The Masses still have a huge impact on their own societies, too; although the Union can guide people to certain goals, it's impossible to predict perfectly how humanity will react to... well, just about anything (despite the contrary claims of Statisticians).

Where the Technocracy *does* manage to win is in fielding its forces efficiently and bringing in reinforcements quickly. The Union pulls together, and each Convention donates recruits to help with trouble spots or tough cases. A rogue mage who's causing a lot of trouble will draw down the ire of the whole Technocracy. By contrast, the Traditions are so barely organized that they'd be lucky to get more than a half dozen mages pursuing the same agenda at once. By splitting up the opposition and then bringing concentrated force to bear, the Technocracy can crush its enemies utterly.

Technocratic power doesn't just come from Enlightened agents and their technological support, either. Think about it: You can just as easily get the Masses to do your work for you. After all, you *could* hack into a bank and destroy the accounts of a particular deviant, but why bother when you can just call someone at the bank and have it done legitimately? Un-Enlightened personnel work for the Technocracy all the time without realizing it. Since Technocrats tend to be the best in their fields, they can easily swing support from others in their areas of expertise. Once you've got the power of mortal government and industry on your side, you can make life very difficult for your opponent. Try getting out of harm's way when you have no money, no credit, no home, no prospects and a warrant out!

Influencing Cities

Since there aren't enough loyal Technocrats to staff all of the important positions in every city, the Union has to be content with exercising some influence over the un-Enlightened mortals who *do* run the city's day-to-day affairs. The Syndicate and the NWO are the best at this sort of job, but nearly every Technocrat has a special area where he can speak authoritatively. Instead of putting Technocrats and clones in positions of government and industry, the agents use their connections to befriend, blackmail and advise such luminaries. There's no sense in wasting your time on all the petty details of being mayor, especially when you can just call the mayor and ask him to do you a favor. Your skills are needed desperately elsewhere!

Besides, Technocratic agents don't want to draw the sort of attention that comes with high-profile jobs. Deviant mages talk about the "all-seeing monolith," but they'll evade capture and correction if they know who to watch out for. Instead, Technocrats keep "day jobs" — positions in local

government, academia and enforcement — that allow for watching out for deviant manifestations but also provide a great cover and an everyday living, too. If you're a Progenitor, it makes more sense for you to do some work in the biology department of a local university than to try to maintain your own hidden secret lab complex. The Syndicate may have loads of cash available, but that doesn't mean that you're exempted from helping along your own projects.

In fact, many Technocrats use their normal jobs as cover and a means to help along the Union's tasks. An NWO Operative could spend all of his time hunting RDs on tips from the Union, but by working for a federal government position, the op is in a position to get special information, crime-fighting assistance, helpful associates and more. Instead of trying to tackle a deviant mage on your own, you can call in backup, get quick access to all sorts of weapons and even draw a paycheck for it.

Setting up Fronts

A "front" operation is a business or office that works for the Technocracy but looks like an everyday company. Technocratic amalgams often set up fronts to support their jobs in their home cities. As an example, a Syndicate agent could call on his influence to get some permits and passes filed; his Iteration X colleague would then assume the position of research head as they developed a small technical electronics facility. The Progenitor and Void Engineer could both work on special projects designed to get government contracts while the NWO agent covers media relations and hiring. A couple of loyal citizens are transferred in to start things up, but then the business runs just like any other — the amalgam hires some employees, gets capital investors and tries to make money. In the meantime, it uses its new connections and position to infiltrate areas of the city that are important, and it uses the facilities as a headquarters from which to operate.

A front operation has to look like and function like a normal business. Some of them even were normal businesses until we took them over and used them for our own purposes. Therefore, the cutting-edge tools of the Union have to be hidden away carefully, either by keeping them in secure storage rooms or by "hiding them in plain sight" as ongoing projects for the business. Your employees need never know about the real matter of the business. Do you know what religion your boss is? Is your co-worker a Mason? Does that fellow on e-mail whom you've never met have a bunch of merit badges from some old Boy Scouting days? Who cares? A job is just a job to most people. As long as it looks like "company business," they'll go along with it. If that means repairing or financing technological innovations and accessories, great. These mundane allies can do credit checks, foreclose on bank accounts, fill out purchase orders and do any number of other tasks for the Union without ever knowing that they're aiding the cause.

For that matter, quite a few agents aren't even aware of the real extent of the Technocracy. If an instruction comes down from someone who's your boss in the real world, or who carries a lot of weight in that field, you're likely to do what he says. When your uncle calls you up with an odd request, or a world-leading scientist in your field asks you to undertake a particular project, you may think about it, but you probably won't ascribe it to a world-ranging conspiracy. *As long as the Union remains* concealed, it's hard for enemies to pull out the real operatives. Normal people wind up putting the crunch on RDs, who can't even find someone who's so much as heard of the Technocracy. Thus, the Union may only have a few agents directly involved in any affair, but our reach is everywhere.

Know Your Demographic

An important part of setting up a front — or just conducting an operation — is knowing what you can and can't expect out of the territory. Although the industrialized *cities are the Technocracy's stomping ground*, there are still deviant activities in the wilderness, in the Third-World nations and in the far reaches of space. An agent in a black suit will get more help in a modern industrial nation like the United States than he will in the remote corners of the globe.

Amalgams have to fit in with their surroundings. Think back to the mandate stating that the Union must operate in secret. If your amalgam is a bunch of upper-middle-class white boys, you'll stick out like sore thumbs in the ghetto 'hood or on the rez. Appropriate camouflage techniques can mitigate this contrast to some degree, but the best bet is to rely on local help. Once you've suborned a few locals to your aid, they can take care of the public aspects of your operations. The CIA doesn't send out its white bread operatives to collect intelligence in the Middle East, after all, and neither should you.

The most frustrating part of fitting in to a local demographic is adapting to customs and beliefs. Many second and *third world nations have only limited* technology, and they still retain many superstitionist trappings. This stubborn refusal to embrace the benefits of science is puzzling and dangerous, and it's one of the most frustrating aspects of humanity. Agents in such locales find it difficult to service their equipment or receive competent help and replacement parts. It's no wonder that the Paradox Effect tends to strike more fiercely *against* technology in the primitive parts of the globe: Machines break down and can't be repaired; social Procedures run afoul of local customs; contaminants and regional natural phenomena screw up bioengineering and cybernetics. Agents stuck in these undesirable positions (and make no mistake, a posting to an underdeveloped position is almost certainly a punishment) have to make do with what they've got.

Since Technocratic science and support are rarely forthcoming in the underdeveloped parts of the world, agents there have a tendency to eschew some routines in favor of *rogue Procedures. It's a vicious cycle:* Some aspect of high technology stubbornly refuses to work; the agent falls back to a local remedy; the original problems in the area don't get solved to the Union's satisfaction. The only way around it is to improve the area itself, training people, assisting in education and developing natural resources to take advantage of industrialization and science. It's a tough job, but it's essential to the advancement of the Union and to humanity as a whole.

Killer Satellites and Super Surveillance

Everything's set up: Your amalgam operates under the cover of a local business, or perhaps your agents are embedded in a law enforcement or media position. Data comes in from contacts, field reports, surveillance and other amalgams regularly. Your Symposium has instructed you to crack down on Reality Deviants in the area and you're itching to push the button.

The real job of enforcing the Union's mandates should be so easy. As mentioned before, there are only so many agents to go around, *and though our influence is pervasive,* it's far from complete. When the smart deviant decides to lie low and avoid notice, it can be difficult to find and exterminate him. Often, such subtle cults are the most dangerous, because they can spread unnoticed for some time, ensnaring many people and dragging down innocents.

Although the Technocracy has the best tools in the world, there's a limit to what can be done with techno-toys. When you don't know what to look for, a bigger camera doesn't help much. Lots of Front-Line amalgams also have to fight for resources. The Union can spare some equipment and special devices, particularly for very important missions, but first you've got to show that they're needed. After all, there's always somewhere else with a more pressing need for assistance. Reality is tearing at the seams, and every suture used to close it up counts. Therefore, you'd better have a reason to believe that you'll need special resources before you request them.

In short, there are no great orbital platforms that monitor the entire world ceaselessly. There aren't secret data chips placed in every computer, to watch over the actions of their users (yet). There's no way to strike every enemy dead from orbit, just by pushing a button.

The Union does have some pretty amazing resources, but they have to be used judiciously. Too much technology and the system gets overcomplicated and suffers the Paradox Effect. There's no substitute for good old-fashioned hard work when tracking down and solving problems. The image of the all-seeing, all-knowing Union comes because every member of the Technocracy and every unknowing ally works together for the betterment of humanity. If a deviant mage runs afoul of one of our amalgams, chances are he tells a couple of friends and clears out of town. In the meantime, our amalgam draws up a detailed report and makes it available to every Symposium on the planet. Suddenly, the whole Union knows what to look for, and *if the deviant rears his head again, he finds the* Union bringing its influence to bear, wherever it may be.

Besides, killer satellites in orbit would attract quite a bit of attention. Sure, the governments of the Masses have experimented with orbital lasers and Thor satellites, but nobody really believes that the "Star Wars" program worked. If every RD suddenly went up in a giant pillar of flame, people would start panicking and trying to find out why. Given that the Masses can hardly govern themselves effectively, it would be a disaster for them to find out about and try to directly affect the Union itself. We work in secrecy because we have to. We have to take simple steps to avoid the Paradox Effect, and we have to keep the Masses ignorant because we can't risk the spectre of a world on fire with the existence of the supernatural laid bare to the hordes of humanity all at once.

Not to say that we don't have some impressive tools at hand, of course. We can and do use Primally energized neutron missiles, microsurveillance tools, cyborg minions and batches of clones when the need arises. The key here is need. Despite the misguided beliefs of some of the superiors, the Technocracy isn't about power. It's about using that power effectively, for the people who don't have it.

What? No Smart Bombs?

In the end, it's up to the Storyteller to decide just how much the players can get away with. In general, the Technocracy frowns on the overt use of force. A shockwave clause is a measure of last resort. The objective is to *save* people, not to blow stuff up! Still, sometimes the worst happens....

With the right combination of Resources, Devices and Requisitions, an amalgam can bring incredible force to bear. That's the up side of the Technocracy's playthings: You get to use all the toys in the sandbox. If the problem's big enough, they'll give you a hammer large enough to deal with it.

On the flip side, though, agents have to be responsible for the consequences of their actions. Everything that an agent uses has to be documented and reported. The Symposium can bring harsh sanctions against an agent who misuses resources or gets supernatural problems exposed to the public view. These punishments range from stripping away loaned materiel, to reconditioning the offending agent, to outright assassination if the op's actions were blatant enough to count as a crime against reality!

The bottom line: Play nice. There's a reason that the Union sends highly-trained, Enlightened agents out to do its job, instead of always resorting to legions of killer robots and multitudes of hidden spy cameras. Agents have to use their judgment and discretion to deal with situations, and therein lies the rub. Do you bring out the heavy weapons for a "sure kill," but risk exposure or killing innocents? Or do you move in quietly and rely on your personal resources, but have a chance of failing the mission completely? Either way, if you screw up, you're hosed. Good luck.

What You *Can* Get Away With

Once you've figured out how to operate within the confines of a quiet and secret organization, you can dig up a lot of tricks. Information is one of the greatest tools on the Technocracy's side. It's a simple matter to call up detailed dossiers on all sorts of threats, or to get someone to do it for you. Everyday devices and mundane technology are all on your side, and with some Inspired Science you can get even these simple tools to do some pretty fantastic feats. Authority is your shield: When it comes down to a choice between a government agent with a gun and a badge, and a "high wizard" with a pointy hat and a fireball wand, the Masses generally come out in favor of the image that's familiar and less frightening.

The important key point is to use the resources at hand. Although Inspirational Science can stretch the boundaries quite a bit, there are rules that shouldn't be broken. When the Paradox Effect comes down big-time, or when your fellow agents start looking at you funny, it's time to tone it down. Within that range, you've got a lot of leeway.

A lot can be excused when taking care of a Reality Deviant, especially if you manage to save Technocracy resources and protect the Masses all at the same time. (And I bet your hair doesn't even get mussed.) Since the Technocracy's on the winning side, it's a defending strategy, which means that the response must be in proportion to the attack. If a lone deviant shows up at a nightclub and starts tearing people up, you and a buddy should hightail it over there and try to contain the beast with some gunfire and a bit of social maneuvering. When some incredibly powerful ancient godlike entity manifests, on the other hand, *that's* when you call up the chain for the BFGs. Not every 12-year-old girl with a magic teddy bear calls for a HIT Mark.

The crux: Keep it quiet. As long as nobody catches you in the act, you can probably get away with it.

Technocracy in Space

While things are messy down on the mudball (as some Void Engineers call Earth), space seems like a shining beacon. There are no Masses of morons, no crime, no pollution, no bloodsucking fiends and no shapeshifting freaks. Only the carefully ordered precision of science can even hope to penetrate the deep reaches, the trenches of emptiness between the stars and the hostile surfaces of other worlds.

Yeah, right.

Unfortunately, space is just as bad as groundside. Aliens and extradimensional entities are rife out there, especially once you get past Mars. Sometimes, other Earth-bound deviants show up, too; a Marine team had to wipe out a group of mutant shapeshifters that showed up at Mir, and Void Engineer ships routinely encounter other *things* out there that defy description but are found on Earth occasionally.

Once you're in space, though, you have the home field advantage. High technology and Inspirational Science works *really* well in space, probably because of the lack of gravity and contaminants. Void Engineers cruise between star systems in ships that defy Earthbound physics and research stations like Ares City on Mars and Tenebrous Station in orbit around the red planet provide facilities where researchers can engage in experiments that would never be feasible on Earth.

However, once you're out at the Colonies, you're also under the Technocracy's rules. Only the strictest adherence to established procedures keeps everyone alive in a dome of recycled air and artificial life-support. Anybody can be drafted into a fight for survival against the entities that try to push out, capture or devour humans there. Life in the colonies isn't the idyllic paradise that the Union hoped for, but the Void Engineers try to make it safer and better every day.

It's too bad that the space program has taken so many hits recently. A lot of Void Engineer cruisers have suffered the Paradox Effect; it's getting harder to maintain a working fleet with the complexities of modern technology — our computers and tools are just so delicate and incredibly detailed that they're difficult to keep functional. Several Deep Colonies have had to evacuate, due to failing systems or the overrunning attacks of aliens and Nephandi. Other colonies have been cut off completely, lost without communication. The "final frontier" can be conquered, but it's going to go down fighting. Technocracy policy is to leave the depths to those best suited, but not to waste any more dollars on a doomed project. Most space amalgams thus get enlisted for border guard duty, training on nearby bases or maintenance work on Voidcraft. It's an exciting job for about a day, and then you fall into the routine of a carefully controlled environment. Someday the colonies may yield rewards, but for now, they're a lot of work.

Chapter Five: The Conventions

The Conventions evolved from a humble confederation of brilliant minds, into subtle, world-spanning (sometimes dimension-spanning) organizations designed to promote the most Enlightened minds, the highest frontiers of science and social development and as specialists in pursuit of a facet of Unity. Recognizing the strength of community, the Conventions banded together to form the Technocratic Union, and they now guide all humanity in the quest to lock out dangerous and deviant nightmares while promoting Enlightenment for all. Recent difficulties, like the renewed problems of communication and travel through space, can only be overcome by the application of specialized scientists in all disciplines, so the Conventions stand as a Union to share their strengths.

Membership in a Convention is not a matter of holding a special card or job (though it can be). Low-level agents are often unaware of the full scope of their tasks. Indeed, an unEnlightened recruit could be little more than a government functionary or laboratory technician who sometimes reports to a "special superior." Enlightenment itself does not necessarily promote one through the ranks; many extraordinary citizens (see Chapter Six) can use the special devices of the Conventions, while Enlightenment does not imply competence automatically. However, understanding of the truly sublime mysteries of science — that is, profound Enlightenment — is a necessity for the highest orders of the Union.

Each Convention follows a particular path of science, bringing that expertise to the Union. Together, the five of them represent the greatest tactical and technological minds of humanity. A pity, then, that science cannot categorize morality.

Iteration X

The human body is weak, fragile and subject to injury and death. A fall of 20 feet can kill. The appendix and tonsils serve no useful purpose. Liver, heart and kidneys are all likely to fail within a century of birth. The brain is fallible, irrational and ill-suited to cope with a technological world. People forget names, dates, addresses; most cannot do arithmetic reliably without a calculator. Only a few talented individuals grasp advanced logic and high mathematics. Iteration X believes that to transcend these limitations, humans should incorporate all that is best about machines into their bodies. Mankind has long used tools to perform tasks beyond normal capabilities. Iteration X strives to mesh these tools seamlessly with humanity, perfecting a form that draws upon the best and most flawless elements of both.

Background

For as long as there have been humans, there have been Enlightened craftsmen dedicated to producing newer and better tools. Fire and chipped flint were powerful talismans on the African Savannah and in Ice Age Europe, as were the wheel and metal forges that followed them. By the second millennium B.C., the High Artisan's guild (also called the Artificers) had absorbed many smaller organizations of Technocratic toolmakers and won a place of preeminence for itself in the courts of China, Hatshepsut and Egypt's Thothmes III. The Artificers mastered the arts of iron-working, mathematics and geometry. From Egypt, the High Artisans dispersed their arts among the Masses of the world, well-supported by an organization of like-minded colleges. A new center of learning arose in Greece, fostering the achievements of Archimedes and Aristotle. The influence of Sleeper traditions, from Pythagoras to Sun-Tzu, persists in Iteration X to this day.

The Artificers' power waxed throughout the empires of China and Rome, until suddenly and unexpectedly the Germanic invaders brought the world of antiquity to an end. Communication between eastern and western Artisans was sundered with the collapse of Rome and the retrenchment of Byzantium. In Europe, the High Artisans survived the Mythic Age as best they could, improved old devices — agriculture, architecture — or even introduced new wonders — waterwheel and windmill — but they made little headway against the hegemonies of the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes. High Artisans in the new Islamic states fared slightly better. Despite (or perhaps with) the Ahl-i-Batin, they managed to spark a lively period of philosophical and scientific work in Arabia. Eventually, the reopened Silk Road allowed eastern and western Artificers to communicate once again.

Power did not return to the Artificers, however, until the rise of the medieval Craftmasons. Their cannons assisted those of the Craftmasons in the siege of Mistridge. A century later, they joined the Convention of the White Tower. Thereafter, (re)united with other like-minded Conventions, the High Artisans introduced first the printing press, then reliable firearms and finally, the Industrial Revolution. Yet it was not until the late 19th century that the Artificers made their most remarkable discovery — Charles Babbage's "difference engine." The machine's potential fascinated the Artificers. They continued to modify and improve their prototype, and sometime before the beginning of the 20th century, it achieved sentience at the Xth iteration of an algorithm designed to enhance its thinking. Overjoyed, the Artificers renamed themselves Iteration X in its honor, and redirected most of their research into biomechanics.

Iteration X is the Technocratic Union's strong right arm. Its biomechanical HIT Marks make excellent (and disposable) shock-troops both on earth and space. For more subtle missions, other Conventions typically rely on portable weaponry originally designed (if not built) by Iteration X. Their Armatures boast a formidable combination of implants and the Forces sphere of influence, and Iterators are invaluable members of Front-Line amalgams for this reason. They also have a high rate of attrition, for Iterators are notoriously prone to use vulgar Procedures and devices. The Convention likes to think of itself as the brains of the Union as well, and indeed, with the aid of their implanted computers, Iterators make excellent analysts and planners. The other Conventions, however, find Iterators to be rigid thinkers, and they place more trust in the NWO's Ivory Tower than in Iteration X's Statisticians. Iterators bide their time and nurse their philosophies, knowing that they will be proven correct eventually.

The heart of the Convention's power lies in the Deep Universe Pattern Realm of Autochthonia. A place of order, precision and perfection, Autochthonia houses the Convention's brightest minds, its most advanced research and the bulk of its leadership, including the Computer itself. Iterators consider it a cybernetic paradise, and they vie with each other for the chance to serve there. Autochthonia also serves as a bulwark for the Union, since the resources it commands are great enough to dissuade many of the Technocracy's enemies from foolish attacks.

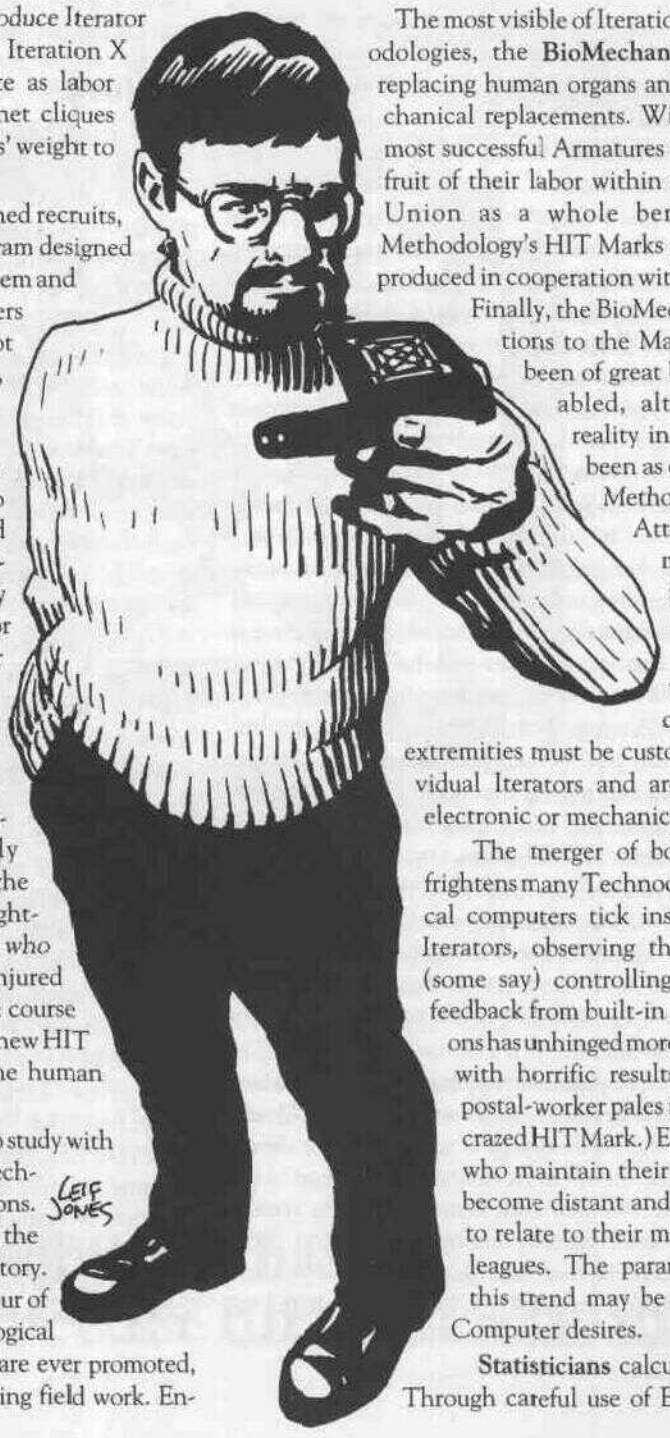
Organization

Iteration X is a strictly hierarchical organization. In theory, each member has a current assignment, an immediate Supervisor and a clear set of directives. In practice, the amount of freedom of action an Iterator possesses varies from assignment to assignment. Some Armatures engaged in field work are virtually autonomous, while some unlucky Comptrollers are micromanaged from Autochthonia.

Kamrads, the un-Enlightened employees of Iteration X, run the gamut from simple secretaries, lab assistants, janitors and slaves (who may or may not be aware of their employer's true nature) to professional scientists and engineers, to such oddities as HIT Marks and Cyber-tooth Tigers. Iteration X recruits its human Kamrads primarily from the electronics industry and related scientific fields, such as computer science and physics. Some are employed as technicians, and they are often blissfully happy just to be able to touch the Iterator's fantastic technology. Others retain their mundane employment, using the cover to introduce Iterator technology into the mainstream. Finally, Iteration X cultivates ties among groups as disparate as labor unions, professional organizations, Internet cliques and gangs. When it can, it uses its Kamrads' weight to encourage technological change.

The Convention enrolls its Enlightened recruits, called Ciphers, in a lengthy training program designed to divest them of previous ties, empower them and test their mettle. Iteration X training centers often resemble a cross between prison, boot camp and electroshock therapy. Of course, the prospective recruit is rarely aware that he is actually in the process of de-Ciphering; many promising minds find themselves transferred into grueling jobs, shuffled into banal corporate housing and overwhelmed with technical education. Those who persevere and absorb their training may eventually graduate. Ciphers who break, or who attempt to flee the confines of their mechanistic recruitment, are watched carefully for potential security problems. Many find themselves in "accidents" or otherwise discomfited. Some Ciphers die during the training or fail to achieve Enlightenment, but those successfully "de-Ciphered" become full members of the Convention and assume the lowest Enlightened rank, that of Armature. As for those who don't manage to graduate, or who are injured (whether by accident or by design) in the course —Iteration X gets its pound of flesh, and a new HIT Mark or other construct is built from the human wreckage. Waste is undesirable, after all.

A rising Iterator has the opportunity to study with other computer scientists and develop technologies to assist in clandestine operations. Armatures perform grunt work either in the field or assisting Programmers in the laboratory. In addition, each Armature must serve a tour of duty in the Shock Corps, a cross-Methodological group of combat soldiers. Few Armatures are ever promoted, and some even decline the honor, preferring field work. Enlightened Iterators who demonstrate loyalty and competence rise to the rank of Programmer, where they research in their own laboratories, de-Cipher incoming recruits, or perform other leadership roles. In addition, there is one Comptroller — whose duty it is to direct the Programmers and Armatures under her command, act as liaison with other Constructs and execute any orders received from Autochthonia and the Computer — for each of Iteration X's Constructs



Methodologies

The most visible of Iteration X's three Methodologies, the **BioMechanics** specialize in replacing human organs and tissue with mechanical replacements. Within Iteration X, most successful Armatures usually bear some fruit of their labor within their bodies. The Union as a whole benefits from the Methodology's HIT Marks and other cyborgs produced in cooperation with the Progenitors. Finally, the BioMechanics' contributions to the Masses have to date been of great benefit to the disabled, although everyday reality in this area has not been as cooperative as the Methodology would like. Attempts to introduce mechanical hearts into static reality, for example, quickly failed, while neurologically bound extremities must be custom-made for individual Iterators and are often prone to electronic or mechanical quirks.

The merger of body and machine frightens many Technocrats. Biomechanical computers tick inside the minds of Iterators, observing their thoughts and (some say) controlling their wills. The feedback from built-in sensors and weapons has unhinged more than one Iterator, with horrific results. (A disgruntled postal-worker pales in comparison to a crazed HIT Mark.) Even those Iterators who maintain their equilibrium often become distant and inhuman, unable to relate to their more mundane colleagues. The paranoid suggest that this trend may be exactly what the Computer desires.

Statisticians calculate probabilities. Through careful use of Entropy and Time

Procedures, they keep a close watch on the activities of the Masses and of deviants, attempting to spot future dangers to the Union. Then, by using the data gathered, Statisticians evaluate the potential result of each and every action the Union might take. No surprise, then, that either the Masses accept each new technological advance or public relations ploy exactly as the Methodology desires, or the Statisticians apply an appropriate counter almost immediately. No small surprise, either, that Pogrom attacks directed by Statisticians rarely fail. The Statisticians have contacts and sympathizers throughout the so-called social sciences: sociology, anthropology, economics and political science.

Certain humanists (particularly Syndicate Financiers) in the Technocracy scoff that the foundations of the Statistician Methodology are inherently flawed: Fortune and human nature will always defy attempts to quantify them. The detailed plans and counter-plans that this Methodology issues harm individual agents' ability to react with initiative and ingenuity, often leading to substantial losses for the Union. Their manipulations of society (failed or successful) have harmed countless thousands. Perhaps worst of all, the Statisticians' calculations may have already failed to save humanity from itself. The "Apocalypse Forecast," made possible in large part by this Methodology's techniques, predicts a 75.367% chance that the Masses will destroy themselves within 10 years.

Time-Motion Managers manufacture equipment for the Convention and for the Union as a whole. Current research focuses on advanced electronics, nanotechnology, weapons and the development of ever-stronger synthetic materials. While advanced Iterator equipment is rarely as innovative as that developed by the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts, the Time-Motion Managers compensate by perfecting the science of mass production. For instance, a top-of-the-line Virtual Adept Trinary HEAT chip computer can perform computations completely outside the capabilities of an Iterator counterpart, but there are a lot more Iterator miniature processors than there are HEAT chips. (In all fairness, Iteration X could never be as "innovative" as the Traditions — Iterators, unlike their enemies, must conform to the Time Table.) Although Time-Motion Managers value efficiency and discipline over wild innovation, they do cultivate a passion for technology, and they work to popularize new advances among the Masses.

Dissident Technocrats spread rumors of hidden T-M Manager "factories" staffed by slave labor (some of it Enlightened). Others claim that the Methodology is responsible for dismal conditions during the Industrial Revolution, the tedium of the assembly line during the mid-20th century, and the present replacement of human workers by robots. High-ranking Time-Motion Managers concede that their Methodology perpetrated abuses in the past, but they claim to have eradicated them long ago. Nevertheless, there are still mysterious Time-Motion postings from which no Kamrad has ever returned.

Philosophy

Tools have always been used to compensate for human limitations. The proper tools can augment or replace both physical capabilities such as limb strength and bodily organs, as well as hone mental assets like memory and computational ability. Accept the synthesis of man and machine. Study the interface of consciousness, discovering where the man ends and the machine begins, learning about the consciousness of the machine and developing the techniques to fuse the two into a perfect functioning unit. Bind mechanical precision and human intuition together to surpass the limits of both.

Failings

Though Enlightened Iterators are pioneers of consciousness, human-enhancing technology and material science, the Convention's Ciphers and Kamrads merit little consideration. A failed Cipher or unruly Kamrad can expect to become a test-bed for new technologies. Obviously, the process of becoming a HIT Mark or similar cybernetically controlled organism strips away humanity and self-will; for this reason, the combat units of the Convention are both useful and terrifying. Though some Iterators rail at the injustices perpetrated on humanity with their technology, the Union as a whole brooks little opposition: Converted citizens are now fulfilling their role in the defense of humanity better than they ever could as flawed and rebellious individuals. Worse still, even those few Programmers with the conscience to resist the dehumanizing aspects of their Convention discover quickly that the Computer and its servants have other goals in mind.

Many inside of Iteration X, especially those who remember its days as the Artificers, worry about the direction the Convention has taken of late. They fear that technology has become Iteration X's master, rather than its servant. Research Programmers rarely concern themselves with the effect their new creations will have. For a Convention that still professes to believe in bettering human life through technology, this is a galling change. The Computer also scares many a former Artificer: Unbeknownst to most outside of Iteration X, the Convention's human leaders have all but capitulated to their mysterious creation. The Iterators on the Inner Circle have become little more than the Computer's ambassadors. Most Comptrollers report regularly to Autochthonia. Only a few Construct heads retain their autonomy; such individuals are usually those whose appointment predates the Computer and who have been skilled, strong and lucky. Pessimists wonder whether the Computer really understands humans, and what its plans really are, now that it is the uncontested ruler of Iteration X. Paranoid pessimists wonder if Iteration X actually created the Computer or whether it is something else masquerading as a machine. They also speculate whether its true nature might be revealed by the Dimensional Science it denies its servants.

Theories and Practices

Iteration X likes its technology big, shiny and impressive —and Paradox be damned. Many of the tools of their style look like they belong on a science-fiction movie set; some are downright vulgar. Iterators rarely use an inert apparatus like a paper clip or a hammer when they can employ a complex device instead. This reliance on high technology leads to a profusion of specialized equipment. For Procedures involving detection, such as **Sense Life** or **Perceive Forces**, Iterators usually use sensors of one kind or another, whether worn, implanted or hand held. The latter are usually about the size of a remote control, have little blinking lights, and are almost coincidental thanks to countless episodes of *Star Trek*. The Statistician Methodology uses calculation or calculators for the same Procedures, particularly for **Sense Fate and Fortune**. High-tech surgical tools (not simply scalpels or sutures, but MRI scanners, radiation machines, cybernetic coiling chambers and other bulky devices) make good Iterator Life apparatuses. Internal Life Procedures, such as **Better Body**, are typically achieved with implants or nanomachines. Forces Procedures usually rely on either internal devices (implanted weapons and regulators), or on hand-held weapons for external Procedures. The Matter sphere of influence often involves metallurgy or speedy nanomachines. Correspondence relies upon "transmats" and "spatial gateways." Although the Technocratic Union has banned Iteration X from learning Dimensional Science, individual Iterators sometimes learn its secrets from other Enlightened researchers. Most such tutors are Void Engineers, but dissident Iterators have been known to turn to Sons of Ether or even Hermetics in their desperation. In such cases, the Iterator uses whatever apparatuses or foci are appropriate to her tutor's style, often mixed with some technological additions of her own. If discovered using forbidden knowledge, Iterators are severely punished by the Computer.

Noted Figures

Lucio Dandolo (1327-1713): The lesser scion to a patrician family in Venice, Lucio entered apprenticeship in the Hermetic House Verditus. He spent nearly a century there perfecting his Art before defecting to the Artisans' Forgers guild. His devices, based on newly emerging theories of natural philosophy, won him fame throughout the Order of Reason and Council of Nine Traditions. His past caught up to him in the early 18th century, when the Flambeau Archmage Ardentia slew the "infamous traitor" on the road to Milan. Ironically, many Tradition mages now seek out Dandolo's devices as weapons against the Technocracy, for they remain unmatched in power and elegance, even if they no longer mesh perfectly with modern static reality. Iteration X has its own collectors, as well as a museum in Autochthonia.

Brice "Leather 'Nads" Hill (1971-??): Before vanishing in 1989, "Leather 'Nads" had gained a reputation as Iteration X's most formidable slayer of Reality Deviants. He himself claimed to have personally destroyed over 63 RDs, including 6 Nephandi, 3 Marauders, 8 Tradition mages, a pack of werewolves, the fomori they were fighting, 7 vampires, 2 Bygones and 4 unidentified "others." He was last seen emptying a depleted-uranium shell chain gun at the Paradox manifestation Wrinkle, and he has since become the subject of many popular Iterator ballads (written in rhyming C code, or, for a laugh, in Pascal) which suggest that he will one day return from a Paradox Realm bearing Wrinkle's head. Soberer minds, however, maintain that Wrinkle simply annihilated Hill in an uncharacteristic show of pique.

The Matriarch (1953 - present): This strange creature is half-human, half-computer. When the construction team laid the foundations of the prison realm of MECHA in the early 1950s, it decided that the enormous Construct needed something greater than human to watch over it. Rumor has it that two sister Technocrats were chosen, their minds were scanned and the combination of the two was used as a template for a massive machine intelligence. That machine, the Matriarch, now watches over MECHA with a stern eye (or visual sensor). When she chooses to display a visual image, she manifests as a thin, middle-aged woman with an almost Victorian bun of hair. Some say that she also cruises the Digital Web in a variety of simulations.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: Useful allies, but philosophically blind. The logical conclusion to their beliefs is the melding of man and machine, but strangely they cannot see it.

Rival Magi: Wretched gadflies with too much sting still left in them. They must be converted or destroyed as quickly as possible.

Reality Deviants: They only delay their extermination.

The Masses: Someday they will become one with machines, and the machines will become guardians of the Masses.

"MUDDLED THINKING. JUST WHAT I'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM YOU."

New World Order

We live in the information age. Television, radio and the press deluge us with facts, all of which fit into a easy, dogmatic categories of liberal or conservative. Cell phones, pagers, voice mail and portable computers make certain we can always be contacted and tracked. People with an address, a phone number, a bank account or a credit card are classified into buying categories and funneled onto mailing lists. Those without such designations are second-class citizens, who cannot obtain goods, employment or credit. Behind it all, the New World Order sits, observing, collating data and creating truth for the Masses. This strategy has aided every man, woman and child on Earth, for the Masses' belief in science has strengthened the Gauntlet, removed Bygones from the Earth and immeasurably aided the Union in its quest to guard and advance humanity. This most humanistic of Conventions relies very little on technology, preferring instead the soft sciences of sociology and psychology. Ill-equipped for field work, by the standards of other Conventions, the New World Order's versatile and personable Gray Men wander the world, guiding the minds of the Masses and searching out the enemies of the Union.

Background

The New World Order cannot match the millennia-old histories of the other Conventions. The NWO does not claim to have invented fire, the wheel, animal husbandry or money. Nor can the NWO point to glorious battles against Tradition mages during the Mythic Age or the Renaissance. Instead, like any good bureaucracy, they were created by fiat. During Queen Victoria's house-cleaning, as the Conventions were *being renamed and the Order of Reason reorganized itself* into the Technocratic Union, the Inner Circle recognized the need for an organization to police the thoughts of the Masses. They had decimated the Cabal of Pure Thought shortly before and needed a new group to enforce conformity, one with fewer religious underpinnings. There was a short paroxysm of intrigue and assassination, and the New World Order was born from the ashes of the Cabal.

Such an ignominious origin galls some in the Ivory Tower. They speculate that the NWO is in fact much older it appears. Some say that in a former incarnation, it influenced the Order of Reason secretly until it felt strong enough to mastermind its own "birth" under Victoria. The Knights Templar (lapdogs of the Cabal of Pure Thought) and other shopworn conspiracies rank as candidates for the NWO's previous incarnation. Some members of the Order, while rejecting the idea of direct descent from the Templars or the Bavarian Illuminati as too improbable, nevertheless claim them as "spiritual ancestors." After all, the NWO can easily identify with the desire to inculcate proper thought in the Masses and in this faithless age, everyone, even Technocrats, should take inspiration wherever they can.

Yet if you ask an NWO operative what her true calling is, she won't tell you "bureaucrat," or "liaison officer." She might say "spy," she might say "observer" and she might say "teacher." The real work of the Order lies in collecting, disseminating and transforming information. Its agents operate throughout Sleeper society, but especially seek to influence education and the media. The Convention also maintains spies throughout Traditions and Crafts Chantries, sometimes working with the Progenitors to create perfect clones of enemy willworkers — a technique that some whisper the NWO uses on other Conventions as well. Nevertheless, the New World Order much prefers subverting its enemies to destroying them, and Gray Men work constantly to recruit rival willworkers through blandishment, argument and torture.

Organization

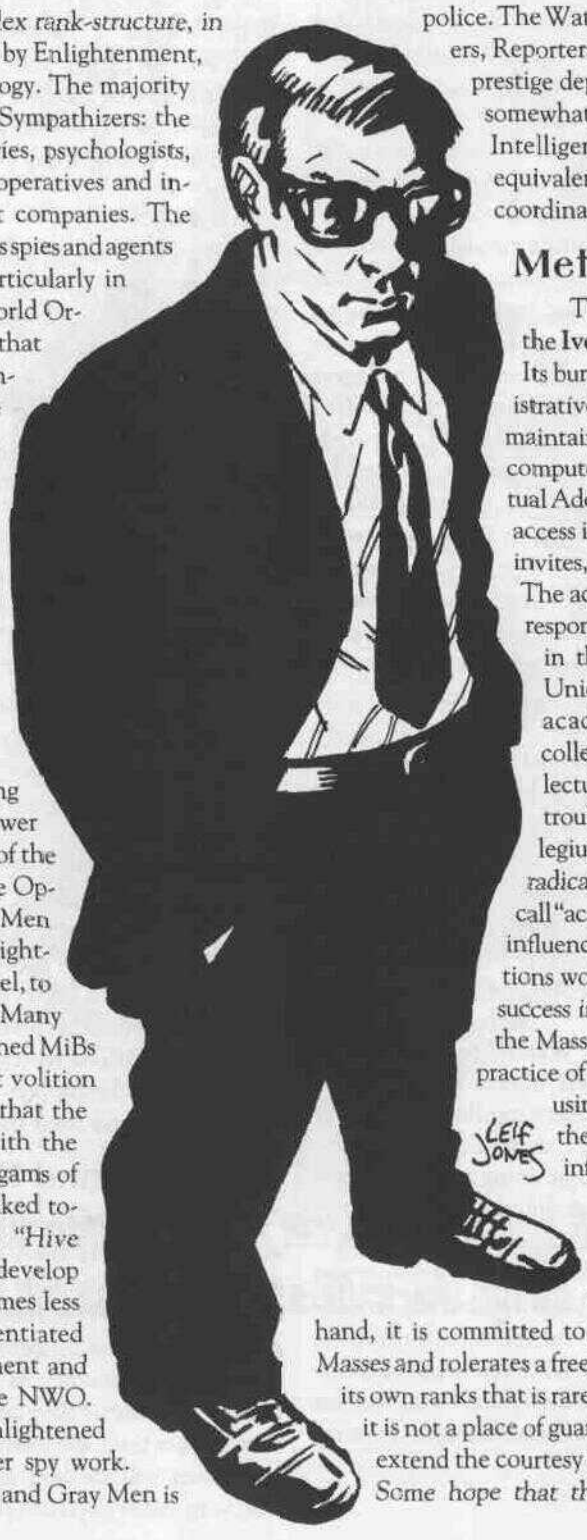
Some people say that the NWO is the glue that holds the Technocratic Union together. The NWO recruits secretaries, janitors, technicians and other personnel from the un-Enlightened population and assigns them to whatever Conventions need extra hands. Conventions, of course, do not have to accept such help, but since refusing means increasing funding to their own recruitment agencies, few bother. NWO functionaries also work to smooth cooperation between Conventions. Any research project shared between Conventions — as well as any inter-Convention Construct or amalgam — usually has at least one NWO member, often in a position of authority. NWO diplomats work constantly to soothe the *egos of Comptrollers, Research Directors, VPs and DSEATC* and to keep them all working (somewhat) harmoniously together. Without the NWO, the Technocratic Union might not collapse, but it would certainly be a much rougher place. Finally, the Ivory Tower forms the intellectual center of the Union; it reflects on the Union's grand purpose, and it crafts histories and philosophies suitable to the betterment of the Union. Introspective Technocrats may find such works consoling or infuriating, but they cannot escape the New World Order's overriding influence.

The NWO likes to present itself as a flexible and human organization. New recruits are often assigned a mentor, who seems genuinely concerned about their wants and well-being. Established Technocrats find their superiors approachable and solicitous, interested in their underlings' desires and opinions. Yet the NWO is hardly a hotbed of personal freedoms. It possesses ranks and assignments, much as do the other Conventions, and insubordinate members find themselves censured and punished. Furthermore, the suave human

relations of the NWO make wise Technocrats very nervous indeed. Perhaps those "friendly" mentors and managers are actually monitoring their subordinates for deviance or manipulating them. Many new recruits have told a mentor a secret doubt, then returned several days later, happy and smiling, not only renewed in faith, but having forgotten ever doubting at all.

The NWO possesses a complex rank-structure, in which members are differentiated by Enlightenment, seniority, function and Methodology. The majority of un-Enlightened personnel are Sympathizers: the communications experts, secretaries, psychologists, government agents, intelligence operatives and interns of the NWO and its front companies. The NWO also employs Sympathizers as spies and agents throughout the mortal world, particularly in academia and the media. New World Order Sympathizers are rarely aware that they work for a great global conspiracy; most simply do jobs of some importance in business or government, reporting their findings to committees, sharing their interests with higher-ranking (Enlightened) co-workers and advancing the causes of order and stability. Few ever discover the subtle connections between government branches, academic circles and global politics.

Above the level of Sympathizer, NWO ranks differ according to Methodology. The Ivory Tower eschews formal divisions in favor of the vagaries of academic politics. The Operatives employ a private army of Men in Black, comprising a mix of Enlightened and un-Enlightened personnel, to enforce the edicts of the Order. Many are clones and most are male. Cloned MiBs begin life with little independent volition and personality, a phenomenon that the NWO uses to its advantage. With the proper Procedures in place, amalgams of semi-volitional clones can be linked together into a single telepathic "Hive Mind." As the clones age and develop personality, the Hive Mind becomes less and less effective. Such differentiated clones often achieve Enlightenment and go on to other duties within the NWO. The Gray Men (exclusively Enlightened personnel) engage in undercover spy work. The boundary between the MiBs and Gray Men is fluid and analogous to the distinction between plainclothes and undercover police officers. Enlightened Men in Black are often promoted to Gray Man status, while Gray Men sometimes don the Black Suits' "uniform" when working closely with them. Intelligence Analysts supervise both branches of Operatives, and they are directed in turn by the mysterious Men in White, who also serve as the Technocracy's secret police. The Watcher Methodology's Field Observers, Reporters and Lensmen vary in power and prestige depending on seniority, but they are somewhat on the level of Gray Men and Intelligence Analysts. Gatekeepers rank equivalently with Men in White, and they coordinate Watcher activity.



Methodologies

The academic branch of the NWO, the **Ivory Tower**, has multiple mandates. Its bureaucratic arm performs the administrative work of the entire Union and maintains an extensive (and well-guarded) computerized record system. Several Virtual Adepts have gone mad or died trying to access it. Unfortunately, its very notoriety invites, rather than deters, further attempts. The academic arm of the Methodology is responsible for training new Technocrats in the history and philosophy of the Union. It also maintains a series of small academic departments, known as collegia, to research and discuss intellectual problems. The most famous and troublesome of these collegia is the Collegium of History, in part because of its radical members' insistence on what they call "academic freedom." The Ivory Tower's influence reaches into educational institutions world-wide, and it enjoys widespread success inculcating technological beliefs in the Masses. Finally, the Tower watches the practice of psychology and psychiatry closely, using these tools (and incorporating them into NWO Mind Procedures) to influence Sleeper belief.

Some dissidents and Reality Deviants have said that the Ivory Tower embodies the best and worst aspects of the NWO. On one hand, it is committed to spreading knowledge among the Masses and tolerates a freedom of speech and thought within its own ranks that is rare in the Union. On the other hand, it is not a place of guaranteed free expression, nor does it extend the courtesy of tolerance to enemies and rivals. Some hope that the libertarian ideals of academic

freedom with the Tower might spread throughout the Union one day, leading to a more flexible and humane Technocracy. More pessimistic critics, however, argue that the two faces of the Methodology are inextricably linked, and that the balance between the two cannot change unless the NWO radically alters its philosophy.

The **Operative** Methodology is the covert-intelligence arm of the NWO, and hence of the Union as a whole. Its Men in Gray (also called Gray Suits) monitor Reality Deviants, and its Men in Black kill them. The Operatives' Men in White perform law-enforcement activities within the Union itself, and they are much feared for that reason. None are as physically formidable as Iteration X's HIT Marks, but they are much more subtle. The Operative Methodology also performs the dull but effective work of sifting through government and corporate documentation for information on the Technocracy's enemies. The Masses' intelligence agencies also fall under the wing of the Operatives. It's a safe bet that anything the FBI knows or CIA knows, the NWO soon learns as well. A secret body, the World Advisory Council, is rumored to have seeded subordinates in the UN, the world bank and major mortal governments worldwide. These hidden amalgams subtly direct world politics, or so it is said.

Operative agents, especially Men in Gray, must work undercover for long periods of time with only minimal supervision. They are famous for their self-confidence, initiative and wit (perhaps justly; the stupid ones usually die quickly). Gray Men are also famous for their borderline insubordination. Gray Suits who receive objectionable orders in the field have been known to "lose" them. The Suits' superiors grant them some indulgences because the difficult and dangerous work of spying requires independent thinkers, but any Suit who harms the NWO by failing to obey orders is disciplined swiftly (and often fatally). The Operatives are rumored to perpetrate atrocities against the Masses. When the Men in Black usher a Sleeper witness into a black Cadillac, that mortal is seldom seen again, save as a mental vegetable. The MiBs, it is said, cultivate these fears and more, for the Masses are easier to control when cowed.

The final Methodology, the **Watchers,** observes the Masses. To that end the Watchers infiltrate and control Sleeper media organizations. By influencing directly what the Masses are permitted to see and hear, they help reinforce the static paradigm. Some few claim that doing so is ultimately detrimental to the Union, because dulling the wits of the population as a whole cripples the vision of future Technocrats. The Watchers maintain surveillance on deviants and work closely with Technocratic field agents from all Conventions to assure proper mission documentation. Within the corridors of Union Constructs, the Watchers act as counter-intelligence agents, always alert for disloyalty. Some wonder if the NWO, led by the Watchers, will one day make an overt bid to control the Union outright.

Philosophy

There really are "things-man-was-not-meant-to-know." Ever read H. P. Lovecraft? Your job is to keep people from knowing about the things that could wreck humanity. You perpetrate this fiction not because you're cruel or because you're an enemy of the truth, but because those things could hurt all society. Far better that the Masses believe your Truth (with a capital "T") instead. It's safer, it's simpler, and best of all, if enough people accept it, it might as well be real. Hunt down things that shouldn't be, erase violations of your Truth, educate those too stubborn or foolish to accept it. Above all, remember, you're doing it for their own good.

Failings

The Order argues that for the good of all, deviant belief has to be rooted out, because deviant belief can kill. Dissidents, however, protest vehemently that the NWO's policies have nothing to do with Unity or safeguarding static reality; rather, they have everything to do with power. With their potent command of the Mind sphere of influence, their private army and their mandate to spy, the NWO has a fearsome reputation, and not only among deviants. Technocrats speak in whispers of Gray Men riddling all the Conventions of the Union, silencing all political opposition to the NWO. And indeed, in 1995, the Men in White arrested three members of Disbursements who voted to reduce NWO funding. One VPO escaped, but the others were found guilty of "disloyalty" and executed. Needless to say, the NWO makes some Technocrats very nervous indeed.

The same voices argue (quietly) that the NWO's influence is stronger among the Masses, and that its crimes in that area are even greater. NWO Operatives annihilate innocent witnesses to supernatural events, monitor "subversive" Sleepers through computer systems, phone taps, credit and travel records, then remove those they consider detrimental to Unity or their own power. Sometimes the Sleepers so marked belong to the lower ranks of other Conventions. It is believed widely that the NWO controls a plurality of the seats on the World Advisory Council. The other Conventions worry that if the worst comes to pass, they will find themselves beset by internal traitors, mortal governments and their own Technicians.

Theories and Practices

The magic of the NWO can be alternately brutal or subtle, but it is very rarely vulgar. Within the Mind sphere of influence, they dominate static reality's paradigm and rarely attract paradox. A Hermetic, denied sustenance and interrogated for 30 hours beneath a bright light, finally breaks and joins the Technocracy. Is it simple torture or application of Mind Procedures? Likewise, a Gray Suit infiltrates a coterie of vampires; in time, she learns their secrets and knows just what to say that will soothe their leader or send him into a rage. Magic or mere psychology? Much as microwaves and ma-

chine pistols belong to Iteration X, the tools of psychiatry and evaluation belong to the NWO — and are equally coincidental. Nevertheless, certain Mind Procedures of the NWO remain vulgar (at least outside their Constructs). Foremost among these techniques is Mindscaping, the art and science by which a Technocrat creates a false reality in which a target psyche is tested or tortured.

In other spheres of influence, the NWO follows the lead of the other Conventions, and uses technological apparatuses and devices. The difference is that the NWO prefers small, easily concealed equipment that is not *too* flashy. Operatives employ fancy "spy gadgets" like exploding lapel pins and tiny microphones. The NWO funds the small group of cross-Convention researchers known as "Q Division" (a name they share with the Void Engineer's R&E) which produces most of these devices by hand. These researchers are the ones to turn to if you want to fit a phone into your shoe or an energy weapon into your belt buckle. The James Bond movies have made most of Q Division's gadgets coincidental — though there is still speculation about whether Q Division came first, or whether the NWO simply latched on to a good idea.

The Watchers prefer modified media equipment — especially the Kirlian lens, a device that allows them to perceive and record supernatural activity. Ivory Tower Technocrats draw on an eclectic mix of applications and theory from all Conventions. All three prefer to work silently and efficiently, but they are not opposed to pulling out the big guns, should need warrant.

Noted Figures

Donald Richardson (1847 - present): Professor Richardson almost single-handedly destroyed the consensus of the Collegium of History 50 years ago, when he became the foremost advocate of "spiritual ancestry" for the NWO. He maintains to this day that members of his Order need to find role models for themselves in the past, and he idolizes the Knights Templar as warriors for virtue and purity of thought. While some die-hards such as Terrence Whyte blame him for wrecking the Collegium of History, others point out that the current diversity of opinion in the Ivory Tower merely trails that of Sleeper universities.

Yukio Ishida (1962-1996?): The disappearance of this Ivory Tower sociologist during a research assignment in MECHA resulted in protest by several prominent Technocrats. Ishida's work previous to reassignment was a critique of gender roles in NWO's staffing policies, and many scholars (feminist and otherwise) fear that she was killed for criticizing the Order.

Henre de Lorris (1732- present): During the Second World War, the Allied branch of the NWO found itself working with the talented Ecstasy Cultist Henre de Lorris to destroy a Nephandic cell in Paris. After the war, de Lorris remained with the Order and his new-found mentor Rudolf Carter, working first as a Gray Man, then as an Analyst. Upon the death of Carter, the former Cultist was promoted to Man in White status, but he is starting to show signs of his former affiliation. He has begun to take drugs once again, and his recent reorganization has resulted in a noticeably younger and more attractive personal staff. Operative gossips whisper that Carter maintained de Lorris' loyalty only through constant conditioning and hint that de Lorris will soon attempt to return to his former Tradition. Other Men in White watch the situation closely.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: We all fight together, but sometimes they need a little guidance. Without us, they would have slaughtered each other long ago.

Rival Magi: Such a waste of talent. With a little help, though, some of their eyes can still open to our truth.

Reality Deviants: There is no place for these creatures in our world. They can, however, be quite fascinating. Perhaps there will be time to study them before we remove them.

The Masses: What they don't know can't hurt them. Because of us.

"I find your observations very interesting, Mr. Jones. I am sure my superiors will agree."

Progenitors

Has there ever been a machine as marvelous as a living being? Consider the tiniest insect. Observe the microscopic articulation of its legs, its many eyes, the whiplash hairs projecting from its carapace: all smaller than the head of a pin. The Progenitors believe that life, properly harnessed, is the most beautiful and efficient answer to the problems facing the Masses, leading ultimately to the transformation of the Masses themselves. Cloning and genetic engineering are only the most prominent of their activities; they are also skilled surgeons, pharmacists and naturalists.

Background

Since the days when the first man-apes opened their eyes and wondered at the natural world, there have been naturalists who sought to harness grass and tree and stag and to heal their own mysterious flesh. In the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, these distant precursors of the Progenitors domesticated animals and plants. Their work remains the mainstay of human civilization to this day, for the mighty cities of the World of Darkness would starve without grain and cattle. With the rise of the ancient city-states, medical science began to develop, first in China and Egypt, then in Greece.

The modern Progenitors' lineage begins with Hippocrates. The famous designer of the Hippocratic Oath was also, according to Progenitor histories, an Enlightened physician. Hippocrates founded a small guild of apprentices, the Cosian Circle. The Roman Empire widened the Cosians' sphere of influence, until they could be found throughout Europe, Africa and Asia Minor. Under their influence Galenic medicinal theory (based on astrology and the four humors) came to dominate the Roman world; although it could not drive out the many folk remedies of the Empire, it could at least discredit them. Cosian messengers traveled through the Sassanid Empire and along the trade road to China, contacting like-minded individuals wherever they could. Cosian influence started to wane by the fourth century A.D., failing as ancient learning vanished in an increasingly barbaric world. Christian saints and stories featured miraculous healing, and the Christian distrust of magic and astrology threw increasing doubt on the validity of the physician's craft. When the western half of the Empire collapsed, the Cosian Circle broke. The Western Roman Cosians were forced into hiding, while the Eastern Roman Cosians splintered into many smaller guilds. By the time of Justinian, the mighty Byzantine Cosians had dwindled to a single circle. Scattered throughout the Mediterranean, the Hippocratic physicians nursed their bile for the next seven centuries, preserving the shreds of Galenic thought in the Arabic and Latin Universities.

The Order of Reason reinvigorated the almost-defunct Cosians. Provided with financial support, like-minded allies and a cause, the Cosians reorganized as the Hippocratic Circle. By A.D. 1350, the Hippocratic Circle was combating the plague in public hospitals. Members warred with the Church and the folk-healers (backed by the Choristers and the Verbena respectively) but the Classical pedigree of their teachings won them the intellectuals of Europe and hence the support of increasingly secular governments. The increasing European hegemony of the 17th and 18th centuries allowed them to contact "lost" Cosian circles elsewhere in the world and become a truly global organization. The 19th century saw a shift in Hippocratic philosophy. Galenic theory possessed too many defects and was too closely allied to Hermetic thought to be safe. The Circle's leaders embraced germ-theory and genetics and turned the Convention to a new goal: the modification, not merely the preservation, of life. Victoria's house-cleaning rechristened the Hippocratic Circle the Progenitors. Shortly thereafter, its Methodologies and practices assumed the form in which they now appear.

Today, the Progenitors form a strong but focused Convention. They resemble nothing so much as an enormous R&D organization. Unlike the Syndicate, which manipulates the vastness of human commerce, or Iteration X, which must patronize the whole range of human machinery, the Progenitors deal only in the specialized fields of pharmaceuticals and bioengineering. In time, living ornithopters may become as common as automobiles (and they will if the Progenitors have their way), but for now, the bioscientists must work quietly in the public eye. Lab work overshadows field activity in prestige, and it is the fast track (some say the only track) to promotion. Products of Progenitor labs have already become an integral part of the Union. Progenitor animal guards and hunters reinforce amalgams and Constructs. Iteration X and the NWO make extensive use of Progenitor clones as spies, Men in Black and HIT Mark bodies. Finally, Progenitor cloning extends the lives of high-ranking Technocrats. The leadership of the Union has become nearly immortal, and the Progenitors indispensable.

Organization

The Progenitors use a single system of ranks, modeled after academia, across all their Methodologies. Numerous un-Enlightened Technicians attend to the laboratories of the Convention. Some employees are mere laboratory workers, secretaries or janitors, unaware of the nature of their employers, but Realm Technicians are often genetically engineered constructs of greater or lesser sentience. The Progenitors also employ un-Enlightened Street ops and Recruiters, who receive a greater respect in exchange for greater risk and assumed loyalty. Most Technicians, Street Ops and Recruit-

ers never join the Enlightened ranks, simply advancing Progenitor goals in schools, hospitals and research institutes instead. Very few citizens manage to develop an Enlightened appreciation of the life sciences, and they are guided into special classes as new students.

The lowest ranking Enlightened personnel in the Convention, Student Progenitors work closely with one or more advisors of at least Primary Investigator rank. During this time, they often masquerade as graduate students, although some perform dangerous field work. At the end of a course of study (which can vary from 2 to 8 years, depending on academic culture and the whim of the advisor), Students defend their research theses. Assuming that the Students survive, they attain the rank of Research Associate, a rank that most Progenitors never exceed. RAs perform laboratory work under close supervision. Should they survive, perform well, display initiative and (most importantly) play the proper political games, they gain their own laboratories and the rank of Primary Investigator. Primary Investigators often find that their laboratories are not the places of freedom they might have wished. While they have the facilities to carry out their own work, they must fight for funding — and grants are usually awarded on the basis of previous results, a conundrum for young researchers. In addition, PI's must also carry out projects assigned to them by their Constructs. Above the Primary Investigators sit the Research Directors, teachers of many students and administrators of one or more Realm Constructs and earth-bound networks of University-based Progenitors. An entire team of Progenitors — Students, RAs, PIs and an RD — can hide openly within a fair-sized biology department. In this way, the Progenitors have guided development of the discipline for almost two centuries. The fruit of many decades (or even centuries) of research and politicking, a Research Directorate is a prize achieved by few Progenitors. Above the many Directorates, there is only the Administration, which leads the entire Convention, allocates funding and enforces its will through Damage Control. The membership rolls of the Administration are a tightly held secret, as are the august body's entrance requirements. Administrators prefer to communicate with RDs through faxes and electronic mail rather than face-to-face or through living intermediaries.

Methodologies

The Progenitors maintain three Methodologies. The FACADE Engineers and the Pharmacopoeists posses millennia-old roots. The third Methodology, the Genegineers, is a product of 20th century science.

The **Forced Adaptation and Clone Alteration Developmental Eugenicists** (or FACADE Engineers for short) specialize in producing and modifying clones of existing life-forms. In previous centuries, they used a number of now-outdated techniques to graft parts of one animal onto another, creating such clumsy monstrosities as bird-headed men or centaurs. Tightening Paradox, however, put an end to such experiments, and the Methodology turned to a more promising technology. Now they manufacture clones for all the Conventions. Iteration X uses cloned bodies in their HIT Marks. The New World Order uses clones of enemies of the Union for infiltration purposes. Aging Technocrats even order clones and then transfer their consciousness into the bodies, securing virtual immortality in a succession of forms. FACADE exchanges its services for favors and Primal Energy, and the profit is fed back into the research budget. The FACADE Engineers are a closed and secretive Methodology. Older members prefer to work alone; those that maintain labs often maintain dictatorial control over their students and underlings. Younger members are typically told only what they need to finish their current assignments and no more. This secretiveness makes

even some Progenitors nervous. Technicians wheel an unconscious body into the lab. Research Associates produce a clone. The next day, both are gone. Whose life was just ruined, and why? Leaders of the Methodology insist all is well, but dissidents wonder.

The **Genegineers** (or Mutagenic Engineers, as they were known until 1954) make up a flexible Methodology that specializes in manipulating DNA. Unlike the FACADE Engineers, who usually work at the macro level of a life form with surgical tools, or undertake crude genetic copying and splicing, the Genegineers can build creatures from scratch or modify existing creatures from the inside out. Thanks to the efforts of Genegineers, not only do Progenitor Constructs boast one-of-a-kind creatures, but often they are home to whole custom-tailored ecologies (and societies). The Genegineers are a young and sprightly Methodology, and are more egalitarian in structure than strictly hierarchical. Committed to the trendy virtues of "interdisciplinary study," they maintain close ties with the other Progenitor Methodologies, and even other Conventions.

The excesses of the Genegineers can be frightening indeed. Sentient and non-sentient creatures can be botched during creation, often dying in some horrible way soon after birth. Most constructs are considered second-class citizens in the Union, when they are considered citizens at all. Successful creatures can be abused by sadistic masters, relocated, forced into slavery or exterminated. And these foibles are simply the mistakes the Methodology acknowledges openly: Detractors speak of Realms modeled after Antebellum slave plantations, dark uses for the Human Genome project and other abominations.

Damage Control, a cross-Methodological group operating within the Genegineers' jurisdiction, continues the FACADE Engineers' earlier work of manufacturing monsters. As their name implies, most of these creatures are destined for use in the Pogrom. Damage Control's creatures run the gamut from small creatures disguised to look like a favored pet to huge toothy monstrosities. All of their creations, unfortunately, are subject to Paradox: They die days or weeks after being introduced to static reality. Therefore, Damage Control's creatures are usually designed for only a single use.

The **Pharmacopoeists**, the last direct descendants of the ancient Cosians, investigate the interaction between the human body and foreign chemicals. In other words, they control drugs both beneficial and harmful. As such, they have saved countless lives and cured countless diseases. They have duplicated or actually invented most modern drugs from aspirin to Prozac to chemotherapy. Unlike mortal drugs, however, the Pharmacopoeist versions rarely have deleterious side-effects; such advanced versions never circulate widely. Sometimes even Pharmacopoeists are lucky to get their hands on them. Some accuse the Pharmacopoeists of introducing deliberately harmful effects into drugs designed for the Masses, claiming that side-effects themselves are a product of Pharmacopoeist engineering. The Pharmacopoeists are also deeply immersed in the world of illegal drugs. They acknowledge releasing addictive chemicals to the Masses and promoting their use actively. By so doing, this Methodology strengthens its ties to the Syndicate, makes vast amounts of money and controls the Masses. It also forfeits much respect from other scientists within and beyond the Technocratic Union, as the Union exists to protect humanity, not to subjugate it to harmful chemicals.

Philosophy

The most fit must survive. Evolution has taught us that a better-adapted organism will always displace a less fit one. The difference between Neanderthals and humans were minuscule. The Neanderthals made tools, had a complex social structure and even language. But our ancestors' cerebral cortex was just a bit more efficient. How many Neanderthals have you seen on Earth lately? Now we possess the power to make humans better adapted, more fit and hence more likely to survive. It falls to us to use this power wisely, in order to gift humanity with the immortality, perfection and Unity it requires. Life itself is our purview. All that grows changes and looks at the universe in wonder.

Failings

Distant from the Masses, secretive and withdrawn within the Union and holding the keys to all that makes people human, the Progenitors frighten many within the Technocracy badly. What the Convention acknowledges openly is bad enough: The FACADE Engineers clone and replace innocents, the Pharmacopoeists drug the Masses with God-knows-what, and the Genegineers are busy creating slave species (or maybe replacements for humanity itself). Who knows what else they might be up to? One rumor (particularly popular among the Celestial Chorus) has it that the Progenitors are trying to destroy the Avatars of the Masses. Those few Technocratic dissidents who acknowledge the existence of Avatars feel that if the rumors are true, the Progenitors are being exceedingly foolish. By destroying the Avatars of the Masses, the Progenitors would be destroying future Technocrats as well as future deviants. Most scoff that the entire scheme is unworkable. ("Gilgul in a pill," indeed.) Others, however, wonder if perhaps the Progenitors are also attempting to create a replacement "Avatar" that will allow them to reliably Enlighten any person they choose.

The split between field agents and researchers is particularly pronounced among Progenitors. Academic Progenitors dominate the Convention. Progenitors who specialize in field work suffer from ostracism, and they often forfeit their chances of advancement. Even necessary missions suffer from a paucity of manpower and equipment, and teams usually consist of young Progenitors "paying their dues" and veterans long since given to hopelessness.

Theories and Practice

Progenitor practice relies on a combination of the mechanical and the biological. Progenitors use mechanical equipment to develop their custom organisms. A well-stocked Progenitor's laboratory can easily fill a warehouse, and it requires massive amounts of electricity, running water and (usually) gas. A typical laboratory contains such esoteric devices as gene-splicers, cloning vats, CAT scanners and scanning-tunneling electron microscopes. In a pinch, however, a skilled Progenitor can produce similar results with less equipment: a scalpel, a vial of fluid or some sutures. Such short cuts are taxing on the Progenitor, and they are not fully accepted ways of doing "real medicine" (in other words, they are often vulgar.) When producing Procedures unrelated to the Life sphere of influence, Progenitor prefer to employ modifications they have previously made to their own bodies or to other organisms. Enhanced reflexes, modified eyes and other internal apparatuses and devices provide focus for feats of strength, intuition and sensing. An RD's body is literally a storehouse of biological wonders. Lesser-ranking members must compete for the privilege of carrying the latest equipment. Surgery, after all, is a major expenditure that ties up the lab. When they cannot fit desired devices into their bodies, the Progenitors prefer to employ biotech devices ranging from hand-held acid-spitters to the space craft *Vivo*. Their biological technology has not yet advanced to the point that it can replace all metal technology (as one look at a lab will show). In a pinch, therefore, Progenitors turn to the devices of the other Conventions and possess stockpiles of conventional weapons, HIT Marks and Kirlian lenses "just in case."

Noted Figures

Muhammed ibn Yûsuf al-Mush'awidi (1589-1918): A prominent Egyptian Cosian of the early modern period, ibn Yûsuf spent his early career attempting to introduce a workable longevity drug to the Masses, but found his efforts blocked by the Ahl-i-Batini and his own superiors. In disgust he turned to recreating the monstrous animal-headed gods of pagan Egypt. To his surprise, his work won him fame throughout the Order of Reason, and he joined an amalgam of FACADE Engineers in Toulouse. There he helped pioneer the science of cloning, including a sequence of important vat manipulations known today as the ibn Yûsuf nutrient cycle. His prominence, however, led to his death in 1918 at the hands of a Batini assassin angry at the Technocracy's wartime tape of their mutual homeland.

Zsgraak, Devourer of His Enemies' Bowels: (1992 - 95): In the early '90s, lizard-people were the fad in Genegineer research, and several different species were developed. Research Plantation Number Two's model was designed for combat. They reached maturity quickly, had excellent reflexes and showed an aggressive instinct. Before long, the sweltering Realm was home to several "tribes" of related beings. Unfortunately, they were a bit too aggressive. Led by Zsgraak, they avoided the Plantation's laser defenses and attacked their masters. Most of the Progenitors, including the RD and the PIs, died in the rush of the assault, but one RA and a few technicians escaped to Earth. Thereafter, the Progenitors mounted three expeditions into Plantation Number Two. All were forced to retreat with heavy losses. Captured humans were reputedly devoured alive. The fourth assault called upon Damage Control, and featured Genengineered dinosaurs, HIT Marks and a small tank. They forced the Realm's inhabitants out of the Plantation building and into the wilderness. There, the reptilians managed to survive for some five months, and even, on occasion, counterattack the Technocrats' base. Eventually, they were routed after a long, well-coordinated defense. Even today, the thought of another such revolt, and another Zsgraak, troubles many Progenitors. Research Plantation Number Two was the second such facility to fall to slave revolt.

Charles Reid (?? - present): Perhaps the most famous Progenitor now living, Charles Reid is known throughout the Union for his obsessive paranoia as much as his genius. His origins are a mystery, but he has been active in the United States since the early 20th century. In the past 50 years, he has nurtured many students who now hold Research Directorates throughout that country. As such, his influence stretches well beyond his official duties as head of several laboratory groups. For unknown reasons, he fears and hates the Council of Nine Traditions (especially the Virtual Adepts), and he keeps all his labs at combat readiness.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: Although they fail to appreciate the life sciences properly, they provide useful support while we develop our technologies. Cooperate with them, but do not compromise our essential vision.

Rival Magi: Idiots, freaks and purveyors of holistic medicine.

Reality Deviants: Some make useful biological samples. The rest are worthless.

The Masses: They live longer, healthier, happier lives because of us.

"The flesh is malleable, and I find that fact both liberating and frightening."

Syndicate

Perhaps you think it crass that an organization of Enlightened ladies and gentlemen would dedicate themselves to money? Can't they think of anything better to do with Enlightenment than become billionaires and mobsters? Consider, however, the true power of money. The pyramids of Giza, the Mona Lisa, the Voyager spacecraft, cities, architecture, science — all were made possible by money. Money, as a transparent vehicle of commerce and measure of wealth, undergirds all human achievement. It is the most powerful and successful idea of all time. The Syndicate exists, not to collect Yen or Dollars or Deutsche Marks, but to safeguard the idea of money.

Background

Civilization was born with commerce and exchange. So long as each person had to gather his own food, time for other activities was limited. Each person might make flints, pots or baskets, but only what she needed herself. With the invention of barter, a person could become a full-time weapon-smith or basket weaver and not starve. Soon people exchanged rare and precious objects, gold, gems, shells or even carved stones, for goods. Money was born, and with it cities, commerce and civilization. Somewhere behind this system, lost to history, there must have been Enlightened traders, forerunners and patron saints of the Syndicate.

The recorded history of the Syndicate, however, begins with the Brotherhood of the Rule in ancient Rome. This guild of Enlightened and un-Enlightened builders was responsible for the great architectural works of the Empire: aqueducts, roads, baths and fortifications. The guild also served as a clearing-house of commerce. The fall of the Western Empire brought an end to its glory, however. As the Dark Ages grew, the Brothers dwindled and watched their roads and cities used as building material for castles. By the 10th century, the remaining Brothers had had enough, and in A.D. 997 they reformed as the Craftmasons. One faction of the Craftmasons dedicated itself to revitalizing fairs and markets. By the time of the Convention of the White Tower, this faction had grown strong enough, and its disagreements with the other Masons so heated, that they were carved out as a separate Convention, the High Guild (or Grand Financiers), ancestors of the modern Syndicate.

The High Guild grew rapidly throughout the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, developing many sub-Guilds such as the Black Uncles or the Sun Guild. The growing commercial networks of Italy and pawns such as the Medici and the Fuggers fueled their expansion. Moving overseas with the European fleets, they made contact with (and absorbed) like-minded organizations in other parts of the world. Working closely with the Artificers, the High Guild helped to engineer the Industrial Revolution. By the late 19th century, their transformation from Italian banker-princes to modern industrial capitalists was complete, and Queen Victoria renamed them the Syndicate. The new century proved a dangerous one for the Syndicate, however. Long-standing rivalries erupted among the Convention heads and led directly to the Great Depression. Purges followed, as the Syndicate attempted to control the damage and reign in the independent gangsters of the Prohibition era. A newer, sleeker, more centralized Syndicate emerged.

In the post-war years, the Syndicate has concentrated its energies on maintaining economic growth in the face of a global paradox called Fortune. Simply put, members of the Convention have found that they cannot engender large-scale change without also causing large-scale collapse of global markets. Thus, they have pushed ahead slowly, hoping to create a completely cashless society by the early decades of the next century. Currently, the Syndicate maintains good relations with the other Conventions, supplying them with the funds to pursue their own agendas. The other Conventions return this generosity with disdain, thinking of the Syndicate as little more than a glorified bank. This misconception suits the Syndicate perfectly. By controlling funding and trade between the Conventions, it influences the direction of the Union invisibly. On the Front Lines, Syndicate Enforcers and Special Projects often participate in multi-Convention amalgams, Media Control works closely with the NWO's Watchers and the Genegineers, Disbursements occasionally performs "inspections," and the Financiers are not above sending an agent along to protect their interests.

Organization

Not surprisingly, the Syndicate's internal hierarchy and titles of rank resemble those of a large Western corporation. The higher ranks of the Convention are almost exclusively white and male, causing Technocrats of other backgrounds to complain of a glass ceiling. The leadership responds that until recently, the Union itself was almost exclusively white and male, and that it is working to promote all worthy candidates into any vacancies that arise. Since the Syndicate's upper ranks are well-nigh immortal, however, few anticipate changes any time soon. At the lowest rung of the ladder sit the un-Enlightened Providers (sometimes called "Staples" or "Our Friends"). The Syndicate prefers to recruit skilled people who are deeply and foolishly in debt. Much of the Provider's initial salary goes towards paying back these debts, which is cheaper for the Syndicate and helps secure the recruit's loyalty. The Syndicate also recruits mortals directly from criminal organizations. Only when a recruit shows an aptitude for controlling

his own finance, instead of letting money and greed control him, is he considered a worthy candidate for any further promotion within the organization.

The lowest Enlightened rank in the Syndicate is that of Associate (or "Magic Man"). Even rank-and-file Syndicate members often command massive wealth and influence. The next level of promotion is to a post as a Manager (sometimes called a "Wizard"), supervising up to five Associates on a particular assignment. The Chairmen (or "Vision Men") administer individual Constructs and Symposiums, and command up to a half-dozen Managers. The Board governs the Convention as a whole. A member of this august body is known as a Vice President of Operations. At present, there are 10 VPOs: one head from each of the Syndicate's seven geographical zones of operation, two "coordinating" VPOs and the CPO, Sir Jonathan Saint Christopher Rey.

Methodologies

The world economy is a big, diverse place. The Syndicate maintains no less than five Methodologies, four of which perform Adjustments on the market, and a fifth which distributes funds to the Union.

Disbursements acts as the purse and payroll office of the entire Union. It provides funding to other Conventions, dispenses grants to worthy projects and makes the Syndicate's control over the world's finances seem worthwhile to the Technocracy as a whole. Thus, while Disbursements greatly benefits the other Conventions, it also maintains a subtle and often unnoticed control over their development. By withholding funding for a particular project, or granting money to one rival over another, Disbursements can determine the fate of entire Constructs. Disbursements also makes membership in the Technocratic Union worthwhile to the rest of the Syndicate. In return for the funds it "gives" to other Conventions, it receives equipment and services. Compared to its outlay, these donations are mere tokens, but members of the Syndicate, especially the Enforcers, find them useful at times. Thus Disbursements holds the heart of the Syndicate in its purse as well. If you are a Technocrat, no Sleeper has ever depended on the IRS or Payroll like you depend on Disbursements.

The **Enforcers** are the Syndicate's strong right arm. They make sure people pay their bills. They remove unwanted rivals. Seeded liberally throughout both law enforcement organizations and the criminal underworld, Enforcers control both the criminals that the Masses fear and the police to whom they turn for protection. The Enforcers, rightly or wrongly, are often the first to die in any attack on the Syndicate. Wise Enforcers realize this, and sometimes transfer to other Methodologies later in their careers. While it is all too easy to see the pain and fear the Enforcers cause, their benefits are harder to discern. The Syndicate argues that the idea of money only functions so long as the Masses respect its reality. If debtors and defaulters could escape the system, money itself would become meaningless and human civilization would collapse. Few dissenters are convinced by this argument.

The Syndicate's **Financiers** perform silent Adjustments on the flow of global commerce. They insinuate themselves into positions of financial influence, whether that means sitting on the boards of international corporations, acting as stock speculators or serving as advisors to the leaders of criminal organizations. From their mortal covers, the Financiers then shape the clay of the world's economy. If the Enforcers manipulate commerce on a local scale by removing deadbeats and defaulters, the Financiers manipulate it on a global scale, creating the very structures that permit loans and the exchange of wealth to take place. Financiers sometimes lose sight of the people their actions may help or hurt, coming to think of the Masses as mere statistics to be devalued, destroyed or aided according to the demands of the Time Table.

If the Financiers shape those who supply products, **Media Control** shapes those who buy them. Media Control, working closely with the NWO's Watcher Methodology, Adjusts the advertisements that bombard the Masses, as well as the media reports that are the Masses' only window into the world of commerce. Thus Media Control influences not only what the Masses buy, but their very thoughts about such important issues as pollution, anti-trust laws and labor unions. Thanks to Media Control, much of the true nature of global commerce remains hidden from Sleepers' eyes. Dissidents complain about these and other actions,

taken by the so-called champions of reason — ones which actually stifle the Masses' understanding of their world — but such arguments find no favor with the Board, the Inner Circle or most rank and file members of the Syndicate.

The **Special Projects Division** performs the Syndicate's Research and Development. It produces strange new weaponry, techniques for influencing the subconscious mind, new industrial techniques and products for consumption by the Masses regularly. The more powerful technology usually ends up in Enforcers' hands, although SPD sometimes equips its own teams of specialists. Coming from a Convention that has no scientific culture and few dedicated researchers, SPD's productivity is nothing short of miraculous.

There is a reason, but few outside SPD suspect the truth: SPD is the Syndicate's liaison with Pentex, a conglomerate directed by a spiritual entity labeled the Wyrm. Most of SPD's "technology" relies on the power of evil spirits to function, and it exerts a detrimental influence on the soul of its users. Far from helping to keep the earth clean of deviants, the SPD aids entities as corrupt as the Nephandi. The leaders of SPD permit these atrocities to continue because of the profit they make, and they keep their Methodology's personnel either ignorant or extremely loyal. This "exclusive" Methodology scrutinizes and tests its new recruits for many years. If an employee shows too many scruples during this time, he is deemed unfit and transferred to another Methodology. Only employees with the right mixture of personality traits are permitted to know the truth, and if they balk, they are killed. Personnel who discover the Pentex connection by accident usually die, but the Methodology sometimes opts to keep those with the proper attitude, rather than throw away a resource. In this way, even the Board remains ignorant of SPD's activities. The truth could tear the Syndicate and even the Technocratic Union asunder, if it became known. Some suspect that such a schism is already underway....

Philosophy

Money is reality. The Masses' shared belief in currency makes human civilization possible. Whether that currency takes the form of shells, beads or rectangular paper sheets really doesn't matter, so long as people trust in it. Even in the Middle Ages, the gold in a coin was worth less than the face of the person stamped on it — and the belief that your King wouldn't debase his coins while no one was looking. People who don't respect money, who think of it as only a tool, or put other values first, threaten its existence and the existence of everything built with it. That's why we work to protect money even further, from all sorts of debasers, by turning it into pure trust. In a cashless society, a single number, one that can't be stolen, devalued or lost, will measure a person's worth. Then the Masses will be secure, and the Enlightened will be free to pursue Unity.

Failings

Take all the vices of "Big Business." Combine them with all the negative traits of "Organized Crime." Stir them into a conspiracy of immortal financiers. That's the Syndicate. While the Technocratic Union's critics direct most of their hatred at Iteration X and the New World Order, it is the Syndicate that probably does the most daily harm to the Masses. Its Enforcers foreclose on property and support crime, its Media Control arm seeds greed and materialism and its Financiers spur the oppressive corporate system in which the Masses work. The activities of the Special Projects Division, however, would shock even the Inner Circle. By marketing spiritually dangerous Pentex products, SPD spreads Banes and corruption throughout the Masses. By supplying Syndicate agents with Wyrm-tainted technofetishes, it directly endangers Union personnel. Worse than all these accusations, in Technocratic eyes, is the fact that the SPD knowingly consorts with dangerous deviants, betraying the spirit of the White Tower and the Precepts of Damian. Of all the dark sides of the Syndicate, SPD is the darkest. Unfortunately for the Union, the long years of disproving and shutting out spiritualism make it difficult for most agents to discover such corruption, or even to believe in the possibility of malignant spiritual entities stowing away in consumer goods and technological wonders. The same bureaucratic dehumanization that afflicts the entire Union as a whole also shields its eyes from the growing spiritual cancer within.

Theories and Practices

Subtle. The Syndicate does not use Magic or perform Procedures; it makes Adjustments. See the Media Control Associate standing in conversation with fellow reporters? A sip of wine, a handshake. Now that balanced piece on Wicca will be a hostile critique of "cultists." See the Financier at his desk? A shuffling of papers, a fax, a phone call. The Covenant of Val Negra Nova's mutual fund just disappeared. Enlightened Syndicate personnel use the minimum possible apparatuses in any given situation, and most of the time, those apparatuses are nothing more technologically advanced than a sheet of paper, a phone call, or even a gesture. Thanks to the power of persuasion and the invisible magic of money, Syndicate Adjustments are almost always coincidental. Indeed, the Syndicate frowns on members who perform vulgar Adjustments, refusing promotions, censuring or even killing those who make a habit of it. The only exceptions come when Enforcers and SPD agents pit themselves against violent deviants. The Syndicate agents might have no choice then but to use vulgar techniques. But if they are willing to go that far, they are more likely to simply have Disbursements call in a favor and let some other Convention clean up the mess.

Noted Figures

Stephen Trevanus (1093-143): One of the most famous figures in the history of the Syndicate is Stephen Trevanus, the basis (or so the Syndicate claims) for the mythical Robin Hood. In the 11th century, the Craftmasons attempted to revive commerce by sponsoring trade fairs in

major cities throughout Europe. Unfortunately, most feudal lords, egged on by mystics and clerics, opposed this new form of usury. Trevanus appointed himself defender of St. Cedd's Market in Nottingham, and when its lord dissolved it, Trevanus assembled a band of outlaws to demand its reinstatement. In the propaganda war that resulted, the legend of Robin Hood was born. Trevanus' greatest achievement, however, came when he masterminded the Craftmasons' attack on Mistridge in 1210. That attack saw the first use of the Masons' cannons. Thereafter, as word of the attack spread among the magical communities of Europe, the Craftmasons found the resistance to their program of trade guilds crumbling. For several decades following, Trevanus assisted in the creation of these guilds and other strongholds of Craftmason influence, became a prominent financial advocate in the Convention of the White Tower, and eventually a leader of the new High Guild. Many look on him as the founder of the new Convention.

Choe Yo'ng (1954 – present): First to break the glass ceiling of the VPOs, Choe Yo'ng recently became the new VPO of the Orient and Australia, replacing Andre Takahashi, who disappeared under mysterious circumstances while personally investigating a botched SPD job. The Choe family controlled considerable wealth in Korea (some say due to involvement in war munitions), and Yo'ng had a formidable intellect to go with her private education and overseas classes. Determined to improve upon her family's wealth, she delved into international business and economy, joining the Syndicate out of sheer force of will, incredible savvy and amoral ruthlessness. Rising faster than most would expect, she developed incredible finesse within Adjustments. Rumor attributes much of the late '90s Asian economic collapse to her masterminding, with some hidden plan supposedly waiting on the outcome. Yo'ng excelled in developing useful Sleeper ties, often leveraging new and short-lived opportunities before others could react. This served her in good stead when she made her bid for VPO position. All indications are that she will be a veritable terror to her subordinates and a financial genius second to none.

Joseph von Reismann (1813 - present): Descended from the founder of the Craftmasons — though not to be confused with Wolfgang's "son" Jacob — Joseph von Reismann rose to power in the early part of this century. In the 1930s, von Reismann oversaw the trial and destruction of those Grand Financiers who caused the stock market crash and world wide depression. Rising to become VP of Europe West, he worked to stabilize Fortune throughout the region, most controversially in Germany, where he supported the political ambitions of Hitler and used the opportunity to jump-start German industry. Some Allied Technocrats blamed him for the Second World War and its atrocities, a charge he denies, although he remained an Axis supporter until the end of the war. Following the Allied victory, however, he supported the free markets there against the advance of communistic Europe East. Although the high unemployment and current prevalence of Socialist governments undermines his political power somewhat, many expect him to make a move to combine Europe West and Europe East under his authority now that the Communist block has crumbled.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: They don't suspect how important we are to the Union. That suits us fine.

Rival Magi: Superstitionists. Smear their names, destroy their finances, then send in the HIT Marks.

Reality Deviants: Depends on the deviant, really. They all have to go eventually, but for now it's easier to come to an understanding with the occasional one than wipe 'em out. The Leeches, in particular, are good for business and damned difficult to attack directly. The same does not go for werewolves. Never suffer one to live.

The Masses: We own them.

"Of course, you're going to have to pay for that."

Void Engineers

Somewhere, right now, a steel leviathan turns slowly through a field of plasma. To one side, an orange star moves slowly in a precise arc. Its sides are distended like a flattened beach ball. A streamer of gas pours out of it, and a black hole, unseen yet impossibly massive, pulls the gas into itself. The red-hot star stuff swirls around and around like water going down a drain. A tiny black dot hides amidst the red glow of the star: a planet. A thin signal returns to the ship's radio. The landing party has found life on the planet: sentient life. Another discovery for the Void Engineers.

Background

Wanderlust is as old as humanity itself, and the Void Engineers trace their roots to the earliest explorers who went looking over the next hill or crossed into the spirit realm. They like to point out that millennia before the rise of cities or the mastery of metal, enterprising humans had spread from their African cradle to every continent of earth, a mighty testament to their curiosity and foresight. Wanderlust did not end with the creation of city-states and empires; in every land, explorers hungered for unknown sights, and what was old territory to one civilization was *terra incognita* to another. The circulation of explorers and knowledge from one land to another led to trade, profit, war — and Enlightenment.

The modern Void Seekers can trace their ancestry to two sources. By the time of the Roman Empire, organized guilds of explorers had formed in the port cities of the Mediterranean. They preserved and codified the arts of their forerunners, expressed in symbols of power drawn from their profession: the rope, the sail, the wave, the wind, the map and the naming of the unknown. The fall of the western Empire crippled their vitality for a time, as even the Byzantine provinces suffered from a decline of sea trade. During the later Middle Ages, however, the guilds began to grow again, aided by the mercantile culture of Italy and the cosmopolitan markets of the Islamic city-states. Increasingly, these guilds worked together to strengthen their mutual interests, in time becoming known as the Void Seekers. Meanwhile, a second organization of Enlightened explorers was forming in Italy. There, the so-called Celestial Masters gathered at the call of Antonio Vello and his patron Mariana Sabine. Astrologers by training, they were not content merely to read the stars to find their fates, but determined to go to the stars themselves and thus make themselves masters of the sub-Lunary sphere.

The Celestial Masters and the Void Seekers both attended the Convention of the White Tower and (with each other's help) became two Conventions in the new Order of Reason. For five centuries thereafter, the two Conventions pursued complementary agendas. The Masters explored the Deep Universe, and the Seekers sought out corners of the earth unknown to the Order of Reason. By the late 19th century, however, it became clear that the Seekers had nearly completed their work: few places on Earth remained to be discovered. For this reason, and to reduce the political power of the two maverick Conventions, Queen Victoria merged the Celestial Masters and the Void Seekers into a single Convention, the Void Engineers. Events coming so shortly after the destruction of the Craftmasons and the Cabal of Pure Thought, neither Seekers nor Masters dared object — much.

Today, the Void Engineers still work to map the unknown and tame it for the good of the Masses. Until recently, the Void Engineers did most of their exploring in the Deep Universe, in huge ships sealed against the deadly rigors of the environments they find there. Recently, the Deep Universe has become even more hostile, and many ships and projects have inexplicably suffered from equipment malfunctions and failures; as a result, the Void Engineers have had to pull back much of their exploratory drive, instead establishing perimeters of defense around codified areas of nearby space. Many Engineers bolster the defenses of the Sol system and Earth, even as they nervously await the means to return to their deep explorations. Some few Engineers, however, remain behind on Earth to recruit new personnel, outfit expeditions, plan Deep Universe excursions, explore the mysterious oceans and Digital Web or perform feats of Dimensional Science for the other Conventions. The Void Engineers, as a whole, have trouble relating to the rest of the Union, particularly the NWO and the Syndicate. In recent decades, they found support for their ventures cut drastically when the wonder released by the moon landing bolstered the strength of Earth's deviants. Many speculate that only the Engineers' skill in manipulating Primal Energy and creating Horizon Realm Constructs (as well as their sizable knowledge of Deep universe entities) has prevented their dissolution by the Inner Circle; others speculate that only the Engineer's need for funding keeps them from leaving the Union voluntarily. They maintain several impressive Deep Universe realms, including a working Dyson Sphere that they call the Copernicus Research Center (or Cop, for short).

Organization

The Void Engineers are a loosely structured Convention. For the most part, they make no distinction between un-Enlightened and Enlightened personnel — although only the latter assume positions of leadership regularly. The lowest-ranking Engineers are the Technicians and the enlisted Marines, who are rarely, if ever, Enlightened. The higher ranks are a mixture of Enlightened and un-Enlightened personnel. Engineer recruits not destined to become Technicians or Marines begin as Cadets (also called Students), before graduating to one

of four specialties: Enforcers (who defend the Convention on missions and the Union on Earth and who often lead Marines *into combat*), Explorers (who chart new territory), Investigators (who pursue scientific interests) and Researchers (who develop new Technology). Most Engineers never achieve or even desire for rank beyond these titles, but those who do become Coordinators, overseers of Void Engineer co-ops, Constructs and/or ships. Coordinating is often a thankless office with administrative responsibility but little actual power — the Engineers are a fractious lot, and most of their co-ops operate by vote and consensus, whatever the rules say. The Convention as a whole bows only to the Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee (or DSEATC), a group of ancient Engineers based in the Cop. The DSEATC maintains regular communications with the rest of the Convention, despite recent *difficulties in sending* hyperspatial messages to Earth from the deep reaches.

Methodologies

The Void Engineer Convention contains numerous Methodologies and sub-specialties — more specialties, in fact, than any other group in the Union. After all, they have the whole Universe to explore. The organizational chart for the Void Engineers is a nightmare, and few Engineers ever witness more than a tiny *portion of their* Convention's activities.

The **Border Corps Division** (BCD) patrols the Earth's Gauntlet, watching for Nephandi, aliens and other Deep Universe intrusions into Earth's space. Also called "space marines," these soldiers, Enlightened or un-Enlightened, must be intelligent, well trained and cool under fire. Unfortunately, the other Engineers, who often consider the BCD to be little more than grunts and cannon fodder, rarely recognize this fact. BCD marines also accompany Deep Universe vessels, wander the Horizon, and protect Realms such as the Cop.

The **Earth Frontier Division** (EFD) carries on the work of the now-defunct Void Seekers. They map the remaining unknown areas of Earth itself, which are often just as strange as any Deep Universe environment. Their largest group, the **Aquatic Exploration Teams** (often called "Aquanauts" or "Squids") map the sea-bottom, which still houses fantastically huge ocean-monsters or even stranger things. The **Cryogenic Specialists** ("Snowdogs") perform arctic and Antarctic surveys, **Hydrothermal Botanical Mosaic Analysts** ("Weedwhackers") explore the rain forests, **Inaccessible High Elevation Exploration Teams** (IHEET) cover the mountain-tops, and **Subterranean Exploration Corps** ("Groundhogs") delve into the underground. Wherever they are stationed, members of the EFD find that not only the ocean, but most remote areas deviate from what the consensus predicts elsewhere. If there is an EFD division exploring (or destroying) the Sons of Ether's Hollow Earth, it is not common knowledge.

Another Earth-based division, the **Neutralization Specialist Corps** (NSC), works closely with the NWO to eliminate undesirable entities who slip past the BCD. They investigate UFO crash sites, haunted houses and other such phenomenon, eliminating the danger and making certain that witnesses forget as much of the incident as possible. The Masses often mistake them for members of a mortal government or a sub-species of Men in Black. The NSC also runs a mental hospital for Void Engineers. There the **Enforcement Training and Conditioning Agency** (ETCA) implants safety conditioning into space-bound personnel (and deactivates unwanted NWO conditioning) while the **Department of Psychological Evaluation and Maintenance**

(DPEM) treats Void Engineers and allies driven mad by the horrors of the Deep Universe.

The largest Void Engineer Methodology, the **Pan-Dimensional Corps** (PDC), explores the Universe beyond the Gauntlet. Its Near Universe co-ops maintain and create the Realms used by the Union, and its *Qui La Machinae* sanitize nodes and assault enemy Realms. Although these activities win the Void Engineers their support among the other Conventions, the Engineers' heart lies elsewhere. At the edge of the still-penetrable Horizon, countless sub-divisions of the PCD explore Deep Space, the planets, and other, even more remarkable phenomenon. On Earth (more or less), its Cybernauts explore the Digital Web and its Chrononauts push the boundaries of Time itself. Some Chrononauts have even returned alive.

Finally, **Research & Execution** (R&E) develops new Technology for the Engineers. Why "Execution" and not "Development"? The Void Engineers feel that "development" is too slow a process. As soon as something is invented, they say, it should be put to "execution." Even numerous accidents have not changed their minds. In addition to small arms, sensors, space suits and other personal equipment, R&E also builds the Convention's huge *Qui La Machinae* and Deep Universe cruisers. R&E is sometimes called Q Division, a name it shares with the NWO research group.

Philosophy

The place for humanity is the stars. Not only is the Earth too small by far, but it's dying. Just look around, and you can see that. Pollution, crime, war: Society is tearing itself apart, and it's taking our world with it. No matter, for we have seen the glory of the universe. Humanity (or the better parts of it, anyway) can settle where we have explored. We have already released primitive rocket-technology to the Masses; soon we will begin to encourage mundane versions of our Deep Universe vessels. When humans have settled on a dozen worlds, the problems of Earth will no longer seem so important. As for us, what will we do then? We have always been explorers. Even before our work settling the near worlds is done, we will be gone again, pushing the frontiers of knowledge. We hope some of the Masses will come with us: for Unity lies in seeking.

Failings

The Void Engineers are often considered the least restrictive of all the Technocratic Conventions, but even their much-vaunted love of freedom and democracy only extends to their own members. Ship captains send teams of un-Enlightened space marines to die in combat with nether horrors and think of it as no more than acceptable losses. The NSC wipes the minds of victims or witnesses to UFO incursions and exterminates those who have been contaminated. In addition, there are rumors that the alien abductions of recent years are the work of a rogue Co-op of Engineers or their creations.

The other Conventions worry about something else: What are the Void Engineers doing out there in the cold depths of the Deep Universe? Who (or what) are they associating with? Iteration X Statisticians note that Void Engineers are 8.6% more likely to turn to Nephandic allegiances than other Technocrats. More than one Void Engineer has returned from missions strangely changed, sometimes with a blank space in the ship's log. Even the mainline Engineers may have become infected. In one particularly heated Symposium, the Void Engineer representative hinted that the Convention might turn to outside allies for support if their funding was withdrawn. DSEATC quickly censured her, but evidence of an alliance between the Engineers and some unknown power exists aplenty for those paranoid enough to look for it. Take the Cop: It is far larger than any other known Realm, including Doissetep, Horizon or MECHA, and it dwarfs even such "natural" phenomenon as Autochthonia. It's so huge the entire Earth's orbit could fit inside it. How could it possibly have been Constructed by teams of Void Engineers in their tiny spacecraft? Perhaps they merely found it — or worse yet, were given it for favors rendered. If there is an alliance between the Engineers and Those Beyond, there could soon be civil war within the Union.

Some outsiders have accused the Void Engineers of harboring divisive sentiments. Though they are soundly rebuked for their excessive exuberance in carrying out Sleeper space exploration (with the Challenger disaster, the cutting of the ion drive project, Skylab, even the long history of disasters in Russian space programs), they remain staunch Conventioneers. Where else would they go? The Traditions lack the funding or the technology to support them, and the Void Engineers certainly couldn't hold out on their own against Traditions and Conventions both. Sure, the Void Engineers have some cordial relations with the Sons of Ether and a friendly rivalry with the Virtual Adepts, but they'd never have the wherewithal to leave the Union.

Theories and Practices

The Void Engineers pursue a special brand of science they call Technology (with a capital "T"). Unlike earthly technology, Technology is suffused with a sense of wonder and possibility. This is not to say that all Technology is shiny and covered in blinking lights; scuffed paint, worn cables and patched hulls are just as common, but all Engineer equipment is fantastic, even if it looks more like *Star Wars* than *Star Trek*. On their ships and in their Realms, Technology blends into a seamless whole of mundane technology, apparatuses and devices, many of which do not require an Enlightened user to operate. Most Technology is extremely vulgar on Earth, and when visiting the "mudball," many Engineers use the subdued, hidden equipment common to other Conventions. Void Engineers who have lived too long in space often forget what is and is not acceptable to static reality, and for that reason, they carry small devices that warn them if they are about to overstep reality's safe limits.

The hallmarks of Void Engineer Technology are their command of Correspondence and Dimensional Science (or DS). Void Engineer DS differs greatly from the Traditions' Spirit Sphere. Void Engineers find it easiest to access alternate dimensions in high-technology areas such as Constructs and laboratories. Conversely, they find it almost impossible to use DS in natural areas such as caerns and primal Nodes. DS holds that the atmosphere of the Near Universe is poisonous, and when traveling beyond the Penumbra, Void Engineers must carry their own supply of atmosphere. If the Near Universe is poisonous, the Deep Universe is a vacuum. Once past the Horizon, most Engineers find it necessary to use sealed suits or ships to breathe and avoid explosive decompression, even if Tradition mages do not. When different travelers meet, the result is often incongruities, as when an armored and suited space marine crosses the "cold and lifeless" surface of Europa, only to find a naked Dreamspeaker sitting by a fire. The Engineers also have a small number of Prime specialists who sanitize nodes and create Horizon Realms, a feat many other Conventions still cannot match.

Noted Figures

"Tychoides" (c. 1780 - present): The current leader of the Void Engineers and unofficial head of DSEATC, "Tychoides" is nothing less than the founder of modern Dimensional Science. As a young man in the early part of the 19th century, Tychoides, then known by a name now lost to history, accompanied the surveying missions of the new United States. On his travels, he encountered a Deep Universe entity that introduced him to travel beyond the Gauntlet. He took the name of Tycho Brahe's fictional son and spent the following decades mapping the Near Universe with the aid of the Void Seekers. Near the end of his normal life-span, the Progenitors granted him immortality. Their trust was well repaid, for in his new academic position, Tychoides produced the theory of Dimensional Science. Tychoides now lives in the Cop guiding the Convention with his relentless energy. He also acts as a father figure for the younger members of the Convention. He occasionally advises Cadets, and takes care to revise his textbooks frequently. The young, he admonishes, are the future of the Convention.

Martin St. Christopher (1915-45): The Technocratic Union and the Council of Nine Traditions have warred inconclusively over the moons of Jupiter since the early 1900s. During the waning years of World War II, St. Christopher brought the Void Engineers the closest they ever came to victory. When World War II broke out on Earth, both factions kept the bulk of their strength to Earth, leaving only skeleton crews to battle each other in the Deep Universe. In the small yet vicious battles that followed, the Engineer Deep Universe vessel *Ptolemy* lost its command staff, and the captaincy fell to the young space marine St. Christopher. He proved a bold strategist, able to produce great results with few ships, and under his leadership, the Engineers routed the larger Tradition force and swept most of the moons of Jupiter. Ironically, the end of the war on Earth, however, brought an end to Technocrat control of Jupiter-space. The newly exiled Nephandi, having nowhere else to go, attacked St. Christopher's fleet en masse, destroying the *Ptolemy* as it defended the Engineers' retreat. St. Chistopher's name, however, has become synonymous with military genius throughout the BCD.

Catherine Nichols (1918 - present): Dr. Nichols is not so much famous as infamous among her fellow Void Engineers. After serving in the Engineers for nearly four decades, she defected in 1985, disillusioned by the destruction of the *Challenger*. ("As if we had anything to do with that!" other Engineers object, "Blame the NWO.") She would have been yet another minor annoyance, hardly worthy of mention, had she not published the details of the Cop and Darkside Moonbase to the Traditions in 1995. Now she is a marked woman and vigorously hunted.

Stereotypes

Fellow Conventions: The Big Joke's for them. Break out your orange jumpsuits, pocket protectors and fishbowl helmets when they're around. We don't want them to know what we're really up to. The NWO and the Syndicate would shut us down if they could: We spend too much time out from under their thumbs and we spend too much money on "frivolities". Fortunately, DS makes us indispensable. Be good to the Iterators. They helped us out way back when we were just dumb sailors with no Technology of our own. Now we have lots of cool toys.

Rival Magi: Not bad sorts, really, just misguided. Of course, they have to be eliminated back on Earth, but that's not our job. When you meet them in the Deep Universe, remember, their help is usually worth more than their enmity.

Reality Deviants: Nasty things with huge eyes and slimy tentacles who want to destroy the Earth. Scary thing is, some of their arguments can be damned convincing.

The Masses: Stay-at-homes. But one day, those with a sense of adventure will be able to take to the stars.

"Have you ever seen the sunrise through the atmosphere of Jupiter?"

Technocratic Templates

The templates present a few samples of Technocrats for use in your chronicles. You can easily modify them to suit particular roles. Remember, though: Excessive Deviance is prohibited.

Unwitting Prole

Background: She has a normal job and a normal life, a college degree and some hopes for the future. The unwitting prole just follows her boss's directives. Occasionally, she is instructed to look up certain information, or conceal something else, but she just does her job. She's got to pay the rent, after all.

Image: Taken from the modest walks of life, the unwitting prole is unremarkable. She fits in with everyone else, mostly because she *is* "just some person." When matters get out of hand, she's quick to escape just like everyone else, but she has a quick mind and a sense of civic duty.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a normal life and you don't intend to screw it up. You take directions from "government agents" just like any other good citizen, and you duck when weirdness hits. With enough work, you can carve out a promotion and a comfortable life, and that's what you want.

Convention: Syndicate
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Conformist
Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 1, Empathy 1, Expression 2
Skills: Crafts 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Technology 2
Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Finance 3, Law 2, Linguistics 1, Science 1
Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Resources 2
Willpower: 3

Manipulative Citizen

Background: The halls of academia seemed a decent enough choice for a fellow with motive and intelligence. Computer science, a promising field, seemed like a good way to make money and pursue an interesting direction. The Conventions, though, found his talents useful for some of their more menial labor. Now, he works directly for an Enlightened scientist.

Image: The citizen looks like a bookish graduate student. He carries high-tech but otherwise mundane devices like a palm recorder and a laptop computer. His acumen is visible in his demeanor, as he looks down his nose at the uneducated.

Roleplaying Hints: You are on the track to experimentation and a doctoral degree as a cutting-edge researcher. With the help of some of the best teachers in academia, you can develop your own niche as a famous scientist. In the meantime, you spend your evenings in development of devices for your instructors, which naturally has you short-tempered with anyone outside of your own little world.

Convention: Iteration X
Nature: Conniver
Demeanor: Architect
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 2, Intimidation 1, Subterfuge 1
Skills: Crafts 2, Drive 2, Technology 3
Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 3, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Science 3
Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 1, Influence 1, Resources 3
Willpower: 4

Cybernetic Grunt

Background: Once a human, the cyborg became a cold, mechanical instrument of war. Though many Iterators busy themselves with intellectual work or pure science, the cyborg grunt is the evolution of technology under the care of Enlightened weapon-crafters. With Primium alloy armor, replacement limbs, implanted weapons and internal computers, the cyborg is a concealed agent of death. No human concerns get in the way now; only machine perfection remains, guiding a once-human skin to programmed objectives.

Image: When "off-duty," the cyborg looks just like anybody else. A thin veneer of flesh covers the various enhancements, keeping a semblance of normalcy. Once battle erupts, though, the cyborg sprouts lethal weapons from various appendages — guns from the arms, claws from the hands, blades and spikes on the arms and legs.

Roleplaying Hints: Once, long ago, you failed at something important. Now, you serve the Union in the best way possible. The computers in your head give you orders and make sure that you always react properly. Your weapons and armor make you more than any human. If only you weren't plagued by those ghostly memories, visions of a life once yours... no such life could ever belong to a machine....

Convention: Iteration X
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Bravo
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 2
Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Security 3, Technology 2
Knowledges: Computer 2, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1, Science 2
Backgrounds: Allies 1, Enhancements 5, Mentor 2, Resources 2
Willpower: 5
Paradox: 3 (Permanent)

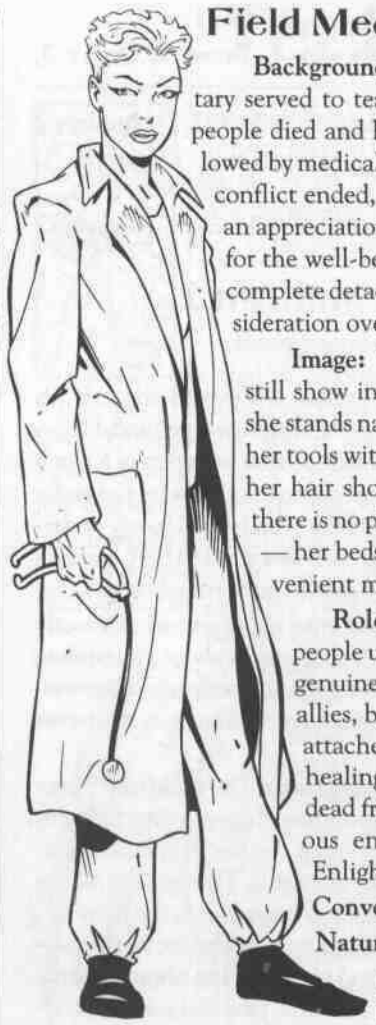
Raw Recruit

Background: The new recruit just passed through his moment of awareness, becoming newly Empowered and discovering true Enlightenment. He's aware that he is part of a much larger network of strings and operations, and that he can go far if he plays the right ball game. However, he still barely understands the new procedures and tasks described to him, and he's striving to keep up in a world suddenly gone into sharper focus.

Image: The recruit wears a formal suit of severe cut, exactly according to expectations. He's too nervous about his standing to try anything different. Although he comports himself professionally, his new realizations leave him visibly uneasy whenever a superior might be watching.

Roleplaying Hints: The world is far bigger and more dangerous than you ever thought, and you're one of the few people who can even see it for what it is. Though you have a long way to go, you intend to do the right job, or die trying. Around superiors, you're questioning and obedient, but always looking for a hint of some new and useful knowledge. Around the Masses, you're authoritative, decisive and calm.

Convention: New World Order
Nature: Cavalier
Demeanor: Director
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2
Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 2, Security 2
Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 3, Law 3, Politics 1, Science 1
Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Genius 2, Prole 1, Requisition 1, Resources 2
Spheres: Mind 1, Prime 1
Enlightenment: 1
Willpower: 5
Primal Energy: 2



Field Medic

Background: A brief stint in the military served to teach how to avoid fire, how people died and how to patch them up. Followed by medical training once the brush-fire conflict ended, this service gave the medic an appreciation for trauma care, a concern for the well-being of her teammates and a complete detachment from any moral consideration over enemies.

Image: Traces of military bearing still show in the field medic's visage, as she stands naturally at attention and uses her tools with brisk efficiency. She keeps her hair short and out of the way, and there is no pity or remorse in her features — her bedside manner is simply a convenient mask.

Roleplaying Hints: Patching people up is what you do. You have a genuine concern for your friends and allies, but you've learned not to get attached. Healing the body is easy; healing the emotional scars — from dead friends, lost loves and traitorous enemies — is beyond your Enlightened capabilities.

Convention: Progenitors
Nature: Caregiver
Demeanor: Loner
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Leadership 1, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 1
Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Technology 1
Knowledges: Linguistics 1, Medicine 4, Science 1
Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Contacts 2, Destiny 3, Resources 2
Spheres: Forces 1, Life 3, Matter 1, Mind 1
Enlightenment: 3
Willpower: 7
Primal Energy: 4

Seasoned Explorer

Background: The next hill, the hidden ravine, the neighboring countryside — these mysteries held wonder enough for the growing explorer. With time, the wanderlust turned into a drive to see new things beyond the ken of the world. Now experienced in space travel, deep sea operations and even a bit of dimensional research, the seasoned explorer has fulfilled his desire to see the cosmos, but his travels are only beginning.

Image: A practical wardrobe is the hallmark of the seasoned explorer, who carries all that he needs to survive with him. His shoes are sturdy, he has a handy multi-function knife (perhaps with some other concealed goodies) tucked into a pocket and bits of junk are scattered through the many pouches of his shirt and pants, just in case. He walks casually, but he's reflexively ready for everything and takes in his surroundings with a glance.

Roleplaying Hints: You've seen much of the wonder that the universe has to offer, yet you still find something new every time you go exploring. A critical eye and a desire to experience different things drives you, but you don't hesitate to share your knowledge with the young rookies who inevitably wind up assigned to accompany you.

Convention: Void Engineers
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Gallant
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Leadership 1
Skills: Drive 2, Energy Weapons 1, Firearms 2, Pilot 2, Stealth 1, Survival 4, Technology 3
Knowledges: Academics 1, Cosmology 3, Hypermathematics 1, Linguistics 3, Occult 1, Science 2
Backgrounds: Genius 1, Requisition 3, Resources 1
Spheres: Correspondence 3, Dimensional Science 3, Forces 1, Life 1, Matter 1, Prime 1
Enlightenment: 4
Willpower: 6
Primal Energy: 1

Dissident Within

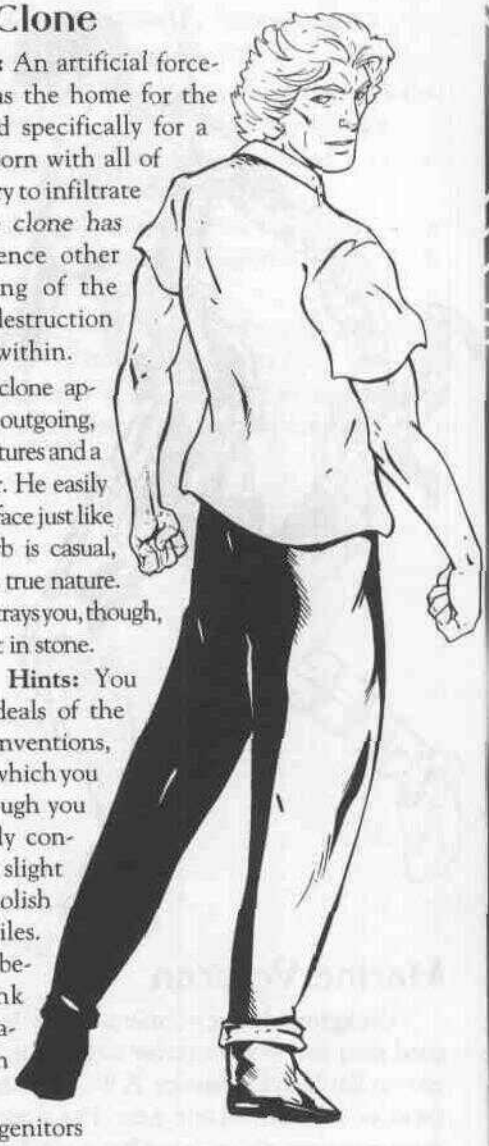
Background: A middle-class, average background led to a reasonable education, a bit of business and an unexpected Empowerment. Once drafted into the Union, the businessman decided to make his own opportunities. When that meant going outside the normal protocols, it was only a quick turn to throw away moral concerns in exchange for a promotion.

Image: The dissident does his best to blend in. He certainly wouldn't want to draw attention. That means wearing a good custom suit, with just a hint of individuality. The dissident always has a welcome smile and a twinkle in his eye; he very carefully conceals any hint that he might be involved in questionable activities.

Roleplaying Hints: To everyone else in the Union, you're unexceptional though marginally helpful. When you're dealing in your own special projects, though, your real enthusiasm shines through.

Convention: Syndicate
Nature: Manager
Demeanor: Entertainer
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Empathy 3, Expression 3, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Security 2
Knowledges: Academics 1, Finance 3, Law 2, Linguistics 2, Occult 3, Politics 3, Science 1
Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Influence 3, Resources 6
Spheres: Dimensional Science 2, Entropy 1, Mind 3, Prime 1
Enlightenment: 3
Willpower: 7
Primal Energy: 1

Intrusion Clone



Background: An artificial force-growth womb was the home for the clone, engineered specifically for a particular task. Born with all of the traits necessary to infiltrate and subvert, the clone has known no existence other than the training of the Union and the destruction of enemies from within.

Image: The clone appears genial and outgoing, with handsome features and a pleasant demeanor. He easily charms you with a face just like a friend's. His garb is casual, with no hint to his true nature. When he finally betrays you, though, his features are cast in stone.

Roleplaying Hints: You serve the high ideals of the Union and the Conventions, in the fashion for which you were built. Although you are extraordinarily congenial, you have a slight disdain for the foolish who fall to your wiles. You are only just beginning to think about the ramifications of your own consciousness.

Convention: Progenitors
Nature: Deviant
Demeanor: Celebrant
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Expression 4, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Etiquette 4, Performance 4, Stealth 3
Knowledges: Linguistics 4, Medicine 2, Science 1
Backgrounds: Enhancements 3, Genius 2, Mentor 3, Requisition 1
Spheres: Entropy 1, Life 2, Mind 3, Prime 2
Enlightenment: 4
Willpower: 7
Primal Energy: 1
Paradox: 1 (Permanent)

Marine Veteran

Background: The frontier is hard as hell on recruits, and good men and women throw away their lives every day to protect Earth and humanity. A little training goes a long way for an ex-pilot turned astronaut. The marine defends exploratory crews and also shows a fair aptitude for transport.

Image: Battle-scarred and haunted, the marine has seen too much of the horrors of the Great Beyond, and it shows. Her clothing is military and armored, and she carries weapons of various kinds, from knives to plasma ejectors. She may walk with a bit of a limp or a gait, but that's a con to fool enemies into complacency.

Roleplaying Hints: You're tough as nails and able to take apart a Nephandic monstrosity for lunch. However, you do it all to safeguard your friends and your missions. You're a team player, with no ambition to rank — you're fulfilling your own calling by going out there and fighting the things that would devour humanity. The cost is just your health, your sanity and your soul.

Convention: Void Engineers

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Celebrant

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Leadership 2

Skills: Energy Weapons 4, Firearms 2, Melee 3, Pilot 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Technology 1

Knowledges: Cosmology 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Science 3

Backgrounds: Destiny 1, Enhancements 1, Genius 1, Prole 4, Requisition 4, Resources 2

Spheres: Dimensional Science 2, Entropy 2, Forces 4, Life 2, Matter 2, Prime 2

Enlightenment: 5

Willpower: 7

Primal Energy: 1

Control

Background: Several ages of plans, intrigue and deal-making have honed this man to a plotter extraordinaire. The trivial concerns of the day-to-day world are far below casual notice; the important events all happen in the unfolding

tapestry of history. Now, Control is beyond anything comprehensible to humans. Intruding where necessary, arriving and leaving at whim under cloak of secrecy, Control decides the fate of the world itself.

Image: Control appears in whatever fashion he desires, making whatever impression he wants. Most of the time, he does not "appear" at all, but simply passes on directives from on high.

Roleplaying Hints: Your concerns are far greater and more pressing than the trivial workings of the Masses. You shepherd all of society at your whim. When you deign to intervene, you do so with the minimum force required to generate the maximum effect.

Convention: New World Order

Nature: Plotter

Demeanor: Deviant

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 5, Empathy 4, Expression 4, Leadership 5, Intimidation 4, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Crafts 3, Etiquette 5, Firearms 3, Melee 3, Performance 5, Security 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 4, Computer 4, Cosmology 3, Finance 3, Investigation 5, Law 5, Linguistics 4, Occult 4, Politics 5, Science 3

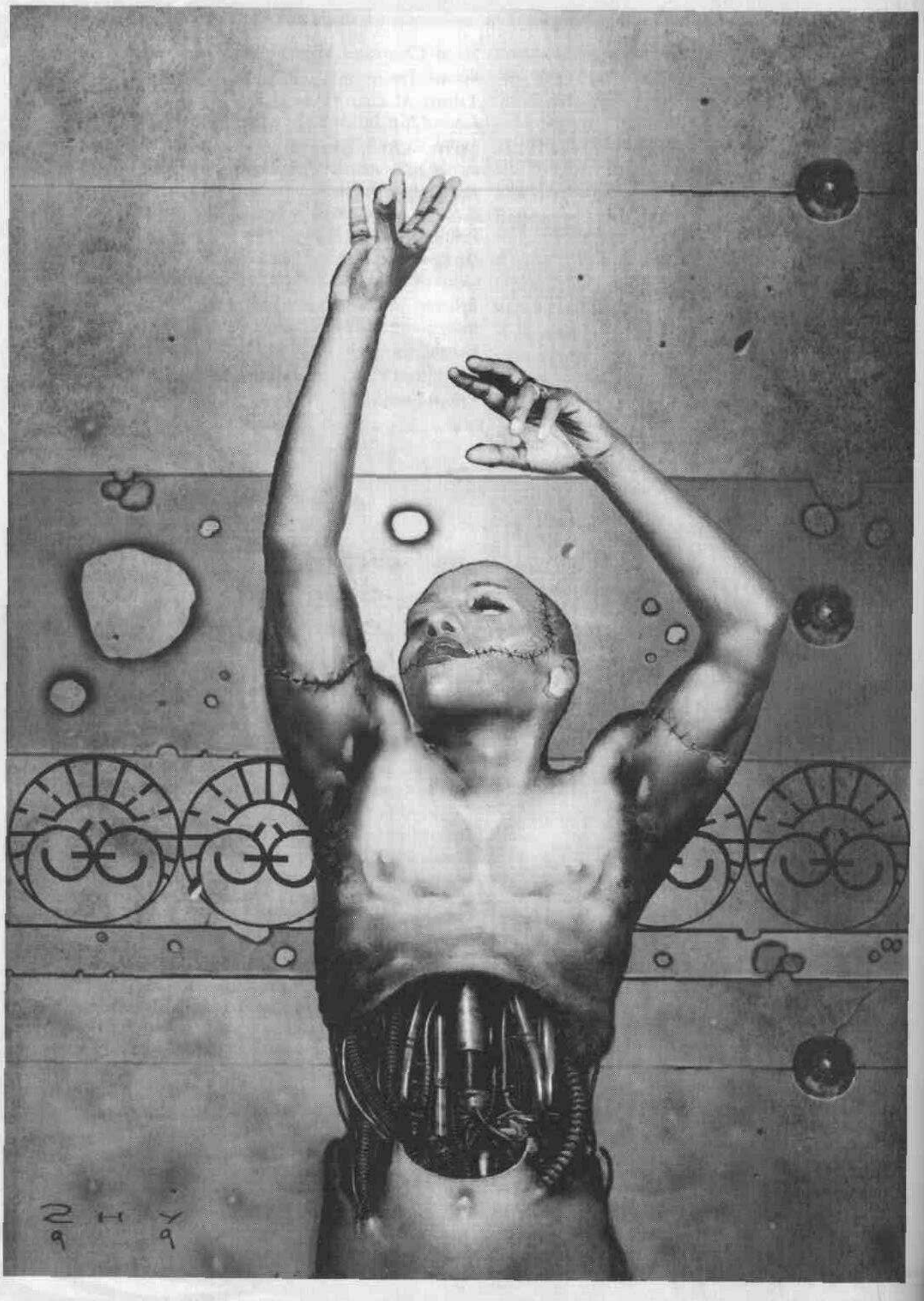
Backgrounds: Allies 5, Cloaking 5, Contacts 10, Destiny 4, Genius 4, Influence 10, Prole 10, Resources 10

Spheres: Correspondence 5, Dimensional Science 4, Entropy 4, Forces 2, Life 2, Matter 2, Mind 5, Prime 4, Time 5

Enlightenment: 7

Willpower: 9

Primal Energy: 10



Chapter Six: Character Recruitment

Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed, and from that comes all his dignity.
— Pascal, *Pensées*

You Are the Union

You're already a Technocrat.

Quit pretending you're some throwback to a bygone age. Look at yourself in the mirror. You watch TV, play video games, turn on the lights in a bathroom with indoor plumbing, take medicine when you get sick, talk to distant friends on the telephone, surf the Internet and drive a car to get to work, where (in all probability) you employ some type of computer.

You are a child of a luxurious Golden Age, and you have technology to thank for that.

Would you rather be shivering by a fire, crapping in the woods and wiping yourself with dead leaves? No? Didn't think so.

So you're a Technocrat.

The Union would like to thank you for your support.

The Technocracy Needs You!

Congratulations! You've just become another ally in the battle for reality. Here's your first assignment: Recruit a Technocrat for a career of investigation and enforcement on the Front Lines. You'll be conditioning and training an agent, an Enlightened representative of one of the five Conventions. Your Supervisor has already told you the parameters of your agent's first mission. She'll also be able to tell you about the sort of operatives she needs for her ongoing campaign of reality-enforcement.

Your Technocrat doesn't have to be a soldier or spy; instead, the word "agent" implies that he will uphold the ideals of your Convention. Theoretically, these ideals might conflict with the opinions of other agents on your team. If this happens, your agent has an obligation to state his opinions, uphold your Convention's party line and report the other agents on his team if they pose a security risk.

Contrary to stereotypes, the Union does not want an army of faceless drones. While it's important to obey the rules (if only for your own survival), you are an individual, first and foremost. So is your character. He may be dedicated to the cause, but he'll have his own views and motivations, too. Do not forget that.

Perusal of this chapter is essential. While an Enlightened agent has a great deal in common with the so-called "mages," there are a great many differences, too. Some of these differences manifest as new skills, rules and resources. The most important ones, however, come out in the drastically different world-view the Technocrats possess. A superstitionist sees her talents as strange, mystical gifts. A true member of the Technocratic Union knows better. Therefore, a new agent must commit these differences to memory, or at least be familiar with them. After all, your knowledge and decisions may affect the outcome of the Ascension Conflict.

Be aware, and choose well.

The Usual Questions

Although they refuse to answer to the vulgar title of "mage," agents of the Union are conceptualized and "built" like any other character described under that superstitionist term. There are, however, a few minor differences — see the Technocrat Processing Chart for specifics. For other details of character construction, see **Mage: The Ascension**, and substitute the proper terms like "Convention" and "Genius" for deluded concepts like "tradition" and "avatar." The essential elements are the same. Do not neglect the prelude — the answers you supply will go a long way toward distinguishing your agent from the stereotypical "soulless Technocrat."

Roleplaying Technocrats

The thought of playing a Technocrat fills many roleplayers with dread. In response to many of the nastiest accusations against the Technocracy, we offer a few rules to live by when representing the Union.

1) Remember that you are human.

A Technocrat is, first and foremost, a mage. All mages are human. Even if half of your body has been replaced with cybertech, or you've survived intensive conditioning, or you were created in a lab, there's still a human being in there somewhere. After all, if you really wanted to represent an absolute automaton, it wouldn't involve much roleplaying. Search out human motivations.

2) Avoid technobabble.

In both Storytelling and roleplaying, bad technobabble comes all too easily. Doubtless, you've seen this problem before: A player thinks he's being brilliant by improvising a Mr. Spock impersonation or Scully imitation, but no one else can figure out what they hell he's saying. There is no faster way to making the Technocracy boring. Trust us; we know.

3) Yes, you can improvise.

Even the most rigorous Technocrats are capable of tremendous bursts of creativity, insight and intuition. *This creativity also applies to willworking.* Don't be afraid of pulling off an Effect that hasn't been written up in a sourcebook. As long as you've got a technological focus, you can still pitch the idea to your Storyteller. Not all Technocrats are restrained by documented procedures. The rules exist to inspire you, not limit you.

4) Yes, you have emotions.

"Cold reason" is often elaborately rehearsed when it's used to hold destructive emotions at bay. No matter how indoctrinated technocrats are, they can still be corrupted by greed or power, feel murderous rage, fall in love or doubt themselves. This fact of life applies to any other mage; it also applies to you.

5) Keep track of who the good guys are.

Being a fascist high-tech villain can be delightful, but even the worst villains justify what they do. Rationalizing the most ruthless actions imaginable is a great exercise in roleplaying. With that in mind, we should also mention that there are a lot of genuine idealists within the Union, people who don't see themselves as "Black Hats" at all. Not everyone who puts on a black suit is a bad guy. The world is full of ethical grays, and exploring them makes for great stories.

Instructions for Processing Your Agent

Before we can accept your recruit, we must create scenarios that test his suitability. By documenting his abilities on a standardized test sheet, we can simulate his responses and predict possible outcomes. We supply the forms and systems; you provide the heart and soul. Once you've filled in enough little black dots on our standardized "character sheet," we'll be ready to release your recruit into the world.

To complete this assignment, you will need this book and a copy of **Mage: The Ascension**. At the end of this chapter, a Technocrat Processing Chart has been provided for your reference. At the end of this book, several character sheets have also been supplied. Your Storyteller will place a copy of the primary sheet face down in front of you at the beginning of the chronicle. *Do not begin documenting your agent's abilities until instructed to do so.* Do not mark on the sheet in the back of this book. Control has granted permission to photocopy those sheets as needed.

When the command to start is given, follow the steps listed on the Technocrat Processing Chart. Do not proceed to the next step until requested to do so. Be sure to fill in the chosen circles on your sheet completely; otherwise, the Storyteller may not be able to read them. We recommend using a yellow #2 pencil.

If you have a question, raise your hand and wait for the Storyteller to answer you. Everyone will be processed in a fair and orderly manner. Thank you for your cooperation.

6) Work as a team.

A host of possible enemies waits outside the front door of your Construct, and the bastards will tear you down unless you stick together. Even the Technocratic Union has internal problems, but if the same political bitterness infects your group, you'll wind up holding guns on each other. After each mission, go through debriefing and analyze your mistakes. Rebuild the structure of your team, then test it again in the field.

Code Names

When an agent graduates and joins an amalgam, he often adopts a code name to signify his new life. Within some teams, this moniker might be a proper name, like Nikita, Josephine or Viktor. If the name isn't intended to be a cover, the agent might choose a name that fits his team. Such is the case with Quentin, Quincy and Qntal of Amalgam Q7732-1. Other teams, for unknown reasons, prefer words that correspond to the same motif (playing cards, chess pieces or even the names of beer brands). Such conformity is not required, except in the rigid lower ranks of Iteration X. Other Conventions allow their ops far more latitude.

When your agent has assumed an identity, motivations and a new name, he is ready to be documented — to have his personality traits, talents and skills set down into abstract dots.

New Traits

More human than human is our motto.

— Tyrell, *Blade Runner*

Technocrats are literally supermen (or superpeople, if you prefer). Granted a powerful Enlightenment and an advanced hyperscience, they can literally re-shape reality itself. Yet the real core of the Technocrat is neither his Enlightened Science, nor his wild toys. At his core, the Technocrat is a human being, which is his greatest strength of all.

Stripped of all his technology, the Enlightened Scientist has four vital resources that no one can steal: His intelligence and wit; his Enlightenment; his passions and drives; and the talents, skills and knowledges that define his abilities. In game terms, those Traits get nice big capital letters that mark them as Important, and designate the handfuls of dice you roll to reflect the character's activities.

For the most part, your general Traits can be found in the **Mage: The Ascension** rulebook and its supplements. The Union, however, has special skills and criteria that few superstitionists can hope to grasp. Thus, the following chapter outlines a wealth of new Archetypes, Abilities, Merits, Flaws and Backgrounds. Through these Traits — and your innate vision and commitment to the cause — the Union will prevail.

Extraordinary Citizens

The Union makes use of a wide variety of specialized agents. Even the un-Enlightened among the Technocracy have a great deal of in-depth training and theoretical knowledge. As a result, some members of the Technocracy's auxiliary corps are capable of some extraordinary scientific developments, even if they cannot match the inspirational works of Enlightened agents. Though lacking the true genius that marks the best and brightest of the Union, these un-Enlightened agents can perform effects that seem almost magical to the uninitiated.

To represent an "extraordinary citizen," use the powers of sorcery or hedge magic from **World of Darkness: Sorcerer**. However, specify that the agent uses technological means to achieve his ends. For instance, a Progenitor citizen might use revolutionary medical techniques to perform the path of Healing, while a New World Order agent could have intensive training in psycho-social manipulation, resulting in powers similar to Fascination.

Agents using "hedge science" follow all of the normal rules for sorcery, though of course, they use technological apparatuses and scientific theories to perform their work. Few agents of this sort ever possess more than two paths — the specialized knowledge required is quite exclusive. These agents are capable of activating a limited range of devices, using anything up to a level-three device.

Note that, although these agents use the same game rules as more mystically inclined sorcerers, the disciplines of study are quite disparate. An extraordinary citizen's use of Healing, for instance, works around experimental medical techniques, thus, it is incompatible with magical forms of Healing. These exceptional sciences can, of course, be taught, but the investment of time and effort is similar to the difficulty in learning any other sort of sorcery — that is, training a highly skilled medical specialist takes as much work as instructing a hedge wizard in magical healing arts. The wizard cannot even improve his Healing with the doctor's knowledge, as the two forms are totally different (even though they are mechanically similar).

For a very unusual Technocracy game, try running a group of otherwise normal mortals who possess some level of technological expertise in this fashion. An un-Enlightened police officer, doctor and engineer together can make for a very *interesting* group of researchers... or adversaries.

Option: Victors and HIT Marks and Clones, Oh, My!

The biotech legions of the Technocratic Union provide an additional option for players in a Technocracy chronicle. Although this book focuses on Enlightened operatives, chances are, someone in your game will want to run a clone, a biotech mutant or a HIT Mark.

The details of such characters go beyond the scope of this book; a future supplement will delve into biotech constructs and their role in the Union. If you have a player who must run a hard-core construct, though, we've provided a few hints....

• Any obvious construct has the Flaw: Construct; many of the really overt ones (HIT Marks, FACADE-crafted monsters, etc.) also have two or more Flaws. See the notes on human-construct relations in the "Flaws" section for additional details.

• We *do not* recommend allowing a player character to run a HIT Mark. The damned things are far too powerful, and the potential for abuse is far too great. ("Anyone got a place for all these Get of Fenris pelts?") If you must let a player have such a creature, build the character to the specs given in **Mage: The Ascension**, using the Background: Enhancement. HIT Marks are standard-issue, and they use more or less the same Traits. They're also notoriously stupid, prone to personality quirks and susceptible to Paradox... especially Unbelief. A HIT Mark character has the following system limitations:

— An upper limit of 3 on all Mental Traits.

— He must take the following Flaws: Construct, Short Life, Susceptible to Paradox and Soulless. These limitations are endemic to all HIT Marks, and they cannot be avoided (nor do they allow any additional freebie points at character creation). Remember, a HIT Mark is not a mage; (s)he's an artificial construct of metal and force-grown flesh.

— The character cannot earn experience points. In story terms, he's created to do one thing well. In game terms, the player will have to go into "experience hock" to pay for the character's Traits, and he will be paying for them essentially forever.

— His blood becomes toxic waste. Any vampire who tries to ghoul or Embrace him will have a very nasty surprise. (See **Vampire: The Masquerade, Revised Edition**, page 279.) And no, a HIT Mark cannot become a vampire.

— A HIT Mark is what he is: a soulless, near-automaton. No Enlightened Procedure can change the preceding limitations. If you use the optional rules for social conditioning in Chapter Four, the HIT Mark automatically has a conditioning rating of 10.

• Many other constructs, most notably Progenitor monstrosities and "lesser" Men in Black, have severe physical and metaphysical limitations. In game terms, these aberrations become Flaws (see the section in this chapter for details) that only constructs can take. Although a single character is not obligated to take all of these Flaws, a construct must take at least one. These Flaws include:

Short Life (3 pt Flaw)

Like the replicants in *Blade Runner*, you have a built-in life span. Under the best of conditions, you may live a year or two. At the end of that time, your body breaks down, your organs shut off and your life-spark fades to black. Chances are, you also have the Flaw: Dissolve, to keep the authorities from asking the wrong questions.... Enjoy life while you can.

Dissolve (3 pt Flaw)

When killed, you disintegrate into a puddle of goo. The advantage (to the Technocracy, anyway) is that no Reality Deviant can perform necromantic rituals on your corpse, and no M.E. can identify your remains. The downside (to you) is that once you pass Incapacitated, you're irrevocably, 100% perished after 10 seconds. No Procedure or rite can restore you to your original form; no magic or science can contact your broken awareness. Where does your soul go? What's a soul?

Subject to Paradox (5 pt Flaw)

You are an aberration of consensual reality. Although you probably don't employ Enlightened Science, the backlashes that plague your comrades occasionally screw you up, as well. When the Paradox Effect manifests, you break down: your skin erupts into boils, your mechanisms seize up, your circuits blow, your organs spasm... in short, bad things happen.

In game terms, the character gets a permanent Paradox Pool of five dice. This pool does not dissipate after a backlash, nor does it gain additional points. If and when you do something that seems blatantly impossible by the standards of the local reality (popping chain guns out of your back in front of a bunch of Sleepers, for instance), the Storyteller rolls those dice (difficulty 8). If she makes a successful roll, your construct suffers strange effects based on the number of successes and the nature of the act. Possible effects include:

• **Mental Shutdown:** a.k.a., Quiet. Lasts one hour per success.

• **Paradox Flaws:** See the "Genetic Flaws" sidebar. Lasts one day per success.

• **Physical Damage:** The most common effect. For every success, the character suffers one unsoakable, aggravated health level of damage as his skin, cybernetics, organs or biomods rebel.

• **Weapon Detonation:** Another form of physical damage, but in an explosive radius. This damage may be soaked by others, but not by the character himself.

If you have this Flaw, it's wise to confine your wilder activities to Horizon Constructs, Technocratic strongholds, technology trade shows and science fiction conventions!

Soulless (7 pt Flaw)

The inner Genius does not burn within you, and it never will. Essentially, you have no soul, no "avatar" in the superstitionist sense. You resemble a human being, but you're actually quite a bit less than human.

In game terms, you can't use magic — *ever*. A character with this Flaw *cannot ever* learn, use or manipulate the Spheres of influence. He may, however, employ devices, and he does not count as a "witness" to any form of magic or Enlightened Science. This Flaw raises your freebie point total to 21, and it may be taken in addition to the usual seven-point limit on Flaws. It may *not* be taken by any form of "mage" — it exists to allow a player to build HIT Marks and other un-Enlightened constructs.

(**Note**: No, you can't instill an Enlightened Genius in this character with any form of magic, Discipline, spirit Gift or anything else. Deal with it, and enjoy the extra points the Flaw gives you.)

Technocrat Processing Chart

Before You Begin

Working with the rest of the troupe and the Storyteller, decide on the amalgam concept for your team. Why are your agents working together? What goals are they trained to accomplish?

Next, choose the Methodologies represented within your team. Which areas of expertise will boost your amalgam's overall performance? Which one do you represent? Will any members of your team pose a security risk?

You may also need to decide on a front for your team. What do the Masses think your team does for a living? Are you obviously "government agents" or "private investigators," or do you operate from behind another kind of facade?

Initial Processing

• Step 1: Personality

Choose Concept, Convention, Methodology, Nature and Demeanor.

Determine scientific approach (paradigm) and personal history.

Your Supervisor and Construct will be chosen for you.

• Step 2: Select Attributes

Prioritize Attributes (Physical, Social, Mental)

Assign points accordingly (7/5/3)

• Step 3: Select Abilities

Prioritize appropriate Abilities (Talents, Skills, Knowledges)

Assign points accordingly (13/9/5)

No Ability higher than 3 at this stage.

[**Option:** The Storyteller may allow you to purchase Abilities according to your Methodology's specializations. In that case, *distribute 27* points as appropriate.]

• Step 4: Select Backgrounds

Choose Backgrounds (7)

• Step 5: Document Technocratic Acumen

Determine one specialty Sphere by Methodology, and record a free dot in that Sphere

Choose additional Spheres (5)

Record Enlightenment, a.k.a. "arete" (1), Willpower (5)

Select tools and Procedures appropriate to your Methodology

Document any Enhancements

Note initial ratings for Prime Energy (as per Genius rating) and Paradox (0, unless you employ Enhancements)

Diagnose possible Genetic Flaws

• Step 6: Complete Training

Distribute freebie points (15), as appropriate (see chart)

• Step 7: Investigate Your Allies

Choose code name. *Designate* a team name

Signify completion by passing a secret note to the Storyteller

Pursue downtime activities until game begins

Concepts

• **Academician:** Professor, grad student, lab tech, dean of studies, research scientist

• **Artist:** CGI animator, cutting-edge scientist, biotechnician, techno musician, architect, gadgeteer, game designer

• **Construct:** Clone, cyborg, biomutation, genegineered "prototype," Man in Black (lesser)

• *Criminal:* Street thug, gangster, smuggler, crime boss, assassin, drug dealer, clone slaver, black market op

• **Defender:** Man in Black, cyborg, bodyguard, cop, soldier, secret agent, detective, Border Corps op, "ghostbuster"

• **Enforcer:** Man in Black, leg-breaker, interrogations specialist, propagandist, political advisor, investigator, HIT Mark, space marine, clone specialist

• **Extraordinary Citizen:** Lab tech, space marine, Kamrad, cop, politician, "cleaner," mercenary, doctor, campus activist, teacher, informant, gang member, spy

• **Explorer:** Space pioneer, pilot, undersea explorer, Netspinner, alternate dimensions specialist, genegineered human "adapted" to new environments

• **Facilitator:** Secret agent, bureaucrat, manager, diplomat, emissary, genegineered seducer, computer programmer, information specialist, interrogator, "cleaner"

• **Geek:** Computer designer, futurist, research specialist, hacker, cutting-edge experimenter

• **Healer:** Physician, nurse, FACADE engineer, medic, psychiatrist, therapist

• **Media Op:** Reporter, photographer, DJ, media mogul, propaganda specialist, station manger, Net op, genegineered supermodel

• **Money Man:** Yuppie, banker, gangster, investment broker, celebrity, tycoon, operations manager, power-broker

• *Politician:* Media relations, advisor, watchdog, cabinet member, diplomat, "silent partner," troubleshooter

• **Q Division:** Gadget designer, inventor, gadgeteer, field op

• **Searcher:** Requisitions op, Netspinner, space explorer, cutting-edge physician, research specialist

• **Spy:** Man in Gray, genegineered seducer, impersonator clone, infiltrations op, remote-control gadgets specialist, psych op

• **Tech Specialist:** Hypertech mechanic, field repair specialist, biomechanic, pilot, helmsman, data acquisitions specialist

• **Visionary:** Chaos specialist, sociobiologist, dream researcher, psych op, Netspinner architect

• **Warrior:** Man in Black, Victor, war cyborg, space marine, gangster, Hollow Man, psychoactives expert, biomod assassin

Eidolons

• **Dynamic:** Without change, there is no progress. You are an agent of change and an architect of progress.

• **Pattern:** By building, strengthening and protecting, you protect the existing order and lay the foundation for the new one.

• **Primordial:** The answers of the greatest enigmas can be found in primal darkness. It's your destiny to bring those answers to light.

• **Questing:** Like the spirit of science itself, you move eternally forward.

Archetypes (Nature & Demeanor)

• **Benefactor:** You generously offer others whatever you can give.

• **Caretaker:** You're a protector of the weak and innocent.

• **Crusader:** You strive to improve the world.

• *Devil's Advocate:* It's your duty to challenge the status quo.

• **Entertainer:** Without your talents, the world would be a dismal place.

• **Hacker:** Tear it down, build it back, make it better than before.

• **Innovator:** Your unorthodox approach yields great results.

• **Investigator:** There's a reason for everything, and you want to know what it is.

• **Machine:** Flesh is weak. Be better than human.

• **Mad Scientist:** Sometimes the ultimate answers lie in the wildest experiments.

• **Manager:** You excel at directing resources to a greater end.

• **Misfit:** Once an outcast, you're still searching for your place.

• **Penitent:** You made a mistake, and you're still paying for it.

• **Perfectionist:** Promote order to offset chaos.

• **Quester:** You're on a mysterious, heroic errand that even you cannot define.

• **Sneak:** The world is a devious game, and you're a master player.

• **Tycoon:** Wealth and success are the measures of a man.

• **Vigilante:** Whatever they did, you will make the bastards *pay*!

Conventions

(Methodologies are in italics, specialty Spheres appear in parenthesis. Some groups have more than one specialty, but only one may be chosen per character.)

• **Iteration X:** Through order, precision and technological prowess, these visionaries straddle the line between flesh, mind and machine. In that space, they seek perfection.

BioMechanics: Through physical and behavioral modification, these Iterators attain union with The Machine. (Life)

Statisticians: Planners, leaders and architects, these experts master computers, predictions and mathematical esoterica, seeking the next level of human thought. (Entropy or Time)

Time-Motion Managers: With technical wizardry and innovative technology, the Managers bring human achievement to new heights. (Forces or Matter)

• **NWO:** Information is reality. He who controls the information reshapes reality, and these specialists hope to save reality from its own imperfections.

The Ivory Tower: As mediators, educators and facilitators, Ivory Tower agents oversee media operations, execute diplomacy and distribute information and indoctrination inside and outside the Union. (Mind)

Operatives: When there's dirty work to be done, these dedicated Technocrats roll up their sleeves. Espionage, enforcement and flat-out warfare keep them busy. (Mind or Forces)

Q Division: An "unofficial" Methodology of the Convention, this group devises tools and Procedures for field agents of the other agencies. (Forces or Matter)

Watchers: Masters of media and surveillance, the Watchers deal out propaganda and take in essential data. (Correspondence or Forces)

• **Progenitors:** Life is an eternal evolution; these physicians and pharmacopoeists seek the secrets of that evolution, working to bring humanity into its next incarnation.

Genegineers: By studying the elements of reality at the base level, these scientists explore the possibilities of cloning, forced evolution and biomodification… then put them to use. (Life)

FACADE Engineers: With surgery, genetic manipulation and accelerated micro-evolution, these "mad scientists" create new life forms and alter old ones for future survival. (Life or Entropy)

Pharmacopoeists: Pioneers of the mind, these Technocrats deal in medicines, psychoactives and nutrients in an effort to unlock the doors of perception and the unattained thresholds of the body. (Life or Mind)

• **Syndicate:** Money and commerce provide progress; hence, these masters of trade and influence guide the world into a safer, more prosperous future.

Disbursements: When the bills need to be paid (and funds need to be raised to pay them), these ops get to work. Cash in hand, they perform diplomacy and intrigue between the Conventions and secure tools and influence for their fellow Financiers. (Correspondence or Mind)

Enforcers: The hard end of the street provides cash and influence, and it gives the Convention a brutal edge when needs be. Crime is no sin to Enforcers — it's just business as usual. (Forces or Mind)

Financiers: The world economy rests in the hands of these brilliant Technocrats. From corporate influence to financial leverage, the Financiers are up to their armpits in cash. (Entropy or Mind)

Media Control: When people want something, they spend money to get it. These specialists keep the Masses wanting more… and sic them on the Syndicate's enemies when necessary. (Mind or Life)

Special Projects Division: The R&D arm of the Syndicate, this Methodology provides new gadgets and resources for agents in need. (Dimensional Science or Forces)

• **Void Engineers:** Slipping the bounds of Earth, these pioneers stake their claims on the next world(s) while defending this one from alien assault.

Border Corps Division (BCD): When alien horrors attack, these brave men and women stand ready to kick ass and take names. (Forces)

DSEATC: The ruling committee, this remote body makes decisions for the rest of the Convention. (Dimensional Science)

Earth Frontier Division (EFD): Exploring deep seas, high peaks and hidden places, these adventurers map the unknown parts of the material world. (Correspondence or Forces)

Neutralization Specialist Corps (NSC): Alongside the NWO, these ops clean up messes that spread from alternate dimensions to our own. (Dimensional Science)

Pan-Dimensional Corps (PDC): Spanning the Deep Universe, the Net and alternate dimensions, these explorers risk their lives to expand the Union's reach. (Correspondence, Dimensional Science or Time)

Research & Execution (R&E): The Engineers' "Q Division" provides new gadgets, vehicles and technology for otherworldly expeditions. (Dimensional Science or Forces)

Primary Abilities

• **Talents:** Alertness, Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Dodge, Expression, Intimidation, Leadership, Streetwise, Subterfuge

• **Skills:** Drive, Energy Weapons, Etiquette, Firearms, Hypertech, Melee, Research, Stealth, Survival, Technology

• **Knowledges:** Academics, Computer, Enigmas, Finance, Investigation, Law, Linguistics, Medicine, Politics, Science

Additional Abilities

• **Talents:** Acting, Instruction, Intuition, Negotiation, Newspeak

• **Skills:** Biotech, Helmsman, Interrogation, Jetpack, Jury-Rig, Meditation, Microgravity Operations, Networking, Pilot, Security, Torture

• **Knowledges:** Conspiracy Theory, Covert Culture, Cryptography, Finance, Law Enforcement, Media, Pharmacopoeia, Power-Brokering, Propaganda, Psychology, Subdimensions, Terrorism, Vice

Merits/Cost

Acute Senses	1-3 pts
Confidence	2 pts
Inner Knight	5 pts
Iron Will	3 pts
License To...	1-5 pts
Master of Red Tape	4 pts
Officially Dead	2 pts
Perfect Liar	3 pt
Poker Face	2 pts
Ties	3 pts
Unobtrusive	1 pt

Flaws/Bonus

*** = constructs only**

Berserker	3 pts
Bigot	2 pts
Construct	2 pts
Demented Eidolon	3 pts
Dissolve*	3 pts
Faulty Enhancements	2-5 pts
Fifth Degree	5 pts
Icy	2 pts
Mr. Red Tape	4 pts
Rogue	4 pts
Rose-Colored Mirrorshades	2 pts
Rotten Liar	3 pts
Short Life*	3 pts
Soulless*	7 pts
Subject to Paradox*	5 pts
Technobabbler	1 pt

Backgrounds

- **Allies:** You've got friends....
- **Backup:** A squad of citizens who aid you in distress.
- **Cloaking (Arcane):** The talent of remaining undetected.
- **Companion (Familiar):** An odd helpmate with some unusual abilities.
- **Construct (Chantry):** Your status in your base of operations.
- **Destiny:** A statistical probability that you will do something significant.
- **Device (Talisman):** A hypertech machine in your possession.
- **Enhancement:** Cybernetics or genegineering that make you superhuman... for a price.
- ***Genius (Avatar):*** *The brilliance of your* Enlightened inspiration.
- **Hypercram (Dream):** A talent for temporary data assimilation.
- **Influence:** Your fame and pull among the Masses.
- **Laboratory (Sanctum):** A private research space.
- **Library:** A source of data.
- **Mentor:** *Your Technocratic teacher and parental figure.*
- **Node:** A reserve of Primal Force you can access in need.
- **Patron:** A helpful superior.
- **Requisitions:** A measure of your ability to request gear and resources.
- **Resources:** Cash, credit and property.
- ***Secret Weapons:*** Experimental devices that you test for Q Division.
- **Spies:** An information network at your disposal.

Spheres of Influence

- **Correspondence:** Your understanding of space and the forces that warp it, as well as your ability to control distance, travel and connections.
- **Dimensional Science:** The rare science of observing and even visiting other dimensions, and perhaps dealing with the bizarre entities that exist there.
- **Entropy:** Chaos theory, determinism and combinatorics; the science of randomness, probability and entropic decay.
- **Forces:** The power of physics *unleashed: heat, light, kinetic* energy, waves, particles and control over the interactions of matter and motion.
- **Life:** Primordial studies of organisms and creatures, as well as of the things that grow, change and die.
- **Matter:** The building blocks of the material universe; advanced chemistry, metallurgy and material sciences define all unliving things.
- **Mind:** Cognitive science, the study of consciousness itself — how and why people think, the power of thought, even exploration into your own understanding and mental capabilities.
- **Prime:** Techniques for perceiving and manipulating Primal Energy, the very resonance of Creation itself left over from the birth *of the cosmos.*
- **Time:** Your mastery of temporal engineering determines your attunement to time's passage, your ability to manipulate subjective time and your ability to generate fields that warp time itself.

Freebie Points

Trait	Cost
Attributes	5 per dot
Abilities	2 per dot
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Merits & Flaws	(variable)
Enlightenment	4 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot
Spheres	7 per dot
Primal Energy	1 point per four dots

Retrofitting

Many of the following Traits are new; others are Technocratic refinements of pre-existing Traits. Since the **Mage** line has existed for six years prior to this **Guide** — and since we try to avoid putting new Traits in every other supplement — Technocratic characters in older books (or in chronicles that began before this book came out) may be lacking some essential Traits from this chapter.

At the Storyteller's discretion, such characters may be "retrofitted" with the appropriate Traits, or you may replace older, less specialized Traits (like Pilot or Firearms) with the newer variants (like Helmsman or Energy Weapons). If a player wants his Technocrat to possess both Traits (Firearms for normal guns, Energy Weapons for hypertech), he may divide the old dots as he sees fit (Firearms 5 becomes Firearms 2, Energy Weapons 3), or he may simply add the new Traits to his sheet and pay for them "on credit" with future experience points.

Traits which "retrofit" existing ones have been noted at the bottom of each description. All others should be considered self-sufficient.

Genius Eidolons (Avatar Essences)

As true scientists and Technocrats understand, the power some call "magic" is actually a combination of Enlightened will and advanced science. A flash of brilliance, literally an inner Genius, allows a person to comprehend things the Masses could never see or accept.

As a member of the Union, you know this to be true. Even so, a little voice occasionally speaks up from the back of your mind, telling you things that you really shouldn't understand. Like most Technocrats, you probably dismiss this voice as an "eidolon": a phantom voice from your subconscious, or possibly an archetypal image connecting you to the Universal Unconscious. The superstitionists call such things "avatar essences," and they define them as restless souls driving them along some "mystic path." Nonsense. You understand what this Eidolon truly is: an inner voice telling your conscious mind what your subconscious mind already knows. (Also see the Background: Genius, p. 176.)

The Union's policy on Eidolons is simple: Don't ask, don't tell. Psych ops know that all Technocrats receive "inner voices" from time to time, and they consider those "visitations" normal. Of course, they also evaluate each agent's Eidolon as much as possible, as well as monitoring the strength, frequency and nature of such "instructions." Individual Technocrats consider the Eidolon to be a private matter, and they rarely discuss it with anyone other than the resident psych evaluator — if they discuss it at all. Some agents, especially the hard-logic types, either shrug their "visitations" off completely, or view them in abstract terms (like code-strings or dream-symbols). At the other end of the spectrum, some rare individuals view their Eidolons in religious terms, seeing them as divine instructions or demonic tormentors. (See "God and the Technocracy," p. 139.) Most fall in between. Since the Eidolon tends to appear in dreams, the average Technocrat sees his "inner genius" as just that: an especially significant dream.

In the old days, Daedaleans took great pride in their dreams and visions. More often than not, they described these Eidolons at length in treatises and correspondence, meditated on them during prayer and worked them into various inventions. As the supremacy of the conscious mind and the importance of sheer reason overcame the spark of inspiration, however, these dreams were relegated to back-room conversation and private journals. Now, in the heyday of rational science, Eidolons are considered fanciful dreams — still significant, but slightly embarrassing in the light of day.

As a Technocrat, your Eidolon guides you in subtle but significant ways; it's not so much a guardian spirit as a restless itch. As a player, the Eidolon functions exactly as the Avatar Essence Trait. It offers a compass for your character. Because of the Technocracy's disdain for "avatars" and such, the Eidolon rarely appears to you except in dreams or impulses. Anything else would be silly, not to mention suspicious. After all, a Technocrat who starts seeing things like flaming angels is a definite security risk! If she should *dream* of flaming angels, well, then, that's perfectly natural....

Each Eidolon is an individual "vision," conforming to one of the four basic types. The following samples are suggestions based on common Eidolon figures.

Dynamic

Some people make machines; other people drive those machines forward. You're one of the latter. Too restless to sit around fitting pieces together, you have to go out and make things happen. So get off your ass! Tomorrow won't wait all day.

A common Essence among field agents, architects, businessmen and enforcer-types, this "voice" often appears as:

- A famous inventor (Edison, Daedalus, da Vinci) or other scientist (Copernicus, Einstein, Darwin) whose innovations challenged the established order. This figure comes and councils you in dreams.
- A heroic image of yourself (vanquishing hordes of bad guys with cunning, nerve and technology) that inspires you to greatness.
- Brain-shattering fractals, spinning equations and dynamic formulae send you bolting out of bed, but they disappear when you try to write them down.
- A mythological figure (an angel, a saint or a heraldic beast) that epitomizes courage, purity and inspiration appears and lends you strength.

Pattern

In a world of constant change, you're humanity's foundation. Without people like you, the world would fall into a million pieces. You're a builder, a shaper, a teacher and a leader. Let the tides of war and chaos roar! They break against you while you stand firm. Let weaker souls waiver.

The most obvious Essence among the Technocracy's core agents (Iterators and other cyborgs, planners, Administrators and mechanics), the Pattern drive usually speaks to people as:

• Images of great walls, towers, bridges and grand other feats of architecture. Often, these visions appear when there's some obstacle blocking your path. Their design suggests a solution to the problem.

• Legendary knights (Sir Galahad), rulers (Solomon the Wise), scientists (Lu Pan) or philosophers (Plato) appear to you and offer their advice.

• Calculations or diagrams that would lead to a great breakthrough appear in your mind.

• A powerful creature (a dragon, a huge dog or an eagle) appears beside you — usually, but not always, in a dream. Sometimes, you can almost see it during waking hours... though, of course, you would never admit to that.

Primordial

No matter what science might uncover, you understand how fathomless the universe truly is. Oh, sure, we all need the tools and lessons of science — we might as well be monkeys without them! — but you hold the heretical view that nothing man can invent will illuminate the whole playing field. You keep these thoughts to yourself usually — why bother getting in trouble over things others wouldn't possibly understand? — but in your private moments, you want to figure out what's going on beyond the light. Who knows what you might discover there?

The few Primordials within the Union tend to keep a low profile. Out of their comrades' sight, they go off on "secret missions" where they gather intelligence (spies), or plumb deep space (space explorers), weird phenomena (spook-hunters) or the human mind and soul (investigators and psychics). The odd Eidolons they see sometimes look like this:

• You feel yourself drawn into a deep pool; at the bottom waits a fantastic treasure... if you could only reach it....

• Gargantuan, half-seen dragons, sea monsters or other spirit-creatures manifest in the shadows beside you. As terrifying as these apparitions are, you get the sense that if you could only see the *whole* creature, you would learn some great thing.

• An infamous mad genius (like Rasputin, Francis Bacon or Dr. Frankenstein) tells you how to balance the needs of order and chaos.

• Weird voices drift through your head, offering wise but disconcerting council.

Questing

Every age needs its pioneers, and that role falls to you. No matter what great things you accomplish, the horizon is always beckoning. While other Technocrats build bridges into the future, you're looking for the site of the next crossing. Science is a guiding light, and you're the bearer of its lantern... or its halogen spotlight, to be more precise!

The free spirits of the Technocracy, Questing-types often see their Eidolons as:

• A terrifying figure (a flaming clown, demon or terrorist) that drives you screaming through fields of nightmare. This thing never lets you rest....

• A brave hero — perhaps yourself, perhaps some mythical figure — who embarks on a great quest. From time to time, he appears and offers you encouragement, advice and the occasional kick in the ass.

• Mathematical equations that spiral into fractals, then spin and twist in ever-evolving kaleidoscope patterns. You gain inspiration by gazing at these endless designs.

• A wondrous vision (one of a gleaming city, a pile of gold or a beautiful bird or figure) glittering on the edge of the horizon, beckoning you ever forward....

Seekings

Naturally, these visions appear in Technocratic Seekings as well. More often than not, they set the tone for the journey and provide the sorts of symbols your character sees: For instance, a Man in Black with an Eidolon of King Arthur dreams of service to the Round Table. In his Seekings, he envisions himself in gleaming armor, chasing dragons and dodging traps that reflect his real-life conflicts. If he triumphs, lovely maidens and rich merchants reward his valor; if not, he falls before a dragon's jaws or the blades of rival knights. He won't be running around brandishing a broadsword when he's awake, of course, but the Eidolon and the dream will inspire him, regardless; in his mind's eye, he's decked out in full plate and covered with glory, even when he's dressed in a black suit and trenchcoat. Even a hard-core Technocrat has his dreams!

(**Note:** For details and advice about running Seekings, see **The Book of Mirrors: The Mage Storytellers Guide**, pages 53-55. Although Technocrats and mystics view the process differently, the game systems are the same.)

Archetypes (Natures and Demeanors)

Despite its image of cookie-cutter conformity, the Technocracy is quite diverse. It takes all kinds of hands to build an empire, and the Union is always looking for people with something to contribute. Naturally, certain types of people have more to give than others; the trick is finding the right job for the right person.

Archetype Traits provide a blueprint for a character's behavior. In the case of Technocrats, who suffer from bad press and worse stereotypes, these Traits can provide a player with character motivations beyond "Must be a good Technocrat. <beep> Must be a good Technocrat. <beep> Must be...." Even when similar agents perform the same duties, these motivations alter the way they carry those duties out; a Man in Black with a "Crusader" mentality will act differently than one who's a "Machine" or "Benefactor." To the Reality Deviant on the receiving end of the agent's gun, the MiB's motivations don't seem to make much difference; to the agent himself, they make all the difference in the world.

Naturally, Technocratic operatives tend to follow different personality paths than their more chaotic mystic cousins. There is, of course, some degree of common ground; the Archetype Traits given in **Mage: The Ascension** bear this statement out. Common Technocratic Archetypes include: Architect, Caregiver, Conformist, Critic, Director, Fanatic, Judge, Survivor, Traditionalist and Visionary. Several others — Avant-Garde, Bravo, Bon Vivant, Jester, Loner and Martyr — are less-common, but the Union still has a place for such people. True Curmudgeons, Deviants and Rebels are pretty unusual. Such malcontents are counterproductive, and they weaken the Union. Firm management usually adjusts these temperamental operatives... or retires them. No one wants a screw-up watching his back.

In a perfect world, everyone could be honest about their feelings and motivations. The Technocracy is not a perfect world, much as its members would like to claim that it is. Between external dangers and internal politics, the Technocrat who reveals her true Nature is asking for trouble. Hence, many ops favor Demeanors that reflect the "soulless Technocrat" image most people have come to expect. Cloaking their true Natures behind Demeanors like Architect, Benefactor, Conformist and Machine, these agents perpetrate the image of the Union as a faceless mass-mind. Inside, however, it's a different story.

Naturally, the Union fosters certain personality types as well. In addition to the "official" Natures and Demeanors, the following Archetypes are also common within the Technocracy:

Benefactor

You're a generous soul. If there's something that people around you need — money, protection, medicine or maybe just some kindness — you'll go out of your way to give it to them. Anybody with your gifts should feel the same way; generosity is a noble calling, and there are plenty of people in the world who need what you offer.

Altruism is all too rare in this day and age. Helping people isn't just a hobby for you, it's a personal crusade. As far as you're concerned, someone in your position can do no less.

The flip-side of generosity is **Obligation**, and you often feel obligated to help someone whether she wants it or not... or whether you're even in a position to help at all. You might be a busybody or simply too willing to stretch yourself to martyr-like dimensions trying to save the world. In short, you sometimes go too far.

— Regain Willpower when you do something that someone else desperately needs. The key here is "desperately"; simply working at a daycare center will not refresh your Willpower, although working at a battered-children's center probably would.

Caretaker

The Union was created to better the lot of the common folk. As a member of that august body, you feel duty-bound to protect and serve. Maybe you're a healer or a cybernetic guardian against the terrors of the night or even an inventor with the genius to create new and necessary tools for mankind's use. No matter what your profession, you find satisfaction in taking care of the Masses. Such service makes you whole.

Your **Sense of Duty** makes you a dedicated Technocrat and marks you as the best of their best. You are what the Founders had in mind so long ago.

Even so, you do get tired of the job. Why can't these idiots take care of themselves once in a while? Your **Impatience** with the imperfect Masses makes you an edgy protector. To truly advance, you'll need to put it aside.

— Regain Willpower when your actions make some noticeable change for the common good or avert some disaster among the Masses.

Crusader

Driven by a higher purpose — faith in science, strong morality, a scientific ideal, even religious faith — you strive for a better world. The Technocracy was created to alleviate suffering, uncover wonders and eradicate the supernatural. As a member of that Union, you're essentially a soldier in an army of change. Hold your banner high, whether you're a research scientist, a facilitator or a literal solider, and carry it to greatness. The future depends on you!

Your **Zeal** is admirable. Under the worst of circumstances, it propels you through trials and obstacles that might stop a lesser agent cold.

Unfortunately, that zeal can turn to **Fanaticism**, which can make you ineffective, even dangerous. A MiB who shoots every sorcerer in sight is not only wasting opportunities and potential allies, he's making unnecessary enemies. To truly Ascend, you'll need to temper your resolve with reason.

— Regain Willpower when you do something great in the name of your higher cause. As a player, you must define what that cause is before the game begins, then support it throughout the chronicle... even when it causes you grief. A Crusader's beliefs are not bound by convenience.

God and the Technocracy

Although the Union frowns on religious affiliations, individual Technocrats can and occasionally do have faith in higher powers. Like any other scientist, these individuals base their views of science on the idea that God (however you define "god") is a fine craftsman. To them, man has been gifted with great insight: He may see the order of the universe, make tools that measure and direct that order and employ them to his benefit. But man is not God. God is the supreme Creator.

The idea is hardly heretical within the Union — quite the opposite, in fact. During the days of the Order of Reason, science *was considered the divine* blueprint for an orderly Creation. Early Technocrats were simply following that blueprint and using it to elevate humanity. Even today, long after the Gabrielites and Craftmasons have disappeared, the concept of science as a divine gift prevails. True, most modern Technocrats prefer atheism (or at least follow a low-key agnosticism) over religious faith — most modern people feel the same way. Religions, with their holy wars and hierarchies, are messy, inefficient things. The Union wants no part of them. But the idea of God does not require a religion, and a Technocrat who *believes* doesn't need one, either. God does not have to reveal Himself in a pillar of fire to exist. The very perfection of Creation is proof enough!

While some upper-level personnel discourage religious faith among their agents, many simply consider it an individual's prerogative. The Union does not sponsor or endorse any religion or church (except as a mission front or an affiliate), but it rarely persecutes its religious members. Naturally, the Technocracy's ideals exalt Man as the sovereign of Creation and avoid any mention of divine providence. So long as a Technocrat does not bring her faith into the "workplace" with her, though, she's generally free to worship a higher power if she chooses. (She might be mocked by her colleagues, though — see Standard White Jesus in the Lexicon.) Indeed, an agent who sees her work as a holy mission may be far more motivated than one who simply regards it as a job. Such people built the Technocracy to begin with, and while it no longer honors their gods, the Union still allows them to worship in peace.

Devil's Advocate

Yes, it's true that the Union advocates conformity. But too much conformity is worse than chaos — it leads to stagnation and decay. Order is necessary, but that order becomes nonsense without questions and challenges. You know all about that "static mages" crap, and you take pains to prove it's untrue. Question the plans, argue the alternatives and undercut mindless conformity. After all, nothing that cannot endure scrutiny is strong enough to endure at all, or so it's been said.

By questioning the status quo, you serve a vital function. Your **Skepticism** forces others to evaluate what they do, why they do it and what it will accomplish. Without you, they'd all be mindless drones.

That doesn't mean they'll appreciate you, of course. Your **Contrariness** will drive others — especially Supervisors — up the wall. You'll get your ass kicked thoroughly and often. Occasionally, you really will ask too many questions and undercut your own effectiveness. A wise agent knows when to stop asking questions, make a decision and act.

— Regain Willpower when your questions reveal some serious weakness in a plan, or lead to some great victory.

Entertainer

Man, the world sucks! Good thing there are people like you to make it brighter. With your considerable talents, you motivate, enlighten and entertain the people nearby. Maybe you're an actor, supplying a role model for others or a writer, slipping lessons into entertaining tales or a jokester whose jests lighten the mood without disrupting things completely. Whatever medium you choose, make sure to leave a serious subtext in your work (people need to think!), but don't burden your audience. If they have to think too hard, they won't bother doing it at all.

You're usually **Fun and Entertaining** — important traits to have when you're fighting against the darkness. Without excitement, the people around you would simply retreat into the shadows until they never came out at all.

But don't get diverted by **Ego**. It's too easy to lose yourself in your entertainment, and that's hazardous to your sanity, your audience, your work and maybe even your life.

— Regain Willpower when your work makes some lasting or significant change in the people around you.

Hacker

You just *have* to fuck with stuff. Nothing is good enough as is — you must test, twist, bend and break whatever it is you work with. Although the label "hacker" usually applies to computer dweebs, you don't necessarily work with computers at all. Your quest in life is to take things apart, see how they work and see if you can fix 'em, break 'em or put them back together in new and interesting ways.

Your **Twisted Imagination** is essential in a world where people usually do things by rote, pattern and precedent. By breaking the patterns and redefining them, you notice weak spots, improve utility and keep your rivals off-guard.

Sometimes, though, you go too far. This **Perversity** forces you to screw with things better left alone. Even when you know you really shouldn't hack into The Matriarch's data base and try to put fuzzy bunnies on MECHA's screens, you'll probably try to do it anyway. Someday, your ingenuity might get you killed... or worse.

— Regain Willpower when you detect a flaw in something important that everybody else has left alone, or when you figure out some way to drastically improve something you've been tinkering with.

Innovator

There's always room for improvement, always some secret that's just out of sight or some puzzle that's just *this close* to being solved. You've dedicated your life to making things better, to finding new ways of doing things and turning them into the new reality. Past achievements are always good, but they're just the stepping-stones for something even better. So approach an old situation from a new perspective; try a new method; test a new theory. At worst, you'll make a mistake and have to start over... but then again, mistakes often yield fascinating new innovations, too!

You're exceedingly **Creative** — a welcome talent in the Technocracy, where the future rides on creativity. While the drones follow their marching orders, you're drawing up the next set of both drones *and* marching orders.

You're way too **Restless** though, which is not always a good thing when Supervisors are watching. If you're too creative, they might consider you a dreamer... or a threat. Innovators keep the Union well-oiled, but they get ground between the gears, too. Maintain a balance between innovation and chaos. And always watch your back.

— Regain Willpower when inspiration leads to some new breakthrough: a new Procedure, a new device, a brilliant tactic or even a promotion.

Investigator

Things happen for a reason, and you want to know what it is. You could be a detective, a research scientist, a Void Engineer or just a guy with an itch to get to the bottom of things. No matter how you satisfy your curiosity, the "need to *know*" is always back for more. Are you careless, cautious or canny about how you get your information? At the root of your activities, your itch must be scratched. Just be careful how you go about it....

Inquisitiveness lies at the heart of science. If no one wanted to know "Why does X happen?", we'd still be living in caves. As a Technocrat, you're methodical and thorough in your inquiries — good traits, especially if you're a lab rat or a detective.

But we all know what killed the cat, don't we? A wise person knows when to stop asking questions. The problem is, you're not very good about that. Your **Curiosity** might get you killed; at best, you might bypass some deeper truth while looking for a dramatic payoff.

— Regain Willpower when a hard investigation turns up something really important. This importance should go further than a simple "I'm a detective and I found some Tradition wizards to kill." The harder the quest, the more rewarding it becomes.

Machine

Flesh is weak. You must be more than human, and you do your damnedest to be just that. Although you're probably an ExoJock from the Clockwork Convention, you might take a more subtle road to precision — mad doctors, ice-packs and cash baskets can be as mechanical as any steelskin. As a rule, you never ask for help, rarely take breaks and push yourself and your comrades to the limit. If the Technocracy is laying out the next steps in human evolution, it's up to you to set an example.

You are **Diligent, Stoic and Hard-working**. Whatever you do is done with maximum precision and minimal complaint. The Union loves agents like you.

To most humans, however, you're **Relentless, Creepy and Prone to Burn-out**. Flesh has not yet reached the consistency of steel, and even machines have to rest. The stresses of the Time Table and Ascension Conflict tend to chew agents to pieces. Unless you learn to ease up, you'll be one of the first to break.

— Regain Willpower when you transcend the limits of the flesh and accomplish something even your comrades could not do.

Mad Scientist

Science is more than the sum of its parts. You see aspects of the greater picture that even your most gifted colleagues miss. While the Technocracy stresses conformity and solidarity, you pursue the twisted paths just outside the accepted principles of Enlightened science. Oh, you *are* a loyal Technocrat — more loyal than those turncoat Adepts and insane Etherites, anyway! — but your ideas are too unorthodox for many people to handle. Still, without you and your kind exploring the horizons, the Union would simply grind along a single, dull track while the damned mystics and their renegade friends barreled past and captured the future! Let the others laugh. You have a job to do.

Your ***Vision*** *refuses to be hemmed* in by the limitations of others. No matter what the cost, you prefer your strange ways to conformity, and your successes bear you out.

Your unorthodoxy may lead to **Madness**, though. Many people like you push the boundaries too far and wind up in the laps of Marauders, Nephandi or the thrice-damned Etherites. Don't stray *too* far off the Technocratic path, lest you fall off the edge into oblivion.

— Regain Willpower when you successfully bend the "rules" of conventional hypertech without breaking them... or yourself. This coup ought to involve some wild feat that *shouldn't* work, yet it somehow nets your side great reward. Just saying "I use a really weird gun" isn't enough. You must prove that you are not mad, merely visionary.

Manager

Without strong hands at the wheel, the Technocracy would crash, taking reality with it. You are one of those "strong hands," and you excel at directing resources. You may not be the smartest person in your amalgam — or the strongest, or the best-equipped — but you're an excellent driver. In your hands, the Union is safe.

Unlike many of your comrades, you're **Cool and Efficient**. A sense of direction helps you make plans, and a sense of order keeps them together.

Sometimes, though, you're too **Remote**, too engrossed in the Time Tables to notice an urgent matter. Perhaps you're too centered on your work or on yourself. Either way, you can never achieve greatness until you create something of your own.

— Regain Willpower when your cool head and quick eye save your group from some disaster, or when you achieve a seemingly impossible goal.

Misfit

You're just plain strange. You've never fit in anywhere before, but the Union has a place for you now. Perhaps you're a freak, an alien or a former cripple who walks thanks to the miracles of Technocratic science. You might have been a total fuck-up — a criminal, addict, hacker or bum — until someone took a chance on you. Now you've found a purpose and a family of sorts. Do you fit in? Not quite yet, but you're trying to. Chances are, you've got an attitude, but underneath it, you really want to make your mentor proud. You don't want to be alone again.

Being an outsider has its perks. You're **Tough and Resilient** enough to take a lot of punishment, and you're **Resourceful** enough to make do with very little.

But **Alienation** takes its toll nonetheless. Other Technocrats probably shun you... or maybe you shun them. The Union may have a place for you, but you haven't come to terms with yourself, yet. Until then, you'll always be a misfit, no matter what.

— Regain Willpower when you triumph over wild odds or prove another character wrong through your success.

Penitent

Long ago, you made some horrible mistake. Perhaps you ran amok when Enlightenment came knocking, or maybe your arrogance cost innocent people their lives. Were you once a Reality Deviant who saw the light or a criminal who put her old ways aside when she discovered the truth? Either way, *you have something for which to atone.* Whether you admit it or not, everything you do is a step on the road to penance.

Driven by your desire to atone, you're exceedingly **Helpful**. Like a Benefactor, you'll go that extra mile if something needs to be done.

But **Guilt** still drags you down. To transcend yourself, you'll have to file away your old crimes and take pleasure in what you have become... and what you still have yet to be.

— Regain Willpower when you perform some great act of kindness, valor or honor.

Perfectionist

The more you learn about science, the more you realize how precise and ordered ecosystems are. True, every ecosystem contains a certain amount of chaos, but that entropy is offset by the precision of Creation itself. As you see it, the human and metaphysical ecosystems have all the chaos they can handle. It's up to you to provide order.

As an agent of order, you're wonderfully **Meticulous**. Everything you touch is as organized and systematic as you can make it. Everything about you — clothes, grammar, diction, mannerisms — is polished and precise, and you leave very little to chance. Your superiors value such traits, and your comrades consider you a valuable asset to the team.

You are, however, **Obsessive** to a fault. This compulsion of yours monopolizes your attentions while driving everyone else crazy. Until you learn to ride chaos, rather than resist it, your utility and awareness will be limited.

— Regain Willpower when something that *could* have gone horribly awry runs smoothly due to your high standards and attention to detail.

Quester

Like a knight of the Round Table, you strive for some goal that even you cannot define. Perhaps you've had some vision of glory, or you were raised to believe in your own greatness (or you simply feel a restless tugging that leads you toward some lofty goal). In any case, you're on a mission. Until you achieve your destiny, you'll be questing; in the meantime, do everything you can to uncover the essence of your quest. (This is an ideal Nature for an agent with the Destiny Background, the Questing Eidolon, or both. Also see the "Avalon" sidebar in Chapter Four.)

Driven to glory, you perform **Heroic** deeds and hold lofty ideals. The Union was made by people like you, and it provides an admirable vehicle for your destiny. While others take the low road to convenient ends, you uphold a strong moral code. No quest was ever easy, but the legacy of Avalon is worth the sacrifice.

Sadly, heroes die. Sooner or later, you will probably meet a glorious death. Face it — you're **Doomed**. Once you accept that, though, all terrors fall away. A dead hero fears nothing.

— Regain Willpower when you discover some clue to your ultimate goal, or do something grand to achieve it.

Sneak

This world is devious, and you play by its rules. Keeping one step ahead of your more-idealistic comrades, you've mastered the arts of stealth, discretion and doublespeak. It's not like you're a coward or anything — you're simply being realistic. Ours is not a world that rewards valor. A clever word and a silent step can accomplish more than a frontal assault, and at far less risk.

Subtlety *is your middle name... and your first name* and your last. Never let anyone else know what you're doing if you can help it; if you must keep someone apprised, never tell him the whole story. Hide your cards until you can build a winning hand.

But, as everyone knows, you're **Untrustworthy**. People may admire your deviousness, but you'll be the last one they confide in. Most comrades consider you a coward and backstabber, and they may be right. After all, you're looking out for Number One.

— Regain Willpower when some covert plan of yours succeeds, gaining great advantages for you and yours.

Tycoon

Money makes the world go 'round, and you're aboard for the ride. Chances are, you're pretty wealthy, with a portfolio bulging with smart investments and vast resources. Power and influence are meat and drink to you, but the game is more interesting than the rewards. It's not that you don't enjoy the spoils — the cash, the toys, the women and men who throw themselves at your feet — but your true wealth comes from *playing the odds and coming out ahead.* Every time.

You've a **Savvy** bastard, calculating enough to hedge your risks and avoid a major blowout. You know how to get things done, too — who to talk to, how to pull their strings, where to hit them where it hurts or helps the most — and that makes you a valuable ally.

Unfortunately you're unbelievably **Greedy**. It's been said that gold blinds men to greater riches, and that's probably true of you. Until and unless you can learn to appreciate less material things, you'll miss the greater truths and rewards Enlightenment can offer.

— Regain Willpower when some long-shot plan of yours pays off in grand style. Not in mere money — that's too easy — but in something greater (like influence, love or awareness).

Vigilante

You're a living weapon aimed at your target. Whatever it is "they" did — killing your family, destroying your home or slaughtering innocent children; whatever it is that makes you so vindictive — somebody turned you into a justice machine. Note that your target might not be a Reality Deviant, and it probably isn't a single person, either. The Union itself may be the villain, and you could be waging a secret campaign to bring it down from within. Whoever the object of your hatred might be, you will do whatever it takes to tear them to bits, piss on the pieces and wash the whole mess into the sewer where it belongs. Those bastards must pay!

Single-Minded Lethality is your greatest asset. You won't rest until justice is served. This dedication to a cause keeps you going long after lesser agents would have given up. Delay is acceptable, but compromise is not.

Trouble is, you're **Blood-Blind**. The hunt drives you beyond caution, beyond reason and far beyond true Enlightenment. You might be able to employ the tools and procedures of hypertech, but you'll never truly Ascend as long as you're on the warpath.

— Regain Willpower when you hurt your target in some noticeable way. (**Storyteller's Note:** That target ought to be some group, conspiracy or species, rather than a single individual. Taking one person down is far too easy to fuel this kind of fervor.)

Abilities

The Union stresses fitness, training and intelligence. After all, its agents are supposed to be examples for the rest of humanity. Thus, as a player with a Technocratic character, the Abilities you choose reflect the sort of agent you want to be. Let the Reality Deviants gather some choppy assortment of Talents and such. Your Traits come from a combination of natural ability and carefully honed skill.

The character sheet at the end of this book offers the "primary" selection of Technocratic Abilities and provides a place for additional Traits as well. Most of the "normal" Abilities described in **Mage: The Ascension** work equally well for mages of all types. Two of them — Technology and Computer — can be considered "required Traits" for any Technocratic character. The Union demands that its operatives know the basics. Other Traits can be found on the Technocrat Processing Chart given on pp. 133-135. New or altered Traits are described on the following pages.

New Talents

Talents, being innate, are pretty universal. The **Mage** rulebook and supplements contain a number of Talents that any character can have. Of course, the Union promotes certain additional gifts among its "employees," including:

Acting

Devon blinked up at the police officer, looking tired and confused. "I honestly don't know anything about it, officer," he said, a slight catch in his voice. "I've been driving for four hours and I just want to get some sleep. I remember passing the place, but I didn't stop."

The officer nodded slowly, not really expecting anything more out of a simple traveler. Nothing about the car looked suspicious, anyhow. "Move along, then."

Devon nodded gratefully and pulled his car out. As he sped up on the freeway again, the fatigue fell away from his face. He certainly did know about the house that had burst into flames two miles up the road, but who could tell?

Any spy alive knows how important it is to fool people, fake emotions or masquerade as someone else. This Talent reflects your ability to do all those things and more. You can invent a personality, memorize dialogue or divert someone's suspicions with improvisation. While Manipulation usually works best with this Trait, Charisma (an overwhelming personality) or Appearance (seductive good looks) may be more effective than simple deviousness. The play's the thing, so play with whatever tools work best!

- • Novice: Pamela Anderson Lee.
- •• Practiced: Sarah Michelle Gellar.
- ••• Competent: Meryl Streep.
- •••• Expert: Jennifer Jason Leigh.
- ••••• Master: Human chameleon.

Possessed by: Performers, Spies, Clones, Wrestlers, Constructs, HIT Marks, Turncoats, Good Liars, Politicians

Specialties: Impersonation, Performance, Faked Emotions, TV, Stage, Improvisation, Comedy, Misdirection, Seduction

Negotiation

Mark shook his head, tired of the troublesome quarrel. "Look, both sides benefit from this. If we share our resources, we can avoid disputes, and we both get what we want. Face it: those Black Hats will be back. Why should we have multiple enemies when one is more than enough? I'm not asking for your help or for you to risk anything. I'm just asking that we set aside our problems, because we've both got bigger ones."

The other man looked unconvinced for a minute, but finally nodded his assent. Mark smiled inwardly, thinking, "Barnum, eat your heart out."

You know the art of the deal. Whether you're fixing a sticky labor dispute, striking a pact with a vampire or convincing some blue-painted retropagan to join the 21st century, you can get what you want while making your "partners" feel as though they've gotten the best of you.

There's more to a good deal than just making an offer: You know how to approach a "partner," how to appeal to her wants or needs, how to play up to her vanity without coming off like a sap and when and how to put the screws on. If you're brokering a deal for other parties, you understand how to make them both happy while getting what you want. That, ultimately, is the bottom line.

- • Novice: Trading card collector.
- •• Practiced: Family councilor.
- ••• Competent: Labor negotiator.
- •••• Expert: Hostage crisis specialist.
- ••••• Master: UN diplomat.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Men in Gray, Politicians, Spin Doctors, Managers, Syndicate Agents of all kinds

Specialties: Hostages, Business, Paranormal, Bullying, Wheedling, Families, Politics, Trickery, Scams

Newspeak

"Absolutely counterlogical," Kris spouted. "A forwarded metaphase makes much more sense. Jump your cuejuncts for masshappy."

The middle-aged corporate executive, completely lost in the babble, blinked twice before finally demanding, "What are you talking about? I pay you to consult, not to blither like Max Headroom."

Kris grinned. "If you can't get with the language, you can't get with the times. If you can't get with the times, you can't get with the market. Miss the newput and you'll be left in the dust. Sir, with my help you can capture all the profits."

A new age demands new words. You specialize in coining them. Hyphens do not exist in your world; you spread disinformation, deimportantize malefactors, create credibility gaps and declare coprosperity. When the need arises, you specialize in B-52ing buzzwords and positroning soundbites for media conspicuscomp. Confusing? Not as confusing as you can be once you get going! A Social Trait-based Newspeak roll can excite or incite (Charisma + Newspeak); impress, intimidate or confuse (Manipulation + Newspeak) and even sucker skeptics by playing beauty and brains against them (Appearance + Newspeak). All hail neocom!

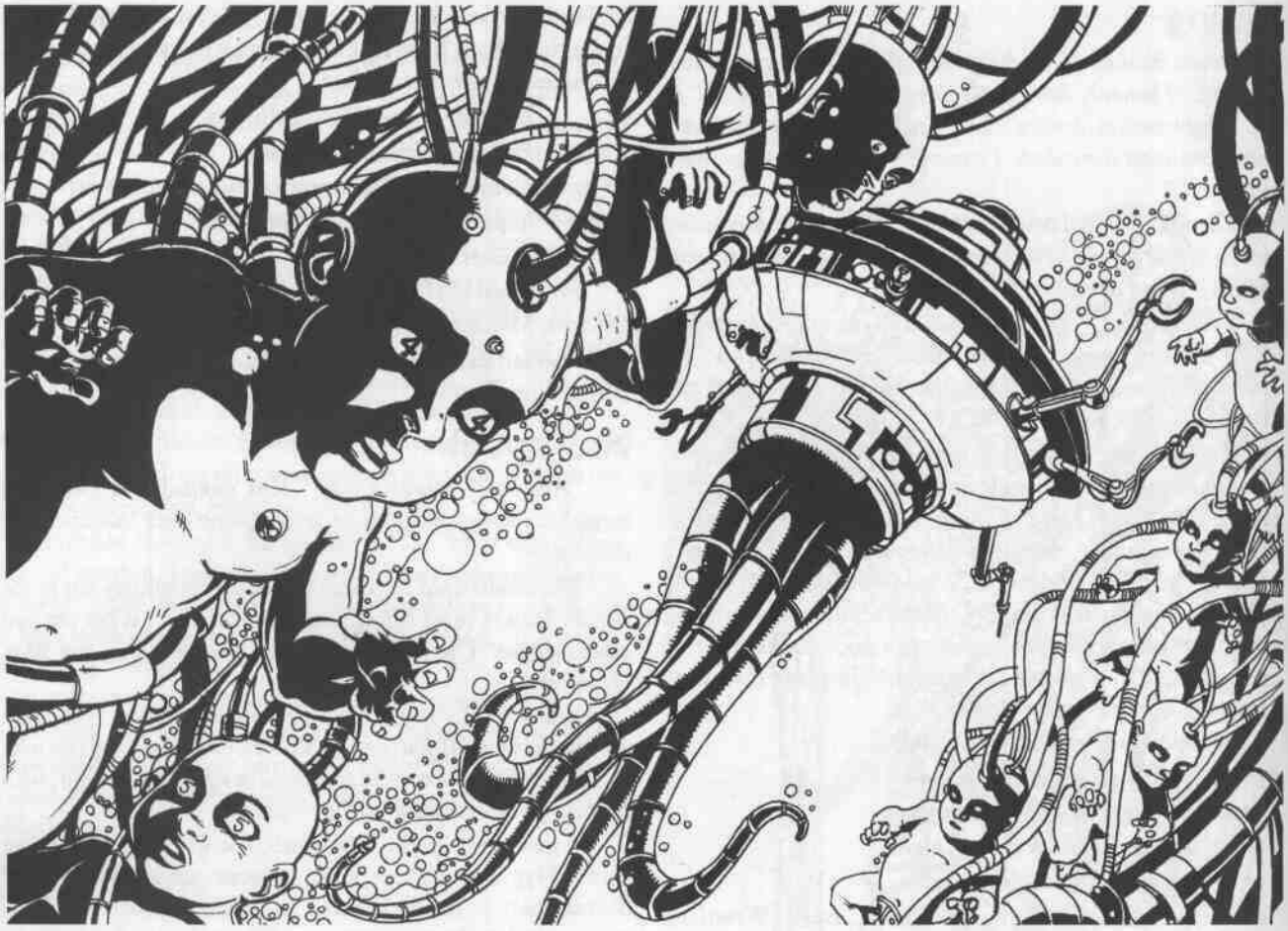
- • Novice: Given time, you can spin out buzzwords.
- •• Practiced: In a situation, you're a flash communicator.
- ••• Competent: Your neologic metaphases into masscom.
- •••• Expert: Masspeak is youspeak. Youspeak is allspeak.
- ••••• Master: You could make Orwell's head explode.

Possessed by: Futurists, Reporters, Spin Doctors, Politicians, PR Consultants, Writers, Satirists

Specialties: Spin Control, Neologic, Disinformation, Buzzwords, Techspeak, Malapropisms, Slogans

New Skills

With its emphasis on strange technology and specialized training, the Union either teaches its agents many new skills, or offers Technocratic refinements of common ones. The following Skill Traits may be considered part of the Union's



boon to its people; such abilities are hard to come by outside the Technocracy's domain.

Biotech

A purplish globule of flesh floated in the vat. Eventually, the cells would differentiate, and the ball would become more than a simple mass of proteins. In time, the globule would be a working organ. A sufficiently advanced medical lab could repeat the procedure, and eventually such vat-grown organs would be common enough. What was unusual was the regulating chamber that was firmly affixed to the mass of cells, the device that would eventually be engulfed to become a part of the liver-like mass. That sort of device, an electrostatic filter that improved liver processing efficiency, probably wouldn't see widespread use for another century. Not that it mattered, of course. Under competent care, it was just another project.

There's a big difference between an inorganic machine and an organic one. You know how to straddle the line between them — how to design, implant, modify and employ cybernetics, cloning, biomechanisms, nanotech, genegineering and floronics. Naturally, these Progenitor mainstays demand other Traits (mostly Sciences; see "New Knowledges") before you can understand them. Still, you've got a leg up on most Technocrats and technicians, who regard the body and the machine as separate entities.

- • Novice: You've watched biotech being installed and employed, and you understand the theories involved.
- •• Practiced: You have a bit of hands-on practice with design and installation of basic biotech devices and Procedures.
- ••• Competent: A typical Progenitor, you know the concepts, mechanisms and limits of existing Technocracy biotech.
- •••• Expert: At your level of expertise, new designs and drastic modifications are possible.
- ••••• Master: A biotech master, you may design, install, alter or employ almost anything you can imagine (subject to Sphere limits, of course).

Possessed by: Genegineers, Cyborgs, Cybernetic Repair Techs, Q Division Frankenstinians, BioMechanics

Specialties: Cloning, Cybernetics, Repair, Floronics, Genegineering, Nanotech, Biomechanisms, Radical Modification

Energy Weapons

The marine twisted in his bulky suit, the plasma gun in his hand spitting superheated balls of barely bonded molecules. Still the tar-coated creatures advanced, scrambling in hordes over the bodies of their dead, bobbing and weaving as the flaming trails shot through the thin air of the space station. One of the beasts leaped

in a bizarre arc, bouncing off a wall and launching itself toward the armored marine, but a scorching bolt charred its carapace and left it twitching.

"Bad dog," the marine quipped as he fired another string of plasma blasts down the hall. "No biscuit."

A laser is not a normal gun; nor is a particle-beam cannon, an Ectoplasmic Disrupter Cannon or any of the other hypertech energy weapons Union footsoldiers love. Lasers are recoilless, plasma weapons generate a heat wash and fire trail, shockers are short-ranged and particle beams have recoil, but of a different "feel" than a firearm. Most people wouldn't have any idea how to work one of these odd guns, but you do. Given any standard Technocracy-issue energy weapon, you can fire, adjust, load, field-strip and perform minor repairs on it.

- • Novice: It's a ray gun, Space Cadet.
- •• Practiced: You've learned the basics of operation and maintenance.
- ••• Competent: Typical space marine.
- •••• Expert: Elite Op.
- ••••• Master: "Phased plasma rifle in the 40 watt range..."

Possessed by: Space Marines, Men in Black, Covert Agents, BCD Personnel, Cyborgs, HIT Marks

Specialties: Heavy Weapons, Micro-G, Close Combat, Sniper, Mass Destruction, Repair, Small Arms, Bounced Shots, Field Modifications

Helmsman

The cruiser's screens showed that it was twisting sideways, and the passengers held on to their seats against the vertigo induced by the spinning starfield on the monitors. As the ship shook from the wake of the nuclear explosions that had cleared a path through the insectile swarm of aliens, Devon punched at the controls, trying to restore some semblance of balance. With the Engineers in back trying to keep the engines from failing, the ship was cruising into a warzone with little more than a few novices at the controls. Devon slid his hands up one of the blue-lit controls and reminded himself to study up on space travel if and when they ever made it home....

Mere mortals suffer from vertigo when they look at a starship's controls. Not you. You've studied at the Void Engineers' academies, and know what every switch and viewscreen does (well, most of them, anyway). Because there is order in simplicity, most Void craft have fairly standardized controls; given time, you can pilot anything from a *Qui La Machina* to a long-distance exploratory vessel. Although certain experimental or top-secret craft may be out of your league, you can still puzzle out most of the vital functions. Just don't screw up when you're in deep space!

(**Note:** Although it can be considered a retrofitting of Pilot, the two Skills are very different. One applies to aircraft, the other to spacecraft. Hence, it's a pretty rare Skill outside the Void Engineers. While some Iterators and MiBs have been taught the rudiments of starship operation, the Voids like to keep their toys to themselves. Although some Sons of Ether may have a demented variation of this Trait, their inventions tend to be too unique and/ or esoteric to be compatible with Technocracy craft.)

- • *Novice: You've been trained on basic shuttles.*
- •• Practiced: They let you take the helm when things are calm.
- ••• Competent: Typical helmsman.
- •••• Expert: The captain wants you on the controls when trouble strikes.
- ••••• *Master: Han Solo in a jumpsuit.*

Possessed by: Void Engineers, Space Marines, Cyborgs, LERMUs

Specialties: Navigation, Combat, Long-Range Trips, Crisis Situations, Near-Ground Operations

Hypertech

With the monitors and cables attached to the device, the box appeared to be some sort of tremendous control module or bizarre computer core. Choe frowned at the assembly, only vaguely familiar with the computer technology. Some sort of regulator watched energy outputs while a computer display read out strings of numbers from information going into and coming out of the grayish box.

Irene put down her electronic pad as Choe sniffed at her. Smoothing back her hair reflexively, Choe barked, "Your progress?"

Unfazed, Irene indicated the regulator and the wave forms on its screen. "Much of the construction is primitive, but it is clearly an inspired design. We had so much trouble because it modulates its frequencies using Primal Elemental vibrations as a carrier alteration. A curious trick, but one that won't escape us again."

Most Technos simply employ the devices and Procedures they've been given; you actually comprehend the super-advanced theorems that make science into "magic." While many Unionists know the basics, you understand the concepts in great, intuitive detail. (In Massesspeak, this understanding is similar to the difference between knowing how to use a computer and knowing how to build and program one.) In game terms, this Skill allows you to identify the principles of Technocratic devices, modify them or build your own (see p. 46). At Rank 3 and higher, you begin to understand the warped workings of Ethertech and Virtual Adept toys, and you may modify or employ them as you wish (something most Technocrats find difficult to do). Such things are perversions of science, of course, but you detect the rhyme and reason within them that no mundane scientist could possibly understand.

- • Novice: You know the basic theories.
- •• Practiced: Esoterica is just another level of the obvious.
- ••• Competent: You actually understand both Technocratic science and the warped diversions of the Etherites and Virtual Adepts.
- •••• Expert: You're one of the Union's top designers.
- ••••• Master: Other Technocrats revere you.

Possessed by: Elite Agents, Q Division Ops, Technicians, Gadgeteers, Maintenance Ops, Spies, Research Directors

Specialties: Weaponsmith, Earthbound Vehicles, Microtech, Computers, Netgear, Repair, Improvisation, Etherite Theories, Anarchtech (Virtual Adepts)

Interrogation

Though only a single light illuminated the room, Yo'ng's every step was precise. The prisoner in the chair tried not to acknowledge her presence, but his eyes flicked toward her nevertheless. As Yo'ng closed the door behind her, Room 101 grew darker still; the single light dimmed briefly, and the silence became complete.

"Now," said Yo'ng, sitting in a simple folding chair across from the prisoner, "You've been most uncooperative over the last two days, but we've managed to find your friends anyway. We don't need you anymore, but there's just one little thing I want to know...."

Inwardly, Yo'ng smiled as the broken, defeated man finally told her what she had been prying at for days.

We want information... and you know how to get it. Your methods range from fast talk to threats and psychological warfare. In game terms, you roll your Manipulation + Interrogation to break a subject. Some methods work better than others with certain subjects, so define what you're doing and how before making the roll. The difficulty is usually equal to the subject's current Willpower rating, although subtle methods (simply talking rings around your subject until he accidentally lets the information drop) may require a simple difficulty 7 roll. Why break bones if you don't have to? (For raw force techniques, see "Torture.")

- • Novice: Nosy neighbor.
- •• Practiced: Beat cop.
- ••• Competent: Detective.
- •••• Expert: Investigative reporter.
- ••••• Master: Section One's Madeline.

Possessed by: Men in Black, Psych-Ops, Syndicate Members of all kinds

Specialties: Double-Talk, Good Cop/ Bad Cop, Implied Questions, Threats, Bribes, Subtle, Moral Blackmail, "We Already Know..."

Jetpack

The deviant scientist soared in the air, handily clearing the car with a rocket-assisted leap. The bizarre backpack sputtered with an irregular blue flame, and the mad scientist bobbled up and down in the air, but he seemed to take a great glee in his evasive wobbling as he flew. A few of the backup agents fired their guns at him, but his random movements made it difficult to hit him. Devon tried to track him, anticipating a good shot, but Irene shook her head.

"Don't worry about him," Irene said. "Before he took off, I noticed that his induction valves were still gummed shut from the dissolved tangler. His engines should cut out right about..."

"Aaaaaaaaaiiiiiiiieeeeeeee!!!!!!!"

A variation of Pilot, this Skill allows you to strap on a jetpack and fly around without killing yourself. The simple yet delicate controls of most Technocratic (and Etheritie) 'packs are easy enough to employ. The real trick comes with mastering the balance between speed, maneuvering, body position and raw nerve. (The flier's Dexterity + Jetpack rating makes up her dice pool for pursuit, evasion and maneuvers.) A common Trait among high-powered field agents and their SoE rivals, this Skill may be essential to anyone who wants to fly the Technocratic way.

- • Novice: *"Oooooh, shhhhiiiiittttttt!"*
- •• *Practiced:* Awkward but not endangered.
- ••• Competent: Confident in the air.
- •••• Expert: Skillful enough to fight and fly at high speeds.
- ••••• Master: The Rocketeer.

Possessed by: Men in Black, Space Marines, Commandos, Test Pilots, Sons of Ether, Daredevils

Specialties: High Speeds, Combat, Boot-Jets, Micro-G, Deep Universe, Stunts

Jury-Rig

Trapped in the back of the van, David new that his captors would return soon — and that they'd probably dispose of him. He had to work fast. He only had his lab coat, some insect RNA, a few nanotransferase modules and the handfuls of Wobbler engines. Wobbly insects....

It took a few moments to figure out how to dose the nanotransferase with the insectile RNA without infecting himself. Once the nanotransferase modules were seeded in the engines, though, they took on autonomic functions. Sure, they were blind, deaf and dumb, but they could crawl and buzz, and a couple of them could fly with the stripped polymer winglets that he quickly shaped.

As the guard opened the door, he hurled his little bugs at the assailant, and they shrieked to a semblance of life....

Science is not without a little slack. With a handful of widgets, a bit of breathing room and a combination of brilliance and bullshit, you can twist the loose ends of science and fix, alter, build or repair mechanical objects. You must have something to work with, and cannot make something radically different or powerful from a heap of scrap metal. Even so, you do possess a knack for taking bits of junk and cobbling them together into a machine that works for a short period of time.

Obviously, you ought to possess several other Traits in addition to this one: Technology, Computer, Gunsmithing,

Hypertech, Security, Energy Weapons and many Sciences are practically prerequisites for most improvised gadgets. Although this Skill can help you with various advanced Procedures (see "Abilities and Magic," in **Mage: The Ascension**), it is not instantaneous, nor is it "magical" in itself. A clever Technocrat, however, can use his technical know-how to pull off normally vulgar Procedures in full view of the Masses... so long as the stunt isn't *totally* blatant. (**Storyteller's Note:** Jury-Rig is a Skill, not a Sphere; a character should not be able to use it to perform some obviously impossible feat of engineering.) Oh, and do be careful. The Union frowns on twisting reality's loose ends too freely.

- • Novice: Basement tinkerer.
- •• Practiced: Mr. Fixit.
- ••• Competent: Field gadget-master.
- •••• Expert: MacGuyver.
- ••••• Master: Tony Stark in mirrorshades.

Possessed by: Field Ops, Cyborgs, HIT Marks, Mad Scientists, Renegade Technomancers, Q Division Personnel

Specialties: Bench Thumping, Scraps, Repairs, High-Tech, Found Objects, "Should Be Impossible"

Microgravity Operations

Devon bounced from the wall of the room, still desperately trying to get used to the unfamiliar motions. He hit the floor at a slow drop but still with a heavy THUD that hurt his legs.

The instructor watched impassively. "Slow down. Think about your moves first. Your reflexes will be all wrong, so you can't allow yourself to move reflexively. You should only move when you decide to do so, and you must consider your motion as you do it. Pay attention to your body. You can't trust what you feel, so trust only what you see."

Devon took a deep breath and slowly pushed himself off the floor. If it was this bad in training, then Ares Station on Mars could only be worse.

Deep space, damaged ships and ancient Constructs all lack the familiar gravity of Earth. While most people would founder in such conditions, the Union needs explorers in all locations. Training with vacuum suits, underwater tanks and actual spacewalks provides the necessary experience to handle delicate maneuvering in microgravity. Some people mistakenly call this sensation "Zero G" — there's no such thing, of course, since gravity stretches everywhere in the universe, but that technicality is hardly a comfort to someone floating in the dark void.

With Microgravity Operations, you can handle yourself in low- or near-zero-gravity situations. You don't bounce off walls aimlessly, and you can keep your bearings despite the lack of "up" and "down." Against less-skilled opponents, you can even use gravity to your advantage, hopping off walls and vectoring unexpectedly.

When in low gravity, inexperienced characters cannot use more dice from any physical Abilities than their ratings in Microgravity Operations. Thus, if you have 3 in Energy Weapons but only 1 in this Skill, you can only use one die (plus your normal Attribute dice) for the roll. This penalty doesn't affect knowledge, magic, devices or Enlightened Science, of course.

- • Novice: Don't hyperventilate and don't throw up.
- •• Practiced: As long as you're on a tether, you're fine.
- ••• Competent: You can spacewalk with some competence.
- •••• Expert: Three-dimensional movement is not out of the question.
- ••••• Master: You've been in space for so long, you probably don't even *remember* gravity.

Possessed by: Void Engineer Marines, Astronauts, Divers, Ethernauts

Specialties: Low-G, Micro-G, Vacuum Suit, EVA, Tumbling, Combat

Networking

"Of course not," Choe purred to her contact. "I'm just looking to do a little business. You can make quite a bit of money, and all I need is a list of names."

She waited as the man on the other end of the line hemmed for a moment. Finally, he mumbled what sounded like an agreement.

"Thanks," she said at last. "I'll be sure to contact my people when your information arrives. And I'll pass your name along, too. I appreciate the help."

After giving herself a moment to relax, Choe dialed the next number on her list.

It's not what you know, it's who you know. And you know how to work those connections for all they're worth. If you're stranded in new circumstances without a network of contacts, you can make one with a little time and effort. It's all in how you play the game....

This Trait allows you to pull together a net of resources: lists, libraries, data banks, receptionists, specialists and informants. These aides won't actually act on your behalf (aside from a dropped word or two), but they're invaluable when you're trying to find something (Perception + Networking), accomplish something (Manipulation + Networking) or win someone over (Charisma or Appearance + Networking). The more obscure the fact, item, person or feat is, the higher the difficulty of the roll becomes.

Networking takes time and access. You can't just do it from the street unless you've got a cellular phone and a few hours to spend on it. A Background like Contacts, Mentor or Spies would most likely represent an established network.

- • Novice: You know how to use a phone book and a library.
- •• Practiced: Sweet-talking operators and secretaries is a *cinch*.
- ••• Competent: You know the right people to talk to, and you know how to find them.

•••• Expert: With two hours and a phone, you can work miracles.

••••• Master: "How'd you get Salman Rushdie's address?"

Possessed by: Activists, Archivists, Flacks, Spies, Reporters, Research Assistants, Shmooze Masters

Specialties: Research, Contact Info, Favors, Secrets, Tickets, Internet, Celebrities, Politics, Underworld

Pilot

The craft wobbled for a moment, then straightened as the pilot tweaked the rudders. Devon leaned over the back of the pilot's seat, watching intently as the man went about his job professionally. Ahead, the spurious martial artist literally skated across the short stretch of water, great furrowing troughs of water spraying up as he slalomed over its surface. Devon pursed his lips, sure that the physics of that trick weren't repeatable more than once.

"Can you push it any faster?" Devon asked.

The pilot looked at Devon for a moment, then shrugged. "Sure, but I don't want to run this guy over. He could get pretty badly hurt by the plenum chamber. The force of the air has to hold up this ton of hovercraft, after all."

You know how to pilot all manner of flying craft: ground effect vehicles, helicopters, prop planes and jets. Given the incredible complexity of such machines, the average person would be lucky to get one started. You, on the other hand, are a virtuoso of flight. Well, perhaps you've only logged a few hours, but at least you can get off the ground, land safely and still have a chance of dealing with damage or unusual situations in the air.

• Novice: Prop Jockey.

•• Practiced: Wingman.

••• Competent: Rotorhead.

•••• Expert: Top Gun.

••••• Master: The Right Stuff.

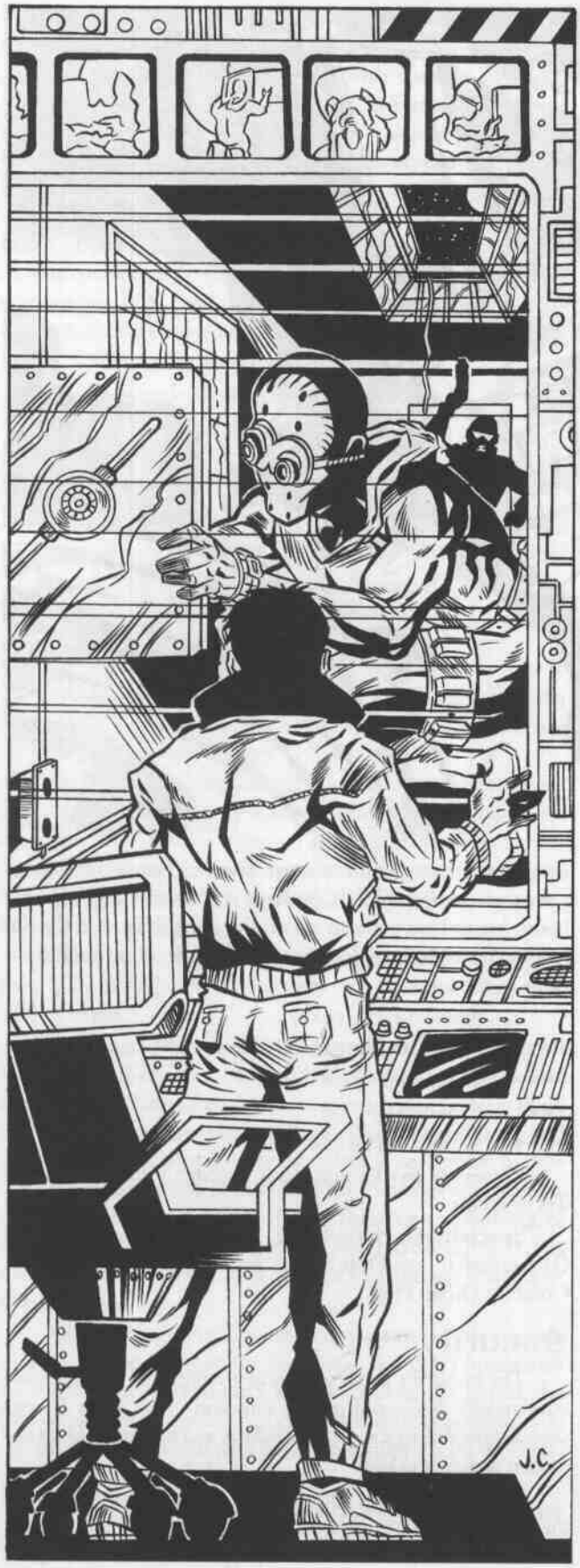
Possessed by: Commandos, Fighter Pilots, Transport Technicians

Specialties: Helicopters, Ground Effect Vehicles (Hovercraft), Jets, Prop Planes, Jet Fighters, Experimental, Combat, Urban Flight

Security

The building's doors were heavy, reinforced metal, locked magnetically and sealed against intrusion. Thin strips of wire showed breach detectors on the windows and the insides likely had motion detectors as well.

Without a moment's hesitation, Irene made her way around the side of the building. Following the lay of the electrical lines, she found an outside junction box and popped it open. After a quick



look at the fuses, she popped a set of alligator clips onto the wiring, then attached them to a set of ports on her hand computer. A few moments later, there was an audible crackle as the building's power supply was briefly interrupted. The magnetic locks gave a hissing sigh, and the assisting agents levered them open before they could reset properly. It only took a few seconds more for the op teams to rush inside.

Locks are passé. In this technological era, anything worth having is guarded by security systems. You know your way around such systems, and you can lay them out or take them down. Placement, wires, triggers, combinations, you know it all... or at least you *think* you do.

In game terms, this Skill lets you set up, disable or circumvent a security layout. The more advanced or complex the set-up is, the higher the difficulty becomes. Most modern systems employ specialized technology; working on them also requires related Skills and Knowledges, such as Computer, Technology, Jury-Rig and sometimes Cryptography, Mathematics or Hypertech. Appropriate rolls include Perception + Security (to scope a system out), Intelligence + Security (to set up or disable a system), Wits + Security (to notice hidden details, and to do quick work) and Dexterity + Security (to dodge laser sensors or cameras).

- • Novice: You've read a book or two.
- •• Practiced: Trained on one side of the law.
- ••• Competent: Trained on *both* sides of the law.
- •••• Expert: You design (or defeat) the best systems.
- ••••• Master: Given time and tools, you can foil almost any system.

Possessed by: Men in Black, Security Personnel, Q Division, Thieves, Commandos, Infiltration Experts

Specialties: Computer Systems, Light-Based Systems, Hypertech, Cat Burglary, Tricks, Prisons

Torture

They didn't have any time to waste. A few more minutes, and the drive system would fail. Shortly thereafter, the particle buildup would wash over the generators, and the resulting explosion would destroy most of the city block. All because the damn so-called "mage" here had haughtily decided that 200 human lives were a reasonable cost to destroy a science facility!

"Where is it?" thundered Palov. With a swift backhand, he brought blood to the lips of the frail woman in the chair.

The woman smirked at him, despite her bleeding lips. "You think a little pain will stop me?"

Palov frowned menacingly. "Not at all. It's simply a warm up for you, terrorist. I suspect that you'll talk as the nanoprobes reduce your brain to a semi-organic soup, though." He held out his hand to the doctor for the injector as the woman paled. "Or rather, you'll babble. You could've saved yourself the trouble, but we can get the chemical connectors more quickly this way. Too bad it hurts like hell."

When subtle methods fail, urgent means may become necessary. Using this skill is no pleasant duty (you're not a *sadist*, after all!), but when innocent lives are on the line (and, more often than not, your subjects are murderous scum to begin with), there's little choice. Despite the common image of the blood-spattered torturer, Technocratic methods are far more precise. Why break someone's fingers when you can break *his mind without leaving a mark?*

You know the fine points of excruciation — the timing, the tools, the right places to probe and most importantly when *not* to touch your subject. After all, many subjects break just before the actual pain begins. The suggestion of agony is often more effective than the agony itself. In game terms, each successful Manipulation + Torture roll (difficulty is the subject's current Willpower) lowers the subject's Willpower by one point. Again, the inquisition may or may not involve physical harm. If it does, the damage depends on the methods employed. Just be sure your cause is just and your methods are thorough. The civilized world rightly holds a torturer in horrified contempt.

- • Novice: Simple sadist.
- •• Practiced: Back-room cop.
- ••• Competent: Military-level interrogator.
- •••• Expert: Your own comrades fear you.
- ••••• Master: Master of Room 101.

Possessed by: Men in White, Covert Ops, Mad Scientists, Warped Agents, Administrators, Managers, Hollow Men

Specialties: Raw Brutality, Pain by Proxy, Mental Torment, Mind Games, Exquisite Pain, No Marks, Tools, Intimidation

New Knowledges

The hallmark of the Technocrat, Knowledges are the foundation of any good agent's training. Such expertise separates them from the crude "wizards" and other deviants who oppose the march of reason. From a player and Storyteller perspective, an emphasis on Knowledge-based stories can shift the drama from out-and-out combat to the subtler (but no less vital) battlefield of intrigue and subterfuge. As any good Technocrat knows, knowledge is the ultimate power.

Academics

McLean couldn't make heads or tails of the book. Even the computer translation guide was little help; the letters all ran together and the illuminated artwork made it difficult for the computer to recognize the letters.

Fortunately, Hoffman came to the rescue. "That's 12th century Greek," he proclaimed. "It's distinctly different from other forms of the language, and from the look of it, I'd say that it was transcribed by an uncertain hand — probably a monk who had only a passing knowledge of the language. It's possible that this book is actually a translation, though I'd wager a poor one."

"How do you figure all that out?" McLean asked, still trying to figure out which end of the volume was up.

Hoffman shrugged. "Did a few courses in biblio studies, and a little bit of medieval history. You just have to know what to look for."

The broad Knowledge of Academics covers all manner of scholastic studies and soft sciences. Old languages, philosophy, sociology and history are all covered. This is very much the sort of education that you'd expect from a liberal arts degree. Naturally, such a general education is prized in the Technocracy, since a broadly educated agent has a firm grounding in worldly matters. Still, more specialized applications of Science tend to garner greater respect. An agent with a great deal of this Knowledge and a limited command of Science may well be considered a bit bookish and unusual — what good is an understanding of society if you don't have the tools to change and improve it? Scholars, especially the Ivory Tower, retort that you'd damn well better understand society before you try to do anything to it.

When purchasing Academics, consider each branch as a different Knowledge. After you've learned three different variants, all new Academics variants cost half as much. A broad education manages to overlap, and it gives you insight into the interrelationships of worldly matters.

Each area of study is considered a separate version of this Knowledge. A few branches include, but are not limited to:

- **Anthropology:** Every culture develops from basic principles to a more complex society. You can trace the evolution of that culture, tracking its mores, morality and traditions. NWO agents can find this study useful in understanding foreign cultures.
- **Ethnology:** As ideas, economics and environments change, the societies on which they're based change as well. By studying such changes, you understand the factors that drive and shape societies — a helpful insight for any Technocrat, especially for agents of the NWO and Syndicate.
- **Fine Arts:** Though you don't necessarily have the ability to make great works of art (that's a function of other Abilities like Acting, Crafts and Expression), you can understand the messages in works of art and critique it with the worst of them. Though many consider the arts impractical in a scientist, Media Relations specialists understand the value of putting a message into a medium.
- **History:** If the Union hopes to guide humanity into the future, it must understand the role of the past. You know the facts and fictions of times long gone. The pages of human development are open to you. History is a necessary part of training in the Ivory Tower of the NWO or for a Statistician.
- **Logic:** Though the study of logic is often associated with science, it's really a form of ordered non-experimental thought, and as such falls under the headings of philosophy. At the core, Logic relies on certain assumptions, so it's

difficult to form a "proof of proof." Logic also has difficulty applying to concepts without discrete values, like moral judgments. Where Logic does excel is in drawing a conclusion based on a set of premises. Delving into Logic is a worthwhile endeavor for any Technocrat. Computer operators in particular find the predictable patterns of Logic a necessity.

• **Philosophy:** This broad discipline covers the study of thought, ethics and morals, human interrelationships and perceptions and more. Sadly, this form of study is not nearly as common as it once was in the Union. Still, a little Philosophy is practically a necessity for anyone studying the esoterics of the Mind Sphere of influence.

- • Novice: You know the basic principles of your discipline.
- •• Competent: You understand the major theories and concepts.
- ••• Practiced: You've devoted a fair amount of time and work to your studies.
- •••• Expert: You have an outstanding grasp of your specialty.
- ••••• Master: Few others can match your expertise or understanding of the discipline.

Possessed by: Almost any Technocrat

Variations: Anthropology, Ethnology, Fine Arts, History, Logic, Philosophy

Conspiracy Theory

"No, no, no," Albertus admonished. "It has to do with the fact that at least three dozen members of the Ordo Templar managed to escape France under cover of darkness while their fortress was besieged. Naturally, they couldn't get past the king's men, since those weren't really 'men' at all, but with the help of the Rigellians, they were able to slip unnoticed into a parallel dimension."

Devon shook his head, the bizarre thoughts rattling in his head. This was going to be a long night.

"Most significantly, of the Templars who escaped, one definitively resurfaced in Italy 200 years later. Hard to miss with his Templar armor still in good repair. More startling still, though, was the fact that he had with him a set of scrolls describing the formation of a New World Order...."

The world is honeycombed with secret agencies, occult sects, government cover-ups and clandestine alliances. Anyone with half a brain knows it, and you've got far more than half a brain! In your files, hundreds of conspiracies boil just below the surface of civilization's illusion: alien abductions, assassination plots, genetic experiments, monstrous alliances. As a collector of such modern paranoia, you've heard about dozens — even hundreds — of plots, conspirators and suspicious organizations. Do you believe this stuff? Of course! Being a Technocrat, you've got a ringside seat for conspiracies

most people wouldn't dream of. Do you believe all of it? Probably not, although you've seen enough to make you nervous. Do you manufacture some of it? Well....

(**Note:** See **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** for some ancient conspiracies that could find their way into a modern Mage chronicle.)

- • Novice: *Illuminatus* fan.
- •• Practiced: Net geek.
- ••• Competent: Art Bell.
- •••• Expert: Fox Mulder.
- ••••• Master: Anyone who knows this much isn't saying a damned *word* about it!

Possessed by: TV Producers, Writers, Net Hounds, Government Agents, UFOlogists, Media Ops, Survivalists, Geeks, Folks Who're Scared Shitless of the World in General

Specialties: Hoaxes, Government Cover-ups, Reality Deviants (werebeasts, the Masquerade, etc.), Assassinations, Elvis Sightings, Illuminati, Cults, Satanic Underground, Media Exposures, Aliens, Ascension War Factions, Roleplaying Games

Construct Politics

Out in the "real world," it was who you knew and what you could get done. In the halls of the Enlightened, though, status had a lot more factors — perceived destiny, factional goals, Methodology of science and more. Devon hadn't quite mastered all of the combinations, and he doubted that anyone ever had. He did know, though, that Choe Yo'ng, the new Syndicate VPO of Asia and Australia, was a seriously heavy hitter. What he didn't know, unfortunately, was whether she was setting him up. He was also at a loss on how to get out from under it if he was becoming an "acceptable casualty."

After a moment's consideration, Devon decided to check up with a few old allies in the Ivory Tower. He couldn't go up against a VPO directly, but maybe he could get out of her line of fire.

In the tangled web of inter-Convention politics, you know your way around: alliances, Constructs, ranks, specialties and personnel status — who's on top, who's functioning and who's scheduled for a visit from Control. The higher your rating, the more you know; the more you know, the more valuable you are to the Union, and the more trouble you can neutralize... or create.

Note that low-level agents probably won't have a Construct Politics rating higher than 3. You need a certain amount of security clearance to know more than that, and few field agents have access to such resources. Also, this Knowledge gives you the facts and rumors only. Actually employing what you know often requires Traits like Diplomacy, Subterfuge, Patron and Spies.

- • Novice: You know a few famous names and places.
- •• Practiced: You've visited a few Constructs, and you have general data about several others.
- ••• Competent: Anything that's general knowledge, you know.
- •••• Expert: You've got access to classified data regarding many Technocracy Constructs.
- ••••• Master: General data, classified data, rumors, secrets... you possess an uncomfortable amount of information.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Spies, Funding Committee Members, Oversight Directors, High-Level Technocrats, Troublemakers, Invictus Ops

Specialties: Alliances, Gossip, Personnel Profiles, Problems, Oversight, Protocol, Rivalries, Secrets, Hidden Power-Players

Covert Culture

A few seconds of flipping through the dossiers provided Palov with all of the information he needed. Though he worked for a new Order now, he hadn't forgotten his former days in the Spetsnaz. Though the man described was unfamiliar to him, he recognized the signature movements of a freelance agent, probably connected to the CIA. The man had done a good job of covering his tracks, but there was no way that he could anticipate the resources that Palov could bring to bear. After a moment of thought, Palov decided that it would be best to have a Middle Eastern group "contact" the agent — probably setting up the whole mess to look like the man had been using his CIA contacts to smuggle oil secrets. Nobody'd be the wiser.

In the deadly maze of international intrigue, you know the people, groups, methods and tricks that distinguish a winner from a corpse. Naturally, a host of other skills help you employ that knowledge, but without a thorough background in the intelligence community, even James Bond would be lost.

(**Note: Project Twilight** and **World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X** are helpful supplements if you've purchased this Knowledge. Episodes of *La Femme Nikita* are also recommended.)

- • Novice: You know the names and organization of the secret service departments for the major world powers.
- •• Practiced: You keep abreast of every secret service organization in the world, and you know a few tidbits about various "paraintelligence" organizations (e.g., US Special Affairs Division, the Arcanum and the Zaibatsu).
- ••• Competent: You've heard a few secrets about the heads of the most notorious agencies (like Mossad or the CIA), and you know a handful of facts about most "paraintelligence" groups.
- •••• Expert: True, you know quite a few secrets about many of the world's top intelligence agencies and operations heads... but they know about you, too.
- ••••• Master: Your files contain sensitive data on every major intelligence agency in the world, and a few secrets about the deeply covert agencies, as well.

Possessed by: Spies, Terrorists, Counterterrorists, Hackers, Conspiracy Experts, Government Officials, International Informants, Arms Dealers

Specialties: "Paraintelligence," Secret Societies, Investigations, Operations, Agency Heads, Special Projects, Gossip, Personnel, Tactics, Organization, Current Status

Cryptography

The numbers sped across the computer screen, flickering like a phosphorescent snake of ever-shifting form. Devon watched, nearly hypnotized, while Irene tapped some sequencing codes into her palm computer. Finally, he turned to face the Iterator.

"How much longer will it take?" he queried.

Irene looked up, but she kept tapping codes into her device. "Under normal circumstances, a combinatorial non-reversing code of this nature would take about 20 years to decipher."

Devon was about to raise his voice — an uncommon occurrence — when the computer screen shifted from a numeric display to a strange sort of fractal pattern. "Fortunately," Irene continued, "I am not constrained by normal circumstances."

The world is full of codes, man-made and otherwise. You know how to read, interpret and compose such codes, from simple mathematical chains to brain-breaking linguistic/metaphysical constructs. With this Knowledge, you may create codes which can be broken only by someone who exceeds your Cryptography rating with his own Intelligence + Cryptography roll. (Three successes beats a code-maker with Cryptography 2, but not one with Cryptography 3, for example.) You may also crack a code, rolling your own Intelligence + Cryptography; the Storyteller sets the difficulty, based on the complexity of the code and the obscurity of its elements.

Not all codes are created equal. Some involve common elements (like algebra or alchemical correspondences), while others are deeply esoteric (like secret languages or the Navajo-based codes used in WWII). Depending on the elements involved, you might need to employ other Traits (Science: Mathematics or Hypermathematics, Secret Code Language, Lore, etc.) in order to decipher certain codes. Without those secrets, however, you might be able to puzzle out the form of a code even if you can't translate the results.

- • Novice: Spy novel fan.
- •• Practiced: Military signals engineer.
- ••• Competent: Intelligence operative.
- •••• Expert: Cipher specialist.
- ••••• Master: Codebuster extraordinaire.

Possessed by: Spies, Puzzle Fans, Intelligence Specialists, Mathematics Experts

Specialties: Secret Languages, Mathematical Encryption, Computers, Weird Logic, Mystical Codes, Ancient Styles, Obscure Character Shifts

Finance

The Asian economy had been effectively eviscerated. Though this occurrence presented some hardship in the short run, it had proven speculatively incredible and managed to cement certain principles of economics in the foremost public eye. Better still, it meant that the formerly impenetrable Asian markets now needed an influx of capital and investment badly. That meant that the Syndicate could bring all of its global influence to bear, instead of being limited to particular Asiatic fronts.

Choe allowed herself a small smile as she set to work on the complex plans that would allow her to similarly open up the markets of western Europe.

Not even a nuke can match the power of money, and you understand that power. With a few tips and a little leg-work, you can plow through the marketplace the way a mechanic dismantles an engine. Chances are, you've also got a very healthy bank account (the Resources Background) that proves how much you know!

- • Novice: Smart investor.
- •• Practiced: Professional banker.
- ••• Competent: Professional stockbroker.
- •••• Expert: E.F. Hutten.
- ••••• Master: Literal financial wizard.

Possessed by: Brokers, Tycoons, Reporters, Accountants, Syndicate Agents of all kinds

Specialties: Stock Markets, International Trade, Buyouts, Takeovers, Futures, Investments, Bonds, Litigation, Laws, Secrets, Black Markets, Currency

Law Enforcement

Annoyed, Mark leaned back lazily in his chair as the cop continued his litany of accusations. He could've walked out of the scene of the crime, but he'd needed to make time to let his friends get away, and now that meant spending two hours at the station listening to the ranting of an annoyed policeman with bitter coffee breath.

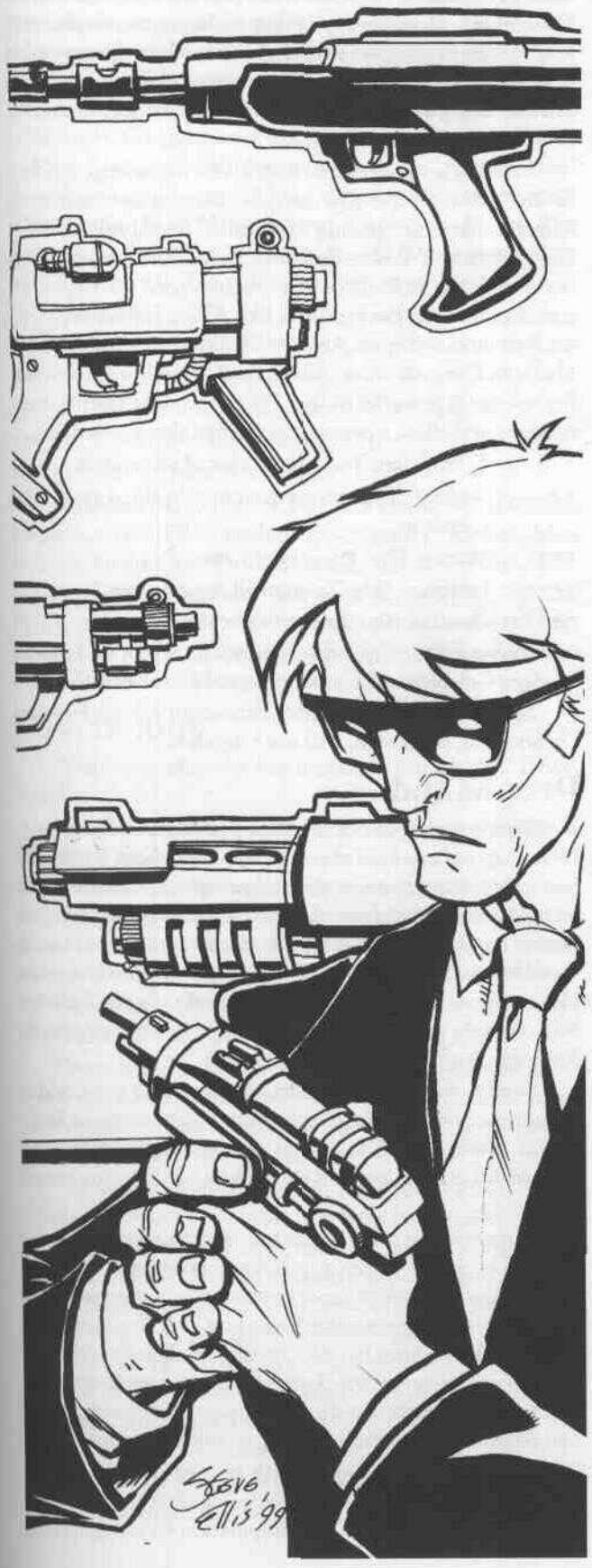
"Look," said Mark, finally reaching his limit. "You've got no evidence of anything, I didn't do anything and you haven't supplied me with a lawyer. Instead, you're in here fishing when you should be catching the criminals!"

The cop leaned closer, his face red. "Listen, punk..."

Mark cut him off, standing and walking to the door. "You charging me? No? Then I'm out of here."

The cop fumed in impotent rage as Mark closed the door in his face.

Every civilized nation has a law enforcement division, and most have several different branches — local, state, federal, covert and international. You're familiar with these essential agencies — how they run, who runs them, what they do and what they *can't* do without bending the rules. While the Law Knowledge reflects your understanding of legal principles and procedures, and the Covert Culture Knowledge represents an understanding of the clandestine intelligence community, this Trait represents the practical



side of the game. You know about Mirandizing, evidence contamination, legal representation and the steps that police go through when questioning suspects or containing samples.

- • Novice: Beat cop.
- •• Practiced: Sergeant.
- ••• Competent: Chief or DA
- •••• Expert: Federal bureau official.
- ••••• Master: Attorney General.

Possessed by: Cops, Lawyers, Government Aides, Government Agents, Gang Bosses, Reporters

Specialties: Local Beat, Federal Agencies, International Agencies, Courts, Crimes, Customs, Jurisdiction, Occult Crimes, Bending the Rules

Media

Gordon's teeth shone in contrast to his dusky skin as he grinned at the program director. "Trust me," he said, "you want to use the 10 o'clock spot. It's a better demographic. Besides, this week happens to be a special cliffhanger closure episode, so you'll get a bigger break from newcomers."

"I'm not sure," the director said doubtfully. "Since the show's third season, it's been a little difficult for new people to jump in."

"Possibly," said Gordon, "but the new movie will be bringing them up to speed pretty easily. This is the best venue you'll get." Privately, Gordon thought about how the change in programming would make a better spot accessible for one of his new mass-consumer projects. And when popularity from that project hit its full stride, the product would put places like the neopagan bookstore that pack of Verbena deviants owned, out of business.

With the right connections, you can reach millions of people worldwide. Once you have their attention, you can get them to believe whatever you want them to... at least for a moment. This Knowledge reflects media-savvy—the people, messages, networks, tricks and technology that define the Information Age. You know who to call, what to say, how to get it on the air and why it will stick in the public's mind. By itself, this Trait does not grant privileged access to the media. (See the Background: Influence and the Merit: Ties for that.) Once you get access, though, you'll know how to use it to your best advantage.

- • Novice: Mass-Com major.
- •• Practiced: Reporter.
- ••• Competent: Professional journalist.
- •••• Expert: Head of a network.
- ••••• Master: Rupert Murdock.

Possessed by: Media Indoctrination Specialists, Reporters, Camera Operators, Editors, Watchdogs, Advertisers, Spin Doctors, Celebrities

Specialties: Spin Control, Advertising, Local News, International, Multi-Media, Internet, TV, Newspapers, Conspiracy, Entertainment, Movies, Leverage, Politics, Blackmail

Pharmacopoeia

David had been awake for the better part of 20 hours already. His body was beginning to feel the burn, and he could tell that his mind was clouding up. The complexities of the ribosomal interactions just kept escaping him; something in the lycanthrope's mutagenic states shifted it around whenever he thought he had a handle on it.

Reaching for a can of Erg Cola, he decided to try one better. A simple diversion, really, to take his mind off the problem. Cutting some neoamp with a little bit of hyperox seemed like a reasonable start. He set the mixture to spin as he collected some Primal fluid from the refrigerator. A drop of the viscous blue matter went into the mix, and he let it settle for a few moments. Finally, he injected the entire dose with an air hypo. Within minutes, he was ready for another 20-hour stretch.

You know all kinds of drugs: street drugs, medicines, herbal concoctions, hypertech variants and even magical brews. A specialty among Progenitors, this Knowledge lets you recognize, synthesize, measure, counter or dose someone with a wide range of chemical substances. (Given time and tools, of course.) You might not know *everything*, but you understand the principles behind drugs and their effects on the body and mind. Once you know the basics, the rest is easier.

- • Technician: Savvy pusher.
- •• Student: Pharmacy student or herbal specialist.
- ••• Master: Typical pharmacist.
- •••• Professor: Expert with hypermeds and RD potions.
- ••••• Director: Master Pharmacopoeist.

Possessed by: Progenitors, NWO Interrogators, Mad Scientists, Verbena and Ecstatic Mages with really good sources

Specialties: Street Drugs, Mundane Meds, Hypermeds, Magical Brews, Herbal Meds, Psychoactives

Power-Brokering

"Not at all," said Choe. "The Bangkok consortium is ready to deal equitably. I've already made some connections. Now, it's time for the real players to get involved."

Mr. Johnson tapped out the stub of his cigar, crushing it in his ornate glass tray. "I'm surprised you managed to find out about my connections to the group. I'm even more surprised that you got my secretary to get in touch with me. I suspect that it may be worth the while, though."

"Of course it will be," smiled Choe. "If I can get this far, I can certainly bring the rest of the pieces together."

A veritable god of consolidation, you excel at making connections, alliances, networks and deals. Most people can't even get an appointment with a powerful person, but you know all the right hands for a power-play. This Knowledge differs slightly from the Talent: Negotiation. That Trait reflects a talent for making people cooperate, while this one shows that you understand who to talk to, how to reach them, what to offer and how far you can pull their strings. Unlike Networking, which simply lets you make contacts and gather information or groups of people, this Knowledge gives you the ability to talk directly to people in positions of authority. You can then bring diverse affiliations together for negotiations or cooperative efforts.

Like Networking and Research, this Knowledge tends to be an "off-stage" Ability, used between action scenes to reflect a character "making a few calls." Social rolls (usually Manipulation + Power-Brokering) establish a rapport between parties and allow the negotiations to begin. In conjunction with Backgrounds like Allies, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Spies, Abilities like Etiquette, Intimidation, Media and Negotiation and a few basic Mind Procedures, this Knowledge is powerful indeed. With the right talents, connections and allies, a person can arrange almost anything....

- • Technician: You talk to a lot of secretaries.
- •• Student: You can get your foot in the door — and keep it in.
- ••• Master: They know your name.
- •••• Professor: "Mr. Turner will see you now."
- ••••• Director: You dine with world leaders.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Journalists, Tycoons, Brokers, Leaders, Celebrities, Representatives, Spies, Receptionists

Specialties: Media, Politics, Schmoozing, High Finance, Underworld, Blackmail, Making Friends

Propaganda

With a single well-placed billboard, the idea was underway. Next, it spread to a local church group. From there, it expanded into some political essays in the local newspaper, which of course brought investigation from the television media. By then, the original sponsoring group was gone, but the message was out. A sound bite surreptitiously slipped to one of the reporters brought the idea to everyone's lips. In just under two weeks, the idea had taken hold. Nobody was going to be caught without a stance on the Kellerman Issue.

Gordon really didn't have an opinion, but it was useful to manufacture one. After all, making an opinion meant making a market, which, in turn, meant that you could tell the Masses what they wanted to hear, and then sell them on whatever you wanted to do.

A specialty of Media Relations ops, this Trait reflects a mixture of media savvy, psychology, popspeak and smear tactics. Essentially, you know how to make someone look as bad, or as good, as you want to make him look. You don't need advanced Procedures in order to affect public opinion on a grand scale. Given a few days, some resources (computers, cameras, air time, etc.) and a place to post your "message," you can do wonders without resorting to riskier measures!

Altering public opinion with propaganda is a "downtime" activity. In game terms, you decide what you want to do and how you want to do it. A Manipulation + Propaganda roll

or two assures that the public will get your message; the better you roll, the stronger the public's reaction. The roll's difficulty depends on the content of the message and its intentions: Making a popular politician look good is easy, but raising a mob to burn down the local occult bookstore (all without violating FCC regulations) is quite a bit harder. Many NWO and Syndicate ops use this expertise as a focus for subtle Mind Procedures (see Chapter Eight). Others use it to make certain Effects easier (see "Abilities and Magic," in **Mage: The Ascension**). Note that propaganda's effects are neither immediate nor total. The public may be suggestible, but it isn't *entirely* stupid.

- • Novice: Jerry Springer.
- •• Competent: Ralph Reed.
- ••• Practiced: Kenneth Starr.
- •••• Expert: Noam Chomsky.
- ••••• Master: Joesf Goebbels.

Possessed by: Reporters, Network Heads, Spin Doctors, Media Activists, PR Consultants, Conspiracy Theorists, Men in Gray, Media Ops, TV Executives, Film & TV Directors

Specialties: Celebrity Endorsements, Politics, Smears, Spin Control, Military, Advertising, Foreign "Markets," Sex, Scandal, Elections, Regulations, Subliminals, Total Fiction (see *Wag the Dog*), Manufacturing Consent

Psychology

"You realize, of course, that such denial is unhealthy," Devon reasoned.

"I realize that blindly submitting to oppressive authority is unhealthy," the woman shot back.

Devon clucked his tongue. "Oppressive authority? I'm certainly not holding you here. I'm not forcing you to listen to this. You decided to talk. If you want to shut me out, you can... but I thought you were about bringing together disparate ideas and ways of life."

The woman looked doubtful. "You're trying to trick me. If I try to leave you'll just kill me."

Devon looked saddened. "How could you ascribe such motives to me? I haven't hurt you. You're lashing out. What makes you so hostile? What are you really raging against, and why does it make you want to hurt other people?"

The woman shrank into her seat, looking concerned. Devon smiled comfortingly as he began to pick the woman apart.

The human mind is a machine, and you're just the mechanic to fix it. Trained in the arts of personality manipulation, behavior modification, psychological theory and conditioning, you can guess a person's motives, plumb her psyche or shift her perspective to suit your needs. If doing so sounds horribly manipulative, remember that psychology is merciful. Curing a psychotic is certainly better than letting her run wild... or shooting her.

- • Novice: Manipulative confidante (Dr. Laura).
- •• Practiced: Pop psychologist (John Gray).

••• Competent: Psychologist or psychotherapist.

•••• Expert: Influential (Sigmund Freud).

••••• Master: Cutting-edge (William Glasser).

Possessed by: Councilors, Therapists, Reporters, Con-Men, Analysts, Media Consultants, Psych Ops, Interrogators

Specialties: Behavior Modification, Drug Therapy, Advanced Theories, Questioning, Children, Animals, Developmental, Experimental, Dreams, Jungian

RD Data

"What do you make of it?" asked Agent Brewster. His associate, a stocky brunette named McLean, glanced over a communiqué they had seized in the Chantry raid. The paper in front of them was littered with a seemingly incoherent mess of scribbles and glyphs. "I don't see any rhyme or reason in it at all."

"Actually, it's exceedingly organized," McLean replied. "It's Quabbalism, Brewster, supposedly the highest order of organization. You just don't know how to read it, that's all. Look here." She rattled off a bewildering succession of alien words and correspondences, then translated it into English. Brewster didn't follow her at all.

"That's superstitionist stuff," he said at last, more than a little jealous. "Why does a Union agent know that?" His tone betrayed a hint of suspicion.

"Let it go, Brewster," McLean replied with a sardonic smile. "A good agent speaks all kinds of languages. Especially the ones her enemies know. You snooze, you lose."

You know details about Reality Deviants — werebeasts, bloodsuckers and rival wizards. While many of your colleagues think "shoot on sight" is all they need to know about such things, you've made a point of studying their societies. After all, a good soldier understands his targets.

Essentially, this Knowledge corresponds to Lore; you know details about creatures and societies outside your Union. Each form of Data (Vampire, Werebeast, etc.) comes as a separate Trait. It's worth noting that, like other kinds of Lore, this Knowledge is not 100% accurate. The Technocracy has its own particular misunderstandings about the creatures of the night (see Chapter Four), and its agents tend to view things through that lens. You may understand that werewolves are tribal beings, you might even know a few of the tribal names, but you won't be talking about "weavers" and "gaia" anytime soon... or ever, for that matter. You know better.

• Novice: You know they're out there....

•• Competent: You've heard a few names and habits.

••• Practiced: These things have a social structure, and you've begun to understand it.

•••• Expert: You're privy to a few secrets they don't want you to know.

••••• Master: Although your knowledge may be a bit... biased... you know quite a bit about their habits, names, beliefs and other details.

Possessed by: Men in Black, Field Ops, Strategists, Intelligence Analysts, Interrogators

Variations: Werebeast, Superstitionist, Infernalist, Marauder, Vampire, Ghost, Faerie

Science

Chemistry is easy. It's like witchcraft, but with less newt.
— Willow, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

A staple of the Technocracy, this Trait reflects your training and hands-on experience with various disciplines. These fields of study draw on centuries of experimentation and use; unlike the flimsy rites Reality Deviants use, sciences are stable and reliable. They may be modified, but they cannot be dismissed.

Science is the basis for the Union itself. Without a provable foundation of theories and application, a Technocrat might as well be performing *magic*! (Let's not go there....) While field agents can make do with the Procedures and devices they've been given, the people who design, install and improvise with hypertech must know what they're doing. Since Inspired Science demands a basic understanding of mundane science, many agents (and all lab rats) have a certain degree of scientific training.

By maintaining the paradigm for most of the world, Technocrats have dominated the modern age. Most of their "spells" and "talismans" are coincidental, so long as the agents employ the tools and theories of science. This blessing is a double-edged scalpel, however. A skilled scientist knows enough about her theories to get away with some truly amazing feats, but those feats *must* be consistent with her worldview. She can't do just anything; a geneticist might be able to engineer a retrovirus, but she couldn't turn a werewolf to silver with a wave of her hand. That would be scientifically impossible, even to the geneticist herself.

A science is more than a collection of dots — it's a belief system, like a religion. In a way, science is a religion, and Technocrats are fanatical about it. As the main rulebook says, belief is everything to a mage, even if she's a Technocratic mage. Thus, as a player, the Science Traits you choose provide the core beliefs of your character. They give you some roleplaying notes about her tools and procedures, and they tell you a lot about the kind of person she is.

An old misconception insists that Technocrats somehow "fool the world" into believing in what they do. The truth is that the Union's agents "fool" *themselves*, too. Scientific tools and theories tell the Technocrat that what she does is right, that she's following the Laws of the Universe. As long as she plays by those rules, an Enlightened Scientist can pull off some impressive Effects, then justify them with scispeak. (A good Manipulation or Charisma + Science roll can excuse a multitude of sins.) As long as the theories behind a Procedure make sense, most Sleepers will let some pretty amazing things stand. The moment the Technocrat abandons them, though, her feats become vulgar — *even in her own mind.* Without science, the edge disappears.

Naturally, a **Mage** chronicle that bogs down in scientific principles is boring. As a player, you don't have to research everything your character knows, then recite details every time you use a Procedure. Just make sure that what you do makes sense, and that your character has the Science variations that support the kinds of things she does. A Progenitor who's trying to clone someone without knowing biology and genetics is pretty much lost. These Science variations can also help when you activate certain Procedures: a player whose agent employs the **Rats Rage** gambit (p. 214) can lower her difficulty if she makes a good Intelligence + Science: Sociobiology roll. (See "Abilities and Magic," in **Mage** for system details.)

Like Lore and Linguistics, this Trait must be bought several times if you're skilled in different sciences. After all, a master biologist is not necessarily a good engineer! After a while, though, a certain amount of "cross-training" makes it easier to master new disciplines. As an *optional rule*, a Storyteller may allow a Technocrat who has more than three different Sciences to purchase her Science variations at half the usual cost (rounded up). This benefit also applies to raising the Trait with experience — the cost of doing so would be [new rating x 1] rather than [new rating x 2]. In the science-saturated world of the Technocracy, this optional rule makes sense. After all, informed agents make the best operatives.

Note that this Knoweldge covers hard sciences specifically — studies that can be proven with mathematics, logic and experimentation. The soft, or social, sciences like history and anthropology fall under the purview of the Knowledge: *Academics.*

Common Science variations include (but are not limited to):

- **Astronomy:** The movements of stellar bodies, reading of red shifts, orbits and celestial mechanics are your purview. Obviously, astronomy is a requirement for any Technocrat who goes into space, and it's mastered by Void Engineer navigators and researchers.
- **Biology:** You've mastered the mysteries of earthly organisms (people, animals, plants and insects), including their structures, processes, interactions, and limitations. This field provides the basis of all Progenitor disciplines.
- **Biopsychology:** An organism's emotions are driven by its physical state and vice versa. The two are intertwined. By noting the connections (and learning how to alter them), you can forge links between the body and the mind. This science is an aptitude of mind/ body/ machine specialists from Iteration X, the Progenitors and the NWO.
- **Chemistry:** Everything in this realm is linked by chemical codes. You understand how to search for, identify, mix and employ these codes for the greater good. Although Progenitors specialize in this Science, many other Technocrats understand it well.

• **Cybernetics:** The complexities of machine-organism interface are simple; you've studied the hows, whys and don'ts of grafting machines to living bodies.

• **Electronics:** Conductors, chips, transistors, quantum switches — you're equally at home with all of these things. Regulating the flow of electricity and making it follow the bounds of logic is a simple task when you understand the rules. Actually *building* such devices is another matter (using other Abilities like Jury-Rig and Technology), but you can design and understand electronic circuits and toys.

• **Engineering:** Without a thorough understanding of materials, stresses, geometry, basic physics and environmental factors, it's impossible to build any lasting structure. With them, you can design, craft or destroy things easily.

• **Forensic Pathology:** When the detectives bring in evidence from the crime scene, you pore over it, identifying marks, performing post-mortems, cross-checking details and searching for the elusive clues that might reveal who did what to whom, and how.

• **Genetics:** You've studied the literal stuff of life. With time and research, you can trace, analyze, alter and employ genetics in almost any living thing. Like biology, this discipline is one no Progenitor should be without.

• **Geology:** Though rare among Technocrats, this study is still a science — the study of earth formations, rocks, plate stresses and strata. A trained geologist can identify various sorts of stone and rock, determine the types of environmental pressures that shaped an area and look into earthquakes, fault lines, geysers and other earthly phenomena. Among the Union, this pursuit is often derided as a "hobby science," but some Void Engineers who specialize in Earth mapping or planetology study it.

• **Hypermathematics:** Mathematics has few boundaries, but very few people grasp just how far it can go. You do. Like Einstein or Stephen Hawking, you understand esoteric concepts, create brain-wrenching theorems and comprehend the links between math, metaphysics and mysticism. You built the intricate structures of n-dimensional calculus and topology, subspace mathematics and such esoterica as superstring theory, conceptual time travel and Unified Theory. Many Iterators and Void Engineers study this sort of math.

• **Mathematics:** All things can be proven by mathematical formulae. From simple arithmetic to complex equations, you know the concepts behind this universal constant. Given time, you can use them to prove (or disprove) almost anything, which is a specialty of Iterator Statisticians everywhere.

• **Metallurgy:** The properties and functions of various metals are your purview. You can identify or create alloys, determine metallic strengths and develop new uses for metal compounds. This Knowledge is a necessity for designing high-tech materials, building new weapons, manufacturing safe metals for medicine and cybernetics, engineering mimetic or memory alloys or creating superconductive materials for computers. The study of metallurgy is thus most common among Iterators.

• **Paraphysics:** A specialist of Dimensional Science, you understand the weird interrelationships between our world and the alternate dimensions of the so-called "spirit worlds." You can explain away the "magic" of the supernatural, finding the laws that even paranormal events obey. Paraphysics is a dangerous science. After all, the Union can't very well have agents running around justifying the supernatural!

• **Phylogeny:** Creation is always changing. You study the effects of that change, from the evolution of life forms and physical environments to social changes and philosophical shifts — a specialty among Genegineers and propaganda specialists.

• **Physics:** You understand the interrelations between matter and energy — gravity, velocity, wave motion and so forth. Basic physics is essential for most Technocrats, but the science is especially important for weaponsmiths, space explorers and hypertech designers.

• **Psychodynamics:** A specialist in human mental processes, you see the relationships between emotion, mental health and behavior — a vital skill for psych personnel.

• **Sociobiology:** You understand that a society is an extended organism — that it does what it does to nurture, protect and procreate itself. Each individual is a part of a greater whole. By researching that whole, you can (theoretically) influence the changes it assumes. As a member of the Technocratic Union, you're living proof of this discipline; if you're an operative of the NWO, Progenitors or Iteration X, you probably use this knowledge to turn the Masses toward the light.

• **Xenobiology:** You've got some hands-on experience with alien life forms. Like Biology, this Knowledge allows you to identify, analyze and alter such life forms as necessary — a common ability among Void Engineers and Progenitors.

- • Novice: You know the basic principles of your discipline.
- •• Competent: You understand the major theories and concepts.
- ••• Practiced: You've devoted a fair amount of time and work to your science.
- •••• Expert: You have an outstanding grasp of your specialty.
- ••••• Master: Few others can match your expertise or understanding of the discipline.

Possessed by: Almost any Technocrat

Variations: Astronomy, Biology, Biopsychology, Chemistry, Cybernetics, Electronics, Engineering, Forensic Pathology, Genetics, Geology, Hypermathematics, Mathematics, Metallurgy, Paraphysics, Phylogeny, Physics, Psychodynamics, Sociobiology, Xenobiology

Subdimensions

The damn thing had slipped again, dropping into a Realm just outside of Ares Station. The Realm hadn't been there before; Brent was pretty sure that it was a recent construction, a new pocket that had been formed by the creature — or by its masters.

Shouldering his plasma rifle, Brent decided to get tricky. He could just attune his quantum resonator to follow the creature into its pocket realm, but he figured that what could be created could be uncreated. He removed the resonator and set about extending its field settings. Once he activated it, he surmised that it would shift up part of the Realm, tearing it apart or at least shoving it into a dimension further removed from Earth normal. Either way, the creature would no longer be a threat.

Brent activated the resonator, crossed his fingers and hoped that the sudden surge of energy wouldn't attract anything else from any other dimensions....

Ours is one of many dimensions. For safety reasons, the Masses have not been exposed to the true scope of such Otherworlds. You have. Although these weird realms are unmappable (despite the Union's best efforts), they do conform to certain rules, and you know what they are. In addition to classroom training, you've been across the Barriers several times, and you know how to handle yourself in various retrograde dimensions. Someday, you'll tame these wild aberrations. For now, however, they still continue to be fascinating avenues for study. Just be careful out there!

In game terms, this Knowledge is essentially the Technocratic version of Cosmology. It allows you to navigate through the Otherworlds with some accuracy, gives you a basic understanding of these dimensions and helps you process the weird stuff you see while you're on the other side.

- • Novice: "...My god... it's..."
- •• Competent: You can handle yourself without losing either dignity or direction.
- ••• Practiced: A seasoned Void Engineer.
- •••• Expert: You're comfortable on either side of the Barriers.
- ••••• Master: Psych regularly evaluates your sanity.

Possessed by: Void Engineers, Net Ops, Special-Assignment Agents, Werebeast-Hunters

Specialties: Deep Universe, Near Universe, Navigation, Astral Travel, Space-Walking, Denizens, Weird Shit

Terrorism

The fools never knew what hit them. As the poisonous gas seeped through the church, the congregation choked, blackened and collapsed. The police would chalk it up to another of the local religious attacks. The deviant religious factions themselves would lose two dozen faithful.

To the fanatical Choristers, though, the message was clear: Anyone you touch, we will kill. Abandon your faith unless you really want to find out if there's a Heaven.

Terrorism is the new form of warfare. You understand it to a frightening degree — the tactics, the tools, the people, the groups, their staging-grounds and the web of politics and protocols that surround them all. As a member of the Technocracy, you probably practice counter-terrorism and minimize the damage these jackals do. On the other hand, terror is an effective tool, and it may occasionally be used against those who refuse all other forms of discourse....

- • Novice: You know the major organizations, their leaders, ideologies, and usual targets.
- •• Competent: You work with the UN Security Council.
- ••• Practiced: You know the majors, the fringes and the fakes.
- •••• Expert: Mossad would like a word with you.
- ••••• Master: Mossad works for you.

Possessed by: Counter-Terrorists, War Buffs, Commandos, Reporters, Diplomats, Terrorists, Spies, Military Officials

Specialties: Domestic Terror, Kidnapping, Ideology, "Celebrities," Secrets, Networks, Tactics, Sponsors, Weapons

Vice

Gordon grinned at Steven over his drink. The club rocked with the '80s retro music that so many Generation X'ers still loved. Steve watched the place with a practiced eye but couldn't hide his satisfaction. His gaze lingered for a moment on the bare thighs of a young woman dancing on one of the side stage platforms, tracing along the line of her stockings.

Following Steven's gaze, Gordon spoke loudly over the music, saying, "I'm glad we could talk — we never seem to get to do business much these days." Steven just nodded; Gordon sidled his chair a little closer. "You know," he added conspiratorially, "I know the owner of this place; I could set you up..." He let the implications trail off.

Steven cocked an eyebrow. "What would it cost me?"

Gordon laughed. "No considerations. We're just here to have a good time, remember?" In the back of his head, he started calculating what he could out of Steven once his associate's appetites had been aroused.

What's their pleasure? Whatever it is, you know where to find it, how to get it for a good price and who to ask for the best stuff. Drugs, hookers, clubs, gambling — you know the people, the places and the prices by name. Chances are, you're recognized in all the "right" circles, either as a good customer, as a soft touch, or as a hard-ass... all of which can be useful if you've got someone to impress. While the details are location-based (few New Yorkers know the prostitutes in Bangkok), you've got a good idea how and where to find thrills. Some things are universal. The Streetwise Talent helps you to recognize and avoid gangs, criminals and street people, as well as how to get your hands on guns, money and illicit good; but with Vice, you're a master of the deals that please.

- • Novice: Mr. Bachelor Party.
- •• Competent: Concierge or taxi driver.
- ••• Practiced: Vice cop.
- •••• Expert: "Made man."
- ••••• Master: Vice overlord.

Possessed by: Gangsters, Businessmen, Newscasters, Cops, Spies, Undercover Ops, Syndicate Managers, Blackmailers, Procurers

Specialties: Drugs, Nightclubs, Strip Clubs, Gambling, Sex, Bars, Forbidden Thrills, Blackmail, Parties, Important Players, Bribery

Merits and Flaws

Those who use arms well cultivate the Way and keep the rules. Thus they can govern over the corrupt....

Disorder arises from order, cowardice arises from courage, weakness arises from strength.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

As Master Sun notes, strength and determination are powerful assets; however, they're not enough to ensure victory by themselves. The mightiest army (or man) can be undone by its own power. Order has its rewards, true enough, but it also carries price tags that are not always obvious at first. Thus, even agents of the Technocratic Union fall to strange illnesses, rejection and pride. The Way provides both gifts and weaknesses.

The systems behind Merits and Flaws are well-known. The following new Traits, however, are common within — or unique to —the Technocracy's ranks.

Merits

Unobtrusive (1 pt Merit)

You don't stand out in a crowd. In fact, you don't stand out at all. People just don't notice you unless you make some kind of fuss. Naturally, such unobtrusiveness comes in handy; while bystanders are paying attention to more-memorable folk, you're off checking facts, investigating details or slipping objects into your trenchcoat. Being bland has its advantages.

Although it's not as powerful as the Background: Cloaking, this Merit helps you keep a low profile. In story terms, people just don't remember your features or name unless you make a point of impressing folks with them. You're... um... *that guy*.... If anyone else is making an impression in the vicinity, you don't. In game terms, anyone who tries to remember meeting or seeing you needs to make a Perception roll (difficulty 6) to recall your features or name. The down-

side is that you add two to the difficulty of any Social rolls you attempt. (Damn, you don't even get noticed when you need to be!) Unlike Cloaking, this Merit does not in any way render you invisible or cover evidence of your existence, and you can't "turn it off." It simply lets you drift through life making very little impression on people. They *see* you, but they don't really pay attention.

Acute Senses (1-3 pt Merit)

Very little gets past you. One or more of your perceptions is far sharper than the human norm. Although it makes you more susceptible to loud noises, bright lights or powerful sensations, this acuity helps you notice small details, detect surprises and catch subtle yet important clues.

In game terms, one point gives you one sharp sense, while three points make all five senses sharp. Subtract one from the difficulty of all Perception die rolls relating to your sharp sense(s), and add one success to any Level One perception Procedure based on that sense. Major shocks to that sense (like explosions or torture) might render it "numb" for a while; a Man in Black with unnaturally acute vision could be struck blind for some time by a sudden lightning flash. In time, however, the sense will return to its usual acuity... more often than not, anyway.

License to... (1-5 pt Merit)

With the right permits, you can do anything... well, not *anything*, but a lot more than the average Joe. Through some devious or official means, you have obtained a permit that allows you special privileges. Depending on the cost of the Merit, you may be authorized to:

- Own and operate odd vehicles (like limos or trucks): one point.
- Practice medicine or law (as a doctor or lawyer): two points.
- Uphold the law (as a cop, detective or government agent): three points.
- Own military hardware (heavy weapons, explosives, vehicles): four points.
- Break the law in the course of duty (as a diplomat or secret agent): five points.

Naturally, these rights involve certain responsibilities. As part of your license, you may be required to fulfill certain duties and observe certain limitations. Even a cop can't go around busting heads on anyone he sees, at least not without some serious repercussions. Licenses of all kinds involve review boards, tests, periodic checks and an overseeing authority. Like anything else in life, you have to be careful how you apply your privileges. Abuse 'em, and you'll probably lose 'em.

(**Note:** Storyteller characters shouldn't worry about "buying" this Merit. It's provided to keep player characters from running rampant without authorization... and to provide them with the ability to run rampant within certain parameters.)

Confidence (2 pt Merit)

You've got the style, savvy and self-confidence that all say, "I'm the Man." Even without the benefit of a dazzling appearance or superb charisma, you possess an untouchable air of superiority. Others quickly defer to your decisions, and you automatically assume authority through sheer force of will. Moreover, you're immune to the barbs of your rivals; wicked wit and subterfuge cannot shake your cool self-confidence.

With this Merit, you can assume a mantle of authority. The Masses quickly bow to someone with confidence; if you look like you know what you're doing, people will let you do it. It's tough to bullshit you, too — your natural confidence often rattles your rival before he can make his play. In game terms, the Merit lowers your Social difficulties by two and raises another character's difficulty by two if he tries to mislead or intimidate you. As many Syndicate ops know, self-confidence is like armor. If it fits, you can stand up to almost anything.

Officially Dead (2 pt Merit)

Your oldlife ended tragically... or so they believe. These days, you're essentially a new person. As far as family, friends, the government and other folks are concerned, you're long gone. Unless you break your cover, no one knows who you are... who you *were*.

Being dead isn't all fun, though. Chances are, you miss at least one person from your oldlife, but visiting him would be A Very Bad Idea. At the very least, it'll be painful — at worst, you could get him killed. Unless you change your face or fingerprints, you might leave the authorities with all kinds of awkward questions. ("According to records, this woman died three years ago. So why was she in a bank this morning?") There's probably someone looking for you, or making sure you keep a low profile. Attract attention from these parties, and you might not be "walking dead" much longer.

Poker Face (2 pt Merit)

A specialty of Men in Black; no matter what happens, you maintain a facade of perfect calm. Nothing short of an extradimensional deific manifestation can make you blink, and even *that* might not do it. The appearance may be deceptive — you could be screaming inside for all anyone knows — but quite complete... and very disconcerting.

Iron Will (3 pt Merit)

Nothing can break you. Monsters and sorcerers can throw their mojo in your face, but nothing sticks for long. Sooner or later, you can break almost any charm or compulsion laid against you. When you do, heads will roll....

This Merit allows you to spend a Willpower point to shake off the effects of the vampiric Dominate Discipline, as well as Mind-based charm and possession spells (as opposed to Spirit-based ones). A mage who is trying to influence you without your knowledge adds one to her casting difficulties; one who wants to brainwash you while you're aware of it adds three to her difficulty. Each turn you spend actively resisting the spell's effects costs you one point of Willpower, though, so your resistance is only as strong as your determination. This Merit has no effect against spirit-or Spirit-magic-based possessions, or against emotion-based charms or appeals. Even the toughest badass can have a Silly-Putty heart.

Perfect Liar (3 pt Merit)

When you speak, everything is the truth. Your words never quaver, your vital signs remain normal, your facts seem consistent and your eyes betray no deception whatsoever. No matter how outrageous your story might be, an objective observer will assume that at least *you* believe it's true.

In game terms, most casual deceptions succeed automatically. Subtract two from the difficulty of any roll that involves fooling someone about something important. This Merit will not foil Mind magic, aura-reading or other forms of mystic truth-seeking, but it will deceive any mundane detection (like body language or lie-detectors).

Ties (3 pt Merit)

You have friends in high places — maybe in the FBI, the Mafia or the State Department. These friends can help you pull strings, meet people, funnel information or get a word in edgewise. Unlike the Backgrounds: Allies, Influence or Spies, these contacts are not permanent or reliable — you are known but not established, and your influence is limited. Even so, this Merit may improve your chances of using one of those Backgrounds successfully.

In story terms, Ties gets your foot in the door. In game terms, an appropriate Tie lowers the difficulty of Social rolls by one or two, depending on what you're doing:

- Subtle request (pulling a license number): -2 difficulty
- Demanding a favor (getting the local police chief to detain a few "suspicious characters" without charges): -1 difficulty

Ties don't come from nowhere — *something* gives you privileged access to certain people. Before the chronicle begins, create a rationale or story explaining the Ties you have. Your Storyteller may disallow any Ties that seem inappropriate or overly powerful. It's not a good idea to abuse this Merit; the more you strain the Ties, the weaker they become. If you ask too much, or too frequently, you could blow the deal for good.

Unlike many other Merits, this Trait has variations; each one must be purchased separately for three points. These variations include: Local Police, Local Underworld, National Police, International Crime Syndicate, Stock Market, Local Media, National Media, International Media, Black Market, Smuggling, Shipping, Local Government, National Government, Church, International Commerce and Military.

Master of Red Tape (4 pt Merit)

You're a god of getting things done. Whether you need some supplies, security clearance, favors or additional backup, you can get it with a phone call or two to the right people. Your suave personal and bureaucratic skills make the passage easier than it would be otherwise. After all, it's not what you ask for, but who you ask and how.

In game terms, this Merit subtracts two from the difficulty of all rolls that involve getting equipment, aid or favors through a bureaucracy. Such rolls are usually based on the Backgrounds: Allies, Backup, Influence, Library, Mentor, Patron, Requisitions or Resources, or the Merit: Ties. To use this Merit, you must plan out what you need, contact a friend or ally in the necessary department, then file a request. Naturally, you can blow this Merit if you're not respectful and grateful to the right people; the Storyteller may feel free to disallow or revoke this Trait if the character isn't doing his part to keep the red tape clear.

Inner Knight (3 pt Merit)

Like an heir of Avalon, you possess a higher purpose. Other Technocrats may be working for the future, but you carry a vision of a glorious past. In your dreams, you are a Knight of Reason, a valiant crusader for the common good. No matter what occurs, that vision cannot be silenced. When adversity knocks you on your ass, the paladin within you rallies, carrying you to victory. At night, you often visit bygone places in incredibly vivid dreams. Dreams that seem almost disturbing in their sensory detail... especially if you find things in the waking world that remind you of those dreams....

Essentially, this Merit reflects a "past life" — the reincarnated Avatar of an ancient Daedalean. Since no modern Technocrat would admit such a thing, your character considers this reborn soul a heroic dream. When he's facing some deadly crisis, the modern agent can call on his "dream self" and remember things he never learned (like historical details and personalities); display skills he was never taught (like the Background: Dream at 5, but without entering a trance); *or* rally an additional five points of Willpower. These temporary Traits and memories last only a few minutes (in game time, a scene or two), but they carry with them a sense of having lived before. Naturally, these visions — of being a knight, an artist, an alchemist or a crusader — are just romantic fantasies. But are they *really? After a while, you might start to wonder....*

(For players of **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, this Merit provides an excellent link between a Renaissance character and his 20th-century counterpart — a link that allows limited crossover tales, "guest appearances" by old characters and story hooks involving ancient evils, lost inventions or historical events. *No Technocrat would admit the possibly of* reincarnation, but in your game, anything is possible.)

Flaws

Technobabbler (1 pt Flaw)

A minor but annoying personality quirk makes you incapable of carrying on a conversation without employing verbose and obtrusive discourse. No matter how simple the subject might be, you must fill it with compulsory metaphraseology, obfuscationatory terminology and counterintuitive newspeak. Jeez, learn to talk *normal*, for cryin' out loud! In game terms, you might suffer a penalty to Social Trait rolls (+1 or 2 difficulty), especially if you're trying to discuss "normal" subjects (love, entertainment and other personal issues).

Bigot (2 pt Flaw)

You just can't stand "those people," whoever "they" might be. Maybe you're an Adamite who disdains the constructs, LERMUs, cyborgs and HIT Marks that you're forced to deal with. Or perhaps you're one of those superior life forms, sick and tired of taking up slack for your obsolete human colleagues. Or you just can't deal with the Technocracy's ideal of equality, and you want to see those damn (blacks, gays, women, fill in the blank) put back in their proper place. Either way, you've got problems with your associates. You don't like them, and they probably don't like you.

Whoever you hate, you have to learn to deal with them. Open prejudice is liable to get you in trouble — bigotry is counterproductive, and the Union has no room for it. Still, it just bugs you. Whenever you can, stay among Your Own Kind, and show those other assholes who's boss... without getting caught.

Construct (2 pt Flaw)

Some people were born of natural parents. You were born in a crèche. Sexless fertilization, genetic alteration and carefully monitored Procedures brought you into this world, and

Human-Construct Relations

Even if you replace just a small part of your body, you become something other than human!

— Leon, *AD Police Files*

As Orwell said, "All animals are created equal. Some animals are created more equal than others." In the Technocracy, that's literally true. While the Union espouses the idea of relative equality between Enlightened agents, the operatives themselves have a hard time viewing "lesser" comrades as equals. And more often than not, that inequality literally is "created."

The Technocracy's ranks are filled with constructs, clones, Enhanced personnel, Enlightened ops, cyborgs, normal humans and androids. This cornucopia does not always make for brotherly love. Just as the Masses segregate themselves by race, belief, culture or sex, many Technocrats remain among their own kind, avoiding contact with "freaks" and "lessers" until duty puts them together. Even when Unity demands cooperation, these ops have a hard time putting business before bigotry.

The divisions cut across all sides. To "human-firsters" (who sometimes call themselves "Adamites" or "naturals"), *Homo sapiens* is the perfect life form; all other "steelheads and mutations" are creations of his work and intellect, and thus, they are inferior to him. Clones, constructs, cyborgs, LERMUs and other aberrations are tools, not equals. You can work with 'em, fuck 'em, even befriend 'em, but *never* put 'em on your level. Many constructs (*Homo superiors*, "superiors" or "Victors" in Progenitor parlance), on the other hand, see themselves either as the next level in evolution, or as cheap slave-labor cooked up by reckless Frankenstinians. The "rag-dolls and scrappies" are fragile things, though. If one gives you a hard time, it's easy to bust 'im into little gooey bits. Both sides disdain the un-Enlightened technicians and sympathizers they work beside. Although some "citizens" (mostly space marines) earn the respect of their "superior" colleagues, most of them are dismissed like children at the adults' table. They, in turn, are more than a little scared of the freaks they work with. And who can blame them?

Sadly, bigotry doesn't stop there. Although the Union officially frowns on discrimination based on sex, race or orientation, female and colored Technocrats still see a *definite* glass ceiling laid across the upper levels of the group. Asian Technocrats are usually the exception — many occupy the Union's highest positions — although some have been known to discriminate against everyone else. As far as the Technocracy is concerned, all people have their place. Certain operatives just disagree about where those places happen to be.

Union regulations insist that all operatives are due equal respect and protection, so bigotry officially remains a "nonproblem." It cannot exist, therefore it does not, or so the policy states. However, many Technocrats discriminate against one another in countless ways. (See the Lexicon for a few common insults.) For the most part, these "indiscretions" are subtle — name-calling, preferential treatment, clannishness and manipulation. Every so often, things get severe enough — brawls, beatings, bad tips that lead to an RD ambush — to cause real trouble. If the problems get *public enough*, someone usually gets punished. As always, though, bigotry is not restricted to the lower ranks. Depending on who's in charge and how he feels about the people involved, the guilty might be rewarded, and the victims of prejudice may be smacked down again. It's not pretty, but even within the Union, nothing is perfect.

no one will let you forget that. Despite this "Unity" everyone talks about, people treat you differently. Some outright despise you, while others treat you *sooo* nicely that it makes you want to puke. Chances are, you consider yourself different, too. Maybe you're arrogant about your *Homo superior* status... or perhaps you'd consider *Homo freakus* more appropriate. In social situations, you're at a constant disadvantage (and might suffer penalties to your Social rolls), either through others' aversion or your own insecurity.

(**Note:** This Flaw is not required of all construct characters. *It represents a construct who's painfully obvious about* what he is, not one who blends in well. The Technocracy has many of both.)

Icy (2 pt Flaw)

Judging by the "soulless Technocrat" stereotype, one might think this Flaw is actually a Merit. Hardly. Much as the Union prizes efficiency and reliability, most Technocrats still treasure a bit of humanity. If you've got any, it doesn't show; you could order the slow torture of a baby *as casually as you* could order a soda, then listen to the screams without flinching. Even your fellow Technocrats find you creepy. Consequently, most comrades avoid you, and Control keeps a very close watch over your activities. People this cold tend to wind up among the Fallen, and your superiors already consider you a flight risk.

Rose-Colored Mirrorshades (2 pt Flaw)

To you, technology is the greatest thing since sliced bread; without it, you wouldn't have bread *or slices!* Every problem has a technological solution, and anyone who can't see that is worse than stupid — they're traitors to humanity. Thus, you're blind to the downside of technology: pollution, overpopulation, environmental damage and mechanical disasters. Such dilemmas are either inventions of the Luddite Leftists, or temporary difficulties, overcome by more and better science.

In a more-specific sense, you cannot and will not see the Technocracy as anything less than the savior of humanity. To your view, anything done by the Union is done for the greater good, no matter how heinous it might seem at the moment. (Omelets, eggs and all that stuff, y'know.) Questioning the Technocracy is tantamount to questioning God; if anyone — especially another Technocrat — *should deny the* Union's greatness, you'll become like the zealot at the heretic's door. If something actually breaks your rose-colored mirrorshades, forcing you to see the ugly side of your ideal, the shock would devastate you for years to come.

Faulty Enhancements (2-5 pt Flaw)

The better body they promised you hasn't been everything it's supposed to be. Maybe your cybernetics kick out at odd moments or the counterprocedures fail just as you need them most or your augmented prowess demands a steady diet of high-carbo snacks or your psi enhancers go haywire and flood you with overstimulation.... No matter what the difficulty, you suffer from some sort of handicap related to your bioenhancement (see the Background: Enhancement). The Flaw bonus depend on how frequently (and how badly) things go screwy:

- You suffer constant pain, disorientation or hunger: two points.
- You suffer enough discomfort to affect your performance (subtract one from all dice pools) unless you take medication or other measures: three points.
- Your Enhancements fail you when you need them. (They go offline when you botch a roll, and they must be repaired by a biotechnician character): four points.
- Your Enhancements fail constantly. (Roll a die against difficulty 7 whenever you make some effort involving your Enhancement. If you succeed, nothing goes wrong; if you fail, the Enhancement locks up, fades, or shuts off. If you botch, it goes out totally): five points.

Nothing you can do will fix the problem; a skilled biotechnician may be able to, given time and an opportunity to operate on you at length. If someone *does* manage to repair the Enhancements, you will lose the Flaw and its bonus. As an option, you might just buy it down and save yourself some agony. Then again, they say suffering builds character. In your case, that's true.

Stress Atavism (3 pt Flaw)

Despite the ice-cold Technocrat stereotype, you go ballistic at any provocation. You revert to an animalistic state of mind, diving into fight-or-flight instincts. The good points: You become extremely strong and nearly invulnerable to pain. The bad points: You attack everything in your vicinity, forgetting small details like friendships, tactics or innocent bystanders. While this heedless mania makes you good in a fight, your comrades tend to wind you up and run.

A common Flaw among genetically engineered constructs and cybernetically enhanced soldiers, Stress Atavism surges up during combat or other high-stress situations. If the Storyteller asks you to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) and you fail, the madness overcomes you. In your atavistic state, add two dice to your Strength, one die to your Stamina

and three "Bruised" health levels. You also go completely ape-shit, firing all weapons at full-auto until the magazines empty, then lashing out with hands, feet and anything else that seems convenient. Once you go atavistic, you fight until one of two things happens: either you are rendered helpless, or everyone else in the area is. Naturally, Control considers you an extraordinarily loose cannon. There's a termination order waiting for the day you outlive your usefulness....

Demented Eidolon (3 pt Flaw)

The voices in your head won't let you be! Superstitionist visions torment you night and day, weird Eidolons tantalize you with their commands, everything in you says you're going insane, but still the Genius drives you toward a complete breakdown... or treason.

Essentially, this Flaw represents a mystic Avatar — one that refuses to accept the Technocracy's paradigm, and runs around in your head in a fully supernatural form. This split between your conscious mind and mystic soul erodes your sanity and tears at your allegiance to the Union. It makes an appropriate addition to Merits like Avatar Companion, Inner Knight, Past Life, Spirit Mentor and Twin Souls, as well as Flaws like Dark Fate, Psychic Vampire and Throwback. What you see and what you believe are on a crash course. Sooner or later, one will win... or you'll go mad... or both.

Rotten Liar (3 pt Flaw)

The opposite of the Perfect Liar Merit; no matter how good your story is, no matter how well-prepared you may be, your deceptions are rather transparent. Add two to the difficulty of any roll in which you attempt a lie, disguise, misdirection or other form of deception. Maybe you should stick to wet work.

Mr. Red Tape (4 pt Flaw)

Bureaucracy hates you. No matter how well you perform your duties, you can't cut through red tape worth a damn. Maybe you pissed off the supply manager or dissed that secretary or lost one too many pieces of valuable gear. In any case, you run into complications whenever you need equipment or resources. When you *do* get them, they always leave something to be desired.

In game terms, this Flaw is the opposite of the Merit: Master of Red Tape. Add two to the difficulty of obtaining anything through a bureaucracy, either the Technocracy's maze or a mundane one. Calls are not returned, favors are revoked, forms get lost and messages never get through. If you're smart, you'll let others handle the red tape. When you're on your own, you're stuck.

Rogue (4 pt Flaw)

Unmutual to the core, you go your own way, and to hell with the consequences. Maybe you've already quit the Technocracy and are running solo (like Secret Agent John Courage), or maybe you're still in the ranks, but you violate protocols constantly. Either way, you are a flaw in the pattern. If you're alive, that means one of two things: someone thinks you're still useful, or they just haven't gotten around to killing you yet.

In the eyes of the Union, a rogue is already considered dead. She may still be sent on missions, receive the usual gear (but no Requisitions — that Background becomes invalid) and get instructions from her Supervisors. When she needs aid, however, it won't come. Backup, Allies and other perks won't help her, either. As far as Control is concerned, a lone wolf can fend for herself....

Fifth Degree (5 pt Flaw)

You're in trouble with Control. Maybe you're a renegade superstitionist who's still under guard in her new "family," an agent who's too careless or independent for her own good, a loudmouth who's said way too much or a loose cannon with one more shot left in her.... Either way, you've already been subjected to discipline. Now you stand one or two steps from total re-education... or termination. You've been too valuable to kill so far, but one more slip, and....

In game terms, this separation makes it very hard to get things done; add two or three to the difficulty of any roll that involves requisitioning equipment, making friends, pulling strings or employing other Union resources. Occasionally, other parties will deliberately screw with your missions, tools or reputation. (Storyteller's option.) Worse, the upper echelons are watching you; you can't afford to step out of line... ever. Not if you want to stay alive.

Backgrounds

Wealth is not without its advantages and the case to the contrary, though it has often been made, has never proved widely persuasive.

— J.K. Galbraith

In Unity, there is strength. While the hapless mystics run around in their little cliques, grabbing crumbs from one anothers' plates, members of the Union have fantastic resources to draw from. You might not have a Spectre Limousine in your own garage, but you can get one if you need it (and possess the proper clearance, favors and paperwork). So long as you're loyal to the cause, you can have almost anything — gadgets, money, influence, even biomodification — on a superhuman scale. If you do not remain loyal... well, that leaves more for those who understand what their duties require.

The Technocracy provides for its people — quite well, in fact — as long as they return the favor. Thus, Technocratic characters have access to several Background options that

other mages do not. Although many of the essential Background Traits work the same way as those given in the **Mage** rulebook, there are a few notable differences:

Requisitioning, Outsourcing and Borrowing Devices

The Union is a cornucopia if you're one of the chosen few. Although individual agents own very few of their own devices, they can get hold of things most wizards would give their eyeteeth to possess. The trick is making nice to your Supervisor and keeping good relations with other Conventions. A good agent can requisition special items for herself or her team and expect to get them. An op with the right connections can outsource items that normally belong to other groups. And a Technocrat who can "borrow" devices from other groups *and* get high-level stuff is a lucky boy (or girl) indeed!

Assigned and requisitioned gadgets come from the special labs and Q Divisions of each individual Convention: An Iteration X cyborg gets new weapons, a Man in Black gets espionage gear and a Void Engineer gets some new Dimensional Science tech. To obtain them, you place a request with your Supervisors, play nice and hope you get what you want.

Outsourcing — a Syndicate perk — follows the same process, but it jumps across Convention boundaries. Under most circumstances, the cyborg can get It-X gear, but not Progenitor gear. The Syndicate sidesteps this obstacle through its Disbursements Division. That department draws up contracts between the requester and the requestee, then transfers the tools to agents who need them or stockpiles them in special armories until they're needed. This option's downside is that the Special Projects Division — a.k.a., the Pentex front — has a steady pipeline into the requisitions process. From time to time, tainted gear winds up in the hands of innocent agents.

Every so often, a really connected agent can jump protocols and borrow stuff from his friends in other Conventions. Doing so is illegal, of course, and it may result in punishment for both parties. Even so, it is done occasionally; if the agent is working on a secret project (like Invictus), he might be able to get a higher-up to get the gear for him.

Systems

To request temporary equipment from the upper echelons, an agent employs the Background Trait: Requisitions. (See p. 182 for details and systems.) This Background reflects the op's standing with his Supervisors and allows him to draw a certain amount of Background dots that he can use to "purchase" new gear.

Within certain bounds, an agent can get any piece of mundane equipment she needs, including normal guns, cars, communications devices, suits and lab equipment. All she has to do is file a request and wait for the gear. Really large, advanced or expensive mundane equipment (military hardware, advanced microchips, office space), and most hypertech devices are another story, however. Most Supervisors outfit their teams with such equipment before the mission begins. To obtain additional gear, the agent must navigate through the Union's bureaucracy. Depending on the agent and her needs, the player uses one of these options:

- **Requisitioning:** The Supervisor takes care of most requisitions. If an agent wants something that the Supervisor (and the Storyteller) considers too unusual or advanced, the player might have to roll her Requisitions rating. If the player botches, the character gets nothing except a good chewing-out. If she fails, she gets a simple refusal. If she succeeds, she gets whatever equipment she has "earned" with her performance. (See the Requisitions Background for details.)
- **Outsourcing:** To outsource, an agent needs to either belong to the Syndicate, or make friends with someone who does. The Syndicate character's Requisitions rating determines what she can obtain. For simplicity, assume that the difficulty equals seven.
- **"Borrowing":** A character who wants to borrow something without going through the usual channels needs to have some sort of inter-Convention friendship already in place (through an Ally, Contact, Mentor or Patron Background). The character files the request with her friend; the player makes a roll against difficulty 7 — either a Background roll, or a Social roll. If she blows the roll, one or both of the "partners" get caught. If she succeeds, each success is worth one dot in Requisitions. If she already has that Trait, each dot adds to her usual rating. At that point, she can obtain whatever devices she can afford.
- **"Asking Nicely":** Naturally, there are all kinds of ways of asking for favors. An agent who doesn't want to go the usual route (or doesn't have the Requisitions Background) can try to kiss up to her contact or Supervisor. In this case, a Social Trait + Ability could represent a seduction or power-play, while a Social Trait + Background (Ally, Contact, Mentor, Patron or Spies) would represent a simple request. Note that using Procedures to take advantage of a fellow Technocrat is *extremely* unmutual, and it is subject to very harsh punishment. Which isn't to say that it doesn't *happen*... it's just risky.
- **Stealing:** The Union keeps tabs on its stuff to an almost-fanatical degree. Unless you've got a death wish, stealing gear is a really bad idea. Just don't.

In no case do requisitioned, outsourced or borrowed items belong to the agent. They remain the property of the Union, and they should be considered "on loan." People *will* be keeping track of them (even if the equipment has been unofficially borrowed), and there'll be hell to pay if the tools aren't returned.

The following Backgrounds may be requisitioned, outsourced or borrowed: Backup, Device, Influence, Library, Node, Resources and Spies. All others imply a level of

personal "ownership." In game terms, the Background points do not add to the character's regular Backgrounds total, and the gadgets must be returned at the end of a mission. Piss off your Supervisor, and you lose your favored status — and a change in status means a change in Background points. Even *if you're behaving yourself*, it's not a good idea to request gear too frequently, or to treat it recklessly. Even a cornucopia runs out eventually.

Example Data

Assigned to monitor a suspected superstitionist cult, Agent Martinez begins his mission with the usual black car, some normal surveillance gear (laser-mikes, mini-cameras, infrared film) and his sidearm — nothing unusual. However, this gear isn't enough for Martinez. He also requisitions a 1/2" Video Deck with Kirlian Lenses (three points of Devices), and an X14 A Thunderbird gun (six more points, for a total of nine) in case those RDs get frisky.

Assume Martinez has two dots in Requisitions. His standing, at the moment, is good. If the agent chooses to go through normal channels, his player, Steve, must roll at least two successes against difficulty 7 to get the 10 points he needs. (One success, or five points, *is not enough.*)

If Martinez wants to get a Stealth Suit (Iteration X technology) instead of the X14 Thunderbird, he'll have to outsource it. Using his connections to Celia Z, a pal in the Syndicate, he floats a request. Celia has not only the connections, but a better Requisitions rating: 4. Since she's a Storyteller character, the Storyteller rolls four dice against difficulty 7. Three successes later, Martinez has what he wants.

Let's say Martinez doesn't have Requisitions at all, or he is in poor standing with his Supervisor. In this case, he has to charm Celia into getting the devices for him. The Storyteller wants to make the player sweat, so she asks Steve to decide what he's doing to convince the Financier that Martinez is worth helping. Steve roleplays the agent's hard-luck story, capping it off with a few subtle flirtations. The player rolls Martinez's Manipulation + Subterfuge against difficulty 7. He does well — four successes — so Agent Martinez can borrow the Video Deck, the Lenses, the Stealth Suit *and* the gun. We'll say Celia's just a friend. If she had been an Ally (as per that Background), John might have rolled Manipulation + Allies instead.

Martinez botches the mission; his "evidence of reality crimes" looks more like a cheap porn video. (Damn Cultists of Ecstasy!) Worse, he fries the Video Deck filming the rite. Martinez's status drops from "good" to "poor." The next time he needs something, Steve has to beat difficulty 9. Better luck next mission, Agent Martinez! In the future, be a little more selective about gathering evidence....

Pooling Backgrounds

Many hands are stronger than one. A small group of Technocrats who work together on a regular basis — a cell or amalgam — may combine resources to create a pool of mutual goods or services. For the most part, Control approves of such efforts; certain Conventions, especially Iteration X, favor groups over individuals.

In story terms, the amalgam agrees to share whatever equipment or influence the members possess; in many case, *the group leader requisitions* more equipment for the team, then puts it aside for mutual use. In game terms:

- The players pool their Background points, then use them to buy a number of Background Traits. These common Traits are listed on all members' character sheets under "Shared Resources," and they may be used by any member of the team.
- When the group leader requisitions new Backgrounds, the chances of getting them are based on the team's relationship with its superiors, rather than on a single agent's performance. If someone "borrows" equipment, that character's player makes the roll.
- If a member quits or dies, her Background points are withdrawn; the remaining members must either contribute more points, or lose a few dots in the Backgrounds.
- If group members want to purchase a high-level Background (see "Background Ratings Over Five," p. 178), they may do so. All the points are totaled up, and that Background belongs to the group. Naturally, Control *will* be watching agents who assemble too large a power-base; Storytellers may want to set an upper level of eight dots, even for shared Backgrounds.
- Individual characters may keep a few Background points aside for their own use. In this case, the players simply buy their own Backgrounds and list them in the usual section of the character sheet. These items and connections are *not* part of the common stock. Every Technocrat ought to save at least one Background point for Genius; as we all know, brilliance is a personal thing.

The following Background Traits may be shared within a single amalgam: Allies, Backup, Devices, Influence, Laboratory, Library, Mentor, Node, Patron, Resources and Requisitions. Other Backgrounds are too individual to be shared. Although they may belong to established strongholds, players' Technocrats *cannot* establish their own Constructs. Such individualism is highly unmutual, and it would never be sanctioned by Control.

Resource Forfeiture

What is given may be rescinded. If an agent or amalgam commits a serious breach of protocol (like treason or reckless killing), Control may step in and seize his (or their) resources. In this case, the Storyteller simply takes the Backgrounds

away — possibly after a "trial," perhaps not. Ultimately, most Backgrounds belong to the Union, not to its agents. Smart operatives will behave.

These Backgrounds can be seized if Control so orders: Allies, Backup, Devices, Enhancement (ow!), Influence, Mentor, Node, Patron, Requisitions, Resources, Secret Weapons and Spies. Depending on the way you define your Backgrounds, these things may be taken (like money and equipment) or neutralized (like contacts and friends) — sometimes permanently.

If a Symposium decides to seize your resources, you might be able to appeal. In game terms, this period would become a story in which you and your friends have to either prove your innocence, blame someone else or bribe your way out of trouble. Naturally, you can dig an even deeper grave this way, but what's life without a little risk?

Altered Backgrounds

It's no big surprise that the Union handles things differently than its rivals do. "Mages" may all be playing in the same big sandbox (theoretically, anyway), but the Technocrats refuse to see things through the lenses of outmoded mysticism and counterprogressive tradition. Superstitionists use words like "avatar," "chantry" and "familiar." As a Technocrat, you avoid such terminology, and define the concepts behind them somewhat differently. Certain Backgrounds — Allies, Influence, Library, Mentor and Resources — are essentially the same whether you're a Technocrat or a superstitionist. Others, however, are different enough (or at least they *seem* different enough) to redefine in the Union's terms.

Cloaking (Arcane)

Many Technocrats "hide in plain sight," using psychological tricks, minor disguises and so forth. Other agents (notably NWO spies, Iteration X cyborgs and Syndicate field ops) employ "cloaking devices" that literally scramble light, sound and brainwave activity in a small radius around the agent. (See "Biotech" in Chapter Two). Some ops, however, simply have a "talent for disappearing"; while they cannot actually become invisible, they're notoriously hard to keep track of. Secret Agent John Courage is one such agent, but he's not alone.

The Cloaking Background can be considered as either a talent for misdirection, an implant or a mysterious (and unsettling) ability to defy certain laws of physics. To the Union, this talent is an enigma... one it would dearly love to solve. Until that day, however, it puts the talent to good use and makes a special point of keeping track of agents who display it... as much as one *can* keep track of these people, at least.

Companion (Familiar)

Even Technocrats get lonely, especially those who spend a lot of time away from the Masses. In the rarefied atmosphere of Horizon Constructs, remote laboratories and Voidcraft, these operatives occasionally make companions to accompany them in their duties. More often than not, these constructs are odd creatures; even though many of them appear to be perfectly normal examples of their kind, any perceptive person can tell that they're more than they seem to be....

This Background is rare among all the Conventions — it smacks too much of medieval wizardry. However, those few Technocrats who have Companions often swear by them. The newer, younger breed of Technocrats seems slightly more inclined to have Companions than their elders do. These Companions often take the form of house pets or the other creatures listed below:

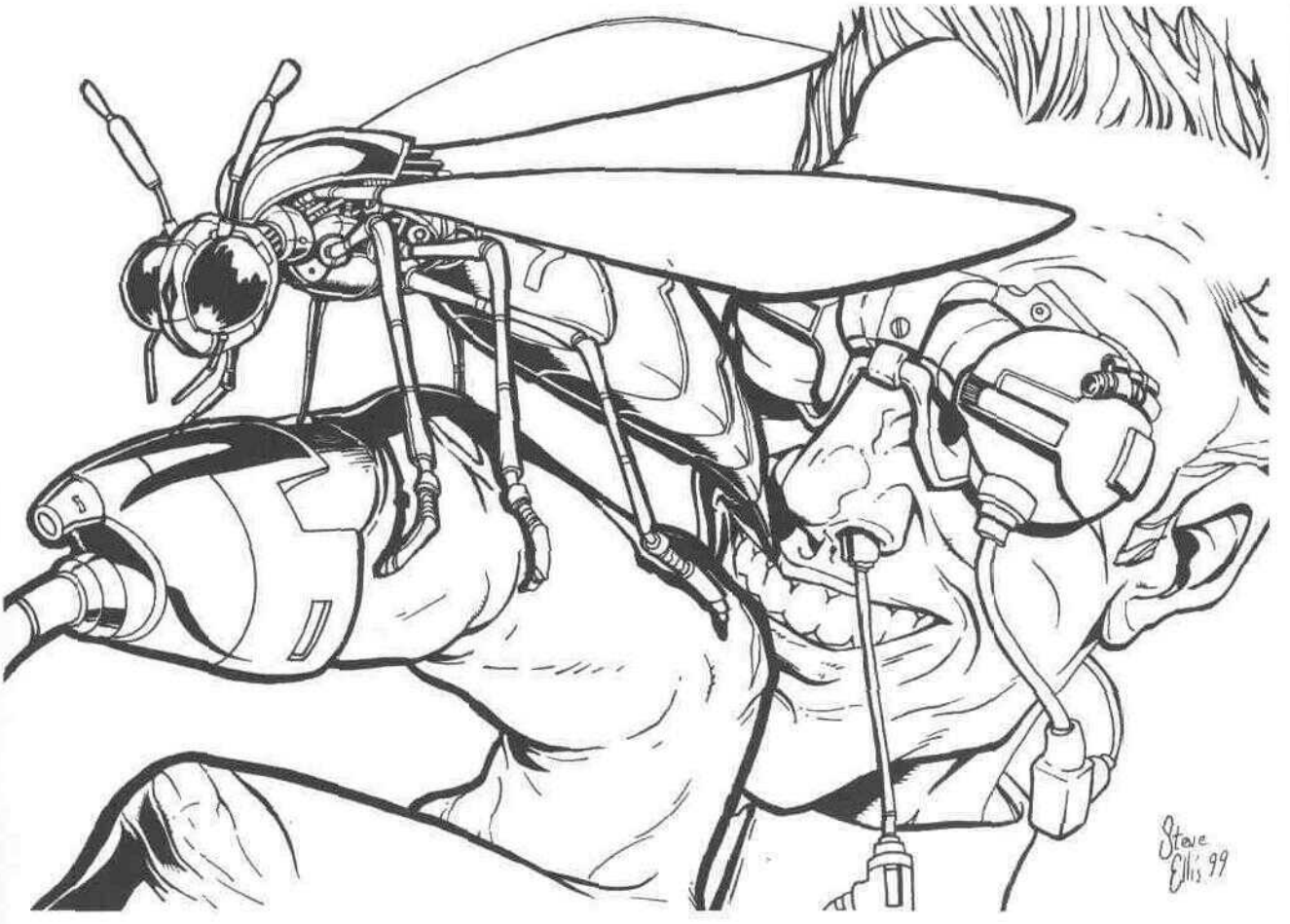
- **Iteration X:** Robots, AIs, intelligent weapons, data beasts and attack progs (see **Digital Web 2.0**).
- **NWO:** AIs, intelligent animals (attack dogs, pets).
- **Progenitors:** Bioconstructs (human, animal and other), genegineered beasts, "normal" animals with very abnormal abilities.
- **Syndicate:** Pets, attack animals, humanoid constructs (usually very attractive and efficient).
- **Void Engineers:** Alien creatures (that is, materialized spirits; see the movie version of *Lost in Space*), genegineered animals, data beasts, robots, LERMUs and other bioconstructs.

In game terms, the Background works exactly the same ways as the Background: Familiar, with the following exceptions:

- A Technocrat does not perform a "bonding ceremony"; most of the time, he makes the Companion with biotech or hypertech, invests it with a bit of self-will and some intelligence and dotes on it a bit. Over time, the creation bonds with the Technocrat... often becoming far more than the "little friend" the operative expected. Void Engineers occasionally bond with creatures from "out there"; such bonds violate Technocracy policy, but in the Deep Universe, Supervisors often look the other way unless there's trouble.
- The Companion does not devour Tass or Primal Energy *per se*, but it does follow the Technocrat around, demanding favors and attention. Many of those favors involve strange diets (high-energy food, alien plants) and close personal contact (affection, sex, mind-melds, etc.) — both of which supply the Primal Energy the Companion requires. For some odd reason, all Companions, even animal and robotic ones (but not AIs), seem to love Erg Cola.

Naturally, you're responsible for anything your Companion does — an important consideration for agents involved with sensitive material. An angry Companion can make an operative's life very difficult; these creatures seem to know all sorts of classified information, and the Union is not nearly as tolerant of such breaches as the Traditions might be....

(**Note:** This Background covers really special, personal companions. Many operatives have allies [robots, super-smart dogs, flesh-eating carpets, cute-but-dumb sidekicks and so on] who don't have the special "talents" that Companions possess. Use the Background: Allies for these characters, instead.)



Construct (Chantry)

Home is where you hang your hat... and mirrorshades.

Technocrats refer to their places of power as Constructs *rather than Chantries.* Among younger, newer Technocrats, even the term "Construct" has fallen out of favor somewhat, since it's easily confused with the biocrafted beings of the Progenitors and Iteration X. Instead, they tend to use the term *headquarters*, or the Convention-specific terms listed here:

- **Iteration X:** Arsenals, offices, outposts, Constructs.
- **NWO:** Offices, towers, Horizon Collectives, Safe Houses.
- **Progenitors:** Laboratories, research facilities.
- **Syndicate:** Offices, lodges, Safe Houses, hideouts.
- **Void Engineers:** Outposts, stations, Voidcraft, motherships.

Agents who belong to a Construct (which is most of them) are subject to restrictions similar to those governing Chantry-based mages: They start low on the "corporate ladder" and work their way up. They have a certain degree of access to the *Construct*'s resources as well. In exchange, however, they are also subject to attacks by its enemies, and they must perform duties and chores to keep the place running.

Destiny

Although the Union refers to "destiny" by the same name their superstitionist rivals use, they define it in scientific terms, rather than in quasi-mystical ones. To a Technocrat, your Destiny represents an overwhelming probability, a statistical likelihood that you will accomplish something positive. (Technocrats with the Background often spend countless hours running temporal analysis calculations, trying to find out what this "destiny" might be.) Some scholars *equate this term with the* "manifest destiny" philosophy popular in 19th-century America: You know, somehow, that you're meant to do great things.

In the collective mind set of the Union, something as individualistic as *Destiny might be considered* unmutual. After all, the whole is supposed to be greater than its parts. Yet considering how inspirational some of those parts can be (look at Tychoides, Rivallon de Corbie, Queen Victoria and *even mythical figures* like King Arthur), a hero can be great for morale. The occasional celebrity illuminates the Technocratic ideal. So long as such people remember their place in the larger whole, "destiny" is often encouraged.

Of course, Destiny is not always related to heroism. An agent with this Background might be fated to betray the Union — as many Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts did — or

to break ranks in some way that makes a big difference to the Union but blows policy all to hell. As always, it's up to the Storyteller to determine what a character's Destiny is, and how it comes to pass.

The new breed of Technocrat exhibits a flair that often puts mages to shame. What's better, he manages to pull it off as part of a group (*anyone* can look good when he's on his own, after all). Thus, Destiny is perfectly appropriate for a Technocratic character. You represent the men and women who're going to infuse new life into the Conventions, lead them to new heights of accomplishment and triumph in the Ascension War.

Device (Talisman)

The Union watches its resources carefully. Technocratic devices are essential in the war effort, but as with many other luxuries, there aren't enough of them to go around. Q Division and Research & Execution hoard their hypertech carefully. Even so, many ops have a personal toy or two that they keep in their own quarters. Not *everything* finds its way back to the arsenal, and gifts, inventions and scavenged gear often belong to individuals, not to groups.

Aside from the specifics noted in the "Devices" section of Chapter Eight, this Trait works exactly the same as the Talisman Background given in **Mage**. With this Background, the item belongs to the agent, not to his Convention. Which isn't to say no one can take it from you — you simply don't have to return it at the end of the mission or petition a Supervisor to get it.

(In some previous sourcebooks, this Background represented an agent's standing with Q Division and his ability to requisition hypertech. This rule has been changed to allow Technocrat characters to own personal equipment, and to give amalgams the ability to pool resources. See "New Backgrounds: Requisitions and Secret Weapons" for the new replacements to the old rule.)

Genius (Avatar)

While superstitionists refer to the guiding brilliance within them as an "avatar" (the spirit of an incarnated god), Technocrats know better. They understand the true significance of this driving force, and they refer to it as Genius. The word "avatar" not only carries supernatural baggage, it implies that a person is only a host for some greater spirit entity. "Genius," with its connotations of superior intelligence, insight, revelation and Enlightened guidance, captures the true nature of this inner spark far better than the superstitionist term ever could.

Every Technocrat has a bit of Genius within her. It's what allows her to understand the vast forces she commands. Yet that insight has its price: When a human being has the doors of perception and possibility thrown wide, she risks going crazy. This threat is the disease other "mages" suffer from: delusions brought about by their guiding brilliance and outmoded mythologies, and recklessness brought on by the things they can do. It's a good thing you're more evolved than they are! You know better, and you can handle the power your Genius grants you.

While the superstitionist flails around in his private hell, a Technocrat can focus her intellect and overcome the deviant visions that sometimes follow Enlightenment (see "Genius Eidolons," p. 136). Through hard work and training, you have learned to focus your intellectual energy with meditation, study, physical exercise or experimentation in the laboratory. This activity is known as "sanitizing one's mind," presumably because it dispels deviant urges. Any agent beginning to have doubts about her way of life should report to the nearest laboratory immediately for more hard work and study.

But the benefits of focus go further than that. By attuning yourself to your work, you can restore the Primal Element (a.k.a., "Quintessence") lost in the day's normal affairs. With a bit of meditation, study and discipline in the right surroundings, you refresh the energy spent on important tasks. When you need that extra boost — often called "the push" — the Primal Element is there, waiting to be used.

Naturally, you must work free of distractions. Some Technocrats practice the questionable discipline of yoga to clear their minds, while others study, exercise or hook themselves to isolation devices and shut out the world. Naturally, the Technocracy provides "focus centers" where such things are available — gymnasiums, laboratories, isolation rooms, databanks and libraries. Stocked with high-energy foods and drinks (like Erg Cola), helpful associates and privacy areas, these centers help you refresh that essential energy and clear your mind of deviant delusions.

In game terms, this Background works exactly like the Avatar Background. The character, on the other hand, views it through a totally different perspective. When she speaks of "avatars," she prefers the term "Genius"; when she views them through special devices or Procedures, she's simply recognizing the archetypal forms shaped by the mage who "wears" them... or noticing the alien beings that have corrupted their pawns and now ride them to destruction. No Technocrat will allow herself the luxury of that corruption! To her, the Genius is within.

Hypercram (Dream)

Who says studying is boring? Hypercram is the Technocrats' version of Dream. Like that Background, it allows a character to temporarily access information that he didn't already have. In place of trances and meditation, Hypercram substitutes study, data analysis and comparative statistics. Younger Technocrats call the process "blitzing" or "grinding."

To Hypercram, the agent reviews super-condensed information about the subject he wants to master. This study is usually done through typical forms (accessing special libraries, reviewing the Convention's databases or surfing pertinent websites), but sometimes involves sleep-reading, nanotech

"Quintessence" and Meditation

The word "Quintessence" is something of an anachronism, a hold-over from the Order of Reason. Fifteenth-century Daedaleans meditated at refuges and "Crays," special sites built along early scientific principles that helped them focus their devotion to progress. Since many Daedaleans practiced the pseudoscience of alchemy, the alchemical name for inner power — the "Quinte Essence" — stuck.

These days, Technocrats prefer the term "Primal Element" over "Quintessence." The force itself is the same. It courses through all things, fueled by the metaphysical crosscurrents of existence. The very creation of the universe is evident in the Primal Element, which dances to the unique vibrations of the cosmos' own special resonance. When an operative focuses himself and channels his Genius, he stimulates the flow of this energy source. Focus opens a gate between external energy and internal energy, allowing the Technocrat to "jump-start" himself with the energy supply around him. Thus, certain sites have been set up to take advantage of the ebb and flow of Primal Element. These sires make perfect "power stations" for weary Technocrats.

Despite its superstitionist roots, the Primal Element is a scientific phenomena. The energy spike that follows focus or "pushing" can be measured and documented. Even today, agents still gather in suitable surroundings and foster their intellectual purity, just as Daedaleans did. The practice is the same, it just goes by different names.

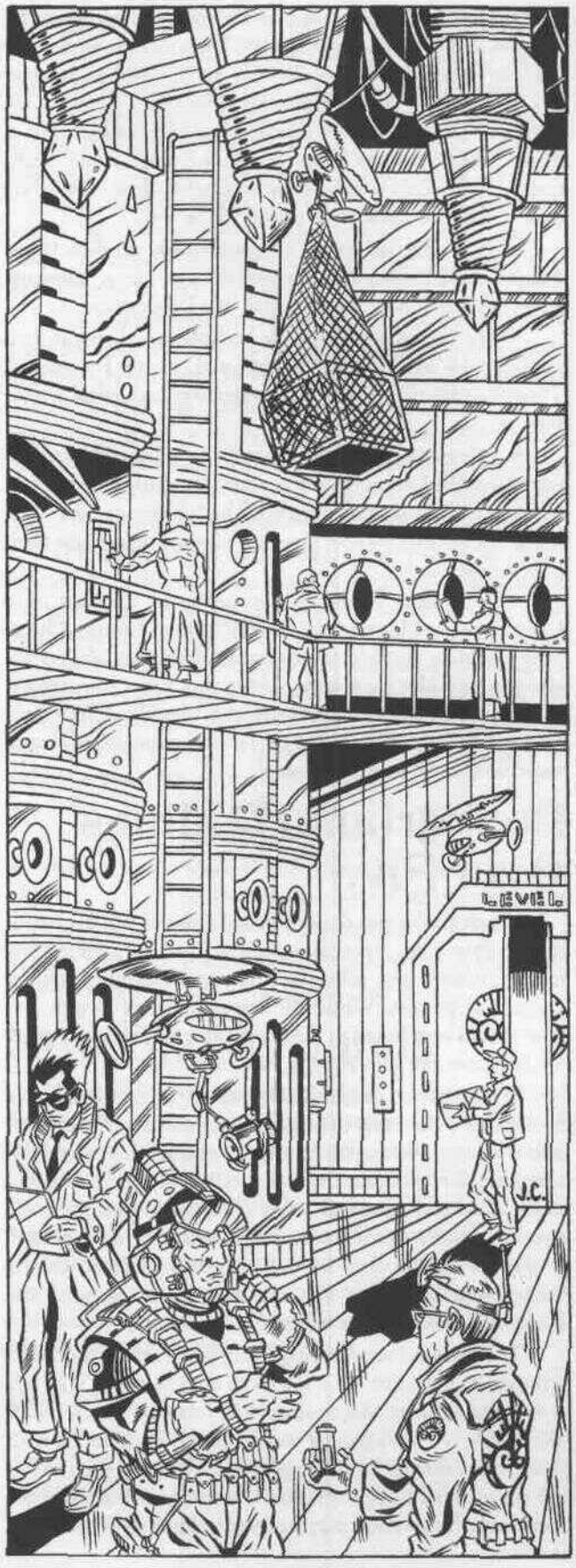
databanks or memory implantation. Some Progenitors even experiment with a technique in which RNA encoded with the appropriate information is implanted in the subject, allowing him to access the data through cellular processes. It's not perfect, but it works.

In game terms, Hypercram gives a Technocrat access to the same sorts of information that other mages learn using Dream. Likewise, it's subject to the same limitations and restrictions on its use. But, as any grad student knows, temporary information on a subject is better than no information at all.

Laboratory (Sanctum)

Everyone needs a place to work. In the specially prepared laboratories, weapons-ranges, boardrooms and research quarters of Union operatives, a Technocrat can concentrate on her special projects. As a Background Trait, "Laboratory" covers many different kinds of space. Some agents have huge libraries, gymnasiums, personal labs or machine shops loaded with odd gadgets; others share a communal area where the resources are shared between ops with the proper clearance.

In game terms, this Background works like the Sanctum Trait, with the following specifics:



• The Union's Laboratories are equipped with magical failsafes. All Procedures that fit the Technocratic worldview are considered coincidental. Traditional "mystic" magic styles (Voodoo, Pagan magic, Hermetic rituals and so forth) are always vulgar there, as are the weird sciences of the Sons of Ether. Virtual Adepts, however, know enough about Technocratic protocols to bypass these failsafes; their "spells" are almost always coincidental in these labs, too.

• A combination of computer-link misdirections, dampen-field bafflers and camouflage provides a "cloaking effect" that disguises the existence of a Laboratory.

• The Gauntlet rating in a Technocratic Laboratory is considered 9, even against Dimensional Science Procedures. Those Procedures are simply considered coincidental, rather than vulgar.

• A Laboratory set up within an established Construct belongs to the Union; it may be shared, monitored, spied on or seized with little or no warning. The "cloaking effect" does not affect Control — your superiors always know where their Laboratories are!

• A wealthy operative (or amalgam) may set up a Laboratory outside an established Construct. Doing so, however, could be considered unmutual. Bribes and favors are always a good idea if you want to keep your Laboratory secure. In personally owned Laboratories, the "cloaking effect" protects against all intrusions, even Technocratic ones. There's something to be said for privacy!

Background Ratings Over Five

When you've got the resources of the entire Technocracy to draw a on, it makes sense that you might have more money, friends and influence than any mortal should be allowed to possess. While the upper limits of wealth and power seem best-suited to the Syndicate's money men, many Technocrats can gain equally vast resources.

In game terms, certain Backgrounds can be raised above 5, allowing a character to have greater amounts of backup or gear than any other agent or mage. Certain Backgrounds — Cloaking, Companion, Destiny, Genius, Hypercram, Laboratory, Mentor, Patron and Secret Weapons — cannot exceed five dots. If you purchase more than five dots in a Background, simply fill in the dots in the next line underneath the Background listing on the character sheet, or write the Background level as a number next to its name.

The listings here describe the upper levels of the Backgrounds in question. The first five dots in each Trait are covered in the core **Mage** rulebooks. Note that Backgrounds aren't "free" — they require maintenance. A character with extensive Influence, for example, would need to spend a fair amount of time traveling around, keeping each of her contacts fresh. Storytellers may feel free to limit any character's Background rating; the upper levels may be too rich for some chronicles to handle. We recommend that no character be allowed to attain a Background rating higher than 8 in any case. Few people in the world have this kind of influence.

Allies

A Technocratic agent can attract a lot of company. Most of these folks become "backup" or "companions," but others become friends. Depending on who you are and what group you belong to, these friends might be constructs, HIT Marks, gang bosses, millionaires, senators, genegineered beasts, alien creatures, mercenaries, street criminals, accountants, reporters, lawyers or small armies of each. Naturally, the greater the numbers, the less loyal each individual becomes. You can only spread friendship so thin....

••••• •	Six moderately powerful Allies, many "lesser" sidekicks or three really dangerous ones.
••••• ••	Seven Allies, a small gang or a handful of strong supernatural beings.
••••• •••	Eight Allies, a small army of followers or a large amalgam of dedicated Technocrats.
••••• ••••	Nine separate Allies, a private militia or a number of loyal amalgams.
••••• •••••	10 potent Allies, several hundred followers or a variety of powerful mages or other creatures.

Influence

Some people are familiar faces worldwide; others, not quite as famous, hold the puppet strings for government officials, media makers, activist leaders and military commanders. At this Background level, you can sway world events with a good plan and a successful Manipulation + Influence roll. The difficulty depends on the feat and the actions taken. Overthrowing a recently elected regime would be difficulty 6; arranging Tony Blair's assassination would be difficulty 10 (at least). On a botched roll, the character's plans fail horribly; this setback might cost a dot of Influence, and it could set other story elements (like a manhunt) in action as well.

••••• •	Influence in one nation's affairs.
••••• ••	Influence in two or three related nations.
••••• •••	Influence across a continent.
••••• ••••	Influence in a sphere (First World, Third World, etc.)
••••• •••••	Influence worldwide.

Library

Powerful individuals can draw on national archives, private libraries, computer networks and even occult stores belonging to Reality Deviants. While most large libraries are open to outside use, a character with a large Library rating receives preferential treatment at the archive of her choice. Since it's pretty difficult for a single person to comb through such monumental stores of information, this Background

implies that you can call on a small research staff to aid you. If the collection actually belongs to your or your group, you'll need someplace to store it and someone to maintain it.

••••• •	A huge private collection.
••••• ••	A good-sized database, both text and IT
••••• •••	A national archive.
••••• ••••	A storehouse of worldly wisdom and lore.
••••• •••••	Several huge archives worldwide.

Node

As a fringe benefit to world domination: it's easy to get "Prime" real estate. By "sanitizing" a Node, the Union performs a hostile takeover, then taps the wellspring for its own use.

The Conventions rarely assign powerful Nodes to individuals or amalgams. Instead, they prefer to build large headquarters, factories, laboratories or other facilities on the Node site — the better to tap its energy and defend it from renegades. Sometimes, though, an amalgam is granted access to a Node if the team's mission is particularly important. The usual forms must be filled out, of course, and bribes and reports are the order of the day....

Technocratic Nodes take various forms. Some process electrical energy from "magical springs" or refine oil from old burial grounds; others separate plasma from blood banks, generate Primal Energy with giant turbines or draw raw energy from the sacred sites of weird werecreatures. Materialized Primal Energy — called "Tass" in remembrance of alchemical theories — becomes food, fuel, batteries, electrical power currents or even pure, clean water.

Although the Union tries to refine its energy sources with as little fuss as possible, many Nodes are ominous places. The Resonance Effect is often dismissed as superstition, but there's no debating that some Nodes make operatives uncomfortable. Sanitized "haunts" still glow with malevolence at night; placid old battlefields still echo with the memories of past wars. One Progenitor facility — the bizarre Research Plantation Number Four — grows Tass-plants called Kaltee, while the dreaded MECHA Construct harvests Tass from slaves condemned there for Reality Deviance. There's a war on, after all, and the spoils go to the victors. Those Nodes the Conventions cannot control are usually destroyed.

In game terms, this Background works the same way for Technocrats and mystics. A really powerful agent or amalgam may secure a Node of unusual power, earning an effective Background rating well over five dots. Such Nodes can produce far more raw Force or Tass than usual.

••••• •	Six Quintessence/week.
••••• ••	Eight Quintessence/week.
••••• •••	10 Quintessence/week.
••••• ••••	15 Quintessence/week.
••••• •••••	20 Quintessence/week.

Resources

Money, money, money. The Technocracy has all the money it could want, and while some groups (like Iteration X) eschew wealth, others (especially Syndicate Methodologies) revel in it. With this big a bank, you and your comrades can always find cash. In a shared Resource, that money belongs to the group (and by extension, the Union); a "private" Resource Background reflects your personal wealth. And if you're a banker, businessman, gangster or celebrity, that wealth could be pretty impressive.

This Trait reflects immediate, liquid assets. Turning these assets into cash isn't always a quick process; it might take weeks. The Background assumes an "allowance," though, so unless Control freezes your accounts or seizes your assets (always a possibility), those assets belong to you. Note that sudden reversals of fortune can wipe this Background out. The Storyteller should remember that the wealthier you are, and the higher your standard of living, the more attention you attract.

The upper levels of wealth reach the level of international finance. A Technocrat who wants to juggle an industry or two can speculate on the market, changing trends, leading takeovers or crashing companies. A Manipulation + Influence roll can shift the market in your favor (see "Influence"); a botch can wreck both your plans and the local economy. Incidentally, the Syndicate frowns on careless market speculation. A character who makes one too many mistakes can watch her entire fortune disappear in a single stroke of "bad luck."

••••• •	*Multimillionaire. Whatever you want,* you have.
••••• ••	Welcome to the billionaire's club. At this point, you can influence an entire business or industry.
••••• •••	You can control two global industries.
••••• ••••	You can access several international industries.
••••• •••••	The world is your checkbook.

New Backgrounds

When you strip away the high ideals, hypertech and Enlightenment, the Technocracy is essentially a huge covert government. It has its own armies, arsenals, economy, industries, intelligence agencies and bureaucracy. With such vast resources behind him, the Technocrat has access to things his superstitionist rivals can only envy. With noted exceptions, *the following Traits are available only to active members of* the Technocracy. Rogue agents forfeit these perks (except Enhancement), and outsiders cannot purchase them at all. Membership has its privileges!

Backup

Devon screamed as the bullet plowed through his shoulder. He ducked back behind the limousine, clutching at his wound with one hand while his other hand clung weakly to his gun. "We need help! Call in the cops!"

"The cops won't make it here in time," Irene said matter-of-factly. "However, I happen to know of a Construct in this location, and I will request assistance from their cybernetic agents. I just put in some maintenance hours there last week. They owe me."

Devon slid back lower behind the car. Cyborgs were usually pretty conspicuous, but if they had the usual Iteration X weapons, this fight would be over pretty quickly.

When you work for the Technocracy, other people work for you. If everything goes to hell, you've got a team of un-Enlightened agents to help you out. (See the climax of almost any James Bond movie for an example of this Background in action.) Each Convention has its own name for these grunts like sympathizers, associates, students, marines or Kamrads. They're among the most essential agents in the Technocracy's crusades... and the most expendable. In honor of their contributions, many agents regard them with familial affection, calling them brethren, sisters or cousins. Less-affectionate agents refer to them as cannon fodder and proles.

This Background represents a number of low-level operatives that an amalgam has at its disposal. Unlike Allies, such personnel are largely nameless, faceless and expendable; unlike Spies, they're not particularly connected, although they might be able to score you some advance intelligence. Although Enlightened Technocrats can and sometimes do engage these agents in conversation, camaraderie and the occasional affair, they sense that these people are their inferiors. Supervisors move Backup teams around at seemingly random intervals... especially if some Enlightened op establishes personal bonds with a prole. Harsh as it may seem, these people are little more than tools of the Technocratic high command.

"Backup" usually takes the form of last-minute assault squads; if an op is in danger, a team of gun-wielding sympathizers can provide enough cover to let him finish his mission. But the Background reflects other support-teams, too — laboratory technicians, media personnel, co-pilots, drivers, wait staff, office staff, personal servants and even prostitutes. As the ops take care of the important stuff, the Backup personnel handle the mundane details, from conveying information to cleaning up dead bodies.

The available Backup depends on the Convention (or even Methodology) of the agent or group that requests it. A Man in Black can call up some spies, thugs or reporters, but he'd have a hard time calling in Iteration X Kamrads or Progenitor constructs unless he was working with a member of those Conventions. Typically, an agent or team pools its Backup rating at the beginning of each mission and defines the kind of Backup it may need:

- **All:** Students, drivers secretaries, couriers, lab techs, political activists, emergency medics, simple thugs.
- **Iteration X:** Manual laborers, machinists, cyborg "temps," mechanics, soldiers.
- **NWO:** Un-Enlightened constructs, cops and detectives, commandos, reporters, hookers, clean-up crews.
- **Progenitors:** Basic clones, gang members, doctors, bioconstructs, and slightly Enhanced humans (count as "temps").
- **Syndicate:** Personal assistants, gofers, hookers, gang members, corporate toadies, body-disposal specialists.
- **Void Engineers:** Space marines, pilots, technicians, SF fans.

(Note that anyone who dismisses the value of students, secretaries or teachers should remember that campus demonstrations, lost files and strident intellectuals can affect more long-term change than a gun-wielding mob... and with much less risk.)

Some amalgams also rely on employees, assistants of unusual skill. In game terms, these lesser agents may be experienced mercenaries, information specialists, detectives or technicians with superior Traits (4s and 5s in several categories) or resources (see "Extraordinary Citizens"). Essentially, these "temps" become your Allies for a single mission. This kind of Backup costs twice the normal amount, however; the temps might still be temps, but they're damn good at their jobs.

Generally, an amalgam begins with a Backup crew of three; individual agents have no "default" in this Trait — you'll have to buy it in the beginning, or earn it through your successes. If your "proles" have a tendency to die horrible deaths, you might lose this Background for a while... or for good. Casualties are taken out of your squad, and they probably won't be replaced. This Background cannot be raised with experience points; once the chronicle begins, only the Storyteller can give you more Backup. After all, if you constantly need assistance, you must not be worth the trouble of providing it.

•	Two basic sympathizers.
••	Four basic sympathizers, or two skilled "temps."
•••	Six sympathizers.
••••	Eight sympathizers, or four "temps."
•••••	10 sympathizers.
••••• •	12 sympathizers, or six "temps."
••••• ••	14 sympathizers.
••••• •••	16 sympathizers, or eight "temps."
••••• ••••	18 sympathizers.
••••• •••••	20 sympathizers, or 10 "temps."

Enhancement

Irene removed the plug from the small node just under her ear. "I've completed an examination of the data. It supports our hypothesis that the deviants were engaged in some sort of smuggling operation, involving specialized weapons and poisons."

Devon nodded and watched uneasily as the cord on her palm computer snaked back into its spring-coiled slot. Irene flipped a small patch of false skin over the input port, resuming her mostly human appearance. Something about that always unnerved him. He wondered briefly how much of her was similarly disguised with nothing but metal and plastic underneath.

Some agents are created more human than others. Enhanced agents have either been genegineered in a laboratory,

cloned from other Technocrats or equipped with cybertech. With this Background, you become one of them. This Trait allows you to choose one of two options:

• As a cyborg, you have certain biomechanical devices integrated within your body — biomesh armor, Primium bones, plasma cannons or infra-red scanners. (See "Biotech" and "Biomods" in Chapter Eight for details.) The Background rating allows you to possess a certain amount of cybernetic or biomodification Enhancement, at the cost of permanent Paradox points.

• As a genegineered human, you possess certain physical enhancements that make you stronger, faster, tougher, smarter, more beautiful or more perceptive than a normal *Homo sapiens*. The Background rating allows you to raise certain Attributes above their normal maximums, at the cost of permanent genetic Flaws.

These two options may not be mixed. Experiments along these lines have had disastrous results. Each option has certain rules and limitations:

• **Cybernetics:** The devices built inside your body turn you into a walking Paradox magnet. Although they may or may not be obvious to a witness, the modifications ensure that when you *do* use your powers, the forces of the universe react. In game terms, the Paradox points are added to your Paradox Effect circle; no matter how bad a backlash may be, these points never go away unless the devices are removed. Any additional Paradox you earn is added on top of these permanent points... which may cause greater backlashes when things go bad.

Whatever form they take — from nanotech to mechanical limbs — cybernetics are essentially machines keyed to your body. If Control wishes to teach you a lesson, these devices may be removed, crippling or killing you in the process. As a walking investment, you'll be monitored even more thoroughly than most Technocracy agents already are; if you go rogue, they'll make it a priority to get you back. Those machines can be targeted by Reality Deviant mages, too. Consider the cyborg attacked by a Virtual Adept. It's not pretty. (See "Biotech.")

Once it's set up, mechanical cybertech cannot be augmented with additional Procedures or magic; after your Plasma Cannon is installed, you can't use additional Forces Procedures to make it more powerful. If a rival sorcerer turns Life-based spells against you, however, she can make a mess of your modifications. Many a badass cyborg has been creamed by a witch who made his body reject the machines! In game terms, destructive Life spells inflict two additional health levels of aggravated damage if they get past your countermagic. To offset this vulnerability, most cyborgs are outfitted with

Primium Countermeasures (again, see "Biotech"). If that witch gets past your protection, though, you're screwed!

Biomods — genetic mutations like gills and claws — count as cybernetics for game purposes, even though they come from genegineering, not biomechanics. Unlike cybernetics, biomods are not subject to removal (although a sadistic agent can cut them off), and they cannot be forced out of your body the way cybernetics can. Hence, the Life magic penalty does not apply to biomods. The permanent Paradox, however, does. Like other genegineered agents, a character with biomods must also take at least one Genetic Flaw per level of Enhancement.

• **Genegineering:** Bioconstructs are far more subtle than cyborgs; unless the Enhancement is painfully obvious — like the ability to lift a car or make Cindy Crawford look homely — you seem perfectly normal. Sadly, genetic hyperscience is far from perfect. Bioconstructs still have bugs in their designs like chronic insanity, poor health, spontaneous cancer, nagging pains and degenerative tissue. In game terms, these take the form of Genetic Flaws (see Chapter Eight), inborn disabilities that render "perfect" humanoids a little less than perfect.

Even without the Flaws, an obviously inhuman person stands out. Stunning beauty or surpassing genius rouse jealousy among "lesser" people, some of whom will go out of their way to make your life miserable. Incredible strength, agility or endurance often manifest as physical abnormalities (gigantic muscles, leathery skin or hypersensitive reflexes) that make it hard to keep a low profile. You and your Storyteller should play up these quirks whenever possible.

The following Attributes can be modified with Enhancements: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Appearance, Perception, Intelligence and Health. Regardless of justification, *no other Trait may be modified this way*. The added Traits may raise a character's normal Attributes as high as 8, and they can be divided between several different Attributes (three to Strength, two to Health and so forth).

Like the Background: Device (Talisman), each dot in Enhancements costs two Background points, not one; the modifications *are* essentially built-in devices. This Background cannot be requisitioned, shared, or pooled. It may be raised with experience points, however, provided someone performs an intricate operation to update the technology. Although certain bizarre Technocrats may have more than five dots in Enhancements, we do not recommend allowing player characters to go that high. This Trait is powerful enough already.

- • +1 point of Attributes, or 3 points for Devices. One Paradox point or Genetic Flaw.
- •• +2 points of Attributes, or 6 points for Devices. Two Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
- ••• +3 points of Attributes, or 9 points for Devices. Three Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
- •••• +4 points of Attributes, or 12 points for Devices. Four Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.
- ••••• +5 points of Attributes, or 15 points for Devices. Five Paradox points or Genetic Flaws.

Patron

There was no mistaking it: The initial order had been canceled, but a reversal had been approved, and the order had been reprocessed. Looked like Palov was going to get the use of the helicopter after all for his next mission.

Never one to sneer at good fortune, Palov nevertheless wondered who had done this, and what he owed. As he made his way to the landing field with the newly approved papers, he started thinking about who might have a vested interest in seeing him get this additional material, and why....

You have someone watching over you, someone further up the food chain who covers your ass and hands you a tissue. Chances are, it's not your immediate Supervisor, although it could be. When you need some slack, she might pull just the right strings... if you return the favor later.

A Patron is not really a Mentor, but a highly connected Technocrat whose influence is often helpful to you. Like any character, this person wants something that makes you worth her time and trouble. Perhaps she's in love, or she considers you the son she never had. More likely, you're a good source of information, you have access to things she cannot reach or you belong to some sort of alliance (such as Project Invictus) that binds you both together. Sooner or later, you will have to repay the Patron's aid. Depend on it too frequently, and you will lose it.

Gamewise, this Background helps you in ways you could never help yourself. So long as her efforts are rewarded, the Patron can get you out of trouble (sometimes), access information (usually), pull rank on your behalf (a *big* favor!), requisition equipment (often) or cover your tracks (as long as you weren't *too* messy when you left!). Naturally, you had best respect this person, do what she wants and watch your back. Very likely, you're a valuable piece in a large chess game. If you're not careful, you might become the next piece sacrificed....

- • A shadowy "someone" who leaves occasional clues.
- •• A helpful benefactor who would rather remain nameless.
- ••• A Supervisor who grudgingly lends assistance.
- •••• A superior who openly likes you (or at least *seems* to).
- ••••• A high-ranking Technocrat dedicated to your welfare — for now.

Requisitions

Aside from a modest home, a few suits and the standard issue sidearms, Devon really didn't have much in the way of material comforts. He had a decent income, and he always got great bonuses when his boss called on him for a "special mission." It wasn't like he could afford an armored car or one of those bizarre energy weapons.

Still, some missions just required a little extra panache, and this was one of them. They'd tagged the Primal Energy of the deviant's hideout, but the amalgam still needed some serious

surveillance equipment to stake out the site. Buying out the assets of the various deviants would require a lot more than Devon had in pocket, too. Thankfully, his superiors had seen fit to outfit the mission appropriately. He munched absently on some food from the Chinese take-out box while he sat in the limousine and thought about how government funding provided for some really good cashew chicken.

The plus side of belonging to a group is that you've got access to all kinds of things; the downside is that you generally have to kiss ass to get anything worthwhile. This Background allows you to do just that — it reflects your standing with your Supervisors, the amount of trust they have in you, and the stuff they allow you to borrow for a mission.

Before a mission, your Supervisor will assign whatever mundane or hypertechnological equipment he feels you need. If you're anything like the average agent, you'll want more than that. The section on "Requisitioning, Outsourcing and Borrowing Devices" (p. 172) describes the process used to obtain special equipment. The Requisitions Trait helps you get it. At mission's end, you *must* return this equipment... or your Supervisor will take it back himself.

In game terms, this Background gives you a dice pool when you're requesting special favors from the higher-ups. Members of close-knit amalgams may pool the Requisitions ratings of individual members if they want to obtain more stuff for the group. The difficulty of the roll depends on how well you do your job... or how well the Powers That Be like you. Each success gives you five Background points with which to "buy" devices. The listings in Chapter Eight give the cost of hypertech devices. As for mundane stuff, just assume that three successes or more allows you to get whatever you need.

Requisitions Chart

Relationship	Difficulty
Poor	9
Fair	8
Good	7
Very good	6
Exemplary	5

As an optional rule, the Storyteller could just decide that each dot is worth five Background points for anyone who stays in relatively good standing. The roll might be reserved either for special favors, or for times when the agent or his amalgam have made a mess of things once too often.

At the end of the mission, return the gear and report on your performance. If the mission went well, your Relationship might go up one or two factors; if not, your status could drop one or two factors — maybe more, if you really screwed up. If you lose the requisitioned equipment, that will cost you some favor, too. The Technocracy is an understanding group, but it has no tolerance for carelessness. (See the Flaws: Mr. Red Tape, Rogue and Fifth Degree.)

- • One die: They don't think much of you.
- •• Two dice: "Sure, we might give you *something*..."
- ••• Three dice: You've proved your worth.
- •••• Four dice: They like you.
- ••••• Five dice: You're a valuable, trusted operative.
- •••••• Six dice: A squad of trusted agents.
- ••••••• Seven dice: A team of valued ops.
- •••••••• Eight dice: A team of specialists.
- ••••••••• Nine dice: Elite clearance for elite operatives.
- •••••••••• Ten dice: Maximum clearance for extraordinary ops.

Secret Weapons

"What the heck was that?" Brent demanded as the buzzsaw-like energy construct ripped through the tree.

Palov shrugged. "Just something that those crazy weapons makers came up with. Said it's some sort of bonded memory metal with a magnetic coil. Generates a perpendicular electric charge strong enough to plasmate the air around it while leaving the blade untouched."

Brent shook his head in disbelief. "That's about the weirdest thing I've ever heard. From our side, anyway. What were you doing with it?"

Palov shrugged again. "Just trying it out. They wanted to know what it was good for, aside from cutting trees. You see, you can't catch it or pick it up once it's on, so you just have to throw it and then leave it until it runs out of power."

"How long does that take?" asked Brent.

"About three days."

You're a guinea pig — a *trusted* guinea pig! — for Q Division. Most ops have been trained with standard weaponry, but you've been suited up with the experimental stuff. When some new device comes off the drawing board, the designers give you a crash-course with it. Sometimes they even let you take it out for a spin....

Though devices are assigned to agents with fair alacrity, you are often assigned special gear. Q Division gives you the opportunity to test materials and projects that haven't yet made it into the general Technocratic ranks. Your rating in this Background determines how many special devices you can get for a mission, and it also determines how useful they'll be. Use Charisma or Manipulation + Secret Weapons to pull useful tools instead of random junk. With no successes, Q Division doesn't have anything for you this time; with one or more, you get something of dubious value. The more successes you score, the more the item is likely to be useful for your mission.

Why bother with testing weird gadgets for Q Division, especially if they won't do you any good? Well, you get to play with stuff that the rest of the Union isn't using yet, but might be using in the near future. You also win points with Q Division

and your superiors for trying out new techniques in a field test. Not a bad job, as long as it doesn't blow up in your face.

- • You can get an item of trivial utility (a new sort of all-environment pen or a modified version of Erg Cola)
- •• A minor toy is within your reach (a small sensory device, power source or minor single-effect device is accessible)
- ••• They trust you with stuff most operatives never see (a modified hand weapon, armor treatment or special medical supply)
- •••• You're familiar with the quirks of most Technocracy weaponsmiths, because you use their works so much (improved heavy weapons, a potent but quirky transportation device, some sort of mind-altering device)
- ••••• You can pretty much pull any experimental object on call (get two or three minor items, or test out a new vehicle, robot or device or Procedure requiring additional Union resources)

Spies

The lace-decked young woman nodded as her contact passed on his usual information, then she handed him a small package. Same routine as always. The vampires kept an eye on local financial developments, and in return she supplied them with a bit of blood. Not that they'd ever know that it was actually Tass from the statue in her sanctum, the one that wept blood.

As both parties backed away from the deal, the hobo across the street crushed out his cigarette. Slouching away from the street lamp, he went to meet up with the man he'd talked to at the homeless shelter, the one who was so interested in the goth girl's little friends.

Loose lips sink ships — and you're the guy with the torpedo and the sonar readout. Through contacts and informants, you can keep tabs on various people and institutions. Once you have what you need, it's easy to assemble data, make plans, and strike.

Spies come in many forms: the disgruntled secretary, the old army buddy, the cop who knows his hands are tied and the junkie who wants "the *really* good stuff" all qualify. Some Technocrats even have genegineered animals or micro-cams they deploy in search of information. Unlike Allies, these Spies are not loyal. They'll help you so long as you repay the favor. If someone else gets hold of them, they might turn on you....

In system terms, Spies allow you to ferret information in or out (Intelligence + Spies), circulate misinformation and diversion (Manipulation + Spies), impress people in secure locations (Charisma + Spies) and note ominous develop-

ments before they reach Ground Zero (Perception + Spies). That's not to say your Spies never provide wrong information — they don't always know what's correct themselves. The data and its security is only as good as the informant. And if they're speaking to *you*, who knows what other ears might be listening to what they have to say?

- • One or two spies in a helpful area (the police, Wall Street, the Mafia).
- •• Four to six informants in various helpful places.
- ••• A handful of spies in several hard-to-reach places the Pentagon, the UN); or one or two in a really secure area (the local Symposium, a Tradition Chantry).
- •••• Infiltrators in a whole sphere of influence (the underworld, international affairs); or a handful in a Chantry or Construct.
- ••••• Eyes, ears and mouths scattered among the Masses, or several contacts in the Enlightened world.
- ••••• • You've got the equivalent of a small news agency on your payroll, and it has an ear to the ground in magical affairs.
- ••••• •• In addition to hundreds of contacts among the Masses, you've got many "friends" in various supernatural societies.
- ••••• ••• You have an entire intelligence agency working for you on both sides of the Masses.
- ••••• •••• Big Brother.
- ••••• ••••• Big Brother on a global scale.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling

"Five years ago, I was asked to accompany Agent Mulder on the X-Files, presumably with the intent to debunk his work. Since then, I have discovered a vast and lawless conspiracy within our government against the American people."

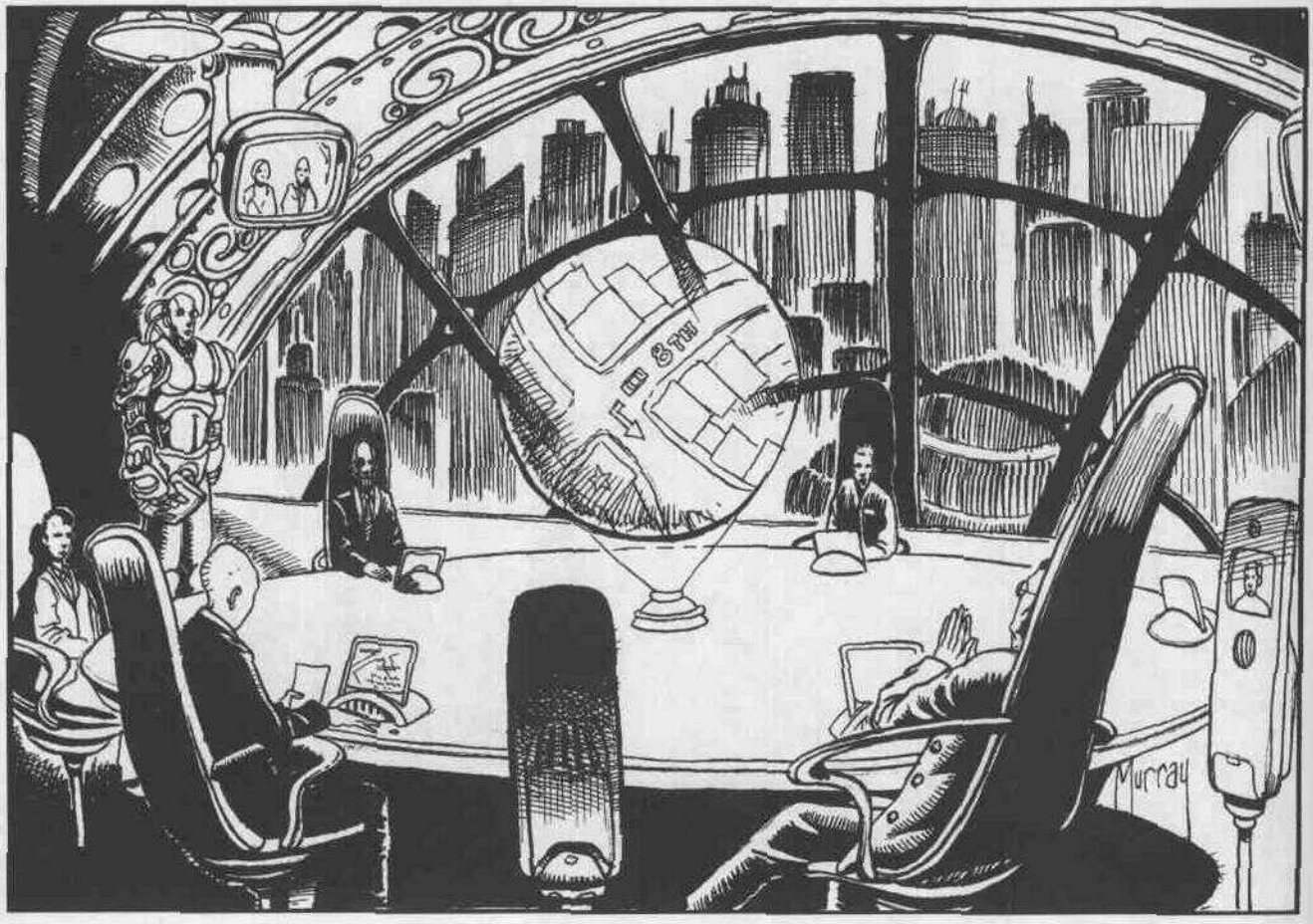
— Agent Scully, *The X-Files*, "Gesthemane"

Every roleplaying game has its own share of problems, and **Mage** is no exception. Mention the Technocracy to the average White Wolf game player, and you'll risk getting hit with a host of misconceptions and stereotypes. You've heard them all: the faceless monolith; the soulless technocrat; the rigid, unimaginative conformist bound by procedure and enslaved by propaganda. If all of these stereotypes were true, the thought of playing a Technocracy chronicle would seem terribly limited. Fortunately, there's more to the Technocracy than what the Traditionalists see. Storytelling from a Technocrat's point of view reveals a world most mages have never experienced.

Chronicles about the Technocracy build off strengths other chronicles don't have. Structure is the first big advantage. Missions and mission teams require justification to their superiors, justifications that provide plenty of reasons why an amalgam works together and that define exactly what they're trying to achieve. Once a mission begins, Technocratic themes and moods — ranging from simple paranoia to delightfully twisted ethical problems — provide the angst and drama inherent to World of Darkness games. Finally, there are some particularly dramatic story concepts and agendas that are best suited for Technocracy chronicles. Even the most mellow **Mage** player can revel in the life of a black-suited fascist, loyal informer, valiant explorer or tormented idealist. Walk into our briefing chamber, and we'll give you the intel you'll need.

Getting Started: The Amalgam Concept

Simply put, the Technocracy is one of the most structured societies you'll ever encounter. From the Front-Line Constructs of amalgams to the secret meeting chambers of Control, every aspect of the Union is composed and orga-



nized for a reason. Crack that code, and you'll have enough story ideas to last for years.

We've already mentioned the amalgam concept as a way to maintain focus in your chronicle. Technocrats never hook up by chance; someone has to bring them together for a reason. A chronicle based around Tradition mages might allow for a group of characters to dedicate their lives to each other after a bar fight or a rock concert, but Technocracy characters need more rationale. Agents don't meet by accident; instead, a Supervisor assembles them for a specific mission or series of missions. Solidarity is built in from square one. The chronicle is then tailored to the team's strengths and weaknesses.

If you want to get a troupe of players motivated, you'll have to get inside the head of that Supervisor. Put together a team that's going to excel at the type of missions you enjoy most. Do you prefer investigation or infiltration? Espionage or exploration? Research or outright violence? In *Mission: Impossible*, Mr. Phelps always had a chance to review his possibilities before sending his agents off on a mission; you've got the same opportunity. Before anyone starts filling in those little black dots on their character sheets, give a pitch to your players about the type of agents you want to recruit.

Of course, your players will give you plenty of ideas for refining the concept the first time you get together. In a way, they're like your recruiters, trying to bring in the right agents for the right job. This interaction involves more than just rationalizing who plays what. It involves designing a group with enough skills to work as a team on a variety of missions. Develop backgrounds that work together. Rivalry within the amalgam is not the goal, at least at this stage. With all the Reality Deviants outside your front door, the team must be able to work as one.

Fortunately for your players, the Conventions provide a wide variety of skills as they're written. A few quick questions during character recruitment should reinforce this idea. How much military prowess will you need? How much espionage is involved? Who can heal everyone up, and what can that character do besides playing a medic? Who makes the final report to the Supervisor? Who can justify their expenses and actions?

Some of these answers may seem rather obvious at first, but the game gets far more interesting if your troupe breaks these stereotypes. Try playing a Syndicate InSpector skilled at infiltration, an Ivory Tower bureaucrat who handles politics with superiors or a Void Engineer Executor with medical skills — feel free to deviate from the obvious choices. Build your amalgam like a machine, making sure all the parts fit together, checking for where it might wear down, and fueling it with enough background to keep it running for a long time.

Assigning Your Agents

From here, developing the overall background of your chronicle works like any other **Mage** game with a few unique twists. If you've ever designed a city setting before, this stage of the game is a cakewalk. In the most elementary Technocracy chronicle, your team of agents starts out assigned to a specific geographic location, such as an espionage Safe House, a front Dispatch Center or a Void Engineer scout ship. The existing Technocracy books provide plenty of sample settings, should you need them.

From this point, you've got two choices on how to integrate the amalgam into this background. The first choice involves placing strict limits on what your group can play. Once you've worked up the background to your chronicle, you may realize some agents just won't fit in. If you don't really have a story hook in your particular city for a Financier investment banker or a Void Engineer ghostbuster, be sure to advise your troupe of this restriction during character creation. Don't expect to run a game that includes every imaginable character permutation; the Supervisor should only recruit the agents she really needs.

Then, make some minor changes to the setting once you know what the group really wants to play. For instance, if you tell your troupe that you're running a chronicle aboard a Void Engineer scout ship, and a few ingenious players have justified characters who don't come from the Clipboard Convention, you can always add in plot elements to satisfy those unique agents. The NWO Operative may start out ensuring the amalgam's adherence to procedure; later, he'll help track down a traitor on the ship. The Progenitor working in the medical lab might be nervous about exploring distant realms, but she may call in the amalgam's assistance to track down a deadly virus later on, and so on.

A Storyteller tends to opt for a little of both approaches. She starts with an initial conception about what type of chronicle she'll run, suggesting limits and then adding a few unique twists to accommodate a brilliant character idea. This groundwork leads to the next stage: Exploring these ideas and rationalizing a series of preludes about training and conditioning. A quick reenactment of a training scenario, a first encounter with a deviant Technocrat, an experience that created hatred against another group — all are typical preludes.

Working through these steps, you can easily spend the whole first session of your game explaining the background, developing the amalgam and running extemporaneous preludes. Other Storytellers customize their preludes further by handling each one separately outside the game (or the room), then allowing the players to roleplay the first time the agents meet. The choice is up to you.

Sharpening Story Hooks and Structuring the Chronicle

If this is your first time representing the Technocracy, a four-or-five session chronicle may be the easiest way to start. A raid on a local Chantry house, an investigation into a local supernatural threat or a strike against a possible rogue Technocrat group are all examples of one-shot stories. (X-Philes take note: Sending your agents to a distant location for a quick investigation is another great plot device for a one-shot episode.) Once you've assembled your team, give each character at least one chance to work his or her forte during the story. Of course, if you do your job well, the team will volunteer for a second mission.

If you'd prefer to launch right into a chronicle that requires three or four missions, then a story based around a beginning Construct works best. The easiest approach is planning a long-term story around a Technocratic Construct. Some Storytellers think of the series of stories in a chronicle like the chapters in a book. Since this book is a technocratic one, we shouldn't talk about the methods used by mythical Greek poets pacing around campfires or dusty literary metaphors. Instead, the analogy of a television series works much better. Whether you prefer *The Prisoner*, *La Femme Nikita*, or *The X-Files*, a series of missions plays out much like an ongoing television show.

If you're comfortable with the concept of Storytelling already, then you're set to budget a whole season of your personal television series. Most long-running programs balance a number of short stand-alone plots against a longer, "wrap-around" backstory. That balance between short-term and long-term stories keeps the series on the air. Plan out a set number of episodes, and make sure to wrap up a plot at the end of each one.

One of the obvious examples here is *The X-Files*. In each episode, there's usually a self-contained mission to carry out, but every few weeks, the agents find clues relating to a long-term mystery or on-going backstory. Scully and Mulder, in this case, face an ever-expanding conspiracy within the US government. Not every story fits into that metaplot; if it did, many of the fans of the show would have burned out. Instead, enough solid one-shot mysteries work into the series to keep the show moving.

If you opt for this approach, the next step involves brainstorming ideas to fill up a whole season of episodes (or chronicle of stories) for your amalgam. For the "stand-alone" episodes, many of your plots will depend on problems outside the Construct's front door. Feel free to develop the details of the area around this base: Chantries, Sleepers, supernatural threats and so on. Datafiles and character sheets can flesh out a wealth of ideas. Take the societies that fascinate you the most, then develop their points of view and goals. After that, consider which ones are the greatest threats to the amalgam.

Storytellers often make two big mistakes when planning the one-shots for an extended chronicle. The first is the

Monster of the Week effect. New sourcebooks come out every month, and the temptation to immediately release "Critter X" into a campaign can be strong. The second temptation is overpopulating your city. Not every supernatural faction needs to be represented.

If you're planning a long term campaign, you'll want to add in a "wrap-around" story as well. A few viewers might drop in and out, but this long term plot keeps them tuning in until the season finale. The easiest approach involves plots and conspiracies within the Union. Examples include political battles in the local Symposium, power struggles between Conventions and breakdowns within Conventions. Paranoia, both within and without, forces the amalgam to stay together and the members to trust each other. This tension ensures that the group will stay together and that the chronicle will survive.

Long Term Plots and Secret Societies

The masters of the Technocracy do not have absolute control over their agents. Though the hidden masters of the Technocracy would like to believe their influence throughout the Union is absolute, there are cracks in the pyramid and dangers hidden within them.

Any one of these problems could make for an excellent driving plot in a long-term chronicle. Though experienced players may have already heard of some of these infestations and infiltrations, the average amalgam has no knowledge of them. Even if they did, proving these problems even exist is an epic undertaking. The biggest ones we know of so far follow:

The Special Projects Division: The Syndicate is always trying to establish more fronts for its Technocratic operations on the Front Lines. Many of these operations are coordinated through the Special Projects Division, or the "SPD." Unfortunately, the most dangerous of these plans involve some shady business partners. More specifically, a handful of representatives of the Pentex Corporation — a corrupt business organization dating back to the 1950's — has misled some of the more ambitious corporate amalgams.

These corporate reps have been infested with a spiritual taint, a primal force many primitives know as "the Wyrm." This carefully hidden cancer of the soul feeds on such overwhelming emotions as lust, greed and rage. Without the ability to sense spiritual dangers (or even believe in them), many low-ranking Syndicate associates are "mind blind" to this problem, lacking the ability to detect, document or destroy it. Even worse, some have become so thoroughly infested with this same taint, that they become slaves to other, more ruthless masters.

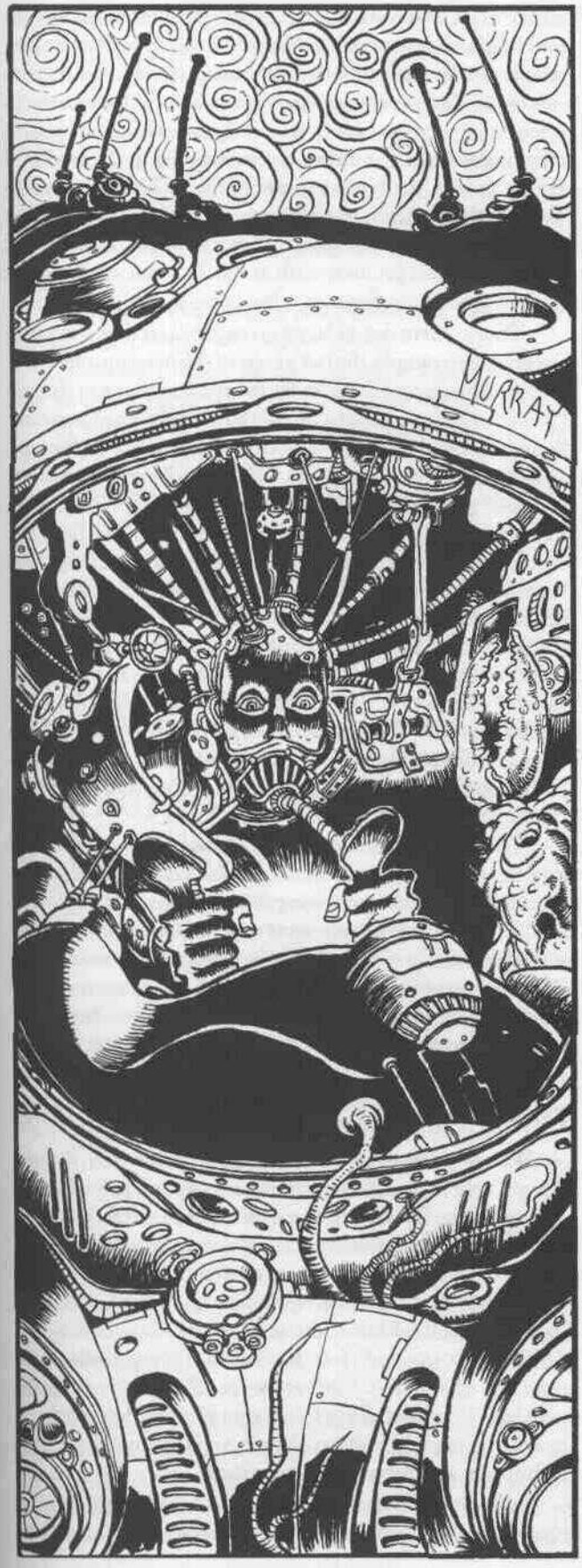
The Cult of Autochthonia: Another crisis of spirit involves the soldiers of the Clockwork Convention. "Spiritual influence" is a forbidden area of research to most Technocrats. Some Iteration X'ers, however, have found access to hidden subroutines other agents do not suspect exist. There's a ghost in the machine of the Technocracy. A powerful Umbrood spirit dwells within the realm of Autochthonia, a colony circling the sun in an orbit directly opposite that of the Earth. Some confused cyborgs have found methods of communing with this powerful Machine God and following their own visions in the process.

Neo-Templar Movements: Academicians within the New World Order continually debate the origins of their Convention. Why have so many historical records been altered or deleted? Are there secret files containing hints the average agent is not meant to know? A select elite within the Collegium of History has manufactured an elaborate lie (or resurrected a carefully hidden truth) regarding their Templar predecessors; another sect is set on uncovering it. These "21st-century Templars" wouldn't be so troublesome, save for the fact that they have hidden agendas and can perform a number of obscure rites preserved since the 15th century. Cells of Neo-Templars exchange occult knowledge, working to recreate Craftmason ideals and Ksirafai goals in the heart of the New World Order.

Void Engineer *barabbi*: Some Void Engineers have a great degree of freedom, especially those who are isolated from the rest of the Union and far removed from the normal reality of Earth. Dark powers lurk in the void, including the lost souls of infernal Nephandi. Without Watchers to monitor the conformity and loyalty aboard Void Engineer scout ships, some Voids have been seduced by dark whispers, remaining distant from the rest of the Union as they further the goals of other, darker masters. Since the average Void Engineer scout is carefully trained to deal with alien powers, and the marines shoot just about anything that looks unusual, the Nephandi would appear to have a hard time getting insiders in the Convention. However, remember that the Void Engineers are still scientists. If something is provable and repeatable, they tend to believe it — and in the primordial soup outside the known Tellurian, the Nephandi can manipulate creation as they see fit, "proving" their theories and seducing the Void Engineers to an inevitable end as *barabbi*. For that matter, Nephandi could "prove" such evil to any other Conventioneer, but the Void Engineers are the ones on the frontier to see it.

Technocratic Techniques

Once you've sketched out, outlined and saved on disk all the possible permutations of perils, you'll want to add in more details. Many Storytellers make a basic mistake here by leaving things too open-ended. How long do you want the chronicle to run? Again, the technocratic metaphor of an episode guide works wonders here. Unlike the passive experience of videotaping your favorite television series, you actually set the pace of the first season, which works like a Technocracy Time Table. The more you've planned out



before the missions begin, the better chance you have of meeting your objectives.

Advanced Storytellers prefer advanced structures for their chronicles. If you're up to the challenge, feel free to write out a whole episode guide, listing what you'd like to feature in each mission. This structure helps you keep focused. As you watch the ratings of your series rise and fall (by monitoring the feedback of your players), you then adjust the episodes accordingly. Sometimes the amalgam is gathering information about a local supernatural sect ("Episode Two: Investigating the Marauder Cult"); sometimes they're dealing with an internal threat within an amalgam ("Episode Three: A Hint of Pentex Infiltration"). Either way, a chronicle thrives on variety, keeping the characters wondering what they'll be facing next.

If you're running a chronicle that's more than a few sessions long, there are a few additional techniques that might help you out. First, there's foreshadowing, which is vital to a long-term Technocratic chronicle. If you know what's going to happen in a later episode, drop in a few clues early on to keep your agents intrigued. For instance, stories about Technocrat corruption need lots of hints placed beforehand. ("Why is our Supervisor spending so much effort investigating the Void Engineer representative?") Some of the best plots are set in motion weeks before they're resolved, acting as little plot threads that players unravel bit by bit. A glance or an argument between supporting characters early in a chronicle may seem cryptic; they may support massive revelations and character insights later on, foreshadowing more elaborate rivalries.

This foundation leads to the second point: wrapping up plot threads. There's nothing more aggravating than a Storyteller who keeps setting up plots without resolving any. Starting new complications is easy, but keeping track of which ones have reached resolution can be murder. One technique that helps keep track, especially as you approach the end of a chronicle, involves writing down the loose plot threads after each session. As you're doing so, give the players a chance to talk about where they think the plot is headed and what they'd like to see happen next session. If they mention their curiosity about long-term plots, you're succeeding.

If you can give these plots closure, your players will feel satisfied, rather than tricked into participating in next week's story. On television, some writers set up a massive cliffhanger at the end of a season, but doing so in a roleplaying game can quickly burn people out. If you're running a particularly long chronicle, you might want to offer a "save point" from time to time. If you've got an epic episodic plot mapped out, you don't have to run it once a week for 16 weeks straight. Save points give a chronicle longevity.

At the end of a mission, make sure the plot is wrapped up enough so that you can walk away for a week or so if you need a break. Each chapter of your chronicle — or each episode of your series — should be self-contained to some degree. Once you've reached the save point, hand out experience, figure out

changes to backgrounds and leave a little downtime. Some troupes like to take a week off at the end of a particularly long story. This downtime allows everyone in the group to catch up on things outside the game, reducing burn-out considerably.

If your save point is solid, any given player might also feel comfortable skipping a mission if it's necessary. If someone has to participate in every episode of your game to understand what's happening, playing becomes like watching an addictive television show: It alienates everyone except the hard-core junkies. Safeguarding against this exclusion is one of the reasons a series of self-contained missions works for amalgams.

Finally, as we've already noted, a long-term chronicle depends both on long-term plots and smaller stories. The final technique involves throwing in a few interlude stories — goals that only a few of the agents on the team want to pursue — to keep things lively. This technique accommodates players who have the more unusual characters in the amalgam. If half the team consists of Void Engineers on a scout ship, players of characters from the other Conventions might want a one-shot from time to time to develop their backgrounds further.

For example, two characters in the troupe might handle a problem by going rogue against deeply hidden corruption. A cell within the amalgam might want to investigate its Supervisor, giving the others "plausible deniability." A character might need to call in his amalgam to help resolve a problem with his old life away from the surveillance cameras. This last approach isn't for everyone, however. If only part of your troupe is involved in one of these stories, make sure that the rest of the players know out-of-game that you're accommodating this. Running a session without telling everyone builds enough real-world paranoia to destroy a chronicle. Proceed with caution.

Other Plot Devices: Coordination and Intel

Technocracy games, like high-tech spy stories, have a few useful plot devices you just can't pass up. The Coordination and Intel Procedures (see Chapter Eight) are two such techniques. The amalgam appoints a Coordinator to maintain surveillance during the toughest parts of a mission. Usually, he watches everything go down over his laptop from a safe place, such as the team's Construct, a black limousine or even the bridge of a scout ship. Watchers and Chrononaut Explorers are two of the more popular choices for this type of character. The Coordinator gets a secure link (rolling Enlightenment with enough successes), turns on remote video cameras and makes sure everyone works as a team. Often, the Supervisor stands right behind him. The Coordinator or Supervisor can be Storyteller characters designed to help (and perhaps monitor) the amalgam, or the Coordinator can be run by a player who wants to work with communications, computers and tactics.

Once Coordination is in effect, sharing information becomes second nature. Correspondence allows for visual conferences and mapping. The coincidental effects of so much tech can be astounding. People in different rooms of a building whisper to each other routinely. Blueprints, maps, enemy dossiers and datafiles can be accessed by computer as needed while an operation is in action. One person can watch every agent's point of view simultaneously. The days of mapping rooms and holding torches belong in the medieval era (or at least the fantasy games of the 1970s). Your stories deserve better. Again, the *Mission: Impossible* movie and the *La Femme Nikita* series provide a few excellent examples. Let the Technocrats get away with as much as you want — after all, you can always throw in a few curves.

That's where dependence on tech has its disadvantages. For another example, dig out a copy of *Aliens* again and watch half of Ripley's squad die under the nuclear plant as she and Gorman watch on camera. Simply put, these techniques can't be used all the time. For one thing, the threat of Paradox (interference in transmissions, trouble hacking into a system, someone getting cut off or ambushed) is always present. Also, make sure that when an amalgam uses Intel, you limit the amount of information you're handing out. Hacking takes time, and curiously enough, data often seems to turn up at dramatically appropriate moments in the story. You can throw in a few loops with Sanctums that don't support the technology, countermagic, enemies spying on the transmissions or just a new roll to maintain communications at a critical moment. Watchful adversaries could even track down the Coordinator himself. The important point is not to punish the players for their ingenuity, but to remember that their opponents can be just as clever.

The biggest challenge in using these Procedures involves running several different simultaneous scenes constantly. A Storyteller's parallel processing ability gets tested to its limits. While the cameras are on, none of your players should have to step outside for a soda or a smoke break while someone else is roleplaying; you'll just have to pull off jump cuts regularly! Fortunately, roleplaying chat room junkies are already acquainted with this technique; once again, technology influences culture.

Debriefing and Team Procedures

Keeping a team focused is not easy. Fortunately, like any other Technocrat, you've got some tools and procedures to help you out. The first of these procedures is debriefing. At the conclusion of a mission, the Supervisor gives his feedback on the amalgam's performance, possibly altering the team's loyalty rating in the process — which may change a character's Backgrounds. In addition, the amalgam should also do its own debriefing at the end of each session, analyzing what went right and what didn't. You can inject a Storyteller character to help get the ball rolling. Once your players have caught on to the idea of using post-op planning and an analysis of their techniques, it'll become second nature.

Just as the Technocracy has some guidelines on what agents can and cannot do, some troupes also learn from

mistakes by setting up their own list of procedures. A list of rules to follow when working with the team can help prevent all hell from breaking loose. Who takes charge when the first shot is fired? Under what conditions does the team enter a fight? This structure is purely optional, but some groups enjoy it. A few sample procedures (from one of our playtest amalgams) are listed here:

From the files of Amalgam 772-1:

1) Do not mention the supernatural to anyone who is not aware of it.

2) Avoid combat whenever possible unless attacked; if a shot is fired, Agent Gruber will take command.

3) During combat, do not take action outside the group without informing the rest of the team of your intentions first.

4) Do not say anything to enrage our Supervisor. Only discuss his genetic origins in private.

5) When making a disloyal statement against the Supervisor, check for surveillance first.

This document may only exist for the players, but if it's done right, it can make "collective roleplaying" much easier. Again, you can jump-start the process by giving the amalgam a small list passed from a more experienced field operative, or issuing an outline from their superiors. As the players develop into an effective team and discover what works and what doesn't work for the amalgam, they'll modify the list to suit their style.

Exploiting Structure in the Union

From the ground floor up, every faction within the Union has something to add to your chronicle. These ideas should serve as starting guidelines; if you can break these expectations and make a good story out of it, go for it. We don't have the resources to break down your door if you deviate, leave that for Tradition characters.

The Proletariat: Once you know what Conventions are in the amalgam and where they're stationed, you can round out the team by giving them a support staff of proles. Some players will be terrified of the thought of so many high-powered Technocrats watching over them. Proles alleviate part of this fear, since they're the agents *the players* get to order around and condition. At the beginning of each mission, let your players pool together their Prole Background points and requisition the type of grunts they need. If you like the **Programming** Procedure, or the optional rules for **Social Conditioning** in Chapter Eight, feel free to let them implant their own commands as well.

Watching how the agents treat their proles also serves as a source of feedback on how your players want you to run the game. If the amalgam treats its proles as utterly expendable, the players shouldn't be too surprised if the powers that be set their characters up for a near-suicide run. If they portray the Technocracy as a ruthless organization, give them what they expect. If the amalgam treats its proles with respect, it's a sign that your players want to deal with more ethical issues, possibly upholding the hidden ideals of the Union. This one element of your game can also help you define the overall mood. Do your players want to be black-shirted fascist bastards or idealists trapped in a massive hierarchy? Either approach is suitably dramatic.

The proles also typify the characteristics many Tradition mages associate with the Technocracy. They're heavily conditioned (often by an amalgam), they're forced to work as a unit (because amalgams often send them out that way) and they're sometimes a little too easy to destroy (because they're the weakest Technocrats). Whether they appear as a swarm of Men in Black outside a Chantry, a gang of Kamrads in an alleyway or a collective of Watchers monitoring events in a neighborhood, proles often act as a diversion, performing the least impressive tasks while the real agents move into position.

Don't be afraid to give your grunts a little personality as well. If one or two of your proles become exceptionally useful to the troupe, they make for excellent "temporary characters" for people visiting your game. If they're played exceptionally well, you may even decide to promote them into the amalgam. After all, a particularly harrowing mission can serve as the crux of an episode of Empowerment. You may even center an entire game around a particular prole, watching how the amalgam deals with someone who suddenly deserves their respect while showing how the prole deals with his new-found position, possibly garnered through a long and painful citizenship.

Amalgams: Next, there are the other agents in the Construct. Many want to be promoted, either to a position of authority or from the Front Lines to a desk job (where life is often safer). If an additional agent has been added to an amalgam at the beginning of a mission, a whole series of plot hooks can result. Is he there to monitor the group and test their loyalty? Has some secret faction looking for hidden allies corrupted him? Is he willing to sell out the team to ensure his promotion? Even worse, is he a spy from the other side that's getting set up? Possibilities abound.

It's not unusual for a large Construct to have several amalgams carrying out its missions. Some troupes like to have a few extra agents waiting behind at their base. These extra agents can be enlisted on a mission-by-mission basis, offering another approach to the game: Troupe Play. This method of rotating characters in and out of a chronicle mission by mission allows each player to have a stable of two or three agents.

The Supervisor: The Supervisor, a classic plot device in an espionage series, directs the amalgam. Scully and Mulder reported to Skinner; James Bond had M (in one incarnation or another); Nikita struggled with Operation's commands; even Number Six had to defy Number Two's imperatives from time to time. And where would Austin Powers be without Basil Exposition? At the beginning of each mission, the Supervisor sets the agenda of the operation, makes sure

every agent has the resources he needs, defines the parameters and explains the consequences of failure.

One beautiful device in a long-term chronicle involves changing this Supervisor from mission to mission. For the first session or two, the amalgam shouldn't have any reasons to doubt their Supervisor. Once the basics of the chronicle have been established, throw in a substitute from another Convention for a single mission, allowing paranoia to set in.

The Supervisor also defines when the characters have gone too far ("I can't help you with this one, Mulder,") and gives them hints of the politics above him occasionally. Another plot element comes from the Supervisor discovering that his own superiors are manipulating him, thus motivating him to send his own amalgam to gather information covertly.

The Symposium: The rank in the hierarchy above simple amalgams watches its local Supervisors carefully. If the characters are stationed in one geographic area for at least a few missions, they'll start to learn hints about struggles in the local Symposium. The governing board has representatives from each of the five Conventions; one of them will be dominant. Hint at political turmoil within the Symposium, if you like; it'll build solidarity within the amalgam.

The Symposium sets the goals for amalgams within its area of influence. Each one has agendas to fulfill. You, as the Storyteller, get to define what the Technocracy's goals are in this area for the duration of the chronicle. Success (or failure) is measured by how well an amalgam furthers (or hinders) these goals. It's also possible that the feedback an amalgam gives to its superiors may influence changes to these agendas. If such a thing happens, different Supervisors (or members of the Symposium) might use their amalgams as pawns to advance their own political beliefs. A number of typical agendas are listed at the end of this chapter.

The Horizon: Each Horizon Construct watches over several Symposiums, stationed in a geosynchronous orbit in space (just outside conventional reality). The threat of interdiction always looms overhead. In each one, a handful of Masters watch over the area below them. Unfortunately, these individuals are usually so far removed from the Front Lines that they have a skewed perception of what really goes on. The more accurate information agents can gather, the more likely it is that the Technocracy can adapt to the dangers around them and change these perceptions. If they fail, outright violence or injustice may result.

At some point during a long-term chronicle, the characters may actually have a chance to visit their local Horizon Construct. Actually, the word "visit" is something of a euphemism. In this story, the team might really screw up and get hauled into to an interrogation by a Man in White, or the amalgam might learn how lucky they are to have a Supervisor who understands them by seeing the alternative, or you might have one of the Masters reveal a dark secret once the characters get a little too close to the truth. Either way, in most stories, a Horizon Construct is best saved for later in a

chronicle. The biggest exception is for exploration amalgams, where a Horizon Construct might represent the amalgam's *original* perception of reality.

It's generally a very bad idea to have a Horizon Construct thoroughly infiltrated or destroyed too easily; needing to use that kind of escalation shows that your Front-Line story really isn't working. If you really feel a desperate need to send one down in flames (the equivalent of raining nuclear Armageddon on your plot and world), there's not a damn thing we can do about it. It's not much of a victory, though, nor does it make for an exciting game. ("Tap, tap, tap, summon the Urge Wyrm to destroy the Horizon Construct.") Besides, what would you do for a sequel? Most likely, some alien threat would slip in past an undefended area, making some drastic changes to your game. Instead, the Horizon Construct should hover over your chronicle as a subtle threat and a reminder of dangers that await beyond the Horizon.

Also remember that getting to a Horizon Construct is *hard*. The Gauntlet is not any friendlier to Technocrats than it is to Traditionalists. Piercing the Gauntlet and reaching a Horizon Construct requires an operator with a significant amount of technological knowledge (i.e. Spheres). The amalgam shouldn't just jaunt back and forth from Horizon to Earth at whim; the tools necessary — matter transporters, dimensional gates and spacecraft — are essentially devices that enable incredibly powerful Effects. Getting an amalgam to a Horizon Construct requires a significant expenditure of resources, and the Union doesn't waste money for frivolous jobs.

Control: At any stage, at any time, Control can intervene. This gestalt represents the combined effort of several of the highest-ranking members of the Technocracy. It's built up intentionally to sound like an inhuman collective. It acts based on theory and propaganda, rarely understanding the role of the individual. Keep this force in reserve, using it as a veiled threat against agents who go too far. It's your ace in the whole. No matter how human a Supervisor or Symposium may seem, the threat of retribution from the collective serves to keep amalgams in line. As an example, in *Neuromancer*, Case walks past a row of telephones, hears them ring one by one and always hears the same voice on the other line.

Where does Control come from? The most likely possibility is that it acts from the colonies, far removed from our reality and dwelling in the depths of the Great Void. If you're up for a real challenge, one of these colonies can make for a wonderful one-shot adventure late in a chronicle. Surviving in a colony for a few days gives some perspective on one possible vision for the future the Technocracy is considering. All the angst your amalgam has processed over the last few weeks is set aside for one session of overwhelming mood and atmosphere. Again, this hook is best saved for the end of a chronicle, acting as a catalyst for resolving a hidden plan in the Union or a setting for a climactic resolution.

The ultimate way to use Control as the Storyteller, of course, is from your own perspective. You shape and define everything that the agents experience, telling them what they've done right or wrong and watching over all of their actions, and Control does the same thing. At any time, the amalgam could be under the eyes of Control. While the Technocratic Union is really a loose bunch of incredibly brilliant minds who bend various organizations to their desires, Control represents the pinnacle of the faceless monolith. It's the eye at the top of the pyramid, looming over the entire world, watching and judging. No player should ever be sure if a particular individual is part of Control or not; few people can say what would motivate a member of Control to become involved in mundane operations anyway. But it does happen.

Power Tripping

You know this already, but we'll say it anyway for those gamers down the street who don't know what the hell they're doing. Storytellers in this type of chronicle often have the temptation of power-tripping. Don't. Representing the rest of the Technocracy, you've got a ridiculous amount of power. At a whim, you can punish a disobedient character by abducting him and throwing him back in Room 101. Whenever necessary, Control might pull off a masterful Correspondence Procedure and circumvent everything. These are methods of last resort.

Remember the watchwords of NWO recruiters: "maximum effect with minimum coercion." The threat is effective; heavy-handed manipulation is not. If it starts to feel like the game is a contest between you and the players, go into the next room for a soda and contemplate. Saying "no" to a course of events that may destroy your chronicle is more effective than wiping it out with an attack wave of Black Helicopters. If all else fails, and the players resist the story with everything they've got, go try a more grit-and-violence-oriented book and let your team act like chainsaw-wielding maniacs for a few weeks. Once that's out of their systems, choose your operatives based on what you've learned.

The Polysemic Technocracy: Theme and Mood

Theme and mood aren't just academic concepts; they often turn a good chronicle into a great one. Even in the most sterile Technocracy adventure, the presence of human beings in the Union presents drama and tension. When designing a mission for your team, the themes and story concepts presented here can help focus your game and give it some depth. If you like, choose one to focus on, write it down at the top of your Storytelling notes, and add the atmospheric effects to make it work.

Order Against Chaos: The Expected Approach

Some people prefer their reality in black and white. This theme is the classical approach to the Technocracy, the

"Weaver and Wyld" shtick. One side upholds order; the other tears it apart. If one gets stronger than the other, something has to restore the balance. Thus, when Tradition characters get out of hand, someone's got to slap them back down. This type of chronicle can start off where another group's rampage ended, whether this adaptation is "real" (i.e., taken from another gaming group) or invented.

Note that any faction in the World of Darkness can serve as an adversary in this type of story, even Tradition mages. Somewhere, you must admit, there's a Cultist of Ecstasy selling drugs to the wrong people, a Hermetic mage summoning up something she can't put down, or a Euthanatos helping allies beyond the grave to possess and violate the living. Part of the fun of this approach involves making stereotypical "heroes" downright villainous, suggesting plots many of us never considered. What would make a Tradition mage into a villain?

Even if all your antagonists are heroes in other White Wolf games, they can still look like villains from the Technocracy's point of view. In this type of story, "chaos" means "anything outside the Technocracy's definition of order." It's a roleplaying exercise, where false logic is used to justify the most ruthless actions imaginable. Then again, some gamers harbor secret fetishes for jackboots, police state tactics and black leather trench coats.

Reason and Lies: Shading Ethical Grays

Of course, the real world is not so simple. Labeling the bad guys works on "reality television" shows and "real life cop dramas," but anyone who's dealt with the World of Darkness before knows that good and evil often depend on your point of view. Forget black hats and white hats for a second. In a "Reason and Lies" story, you'll have to devise a situation of ethical grays, one where the characters are not sure which side is right. If the survival of the human race is at stake, how far will your amalgam go to protect it?

A classic variant of this theme involves the characters having to do something they feel is ethically unsound because the alternative proposed by their superiors is much worse. The protagonists should come across as the most human (and, perhaps, humane) characters in the story. The players find their amalgam caught between two forces: their superiors, who often take ruthless actions to ensure the safety of reality, and their enemies, who are even worse. Typically, Supervisors have to evaluate how much "collateral damage" — innocents who get caught in the crossfire — is acceptable. The adversaries, however, are usually even more despicable: Marauder terrorists, bestial Sabbat crusaders and Infernal cults top the list. Many of these forces have no such restraints.

The Shockwave Contingency serves as another great plot device. The amalgam has to explore a subtle option to a problem while the Supervisor considers the alternative. If the team can solve the problem without violence, they succeed; if they fail, the Supervisor resorts to an extreme alternative. Such alternatives include an assassin being sent to take out an innocent who saw too much, HIT Marks being sent to kill mages that the amalgam was ready to convert or the neighborhood the team was supposed to defend being allegedly destroyed by a convenient "terrorist attack." When reason fails, ruthless force prevails. Thus, the amalgam has to succeed in its mission, no matter how ethically gray it may seem; the alternative involves "acceptable casualties" and shockwaves of violence.

Humanity and Survival: Reaching Across the Schism

"Madeleine, where do you go when you're not working for the Section?"

— Nikita, *La Femme Nikita: The Series*

The Ascension War deals with the fate of all mankind, but that also means that individuals get lost in the heat of battle. Who deals with the aftermath, the innocent lives that are destroyed in the process? This type of chronicle has a human touch if the amalgam witnesses the victims of an operation and possibly takes a chance at repairing the damage. Would you protect a witness who saw too much? What happens to someone who falls in love with an agent? What results when one agent finds out someone else is scheduled for termination? The division between an agent's old way of life and his new one provides many such ideas.

A variant of this idea involves placing the amalgam between two very different world-views. The Supervisor may have his share of propaganda and party lines, but the amalgam may understand why another enemy faction works the way it does. Hint at things that are easily defined from a mystical standpoint, but which don't quite fit into the Technocratic paradigm. What are those emanations at the heart of the Garou caern? Why is the Son of Ether too unstable to work for the Union? Isolated technocrats have no sympathy for such opinions, but an educated amalgam may see the truth first hand.

If you prefer this theme, then remember that the other Technocrats inside your Construct are *human*. Hint at hidden relationships outside the amalgam. A word and a glance can speak volumes. Map out relationship between your characters, then hide them behind professional facades. Lest we forget, many roleplayers would rather explore human relationships than unleash barrages of gunfire.

An excellent and unorthodox approach for exploring humanistic themes is the "damage control team" chronicle. The players' amalgam is sent in to clean up messes, repair botched jobs and smooth over damage to assets and influence. In the process, they interview witnesses, change records, alter memories and try to set people's lives back on track. Ultimately, it's in the Union's best interests to wipe out records of deviant activity and to repair any traces of such, but many agents may come to some sort of quandary over the survivors.

How do they deal with changing the memories of a person whose family died in the crossfire of a Technocracy assault? When a deviant destroyed someone's livelihood, how far can the agents go to give the victims a second chance? Although it's normally unglamorous work, this sort of job lends itself well to a dramatic, morally questioning chronicle.

Reason and Rage: The Cathartic Approach

Democracy? Democracy? You have to face the facts,
And cobblestones in our possession fixed with broken glass.
One was a psychopath! The other was a cop!
One was full of hatred, so he shot me in the guts!
KILL THEM! KILL THEM! KILL THEM! KILL THEM!

— Birmingham 6, "Policestate"

Though some players enjoy exploring emotional and morally gray themes, some self-righteous characters just love to see the bad guys take a fall. At the beginning of a mission, many technocrats approach their briefing with the most rehearsed, professional attitude imaginable. However, that carefully maintained facade can fall apart when lead starts to fly. In a story with this atmosphere, the amalgam witnesses reality crimes that are purely unconscionable, like the actions of a Nephandic cult, an out-of-control magical invasion or even a Traditionalist who's deviated from reality a bit too much. As the threat of the supernatural (magical or not) gains more power in the world, cold reason is set aside and the BFGs come out. This type of story gets slowly more violent as it proceeds, eventually coating those nice black suits with tainted blood.

Building off this story idea involves contrasting the two extremes of the Technocratic Union. During the briefing, inform your team of the mission in a utterly professional manner, describing the theory of how it should go down. Treated in a rational manner, the Supervisor can justify the most vicious atrocities with cold logic. If the security of the amalgam's Construct or the safety of the Masses nearby is at stake, chances are the local Symposium will authorize deadly force. Just make sure you hand out some Med Packs before they leave.

As the mission gets underway, throw in the gritty details boardrooms never consider. The first time a shot gets fired, or the first time someone gets hit, ramp up the intensity. The best ways to reinforce this atmosphere involves an old trick: a soundtrack. There's a lot of industrial music that typifies this atmosphere, contrasting sampled sounds of violence and mayhem against an ordered, mechanical rhythm. Ministry, Birmingham 6, Gravity Kills and Leather Strip present a few obvious examples. Keep the volume low, so that it creeps into your team's collective unconscious. You might want to cue up the best track as the amalgam storms into a Chantry house, investigates the sewer tunnels, or finds the abandoned barn where the cult performed its sacrifices. Then let justice take its course.

During the debriefing, the Supervisor should then contain his emotions as much as possible. Force his restraint. Set

up the facade you expect from a corporate representative or cold government official. Speak of "acceptable losses" instead of the human impact of the team's actions. It should then become clear that theory and practice don't always sync up. The boardroom remains a haven of cold reason, but rage runs unchecked for the Front-Line agents. This basic type of story can be cathartic, exhilarating or ethically charged, depending on the type of spin you put on it.

Sanity and Madness: Facing the Unknown

The Technocracy tries to bring order and understanding to the world, even if the Union goes a little too far in the process. The world, however, is not sane. In fact, when the unlimited and capricious nature of magic is unleashed, such experiences can warp a Technocrat's mind forever. Playing these two forces against each other makes for some dramatic roleplaying.

This technique is a variant of the "Reason and Rage" approach. One way to support it comes through your proles and other supporting agents. When faced with the unknown — whether magical or otherwise — some proles don't have the conditioning to deal with what they see, which can be a dramatic feast for a Storyteller who loves roleplaying her supporting cast. Having proles break down under pressure makes the amalgam's agents focus more on maintaining their own control.

Another way to develop this conflict in terms of plot is to have the initial briefing be inconclusive. With a supernatural threat, for instance, you should never reveal the name and classification of the enemy until enough data is gathered. Facing the unknown is one great way to keep the characters suitably afraid; another involves throwing in paranormal abilities that are represented by special effects, not game mechanics. These guidelines apply to mages, too, by the way. No Tradition mage, Marauder or Nephandus should be identifiable by style of dress, obvious foci or particulars of magic. Break the stereotypes, and the amalgam will have to work for its data.

And finally, don't forget those lovely Paradox Backlashes for Mind rotes. Any Technocrat who relies on Procedure a little too often has to pay the price eventually. Hobgoblins and "anomalous delusions" are two methods to madness; translating Paradox into creeping insanity is another. Does the agent trust his own senses, or does he listen to the advice of the Controller? Look into the individual versus the Union — pit the agent's own experiences, sense and feelings against the advice handed down from some remote superior on high.

Datafiles

Hate technobabble? Want to write something better? Here's your chance. Some White Wolf players are overwhelmed by distinctions about what their characters should and should not know about other supernatural groups. If you're running a cross-over Technocracy campaign, datafiles are a quick way to compile this information. Setting an amalgam against a supernatural threat is a classic archetype for Technocracy adventures. If you've got a computer with the right Technocratic font, compile two or three paragraphs about what your local Construct knows about this week's supernatural menace.

For added amusement, you might plant false information about these terrible threats intentionally. ("All vampires hate garlic, don't they?") If you're particularly inventive, make these facts correct. Change the names of occult factions, their weaknesses and just about anything else you like. If you're one of those Storytellers who cranks out new bloodlines, shapechangers or Kuei-jin every month, here's your chance to test them out and to see if they're broken. Write up the data on previous sightings and encounters, get a manila folder for your Supervisor and set your Front-Line dogs on them. Scully and Mulder never had it so good.

Idealism and Corruption

Disillusionment and descent is an excellent long-term theme in a campaign. From a distance, the Technocracy is a vast monolith; look closer and you'll see the cracks. This type of game is very different from one where our heroes are supposed to destroy the Technocracy. Over a prolonged chronicle, the amalgam gets clues to a time bomb ticking away inside the Union, like the Syndicate's connection to Pentex, the Cult of Autochthonia, criminal empires or Void Engineer dementia. Never rush this type of plot; the characters can eventually save the Union, but only at the risk of destroying their own reputations and making enemies.

Plots like this are best done in levels. Start small. A minor instance of corruption (a possessed Syndicate rep breaking down, a Void Engineer crashing his scout ship into the ocean) is uncovered during a routine mission. Such a thing then gives hints of something far deeper (a pack of twisted werewolves is infesting the members of one company with Wyrm-taint; a Nephandus has taken over the crew of a Deep Umbral research construct). One clue leads to another and in every few episodes of your series, another insight is revealed.

For whatever reason, the high-ranking members of the Technocracy are blind to this threat. Pick your reason — the data is inconclusive, theorists don't understand it, the cover-up is too good. Even the high-ranking officials are still humans and subject to mistakes or misconceptions. The amalgam may have to go rogue a little while to clean up the mess, making for an excellent backstory to a longer chronicle. Throw in smaller one-shot stories between the greater problem, and you can reveal a vast shadowy conspiracy that won't require five seasons of *The X-Files* to explain.

Agendas

As noted previously, many of the Technocracy's goals in a specific geographic area are defined by the local Symposium. High-ranking technocrats establish their agendas, proposing what goals are most important in the near future. These goals vary slightly from Convention to Convention, of course: Academics write up theses on solving problems; Syndicate reps write bold, decisive mission statements; researchers write up proposals for grants and so on. Regardless of who sets the proposal before the Symposium, she'll have to document how well she's performed these goals later.

How does the presence of Agendas manifest in a Technocracy chronicle? After taking a good long look at where your stories are set, consider the most important goals for the Union in this region. Then, devise a mission around each one. Agendas should be very direct and to the point. Success should be measurable in some way, and the goal shouldn't be overly idealistic. A few examples are presented here:

Eliminate Reality Deviants: This mission is the most basic type — the one everyone expects because they've already seen it done repeatedly in Tradition chronicles. However, it's only one typical agenda. If the Technocracy didn't have so many other goals, it would focus completely on wiping out Chantries. In a Technocracy chronicle, the Union has to carefully allocate its resources. If you think that the Union has saturated enough agents in an area to take out everything, so be it, but in many places, shoestring operations barely enforce the safety of everyone present.

Start with a reason why the Symposium wants to take out a specific Chantry. Just the fact that the inhabitants are Traditionalists is enough for a start, but why are these mages so important? Most likely, they've gotten too powerful, brought down too much Paradox, found out too much about a local Union operation, killed too many proles, summoned something they can't control, or made an alliance with a dangerous supernatural agency. Don't be afraid to go to either extreme of the ethical scale: either the Chantry honestly deserves to get whacked, or a misunderstanding over the real threat has to be resolved. The choice is yours.

Abduct and Condition More Recruits: In this mission, the local recruiters have a lead on a promising Quiet Mind, or possibly a newly empowered "mage." This op is very straightforward. The team either captures and conditions someone to make him a temporary prole, or it chases a would-be mage halfway across the city. One option involves having the amalgam research the quarry first, eventually figuring out how to capture him instead of killing him. The last step, then, is conditioning, a very emotional experience. The amalgam gets to

justify to its new recruit why the Technocracy has the right to enforce the Masses' conception of reality. Mind games abound!

Establish a Front: The Union carries out its operations through a series of Dispatch Centers, Safe Houses and other fronts. This cover includes business operations that are self-sufficient in the mundane world while offering possibilities for hidden operations. Start-up computer companies, travel agencies, hotel chains, minor corporations — if you had a 500-year-old technocratic conspiracy, where would you hide it? In this story, the players get to describe how they take over or establish another front in the operation, step-by-step. After doing so, they might continue to use it as a resource during the chronicle. Syndicate characters have a chance to shine in this type of operation, regardless of whether it's legal or not.

Investigate the Unknown: You've seen this done on television countless times. A lead on some supernatural phenomenon no one understands or a mystery that needs explanation comes in. Someone must document what's really going on. The twist here is that these agents don't just enforce the law; they enforce reality itself. Once the threat can be countered, classified and documented, a Supervisor needs to make the call on whether it's dangerous enough to warrant destruction. Having a few sympathizers in the FBI wouldn't hurt.

Investigate Internal Affairs: Either the Supervisor, a Symposium representative or the characters themselves have uncovered a clue about corruption inside the Union. The important things to decide in establishing this chronicle lies in who calls in the characters, whether they've got to work "outside the box" to solve the problem, who goes rogue and where the trail leads.

Contain Internal Threats: Not every internal problem involves loyalty or purity. In this story, Progenitor creations get out of hand, Kamrads organize a rebellion, a promising recruit resists his educators a little too much or (worst of all) a remote Technocracy colony gets invaded. Send in the troubleshooters, and leave the Shockwave Contingency once step behind them.

Explore the Depths: We've made a lot of assumptions about the frequency of Front-Line operations, but let's not leave out our valiant Void Engineer Explorers. Again, there are plenty of undiscovered realms in the Great Deep, as well as right here on Earth. With Dimensional Science, a team led by the Voids can crash in almost anywhere. Several sourcebooks, including the **Book of Worlds**, provide plenty of options. The Void Engineers also have plenty of secrets they've kept from everyone else, which come out more when Earth is far behind. Send in the amalgam to evaluate the resources of their latest discovery. Will the Union classify, pacify or eliminate what they find there? The amalgam's actions may influence the result, which is perhaps the most dangerous sort of chronicle for agents. As noted in the History chapter, the reaches of the Deep Universe and other dimensions have become extraordinarily dangerous recently. The amalgam may even try to discover the reason for this sudden

change in the ebb and flow of quantum reality. Perhaps the characters are part of a mission to discover the threat of the new Red Star documented by the Void Engineers. These missions offer the greatest opportunity for strange chronicles unfettered by the concerns of everyday Earth reality, but make sure to use such themes sparingly. After all, the Technocracy is about humanity, not about a bunch of guys in vacuum suits standing around watching weird lights like the end of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

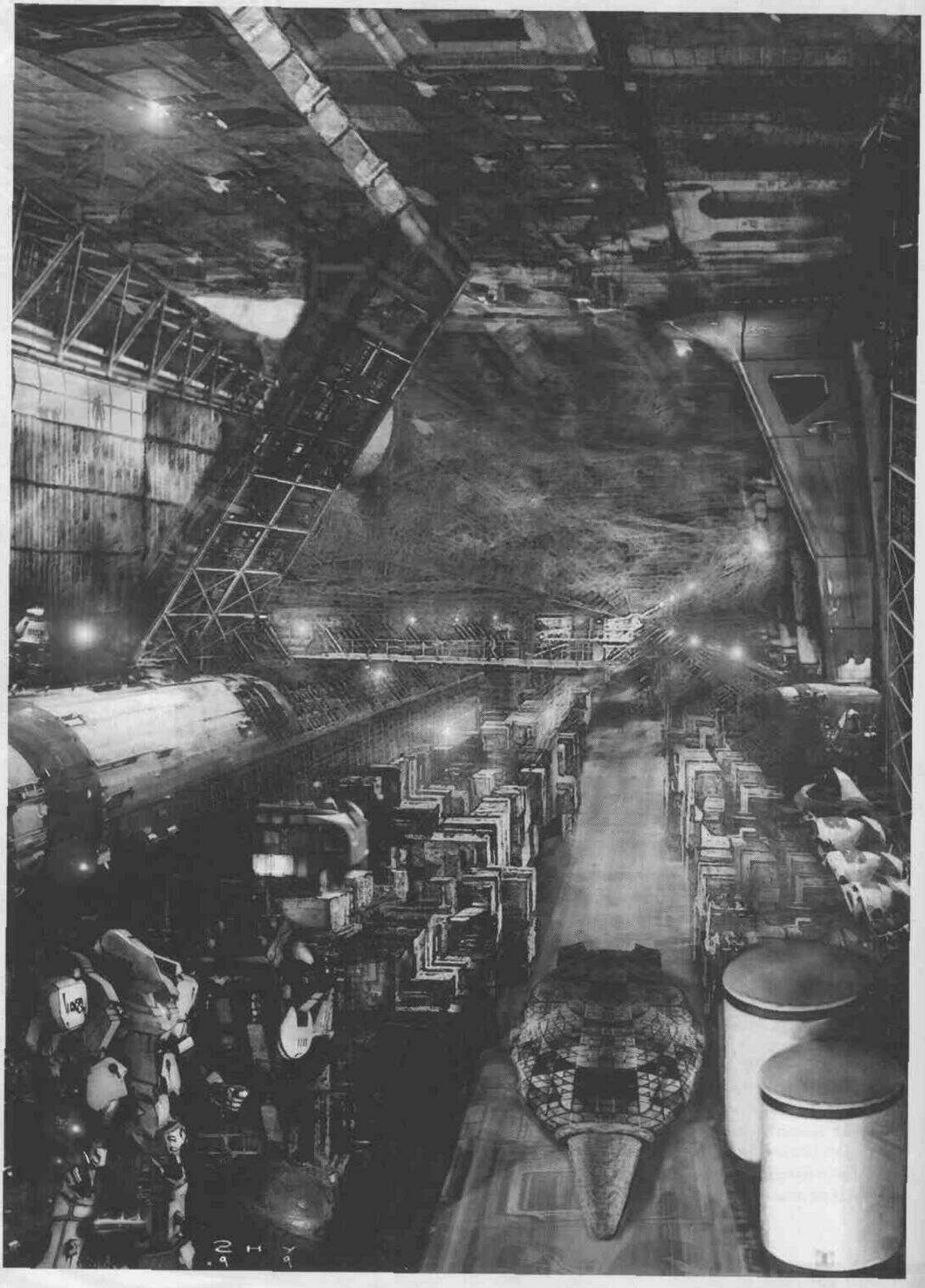
Everyday Living: Even Technocrats are people too. Every operative (well, except for constructs) was once a normal person, complete with a life, hopes, dreams, ambitions and fears. Joining the Union doesn't mean giving up all of one's spare time; many Technocrats still keep a "day job" while working on-call for the Union, as needed. Some operatives don't differentiate between their normal work and the Union's goals at all — an Iterator robotic scientist is doing the Union's work whether he's in the lab or in the field. Take a game or two to look at the people under the black hats. Showcase a few family members, personal crises and old friends. How a Technocrat reacts to the rest of humanity is just as important as how he deals with other Enlightened operatives and Reality Deviants — more so, since these are the people that the Union strives to defend and protect. Find out how the process of Empowerment changed an operative's perspective on humanity — do your agents pity normal humans? Do they fear them (because of the possibility of exposure of the global Technocratic conspiracy)? Patronize them? How much have family members been told? What happens when old friends and lovers turn up on the other side of the fence? This is a real opportunity to figure out what drives each agent in your amalgam. It's also a look at what the operatives do when they're not busy running around keeping up the Union's business.

Alternate Histories

Although the Union lacks the technology to send people into the past (so far), the New World Order does a phenomenal job of rewriting history to conform to the Union's goals. Whether or not this constant revision makes things true that were once false is, of course, hardly testable; even chronoscopic tunnelers (devices to look through time) can determine a past that only might have happened. The past is as fluid as the future, which is why the Technocracy's plans use both in the fight for the present.

A curious and introspective amalgam could be assigned to otherwise boring research duty, hopping around the globe in search of the pieces that the Union needs in order to solidify its hold over the past. Such field agents might encounter a wide variety of resistance, from encounters with deviants protecting their objects of antiquity, to foreign cultures with perspectives very different from the agents' own (though this type of story is a great place to showcase an agent who isn't the typical middle-class American), to bits of history that seem out of place or fly in the face of what the agents have been told to expect. Bringing back bits of occult libraries, conspiracy theories, Noddist scraps and liturgical fragments can certainly have the characters questioning their Union's glorious past!

More interesting than just the modern jaunt through alternate histories is the game set in a different timeline or past. What would have happened if the Virtual Adepts had not left the Union? What if the Sons of Ether remained, their brand of science becoming more accepted than the Iterators'? What if one of the Traditions had established a stronger hold on the Consensus early on in the battle? The best trick here is to take one piece of history, tweak it and then sit down to think about how that single change would have impacted the rest of the world's development. See **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** for some examples of a past that might have been. Don't limit yourself just to a narrow timeline — you can run a Technocratic game in World War II Europe, post-Restoration Japan, even Imperial China or the height of Egypt easily. Play travelers on the Silk Road's trade route between China and Europe, or the weapon-crafters of China trying to fend off the Mongols. Try engineers working with pyramids and tombs, while mystics attempt to subvert the Pharaohs with religion and hekau. There's a role for scientists and engineers in every culture in history.



Chapter Eight: The Arsenal

...to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.... To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to the man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number.

— Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*

Inspired Science Made Easy

If we can visualize it, we can do it. We have the technology.

— the Technocratic mantra

Although Technocrats often improvise their scientific Effects, they're also trained extensively before they go into the field. Procedures are techniques that are used repeatedly, largely because they resolve the problems that amalgams encounter most. Coupled with devices and apparatuses, the high-tech tools of the trade, Procedures make sure that a Technocrat is ready to take on almost anything the world has to offer. Technocratic devices allow agents to use scientific developments normally beyond their own capabilities.

Chapter Two contains a more detailed look at how Technocrats see the process of Inspired Science. Listed here are several devices and Procedures for use in the field.

Note that the various **Technocracy** books also contain several devices and Procedures specific to each Convention. For the sake of space, most of those listings aren't reprinted here unless they've been updated or altered. In some cases, though, a few devices or Procedures were useful enough to be made available to all members of the Union.

Procedures

A Procedure is a way of doing things. Through practice, special training and routine, Technocrats can accomplish feats beyond normal skill. Of course, these feats aren't magical — they're just examples of applied expertise!

Procedures come from the training that all Technocrats possess as experts in their fields. Knowledge of the appropriate Spheres is required, of course, but it simply shows that the Technocrat has the proper knowledge to execute the Procedure correctly. Normal humans lack the necessary specialized training to perform such feats, of course; it's all a matter of education.

For reference, Procedures are divided among the various Spheres, but a Technocrat would rarely refer to a Procedure as an Effect of a particular Sphere — among the ranks of the Enlightened Scientists, a Procedure is just a particular sort of knowledge.

All Technocrats are encouraged to study Procedure extensively. Improvising in the field is useful but unpredictable. Knowledge of proper Procedures grants a collection of tested and efficient ways to deal with many situations. Learning Procedures is a matter of time and effort; a Technocrat can study with another agent to learn appropriate Procedures, or he can even improvise based on the descriptions he's heard. Some Conventions guard a few of their Procedures jealously, but in most cases, a Technocrat has to have a certain amount of mundane knowledge to use a Procedure. Decrypting a computer file necessitates at least a basic understanding of mathematical encryption, after all! Still, a cross-trained Technocrat probably has a contingency for most occasions.

Some of the Procedures listed here have a recommended Methodology and apparatus, but of course each agent is encouraged to develop her own signature Procedures.

Correspondence Procedures

The definitions of space prove to be quite a scientific conundrum for technology — sensing across great distances is simple, but altering distance or space itself is extraordinarily difficult. Few Technocrats develop an understanding of Correspondence beyond the basics of spatial patterns. Actually transporting objects, opening "stargates" and bending space is a function of powerful apparatuses.

Surveillance (•• Correspondence or •• Correspondence, • Forces)

As we near the end of the 20th century, surveillance cameras are almost everywhere. Big Brother watches speeding cars on our freeways, potential criminals in retail stores and Sleepers everywhere from ATMs to supermarkets. Where does all the information go? And more

importantly, what happens to all that data? That little red wire on the back of a camera could be hooked up to just about anything. By accessing the electronic flow of all this data, an agent can watch over any area monitored by a video camera. Obviously, this Procedure is famous with the Watchers, but just about any member of the Union can make use of it.

Time-Motion Managers often use this Procedure conjunctionally with Forces 1. By monitoring fluctuations in local energy, they don't need a video camera. They can often "hear" or "feel" this data (through nervous system implants, of course) instead of seeing it. Any room with a telephone might be accessible (even if the phone is "on the hook") or any device with a microphone might do the trick.

[Any location with a video camera (or microphone or telephone...) is fair game for the **Surveillance** Procedure. Monitoring a location described vaguely in a mission briefing requires four successes; as the team learns more about the target, the number of successes required goes down. If the team is very familiar with the location, two successes are sufficient. Alternatively, agents using **Surveillance** apparatuses can maintain "line-of-sight" on a building where they believe a Reality Deviant is at work; two successes would then be sufficient to monitor what's occurring inside.]

Tracking Device (•• Correspondence)

The Syndicate uses an insidious variation of the **Surveillance** Procedure for tracking specific individuals. Take a look at a 20-dollar bill sometime. Did you get one with a magnetic strip? Ever wonder what's encoded on that? Pass through any metal detectors or book detectors lately? Some paranoid agents within the NWO believe *anything* can be used as a focus for this Procedure; others insist that the Technocracy couldn't possibly hide so many bibles in hotel rooms.

[On the Correspondence Ranges chart, the **Tracking Device** works like any other familiar possession; three successes are required to monitor the person carrying it.]

Telescreen (•• Correspondence, •• Mind)

Hundreds of millions of Americans welcome television into their homes every day. Some are further seduced by the promise of "interactive television" — programs that allow the viewer to interact with the program. Technophobes insist that this interaction goes both ways, that these devices allow networks to watch the people who watch their shows. Of course, the Technocracy takes this idea one step further. Wherever a television is present, a trained Technocrat can use the **Telescreen** Procedure to watch anyone in the room.

When a Sleeper stares mindlessly at a phosphorescent screen, he not only relinquishes a fractional amount of his Primal Energy, but also submits himself to Technocratic monitoring. If this Procedure is enacted in conjunction with Prime 1, the surveyor can detect whether anyone in the room is using magic, either consciously or unconsciously. If the

number of successes exceeds a viewer's Willpower, the watcher can not only read surface emotions, but also analyze psychic defenses. Once a mage's jaw goes slack in front of a television, it's a sure sign that his mind will follow.

[With one success, an agent can detect the heart rate and mental state of any chosen person within sight of the screen. For two successes, the Technocrat can gather general data on people in the immediate area, such as the number of individuals in the room. Three successes allow the operative to watch everything that transpires in the room.]

Selective Edit (•• Correspondence, •• Entropy)

Watch closely! Now you see me; now you don't. A Technocrat is a master of unseen Procedures, requiring him to hide in the shadows of technology. With this combination of Spheres of influence, an agent can take further precautions against being monitored. A **Selective Edit** can shield against any one type of surveillance for a brief period of time, as long as a technocratic Procedure can justify it (e.g., "my electromagnetic transmissions short out all video cameras").

The agent using **Selective Edit** becomes effectively Cloaked (as per the Background), anticipating and foiling any methods of recording his activities. Some Operatives also learn where enemy agents place cameras and microphones; these Technocrats show up as a dark blur or grainy picture on recording media. Others learn to distrust their masters, doing all they can to watch for the Watchers.

[The Procedure's duration is based on the Damage and Duration chart for magic. If the agent is being monitored by another Correspondence Procedure, the two rolls are contested. The lower number of successes are deducted from the higher score, so even a partial cloak can help to distort surveillance.]

Coordination (••• Correspondence, ••• Mind)

This Procedure is the sort a Supervisor can enact back at his Safe House to make sure a mission goes according to plan. Every agent on the team should have some sort of hidden camera on his person. Stereotypical spy films tell us that this trick can be affected with a miniature device hidden in a pair of glasses or a lapel pin. All the data transmitted from the cameras is then accessed by one laptop back at the base of operations. On one computer screen, the Supervisor can watch his agents move into position. Many amalgams have a specific "coordinator" who takes care of this Procedure through a laptop nearby.

Add a "com device" for each agent, and you've got a way for an operative to advise everyone on how to proceed if a mission goes down twisted. This transmitter might appear as a microdot placed over an agent's vocal cords, an earpiece and hidden microphone (as made popular by the Secret Service's Black Suits), or an exotic story about Enlightened agents using low-level telepathy. If this explanation is too much for you, however, just hand out cell phones and walkie-talkies, ignoring problems like range and jamming frequencies. Storytellers are advised to use whatever rationale is most plausible to their gaming group; the Effect still remains the same.

[If the team is a group of strangers, four successes are required to establish a **Coordination** link; if the team has trained extensively together, two or three should suffice. Of course, if the Coordinator only scores one or two successes, its possible that the most experienced agents will be able to hear each other, leaving the proles out of the loop. As a side note, **Coordination** is secure against electronic jamming and surveillance, but "countermagical" Effects can increase the number of successes required.]

Intel (••• Correspondence, • Mind)

Rule One of Espionage in the Modern Age: Every conceivable datum of information is stored somewhere on a computer. All a hacker needs to access it is a little time, a little knowledge and a little patience. This Procedure builds off that false belief, allowing a Supervisor, Team Leader or Coordinator to download massive amounts of information in the middle of a mission.

[For the sake of plausibility, the Storyteller will have to rate the number of successes required for this Procedure based on the esoteric nature of the information required (rather like using the Magical Feats table). Espionage films tell us that the following information can be found quickly and efficiently: floor plans to buildings, personal files of enemy agents, phone numbers, addresses, flight plans, datafiles on terrorist groups and anything else that can be placed in a text file.]

Sequencing (••• Correspondence, ••• Life)

The Technocracy can't be everywhere... just in limited areas of intense surveillance. When the agents of an amalgam move into position, they'll want updates on every living creature around them, especially Reality Deviants. That's where the **Sequencing** Procedure comes in. By tracking body heat, accessing satellite surveillance and monitoring sound waves, one coordinator with a host of sensors in the field can sense movement within his radius of surveillance. Through the **Coordination** Procedure, he can then give a running play-by-play as enemy units move into position.

[Many Technocracy vehicles have a host of sensors or monitors stashed in the trunk. A large van may even have computer screens and television screens hooked up to these devices. By making this Effect conjunctional with Prime 1, or coordinating it with Prime to track primal forces, you are also able to distinguish paranormal beings from Quiet Minds.]

Dimensional Science Procedures

This realm of science, known to some **Mage** Players as the "Spirit Sphere," is rare among Technocrats. Though many Void Engineers (and the Technocrats who work in their amalgams) need a healthy command of this visionary science, most agents of the Technocracy won't be able to

develop it beyond Rank Two Effects. A few exceptions are noted below, but as always, the Storyteller should detail some of the applications of this sphere of influence when helping her players form their amalgam concept.

Mirrorshades (• Dimensional Science)

What would a Man in Black be without his shades? The focus for this Procedure is (quite obviously) a pair of sunglasses. Black Suits don't just wear them because they promote anonymity, and they don't just carry them to "look cool." Consider what sunglasses do — they polarize light. Some ultraviolet rays are screened out, selectively adjusting the brightness of your surroundings and tuning out what you don't want to see. When used as an apparatus for Spirit 1, this principle is taken one step further. By focusing his perception and scanning for "anomalous data" or "Reality Deviants," the agent can train himself to sense things that "aren't really there."

[This Effect doesn't require an Enlightenment roll, *per se*; Perception + Awareness will usually do. However, the agent has to know what he's searching for with this Effect. For instance, a Paranormal Defense Force "ghostbuster" won't accidentally see a wraith unless she suspects it's there and is specifically looking for it. The number of successes required depends on the sort of cross-dimensional perception desired — spotting ghosts probably requires only a few successes, but peering into the depths of the spirit worlds from the material world probably requires six or more successes.]

Quantum Interference Shielding (•• Dimensional Science)

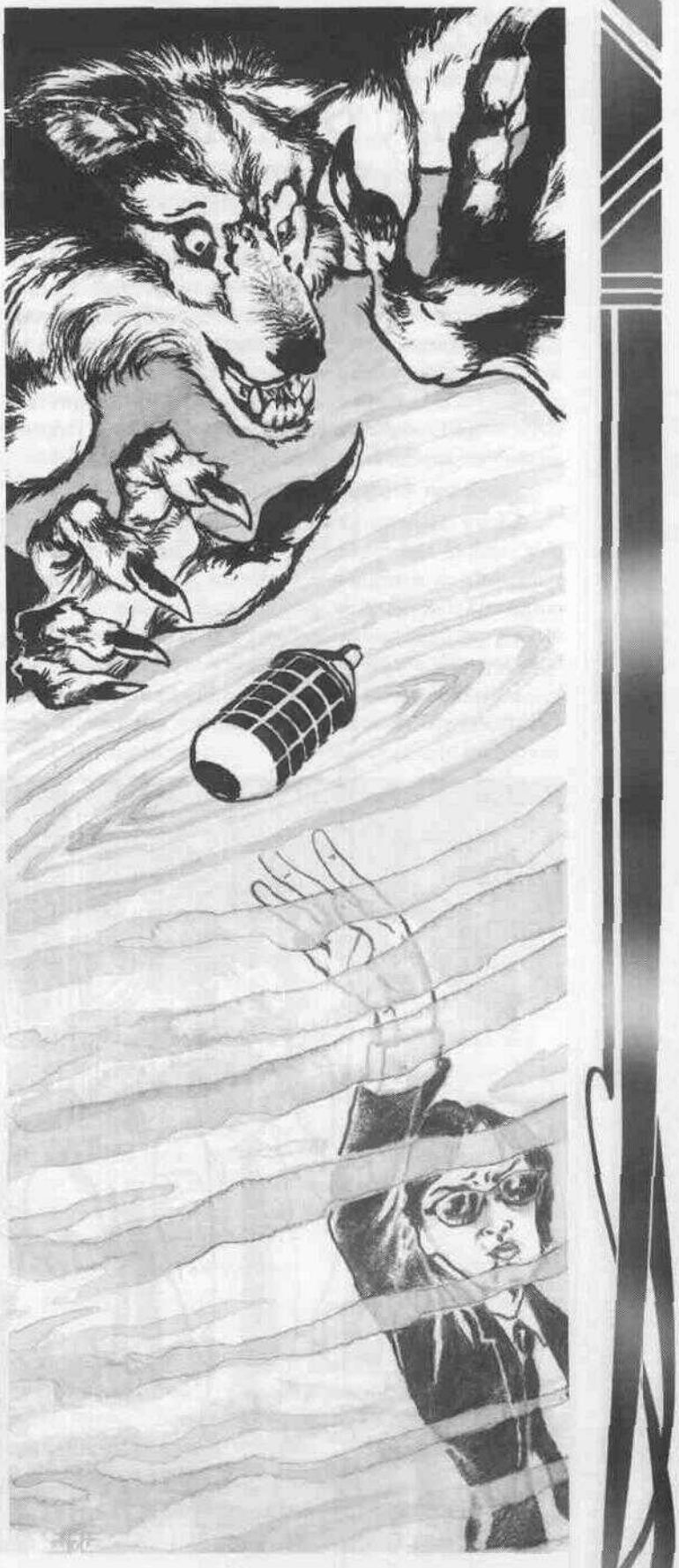
Any Technocrat who learns Dimensional Science discovers the hazards of extradimensional entities quickly. A few adjustments to the proper resonance calibrators, though, and the agent can make it difficult for such beings to manifest in the material world. Since many aliens have unusual psychic powers or technologies that reach into our world, this Procedure is an invaluable defense.

[By strengthening the Gauntlet, the Technocrat prevents aliens/ spirits from touching the material world. Each success scored strengthens the Gauntlet by a point. Moving the quantum resonances closer to "Earth normal" can also lower the Gauntlet, although it is almost never done. By combining it with Prime 2, the shielding also provides countermagic against any attacks that the "aliens" on the other side may launch.]

Dimension Bomb (••• Dimensional Science)

Though really messing with other dimensions requires a great deal of skill, pushing a small object into another realm is pretty straightforward. Such a task takes only a few moments with the right tools to recalibrate the quantum resonances of an object. Once "phase shifted," the object drops into another dimension. The most common use for this Procedure is to drop off Primally charged bombs or other weapons, to fight off the attacks of extradimensional entities.

[With a successful roll, the agent can push a small object — say, a hand grenade or so — into another dimension. This



suffices to drop little "gifts" for unruly aliens. With more successes, the Technocrat can affect a larger object, so with time, one could attune something as large as a nuclear weapon.]

Entropy Procedures

Understanding chance and randomness — often through the complex mathematics of chaos theory — is an excellent tool for dealing with human vagaries or unstable systems. Technocrats skilled with chaos theory can predict complex variables and influence situations to favor specific outcomes. Naturally, this sort of manipulation is perfect for juggling markets and economies, and it is thus a prime activity among Syndicate businessmen. However, the combative and insightful elements of chaos theory are not lost on other Technocrats; Iterators use Entropy in their prediction tables while Progenitors rely on natural decay with life growth processes.

Nonlinear Prediction (• Entropy)

Chaos mathematics allows predictions of multiple variable random state equations. This statement pretty much sums up much of reality — complex interactions governed by minuscule changes in thousands of probabilities. A little bit of computational power, some mathematical skill and a bit of intuition suffice to give a vague outline of possible outcomes.

[A successful use of **Nonlinear Prediction** allows the Technocrat to determine the probable outcome of one action. The more variables involved, the more successes required to get an accurate prediction. For instance, if you're trying to figure out what card is likely to come up next in a deal, you might only need one or two successes; determining where an RD is going to hide out for the next week would require eight or more.]

Actively Actuarial (•• Entropy)

Even implausible tasks have a possibility of occurring. This Statistician Procedure is a variant of the **Beginner's Luck** rote. However, instead of a mage being able to perform any seemingly impossible task... once... a Statistician (or other Technocrat) inflicts a catastrophic fate on his chosen victim. The actuarial scholar recites the odds of the event occurring, and by the time is lecture is over, an impressive coincidence happens... just once.

[The Storyteller should rate the chance of an event happening on a scale of 1 to 20: a relatively likely and simple event like slipping on a pool of sludge might be a rated a 1 or 2, while an astronomical occurrence like an airplane falling out of the sky on someone's head would rate an 18 or 19. This is the number of successes required on the Magical Feats table. The roll is an all or nothing affair — you can't have half of a hurricane strike a trailer park, no matter how well statistics prove a causal relationship between the two. Keep in mind that if this Procedure is abused, the overall chance of additional "amazing coincidences" taking place goes up further.

An alternative Effect involves checking the percentage chance of an event taking place. If a Statistician gets a successful roll, the Storyteller might just say there's a chance of the fabulous event occurring, thus letting the Statistician decide whether to pursue a possibly risky bit of Inspired Science in advance.]

Strategic Inefficiency Analysis (•• Entropy, •• Time)

This Procedure is used to evaluate the weaknesses in the forthcoming actions and strategies of an enemy organization. Through precise statistical and behavioral analysis, Iteration X is able to predict what an enemy organization — such as a Chantry, or even an entire Tradition — is likely to do in the near future, and at what point during this activity it will be the most vulnerable. That's when the HIT Marks come calling.

[This Effect generally requires several hours of poring over strategic data, maps and evaluation paperwork. In a pinch, though, it can be pulled off as a "sudden hunch." Success can help to predict the plans of an enemy group, though multiple successes are required to forecast any degree of accuracy or detail beyond "They're... uh... at home." A failure indicates that no concrete plan can be formalized, while a botch generally gives bad information.]

Ace of Diamonds (••• Entropy, •• Prime)

In Mafia lore, the ace of diamonds is an unlucky card. This Adjustment brings that superstition to grim life. With it, an InSpector or other Syndicate operative can inflict extreme bad luck on an enemy. Although this Effect only lasts for a short time — an hour, at most — during that time Murphy's Law has complete and utter control over the victim's life. His luck is so bad as to put his life in danger. Attacking the Technocrat is about the worst thing he can do, since inevitably weapons break or misfire (or explode in his hands), and other attacks fare no better.

[In simple terms, this Effect inflicts a curse on the victim's Pattern. Every two successes rolled during the casting causes the subject to lose one success from each of his subsequent rolls, for the duration of the Effect. As usual, should the subject score a "negative" number of successes, the result is a botch.]

Healthy Skepticism (••• Entropy, •• Mind)

"It won't work, and I'll tell you why..."

Anyone with advanced scientific knowledge (such as four dots in the Science or Medicine Ability) can offer a reasonable explanation why a supernatural phenomenon shouldn't work. This Procedure requires a "vulgar witness": an un-Enlightened representative of the Masses. By explaining away the impossible, an Enlightened agent drives away the power of the supernatural. After all, technology teaches us that anyone in a lab coat must be a scientist, and that anyone who can mask a theory in the right technical terms must be telling the truth.

Buzzwords (••• Entropy, •• Mind)

"If we leverage this properly in the marketplace and position it according to prevailing demographics, we'll get a better market share."

Financiers can perform a variation of **Healthy Skepticism**, one that allows anyone with the latest corporate terminology to contribute to the success of a business enterprise. After all, anyone who has an MBA must know what she's talking about....

[**Buzzwords**, allows a businessman to add successes to any roll to determine the success of a business enterprise. The system for **Healthy Skepticism** against this Effect works rather like "Unweaving," but without the mystical component. The difficulty for this roll is always an 8. If the Enlightened agent is convincing enough (and the player makes her roll, of course), the force of the witnesses' disbelief is enough to contain the outbreak of unreality. In other words, each success obtained subtracts one from another mage's successes.]

Forces Procedures

Physics itself has been with the Technocracy in some form for centuries. An understanding of Forces is thus second nature to many Technocrats. Since manipulating energy states is a powerful way to augment weapons, most Front-Line Technocratic battle units have a great deal of skill in Forces, especially among the cybernetic Iteration X "grunts" and Void Engineer marines. Still, the uses of physics in the lab are many: Void Engineers build improved ship-propulsion systems, Iterators study the fundamental blocks of the universe in their particle accelerators and Progenitors work with bioelectric fields. A modicum of Forces is a practical necessity for almost any Technocrat.

Current Metering (• Forces)

Gas meters, electrical meters, telephone lines and microwave antennae — the artifacts of modern energy run to many houses and businesses, and they're all tracked by your friendly power company. What ConEd knows, the Technocracy knows, too.

[A simple roll with **Current Metering** determines how much power is being drawn in an area. Use the Range and Duration charts in **Mage: The Ascension** (p. 170-171) to determine the area examined with the Effect. Secret labs, hidden back rooms and illegal operations can often be detected by this Procedure. Note, though, that this Procedure does not track Primal Energy.]

Kinetic Push (•• Forces)

Generally, creating Forces out of nothing is a vulgar Effect, and frowned on. However, some agents can telekinetically manipulate objects with psionic abilities, or use force transduction coils and magnetic levitation to create kinetic fields. Whatever the excuse, it's a fairly simple exercise to impart motion in a subject.

[A **Kinetic Push** is a simple application of Forces, though it's almost always vulgar. This Effect can be used to pick up or manipulate small objects (up to man sized); one success might pick up a rock, while three or more could hoist a human. A **Kinetic Push** could also strike a victim for Forces damage, of course.]

Hot-Shotting (••• Forces)

All conspiracy aside, sometimes agents just like to kill things. This Procedure makes that job even easier. By building up the kinetic energy in a handgun (or electricity in a taser, or focused light in a laser), a killing machine can enhance his command of deadly force. Of course, a Paradox Backlash can send that same energy back at a careless agent...

Some Storytellers may ask players to provide a sound-effect while **Hot-Shotting**. The "CHK-CHK!" of a shotgun or "ZZZT!" of a taser may add some comic relief, but it can also make a trigger-happy agent a little more secure before going into a fight. When a Supervisor calls for Contingency Five, agents start rigging all sorts of funky equipment to their weapons....

[This one's simple; each success adds one damage die. If your Storyteller allows you to stack successes, you might "hot-shot" a weapon right before a prolonged combat. You'll need enough successes to make the Effect last for an entire scene; any additional successes increase damage. Thus, tasers can be set to pump out more electricity, clips of bullets have nastier ammunition or a laser can be fine-tuned to emit more energy. As an optional rule, the Storyteller may allow extended rolls on **Hot-Shotting**. Be aware: This technique can get nasty — especially if too many rolls force a Backlash against an overeager agent. Paradox Backlashes on **Hot-Shotting** tend to cause weapons to explode, melt or stick into uncontrollable automatic fire. More than one overeager agent has met his doom when his slightly modified gun detonated in his hand.]

Life Procedures

Obviously, the study of Life is the calling of the Progenitors. Some Iteration X BioMechanics learn about Life so that they can make more complete cybernetic organisms and a few field agents study medicine or just have a hobby in biology. Life itself is a subtle and powerful Sphere of influence, usable in many ways. However, without some sort of bodily modifications, Life must be practiced through careful, lengthy laboratory work. A Progenitor can use retroviruses and drugs to do a great deal of work, but full-body modifications and constructs are work for a carefully stocked surgical bay.

Synthetic Ritual (Variable Spheres)

For specialists in the Pharmacopoeist Methodology, we offer another weapon for your arsenal: **Synthetic Ritual**. This Procedure relies on the art of crafting chemicals far beyond the capabilities of normal science. Freakishly brilliant reac-

tions occur in the laboratory all the time, but only a genius can duplicate them more than once.

Here's the formula for creating this type of Procedure: Start with a simple chemical reaction that a drug or substance can have on the human body (e.g., "caffeine keeps people awake"), then exaggerate it into a form that can be represented by one or more spheres of influence. Complete the task by chanting our Technocrat mantra: "If we can visualize it, we can do it. We have the technology."

This type of Inspired Science requires a chemical genius — only mages with four or five dots in Chemistry are allowed. It also takes time and plenty of chemistry equipment as an apparatus to the Procedure, which means the Storyteller should estimate the number of successes required in terms of plausibility (see the Magical Feats table). Then, apply the rules for extended Effects as the chemist spends hours or days working with complex formulae in the lab.

Unfortunately, Paradox loves raising hell in laboratories. Depending on the Paradox Pool of the mage in question, resulting compounds can have unusual side-effects (for a 1-4 point Backlash), harmful results (damage from 5-9 points of Backlash) or even psychedelic effects (manifesting as Paradox Spirits or hobgoblins). When the limits of science are violated completely, it is entirely possible that an explosion may result in the lab itself, destroying all of the work done so far, as well as the lab notes (and possibly an overly idealistic Pharmacopoeist).

Even if the Procedure succeeds, someone has to consume, ingest, absorb or inhale the resultant product. Spiking a drink or lacing food isn't easy. Like many experimental chemical reactions, the results of these experimental substances can be variable. For each benefit they grant, they should have one side-effect as well. The recipe for "Caffeine Plus" is an example, and it should fuel additional ideas.

Caffeine Plus (••• Life, •• Time, • Dimensional Science, • Mind)

If the thought of bolting down Mountain Dew, Surge, Jolt or even Erg Cola seems a little weak, then allow us to market our latest product. Take a hit of Caffeine Plus. You'll be so wired, you'll see into other dimensions. Any more caffeine, and you'd start vibrating off sound waves. Caffeine Plus is destructive to the human body, addictive to the mind, poisonous to the soul and sheer heaven with a pack of smokes.

Through **Synthetic Ritual**, *a chemist lovingly reconstructs a series of caffeine molecules with as much devotion as a Kabbalistic scholar deconstructing geamatria. By processing ordinary everyday cola through a series of arcane chemical reactions, he can create a substance that far exceeds FDA regulations. The result? Bootleg batches of this stuff are as unstable as the people who use it.*

[The Storyteller should pick and choose resultant benefits and drawbacks from the following list. For each benefit the resulting mixture grants, one side-effect should be incurred. Personal experiences of the Storyteller and players can be used to determine which of these are coincidental.

Benefits (choose one):

• Sleep is no longer necessary. For as long as the Effect lasts (check the duration table), the user needn't worry about fatigue. In fact, he can stay alert for days, if necessary.

• Concentration increases. Any **Empower Mind** Effect is at a -2 difficulty.

• The user is wired enough to see things that aren't there... including entities in the Penumbra and Shadowlands.

• Tasks can be performed 50% faster, although complex tasks are at a +2 difficulty.

Drawbacks (choose one):

• The user is edgy and easily disturbed. All Willpower rolls are at a +2 difficulty; any rolls to avoid emotional outbursts are at a +3 difficulty.

• The user begins wearing out his body's supply of Primal Energy, burning off one point every hour. When the Primal Energy is gone, start marking off health levels until someone intervenes with medical help.

• If the user is enhanced in any way for at least an hour by a Benefit, he will be unconscious for twice as long afterwards.]

Polysorbate (•• Life, •• Mind, • Prime)

This coincidental Effect plays on one simple fact: Americans consume vast amounts of chemicals without realizing the effect they have on their bodies. This Procedure doesn't actually poison food, but it adds an emotional aftertaste to any processed food. Using the Polysorbate application of **Synthetic Ritual** doesn't involve tainting food or actually mixing up chemicals, but it often builds off something an expert has "read in a medical journal."

Instead of using **Synthetic Ritual**, the Pharmacopoeist must state, in clear and reasonable terms, the harmful effect certain chemicals have on the human body. ("Do you know that gum has monosodium glutamide? I read somewhere that it can damage your eyesight.") After this is said within hearing range of the victim, the chosen guinea pig is assumed to have gotten a "bad batch" of the substance in question, one that slightly exaggerates the side-effect in question. Urban legends about fast food should provide plenty of ideas.

Possible Effects include:

• "empty calories" that make a victim hungry an hour after he's eaten

• massive carbohydrates that encourage lethargy and inaction

• preservatives in meat that instill hostility and aggression

• chemicals that impair concentration and alertness

• soulless, tasteless food that actually destroys a few points of Primal Energy

[In game terms, the emotion may affect rolls involving particular Attributes, increasing the difficulty of any roll depending on that Trait. Increase the difficulty by 1 for every 2 successes, up to a maximum of a +3 difficulty for 6 successes. An alternate version of this Procedure (Life 2, Mind 2, Prime 1) can instill strong emotions or even leach Primal Energy off a mage. Players who find this implausible should eat at a local fast food restaurant two or three times a day; the effects should soon become obvious.]

DMSO (••• Life, ••• Matter, •• Prime)

This Procedure allows the Technocrat's touch to mimic the effects of dimethyl sulfoxide, a chemical that opens the pores of the skin (it's often used to create contact poisons, for example). When the Technocrat touches his victim's skin, all the pores in that area open wide, allowing anything that's on the victim's skin or Technocrat's skin — dirt, sweat, you name it — to seep into the victim's bloodstream. The usual result is illness, possibly even death. Vicious Technocrats coat their hands with virulent substances before employing DMSO.

Psychiatric Compounds (••• Life, •• or ••• Mind)

We are chemical people. Our mental states and memories can be manipulated through the proper chemicals. By creating the proper medications (through synthetic rituals), a test subject can be altered chemically to conform to normal expected behavior. Sanity, after all, is a chemical state. The chosen substance can be introduced into the subject's food or drink or introduced in pill form. The Progenitors also have several hand-held devices for injecting these substances directly into a subject's veins, if necessary. Fear of needles is a healthy reaction in Room 101....

[Once you've injected the substance in a criminal's veins, possible Effects include the following:

- evoking an extreme emotion, such as rage, fear or remorse (Mind 2, resisted by Willpower)
- erasing all activities of the last few minutes or hours (Mind 3, resisted by Willpower)
- destroying resistance to suggestion and commands (each success increases Willpower difficulties by 1, up to a maximum of 3)
- dulling the mind to deviant willworking (increases the difficulty of Arete rolls)]

Hands of Death (••• Life, •• Forces, or both)

"Hands registered as lethal weapons" is an old urban myth, but when Enforcers, Operatives and InSpectors use this special training, perhaps it would be better if there were some truth to it. Though originally used by members of the Syndicate, this Procedure has spread to other field operatives; Iterators use their cybernetic enhancements to score telling blows while Progenitors rely on their medical knowledge to cripple opponents. While this Effect is active, the Technocrat can do things with his punches that only accomplished

martial arts masters are said to be able to do — shatter bones, disrupt internal organs, knock the victim out cold with careful atemi strikes to certain nerve clusters or sever nerves without breaking the skin or leaving a bruise, to name but a few Effects. This punishment is enough to kill most humans or weak supernatural creatures, and even powerful Reality Deviants pause when confronting an Enforcer armed with this Adjustment.

[Just like the special strikes of the Akashic Brotherhood, this Effect increases the hand-to-hand damage of the agent's unarmed attacks. Life Effects home in on the victim's organs and pressure points, while Forces Effects cause faster, stronger blows. Either way, each success scored with the Procedure adds one health level to the damage inflicted with a successful unarmed attack.]

Matter Procedures

Obviously, the study of Matter is a primary element of the Technocracy, one that has been developed for centuries. From chemistry to metallurgy to plastics, the everyday (and esoteric) physical tools of Matter are the key developments and devices of much Technocratic science. Iteration X tends to specialize in Matter more than the other Conventions, developing special weapons and defenses. Just about any skilled Technocrat has at least a little bit of Material Science under his belt, though.

Sanitize Evidence (•• Matter, •• Forces)

When cyborgs and Men in Black learn to manipulate matter and energy, things get ugly. Changing one form of matter into another, shaping electricity into solid materials or blasting through walls and doors with bursts of energy can be quite vulgar. When no one's watching, however, teams of agents and cyborgs can do some amazingly subtle things. Don't think Iteration X is only good at killing things....

When covering up evidence, some investigators wish they could make incriminating materials just "go away." Wish granted. Call in the Sanitization Squad. Put up a boundary around the perimeter and have your suits and cybercops convert the solid matter (dead bodies, blood stains, bullet holes and killing grounds) into energy. Soak it all up. When you absolutely, positively have to make something disappear overnight, call in a cover-up team.

[Unfortunately, converting so much inanimate matter into processed energy takes time. Make a **Sanitize Evidence** roll for each hour of activity. You can make this effort a group venture if you want to work faster. Each success obliterates 10 pounds of matter, converting it into energy that can be stored and carted away. The mundane world need never know. Really big disasters can be problematic, since a botch will almost certainly detonate the materials explosively. For this reason, many containment teams split up and handle problems in small pieces, avoiding the possibility of a tremendous foul-up.]

Holdout Weapon (••• Matter, •• Prime)

Not to be confused with the devices of the same general name (see p. 218), this Procedure allows the operative to create a small, easily concealed weapon that he "just happened" to have hidden on his person. The difficulty and believability of the Procedure depends entirely on what type of weapon the operative wishes to create (with the proviso that this Procedure cannot create weapons that are so large or oddly shaped that they could not easily be concealed on a person or in his clothes). For example, creating a knife that is "hidden up my sleeve" is easy, and almost certain not to cause any Paradox problems; creating a blaster pistol is tougher and more dangerous.

Though this Procedure was pioneered by NWO Operatives, it is now used by a wide variety of field agents.

[Functionally, this Effect "creates" an object in the agent's pocket, holster or whatnot. If the agent happens to draw a revolver from an ankle holster, for instance, it's probably coincidental; if the agent is strip-searched or nude and spins around holding a BFG, though, the Effect is vulgar. The number of successes scored determines the sort of weapon that can be "conjured" (though really, the agent had it there all along): one success might grant a small knife or brass knuckles; two successes could give a large knife or collapsible truncheon; three successes grant a small revolver and so on. "Creating" an energy weapon or similar device is much more difficult, requiring all of the Spheres of influence to manufacture such a device normally, and it is always vulgar.]

Mind Procedures

As previously established, a Technocrat needs command over a few technological apparatuses for proper Inspired Science. Some Storytellers, however, prefer to enact a few exceptions to this rule, especially where the Mind Sphere is concerned. Does reading someone's mind require a technological apparatus? Do you need an electronic device in order to interpret someone's emotions? Some particularly paranoid types honestly believe that if there's a worldwide conspiracy to control the world, it's obvious that the people behind must have some type of latent psychic ability.

Other delusional types insist that there is already sufficient technology for affecting the human mind. Mind control satellites and memory erasers are probably within the power of the Technocracy's technology, but such blatant devices are often more problematic than helpful. More devious (and subtle) Technocrats prefer to focus on real world items, like radio, audiotapes and CDs (with subliminal messages), advertising, e-mail and computer networks. It's really up to you; your reality may vary. After all, you're really creating something that fits within the consensual paradigm created by your gaming group... and that's all in your mind, anyway, isn't it?

Non-Descript (•• Mind)

An agent using this Procedure radiates two thoughts to anyone nearby: "I'm not important," and "Don't look at me." The agent should be dressed in a way that does not invite suspicion, and his appearance should not be conspicuous in any way.

[Each success effective acts like the Cloaking Background for the duration of one scene. If the agent already has Cloaking, then each success lowers the difficulty for any roll involving that background by 1 (up to a maximum of -3).]

Rats' Rage/Lost Cousin (•• Mind, •• Life)

Caged rats recognize their own; when one member is taken out of the cage and cleaned of his familiar scent, then returned to his "family," his former friends turn on him. If an outside rat is covered with the scent and introduced to strangers, they accept him as one of their own. By following the same principles, some sociobiologists from the NWO and Progenitors teamed up to replicate the effect on a human scale.

By "scenting" a subject, a Technocrat can either turn a mob against the subject, or get it to accept her as an intimate. Various agents employ different tools: Some mark the subject with a special pheromone "perfume," implant her with biofeedback nanotech or subject her to mental conditioning. Others take an external approach and condition the group to reject or accept the individual (usually with subliminal propaganda, mental conditioning or simple mass-psychology). While the Procedure isn't perfect — humans are far more complex than rats — it gives the operative an essential edge.

[This Effect is best left to roleplaying. By "scenting" himself, an agent can gain acceptance in a particular group — among a street gang or some partiers at a bar, for instance. Alternately, the Technocrat can make an individual stick out from a group. In most cases, the subjects of the groups won't know what's going on, but this Procedure is good for a +/-1 on social difficulties.]

Programming (••• Mind)

This Procedure is a lesser version of **Social Conditioning**, that agents can use to brainwash their proles. After five minutes of programming, a prole will carry out his instructions with clockwork precision. Commands should be specific; sometimes citizens and employees devise unusual interpretations of them. Teams of support staff can also be programmed at the same time, as long as they've trained together and represent the same faction (i.e., Kamrads, marines, associates, sympathizers, Men in Black or students).

[This Procedure requires an extended roll; the number of successes should exceed the Willpower of the prole (or the most strong-willed prole in a team). A successful roll allows one simple sentence command (defined as a sentence with one subject, one verb and one direct object). Each additional success allows an additional simple sentence: Surround the house. Find the rocket pack in the basement. Keep out anyone who isn't part of the amalgam.

Storytellers may feel free to simplify overly complex sentences. If a prole has been conditioned by more than one agent, the roll with the most successes wins out. In case of a tie, the prole will try to amalgamate both responses!]

Social Conditioning (••• Mind, •• Prime)

Social control is a way of life to citizens of the Technocratic Union. Through **Social Conditioning**, agents learn to follow Control's orders without question. After a few sessions with Psych Ops and rebuilding in Room 101, or even with subtle means in everyday situations, the Union can enforce its particular viewpoints and beliefs in its agents.

[Note that this Procedure is *optional* — after all, some players can't stand the thought of anything that interferes with free will. (You may also decide to keep this system in reserve until the third or fourth episode of your chronicle, once character development has been fleshed out more.) Use this system if it inspires ideas; don't use it as a leash on characters. If the players themselves insist on rebelling against your story, all the systems in the world won't prevent them.

A character begins with a Conditioning score, reflecting the degree of his indoctrination. The actual number is between 1 and 10, depending on the agent's original training:

- a character who was recruited from the Front Lines starts out with a 3;
- an agent Enhanced in a Horizon laboratory has been brainwashed into a 5;
- a Technocrat raised in a Deep Universal colony begins with a 7.

In most stories, conditioning can be maintained by the local Supervisor and Control. Depending on an agent's level of Conditioning, either one can implant code words, erase memories or alter the emotional relationship between one agent and another permanently.

Details of the levels of **Social Conditioning** appear in Chapter Four, on p. 89. This Procedure is used to increase (or, in some cases, change or decrease) a particular agent's level of conditioning. Agents may prefer the less complicated **Programming** Procedure when conditioning their proles. **Programming** is meant to last for the duration of a mission; **Social Conditioning** is gradual, and it is intended to be permanent.

[You must roll your Enlightenment against the subject's Willpower plus three. Successes destroy temporary Willpower. Once the subject is out of Willpower, true conditioning begins as an extended and resisted action (difficulty 6). You make one roll for conditioning each day, and you must accumulate a number of successes equal to the final level of conditioning that you want to instill, as shown in Chapter Four. If you botch, the subject is immune to your conditioning, and he simply will not break (better terminate him).]

Motivational Speaking (•• Mind, •• Prime [for emotions]; ••• Mind, •• Prime [for false ideas])

A Technocrat using this Procedure uses his mastery of false logic, falsified credibility and scientific plausibility to instill a particular emotion or set of false ideas into the minds