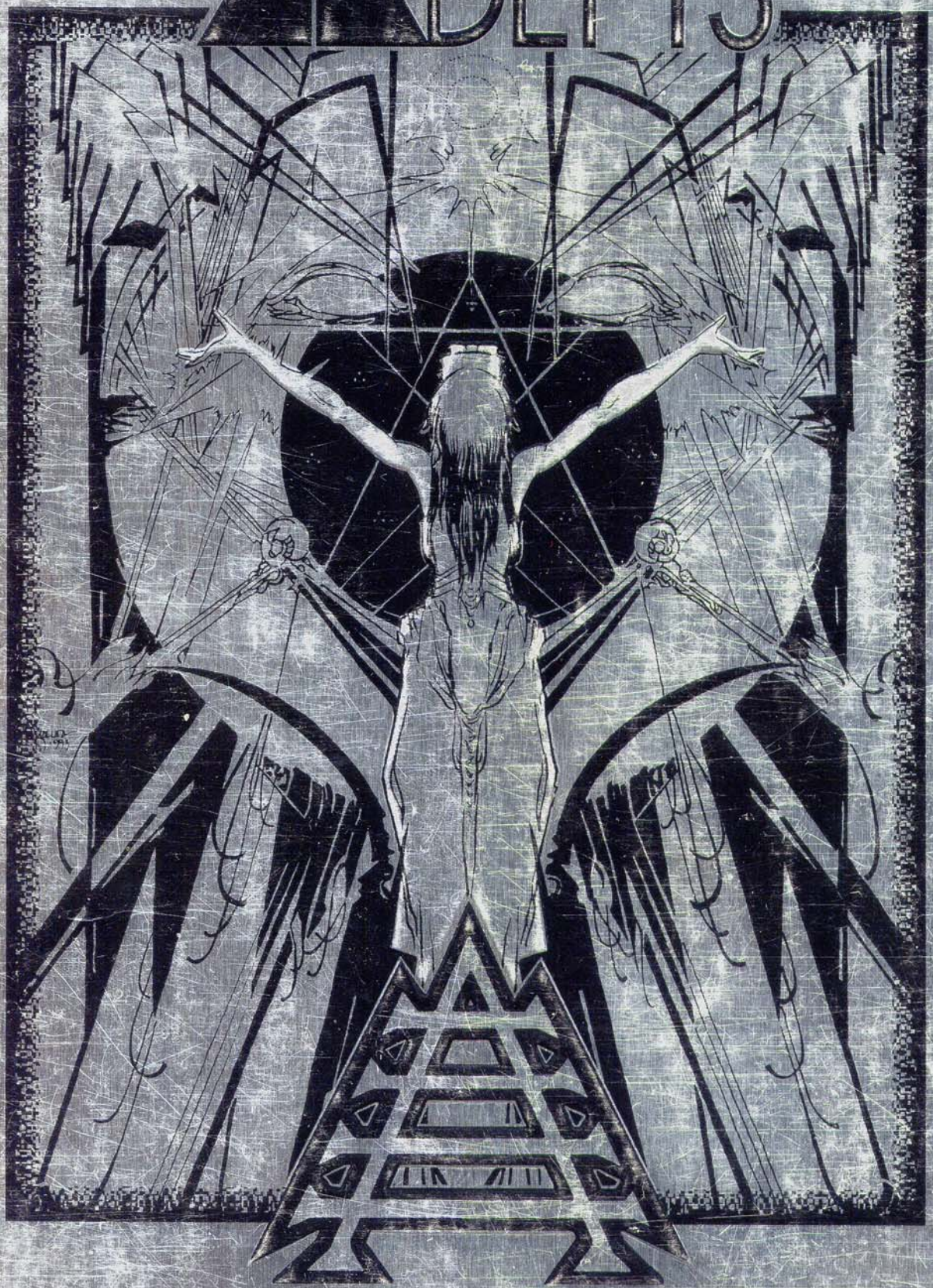
VIRTUAL ADEPTS™



Tradition Book One
for Mage: The Ascension

VIRTUAL ADEPTS™

Knowledge is the Only Reality

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R.I.P. – I mean, Welcome!

Horror has a name, and her name is Jennifer... yes, Jennifer Heartshorn, late of the blood-stained Shakespearean boards and gory battlefields of the live-action scene, has signed away her soul... I mean, joined the crew as the line developer for **Wraith: The Oblivion**. Let's all give her a hand — just the right one.

Save the left hand for Kim Shropshire, who joins manic Mike Krause in the bloodpit of our sales department. With the coming of the Month of Fools, we at White Wolf are pleased to welcome these two intrepid souls into the fold of the Great White Wolf.

Long may they howl!

Special Thanks to:

Rich "Pumpkin King" **Thomas**, for his favorite CD soundtrack.

Aileen "Speed Demon" **Miles**, for her fast, Fury-us work. Welcome to the crew!

Michelle "Oh, Bullcrap" **Prahler**, for being pure as the freshly driven...

Chris "Proctologist" **McDonnough**, for his explosive wit.

Steve "Captain" **Wieck**, for pointing out a port in the storm.

Josh "Gothic Splash" **Timbrook**, for watering the artistic desert with the ink of inspiration.

Ben "Wow!" **Monk**, for buying the $6,000,000 hoax up to the bitter end.

Larry "Lord of Lead" **Schnelli**, for playing Santa with the little people.

WHITE WOLF
GAME STUDIO

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Because of the mature themes involved, reader discretion is advised.

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Prelude: Information Glut

By Darren McKeeman

Flesh. Bone. Meat. Everything my body is, I hate.

I wake in the morning (or afternoon) and I hate that I can't see well enough to hate my reflection. No matter how much I look at everything, there just doesn't seem to be enough to go around. Of course, right now is different. Right now, I see a symbol of my hatred lying prone on the table before me, screaming for mercy.

Things are different with a computer. You can flood your senses with as much information as you can take. Many of us in the Adepts do this to get the most out of our brains. I do it to get the most into it. The story behind this isn't pretty.

•••••

Back when we were in the Technocracy, we shared the Information Glut with Iteration X. We weren't surprised when it showed up as one of the most vile tortures conceivable. What could we do? The information would have leaked out somehow. Nobody can keep secrets for long. Information is a living force that most people can't fully comprehend. It wants to be free. It wants to be known.

I underwent the torture when we defected. I stayed behind to make sure the last bit of data was downloaded and copied from the Technocracy databanks, and was one of the unlucky ones who got caught. Our own rote was used against us to try and reprogram us into perfect citizens.

•••••

The perfect citizen lying on the surgical table before me is a member of the Technocracy, what's popularly refered to as a Technomancer. He has information that I want. He has information I will get.

•••••

The rote we perfected works directly on the brain of the subject. Essentially, it re-tunes your brain, making it more sensitive to stimulation. All the senses are heightened. When the Technocracy was through with me, my clothes felt like razor wire and fiberglass soaked in alcohol. The food I ate for breakfast tasted like sulfur and acid. I constantly felt as if I were staring into a fusion reactor, and I could smell the disgusting stench of my captors under the cheap perfumes they used to mask their body odor. My constant retching felt as though my body was turning itself inside out. They did this to me for a full year. I nearly died.

They should have killed me.

They let me go after that hellish year, placing me in an insane asylum. They could get no more pleasure from torturing me; I had grown insensitive to their torture. A former colleague of mine fiddled with the hospital records, and got me out. Adepts never abandon each other. I spent nine months trying to recover from the torture, as I slowly discovered the repulsion I had for my body.

•••••

The repulsion I have for my body is nothing compared to my repulsion for the piece of meat on the table in front of me. He will know nothing of my pain. That's one thing I will not share with them. He's asking me all the usual questions now. Like why I'm doing this. What did he ever do to me. Who am I. I won't tell him the answers. His ignorance will sweeten his torment.

•••••

Nearly a year of constant torture has warped me into a vestige of what I once was. The human brain is a strange and funny organ. It can compensate and adjust for anything.

When you're a baby, you can't see things normally everything is upside down, because you're right out of the box. As you grow older a few days or months later, your brain "tricks" itself into thinking everything is right side up. The same thing basically happened to me. My brain "tricked" itself into thinking that extreme input was the only input there was. This was the way things are normally. I can't feel anything now. My nerves are deadened, and I can only feel extremes. I spent my whole first night alone slicing my arms and torso with razor blades. I was back on-line to the world, and I wanted desperately to feel something, anything. When I realized that the blades were too sharp to be painful, I found some rusty knives. By the time the other Adepts got back to our hidey hole, I was nearly dead.

•••••

The slab of meat on the table isn't dead. He's not going to be dead for a long time.

•••••

Adepts stick together, that's one good thing. They helped me. New devices were invented so that I could experience the real world normally. I live in the Net most of the time; there you can turn up the volume, turn up the light, and turn up the sensation without anyone else noticing. When I have to get around in the real world, I have a special rig I have to wear.

My sunglasses amplify light so that I can see. I'm nearly blind because there is not enough light in the world to feed my hungry eyes. Hearing aids crank one-hundred-eighty decibels into my shattered auditory nerves. I still can't feel or smell. Did you know that the skin is the largest organ in the human body? I constantly burn myself on stoves.

If I had another year, I could turn myself back to normal. I'd also be crazy. I've done research on sensory deprivation, and I don't think I'd be able to handle the strain of going a year or so without feeling anything. Not after that year of hellish torture.

So I live in VR.

I know exactly who did this to me. I know everything about them. I memorized every detail of their face, and every detail of their bodies. I've been following them in the Net. They could have the most sophisticated plastic surgery the Technocracy could dream up, and I'd still find them. I know their smell. This one on the table before me has that smell all over him.

Information Glut can be a good thing, in the right hands. Accelerated learning and heightened senses can help you out a lot. When it falls into the wrong hands, it can be devastating. I will never be able to understand why the Technocracy wants to do that to every person. They are doing it to you, and you don't even know it. It's subtle, but there just the same. They flood your brain with images and information that they want you to believe. You are under attack from every angle — television, teachers, advertisements, you name it. My experience taught me this. I thank Kibo sometimes for what they did to me, because now I am immune to their most powerful weapons.

I have a few Sons of Ether friends working on the rest of my rig. The parts are coming in bits, starting with the most important senses. The time will come when my polycarbon exoskeleton is finished, and I will see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the whole world fully. Then I'll be ready.

•••••

He tells me everything I need to know. Where my next victim is. What his name is now. I've picked his brain clean. I've even discovered a few new parts of the Technocracy's Time Table. They had to revise it horribly when we left. Though I really don't care about that now, I remember it, in case it becomes useful later.

•••••

I think that the only thing worse than what they did to me would be sensory deprivation. As I lay down to sleep, I find that I can't rest without my hearing aids. If I take them out, my mind becomes totally aware that there is no sound, nothing reaching me. I start to panic, and I can't move. Can you imagine what it is like not to *feel* anything? This is what I will do with those bastards. A few years of floating in a tank isn't good enough. I want to rewire their brains.

•••••

The meat on the table in front of me can't hear himself, can't feel his vocal cords tearing from the strain of screaming. He can't see anything. He can't feel. He thinks he's dead. I know. I decide to jack into his auditory nerve, giving him a final message before I turn the lights out.

I'm doing this to you, I say. I'm going to do it to your bosses when I catch them. Your people tortured me, and now I'm paying back in full. I've been following them, in the Net. Most of my captors went on to bigger things. I like that, because they've got more to lose now. All of them are augmented in some way. I can see the information in the chips in their brains in the Net. Through the Net, I can access these chips. The chips give me access to their brains. After a little re-programming, I burn out the chip and the surrounding brain cells. They'll live. They just won't be able to feel anything.

I cut the link. Should I cut his throat? No. I'll sit hear and listen to him. His scream is a beautiful sound, full of timbre and melody. There is no sound quite as satisfying as the screaming of a Technomancer. I move quickly, rigging the IVs so that I can take care of him for a very long time. I watch his brain waves on my EEG display. He's probably going to die within a few months anyway. The daily shock and inability to sleep will kill him. Until then, I'll have my own orchestra right here in this room, until he goes hoarse. I pour some water down his throat, just so he won't strip his vocal cords too soon.

It's easy to think too much about these things when you can't feel anything. They killed my nerves. They should have killed all of me.

Q
&A

Introduction: FYI CYA

It's good to know that we can create our own memorable event without waiting for freakish weather to break the monotony of life.

— Sasquatch, *Today's Delightful Surprise* (an alternative press magazine)

from:dante@crystal.net
Subject: Frequently Asked Questions & Answers (FAQ)
Message-ID: <CGqJwF.C3I@crystal.net>
Summary:
This posting lists frequently asked questions and answers about Virtual Adepts. It should be read by anyone who is new to the Virtual Adepts
Sender: dante@crystal.net (Crystalnet News)
Organization: Virtual Adepts Chantry Network
Date: Fri, 19 Nov 1993 11:00:14 GMT
Approved: answers-request@crystal.net
Archive-name: virtual_adepts/faq
Last-Modified: 1993/9/18
Version: 1.4
VIRTUAL ADEPTS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
Version 1.4 - 18 September, 1993

Right! This FAQ gets sent out to every Adept when it's updated, but the people who need it the most are the newbies. So if you're seeing this again, don't be alarmed. You haven't been downgraded to loser status. Yet.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Dante. It's my dubious honor to write this little intro to the Virtual Adepts. We do this for the same reason end-users generate FAQs on their networks — so you won't look stupid for asking a question you should know. Any new questions that any Adept thinks oughta be on here should be sent to mckeeman@netcom.com. He's keeping track of the questions for me. We update this thing about once a year or so.

On to the questions...

q: Who and what are the Virtual Adepts?

a: Well, there's no easy answer to that one. Loosely, we're a group of mages who have discovered the true nature of reality. Then again, just about any group of mages will tell you that.

We're a group of mages who have specific ideas concerning reality. Through these ideas, we can mold reality to our every whim. Our model for reality is the world we can create with computers and electronics. We can apply this type of analogy to the real world, effecting changes that most people deem impossible.

Not all Virtual Adepts use computers. Some use pocket calculators. I've even heard of some who model reality on the programming of VCRs. (*that* is weird.) It's all the same idea, though. Information is reality's lifeblood. This message you're reading now is affecting reality in its own way. Read that last sentence about a thousand times and you'll get the idea. Change the information, and you change reality. That's the whole concept in a nutshell. Sounds simple, huh? Nothing's ever *that* simple.

The Virtual Adepts are the baddest damned thing to happen to this ball of dirt since lightning up and created amino acids. We've got the know-how, we've got the resources, and we've got the ELITENESS to bring every single mage out there to Ascension. Hell, we're going to do that for every SLEEPER too. I'd like to see one of the other groups of mages out there claim they can do that! They can't, because they aren't as bad or ELITE as we are. They don't know who they're messing with. We're simply the ELITE. Nobody else can touch us, see? Watch them try to hack our systems and get carved up by waterknives. We are too ELITE to screw with. 'Nuff said.

q: Who are the Traditions?

a: Alright, that's most new Adepts' *second* most asked question. I'm going to try and oversimplify it: the Traditions are the Good Guys.

That's not good enough for you? Great. Let's put it another way then.

The Traditions are nine different bands of mages that have formed an uneasy alliance with each other for the purpose of resisting the destructive influence of the Technocracy. We joined the Traditions in the early 1960s, after we defected from the Black Hats and Mirrorshades. The Traditions aren't bad; even we can't save everyone without their help. Of course, these guys can't save the world by themselves, either. They're not bright enough. That's where we come in. We'll show them the way; they'll execute the program. Then they'll thank us for being so good.

q: What is the Technocracy?

a: Here's the short form again: these are the Bad Guys.

OK, that's sorta cheating. We know more about the Technocracy than any other member of the Traditions. We used to be members of the Technocracy. For this reason, very few other people in the Traditions trust us. To them, we still think like Technomancers.

Well, the Technocracy is made up of about five or six "Conventions" that have about the same purpose as the Traditions. When we left, there were five Conventions — we're not sure how many there are now. We're pretty sure

that all the old Conventions are still there: the Syndicate, the New World Order, the Void Engineers, Iteration X and the Progenitors. You'll probably run into representatives of all these Conventions at one time or another, and they're all going to try their damnedest to kill you. The Technocracy hates Virtual Adepts beyond any other Traditions, because we are the only Tradition that actually has *hurt* them. We are still hurting them more than any other Tradition. They're just losers. Sore l00zers, in the words of some of our younger members.

q: What does the Technocracy want? Who are they?

a: OK. Here are some things the Technos want: they want to enslave humanity. Actually, they wanna make everything "perfect" and "utopian." Same thing.

They also want to destroy the Traditions. Especially us.

Who are they? Next time you meet a government official, next time you see a civil servant, next time you meet a cold and hard scientist, you'll know. You just have to meet them to know. But the best definition is that the Technocracy is "them." Anytime you can't find an adequate word to describe it, use "them" or "they". Like the Church of the Subgenius says, "Find out who *they* are..."

q: Who actually likes me for being an Adept?

a: Hahahahah. Next question.

q: What's the point in being an Adept if everyone hates me?

a: It's not like you *chose* to be an Adept. We chose you. We knew you could handle it, because you've been dealing with it all your life. You never quite fit in when you were a kid. Other kids bullied you, and you retaliated by finding out more than they did about how the world worked. Don't look at it like these other people hate you — look at it like they're jealous of you. They've got lots of reason to be, man.

q: What is Ascension?

a: Awright. This is a real easy one. I can go on about this one all day too. Ascension is ELITENESS.

Of course, we want everyone to be elite. We even want Sleepers to be elite. We want losers and lame phucks to be elite. We're gonna do it, too. How? I'm glad you asked.

This old reality is thrashing itself down. It's about to collapse. When it does, we're gonna be ready. It's gonna be Armageddon for sure then, and we're gonna lead the promised elite to Ascension. Only it's not gonna be just one hundred forty-four thousand, dude. We're gonna get everybody, and we're gonna herd them into a new reality. A virtual reality. This will be our improved version, like version 2.0 of reality, you know? We're exploring it right now. We created it back in the fifties, and as soon as we get it ready, we're gonna start with the exodus. There are some who say that the end will come on July 5th, 1998. That's not far off the mark, let me tell you. We're coming up on the end times real quick now. You just gotta help. When we're through and everybody's riding high in Reality V.2.0, you'll

be sitting there drinking a Singapore Sling with a little umbrella in it, being fanned by harem girlz. Why? Because you're one of the sooper ELITE.

q: How do I contact you guys?

a: Don't call us. We'll call you. Actually, if you're new, you've got someone watching you all the time. This is so you won't get into too much trouble. After you've gotten beyond the stage of needing guidance, you'll be instructed on how to contact us.

q: What am I supposed to believe here?

a: Believe what you want. It doesn't matter to us. The only point is that you are reading this right now. The information you are absorbing is becoming known, and that's what the universe is all about. What you believe about this document may well prove to be false later on. If this had been written in the fifties, it would be false now. You do not have to worry about such things. The information is all that matters. It's alive, and it's mutating inside your head. Pretty soon, it'll bust out like some kind of virus and you'll have to tell someone about it. Just watch it and make sure it's not a Technocracy agent or a Sleeper.

Everything that you are reading in this FAQ, at this time, is true. It is guaranteed to be true up to a year or two from now. Something major might happen and we may have to revise some of these points. But I doubt it.

q: What is the Net?

a: Sorry. That's another FAQ. I would say that it's the best hope for Ascension around today for mages of any Tradition, but that'd be bragging.

The Net is the best hope for Ascension around today for mages of any Tradition. :)

q: Why is the headquarters in Omaha? Isn't that where the Wild Kingdom dude used to live before he died?

a: We get so much mail about this one. I'm gonna explain it to you real slow.

It started out here. We used to be part of the Technocracy. We were part of the government. We had to have a lot of throughput for our data, and most of the military and civilian phone lines met in Omaha. Center of the country and all that. Well, the Technocracy never found out that our Chantry existed virtually, otherwise they would've freaked. We haven't had the opportunity to move it yet. Don't think we don't want to. Let me shoot some of the logistics at you:

We've got a *huge* amount of data in the Chantry. You can find almost anything there. We happen to have about a million terabytes in one storage space alone. That's one of five hundred storage spaces.

Now here is your first lesson in being a Virtual Adept.

It doesn't matter where the damn thing is! You can get to it from any wall outlet! What do you want? You want me to tell you it's in Silicon Valley? OK! It's in Silicon Valley! There! It's the same thing! Reality is being dictated by what I tell you! Jack in over at Silicon Valley and see what I mean, you moron!

Hopefully, you'll realize that it doesn't *matter* where the headquarters is. It has no physical location. It doesn't matter.

q: What's with your attitude?

a: Attitude is everything with being a Virtual Adept. Remember that, and you'll go far. Question authority and everything else you can think of. You are the ultimate authority, because you are processing the information we're throwing at you. If you don't like my attitude, or can't match it, you shouldn't be a Virtual Adept.

q: Where are the parties?

a: Get in touch with some of the fringe groups. They throw the best parties, about twice a year. If you're in for something a bit more mellow, there's a monthly Tribunal where you can brag about hacking the local McDonald's computer and look *real* lame. That's happening every month at the HQ. Better yet, just wait for someone to mention one. Be too cool to bring it up to someone else.

Well, that's the end of the questions. I've tried to answer them as best I can. You may find my style of writing a little bit more confusing than I do. If this is the case, sit down in a chair and recite the first word that pops into your head until it becomes a meaningless sound. Then you can read this again.

end FAQ file

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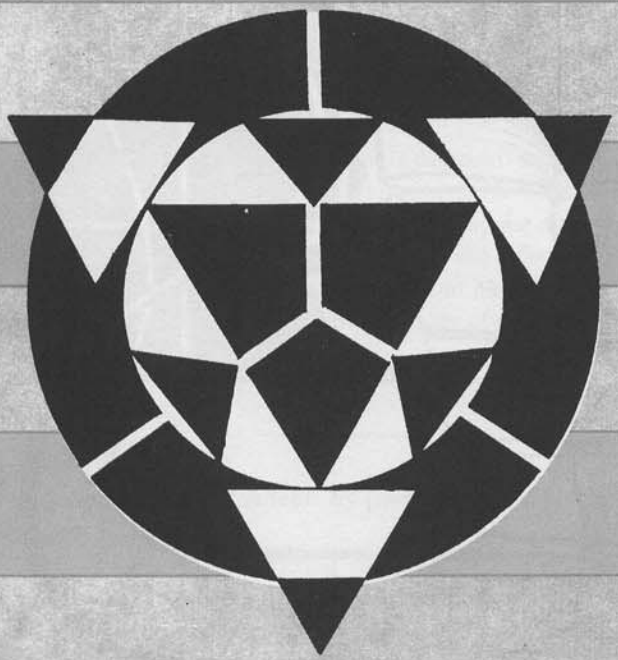
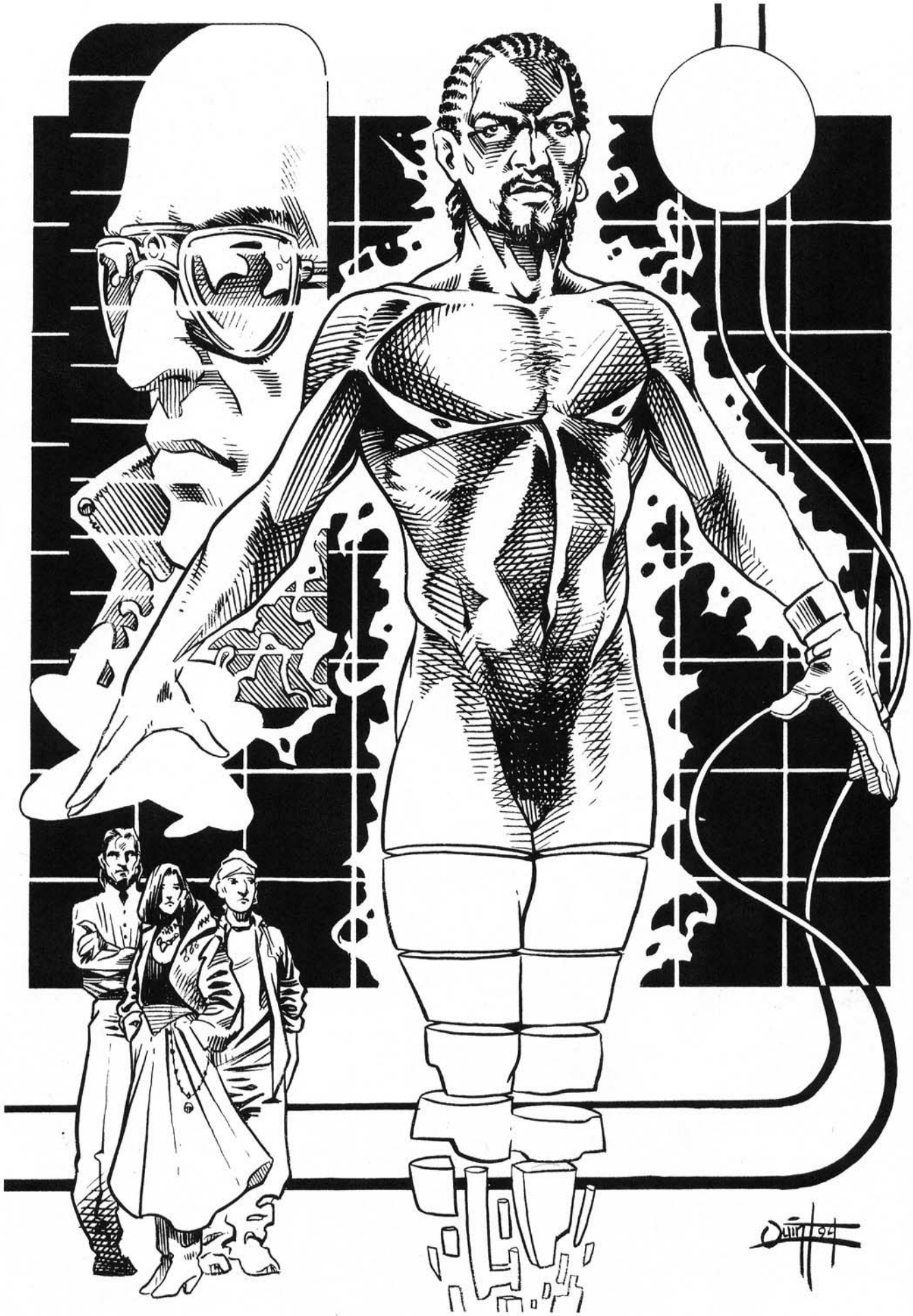




Chapter 1.0: Delusions of Grandeur

Sarcastic, mod. — Syn. scornful, mocking, ironical, satirical, taunting, severe, derisive, bitter, saucy, hostile, sneering, arrogant, cynical, corrosive, contemptuous, biting, harsh, grim

Sardonic, mod. — see sarcastic

— Webster's New World Thesaurus

If I were a member of one of the other Traditions, I wouldn't trust the 'depts either. Our beliefs are alien to all those who wallow in the mire of conservatism and tradition. We are subverting a whole generation of Sleepers to our ways and system; who wouldn't be wary of that kind of power?

— Electric Death, Virtual Adept master

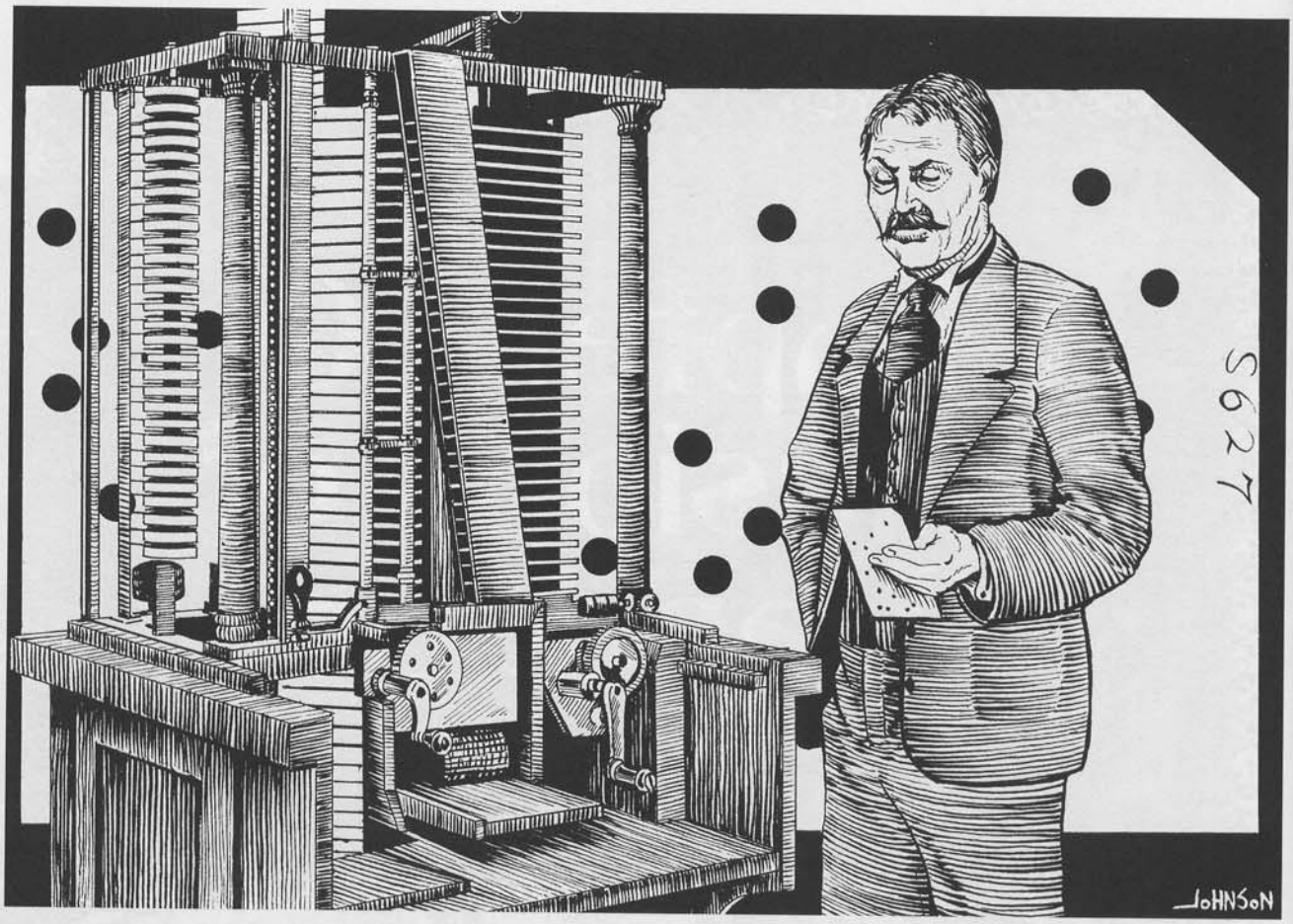
April 15, 1990

Memo on Virtual Adepts by Lars Mjolnir, Order of Hermes

Until recently, the Virtual Adepts have not proven themselves to be trustworthy allies. Many among our Traditions still regard them askance. The following papers show cause for our concern.

In this digital age of computers and technology, the Virtual Adepts have sought to understand reality in terms that can be interpreted easily by machines. To this end, they have formulated the theory that all of reality is made up of information, and that magick results when one manipulates that information. They use the virtual reality Net to prove their point, to demonstrate that consensual reality is not important, that only the information received by a person's senses is important. Some Masters may recall the fuss some years ago when the Virtual Adepts presented their "10th Sphere of Paradigm" argument to the Council some years ago. The particulars of this proposal (documented in the Council minutes, volume MXVI, pages 114-128) detail the Adepts' concept of information as an essential component of reality. The Council rejected this idea, but we are certain to hear more about it.

I have gathered correspondences from the roots of this Tradition until the present. I believe these documents tell the story much better than anything I could write. As far as I can tell, these letters and memos are genuine. The source of each, when available, is listed above the entry. This capsule history, I believe, shows that the Adepts are experts at manipulation and are not to be trusted.



The Foundations

January 15, 1850

From: The Honorable Sir Anthony Wainwright

RE: The Difference Engineers

I have completed my observations of the Difference Engineers, as per your request. This odd little clique has virtually no importance at the moment, save that they appear to be an offshoot of the Sons of Ether. Charles Babbage's mechanical computational machine fell short of practical applications, but these ingenious tinkerers have improved on the design and given it a steam-based powerplant. In their hands, it is now a capable calculator.

Their mastery over certain natural forces approaches what we would carefully call "magick." Their analogies to telegraph transmissions have given them an insight into the Correspondence effect that rivals that of the Seekers of the Void. They also seem to be of the opinion that a major technology is about to be unleashed upon the world that will be in every home, and greatly enhance our control capabilities. More about this later.

They also claim to have discovered a new sphere of influence. I scoffed at the idea, but I also listened to my subject. He said that the Difference Engineers have discovered the basis of the "Information Sphere." They had happened upon it while exploring the possibility of using the Difference Engine as a means of information storage and retrieval. After listening carefully, I am of the opinion that my interviewee was out of his mind. This seems to be a common trait.

One final note: The Difference Engineers have told me that they are 98% certain that a new technology will emerge within thirty years that will be installed in every home. This description sounds like some offshoot of the telegraph. If it is true, then we cannot afford to miss such an opportunity. I advise our honorable Guild partners to start work immediately on a way to promote this new technology. We must also make certain that people do not understand how it works. With one of these "telephonograph" devices in every home, there is a good chance that we may be able to monitor every word spoken in every household. We can stamp out subversion at its root, thus bringing ourselves further along our time table.

From: James "Gearhead" Peritone
To: The Convention Council
Date: July 20, 1880
RE: The Telephone

The Difference Engineers have been cloistered in many meetings since the invention of the telephone a few years ago. We have used the new device extensively, and we believe that it has a power and longevity not normally associated with technology. This device could redefine the way people look at technology, changing the world for the better.

Alexander Graham Bell is the man responsible for this device. Though one of the unenlightened Masses, Bell possesses an uncanny insight into strange phenomena, much like an un-Awakened Son of Ether. He began dabbling with the transmissions of sound with a device he made from an actual human cadaver's ear. He's most inventive!

The telephone has brought about some profound paradigm shifts in our organization here. We have actually taken to conversing mostly by telephone in what we call "conference connections," and we have abandoned our old concept of information stored within steam-driven contraptions. We have realized that information can only be quickly and accurately represented by electricity and electrical pulses. To this end, we have devised a system for representing information electrically. We are working with the Sons of Ether to build a prototype of this machine. We expect to have it finished by the turn of the century. Until then, we will continue to work with our engines, but we have already realized that they are obsolete.

We now have a request to submit to the Conventions. We have spent many hours pondering a question; many of us claim to have had a vision of a new Realm that has opened through this new device. We are asking your permission to begin experimentation with this Realm, if it exists. We believe that it exists "virtually," outside of normal consensual reality. Our best description at the moment of this new Realm is that it is the place where telephone conversations take place. We are also asking permission to change the name of our organization, due to our massive changes in philosophy. We would now like to be referred to as the Virtual Adepts.

10 June 1890

Dear Sirs:

In response to your demands that we achieve the following results by the specified times, I will address each concern separately. We have calculated the probability of each and come to these conclusions.

1) Flying machines by the turn of the century: Possible. — 90%
2) Tracking devices by 1920: Maybe — 60%
3) Reliable radios by 1920: Yes — 100%
4) Self-powered high-explosive bombs by 1950: Yes — 100%
5) Ways to hypnotize large groups of people by 1960: Maybe — 75%
6) Complete control over human population by 1980-1984: Definitely — 100%

Humbly yours, Eli Godwin, Virtual Adept

May 15th, 1899

From: James "Wirehead" Peritone

To: The Conventions

RE: Progress Report

When I last reported to you, I stated that we were undertaking a new project. This project has now borne fruit, and we have unveiled it to our fellows. It is what we call the electrical computer.

Through the use of the telephone and a special rote, we have duplicated our initial model and transferred it to all of our members across the continent. Although we know that it is against regulations to use such vulgar magick, we felt it was necessary to accomplish such a feat. Our old Difference Engines were breaking down due to friction and grit in the cogs. We desperately need to upgrade our equipment.

This electrical computer is not a thing we would want the normal populace to have at this point. We estimate that society will be ready for such a machine between fifty and sixty years from now. Meanwhile, we will continue to improve upon our design until it can be used for Technocracy purposes. It is good enough for our purposes, but extremely unfriendly to use at this point. The primary means of input is a series of thin balsa wood cards that we have punched our programs out on. Output operates by means of a specially enabled telegraph. It only outputs numbers at this point, but we are working on a system to represent letters not unlike the telegraph method.

Trouble

August 20, 1910

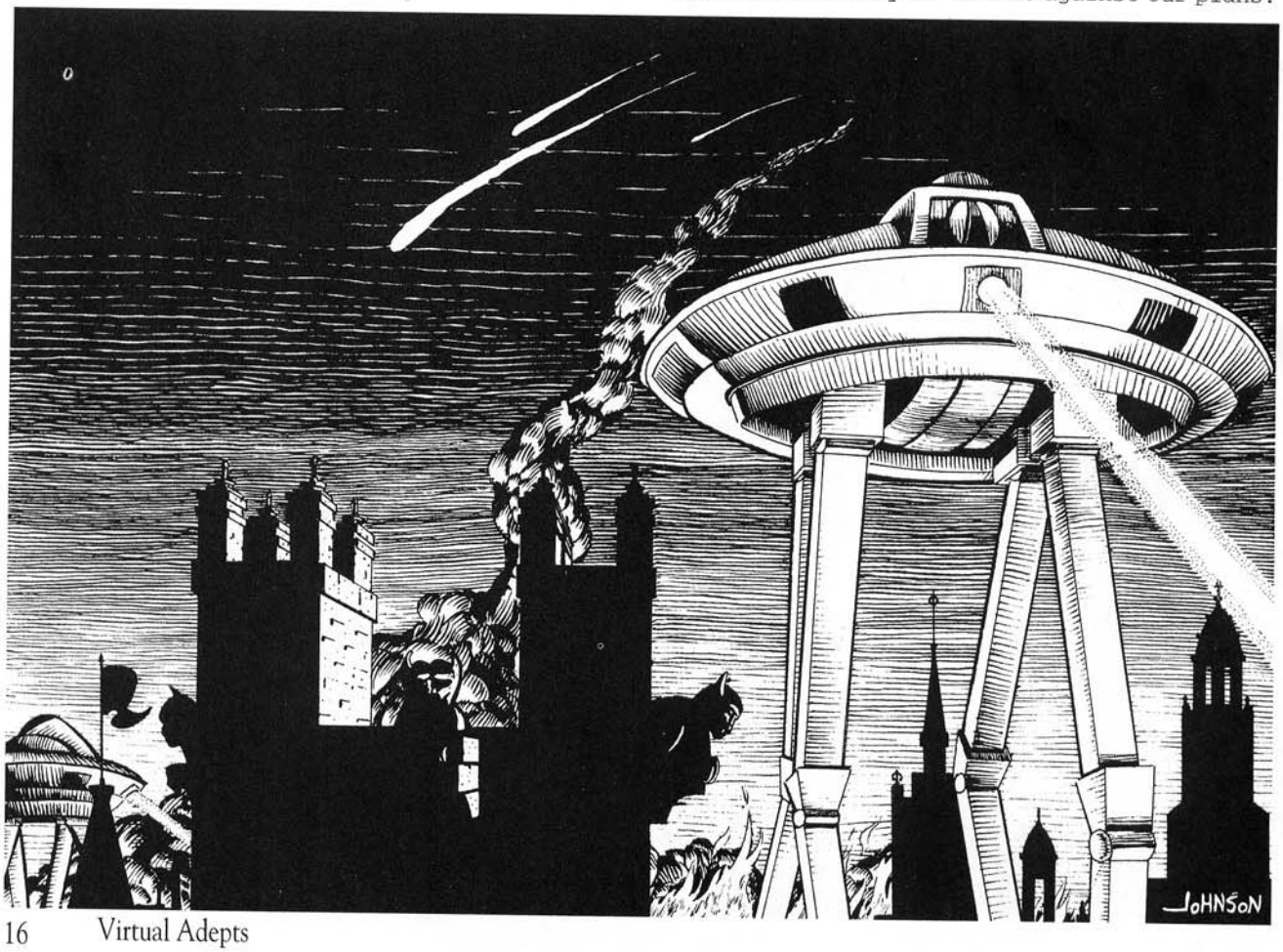
From: Iteration X

To: The Conventions

RE: Report on Science Fiction Literature

We have evidence that the Virtual Adepts are involved in "science fiction," among other forms of fiction, and have passed dangerous information on to the Masses. The stories of H.G. Wells have been especially revolutionary, and many believe that he shows a great deal of Adept influence. The Adepts wish to "engineer" society into new directions through ideas and warnings in popular fiction. Several times, we have had to rein in the Virtual Adepts with stern warnings because their stories were causing too much fancy in the minds of Sleepers. The Adepts have begun to view our Convention as a group of paranoids clinging tenuously to our power. They must be taught a lesson for the common good.

I believe that the Virtual Adepts are becoming more trouble than they are worth. We should continue to keep a tight rein on them. While their "science fiction" is a good way to prepare the Masses for what we have in store for them, it would take only a change in the writing style of the story to turn it against our plans.



These "science fiction" writers have come up with a number of good ideas, we must admit. One writer known as Verne had a useful one – a manned expedition to the moon. I believe that we should pursue this concept to demystify the stellar regions to the populace. The popular notion that the moon is made of green cheese is simply just too fanciful to be allowed.

March 20, 1915
From: James "Wirehead" Peritone
To: New World Order
RE: Zimmerman Telegram

Speaking in my official capacity, I must denounce your accusation that the Virtual Adepts engineered the Zimmerman Telegram. It is not our intention to destabilize the activities of any of the other Conventions. This document has obviously undermined your organization's careful maneuvering to weaken the European community.

Our new statistical experts state that the resulting War currently underway will have some very dire repercussions for Europe over the next thirty to sixty years. My suggestion to you is to stop seeking to lay the blame for your actions elsewhere. We are not inclined to do anything detrimental to our mutual goals.

March 20, 1915
From: James "Wirehead" Peritone
To: Members of the Virtual Adepts
RE: The Zimmerman Telegram

Our confederates in the other Conventions are not amused. I must warn you to act very cautiously. We have always been viewed as something of a loose cannon among the Conventions, and this telegram business has aroused even more suspicion than usual. Any hope that Europe will be unified through this War is asinine to say the least. However, now that it has begun, we should begin to make the most of it. And to whoever wrote that damned Telegram, I say this: next time, consider the explanations I must make to the other Conventions, agreed?

November 24, 1924
From: Gregory Heinz, Chaotician
To: James "Wirehead" Peritone
CC: The Conventions
RE: The Temperance Movement

I must report to you on the effects of the Temperance Movement in North America. A group of religious fanatics has managed to get a bill passed prohibiting alcohol sales in the U.S. This has many effects we may take advantage of:

1) There is 100% certainty that there is still demand for alcohol.

2) The Syndicate has the channels in place to distribute it through the Mafia.

3) There is a 75% chance that the upswing in criminal activity due to alcohol running (bootlegging) will pressure the government into action – a 100% chance if we pressure it.

4) There is a 60% chance that the people will accept this action as necessary and give up some constitutional rights for "the cause."

5) There is a 50% chance that the government agency in charge (the FBI) will achieve hero status among many impressionable young people.

6) This will lead to ambivalence when we start using this agency to monitor the activities of the people, with a 75% certainty overall.

I urge you to seize this opportunity now. A prime staging ground could be in Chicago, where illicit whiskey comes across the border from Canada by the hundreds of gallons. There is, however, one element in Chicago that will be hard to crack; there is something else going on there that throws an unknown variable into the equation. We hope it does not affect the solution to the formula too drastically. What this variable is, we do not know. We suggest some forays into Chicago to find the answer.

Social Engineering? The Second World War

From: Gregory Heinz, Chaotician
To: The Conventions
RE: The Stock Market Crash

We have been studying the effects of the Stock Market crash and we have come to a few conclusions.

1) The Stock Market system is flawed. It essentially works on feedback; any negative feedback, such as a dip in the prices of commodities, triggers a wild fluctuation.

2) This disaster may further disrupt the international economy. Germany may take a hard hit, as it is climbing out of its struggle to pay restitution for the Great War. Hopefully, their new leaders will be able to help them weather this depression.

3) This would be an ideal time to establish a government that could advise and control all world governments for the common good.

Please note that we are very rarely wrong in our predictions. Our track record has been superb, and the majority of the decisions based upon our data have been sound.

January 4, 1940

From: New World Order

To: The Conventions

RE: The War in Europe

Many of you have been following the War in Europe. Adolph Hitler seems to have found a feasible solution to his country's problems, economically speaking.

We here at the New World Order see this as an opportunity to unite the European governments under one flag, the swastika of Germany. Ultimately, such unification will lead to a single world government, as recommended by the Virtual Adepts in earlier communications.

We will call a symposium to discuss matters of import within a year.

October 15, 1941

From: Roger "NemaTrode" Thackery

To: The Conventions

RE: The War and Hitler

First, I would like to announce the death of James "Wirehead" Peritone. He was killed in a London flat that was bombed this past summer. I will be taking over as the liaison to the Conventions. As this is my first release, I do not relish telling you what I must.

The Virtual Adepts would like to take this opportunity to denounce the actions of Adolph Hitler and Germany. Many men of science have been persecuted and killed through the Nazi's technological ignorance. They also seem infected with a Nationalism that destroys any chance they have of progress. To them, all men are not equal. The "master race" and "Ubermensch" concepts are anathema to the professed goals of the Technocracy. Someone did not do the necessary research.

Second, reports and information we are receiving indicate that massive destruction of human life is underway in Poland and Germany. The objects of this genocide are Jews, whom the Nazis regard as inferior. We in the Virtual Adepts see this as a moral outrage of the highest proportions. We also condemn Iteration X's use of the situation to conduct experiments.

We Adepts are not without power, and we will make ourselves heard in the next few months if we must.

* * *

December 1, 1941

From: Roger "NemaTrode" Thackery

To: Virtual Adepts

RE: Japan

Our plot to get the U.S. involved in the war seems to be imminent. We have taken steps to ensure that all U.S. espionage data is either false or rejected by the government. The Japanese fleet is preparing at this moment to attack Hawaii. Since

Japan has treaties with Hitler, Germany will most assuredly declare war on the U.S. after the attack.

The U.S. must enter the war. That bastard Hitler must be stopped — at any cost. Please note that this information is extremely sensitive. If any of the other Conventions found out about our little plan, it would become difficult for any of us to lead normal lives.

January 20, 1944

From: Central Control

To: The Conventions

RE: World War II

We would like to announce a major shift in our position regarding Germany and the war now known as World War II. Thanks to information provided by the Virtual Adepts, we now have proof that the Germans have undertaken a massive search for magickal and mystical relics. Such relics are supposedly the birthright of the "Aryan Nation." This is unacceptable to us. The occult influences Hitler will bring with him during the unification of the European continent can only erode our position. Therefore, we are withdrawing our support for Hitler and placing it firmly behind the Allies.

Following our withdrawl, Hitler's defeat cannot be any more than a year or two away. He is beginning to stretch the resources of his war machine, and the combined efforts of the Conventions should halt him in his tracks.

You have your orders. This is by Technocracy mandate. Personal opinions mean nothing. We will tolerate no subversion in this matter. All Conventions will work for the defeat of Hitler.

— Central Control

The Adepts Rebel

February 17, 1945

From: Alan Turing

To: Roger Thackery

RE: The Enigma Codes

Roger,

We broke the Enigma codes a while back. I am expecting to have to explain how I did it once the war is over. To this effect, I've asked the Sons of Ether to construct a crude version of our electrical computer. This will be presented to the British government as "the Machine that cracked Enigma."

Of course, it will be dissected. Many will copy and improve on the design. I am expecting this. But Roger, I have a vision that goes far beyond this war. I have seen visions of the Virtual Realm in my dreams, the Realm where all points become one. We can achieve it in less than ten years if we work with the Sleepers.

I am also contemplating the possibility of intelligent machines. These machines would be of such a nature that a person would be unable to distinguish its output from that produced by a human being. I am still working on this concept.

The other Conventions will not like my vision. That is why we must keep this a secret for as long as possible. I know that the other Adepts will want to go forward with this project as quickly as I. I can only hope it doesn't destroy us in the process.

September 19, 1947

From: Jared Thorne, Iteration X

To: Central Control

RE: Alan Turing

I infiltrated a Virtual Adept conclave this day. It is not hard to do such a thing. They do not meet face to face, but rather through telephone systems and their computers. With the proper passwords, one can very easily eavesdrop, and even join in without fear of detection.

I am convinced that the Adept named Turing is dangerous. He is speaking of intelligent machines and a new idea he calls "virtual reality." While this idea on the whole is not bad, he is speaking of doing this within five years. These things are not planned on the Time Table for at least fifty to sixty years. A plan like Turing's could seriously destroy our Time Table beyond any hope of repair.

Many of the Virtual Adepts are behind Turing. They love him. He is now their virtual leader, their most "elite," as they say. Furthermore, they have been in touch with the Sons of Ether. These mages long ago joined the Traditions and are forbidden to be contacted. I do not know what the Virtual Adepts are up to, but it seems quite subversive.

* * *

December 12, 1950

From: The Syndicate

To: Alan Turing

RE: VR Work

It has come to our attention that you have been working on a project that you call "Virtual Reality." It is our opinion that this work is dangerous, and we order you to cease and desist at once. Failure to comply will bring heavy retribution upon you. We have private information that could irreparably damage your position in the British Government, and we will release it to them if you do not immediately comply.

Of this information, I can say that we have compromising photographs of you and another man. We have several sets of these photographs. Once you have ceased work, we will mail you all of our copies. Until then, be warned.

March 10, 1954

From: Central Control, NWO

To: Men in Black

You are hereby notified that Alan Turing has been determined to be a threat to the Technocracy. You are also hereby notified to terminate him with extreme prejudice. It seems that no amount of cajoling on our part will stop him from building his virtual reality machine. When you terminate Turing, if you find any electronic device in his possession you are to destroy it and bring the remains to us.

Any of his compatriots present at the time of your raid will also be subject to the terms of this memo. There are to be no witnesses.

June 20, 1955

From: The New World Order

To: The Conventions

RE: Grave happenings.

Things are not looking good.

We have been hurt tremendously by the treachery of the Virtual Adepts. It seems that they have taken every piece of information about us and by us, injected it into their "virtual reality", and promptly disappeared. Our contacts have not been able to find any trace of any Virtual Adept anywhere. Aside from a few stragglers now in our custody, the Adepts have disappeared.

At this time, we declare the Virtual Adepts enemies of the Technocracy. Any contact with them is forbidden and punishable by death. Any Adept captured is to be terminated with extreme prejudice. There will be no exceptions.

The Time Table has been shattered. We have no choice but to revise it. Many items on the Time Table will be pushed back for years. All of this is due to their cowardice and insane treachery. Their acts of treason will not go unpunished.

Many of the Adepts we have caught are being pumped for information. They are not talking. For this reason, any future Adepts caught will be killed. We are not interested in the means of execution, but we prefer that it be done slowly and painfully, as an example to others.

The Virtual Adepts join the Traditions

September 23rd, 1959

From: Julian Spence, Son of Ether

To: The Council of Traditions

RE: The Virtual Adepts

We of the Sons of Ether have been in contact with the former Technocracy Convention known as the Virtual Adepts. The Adepts have proven themselves to be useful to us, providing us with information that we had no idea existed. We believe that the Virtual Adepts would be a worthwhile addition to the Traditions, and that the relationship would be mutually beneficial. The Adepts must stop their years of running from their former Associates. And, as we know, our Council has been one seat short since the Ahl-i-Batin left some years back. We need a ninth Tradition for the Council; the Virtual Adepts need sanctuary. I believe that we have a common cause.

We have been asked to make an informative proposal to the Council of Traditions, in exchange for the Adepts' admission into the Traditions. Said proposal includes the Time Table of the Technocracy, projects in planning, and detailed reports on the Iteration X Machine Realm, Autocthonia. These have been provided to me by Roger Thackery of the Virtual Adepts. We anxiously await your answer.

July 10th, 1961

From: The Council of Nine

To: The Virtual Adepts

RE: The Traditions

We of the Traditions hereby extend to you an offer of amnesty and friendship in our organization. We have allocated resources to the inclusion of your group into our Council of Traditions. The following terms will be met:

1) Your group will be on a probationary period of five (5) years.

2) You will turn over to us as much information as possible on Technocracy plans.

3) You will occupy the ninth seat on the Council of Nine, adopting as your Sphere the element of Correspondence (with which, I am told, you are intimately familiar).

4) You will provide us with regular reports on activities your group is conducting until the probationary period expires.

July 11th, 1961

From: Roger Thackery

To: The Council of Traditions

RE: Invitation

We accept.

* * *

February 10, 1979

From: Roger Thackery

To: The Traditions

RE: The Hyper Intelligence Tech Mark IV

We have been following reports of mages attacked by machine-like humanoids in the past few months, and we have discovered the following. An up-and-coming Adept named Dante has brought me information he captured from Technocracy databanks in a daring raid. This particularly involves the Hyper Intelligence Tech Mark IV, or HIT Mark.

Dante showed me the construction plans he liberated from the central Iteration X computer. I expect them to change their plans as soon as they find out we have them, but the plans should provide us with some advantage regardless. The design specs for this machine involve vat-grown flesh placed over an armature made of an alloy of adamantine and buckminsterfullerite. As you may know, this combination has an extremely high resistance to normal magick. We are analyzing this new threat to the Traditions in hopes of finding a weakness.

January 14, 1984

From: Erik Trent, Cult of Ecstasy

To: Roger Thackery, Virtual Adept

RE: New Year's Party

Okay, guys, the "Big Brother is watching you" virus was funny. The hallucinogenic spring water was amusing. The reprogrammed HIT Marks dancing the soft-shoe were impressive, I'll grant you, and re-routing the Progenitor Quintessence-drain into the hospital life-support systems was a stroke of genius. But scrambling the NORAD channels and flashing brain-burning subliminals from every terminal in Advanced Technologies Incorporated was not only reckless and cruel, it was stupid! Black Hats and Skin Jobs have been combing the streets since New Year's. We've lost two good mates in my cabal alone, and a lot of Sleepers have been hurt as well. You may have kicked the Pogrom up another notch. Congratulations, assholes! You guys are a menace!

Ever since you joined the Council, you Netheads have played both ends against the middle and split whenever the shit got thick. Well, don't call us for help again, bozos. We should never have let you in! I hope the HIT Marks blow you all to hell!

— Best Regards, Erik Trent

January 20th, 1984

From: Bank of Maryland Collections Dept.

To: Erik Trent

— Final Warning —

Dear Mr. Trent;

Our records indicate that your credit account is over six months overdue and that the past-due balance exceeds $2,000. Our efforts to contact you have been unsuccessful. If you do not contact us within the next 48 hours, we will be forced to bring legal action against you. Please contact us at the number below.

24-hour service line: 1-800-292-1819

Thank you for your patronage.

Lydia McKathaway, Collections Representative, Bank of Maryland

Chapter 2.0: Society of Loners

Anarchy, n. 1. [Disorder] — Syn. turmoil, chaos, mob rule; see disorder

2. [Absence of government] — Syn. political nihilism, disregard for law, lawlessness, avowed hostility to government.

— Webster's New World Thesaurus

Never let 'em see you sweat!

— Television advertisement

From: Sharri Powell, Amhurst Coven

To: Brian Hastings

Blessed be!

I'm passing you a few of my notes gathered on my little "field trip" with the Virtual Adepts. As of now, they still consider me one of their own; I couldn't get some of the info that I've recovered otherwise. I don't even want to think of what would happen to me if they found me out. I'm trusting you, Brian! Do not, under any circumstances, let this letter out of your sight and don't transfer it onto any form of computer or word processor. I know that the Adepts are supposed to be our allies, but I don't think they consider anyone but the Frankensteins to be their friends.

I think that we, of all Traditions, can understand their attitude. The Black Hats have a heavy grudge against the Netheads, so the Adepts have a right to the chips on their shoulders. They really aren't bad guys once you get to know them. All the same, I realize that we've got to keep our own backs covered. Hence, this letter. If nothing else, this data might give us an edge later if we need it.

All of this is stuff I managed to pick up over the last six months. I'm keeping my cover for now and might have more to report in a month or so. The Adepts put up a big front, but they actually play things pretty close to the chest. I think they'd shit if they knew how much I've discovered, but then again, they're the ones who're always saying that information wants to be free! Anyway, here's what I've got:

soc.culture

If you're so special
Why aren't you dead?

—The Breeders, "i just wanna get along"

The Virtual Adepts have their own distinct and strange social structure. Don't let the "computer geek" facade fool you — they do have a fellowship. It just operates by unique rules.

Status & Meetings

Rank in the Adepts is gauged by how competent a person is. The higher an Adept is in ability, the more prestige she has.

Ability isn't always an easy thing to judge. Reality tampering and Net-hacking are dangerous practices; a good brag can confer almost as much status as the deed itself. Adepts are masters of braggery — so much so that many do it unconsciously. Pride is second nature to the Adepts. If an Adept explains a procedure to destroy the databanks of the Progenitors, few would be suicidal enough to test the theory. However, if the idea sounds plausible enough, and if the Adept can show proof of the raid by producing an operator's manual or some such, then that particular Adept wins some grudging respect and status. He would still have that respect if others later found out that he had actually collected his "proof" from the trashcans outside the building in the physical world.

A good many Virtual Adepts avoid physical contact with anyone. They figure that they can get anything they want done from the comfort and privacy of their lairs. When most Adepts are seen in public, it's usually a clever ruse. Many detest personal contact so much that they program sophisticated holograms that act as proxies. These holograms often project a holographic simulacrum through Correspondence, and only function in close proximity to some kind of technology. The simulacrums aren't particularly vulgar magick, as long as some Sleeper doesn't shake hands with one.

Other than ability, there is no real power structure to any Virtual Adept faction. It's largely a popularity contest. A powerful Virtual Adept may call a meeting and expect at least half of the Adepts in the world to attend, while a small-time operator might "invite" the same number through lies and innuendo. Most of the Adepts gather twice a year in reality at a central location to meet and "put a face" to those people they talk to over the wires. These meetings usually begin with impassioned ranting about rights and theories, then turn gradually into debaucheries that would arouse a Cultist of Ecstasy. Few outside the Tradition attend without an invitation; I was the only non-Adept that I could recognize. These parties, I think, blow off some of the steam that comes from being a persecuted minority.

Among the Traditions, the Virtual Adepts are second only to the Cult of Ecstasy in the use of perception-altering chemicals. They use plenty of stimulants and toy around with drugs reputed to make a person smarter. These "smart drugs" are usually just vitamin supplements, but a few are experimental medicines developed for treating Alzheimer's Disease or narcolepsy. This abuse, I think, can be attributed to the Tradition's respect for superhuman ability. Ability is practically synonymous with intelligence to the Adepts. Most of the mages who dabble in this area end up burning themselves out very quickly, and to that end most drug users are looked upon with disdain by their "straight" counterparts. A good many of the Adepts who choose not to experiment with drugs fear correctly that smart drugs are products of the Progenitors, created to rot the Adepts from within. More and more Adepts are beginning to see drug use as a curse rather than a blessing.

The Virtual Adepts meet twice a year at the Crystal Palace, the Tradition's main Chantry, to discuss combat strategies. These meetings have no real structure, and consist mostly of ranting and trophy-waving by Adepts who've struck a blow against the Technocracy. These meetings focus the Tradition members toward their common goals — the raising of consciousness and the downing of the Technocracy. Because the meetings occur in virtual reality, not realspace, most of the Adepts in the World can attend. Meeting times are often posted with stolen access codes in the virtual conclave called the Spy's Demise. Some Adepts even confer in the Demise itself, but that's a risky proposition. The place is heavily watched.

Handles, Icons, Lames and Elites

Most Adepts do not use their real names. Instead, they come up with short, easy-to-remember "handles" to identify themselves. This helps preserve their anonymity and allows them to disassociate themselves from their mundane lives. Like the icons they create in virtual reality, these handles let the Adepts live out fantasy lives.

Netheads use handles when conferring in chat mode — "talking" online like Sleepers do. Most Adepts can also project their consciousnesses or even their physical bodies into the Net, creating "icons" of themselves. These icons can adopt the form of anything the creator desires, within reason, although identification codes make outright deception difficult. Net projection takes some degree of time, skill and risk, so hacker mages simply chat online unless there's some reason to do otherwise.

This anonymity forms a cornerstone in the Adepts' anarchistic social structure. Because a mage in virtual reality can shuffle identities with ease, Adepts can speak their minds without fear of alienation. Many of the Adepts

I've met are pretty shy people in person, but they let fly with all kinds of outrageousness when they're in the Net.

Since Virtual Adepts tend to base social structure on ability, they have coined a term for extraordinarily gifted people — "elite." Adepts at the bottom of the totem pole or who have otherwise screwed up are called "losers," "rodents," "posers" or, worst of all, "lame."

These distinctions are simultaneously tongue-in-cheek and serious. To an Adept, eliteness is an epitome, the be-all and end-all of everything. "Eliteness" defies words, but most Adepts will rant for hours on the subject when asked about it. Certain factions of the Virtual Adepts, reacting to these fervent ravings, ridicule eliteness; they still cherish it, but realize that pride alone will not make them elite — they'll achieve immortality and eliteness without forcing everyone else to acknowledge it.

The flip side of eliteness is being lame. All kinds of things can make one lame — misuse of magick, stupid or excessive flaming, bragging beyond your proven ability, lying online (and getting caught), breaking your word to another Adept, pulling off petty pranks as if they were a big deal. An Adept marked by lameness can only redeem himself with some spectacular stunt. This mockery pushes Adepts to try harder — not a bad thing when everyone's against you. At the same time, much of the posturing struck me as a pretentious waste of time and effort. It seems to work for them, though. I guess that's what matters.

For the record, an Adept who sells out to the Technocracy isn't lame; he's dead.

Protocols

The Hacker's Code of Ethics

The Virtual Adepts remember their Sleeper roots and the hacker subculture that so many sprang from, and live by a loose code that dictates a certain moral conduct more than anything else. Most Adepts follow this code — those who do not are regarded as "lames." These codes have been distilled over the years by many different Adept groups, but can be traced back to the turn of the century and the invention of the telephone.

The social structure of the Virtual Adepts is held together by these loose codes, a common passion for techno-magick and a pervasive us-against-the-world siege mentality. Being a solitary group, Virtual Adepts share few customs. They do, however, have a few quirks worth mentioning.

Virtual Adepts tend to look for the quickest way to do anything; their handwriting reflects this — it's usually unintelligible. Most Adepts prefer to type and avoid handwriting altogether. When typing, they often spell words with sound-alike letters and numbers, as opposed to the common spellings. This, I'm told, reduces the time spent tying and makes transmissions harder to crack. Many agencies scan computer document for certain "key words"; if those words are "misspelled", the scan misses them. Many hacker mages change their handles often for the same reason.

The Adepts have many strange holidays that don't coincide with other acknowledged holidays. They celebrate the end of World War II, the invention of the telephone and the birth-and-death days of their idol Alan Turing (the latter is called "Net Day," for some obscure reason), but their biggest parties occur on dates gleaned from science fiction books. As we all know, most of the Adepts went nuts during 1984, tossing around the "Big Brother is Watching You" thing like a volleyball, even going so far as inserting references of it into TV commercials. Most Virtual Adepts host individual holiday parties, usually in Netspace; many invite friends from other Traditions just to freak them out.

The Net

You will look into a computer screen and see reality.... And your computer's screen is transformed, into a clear surface with brilliant, multi-colored life unfolding just beyond it. People will stop looking at their computer screens and start gazing into them.

— David Gelernter, *Mirror Worlds*

Most Virtual Adepts interact solely in the Virtual Reality Net, an odd Realm that's neither here nor there, but everywhere at once. The Net, which some also call the Digital Web, or simply the Web, is the real home to most Adepts, since Netheads so rarely meet face to face.

The Mighty Hacker Commandments

1 — Information should be free. If J. Random Hacker finds out a piece of information that is not previously known, he disseminates it amongst his colleagues.

2 — Data is not to be destroyed. Learn from what you see, but do not destroy it. Leave it for others to see.

3 — Never let them know you're there. All hackers take great pains to cover their tracks in any system. This usually means learning as much about the system in question as possible. This is one of the many exceptions to rule number two — you may have to destroy data to cover up the electronic paper trail you've created.

4 — Never stop learning. There's always something new to learn. Technology moves so fast that there's no way you can stop learning and stay on top of everything.

5 — Spread the word. Open the eyes of everyone around you, or at least try. The Technocracy has the guns, but we can still have the numbers.

This Net is immense; the Virtual Adepts aren't the only ones wandering around there. Mages from other Traditions (and Technocracy mages, too) hang out in the Net as well, though the Adepts are the undisputed masters of this domain. The Net includes sensual feedback for all sensations — touch, hearing, sight, smell — and I can attest that these sensations are almost as vivid as the real thing. There are even optional settings for taste. Most Adepts jokingly set their icons to taste like cooked chicken. Don't ask me how I found this out.

Disputes

Fights are rare. When they do occur, they rarely inflict permanent damage. They usually involve heated arguments in virtual reality, but are often so intense that when viewed from a distance they look as though the contestants are hurling bolts of fire at each other. This may have evolved from early chat programs, in which the constant arguments were called "flames"; passionately arguing a ludicrous point for a stupid cause is often called "flaming" someone. The Adept who devised this contest had a sense of humor.

Another form of combat the Virtual Adepts practice is not so pleasant. It usually involves virus programs and can take a number of days or weeks to decide the outcome. This form of combat is called "core wars," and it derives from an ancient hacker ritual. A supercomputer is set up with two virus programs. Each program is designed to wrest as much time as possible from the central processing unit of the computer while trying to erase the other program from the computer's RAM. Virtual Adepts who accidentally step into a computer that a core war is being run on barely escape with their life patterns intact. Survivors describe the experience as "terrifying," and tell of vast armies of hallucinatory skeletons or spaceships combats. Some fun!

Flame Wars and Core Wars

Flame wars often erupt spontaneously, usually beginning with a string of insults and digressing from there. These insults (or particularly good points scored in an argument) take on the appearance of bolts of fire. The better the insult or rebuttal, the bigger and brighter the flame. This flame is purely symbolic and does no damage. Other Adepts, drawn by the display, often watch the debate and pick the winner. If the flamers are equally lame, the observers may simply flame both of them en masse. This will not usually damage the offenders, but often brands their icons with a glow that lasts for days, singling them out as lame.

Flame wars should be roleplayed when possible, with the other players judging the winner. A straight system for flame wars could entail resisted rolls of Manipulation or Wits + either Expression or some other Ability related to the argument at hand (Wits + Technology, for example, if the flame war centers around a technical dispute). Using magick during a flame war is not only bad form, but may be considered an attack to be met with real force.

Core wars are more serious, requiring a formal challenge and acceptance. Each Adept invests all of his immediately available Quintessence into creating a virtual supercomputer ("refueling" is not allowed), then "ties" his Avatar into the computer's works. Each Adept then creates a virus using Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 8. The more successes the Adept scores, the more powerful the virus is. The contestants then charge their viruses with the Net's free Quintessence (Prime 3) and set them loose inside the computer. Charging the virus is not essential, but does help the virus survive the coming battle.

The war is run as separate extended actions, one for each combatant. The battling Adepts roll Avatar + Computer (yes, this is an unusual kind of roll). The first contestant to score 25 successes against difficulty 9 wins. Each point of success in virus-creation adds one success to the extended roll, and each five points of Quintessence channeled into the virus during creation adds one more success. These rolls are made three times per game day. Core wars can take a while.

Because the mages tie their Avatars into the computer, they may take real damage from a core war. Each botch causes one Health Level's worth of non-aggravated damage. Double botches cost a point from the Adept's Avatar; this damage heals like regular damage, but cannot be soaked or healed with magick. The loser of a core war likewise loses a temporary point of Avatar *and* takes a level of damage — these fights are serious business.

soc.philosophies

No, I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered as patriots.

— Republican Presidential Nominee (1988) George Bush

The Virtual Adepts are one of the most fragmented of the Traditions. All Adepts, however, believe that reality is composed entirely of information, that all places are really one and the same and only the information we perceive makes them seem different. Among the various Adept legions (see below), this belief takes radically different forms. The Cyberpunk belief that information wants to be free contrasts sharply against the Chaoticians' theory that information should be reduced to chaos.

Information

Information is the model upon which the Virtual Adepts reshape reality. They are masters of engineering information to their own ends, and claim that they taught the N.W.O. everything the Convention knows. Ironically enough, the Technocracy used some of what they learned from the Virtual Adepts to literally write the Adept Alan Turing out of history. I'm sure that you remember the uproar the Adepts caused about six years ago when they proposed that "Tenth Sphere of Paradigm" concept, that idea that information itself is a natural and metaphysical element of reality, to the Council of Nine. They had some good arguments, I'm told, but it'll be a cold day in hell before they get the concept past the Order of Hermes!

The real problem with this kind of magick is that Paradox (or Entropy, I'm not sure which) accumulates in any collection of data over time, allowing suppressed information to escape. Each faction views this effect differently. While the Cyberpunks maintain that the information wants to escape and has a will of its own, the Chaoticians argue that Entropy takes hold of the magick that maintains data in recognizable form and allows that information to leak out.

The power of this philosophy should not be underestimated. Few Sleepers (or Awakened, for that matter) question the information force-fed to them daily by both the Technocracy and the mass media in general. When testing a new Disciple, many Virtual Adepts like to quote Kurt Vonnegut, telling the recruit that they are the only sentient being with free will in the universe — that everyone else is being manipulated by a higher power to see exactly what they will do with that free will. By observing how the subject reacts to this statement, the mentor can get an insight into the prospective mage's head.

Computers

Most Adepts tend to be very frugal, with the exception of one possession: their computer. They usually spend extravagant amounts of time, effort and money in order to maintain and perfect their machine. Each Adept's computer is unique, often unusable by anybody but the Adept who programmed it. If an Adept is truly elite, as they say, he can use any computer in existence.

Adepts tend to be very animistic about their computers. They will talk to them, give them names, and even swear or hit them if they don't perform correctly. This leads to some amusing misconceptions from the other Traditions, especially the Dreamspeakers, some of whom supposedly use computers with spirits bound inside them. Very few Adepts really believe that their computers have actual souls —they prefer to think of a computer as a life-form without a soul or an Avatar, a life-form that the Adept herself completes. Some hacker mages add so much programming and knowledge that the computer and the mage become almost indistinguishable from each other; the relationship becomes symbiotic, with each "partner" needing the other to feel safe and secure. It sounds weird, but just consider these magickal computers as the familiars of the mages who use them.

Avatars

As we all know, our Avatars guide the paths we take. The Virtual Adepts usually pick and choose the Sleepers they Awaken and tend to follow certain profiles.

Dynamic essence predominates among the hacker mages. These visionaries strive to "upgrade" reality, either by "reprogramming" this one or establishing another. The Digital Web demonstrates the Tradition's success with the latter approach. Although Questing Virtual Adepts are less common, they do exist. The Questing Virtual Adept usually has the vision to change the world, but aspires to goals that even Masters cannot attain.

There are few Pattern mages within the Tradition, and I have yet to hear of one who sounds like a Primordial type. My guess is that these Technomancers have filtered too much of the Primal Essence out of their systems, though the Dynamic forces within them keep them from becoming static like their Technocratic cousins.

Phraseology note: Yes, the Virtual Adepts and their friends the Franken... I mean, the Sons of Ether, can be properly called Technomancers, although they detest the phrase. Their magick flows from their Avatars through their technology. Their attitude sets them apart from the Technocracy, but their methodology remains the same.

Awakening & Initiation

Virtual Adepts don't usually Awaken by accident. Most Awakenings are brought about when a cabal or powerful Virtual Adept discovers some Sleeper with great potential. The Sleeper is followed for a number of years;

when the time is right, her "mentor" begins to feed her information pertaining to magick and the philosophy of the Virtual Adepts. If the subject responds favorably, more information is fed to her. If not, then contact is broken off. One Adept told me that her Avatar itself spoke to her via a chat line (talk about hearing voices!), and I've heard of others who Awaken spontaneously while patched into virtual reality. In any case, the Tradition does at least *try* to check out new members at the door.

Once the prospective Adept is in the right frame of mind, the "mentor" visits her and demonstrates the power that lies within her. By this point, the newly Awakened Adept merely learns how to focus her power through the computer or some other foci.

The mentor then will spend as long as he decides with the pupil, training her in the correct use of the Correspondence Sphere and five simple rotes. These rotes vary, but all Adepts consider five to be a special number, the minimum number of rotes a Virtual Adept must know.

The training period of a Virtual Adept lasts approximately two months; at the end of this time, the mentor presents the new Adept to others attending the monthly Chantry meeting. At this time, the Adept will either choose or be given a handle and limited access to the Main Chantry.

Sleepers

Most Virtual Adepts share a studied ambivalence towards Sleepers, or "end-users" as they call them. Adepts they generally avoid associating with end-users, but remain dedicated to helping them nonetheless.

One need only look to the Tradition's founders to understand this attitude. Babbage and Bell both wanted their inventions to change the world, but couldn't comprehend why other people didn't understand how such contraptions worked. Adepts are often so intelligent that other people can't hold conversations with them without getting lost. For this reason, the Adepts are generally loners. The flip side to this is that they're smart enough to realize (somewhat vainly) that Sleepers can't possibly take care of themselves. For this reason, the Adepts are dedicated as a whole to bring Enlightenment and Ascension to as many end-users as possible (see "Hacker Ethic #5"). Although Adepts know they work for the common good, they often end up detesting those they are pledged to protect.

soc.legions

You reap what you sow
Put your face to the ground
Here come the marching men
Your colors wrapped around
— Sisters of Mercy, "Colours"

Even loners form cliques; some Virtual Adepts call theirs "legions," with tongues planted rather firmly in cheek. Many of these Virtual Adepts' legions subdivide even further into cliques of two to five Adepts. These groups usually take on imposing names. These names aren't really relevant to anything, and judging the power of a group by its name is dangerous. Many mages have disappeared after accidentally insulting a group with a silly-sounding name.

The legion subcultures aren't universal by any means, but provide as clear a picture of these cybernetic anarchists as we're ever likely to get.

Cyberpunks

Dark angels in the attic
Sixth sense stockpiled in the cellar
And the ladder is broken
Memories sleep in dust
This shelter is doubtful...
— Voivod, "Into My Hypercube"

In the early 1980's, a new type of science fiction caught on among Sleepers and mages alike. Dubbed "cyberpunk" by a writer from Austin, Texas, this nihilistic genre showed a bleak vision of a future sprawl dominated by greedy megacorporations. Films like *Blade Runner*, *Brazil* and *Tron* spread some of these cyberpunk ideas into popular culture, albeit in a watered-down form. Most Sleepers regard cyberpunk as paranoid fantasy. The Virtual Adepts, who claim at least partial credit for the genre, regard it as a wake-up call.

After the Adepts defected, the Technocracy lashed out at anything they thought might be a Virtual Adept stronghold. When personal computers became easily accessible tools in clever hands, the Black Hats figured that they had found their former comrades. Under the guise of "national security," governments rounded up hackers and computer jockeys, many of whom had less than nothing to do with the Adepts, by the score. Popular opinion, too, was turned against hackers — movies depicted them as anti-heroes, not really meaning any harm but causing trouble just the same.

Egged on by the New World Order, government agencies sidestepped their own laws to crack down on computer hackers, while scientists in the employ of you-know-who ridiculed the cyberpunk genre. The genre caught on anyway, and many fans embrace technology while watching out for "Big Brother". A new generation is using the Technocracy's tools against them, and the Cyberpunks stand at their forefront.

The Cyberpunks are typically free-for-all mercenaries, burning out on drugs and choline enhancers while coding rotes all night. Most would prefer to live inside the computer for the rest of their lives, disdainfully cursing the 'meat' of their physical bodies. They don't normally associate in groups, but are fearsome to behold when they do. Very few computer systems can resist the combined assault of several Virtual Adepts Cyberpunks.

Their philosophy of magick is as crude as their methods. A typical Cyberpunk will use Force, Matter and Correspondence magick in as vulgar a fashion as possible, not because he enjoys it but because he lacks the imagination to do anything else. For technical wizards, Cyberpunks are damned crude.

Paradox seems not to matter much to the Cyberpunks. To them, their own existence is a huge paradox. They purposefully try to accumulate dangerous amounts of Paradox, then expend it in horrifying ways that change them forever. Hence, many Cyberpunks look rather ragged; their icons often have pieces of non-functional machinery projecting from them. Cyberpunks with severe Paradox flaws may actually have this happen to their real bodies! While it's hard to conceal, many seem to enjoy this look.

For all their posturing, this legion relies heavily upon rotes and programs. While most other legions disdain wholesale use of rotes, the Cyberpunks view them as just another shortcut to get things done. They collect rotes religiously, just to have them "just in case." While some legions view rote-use as a holdover from their days in the Technocracy, when creativity was stifled and doing things by the accepted norm was the rule and not the exception, the Cyberpunks view it as not having to re-invent the wheel.

Cypherpunks

Do you feel the power
Baptized in electronic water
Prodigal sons and beautiful daughters
With smiling bows and rosy cheeks
And the righteous bath,
Death to the freaks
— Oingo Boingo, "New Generation"

The Cypherpunks emerged in the late eighties as a reaction to the aforementioned hacker crackdowns. They believe in protecting themselves and their data as much as possible, and have developed encryption codes and security systems for their Chantries beyond anything seen by the NSA. They have written protection rotes, similar to these codes, that can stop bullets, scramble voices, and encrypt their very thoughts.

Cypherpunks aren't nearly as crude as the Cyberpunks, but still aren't as refined as they'd like to be. They're actually an offshoot of the Cyberpunks, retaining the reckless abandon of their colleagues. They tend to be far more subtle than the others, though, and concentrate more on information-gathering and protection than on mayhem. While Cypherpunks still enjoy vulgar magick, they use it with more finesse. They've got an annoying tendency to spend Paradox as fast as they accumulate it, creating a problem for those around them. Unlike their more destructive kin, the Cypherpunks prefer Mind and Matter magick to raw Force.

In ordinary conversation, the Cypherpunks I've met are much more outgoing than your average Adept. They will usually slag your opinions and take up a contrary position just to spite you. This is the Cypherpunks' usual style — they claim they're trying to make you consider all the possibilities, rather than simply accept everything at face value. Usually, they only succeed in pissing people off.

Chaoticians

When prison stocks are iron and have no
place for the head, the prisoner is doubly
in trouble...
If you try to hold up the gate and door of a
falling house,
You will also be in trouble.
— Zen Koan

The Chaoticians are an altogether different breed of Virtual Adept. While the Cypher-and-Cyberpunks have very similar artistic philosophies, the Chaoticians are cold and calculating scientists. They believe that the information that makes up reality is too complex to manipulate directly, and therefore must be analyzed and controlled by probabilities. These Adepts study Entropy heavily.

The Chaoticians get their name from the theories that so many of them hold dear. Chaos theory is very important to the Chaoticians — they view the coming Ascension as the embodiment of chaos theory. When any system becomes too complex, the theory goes, it will ultimately break down. This is what the Chaoticians believe is happening to reality — they feel that this world is rapidly coming apart at the seams. This legion includes many of the Adepts seeking to reformat reality ASAP.

Chaoticians are master mathematicians, fiddling with numbers to make them say whatever they want. Most Adepts will agree that a Chaotician can demonstrate that pi equals four and that the magic bullet theory is true. Through bizarre mathematical warpings, Chaoticians can cause virtually any event to happen. They don't need full-blown computers as foci; they use fancy scientific calculators instead.

These Adepts aren't as plentiful as the "regular" variety, but they make up for their scarcity with subtlety. Chaoticians rarely venture into the Net. Most Chaoticians are skilled at coincidental magick, a marked contrast with the "punk" legions, who consider creative Paradox to be some sort of contest. The Chaoticians I've spoken to prefer

the random power surge to the all-out attack, and regard other legions as boorish and crass.

Reality Hackers

I'd like to turn the whole world on
Just for a moment
Just for a moment...
— Danielle Dax, "Tomorrow Never Knows"

The Reality Hackers are the newest, smallest and most unique faction among the Virtual Adepts. Unlike many of their brethren, the Reality Hackers have little or no interest in exploring virtual visions of reality through the Digital Web. They do not find BBS chatter or computer hacking appealing. Instead, this legion uses magick and high-tech computers to hack an entirely different kind of information system: the universe.

The Reality Hackers believe the universe to be the most intricate and powerful network ever created, simply made up of a series of complex codes — codes that were made to be broken. Ergo, the universe, and all life with it, is ripe for hacking. This faction preaches that for one to Ascend, one must look without, not within.

Naturally, this philosophy has been the topic of many a heated discussion within the Tradition; some feel that this faction refuses not only the power and tools they've been granted, but everything that the Virtual Adepts stand for and hope to one day achieve. Still other Adepts praise the Reality Hackers for their ingenuity. The debate is sure to continue for a very long time.

Life Hacking

The Reality Hackers perceive the Earth as a giant network linked to millions of other networks comprising the intergalactic network of the cosmos. Each city of the Earth is viewed as a network wherein may be found millions of systems, or people, to be cracked and manipulated. Some powerful Reality Hackers reputedly use a secret rote to hack into people if they have a bit of genetic material from the subject in question. This frightening ability allows them to tune their foci to the genetic "code" of the individual and reprogram his brain using the Mind Sphere. I've heard that Reality Hackers can reprogram a body to produce hallucinogenic compounds or deadly toxins spontaneously, as a result of reformatting the way the body works. I've even heard speculation that these mages may, by using this rote, effectively time travel into the past by using old genetic material and "taking control" of a person long dead. Although this seems nothing more than a dark whisper, it's chillingly plausible. These guys bear serious watching!

Fortunately, it's said that the Reality Hackers have found some minds difficult, even impossible, to open. There is a theory that this has something to do with the psychic potential in some individuals. I think it may have something to do with Awakening, as I've never heard

Life and Dream Hacking

These arcane powers attributed to the Reality Hackers may be beyond the reach of many Virtual Adept characters. The **Life Hacking** rote is a closely guarded secret; the consequences would be horrifying if the rote fell into the wrong hands. Discovering it (or creating some variant of it) should be a heavy undertaking, requiring at least three dots in Correspondence and Prime and four in Mind and Life.

Dream hacking is considerably easier, requiring two or three dots in Correspondence and three in Mind. Both procedures are pretty invasive, and other mages (particularly Dreamspeakers, Akashic Brothers and Verbena) are likely to take offense at Adepts using such magicks.

rumors of other mages or Garou being mind-hacked this way. Reality Hackers have, however, had tremendous success in quietly breaching the minds of certain Technomancer Acolytes, allowing the Hackers access to new campaigns against the Virtual Adepts.

One problem that Reality Hackers have encountered has a certain poetic ring to it: viruses. Not computer viruses, but viral illnesses and general sicknesses of the human body itself — the common cold, the flu, and a number of painful, sometimes fatal, diseases like Hodgkin's Disease, AIDS and cancer. If a Reality Hacker infiltrates a Sleeper before running a virus detector program, and the Sleeper in question is infected with a virus or illness, the Reality Hacker may, in turn, contract the disease while her computer equipment suffers a similar computer virus. Some Reality Hackers theorize that the Progenitors may know more about their faction than the Adepts expected, and are actively infecting Sleepers to bring an end to the faction. It sounds like karma to me, but what do I know?

Dream Hacking

While the Virtual Adepts look to the Digital Web to create worlds of virtual reality, some Reality Hackers look to another medium to explore the nature of existence — the dreams of Sleepers. The Reality Hackers claim that the virtual creations of the Web pale in comparison to the worlds that members of this faction have walked, touched, smelled, and tasted in the dreams of Sleepers.

The Reality Hackers believe that mortal dreams are a key to learning the secrets of the Tapestry and a door to countless Realms yet undiscovered. Some place messages in Sleepers' dreams for other Reality Hackers to find when normal channels are too risky to use. One Hacker I know claims to meet with his buddies inside someone else's dreams. I won't pretend that the Reality Hackers don't make me nervous. There aren't many of them, and the things they claim to do would take enormous skill and power to pull off. It could be that all these stories are just that (see my note on bragging and status); they do, however, raise some disturbing possibilities. I've made the Reality Hackers a priority on my "need to know" list. Fortunately, this is easier with the Hackers than it is with their comrades. Though many Virtual Adepts refrain from meeting face to face, the Reality Hackers usually prefer to.

This so-called "legion" may have some truth to what they espouse as reality, but their methodology appalls me. Can you imagine what could happen if the Technocracy were to discover this life hacking rote? The idea of mages holding court in my dreams scares the hell out of me, and pisses me off for the Sleepers involved if it's true. As I said, this legion needs to be closely watched!

soc.chantries.crystal.palace

I did what I could to infiltrate the Adepts' main Chantry, but none of my contacts ever goes there. I've got a promise from a "geezer," a pre-Net Adept, that he'll take me there soon, but any info I can get will have to wait for a later report.

The main Chantry, called the Crystal Palace, is represented by a tall structure in the Net, but doesn't exist in realspace at all. This Chantry gets its Quintessence from a massive tap through phone lines in Omaha, Nebraska. It's pretty old as virtual reality constructs go, and entropy is said to be on the increase there. (This raises ominous possibilities for other VR constructs, which Netrunners call "Formatted Web" or "stacked files.") Many Adepts feel that the Crystal Palace should be tied to where the real action is — Silicon Valley — but old-timers resist the urge to move.

The Crystal Palace, so I'm told, takes the form of glittering spires of data in the Net. Most of the Adepts who frequent this Chantry are of the Old Guard, hacker-mages who remember when the Adepts were a Technocracy Convention, Kennedy was shot and vacuum tubes were high-tech. Many of the younger Adepts shun the main Chantry, preferring to hang out in seedy bulletin board systems (BBSs), trading pirated user setups, rotes and access keys.

It is rumored that the Kernel of the Net lies somewhere in the Crystal Palace, but most Adepts scoff at the idea. They all agree that the Kernel is everywhere and everything in the Net.

The Rote Database

A huge database of rotes has been created in program form: stored in the Crystal Palace, it appears as a huge warehouse. Grouped and cross-indexed by Sphere, these rotes represent the sum of knowledge of the Virtual Adepts. Only a Virtual Adept may access this database; anyone else will have her icon disrupted. In extreme cases, she may be killed by neural feedback if she attempts further intrusion. Even Adepts must pay to copy rotes, either by performing some favor for the Chantry or by adding some new rote to the library.

Virtually any coincidental effect an Adept may wish to create is available here. It takes an average of two to thirty minutes (roll Computer + Research, difficulty 6; each success shaves five minutes off of the access time, to a minimum of two minutes) to find the proper rote in the database, depending upon how specific the Adept is in describing it.

This rote can then be stored on any personal computer, effectively teaching the rote to the Adept (or at least to his computer). Each rote takes an average of one minute to download. Note that each rote is usable only once unless the Adept makes multiple copies of it. Copies cannot be erased from the Adept database in the Chantry. Each rote takes up approximately 512 kilobytes of storage space on a computer. This means that about two hundred rotes can be stored on a standard 120 megabyte hard drive. Many rotes pirated from the Technocracy, as well as from other Traditions, are also stored here.

soc.tactics

Combat with Virtual Adepts seems peculiar to mages used to a straight-out fight. Other Traditions view Adepts as cowards because they seldom confront an enemy on any terms other than their own. Nothing could be further from the truth; a Virtual Adept is deadly in combat. The hacker mages are survivors, and have developed formidable tactics.

Social Engineering is a favorite trick; in its broadest sense, "social engineering" is a kind of sociological sleight-of-hand, getting a group of people to act without actually telling them to (see my note about the "cyberpunk" phenomena, above). In personal combat, Adepts use Social Engineering to baffle and outmaneuver their opponents.

The Adepts prefer, when confronted with an enemy face to face, to use their Social Engineering to distract the enemy. This is known among the Adepts as the "Look, there goes Elvis" trick. In the meantime, the Adept weaves a rote to digitize the opponent and inject him into the Net, causes some physical disturbance with Forces or Matter, or simply scats. Fights with Virtual Adepts take place quickly or not at all.

Most Virtual Adepts working in mixed cabals are most comfortable coordinating attacks from a home base. They have the technology to keep a constant and vigorous communication going among a party of mages, and the presence of mind to direct the others in a firefight. Others may walk among their comrades as an icon, using Correspondence magick to "be there" and cutting out when the going gets tough. Still others enjoy getting into tense situations and actually go into the field. An Adept may also work as an ace in the hole; a powerful Adept can quickly transport supplies, aid and other backup to mages in need.

Summation

As you can probably guess, I respect these hot-wired bastards. Their insights are a bit screwed, but they've got some solid ideas just the same. If I sat staring at a computer screen all day and night while HIT Marks chased my tail, I'd develop some weird ideas, too. While I haven't forgotten my mission, I've made friends among the Netheads and I advise cautious cooperation between our Traditions for the moment. All the same, don't turn your back on them, and for the gods' sake don't put anything on computer files that you don't want them to see.

Merry meet!

— With all regards, trust and love,

Sharri

Social Engineering

A Virtual Adept proficient in Social Engineering can use a subtle form of social engineering to convince an opponent that the Adept is someone she is not. In more extreme cases, she may use it to vanish into a crowd or to mask herself from detection, fooling pursuers into thinking she is not really there.

To use Social Engineering, an Adept must have at least two dots in Mind, and the Ability of Subterfuge. The difficulty of the roll is usually 8, but may be decreased if the Adept is especially clever or if the subject is elsewhere, like on the telephone or over the computer lines.

Chapter 3.0: "Does Not Work Well With Others"

Anarchist, n. — Syn. insurgent, rebel, revolutionary; see agitator.
— Webster's New World Thesaurus

Defenceless under the night,
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
— W.H. Auden, September 1, 1939

E-mail message from Isaac73

Subject - Re: Other Trads

Darkheart,

I've thought about the last set of e-mail you sent me, regarding the other Traditions. You're really frightening, you know that? I mean, from the stuff you sent, it seems like we're all alone. The Technocracy hates us more than all the others combined. The rest of the Traditions are waiting to punt us off the Council. I mean, I know we're the best, the very best, but without any allies, aren't we doomed? I'm sure you know, like everyone else, all the software in the world doesn't make up for human contact. Even the Sleepers know that. I'm awfully fuzzy on this stuff. Could we get together to chat about the rest? I'd like it if you could bring someone, maybe Daneel, just so I can have another view.

Isaac

Log #375A

Private Room: Tradspace@Spy's Demise

Isaac73: When does the log start recording stuff?

Darkheart: It's on now, kid.

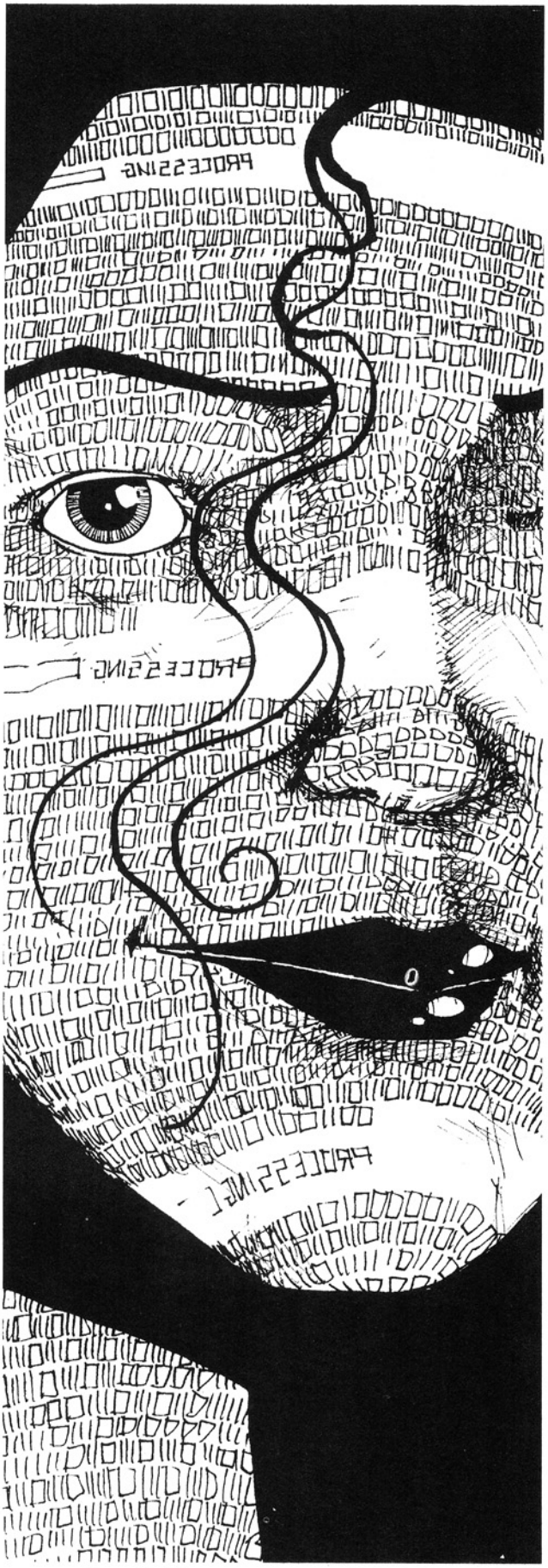
Daneel: Isaac, anytime you want to start the questions, go ahead.

Isaac73: Thanks, Daneel. So, do you just want to do them all in alphabetical order?

Darkheart: Watch out, kid, you think too much like the Technocracy.

Daneel: Stop calling all the Apprentices "kid," Dark.

Isaac73: So, first on my list is the...



Akashic Brotherhood

Darkheart: I'll field this one. I've known too many of the A-K brothers. Basically, kid…

Daneel: Dark, delete the "kid" stuff!

Darkheart: Fine, Daneel. Anyway like I told you before… Isaac… the A-Ks are trapped somewhere in ancient Oriental thought. Sure, they know really cool fighting techniques and they've got all that mind over body stuff down cold, but when it comes down to it, that stuff doesn't cut it in the modern world. You can't stop the Technocracy with a flying kick or with deep meditation.

Daneel: The other problem they have is the amount of training their members have to go through.

Darkheart: Yeah, unless you want to spend your life devoted to training, the A-Ks are out. As one of them told me, "Either you study the Do or you don't study. There is no in between." They're constantly working to achieve the same goals over and over. Millennia have passed, but the A-Ks remain the same.

Daneel: Their biggest problem, Isaac, is that they don't change with the times. The Brotherhood's name even recalls the past. They aren't into science, and they disassociate themselves from the world to master their Avatars.

Isaac73: Okay, I see what you don't like about them, but how does our Tradition relate to the A-Ks? What can I expect if I meet one?

Darkheart: Expect to be ignored, if you're lucky. If not, he'll just decide you're part of the Technocracy. Wham! You'll never even see the attack coming.

Daneel: ::sighs:: If you can befriend a member of the Akashic Brotherhood, you'll have a loyal ally for life. We do share some common ground with them. They alter themselves and their perceptions to master the world. We just take things faster. We alter the world to fit our perceptions.

Isaac73: You mean, by creating Virtual Realms in the Net?

Darkheart: ::laughs:: Yes, I'm sure she does, not that you'll ever see any Virgin Web in your lifetime.

Daneel: A few members of the Brotherhood actually enjoy using the Net. Virtual reality helps them meditate and concentrate on Do… Anyway, whatever you do, don't anger them.

Darkheart: And if you decide to mess with one, make sure you're well-hidden, like on the other side of a state…

Daneel: Remember, although they don't adapt quickly enough to combat the Technocracy in this modern age, they do have talent. They just need us to guide them.

Darkheart: I prefer raw manipulation myself.

Isaac73: Okay, that's enough on them. Let's go on…

Celestial Chorus

Daneel: The Celestial Chorus is next, in alphabetical order. Although if you want my preferences, its a toss-up between the Chorus and the Verbena for greatest trash Tradition in the Council of Nine...

Darkheart: The Verbena get my vote.

Isaac73: Could we discuss the Celestial Chorus? Please?

Darkheart: Watch your tone, kid.

Daneel: The Celestial Chorus live in the past. Somewhere, in their minds and places of worship, they've created a vision of God, the Supreme Being, some sort of Prime Mover. Think of the Church during the Dark Ages. They see the Divine in everything.

Darkheart: Sometimes I think the best thing about the Technocracy is that they dethroned the Chorus. Here is one Tradition that still can't get it together. They failed to bring Ascension to the masses in the Mythic Age, and they certainly can't get their act together now. Most of them want to deny science, not embrace it.

Isaac73: Is there something wrong with believing in a higher power?

Darkheart: Why should we? We are the power. So are you... Initiate.

Daneel: There's nothing wrong with believing in a divine force if you want, Isaac. Just don't let it limit your vision. The Celestial Chorus lets itself stagnate. They're every bit as afraid of change as the Technocracy. They don't want any of us to have information. Everything works on faith. Don't dare question the powers that be. If they had their way, you would not only not be online, but you wouldn't be able to read either. Trust in God, not yourself. That's their message.

Darkheart: Personally, I don't believe in any divine entity. Religions are excuses for the weak. If you don't have any willpower or personality, find a religion. Many institutions aren't going to make it through the Electronic Age. The Chorus is first on the list to go. It's dead, so's God. Let's move on.

Isaac73: Hang on a minute. What happens if I meet some of them? I noticed a few were even out in the Demise...

Daneel: Some members of the Chorus recognize the power of the media and computer systems to spread their gospels. They use technology to broadcast their backwards-looking messages. If you learn only one lesson from the Chorus, make it one of personal responsibility. No divine force will make the world a better place. We create our own heavens and hells. You can see them better in the Net, but they're still around in realspace.

Darkheart: Look, put up with the CCs if you want, Isaac. Humor them. Chances are they won't bother you. If you take one into the Web, she's likely to think it's some kind of miracle. You're more likely to convert her to computers than she is to make any of us accept her dogma.

Isaac73: ::sighs::

Darkheart: I can see you're a bit idealistic, kid. Oh well, you just need some experience to get rid of that innocence. And the best group to do that would be the..

Cult of Ecstasy

Darkheart: If you want a good time, meet a member of the Cult of X. They're unbelievable.

Daneel: Mmmmm... I agree. If you want a party... or just a good time... meet a few Cultists. But if you're trying to do anything serious, forget them.

Darkheart: What do you mean? They're serious about what they do. And they do it well.

Daneel: Lot of good that's going to do you, when Iteration X has a HIT Mark or three at your door, ramming large guns into your meat and opening up.

Isaac73: What do Cult members do?

Darkheart: You can't be serious about that question. They're called the Cult of Ecstasy for a reason... ::smiles::

Isaac73: I know they're purveyors of pleasure. And Dark, I'm certainly experienced enough to want to find an attractive C of X member and introduce her to cybersex. She might enjoy interfacing with sensory input flowing directly to her pleasure centers. I wanted to know... what else they do? Do they have any value as far as Ascension?

Darkheart: First of all, kid, I doubt you'd introduce her to anything...

Daneel: Watch out, Dark! Isaac's going to make a good Adept yet. He's already starting to challenge your authority.

Darkheart: Can I finish, Daneel?

Daneel: Go ahead.

Darkheart: Thanks. Ok, Isaac, you want to know what else they can do? Well, pleasure is persuasive. Sleepers flock to them. Also, many of the C of Xers are at least Disciples of Time. But, mostly, they're good for parties, that's all.

Daneel: Ultimately, they waste away their existences, Isaac. They aren't creating anything that lasts. The Cult of Ecstasy appeals to many Sleepers, but people need more than a series of pleasurable experiences to give their lives meaning.

Darkheart: Spoken like a good computer geek too repressed for the party crowd, Daneel. A lot of Adepts get touchy when sexual issues are brought up, don't they, Isaac? Proving yourself online is one thing, hot animal intimacy is quite another.

Daneel: I have a feeling that your meat isn't nearly as well-proportioned as your icon, Dark. And I've taken my flesh into one of their pleasuredomes, for your information, and I wasn't impressed. There weren't too many hot animals there who could carry on a lucid conversation with me, especially considering the drugs and all the music.

Isaac73: Fine, I get the picture, and I'll learn to relate to them. It sounds like I'll have fun in the process. Now, one group I'm totally lost on is the..

Dreamspeakers

Isaac73: What are they about? I mean, shamanism? What does that have to do with the modern world? I mean, that's farther gone than the Celestial Chorus.

Darkheart: Basically, I wouldn't worry about them or pay them any real attention. They don't have any organization. They all seem afflicted with constant depression, bemoaning the death of the world. And they dance around circles, painting their bodies, beating drums, and doing their best work asleep.

Daneel: Dark, don't you think that the Dreamspeakers best embody what the Technocracy lacks? Isaac, if you could combine the Technocracy with the Dreamspeakers...

Darkheart: You'd have a bunch of stagnant crazies using science to summon spirits to tell them the world's dying, and dragging us down with them. But hey, at least, they'd be amusing to watch.

Daneel: No! You'd have dedicated scientists who would care about the human and natural aspects of the world.

Darkheart: Are you a New Ager or something, Daneel? Is that why you don't like the Celestial Chorus?

Isaac73: Dark, please, I'm trying to learn.

Darkheart: Kid, you can always review the log later. That's why we're making one.

Daneel: I think you're afraid of expressing your inner self, Dark, which is why you do the typical Virtual Adept show of smug arrogance whenever you can't relate to something.

Darkheart: Ohhh, that's deep. Be glad I like you, Daneel.

Isaac73: Excuse me, the Dreamspeakers?

Daneel: Where was I? Speaking of logs, let me scroll back... oh yes, aspects of the world. One of the reasons that I like the Dreamspeakers is they understand other forms of reality.

Isaac73: Like the Digital Web?

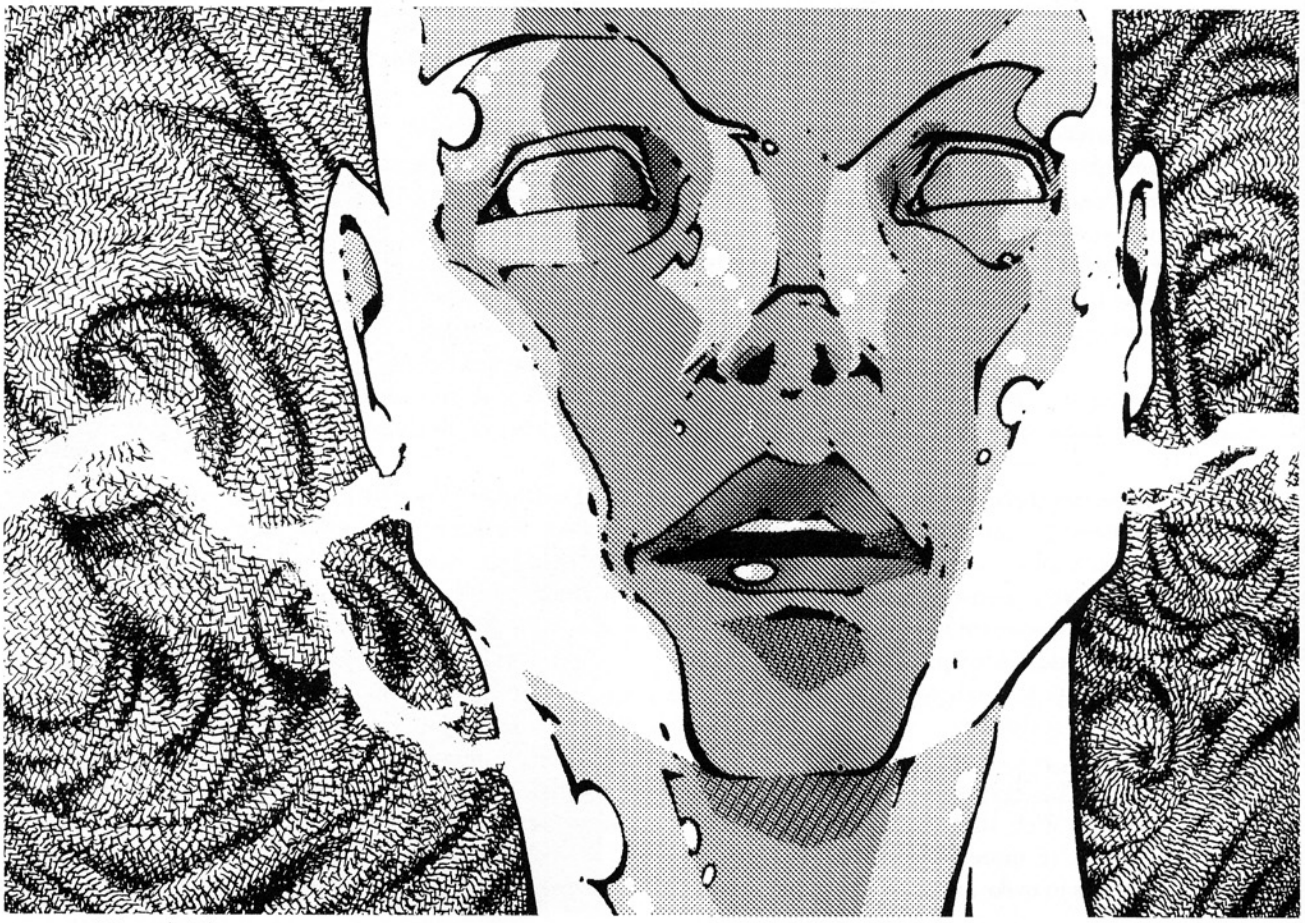
Darkheart: I wouldn't go that far...

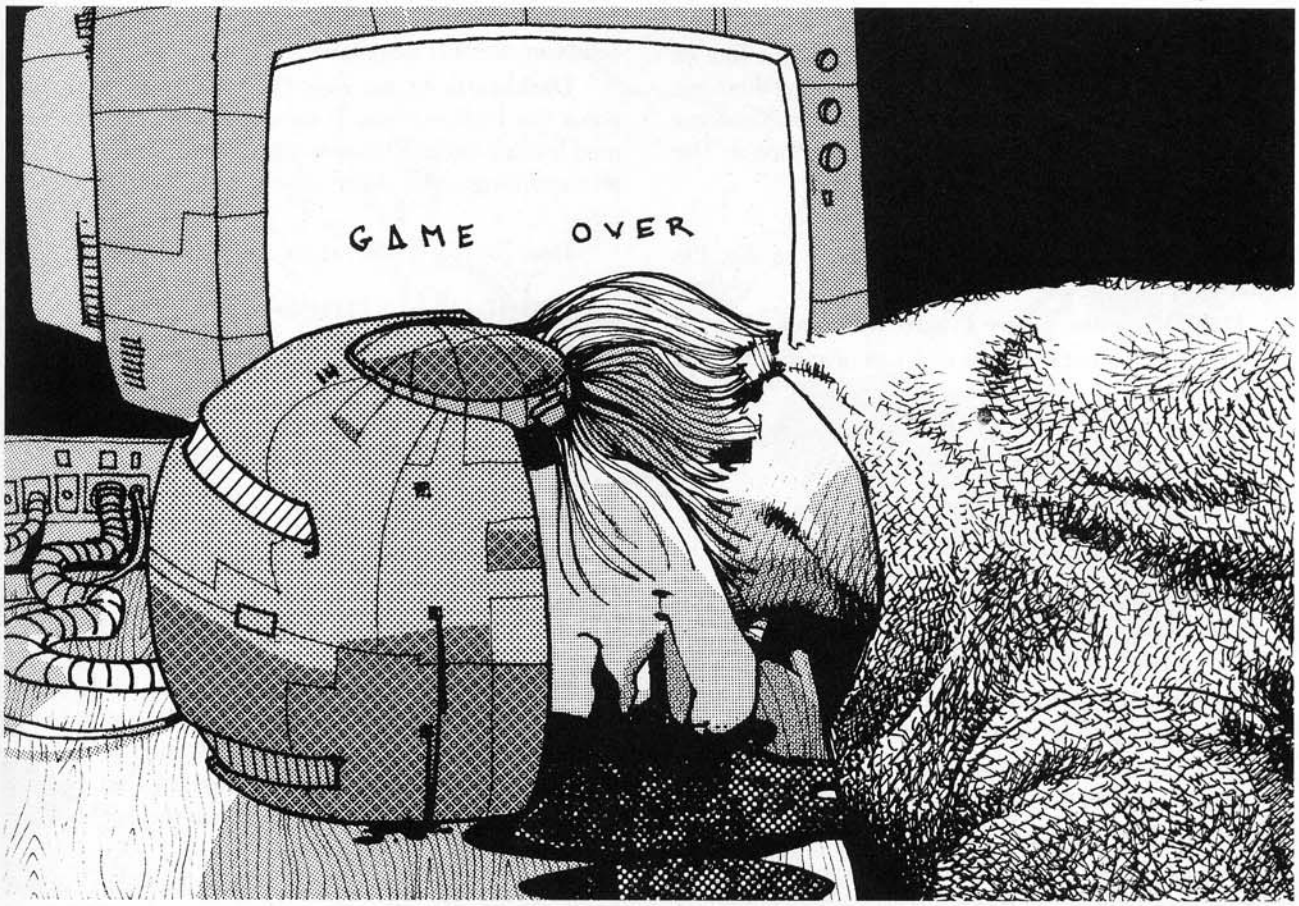
Daneel: More like the rest of the Umbra than the Digital Web, but yes. The Dreamspeakers gain data about the fabric of the Tapestry from their spirit allies.

Darkheart: Yeah, and if they were at all organized in the slightest, like if they had Chantries, maybe someone could find and use that data...

Daneel: They have Chantries, Darkheart, despite what some of them say. There's one called the Second World of the Dine out on the Horizon.

Isaac73: Wait a minute, how can a Tradition not have an organization?





Darkheart: ::smiles:: Do you think we have a real organization, kid?

Daneel: They have initiation ceremonies, and they recognize other members. As I understand it, and I'm far from an expert on Dreamspeakers, they emphasize the uniqueness of each human being, as well as the responsibility that we all have for the planet. We are individuals within a spiritual whole.

Isaac73: So, what happens if I meet a Dreamspeaker?

Daneel: It's hard to say. Like us, they're individuals. You can't judge one by the rest of the Tradition.

Darkheart: You can say that about any mage, Daneel. I've never met a mage, outside the Technocracy, who fit perfectly into a stereotype.

Daneel: What I meant was that they have more loners and less communication than any of the other Traditions.

Darkheart: They say that they use dreams to speak to one another. That's why they call them the Dreamspeakers. Almost makes sense, doesn't it?

Isaac73: Ok, my common ground with the Dreamspeakers is my individuality and an understanding of altered states, plus a mutual commitment to humanity.

Darkheart: Next, my favorite twisted nightmarish types, the...

Euthanatos

Darkheart: My advice, Isaac, is to leave them alone. Avoid any group with an obsessive fascination with death.

Daneel: I agree. Isaac, a Euthanatos might just decide to kill you outright as an experiment, or because our Tradition was part of the Technocracy. I don't pretend to understand the Euthanatos, and I don't want to. If they want to experience the Net, fine. We'll show them our path to Ascension. Otherwise, give them a wide berth.

Darkheart: If you meet one, treat him like a Nephandus, except don't attack. Got it?

Isaac73: Actually, I met a Euthanatos already. Seemed like a nice person. Sure, we talked about death and dying, but he didn't act like Jack Kervorkian or anything.

Darkheart: Fine, go ahead and have your own experiences. I just wouldn't trust a Euthanatos. You only have one chance with them. If you misjudge one, you won't ever have to worry about how to deal with the other Traditions or anyone else.

Daneel: An Adept should know appearances can be deceptive.

Isaac73: Drop it, guys, you're sounding like the Conventions. Stuck in one mode of thought.

Darkheart: Watch it, Apprentice, or I'll send you on a psychedelic trip through virtual wonderland that'll make a bad LSD trip seem like a night of drinking.

Daneel: Give him some slack, Dark. He'll learn better.

Darkheart: Look, kid, the 'Thanatos don't like us because they know we have the secret to putting them out of business. Eventually, we'll just be able to download our brains online and live forever. Kibo's already done it. The flesh is the past, electronics are forever.

Isaac73: Are you serious, man?

Darkheart: Deadly, kid. I'm not going to die. I'm better than that.

Daneel: ::smiles:: I have to agree with Dark.

Isaac73: I'm not ready for that sort of stuff. I like my body.

Daneel: There's more to life than a heartbeat, Isaac. You'll see after a few trips into the Net.

Isaac73: Well, what about the...

Hollow Ones

Isaac73: Aren't they just like the Euthanatos?

Daneel: No. ::laughs:: Do you want to know about the Hollow Ones or all the Orphans?

Darkheart: Let's just talk about the Hollow Ones and forget about the rest of the Orphans.

Isaac73: I'd like to know as much as possible.

Darkheart: We'll be conferencing forever if we try to talk about all the Orphans.

Daneel: Dark's right. I'll download some files on the others for you later, Isaac. As long as Dark doesn't mind...?

Darkheart: Fine with me, Daneel.

Daneel: Good.

Isaac73: Thanks, Daneel.

Darkheart: The Hollow Ones aren't into death. They think we're all doomed, kid. They're just having a good time on this decaying rock before everything goes. They know how to party, just like the Culties. Unlike the Ecstatic, the Hollow Ones can occasionally do other things. At least they recognize the existence of technology. That puts them ahead of all the backward looking Trads.

Daneel: Potentially, the Hollow Ones could be the first group of mages to embrace our brave new electronic world. It's infinitely better than dark reality.

Isaac73: So what are they like?

Darkheart: Kid, I told you, they like to party, wear black, and celebrate the death of society as we know it.

Daneel: Not that the Sleepers have much of a society anymore... at least, not one with any real values.

Isaac73: Is everyone in our Tradition so down on reality?

Darkheart: Pretty much. Reality doesn't stack up against virtual realms. With computers, we improve upon reality.

Daneel: I'm not down on reality, just society. The Technocracy killed our sense of community. Another thing that makes us cool is that by connecting everyone online, we create a stronger, larger community with better communication. Life gets better.

Darkheart: At any rate, Daneel made a good point about the Hollow Ones. If we show them a yellow brick road leading out of Kansas to the Emerald City, they'll be all too willing to skip down it. Nobody'll want to leave our Oz.

Isaac73: Cool. Okay then, what about the...

Order of Hermes

Daneel: The scientists who failed. That's what the Order is.

Darkheart: Yeah, they were close to discovering a science so they could impose their own system of metaphysics on the world.

Isaac73: What happened?

Daneel: They were overcome by hubris, too much pride... they kept their discoveries to themselves, the elite few. The Order couldn't bear the thought of magick being accessible to everyone.

Darkheart: The Ords were on top for a while. In the Mythic Age, they had the power. The Hermetics had as many different groups as the Traditions and the Conventions combined. They had the potential, but not the momentum. The Sleepers rejoiced when the Technocracy swept them away.

Isaac73: Now, the magick of the Order works like that of fantasy wizards, right? The Merlin sort of stuff?

Daneel: Not really. Find a good online file on medieval magic. Its a little different from the stuff you read in fantasy novels.

Darkheart: They almost had a system. If they had let everyone else join their party instead of sneering at the un-Awakened masses, then... we wouldn't have a Technocracy. We'd have an Order. Hell, if they hadn't been so involved with infighting to recognize the Technocracy as a threat, we wouldn't be here. Never get into politics, kid.

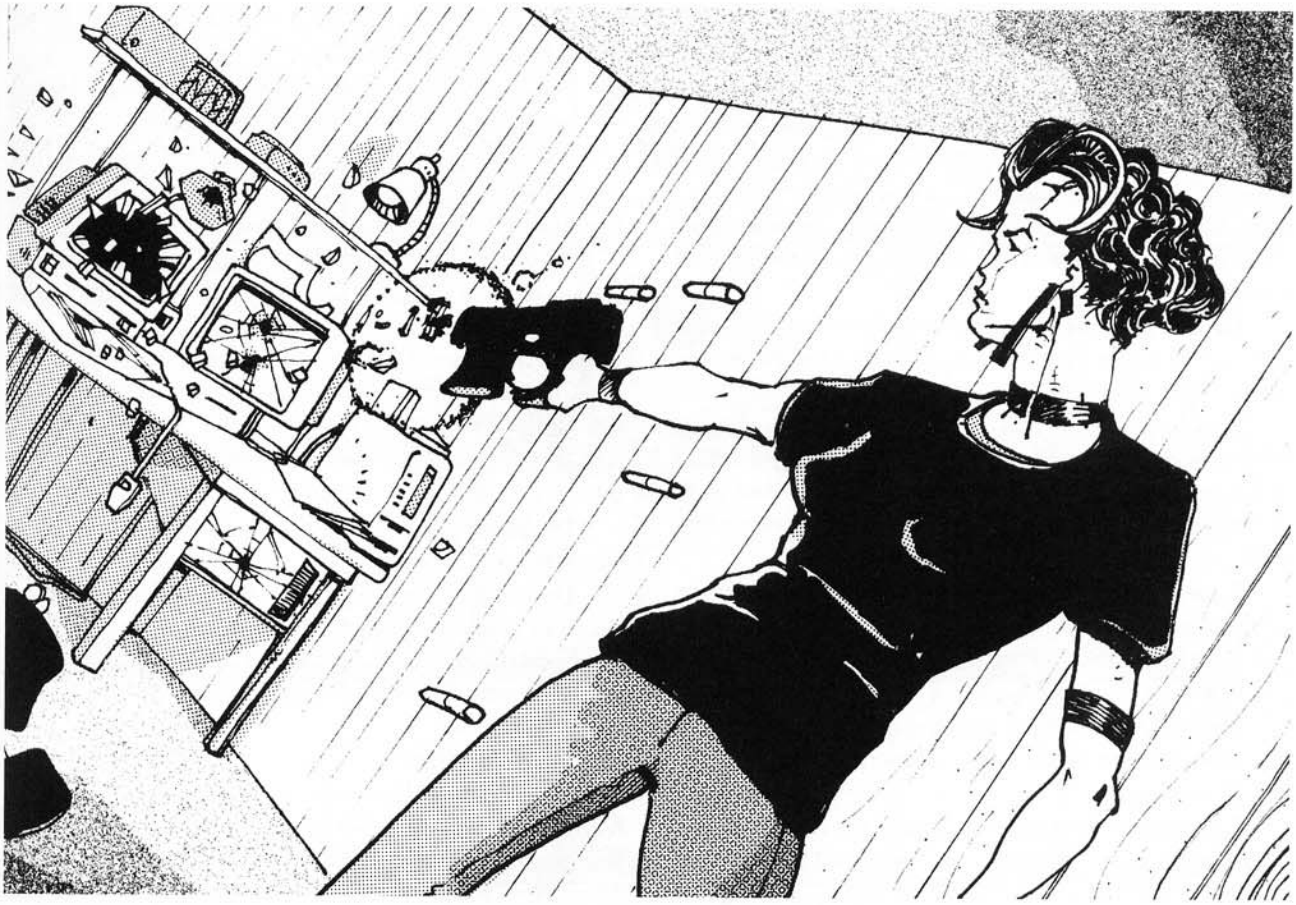
Daneel: As it is now, the Order has to get with the future and stop living in the dead past. They're stagnant.

Darkheart: Yeah, they've got to wake up and stop trying to solve the world's problems using magicks that died out centuries ago. Old failures don't make new solutions. Another dead Tradition.

Isaac73: The more I hear, the more I wonder what would the other Traditions would do without us? It seems like most of them are lost in the past.

Darkheart: Very good, kid. Now you see why the Technocracy's winning.

Daneel: The other Traditions need us. Without our knowledge of technology, the Technocracy would have blasted the Council of Nine into ruin a long time ago. Some factions of the Order of Hermes realize this on some level some of the time. But, even they just don't understand what we're doing.



Isaac73: So, the Order of Hermes supports us?

Darkheart: No. No one supports us, we're on our own.

Daneel: Ignore Dark a minute. They support us in theory. They know science can't be ignored. However, they want to infuse science with mysticism. If they could just let go of the past and shed their politics, then… ::shakes head::

Darkheart: My final words on them. Another dead Tradition.

Daneel: You shouldn't have too many problems with members of the Order.

Isaac73: Good. I've always admired ancient mysticism, at least the fantasy kind. It makes for good computer games.

Darkheart: ::smiles:: That's the attitude, kid.

Isaac73: So, who's next on the agenda?

Darkheart: The real crazies, the…

Sons of Ether

Daneel: Here's a group you can feel safe approaching. Of all the Traditions, they're the ones closest to us.

Isaac73: Why?

Darkheart: They're a Technomancer Tradition, just like we are. Except while the Adepts planned to break from the Greyfaces, the Technocracy punted the Sons…

Daneel: The Children of Ether don't view science like we view science. And they definitely don't work like the Technocracy. They specialize in massive speculation, creativity. The Children don't see…

Isaac73: Hang on, Daneel. Why are you calling them the Children?

Daneel: Oh, well, that is one of the throwback problems of the Etherites. They refuse to change their name, even though they have a number of women in their Tradition. The female Sons I have spoken with like to call themselves Children of Ether. So I do as well in support of them.

Darkheart: Just call them, Sons, Isaac. You won't offend any of the old anal farts in the Trad, and the ladies will correct you.

Daneel: That won't help them change.

Darkheart: It's not my problem. I have to worry about HIT Marks, and MIBs online, not whether the Sons are called the Sons, Daughters, Children, Worshippers, Disciples, Descendants, Etherites, Etherians, etc. I could go on, but I've wasted too much time here already.

Isaac73: I think I'll just use Sons until I know better.

Daneel: You should never compromise the truth.

Isaac73: By the way, Dark, I am learning some stuff. I do appreciate this.

Darkheart: It's not a problem. I offered, remember?

Daneel: Where were we?

Isaac73: What is Ether?

Darkheart: Ether is this stuff that is supposed to exist in space, between the planets. Essentially, the Technos held a symposium and the Void guys decided that it shouldn't exist. A debate followed, and the other Conventions declared that there was no Ether. The Sons revolted and left, although I think it was the Conventions' way of saying, "Get in line."

Daneel: Anyway, the cool thing about the Children is that they don't let Technocracy theories stand in the way of their experiments. Creativity and intuition guide them.

Darkheart: Even I have to admit that it's amazing what some of those nutbags come up with. Rayguns, tunnelling machines, alchemy, even robotic A.I.s that work entirely differently from anything the Technocracy's created.

Isaac73: They sound cool. Why do you keep referring to them as nuts, Dark?

Darkheart: Some of them just go a little too far outside the bounds of normal thought for me.

Daneel: A few of them get consumed by their theories. Everything in the world works differently from what we accept as science.

Darkheart: But they make great conversationalists. If you want to have fun with one, watch a few bad sci-fi movies with a couple of robots. Then find a Son of Ether and talk seriously about the movie with him.

Daneel: The Children of Ether are good allies in the Ascension War. We can trust them better than any other group.

Darkheart: Isaac, listen to me, don't trust anybody.

Isaac73: All right, well, we're at the end. Who are the...

Verbena

Daneel: They are a bunch of sick witch-types who believe that you have to spill blood everywhere to use magick.

Darkheart: Stay away from these loons, kid. They are twisted ritualists better off forgotten. We don't like them, they don't like us. They can't understand science at all.

Daneel: And they just don't understand that ancient dark rituals are what opened the door for the Technocracy.

Darkheart: They're enough to make you think that maybe there was a reason behind the Salem Witch Trials.

Isaac73: Wait a minute... those trials were a bunch of paranoids and some misunderstandings...

Darkheart: Actually, they probably had more to do with vampires than Verbena, but you can categorize both in the same group. Dangerous.

Daneel: The only good thing about the Verbena is that they fight the Technocracy. That is the only good thing. If they ran the world, the Sleepers would scream for the Technocracy to come back.

Darkheart: If you ask me, there's another good thing.

Daneel: Oh?

Darkheart: They're going to die out, because they don't change. The Verbena can't ride the wave of the future, so it's going to wipe them out.

Daneel: I'm glad you think so. They've managed to survive this long. The Order tried to exterminate them in the Mythic Age. They survived attacks by the Celestial Chorus. They survived the coming of the Technocracy. And, in case you haven't noticed, they're gaining support among the Sleepers as a reaction to Big Brother.

Isaac73: Are they involved with the New Age movement?

Darkheart: Yes, but I still think they're going to shrivel up and blow away.

Daneel: The biggest problem I have with them is that they can't accept the fact that truth in the modern world can be found through technology. They want to think that the Computer Age doesn't exist, because they can't cope with reality.

Isaac73: What?

Darkheart: Daneel has a personal problem with the Verbs, obviously. The Verbs don't think science has any meaning. They think civilization should go back to the Stone Age or at least pre-Roman Europe, if Ascension is to be found.

Isaac73: They are a bit out of it.

Darkheart: Yeah, but they might sacrifice your blood to try to get back there.

Daneel: Our Traditions pull the Council of Nine in different directions. It's a struggle we have to win; otherwise, the Technocracy will.

Darkheart: If the Council went the wrong way full steam, we'd find something else to do. After all, we are the very best. ::smiles:: The cutting edge... and soon, the entire world will be ours with just a touch of a button and a quick electronic impulse. We've got the best of both worlds; the vision of the Council and the weapons of the Technocracy. Remember that, kid.

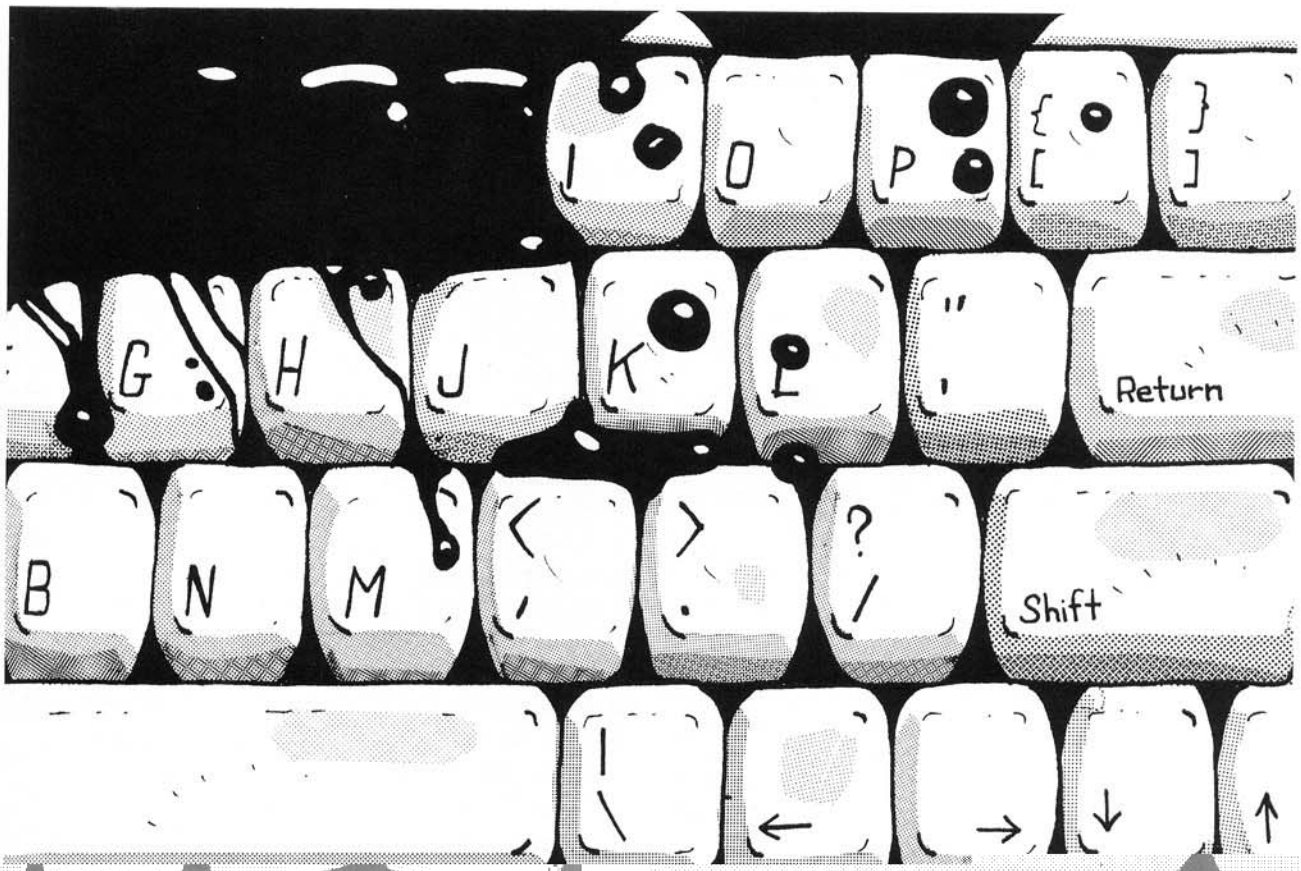
Daneel: Remember that, no matter what, even if you have to deal with Verbena, we need all the allies we can get. Okay, Isaac?

Isaac73: I suspect I'll access my own truth after a while. Thanks, both of you. Daneel, I really enjoyed meeting you.

Daneel: I don't think we're done yet, Isaac.

Darkheart: Yes, we are. There aren't anymore Traditions.

Daneel: Well, far be it from me to tell you how to be a teacher, but Isaac needs to know that there are other things in the world to watch out for.



rt: The important thing, Isaac, is that they're
ey exist. Vampires are real. What they're up
limits are, no one knows.

Why haven't the Sleepers discovered them?

rt: Don't you read *Deviant* magazine or any
re's stuff on vampires in them all the time.

The undead hide themselves. They work in
rational ways.

rt: I think they hack into networks and erase
ting data. Besides, Sleepers live their lives in
al. We're talking about average people who
n computers... they don't have the imagina-
vampires. The Technocracy wouldn't want
ing in vamps anyway.

Why don't vampires suffer from Paradox?

don't know.

rt: No one knows.

They do have to drink blood, right?

rt: As far as I know.

The key to dealing with vampires: don't!
me files and missing persons reports in your
get a chance. Use a mapmaker package and
pearances. That'll help show you what areas

rt: Just don't take stupid chances, kid. Travel
, spend nights online.

Isaac73: I'll take any data I can get.

Darkheart: See, I trained him well.

Daneel: Isaac, have you heard of vampires and werewolves?

Isaac73: Well, if mages can exist, I'm sure vampires and werewolves do...

Daneel: Smart. Let's start with vampires.

Vampires

Darkheart: Do you recall everything I said about the Euthanatos?

Isaac73: Yes.

Darkheart: Well, vampires are worse. Be thankful that the undead don't stalk the Net.

Daneel: But... Dark, some say they have influence, even here. ::laughs::

Isaac73: So, what are vampires like?

Darkheart: Did you ever see Dracula?

Isaac73: No, but I played a CD-ROM game about Drac.

Darkheart: There you go. Imagine a twisted sicko like Drac, who has lots of powers and no Paradox.

Isaac73: Should I carry around a stake and a cross?

Daneel: ::laughs:: The stake's not a bad idea. I'd lose the cross, unless you want to leave us for the Celestial Chorus. Remember to wear a garlic necklace.

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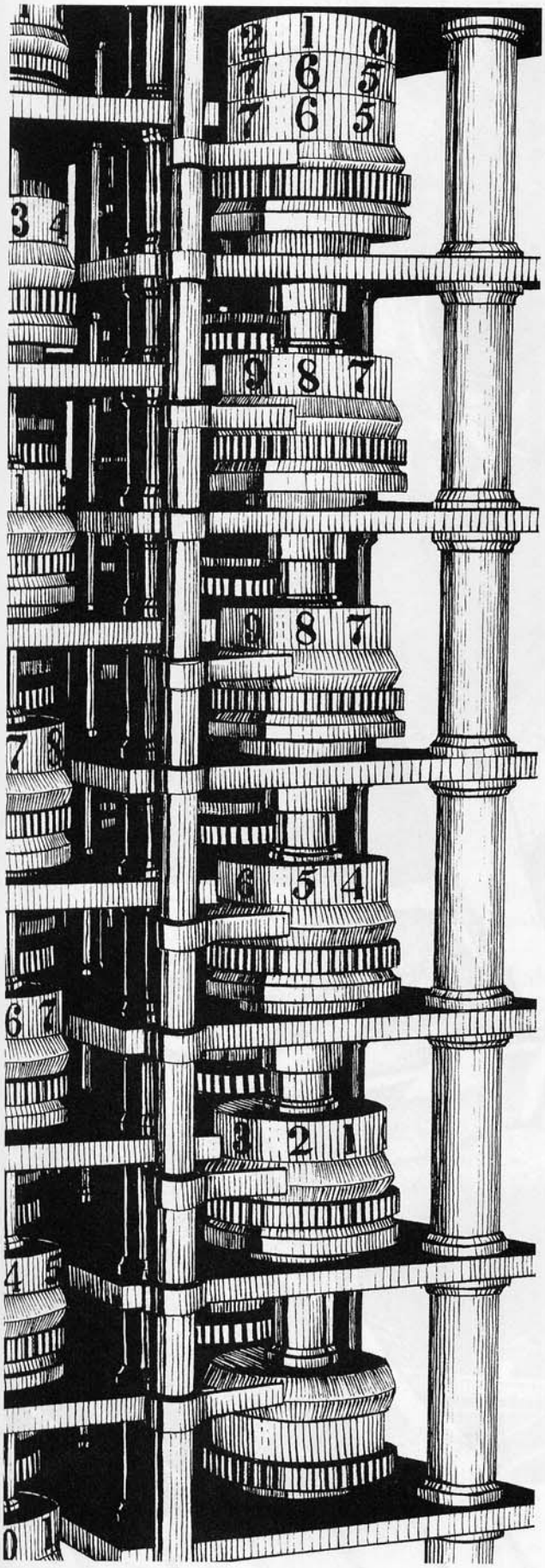


this way, if they kill me, I get the satisfaction of causing them problems anyway. The Fire Department's got paramedics, just in case things get really bad. Contacting other Adepts works well too.

Isaac73: Oh…

Daneel: And if I'm worried about being outnumbered, augmenting the danger of Paradox helps cut the odds.

Isaac73: Then…

Daneel: Then I cut loose with something vulgar to get out or try to destroy them. Getting away from danger is always priority one. Remember, Sleepers are your friends.

Isaac73: Ok, so you do unleash eventually.

Daneel: Well, it's us or them. Dark, what do you do?

Darkheart: ::smiles slowly:: Do you really want to know?

Isaac73: I would, Dark.

Darkheart: Ok, I let them know they passed their test.

Isaac73: What?

Daneel: You are crazy.

Darkheart: It's like this, and I don't recommend you try this at home: if they catch me dead to rights, which has happened, I compliment them. I use a little voice scrambler, pure mundane tech, to give my voice that crisp Technocracy tone. Then, I stare at them and state: "Your detection and response time to the threat was 5.6 minutes. Within the acceptable parameters. I am Number 5 of the New World Order. Check your Construct records for verification of my authority."

Isaac73: What then? Don't they crisp you?

Darkheart: No. While I'm doing that, I'm tapping my Alpha and working on intercepting their transmissions and responding with a proper verification code. Then, they usually let me walk.

Daneel: That's just a stupid and near-lethal way to buy time. Use my method.

Darkheart: I agree, it is stupid. But I'm good enough to pull it off. That's the bottom line.

Daneel: Isaac, if you want to take on the Technocracy, use your Correspondence to keep plenty of distance between you and them. Distance buys you time. They use computers. We control computers. Information is power. Use better data to destroy their operations. That's the bottom line.

Darkheart: Develop your own style. Whatever works best for you. Treat any advice Daneel and I gave you tonight like an ad for a hot new computer game that hasn't come out. Vaporware. It could be great, but be really careful about staking your life on it. Rely on yourself…

Daneel: And your cabal.

Darkheart: Whatever.

Isaac73: Well, I appreciate all this data. Did it all log properly?

Daneel: ::smiles:: Of course.

Isaac73: Great, you two told me a lot. ::chuckles::

Darkheart: What's so funny, kid?

Isaac73: I don't know whether I learned more about the other Traditions or being an Adept.

Daneel: ::laughs::

VHS

Chapter 4.0: Initiates

Visionary, Mod. 1. [Impractical] — Syn. ideal, ideological, romantic, utopian, quixotic, in the clouds (D); see also impractical.

— Webster's New World Thesaurus

Trailblazer, n. 1. a person who blazes a trail for others to follow through unsettled country or wilderness; pathfinder. 2. a pioneer in any field of endeavor.

— The Random House College Dictionary

The Virtual Adepts are far more than spell-casting computer geeks. The more romantic among the Tradition consider themselves Hackers at the Gates of Reality. The more pragmatic just see themselves as a reality check for the world at large. This chapter presents a few beginning Adepts for players or Storytellers to use as characters or inspiration (or for a good laugh).

The Couch Potato

I don't think television will ever be perfected until the viewer can press a button and cause whoever is on the screen's head to explode.
— Michael O'Donoghue

Quote: *See this, man? My new, wide-screen fifty-six-inch home entertainment system with two VCRs and a satellite dish. I get over 500 channels now, and I don't even have to move. I can see what good new shows are coming up for the fall season. In fact, I can even get some shows that aren't even in production yet! And that's not all I can do! Watch this...*

Prelude: You weren't an outsider. You were just lazy, always looking for new ways to do things easily. You never wanted to do actual work, but had to in order to keep upgrading your entertainment system and computer. People complained that you were nothing but a couch potato.

Despite being a fairly gross individual, you had friends of a sort. One of them invited you to a party one night. He had the greatest system you'd ever seen, and he hooked you into some mega-bucks VR rig and sent you on the trip of your life. "Like it?" he asked when you returned. Staggered by the things you'd seen, you could only nod. "It's real," he said, "not a simulation." You knew then that you'd do anything to take that kind of joyride again.

Your new mentor made you work, which sucked, but it paid off in the long run. You're still a couch potato, but now you can work for the greater good without leaving your room. Life is happy.

Concept: You were a kid who watched TV. Too much TV. You know the lines to every episode of "Happy Days," "Star Trek" and "Mork and Mindy". You command the Knight Rider and advise "Charlie's Angels" without lifting a finger. You can take on any guise you desire or send your icon anywhere you want to go. Watch out world; you've just moved into Sweeps Week!

Roleplaying Tips: Quote television shows and affect mannerisms from all your favorite characters. Be daring and brave — you can always change the channel if things get too nasty. Why take life seriously? After all, it's only a TV show — isn't it?

Magick: Your control of Correspondence and Forces allows you to project an icon anywhere you want to be. With Time magick, you can slow or speed your perceptions of time and witness events in the past or future; these Time effects are coincidental if they're focused through your entertainment center. Though your icon cannot do anything beyond your abilities, you can make it look like anything you want it to (Manipulation + Subterfuge to fool people). Although your body remains at home, anything that affects your icon affects you as well — pull out when things get thick!

Equipment: Remote Control, bathrobe, potato chips, entertainment center, really comfy couch.

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Pattern
Nature: Loner
Demeanor: Conniver

Concept: Couch Potato
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●OOO
Dexterity ●●OOO
Stamina ●●OOO

Social

Charisma ●●●OO
Manipulation Fast Talker ●●●●O
Appearance ●OOOO

Mental

Perception ●●●OO
Intelligence ●●●●O
Wits ●●●OO

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●OO
Athletics OOOOO
Awareness OOOOO
Brawl OOOOO
Dodge ●●●OO
Expression ●●OOO
Intuition OOOOO
Intimidation OOOOO
Streetwise ●OOOO
Subterfuge ●●●●O

Skills

Drive ●OOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms OOOOO
Leadership ●●OOO
Meditation ●●OOO
Melee OOOOO
Research OOOOO
Stealth OOOOO
Survival OOOOO
Technology Leisure Tech ●●●●O

Knowledges

Computer ●OOOO
Cosmology OOOOO
Culture TV ●●●●O
Enigmas OOOOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Linguistics OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Occult OOOOO
Science OOOOO

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●●●OO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces ●●OOO
Life OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Prime OOOOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time ●●OOO

Other Traits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Backgrounds

Arcane ●OOOO
Avatar ●OOOO
Mentor ●●●OO
Talisman ●●OOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

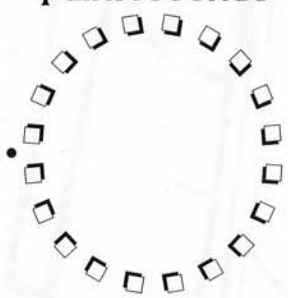
Arete

●●●OOOOOOO

Willpower

●●●●●OOOO
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

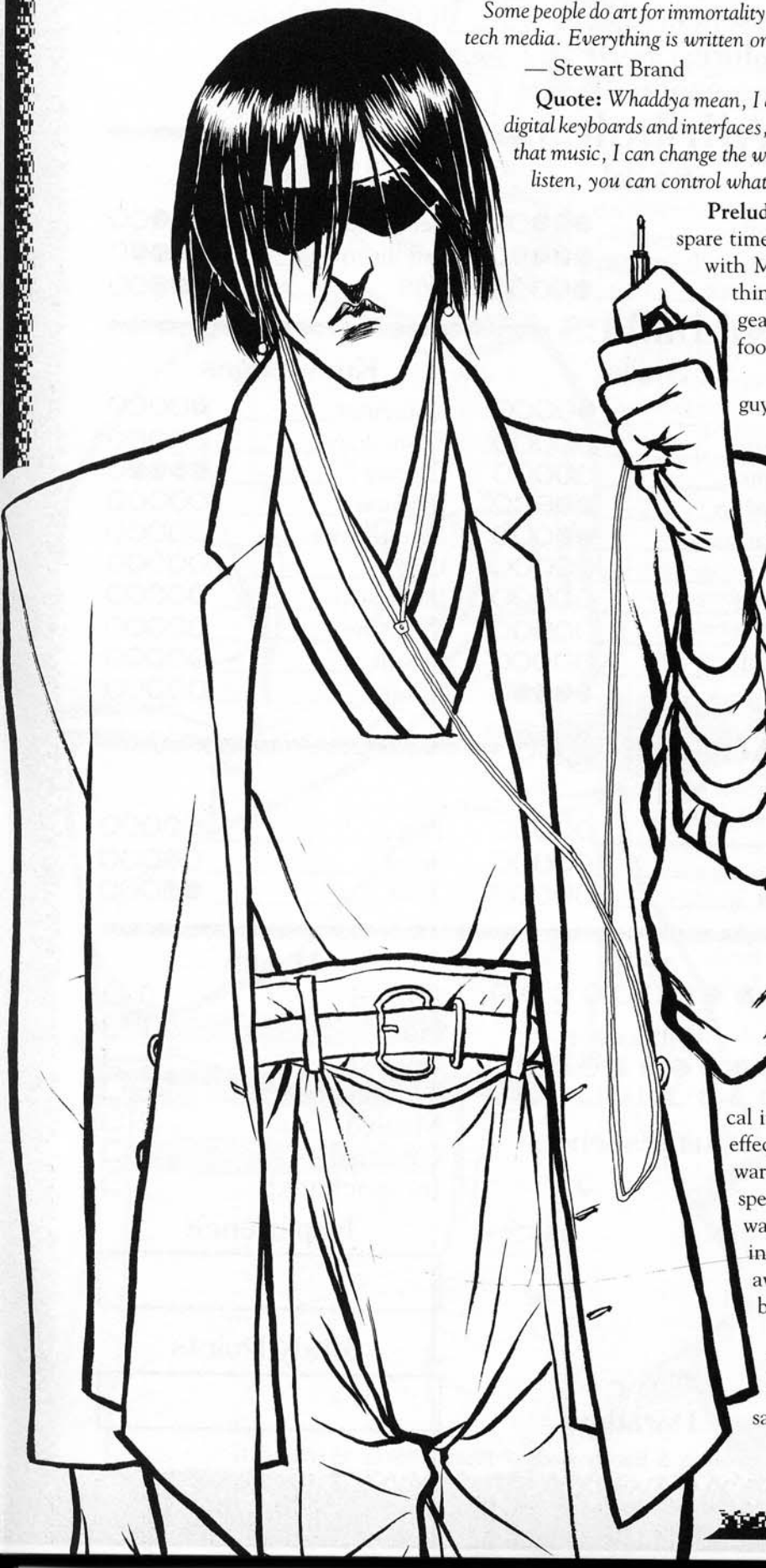
Bruised	-0 ❑
Hurt	-1 ❑
Injured	-1 ❑
Wounded	-2 ❑
Mauled	-2 ❑
Crippled	-5 ❑
Incapacitated	❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

The Musician



Some people do art for immortality. You have to give that up if you're going to work in high-tech media. Everything is written on the wind.

— Stewart Brand

Quote: *Whaddya mean, I don't make real music? I'm a one-man band. Through digital keyboards and interfaces, I can make music — anything I can imagine. Through that music, I can change the world. Life was meant to have a soundtrack. If you just listen, you can control what happens in the big picture.*

Prelude: You were a struggling musician spending your spare time with an Amiga in the basement. Experimenting with MIDI interface, you went really crazy. Such odd things happened when you screwed around with your gear! You chalked them up to late nights and too little food.

One night, you jammed with this really intense guy who played like Beethoven on Ecstasy. You never saw him again, but he calls you on the BBS every now and then. He patched you into another BBS and introduced you to his friends — his very odd friends. Like you, these guys knew the power of using ivories instead of qwertys. Their ideas of power, however, were a little different...

There's a name for your type of music. Magick.

Concept: You're an artist using pure digitized sound to shape reality at your command. While you prefer to work alone, you maintain contact with other artist friends to trade techniques. Sometimes you even collaborate. Unlike some of your buddies on the Net, you like to go club-hopping and even play the occasional gig.

Roleplaying Tips: Learn a lot about both MIDI and music and drop phrases from both worlds. Talk over everybody's head about this stuff — you don't care whether they understand or not. Violently object when people insult your music.

Magick: You channel your art through musical instruments rather than a keyboard. Most of your effects shift the Forces around you in fairly straightforward fashion, and you use them to create personal special effects — electrical discharges, light-and-sound wave alterations, that sort of thing. Your understanding of Correspondence is sketchy at best. You can get away with some pretty spectacular stunts in clubs, but without your rig you're in trouble.

Equipment: Commodore Amiga, Yamaha DX-7 keyboards, drum machine, MIDI guitar, sampling machine, recording deck, tapes of old movies (to sample quotes from).

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Pattern
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Rebel

Concept: Musician
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●OOOO
Dexterity ●●●OO
Stamina ●●OOO

Social

Charisma ●●●OO
Manipulation (Dynamic Performer) ●●●●O
Appearance ●●●OO

Mental

Perception ●●OOO
Intelligence ●●●●O
Wits ●●OOO

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●OO
Athletics OOOOO
Awareness ●●OOO
Brawl ●●OOO
Dodge OOOOO
Expression ●●●OO
Intuition OOOOO
Intimidation OOOOO
Streetwise ●●●OO
Subterfuge OOOOO

Skills

Drive ●OOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms OOOOO
Leadership ●●OOO
Meditation OOOOO
Melee OOOOO
Research OOOOO
Stealth OOOOO
Survival OOOOO
Technology (Musical Equip.) ●●●●O

Knowledges

Computer ●●●OO
Cosmology OOOOO
Culture (Music) ●●●●O
Enigmas OOOOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Linguistics OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Occult OOOOO
Science ●●OOO

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●OOOO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces ●●●OO
Life OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Prime ●●OOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time OOOOO

Other Traits

OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Backgrounds

Allies ●●●●O
Avatar ●●●●O
Influence ●OOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Arete

●●●OOOOOO

Willpower

●●●●●●OOOO

❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence

Paradox

Health

Bruised	-0 ❑
Hurt	-1 ❑
Injured	-1 ❑
Wounded	-2 ❑
Mauled	-2 ❑
Crippled	-5 ❑
Incapacitated	❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

Revisionist Writer

Little man with a big eraser, changing history

Procedures that he's programmed to, in all he

Hears and sees

— Megadeth, "Hook in Mouth"

Quote: *I've got the real power, man. Whatever I write, the people will believe. What the people believe becomes reality. I'm an old pro at this — I used to do it for the government all the time. Can you recall the past? The present? The future? I can control what you remember. I'm the one who writes it all down. I am the Kitty Kelley of the Traditions.*

Prelude: You were just another government zombie leading a totally pointless life. People derided you for being a civil servant. "You don't need brains to work for the government." Yeah, right. You had an uncanny knack for shaping opinions, though. People took what you wrote pretty seriously. Too seriously. One day, the Men in Black paid you a call.

Your Awakening was pretty traumatic. The idea of deliberately molding anothers' thoughts went against your grain. The Bureau of Internal Security didn't agree. Your Avatar didn't, either. You still battle the bitch on occasion, now that you know what she is. You have the upper hand, for now.

When the Reality Hackers busted you free from the Bureau, you threw in with the Adepts. They, in turn, taught you how to harness your talents for the greater good. And for occasional revenge...

Concept: You were a bureaucrat. Now you're an artist. You play with the written word and the ever changing flow of history past, present and future. Your Avatar can be domineering, and you have frequent conflicts with her. She tempts you with the power you both wield over other people's thoughts and memories. Sometimes you still give in to her.

Roleplaying Tips: You've done your time in the bureaucratic slave pits — no one is going to tell you what to do again! Your clothes, hair and vocabulary are calculatedly outrageous. Flamboyantly defy the mouse you once were. Your Avatar has a Technocratic bent and struggles to control you, but your Virtual Adept buddies have taught you the value of free will.

Magick: Your command of Mind and Correspondence allows you to alter memories or emotions. By focusing your magick through writing, you can use a variety of coincidental effects. Your targets may believe that the power of your prose has led them to new conclusions. You need not be present to change another's mind — you can shift your senses and power anywhere hard copy of your writing exists.

Equipment: Portable word-processor with micro-printer, flashy clothes, white-out, pad and pencil.

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Pattern
Nature: Deviant
Demeanor: Rebel

Concept: Revisionist Writer
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●○○

Mental

Perception ●●○○○
Intelligence ●●●●○
Wits *Perceptive* ●●●●○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●○○○○
Athletics ●○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Expression ●●●○○
Intuition ●●●○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○

Skills

Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●○○
Leadership ●●○○○
Meditation ●●●○○
Melee ○○○○○
Research ●●●○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ●●○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ●●●○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ●○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●●○○○
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ○○○○○
Life ○○○○○
Mind ●●○○○
Matter ○○○○○
Prime ●●○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Backgrounds

Avatar ●●○○○
Influence ●●●○○
Library ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Arete

●●○○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●●○○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence

Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ❑
Hurt -1 ❑
Injured -1 ❑
Wounded -2 ❑
Mauled -2 ❑
Crippled -5 ❑
Incapacitated ❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

The Cyberpunk

so that kid from the bad home
came over to my house again
decapitated all my dolls
and if you bore me
you lose your soul to me
— Belly, "Gepetto"

Quote: *Billy Idol can hump a passing planetoid. He's just a wanna-be. So are you. You suck! You should be glad I'm even letting you this close to me. Information wants to be free, and you and everyone else on this pitiful orb are gonna have to deal with the fact that information is pissed about being caged up so damn long.*

Prelude: It all started when you were online to that CIA computer. Someone broke into chat mode and you freaked. You cut the power, you yanked the phone cord outta the wall. When you looked back at the screen, they were still there, typing glib little messages. "Join us," they said. With little smiley faces at the end, like this :).

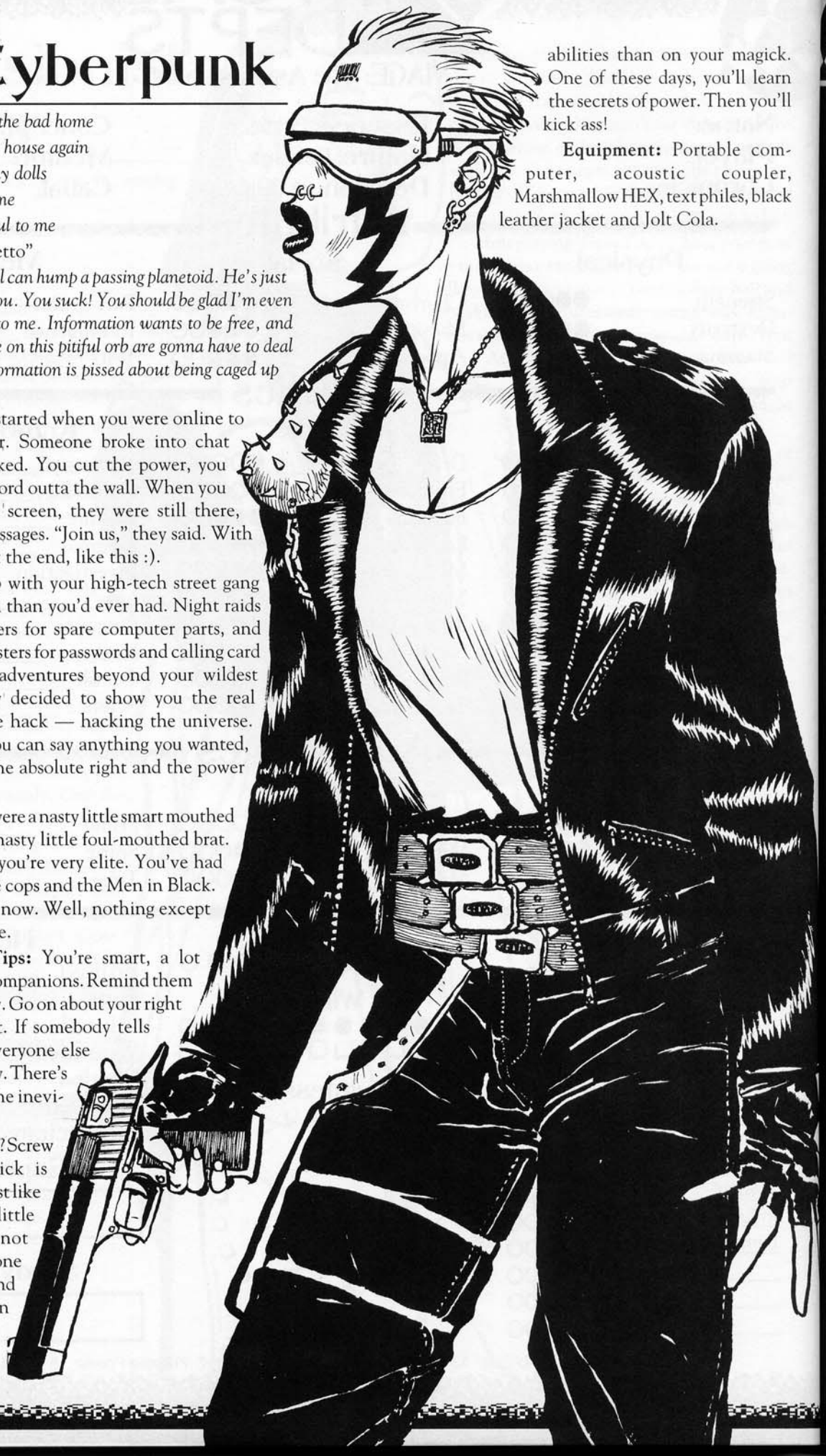
You hooked up with your high-tech street gang and found more fun than you'd ever had. Night raids into IBM's dumpsters for spare computer parts, and into AT&T's dumpsters for passwords and calling card numbers. On-line adventures beyond your wildest dreams. Then they decided to show you the real power, the ultimate hack — hacking the universe. You learned that you can say anything you wanted, because you have the absolute right and the power to.

Concept: You were a nasty little smart mouthed brat. Now you're a nasty little foul-mouthed brat. You know a lot — you're very elite. You've had your run in with the cops and the Men in Black. Nothing scares you now. Well, nothing except for Demonseed Elite.

Roleplaying Tips: You're smart, a lot smarter than your companions. Remind them all of this constantly. Go on about your right to free speech a lot. If somebody tells you a secret, tell everyone else you can immediately. There's no use in delaying the inevitable.

Magick: Subtle? Screw subtle! Your magick is flashy and vulgar, just like you. You know a little about a lot, but not enough about any one thing, so you depend more on your own abilities than on your magick. One of these days, you'll learn the secrets of power. Then you'll kick ass!

Equipment: Portable computer, acoustic coupler, Marshmallow HEX, text philes, black leather jacket and Jolt Cola.



VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence:
Nature: Bravo
Demeanor: Avant-garde

Concept: Cyberpunk
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●○○
Dexterity Quick Reflexes ●●●●○
Stamina ●●●○○

Social

Charisma ●○○○○
Manipulation Scary ●●●●○
Appearance ●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ●○○○○
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ●●●○○
Dodge ●●●○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●○○
Streetwise ●●●○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ●○○○○
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ●●○○○

Knowledges

Computer Hacking ●●●●○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●●●○○
Investigation ●●●○○
Law ●○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ●●○○○
Life ○○○○○
Mind ○○○○○
Matter ●●○○○
Prime ●○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Backgrounds

Allies ●●●○○
Avatar ●●○○○
Dream ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Arete

●●○○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●●●●○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence

Paradox

Health

Bruised	-0 ❑
Hurt	-1 ❑
Injured	-1 ❑
Wounded	-2 ❑
Mauled	-2 ❑
Crippled	-5 ❑
Incapacitated	❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

Chaotician

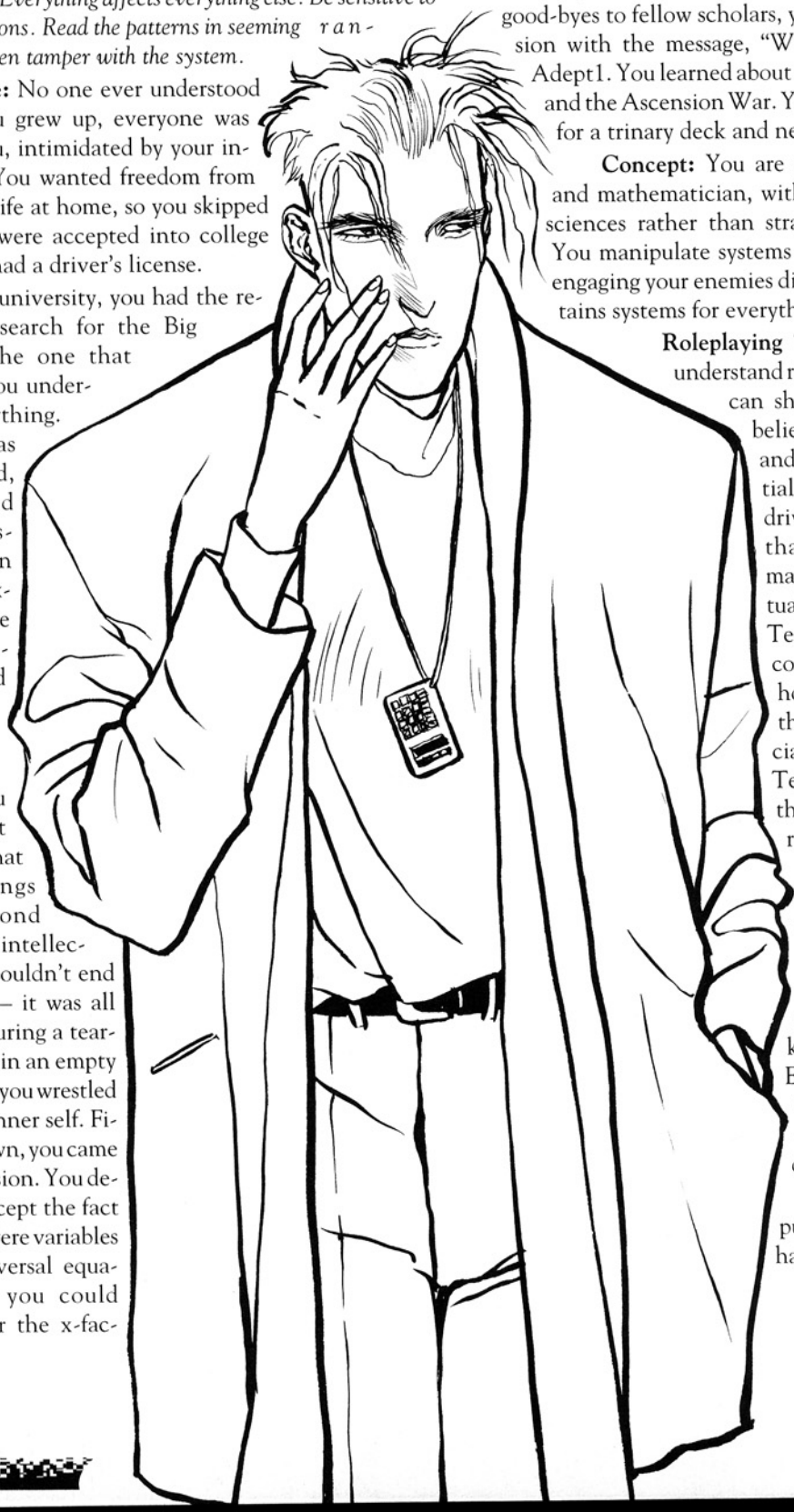
There are those who think that
Life is nothing left to chance
A host of holy horrors
To direct our aimless dance
— Rush, "Freewill"

Quote: *Everything affects everything else. Be sensitive to initial conditions. Read the patterns in seeming randomness. Then tamper with the system.*

Prelude: No one ever understood you. As you grew up, everyone was afraid of you, intimidated by your intelligence. You wanted freedom from your caged life at home, so you skipped grades and were accepted into college before you had a driver's license.

At the university, you had the resources to search for the Big Concept, the one that would let you understand everything. However, as you studied, you found more questions than answers. Existence seemed unsolvable, and therefore uncontrollable.

You didn't want to accept that some things were beyond you. Your intellectual quest couldn't end in failure — it was all you had. During a tear-filled night in an empty parking lot, you wrestled with your inner self. Finally, at dawn, you came to a conclusion. You decided to accept the fact that there were variables in the universal equation. But you could account for the x-factors.



You envisioned patterns in everything. You punched random numbers into your laptop and recognized systems. As a game at first, you charted your peers' behaviors on your laptop. After a few simple experiments, you could predict many of their actions and reactions. There were answers within certain parameters. Finally you decided to leave the university. You had a concept; now you had to affect the system.

As you used the school's online account to e-mail good-byes to fellow scholars, you got a flashing transmission with the message, "Welcome to the club" from Adept1. You learned about magick, the Virtual Adepts and the Ascension War. You traded in your old laptop for a trinary deck and never looked back.

Concept: You are an extraordinary physicist and mathematician, with an intuitive grasp of the sciences rather than straight book understanding. You manipulate systems from a distance instead of engaging your enemies directly. Your computer contains systems for everything you need.

Roleplaying Tips: You want others to understand reality's systems, so that they can shape their own paths. You believe Ascension is possible, and every action could potentially cause it. This knowledge drives you with an intensity that impresses your fellow mages. You enjoy the intellectual challenge of fighting the Technocracy, and you try to convert Greyfaces, realizing how close you once were to their thinking. You find a special satisfaction in foiling the Technocracy by manipulating the flaws in their paradigm of reality. You carry a gun, because it's an effective way to stimulate almost anything.

Magick: Your Correspondence understanding is rudimentary, but your knowledge of Matter and Entropy makes up for it. Use your grasp of patterns to change them or break them down.

Equipment: Laptop computer, pistol, leather jacket, hand-held radio scanner.

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Dynamic
Nature: Architect
Demeanor: Fanatic

Concept: Chaotician
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●○○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○
Manipulation ●●○○○
Appearance Impressive ●●●●○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence Patterns ●●●●●
Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intuition ●●○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●●○○
Melee ○○○○○
Research ●●●○○
Stealth ●●○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ●○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ●●●○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●●●●○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science Intuitive Mathematics ●●●●○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●○○○○
Entropy ●●●○○
Forces ○○○○○
Life ○○○○○
Mind ○○○○○
Matter ●●○○○
Prime ●○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Backgrounds

Avatar ●●●○○
Dream ●●○○○
Mentor ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

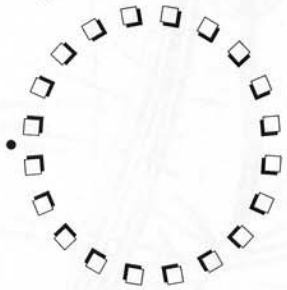
Arete

●●●○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised	-0 ❑
Hurt	-1 ❑
Injured	-1 ❑
Wounded	-2 ❑
Mauled	-2 ❑
Crippled	-5 ❑
Incapacitated	❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

The Mad Simulator

... the Digital Revolution is whipping through our lives like a Bengali typhoon — while the mainstream media is still groping for the snooze button.

— *Wired* Magazine

Quote: *It takes Nature thousands of years to improve reality. I can duplicate reality, and make it better in seconds. Show me a God who has that kind of power.*

Prelude: When you were young, you dreamed about being a filmmaker. You wanted to make a movie with a positive utopian vision, and you started designing computer graphics in your late teens. Virtual reality replaced your dreams of film. Instead of showing the world utopia, you would give it to them. You wanted to take the real world with you on your odyssey.

A pioneering VR company hired you. The job paid well, and replicating the world became your life. For entertainment, you explored a dozen electronic services, and soon piled up e-mail messages, asking sinister questions about things you didn't recall mentioning online.

When the software was ready, you demonstrated the VR suit and environment. The president of the company attended, and all eyes fixed on you. Then the unexpected happened, something that you hadn't programmed. A glowing electronic portal shimmered in front of your eyes. You moved toward it and left your body, shifting into the Digital Web. An explosion of pain and wonder enveloped you. There was another world out there!

In realspace, your body crumpled. You saw a silicon woman standing over you like an angel before they ripped away the goggles and took you back. You spent the morning in an emergency room, and the afternoon cleaning out your desk. They said the experiment was a failure. You knew better.

Spending your life savings, you built a simulator in your apartment. You found another portal, a conduit, and the silicon woman. After she told you about the Digital Web and sold you on the Virtual Adepts, she disappeared.

Wandering the electronic landscape of the Net, you discovered that many of your online friends were Adepts, and they welcomed you into their community. Now, you intend to bring Ascension by taking everything, copying it, and making it better.

Concept: The private sector considers you a failure pioneer. If only they knew. You want to duplicate everything online: buildings, landscapes, even people. You want everyone to participate in your vision of Ascension.

Roleplaying Tips: Everything relates back to constructing a new world. You fight the Technocracy and collect Tass for your future virtual realm. Since your firing, you have no respect for corporations. You feel uncomfortable with sexual relations in realspace, but are uninhibited online. Most of your down-time is spent scouring the Net for virgin territory or questing for the mysterious silicon lady.

Magick: Through Mind and Correspondence, you probe and explore rather than alter or destroy. Your magick is strong in the Net, but weak in realspace. Use your powers indirectly, with as little violence as possible.

Equipment: Camera, computer, virtual reality suit, a massive software collection, a dozen passwords to online services.

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Essence: Dynamic
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Loner

Concept: Mad Simulator
Mentor:
Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●○○○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●○○

Mental

Perception Patterns ●●●●○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Expression ●○○○○
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○

Skills

Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Research ●●○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology V.R. ●●●●○

Knowledges

Computer ●●●●○
Cosmology ●●○○○
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●●○○○
Investigation ●●●○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ●●●○○

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●●○○○
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ○○○○○
Life ○○○○○
Mind ●●○○○
Matter ○○○○○
Prime ●●○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Backgrounds

Avatar ●○○○○
Destiny ●●●○○
Library ●●●○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

Arete

●●○○○○○○○○

Willpower

●●●●●●●○○○
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence

Paradox

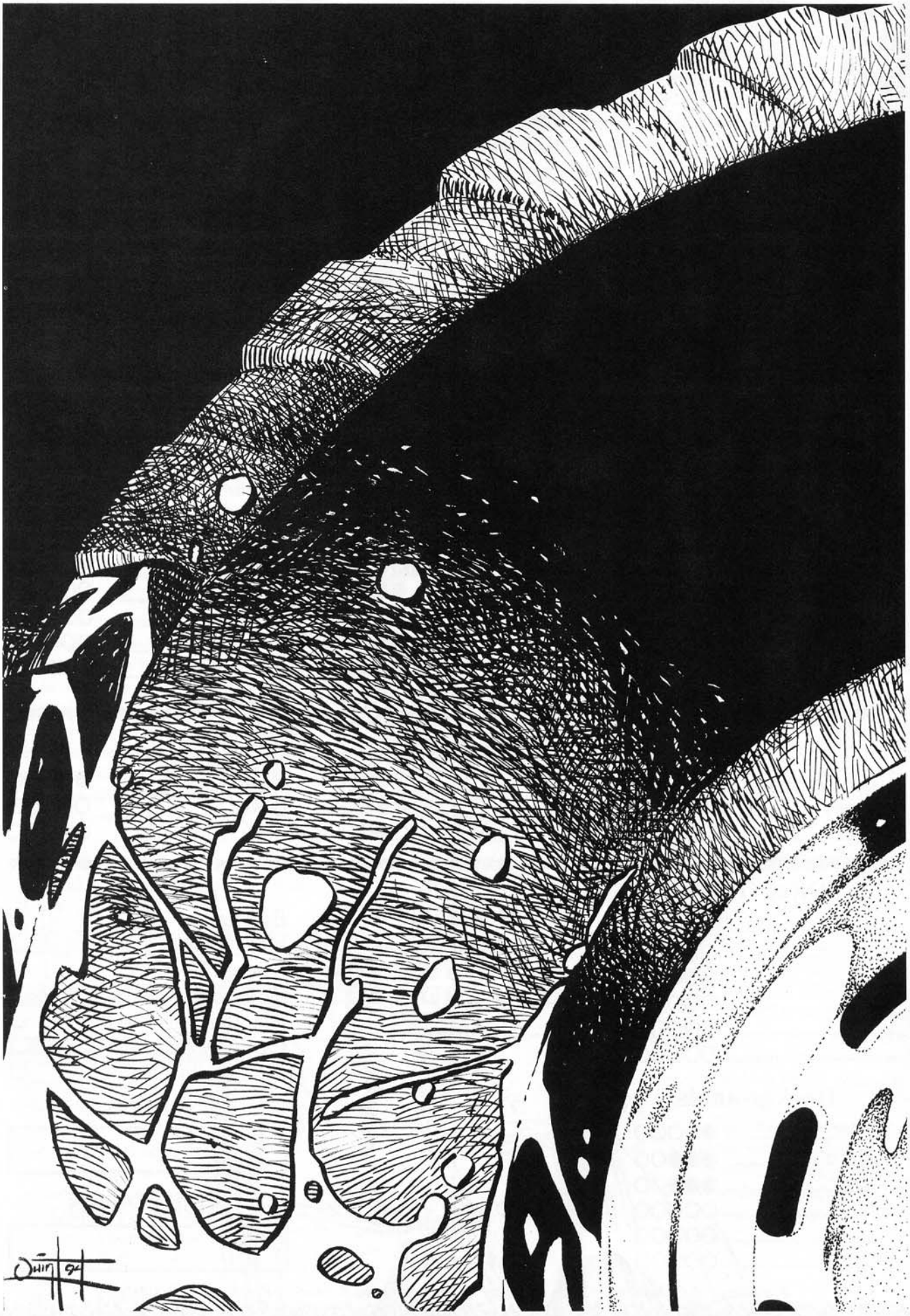
Health

Bruised	-0 ❑
Hurt	-1 ❑
Injured	-1 ❑
Wounded	-2 ❑
Mauled	-2 ❑
Crippled	-5 ❑
Incapacitated	❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)



Appendix I.O: Neat Stuff

The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

—Thomas Jefferson

Magick

This section contains some hard and software for Virtual Adepts. More information, rotes, Talismans and samples of Adept slang can be found in the virtual reality sourcebook, Digital Web.

Rotes

Encrypt Thoughts (1 Mind, 1 Life, 2 Prime)

This rote was created by the Cypherpunks to protect their brains from prying mages. Cypherpunks value the sanctity of their information above all else, and take great pains to ensure that they are not being spied upon. The mage prepares the program and sets a public "key" for the encryption he is placing on his thoughts. From that point on, no person may read his mind without thinking of the "key" or password the mage has set. In this way, the mage may allow friends to read his thoughts, but not enemies. The Cypherpunks will not usually give out their "keys" to people who are not using this rote already.

[Each success subtracts two successes from any outside party's attempts to read the Adept's mind, above and beyond countermagick. The Prime magick disrupts mind-reading attempts.]

Degrade Order (2 Entropy, 2 Correspondence, 3 Time)

This rote was developed by the Chaoticians to research the effects of Chaos on complex systems, such as the human body. It works by applying pressure from two directions—adding more Entropy into the system to be degraded,

and accelerating Time to watch the effects. For example, if this rote were used on a flower, it would appear to wither and die in about thirty seconds. This compresses a relative life span of a system into about thirty seconds to a minute.

[Correspondence is used in this rote to keep the field effect away from the mage. Difficulty modifiers are based upon the size, complexity and distance to the target. A flower would be difficulty 5, while a person would have a 9 or 10 difficulty.]

Information Glut (Correspondence 2, Mind 3, Time 2)

This rote allows a Virtual Adept to enhance any one sense of his body. This lets him "turn up the volume" and hear things he normally couldn't hear, or increase his ability to comprehend sensory input he receives. While the Virtual Adepts use the rote to accelerate their computer comprehension, the Technocracy uses it as a highly specialized instrument of torture, as it affects the mind rather than the body. There are many other uses for this rote, from night vision to tracking people by scent.

[Each success gives the subject a temporary + 1 to his Perception Ability for a scene. "Hardwiring" with Life 4 can make the effect permanent (see Prelude).]

Holographic Projector (Correspondence 2, Forces 3, Mind 3, Prime 2)

Through this rote, the Adept can project a hologram (or icon) of herself wherever she desires. Since holograms are nothing but patterns of light, the persons perceiving this hologram must be fooled into thinking there is actually a person there. Through use of the Mind discipline, the Adept also projects smell and sensory data to the hologram's "audience." This rote rarely fools mages, supernatural beings or detection devices, but four or more successes might con them for a turn or two.

[The Prime in this rote fuels the created Forces which form the hologram. The hologram is an illusion, and cannot affect or touch other parties in any way, but cannot be harmed, either. A variant on this rote, using Correspondence 3 and Forces 2, allows the mage to project an icon using her Avatar and ambient Force energies (Forces 3 and Prime 2 are still needed to create these energies from nothing). This icon appears in any roughly human-sized shape the Adept desires, but the mage, tied as she is to the icon, will take any damage the icon sustains. This icon may affect reality, but the mage's real body remains helpless at her keyboard.]

Computers

I enjoy working with human beings and have a stimulating relationship with them.

— Hal, Arthur C. Clarke, *2010: Odyssey 2*

Computers are more than just foci or Talismans for Virtual Adepts — many become Familiars in the most literal sense (see **Book of Shadows: The Mage Players Guide** for the new Familiar Background). Even "regular" computers are prized by Adepts. Being Technomancers, the Virtual Adepts require some kind of technological focus for their magicks, even into the higher levels of Arete (5 or even more). The **Mage** book **Digital Web** contains more details on mundane and magical computers.

Icons

Icon creation requires a roll of Intelligence + Computer, difficulty of 8, with four or more successes required, often performed as an extended action. In the Net, icon creation is a coincidental effect once the mage's consciousness is inside; the **Holographic Projector** rote is necessary to produce an icon in realspace. A mage can change his icon's appearance by rolling Manipulation + Computer, difficulty 6. Assumed shapes do not change traits, although Appearance and Intimidation may be raised by a number of dots equal to the number of successes on the Manipulation + Computer (maximum of 5 in either one).

Within the Digital Web, an icon can be identified by a pattern code somewhere on its person. Realspace icons have no such codes, but may be detected as fakes with a roll of Perception + either Awareness, Alertness or Subterfuge, depending on the circumstances. Masquerading as someone else requires periodic rolls of Manipulation + Subterfuge, with difficulties likewise depending upon the circumstances.

The Systems

Standard computer equipment is often inadequate for magick. Such devices are too limited to process magickal effects and too fragile to withstand the strain of reality-warping. These limitations add to the time necessary to work magick, restrict the Spheres used to the first and second ratings only (the chips cannot comprehend the logistics of high-level magicks) and shorten the life of the computer itself. Fortunately, the Adepts take care of their own. Mentors often help their protégés "upgrade" their systems.

There are usually several things a Virtual Adept will do to upgrade a computer before he uses it. The computer usually undergoes a rigorous testing (called burn-in), attuning it to the specific Adept using it. The computer is then magickally enhanced, turning it into a Trinary computer, a unique focus (**Mage**, pg. 178-179). Computers storing Quintessence and capable of their own independent magickal effects are considered Talismans.

Gadgets

When many people think of foci for a Virtual Adept, they think of a standard laptop computer or a keyboard/CPU/CRT arrangement. This couldn't be further from the truth. While the center of this arrangement is usually going to be some kind of computer module, there will always be a number of alternative input and output devices for Virtual Adepts to utilize. The following options are much more portable than the traditional keyboard rig.

PowerGlove:

One of the most obvious replacements for the traditional keyboard is a PowerGlove, a special glove fitted with sensors that relay the motion of a hand back to the computer. Mages using Correspondence 2 can work their computers from a distance with these devices.

Heads-Up Display:

This display consists of a video monitor built into the side of a pair of mirrorshade glasses. This allows the mage to watch video output in addition to whatever is in front of her; she doesn't have to take her eyes off the enemy to see if her rote is running on the computer. This, combined with a PowerGlove, is the choice of many combat mages today.

Musical Instruments:

Musical instruments are also alternative forms of input for the Virtual Adept (though many Adepts are notoriously tone deaf). Musical instruments that patch into computers through MIDI ports are pretty expensive but mages rarely worry about funds. Through the musical instrument, the character can "intone" rotes that have magickal properties and might even form some kind of song...

Voice Recognition and Output:

The field of voice recognition has come a long way, even if it hasn't progressed to the level depicted in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A portable computer with a voice recognition circuit and voice output makes a powerful weapon. These devices leave a mage's hands free and can be set to recognize only the owner's voice. The drawbacks of such a system include confusion of signals (from other sounds, or a mimicking mage) and distortion (which could have deadly results).

Message Pads:

There are "personal digital assistants" out today that can recognize handwriting and be used to store commands. This sort of thing would be perfect for a Virtual Adept. With a built-in fax or a modem, it would even allow limited access to the Net.

Trinary Computers

Most computers count using a binary system; that is to say, they use ones and zeros to represent information. A trinary computer uses three states (on, off and negative on) to represent information. In this way, Virtual Adepts get considerably more processing power and have machines that are very nearly intelligent. While most computers are able to handle only "yes" or "no" as concepts, the computers of the Virtual Adepts can also accept "maybe" due to their trinary nature. This allows the computer to use "fuzzy logic" as a problem solving tool. Fuzzy logic is what human beings use when they think about concepts like "warm," "cool," "damp" or "smelly." These concepts aren't tough to a human being, but they pose problems for a computer. Fuzzy logic allows a computer to grasp these concepts.

Appendix 2.0: The Elite

Dante

The loss of liberty to a generous mind is worse than death.

— Andrew Hamilton

I wish I had a dime for every time I hear "virtual reality" nowadays. I remember when VR wasn't on the lips of every nitwit with a PC. In the age of "iteractivity," Sleepers seem to want to control their entertainment, but instead of using technology to enlighten the world, most of them think of new ways to destroy one another. Mortal Kombat isn't reprehensible, it's typical.

The realization that one needn't be subject to someone else's desires is hitting the mainstream. As soon as Sleepers realize that life is just one huge program and that they can change it, all hell's gonna break loose.

Living with the idea that you can destroy a city block with a thought isn't easy. Humanity isn't ready for this type of power. So we've got to fight the Mirrorshades. I'll be damned if I live in Hell V3.0.

Cabrini Green, Chicago. Most people who live here end up trapped between welfare shackles and a neighborhood that marines couldn't survive. Most mothers would sooner abort a child than have one, but Andrea Collingsworth had higher aspirations. She prayed to God that He would watch over her child. Someone was listening, but he wasn't God.

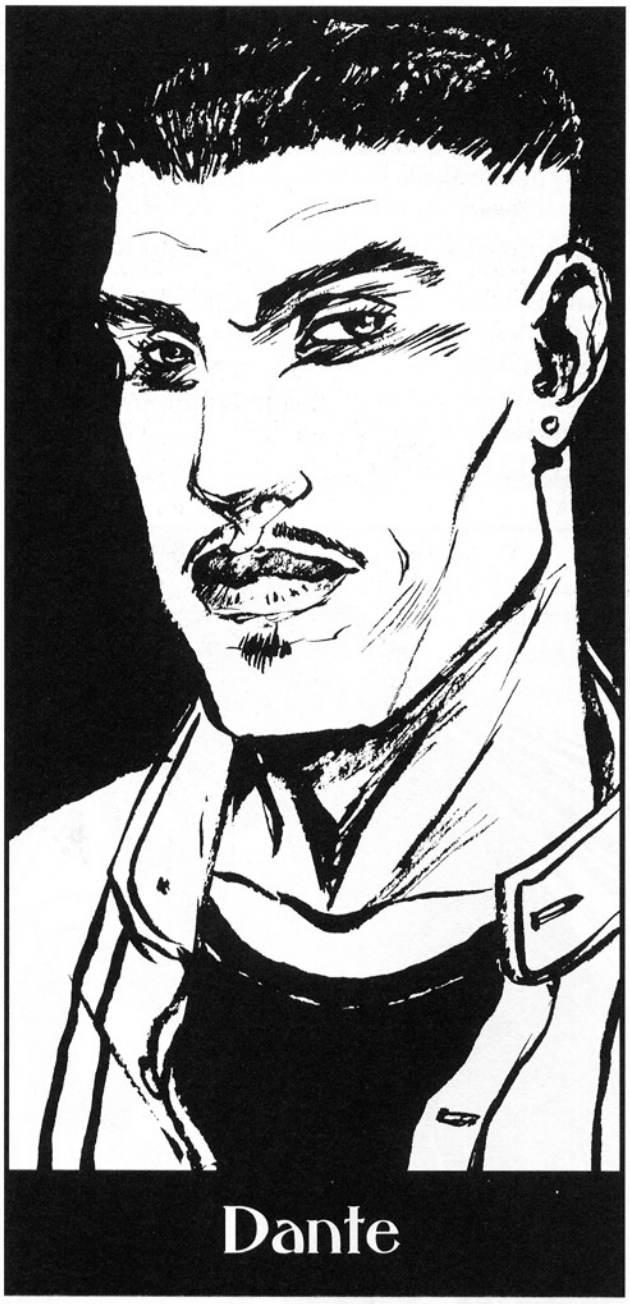
Dr. Bens told Andrea that her child was in danger, that he would be born mentally deficient and could never live a normal life. She could, however, help other mothers by participating in a secret experiment to treat such disabilities. Andrea was paid fifty thousand dollars to participate. She didn't argue.

Dr. Bens had never seen an unborn child whose Avatar had already Awakened. The Progenitor planned to discover how such a miracle was possible. For eight months, Andrea underwent a battery of tests. She didn't survive the birth of Desmond Collingsworth. Dead mothers tell no tales.

Dante grew up in a middle-class family he thought was his own, under constant surveillance by the Progenitors. It was no surprise that he finished high school at the age of eight, or that he graduated at the top of his class at Harvard, or that he completed medical school in five years. It *was* a surprise when the Virtual Adepts ran off with him.

They called themselves the Lab Rats — each one Progenitor born and bred. The Lab Rats taught Dante the ways of magick and the truth behind his birth. He left the group soon afterward; simple revenge wasn't his style. Now he strikes at the Technocracy on a deeper level, stealing their ammunition — children. Rescuing those earmarked for the Technocracy has become Dante's calling. Most he gives over into the care of Tradition allies. Some few he teaches himself.

Perhaps the most well-known Tradition Master, Dante always has at least two students. Studying under Dante is considered extremely elite.



Demonseed Elite

You plant a Demon Seed
You reach a Flower of Fire,
See those burning crosses,
See the flames, higher and higher...
— U2, "Bullet the Blue Sky"

So here I am... 3 am, kitchen. Sitting at counter, pouring some cereal, making a mess with the milk. Never let it be said that I skimp on nutrition, including the full day's supply of Vitamin K I get with my Alpha Bits. Just ask any other elite types and they'll tell you too... Vitamin K is the way to start out a totally elite day.

I've gotta keep my k-ness up 'cause I don't want any shit coming down on me from DemonSeed Elite. If you still don't know the deal with DemonSeed Elite, then listen up. People don't like to talk about him/it much, 'cause it's such a heavy subject... like a giant cow hanging over your head, ready to drop at any slip up you make. Or in this case, a monster truck.

Rumor is, back in the late 1970s-early '80s, DSE was a user who achieved Maximum K-rad Eliteness, at which point his soul merged with the global telecom network. DemonSeed Elite was no longer just a person, but an entity residing in the cables and satellite links of the network. He is AT&T, he is Internet, he is SouthWestern Bell, your phone, the spy satellites which orbit above our heads. He knows when you've been sleeping and he knows when you're awake. And he takes any sign of lameness on his networks as a personal insult. To speak his real name is to die. Lamers and r0dents all face his wrath. No one has seen him dealing out his vengeance, or been alive afterwards to tell about it, but it will come. Believe that.

All we can do is make assumptions from the wretched remains. A thirteen-year-old with his intestines ripped out; fiberoptic cables twisted tightly around the pulp of what was once his frontal lobe. The young geek's forehead was branded "k-lame," the words still sizzling in his freshly seared flesh when he was found bleeding to death on the floor of his bedroom. His monitor still glowed with the an ominous "CUL8R!" left over from signing off the friend he had been chatting with over the modem. His pal suffered a similar fate.

DemonSeed Elite, in a physical manifestation, is said to prefer travelling in a giant orange monster truck with tires 30 feet high and 30 feet wide. The accuracy of these monster truck descriptions may leave something to be desired since the witnesses were pissing their pants at the time of observance... though the monster truck theory is consistent with some reports of death. On several occasions, groups of r0dents were found squashed flat in the middle of a parking lot or open field. The only clue to the cause of their sudden flatness was giant tread marks all over their bodies. It's as if a large truck fell from the sky and crushed them into a 2-D state, then disappeared!

Now you can believe this, take heed, and watch out for yourself, or not. Hey, it's your life. But as for me, I'm gonna get on with eating my Alpha Bits. I'm no fool. No siree.

Cathrine Blass/X-Cel

Is this going to involve raw human ecstasy?
— Zippy the Pinhead

TO: MISSION TEAM 46701
FROM: AMALGAM PRIME #42
SUBJECT: CATHERINE BLASS, AKA X-CEL

It has come to our attention that the controversial entertainer known as Catherine Blass (see N.W.O. file #46539 M-6) is, in fact, the Virtual Adept terrorist known as X-Cel. Blass (hereafter referred to as "the subject") is to be pursued and detained for interrogation and re-education as soon as possible.

The subject first achieved some fame among counterculture elements of the Masses some five years ago when her performance-art show "Rage on a Meathook" was banned in Washington D.C. for obscenity, sexual solicitation and slander. Operatives observing the show noted the subject's inventive use of technology at that time; in one portion the subject's body was wired for sound, then flogged by an audience volunteer. Another segment had the subject demonstrating a four-octave singing range by shattering glasses on a video monitor. Several spectacular effects (see file noted above for details), attributed at the time as technological gimmicks, are now clearly the work of coincidental magick.

The Adept called X-Cel (name derived from a Mayan moon goddess; see N.W.O. file #45698 A-12) has achieved some notoriety among users of the Net (General file #X1590 /6) for her merciful acts and information-brokering tactics. Void Engineer amalgam #52 reported being rescued by a virii storm by X-Cel, who then healed one Engineer's mental injuries using what was assumed to be Mind/Life treatments. Iteration X Operative #23 reports that X-Cel has compromised his cover on three separate occasions. At neither time did X-Cel demonstrate the hostility or violence associated with the Traditions.

Subject Blass is a European/Hispanic female, 31 years old, 5'6" tall, weighing 134 lbs. See enclosed visuals and file #46539 M-6 for details. Psychological profile indicates aggressive tendencies, sexual deviance and antisocial attitudes. Subject X-Cel appears as a radiant nun in traditional Mexican garb and speaks with a softly accented voice. As the enclosed visuals show, she bears little resemblance to subject Blass.

Blass/X-Cel is to be considered dangerous but useful. Psychological profile indicates either multiple-personality disorder or an unhealthy degree of imagination. Approach with care; Report to Regional Headquarters C when successful.

TOO LATE, CABEZOS DE MIERDA! I'M ALREADY GONE! — X-CEL

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name: Essence: Concept:
Player: Nature: Mentor:
Chronicle: Demeanor: Cabal:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●OOOO
Dexterity ●OOOO
Stamina ●OOOO

Social

Charisma ●OOOO
Manipulation ●OOOO
Appearance ●OOOO

Mental

Perception ●OOOO
Intelligence ●OOOO
Wits ●OOOO

Abilities

Talents

Alertness OOOOO
Athletics OOOOO
Awareness OOOOO
Brawl OOOOO
Dodge OOOOO
Expression OOOOO
Intuition OOOOO
Intimidation OOOOO
Streetwise OOOOO
Subterfuge OOOOO

Skills

Drive OOOOO
Etiquette OOOOO
Firearms OOOOO
Leadership OOOOO
Meditation OOOOO
Melee OOOOO
Research OOOOO
Stealth OOOOO
Survival OOOOO
Technology OOOOO

Knowledges

Computer OOOOO
Cosmology OOOOO
Culture OOOOO
Enigmas OOOOO
Investigation OOOOO
Law OOOOO
Linguistics OOOOO
Medicine OOOOO
Occult OOOOO
Science OOOOO

Advantages

Spheres

Correspondence ●OOOO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces OOOOO
Life OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Prime OOOOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time OOOOO

Other Traits

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Backgrounds

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

Arete

O O O O O O O O O O

Willpower

O O O O O O O O O O
❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

Quintessence

Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ❑
Hurt -1 ❑
Injured -1 ❑
Wounded -2 ❑
Mauled -2 ❑
Crippled -5 ❑
Incapacitated ❑

Experience

Study Points

Attributes: 7/5/3 Abilities: 13/9/5 Spheres: 5 Backgrounds: 7 Freebie Points: 15 (7/5/4/2/1)

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Magick

Preferred Effects	Rotes

Talismans

Name	Level	Arete	Quintessence	Appeareance

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Brawling Table

Maneuver	Accuracy	Damage
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Kick	7	Strength + 1
Body slam	7	Special; see Options

Armor: _____

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Expanded Background

Contacts, Sleeper

Contacts, Awakened

Influence, Sleeper

Allies, Awakened

Resources

Mentor

Familiar

Chantry

Acolytes

Node(s)

Possessions

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Foci

Computer Gear

VIRTUAL DEPTS

MAGE: The Ascension™

History

Awakening

Goals / Destiny

Seekings

Quiets

Description

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

Age of Awakening

Hair

Eyes

Race

Nationality

Height

Weight

Sex

Appearance / Nature of Avatar

Visuals

Cabal Chart

Character Sketch

Blood Pit

Hero of the Pit

Wins: 58
Losses: 27
Kills: 6
Team: Blanco Lobo
Height: 4'0"
Weight: 159
Weapons: two warhammers
Preferred Fighting Style: Wall of Steel
Most Hated Opponent: Damper (killed by Gangrene)
Fondest Blood Pit Memory: Back-to-back kills of two warriors of the Colonial Marines. Nord lost badly to R. Frost so challenged and killed a teammate of Frost's the next time. Frost then issued a Blood Challenge and Nord responded by killing Frost too.
Quote: "Your bones shatter like ice!"

Nord

Commentary: Though known not to be a very smart warrior, Nord succeeded based on his outstanding physical prowess. Despite the lack of intelligence, Nord is known to have mastered the warhammer. Many feel that Nord retired at the height of his ablities, and he had just achieved the pinnacle of dwarven strength through his arduous training program, but Nord felt it was time for younger warriors to take over the Pit. He had suggested that he might return, but that is doubtful following his traumatic retirement fight against Gangrene of Virulence. It was the first time in Blood Pit history that two retiring warriors faced one another and the fight resulted in the death of Gangrene, the opponent Nord respected most.

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