# Apparitions, Genius Loci, and Mingled Reality

## Optional Rules for *Transhuman Space*

### by James P. Barrett

*Angela observed Victor entering the hotel room in Shanghai via the cameras discreetly located around its edges. He resolutely strode towards the desk at the center, moving out of the way of the furniture as he passed. Using the array of sensors in the suite she had an almost perfect three dimensional impression of where he was, and what actions he was taking, which was further enhanced by the location signals which Helmut (his person AI residing inside his VII) was transmitting to the building's v-tag network. With scarcely more than a thought she was negotiating access permissions with Helmut, and a fraction of a second later she had limited privileges to provide Augmentive Reality information which would be shown on Victor's VII. Flicking through her "wardrobe" she selected her customary tall, attractive northern European appearance, clad in a uniquely created ensemble based upon the current fashion for women in London.*

*Victor was unsurprised when Angela appeared out of thin air directly in front of him. Helmut informed him discreetly that she was an apparition and not physical, something he really felt he could have worked out for himself. His movements and speech made it obvious to Andrew, who was observing through the same camera system, that he must have been talking to Angela. Seeing that the discussion didn't seem to be too personal (dealing with a private members bill Victor was helping to move through parliament) he signaled Angela and Helmut asking to set up a three-way conversation.*

## Apparitions and Mingled Reality

The virtual interface equipment used by most sapients in fifth wave nations has led to considerable blurring of the distinction between reality and VR. This is never more apparent than with the recent phenomenon of so called "Mingled Reality" environments, locations which are neither wholly physical, nor wholly virtual, but instead combine elements of both. The main technology behind MR domains is not new. It consists simply of a full surveillance grid (generally combining cameras, infrared sensors, and sometimes even surveillance dust), a dynamic system of v-tags, and a Virtuality node containing a Digital Kingdom modeled precisely upon the physical structure of the area. While in the physical room all persons (and indeed non-persons such as animals and 'shell equipped NAIs) are monitored by the surveillance grid, and the data is used to control a representation of them within the Digital Kingdom. At the same time, any user accessing the Digital Kingdom has an image of their character (often referred to as an apparition due to its insubstantial nature) projected onto the VIG equipment of all physically present characters via the local v-tag system. The effect is to allow users accessing

the Virtuality Node to interact with persons physically located in the room exactly as if they were physically present themselves, with the one proviso that, since they have no physical presence they are unable to touch or lift solid objects, being, in effect, insubstantial.

The Software required to run an MR domain is referred to as an MR Manager. It is twice the price and one Complexity level higher than VR Manager software (p. TS145) capable of handling the same number of users; for these purposes both those physically present and those accessing via the web are counted against the number of users the software can support. Interacting with an MR environment via the web requires only normal VR software and equipment, and all actions take the normal Telepresence penalty (p.TS144).

Although for most purposes the MR environment has little or no advantage over a similar purely virtual environment, it has recently started to become popular with groups who carry the "really being there" meme, but wish to still be able to interact with people who are for whatever reason unable to be physically present.

# Free Floating Apparitions

Although apparitions appear most frequently in Mingled Reality environments, with the correct access any AI is capable of sending visual information to a person's VIG for display no matter where they are (as long as they are on the web). The creation of an apparition as a means of properly communicating and interacting with a person however requires more than simply the ability to send visual and auditory information, it also needs a good perceptual image of the person's surroundings and a knowledge of their location, together with the ability to manage a simulated VR character internally. If the GM wishes to allow it, characters with the Digital Mind feature may be able to be designed with this capability. This is a modified form of the Spirit Projection advantage (p.SP76):

Spirit Projection (Easy Materialization 3, +60%; Unlimited Lifespan, +30%; Limited Materialization: Sounds and Visual Effects Only via VIGs, -15%; Limited Perception: Can Perceive the Physical World Only Through Cameras, -10%; Missing Powers: cannot taste/smell, or ride in vehicles, cannot use Awareness, or Spirit Travel, can communicate telepathically only with VII users, cannot tap fatigue, use poltergeist effect, possession, or Probability Alteration, -105%) [60]. Unless the character also has Mindshare, projecting an Apparition takes full concentration, and the character may not perform other actions at the same time; in effect whatever 'shell the infomorph is currently inhabiting is rendered "unconscious" for the duration of the manifestation. Infomorphs with the Mindshare Advantage can use it to allow them to operate their current 'shell while projecting, or to project multiple apparitions simultaneously.

The ability to manifest is also very dependent upon the availability of accessible surveillance instruments in the area in which the target is located. Most public locations in fifth wave cities will be well-covered, but payment and permission may need to be negotiated in order to make use of the equipment depending upon the location. For private dwellings it is likely that only trusted friends and acquaintances will be given access, and sometimes not even they will. As a general rule, the more public a place is the more likely it is that the surveillance equipment there will be accessible to the general public. For example, a common tourist site and widely-used thoroughfare in a major European city is likely to have full camera coverage with no restriction as to who can view the footage, while a camera monitoring a back alley leading to the loading area for goods to be brought into a row of shops in the same city is probably only accessible by the police. Similarly the higher Control Rating of the area, the less likely the footage is to be available to the general public; thus a similarly large thoroughfare and tourist site in Kazakstaan

is very unlikely to be publicly accessible (and if it is then the feed is highly unlikely to be accurate).

# Genius Loci

The concept of the Apparition brings up the possibility of a new kind of infomorph character: the Genius Loci, or spirit of place, which keeps its program stored and running on a distant server upon which it pays for computer time, while interacting with other characters and in other places by the means of Apparitions and telepressence. GMs should be warned that the Genius Loci template below should only be allowed to Infomorph characters whose physical location is, for the purposes of the game, irrelevant, because either the computer upon which they run will never be attacked, or because backups are made almost continuously, and so physical destruction would not matter. Such characters are probably out of place in (and would be of little use in) a heavily combat-based game, but make good characters for heavily political or social games, and even in combat-heavy games can make good NPCs.

### *Genius Loci*                                              *30 points*

***Attribute Modifiers:*** **ST** -; **HT** -.

***Advantages:*** Radio Speech (Infrared and radio, +20%) [30]; Spirit Form (Easy Materialization 3, +60%; Unlimited Lifespan, +30%; Limited Materialization: Sounds and Visual Effects Only via VIGs, -15%; Limited Perception: Can Perceive the Physical World Only Through Cameras, -10%; Missing Powers: cannot taste/smell, or ride in vehicles, cannot use Awareness, or Spirit Travel, can communicate telepathically only with VII users, cannot tap fatigue, use poltergeist effect, possession, or Probability Alteration, -105%) [60].

***Disadvantages:*** Dread (Lack of Web Access) [-10]; No Manipulators [-50].

***Features:*** Any computer. ***Taboo Trait:*** Physical Changes. ***Date:*** Any. ***Cost:*** Per computer (p.TS142).

The Genius Loci template is combined with an Infomorph template, and so replaces the normal cybershell or bioshell which the infomorph would need to purchase; in effect this is an infoshell, a body constructed entirely out of computer data. As always, the infomorph character may buy Mindshare (which will allow the manifestation of multiple apparitions at a time), or Vessel, which will allow the infomorph to have physical bodies into which it can be transferred. Since such an infomorph will retain its dedicated apparition managing capabilities when transferred to another body (although without Mindshare the normal restrictions on number of apparitions and/or 'shells controlled at once still apply) the GM may wish to treat the Spirit Form advantage included in this template as being part of the character's mind rather than their 'shell, and thus still accessible (as the modified Spirit Jumper Advantage described above) while the character has been transferred to a different Vessel.

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